

## INTIMATIONS OF MORTALITY AND SPIRITUAL VACUITY IN JOHN UPDIKE'S FICTIONAL WORLD

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### **Abstract:**

John Updike is not a patently blatant, vociferous, Christian author like C S Lewis or a putative apologist like Dorothy L. Sayers. Beliefs, spirituality and faith as processes of the quest for God ensconce a significant part of the substance of Updike's world view. With considerable similitude, Updike appropriates spirituality and religion. Updike's spiritual cognizance is found in his stories and a perusing of his oeuvre suggests that he is genuinely engaged with manifesting the rarefied conviction of Americans. This paper presents some of his major concerns like immortality, death and relevance of religion.

**Keywords:** Spiritual Vacuity, immortality, trepidation of death and relevance of religion

### **Introduction:**

John Hoyer Updike's short fiction is outstanding for its potently fluid prose and astute comments. Most of his chief leitmotifs find suitable expression in the short stories. There's a highly momentous affiliation between his short and long fiction. The two forms of fiction share an intricacy of themes and techniques. At times, the themes of the stories find distinct parallels in the novels. This thematic inter-relationship point to the fact that the writer's fictional world is rather integrated by recurring themes and techniques

Updike is not a patently blatant, vociferous, Christian author like C S Lewis or a putative apologist like Dorothy L. Sayers. It is hard to deal with John Updike's definitive vision or ultimate mission. He has evinced keen interest in essential theological and philosophical matters. John Updike grapples with all the unpretentious issues of the Christian idea of immortality, fear of death and relevance of religion in his oeuvre. Updike has a profound and long-haul interest in essential religious matters, for example, 'is there a God'? 'What befalls us when we leave this earth? Or 'does everything simply show up with the progression of time'? Religion dominates his thoughts while spirituality is blatantly manifest in his characterization. Clergymen figure conspicuously in a significant number of his short-stories and the surface of their lives and considerations is as persuading as his portrayals of other professionals. Probably

the best homilies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are his manifestations in the sermons of his anecdotal ministers.

Updike asserts: "I thought of all my action as illustrations to Kierkegaard". 1

Kierkegaard was among the principal masterminds to relate together the dread of death, sex, and its attendant guilt, a seemingly natural corollary in the shape of concomitant culpability. Nobody has seen any shame or guilt in the sexuality of animals but there are myths about Adam's fall from grace as the natural concomitant of the discovery of sexuality. Leitmotifs of the dread of nothingness, guilt and anxiety show up in the Rabbit books and his initial stories as well. Kierkegaard utilizes his own considerations and improvements to the empirical position that focused on the non-equable nature of life and the requirement for self-assessment. Kierkegaard affected Kafka and later Updike as well. (Updike, 1971. 429)

In the long train of writers who reflected the general public of their occasions, John Updike was one. Born in the year 1932 in Pennsylvania, he had an unremarkable youth. He became a force to reckon with through his compositions where he took upon himself the assignment of recording post-war America with a scramble of unparalleled authenticity. A productive author, his opus incorporates in scores of short stories, seven verse assortments, 24 novels and various papers and analysis. He managed issues as diverged as God, religion, otherworldliness, the importance of life, sex, family life, sexual orientation, realism, prejudice, governmental issues, so, all contemporary issues that assail man. Unaware of the basic feeling, he delivered an unwavering record of the American culture he noticed, leaving the perusers to reach their own inference.

In his works, he broke down the material, otherworldly, and moral parts of human character with regard to an advanced society which was unmatched in abundance, force, and individual flexibility in the long chronicles of man's presence, and attempted to understand the reason and significance of life. The fundamental powers that style an author's character can't be overlooked if the intricacy of the surfaces that establish the content is to be fathomed. All the more so with a creator like Updike, whose work is a combination of the financial and religious powers, and the scholarly and aesthetical certitudes of his occasions. Updike's stylish ideology has its establishment in his stringent childhood in similarity with the conventional working-class white American protestant ethos. His folks were Lutherans and financially of the lower-working class stock and followed their European roots to the Dutch and the German. Being a touchy kid, he was curious of man and nature around and this was later strengthened by his mom's wrecked invasions in the specialty of composing. Normally, family, church and God involve a focal spot in Updike's works.

Regardless of protestations in his self-portrayal *Self-Consciousness* to the opposite that his Christianity was "battered and vestigial" (141), Updike would never grow out of the early

impact of religion-focused adolescence. His much-vaunted guarantee in the later years that the religious and otherworldly emergency in early adulthood was settled by a perusing of Kierkegaard and Karl Barth was perhaps an exaggeration. The reality remains that the Lutheran lessons of his youth were never obscured and the experience with the Christian existentialist of the eighteenth century and the German Protestant scholar of the 20th century only gave a scholarly affirmation of his early life convictions. The seed of religion that was planted in the Sunday schools remained profoundly interred and notwithstanding the horrible climate, his faith endured the materialistic and agnostic America of the 20th century. Despite the fact that his conviction separated him from his associates, he didn't hold a statement of regret for the Christian faith as he knew about the religion's original effect on human life which he communicated in *Self-Consciousness*:

I was still somewhat enchanted, and that was artistically useful, since Western Culture since Boethius to Proust had transpired under the Christian enchantment and the psychological tensions that this enchantment generated were, really, almost all there was to say. (142)

It is this acknowledgement of mental strains emerging out of the interchange of faith and the vicissitudes of existence, each attempting to delete out the other which hoists his work to an academic plane.

He believed the work of a creator to be that of a valid and devoted observer of this novel position appointed by the Providence and toiled hard to accomplish constancy of the most noteworthy order. Never an obdurate Christian, Updike was not buried in the polemics of custom and religious accuracy. "I doubt Orthodoxies," he pronounced in *Self-Consciousness* (142) and declared his stand: "Regardless of whether God's number be three or one or zero, human benevolence and tolerability are sufficiently clear" (133). His spiritual viewpoint was coloured more by a feeling of surprise and stand amazed at the creation than on finding the arrangement in devout regulations for the adversities that plague the world. His sincere worry with life in the entirety of its multitudinous shapes enveloping inside it the dualistic elements of certification and refutation which simultaneously produce the delights and distresses of existence give profundity and scholarly force to his works.

The connection between Man and God, the effect of the loss of faith on human life and the powers that work to fill the vacuum made by the retreat of the congregation get a profound investigation. Religion keeps on applying its hang on the creative mind of individuals, artists as well as ordinary folks.

In a 1962 memoir, Updike named religion as one of the three extraordinary things that captivated him in his childhood and this interest didn't stop even to the furthest limit of his

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profession. "In this flawed world there can't be a profoundly redemptive attention to God, both inside and outside the congregation". God or rather correctly the function of God in the lives of a man with regard to the escalation of mainstream belief systems and obscuring of faith in the supernatural was an object of extraordinary investigation in huge numbers of his works. A determined objective fact of the function of religion in the Rabbit series: Rabbit's religious sentiments and the essentialness of their consistent disappointment are focused all through the books by Updike, who more than most contemporary authors, actually finds in conventional religion a significant perusing of human experience. That he was an admitted Christian doesn't make his work religious, however, the supported consideration that '*theos*' driven issues got consideration in their shifted structures lifts it to a genuine platform.

The spiritual dimension turned into a wellspring of tension and pain to Updike's characters. It mirrors the key aspect of his work. His anxiety was not religious but rather was to survey the effect of the lessening of faith in singular lives and its inevitable result on the general public. Despite the fact that Updike can't be epitomized as a Christian Existentialist, he went under the impact of Soren Kierkegaard, who is considered as the pioneer of existentialism. A concise examination of the striking aspects of the existential way of thinking and a framework of the philosophical issues that overloaded Kierkegaard would light up the conversation of the layout on which Updike's works rest.

Existentialism was a multifaceted development and it rose to unmistakable quality in the philosophical circles of the early 20th century. The time frame after the Second World War was a period of intense loss of faith in religion just as in common philosophies. In a period when the critical way of thinking of Nihilism was wresting to involve a vaunted position in the scholarly domain, the existentialist way of thinking with its accentuation on the man at the centre did a lot to offer a contradiction. The new way of thinking is noted for its unambiguous stay on the privilege of a person to settle on a decision and style his life in wording with it. It gawked at any endeavour to produce similarity with the predominant cultural standards and in its fervent emphasis on the privilege of the person to settle on fitting decisions, it endeavored to make another element of importance to life. This inflexion on the opportunity was not a solicitation to an existence of Bohemian excess, nor was it a call for disorder all things considered. Existentialists accept that freedom and duty combine with moral feelings. In spite of the fact that it might be said morals came to indicate something deciphered as an opportunity in one's own specific manner, the basic concern was to welcome us to look at the realness of our own lives and of our general public. As opposed to the Hellenic order to know oneself, the new standard set a premium on carrying on without one's life which contributes importance to one's existence.

Updike saw Kierkegaard's books transform himself and soothing his morbid trepidation of death. His topics of blame, nervousness, guilt anxiety and dread of nihilism show up in

"Pigeon Feathers", "Astronomer" and the Rabbit series. The double effect of Kafka and Kierkegaard is seen in Updike's nonstop quest for the equivocalness of social encounters, the requirement for the explanation of subjects and ways of thinking must bow before the person's very own assessment of that which gives meaning to life. 2 (De Bellis, Jack. Ed., 2001. 236)

Karl Barth's dogmatic on damnation, reconciliation, redemption and salvation was a major inspiration and influence on Updike. Barth, in a way, facilitated him to defeat the downturn and otherworldly crisis that held onto him. 3 (Michael. D. Sharp. 2006.) Updike vouchsafes Barth's comment that "One cannot speak of God by speaking of a man in a loud voice". For Updike and Barth, the qualification between the celestial and the human is outright as God is entirely the other, who is inaccessible as well as mysterious. Hence, it can be said that the main religious inquiry is that of faith and salvation. Updike and Barth mutually declare that 'the existence or the will of God' can't be demonstrated. So, the inquiry is not "Does God exist": instead, it is "Do I trust in God's presence". (Bernard A Schopen: 535). 4 Updike's enthusiasm for Kierkegaard and Barth isn't simply limited to their helpful incentive amid his intermittent breaches of the soul. The interest of these two theologians is a scholarly one, grasping yet additionally rising above the devout. One of the alluring highlights of both Kierkegaard and Barth is the utilization of sensational systems, for example, incongruity, exaggeration, a reiteration of expression, and the insinuating aside.

The Christian beliefs, spirituality and faith as processes of looking for God ensconce a significant part of the substance of his world-view; however, the universe of workmanship furnishes Updike with plenty of similitude to appropriate spirituality. In 1997, Updike was referred to as a "recognized Christian person of letters". He recognizes that Christian creed and conviction gave him solace as well as mental fortitude throughout everyday life. His creed reveals to us that

"Truth is holy and truth-telling is a noble and useful profession; that the reality around us is created and worth celebrating; that men and women are radically imperfect and profoundly valuable" (Yerkes, James. 1999. 4) 5

Updike's religious cognizance is found in his work and a perusing of his fiction shows that he is genuinely engaged with manifesting the minor conviction which lies beneath the life of Americans. Updike's stories are not "religious" in a tight comprehension of that expression. There aren't any Christ figures or other sacrosanct images in his stories; and when he depicts the Church, it generally puts on a show of being an antiquated, dead foundation, run by maladroit, fumbling, ethically and a pastorate spiritually ruined.

While pundits regularly brand Updike as a spiritual author, his short-stories and longer fiction don't attempt to propel a particular religious conviction. He pronounces that the focal

subject of his stories is "intended to be an ethical problem," and his books are proposed as "moral debates with the readers". Nonetheless, a major chunk of Updike's significant stories manages religious subjects. Updike never settles religious inquiries in his work. Rather he needs his stories to start moral discussions with the peruser. By making his protagonists and other people investigate the profound importance of their own reality, Updike wants to rouse his perusers to attempt comparative investigations. (Sharp. D. Michael. 2006.1349) 6

Updike utilizes ecclesiastical characters impressively more frequently bringing them into a considerable lot of his books, for example, *Beauty of Lilies*, *Roger's Version*, *Of Centaur*, *The Poor House Fair* and *Of the Farm*. While perusing Updike's accounts numerous pious individuals feel their own youth, their expectations and fear. Updike expounds on a man's quest for individual everlasting status. He frequently takes Protestant Christianity with reality. He gets a kick out of the chance to illuminate the religious existence of modest American communities and rural areas. (David Thorburn and Howard Eiland, eds., 1979. 183) 7

Updike takes recourse to incongruity and deception to show the triviality of an awful mortal, the current church-goer. At times, his characters guarantee the presence of celestial beings, yet their belief is discontinuous, abstract and regularly whimsical, and the object of their conviction is once in a while fair with customary western ideas of heavenliness. In Updike's accounts, Christians arise as as "a minority flock furtively gathered within the hostile enormity of a dying, sobbing empire". (David D,Galloway. 1981.30) 8

Mortality and interminability are significant topics all through Updike's stories. He offers no solitary reaction to it. Through a wide assortment of characters, he gives a mosaic of responses. "Morality is no problem for those of strong religious conviction" he averred. Be that as it may, the quest for faith is seen in "*Pigeon Feathers*" as in several other stories. Updike's characters hunger after a corporeal and unmistakable sign of the heavenly. (William R Mac Naughton: 1982, 262) 9

In *Pigeon Feathers*, he highlights David, the hero at key minutes and his mission to wind up in a world that is progressively counterfeit and overwhelmed by inconsistent perspectives. "*Pigeon Feathers*" recounts David's mission to discover responses to the essential otherworldly inquiries. The thought of total extinction with no hope of afterlife fills him with horror« But he does not give up.

David keeps on fixating on death yet finds shallow solace in school and at the chapel. He sees each one of those provocative, perfumed and kidding individuals pass on secretly by anyone. In their association, David worries that they will convey him too into the brilliant, modest heaven which is saved for them. He consoles himself that someplace on the planet, there must exist a couple of individuals who have faith in what is vital, and the bigger the

group, the more prominent the possibility. Seeing the priests' brightness, the lesson themes posted outside the holy places, the kid's shows in magazines brimming with blessed messengers or fallen angels keep him buzzing with the chance of expectation.

On David's 14<sup>th</sup> birthday, his folks gift him a rifle. David's Grandma requests him one day to shoot the flock of pigeons that have settled in her barn. David gets a sort of delight from slaughtering the fowls. At the point when he shoots one bird but it doesn't tumble from the rafters, he shoots it over and over, planning to make it fall like the others. Later, David's mom orders him to inter the fowls. As he does as such, he admires their lovely plumes. David is overwhelmed by the magnificence of his general surroundings and considers God's creation. He discovers comfort in thinking that the God who pampers his specialty on little feathered creatures will permit him to live until the end of time.

“The God who had lavished such craft upon these worthless birds would not destroy His whole Creation by refusing to let David live forever” (p.105)

Toward the end of the story, David's pursuit of faith is immediately settled by the unpredictability of winged creature's plumes and goes soothe his questions about the presence of Paradise in an unexpected image. In the pigeon-shooting scene, Updike shapes the story's themes. Unexpectedly, a demonstration of severity liberates David from his dread of death. By portraying this, Updike uncovers that the dread of death is at the base of all human brutality, however, that it additionally drives one's gratefulness for magnificence.

David's faith doesn't exactly trail any specific religious tenets; all things being equal, it is established in articulations of magnificence apparent even in humble animals. At long last persuaded of God's hand, David dismisses the unacceptable clarifications of Paradise and the spirit the pastor and his folks attempt to give. David's emergency of confidence is relieved in a private moment and without the assistance of Reverends. David isn't just the hero yet additionally the focal point, through which the topics of religion and nature are seen.

Lusher says:

This one revelation does not rescue David from his spiritual crisis forever. The faith he grasps is provisional, and indeed of supplemental support as he recedes further in time and space from Olinger. (Robert M, Luscher., 1993. 32) 10

**Conclusion:** Uneasiness about mortality damnation, reconciliation, redemption and salvation frequents Updike's protagonists. He evinces curiosity in a somewhat customary type of substantial restoration, yet some sort of otherworldly everlasting status, as the main expectation equipped for fulfilling one's most profound necessities. His inquiry on the 'intrinsic problem in human existence' reveals the disharmony of the modern man's situation in the world and man's quest for individual freedom. The apparent inconsequence of mortality

repetitively returns as apprehension which is resolved by the hope in the resurrection of the body and eternal life. Faith, spirituality and beliefs as processes of the pursuit of God entrench the substance of Updike's world view.

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