IDEA OF AMERICA IN SELECT NOVELS OF JOHN UPDIKE

ABSTRACT

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By

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ABSTRACT

A literature which emerged out of the roots of wilderness, managed to wipe out the stain of plagiarism whenever accused by the already rich and mature European typewriters’ outpourings and has always been ready to reform itself through the oeuvre of distinguished writers of the nation, in every literary era. What Hawthorne did for American Puritanism was further carried out by Updike in his literary career through 20th century America. Beginning with Rabbit series which make up the backbone of his literary outburst, he seldom eulogises the American spirit of adultery, selfishness, capitalism, consumerism and wavering faith. He puts his heart and soul to reform the deteriorating self and values of his nation.

With the onset of intensive study of the select novels, a perfect projection has been sought regarding the American doubtful spiritualism, the spirit of boastful assertion and the reasons of the culture’s gradual decay, narrow-mindedness, racialism, insecurities in second marriage, the lasting scars and psychology of the humiliated children due to the betrayal of either of their parents.

The last point above has its imprints overshadowing the other ones as it sets a chain of betrayal, unpleasant memories, jealousy and a haunting revenge on the mind of the protagonist, Prof. Roger Lambert, in the first gem of Updike’s select novels’ package, Roger’s Version (1986). In the first hand narration in Roger’s Version, it is clear to the reader that insecurity haunts Prof. Lambert, throughout the story, due to his second and younger wife, Esther. Moreover his unpleasant past, cropped out of a betrayal in his parents’ marriage when his father got involved with another woman and left Roger’s mother grief-stricken and unsupported. Roger’s step-sister, Edna, roused his revengeful instincts with her lavish and secure childhood. Roger Lambert, when grown-up and educated, at a point, loses his sublime faith in God. He fails to
respect his first but infertile wife, Lillian, who extended her love to orphans and in an angelic way, gave away her material assets for the welfare of the helpless and the poor. With Esther, he had a son, Richie, but their house is symbol of chilled emotions and decay. Edna’s daughter, Verna’s appearance on the scene does not contribute much to the novel except a soft corner for racial discrimination and the brown race; though she stimulates her uncle Lambert’s revengeful instincts and he manages to get a chance and goes as far as to have sex with his niece. He feels released and blessed for a few moments partly because he could not believe to have revived his sexual juices in his deteriorating years and also that he had avenged his own humiliation as a neglected child and satisfied his thirst for Edna through Verna. Now the most threatening blow that Roger Lambert got was from a zealous computer whiz, Dale Kohler, also Verna’s friend. Dale, in an attempt to prove God through a computer programme manages to thwart much of Lambert’s mocking attitude about a God who would be ‘felt in a computer software’; would be available in ‘frosted images’ and in human hands and digits rather than in hearts and minds. But as Dale begins his project, he experiences a gradual spiritual break-down and discovers his inability to carry on his Government Grant aided project. This is an indication for inability of human beings to possess God in a specific size or shape. All through the novel, Lambert acts a spy on his house, his new wife and his ‘opponent’ Dale whom he abstractly accuses of committing adultery with his wife, Esther.

Updike, in an attempt, to project the negatives of betrayal in relationships and its dire consequences, emotionally and psychologically, on the children; loss of faith and the resultant doubtful mind, suspicious nature, insecurity and complex, biases in terms of racialism, gender and age and the triumph of devil over struggling and wandering human mind in search of God, writes a tell-tale journey of Lambert into
the mind of his wife and Dale Kohler. Updike joins various vertices of relationships and makes them revolve around Roger Lambert and brings home a point that children need a healthy, robust and secure childhood to grow into positive and blooming future. Only then, emotions like revenge and jealousy will seldom find their way to them. Children grown under the wings of their caring parents never learn to acquire hip-hop nature while sexually playful nature of parents can guarantee a series of betrayal in coming future. As far as the question of God and Divinity is concerned, Updike asserts that claiming to have knowledge of religion is appreciable but trying to possess that knowledge to the extent of megalomania and derailing one’s own students, should be out of question. Moreover, adultery and material distraction add to our godless values. The end-scene of Roger’s Version depicts the couple, Roger and Esther, behaving as casually as ever. Esther’s telling him that she is going to Sunday Church, a place where he has stopped to go long back, fills the reader with doubt about the confirmation of Roger’s descriptions for Dale and Esther’s relationship. Esther’s ignoring Dale in thanks-giving party in her house also denotes that she abhorred him for losing his zeal and godly grace. While Verna is an instrument to rouse our sympathy, Esther, though a home-breaker turned wife, is a symbol of quest for Divine grace in a ‘divinity professor’s mind’, in ‘binary digits of computer programme’ but ultimately acquires solace in a cathedral. At last she understands that God resides in a peaceful and confident heart not in material or fleshy bodies.

In the Beauty of the Lilies (1996) is the familiar song of Updike for his deep felt sorrow about the weakening bonds of godly values in religious preachers of the nation, following the price that the posterity has to pay. God’s love is transcending and is not to be claimed or measured otherwise God has the Ultimate Power in his
Abstract

possession and is capable of humiliating his slaves to a silent death. Among Updike’s protagonists, whoever muses to have acquired the summit of theology, finds himself drifting away from Divine grace (Revd. Clarence Arthur Wilmot and Roger Lambert) and left in a pool of doubt, anger, jealousy, escapism, decay and intolerance. The person loses his worth and is caught in a web of insecurities. The Protagonist, Revd. Clarence Wilmot, feels ‘last particles of faith’ have left him after he had served the ministry for almost a lifetime. He spends a long time contemplating the household furniture waiting for some external sign of God’s wrath. Even an extension in Church for Lord’s services fails to cure his faithlessness and he resorts to leave the parsonage. The atheist Ingersoll is an instrument for taking Revd. Wilmot off track and his book *Some Mistakes of Moses* successfully does its task. Clarence is rendered jobless and in a state of acute penury and is left to trot through the streets of Paterson, under blazing sun or the stormy weather, selling copies of an encyclopaedia for children. To escape his distress, Clarence hops into the movie houses where the fate of actors is not in the hands of God but in the hands of manipulative producers and directors who can bring upon a happy ending even from bleak circumstances.

This novel of Updike celebrates its stumbling entry into the millennium years with a gradual worship for stardom. The silent decay of Clarence shattered his children; Jared, the lost and disillusioned American youth behind the glory of war, Esther, an immorally selfish daughter and the shocked and delicate Theodore who was disappointed with God for what happened to his father. Clarence’s wife, Stella also feels the unexpressed guilt felt by her husband that once a person who kicks off God’s grace then only the Almighty knows how to degrade his slave towards silent death.
This novel is also a pamphlet in which Updike gives an account of such things which are endeared by God. Clarence’s sister and his youngest son, Esther and Teddy have their roles in connecting with the world through telephone and postal service; Estella’s struggle with her lively spirit and her will for life throughout the journey of four generations to come, Teddy’s daughter, Essie’s confidence in herself and in her secure and certain familial bonds and lastly, Essie’s son, Clark’s ultimate sacrifice for innocent women and children to liberate them from the tyranny of a pseudo-god, Smith; and right there Updike’s four-generation saga completes its arc which had started from abstract love for God and ends with the same, thus conveying its message successfully that a person’s sole aim of life is to live for God and his creatures and likewise die for Him and for them.

In the same way, the love for God and his creatures is extended towards a third counter-part, Nature, in Updike’s Towards the End of Time(1997). This novel is a typical critique on Wild-Life preservation where the protagonist, Ben Turnbull, represents a selfish but impotent part of civilization that falls helpless in the hands of a poaching spirit, his second wife, Gloria. The deer in the forest sometimes camouflaging as a whore in his house symbolises the demand for the shelter. Here, Updike conjures the appeal for the preservation of nature all through the novel. His nagging with Gloria, every now and then, represents the collision of the civilization-gone-astray with capitalism and industrialization. The novel is full of the element of innocence and concentration exhibited by the attractive animals while feeding on greenery. Poachers, deer-slayers and armed persons are extensively mentioned in the novel. How killing of animals can disturb the ecological balance, is illustrated with the example of breaking up of the first marriage, throwing out the first wife from the familial chain just to replace her with a second wife who has no affection with the
existing children and other relations but her sole aim is to exercise a domination over her partner and to muse of her position as a rich widow in near future. The sympathy that the animals expect from the human beings and their subsequent disillusion and that ‘one long gaze’ from a dying or fleeing animal is just a warning for the animals’ brewing inner grudge, a question on their part whether the Human world does know that ‘Time’ repeats itself or whether it knows, how well the creatures gifted with reason, are preparing for the last meeting with God. Updike also sketches the ugliest future of America in the form of pseudozoans – metallobioforms, the upcoming wild-life born out of the spilled chemicals from nuclear reactors and that swallows everything ranging from wood to living human beings in just a wink of an eye. Rest of the theme constitutes of breaking up the prevalence of racialism, value of patience and the power of adjustment in the African nature and a craving in elderly people in the American society to get due respect from the younger generation.

In Villages (2004) the author shifts his focus from Nature and Creation to familial relationships. Here, Updike emphasizes on stability in personal relations through the extreme and merciless instability exhibited on the part of the protagonist, Owen Mackenzie, a soft-ware engineer. Updike opens his novel in the present tense to enhance the experiences of the punished-self of Owen. His dream of guilt – his second and younger wife, Julia’s dead body lying naked in a room and doctors are trying to save her while Owen is standing at a distance with a feeling of remorse that he had killed her – fills the readers with horror and curiosity about Owen’s evil past. Updike also tries to avenge for Owen’s victims in the past, by describing in detail his sagging flesh, hurting eyes, the restlessness that he experiences, when he awakes from a dream, bewildered, and does not find Julia beside him in bed, in describing his nagging bladder and above all, his dreams; a unified wifely figure in his
dreams, leaves him confused about who the woman is. For further clarification, Updike takes us to Owen’s past where he grows from a hesitating and troubled child into an MIT student. Descriptive accounts in the novel about the aftermath effects of war helps Updike to criticize America as a ‘vain war-lover’ whose dead soldiers are given tribute on a bulletin-board at Haskell Crossing but the survivors are forgotten and rendered jobless and some desperate ones commit suicide. Once married, Owen takes women as his guides. He needs his wife to tell him about the other women and those other women to teach him about the feminine gender. Thus the onset of a sexual odyssey leaves Owen as a favourite and hot commodity in the market to satisfy the sexual urges of women with his own lecherous instincts. But ‘Time’ has to show Owen that permanence never finds its way to the pride of human beings. After sleeping with a long list of women, Owen is overwhelmed with Julia, a parson’s wife and decides to marry her. In the tense atmosphere of filing for the divorce, while Owen’s children praying for a unified home, the stoic attitude of Owen leaves us clutched-fisted out of anger for his selfishness, dishonesty and his never-growing-up position. His wife, Phyllis accuses Julia of being a ‘con-artist’ and decides to cancel the petition for divorce but on her way she meets an accident and dies. Eventually, married to Julia, Owen lives with a third haunted self in the house. He and Julia live in fear of losing each other; Julia feels insecure even when Owen is out to play golf; when he sits alone, she notices him gazing somewhere guiltily.

Updike does not miss hitting Owen financially when his youthful children damaged his material assets in circumstances or places which matched one of Owen’s sexual meetings in the past. Owen is left alone after the last of his kids leaves the house to struggle in life. In the concluding words of the novel, Updike compares Owen to America which lives in a fantasy that she is superior to other nations but
inwardly she is just drowning herself into the pit of decay, fear and insecurity. Updike also takes an opportunity to give an answer to Owen’s questions which were left unanswered; he denounces the carnal value of sex as universally perceived by the human beings and emphasizes on its psychological significance which has the ability to leave its practitioners to revere its lasting imprints on their minds instead of groping for words, if the activity is rated otherwise. Through this novel, Updike also treats the obsession of a public with new technology and the gadgets and the obsoleteness of creative art and craft. In a nutshell, Updike portrays an adulterous capitalist (Owen/America) crazy for modernism, rich in resources and atomic power but at the end of the day ‘all alone’ with only ‘enemies’ and ‘competitors’ around.

*Terrorist* (2006) completes the full circle with its linking strands of adultery, insecurity, broken homes, lack of parents; and also explores some novel themes like weak educational system, lack of belongingness towards nation and bringing up of a terrorist mindset.

In this book, Updike resolves to treat the problem of the adolescent minds who are fresh pass outs from High School and could be a promising future for their nation. Updike’s shattered protagonist, Ahmad Ashmaway Mulloy, a mixed blood American student of Central High, experiences a mental turmoil due to his split family; a single mother with sexually playful nature who mocks her son’s Muslim religion and a runaway Egyptian husband. The kid Ahmad who used to question his mother about his father, was sent off to a mosque to have lessons in Quran in the company of Imam Sheikh Rashid. The introvert child grows into a High School boy with increasing complexities and hatred towards Western godless culture. At the end of the day, Teresa Mulloy ends up having a child who does not even want to bind himself with her as an American son.
Updike also prepares an alter ego of Ahmad in the novel – a counsellor in Central High, Mr. Jack Levy, who inspite of being a partial atheist, loves humanity, wants to impart fruitful teaching and misses the long lost moral values in American culture. Jack Levy is a mouth-piece of Updike and likewise tires himself out grumbling about the deterioration of the educational system and the rough and crippled progress of American unity. His tightened self finds its release in Teresa’s bed but a woman longing for a permanent partner ultimately rejects him and accuses him of being a depressed insect, only fit for holding the responsibility of his obese wife, Elizabeth. Elizabeth resembles the American mainland that is fed on cookies and entertainment, crazy about modern gadgets which help minimise the work as well as the body movement and at the same time milking money out of citizens in the form of bills and taxes; she also symbolizes the American worries about terrorists’ attack and talks about American defence but cannot do anything about it. Updike’s Ahmad is prepared for a terrorist attack by Sheikh Rashid but timely intervention of Mr. Jack Levy stops his student from going ahead. What Ahmad could not allow his own mind to perceive as human love, is accomplished by his alter-ego, Mr. Jack Levy.

Thus, in an attempt to create a Utopian America, Updike had to satirize, criticize, lament and point out a decaying culture with inhuman values, lack of self-restraint and self-preservation, racialism, moral and spiritual degradation, wavering faith, unstable relationships, blind faith in capitalism and technology, glorification of war and its disillusions, extreme negligence towards nature and destruction of Self as well as of the world. Updike cast a wet eye on the canvas of this mainland and discovered that he should act like a potter who keeps patting his pitcher while grooving it on the wheel to give it an ideal shape. His whiplash is sore but awakens the reader to the bitter American reality. In his novels, Updike has given every
possible way to instruct the readers for bringing about reformation, improving their lot, respecting natural laws, being kind and human in behaviour, getting the other concept of Carpe D’iem i.e. to spend the entire life in preparing one’s own self for achieving salvation instead of obsession with sex. He wants his countrymen to realize the ticking hands of the running ‘time’ and respond to his ‘call’ and save themselves before it becomes a ‘Late Call’.
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THESIS

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Certificate

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “Idea of America in Select Novels of John Updike” by Ms. Tehreem Zehra, is her original endeavor for this research work, carried out under my supervision and is suitable for submission for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English.

DR. SHAHLA GHAURI
(Assistant Professor)
Dedicated
To My
Late Dear Mother
Acknowledgement

All praises and thanks are to the Almighty Allah, the one Universal Being, the Creator, the Cherisher, and the Sustainer of the World.

“Proclaim! And thy Lord is the Most Bountiful. He who taught the Use of Pen; Taught man that which he knew not!” (Surah Alaq 3-5, Al-Qur'an)

I hereby submit my being to my Creator, the One who enlightened my life with the light of knowledge and endured me with the requisite ability to complete this piece of work with all authenticity.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION
INTRODUCTION

Updike said in 1996 in an interview with Jane Howard that ‘My subject is the American protestant small town middle-class. I like middles. It is in middles that extremes clash, where ambiguity restlessly rules.’

For an American writer to know the sensitive targets of his nation, be they social or political, trends and movements of every age and their origin, the behaviour and mindset of people from any part of country, nature of culture and society, he should possess a comprehensive knowledge of two great bodies of literature written in England and in the United States. Then only, he will be able to project the inner American mind and construct a seemingly authentic sketch of the idea of America as such. To achieve such accurate results, the writer or the novelist has to ‘drink to lees’ the historic roots of his race and the nation as a whole.

American literature begins with the first writings of the English settlers in James town, Virginia, in 1607. The beginning of their literature saw not only the burst of creative activity as there was in the England of Shakespeare and in the Greece of Pindar and Sophocles but also confronted the harsh primitive physical environment and the stern principles which they adopted to ensure their survival. The development of its ideals and character resulted from an amalgamation of European inheritance going back to Teutonic and Scandinavian ancestors and the influence of a new world environment. America was colonized by Europeans who shed away their own ideals in order to assert their belongingness with the new acquired land; pushed away the native tribes to make room for themselves; struggled for an identity amidst the equally or more powerful settlers’ group in new England. This constant struggle also gave them a feeling of insecurity about their hard earned status which now has important impact on American life.
When an American looks into the rear view mirror spanning the colonization till present age, he can’t help wondering what he must do to shun any disaster that could threaten his country. At the same time, an American, a former foreigner, fears outsiders lest they should snatch his share of America and assert their own right, as he himself once did.

A fearful sense forces the Americans to lead a Marvellian life, where ‘times winged chariot hurrying near; and yonder all before us lie deserts of vast eternity.’ The land, once a wilderness, was gradually inhabited with distinguished groups of people, who, in a mixed society, retained their individuality.

From 1600 onwards, for a century and a half, colonization could not contribute much to the literature of United States of America due to the following reasons:

- The group of English settlers represented religious dissenters, adventurers and coal miners, runaway from factories that were under bondage.

- Primitive wilderness forced polished Europeans to be practical and resourceful to seek mastery over the material environment.

- Different groups of English settlers and hence different living ways, culture and values.

Settlers from different places sought their own purpose for colonization. Therefore, there was little to promiseand the way colonial people expressed, is better referred to simply as writing rather than ‘literature’ because there was nothing of much artistic value in it. The writing then consisted of factual prose, reports, letters, sermons and long dry theological argumentation. (G. E. Smith, 1962)

Captain John Smith (1579-1631) sent back to London his A True Relation of Occurrences and Accidents in Virginia in 1688 and General History of Virginia in 1623. William Bradford, wrote his History of Plymouth Plantation which cover the
years 1620-1647. John Winthrop wrote his *The History of New England* from 1630 to 1649 and accounts of Puritan mindset of the time. Thomas Mortan’s account *The New English Canaan* (1637) is quite different and most of the time his group was engaged in disturbing the Puritans.

Four generations of Mather family of Boston (1596-1785) illustrated the gradual declining power of the original Puritanical theocracy in New England during colonial period. Jonathan Edwards wrote his book *The Freedom of the Will* which argued that man does not act by virtue of a free choice but in accord with the will of God.

Benjamin Franklin is famous for his political activities in simple but effective sense. Being a journalist, he had the straightforward style of journalism. His autobiography is a permanent classic and a model for the genre.

The repressive colonial policies of George III and the Parliament gave American colonists a common cause to join forces. The colonists joined hands and succeeded in welding them into common ideal – ‘independence from England and founding of an American Republic conceived in liberty; new concept of freedom and democracy’. In American history, the period from 1765 to 1810 is divided into two parts – the revolution (1765-1783) and the foundation of the American republic (1783-1810).

The writings of the revolutionary period was an outpouring of deep conviction filled with spirit of liberty and political controversies. With ‘Speech Against Writs of Assistance’, James Otis set off a chain of denunciatory expression on British. Other noted writers of this phase are John Dickinson, Samuel Adams and Francis Hopkins.
Patrick Henry is considered the master of fiery oratory whose *Speech on Liberty* has provided the world with its most quoted phrases on the subject of liberty.

(G. E. Smith, 1962)

America had no novel of its own before 1789 because the novel was classed with drama as one of the sure paths to perdition. However, English romances were bootlegged into various sectors of the colonial ‘female’ society and were being devoured as far as North most inhabited areas. In the southern colonies, certain English books were largely dependent on the fact that whether the clergy liked to read them or not, e.g. Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740) was considered a book of moral instruction and was reprinted by Franklin, the first novel published in America. Other similar examples are *Robinson Crusoe*, Rassela’s *The Vicar of Wakefield* and the works of Sterne. The first American novel ever written by Mrs. Sarah Wentworth Morton *The Power of Sympathy* was written in the form of letters, in imitation of the English Richardson’s work. It set the tone for other late 18th century romances like *Charlotte Temple* (1970) and the *Coquette* (1979), both written by female writers. All the novels were of the sentimental or the gothic type, popular among the ladies of London and proclaimed their purposes in regard to the dangers of ‘seduction’.

The gothic romance of wild and improbable incidents gained fame in America along with sentimental novels with such thrillers as Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). Its chief claim to fame was its speedy narrative, with exaggerated happenings succeeding each other rapidly. The gothic school in England greatly influenced American first serious novelist Charles Brockden Brown (1771-1810). Apart from some scattered poems, he wrote a pamphlet *The Dialogue of Alcuin* (1997) which argued for women’s rights. His major work is *Wieland* relating the story of a flashback by the sister of protagonist. In *Edgar Huntley* or *Memories of a Sleep
Walker (1799) Brown portrays America as a wild and exotic piece of nature. He introduces American Indians (natives) as brave but no match with white settlers. Brown is the best fiction writer until Poe, Cooper, Hawthorne and Melville.

St. John de Crevecoeur (1735-1813) and Hugh Henry Breckenridge (1748-1816), were two European born writers and left most interesting accounts of the rural background and of the Western frontier life. Both writers possessed charming prose style and one captures what the other misses in the colourful realities of the Western fringes of early America; both were interested in manners.

By 1815 United States stood on its own feet and now it was time to join the world stream but not to give up its native self-reliance and individuality. By that time, 12% of the population were Negro slaves and the political power was shifted with the admission of slave and non-slave states.

By 1830 Philadelphia, Lancaster, New York and later Mississippi valley opened educational institutions to educate the common people. Newspapers and magazines flourished due to the revolution and interest in political issues. In the meantime an article by Sydney Smith not only echoed down through the century in America but also thrashed its literary prestige. Smith abused Americans as people whose literary or artistic works are not acknowledged anywhere, laughed at the nothingness of their own literature as it was all imported. The American intellectuals admitted the truth and gradually a school of American literary criticism was formed.

While European romanticism had been a reaction against classical and neoclassical norms, in America it’s not a revolt but the beginning of a genuine literature.
American romanticism is divided into two periods:

1. The first period represents the beginning of a national literature and its writers of New York and Pennsylvania were greatly influenced by English romanticism.

2. The second period, ranges from 1830 to the outbreak of civil war, centred in a New England school of writers.

The first period writers landed to fall into sectional groups with marked distinction as to attitudes and development of themes. The New York group, popularly known as ‘knickerbockers’ from the use of the term by Washington Irving in his historical satire of the Dutch in 1809, had their activities revolving around New York city. The group was hardly a literary ‘school’; in that they brought to their creations, diverse and scattered tendencies. Washington Irving is known as the first American romantic. He is the first writer of short fiction tale with an American background and the first to win European approval. In his first work, *A History of New York* (1809), he put his heart and soul gathering data about the early Dutch settlers. He produced the first issue of his literary masterpiece, *The Sketch Book* (1819-20) whose comic tales and sketches enjoyed a tremendous popularity both in America and England.

(G. E. Smith, 1962)

James Fennimore Cooper (1789-1851), like Irving was as much at home in Europe as in America. His personality was a mixture of the aristocratic and the democratic. He experimented with every form of prose and produced pioneer American novels of at least six different varieties. Cooper started his literary career with *Precaution*, a novel about cross-section of English genteel society. His second book *The Spy* (1821) was an immediate success in America and in England. *The Bravo, The Heidenmauer* and *The Headsman* were written in Europe, praising American democracy as contrasted to a decadent European feudal aristocracy. *The
Monikers written after his return from Europe is a bitter satire on the American institutions which he had once praised in his novels. Cooper’s position in American literature depends upon five novels written at various periods of his career, collectively called The Leather Stocking Tales for the Frontiers man; Natty Bumppo, one of the most famous fictional characters. These novels are considered in the sequence which follows the life of Natty Bumppo: The Deer Slayer (1841) shows Natty as a frontier scout in his youth. The Last of Mohicans (1826) is the strongest of the five novels, shows Natty as a rescuer of commander’s daughters but who are again seized by the invaders and the last members of Mohican aristocracy are killed in another dramatic rescue. The Pathfinder (1840) shows the scout as strong as in the Mohicans. In The Pathfinder and The Pioneers (1823) he is as old as forty years and more but his adventures continue throughout the novel. In The Prairie (1827) Bumppo is nearly ninety years old but still active in his contribution toward pushing civilization westward. In this part Natty dies surrounded by people who were sometimes good and evil at some other times, the Whites and the Indians.

Two great figures of the second period were Herman Melville (1819-91) and Walt Whitman (1819-92). Most of Melville’s work is autobiographical and pessimistic. Most of his novels revolve around his harsh experiences of whalers’ ships going South Sea and pleasant and serene feelings among the natives of the Island somewhere near South Sea.

His first novel Typee (11846) and Omoo (1847) are autobiographical. Typee deals with Melville’s experience after abandoning the Whaler in mid Pacific. The first book finds more than once, Melville’s literary efforts against the evils that civilization has brought to the spoiled natives of the Pacific Islands. Omoo deals with his escape aboard the Australian whaler where he leaves the ship of Tahiti. These two books had
some theme and content matter as in *Omoo* also Melville deplores the harmful effects which the interbreeding of native with foreigners has brought to the purity of Island character. *Red Burn* (1849) deals with his first voyage and presents character studies of various crew members. *White Jacket*(1850) records author’s life aboard the United States frigate on his return from Australia. It’s a powerful novel, although laden with propaganda for correction of novel practices, such as flogging.

In *Mardi* (1849), he gives a symbolic allegory to form the framework of *Moby Dick*. The allegory concerns man’s fruitless search for beauty and happiness to appreciate its power. *Moby Dick* appeared between (1849 and 1852) but attracted little notice. In *Pierre* (1852) he gives unrestrained vent to his pent-up anger at the failure of his efforts in the face of the blasé public contempt that was shown to his masterpiece *Moby Dick*.

Walt Whitman wiped out all the doubts that American literature was capable of seeking its own path into the future. With him, American poetry received its strongest injection of robust vigour. Whitman’s hypodermic was laden with robust and optimistic individualism, frank and outspoken idea, radical departures from classic form.

Whitman was fiercely proud of his origin whose roots were as fearless and adventurous as the rough Vikings of North Sea. He was a true American who worked on exploring its landscape, inhabited areas, wilderness, classical literature, etc. He did this leisurely by wandering across American subcontinent and gradually assimilated the entire America which he revealed in bits and pieces throughout his life in his poetry. Finally, after grounded in knowledge and inspired by the stirring ideas, he produced his first edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1855) which underwent eleven revisions throughout his lifetime. The first seven editions follow an expanding
America, portrayed in its joy and its sorrow. *Leaves of Grass* covers 1850-80 America in its expanding aspects: national and international issues, city life, wild frontier and people. Whitman’s *Song of Myself* is the longest poem and his most representative one of American life.

In 1880, with the declaration of Washington as capital, all the politics, culture and commerce moved either towards North through New York or South through the New Orleans.

Two Southern centres maintained and nurtured a literary tradition during the rise of American romanticism with writers such as Edgar Allen Poe, Richmond and Charleston. After the war, in Virginia plantations, life became more leisurely with better transportation and cooperation thus giving more time for contemplation and developing cultural interests. For about quarter a century, Virginia produced literature which idealized their land of plantation.

John Pendleton Kennedy, a novelist, presented best view of a section of early America which took on many characteristics of feudal England. He presented an idyllic view of plantation life but his view of early American life gives little of democratic vision.

Edgar Allen Poe (1809-49) was the exception who treated the ‘Plantation tradition’ in the rosy haze of historical romances and sketches. Poe was the first genuine literary critic of America. Before that, American criticism had been an emotional and biased matter. Poe introduced an analytical approach to criticism based upon wide knowledge of literature and a sure sense of weighing values.

As an artist, Poe produced more than sixtystories and forty-eight poems. His shorts stories were also a source of inspiration to the great French master of the genre, Guy de Maupassant. He gave this genre a definite form. His shorts tales – *The Fall of*
the House of Usher, The Cask of Amontillado, The Tell-Tale Heart, The Black Cat, The Masque of the Red Death and The Bit and the Pendulum carry considerable elements of supernatural and all are a masterful creation of a mood of fear and terror.

Poe also created the modern mystery tale which established the modern detective story. The Murders in the Rue Morgue, The Purloined Letter and The Mystery of Maria Roget are examples of such tales. The Old Bug is a tale of cryptology and its use in locating a buried treasure shows Poe’s employment of ratiocination in his plots, a sharp and logical process of reasoning.

The West was still a developing civilization and scanty production of literary works led to the favourism towards Eastern writings. The Westerners were living romanticism because it was a period when writers were awaiting a new generation and anticipating writings about the end of great conflict between the states in 1865. Timothy Flint, David Crockett, Augustus Longstreet and Alexander Ross were among the notable writers.

Two chief elements of literary romanticism were – a gospel of individualism and a search for man’s peace and happiness. A true American literature began in New York and Pennsylvania, but in the second and third decade of 19th century, both intellectual and aesthetic revolt was seen in New England more than other sections of America.

The intellectual atmosphere of New England romanticism consisted of three aspects:

- Revolt against Calvinistic theology resulting in Unitarianism.
- An idealistic philosophy-transcendentalism-primary ideas of which were imported from Europe and adapted to the local American impasse.
- An anti-slavery or abolitionist element.
The common emphasis was that of the worth of individual, man’s free will, salvation, goodness of man. These were the elements of romanticism which gave rise to romantic literature in New England. William Ellery Channing (1780-1842) was the early leader and helped in awakening New England.

Transcendentalists were interested in individual and developed their ideals from European philosophers, English romantic poets, French revolution and their own interpretations for living of good life. Ralph Waldo Emerson was the chief figure of this movement and defines the new American thought in his essay – *The Transcendentalist*. What was Transcendentalism for New England is Idealism as it appears in 1842.

Growing side by side was the abolitionist doctrine on demand to free the Negro slaves. In New England, this political and social issue entered literature and produced a great mass of anti-slavery works. Poets like Long Fellow, Whittier and Lowell contributed to this branch of a particular romanticism. In the field of prose fiction, the publication of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* fanned the fires. ‘Stowe made of uncle Tom’s ‘cabin’ both the title and the central symbolic place. The cabin, in the novel, is replaced by Quaker farmhouse where the mixed-race American family, sits down to eat. Stowe’s claim is that, although separated, yet such dwelling places like Uncle Tom’s, are all really rooms of one national house through whose corridors narration and feeling follows.’ It contributed in abolition of slavery and helped in producing a mass of orations, tracts, essays and argumentative speeches. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* aroused a moral indignation. It was the first social novel which treated a major problem of America some fifty years before social novel came into being. Stowe wrote two more antislavery works – *A key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1853) and *Dred, A Tale of the Great*
Dismal Swamp (1856). Her other works are popular romantic novels – *The Minister’s Wooing* (1859), *The Pearl of Orr’s Island* (1862) and *Old Town Folks* (1869).

(Philip Fisher, 1999)

By 1810, old Calvinist dogma and tradition died and new theological philosophies giving worth to individual rose. As a result an all enveloping romanticism and aesthetic literature began to rise. The chief figures John Greenleaf Whittier, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry Wadsworth, Longfellow, James Russell Lowell and Oliver Wendell Holmes. These figure are not all found in a group or ‘School’.

Hawthorne wrote legendary sketches *Twice Told Tales* (1837); allegories and parables – *Sights from a Steeple, The Minister’s Black Veil, The Toll Gatherer’s Day*. His most famous works *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) hailed as an ‘American novel’ for the portrayal of dark and foreboding shadows of the Puritan past and *The House of Seven Gables* (1851) treating evils of inbreeding and the sins of heredity. *Blithedale Romance* (1852) deals with the surroundings of Brook Farm, a transcendental retreat. *The Marble Faun* is laid in Italy. His short stories *Dr. Heidegger’s Experiment, The Birthmark, The Ambitious Guest, The Maypole of Merry Mount, Rappaccint’s Daughter, Lady Eleanor’s Mantle*.

With the end of the Civil War, romanticism from Europe served as a primer for the beginning of a true national literature in America. Only Walt Whitman spanned civil war years with his booming pride. Romanticism became a major characteristic of American literature after 1865 along with the new elements of ‘Local Colour’ in a frontier literature and realism. People came to demand a literature that would give them a colourful and entertaining view of life as it was happening about them in the nation. The local colour school contributed a great deal towards
uncovering valuable sources of American themes for literature. Their efforts had great influence upon realists of this century but the writings of the local colourists are shallow and sentimentally romantic.

Mark Twain was born in Missouri in Mid West and was moulded by the American frontier. He began his writing career as a western humorist, hoping that his permanent literary genius would lie in the direction of social satire. Being a sensitive observer of the realities around himself, Twain became disillusioned with the materialism of the age. As a result he became bitter and his optimism faded to reflect a profound pessimism towards the human race. His recollections of his boyhood surroundings and the rosy dreams of his youth produced his masterpieces – Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn and Life on the Mississippi. His work consists of humorous writings, sketches, travel narratives, lectures, auto biographical fiction and historical romances. His final writings are predominated by black despair of his spirit due to his loss of faith in God and man. His best work of this period is The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg (1900).

Materialism discouraged the lucid flow of life. The life was no longer romantic in its national aspects. Romanticism was ‘gilt and tinsel’, artificial and shallow, filled with colour, side – splitting laughter, exaggeration and a forced recentness. About 1890 industrialism and the disappearance of the frontier brought the feeling that the individual freedom and romance had disappeared from national life.

William Dean Howells, Henry James and Hamlin Garland were not pioneers of realistic creed but before they had ceased to write, the realistic method was the major trend among the greatest fiction writers.

Howells is an important name in American literature as a novelist and a literary critic. He preached the realistic creed in many critical works, for e.g. Criticism
and Fiction (1891). In all Howells wrote twenty-five novels, eight of which deserve to live as landmarks in American literature’s climb to realism. Two novels are of great significance – The Rise of Silas Lapham (1885) which relates the story of self-made colonel Lapham and his reaction at the loss of his fortune and prestige in Boston society. A Modern Instance (1881) is a problem novel which deals with the deterioration of marital life when two young lovers discover their incompatibility in marriage.

Henry James spent most of his life out of America because he felt that American culture was shallow, materialistic and hypocritical. In The Portrait of a Lady (1881), the heroine is an American woman who lives in Europe. In The Ambassadors (1903), the intellectual American hero discovers in Paris the satisfactory cultural values which he missed in America. In The Golden Bowl (1904), an American girl, married to an Italian Prince, is called upon to face the adultery of her husband with her own step mother.

Garland was son of mid-west and was impressed with the drudgery and misery attached to middle border farm life. He wrote his first book, Main Travelled Roads (1891), a collection of stories and sketches of many miseries and few joys of mid-western farm life. Gradually he became concerned with reforms of farm conditions and his auto biographical narrative A Son of the Middle Border (1914) is an important and well balanced account of pioneer life on the western farm.

Rise of industrialism, business, disappearance of the frontier and of free land, concentration of political and economic power in the hands of big business sectors and attendant corruption, rise of organized groups, advances in science and technology particularly in the field of biology with the theories of Darwin and its easy promulgation of deterministic ideas from which man would appear to be a victim of
circumstances and be able to control his own destiny, the resulting spirit of pessimism, advancement in transportation, dissemination of facts and ideas, national unity, breaking down of the influence of eastern aristocratic group and their traditions, rise of international arrogance and display of imperialistic policies in the Spanish American war (1898) the Panama Canal acquisition, the ‘big stick’ policies of Theodore Roosevelt and influence of European literatures dedicated to realism. In spite of that, a ‘Pseudo Romanticism’ had continued in American writing but the major portion became increasingly realistic in its presentation of both pleasant and unpleasant aspects of the society. (G. E. Smith, 1962)

To define realistic fiction, certain terms used, are – Realism, Naturalism, Impressionism and Expressionism. Many of the writers’ lesser ability has departed from the realistic method. Such techniques obviously lead to the opposing technique of romanticism – sentimental fiction, sentimental realism, social fiction, regionalism, exoticism and the historical approach.

**Developments in Fiction**

The concentration of population in industrial centres, the dying spirit of individual independence in the face of a vanishing frontier and industrialization brought the spirit of helplessness to America. Man came to be considered by the writers as automation. This fiction technique of disillusionment and pessimism dominated the best writers of prose and some poets from 1890 to 1930. Naturalism caused the reflection of American life as harsh as the writers saw it. Stephen Craneswrote *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893). His interest in the sordid and brutal aspects of New York’s Bowery district, which he observed on his beat as a news reporter, led him to pen down his episodic analysis of slum conditions in the form of a novelette. Crane’s another novel *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) is an
impressionistic masterpiece of war. It is American literature’s first attempt to a direct and impersonal view of civil war conditions. The protagonist, Harry Fleming, like Maggie, is a victim of circumstances which leads to his moral disintegration. The young New York lad, who has volunteered with the Union forces, gradually goes to pieces under gunfire. Another genre of Crane’s production is short story. One of his famous stories is *The Open Boat*, a tense and graphic account of four men in an open boat, the only survivors of a shipwreck of the Florida coast.

Theodore Dreiser wrote his works at the height of receptivity to the naturalistic technique in America and became the most prominent writer among naturalists. *Sister Carrie* (1990) is his first experiment in the European style Naturalism where a working girl jumps from one lover to another for a cradle of success but the ultimate success gives her nothing except loneliness. Dreiser wrote his most famous novel *An American Tragedy* (1925), a long and sprawling chaotic narrative built around a very flimsy plot.

The spirit of naturalism, which reached its peak of development with Dreiser, has had many followers among American writers. After Dreiser, the naturalist writers drifted towards a very subjective treatment of their material. But the general tone of pessimism and disillusion, continued to be characteristic of a large body of American fiction until very recent years. The social ills treated were – corruption in politics, individual greed of speculators and industrialists and a misdirection of American basic democratic concepts.

In fact, within the period following the civil war, writers such as Mark Twain, Hay, Adams and Howe had written novels which had a sociological purpose to analyse evil within American economic and social structure. This social novel was a form of realistic novel but it did not attempt to suggest remedies for the conditions
described. Theodore Roosevelt angered at the efforts of these writers, probing into economic and social institutions to expose the malodorous facts, and referred to them as ‘muckrakers’. The earliest of the muckraking movement were the journalists and their studies appeared in magazines. Among these studies were such exposes as Ida Tarbell’s *The History of the Standard Oil Company* (1904) and Lincoln’s Steffen’s *The Shame of the Cities* (1904). In 1920s, the ‘muckraking’ crusade and much of the fiction, devoted to the analysis of social problems, had subsided and had given way to a more artistic type of realistic delving into American social structure to expose its weakness. In 1930s, the economic depression kept the sociological novel in the forefront of American realistic writing as it treated the social miseries induced by the depression.

Upton Sinclair is the greatest and most representative of the ‘muckraker’ aspect of the social novel. *The Jungle* (1906) is an expose of the filth and corrupt practices he found in the meat-packing plants. In *King Coal* (1917), and *The Profit of the Religion* (1918), he attacked the religion as a tool in capitalistic hands to keep the poor in contented subjugation. In *The Goose Step* (1923) and *The Goslings* (1924), he attacked the regimentation and one-sided educational diet imposed upon the school systems by capitalist manipulators. In *The Flivver King* (1937) he turned his searching technique upon the automobile industry. In *World’s End* (1940) Sinclair began to trace the career of his hero, the illegitimate son of a munitions manufacturer and an international beauty. In *The Lanny Budd* series, Sinclair carries his herothrough every major world event from World War I to 1953.

The social novel’s stemper took new directions, mainly that of a dissection of attitudes and institutions of bourgeois society. The focus of attention was principally the small town and the village with attacks on the spirit of narrowness and smug
Puritanism. But the picture of the realist novelists of the twenties, of the American small town, was a different one. They pictured village life as dull and resistant to change.

Sinclair Lewis, a social realist, produced three novels of excellent standard. *Main Street* (1920) brought him international fame as a realist and a satirist. The novel is a sociological study of rural Midwestern town. *Babbit* (1922) is a penetrating study of smug middleclass respectability and *Arrow Smith* (1952), a conflict between personal high in an individual doctor versus the narrow bigotry in medical practice which would reduce the high minded scientist to a sordid conformist level of sham and avarice.

Sherwood Anderson, unlike Lewis, became concerned with the inner conflicts of his characters. He saw the American small town as a seething cauldron of individual frustration and passion. *Winesburg Ohio* (1919) is the collection of short stories which are studies of human behaviour, of confused and frustrated personalities. During the years of economic depression, most enduring social fiction came from writers whose attention was drawn to the wide gulf between the average middle class Americans and certain groups of under-privileged individuals. The fiction in the period between the two World Wars was devoted to the studies of migrant agriculture workers, the sharecroppers and the tenant farmer groups of the South, workers in the Eastern textile mills, minority racial groups and city slum population.  

(G. E. Smith, 1962)

John Steinbeck’s liberal and humanitarian views have found expression in his best novels as an ardent desire for agrarian reform in the direction of more widespread individual land ownership. Steinbeck’s notable works are *Tortilla Flat* (1935) and *Of Mice and Men* (1937) *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) is one of the most convincing
social novels that raised Steinbeck to the level of great prose fiction. This story of the migration of a farm family from the Oklahoma dust bowl to a fertile California valley is a work of masterful descriptive power and artistic realism in character delineation.

The sociological novel continued on a minor note as the war focussed sharp attention upon the American rift between ideals and practice in treatment of the major American minority racial group: the Negro. In *Strange Fruit* (1944) by Lillian Smith, a Georgia social worker charged both Negro and white with responsibility in the solution of their mutual difficulties in living together and sharing equally the fruits of Democracy. Richard Wright’s vivid and forceful narrative tends to concentrate upon the viewpoint of the Negro. His *Native Son* (1940) brought him immense fame and *Black Power* (1954) is a study of Negroes in Africa.

Apart from Negro minority, the war also brought two other social problems into sharp focus: the social effects of atomic war fare and crime in the younger age-groups. The most sensational fictional treatment of juvenile delinquency was *The Bed Seed* (1954), a highly naturalistic treatment of an eight year old murderess.

*Genteel Realism*

Standing at the opposite pole of naturalism, within the meaning of the term realism as a straight forward presentation of life as it is, there has been a 20\(^{th}\) century group of writers who followed in the footsteps of Howells and James – ‘The Pioneers of genteel tradition’. This group has attempted to present a realistic view of life, but they have carefully chosen their materials from select areas of American Society. They are aristocratic writers who cultivate themes related to the conventional and established codes of upper class morality. The leading figure of the tradition of genteel writing has been women.
Edith Wharton was mildly satirical. Basically she was concerned with the beauty of expression and refinement of theme. One of her best novels is *The House of Mirth* (1905), which is the story of a girl who is ostracized from her group because of her unconventional behaviour. *Ethan Frome* (1911), her masterpiece, is a novelette dealing with simple New England people.

Willa Cather began her writing career with the recollections of her childhood which she spent among European immigrant groups. Her best novel of early period is *My Antonia* (1918), the tender and sympathetic tale of a bohemian immigrant girl and her hardships on the Nebraskan frontier. When the store of recollections from her past exhausted, she turned her attention to the efforts of Catholic Church in the Southwest and in Canada. Her best known work from this period is *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927).

Some novelists purported to present American life as it is but coloured their efforts highly with personal pride, patriotism and optimism. Booth Tarkington produced novels which are representations of surface reality, biased towards an abiding American faith that virtue and integrity always emerge triumphant. One of his best novels is *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1918). Other writers are Edna Ferber, Kathleen Norris and Fanny Hurst.

In the few years to come American better creative writing had been a realistic one with the author’s approach being objective or subjective. The subjective approach was very strong in regional novel. Naturalism, objective or subjective realism, and the more genteel and sentimental approaches came to be found in American regional fiction.

The historical novel also gained steady popularity. Many writers of popular fiction produced a plethora of sub-literary historical novels. The most popular of the
sub-literary, ‘historical romances’ was the single work of Margaret Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind* (1937) a long narrative dealing with the Civil War and the Reconstruction period. The historical novel continues to hold popularity of a blending of realism and romanticism even in today’s American writing which is the interest of Americans in the rich resources of their soil and people of past and present. Some distinguished writers are: Zane Grey, Emerson Hough, John fox, Owen Wister, Winston Churchill, Kenneth Roberts, etc.

Along with realism and naturalism, there came a corresponding surge of exotic and imaginatively fanciful fiction. To many, the new realistic methods produced only sordid pictures of life and demanded optimism and the thrill of high adventure. Many were tired of the local colourists’ versions of the American scene and yearned to be stimulated by the call of far-off places.

American readers were also excited by the wave of exotic fiction and poetry which poured in American bookstores from England. Such fiction and Poetry was carried to the South Seas by Stevenson, to India by Kipling and to Japan by Hearn H. Rider Haggard, Sir Anthony Hope and others. H. G. Wells had begun to produce a type of scientific fantasy which reached into other worlds. Conan Doyle had created his super detective, Sherlock Holmes, who was gifted with uncanny powers for ferreting out the weird and exotic crimes of master criminals.

In America, Lew Wallace had carried readers back into the splendour of Aztec Mexico through *The Fair God* (1873) and to the glories of ancient Rome in his *Ben Hur* (1880). Charles Major’s *When Knighthood was in Flower* (1898), Booth Tarkington’s *Monsieur Beaucaire* (1900) and George Barr McCutcheon’s *Graustark* (1901) precipitated a revival of romance, a false or ‘Pseudo’ romanticism of escape to alien and fanciful realms of imagination. James Oliver Curwood exploited the theme
of the north woods of Canada and Alaska; Nordof and Hall took the South Sea in their works, Edgar Rice Burroughs found escapism in Neo-primitive Superhumans such as ‘Tarzan’. Today the detective story and the historical romance are the most exploited themes which provide escape from reality for American readers. From 1903 to 1950s the popular novel attempted to create revived sense of Christian spirituality by the exploitation of New Testament themes. *The Robe* (1942) has been the most successful to treat biblical themes in an exotic manner. The two most successful writers of the exotic fiction in the century have approached their escapist matter from widely differing directions. Pearl Buck has devoted most of her production to Chinese peasant life. In *The Good Earth* (1931), she manages to make this ancient culture comprehensible to western readers. *Jurgen* (1919) is James B. Cabell’s representative work. He creates a mythical middle-aged country of Poictesme to which he returns to develop his dream-like tales of fantasy.

Beside novels, short fictional forms gained popularity since the times of its pioneers Hawthorne and Poe. Such writers as Frank Stockton (*The Lady or the Tiger*) and Richard Harding Davis (*Gallengher*) began to exploit sentimentality and normal human curiosity in their themes. During the first decade of 20th Century, a phenomenally successful short story writer was William Sydney Porter who wrote under the pseudonym O. Henry. His most famous collection is *The Four Million* (1906).

Throughout the 20th century and till today, the novel and short fiction have continued to be the most exploited form of creative writing. Beginning with Washington Irving till today, America has given birth to some top ranking essayists, short story writers and novelists. All sorts of novels – historical, series of novels constituting a saga of generations, science fiction, novels dealing with dilemma
related to faith or Godlessness have been written by American novelists who know the very threads of their nation in its most changing times. Most of the novelists resort to superficial rebukes to project the negative reality of the nation. They also deal with the problems and issues satirically, picking up events from middle class families, town talk and daily incidents.

One of these prolific writers is John Updike who possesses the deepest knowledge of every shore of the American subcontinent. Besides treating America as a continent, Updike can easily tackle domestic, religious and national issues by making death, sex, doubt, faith and reason as his themes. Whenever and wherever needed, he widens his spectrum towards adultery, escapism, insecurity and lack of satisfaction. Taking the above mentioned aspects he manages to merge them slowly but steadily with the domestic, social, political, religious, and national and even with the universal content. Each of his works has its own stream to follow; but some deal very smoothly with more than one issue. In some other work, loss of one aspect leads to the loss or destruction of the other. For Updike, life is like a human body with God as its guide whom the creature seeks whenever he is helpless before worldly as well as unworldly things. Just like the human body, the crippling of any one aspect in one’s life, leads to the ‘malfunction’ of the entire life. Updike longs for a Utopian America. Therefore, the reader can feel a helpless rebuke calling for help and reformation, because Updike had a strong belief that the world can always be brought out of its cloudiness and made fair in a season. Therefore he populated his fiction with character that frequently experience personal turmoil and must respond to crisis relating to religion, family obligations and marital infidelity. His fiction is distinguished by its attention to the concern, passions and suffering of average Americans. Basically a writer begins with his personal truth, with that obscure
vulnerable and once lost previous life that he lived before becoming a writer: but those first impressions discharged a process of years – he finds himself though empty, still posed in the role of a writer, with it may be an expectant audience of sorts and certain habit of communion. It is then that he dies as a writer, by resubmitting his ego, as it were to freshen-up drafts of experience and refined operations of mind. The human inside the writer wants to relive his past, this time with a difference. He desires to redeem his repentant soul by equipping his character with the worldly and unworldly things that he missed in his own time, thus conveying a profitable message to mankind. In words of Updike, ‘Energy ebbs as we live. . .almost alone the writer can reap profit from his loss.’

(Picked Up Pieces, 1975)

In his foreword to Olinger Stories 1964, he characterized his early stories as ‘crystallization of memory’ a most apt description of stories collected in The Same Door (1959) and Pigeon Feathers (1962) collections. It is an important designation not only for his short stories but also his novels ranging from the most autobiographical The Centaur (1963) Of the Farm (1965) to the futuristic, The Poor House Fair (1959) and others. As he later remarks, ‘I was full of Pennsylvania thing I wanted to say’ and it’s evident that Pennsylvania thing of his youthful memory informs almost the fiction of 1955-65 decade. The Olinger of Updike’s stories is evidently the Shillington, Pennsylvania, where Updike himself grew up. Some of the early short stories during this period figured a young boy as a protagonist who is, in fact, an alter ego of Updike himself. Like ‘Peter Caldwell’s father in The Centaur, Updike’s father too, was a High School teacher and Updike himself, as one can guess from his stories, was the brightest boy in the local high school an image of his
childhood which he presents in ‘Terrorist’ along with droplets of dew perfumed with imagination, where a reflection of an ideal father is seen through ‘Jack Levy’.

(The Paris Review, 1968)

Aware of the tendency that might have led some critics to dismiss The Centaur and many of his stories as little more than surrogated glimpses of the past, Updike defends it as an honoured tradition in American culture, ‘I’m still running on energy lay down in child hood. . I really don’t think I’m alone among writers in caring about what they experienced in the first 18 years of their life. Hemingway cherished the Michigan stories out of proportion. I would think to their merit. Look at Twain, look at Joyce. Nothing that happens to us after twenty is as free from self-consciousness because by then we have the vocation to write’.

(Jane, Howard and Samuels C. T, 1966)

Updike released more than sixty books in a career started in 1950s. He won every literary prize, especially two Pulitzers and two National Book Awards. He wrote novels, poems, criticism, the memoir Self-Consciousness and an essay about great baseball player, Ted Williams, withits immortal line about the surely slugger who refused to tip his hat to his fans: ‘Gods do not answer letters’.

Endowed with an art student’s pictorial imagination, a journalist’s sociological eye and poet’s gift for metaphor – John Updike was arguably America’s one true all round man of letters. He moved fluently from fiction to criticism, from light verse to short stories to the long distance form of the novel. In his most resonant work, he gave ‘the mundane its beautiful due’ as he once put it, memorializing the everyday mysteries of love and faith and domesticity with extraordinary nuance and precision.

Updike summed up his love for his vocation: ‘To distribute oneself. . .as a kind of confetti shower falling upon the heads and shoulders of mankind out of book
stores and the pages of magazine is surely a great privilege and a defiance of the usual earth-bound laws whereby human beings make themselves known to one another’.

(NewYork Times, 2009)

Basically Updike was always proud of autobiographical element in his work. He always acknowledges the connection between his autobiography and the novels. His novels *The Centaur* 1963 and *Of the Farm* 1965 both are laden with autobiographical element and the latter seems to be sequel of the former. Updike supports the suggestion that Joey Robinson from *Of the Farm* has taken up Peter’s pen.

By comparing Updike’s interviews with his fiction and stories, we find that much of his fiction is thinly disguised autobiography whether it is *The Centaur* or *Of the Farm* or *The Dogwood Tree* or *Terrorist*, where fatherly feelings of Jack Levy are translated into an ideal father who really longs for a stable family, though at the cost of bringing his own marital life at the verge of break-up. In the novels whether the hero is ‘Allen Dow’ or ‘Clyde Behan’ or ‘John Updike’, the facts are always the same.

The years 1964-66 mark an important transitional stage in Updike’s progress and so are crucial for a comprehensive understanding of his writing career. Updike wrote the foreword to Olinger stories in 1964 with attention of saying farewell to Pennsylvania and to his boyhood memories. After the novel *Of the Farm* his fictional locale moved from Pennsylvania to New England and his themes came to reflect adult concerns instead of boyhood recollections.

*The Music School* collection holds a distinctive place in Updike’s writing because it contains several stories that in addition to more familiar Updike’s themes, deal with the issues of artistic self-consciousness and the act of composition itself. In
the story *The Bulgarian Poetess* (1965), Updike created a spokesman who would explicitly engaged these issues with Henry Beach. Later, these stories were compiled and published in a book form, *Bech: A Book*; the second series was named, *Bech is Back* and his third series, *Beck at Bay*. Of these stories, Updike said, ‘. . .at any rate, I have used the writer in *Bech: A Book* as a subject in order to confess sterility in truthful way. . .In my book, I tried to. . .and I believe I did pack and dispose of a certain set of tensions and anxieties which I have as a practicing writer.

(Frand Gado, 1973)

In the decade 1965-76, the tension of marriage, the process of dying and the varied losses of faith – religious, political and sexual became his central themes. However, he himself observed that ‘the difference between Olinger and Tarbox is much more than the difference between the childhood and adulthood than the difference between two geographical locations. They are stages on my pilgrim’s progress not dots on the map.’

*The Paris Review*, 1968

*Midpoint*, though a lesser known work, is another milestone in Updike’s career in which he sets forth his outlook on life and art. In an interview first published in 1972, Updike’s said, ‘When asked about what my philosophy was, I tried to write it down in *Midpoint.*’ *(PickedUpPieces*, 509) The philosophical and theological concerns which form an integral part of the poem, offer an insight into the underlying intent of Updike’s novels from *The Poor House Fair* (1959) to *The Roger’s Version* (1986) to *In the Beauty of the Lilies* (1996). The commitment Updike sets forth in his poem provides the screens through which we may sift the complexities of his seventeen novels. Throughout the five cantos Updike reveals that he is committed to the centrality of the reality of the material world, and a life of mystery and faith. In
the poem, he clearly aligns himself to the theology of Kierkegaard and Karl Barth and sings praises for them.

In Updike’s less autobiographical fiction, themes from the Olinger stories recur in various forms. Instead of personal nostalgia, there is nostalgia for pre-urban America. The dominant characters in the later fiction are old men or young ones who feel at odd against the modern world. Instead of the efforts to capture one’s past, there is a quest for permanence that involves religion. *The Poor House Fair* (1959) is quite unusual for a first novel, but it has the germs of Updike’s mental and spiritual concerns which were later explored in his novels especially ‘*The Scarlet Letter* trilogy’. It’s set twenty years in future and is written as an anti-1984 (George Orwell, *1984*). In this novel, there is ongoing debate between Conner, the perfect old age home, who in fact, stands for the humanist approach to life, and Hook, the 94 years old protagonist who shares Updike’s views on faith and spirituality. Conner represents the secularization of American life, the increasing concern with material values, an idealist dedicated to his duties and responsibilities. The key to goodness is faith. Novels of Updike make a quest for a set of values – religious, ethical or social that could give meaning to the flux of existence.

Updike’s other concerns are themes of love and marriage that have occupied his interest from the beginning of his literary career. Updike was acclaimed as master of this genre with the publication and overwhelming success of *Couples* in 1968. *Marry Me*, a romance, published eight years after couples in 1976 deals with the same theme of adulterous sex lives of young couples in their thirties. Both protagonists Jerry Conant and Piet Hanemma believe in God, fear death and seek release in adultery. The reason of this is that the bulk of *Marry Me* was written before *Couples*. The action of *Marry Me* occupies the year from the spring of 1962 to the spring of
1963. The events of Couples fill the months from the spring of 1963 to the spring of 1964. These novels deal with marriage in progressive states of deterioration in small town Eden. As in The Poor House Fair, in this novel also, a question exists, ‘After Christianity what?’ Updike in the sixties felt that a new kind of religion might be emerging, not like the rational, socially engineered welfare state positioned in The Poor House Fair, but rather a religion of human interplay including sexual interplay. Marry Me was followed by The Witches of East Wick in 1984. It is the third of Updike’s New England novels dealing with deteriorating marriages. It is also set in 1960’s and probes American culture’s attempts to find a replacement for an abandoned Christianity.

To the question, ‘After Christianity what?’ the novel suggests that the attempt to find a successor to Christianity is futile. Throughout his writing career, religious faith has a dominant aspect of Updike’s writing. In his early twenties, when he was facing a religious crisis, he read such theologians as Karl Barth and Kierkegaard whose religious views left an indelible impression on his consciousness. His love for Barth finds an obvious expression in such full blown characters as The Reverend, Thomas Marshfield and Professor Roger Lambert. His religious views are reflected in these three novels – A Month of Sundays (1975), Roger’s Version (1986) and S.A Novel (1988). Updike’s trilogy is a transformation of Hawthorn’s masterpiece. He joins his predecessor in investigating adultery, sin and salvation, but the trilogy is as much as contemporary musings on Hawthorn’s themes as an adaptation of the Hawthornian dilemma. Updike confirms his sympathy with Barth’s argument that humanity cannot reach God, only God can touch humanity. The result is that the element of faith always out weighs good works. Marshfield is a minister caught between the apparently conflicting demands of stern faith and insistent eroticism. He
engages himself in adulterous affairs with his parishioners. When discovered, he is sent to a rest home for disturbed clergymen, where he is suggested to write for therapy. Still he is far removed from pangs of consciousness suffered by Hawthorne’s Dimmesdale. Instead its Barth’s definition of faith that sustains him during his sojourn in the desert. Confident of his belief, Marshfield unifies the material and the spiritual and emerges victorious.

Updike’s position on the unimportance of ethics has its source in Barth’s assurance that evil is always relative because it’s not part of God’s positive creation. Such an opinion does negate the necessity for faith. Bernard Schopen has given the soundest analysis of the relationship between religion and Updike’s fiction. He says that the faith discussed in the novels, ‘is one to which many of the assumptions about the Christian perspective do not apply, especially those which link Christian faith with an absolute and divinely ordered morality.’ (Bernand Schopen, 1978)

The next novel in the trilogy, Roger’s Version (1986), portrays Roger Lambert, a dry bookish scholar, a professor of early Christian heresies, who is drawn after Hawthorne’s Roger Chilling worth. The main action of the novel consists of large discussions between Roger and a 28 year old student Dale Kohler, possessing a startling idea put as ‘God is breaking through’. He seeks to prove his creations and His existence through an advanced computer technology. With Roger’s help he obtains a grant from the university to pursue his project. The clash between two contrary thoughts – Lambert’s Barthianism – God is beyond all human understanding against Dale’s insistence that he is knowable and even tangible. But Roger maintains that to reveal God is to eliminate God’s majesty. Dale may be a believer but his effort to reveal God’s face makes him an anti-Barthian heretic. In keeping with the erudition of Chilling Worth, Updike directs Roger’s Version with intellectual intensity. Another
feature that the novel shares with Hawthorne’s masterpiece is Roger’s reaction on
discovering Fake’s affair with his wife Esther (HesterPryne). The older man uses the
relationship to irritate Dale’s conscience as Chilling worth did Dimmesdale’s
preventing any open confession that might bring repentance and release to the young
man.

Updike turns to Hester’s version of The Scarlet Letter with S: A Novel in
which he investigates rebellion from a disgusted wife’s point of view. Updike’s Sarah
(Hester) pursues mystical eroticism with an oriental flavour. Calling attention not to
Hester’s artistic skills but to her sexuality, he stresses her association with the serpent
in Eden when he designs the letter S on the book cover to resemble a snake.

Sarah worth, the protagonist deserts her ‘dark and unheeding philandering’
physician husband Charles to join an Asharm in Arizona desert. Her search is for
enlightenment beyond highly privileged but suffocating upper middle class life. The
Ashram is an object of satire but it soon becomes clear that what has actually misled
Sarah is another form of antinomian feminism. When Hester’s adultery is discovered,
she retreats to a cabin in the forest and keeps silent, while Updike’s Sarah travels to
her Ashram and speaks up. The epistolary style in S gives Sarah the voice that
Hawthorne denies to Hester.

Unlike the predecessor, Sarah escapes with her eroticism. Both women reflect
their cultures, but Sarah has the advantage of knowing much of the society and this
supports her rebellion. Barth’s theology is not an issue in S. A Novel more the
dominant concern is feminism. Updike’s insistence is on the unification of body and
soul, separated by the Puritans and kept asunder by Hawthorne even in his radical
transformation of the scarlet letter. Marshfield, Sarah and Roger Lambert pursue
freedom to extremes because they know with Updike that Barth’s formulas are apt.
Since only God is perfect, humanity by definition is free to transgress. To remain human, humanity must resist God’s perfection.

*In the Beauty of the Lilies* (1996) is a four-generation saga which is partly a fictional version of Updike’s family history, partly account of the decline of religious faith in America, and partly a reflection of Updike’s angry, personal struggle to find religious meaning. Updike told ‘Publishers Weekly’ that in this novel, he has attempted ‘to make God a character, although in ways that illuminate spiritual emptiness in American life’. (James M. 1996) The Revd. Clarence Wilmot loses his faith and consequently his career in ministry. Updike also links Wilmot’s loss of faith to the rise of movies.

In this way, as a writer, Updike was remarkably prolific, his reputation secured by the Rabbit Angstrom series, *Couples* and his three episodes of *Henry Bech*. His novels examined life on socio-economic terms and brought a new frankness to sexuality, infidelity, and family betrayal. But they also deal head on with Updike’s concern for American tradition and the social and religious values that he grew up with. *Rabbit, Run* (1960), the first of his quartet series on former high school basketball star Harold Angstrom, inflamed readers with its portrayal of an average, middle class American who is spiritually and mentally eroding. This series, ending with *Rabbit at Rest* in 1990, is a lifetime of spiritual crisis that ranges over Updike’s entire adult life. Harold Angstrom is seen trying to uphold his notion of self-worth while dawdling through a society that is overpopulated, oversized, overmechanized and with under-achievers left to rot.

Working in a materialistic context, Updike’s fiction was still based on a protestant, depression era viewpoint. Updike matured during a period of economic scarcity, an individual’s reliance on the community at large and religious
sentiment. As the U.S. advanced through the 1960s, 70s and 80s, his novels featured characters with eroding family bonds and who seem to be drowning in late 20th Century affluence. Updike experienced the sixties lifestyle first-hand (his first marriage ended in divorce), lived through the turbulence of Vietnam and, therefore, showed a keen interest in human failure. Updike’s novels have been described as crass, in poor taste, weighted down in their hopelessness, harsh descriptions of everyday life, portrayal of women – always sardonic and often brutal – had not placed him in good stead during an era of female equality. Updike’s existing readership also declined over the years as a Christian perspective and focus on white, middle class America grew increasingly quaint. However Updike still has a devoted group of readers and is frequently the topic of conversation at literary gatherings, but public support has never equalled the quality of his writing.

The question that will be answered in decades to come is, whether Updike wrote for all eras or if he simply wrote for his own. Not one to self-promoter, Updike shrugged at the idea of posterity and viewed his reputation after death as fully in the hands of others. He insisted on honest trials to amuse others.

Even with his recent success, years must pass before a sound evaluation can be made of Updike’s work. The American population has changed shape in the decades since his first novel and there is nothing to suggest that what remains of Depression era ideologies will be carried on. Still, Updike’s commitment of portraying American life has secured fame in his own lifetime and will provide his best chance of remaining in libraries. Updike documented the national situation like few have and he has provided us with a detailed road connecting us from past to present.
Works Cited


REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Updike is considered as one of the greatest American fiction writers of his generation. Besides Tony Morrison, Updike was the most written about living writer of his time. He was widely praised as America’s ‘last true man of letters’. The excellence of his prose is near-universally acknowledged, even by those critics who are sceptical of his significance as a novelist and of his larger artistic vision. Updike’s themes and his style of writing elicited a mixed response in the beginning of his literary career. His early works *The Carpentered Hen* (1958), *The Poor House Fair* (1959) and *The Same Door: Short Stories* (1959) were greeted with enthusiasm in the literary circle. ‘New York Times Book Review’, welcomed Updike’s ability (reminiscent of both Chekhov and Joyce) to discern significance in the lives of ordinary people. Ultimately, Updike remains as the foremost man of letters whose prodigious intelligence, verbal powers, shrewd insight into the sorrows, frustrations and banality of American life separates him from the ranks of his contemporaries. Amidst this general craze, there were complaints of weakness which prefigured attacks on Updike that became commonplace later on. Richard Gillman wrote in an otherwise favourable review of *The Poor House Fair*: ‘Occasionally, too his book suffers from what Pascal described as ‘The wearing effect of continuous eloquence’.

(Gillman, 1959)

The novelist, Philip Roth, considered as one of Updike’s chief literary rivals, wrote – ‘Updike is our time’s greatest man of letters, as brilliant a literary critic and essayist as he was a novelist and short story writer. He is and always will be no less a national treasure than his 19th century precursor – Nathaniel Hawthorne’.

The hero of Updike’s most acclaimed series of novels, *The Rabbit* series, is considered Updike’s American Everyman. The large majority of review of Updike’s second novel *Rabbit, Run*, were also favourable although some reviewers puzzled about
the writer’s attitude towards the protagonist. But the charges of triviality kept on growing. Another review in ‘Times’ said, ‘This dedicated 29 years old man of letters, says very little and says it very well. . .The impressions left are of risks untaken, words too fondly tested and of a security of skill that approaches smugness’.

(Put and Take, Time, 1962)

Other critics are of the view that his prose is superficial and overly descriptive to hide the fact that his work is about nothing. Even sympathetic critics like Guerin La Course observed that ‘He fears to foray into the night world of feeling for the significances. The polarity of genius has a double edge’; warning that Updike can’t afford to sit on his hands; he concluded, ‘He relies apparently on language rather than thought, sense rather that sensibility, wit rather than wisdom, all of which afford only temporary harbour’.

(Commonweal, 1963)

According to Amitabh Ghosh, ‘The end-result is that Updike is unable to cut his brown characters loose from the texts, scriptures and ideologies. As for his belief, that elaborate descriptions of skin colour are a form of insight, it is not wholly without merit, for it does serve to occasionally enliven the prose’. Updike’s preoccupations with diverse concerns like sociological, metaphysical and Christian led to different interpretations of his texts. His highly distinctive prose style features a rich, unusual, sometimes inscrutable vocabulary as conveyed through the eyes of ‘a wry, intelligent authorial voice’ that extravagantly describes the physical world, while remaining squarely in the realist tradition. Updike famously described his own style as an attempt to ‘give the mundane its beautiful due’. Updike’s early works featured the influence of JD Salinger, John Cheever and the Modernists – Marcel Proust, Henry Greene, James Joyce and Vladimir Nabokov. Among the very early critical articles, Dean Doner’s *Rabbit Angstrom’s Unseen World* takes into considerations the short stories such as *Ace in the Hole and Lifeguard* and
Updike’s novels *The Poor House Fair* and *Rabbit Run* and concludes that humanists are consistently projected as antagonists in Updike’s works. For Doner, Rabbit becomes the hero, victimized by the net of humanism. Eccles and Conner, two humanists are the antagonists and Rabbit’s irresponsible behaviour and self efforts for breaking free are as in a sense redeemed by this belief in God.

Arthur Mizener, in *The American Hero as HighSchool Boy: Peter Caldwell*related Updike’s nostalgia for his past with a religious feeling. And this may be true because Updike wrote about America with certain nostalgia, reverence, recognitions and celebration of America’s broad diversity. (Arthur Mizener, 1964)

The sense of religious in Updike is dealt with directly in Michael Novak’s essay – *Updike’s Search for Liturgy*. (Michael Novak, 1963) Novak attempts to show how the narrator in Updike’s short stories searches for images of a deep and serene way of looking at life which is completely lost in contemporary secular world. He concludes that Updike is attempting to impose meaning on flux that he is dealing with serious issues and is trying to reinforce the significance of religion in America. The idea of Updike as a religious writer is also explored in Robert Detweiler’s, *John Updike and the Indictment of CulturalProtestantism*. (University of Florida Monographs, No. 14) Focussing on *Rabbit, Run*, Detweiler sees Updike fighting in the novel the same kind of problems – false moralism, a belief in progress that ignores man’s sinful nature, corrupt institutions – that the neo-orthodox theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, had been fighting from the 1930’s. Rabbit lacks inner resources, but with proper support he could have overcome his crisis. His tragedy as a man without grace is that his crisis doesn’t lead to redemption, yet the critic holds the failure of the community and the institutions responsible for Rabbit’s failure.
In another article by Thaddens Muradian, (Muradian 1965) memories of childhood, pain, loneliness and death are marked as Updike’s major themes. The critic asserts that Updike treats death in his works as a necessary end to life, which ushers in something better than life, i.e. life after death. Norris Yates also speaks of religious matters in *The Doubt and Faith of John Updike*. (Norris, 1965) Besides these articles, two pamphlets also take up the question of religion in Updike’s works. The first published in 1967 was by Alice and Kenneth Hamilton and the others by Charles Samuels, came out in 1969. The Hamiltons’ *John Updike: A Critical Essay* serves as a modest introduction to their more stridently Christian interpretation of Updike, published in 1970. According to Hamiltons, ‘Updike thinks of his characters as musical instruments which, even though untuned, can reverberate with the sounds of eternity’.

(Hamilton, Alice and Kenneth 1970)

The first full length study of Updike’s work is *The Elements of John Updike* by Alice and Kenneth Hamilton. (Hamilton Alice and Kenneth, 1967) They believe not only that Updike has everything to say but also that he says it with enormous precision and power, not through the medium of direct exposition but indirectly through the medium of imagery and parable. The Hamiltons, therefore, give only scant attention to the realistic content of Updike’s fiction and concentrate almost entirely on the patterns of meaning that are traceable beneath it. They find Updike demonstrating the abundance of God’s grace and the unwillingness of contemporary man to accept it. They find Christian orthodoxy to be Updike’s solution to the dilemmas of 20th century life. But their position overlooks the sociological significance of Updike, as they do not want to treat literature primarily as a soft document even though Updike so carefully details minutiae of our ordinary experience. Their shortcoming is that their interpretation of Updike, places all emphasis upon individual’s relationships with God and that too of a Christian persuasion.
Through their work, Updike emerges as a kind of monster-symbolist and theological preacher, whose work is viewed not as literary but as a repository, of religious and mythological imagery. The Hamiltons argued aggressively that Updike has constantly dealt with the abundance of God’s saving grace for those who freely accept it. Their explication of Updike rather diminishes the complexity of his characters and makes Christianity sound like the only plausible theoretical understanding of human existence. It has to be acknowledged that the meaning of God has always been a concern of Updike’s works and there are also Biblical allusions but the Hamiltons’ interpretation of these seems, at times, arbitrary and almost always too simple. They write, for e.g: ‘Snow from heaven, bringing to a halt earthly business, allows man to know that he is in the care of a providence ordering all things in a fashion beyond his comprehension’. But the study is not always this reductive; Hamiltons are sensitive to Updike’s allusiveness, not confined to Bible or Karl Barth or Kierkegaard but also to such sources as varied as Robert Herrick (about whom Updike wrote his Harvard thesis) or Pliny’s Natural History. However, one is often compelled to object the way in which they interpret the function of the allusions. Nevertheless, the Hamiltons hold a significant position in Updikean criticism for their pioneering work.

Like the Hamiltons, George Hunt too preoccupies himself with the religious overtones of Updike’s work in John Updike and the Three Great Secret Things: Sex, Religion and Art. (Hunt, 1980) His thesis is that these aspects characterize the predominant subject matter, the thematic concern and the central questions that sound throughout Updike’s fiction. The focus in the early fiction is on religion; beginning with TheMusicSchool, it is on Sex and with A Month of Sundays, art and the problems relating to fictional creation come to the fore. Hunt insists, ‘like a musical composition. . .these are his motives or tonic centres that, even when muted or wedded with subordinate
themes, still resonate for the attentive listener’. He seeks to demonstrate that Updike has a most sophisticated religio-artistic vision, informed and often shaped by a very complex and subtle theology. Besides, Hunt shows how the ideas of such figures as Karl Barth, Soren Kierkegaard and Carl Jung can increase one’s understanding of Updike’s world. He shows Barth’s attitude towards evil and the relevance of this attitude to Updike’s treatment of Rabbit Angstrom; Kierkegaard’s ideas about dread, guilt and sin particularly, as they relate to sexuality, which in Updike’s estimates, according to Hunt, is not only psychologically complex, but also morally and religiously ambivalent. Hunt also suggests the possible influence on Updike of the compellingly dramatic voice of these theologians, as well as of their distinctive, dialectical and ambiguous modes of argumentation.

In addition Hunt seizes upon his own knowledge of Carl Jung’s theories about the anima and individuation to illuminate Updike’s fiction, in particular Of the Farm and A Month of Sundays. Marshfield’s month records on man’s psychic movement from his concern with his ego – the dwelling place of his conscious life to his encounter with the unconscious symbol of the self. Besides, Hunt refers to Carl Barth, Kierkegaard, John Bunyan, Carl Jung, Sigmund Freud, Denis de Rougemont, Northrop Frye, Joseph Campbell and R.W.B. Lewis. In other words, he seizes upon whatever idea appeals to him to explain what he regards as the resonance of Updike’s fiction.

In his late books, Updike shows no willingness, verbally, to acknowledge silence, failure, interruption, loss of faith, despair etc. Supremely, he can describe these feelings and tastes but they are not inscribed in the language itself. He uses language for all that it gestures towards the usual range of human disappointment and collapse, testifies instead to its own uncanny success; to a belief that the world can always be brought out of its cloudiness and made clear in a fair season.
The detail of Updike’s writing was so rich that it inspired two schools of thought on his fiction – those who responded to his descriptive prose as to a kind of poetry, a sensuous engagement with the world, and those who argued that it was more style than context.

The latter position was defined by James Wood in the 1999 essay ‘John Updike’s complacent God’ in *The Broken Estate*, which was actually a review of Updike’s 1996 novel *In the Beauty of the Lilies*. In that review, if we substitute the name of Wood with Updike and the word critic with the writer, it’s all the same. Wood is far too light weight to be a tragic critic and he is very much a theological writer. He retains all the categories of a bland, back-ward looking Christian humanism in a nominally secular form. Wood and Updike are ‘linguistic positivists’ for whom the word is a window even though he is canny enough to realize that he should hedge his bets now and then. Inspite of being the opposition critic, he said, ‘Updike, unlike Beckett or Bernard, never appears to doubt that words can be made to signify, to refer, to mean’. For Wood it must have been a breath taking hypocrisy or a jaw-dropping lack of self-knowledge. He has never demonstrated the least capacity to appreciate or understand Beckett or Bernhard. What Wood said above for Updike, also applies for himself. (Wood, 1999)

Some critics, focussing on the religious implication of Updike’s work, read his work and his concept of love and adultery in the light of Karl Barth’s theology. Gray Waller’s *Updike’s Couples: Barthian Parable* forwards the thesis that it is Karl Barth’s compassionate neo-orthodoxy that provides the distinctive moral backbone for *Couples*. Waller points to the end of the novel and asserts that Barth’s theology accepts men as they are and the novel’s happy end is in keeping with Barth’s view that God wills everything to be ultimately well in the apparently worst of all possible worlds.

(Waller, 1972)
Bernard Scophen in *Faith, Morality and the Novel’s of John Updike* (Scophen, 1978) says that Updike’s faith is Christian but the Christian perspectives which link faith with an absolute and divinely ordered morality do not apply to it. Schweppe analyses Barth’s complex theology as reviewed by Updike in *Anselm: Fides Quarren'sIntellectum* (Updike, 1965) since Updike believes in Barth’s notion of God as ‘wholly other’ and determines his faith only with the profession of Apostle’s creed. It contains no inherent moral system, therefore, he rejects the notion that literature should inculcate moral principles. This factor determines much of the ambiguous attitude of Updike’s protagonists who are religious and adulterous at the same time. That may be the reason why we find many of his books centred on middle class domestic life – marriage, adultery and divorce. He often peppered the novels with descriptions of sexual intercourse to the point of gratuitousness, some critics said. He never spares the chance of presenting a religious person or a knowledgeable theologian, community adultery, sometimes even with younger relations. (Roger’s Version/wiki)

In *Updike’s Idea of Reification*, Terence Doody posits the idea of reification based upon the idea of God’s existence that Updike had been developing since his first novel. Doody argues that Updike believes that things are not “nullity” but are suggestive of God and that there is ‘immanence in things’. About the ethical question he holds the belief that morality is a relative matter compared to the absolutes of life which are death and the physical relations of bodies together. (Doody, 1979)

Sex in Updike’s work is noted for its ubiquity and the reverence with which it is described. His contemporaries then, invaded the ground with wild Dionysian yelps, mocking both the taboos that would make it forbidden and the lust that drove men to it. Updike must have been honest about it and his descriptions of the sight, taste and texture of women’s bodies could be perfect little madrigals. In ‘Champions’ interview with
Updike on “The Bat Segundo Show”, Updike replied that he perhaps favoured such imagery to concretize and make sex ‘real in his prose’.

The existentialist aspects of Updike’s work have been explored by David Galloway. He explores the theme of existence of an individual in a meaningless universe – a universe in which precepts of religious orthodoxy seems increasingly less relevant. Galloway views *The Poor House Fair* as a novel of dismissal which suggests the failure of various traditional systems to fulfil contemporary man’s spiritual needs. Galloway sees Updike attacking humanism as one of the life denying impulses of the age. He views Rabbit as a saint with a vision of the absurd and the need to find a world in which he can again experience – the sacredness of achievement. Rabbit, he claims, wants to comfort and heal and is selfish only in the manner of the searcher after truth. Rabbit rebels against the wasteland into which he is born and consistently opposing the reality which he encounters. Rabbit becomes an absurd hero and because of the highly spiritual devotion to this gesture against the world, he becomes a saint. Galloway further stresses that Updike’s own faith is ‘capricious’ and he continues to explore rituals which sustain men in a Godless universe. In *The Centaur*, too, Updike describes a world devoid of meaning. George is not claimed as a true existentialist hero by Galloway as he lacks a vision of absurdity. 

(Galloway, 1966)

A second existentialist interpretation of Updike published around the same time, is Sidney Finkelstein’s *Existentialism and American Literature*. In his analysis of *Rabbit Run*, he identifies Rabbit as defeated by a life so antagonistic, so impossible to understand and therefore to cope with, that his struggles are only pathetic, impotent gestures. He says that Rabbit’s feelings of all encompassing alienation is not so much due to his complaints against family or condition of life, as due to his own emptiness which conditions his alienated relations to others. According to Finkelstein Updike sees
contemporary America as a home of petrified humanity. (Finkelstein, 1965) America’s bleakness is ascribed to the blind and meaning movement of life itself. In *The Centaur*, the mythic parallels of the story are, in fact, an attempt to give the bleakness of small town America a philosophic universality, to intimate that the world has not progressed but according to Nietzschean’s view, has merely decayed and hardened. Howard Harper, too, reads Updike as existentialist novelist and around this premise Harper builds series of useful readings of the novels up to *Of the Farm*. (Harper, 1964) He argues that in the first novel *The Poor House Fair*, the belief in God is shown to be a spiritual necessity stronger than humanitarian illusions of the welfare state. But in the later work, God becomes increasingly vestigial, a ceremonial ideal to be invoked against the world. Harper sees Chiron as perfect symbol for existential man at home in neither material nor spiritual realm.

In another study, Sukhbir Singh shows that Updike treats the question of man’s survival in a society where God has failed, leaving man in the void of nihilism. (Sukhbir Singh, 1991) His protagonists are always curious to feel the presence of God in their Universe. Sukhbir’s study finds illustrations in Updike’s novels such as *In the Beauty of the Lilies*, in which reverend Wilmot lives in the chaos of Godlessness and tries in vain to feel God’s presence even in the household furniture. Ultimately God causes his presence to be felt through the innocent and blessed form of his creation – The children – The ‘Innocent, Angelic Children’.

In terms of expressing ideas and lively presentation through language, Updike ranks with highly criticized personalities of American fiction writers. He and Tony Morrison were the most written about living American novelists of their time. Updike was widely praised as ‘last true man of letters’ with an immense and far reaching influence on many writers. The excellence of his prose style is acknowledged even by the
criticals who are sceptical of other aspects of Updike’s work. Critics emphasize his ‘inimitable prose style’ and ‘rich description and language’ often favourably compared to Proust and Nabokov. Some critics consider the fluency of his prose to be a fault, question the intellectual depth and thematic seriousness of his work, while others criticize Updike for misogynistic depiction of women and sexual relationships. Other critics argue that ‘Updike’s dense vocabulary and syntax function as a distancing technique to mediate the intellectual and emotional involvement of the reader’. On the whole, Updike is extremely well regarded as a writer who mastered many genres, wrote with intellectual vigour and a powerful prose style, with ‘shrewd insight into the sorrows, frustrations and banality of American life’.

In direct contrast to James Wood’s evaluation, the Oxford critic Thomas Karshan asserted that Updike is ‘intensely intellectual’ with a style that constitutes his ‘manner of thought’ not merely ‘a set of dainty curlicues’. Karshan calls Updike an inheritor of the ‘traditional role of the epic writer’. According to Karshan, ‘Updike’s writing picks up one voice, joins its cadence and moves on to another, like Rabbit himself, driving South through radio zones on his flight away from his wife and child’. Disagreeing with Wood’s critique of Updike’s alleged over-stylization, Karshan evaluates Updike’s language as convincingly naturalistic. (Karshan, 2005)

Harold Bloom once called Updike ‘a minor novelist with a major style. A quite beautiful as well as a considerable stylist. He specializes in the easier pleasures’. Bloom also edited a collection of critical essays in 1987, in which he concluded that ‘Updike was capable of writing beautiful sentences which are beyond praise’; nevertheless, Bloom went on, ‘the American sublime will never touch his pages’. (Bloom, 1987)

‘The Fiction Circus’, an online and multimedia literary magazine, called Updike one of the ‘four Great American Novelists’ of his time along with Philip Roth, Cormac,
McCarthy and Don DeLillo each jokingly represented as a sign of the Zodiac. Updike was seen as the best prose writer in the world like Nabokov, before him. But in contrast to many literati and establishment obituaries, ‘The Circus’ asserted that nobody ‘thought of Updike as a vital writer’.

(Fiction Circus, 2009)

The critic James Wolcott, in a review of Updike’s novel, The Widows of Eastwick (2008), notes that Updike’s penchant for observing America’s decline is coupled with an affirmation of America’s ultimate merits: ‘Updike elegises entropy American style with a resigned, paternal, disappointed affection that distinguishes his fiction from that of grimmer declinists such as Don DeLillo, Gore Vidal and Philip Roth. America may have lost its looks and stature, but it was a beauty once, and worth every golden dab of sperm’.

(Wolcott, 2009)

Gore Vidal, in a controversial essay in the Times Literary Supplement, professed to have ‘never taken Updike seriously as a writer’. He criticizes his political and aesthetic world view for its ‘blandness and acceptance of authority in any form’. He concluded that Updike ‘describes to no purpose’. Vidal mockingly refers to Updike as ‘our good child’, in reference to his wide establishment acclaim, and excoriates his alleged political conservatism. Vidal’s ultimate conclusion is that ‘Updike’s work is more and more representative of that polarizing within a state where Authority grows ever more brutal and malign while its hired hands in the media grow ever more excited as the holy war of the few against the many heat ups.’

(Vidal, 2009)

As the researcher is concerned only with select novels of Updike, so, works will be considered from various aspects, to finally frame out an ‘idea of America’ as sketched by other authors and writers. Before going for particular texts, some reviews and opinions of critics on these works are skimmed. It will be more interesting to go through the views taking Updike’s select work in a chronological order of their year of publication.
As Updike published his unconventional novel *Roger's Version* in 1986, the book managed to enter the finalists for the 1986 National Book Critics Circle award in fiction. In ‘Critical Mass’s’ ongoing blog ‘In Retrospect’, contemporary critics revisit former winners and finalists National Book Critics Awards. Critics almost universally praised John Updike’s *Roger's Version* when it was published. What they could not agree on, was, what exactly they admired in it.

Writing in ‘Newsweek’, David Lehman praised Updike’s command of the language of the two esoteric disciplines that Lambert and Kohler represent: ‘It’s rather thrilling to watch Updike assimilate the new vocabularies of particle physics and computer technology and then fuse them with the ancient vocabulary of religious belief’, he writes. In the ‘Washington Post’, John Calvin Batchelor appreciated the novel’s reworking of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, placing Lambert in the role of Roger Chillingworth. . . ‘a perfect 20th century beast’ boastfully wicked in all directions.’

In ‘The New York Times’ Michiko Kakutani praised it as ‘one of Updike’s finest domestic portraits’, writing that as the novel “unfolds, adultery . . . as well as the attendant emotion of jealousy, guilt and resentment. . . begins to push the question of religion off the centre stage, giving Mr. Updike plenty of room to examine, with his usual skill, the pattering and shadows of domestic life in the middle class.’

The most perspective contemporary review of *Roger’s Version* was written by the novelist David Lodge, who seemed slightly aghast at what Updike was up to the point where he dedicated some space in his review attempt to deny it. Writing in the ‘New York Times Book Review’ he noticed the games Updike played in the novel, but was so thrown by them that he doubted Updike’s intentions: ‘If Mr. Updike were a novelist given to meet fictional tricks, we might suspect him of holding up a mirror to the reader’s credulity, by making his character claim the same freedom to invent that we grant the
novelist. But everything we know about Mr. Updike suggests that he shares the modern sense of factuality and believes that fiction should create the illusion of it. Otherwise, why take all that trouble to get the scientific discourse right?’

David also writes that there are five distinct discursive strands interwoven in the texture in John Updike’s *Roger’s Version* – Theology, Pornography, Domesticity, Physical description and Computational Science. These are fascinating and important issues and it is heartening to see a literary novelist taking them on board.(Lodge, 1986)

Updike published his four generation saga *In the Beauty of the Lilies* in 1996 which takes its title from a line of the abolitionist song ‘The Battle Hymn of the Republic’. His 17th novel, *In the Beauty of the Lilies*, beginning in 1910 and ending in 1990, covers four generations of the Wilmot family, tying its fortunes to both the decline of the Christian faith and the rise of Hollywood in 20th Century America. In appraisal of Updike’s work, ‘New York Times’ critic, Michiko Kakutani wrote: ‘Mr. Updike’s stunning and much underestimated 1996 epic, *In the Beauty of the Lilies*, tackled an ever wider swath of history than *Rabbit*tertralogy. In charting the fortunes of an American family through some eighty years, the author showed how dreams, habits and predilection are handed down from generation to generation, parents to child, even as he created a kaleidoscope portrait of this century from its nervous entry into the 20th century to its stumbling approach to the millennium. (*Beauty of the Lilies*, Wikipedia)

In a review posted by Scott Douglas, edited on July 28, 2008, *In the Beauty of the Lilies* is approached from three different angles. According to Scott, the most interesting character in John Updike’s *In the Beauty of the Lilies*, is Clarence. Clarence’s view of God is outrightly shocking. His mind is like the mind of many during this time-period; why believe when science seems to be offering more solutions? Historically however, Clearance’s mind seems more post-modern than it does modern, but this makes him all
the more intriguing. The mental upheavals of Clarence’s mind take Scott to approach the novel from a psychological angle. Clarence’s granddaughter, Essie/Alma, parallels Updike’s own life and upbringing. While she never abandons God completely, as her dad and grand-dad before, Essie is, in a sense polluted by the world. Updike creates a sense of Concordia discord as he responds to the world. It is like he has taken a step backward and examining how ‘imperfectly perfect’ the world is. There is corruption but with Essie, Updike shows how life goes on in a post-religious world. This girl represents several changes that makes Scott approach the novel from the angle of ‘Traditional approach.’

Basically the novel is a cycle. A minister who abandons God; a postman that never had God; a godly girl turned evil; a new age nut. In this way, it is a novel in the tradition of family sagas like Steinbeck’s East of Eden. It begins with a man who becomes an apostate and ends with a man who becomes an apostate. Due to this cycle of life, Scott takes a formalist approach to the novel. (Review by Scott Douglas, 2008)

A publisher, Miami Herald, wrote that Updike not only tracks the fortunes and falls of an American family through four generations and eight decades but also creates a shimmering, celluloid portrait of the whole century as viewed through the metaphor of movies. The ‘New York Times’ wrote that it is ‘an important and impressive novel: a novel that not only shows how we live today but also how we got there. . . A book that forces us to reassess the American values and the crucial role that faith (The Longing for faith) has played in shaping the national soul.’ The Boston Globe wrote in a review that the novel is ‘stirring and captivating and beautifully written. . . This new novel displays a depth and a narrative confidence that make one sigh with sweet anticipation. This is the Updike of Rabbit books, who can take you uphill and down with his grace of vision, his gossamer language and his merciful, ironic glance at the misery of the human condition.’
Towards the End of Time (1997) bagged lot of praise from Margaret Atwood who wrote a very positive review of the novel for ‘The New York Times’, ‘Memento Mori. . .But first, CarpeDiem.’ She praised Updike’s brilliant metaphors and describes the central character, Ben Turnbull, in his semi-idyllic, upper class rural home as ‘a Thoreau run through the meat grinder of 20th century.’ She not only notes his frequent brutality (both towards himself and others), but also notes his rueful even handed powers of observation that ‘fall’ alike on everything – on flowers, animals, grandchildren, corpses, copulations; on ancient Egypt and plastic peanuts; on memory, disgust, dread, lust and spiritual rapture.’ She ends with the claim that ‘As memento mori and its obverse, carpediem, Towards the End of Time could scarcely be bettered. (End of Time, Wikipedia)

In an article by David Leigh on ‘Ironic Apocalypse in John Updike’s Towards the End of Time’ he wrote that Updike’s major attempt to publish a novel in 1997 about the ‘end of time’ caught his critics off guard. Some considered it a failure of genre, awkwardly mixing realism with science fiction, others found it fascinating in parts but full of undigested excursions into alternate universe and loath some anatomical descriptions of old age, some still others attacked its narrator as a repulsive, inconsistent and socially blind misogynist or found the novel superficial, secular and pessimistic. David Malone is one of the few who discovered beneath its realistic surface several patterns that bring out a deeper and even transcendent dimension, namely the novel’s use of mythic parallels as a sort of fantasy world behind the realistic framework. Taking a clue from Updike’s The centaur, Malone provides an insight into the meanings of deeper episodes by finding parallels with the Acteon, Io, and Inanna stories from Greek and Sumerian myths; he sheds light on the role of Gloria, the narrator’s second wife, by bringing in parallels with the white Goddess; he even stretches to find similarities between the quest in the latter half of the novel and the Gilgamesh epic. But
Malone also admits that the narrator is ‘enormously self-involved, charmless and resentful of women’. (Malone 81)

Ian Hamilton in his essay Redeemable Bad Guysays that Updike, it has often been proclaimed, knows what it is like to be day to day common place American, and knows it with good humour. Others weigh it with ‘wither America’ but Updike gets to parts of his country’s psyche that most high brow novelists can’t, or can’t be bothered to tune into. But then, Updike, it is also said, is not quite a highbrow novelist, not in the sense that, saySaul Bellow might believe himself to be, or even Gore Vidal. Vidal sneers at Updike as a middle brow provincial, by which he seems to mean that Updike timorously fails to stride forward as a ‘global sage’, or as a ‘Custodian’ of threatened high brow values. On few occasions, Updike has pronounced on public issues that he has tended to adopt a ruefully conservative position, and Vidal has poured scorn on the ruefulness. On the whole and unashamedly, Updike quite likes being an American, and likes it not because America ‘the global power’ is to be proud of but because America’s vast census of small, pitiable greed and woes is what he happens to woken up to, every morning. Geopolitics aside, if you want to know how most Americans think and talk and know it without condemnation, there is in fiction no stenographer more wittily alert than he was.

(Hamilton: Redeemable Bad Guy, 1998)

‘Book Marks’ magazine wrote that Updike treads over familiar territory with Villages, his 21st novel. For those who crave more of his famed in visitations into suburban sex and the male mind, this novel can prove a welcome addition to the canon. To some critics, however, Villages seemed a rehash of old material, with little to recommend to modern audience. Detractors found Owen’s sexual antics empty, his life devoid of emotional growth. Still, Updike remains one of the premier stylists of the
English language, and he handles his subject with the assurance that comes from a lifetime of practice. (Book Marks Magazine, 2009)

Kris in his review writes some Updike’s lines about Villages. Updike wrote: ‘It was a celibate villager who wrote, we know not where we are, besides, we are sound asleep nearly half our time. Yet we esteem ourselves wise, and have an established order on the surface.’ Such a surface order makes possible human combinations and moments of tender regards. It is a mad thing, to be alive. Villages exist to moderate this madness, to hide it from children, to better it for private use, to smooth its imperatives into habits, to protect us from imperatives into habits, to protect us from the darkness without and the darkness within.’

For Owen, life can be seen through a series of sexual escapades from boyhood to old age. And even in the quieter moments, he’s not sure it amounted to more than that. Affair after affair, Owen chased his most base instinct in hope that he could find answers to life’s more pressing questions in the comfort of a soft, wonderful bosom. Owen lives in the moment never stopping to think about the why or how, understanding only on the surface what responsibility means. (Kris: Book shelves: fiction. 2008)

According to Blake Morrison, both books, Couples and Villages describe ordinary middle class lives in small East Coast Communities (Villages or towns in British English), with special attention paid to ‘Post Pill Paradise’ in which, as Larkin puts it, ‘everyone young is going down the long slide to happiness endlessly’. But whereas Couples is a report from the frontline, Villages is entirely retrospective and (another aspect of its riskiness) quietly frustrates the narrative expectation it invites.

Lee Siegel, in a review for Updike’s Villages in ‘New York Books’, says that Updike in his early seventies writes about sex as avidly and microscopically as he was in his early twenties. But the younger Updike lustrously evoked mortal coils coiling as
though he were an awe-filled acolyte administering the mysteries at Mass. In *Villages*,
mystery often devolves into professional turf. That’s what happens when a transcendent obsession threatens to become a patented and in the slapdash final pages, Owen is compared to America and America is ‘haunted’ by the ghost of ‘President Reagan. . .this handsome snake oil salesman.’ The entire country becomes a ‘national village’ shrouded in ‘evil’, in the way that Owen’s nurturing, protective villages also nurtured and protected his lies and betrayals. (Siegel, 2005:nymag.com)

Acting as a narrator to *Villages*, Edward Herman says in a review that ‘Villages. . recaptures and concentrates the erotic’s essence of the earlier books (*Couples* and others) but adds a mellow, retrospective tone. . .In its period, setting and cast of characters, the story also overlaps consistently with Updike’s own biography, tempting one to read it as a confession. In the end, the book gratifies in every way as an exhibition of educated prurience, an elegy for an era and an inquiry into the morals of a striving upper middleclass white male. . .Though Updike dabbled in experimental fiction in much the same way that his frisky New England husbands do in adultery, he’s at heart a solid artistic conformist who succeeds by embracing conventions, not spurning them and embracing them so avidly and strenuously that they yield surprising new juice.’

(Edward Herman, 2004)

Most of the time, during his writing career, Updike examined America in his fiction and essays, reflecting upon its art and history, documenting its volatile progressions. In their longings, in their occasional self-discoveries and more usually in their self-deceptions the characters in his novels and stories have demonstrated the desperation with which people in America have sought to find some equilibrium against the background of headlong change. To ponder Updike’s work in now old fashioned socio-political terms it might be said that he examines our struggle to maintain a viable
centre for our inner life while enduring the most revolutionary force in history – American capitalism. The civil war and its consequences forced America to undergo the processes which were later given the name ‘Americanization’. The term invokes the transformation of the landscape into unnatural mechanical shapes, of night into day, of speed for its own sake, an irrational passion for novelty at the expense of quality, a worship of gimmickry. ‘Americanization’ also meant a setting aside of the social order in ruthless pursuit of profit, a jury-rigged class-system based on money, a rootless and dislocated population, a random disordering of priorities.’

This pondering of truisms is more germane to an appreciation of Updike’s new novel, Terrorist, than one might first think. One of the most interesting things about this is its convergence of imagined views about the way this country is and the way it appears. The setting on which this parable (Terrorist, 2006) of 21st century condition unfolds, is Northern New Jersey, that familiar landscape of marshland and industrial slough supporting the decaying remnants of once prospering immigrant-energized towns. 9/11 was the day when all eyes turned heavenward there and hundreds of sons and daughters of New Jersey died. The invisible but somehow immanent presence of 9/11’s inferno over New Jersey serves to remind us that Updike, whose work has never departed too far from his religious concerns, has written about apocalypse before. In his haunting but unresolved novel Towards the End of Time (1997), he presents a war-and-crime ravaged terminal, America, its sky blighted by a meritorious second moon, he calls it a ‘torus’ that looms over the land as a mockery, as a grace. The America in which this new story unfolds is not freakish or surreal, but its moral exhaustion and reprobation are nearly intense. Come to preside in judgement are not metaphysical forces but an assembly of religiously driven immigrants, certain in their own convictions, which they are convinced would equip them to see through the pretentions of their adopted country
and set it to rights by slaughter. *Terrorist* is not mixed with symbolist surrealism as *Towards the End of Time* was. Its characters inhabit a real New Jersey, for the most part and they are credible individuals. Protagonist’s religious instruction provides the opportunity for some long discourses on Islam in the modern world – one of the didactic areas of the novel. But these dialogues, along with the reflections they provoke in Ahmad, the protagonist, serve Updike’s intentions – the examination of contemporary America exposed to the passions in the non-American world. Updike can clearly imagine his way into the moralizing resentments that this country brings forth in the hearts of those who are at once under-privileged and confidently traditional. On the other hand, this story is no supine catalogue of self-revlimination. Its tensions are well calibrated and the points of view, clearly and at times ironically presented.

(Review by Robert Stone, 2006)

Updike’s *Terrorist* puts us in the head of a man with 72 virgins on his mind. A New Jersey High School goer, a ‘radical loser’ right out of Hans Magnus Enzensberger’s much discussed essay in *Der Spiegel*, agrees to a suicide bombing mission on behalf of radical Islam, may not be first rate Updike. His *Brazil* (1994) was one example, a magic realist comic opera in which romantic egoism fared no better among Shaman and Jaguars gods than it had in the French Revolution. *The Coup* (1978) was more to the immediate point, since it is the only other Updike’s novel that quotes *The Quran* and was written from the African-Muslim point of view. Colonel Hakim Felix Ellello, a student in the US before he became President of Sub Saharan Kush, articulated Leonard’s favourite sentences in all of Updike: ‘I perceived that a man in America is a failed boy.’ Ahmad Mulloy, the 18-year old terrorist himself is the latest in a long line of Updike’s boys failing their way to manhood. Ahmad’s destiny is made plain by the title of the book. In the first chapter he tells Jack Levy, the non-practicing Jew who is his high school
guidance counsellor, that Shaikh Rashid has advised him against going to college and set him on the ‘voke’ track so that he can learn to be a truck driver. (Jonathan Raban, 2006)

However, unlike every other novelist looking over his shoulder at 9/11 – an Ian McEwen, a Reynolds Price, a Jerry McInerney, a Jonathan SafranFoer – Updike isn’t writing from the victim’s point of view. He guesses instead, at unhinging excruciation. *Terrorist* has to be read as part of an accumulating literature in which serious novelists have tried to grope their way into the mind of the ultra, a literature that began with Dostoyevsky, Conrad and Andre Malraux and continues with Don DeLillo, Richard Powers and Salman Rushdie, trying to explain the phenomenon of what Victor Serge called ‘the lunatic of one idea’ as he shape shifts from Belfast to Beirut to Jakarta to lower Manhattan, from skyjacking jumbo jets to bombing abortion clinics, from Pol Pot to Shining Path. Terrorists and torturers tend to be more interesting in novels, where they have complicated rationales, than they are in banal person. To think about horrific behaviour, novelists need to imagine minds as nuanced as their own.

(New York Books review)

But horrific behaviour is perfectly capable of writing its own novel, of spinning its own excuses for abduction, torture, rape and murder out of a spidery bowel and a smoked brain. Its purpose is to dominate and humiliate so as to create a total immersion maze, where private American histories, personal belief and multiple motives are beside the brutal point. What we really need Updike and his likes for, is, to remind us, over and over again, that each fragile human being, every Rabbit or Ahmad is an end, not a means.

(John May, 2006)

Updike’s *Terrorist* is one of the recent literary marvels from one of the masters of creative literary power. *Terrorist* fulfils so many tasks of fiction, so rich and awarding. It is absorbing as it is thick in its description of place and character and these story elements
are woven at times lyrically. Updike instructs and entertains in the same sentences. Character portraits, it feels, at par with Mailer’s Gary Gilmore in *The Executioner’s Song*, HandKe’s Joseph Block in *Goalie’s Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, Jim Harrison’s Farmer and Updike’s own Rabbit Angstrom and his son Nelson in *Rabbit is Rich*. The young protagonist, Ahmad, is actually a product of adults who surround and claim responsibility for him. His idealism and needs are in direct proportion with Updike to the neglect, self-indulgence, and mystication of his teachers, counsellors and single mother. He is abandoned; and proves not all that diverse and complicated than his peers in the end, in fact, even out distancing them because his zeal has given Ahmad a perceptive and intellectual clarity far surpassing others of his generation.


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ROGER’S VERSION

Though many readers are aware of how Updike has chronicled America of the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and the 1980s in his *Rabbit* Tetralogy, few have paid close attention to his other multi-volume work concerning America (a canonical American text), namely, The Scarlet Trilogy. In 1975 Updike published *A Month of Sundays*, a novel in diary-form in which a spiritually tormented and adulterous minister from Massachusetts is ordered to an Arizona motel for ministers-gone-astray; there he is urged to wrestle with his perverse soul and rub out his ‘stain’. Updike later referred to that novel as ‘Dimmesdale’s Version’ of *The Scarlet Letter*. In 1986 Updike published *Roger’s Version*, an unreliable first person narrative in which a Harvard professor, a crusty old doctor of divinity named Roger Lambert, manipulates and feeds upon the life of a youthful, pious computer science graduate student named Dale Kohler. In 1988 Updike published *S.A Novel*, in which an angry North Shore housewife, with a strong predilection for vitamin A, rebels against her Puritan heritage and patriarchal society by travelling to a desert ashram in Arizona. In these three novels, each told from the perspective of a contemporary version of one of Hawthorne’s three protagonists in *The Scarlet Letter* – Arthur Dimmesdale, Roger Chillingworth, and Hester Prynne – Updike has expanded, updated, satirized and rewritten Hawthorne’s text, creating his own *Scarlet Letter* trilogy. Though these novels with the notable exception of *Roger’s Version* may appear to be lighter, fairer and less substantial than the best of Updike’s *Rabbit* novels, *The Centaur*, or *The Coup*; initial readings are deceiving, particularly since these novels are trickier and more multi-layered than the more conventionally realistic *Rabbit* tetralogy. *Roger’s Version* is one of the most exceptional volumes in Updike’s oeuvre. In fact, all the three novels reveal a more post-modern Updike, one who experiments with alternative
narrative modes, such as the diary and the epistolary novel, in creating texts that are highly reflexive. In addition, they disclose an increasingly erudite Updike who has mastered and integrated into his novels, a wealth of difficult information from such disciplines as computer science, particle physics, evolution theory, cosmology, ecclesiology, early Christian heresy, Hinduism and Buddhism.

The novel opens and continues in first person narrative by an old divinity professor, Roger Lambert, who, from his ideas and principles indicates that he is a follower of Barthian religious codes. He has been happy at the divinity school where he and his colleagues teach the innocent religious fervents who mistake these astray religious scholars as religious fanatics. That may be the reason why he sometimes remembers his days in active ministry with a sort of bitter nostalgia:

The hours are bearable, the surroundings handsome, my colleagues harmless and witty, habituated as they are to the shadows. To master a few dead languages, to parade sequential moments of the obdurately enigmatic early history of Christianity before classrooms of the hopeful, the deluded, and the docile – there are more fraudulent ways to earn a living. I consider my years spent in the active ministry. . .if not exactly wasted as a kind of pre-existence, the thought of which depresses me. . . I am a depressive. It is very important for my mental well-being that I keep my thoughts directed away from areas of contemplation that might entangle me and pull me down.

*(Roger’s Version, 3-4)*

It is clear that religious faith requires ‘contemplation’, a quality that Roger avoids, as existence without religious faith makes one as depressive as Roger. God’s grace can do wonders; a divine honour which the professor no longer enjoys.
When the novel opens, Roger Lambert, who is used to smoking pipe, is already sitting in his office, when strides a raw, young evangelical computer programmer from the Mid-West, Dale Kohler, bringing two unwelcome messages – Verna, Roger Lambert’s half-niece has moved into the area with her illegitimate child; and Dale has hit on a scientific proof of the existence of God. It is clear that Roger dismisses his visitor who fervently asserts his own scientifically theological claim. Moreover, Dale wants Roger’s help in obtaining a grant to finance his research. Roger despises these ‘youthful learners’ who keep probing facts as well as philosophies in order to chase the solution. In the meanwhile, the government and private sector grant becomes their nurturing support and reason of their hanging about in the university campus. According to Roger, these no-fledging students spend years and years in the campus:

You may see them in a university town, these people who settle in a casual uniform and cunning ingenuousness of the youthful learner as though it is a permanent, and paying, profession. Some grow grey hair and great bushy tails of ill-fed progeny while still innocently pursuing knowledge.

(Roger’s Version, 5)

At another instance he accuses these hermits for ‘using God as a gimmick for a grant. This whole generation has grown up that thinks of nothing but grants. An academic welfare class.’

(Roger’s Version, 44)

It may be taken as a feeling of jealousy on the part of the professor who is no longer an innocent or a faithful slave of God. He believes that religious faith can only be supported by true faith whereas modern science which talks about gravity, force, bond, evolution from cells, etc. cannot claim to be capable enough to rise to the level of spirituality. Besides, Roger also suffers from lack of tolerance before the
spontaneity of anxious and pious Christians such as Dale Kohler. Through the presentation of his thoughts it is clear that this intolerance has been troubling him since he lost his faith. His intolerance is one of the outward symptoms of his depression. Even praying for his own self or for any person is beyond his tolerance. To the professor, the present generation Christians have a kind of historical innocence that knocks him out of his mind. It is strange that a youthful computer whiz knew the ultimate details of the universe which led to facts and proofs about the presence of God everywhere around mankind. His depth of knowledge, zeal and willing faith captured Roger’s attention beyond expression. Somewhere deep inside himself, he had to confess that the thrilling spirit of the young project fellow made him jealous as he perceived Dale’s robust religious self among his dislikes.

Besides, Dale had been one of the acquaintances of his step-sister, Edna’s daughter – Verna. After so many years Dale had come just as a spade to dig out Roger’s not very happy and prestigious past – his father’s affair brewing since when he was in his mother’s womb, his father’s divorce, remarriage and nurturing Edna with the new wife, and Roger’s visiting his father only during vacation. It meant a life full of humiliation, lack of a parent and his loss, even when he was present in the world but not for Roger; the first as well as the legitimate child. Instead, he was always there for his mistress turned wife and their daughter, Edna. All this led to a psychological competition for the preference that Edna was given by the father. For Roger, Edna was no more than an animal whose adolescence smell emitted an ‘animal aroma’ and who had tres-passed his happy familial life. He always wanted to repay this animal with his own animal instincts and now Dale had come to remind him of his duty as a maternal uncle of Verna, who, after an affair with a black man had his baby and consequently, her parents turned her out. Roger, a faithless Christian, devoid
of patience and generosity could not expect himself to shower fatherly affection upon a girl whose mother was never entrapped by him and her birth was responsible for shattering his childhood.

Dale Kohler attacks Roger’s chilled faith from many angles. Each question, inquiry or information, be it related to Verna or to Dale’s own project was no less than an almost deadly blow on Roger’s Godless microcosm. Moreover his tactical and convincing points justified his deserving of the grant. Achievement of uniformity by the galaxies in terms of radiation, just the right amount of smoothness in the galaxies in spite of inhomogenities in the primal fireball, precise balance of initial time to achieve current expansion rate of the Big Bang, just the favourable amount of strong force which binds the automatic nuclei together and gives the sun its nuclear reaction chain, the apt weak force to bring about the supernova and the resulting heavy elements to constitute earth and creatures. Yellow stars like the sun which are balanced on knife edge between the inward pull of gravity and outward push of thermonuclear reaction – all these are terrifically finely adjusted constants that have to be just what they are. When a person, after knowing all this accuracy but not finding the concrete power regulating it all time round, becomes horrifically bewildered and he has to say what Dale said:

The sun. Yellow stars like the sun, to give off so much steady heat for ten billion years or so, are balanced like on a knife edge between the inward pull of gravity and the outward push of thermonuclear reaction. If the gravitational coupling constant were any bigger, they’d balloon and all be blue giant; any smaller, they’d shrivel and be red dwarves. . .these terrifically finely adjusted constants that have to be just what they are. . .and there’s no intrinsic reason
for those constants to be what they are except to say God made them that way.  

(Roger’s Version, 14)

According to Dale, when the adjustment of constants went beyond the understanding of modern science, the scientists, to keep their old atheist materialism, try to get around assuming that such circumstances may be more of chance, probability or improbability. Instead of surrendering and accepting that God is the Creator, they propose many crazy theories and blame religious people for stretching the facts and making excuses which refute the factors of scientific findings.

As Roger sticks to his spiritual concept of faith, he can’t accept that exploration of any kind could lead to exploration of God. According to him, God is no such thing to be found or an image behind frosted glass that is cleared through aptness of constants. At times, when Roger Lambert saw the religious fervour of Dale Kohler, he hated him for it. Provoked, he also finds himself talking about the ever-existing ‘God who reveals himself to human heart and laughs at its pride’. He could not help dredging beliefs he had once arrived at long, before he lost his faith.

Besides religious debates, the novel also provides knowledge about regretful issues like racialism and gives us glimpses of contempt towards Blacks when Roger mentions that the university area is ‘safe from racism’ and, that he was ‘surprised’ that Verna went ahead and got involved with a black man and had his baby’.

(Roger’s Version, 5)

Americans’ restriction for interracial relation is no less than a taboo. Discrimination is followed at multiple societal levels. Such a racist society where black children are denied useful and vocational education, or else the schools have made the education so expensive that blacks sometimes cannot afford it. Moreover, if black teachers look for a job they are offered low wages which they have to accept due to the denial of
white children for black teachers and the unavailability of schools for black children, being the main discouraging factor. In this way it becomes for the Black, a question of one choice or no choice. We also smell the sense of insecurity on the part of Americans from British and Europeans. Dale points out that best brains working on real implications are over in England, which means that Americans, apart from internal conflicts over trivial matters like racialism, are doubtful that they have the second grade brains that are incapable of protecting the nation financially, morally, spiritually as well as physically.

Initially, Updike is quite confident of his zealous student, Dale and equips him with rich theological artillery that hits Roger like thunderbolts. Over and again Roger experiences a depressing effect which is projected in a sort of anger and rudeness due to the relations, sexual and intellectual, among himself, his second wife, Esther, his niece Verna and Dale and Updike takes up his chance to make up the novel’s plot. Roger’s cold and godless soul not only astonishes Dale but it has also been a pinching pain for his second and younger wife, Esther who met him 14 years ago when he was in active ministry. After all, Roger had followed the steps of his father in abandoning his first wife, the generous but biologically inactive Lillian for Esther, though the new couple has been leading a seemingly aloof life, as disgrace-turned-remorse never stops chasing them. Esther’s commenting on him and making it sure that ‘at least he used to’ believe in God sometime, taking pleasure in arguing with him while favouring young zealous souls for whom God is more than just an idea, seeking amusement in seeing how Roger defends his style of nonsense against somebody else’s style. Her ‘snake-like-glade’ interest in Dale’s project as well as his physique and a desire to see him visit her house, rouses our curiosity. There is a lot of fun to be had with this situation because right here starts the loosely paralleling of The Scarlet
Roger’s Version

Letter – an ardent young preacher (Dale/Dimmesdale) commits adultery with the sensuous wife (Esther/Hester) of a sour, cynical older man (Roger Lambert/Roger Chillingworth), who gradually undermines the younger man’s spirits. Roger believes that his wife, Esther now, ‘never fails to let him feel her disgust’. She says:

You know what I think. . .I think it’s nonsense. But I’m amused to see you so vigorously defending your own style of nonsense against somebody else’s style. All these emperors without clothes, you all have turfs to defend. This boy comes in and offers to prove God’s existence and you. . .obviously wish him dead, gone, out of the church. To you he’s a heretic.

(Roger’s Version, 44)

Then Roger also accepts that she should not be blamed because ‘emotions change and the chemistry of impulses with them’. Esther is undoubtedly longing for a partner of her age group. Her saying that she ‘hasn’t been around a brainstorm for years’ clearly translates her physical thirst and the subsequent storm she is undergoing. The joke is that we are getting ‘Roger’s version’ of the entire events. We see how grating naive piety can be, especially on someone who has made his peace with the world and the flesh, who knows that virtue is a straw to the sexual-fire in the blood.

But there are also arguments in Roger’s Version, and earnest ones. Dale is convinced that a number of physical coincidences and improbabilities, individually striking and collectively mind-boggling, rule out randomness as a cosmological principle. But despite his breathlessness and occasional lapses into crude numerology, he does manage to suggest plausibly that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in Roger’s modern, secularised Protestantism.

An important thing that Dr. Lambert points out for himself is his habit of ‘spying’. This very word is the backbone of the novel, as everything is, as seen by
silent Roger from behind curtains. As he confesses that ‘secret glimpses of life proceeding unaware of his watching have always excited him’. It is one of his most innate and oldest habits which are attributed to almost all stages of his life. He used to stealthily approach his parishioners’ place, he used to glimpse his wife inside the house when he returned home after work and he spied on the neighbours and their evening routine through the window. Updike’s Roger is compared to America which likes to spy on its neighbouring as well as distant nations to whom afterwards it approaches as a so-called well-wisher; America regards it her right to send spies and detectives to other countries and possess herself with the secrets of each political body.

Also, a quick glance on the changing American culture, the shift in perception of life by Roger as he passes through the streets and avenues, makes it clear that there is still air of distastefulness for the once immigrants on the part of the Americans or the new England settlers. Chinese, Indians, Vietnamese or Japanese if not given brilliant opportunity in job sectors, they do not hesitate in spicing up Americans’ appetite with spicy, insinuating cuisine. They open restaurants and make it their staple business for which they become known. Still, Americans alienate these people saying that Americans, who had once sailed across the seas eastward or westward to suck-in the world’s wealth, also brought such impurities (immigrants) along with the pure inflow. These are for them remnants of an old adventure, yet Americans praise them for their global mixingness, for their partaking of and amplifying the energy of American shop-fronts.

Domestically, we find the same harping tune of adultery, remarriage and betrayal, not only on the part of the husband but sometimes it is also the wife who
brings upon the doom in the relations. Roger’s neighbour, Mrs. Ellicott gets such a
description of her life:

In her prime she had had a peculiar knack of driving her husbands to suicide;
at least two had done away with themselves, leaving her their real estate and
furniture, so that her present holdings were like layers of sedimentary rock
compacted by the pressure of the years, the shifts of the economy over the last
decades all traceable in the composition of her portfolio.

(Roger’s Version, 32)

Moreover, the same problem of frequently changing sexual partners, longingness for
trust, love and satisfaction overwhelms this American literary piece also. Updike is
always in an attempt to write about the adversity so that the otherwise happiness could
be valued and that’s why, he wants to ‘describe American life, as it’s seen by its
losers, in the American style’. Children craving for fatherly love and sketching their
father’s image in other men who casually visit their mothers just as Verna’s
illegitimate child, Paula calls every adult male as ‘Da’ assuming him her own ‘Dad’.
It may be taken as an accusing signal for men who don’t care about their
responsibilities after making their partners pregnant and abandoning them. ‘Ba’ ‘Da’
is a symbol which Paula uses for pronouncing ‘Bad’.

We also come across some of the discursive strands interwoven in the novel. Roger
Lambert is a professor of divinity and is a somewhat dilettantish disciple of Karl
Barth who insisted on the utter separateness of the Divine and the human, and the
dependence of the latter on the former. Updike is well able to evoke the ethos of an
academic theology department, and to have sly fun with its professional rivalries,
pretentions and jargon.
Then there is the discourse of domesticity, the faithful rendering of small quotidian activities such as cooking meal, fixing a drink, changing a baby, driving a car, the social dynamics of the nuclear family. Roger’s son, Richie, sitting where his mother was arranging for supper and T.V. was placed in the same room. There is lot of physical description – of trees, houses, furniture, clouds and the whole mesh of culture and nature that makes a suburb or a city. There are also extended topographical passages in the novel that trace Roger’s movement from the relatively affluent and commodious residential streets around the university to a run-down housing project where Verna lives, thus negotiating the project’s decaying environment which reflects his uneasy consciousness of social and economic divisions in American society.

David Lodge, in his review, expresses the concern that the most unusual discourse in this novel is opened right in the beginning. It is a discourse of science – mathematics, physics, biology and computing. Dale Kohler, a fundamentalist Christian, is convinced that the more science discovers about the mathematical equations underlying the Universe, the more unavoidable becomes the conclusion that they are not the result of chance. The pair debates the issue in a series of set pieces that cover cosmology, evolution and the relation of body to mind. There are fascinating and important issues – a rising tide of Christian fundamentalism in America today – and it is heartening to see a literary novelist taking them on board. Updike is not content to give us a more impressionistic whiff of physics, maths and biology. He makes Dale speak with the passion and particularity of the true enthusiast. (David Lodge, 1986)

Dale has a detailed discussion about cosmic and physical phenomena and Prof. Lambert comments on ‘biological’ elements. We view a heated discussion
where Dale gets a chance to present the certainty of God’s role in the evolution of life as against the assertion of Darwin. To avoid confusion, Dale, very clearly starts with the very beginning of the thread of ‘the primodial soup’ where flashes of lightening once brew up into amino acids then proteins and finally strings of DNA inside a cell or a creature. By giving the example of this chain containing life sustaining biological elements in sequential progression, Dale wants to bring home some other point. For this he begins with a number of examples such as theory of primitive earth’s atmosphere being a reducing one (based on nitrogen and hydrogen and devoid of free Oxygen), whereas the primitive rusty rocks prove the presence of Oxygen. Secondly, the amount of information needed to make even the simplest virus-like piece come to life, was so great that the fact of it being assembled by chance, is out of question. These examples support Dale as evidence whenever he raises the topic of ‘primodial soup’ and some additional problems that the young scientists ignore such as the ‘energy factor’ which is needed to keep the system going. Then, there are enzymes which are base products for making proteins and the resultant DNA. If the blind passive nature is capable of generating energy, then how come the laboratories since 1954 have been mixing up these electrified soups but coming up with no results at all. The only result is that the unshaken faith on scientific power shakes out, human pride shatters when a mess of unrelated polymers comes out of complex reactions. In spite of all these points, Roger did not fail to relate the universal process as very natural and not under supervision of a super natural power. Dale refutes his ideas by blaming him for sounding like neo-Darwinists who talk grandly like trends and tendencies and the imperfections of the fossil records. Such scientists tend to ignore the fact that these records of dead creatures appear and disappear. Their ignorance is clear from
the point that these gaps are not just gaps; they are humongous huge holes which cannot be filled with limited human knowledge.

Dale boldly questioned the mystery of development from the unicellular organisms to the multi-cellular ones asserting his surety about some anonymous power directing their growth, form and shape. The argument did nothing much except add a little confusion to Roger and his decision that the project to prove God’s existence could take them nowhere except several centuries back to the age of ignorance and the bewildered primitive man who kept making stories about the tricks that gods were playing in the heaven. He also mocks Dale at trying to befool the age of modern science to cave-man’s cosmology and of tying God to human ignorance. He just wants this idea to be jerked off; he wanted the mission of curiosity for the whereabouts of God to be turned down, God to be freed from being studied about and contemplated for. Roger tries his best to avoid God into oblivion. This was Roger’s virtual blow which contained its passion in it. He cared about freeing God from cavity of human reason, feelings, emotions as well as thinking, even if this freedom would lead to the death of Almighty’s existence. Dale’s counter attack is again a significant one as he explains it wisely:

. . .modern man. . .surrounded by an airtight atheist explanation of natural reality. . .astronomers. . .biologists are staring something in the face they’re not letting you in on, because they don’t want to believe it themselves. . .you can take or leave it, because that’s the freedom God gave us, but intellectually don’t be intimidated. Intellectually you don’t owe the Devil a thing. . .the Devil is doubt. . .makes us reject the gifts God gives us, suicide is the second cause of death among teenagers, secondly only to automobile accidents. . .

*(Roger’s Version, 80)*
Surprisingly, Roger gives an astonishing interpretation of the word ‘doubt’ as deduced by him and as the word been taken up by religious scholars all over the world, who define ‘devil as the absence of doubt’. *(Roger Version, 81)* Excessive faith is leading people into suicide bombing and setting up extermination camps. ‘Faith’ as a weapon in the hands of religious leaders who use it to push the fervent followers ‘go out and kill’. Updike has tried to give a clear explanation for blameless souls who are modified to become terrorists when they themselves don’t know what they are groomed for. It must have been in Updike’s mind how innocent children like Ahmad Ashmaway in *Terrorist* are taken advantage of, snapped away from familial and social ties and chiselled into destructors by their so-called role models – their preachers.

For Dale, evolution does not mean knowing everything about life and its elements. It is about knowing more about it so that its miracles may be unravelled and God’s marvels may be appreciated, just as the human eye or the trilobite eye, which had been so sophistically created in accordance with the laws of refraction that were not known until the seventeenth century. Several other examples such as jawbones of reptiles evolving into mammalian ear, difference in the qualities and uses of the same organ in aquatic and land animals and the birds in flight – all could not have come about by accident or through a set of random errors piled one on the top of the other. Roger declines the crippled faith which stands on facts and proofs. He believes that spiritual faith helps in the acknowledgement of God as different religions in his name were spread like fire in the forest. Moreover, wonders of nature have always roused the curiosity of man. So, if God is so purposive, then what about the deformity, disease, pain and suffering that engulf the Mankind. That’s why people turn to Him only when they are hopeless. Here, Roger is reluctantly revealing the fact that the
students come to the divinity school, eager to get fused with spirituality and God’s grace but their innocent will and hope is turned into hopelessness due to a guidance which is devoid of faith. Another point driven home is the selfish nature of Mankind which approaches God only when it is grief-stricken and hopeless. Roger strongly supports the notion that God is all about faith and faith is abstract belief and not a handful of evidences.

At the point of sparing any money to Verna for her self-maintenance, Roger is reminded of Buddha’s non-attachment according to which ‘Desire is the origin of every problem.’ Verna’s non-attachment with the embarrassing elements of her life could have saved her from falling into the pit of shame. He also remembers Jesus’ Doctrine ‘Do unto Others’ to spend the money for the welfare of the needy. Calvinism marked out material property as an outward sign of human prosperity which means that art of giving away is an inner richness of the soul. But Roger sees the American public of 1980s has turned to rust due to the false guidance of communication and technology. Scholarships and grants by the educational system never give them chance to strive and struggle for food in their lives. They remain as dependent as infants even in their fourth decade. As far as Jesus’ Doctrine is concerned, Updike gives a wonderful example of Roger’s first wife Lillian who is an embodiment of generosity in herself. Updike masters the art of bringing two opposite poles together so as to give them time and a kind of self-experience and a chance to realise that they are a mismatch. Though, one of them still has the capacity and desire to continue with the relation, yet the other partner has a tendency to hurt the former. Roger, like Owen in Villages, abandons his first wife for another woman, though not after a sexual sojourn as Owen. Phyllis was gifted with an inhibition whereas Lillian is unable to reproduce children. So, she extended her love to the wandering students, bereft
parishes, relatives, etc. Her lamb-like innocence gave Lambert ample opportunity to carry out his affair with Esther. But the morality was still struggling with the shamelessness that they both exhibited before the parish and scandalized it. That is the reason why the couple have been living a Bohemian life.

Roger heartlessly thinks of making fun of Dale’s efforts for proving God’s existence, so, he talks to one of the authorities from grants commission and thereby makes an amusing publicity of the matter. Lambert knew that the committee was less than convinced for sanctioning the grant for computer theology. At the same time, he felt jealous of Dale who could reach heights of acclaim with his project or at least attract comments and criticism which could bring him a considerate profile in the world of theology. On his side, Dale is also equipped with religious knowledge and comments sharply at Roger’s glamorous attitude. In his opinion real prayer and kindness is accepted by God only when done quietly without making fuss about it.

Verna represents that part of civilization which is blamed for propagating the human race in its every form, gender and colour. In such an extremely racist American world, where blacks are accused for everything, even a white is not spared if she has a black man’s progeny. Here the concept of blaming a female also arises as nobody takes pain to talk about a father’s responsibility. The mother is simply accused of being immoral first, then illogical for trying to raise a ‘brown’ race. Even Verna, after showing such courage ‘to have produced a biracial baby’, submits as naturally as possible to accept that she is ‘not normal’. ‘Updike sounds to be suggesting that the saintly Hester (The Scarlet Letter) operates as a mythical predecessor for contemporary females (Verna) who turn to volunteer for work or work for little pay?’ Or more precisely for little ‘reverence’, here. (Searles, 1994)
But as far as Roger is concerned, neither the fact of Verna being a disgraceful girl, devirginated by a black man, nor the taboos could restrain him from finding Edna’s image in Verna. Somewhere, the instinct to avenge for his pitiable mother and for himself is functioning, as ravishing the fruit of his disloyal father’s granddaughter, could satisfy his wild emotions, to some extent. On her side, Verna has the measure of Roger and his darksome longings, slyly suggesting, to his own surprise and retrospective fascination, that his interest in her mother was more than half-brotherly when he and Edna were children, long years back in the splendidly named mid-Western town of Chagrin Falls. Verna feels that her uncle Roger would sound sweeter and more sympathetic when he talks about God. It makes a person feel softer towards other people and an angelic character adds upon them. Verna longs for a supportive soul who could treat her better than ‘let me do something nice for somebody’ purpose. But to her disappointment, her raunchy, erotic presence acts upon Roger as a memento mori, and in one of his more cheerfully chilling insights he assured her that ‘its helped him get ready for death’. Roger’s conscience rests easy in the matter of his fascination with Verna, since his wife Esther, as assumed by him, has been conducting a ravenously carnal affair with none other than Dale Kohler. In the moments of their great fall, Verna resembled a spirit entangled in this demanding world and submits to them compromisingly and Roger himself symbolised the great fallen, valueless slaveaway from God’s grace and had ‘no further depth to fall’:

Lying there with Verna, gazing upward, I saw how much majesty resides in our continuing to love and honour God even as He inflicts blows upon us – as much as resides in the silence He maintains so that we may enjoy and explore our human freedom. This was my proof of His existence, I saw – the distance
to the impalpable ceiling, the immense distance measuring our abasement. So
great a fall proves great heights. Sweet certainty invaded me.

(Roger’s Version, 281)

In this way, for Roger, God’s majesty lies in the stirring up of thoughts, turning on of
the body and the revival of body juices beyond time and relation. For him, God is
sublime but his love is an attempt to reach mankind, translate and transform itself into
its baser form and whenever God wants to love his creature; his love dawns upon the
creature as sex, satisfaction and science.

All outdoor trips by Updike’s protagonist serve as sources for surveying
America of the 80s. All the buildings show signs of care and maintenance that was
once given to them generously but later left unattended to. Railroads, clusters of
millsand rusted sheds are some of the remnants of growing capitalism. America, with
the passage of time, never lagged behind in recognising the need of the hour; cheap
labour, forgetting one business and switching on to the other and thus leaving the
previous place and sources to decay. Updike has dealt with this topic quite
comprehensively in his In the Beauty of the Lilies where he sketches the same pathetic
view of rusted machinery, abandoned chemical factories and greenery free river banks
where some time ago, mineral extraction refineries had been set up. There he also
talks about how the white residential areas are gradually being overtaken by the
Blacks and the power which seems to be slipping into the latter’s hands.

Tertullian argued in De resurrection carnies that soul is at par with the flesh in
extracting and enjoying the nature, world and its pleasures to the full extent. He wrote
it when he left orthodoxy. Therefore, according to him, flesh should be equally
punished as it plays an important role in committing sins. Though Roger thinks that
‘resurrection of faith is the most emphatic doctrine’ yet, Tertullian says that ‘flesh
cannot be dispensed with by the soul'. By its means, all the sense organs, as psychoanalytic theory puts it, link the effects to the faculty of speech, which depends on a physical organ, tongue. God has knitted the soul with the flesh so tightly that their separation can be done with death. It is a contract that human beings have never signed and if it has been done, then it happened without consultation. Wavering faith has made America step into the twilight of their religious belief. Roger Lambert is quite confused with the fact that the soul is body’s master. He feels sick to think that someday souls and bodies will have to restrain from worldly pleasure but still the idea of eternal survival lifts up the heart. Even the idea of everlastingness sounded ridiculous to Lambert. In this case, he preferred to refer to this doctrine as believed by the heathens. According to them, the flesh is accused of being unclean, guilty and troublesome. Here Tertullian and Barth seem to agree that man is flesh and by nature ought to perish.

Sexual meetings of Dale and Esther appear in the novel at places where Roger is scanning through pages where Tertullian makes his sensible questions about the possibility of continuing worldly pleasures in afterlife. Moreover, disease, decay, pain and suffering go hand-in-hand with the worldly life. Tertullian felt that heart-breaking force which was required to wish for the untimely death, thereby, a permanent break from base desires and yearning for fulfilment, but at such a time the pagan desire to live forever, overcomes all the religions and faith.

In the present time, faith is the only material which is lacking in the technologically advanced countries as science has replaced this faith with material. Even if this materialism is taken seriously and used up for good purpose it can work wonders just as theism adds marvellous beauty to human nature. A godly person believes that faith does not offer him any chance to raise questions but science is a
base power so it just has the capability to ask a lot in the way of facts and proofs. Current materialism wants confidence of human beings, their emotions and moral sensations.

Any sign of weariness or hopelessness on Dale’s side revived Roger’s courage and he managed to see the image of fervent students of theology losing their faith quite soon. Deterioration and confusion at any step in the course of the study, signals Dale’s stability turn into wavering faith, lowers the jealousy for Dale’s zeal, in Roger’s heart.

Moreover, Dale’s hands tracing circuits and connection in air is an indication of growing hollowness in his faith and vagueness of his aim. His thread which tied him to his belief is losing its grip and the falcon is moving away from its falconer. (W.B. Yeats, The Second Coming) We smell the upcoming failure and pitiable inability of Dale Kohler to prove God’s existence through a computer programme. He tries to organise his points and taking help of psychopharmacology, brain anatomisation, synapses, and study of brain with the help of computer, he concluded that brain is a material and mind is something which can be applied on any brain, provided the brain is to be modified with habit making. In this way, brain is the hardware and mind is the function of brain, i.e. software. But the point is, even a latest computer technology, no matter how advanced it is, or how many computers are linked to together to make the software as self-conscious or self-generated as ‘life’ itself, but still one can’t get the sensation, emotion, will or self-reference. Life and God’s marvels can never be proved on trivial things such as computer’s screen. They just have to be accepted as God’s gifts to nature and willing surrender by mankind is a signal of acceptance of his sublimity. Dale says that even if anyone dares to achieve some similarity between the so-called computer programme which can be applied to
so many hardware and the enzymes, proteins and acids getting assembled in the primordial soup to generate life all by itself, then one has to build a computer which can re-programme itself or has the ability to commit suicide if it gets bored with itself and depressed. Here also the material and key to success is faith and this faith when takes the right path, becomes theism.

Desires and thoughts are such abstract generations which rise in neurons that stimulate the muscles of a body and make them move. Desires are the essence of our life and the most obvious fact of our existence. But here we find Dale fighting against materialism which asks us to ignore our desires and it also defines human consciousness as an illusion. It is all the matter of arbitrariness of certainty or uncertainty, possibility or impossibility and belief or disbelief. Existence of abstractions in religious matters and incidents makes it difficult for science to believe in them. Whatever seems impossible and absurd to the material world, is sometimes very close to God. For science, reality is always uncertain and is dependent upon observation, so that, facts may generate belief.

Furthermore, the arguments of professor Lambert that the material world does not care for ideas, values, morals, thoughts and desires, not even for prayers and wishes. But Dale’s constant struggle to defend the question of faith takes him to present an example of Christ where Christ gives the manifestation of the power of faith that it could move mountains; determination and resolution can change the material world.

After a thrilling discussion, Roger manages to convince Dale about the sublimity of God that is not so simple as ‘to be tucked into odd bits of astronomy and nuclear physics.’ A convinced Dale confesses the existence of a sort of anger which indicates break-up of some Divine connection within himself. He came to a
conclusion that even natural calamities are indignant messages of God to his people and that’s why sometimes atheists turn so religious and self-righteous. A person has to put above him an apostle of righteousness to whom he could turn to in adverse times. God is too generous to humiliate His creatures by making them bend before Him if they do not want to. Instead, He presides in every human heart, so that people could be loyal to themselves without being aware of His presence. He makes His proud slaves accept His benevolence through themselves.

A meeting with Grants Committee reveals the weak stand which religion suffers in technologically advanced America. Dale partly loses his enthusiasm when the first member asks him about whether reliability on cosmic constants will prove worthy as these numbers and tables keep changing every few hundred years due to new discoveries in the universe. Dale asserted about the remarkable, delicate balance of fundamental forces in the Big Bang and the forces which produced a perpetual chain of sustained and stable reactions to evolve life; questions are raised as to how could such a study be carried out only with the help of cosmic constants without spiritual elements like subjectivity, moral law within heart and abstract elements like God’s blessings. Another member was also full of doubts about the ability of God to mould and pat the clay to make creatures. Verses related to creationist doctrine don’t explain how matter took form. In the first chapter of Genesis, verse 20 subjunctives are found which indicate God’s permission or blessing for life but nowhere his powerful hand has been mentioned to control it. An objection was placed at his trying to carry out his research with the aid of creationist doctrine as it was quite worn out area and the situation of other researchers who have already taken up this field, is equally pitiable. Dale’s reconfirmation that he is all for science and has not much to do with creationist doctrine, pacified some of the members with
the novelty of this sort of project. An enthusiastic discussion revolving around digits, constants, multiples, numerical coincidences, equations of temperature and radiation landed on some sort of satisfaction on the part of the committee. In addition to that, Rebecca Abram, a member of Grants committee, marked his research as ‘charming’ in an age when everybody is crazy about ‘Black’ or ‘Women’ studies – the area, Americans are mostly obsessed with. She also sensitized the scope of studies about genders saying that women are tired of being studied. She also argued that the world should move on to study something else except patriarchy. Through this discourse it is implied that everywhere in America ‘racism’ and ‘gender’ are areas of interest and research whereas faith and religion hardly find any place.

After seeking the Grant and advancing in his work, Dale comes to know from a blonde graduate student that plants and animals have special visual, olfactory and courtship abilities which signify an entirely angelic conversation that is invisible to human beings. This revelation disturbs Dale as his conscience throbs him with the standard item of Christian faith that there are realms of knowledge beyond us; God’s ways that are not ours. These extra ordinary abilities of animals and plants seem to insult him inspite of being the most rational part of God’s creation. Then he is reminded of the human’s restricted ability ‘that the eye is the soul’s window’ and one has to ‘trust its information to be complete.’ According to this standardization, human beings have the right just to praise God for his marvellous creation and no right to explore His identity. With this feeling developing gradually within him, Dale, along with the pressure of his work as well as the inability of his computer to withstand the gigantic numbers, dreadfulness and fear touch him and his hands hesitate as he realizes that he is really trying to unfold the identity of the unidentifiable – The Almighty – The All Maker – The All Creator. It is the human being and other
creatures that survive and ask for identity and the most blessed identity of creatures is – ‘The Believers’. In this way it is not God who needs to be identified. Each step of Dale’s research leads him towards nothingness as the data of his computer is ‘a paltry of number of objects that exist on the Earth or in the Universe’. He divides the Bohr atomic radius by the Hubble cosmological radius and is thunderstruck at the result – 666, the number of the Beast in the Book of Apocalypse. All these results were indicating the divine rejection for his studies. Since receiving the grant, his moral consciousness has been nipping him more. The probable futility and the feeling of guilt at tres-passing into others vicinity such as Roger’s house, his wife (as imagined by Roger) and at some other times daring to attempt what God does not permit – identifying him as a character controlling the world – eventually collapse him.

Even during the climax of his studies he has that dreadful feeling as he hopes to view a face on the screen as an evidence for God’s presence. But at the same time Dale feels its hatred for himself and a fear overcomes him as he anticipates a revenge on its part. In the end he observes a hand on the screen which looks faded when produced as a hard copy.

Lately we see how history repeats itself and Esther this time becomes the passive part of it. Her charming ability of performing sexual stunts and being younger than Lillian were some of the reasons which attracted Roger towards her. Moreover, giving Roger a child to run the family name after her illicit affair cost her the wrath of the Church and society and now she finds herself at such a turn of life where Verna, younger than Esther herself, was ready to become the second Esther. However, in Roger’s mind, Esther’s affair with Dale seemed easy going and enjoyable to her as it never marked her insecurity but now she smelled another competitor ready to pull out Roger from her life and her fury and doubt over the matter confirmed the hollowness
of Roger’s imaginations. These nibbling assumptions were the guilt-turned-haunts that Roger was paying for the wrong he did to Lillian. Unlike Owen, Roger did not have to live with a third self in his house as Lillian seemed to be less spiteful and more compromising than Phyllis but the sense of distrust, insecurity and humiliation of being husband of other man’s mistress was not less than God’s wrath.

Here conclusion of Tillich for human beings making up the loss of one person with another is that ‘creatures are not only religious but also social’ which indicates that in American society replacement of relations and partners is taken as a sign of socialism. In the end Tillich places the salvation of Westerners from Barbarism in the hands of socialism.

Some passages are just a cold rebuke that technologically advanced Americans want to gratify desires but are unable to shoulder the responsibility of consequences. These passages also clarify that deadly measures are taken to avoid the unwelcome guests to this world.

Gradually Dale comes to realise the fatality of proving God’s existence through computer stuff. The fatal blow and the true realisation of his hollow and faithless theory dawned upon him when Roger threw him into an alleged talk with Mr. Myron in a thanks giving party given by Lambert in May as the academic session is on the verge of completion. Actually science and religion are lines moving in opposite directions and Roger failed to clarify this logic before Dale. He thought that Mr. Myron would be a good spokesperson for him and would be able to disprove Dale’s theory in language appropriate for him to understand. This was exactly what happened when Myron says:

nobody denies the Big Bang has a few wrinkles we don’t comprehend yet, we may never comprehend for that matter. . .even the oldest star clusters show
traces of the heavy elements. . .strange because there’s no older generation of stars to have cooked them up and . . .the particle mechanics of the Big Bang could only have supplied Helium and Hydrogen. . .the three dimensions of space. . .can’t be pried apart either. . why don’t we live in two, four or twenty-four. . .you need three dimensions to make a knot. . .in space-time. . .without time you don’t have anything. . .there wouldn’t be any casualty. . .without casualty, no universe. . .

(Roger’s Version, 298 &302)

It does not mean that the present situation of the universe or the earlier one was or is ever suitable enough to sustain life. Mr. Myron is not in favour of singing praises about the consistency of Big Bang’s resultant elements, forces and reliability of masses. Heavenly power is unlimited and should not be restricted to Big Bang only, but the cosmic history long before Big Bang as well as the microscopic organismsthrough their adjustments and signals emitted by them, deduce that ‘the Universe existed to produce their little puddle and them!’ But this again confines us to our little world. To achieve the ultimate satisfaction is what human craves for, it depends which level they are able to put themselves at. In a country, whose foremost craze is technology, restless souls wander about, groping blindly, in search of faith and most of the time, deriving satisfaction in peaceful meditation sessions of Buddhism and obsessive remembrance of God in Sufism. In this way, no American follows hard and fast rules or strict paths of his or her forefathers. Everyone tries to seek satisfaction in his own way. But returning again to cosmology, Mr. Myron assures the majesty of God in creating something or everything from nothing.

But returning to what one might think of as Updike’s reality principle: the primacy of libido. As manipulated version of Roger’s imagination suggests to him
that whatever the faith of a person is but it gets contaminated with fallen desires of a
God’s disciple and such carnal affair of Dale with someone or Roger’s own wife for
instance, could be responsible for the blurred focus of Dale, thus his certainty falters;
he de-sublimates. As an arrogant evangelical know-it-all, Dale had certain piquancy,
even a perverse charm. But magnificent obsessions do not thrive in the worldly, cosy
atmosphere of Updike’s fiction; they are undercut by his ubiquitous mild irony. For all
the high-voltage philosophizing in Roger’s version, it is this irony — ostensibly
Roger’s, since he is the narrator, but recognizably Updike’s that poses the book’s
most intriguing problem. It lends to Updike’s most intellectual novel, an anti-
intellectual flavour. He is clearly fascinated by the questions they suggest. But within
the novel, those questions never come to seem urgent or threatening; his tone defuses
them.

It is true that neither God himself nor faith for him should ever be
underestimated. That’s why, even when everything comes to an end, faith never dies
and as Updike has manifested in his novel ‘In the Beauty of the Lilies’, their particles
continue to exist in any form, though remaining dormant through coming generations.
And Roger rightly says that ‘what we think we believe, is a minor part of what we do
believe’ — which means that belief in its true sense is always with us, while our
conscience picks only whatever it perceives as belief in its seemingly relevant sense.

As discussed earlier, in America, sex is an outlet for fear, a spiritual
satisfaction sometimes and escapism; but the more rampant ideology is that sex is
itself God in loving stage. Whenever two fleshy bodies are adoringly copulating, it
becomes easier for them to countdown the completion of worldly responsibilities and
face death more bravely. This becomes clear when Roger is not guilty of having
getting laid down with his niece, Verna; instead he feels he is relieved of the burden of the fear of death.

In the after word by John Banville we deduce the puzzle as ‘America’s twin obsessions’ and, it might be ventured, the main driving forces behind it are technology and religion. The two are not as mutually opposed as might seem the case. American Protestantism – the Republic’s creed-of-choice – is a hard-headed insistence on ecstatic certainties, nothing at all like the quietest and largely jaded version of it that is now-a-days practiced in fewer and fewer and smaller and smaller pockets of rotting old Europe, while American technology has a decidedly evangelical cast to it – think of Space Race of the 1960s, or the messianic ambition of Reagan’s Stat Wars endeavour. The ghost in America’s machine is the Holy Ghost.

The literary figure which epitomises a synthesis of these two national drives is the devout humanist Benjamin Franklin, harnessing God’s thunderbolt to light his country and enlighten his countrymen. Franklin and Updike are both American patriots with a hankering for and knowledge of old Europe, both are fascinated by the worldly yet in dream; and both have more than a passing interest in the third of America’s enthusiastic pursuits, namely sex.

The university in question is one of American institutions, and Roger, being a part of its divinity department and the mere mention of it conjures the spirit of Emerson whose essay The Divinity School Address might be considered America’s unofficial Declaration of Religious Independence. But if Emerson abandoned the ministry because, as he airily informed his congregation, it simply did not suit the temper of his thought to continue in it, Roger has forsaken the pulpit for the lecture hall out of a more Manichaean impulse.

(John Banville, afterword)
Roger is a keen student of early Church Fathers, relishing the cut-and-thrust of their doctrinal squabbles, but his wife, the splendidly mordant Esther, sees through to a bleaker source of his enjoyment:

‘He thinks they’re funny. . . with him all those men arguing and killing each other over these ridiculous distinctions are just a cruel joke. . .

(Roger’s Version, 202)

With this observation, as with so much else in the book, it’s significant that we are hearing it at second hand, for this is Roger’s ‘version’ of how his wife thinks and what she says – and more alarmingly, what she does. Roger's hatred of Dale exists before Dale's involvement with Esther. Esther and Dale's adulterous relationship, then, is related only tangentially to Roger's desire to destroy Dale. In fact, Roger writes the affair between his wife and Dale so that it is but one element in a seduction plot.

(John N. Duvall, 1991)

Yet out of his own mouth too he reveals the darkness in his heart. Walking through an unsavoury neighbourhood of autumnal Boston he comes upon a ginkgo tree ‘with its gonglike golden colour’ and muses that ‘there are so few things which, contemplated, do not like flimsy trapdoors open under the weight of our attention into the bottomless pit below’.

(Roger’s Version, 74)

For Roger, the bottomless pit is not Hell, exactly, but a more refined form of perdition. His is a kind of anti-theology. As a follower of the uncompromising Christian thinker Karl Barth – ‘A Barthian all the way’ – he considers belief in the kind of personal God conceived by latter-day wishy-washy liberal theological to be next to blasphemous: God, he insists, should not be reduced to the petty yearnings and demands of human subjectivity. God by His apparent absence is always with us, and
he quotes with high approval Barth’s scornful challenges: ‘What manner of God is He who has to be proved?’

(Roger’s Version, 219)

The book’s particular blasphemous bent on finding a proof for the existence of the deity is obviously, Dale Kohler, ‘his eyes in their deep bony sockets, an uncanny, sheepish, unutterly cold, pale blue’ working as a research assistant on a ‘special graphics project’ at the Cube, the university’s Computer Research Centre.

Roger’s Version is unusual in the Updike oeuvre for the levels of lubricous disgust, the author allows his narrator to indulge in. Roger Lambert in his own version of himself, is cold, manipulative, predatory and voyeuristic; Verna merrily accuses him of being ‘evil’, the Reverend Thomas Marshfield, the womanising protagonist of Updike’s 1975 novel, A Month of Sundays. Having been caught with, not his hand but a more potent part of his anatomy in the parish honey pot, Marshfield, a frolicsome Paul Tillich to Roger’s forbidding Karl Barth, is banished to the desert for thirty days to meditate on his many sins. Unrepentant and in a prose style, as fancy as HumbertHumbert’s, he sets out most clearly and unequivocally Updike’s the novelist’s affirmative attitude to adultery:

Wherein does the modern American man recover his sense of worth, not as dogged bread-winner and economic integer, but as romantic minister and phallic knight, as personage, embodiment and hero? In adultery. And wherein does the American woman, coded into mindlessness by household slavery and the stupefying companionship of greedy infants, recover her powers of decision, of daring, of discrimination- her dignity, in short? In adultery.

(A Month of Sundays, 46)

Roger’s saliva tingly detailed descriptions of Esther and Dale – conscious references here, surely, to Hawthorne’s Hester Prynne, unfaithful wife of the creepily
complaisant Roger Chillingworth, and her lover Arthur Dimmesdale – in the toils of love, as pictured in his imagination, come as close to plain obscenity as anything in Updike ever has. The opulent exactness of the writing lifts these passages high above the fevered scribbling of the pornographer. The pretext for Dale’s repeated presence in the Lambert home is that he has been hired to coach the couple’s educationally slow son Richie in mathematics whereas in the mind of Roger it is the lessons of a wholly other kind that are administered on a stained mattress up in the attic, as Esther, another of Updike’s marvellous women, with her cigarettes and her sweet vermouth and her pert and lovingly lingered-over bottom, initiates Dale in the arts of grown-up passion.

The mystery in the heart of Roger’s Version is whether or not we are to credit Roger’s ‘version’. Updike does not give his protagonist the gift, if such it would be in the circumstances, of second sight, and therefore, if Esther and Dale are in reality having an affair that Roger believes them to be having then, as analyzed earlier, the descriptions of their love-making must be the product of Roger’s imaginings, and not a true version of the real thing. But does Roger believe they are having an affair? Is it not that he is simply diverting himself with what in the old days the priests would have designated dirty thoughts? Strangely, the ambiguity at the heart of the narrative is what Roger’s version is all about, and much of its peculiar, unsettling power. Nowhere else in his work does Updike effect so convincing a chemical wedding between, on one side, his fascination with the fetid underworld of sexual transgression and, on the other, his almost boyish enthusiasm for technological know-how as represented by Dale Kohler in his computational quest for God. Software and hardware, indeed. Roger’s Version is Updike’s darkest and most disturbing masterpiece, a meditation on the world, the flesh and the Godhead in which the devil,
too, gets his due. For us, in our slough of past lapsarian despond, Roger’s is the version that gets it just right.

It is often claimed, particularly by those who want to emphasise the positive relations between science and religion, that western science could only have risen in the context of three great monotheisms; Judaism, Christianity and Islam. What was essential to the rise of western science was belief that the world is fundamentally ordered and reliable. It seems clear that, of different kinds of religious beliefs about creation, the conviction found in Hebrew scriptures that the world is ‘good’ in itself – the work of one God, a creation who does not keep changing the rules – is very favourable to a belief in an ordered world.

In an essay on Science and Religion, it was expressed about divine belief that God brought the world out of nothing as an act of free creation, which is a the main line of Christian Doctrine of creation, implies (a) that the world is not itself part of God, and is not therefore itself Holy, and (b) that God could have created a different world. Hence, in order to discover what harmonious, faithful and ordered work did do – a plausible task for natural theology and philosophy – it is both permissible and necessary to ‘put the world to the test’ in Francis Bacon’s memorable phrase-conduct experiments. (www.counterbalance.orgReligion and Science)

In the novel, Roger Lambert thinks through Updike:

Whenever theology touches science, it gets burned. In the 16th Century astronomy, in the 17th microbiology, in the 18th geology and palaeontology, in the 19th Darwin’s biology all grotesquely extended the world-frame and sent churchmen scurrying for cover in even smaller, more shadowy nooks, little gloomy ambiguous caves in the psyche where even now neurology is cruelly
harrying them, gouging them out of from the multi-folded brain like wood lice from under the lumber pile.

(Roger’s Version, 32)

Pope John Paul II wrote in 1988:

By encouraging openness between the Church and the scientific communities, we are not envisioning a disciplinary unity between theology and science like that which exists within a given scientific field or within theology proper. As dialogue and common searching continue, there will be towards mutual understanding and a gradual uncovering of common concerns which will provide the basis for future research and discussion. Exactly what form that will take, must be left to the future. What is important, as we have already stressed, is that the dialogue should continue and grow in depth and scope. In the process, we must overcome every regressive tendency to a unilateral reductionism, to fear and to self-imposed isolation.

(John Paul II, A Message to the Revd. George V. Coyne, Vatican City: Vatican State Observatory, 1988)

Near the end of the novel, Roger is brooding gloomily. He uses a phrase that may go some way towards explaining why Updike wrote Roger’s Version and, at the same time, why it feels a bit bloodless. Roger refers to ‘our Godless freedoms that become, with daily use, so oddly trivial.’ This remark immediately brings to mind, another, a well known adage about the literature of contemporary Europe: ‘In the West, everything goes and nothing matters; in the East, nothing goes and everything matters.’ It is difficult to manage a more civilized, tolerant, humane sensibility than Updike’s, which surely has much to do with his having steeped in an exceptionally rich, free society during its long golden age. But this achievement provokes some
troubling questions. What if the price of Updike’s marvellous, inexhaustible irony is weightlessness? What if the fruit of our indubitably precious breed is a certain moral and aesthetic lightness of being? What if the absence of illusions, religious or political, entails in the long run an absence of intellectual passion? Updike has long been one of America’s foremost fictional wizards. But in Roger’s Version, the literary equivalent of the law of gravity catches up with it. (The Boston Phoenix, 40)
Works Cited


Chapter 4

IN THE BEAUTY OF THE LILIES
Years, ago, in one of his glittering essays, Updike wrote of his admiration for novels that ‘give us, through the consciousness of characters, a geography amplified by history, a chunk of the planet.’ Up till then, the chunk of planet, Updike had chosen to explore himself – 20th century America, as colonised by middle class – had been most knowingly and most intimately chronicled in his Rabbit novels, a quarter of books that gave us four decades of American life as seen through the experiences of a high school basket ball star turned car salesman, Harry (Rabbit) Angstrom. In his novels ‘Updike tries to cover the last half century of American history, from the beginning of Cold War to the Millennial Reflections’.

(Catherine Morley, 2000)

Then, in, In the Beauty of the Lilies (1996), Updike took on an even more daunting project: to chart the fortunes of an American family through four generations and some eighty years, and in doing so, create a portrait of the country, from its nervous entry into the 20th Century to its stumbling approach to the millennium. This Wilmot family is seen struggling through their successive bouts with religious doubt, mediocrity, fame, and fanaticism. (Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol. 139)

Religion, of course, has rumbled through the pages of Updike’s fiction from the start, from the books like The Poorhouse Fair and A Month of Sundays through Couples and Roger’s Version. Most of Updike’s heroes feel themselves torn between their spiritual aspirations and their fleshly compulsion, between their yearning for redemption and their dark suspicion that no meaning exists. Like Henry Bech, they worry that they are nothing but ‘a fleck of dust condemned to know that it is a fleck of dust’. Like the Witches of East wick, they see that ‘the outside of things was sunshine and scatter’ while ‘the inside of everything was death’. But in this novel, apart from
the consciousness for valuelessness, ‘Updike focuses on the mysterious future in addition to the nostalgia for the past’. (Schiff, 2002)

The existential anxieties culminate in the opening pages of the novel when the progenitor of Updike’s American family, Rev. Clarence Arthur Wilmot, suffers an acute spiritual crisis. It is 1910, and one fine spring afternoon in Paterson, New Jersey, Clarence feels ‘the last particles of faith leave him’ forever. The loss comes as a palpable, physical sensation and it leaves Clarence adrift in a universe suddenly rendered empty and devoid of hope. (Beauty of the Lilies, 05)

The opening pages also attribute departure of faith from Clarence’s self with the loss of consciousness of the ‘struggling Hollywood star Mary Pickford who faints on the set of a movie’. This vague attribution leads us to more than one direction. First, a creature without faith is as lifeless, as spiritless, and as mentally numb as one who loses consciousness. Such creature has no more relation with or liveliness as it is unaware of the element of hope around it. Secondly, creating an artificial image of life on silver screen and colouring it according to our taste is just escapism from the reality. The moment Clarence lost his faith, his Godless, graceless soul succumbed itself to the artificiality of life on screen and escapism. (Frank Kermode, 1996)

It’s not that Clarence never tried to avoid such Godlessness but the very specks of atheism were despised by him. Lately, he had engaged himself in studying Robert Ingersoll, the famous atheist, whose Some Mistakes of Moses had the content:

‘. . .the God of Pentateuch was an absurd bully, barbarically thundering through a cosmos entirely misconceived. There is no such God, nor there should be.’ (Beauty of the Lilies, 05)

Clarence had been reading Ingersoll ‘in order to refute it for a perturbed parishioner’. (Beauty of the Lilies, 05) And here the irony worked. Instead of pushing atheism
away, Clarence himself was caught in its shackles. It’s not that he was driven towards them willingly and hastily but he had been trying hard to retain his faith in spite of repeated attacks of Godlessness:

Clarence’s mind...like a many-legged. . .wingless insect. . .been struggling to climb. . .walls of. . .a slick-walled porcelain basin. . .now a sudden. . .wash of water swept it down into the drain. There is no God.

(Beauty of the Lilies, 05-06)

This blasphemous knowledge dawned upon him as a ghastly moment, a silent sounding of bottomlessness, a curious lightness and flatness in sounds which are indicators of life; for Clarence, life seemed to have lost its resonating base. The baselessness of this feeling seemed to justify what Clarence has suspected for a long time – universe had no relation with the betterment or deterioration of human being, i.e. universe is completely disinterested and detached from creatures and empty of ‘divine content’. All the criteria of God had evaporated into fumes, except cruelty and death, which after being devoid of God’s grace, had become simply facts. Such facts can be treated by subjecting them to oblivion as forgetting them is the only comforter. All the stressing questions and riddles like – Man can never have free will as long as God is the sole possessor of the perfect freedom; Why Man is blamed when all actions are predicated by God? – these questions which pressed upon Clarence’s mind simply evaporated. These questions always demanded the need for ‘justification of ways of God to men’ (Milton’s Paradise Lost). But now the strain was lifted at a blow. Clarence’s mental pressure relaxed but even then the chasm left by the absence of faith was appalling. It has been a history that under the influence of atheism human beings lost their graceful value. In the same way, Clarence’s own life would soon rot as a creature full of life gradually turns into layers of fossiliferous rocks and coal after
its ‘death’. Some hopeless and terrible feelings attacked right then. Without Biblical blessing, the physical universe seemed surprisingly horrible and disgusting. The thought of people slaying animals and eating disgusted him:

All fleshy acts became vile, rather than merely some. The reality of men slaying lambs and cattle, fish and fowl to sustain their own bodies took on an aspect of grisly comedy – the blood soaked selfishness of a cosmic mayhem. The thought of eating sickened Clarence. . .

(Beauty of the Lilies, 07)

Mr. Clarence Wilmot knew that internally atheism had crashed his hard earned faithful self. Faith is the only thing that imparts hope and here it’s withdrawal from Clarence’s self marked a ‘pitch- smooth black of utter hopelessness’.

(Beauty of the Lilies, 10)

Clarence was well aware of his internal crumbling spirit but he longed for an external sign to prove the aftermath effects of atheism; a sort of punishment by furious, dejected God. What was God waiting for? Why did not he retaliate and punish him? Interior guilt made him wait and stand there wondering to bear upon himself the wrath of God:

He stood baffled, looking about the dining room for some exterior sign of the fatal alteration within him. There is no God . . .Yet no exterior change of colour betrayed the event . . . the mahogany dining table. . . the tiffany – glass chandelier. . . the bow-front sideboard, the brown wall-paper. . .none of these mute surfaces reflected the sudden absence of God from the universe. . .

(Beauty of the Lilies, 10)

God’s universe, which consisted of angels, Christ, Providence, ultimate mercy and even eternal heaven, is now devoid of ‘the passionately debated distinctions of
Sublapsarianism, Supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism, in regard to the precise moment when God imposes election. Though his present state was that of a ‘depleted’, a creature stripped off his grace yet he felt a distinction in his shape. He felt his own identity independent of God. The sense of freedom overtook him. He felt the courage to be angry and resentful against his past long captor who had his authority over Clarence’s self. The atheist Ingersoll, among his other promises, promised the liberation of clergy from the shackles of religion and its theories.

At this time, Clarence is reminded of the information given in the Bible about the false pride enjoyed by man in this world when he claims independence from God. According to the Bible, faithlessness is vanity and vexation of spirit. Even the learned scholars, if they are proud of their knowledge, why do they die as fools? Faith is fruitful provided that Christ is mentioned every now and then and we believe in him in this life and in after-life as well. Even a faithful person should plead to God again and again not to forsake him. This to remind him that he is valueless, sapless and spiritually dead without God’s Grace. On the other hand, the passage of Ingersoll’s Some Mistakes of Moses, narrated the desire of Ingersoll to break the link between the believers and the God. For him, the satisfaction of material demands and basic needs must drive the preachers towards the practicality of life. They should divert their lectures towards the ways of strife and preach the doctrine of vocation. The people and families are forced to concentrate on these doctrines which they hate and give no importance to.

For Clarence, these doctrines are not hateful but full of pity. All those years, these doctrines have been to him like a ghost among the faces of those from sick beds, Sunday pews and economically deprived households who sought him for help and
courage. All that these faces struggled for was, according to Calvin, ‘Grace’. Grace, as Clarence recollects from his past, graceful life:

\[
\text{an interplay between men and God achieved within the mystery of Christ and His Placation of that otherwise ineradicable sin inherited from Adam leaving men with. . . lively tendency to disobey God.}
\]

(\textit{Beauty of the Lilies}, 13)

This faith lay not in human beings themselves but followers and the preachers ‘in their agreeing to meet in faint hope of daily miracles’. God has assigned the preachers the duty of taking care of the followers and the faithful as an infant is nurtured tenderly.

Here Clarence is caught in a tug-of-war between Ingersoll and God on the matter of taking care of people. While God takes care of his people through the doctrines preached by clergy and offering salvation to those who lived and died in faith, Ingersoll forcefully refutes the point for material reasons. He believes in science and its forces and scorns those who ‘poison the minds of young’, ‘prejudicing children against science’ and not encouraging the deserving minds to achieve ‘sublime standard of reason.’

(\textit{Beauty of the Lilies}, 14)

Clarence is also reminded of European critics who never respected the Bible as religious book but earned their bread from behind its criticism. Shamelessly, they called themselves theologians while they undermined Christianity’s ancient supporting walls and pillars.

Earlier faith had given Clarence the majestic confidence of diving deep into ‘the dubiousness and facticity of the old Gospels of Mark and then return to the reassuring ground of Gothic, semi-bucolic Princeton, where his instructors radiated an undisturbed piety and his fellow students appeared uniformly stout in their vocations,
vigorously proof against disabling spiritual wounds’. It was a time when Clarence ate heartily and idea of eating never disgusted him; then these very books of library comforted him and quenched his restless, evangelical spiritual thirst but now these books formed a ‘comfortless wall’.

In his study Clarence caught glimpses of such books as *Pilgrim’s Progress* and *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* – which were related to the progress made by true believer who never left the path of righteousness. There is also mention of Victorian values like scepticism, doubt, reason which was being experienced by Clarence for the last many days. But even the Victorian Tennyson believed in placing Religious matters slightly detached from worldly forces and facts. But here Clarence, even after knowing and ‘drinking to lees’ the Christianity and its rules lost his faith though God never put him to fire test. Moreover his fingers tugged out *The Origin of Species* which is quite ironic for his position in the Church. The writer, Darwin, who himself was a clergyman’s son, wrote that ‘natural evidence should not shock or thwart the religious feelings’. People should be satisfied that law of gravitation is subversive of natural and inferentially revealed, religion. He also wrote about an author of his acquaintance who had expressed that knowledge of natural evidence is as important as original forms full of life and that God required making another creation to fill up the voids created by his previous laws. Darwin’s clarification of natural evidence proved life process so simply that God’s laws sounded very trivial as if they needed not to be carried out. Clarence still flipped about in the hope of finding some trace to regain the imprints of his faith but he soon gave it up. He was still grateful and at the same time surprised that ‘life’s mechanism never stops, it continues even in the person who is aware of his own death within moments’.

*(Beauty of the Lilies, 17)*
Surrendering before these miraculous forces, Clarence suspected weakly that the fault was in him and no atheist or scientific materialism was to blame for this collapse. Faith, which is a blessed force, protects a ‘Christian against the temptations of an age’. (*Beauty of the Lilies*, 18) Evil temptations have always been present in this world. Even the first apostles were surrounded by scepticism and mockery and Christ’s teachings were no less studied by Paul as by sceptics.

Now thinking about his professors he drives home a point that what they always concealed, was the possibility that all faith was about nothing. All types of Churches are no more than the evil pharaonic and Polynesian priesthood. The Church fathers who studied Jesus and Christianity were no different than common people or even atheists of their own time. They had to face the mortality which was also the fate of other people. They were never among the distinguished or blessed people. They never experienced such graces as – Eternity or Confirmed Salvation.

Clarence read a few pamphlets preaching about Christ’s promise of coming. Christ’s promise of coming does not involve his physical coming but is ‘fulfilled in the spread of Christ’s doctrine and the reproduction of his and spirit in the world’.

(*Beauty of the Lilies*, 19)

Another pamphlet involves Judge West’s opinion which reflects his robust optimism. His way of perceiving the world is optimistic which finds its vitality/sap in ‘faith in the goodness of God and the excellence of his creation. But Clarence pitied such optimism and fervour of faith which ‘shields the molten iron of natural truth’.

(*Beauty of the Lilies*, 20) The Church ‘with its fantastic doctrines,’ drags humanity towards pathetic human life. Hope is the essence of life and this is what Clarence has lost:
Hope is our sap, our warm blood. Clarence had lost his sap – not suddenly but over the nearly twenty years since seminary, when he and his cohorts, like soldiers training to brave the terrors and shadows that beset Christendom, had brimmed with the jolly, noisy juices of militant, masculine faith. It has been his vow, his vocation, to keep the faith, and he felt his failure within him as an extensive sore place, which rendered all his actions at his desk stiff and careful.

(Beauty of the Lilies, 20)

Hope results from the faith which has stopped finding its way to Clarence’s heart but even then he still believes in sublimity of serenity. He still believes in it and how it likes to reside in humble hearts and simple houses whereas overtly impressive construction always follows in vain. In a number of instances, we get glimpses of Clarence’s belief, at which sometimes he himself wonders. The same thing followed him when he was called upon the sick of his parish, Mr. Orr, who represents a rarely found pious, extremely faithful and God – fearing part of human population. Mr. Orr could never afford to enjoy worldly pleasures of any kind due to his meagre income but never forgot to thank God even when he slept hungry. He had always put up with a hard life but still not expected to exploit heaven’s comforts. As a human being, he thought, mistakes which he must have committed in state of unawareness might inflict him with divine punishment. Mr. Orr’s humbleness impresses the reader beyond expression and shocks the reader to realise that heaven is not such an easily affordable bliss. His complaint to Clarence includes the sermons which rarely talked about damnation or instructed the people to fear God. There are lectures teaching men to be compassionate to the poor and the less fortunate. Mr. Wilmot assures that every Christian is a victim of wavering faith. Ironically, faith is another name for ‘doubts,’
‘fear of being overcome by time.’ Doubts are so enormous that they become worth challenging (which means there is some degree of consideration bestowed to doubts by Christians). The philosophical doubts and forsaken feelings experienced by Clarence, his long-term doubts slowly changing into belief regarding God’s non-existence, God being a non-factor, origin of matter, evolution of man, pointlessness of universe, unimportance of man in the eyes of God – find their answer in a mathematical rebuke given by Dale Kohler in Roger’s Version but the resultant collapsed self of Dale takes us to Esther (Roger’s Version) who, on a Sunday morning declares to her husband, Roger, in her own way that she has found God in her heart who is calling her to meet His creation in the Church.

The dinner organised by Clarence’s family for church committee members is like a kaleidoscope through which Updike stretches his attention towards other problems of struggling 20th century America. In the meanwhile, Clarence is given ample time to reflect over his loss of Divine bliss. Sometimes ignoring the conversation over the dinner table, Clarence ponders over his own ideas and also wonders to what extent people believe in God. He came up with a point that God’s existence or non-existence is all about the end of worldly life and beginning of afterlife. Death is the exit to one and the entrance to other at the same time. Here, death is used as a Pun – end, mourning, detachment, no more on one side; and a beginning, unimaginable and fresh start, full in God’s sight, a monotonous praiseworthy eternity on the other. For most followers, this was the essence, aim and importance of religion for which they had not much to waste – about an hour on Sunday mornings. Such strange ideas about hateful and ungrateful nature of man strike Clarence during the Dinner scene. ‘The Dinner scene’ at Clarence’s parish-owned house is the most significant portrayal of mixed American society with most of
its members expressing their anguish before the capitalists. Here Updike collects nearly all the representative classes of American society – members of Church committee, private business people and also Parishnors, most of them undergoing financial crisis. The scene reflects the clashing views of employers and employees with regard to industrialisation. Mr. Dearholt and Mr. McDermott represent the industrial revolution and the Belonging Self of America which goes back to pirate Scandinavian spirit and wilderness of a continent which was inhabited by savages and cannibals. They eulogise American self as a result of hard struggle and as a life carved out of rocks, shelterlessness, merciless hardships of weather and environment. In the words of Mr. Dearholt, the mill-owner:

Struggle and survival, it’s been ever the way. . .it tests a Christian’s mettle. . .fight the good fight. Jesus was no namby – pamby. He knew life was a ceaseless battle. . .He came to bring a sword . . .the English and Scott who got here faced a wilderness. They had to fight cannibalistic savages! Those of you who came later are fortunate. . .we cleared the way. . .children and grandchildren will thank us. . .everything I say. . .to encourage my fellow Americans. Courage and faith, that’s all we need. *Faith*. There’s where the power to success comes from, in a land God favoured with such a wealth of opportunity. . .no free rides here. That’s the way we do things here.

*(Beauty of the Lilies, 27, 29& 30)*

They usher industrial revolution as healthy signs of progressive life. Not to talk of marvellous scientific inventions from time to time which leave such devourers of manpower and its ravishers richer than ever. Their praises for such developments as speedy machines with self fault-detectors, enable to produce double the quantity in just half the time with limited number of workers, thereby managing half a dozen
machines at one time. Hence less money goes out of the mill and that also in form of controlled or fixed wages and heavy fortunes are made from exporting such large quantity of product. Employers are blessed with dreams which soon come true as expansion of cottage industries into large scale mills and firms. Moreover, the emigration of refugees, pitiable faces and runaways guarantee low wage workers. In his conversation with an Italian widow, Mr. Dearholt portrays America as a land of fearless workers and not a land of ‘free rides’. The Italian widow laments the heartlessness and brutality of industries where her husband wasted himself with the fatal chemicals and perished. Here Mr. Dearholt comments that Europe for present day Americans is a land where people care for each other but have no pinpointed aim. America inhabits those who care for nothing but for money, trying his best to justify American materialistic aims.

Mr. Kleist represents the anguish of a worker during industrial revolution. He gives horrifying accounts of wages which were increased as long as the matter benefitted the bosses and again brought back down when the workers got used to the quantity of double work. He also talks about the unfair distribution of money and the immeasurable gaps between rich and poor which were ever and ever expanding. He talks about the weak motives of labour union, who, out of competition or corruption never took a stiff stand against the employer classes. Helpless foreign women and late immigrants were likely to be treated shrewdly by employers and kept at substantially low wages taking undue advantage of their light and shallow established life and their homes in need of income, no matter how low it is.

Americans, who have nurtured and developed their roots deep into American Self, boast of their Scottish and English origin. They came as Catholics and still traces are found in their spirit of adventure, courage and faith. Americans are so possessive
of this hard-earned nation that they hate to give immigrants their share easily. They never give away anything until they make sure that they have sucked the blood properly – a way of being very loyal to Capitalism.

After the dinner, Clarence has a long conversation with the church committee members. The church committee represents the dominant group of the first few decades of the American society. Capitalists apart from running industries, invest money in church to gain fame. Every effort and expense is directed towards a merely material end. The idea of constructing a two-storey Sunday school and church social wing and an upstairs space rentable to well-off foreign groups is given the name of ‘Growth of the Organisation’. Committee believes that anything that does not grow dies with time and is forgotten. Reputation is achieved through the physical size of the building and its outer magnificence even if it is a church ignoring the moral point that competition and envy with other churches and commercialisation of the very place to make up the expenses have no place in worship. Clarence was surprised how, even after losing his faith, he felt disgusted at the idea of materialism.

But awakening to his own reality, Clarence found that God to him was livelihood, foundation of his self and his family. He realised that his loss of faith would have worldly consequences for his family: namely, the loss of their parish-owned house and their social standing in the community.

(Michiko Kakutani, 1996)

In spite of all these feelings of disrespect and ungrateful resolutions on part of Clarence, God lent a merciful hand. Church heard Clarence’s plea for not being able to continue his services as a priest and thereby deceiving the one feeding him and his family. But the Church extended his services in Lord’s honour for an entire year. God never wants to leave his slaves unattended. He extends his attachment to them as long
as possible. But this duration could not cure Clarence of his wavering faith turned into faithlessness. If we judge Clarence on the basis of his honesty for willingly leaving a place because he no longer deserves it, still his upcoming life and degenerated health mark the beginning of God’s wrath. In fact, employment for a lapsed minister is hard to come by, and Clarence soon finds himself going door-to-door hawking cheap encyclopaedias: items he regards vaguely blasphemous products, ‘a commercially inspired attempt to play God, by creating in print a replica of creation’. In his free time, Clarence went to the movies, where he watched the world being created anew in newsreels and features and shorts. (Michiko Kakutani, 1996)

He never found relief in escapism and his rotten health could translate itself in spite of his silence. After blood-curdling humiliation and degradation out of door to door rejection of popular Encyclopaedia, Clarence slithered inside moving picture houses and found solace among the worshippers sitting scattered and silent within these ‘catacombs’. Ever since his revelation of God’s non-existence, he had been a victim of a crusty, clinging sense of loss warning him of the growing wrath of some faceless, dimensionless disciplinarian. Within the movie theatre he got chance to hide from his own accusation. He experienced relief in the images of other shadows in peril and torment which lifted his soul on curious wings of self forgetfulness. (Beauty of the Lilies, 104)

Moreover, at the same time Clarence could witness a new world being created with lot of material bringing his suspended disbelief into belief. Books published talked about courtesy, gallantry and materialism. Readers were exposed to new areas. For Clarence, the final paper-thin veil which still made him guilty about himself was raised with the sinking of the Titanic in 1912 which confirmed for him the absence of God to its very bottom. Had Clarence realised the proud statement under which ‘even
God could not sink the unsinkable’ in no time one could say that this was none other than the divine punishment. Besides, evil, cruelty of slavery exhibited the indifference of universe and God on the part of humanity. After a long day of humiliation, Clarence longed to forget, in a trance as infallible as opium’s, his fall, failure, disgrace, responsibility and nullity.  

(Beauty of the Lilies, 108)

Young and tender Theodore, the youngest of Clarence’s children could never stop accepting the indifference of God towards his father. He believed that his father should have been given a clue or a ray of hope or any other measure through which God had confirmed his existence. Teddy’s heart lamented the unending wait his father bore throughout his life after leaving the seminary.

Teddy used to be grateful to his average personality. He had already seen the negatives experienced by the family out of his father’s unique sharp mindedness and the troubles in which his own elder brother Jared was caught due to excessive pleasures derived out of attractive personality and exciting aims.

Clarence knows the inner beauty and softness of feelings of his youngest son. He knows him as a sensitive being condemned to watch his father die slowly and silently. Clarence wants his son to follow the American doctrine which was adopted from some Eastern country. The statement could be used for optimistic purpose on all occasions. The statement, ‘This too shall pass away’ kept the morale high. Clarence, in spite of having been sharp minded, confesses his inability to struggle for his goals. He simply took upon the vocation his father had dreamt for himself – ‘ministry’. Here Updike portrays the middle-class notions that are often imposed on youngsters. Children are forced to tread upon ways they are not made for. Later on, it might have an adverse effect on them as passion and excitement might subside with the time and when one realises the fault, it is too late and the person is left good for nothing.
Clarence is sure that his son will be fine with a caring heart and an average mind that he possesses. Clarence now realises that if he had valued himself more, he would have chosen for himself the life and vocation of his choice. He is afraid that Teddy is too tender to value himself. After Clarence left the ministry, Teddy could never pray for himself or for his own well-being as it seemed disloyalty to his father.

Many pages relate the anxiety of middle class families whose children are divided into ones who join war to impress others and win money based honours; and the ones who cannot wait till they can legally drop-out from the school and get lost in the clatter of mills and mines. Sometimes children interested in education have to kill their dreams for earning money. Here in case of Teddy, his father’s sin snatched his dreams of becoming a distinguished student at the school who would have utilised his leisure time in becoming a sportsperson or a promising star. Teddy’s elder brother, Jared, also suffered the thunderbolts of his father’s blasphemy. Increasing demands of age and flesh and a longingness for self-dependence draw the youth to war. In America it sounds impressive and prestigious and opens for them new gratifying doors as well. In words of Jared:

I’m going to be a soldier man. . .If you don’t, you won’t get any more pussy, that’s what our girl friends tell us. Over in France the mademoiselles do it to Americans for free. . .We go over there to save their ass. . .like the president says, who wants to live in a world run by Germans? They’d make you eat sauerkraut every day and wipe your heinie with a wire brush. . .They see that old red, white and blue flapping away, they’ll run, the dumb Huns. They can push the frogs and Belgies around, but they won’t push real he-men. . .

*(Beauty of the Lilies, 117)*
But the reality of war soon disillusioned Jared when he was confronted with the so-called glory of war which was just a mess of bodies, and while expressing his disgust for war to Teddy, he said:

. . .the war just a few miles away, their country a battlefield for four years, and these waiters in the bistros hurrying and scurrying making a quick franc on the Americans dragged over there to save their lousy froggy hides. . .war was just a mess of bodies, some dead and some still alive and kicking, and nobody had a notion in hell of what it was all about – why the war had come, or why it was going away. . .Millions died, and it just happened. . .It was weird, the war. . .guys you’ve been beside day and night, suddenly they’re dead – a piece of garbage. . .

(Beauty of the Lilies, 118, 119)

Opposition was gassed and the extremely shocked and lost souls longing to return to their motherland and never to cross its border in future. Those who return, most of them psychologically and physically crippled, are compensated with currency notes temporarily and left the so-called honour given to them by Uncle Sam. At another instance, Jared contemplated his near future with humiliation:

. . .for what they call my partial disability I’ll be getting fifteen bucks a month for the next year plus the sixty. . .living on Uncle Sam till I get back some use in my arm. . .one thing this war taught me. . .money is more important than pussy. . .

(Beauty of the Lilies, 119)

Ironically war does not glorify a nation or elate any adoration for further wars. Instead it makes the victims materialistic and just thirsty for money and money making. In this way, not only the worm of blasphemy was devouring Clarence but also the entire
nation was being devoured by the war in Europe – shortage of commodities, difficulties in shipping and youth drained out of the country to join war, either by free will or by force.

Women characters do not have a very prominent role in matters of ministry, war and industrialisation. Somewhere we see Clarence’s daughter, Esther, being confident and possessive regarding her personal freedom after the women got the right to vote.

The deep-felt inner guilt chased Clarence to the deep, dark theatres, barren ways and efforts. Clarence suffered silently observing his children bent under demands of time and age. He watched his wife serving in homes. And suddenly one morning he died as silently as he suffered. His death left a hurtful void in Teddy’s life. For Teddy, the way his father was erased from this world without leaving any instruction or message gave him the sense of absurd injustice. Somewhere he held God responsible for such a death which was not remembered but for the shock it gave the family for generations.

The family, without head, was left with no interest or aim to carry on in Paterson. Moreover, lack of income and inflation forced them to leave the place and move in with Clarence’s sister, Aunt Esther in Delaware, Basingstoke. Basingstoke does not get its mention before second lesson as a store house of British nostalgia, wherein the name itself and the name of the only river were given after the home place of the homesick colonists. The quiet atmosphere is compared to the material fever of the Paterson and other places translated themselves through rising mist in the morning and the evening – few mills, very less factories and agriculture being the main occupation along with greenhouse plants and poultry was the main hobby of the residents, yet the town did not fail to propel its prosperity thus improving the local
economy by dealing in mass destructive material. Sooner or later human life is bought and sold in terms of fatal chemical combinations and reactions. With not much population engaged in specific professions, people in Delaware could satisfy their basic needs by selling vegetables and owning shops in which they themselves worked and satisfied local needs of the inhabitants. To earn living for the house and with Aunt Esther not so strong financially to provide Stella’s family a luxurious living, the new settlers have to carve their livelihood by working in house garden and selling the vegetables door to door in Basingstoke. Even the art of selling vegetables in Basingstoke disgusted Teddy as he was reminded of his father’s miserable year of encyclopaedia – ‘peddling and a sense of suffering, a fatal humiliation’. In fact, venturing out every day for the same routine gave him feeling that he was selling a part of his own, everyday. Compared to Teddy, his mother Stella had the spirit of going through the troubles with a simple confidence and lack of embarrassment which helped her to adjust with all level of troubles. She took upon herself going out every morning with bags full of vegetables and offering to sell them at every door with a smiling face. Teddy never failed to envy his mother’s spirit of struggle. Many a times we get the notion that Stella represents the spirit that Updike wants to reform America with – an amalgam of faith, struggle, kindness, care, love, cool mindedness, adjustment, understanding, trustworthiness and sacrifice. Updike finds all these qualities in a mother and expects the American motherland would rise one day and inculcate such qualities in all her children. In a land, such as America, there have been only two options left to prove yourself an American – ‘Either be stretched or strike’ which means ‘a real American means to learn to adjust with low returns or cease to live’. 

*(Beauty of the Lilies, 139)*
According to Teddy, struggling for livelihood or proper identity did not reward his father or his brother Jared. Teddy did not want to study either; again his father’s failure could not encourage him to gain knowledge. In this way he wanted to end up crouched in an unknown corner without any question of struggle, trial or challenging the difficulties. He could sense that his father’s knowledge made things too clear for him to accept any power above him. The motion pictures which once lifted Clarence from dark pit of his life seemed to give Teddy indications about endless cruelty of life and above all the depression and hopelessness that in case of any mishap there is nobody above to grieve or console the victim. His father’s death had already proved it. What Teddy thought about the value of human beings was that ‘they are like a swarm of mosquitoes, crazy with thirst and doomed to be swatted’. Teddy never wanted to accept that his father could have recovered his beliefs someday. He lost the least interest in divine power and its marvels. Contemporary authors began to influence upon him. He gave himself up to extensive reading and works of Shaw, Mencken and Bertrand Russell tended to teach him about natural facts. These rational amusing English or American authors talked about self-help and mental health and main streets. Gradually he thought the church goers were hundred years behind and were ignorant about worldly concrete facts. Teddy’s agnostic self goes ahead to the extent that he puts the radical and God-mocking magazines right-side out the shop in which he works as a salesman, so that everyone could see it. He was a fan of Mencken because Mencken was closest in his writings to Shaw and Wells.

In that small town of Delaware, Teddy considered everybody as a rube. However a lame girl, Emily Sifford, attracted his attention with her willpower to continue honestly and faithfully with the life in spite of such physical challenge.
Emily represents the simplicity of faithful life. Apart from simplicity of life, she also represents love for natural plants living in bloom. Teddy feels disgusted with the cooked plants as compared to the live plants. In spite of all depression and disinterestedness towards God, Teddy loves life in all its sense and rarely imposes his Godless ideas on others. Emily symbolises a woman’s long felt aching pain resulting from feeling of inequality and lack of respect by opposite gender. She bitterly considers a woman as a being liable to wait for instructions given by males as to what she should do and what she should not. Also her reference and admiration to Swedish actress Greta Garbo, who, through the screen represents the courage of European woman or particularly courage that Every woman should have. For instance, every woman has the right to go after what she wants, be it a commodity or a man to love. *(Beauty of the Lilies, 177)* It refers here to the sum total of repressed emotions of Every woman in a conservative society where the only rulers are males. Every American woman has been an object of oppression since time immemorial. It does not matter where this inspiration for courage comes from. Through Emily, we find that the European cinema is a good source of inspiration to inculcate courage and self esteem in a woman. But the Americans are not ready to accept European ideals once they had shed them for this wilderness. They blame it as immigration and transition of European values to America. Though Methodism lifted the ban on theatre-going and dancing, so as not to lag too behind in the era of advancement, yet smoking, drinking and card playing were still considered to be sinful and illicit love was taken as their parallel. *(Beauty of the Lilies, 171-180)*

Besides avoiding European ideals, for Americans, the idea of having a drop of Negro blood is so hopeless and shameful that an American prefers to be physically
challenged than having black blood in his veins. When Emily gives various excuses to Teddy for being a daughter to Moor mother who was related to Delaware Indians:

She doesn’t have a drop of Negro blood. The worst you can say about Moors is that they might be related to the Delaware Indians. . .I have a horrible deformed foot but no black blood.

(Beauty of the Lilies, 201)

Mrs. Sifford avoids intermingling with people due to this reason. Her ancestors were thought to have worked in southern plantations. Her involuntary habit of covering her mouth with her hand signifies aloofness and that she has no say in the American issues no matter how domestic or trivial they are. Another member who has much to refute about European ideals and morals is Jared. Jared’s conversation is rich with ideas of Americans for other nations and creed. He says: ‘That’s something I love to see – a woman making good American babies to hold off the heathen Chinee. . .’

(Beauty of the Lilies, 224)

In this way, preference is given to pure American blood; Asian and Sub – Asian blood is referred to as heathen, particularly Chinese. American Protestants have opinions full of contempt and shrewdness towards European Catholics. This becomes clear from a slight disillusion experienced by Jared with his wife’s cold temperament as against what he thought about Catholics. He tells Teddy about his wife: ‘Lucille’s. . .pretty cold, it turns out. I thought Catholics would be warm and loving. . .or was it only Italians?’

(Beauty of the Lilies, 225)

He is left wondering whether the Italians were the only Catholics who still followed religion strictly.

Amidst all these ideologies and various mindsets Teddy could not stop lamenting the loss of his father. Anywhere at the mention of God, he was reminded of
his father’s useless wait to get a signal from which could prove the Divine existence but God had stayed silent watching his slave slowly decaying into a graceless, degrading and crumbling pit of darkness. For Teddy, every job meant venturing out every day with the same worn out routine and this reminded him of the fruitlessness his father had experienced. He also tried course dealing in numbers and accounts but to no avail. Jared tried to help him but in his own way. Having been swayed in race of money and profits, he failed to understand that what Teddy really needed was spiritual support to restore his faith to some extent. Jared took him to New York partly to acquaint him with the busy world and partly to detach him from the Methodist girl, Emily. There in New York, Teddy comes to know about the opportunistic nature of his country people. By the Americans themselves, America is treated more as a land of opportunity and self interest than as a motherland. The inhabitants carelessly uproot themselves from their families and settle down in technological pastures chopped of American self. America represents the new part of the world and New York for those people is the America which is building its new beginning where everything is dealt with numbers, accounts and money. As in Jared’s words: ‘McMullen Investments is paying us to bring the numbers in, so things add up. ..the banks are not interested in . . .hard – luck story. They want their numbers. . .There are no free rides in America. . .’ (Beauty of the Lilies, 194)

Teddy failed to gather his shattered self and longed for a safe corner in this world with Emily. After fruitless efforts in New York he came back to Delaware and once again his reluctance for a regular work disturbed his family. At such a time his aunt Esther proved a divine help and blessing for him which he rarely acknowledged in his life. He simply took it as a human help. Aunt Esther guided him to meet the head postmaster and apply for the job of a mailman. Aunt Esther is a guiding
mouthpiece of Updike, who makes journey of lost, wandering and doubtful Americans easier. She takes everything with a light hand and advices that ‘we all must belong somewhere or a person’s not a person. Nobody makes it alone’. Maybe that’s why even after becoming invalid she does not cut herself off from other people. Her telephone is a symbol of connection between herself and other residents of Delaware. Through this telephone she serves Updike purpose of unity and interlinking. At the time of her death, it is proved that death can detach the person from worldly links and technology helps no more. Here the telephone also symbolises her longingness for social relations as she never got any support from her husband.

In his novel, Updike has tried to link more than one character with the society. After qualifying a number of tests, Teddy resumes his walks and ventures out delivering mails which also represents a way of knitting together the society. Updike gave this character a natural tendency to bind human beings with each other from newspaper-selling in Paterson to ice-cream salesman to mail delivery. Another thing which gave him courage to accept the business of door to door delivery was the responsibility a person feels for his partner. The reader must have encountered such feeling of responsibility in earlier pages of the novel when Clarence, though broken and cheap, yet took to encyclopaedia selling as he was at the same stage years ago. He had wife and children to look after. The husband and father in him made him to continue to drag on in spite of the hollowness inside him. Teddy never happened to realise the sameness of nature of the work and the difference in its meaning. God had bestowed Teddy with a goal in his life and the wheel of his fortune ironically turned the disgusting everyday struggle for livelihood into a satisfying source for his fate. He made a good impression on Emily’s parents and his own family also had to agree for this marriage between a Protestant and a Methodist American. After Teddy and Emily
get married, Emily gives birth to a girl child who carries the family feminine name ‘Esther’. Born and brought up to kind and giving parents who cared for home more than caring for money blindly, child Esther or Essie was always joyful and proud at being herself instead of being somebody else. She considered herself as one of the most fortunate children to have been born, one of the member of a happiest home where all five members were secure and united as five fingers of a glove. She felt lucky of being the daughter of a man with a reputed job and a mother who was like a queen in her house and given due respect. The care and pampering with which she was raised up, was unique. Her mother wanted her to miss nothing of all that she had missed as a typical conservative country girl and with her limp that kept her from bodily grace. With a carefree life and a lot of time to admire herself, Essie loved her own body and would not lag behind in grabbing an opportunity to prove herself a goddess liable to be worshipped. Her robust confidence gave her the courage to take risks in her life. She treasured all the remarks that helped her to see herself from the outside, as others saw her. So sure she was of her parent’s care and their desire to give her security that she could feel her mother watching her as she carefully crossed roads. Even as a little girl, Essie never got frightened or worried outside her home. Self-security flushed with confidence made her hold her head very still and stare straight ahead. Updike also makes a comparison between the self – satisfied Essie and the valueless, spiritually poor and immoral young generation. Usually the adolescents are the most frightening. They do things far advanced as compared to their age, due to which they never know what they are up to:

From just the way their mouths moved and eyes flashed. . .you could see they cared about nothing but themselves, not their teachers or parents or the lord
above or anybody. . .four of . . .rapists, it was shocking, had been released from jail down in Albama.

(\textit{Beauty of the Lilies}, 242 – 243)

It is just a blood curdling account through which Updike wants to raise an alarm for the nation to announce the lame future of the country in these nonsense hands. Moreover, racialism is practiced to such an extent that whites can never tolerate the presence of blacks in any sphere of life no matter how trivial it is, which is clear from a conversation between two white women in the market when one of them says: ‘Next thing we’ll be giving the niggers, is the whole country to cut each other up in.’

(\textit{Beauty of the Lilies}, 243)

War and bloodshed get on the nerves and theatrical productions try their hand in moralising people. Movies and cartoon movies were made to depict cruelty on screen, sprinkled with element of sadness to make the viewer realise cruelty more intensely. Essie, who gets a chance to visit Presbyterian and Methodists church, is confident about being friendly with God, and He being near to her. Many authoritative voices sound like God’s voice to her. She is sure that even though it sounded scolding, you knew it cared for you. This idea of Essie is a contrast with Clarence who even as a priest could not feel God’s unusual silence which meant his wrath and not an unawareness of the matter.

Essie’s love for hiding somewhere in the house or sitting safe inside while the rain drenched the world outside is just a hobby through which she cherishes the sense of security that she enjoys being with her family. Crouching in a dark place where no one can see you and you are subjected to no exposure, is a childish funny game for Essie wherein she derives pleasure but for Clarence this hiding from daylight was a vain shelter for his degrading self. Essie has inherited many of the last habits of her
grandfather but their reason is different. For the latter, it is invitation to personal
innocent pleasure while for the former, it was escapism from intense humiliation and
from acknowledgement of no more divine support. Movies take you to a wish-granted
world where shining screen, swift-talking voices and sharp snapping movements take
you to a safe edge with a happy ending. But danger does exist in real life and Essie
also knew that people fell in them, whereas in movies, life and character is moulded
as not to send the audience in depression and so that the audience clings to it even
when they know it’s a dream-world. Here is the place where the audience finds their
dreams coming true. Somewhere Essie’s unconscious mind could reach as far as
Clarence and could guess that the tug-of-war between unfulfilled desires and the
escapism sources to fulfil them were responsible for Clarence’s death. For Essie, her
parents and grandparents were like four essential corners of a rectangle whose image
she made with her hands after she woke up every morning. But in this rectangle her
grandfather was like a ripped corner. His absence was like an inbuilt or crumbled
corner in her life. Essie was well-aware of the incompleteness resulting from his
absence especially when she could feel him satiating her life’s inner song. She felt
him like a blessed hand over herself. Her feelings of God came from him. Here the
reference goes to long back internalised Clarence’s sublime love for God. The very
moments might have enriched him with divine wisdom and innocence, which his life
could not give him. Teddy could never feel such blessing because he had been hurt
with whatever his father had to undergo. Had Teddy known that rebuke or punishment
of God was always accompanied with his care, he would not have turned deaf ears to
call of the church. The remorse soul of Clarence finds its voice in the innocence of his
granddaughter. He had to complete the struggle against the evil – the primary aim of
every faithful Christian. All these blissful qualities culminated to seep into Essie’s veins and produce a proud and loyal resident of Delaware.

Through Essie, Updike projects all the conscience and morality that should have been Clarence’s storehouse. Still a child not projected to the horrible reality of the third world and not aware of the religious depth, we find her a careful and vigilant girl. For instance, she learnt to cherish her body in an extraordinary manner. Crossing the roads of her town, walking straight ahead and treasuring it knowing that it is gifted to an individual only once and after completing its journey it has to perish in the grave. Any accident could damage it beyond repair. Updike feels the intensity and horror of Clarence’s mistake. The one brain, gifted by God for a lifetime, lost in darkness of evil only to subject the body to a slow decay and permanent humiliation. According to what Essie learnt at house if you made a mistake out of unawareness, it would last forever and such a mistake ruined Clarence forever.

In the words of Emily Safford to her daughter, Essie that Clarence’s death took away Teddy’s ability to love the world with confidence. May be this was the reason why Teddy felt comfortable with a crippled woman who won’t be able to become an object of any other man’s interest or love. The catastrophic shock of life left him too fragile to sustain another betrayal of any kind or detachment from any person. In words of Emily: ‘. . .he needed woman, and I was least threatening he could find. . .He just wanted to get through his vale of tears with minimal damage.’

(Beauty of the Lilies, 269)

Essie loved the family, her grandmother Stella and her maternal grandparents who tended to her physical needs and satisfy her desires. But it was the soul of her dead, unearthly grandfather that hovered about her all the time and she could feel it making earnest efforts ‘in his unreality’; pave with her the way to success and to ‘lift
her up towards the heavenly realm where movie stars flickered’. And Essie, partly due to the mysterious unreal presence of Clarence and her internalised habit of visiting church and praying to God, had it in her to pray spontaneously. Meanwhile she also felt her grandfather is lending her his affectionate ear and persuading God like an angel, to reward her prayers. It was one of Essie’s many secrets – the absent presence of Clarence in air. Essie was always curious about the way the tables turned in her favour. She knew that no human being was perfect but the way she prayed innocently to God, even while in bed, proved fruitful and here we feel the hard-earned purification of Clarence for his own soul being rewarded. Whatever he was denied due to his mistake that he committed in his priestly position, was being fulfilled through Essie’s innocent prayers. Very loud and winding passages give accounts of disgusting results of war and whatever changes were taking place wide and far. Somewhere the economy was taking its last breathe while somewhere else it experienced a boon, for e.g.: weapon industries, chemical factories experimenting with different elements and major efforts to produce more and more destructive sources, copper mines, etc. Long passages about ‘battles raging in every direction, situation of war field and killing of civilians, starvation of Jews’ give us an account of the radio bulletins introduced by a telegraph key. Americans were sure that Germans and Japanese will be given fatal blows and crushed to pulp. For them, the very names of these nations were hateful. The code number 666 was exactly the code for HITLER and was for the Americans a cursed number. Americans claim that the Jews dragged them into the war and Americans had to fight it to save the earth from the Jews. So, every American feels it his duty to go and contribute to the purification of earth. Here Updike is sorry for American youth who cannot think about their own future by
themselves but swaying in the waves and ripples created by fiery thoughts of their elders.

There is also reference to the world market which goes by consumerism and not by feelings and a camera man praises a commodity irrespective of its makers: ‘thirty-five millimetre instead of four by five. . .much more maneuverable, and it gives you a whole sequence of shots to choose from. The Germans make it.’

(Beauty of the Lilies, 279)

So in the nation, there are people not caring a damn about their nation’s hatred towards Germans, use and promote German technology shamelessly and go as far as naming themselves Doug Germaine, which Essie thought must have been an invented name. But on the other hand, Updike refers to it as extreme honesty on the part of professionals to connect directly or indirectly with production houses and model agencies. This class cares only for the world market and the dollar. Sometimes they explore striking figures and promote them honestly. More or less Updike eulogises this societal class for being unaffected by worldly ties, boundations and barriers. As in the words of Essie: ‘stars, writers and directors are the people who tell us what freedom means’.

(Beauty of the Lilies, 282)

Somewhere else Essie’s own aunt, young Esther says that after looking at some photographs of Essie she perceives glimpses of her father Clarence as if he had become an angel. During his life, Clarence kept waiting for any sign to get proof for God’s presence. He bore the punishment for his faithlessness and might have been rewarded in his after-life but the left over duties had to be discharged; those duties he sought to do through his son’s progeny. Somewhere the thirsty soul of Clarence was straining to fulfil his own desires of belongingness to the glamour world through Essie. He wants to learn how to enjoy life thoroughly along with remembering God
provided that feelings of self-esteem and cruelty against humanity do not creep into the veins. This might be the reason why all these harmless and unique qualities culminated in his granddaughter, Essie. That is why, for Essie, movie watching and then aspiring to become a star herself, was her passion. Whereas her grandfather, she had heard, took to watching of movies, after his books which helped save the entire community from damnation, failed to save him. He vanished into the world of screen where script writers could change the ‘fate’ of the character even before ten minutes of the shot, and the tragedy be changed into comedy, dead into alive, destroyer into saviour, etc. Everything, after passing through difficulties was brought to happy ending. Wandering in search of escapism was the reason as well as the result of divine supportlessness. He searched for his happy ending somewhere in the fate of the characters. God, though full of anger against him but forgiving, made Clarence wait for a signal but in vain. But his hard time was paid, though after Clarence’s damned body was perished. Clarence had to live a confident life, seek its pleasures and could do it through his angelic granddaughter who always felt: ‘a cosmic attention on her skin as when she was a child, God had watched her every move, recorded her every prayer and yearning, nothing unnoticed. . .’ \textit{(Beauty of the Lilies, 335)}

Clarence’s longing for God was somehow fulfilled. And as in the words of Stella to her granddaughter: ‘When Clarence fell, it was so sudden and uncalled for, there had to be something to make it come right in the end’. \textit{(Beauty of the Lilies, 350)}

According to Stella, ‘human being is selfish by nature; Clarence could have served God selflessly, ignoring the temptation of faithlessness’. It is true as Clarence could have neglected the way of undue freedom but the selfish nature overcame everything. He should have understood that ‘every moment from birth to death is contemporary to
God’. Therefore, every moment has to be spent with care as every single drop of it will be evaluated with utmost objectivity. (Smith, 1983)

Essie’s only son Clark, was not so clever or striking as his mother. If looked at closely, there is a great difference in their upbringing. Essie was born to caring parents with stable relationship. Her own family was a fully fledged family in all its sense; a secure childhood, parents and relatives who were proud of her and taking her as the centre of attraction. On the other hand, Clark was a neglected child, without father and just locked up in a golden cage. He grew up neglected with a mother caring for her own convenience in Hollywood’s ups and downs. Weak or no sense of election created for him sexual as well as professional misunderstanding and the resultant loss of one or the other. Failing to be competent enough to secure for himself a place in any specific profession, he could never identify himself as Clark but as ‘son of Hollywood star Alma DeMotte’. He also tried his hand in porn production but to no avail. Unexpectedly, during one of his journeys he encountered a girl named Hannah in one of the restaurants. As he was new to the place, she took him to a temple to spend the night. Having freely enjoyed a chunk of this girl, he decides to stay till he feels to return to his own Hollywood world. But all of a sudden, he begins to identify himself with this temple and its leader Jesse Smith whose religious commune was called the temple of True and Actual Faith. Essie or Alma was aware of the void that her son had suffered while being with her and she thought herself lucky that such a step could ‘gratify the need to distinguish himself with the quality that suits a woman who always felt a cosmic heat on her skin, always her prayers listened and fulfilled’. Later on, Clark feels that Hannah used her charms and misled him by taking him in her car to the temple for night’s rest. There at the temple, the mysterious atmosphere worked its magic upon the visitors in such a way that they were left in a state of
confusion whether they should leave for the world they belonged to or join this temple where residents claimed they were independent of any government and survived on their own means. Luckily some professionally amorphous residents made life easier by financial support as well as manual labour. To Clark’s surprise, all the women in the temple were sexual partners of the head Jesse Smith. They called themselves spouses of Jesse in Christ’s name. They also had permission to oblige other men for sex but they were to hold children of only Jesse in their wombs. According to him, his progeny as well as the children brought to the temple from outside were given education not through Sunday schools but through Biblical scriptures directly. In the words of Hannah, Jesse deals with love and instruction, thereby, leaving them decide by themselves, to leave or to stay. She told Clark that the residents try their best to maintain the independence of the building to the extent that minimal exchange of daily needs is made with outer world. They try their best to live as independently as ‘lilies’ which grow in water without any connection with any parent plant or roots. But as man is a social animal, he has to feed himself and interact with others. So, they had to keep track of the government policies as well as maintain a link with outsiders through wireless operations. The residents were just surviving in the temple, not enjoying any pleasure except sexual pleasure and that also to flourish a race for their deity – Jesse Smith. They are waiting for the Reckoning when Jesse, the lamb will save them from eternal damnation. Through accounts of conversation between Jesse and Clark, Updike struggles to convey the loneliness, alienation experienced by Clark since he was a child. Updike feels the need for enriching the children with religious knowledge. Only if the child is kept close to religious places, fed with lessons laden with religious fervour and talked to about God’s love and innocence, only then they can be considered spiritually complete. None other than these blessed ideas can bring
forth a promising, peaceful and angelic generation. Somewhere Clark feels the thirst of spiritual attainment in his life. He feels that his mother Alma DeMott was a loved and favourite part of her own parents’ life whereas he himself could not enjoy such a childhood. Business and success blinded Alma to the extent that she could not share her religious pride and satisfaction with her only son. She never mentioned God to him and he could never expect such a careless and selfish mother born of as caring people as his grandparents. All he could get were lame answers now and then from his grandfather, Theodore Wilmot, who along with his wife, Emily, could feel the ups and downs, digressions and depressions that Essie met in her way of success. Again, it was just a human success, which is always temporary. In her declining years, she was left with no choice except the contract assignments of soap operas appearing on television screen which she despised since her childhood. In the career of a movie star, every break has to be named as minor or major break upon which her entire future career rests. Alma became a big success but she paid the price by coming down the ladder forcibly to accept of TV screen. Had she been a part of middle class society, she could have gathered enough courage to retire on her money with dignity. But retirement would not give her the sense of relief or completeness of some services which she could happily pass on to younger generation, like her father Teddy had done in his office. These are not the rules of a ‘Vanity Fair’. That’s the penalty of success that nobody knows when and where to stop. Ambition and desire go on aspiring endlessly when ironically every journey has its ultimate end. Whereas retirement for a serviceman means rest, relaxation, peace; for a star it means being forgotten, lost and identity less. Being known or remembered as long as possible is what their career is all about. That is the very reason why Alma on the verge of sixty married to a rich husband and rich on her residuals subjected herself to long morning
and afternoon makeup and rehearsal sessions, trips across Atlantic, lonely hotel nights and received orders from a young director enough to be her daughter. In spite of that, time exercised its abstract power upon her and she was gradually being forgotten. People started to get confused about her co-stars or the ones she was once cast with. It was clear that ‘she had been mulched in – what had once seemed to her absolute immortality turned out to be a slow dissolution within a confused mass of perishing images like a colourful mountain of compressed and rotting garbage’.

(Beauty of the Lilies, 465)

As Essie Wilmot paid a heavy price for her stardom by giving up her real name, identity and all her life trying her best to fit into those letters of a new unknown name, Alma DeMott, and on the other hand, her son had to give up his own name for joining the commune. For some time he could not feel comfortable with his new name, Esau. It seemed to him a mock name after he read about Esau in Genesis. In the Genesis, Isaac and Rebekah’s firstborn, red and hairy, a rough hunter who was his father’s favourite but was cheated of his birthright by his twin brother, Jacob, who had been born clinging to his heel and became his mother’s favourite, thereby stripping Esau of their father’s blessing. Esau had been a rube. On his part, Clark could feel as if he had been cheated by the commune into deserting the real world of pain and suffering which he originally belonged to. He was later pacified by Hannah who acquainted him with the secret of the story that Esau later forgave his treacherous twin. Hannah was sure that Clark had a good heart. Somewhere she knew that he had been attracted to a commune in search of divine truth. It was not his fault that these people were treading such wrong ways to God which led them headlong towards damnation. Hannah had been successful in exploring the rare virtue of forgiveness in Clark and she knew that a sinner like Jesse would need forgiveness from God as well as from his
victims to be awarded salvation. We find Updike’s heartfelt feelings such blessed virtues in its children as the absence of the same would continue to cost them the lives of their children. Any specific nation has no right to interfere in other nations’ affairs and disputes. A grand nation such as America should learn to forgive petty political matters concerned with other countries. Updike’s thirsty model, Clark, is presented as a haphazard soul groping for Divine Salvation but not a single sign to guide his way, though he possesses such traits which human beings in present world are hardly blessed with. Updike expresses his longingness for such traits which can grandiose a human being to the level of sublimity and thus become among God’s favourites.

God’s faithful followers never need any kind of spell to keep them clung to God. On the other hand, Jesse had his own power of words which kept the residents of commune hypnotised. Esau, in Jesse’s presence felt possessed of some value like nowhere else. Out of surprise and personal conflict, he could not accept such a change in himself and moreover, lack of knowledge about Almighty and His blessed power, could not give Clark a chance for any steadfast judgement. He was also unable to leave, tied by gravity to the so-called Jesse. Knowledge of Divine enrichment fills up a creature with confidence and this becomes clear when Alma says: ‘I know this type. This tow is full of megalomaniacs; it’s the environment. Any man who can sleep with a new girl every night of the week. . .think he’s god. . .they get in so deep embezzling and lying they can’t back out.’ (Beauty of the Lilies, 457)

Therefore, Essie, in spite of having become careless about God, is still confident of his presence very near to her. In other words, confidence and power for firm judgement comes from a soul rich and drenched in Divine love. Esau became one of the followers of Jesse but when the U.S government officials got reports from surrounding areas about young school goers being stopped from schools and
introduced into this clan, they came for an inquiry and Esau was given responsibility
to convince them about harmless and innocent education given to these children not
only for their worldly benefit but also for their Salvation. Esau also gave them an
account of the weaponry in the temple but not an authentic one. Gradually the
situation turned more violent and a school bus was shot in its tyres by one of the male
fervent. Esau was shocked by the way Jesse wanted to tackle the situation by firing
the bus with children inside. Somehow Esau managed to persuade him not to shoot
the bus. This deliberate harmful attack inflamed American government which could
not tolerate more publicity for killing of citizens and the commune had to be
controlled. The temple was surrounded by intelligence authorities and its residents
were promised medical attention as well as protection provided they should surrender.

During such period of turmoil, Jesse, the saviour, experienced an ironical
situation comprising of valuelessness, absent mindedness and impotency due to low
spirits and quoted to Esau lines from Bible where God warns people from following
any layman. Last sermon was given by Jesse just before the climax when military
comes to throw in capsules of tear gas and thus force the residents to leave the temple.
Jesse talked about the Cup that God wanted Christ to drink from. He named it the Cup
of Wrath as was it meant to bear the pain of death. He advised all the children and
women to be ready to drink it. While the military succeeded in exploding various
parts of the temple, Jesse ordered his men to start killing women and children one by
one on the pretext that their way to heaven was clear. After a woman and a minor girl
were shot down and another woman fainted, suddenly from nowhere ‘a flock of
sparkling dark immaterial bubbles descended into Esau and he knew what to do’
(Beauty of the Lilies, 484). He grabbed a revolver and shot the false prophet (Jesse)
twice. He also suffered a bullet in his left shoulder but continued to yell and guide the
women and children outside the castle persuading them that ‘those outside are your friends’. Esau was not afraid of death now that he had avenged God by killing a false God. Also he knew, he would be arrested and his mother would be humiliated before press and media persons. Moreover, ‘the living God laid hold of him’.

*(Beauty of the Lilies, 486)*

While Esau got a divine blessing and possessed something all by himself more valuable than the hypnotic power of Jesse, we feel those bubbles that had left Clarence silently, had descend into Clark after some 80 years to enable him to rescue a group of fanatics, mainly women and children, from the clutches of false faith. In this way, ‘it is with Clark that the Wilmot saga comes full circle until the thing that seemed to capsize the Wilmot family will be the very thing to heal it’.

*(Megan, 2009)*

All the televisions of America and Europe flashed with the breaking news of explosion of the castle. Clark is declared as a martyr who died safeguarding oneness of God and rescuing the women and children by sending them out to safety. The last scene depicts the pathetic condition of women and many children black and filthy with smoke and dirt. The reader cannot help thinking about the future of these children whose fault was that they were being misled by their so-called elders. What has replaced the solid faith of the generations before is something that is unstable and casual and something so ungrounded in the actual word that it actually leads to death rather than life. In the last scene Updike is questioning what is being passed on to ‘the children’ as a legacy as the decades continue to roll on. The connection with something is gone; the words are watered-down and meaningless. Joining the dots of family history can be fascinating: seeing how one family member has left their mark on another; what forms of parenting have enabled or disabled a child; what have been
the important damaging things that get passed down, either in personality or in personal philosophy and how integrated or dissolving is the society that is formed by and which forms these bonds. \textit{(Palimpsest, 2011)}

Updike is a master of his craft as he expertly weaves together his saga of a struggling American family set against a backdrop of a century’s old faith that provided a foundation for America and Hollywood films that create an impossible and unrealistic standard of American life that has shaped the nation’s psyche in ways that even Americans fail to realise that Updike uses Hollywood, both to pace his story through the decades and to reveal the American people obsessed with stars and the idealised version of reality they project even as they abandon the Christian ideals that once grounded them and enabled them to endure the hardships of everyday life.

\textit{(Megan, 2009)}
Works Cited


Chapter 5

TOWARDS THE END OF TIME
In an interview with Charles Thomas Samuels for Paris Review during the summer of 1967, Updike said about his art:

Domestic fierceness within the middle class, sex and death as riddles for the thinking animals, social existence as sacrifice, unexpected pleasures and rewards, corruption as a kind of evolution, these are some of the themes. My work is meditation, not pontification. . .I think of my books not as sermons or directives in a war of ideas but objects with different shapes and textures and the mysteriousness of anything that exists. My first thought about art. . .the artist brings something into the world that did not exist before, and that he does it without destroying something else. A kind of refutation of the conservation of the matter. That still seems to me its central magic, its core of joy.  

(The Art of Fiction, 43)

Ian Hamilton says that Updike, as it has often been proclaimed, knows what it is like to be a day-to-day, commonplace American and knows it with good humour. Updike gets to parts of his country’s psyche that most high brow novelists can’t, or can’t be bothered to tune into. On the whole, and unashamedly, Updike quite likes being an American, and likes it not because America, the global power is something to be proud of but because America’s vast census of small, pitiable greed and woes is what he happens to wake up to every morning.

(Redeemable Bad Guy, Vol. 20)

As stated in Champion Literary about Updike’s waking up to a land drifting away into swamp of sin, adultery, selfishness, obsession, capitalism, consumerism, vain competition with other nations, boastful superiority of being world’s first and greatest nuclear power, wavering faith and ultimate atheism, disrespect regarding all
relations, etc. Updike had dominated post-war realist fiction and it seems that the prospect of his own death appeared backlit by the approaching millennium and online predictions of the death of the novel. When a solipsist dies, afterall, everything goes with him. And no U.S. novelist has mapped the solipsist terrain better than Updike. Updike’s big pre-occupation had always been with ‘sex and death’.

(Champion Literary, 1997)

Age is nevertheless the burden, this time, of his song. The title ‘End of Time’ may be that of the U.S.A. – the book is set in the third decade of the 21st century, after a devastating war with China has disassembled the great Republic, which nobody seems to miss much. The almighty dollar has been replaced by a local script, economic refugees are now sneaking into Mexico instead of out of it, sci-fi creatures called metallobioforms roam loose in the shrubbery, devouring life like army-ants and the independent country of Texas is busily taking over adjacent states or the ‘End of the Time’ may be the end of earth’s time, as there are rumours of possible drastic cosmic events. Or it may be the end of notion of linear time itself, as the protagonist’s consciousness takes startling sideways leaps into the ancient past and the possible future, into the land of what might have happened instead of what did. Or it may be the personal time on earth of the protagonist himself, who becomes, in the course of the narrative, by no means a well person.

In her review for the novel, Atwood counts that all the important things are still in place – automobiles have roads to run upon, the electric lights work, FedEx is operating and the mail and newspapers continue to be delivered, at least in semi-rural Massachusetts, where the protagonist, Ben Turnbull, a 66 year old retired investment advisor, can still thankfully play golf. His gradual disintegration is the novel’s compelling theme. (New York Times, 1997)
Set in New England, like many of Updike’s novels, *Towards the End of Time* portrays a world in which the Chinese and the Americans have attacked one another with nuclear weapons. The aftermath is shown through retired investment advisor, Ben Turnbull’s journal. Though the dollar and the central government are gone, life in Boston and the surrounding areas goes on, thanks to FedEx and other reputed entrepreneurs.

The book is divided into five parts, each beginning with letter ‘D’. After reading the novel, it turns out, in the light of this letter, that the major themes are none other than ‘Death’ and ‘Decay’. Other sub-themes which appear alongside are – the cycles of nature, the passage of time, reality and perception.

Updike had for years constructed protagonists who were basically all the same persons – Rabbit Angstrom, Dick Maple, Piet Hannema, Henry Bech, Rev. Tom Marshfield, Roger’s Version ‘Uncle Nunc’, Owen Mackenzie – who were clearly stand-in for the author himself. They always live either in Pennsylvania or New England, are unhappily married/divorced, but roughly Updike’s age. Always either the narrator or the point-of-view character, they all have the author’s astounding perceptual gifts; they all think and speak in the same effortlessly lush, synthetic way as Updike did. These characters are also always incorrigibly narcissistic, philandering, self-contemptuous, self-pitying and deeply alone, alone the way only a solipsist can be alone. They never belong to any sort of larger unit or community or cause. Though usually family men, they never really love anybody; and, though always heterosexual to the point of satyriasis, they especially don’t love women. The very world around them, as beautifully as they see and describe it, seems to exist for them only in so far as it evokes impressions and associations and emotions inside the self.
For the young educated adults of the 60s and 70s, the ultimate horror was the hypocritical conformity and repression of their own parents’ generation. But the young educated adults of the 90s, who were the children of the same impassioned infidelities and divorcees, got to watch all this brave new individualism; self-expression and sexual freedom deteriorate into the joyless and anomic self-indulgence of the ‘Me’ Generation. Today’s adults have different horrors, prominent among which is a peculiarly American loneliness: ‘the prospect of dying without once having loved something more than your-self’. Ben Turnbull is 66 years old here and is heading for just such a death, and he is terribly scared of it. Like so many of the Updike’s protagonists, Turnbull seems to be scared of all the wrong things.

*Towards the End of Time* is an ambitious departure into the futuristic-dystopian tradition of Aldous Huxley and the soft sci-fi. The year is A.D 2020, and the time has not been kind. A Sino-American missile war has killed millions and ended centralised governments as Americans know it. The dollar’s gone; Massachusetts now uses script named for Bill Weld. No taxes – local toughs now get protection money to protect the up-scale from other local toughs. AIDS has been cured, the mid-West is depopulated, and parts of Boston are bombed out and irradiated. An abandoned space-station hangs in the night sky like a junior moon. On the American earth, tiny but rapacious ‘metallobioforms’ that have mutated from toxic waste and go around eating electricity and occasional human. Mexico has re-appropriated the U.S southwest and is threatening wholesale invasion even as thousands of young Americans are sneaking across the Rio Grenade in search of a better life. America, in short, is getting ready to die.

*(Champion Literary, 1997)*
In this way Updike carefully sketches an America which as a subordinate power, is under threat of other revengeful nations. As people are engrossed in establishing themselves once again and in other places than their native towns, retired people like Ben Turnbull, lead a seemingly relaxed life but domination of a second wife has reduced him to a command receiver, only with a few mean desires still ruling his heart. Most of the time, Turnbull describes flora and his brittle castrating second wife Gloria, the mention of whom is largely accompanied by the wild life trying to feed itself contentedly and devotedly, asking its share from nature’s gift. For Turnbull, the harmony of nature and its elements is getting disturbed due to Gloria’s aggression but he can do nothing about it.

Late November’s snow compels a bit carefree and bent-with-age Ben Turnbull to look for a ‘trace of childhood’ in himself. The search for innocence could not be completed as it was cutshort by ‘an awareness of being behind in ones chores and an unfocussed dread of time itself, and the speedily approaching death’.

(End of Time, 03)

The natural scenic beauty of snow resembling innocence and peace is just like a blessing which Ben knows he does not deserve or does not have time for. Even then, the appetite for more life and longer age does never cease. Ben, observing the things around him, gets the notion that the world does not only get worse with the ongoing time. If a being becomes worse with age, technological inventions become better. Younger generations come up with novel ideas to make cumbersome gadgets handy by a little change in their material and size. Ben, like Owen, in Villages, feels a bit inferior and weak before his second wife, Gloria, who is younger than him. Her dominating nature is reflected in every part of the house. She is the sole ruler of his garden, house and himself. To her, wild life is a nuisance which should not be
allowed to come near human beings. Her spirit of possession has caused her to forget ‘about the life which comes from heaven and has to go there’. She has smeared herself with the ‘blackness’ of her desires and has completely abandoned the notion that the transparency of the rain and whiteness of snow serve to remind us that our lives are always open to visitations’.

(Alice and Kenneth Hamilton, 1970)

Animals from nearby forests come to take their share from natural herbs and climbers but everytime they are shooed away. They are stoned, fired and abused and they end up disappearing into deep and dense nature feeling humiliated. Updike takes this instance from his conscience as had D. H. Lawrence taken it in his poem, *Snake*. Ben also mentions a number of large and small creatures with special emphasis on their primitive right to live on this earth and feed on its natural provisions and also in a justified manner. The way man has trespassed wild life property, no doubt, has disturbed the ecological balance, hurt animals’ dignity and humiliated the primitive rulers on this earth. Their pathos is sometimes reflected in their insolence that Ben sees in the eyes of a doe whose staring look exhibited anger and loss instead of ‘an alert wariness’:

Deer haunt our property here. Walking on our driveway, I sometimes see an especially bold doe in the woods – a big haunch animal the dull dun colour of a rabbit, holding motionless as if to blend into the shadows of the trees. The doe stares at me with a directness I might think was insolence instead of alertness. Her heart must be racing. . .the. . .white tail she shows is startling. . .also the white edges of her large round ears. . .above the black, globular, wet eyes. . .

(End of the Time, 5-6)
Soon after that, she is sternly rebuked by Ben and she retreats into her dense, dark, left-over space which will be soon in the hands of the capitalists, shortly in future.

Ben is somewhat enchanted by animals visiting his garden every now and then but ‘Gloria does not share his enchantment’. According to Ben:

Who would imagine that deer would eat roses? My wife wants the deer killed. She gets on the telephone, searching for men with rifles or bows and arrows and an atavistic hunger for venison and the patience to stand for hours on a platform they will build in the trees. . .my wife is a killer. . .she dreams at night of my death. . .

(End of the Time, 06)

In this way, Gloria represents the rude killers of the society who snatch away animals’ share. The way she spends hours on the telephone digging out poachers from nowhere and the adequate patience to stand on the platform to keep an eye on their prey projects her killer spirit. Gloria is a killer of animals as well as human beings. She finds Ben as a target to outpour her indignation. Ben almost felt that her subconscious mind hated him no less than a deer. With Gloria, Ben experienced his heart racing, once with sexual appetite and now with fear that she wants him to kill innocent primitive rulers and also his approaching death makes his heart race with fear. He feels something for the injustice done to these animals; but his guilty self is unable to overcome Gloria’s heartlessness.

Ben and Gloria seldom enjoy the compatibility of agreeing on one point. What to her seems trespassing on her sole property is to Ben, a natural and basic need of a living organism:

. . .one could see how the hungry animal, its innocence burdened only by the need of its own sizable body, had gone from the yew bush by the rose bed to
the box bush on the other side, from the box to the privet ball by the bird bath, and from the birdbath to the euonymus over by the driveway. . .

(End of the Time,07)

Ben can feel the self-contentment experienced by the animal kingdom when they have eaten to their full appetite. Unlike human beings they don’t ravish or invade the natural wealth; they just satisfy their needs and then leave the nature to flourish on its own. It is like worshipping the earth in their own manner; ‘sensing in the new life around them the mysterious presence of God as well as the ever recurring pattern that make them feel comfortable’ even while enjoying their animal instincts. In this sense they truly exhibit their belongingness with divine gifts and their gratefulness to nature.

(Vargo, 1973)

But such sweet and contented nature of animals is not appreciated by Gloria. She counts the damage caused by the deer in terms of money which will be spent in mending or replacing the nibbled bushes. Being aware of Ben’s leniency towards wild life, Gloria very often ‘pulls out the whip of money, knowing that Ben have been a poor boy’ and even ‘after retirement still tender with financial anxiety’. Ben is hurt to see how his wife regards money as life-force and at the same time he accepts that some of the life sustaining elements, such as rapacity and competition, depend on money and he also recounts that some other forces that make the world go around are desperation and death, and these are somehow related and unrelated to money factor.

Along with this competition for survival and attainment of supremacy, competition of gender persists. For Ben addressing the animal as ‘doe’ and Gloria addressing it as ‘he’ indicates the human nature as putting blame on the opposite gender and at the same time their attraction towards each other. Updike also emphasises on the element of morality which creeps into the mind as when ‘time on
Earth gets too short for lies. If any prick of conscience activates itself in old age, there are other things or elements which stop it from flourishing such as man-made law which finds its way into the constitution; more attention is paid to money and property owned by the citizen wherein any animal can be shot with court law if it trespasses into one’s property. If any purchased land is owner’s property, then where should the primitive rulers go? These animals are ruthlessly killed by the land owners and no court of law questions the killers because American citizens are seemingly authorised to keep arms in their houses. Updike laments this ‘old peasant mentality which loves the American right to bear arms’:

Charlie...owns several shotguns, for ducks mostly, and my wife, having hurled herself and her teal-blue Japanese station wagon into the dark, brought one of Charlie’s guns back with her, with a cardboard box half full of ammunition.

(End of the Time, 11)

Even now people like to keep arms with proper ammunition without any restriction. Updike in a hidden rebuke wants to lay bare the reality that apart from killing animals with full right and authority, people can kill their suspected enemies by themselves thereby taking the law in their own hands. They don’t take law and order worth consulting. As a matter of fact, America is one of those nations where adolescents commit maximum crimes regarding shooting innocent school children, only because they always see arms and weapons in their houses with utmost and reckless freedom. Gloria is a typical part of such generation which has treated weapons as toys in its hands and consider killing and scaring off the animals as their right. Gloria is fairly younger in age than her husband Ben but signs of age and physical deterioration are approaching them at same pace.
Even in her late years Gloria’s moral conscience still has not activated itself. Her conclusion is that the bushes or plants ‘can’t run or hide’; they have such a connection with the wild life that they have to be eaten by it. Updike is rejoicing over the helplessness of Gloria and appreciates the divine relations between nature and wild life. He helplessly wants to awaken America to the fact that preservation of nature should be given priority to capitalism, materialism and technological inventions. Technology and advances can never be eco-friendly. Human beings should tend to nature as a tribute to the fulfilment of needs rendered by it since ages unknown. Leaving human aside, the rest of the nature is united with its elements. Human beings are the only species who have turned against nature – against a blessed gift which has ever provided them with immeasurable elements which satisfy their appetite, quench their thirst, and provide them with shelter, fire and medicines. As reckless use of natural resources result in their exhaustion, and obsession for animal hunting or hating it to death results in their extinction, in the same way, Updike acknowledges a ‘ferocious female nagging’ as a result or a ‘price’ a man has to pay for his much lamented prerogatives, power, mobility and the penis. As studies mention that primitive men were highly spiritual and had the ability to take orders directly from the Gods and discharge spiritual duties thereafter; but now such transcending love has become obsolete and forgotten, nobody wants to busy himself in sublime love; everyone is obsessed with base desires which can be attained in this very world and in shorter time as compared to spiritual love.

Nature is also a part of spiritual love with greenery, wild life and ecological balance, as its components. Basically, *Towards the End of Time* is a critique on wildlife preservation and an attempt to develop interest in animals as if they were members of opposite sex with Ben and Gloria’s frequently addressing of the animals
with opposite gender pronouns. Nature has some elements which never betray it. Though nature provides survival to all human beings but its compatibility with the animals is the best while being busy in eating plants; the stubbornness and devotion of a feeding deer is defined as the relaxed mood of someone’s wife with her accustomed personal routine. While nibbling some leaves, the deer goes in a trance and Ben has to come very close to it to shoo it away. Updike defines this trance as a unique discipline through which an organism is repaying the favour that nature has done for it. Very precisely and openly, Updike laments the ingratitude that Nature meets on the part of the human beings.

Villages and Towards the End of Time has traces of Owen and Ben belittling the value of parents and grand-parents. As Owen after the death of his parents, considered their things no less than a burden, here Ben has given the portraits of his grand-parents to Historical society and never turned to see if they were taken good care of or not. It implies that Updike wakes up to different elements of disrespect in the American motherland. There is also a sense of fear about how it will look in future when a post-war divided America will struggle with economical ups and downs while the parts snapped out of it, will enjoy better economy. Today, America is a land of insecurities, fear and impotency but even then sexobsession is related to something of male pride. Ben dreams of a world when due to his medical fitness he would not feel inferior to his healthy and young step-son. Then Gloria would be left ‘with one less weapon’ to wield against him. It would be like a world where Ben would be self-satisfied with his active sexual and semi-automatic bodily functions.

At the same time, Ben can’t believe that someday all conscious and semi-conscious functions of the body will dissolve back to the compacted silt; he will be as
forgotten as the Neanderthal men. Ben accepts the stupidity of his non-believing the divine law which will never change.

Even after inheriting the natural process of birth and ultimate death, Ben is aroused at the mere sight of opposite gender including secretaries at his old office where he seldom goes now. Sometimes after looking at his own image in the window glass of a train he observes his own gazing eye which reminded him of a deer’s fearful and alert eye. He wondered if this look of the animal expressed its hostility for Homo sapiens species or it just behaved neutrally and kept itself detached from human civilization at the level of generosity and benevolence if any of it existed. The imagination of such eyes left Ben think more about the feelings of the animal; we cannot make our access to the organism concerned to know its feelings or thoughts for us but God has given every creature eyes through which communication takes place provided the other side is able to perceive such soft imprints. Here, Updike comments on the ‘should-be’ extra sensitive perception of human beings which is nowhere to be found. Updike lays emphasis on the abstract must-idea that human beings should count themselves as elements of nature and try to feel the pain and loss of others by merely observing them.

But human nature is not too conscious or sensitive as to extend its sympathy to the wild life at mere projection of feelings on the part of animals. Human nature is so arbitrary that is does not want to stick to a single hypothesis. Divine rules are discussed with respect to religious principles which have undergone many changes with time. These principles are contaminated as new movements and trends crop up. In this way, pure and chaste divine rules are reduced to wavering faith with the changing time and the increasingly acceptable freedom by man thus subjecting the hypothesis to a ‘quantum fluctuation’.
This indifference of mankind has its negative effects on many aspects of nature as well as human society. Ben Turnbull contemplates a deer nibbling at shrubs at his place and the way it takes its share, first warily and then voraciously, emphasizes at the urgency of its need. The beauty of the deer and its way of feeding itself reminds Ben of a prostitute who visits him at home while Gloria is away at work. Deirdre visits him silently but attends to his sexual needs devotedly first and then gradually her aggression increases to the extent that she thinks it her right to move around in the house and hang around with Ben, shopping for him and herself. But no matter how much Ben is concerned about being careful for not leaving clues for Gloria to discover his betrayal, his guilt never leaves him. He feels his sin crying out loud in the form of stains left behind on sheets in the upper-storey rooms, after Deirdre has gone. His guilty feeling is projected as a frightened self, safeguarding his prestige and domestic peace when afraid for his reputation; Ben escapes from reality telling himself that ‘Deirdre is a fantasy’.

‘Whores’, this nomadic section of the society has cropped out as one of the consequences of the collapse of civilisation. The young productive generation who could hold the responsibility of a nation by becoming successive beauticians, editorial assistants, nurses or paralegals are forced to bring efficiency and comeliness to the flesh-trade. This high breed quality of girls turned whores is an advantage on part of men. In this way, animate flesh is sold at large under sensational advertisements and other public banners. These whores, being dissatisfied with their profession which fetches them only meagre income, get into the habit of stealing antique pieces from rich men’s houses as a bonus prize for favours done to these men. During lovemaking, Deirdre discloses to the readers that the reason for AIDS is none other than sex-
obsession. If rules of copulation are not followed as framed by Divinity, the victims of adultery and obsession have to pay for it by succumbing to this disease.

With Gloria gone to a work trip, Ben imagines that he has killed her and got rid of her forever. Both of them compete with each other and Gloria’s domination leaves Ben weak and full of hatred. Gloria never cherishes his position as a husband and prefers his absence from her life. This, she proves, by maintaining her contacts with the people who discharge their duties for her interests such as deer hunting, maintaining her garden and so on. She knows how to extract things of her own interest from nature as well as relationships. Through Ben she has status, house and money while from the nature she has decorative plants and climbers for her own amusement; deducting wild-life from gifts of nature.

In 2020, the world has gone as far as sending people to live in space and ignoring the fact that cosmic rules limit human power beyond a certain height. God has made this world fit for his creation; in turn He wants His creation to be grateful to Him, respect His principles and prepare itself for death and go back to Him with enough evidence that they cared for His world and dealt with it as responsible beings. His unlimited power has confined the human race to one planet and His self despises over-ambition. He has created this planet with just the right kind of provisions for His creation, ranging from unicellular organisms to the largest beasts. At the same time, He assigned Man the most prestigious position of all living beings. And the one enjoying the highest rank should acknowledge its duties willingly because rights and duties are the two sides of the same coin. This is all in contrast with what is going on in 2020, America. A space station has been set in orbit like another world where colonists have been surviving for a time amid their tons of provisions and the solar power green houses:
. . . a space station, three-thousand miles above the Earth, one-hundredth of the first moon’s distance, by men before the Sino-American Conflict dissolved the governments able to maintain the shuttle ships. . . the colonists marooned there survived for a time amid their tons of provisions and their solar-powered greenhouses . . . the world watched in horror. . . the space dwellers one by one died. . . the colony, in its giant honeycomb of hollow struts and exquisitely stretched sheets of insulating foil, still holds a few live crewpersons, surviving on protein tablets and hydroponic lettuce.

(End of Time, 36-37)

As the Sino-American conflict crippled the national economy, divided the American subcontinent and technology received a severe blow, therefore it is impossible to ‘send a rescue mission aloft, even if there is a will’. A handful of dwellers are still alive but a cloud of nearing end hovers over them. Dreams extending beyond human power result in ‘embarrassment, a bad conscience’. Here Updike, once again provokes his reader to think about the exhaustible natural resources which can become extinct without any hope of their revival or recycling. Large amounts of material and energy used up in sending space shuttle and its maintenance in the space, comes from earth’s reservoir which is not for any specific country or continent but for all naturally living organisms on earth. Huge volts of energy used up in running shuttle’s machinery and getting its feedback every now and then through television broadcast can drag the non-renewable resources towards their fatal end. So, Updike is giving different points to be noted down to save various natural resources and the dangerous consequences if they are used recklessly.

As nature’s reservoir is to be used honestly and at controlled rate, so that it may result in equal distribution of all elements of nature, in the same way, Updike
hates the Egypt royalty who were buried along with mind blowing amounts of precious metals like gold, silver, diamonds and so on. In contrast to this royal class he takes his character Ben to an imaginary journey on dead Pharaoh Kings’ valley and leaves him appreciating the efforts of tomb robbers. These villagers follow robbery as an occupation but their robbery does no longer seem a crime; once taken out, these buried royal ornaments are again brought to circulation in the living world and contributes to the material progress of the society.

As the old English saying ‘Healthy mind in a healthy body’, in the same way, an uplifted economy full of future promises belongs to a healthy society which in turn depends on healthy, robust and well-bonded relationships. A society which is torn and shattered with selfishness, lust, unstable behaviour, obsession, temporary commitments and detachments can never flourish. In such cases, Updike advises flexibility of acceptability irrespective of colour, caste, creed, nationality or gender. Since Ben Turnbull’s family was emotionally split by his divorce, he did not know how to be a family until they had an African son-in-law, Adrien, among them. One of his daughters married an African from Togo and the thing changed the temper of the family, for better. Here the American writer, Updike, surprisingly wakesup to an American misunderstanding for Africans who had been addressed for ages as ‘children of Devil’, ‘the uncivilised’, ‘Black’ or ‘Nigger’ by the white world. This inhuman response holds in itself all the brutality and uncivilised nature for those, who, in spite of having dark complexion, hold a storehouse of human values and regard. An account of Adrien’s behaviour, his capacity to understand, to withhold himself, tolerate and deal smoothly with all issues ranging from child-birth ceremonies to welcoming his father-in-law and making him an important part of these occasions ensure Adrien’s healthy upbringing in spite of having a number of half
siblings in many countries from his father’s informal wives. The fact that all his
brothers and sisters are leading successful lives with good academic status implies
that the Blacks have successfully outstood racialism and are enjoying reputation all
over the world. They have managed to create an identity in this world of whites and
browns. They also have managed to impress immorality with their values and ethics.
For instance, Adrien’s deep voice and slow utterance adds charm to his eloquence. He
presides over his family to assert his presence even when he is absent. He helped
improve Ben’s deteriorated status resulting from his betrayal with Perdita. Ben’s
shadowy status and his shame-faced appearances at different occasions took on
sudden refulgence with Adrien’s arrival in the family. Now Ben was given a respected
status of grandfather to Adrien’s children and the special place ‘in the outdooring
ceremonies’. Being a grandfather to half-African children was more prestigious than
being a pure American father’. This Adrien’s African magic brought back the lost
family-love to Turnbull. Respect for one’s own culture is the second thing – Adrien
has never forgotten symbols from Togo – knots, braids, beads, and masks are found
everywhere in the house. Elders of the family including Ben Turnbull’s portrait
occupy a place of honour in the ‘living room’ – the place which is a symbol of
connection between house members and the society. Moreover, the innocent
discipline of Adrien’s children and their tame nature in an age of VCRs, PCs and CD
players, is amazing. His children like folktales and children’s stories rather than
gadgets and video-games. In addition to their discipline, they also possess an air of
their grandmother, Perdita. It implies for Turnbull that if a commitment fails then the
chain of ancestors and descendants offers to solace the coming generations or the
loved ones who are still alive. In other words, signs of heredity are symbols or marks
left deliberately by nature to emphasise our connection with the past. At no cost the
forefathers to be forgotten. But the problem with human beings is that they want to assert their individual self and get it acknowledged. Their sense of ego does not give them a chance to be generous enough to identify themselves as part of some ancestral chain. Nature, in the form of DNA transmission, offers as cold a comfort as the transmigration of souls. In this way, Updike makes Turnbull feel guiltier than ever. Ben Turnbull, even after separating from Perdita will not be able to wipe her out from his life, as his children and grand children will carry her imprints here and there in their bodies down the biological ladder. Turnbull finds more traces of Perdita in his daughters and grandsons which add to his guilt, shame and inferiority. Also, there are, on the other hand, sensitive people who think they are left alone in this world after their elders die and in the Eastern part of the world such loss is considered as never drying tears. Updike uses the word ‘solace’ especially for such people who miss their dead ones and wants to add to their comfort that those gone are still present through their living ones. Updike also questions himself with the fact that if human beings are not able to detach themselves from the memories of this world, from their descendants, then why should they actually die? So, not wanting to die is the result of remaining attached to earthly attractions. Here, Updike laments the loss of the sense of sublime level experienced by the hermits who used to retire into the natural activities of forests or into the peaceful silence of mountains in search of God’s grace and spend their uncountable hours contemplating his gifts and singing his praises.

In contrast with the time of hermits when nature was adored, now in 2020 America, the situation is such that pastures and such pieces of fertile and productive land are gifted by the president of America, as bribes, to people willing to go to Mexico and Haiti where economy is stronger and conditions are more promising. The land is being divided into bits and pieces to be cultivated first and then an era of
construction, industrialisation, capitalism and consumerism. This implies the immeasurable difference between how land was felicitated with prayers, contemplation and adoration and how it is now chopped out for selfish human interests. Such interests lead towards the production of commodities which range from simple household items to mass destructive chemicals.

Guilty self of Ben Turnbull has various future visions. One of these is his chaotic image in the eyes of his grandchildren. Inspite of an improved reputation among his own children due to introduction of African family values, yet he fears his upcoming valuelessness after his death. When he will die, his absence may not create a killing void in their life. All they might feel, would be ‘a faint apprehensive pang, tinged with the comic’ which clearly indicates the minute degree to which he would be missed and how lightly his death would be taken by present generation. A person is always hungry for love. Though he lives his life joyfully and takes all material care for his young ones but he longs for the opportunity to live through their emotions, to respond to their call of love and live his own childhood through them. At the end of his life, a person always looks back to such times to which he turned deaf ears due to his distractions. He understands at the end of his life that life can be cherished only by living it through others, by being generous to them, by giving away one’s time to gift others with happiness. Good deeds outlive those who have performed and practiced them during their lives and only such people are cherished as long as they are alive, missed and remembered after their death.

Whether Ben has any good deeds in store to repay him after his death, is quite doubtful even to him because his guilty self has more images to shock him with. Apart from loss of love in his family and among the vague reputation after his betrayal and divorce from Perdita, having Gloria in his subconscious mind and
Deirdre in his bed, is another sign of losing himself. Ben, here, is very similar to Owen of *Villages*, who had his punishment to be continued for the rest of life with pastor’s wife. Perdita, through her visible genetic tendencies and Gloria with her haunts in his house while Deirdre is with him, preside over the house and make Ben’s conscience full of doubts and fear about the presence of a third being watching him in his betrayal. At times, Ben recalls a narrow place of high traffic ‘Mystic River Bridge’ where Gloria was leading him in his dream. It was a long winding way through downward tunnels, bridges over rivers, concrete pavements and so on. Gloria moved on impatiently and absent-mindedly ignoring the ‘screaming depths’ but as the image of Mystic River appeared, somehow she was able to double back and traverse the gulf and lead Ben safely to the northern side. Though Perdita been his first woman and Gloria been his second and more strict yet she acts as his saviour. Mystic Bridge is famous for its tragic events – for accidents and husbands killing even their pregnant wives themselves and blaming Negroes for the crime, instead. Later on, the suicide notes revealing the truth that the killer husband had done the deed, long premeditated in a brain overheated by an infatuation with a younger woman. The incident made people wonder if ‘inside every husband, there a wife-killer.’ This reflects the frequency of wife-killings in America and the mindset of a husband who is never satisfied even with his pregnant wife. Updike reveals an ever lusting nature of male individual who may kill his wife in any way – physically, emotionally or spiritually. As Ben betrayed his wife Perdita and killed her emotionally and at present is trying to bestow her acquired status in a mockingly temporary way to a prostitute.

On the other hand, glimpses of female nature can be seen even in birds and animals. In response to Ben’s presence:
Two visited the pond down by the mailbox. the geese, with their haughty black faces and pearly gray bodies, are intruding upon a pair of mallards who have been in the pond. my watching alarmed them. the little brown female tried to paddle away and ran into slush. The drake with his sumptuous green head followed, and so she found herself performing as an ice-breaker. beating her wings to give herself extra thrust as the ice thickened. the handsome drake serenely floating in her wake. the female of the species takes on the serious business, while the male wears the plumage.

(End of Time, 104)

In this way, both of them seemed to agree perfectly that the task was hers. Thus, carving into the world, bringing up a civilization and trying to give the world its perfect shape is a responsibility enshouldered by females willingly while males savour the flavour. Besides taking responsibility, the female has tendency to safeguard the life. This is the reason why females are more sensitive to relations, life matters, more scared of accidents and more confident while holding guarantee of future life in their arms – their babies.

With these everyday incidents Updike breaks through the patriarchal analogy of male carrying family genes forward. Women are unitary beings, sustainers of life and store-house for future family genetic set-up, as Ben’s daughter and grand-daughter, Roberta and Jennifer seem to be.

As disturbing the harmony and peace of an easily going and naturally convincing commitment of marital bonds produce toxins of life-long guilt and haunts, in the same way, disturbing the ages-old nature with seemingly constructive and beneficial human activities leads to hellish and hazardous results. At such a time, even the natural sounds lose their beauty. Ben no longer hears the soothing thrumming
sound of a ‘wood-pecker’s bill attacking rotten wood’. Destructive activities of human beings have wiped out the trees and grasslands to replace them with houses and concrete roads with petty gardens. Birds have retreated into handful dense forests. Challenging nature, crippled with poisons of industrial revolution, steam-engine, petrochemical plants, thermal power stations and nuclear reactors has gifted human beings with heinous inorganic creatures:

The microscopic first forms...arose in city dumps...attached to the perimeter of army base or nuclear fuel plants wherein a soup of spilled chemicals and petroleum by-products was energised by low-level leaks of radio-activity. Metal particles smaller than iron filings fused, propelled into a self-sustaining reaction perhaps by chemical activity of oxidation accidentally placed adjacent to a fortuitous mix of chemical influences. These tiny resultant creatures, with an anatomy much simpler than their organic equivalents, still possessed complexity enough for reproduction, in the industrial soup.

*(End of Time, 110)*

Their already refined and processed constituents enabled them to experiment with varieties of anatomy. Since twentieth century, within two centuries these metallobioforms have gained the size and weight of tree shrewd and field mice. But the phyla of these metallobioforms have their specific qualities of sleeplessness, affinity to oil or electricity, penetration, sexual reproduction and feeding on organic wild life when ever usual diet is not available. Radio-broadcast and television telecast present programmes warning over the threat of these ‘pseudozoans’ as ‘science has predicted the evolution of ever larger and voracious forms in future’ which will live on earth’s surface and in fields quite openly and without fear. People of 2020 are left to hear mechanical thrumming of these pseudozoans. They no longer hear the
woodpecker’s melody of nature. In this way Updike has given the most horrified image of our near realistic future. Countries boasting of being super nuclear power will have the same future that Updike, as an ideal citizen, patriot and an eco-friendly human being, foresees. Updike has taken back-breaking responsibility of enlightening the entire world. His rebuke to these atomic powers indicates the victory of the so-called backward African and some Asian countries whose developing economy can only afford to feed its citizens over the leviathans who feel proud of their unshakable faith in atomic production.

Lamenting the earth’s future, Updike once again turns towards both genders and finds that it is the female who favours the nature by weeping ‘for the world itself, in its beauty and waste, its mingled cruelties and kindness’. Women in Ben Turnbull’s life showed him the both phases: ‘Perdita wept out of compassion at the magnificent beauty of a church and Gloria, at the death of some character of a novel or loss inflicted to her garden when the deer ate all her tulips’. Updike also finds woman’s tears in mothers and wives. Through him Ben Turnbull recollects his mother’s tears expressing grief, poverty, domestic frustration or bodily decay. He remembers his childhood with a pained mother and defeated drunk father, especially when both quarrelled about there not being enough for good and promising life.

Updike professes this quality of women to stay, suffer and weep in contrast with men who ‘always rush onto the next thing’. Ben’s father rushed to the liquor, Ben to the corners of the house ‘to burrow away from the family sorrows’. Men are escapists. Even in the Resurrection story, John 20, Simon Peter rushed to the emptied sepulchre while Mary stayed and wept for crucified Jesus’. Jesus loved Mary for her tears but at the same time avoided her touch. Bible emphasises on frankness among same gender, for the opposite gender ‘spoken language should be as good as a touch,
each word should be worth living in ears’. As the gospel says, ‘Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God’. (Colossian, 112-113)

So, as long as you fuse yourself spiritually, with Christ, you are as near to God as Christ is. Your life is God’s gift; ask him to protect it for you. With this wittily implied religious connection, Updike mocks the so-called local agencies which comprise of the native, tough rascals whom the Americans of 2020 seek for personal security. These groups compete with each other for their material interests. Instead of serving nation and mankind, they just devour public and government properties, thus surviving by looting offices. Besides robbery, thefts, murder and ransom money, these mixed blood teenagers impose protection money on residents as a price for protecting them against other local toughs. 2020 America has no federal government and the citizens have to rely on either of these warring gangs of teenagers for their protection.

America has no structure. Again, Deirdre, Updike’s mouthpiece is ready to chalk-out the image of 2020 America:

. . .but when there was a government, there were things like the FBI and the Federal Reserve Board to keep things stable. There was structure. . .is worth paying quite a lot for. Without it, you get just survival of the brutes. . .the Roman Empire, before it broke up, made the spread of Christianity possible. . .those soldiers and roads. . Christianity would never have gotten out of Jerusalem without those roads. . .would have been squelched by the Jewish establishment. . .

(End of Time, 121)

Updike sketches for us an ideal structure of a country’s administration through Deirdre. A country’s structure should have roads, pathways, and faithful soldiers to
enable it the flow of betterment and outflow of its power for outsiders’ enlightenment. In this way, the nation will experience an intermingling of ideas and strategies and flexibility in nature to cope up with adverse conditions. Deirdre gives the example of Roman Empire during Renaissance due to which Jerusalem was forced to let Christianity to find a way out to flourish. In this way, Christianity spread all over the world and acquired towering number of followers and gained its own mastering status. In the same way, America should learn that by giving away its benefits and sharing its power with the world will not victimise it with sense of insecurity. Only then, it will gain respect, have its influence far and wide in good terms and have its place among God’s gifts for other nations which are still developing economies. Eventually America will be acknowledged as no less than the pioneer of new renaissance.

All this benevolence, generosity and perpetual enlightenment can never be achieved without spiritual and religious guidance. Updike himself once experienced ‘a kind of philosophical panic’ in his life and it was the fear of death which overcame him. At such a time he began reading ‘Barth and Kierkegaard and they gave him a kind of solace and renewed his faith’. They convinced him about human condition and Updike managed to ‘leap into his faith’ once again. The ‘world becomes accessible’ to such people. God never wants to leave this world without guides and philosophers. Prophets sent to the world always left behind their disciples to carry on religious teachings towards posterity. With the onset of modernism, hermits and scholars have lost their value and have come to be regarded as unwanted part of society. The worst part of it is that the present religious scholars are not as faithful as ancient disciples. They modify their teachings according to the demands of the age.
These scholars lack the spark to bring the new generations to the track because they themselves have gone astray. (Kakutani, 1981)

Americans have to survive amid the sense of insecurity against the intellectual and sharp minded immigrants who are icons of technology and have the best commands over their respective occupational areas. While writing the novel, Updike must have the vague sketches of World War II, in his mind. Through this imaginary Sino-American war, he relives the moments of humiliation on the part of Japan’s psyche when the nation’s dignity was given an ‘acid-bath’ with the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Even now the event has left Japan more destroyed than any other targeted nation. This war which was fought over the question of control on Asia left Japan ‘too ruined to compete’. (End of Time, 148)

But they have the intuition, as in Updike’s mind, that a phoenix always raises from its ashes. The ‘resilience of a demolished nation’ like Japan has already taken them with surprise after world war second. Updike wants to warn the disastrous nations that repeated smashing of a certain country and stripping it of its power, dignity and identity may inflame its honour to the degree of uncontrollable hatred and fury. Instead of inculcating such hateful emotions in defeated generations, care should be taken to create a cobweb of never ending friendly feelings which seldom die. For this, countries will have to give up competition to acquire power orto struggle for more space or to cross barriers. Peace and harmony should flow everywhere, as God knows no boundaries, political barriers, nationality, power, colour, caste or creed. His earth is absolutely perfect in all its chemical and atomic laws to provide enough duration and stability for the evolution of intelligent life. Any minor deduction or increment in any of these dimensions would result in the most inhospitable form or more precisely an impossible mode of life. Ben has to undergo such impossibility the
entire time which he has spent with Gloria – the woman other than his first wife. Any minor disturbance in the first phase of life results in long lasting upheavals. The first phase with its marital bonds is a gifted one, and any wrong step on the part of either partner bears its thorns to the future relations made by them. At this time, Ben considers his marriage a game of thrust and parry. He admires Gloria for her talent in dealing with the life but at times, he is also scared of her terrible domination and distrusts her desire for his well-being.

The rare element of trust is still found there in America even after the Sino-American war as there is still belief in fairness, rudimentary rights guaranteed to everyone regardless of creed or colour. Ben misses this bliss inside his marital life as his wife admires the freedom and carefree living-style of widows.

But Gloria is not the only threat around. There is Deirdre, who appears in images of a deer initially and gradually metamorphosed into the paid-working class slut and in some instances she becomes a superheated fantasy of Ben. Gloria inspires threat and fear whereas Deirdre lust, contempt, hatred, guilt and a mournful longing for lost youth. During the latter’s stay, Ben complains of not finding a teapot or rug while these very things reappear after Gloria returns; this shows that Deirdre was not so realistically present in his life.

A group of juvenile extortionists move into the woods on Ben’s property and run a small-time protection racket, targeting him and his neighbours. Initially, they convince Ben that they are subordinates to Phil and Spin and are assigned to do the collection in nearby areas. In the meantime, they kill Spin to horrify Ben and thus forcing him to submit to this gang of young brutal kids. After seeing Spin’s dead body, Ben’s vain attempts to call emergency toll free numbers or the police department or crime branch, one after the other, bring home the point, how useless
police is in 2020 America. Ben comes back gasping to the crime sight only to find Spin’s corpse disappeared. Ben was being watched by this racket and they were waiting to frighten him to submission. A female member of the gang, Doreen, who had recently stepped into puberty, became Ben’s centre of attention. Ben gets a perverse kick out of turning himself into their fatherly business counsellor, advising them to kill pet animals and to burn down beach houses in return for a percentage while exchanging cash for touching-only privileges with Doreen. He is afraid of Doreen too but she arouses mostly wistfulness. Through her, he has access to the lost pre-pubertal inexperienced self once he was, for which he feels a tense nostalgia.

Apart from enjoying privileges with Doreen and a cut in percentage, Ben safeguards his land earnestly by keeping the kids busy in frightening neighbourhood to submission. A person clings to his land as to his identity. This is the reason why Ben sometimes thinks that after his death he will mind no longer being an American. Not only Ben, but a human being will always miss this earth which has no parallel of itself in the entire universe. The joy of creation, flowing through the generations of birds and bacteria, human beings and areal titans, as they rise and fall is not an illusion but an eternal basis and that a heavenly economy to whose workings we are blind will redeem every one of our living moments and carry to completion each linking of beatitude. And this is possible in the third planet of solar system, in the Milky Way galaxy of all the galaxies in the universe. If man endeavours to come up with an artificial world of himself of another world, sooner or later, the result is a gradual recession and complete disappearance in the vicinity of the constellation, Octans. On planet Earth with its round shape, human race being the last to evolve is given appropriate rights and most of the duties to hold. The unicellular amoeba brought forth the gigantic dinosaurs and mammoth; now reduced to undignified sizes
of lizards and few meters long snakes, have nowhere to go except hiding disgracefully in house corners or crouching somewhere in domestic gardens. It’s really hateful when human attempts to inflict order upon the land, bring death and pain and mutilation to these innocents, whose ancestors enjoyed the earth for tens of millions of years before the naked ape appeared with his technology and enraging awareness of his own sin. People have developed this habit of growing plants and raising flowers of their own choice and interests and uprooting some other plant on pretext of being weeds. Since when human being, a part of God’s creation has got right what is a weed or a pest? Human beings must realise that every piece of nature is perfect in itself, irrespective of its colour, size, characteristics or behaviour. No divine order encourages its creation to kill one another.

Kids from Lynn got stimulus and guidance from Ben to frighten neighbours by killing their pets or burning their sea-beach houses. Both Ben and kids had to pay for it. Ben was killed as man with prostate cancer while Gloria, during Ben’s stay in the hospital, informed Fed Ex which is working nationwide for the utilities, road maintenance and peoples’ protection, having a wide network that can connect big cities and commercial centres about nuisance created by kids. As a result, kids from Lynn, who had trespassed as antisocial elements, were wiped out in just a few moments through metallobioforms and the arrangements were made by Fed Ex.

After his operation, an irritated Ben had to get used to space and time with his new needs and demands. With his diapers he had returned to his own childhood. Not realizing the acceptance of this fact, yet with his gestures and preconceptions as fumbling as grand-daughter Jennifer, he was getting used to time. Besides irritation and humiliation, his dreams are haunted with Perdita in which he sees her images as a cooperating wife, attending to their children more than anything else.
In this way, a blessed person is one who attends to the needs of other living creatures and other Godly gifts. Vegetation on this earth takes care of all living organisms, directly or indirectly, maybe that is the reason why it has been bestowed with shades of colour as attractive as gold. Even the sun is set to shine with its golden light. In the novel we find that in phrases and proverbs the word ‘gold’ is addressed as ‘common’ and ‘poor’ to denote its simplicity and God expects its creation to cherish the richness of this colour in the form of natural gifts. But the human nature, as thankless as ever, ignored the divine gifts and instead, the element or metal ‘gold’ stimulated the thirst and greed of people. Though God has selected colours to suit human health; for instance, soothing green colour of sky suits all eyes otherwise they would be burned blind – such is the argument of some theologians and they present it as a point proving existence of the Omnipotent.

Updike has to feel guilty for the American aborigines wherever mention of God comes. He feels it through his protagonist Ben Turnbull that the Sino-American war could be seen as revenge administered by the Mongolian super power of that Asian continent from which the North American Aborigines had crossed the Bering land-bridge. Documentary movies of old West show:

. . . photos of vast stony vistas and of impassive bronze faces: Indians chiefs hounded to a humiliating surrender, after creekside massacres and epic marches through Dakota blizzards to a Canadian sanctuary where the distant queen’s providence declines to forestall starvation; they are driven back to a bitter treaty with the bearded Great White Father in Washington and the barren heaven of the reservation. A heap of broken promises and a pyramidal mountain of the skulls of bison spitefully slaughtered to cut the red man’s ground out from under him. 

(End of Time, 308)
It was a race accused of ignorance and promised civilization, literacy and identity among nations racing for modernism and power. But with the hypothesis of receding frontier, there was nothing but disillusion of broken promises and a toll of millions of lives just for pieces of Western rocky land. And ultimately, as a sign of hypocrisy the faces of Native American legend heroes are placed on coinage and postage stamps’ of triumphant republic. It is the heartburn of modern descendants whose aborigine forefathers were slaughtered to cut the red man’s ground out from under him. Ben uses this reference to aware himself of the Time knocking on his door but this is not Ben’s turn to ignore his spouse but Gloria’s turn fancy herself as a widow, free from clutches of a husband. On his part, Updike uses the reference of the Red Indians to remind America of the Time’s clock preparing to tick the same hours of the History but from a different angle this time. Sino-American war and the resultant destruction in the American mainland is an answer to what American settlers did to the aborigine Red Indian man who once had crossed the primitive rock-land that joined America and Asia long back. This hunter Asian man certainly must have faced even an uglier wilderness than the British settlers claim to have done. This asserts that the Hunter man’s efforts were no less to be acknowledged than those of the European invaders following Columbus to the land of adventures.

With this consciousness of how the ‘Time’ goes by and how the history repeats itself, but now the powerful of the past have to pay the cost. The victorious of the past have to bear the bitter taste of defeat. Victory falls into the others’ hands. Rolling power of time is stronger than arrogant human nature and its unshaken faith in vanity. Time has reduced Ben from ‘Turnbull’ to a useless frame with his ‘Depends’ and his wife giving terrible signals of affection and interest in other men. The situation is going off-hand with his wife musing of her status as a widow; the privilege and
freedom after losing a husband not for alimony but for his entire property and that also in a natural and unsuspected way.

Tossing aside all the bitterness of his present state, Ben, sometimes spends long hours scratching fungus from the moist walls and the land. After tasting different flavours of the Mother Earth, in the form of a biological mother, first wife, second wife and a fantasy girl, Ben is invited by the earth itself to feed on its higher and purer form – its fungus – a decayed and silent structure outwardly but inwardly undergoes all changes that are due to a living organism. This implies that human beings should also learn a lesson from the earth. The earth appears to be inactive yet it is constantly and selflessly productive. The natural world seems omnipresent without being ostentatious and hence, is taken for granted. After the cold inactive and unproductive winter, spring arrives with bounty and vivacity. Men, too, could be productive and progressive without any aggression, selfishness and the urge for destruction. They could care for nature as it cares for them. They could after eons of selfish actions, brings back a degree of nobility, thoughtful attitudes and universal brotherhood.

Since this fungus, now eaten by Ben, does not possess chlorophyll, it depends upon the rotting organic matter in the substrate. In this way, most of the ground under our feet is an abysmal well of time. Ben thanks God for pure water and realizes that love for earth is the ultimate one and the human nature should identify itself with it, irrespective of physical or political barriers. ‘One element of this earth that takes on the aura of the holy is the land itself – the farms, forests, pastures and meadows which have the capability to sustain human beings as well as wild-life.’ Time has taught Ben to love himself as a human being, a creature who depends on God for its needs; instead of loving his gender and taking its advantage. In this way, as time proves to be a healer for grief, so it is a teacher, instructor as well as a judge. (Vargo, 1973)
While Ben has to pay regular visits to the Beverly Hospital due to his infirmity, Gloria has to do all the raking in the garden and she also gets plenty of time to nurture her fantasy of being a widow. She has hired a deer-slayer, John, whom, Ben thinks that she meets enthusiastically in a girlish thrill. Gloria’s beaming expressions made it clear that she saw a ‘miraculous saviour’ in her hired deer-slayer. With his greatly sophisticated instruments like ‘tarantula’ (silencer) and groovedmetal arrows and a fawn blat, he was sure of accomplishing his task successfully. After three weeks, John’s efforts were awarded and the deer was killed; the obscene fruit of Gloria and John’s joint conspiracy. The very unsympathetic details of killing in the words of John:

Right across beneath my stand, a clean shot, the little downward angle suited me just fine, at about twenty feet. . .she turned her head, to give me that seven inch circle I spoke about. Zing! Right into the lungs. She didn’t get more than a hundred yards, and stopped breathing where she bedded down. She gave me this one long look, like I was coming to her assistance, and then lay down her pretty little head on the leaves. I didn’t use a second arrow. Depending on what gristle they pierce, they can be the devil to work out.

(End of Time, 323)

Ben compares the deer’s carcass to ‘a lover’s stretched body in bed’ and feels a void created in the world with its death. Ben could feel the disillusion that was experienced by this animal in its death throes. Even after its death, the dead body like a ‘taut russet sack tossed into the square-ribbed flatbed’ could, surprisingly, communicate its utter dissatisfaction at the disastrous behaviour of mankind:

The deer’s head was toward me, on the lowered tailgate, as if to be fed something, her lips slightly drawn back, a lavender sliver of tongue visible.
There were little crusts of blood around her black nostrils, relic of the bloody foam she breathed in her last minute. Her eyes were open, long-lashed, coffee-brown globules. . .and the pellets released from her tidy anus in the sorry unravelling of death. From the inner corners of the deer’s eyes flowed two dark markings, like tear trails. But the consciousness. . . had moved on, into another cosmic space. . .Her conical slender face, with its coarse rubbery muzzle and indelible tear trails, gazed towards me; I could feel myself move, a reflected splinter. . .in the orb of dulling gel.

*(End of Time, 323-324)*

Updike is not hasty with his descriptions this time; he wants us to feel the inner grudge of nature, that ‘one long look’, the nature is giving to us through its different organs which are being thrown into the valley of death day-by-day. The deer, through its gaze wants to awaken the conscience in us – the human beings – who claim to be the best creation of God. Updike also feels, in the stare of the deer, the warning of upcoming ridiculous future of the world with all its extinct wild-life. He is questioning the American attitude about the nothingness it is giving to the Mother Earth and in near future, to its own self.
Works Cited


Chapter-6
VILLAGES
VILLAGES

When he published Couples in his mid-thirties, John Updike did not foresee that it would cause a fuss. As he tells it, the neighbors in Ipswich, Massachusetts, where he then lived, were supportive rather than reproachful. But further afield, in New York and Boston, he was attacked for his preoccupation with small-town adultery. This was 1968 and the public ban on Lady Chatterley’s Lover had only recently been lifted. To conventional minds, the carnality of Couples was a step too extreme.

Villages (2004) begins in the present tense, at Haskell Crossing, in Massachusetts. The protagonist, Owen Mackenzie, a retired software designer, is waking in bed. We’re told of the dream he has just had, follow him to the bathroom, watch him shave; hear the teasing marital babble – the ‘connubial nonsense’ – that passes between him and his second wife Julia who is an eco-friendly woman of sixty-five years. We think this domestic placidity will soon be shattered but even before we feel the backward pull, suddenly we find ourselves in the past, back in Pennsylvania, where Owen was born. And though the novel fitfully returns to the present – at one point we glimpse Owen arguing politics at a cocktail party – all the action belongs to past.

Owen’s life and sexual odyssey are unexceptional but he was born (as his author was) with one skin too few and thus makes him exceptionally tactile and alert. Despite the depression, then the outbreak of war, the world he grows up in, is idyllically stable and becalmed, ‘a comic strip version of American reality’ with friendly mailmen and changing trolley cars and peanut-butter crackers. But he’s a timid child, fearful of water, heights, spiders, darkness and the great outdoors. Fear also overshadows Owen’s first near-adventure in adult sex. His teenage courtship of
Elsie follows the regulations of those days – ‘a nest of growing permissions’, ‘an inch 
or two more flesh surrendered with each date’ – until one night they are alone and 
naked in her car together, and on the cusp of losing their virginities, when he is 
spooked by hoots and rustlings from the forest, and (like Piet Hanema in Couples) 
finds his excitement being ruined by nerves. More than once, scenes of Owen’s sexual 
excursions take place in lap of nature where Updike makes the couple glide 
apprehensively in ‘pastoral love lyrics’ and the young flesh tries to experience its 
‘sexual awakening’ with the help of the ‘sporting of respective organs’ in the ‘car’ or 
at a picnic spot on ‘twenty-acre nature preserve’. (Taylor, 1971)

Owen’s anxieties never quite leave him, despite his charmed, only-child 
existence. After university, he goes on to make a successful career in computers, 
leaving IBM, with his friend Ed to set up with a half-share in a small business called 
E-O data. The technicalities of the development of computer science from 1950 to 
1990 in the novel are dealt with more dutifully than the other strand – the chronicle of 
Owen’s sexual experiences during the same period. Each evenly numbered chapter is 
titled ‘Village Sex’, an understatement of the case, since the other chapters have sex 
in them, too.

To begin with, when he meets Phyllis at MIT and marries her, Owen is still an 
innocent student with no hardcore sexual experiences as such. His first affair finds its 
way into his undisturbed life by the time he has turned thirty and has already become 
a father and moves to Middle Falls for financial prospects. Indeed Owen retains 
innocence throughout his life, even when he is juggling affairs. Two kinds of women 
exist in the world, he perceives: ‘Those with whom you have slept and those, a cruelly 
disproportionate but reducible number, with whom you have not.’ Though not a 
predator, he takes an old-fashioned thrill in sexual conquest and never overcomes his
wonder at women’s bodies – or at their willingness to let him inside them ‘in such a reckless and adorable way.’ He holds to his faith that women are the bolder gender. And the ‘monstrous miracle’ of sex intrigues him to the last, even after he experiences the heavy toll of sin it can extract.

All the women he ever slept with – Phyllis, Faye, Alissa, Vanessa, Jacqueline, Antoinette, Mirabella, Karen and (putting an end to all his juggling) Julia. His women may not have careers – some are desperate housewives – but he pays homage to ‘the realm of purely personal’ which they share with him. In the novel, God and love are discussed in detail.

The poetry of carnal minutiae is Updike’s trademark and Villages shows no diminution of inventive. Sex to Updike, is our redemption:

Sex is a programmed delirium that rolls back death with death’s own substance; it’s the black space between the stars given sweet substance in our veins and cervices. The parts of ourselves conventional decency calls shameful are exalted. We are told that we shine, that we are splendid, and the naked bodies we are given in the bloody moment of birth hold all the answers that another, the other, desires, now and forever.

(Villages, 319)

This quasi – Biblical apologia for the life and work comes in the last chapter, the fourteenth, and an extension to the main structure required by village wisdom, which says that no building should consist of thirteen storeys. It’s lucky for us that Updike is superstitious, since some of the best writing in the book is to be found here. On the strip – mall debasement of U.S towns, for instance: ‘There are fewer and fewer somewheres in America, and more and more anywheres.’ Or: ‘Big countries are
happier than little countries: more responsibilities.’ Or: ‘Optimism tends to succeed but does this refute the majestic truths of pessimism?’

(Villages, 309-313)

The last chapter makes clear why nothing happens to Owen in the present tense. By now, he has found his place in the world and the strings that made him a puppet of the libido have been snapped. All he knows of his male friends is their gold swings. All he knows of womanhood is Julia and the surface order she has brought to his sprawling life. Their tender, babyish regard for each other – ‘squabbling like mated toucans in a tropical jungle and then flying away in a perfect forgetful unison’ – is the best anyone can hope for in old age, Updike implies, and a stay against the darkness to come.

(Morrison, 2005)

The most memorable moment of the book comes early on, when the opening dream is transformed, the body resurrected, in a scene of Owen poised above his elderly second wife, Julia, her broken leg in a plaster cast. This image of one body hanging over another, menacing, resuscitating, concealing, addressing itself sexually or pulling back from sex, is the seed of Villages, an image tangled, full of meanings that Updike unravels only tentatively. Those gemlike dragonflies hover above the listlessness of Owen and Julia’s life, but their exalted rapture is an exception to the petty temper of Villages.

Sexual maturity with Owen seems an aberration through which he briefly passed, more or less uncomprehending; on the way from his first childhoodness of old age. Sex is always ‘basty’ – a private word from Owen’s childhood, meaning ‘messy gross’. Owen’s sexual education begins with an obscene drawing on the side of the playground-equipment shed, a picture that ‘looked like a swollen letter M, but, on examination, was a naked woman’. Sex has some truth to tell Owen that he cannot spell out, whose language he will never know; the M is the variable in an equation
that Owen cannot solve, the banal observe of W, or woman. In *Rabbit Redux*, as he is flicking through the phonebook, Rabbit muses that M is exactly ‘the initial to put off obscene calls’, least likely to attract aggressive sexual inquiries.

Owen goes to women to be told things: he needs his first wife to explain to him that his mistress had been ‘flashy and hard-nosed ad shallow’, and his mistress to tell him that ‘life is not some dream you can just wander through’. Occasionally the narrator reports on Owen’s progress with facetious condescension – ‘Another step in his education was due’-which is picked up by the arc, even mocking, Victorian headings: ‘Dream on, Dear Owen’; ‘How Phyllis Was Won; ‘You Don’t Want to Know’. For all the talk of education, Owen’s character seems not to develop. (Karshan, 23-24)

The novel opens in Owen’s bedroom where he is still enjoying the early morning slumber. With Julia, he has become habitual of stealing late hours of morning for cherishing more sleep, after she gets up for her daily routine. In one of these mornings, we are shocked to find him dreaming about his wife’s dead naked body. She is given artificial breathing by a medical official. Owen watches all the activity with guilty-stricken feelings. He thinks that his interference in her peaceful life with her generous husband, priest by vocation, has forced her to succumb to death. She has killed herself to find a way out of her sinful and graceless life. Remorse overcomes Owen and this dream symbolizes his prick of conscience. It may be that Owen’s adulterous Odyssey is itself rebuking him. Beginning with Phyllis, he encountered women in a series of sexual affairs. Though the beginning of his sexual saga was astonishly applauding as he was still virgin until his wedding with Phyllis but once he tasted of Faye, the first woman who gave him impetus outside his house, he could not resist himself from taking further risks. His sexual life carried with it heavy toll of sin, seduction, domesticity and debauchery. Many of Updike’s heroes
hope to unify and then ‘reunify body and soul’ – most of the time by gnawing the brawn of their carnal desires – Owen is somewhat an immature character who spends his life wondering over the marvels of a female body.

(Donald J. Greiner, 1985)

Owen’s women were his tutors more than his sexual partners and with every partner Owen discovered new marvels of sexual experience. At times, when Owen sees birds, he gets a feeling that the birds also try to teach human beings to stop being vain. In this way, if women are sent to this world to make a man know the worth of his manhood, so the birds try to teach human beings the worth of simplicity towards Nature. Birds have their own world elevated from the ground. They are the ones that seek heavenly stars for guidance during migration. The upper world is their territory all year round and different parts of the world are their seasonal territories with no objection to their living and survival. Here Updike is lamenting the hostile nature of mankind where fellow human beings have no right to move out of their political boundary without legal proof and some place to where their entry is banned due to material, diplomatic and political differences. Updike calls upon mankind to be as generous and loving as birds. We sense criticism on American politics which never receives any immigrant with open arms nor has the habit of giving away its God-gifted products to the needy. He wishes his nation to inculcate the generosity and welcoming nature in its citizens. Some of the birds behave in a friendly way with human beings trying to adjust with them and at the same time, trying to teach them the value of adjustment.

After wasting his life in sexual adventures, Owen finds its translation in the ugliness of his old-aged facial skin. His face defines itself in terms of weakness,
crease, wrinkles and fleshy folds. Sometimes he feels his sins projecting themselves in his sagging flesh:

. . .inviting weakness. . .creases drag at the corners of his mouth, and the eyelids are wrinkled like a desert reptile’s. . .folds snag. . .weigh on his lashes in the morning. . .hates that familiar feeling of something in his eye, elusive but bothersome. . .

(Villages, 08)

There is mention of smoking with clues about its hazards and diseases caused by it. Taking In the Beauty of the Lilies, into consideration, smoking becomes a common point and in both the novels Updike complains of too much smoking habits in American society. An ‘American smokes to no purpose except nothingness and self decay.’

Like smoking, reference of war also haunts both novels – In the Beauty of the Lilies and Villages, war is a vital part of American citizenship. Being killed in the war is considered a way of being not only loyal to America but also immortalizing one’s own self in the war memorial charts hanging at some public crossing. The survivors and those who sustained serious injuries, feel proud as long as they feed on government grants. Soon after they are forgotten and grants cease; they are either rendered idle or seek cheap, risky and adventurous jobs.

There is also mention of adjustment problems with the spouses. Illustration is given in terms of aggressive behavior on part of Owen’s father who makes an irritating partner for his spouse. Submissive nature of a female such as Owen’s mother, gives her no opportunity to savor the colorful taste of life. Sense of financial insecurity always disturbed Owen’s father, Floyd Mackenzie, and gradually Owen internalized this feeling as naturally as a biological descendent.
American society longs for quarrel-free homes and healthy family-life. As far as Owen’s small town is concerned, ‘there were no divorces’; there was lot of disturbance, unrest, confusion in the houses but still people adjusted and the life got along without divorces. ‘Divorces were a way of dealing with life in Hollywood and New York. High class society was more susceptible to this sinful act.’

Glimpses of *In the Beauty of the Lilies* can also be discerned while studying the journey of traits from Owen’s maternal grand-father to Owen himself. His grandfather owned a hardware store, which, inspite of its valuable inventions could attract no customers and thereby no profit or prosperity:

He owned a hardware store in Mt. Airy, this original Owen, and his spare time had invented things. . .but no company had ever taken up their manufacture and made him rich. . .died bankrupt but a glimmer of his hopes of outwitting the hard world descended to his grandson.

(*Villages*, 15)

Some instances in the novel warn the human world about unpredictability of death. Updike, near the close of his foreword to *Early Stories*, notes that happiness has never been the subject of fiction; likewise he knows that ‘death and its adjutants tax each transaction’. Death approaches with suddenness, therefore, Updike’s aim is to inculcate fear in human mind. God is omniscient, so, every act of human beings should be directed towards virtue and that the unpredictable death may not strip mankind off God’s grace. At the same time, God is all forgiving and gives human beings various opportunities to redeem themselves. God has gifted his creatures with quality to beget ‘children’ – God’s angelic version in young and innocent faces. To bring-up their children in the best possible way, people need to abstain themselves from all evil deeds so that they can portray themselves as role models before their
young ones. Another way is to be kind to the weaker sex, in every respect. The most shameful and frequently faced problem by American children is the disappearance of their fathers from the family, sooner or later and that too, for another woman. Owen’s buddy, though his best friend, still had to bear ‘crowning insults’ from Owen for being a fatherless child. Owen had a time to boast of having a father and of being a child to an unbroken family. (Pritchard, 2005)

Feeling of unhappiness and distress experienced by women because of them belonging to gender other than male and being subordinate species in home and society is among the top issues of the novel. For instance, a secret unhappiness made the life of Owen’s mother stressful. Updike has talked about some rare moments of a woman’s life when she feels disgusted of all worldly relations as they always demand from her without giving anything in return, not even respect. A woman sometimes despises the base desires, tries to forget their existence and gives them a ‘touch me not’ response. In Updike’s opinion, such denials should not be met with aggression or arrogance on the part of males. Such purity adds to the chastity of woman and this trait is endeared with Christ.

Owen longed to gain knowledge about women, discover those secret pathways which could be laden with answers for such questions as related to the women world. Knowledge about reality ‘is good to have’ even if it is sinful. His main areas of thrust were physical and emotional aspects of women. He always needed women to guide him towards their feelings and to tell him about other women. But Updike sometimes deals with his protagonist strictly and gives him a whiplash of remorse. There is extensive account of his guilty feelings which chased him even in his dreams. In his dreams he never saw his wife in a clear vision:
Often in his dreams the wife-figure is ambiguous, misty-faced, and could be either woman. Phyllis, a stately dirty-blonde had been taller. . .certain bohemian insouciance, and Julia, a compact, long-lashed brunette. . . snappier. . .but both acquire in his dreams a recessive, generic wifeliness.  

\textit{(Villages, 38)}

Moreover, at some instances, Phyllis’s feeling of loneliness and insecurity on the part of her husband and her own silent acceptance with resignation, leave remarks on Owen’s subconscious mind which awake him during his sleep to shake him up out of guilt and fear.

Also, his guilt was accompanied with reluctance he had been experiencing since his childhood. His reluctance had its roots in his father’s financial crisis, his mother’s deteriorating health and his parents’ unhealthy relationship. His father’s job was none too secure. Then, when Owen was thirteen, his still intact world shattered; the mill where his father worked, closed down. Floyd Mackenzie walked the baking summer-streets of Alton looking for an accountant’s job. ‘The humiliation of it wore his face thin and tinted it yellow’ which reminds us of Updike’s Clarence Wilmot and his encyclopedia. The uselessness of accounts and the honesty attributed to it, depressed Owen’s father and he vowed to get his son a practical scientific education. Floyd Mackenzie’s experience of the depression had been that ‘engineers were the last people to be fired, so, the kid needed to latch on to something practical.’

Such financial crisis settled in young Owen’s self, thus, the future dreams of inventions that would make him rich. But it could not generate in him a thirst for creation and to embark into opportunities. For creation and novelty he needed to struggle wherein he had no risk-taking capability and he never wanted to come out of his passivity.
The novel is not only about personal feelings and desires of some characters but it is also an excellent critique of shocking reality of some of the American values as a whole. An honest, respectful and moral behavior towards these values could turn a nation into a Utopia whereas derailment of the same turns life into a perpetual thirst, dissatisfaction and guilt. Owen could never respect the fact of his father supporting members of three generations in a house – parents, wife and son. He never tried to reward his father’s expectations with him. Instead of learning from his father and minimize his burden, Owen never valued his sacrifices and settled down cozily with the well-off Phyllis. For him, the fact persisted that ‘parents embarrass their children’.

(Villages, 103)

The other degrading value is the injustice done to women. In a particular nation, success can never be a big deal if gender segregation is erased, giving way to cooperation and a feeling of felicity for each other. Phyllis is an example of a national treasure that is never valued for its mental brilliance and appreciable potential. Even her ambition to pursue a PhD is thwarted by her husband. Owen never seemed to admit that four children were born out of their union. In words of Owen, ‘It’s not as if we screw all the time, either. I hardly know how it happens.’(Villages, 144) For Owen, destiny of a woman was to be thrown inside four walls, unnamed, unknown for her contribution to national progress:

He had always felt mathematically inferior to her, earth-bound, relatively muddy in his thinking, though he had done creditably at MIT. . .received faithful raises from IBM. . .and in some pocket of his heart was relieved that she had relegated PhD thesis to the dustbin. . .nobody wants a wife smarter than he.  

(Villages, 130)
Not to mention man-woman relationship, Updike also laments the inability of women to wake up for their own united cause of adoring their feminist dignity by themselves. In almost every sector, woman abhors woman, making it advantageous for men to rule over their divided feminist self. Updike illustrates his point by giving us a pathetic account of woman-to-woman relationship which was a record of tension between Owen’s mother and his wife, Phyllis.

Scanning through elderly people’s life in nearly all Updike’s select novels, we never fail to grieve over their longingness to connect with life and people. The nearing end years of Owen’s grandfather somehow remind us of aunt Esther in In the Beauty of the Lilies who remained in contact with the outer world with the help of her telephone, and here, for Owen’s grandfather, ‘waiting for the mail’ signifies the same thing.

On the other hand, Owen’s father doesn’t feel light hearted at the sight of his son, Owen and his family. His rich son who ought to have lessened his father’s burden of running household expenditure, keep his parents and grandparents with him in his lavish home and take special care of their elderly needs, mercilessly leaves his father to bear all the expenses of Owen’s family visits. American children seldom prove to be their parents’ soothers; in fact, the heartlessness of grownup children results in the parents’ alarming tension.

Another aspect of conflict was the more reserved nature of Owen’s mother than that of Phyllis. In fact, Owen’s mother never experienced self-satisfaction or any exchange of dignified treatment by her own husband who had always killed her youthful excitement, never respected her womanhood and left her to search for a faithful male in her son. All these conflicts could not give Owen a prick of
conscience. Instead, back in Middle Falls, he was ready to bless himself with his worthy betrayal.

In a country of conflicting familial relationships and unstable sexual lives, a broader spectrum gives us an overview of coming and going political leaders. Such violent, political and racial situation gradually became piece of everyday news. Americans, even then, would not fall short of entertainment. To fizz off their strain of child-rearing, home-making, earning livelihood with ticking of the clock, couples met at the town’s get-togethers where others’ spouses exchanged words and liked each other – which was not unexpected in such particular social setting. Such savage freedom gave Owen his second sexual break, Faye. Owen sought to public booths to contact Faye but again, he being reluctant, gave chance to Faye to dominate. She instructed him of what he should do or say in case anybody else picked up the phone. She herself decided when their hot meeting would take place and where. On the phone itself, Faye taught him to be patient and practical ‘because life is not some dream you can just wander through’. (Villages, 151) She also instructed him to drink more. Owen always accepted such instructions from women as he wanted to know the how-about of adjust with every woman, trying to grasp their different demands regarding sex. Faye’s sexual recklessness and adoration and her gladness that her man was Owen, was not less than a lesson for Owen. Their stolen hours from Owen’s precious work achievements and Faye’s domestic care, take us into Roger Lambert’s apartment in Roger’s Version where Dale and Esther are swallowing time into huge gulps to steal as many moments as possible in silent adultery. Owen and Faye would sneak into her house where Faye would wander naked as a deer moves in the forest. A woman’s image compared to a deer indicates a connection with Updike’s Towards the End of Time. Like Esther of Roger’s Version, it was Faye who ended the
affair and left her lover shocked. Through Faye’s conversation with Owen over the phone about her husband’s trickiness regarding money and Phyllis’s assurance that Faye’s husband ‘took good care of her financially but he had exhausted her capacity to romanticize him’ (Villages, 163), it was proved that Faye was just quenching her sexual thirst by romanticizing Owen as one of her many victims. Once satisfied for some time, she retreated into her lavish household.

After sometime, Owen met Stacy, his partner Ed’s fiancée. In his heart, Owen accepted the fact that Stacy was a charmer with her extremely unreserved way of swimming, fully naked. In a moment of loneliness and awareness of Owen’s affair with Faye, she offered Owen a blowjob which due to his sense of respect for his partner, and a prick of conscience, Owen refused. But Stacy’s aggression and willingness reopened him to new possibilities. In no time he could look for an excuse for his sinning and seducing nature as nobody was devoid of such disgusting traits, not even the government. Everybody, whether individually or collectively, sin as per their levels. Here, Updike magnifies his view regarding corruption where human beings give way to blunders with the excuse that if others do it then why not they. So, in case of any rebuke from within, a sinner has others’ deeds to fall upon.

At Heron Ponds, Alissa Morrissey, wife of Ian Morrissey, the commercial painter, attracted Owen towards herself with her strange body fitness and frequent smiles at hearing Owen’s voice. At New Year’s Eve in Morrissey’s house, under the influence of celebratory champagne and roused by Alissa’s party-outfit, Owen could not resist himself from kissing her and touching her private parts. Her tough resistance confirmed her acceptance for him. It became clear to Owen that these were layers to Alissa as there could be to all women. Owen was proud of his discovery – one step
ahead in his education and a progress in his sexual odyssey. ‘Now the trick was to find the layer where a man was welcome’. (Villages, 192)

The Morrissey’s entertaining others at late night parties in their house, is a clear sign in America that the family is going through marital distress.

Ian Morrissey, a magazine illustrator represents the handicraft job artist whose outworn talent is no longer accepted anywhere. The resulting diminished respect has turned him into a gloomy and sarcastic person with an old age look. Graphically air-brushed computerized photographs have replaced old manual illustrations. Updike, through this New Year’s Eve party, brings Ian and Owen opposite to each other – one representing the rapidly outdating services which are no longer cared for and the other ascending the ladder of success in the race of industrialization. In words of Ian:

We react to machines and go dead when they are shut off. . .your old man, limited as he was, had mastered his tools. Nobody can use tools any more. They have to have everything done for them, by so-called experts, at twenty-five bucks an hour. And even so it’s all done badly. (Villages, 195)

Disappearing magazines from the market also marks the decreasing reading habit in people who are now more attracted towards latest audio-visual inventions and with little time left for contemplation and leisure-study. In such an atmosphere of destruction and construction, Owen managed to welcome Alissa as his new mistress. With Alissa, Owen made piles of discoveries. In fact she turned out to be the most talented and updated instructor in the field of sex. On the other hand, Owen discovered in himself the capacity to remain cool during sex, to hold his own orgasm and release it when the woman was about to have her own climax.
At two instances, Updike has shown the image of a woman during sex as being sacrificed and the man as an executioner – when Phyllis and Owen were preparing to devirginate each other, Owen imagined he was fleecing a lamb as he moved the comb repeatedly over Phyllis’s genitals and now when Alissa knelt for him, cleaving her legs, the sight of her cervical vertebrae seemed to Owen ‘the neck’ that ‘the executioner sees’.

But there were areas to which Owen was still an unfrequented explorer. Menstrual blood of a woman, flaming erected penis were among those events which Owen either hated or shied away from. With Alissa he discovered that these sore and ugly organs called genitals was sense of being of an individual. Their value was in their inward juices which had to be valued by the partners. Under the influence of sexual excitement, Owen could go on as long as the faith of their value overpowered him but then he was left uncertain as to why women put up with such pain, risk and disgrace. After a certain session, he felt that women took abasement and pain as part of bliss. Here the author raises the point that unless a sexual transaction was a psychological one, the male partners are left to ‘stick with the sordid pathos of the inflatable female bodies, with usable mouths and vaginas. One must feel the other.’

(Villages, 204)

After struggling with each other’s bodies and using them to their completeness, the two lovers, Owen and Alissa, had to grope for words and things to discuss. After having exploited the bodies, they had no aim in such adulterous relationship to aspire for. Here Updike’s rebuke is clear when he pinpoints the ‘problem:
. . .what do you do with the bodies afterwards? A man and a woman like-minded enough, with physiologies and sexual educations roughly matched, agree to meet and use each other for an hour; then what?

(Villages, 204-205)

Updike is questioning the adulterous human nature of his countrymen and is suggesting them to wonder for the whereabouts of their self-control and conscience. He seems to be aggressively asking them what they intend to do after adultery; what they are leaving behind for this nation.

Through their cozy conversation, Owen and Alissa help Updike to throw light upon the different causes of murders committed all over the nation. The most prevailing cause being the killings of poor girls who take the risk of getting pregnant but men cannot let go of the matter easily. Owen is also trying to terrify Alissa of grave consequences in case she became pregnant from him. But at the same time Updike takes his readers the safe way down to sex ‘by a shot of antibiotics or a trip to enlightened land where abortion is legal, use of pill or an IUD’. (Villages, 205) Here Updike promotes contraceptives as he does in Couples. Alissa also brings home the point that ‘women need attention. It is a part of their natural instincts. Alissa seems to be struggling to get something through Owen that she greatly misses with Ian. Another instance where she proves Ian’s neglect is, when she never gets the smile revived on her face as she does with Owen; and one of them falls asleep before they finish this marital duty. On his side, Owen cherishes the ‘feminine glimpses that Alissa sometimes shows into what it was like to be a woman which Phyllis rarely afforded him’.

(Villages, 207)

From intimate moments with Alissa, Owen discovered that women seldom feel ashamed of their womanhood. According to Alissa, menstruation feels like
lactation, gives excitement as it is the essence of womanhood. She feels proud of being generous to mankind by giving away a volume of herself. Also, it establishes her relationship with pain and prepares her for the major pain of child-birth. Somewhere, while authoring this conversation, Updike had in his mind the pain of Jesus at the Cross. The way Jesus struggled to be identified as the son of God by pagans and Jews and gave away his blood and bore pain on the Cross for the redemption of mankind. In the same way, a woman, by bearing the fruit of her love-making, wrapped in utmost security in her womb, carrying on this responsible act until she delivers the child with deadly pain; bringing an alive gift to this world, thus, having given away, a precious part of herself generously, free to move about in the world. Also, protecting her child becomes her priority than yielding to her partner. Therefore, as soon as Alissa became pregnant accidentally, she decided to jettison her lover to keep her baby safe; she revived her freshness and smiles while Owen was horrified by the paternal ambiguity of that growing fetus. As pregnancies are thinning out in America, so such good incidents are rare. Updike hands over the responsibility of motherhood to a responsible lady whom he trusts and is sure she would shoulder its task till it is successfully and safely accomplished. Even after continuing their hot meetings for one year and a half, Owen and Alissa were seemingly ignored by their spouses, Phyllis and Ian, who, along with the village, knew everything but didn’t appear to know: ‘A village is woven of secrets, of truths better left unstated.’ It isn’t a village’s way to tell. On the other hand, Alissa was sure that her child would be welcomed by the village. ‘A village is a hatchery, cherishing its smallest members.’ Updike laments the unhealthy relationship of American spouses who either avoid or hate to beget children. According to Updike, family planning is admissible but at the same time child birth is a sign of family’s union, guarantee of continuation of husband-wife
relationship and strengthening of their bonds. This point is very well proved when Phyllis expresses to Owen her longingness for another child ‘if it will bring them close together.’ Phyllis being a true companion for Owen, ignores his sexual affairs, carelessness on his part, and is all prepared for a fifth child, just to have a fresh start with her husband. But the next moment she herself rejects the idea as if trying to make Owen realize the otherwise loneliness. She was becoming harder and bitter for him. Sometimes she also sounded ironical when he advised her to do an academic or dancing course of a year or two. She quite understood where her busy routine would take him to.

Phyllis’s silent longing for Owen and her lack of possession for him gave way to more women in his life. Phyllis asks a crowd of people ‘Who wants to be the next?’ (Villages, 216) to see the new born Nina and congratulate Alissa but this became symbolic for Phyllis withdrawing and giving way to ‘next’ women entering in Owen’s life. And of course, it did happen, as Owen, in an attempt to promote his E-O data, had to attend some conferences where a number of women showed up and one of them explored the opportunities of a night far from home.

At the same time, Owen’s heart sank because ‘the advancing technology was takingover his commandline interface’. ‘The geometrical increase of chip capacity which enabled each pixel on the line-scan monitor to have an address which indicated that a simple manual motion hurled computations to the next locations along with all other pixels in its icon or text block’. (Villages, 223) The inventor of this marvel got the idea from watching school children writing and running their own small programmes using Logo, whose commands were all expressed as objects and movements – ‘Turtle graphics’. Updike here states that ‘it would always be the young who had the intuitive connection with this gorgeous toy, a brainy box’. Such great
progress in the field of technology could present before Owen an alien future, a world of computers, as mass-marketable as typewriters, all their elegant mathematics, once the remote province of electrical engineers and Boolean logicians now buried beneath a cartoon surface. Owen could feel the useless efforts of his generation reduce to heaps of debris. He was worried about the obsoleteness of his sleepless days and nights when he and Ed put their heart and soul to make E-O data stand on its feet. He realized the heart-breaking reality of history of ‘construction and destruction’ which has always been the motto of this nation. Owen and Ed were working their best so that further advancement in this field may not overcome them. The computer world was changing and giving more space to women than Phyllis’s time. Every now and then, one of these women sneaked some hours with Owen away from Phyllis. To hide one’s identity it had become a fad to have ‘fancy names, trim bodies, short skirts, long hair and liberated morals’. Moreover, the girls of 70s and 80s were paying more attention to their physique to follow the mode of feminist assertion. All such beautifully built girls were seen at conferences and their respective stalls where Owen, at the E-O stall, hawked a packaged games application. However, Owen anticipated that these games would not be cashed easily because ‘a home that had a computer in it was one in a hundred thousand’. Updike analyses the future of computer as a box holding video games for children for their entertainment. Initially, it was an invention which took place during world wars as these wars had their own destructive and capitalist demands. Now this device is adding to the industrial, scientific and financial output of the nation.

Owen struggled on his path of achieving success in the sale of E-O data and at the same time had chance to spend his night hours with a lot of feminine variety. There were the desperate ones, as well as happy-go-lucky entertainers who were also
experienced in matters of artificial arousals for sexual desire. Antoinette, working for Cray computers, belonged to the former category while Mirabella belonged to the latter. Here Updike frankly portrays a race which is madly obsessed with fleshly pleasures.

With increasing age, Owen realizes many things regarding women and the plans related to his work; therefore the last chunk of the novel makes Owen analyze the reason why genders are created by God and the formula of specific talent. As Owen perfects the writing of programmes for payrolls and pension plans and is not able to outshine recent software companies, in the same way, women only perfect sexual activities because ‘it was what they were programmed to do, there was no mystery’. (Villages, 234) Gender discrimination is reflected in these lines and Updike’s Owen represents Every American mindset to throw light upon the ideology that a female can never claim to contribute to any stream of national progress; she is ‘good for nothing’ except fulfilling the sexual desires of the main pillars of mankind – ‘the male gender’.

During the seventies, illicit love was no longer a strange temporary contract between any one of the spouses of Middle Falls with the other. By this time, Owen’s sojourn with the women reached its experienced and ripened stage. Now, not only Owen but also most women sought after him in the market of sex and self-offering. Other men were either interested in drinking or inventing chances in promising fields of technology or too consumed by the business of earning a living and taking care of their property but seldom had time to cherish the nurturing essence of their life – ‘wives’. As a result, these women had to hunt for men who could give them time, if not for true love then just for quenching their thirst. Owen sees that where spouses have no considerable age difference between them, the question which might arise after some years of marriage is that of divorce or neglect on the part of one or the
other. But where one of the spouses is older than the other, generally the younger one, the wife, does not have to keep up with an angry, complaining and dominating family-head. Also, she does not have to experience a sort of insecurity or jealousy, instead, she enjoys the helpless position that her husband has to go through or she is given undue freedom by her man, willingly, provided they should be with each other at prior fixed and appointed times. Vanessa is such a woman. Owen sensed her feminine side when he saw her tending to her garden. Updike never misses an opportunity to attribute female with delicacy and softness. And if she is a little rash like Vanessa, then flowers in the garden being tended by her add to this missing feminine element.

She was ‘quite dignified and matter-of-fact’ and approached Owen without any hesitation. Her toughness and her mannish voice added to her confidence so much so that she openly admired Owen’s tender and lovely relation with Phyllis. However, she develops an inferiority complex with the more educated Phyllis. At the same time, she also makes Owen feel repulsive with Phyllis on the pretext that the latter never returns him with equal love. She asserts that Phyllis never gives a damn care to anybody except her children who were her entire world. Vanessa says:

. . .you think she’s lovely, it’s rather touching. . .too bluestocking. She never left school. . .doesn’t give you shit. Or anybody else, really, except her children, up to a point. She is about the most insulated person I’ve ever seen.

(Villages, 239)

Updike makes an astonishing discovery that for an ideal woman her husband’s greatest gift is the children she has with him and her care for them marks the level of respect that she has for her husband but Owen was unable to realize the importance of this subject. In this way, Vanessa had opened for Owen sure reason for his guilt. Owen knew that he was responsible for Phyllis ‘insulated’ in a wounded self; his lack
of respect for her genuine intelligence, his not being fond of her as his wife or his children’s mother, his flying from one woman to another with Phyllis’s deliberate ignorance of the matter and all this to keep her family from a severe break-up. Such a discovery by an unfamiliar woman fascinated Owen and an indication that she was the ‘next’ one to give him lessons on sex.

The lesson Owen learned from Vanessa was a surprising one – ‘masculine women give great sex’. She brought to sex a certain serious playfulness, treated it like a man does, considering the event basically physical and was conscious of the need for variety with her graceful as well as thoughtful touch. ‘Like a good craftsman she pondered over the task while away from the work bench.’ Instead of pouncing on his organs, she used to study them; at the same time increasing his longingness for her so that she could greet him at their next tryst with a fresh idea. At times, in contrast with her masculine pleasure, Vanessa was in a considerable appraisal of the advantages of being a male and frequently mentioned the fact that one of the beauties of being a man is that he cannot be raped. Updike’s Vanessa is a sort of a complicated character who represents the amalgam of being under-educated and the weaknesses of feminine form.

(Villages, 240-241)

During his private meetings with Vanessa, Owen felt that American female adolescents, for their own sexual growth, can go for having temporary physical relations with same sex partners if they cannot afford opposite sex partners but he also admits that such unnatural relations are of no use at all. Vanessa says disappointedly:

. . .like being with a weak man. . .Why be with a weak imitation when you can be with a real one? It’s all a matter. . .of being known. You want to be known better than you know yourself.

(Villages, 244)
In this way, Updike is strongly opposing the lesbian relationship and defining it as being with weak imitation of Y chromosome. Here, he is calling for the revival of originality, of the relationship which never looks as apt as it does between an Adam and an Eve.

In the course of his sexual sojourn, Owen meets another number in his list – Trish Oglethorpe. In one of these New Year parties, Owen fell into a conversation with Trish regarding the element of forgiveness. He appreciated the new president who pardoned Nixon from being sentenced and said, ‘We all need to be pardoned’. (Villages, 247) This hope of being granted pardon eats up Owen like a pest. He has to carry this aura of fear and guilt that he needs to be pardoned by his neglected parents, wife and children especially when he knows that Phyllis proves to be his trustworthy companion in his hard times. Whenever Owen is left to enjoy his freedom with other women, ‘her curious apparent absence gave him a premonitory stab of guilt; he felt unworthy of his happiness’. (Villages, 267)

According to Trish, all the versatile identifiable talents from the so-called inferior being – the woman, ‘makes you wonder what is a woman’. A woman is a wonderful packet, carefully shaped by the divine hands who when steps out from her cocoon, exhibits marvelous ventures in all streams of life. But deducting all the traits which placed her above a man, Owen liked women ‘ironical, detached and devoted to the realm of the purely personal, the privilege of the free world’. (Villages, 249)

With Karen Jazinski, Owen’s encounter was a different one. It made him realize that freedom lies in generation gap. With people of the same generation there comes the question of negotiation about commitment. One feels trapped by future plans and the ‘fear what one is going to do with it’ (Villages, 252). With partners having a generation-gap, there is no future. Moreover, Karen hated making promises
of any personal meetings, the thing which she didn’t have to fear with old age partners. This is the way the younger generation after Owen perceived sexual relationships and freed itself from centuries of hang-ups.

Death is one of the major themes in Updike’s novels. In Villages there is an underlying current of approaching death right from the beginning of the novel. It hits the reader as a harsh reality at the culmination of the novel where Updike states that people run to seek others with hawk eyes unaware of the approaching end which never discriminates between men and women, children and adults, young and old.

Updike comments that people try their best to escape death through different surgery, therapy or ‘an expensive house renovation’ preparing for the years ahead. But they forget that the inevitable finds its way to those who are selected for it because ‘death never loses its quality of unexpectedness. Every time a person falls victim to it, it is expected that others learn a lesson and beware of it. The only solution is to prepare for the death itself. Life should be consumed in doing social welfare, learning and preaching values of love for mankind, respecting feelings and relationships, thus preparing for one’s own salvation. Death is quite merciful to most of the people who die decades after their birth when signs of old age begin to show upon them such as ‘defiant eyes, munching jaws, dropsical knee, excruciating hip, shaky white head’, etc; in this way death warns them of its approach and expects them to prepare for it.

(Villages, 269)

Death is not a long sleep as it seems to us. At times now when the seventy-year old Owen has brought his sexual saga to a halt by marrying Julia, both of them visit the Sunday Church and Owen contemplates the old people and ponders over the idea of approaching death, the priest tries to awaken those in the pews that what we perceive as death in this temporary world is just a duration of short sleep after which a
last call shall awaken all men from their graves in the twinkling of an eye; here come
the greatest riddle:

. . .why did nothingness, the ground note of cosmic reality. . .choose so
troublesomely to violate itself and give birth to anything at all? At this point,
even the religious minds fail to work. The Church in strategic retreat abandons
the cosmos to physics, and takes refuge in the personal. . .evanescent
consciousness.

(Villages, 271)

This consciousness takes us to people who gave themselves up for the sake of love
for mankind but for those who want to be merry and live for their own selves, St. Paul
adds in the Bible that God should not be taken in communication with evil. Evil has
that alluring power which attracts the good towards itself and destroys it. These lines
might be referring towards the slip of Julia, the parson’s wife when she fell in love
with Owen, which she later on ‘construed as rescuing him from a desperately immoral
life’.

(Villages,274)

Being wife to a pious priest, she could not get along with the habit of the
village to keep her affair in a secret continuation. She could not help hesitating in the
faces of Middle Falls respectable ladies and many of them had been Owen’s sexual
partners:

Middle Falls had seen other scandals and break-ups but this was of a novel
order, a clergyman’s wife and a coolly arranged double split. . . Julia led the
way, the first to separate and the first to divorce. Her shock at her own fall had
galvanized her and she never looked behind.

(Villages, 275-276)
Updike had this tendency of turning his characters towards their childhood innocence where more conscience is expected. Updike considers this thing through Owen’s children:

Owen’s second son, Floyd, brought home from school the news that Reverend Larson and his wife, Julia, of all people, were splitting up...they had been fighting a lot and the children...were very upset. Floyd could not see...that it was the news about himself, the first crack of a doom about to descend on his own head. Owen had been drawn into that pit of fatality whose rim...marked so many years ago...Danny Hoffman pulling the trigger of...Colt .38 before dawn...

(Villages, 275-276)

Owen has to be taken away in Mifflin Avenue where, during his childhood, a neighbor, Danny Hoffman ‘killed himself with his own father’s Army-issued colt .38. It was now a matter of some advanced years, afternoon, instead of dawn and a family gathered around kitchen table instead of the financially deprived war survivor, Danny’s lonely home. Here, Owen himself was going to be his child’s executioner. Here the colt was the divorce and Owen was going to fire his family out of his own life and the resultant death would be the broken home. Owen’s children would become like his childhood’s friend Buddy Rourke, fatherless. It was Owen who once felt proud of having a father but now he himself was snatching this pride from his children. He managed to be the most stoic person through all divorce procedures. He felt oddly light. He had a sensation that with this drastic element he had begun his delayed adulthood. This translates what he learnt in his profession. Cutting throat for more profit, leaving and destroying old machines for newer ones, was what Owen was applying to his own life.
Updike also goes on explaining the material differences that take place between the divorcing partners. It is not only the matter of mathematical division. It becomes the matter of dividing joint opinions, feelings and wishes. Moreover, memories have to be split. With Phyllis being newly orphaned, Owen did not hurry in the divorce process with its distasteful facilitators. Though Owen had not been brought up in a perfectly religious atmosphere, still he could feel his children praying for his return so that they could live happily like a family. But now Owen could not back up. He wanted to free Phyllis of him as well as himself of her. He was under Julia’s influence who told him that such marriage was a ‘mutual degradation’.

Owen should have known the consequences that the children of a broken family bring upon their parents. Now the wheels of fortune were slightly turning against Owen as his adolescent children ‘invented a mood of protest, an automotive caricature of adult disorder’. (Villages, 283) Three of his children contributed to the damage of the cars that he owned. Though none of them did it of their free will, but the circumstances exactly matched those which went with Owen while with any of his women. History was repeating itself and his younger blood was punishing him through hitting and hurting his material self. Somewhere the adolescents were deeply wounded seeing how everything was to be divided between their parents at the time of the divorce, so, they preferred to see things damaged rather than divided.

In this way, one side of Owen subjected to extreme destruction, his professional branch tried to offer him the chance for taking risk and magnifying his business from software alone to both software and hardware. Ed, like the ever struggling, aspiring and constructive American mind tried to drag Owen into this larger and newly cropping out development in the American economy. But in this Owen resembles Omar Ashmaway, the father of Updike’s protagonist, Ahmad in
Ahmad’s father also hesitates in taking risk and plunging in American reckless construction and deconstruction. The professional side of Owen fails to brush up itself in spite of having a guide like Ed.

Therefore in very and many places, Updike has discussed this American rejection for old and outworn things mercilessly ranging from gadgets to the elders in the family. Updike tries his best to relate all these things with each other because more or less they have a connection with modernism. Old technology is discarded as soon as the newer strategies are invented. The case is almost same with the furniture acquired as legacy because it is despised by the younger generations; tossed to one side along with the memories connected with them. After his mother’s death, the last member to die in his parents’ house, Owen had to think about the furniture, earlier used by his parents, with a slight distaste.

In the middle of his own furniture, discussing with Phyllis about the matters of divorce, Owen wants to stay in the rooms of his house which are full off memories of Phyllis and of his children. Phyllis knew about Julia as she always knew about Owen’s other women but this time it was the question of a relationship coming to an end. She admits that her inadequacies, her refusals, inhibitions and detachments were somehow responsible for making their life less interesting and spice-free but at the same time she wanted Owen to understand that his extra-marital affairs did make little difference on her as their own commitment outlasted these crippled relations based only on fleshly desires.

The main storm came when the words slipped from Owen’s mouth that Julia will reform him and save him which meant that a younger wife, is cherished as a wife but the one who is older, is avoided because she seems more like a mother. Shocked and wounded at her husband’s washed brain and his stupid excuses, Phyllis determines
not to give up this marriage for divorce. As a matter of fact, she realizes that a 'woman ties man' and for implementing this her withdrawal will make the situation worse. She took her age factor as a humiliation and felt that Owen 'got trapped' in Julia’s ‘pious little singsong’. She stopped blaming herself and turned the canon towards Owen. She argued that it was his job also to make their marriage interesting instead of hopping from one woman to another. Inspite of this furious quarrel with Phyllis ‘he was flattered with her wanting to fight for him’. (Villages, 293) She had to accept that Owen was taken in easily by women and ‘never having grown-up’ was one of his charms. (Villages, 290)Phyllis decided to take a firm stand; she decided to give up the case she filed for divorce and rescue Owen from that trap of Julia – the ‘con artist’. She left Owen behind in a way that he felt ‘she had taken his prospects and troubles out of the house with her’. (Villages, 294)Somewhere Owen could doubt that ‘Phyllis’s indignant reaction was not centered on him’. It was a woman’s wounded pride, threatened security and fear for the children that activated her. Here, Updike is trying to awaken the male gender that if a woman is being angry for her children then she sees the threatened orphaned future of the coming generation. Updike questions the female gender why at such moment ‘they want to go with men’. On one hand, a wife is trying to drag him towards herself and on the other, a slipped woman wants to have him as a new husband. A man is being wanted by two women and earlier he had been an object of interest for many women who still display signs of jealousy for him. In this entire game, man is the demanded centre, women are at the periphery. Updike questions about this worthlessness of a woman. But he comes with the solution that each woman is made for a man and men should realize that ‘nature has provided sockets for respective plugs’. Updike asserts that male gender should accept this balance of nature. (Hunt, 1980)
A woman like Phyllis was too rational for Owen to understand. So far having the sense of security of being Owen’s legal wife, she did not compete with any of his lovers; her high tipped nose and extra care for her children was itself a sign of superiority over other women. She never needed to make an extra show of herself but this time the threat was a deadly blow. Julia was going to throw her out of marital bonds. The shock was too rough to bear. On her way to Hartford, Phyllis lost her control over the steering wheel and the numbness of her mind led her to an ultimate end. Her car flipped and Phyllis broke her neck. Her accident could not stop Owen from marrying Julia but it chased him for the rest of his life as a sense of guilt. On his part Owen had killed two people that day, Phyllis and Julia. In addition to being his wife, Julia was like holding the responsibility of a guilty self inside Owen. The ‘acceptance of each of other’s guilt in taking what they had wanted’ turned their life into a perpetual ‘discomfort’. For the rest of his life Owen was left to be crushed by the feeling of remorse. In his dreams he spots Julia going in a speedy car; events flash upon his mind like animated series of a movie – a speedy car going out of control and the woman inside will be killed after the car meets an accident. In his dream Owen cannot make out exactly who the woman is but sensing her high-tipped head in the seat gives him the notion that she is Phyllis. Awakening from his dream, he fears that it could be Julia so he wanders in the house looking for her, usually after every awakening from his dream. (Suzanne Uphaus, 1980)

The life after 25 years has turned the situation up-side down as Julia spends most of her time with her friends and squanders money lavishly to satisfy herself while Owen, without complaints, confines himself to his house, tinkering with internet and doing oil-painting. As the second wife and also younger, Julia succeeds ‘in keeping her formerly philandering husband on a short leash’. In this span of a
quarter of a century, a lot of new discoveries took place in every field of work and venture. The software and hardware which was new to Owen and his contemporaries, was now common to every household. Every technology was showing its marvels in various fields. Cyber Space, computer-engineering contributing to banks which can ‘summon up currency quotations from all over the world’. (Villages, 303) Major and minor technology spreads its arms beyond American sub-continent and adds to the economy of some of the most backward Eastern countries. (Adam Begley, 2004)

Owen’s drowning years often took him to church where he sensed that the rich seldom came with true faith or a desire to attain salvation. Most of them turned up either at Christmas or at Easter as if to clear off debts of the divine sustainer. Here Updike pauses to share with his readers the hollowness of the rich and he frankly unfolds it. Even after having sensed this ultimate truth, Owen mixes up with rich societal sections but is unable to inherit their traits. Sometimes he marvels at their discipline, disprovocativeness, tolerance, cool mindedness in social meetings and their ability to over-drink. However he admires that rich are spared of scattered wandering throughout the nation, ill-equipped nuclear families of deserted down-towns and razed forests, of roving job to job and mate to mate. The rich neglect the fact that they can be of great benefit to mankind as with their money they can help construct, repair the ancient cathedrals which are means to carry us peacefully from our cradle to our graves.

In this world of spiritual decay and technological fret and fever, Owen has retreated into his house with his oil paints and canvas. Owen’s children, who once had prayed for their father’s return to the family but in return got indifferent glances from him, at this stage of life, were rolling the same punches to him – ‘they
displayed their stoic sophistication of a generation to whom family dysfunction is very common’. (Villages, 304)

But no matter how much one tries to escape from himself or his past, his place of living weaves him to its centre. Every village is near and exposed to the secrets of its own inhabitants. Even after selecting Haskells Crossing as a remote place for living peacefully with little or no connection with Middle Falls, ‘the relationship between Owen and Julia is loving but haunted’. (Villages, 304) Phyllis pulled herself away from Owen’s life but still he thinks of her everyday. She does not intrude much with his dreams but all by itself he feels generic oneiric wife-figure which is not certain if she is Julia or someone else. Such dreams horrify Owen for some time and they impart to him an unending feeling of guilt which is also a prick of his sub-conscious mind. Sometimes this wife-figure in his dreams establishes her aura over his first house which has always been significant to him under the protective wing sof his parents. While conscious and awakened, Owen sometimes thought of Phyllis’s end more like a suicide as if to move away from Owen and Julia’s life. Insipe of her speedy rush in that car, she did not care to fasten her seat belt. He wondered how it could have been a suicidal death when she had an aim to recover Owen by cancelling the divorce procedure. At times, Owen convinces himself that it was a game of fortune turning its wheels towards him because God set the happenings in his favor. With this blasphemous thought, Owen shelters himself thinking that it happened all by itself.

Amidst all this Owen was being punished, no matter whether he could understand the fact or not. For sex, he had always chased women, offered himself to them, was always available for the things he could satisfy them with and his search for women, study of their sexual behavior never seemed to end. For sex itself, he
married Julia and now he had to meet an inhibition while his sexually fervent wife, younger than him, displayed her intimate needs to him. As Updike also knows ‘that increased options’ or in Owen and Julia’s case, ‘increased’ availability should become Owen’s punishment, therefore, sleep overcomes his protagonist to draw a veil between him and Julia. As far as Owen is concerned, the variety of ‘options had to immobilize his activity of transgression with the anxiety of choice’. Surprisingly, his organs are well-aware and are greatly provoked at her sight but fail to receive her signals. Owen, in this way, has partially been successful in his marital life. Both of them are able to live peacefully but still, in their hearts, they know that something very essential is missing. This makes them restless and at times they go on feeling insecure of each other which is clear from Julia’s agitation when she argues with Owen that she hates it when ‘he is not in the house, even when he is just off for golf’.

(Greiner, 1985)

It’s not that Owen, due to his old age, lost his power to provoke his genitals; even glimpses of a woman in his dreams and her wanting him to kiss her leads him to successful erection, which proves that he is still sexually active. Surprisingly, in Julia’s case, he is left to compete with his senile desire to sleep. (Villages, 307)

Owen dreams of a woman, Barbara Emerich, in a school classroom where Owen is asked by his teacher to give Barbara a pencil or a textbook. Barbara instead of receiving things from his extended hand, responds by curling more deeply into herself, so that he had to come closer. She ‘expected him to kiss her but outwardly maintained her stubborn stillness’. (Villages, 307) Somewhere this silent urge of a woman to call Owen to herself but without opening herself to him, reminded Owen of Phyllis at MIT. Owen’s getting an order from an authority to handover a pencil or a textbook to this dream womanly-figure leads us to the point that Owen’s duty was to
gift Phyllis with motivation to study more and complete her PhD instead of feeling cozy with her neglecting it, till it was forsaken forever.

As far as Owen is concerned, the spots in Middle Falls which he visited for sexual purpose marked his town and he remembered Middle Falls by these points, spots and spaces. Haskell Crossing remains unmapped in his mind as such interests do not exist here or if any possibility occurs, Julia tries to overcome them.

Owen remembers his mother whom ‘he had always seen a cosmic questioner’. (Villages, 309) The source of her unhappiness was never known or seen by Owen or to be more precise, he never tried to. He was an object of possession for his mother and his female sexual partners had to struggle to get a share of him. His mother wanted him as a male whom she could rely on after not finding a perfect male partner in her husband. Updike’s dissatisfied mothers, be it Owen’s mother or Ahmad’s mother, Teresa, long for a sense of security by possessing their sons when they fail to possess their husbands. However, with Owen’s second marriage, his mother learned that life is a never ending track; at least it can never end with confining someone to yourself, even if he is your progeny. She also learnt that relationships are a series of withdrawal on one side and acceptance on the other. She had to accept Julia under the same ideology and withdrew from her position as a possessive mother.

Updike unravels before us a surprising fact of death and how it acts as a means of imparting adulthood to us. ‘All Owen’s adults died tidily, out of sight, as if to spare him unpleasantness and preserve his charmed, only child-sense of life.’ Had the adults died in front of Owen the sight of their faces changing color, their wide-opened horrified eyes begging the Omnipotent for mercy, their ultimate struggle for breath and after a last shudder, the body being rendered lifeless, only then Owen could have experienced the sense of responsibility, maturity and a kind of fear from Almighty.
Owen went on committing sins one after another till he became the reason for ‘wreckage of two existing households and a death, though no court could convict him for it’. 

(Villages, 311-12)

It was not that Owen was not given any training during his childhood regarding the skills he needed in life. When he was young, he and his mother used to go to football field and play tennis. Her aim was to make Owen concentrate on the balls, to hit the target and in this way to learn how to combat the hardships in life. She also wanted him to remain connected to her through a common bond of painful struggle.

Updike has in store not only sinners like Owen but also generous people, like the priest Art Larson, who somehow with God’s grace, maintained his financial as well as social status among his former parishes. ‘Surprisingly his manner towards Owen was no less benign than at their first meeting.’ Updike lays stress on the value of faith and how it binds the believer ‘in fatalism’ and a tendency ‘to forgive’. (Villages 312) Faith never fails to soften our hearts and elevate us above human selfishness. Moreover, whatever good we do to our fellow beings shall return to our graves as God’s grace. Updike also analyses Christianity as a source of self realization. It teaches us to limit our desires for eternity, to fear our heavenly abode, to try tirelessly for self improvement, to stop thinking of ourselves as superior beings for whom this world is a misfit and if it’s ‘not an Eden’ then certainly the fault is ours. Once a person is at fault, he continues with this slippery track as he is scared of gathering courage to improve his mistake. Such fears make us loath and avoid death and we try harderto live. Updike concludes that discontent, imperfection and insecurity are basic reasons for non-ending human desires. Updike might be pointing out that remarriage is also within the domain of the above mentioned reasons for greedy desires. At times:
Owen’s puzzlements concerned why a pair (Julia and Larson) so well matched had allowed itself to split up. But ideality becomes by itself, in a couple, a reason for dissatisfaction and rebellion. Americans need to experience room for improvement, for progress.

(Villages, 317)

Updike warns his country to beware of such an end as Owen’s. Even after fulfilling his desires to utmost satisfaction, Updike gives us a terrified Owen:

There is an enlarging hollow in his life – its approaching end. Julia cannot save him, though the sight of her, clothed and unclothed, still lifts his heart. She cannot save him with her silky, willing body, her uncanny aquamarine gaze, or her. Christian piety in which he has joined her in defiance of his scientific instincts and his indifferently churched upbringing.

(Villages, 309)

The children, having gone to enjoy their life, Owen and Julia have been left alone in the house as, once, many years ago his parents were left to die in loneliness. Updike always fills up his pages with fearful warnings about old time repeating with different characters:

Owen and Julia live with another presence in the house, their approaching deaths. Before that. . . with its idiotic life-in-death. . . both forgetful, she of errands. . . he of names. . . names planted early in the brain seem to last.

(Villages, 318)

Both of them are becoming more dependent day-by-day and as it is said that old age is ‘reverting them to infancy’. But some of the old questions are ‘still imperfectly answered’. Though Owen came to know more about women’s resolution regarding
having sex but when the matter fleets about ‘why’ of this thing then it turns out that such questions are better left unanswered as ‘they deserve no answer’.

*(Villages, 318-19)*

‘Women are trapped in a biological universe where the species that do not propagate, disappear. Women’s nature is very large to seek sex amid the world’s perils’ which means that they have more courage to take risks. Updike wants to give due importance to women and to the genitals of both the genders as sex is the only activity that ‘exalts’ women as well as our organs which are otherwise rendered as ‘shameless’.

*(Villages, 319)*

Owen’s poor memory gave him a preview that his charmed life has been a long torment of fear, desire, ambition and guilt. Similarly he ‘fails to conjure Christmas gleam’ in his present ‘excellent white seaside house’ which ‘the shabby homely things in his grandfather’s house had possessed, even in the pale December window light’.

*(Villages, 320)*

While winding up his novel, Updike recounts all the women in Owen’s life, not missing the way each of them achieved orgasm and the way they perceived sex, ranging from Phyllis on her wedding night, Alissa, Faye to Vanessa and Karen. Ultimately, he tries to convey to his readers that all of these women, belonging to different status, ideologies, circumstances and behaviour had common instincts in terms of nature. All of them ‘brought transcendent value to the act, the supreme interaction’. Updike concludes that human nature should be ‘romantic or human beings will fail to lift themselves above the deadpan copulation of sheep and squirrels’.

If the above mentioned view is generalized then the human nature should extend itself to romanticize God’s creation. Updike appeals to his countrymen
tomagnify their potential to love human beings irrespective of race, religion and nationality so that they could elevate themselves above the level of fleshy love of animals and the barbaric nature. A celibate villager said that Americans can’t make out where they stand in this world. Half of their lifetime, they are sound asleep, not aware of their own activities. ‘Yet they esteem themselves wise and have an established order on the surface.’

(Villages, 321)

Here in the novel’s hurried and slapdash final page, Owen is compared to America which is a national village shrouded in denial, in the way that Owen’s nurturing, protective villages also nurtured and protected his lies and betrayals. For America, it is all about ‘unshakable egotism’ as being carved out of wilderness, madly possessed by its mixed inhabitants who have caused it to grow ‘helplessly self-centered’ or rather never grow.
Works Cited


John Updike once said, ‘Any activity becomes creative when the doer cares about doing it right, or better.’ Throughout his literary career, Updike has been a keen observer of ordinary life around him. Often he tempts his readers to re-evaluate their preconceived notions of life. (amsaw.com, *It Happened in History*)

It was always hard not to be secretly a little annoyed at John Updike for being so good at everything. The famous novels aside, memoir, travel reportage, children’s literature, humour, literary criticism and essays on everything from Renaissance painting to Boston Red Sox great Ted Williams poured from his typewriter. The mirror in which he viewed life, pleasingly, reflected back this lively element for him in its most exact, true and unbiased manner. It carried everything ranging from physical aspects to philosophical, ideological, political, spiritual and moral ones.

In his last novel, Updike somewhat goes beyond such themes as confined to Christianity as *In the Beauty of the Lilies* and the quest for God’s existence as in *Roger’s Version* and goes as far as to penetrate into another grand religion such as Islam and portray the misconceptions of Islamic teaching amid political stigma along with an individualistic viewpoint that salvation can be achieved through so-called purification of earth of its considerable chunk of non-believers.

Ibrahim N. Abusharif wrote in his article that Updike was an experienced author, a keen observer and an accomplished ‘noticer’, a man with stories to tell. His method of argumentation was smart and compelling. (Abusharif, 2006)

Updike’s novel, *Terrorist* (2006), is an interesting or ambulance-chasing choice of a narrative from an author of high ‘literary’ standing. It depicts the emergence of an elusive ‘home-grown’ terrorist plot brewing in an imaginary, decaying post-industrial city, ironically named New Prospect, somewhere in New
Terrorist

Jersey – thus almost literally in the shadow of 9/11, both in time and place (except this time targeting the Lincoln Tunnel during rush hours), as if some key facet of that event had been somehow overlooked. The elliptical plot focuses primarily on the experiences of a very lonely but extremely devout eighteen-year-old American-Muslim, named Ahmad; but it also orbits around the relationships between other characters, all of whom are related to Ahmad within a few degrees of separation from his immediate social environment all the way to the secretary of Homeland Security (who seems extremely bewildered by the motives of Islamist terrorists and feels tragically-impotent in the thankless job of facing the shadowy nuisance they represent). (Amien Kacou, 2012)

But what shapes 9/11 into a thought-provoking and finger-raising novel, is Updike’s statement quoted in New York Times-

‘A lot of Koran does not speak very eloquently to a Westerner. Much of it is either legalistic or opaquely poetic. There is a lot of hellfire inscriptions of making unbelievers drink molten metal, occur more than once. It’s not a fuzzy, lovable book, although in the very next verse there can be something quite generous. . . . Arabic is very twisting, very beautiful. The call to prayer is quite haunting: it almost makes you a believer on the spot. My feeling was, ‘This is God’s language and the fact that you don’t understand it, means you don’t know enough about God.’ (Abusharif, 2006)

What Updike’s statement provokes, however, is actually important. Has there been a serious analysis of how the themes of Quran and even its style are perceived by a mind Schooled in the West? Does the current animus and caricatures truly represent an unbiased reading of the text book?
The Quran’s stand, even in its cursory reading, is a powerful statement of, yes, inalienable rights and, in many ways, human agency. The Quran upholds human individual agency, that each individual has access to God, His scriptures: no clerical bureau to move through, no idols to lavish with honey, but a one-to-one prayerful and direct proximity to the All-Holy, regardless of race or affluence. Theology and sociology are not distant cousins at all. If one has access to Heaven with no tolls to pay, then its social dynamics are likely corollaries.

Drinking molten brew is an interesting example that came to Updike’s mind but actually opposes the very point he tries to make about Western appeal. Horrific as the Hell passages are in the Quran, we must go beyond integuments and distil the facts: the inmates of Hell and the dwellers of Paradise Gardens are in ‘circumstances’ that are logically consistent with Western social and political diktats of individual responsibility, that ‘deeds’ mean something, a meaning that transcends any kind of advantage (Old Testament) and one-time salvation utterance (New Testament). All of life, therefore, is an ethical arena, a crucial to prove one’s commitment to the social or religious ‘agreement’ (Quran). The ordering principle and highest truth of life, in the eyes of the Muslim and Book, is the existence of God, His oneness and incomparability, our accountability, humanity’s constant state of return to Him. But ordering principles have always had problems surviving without a path, an identifiable and sometimes ritualistic way in which the subscriber of the Principle decide to take. In other words, Truth (in human trust) requires something to do, something that brings meaning and definition to one’s day. The human creature has an inner, abstract world and also an outer organic ‘body’ that functions in space and time. It makes no sense that revealed religion would neglect the latter and speak only to abstract being, especially when both aspects are God’s creations and not exempted
of the religion project. It is implausible to expect belief to survive internment in the heart with no external ‘visible’ signs. This is a paradigm that fits in the modern Western understanding of human deeds, their evaluations and place in the dynamic relationship between cause and effect, and accountability.

What makes it difficult for ‘Western’ readers to connect with the Quran, is not the Book’s themes or underlying ethos, but the modern political stigma that stalk Islam and its scripture, which can easily cover one’s recognition of the Quran’s core theme and its congruence with many contemporary concepts. The leadership of the Muslim community in America is now made up of more of converts who came from sundry backgrounds but who found an overpowering appeal in the Quran and its first recipient that ultimately led them to pursue its scholarship. Quran apparently figures in their conversation and this is exactly what Updike’s last line tries to convey that Quran should not be the object of conversation rather it should be the subject; and if one deduces ‘violence’ as message of Quran, it means that one doesn’t possess complete knowledge about it or about God.

(patheos.com/blogs/altmuslim/2006)

In his novel, Terrorist, Updike suggests that what we have overlooked about 9/11 is that there may be an ultimate bond of meaning or perhaps meaninglessness or even an uncomfortable empathy, between Islamist terrorists and their American victims or enemies: and the feeling they share is a feeling of dissatisfaction with the meaningless promises of secular modernity and materialism (the decaying post industrial city of New Prospect). Updike also suggests that a key, universal philosophical lesson emerges from the difference in how this novel’s main characters cope with their feelings of modern meaninglessness. That lesson is a lesson about ‘evil’; it is that Americans should resist the essentialist illusion that they can ever pin
down all evil ‘once and all’ and that they should gracefully or at leastironically accept the anxiety of having to engage with it, in what it would be described as a Sisyphean Jihad.

In fact, resisting the temptation to deny the tragically elusive of terrorism might be a necessary step in coping with it intelligently as opposed to allowing American self to remain, like the Secretary of Homeland Security (symbolising impotent efforts), bewildered by it, thereby running the risk of either overreacting or becoming blind to the share of responsibility that is every American’s due.

The lesson emerges from two main characters – Ahmad, a Central High school product being unawaringly trained to be Al-Qaida recruit, and Mr. Jack Levy, a guidance counsellor at Central High. Ahmad’s mission is to bring the plot to completion with his ultimate act of self-sacrifice but without denying his crucial part of responsibility when he decides not to go forward with his plan for ‘martyrdom’, as a result of disruption of the plot by Mr. Levy who also symbolises Ahmad’s alter-ego.

(Amien Kacou, 2012)

Apart from philosophical aspect, if the novel is judged from a bit narrower angle of personal and educational point of view, undoubtedly, many questions are raised on moral and academic standard of America. At a time, when so much official discourse is directed at merely demonising suicide bombers, defining them as an unknowable enemy, terrifying evil but reassuringly others, Updike’s project – to explore a set of circumstances that might explain how an American mixed-blood teenager could find himself driving a truck full of explosives towards New York city with the express intention of killing both himself and as many of his fellow citizens as possible – seems an important one. He may not have answers but at least he is trying to ask a number of questions. What does it say about America that within a few
months of leaving school, a pair of intelligent and sensitive children like Joryleen Grant and Ahmad, have become a prostitute who takes a ‘puff of crack now and then’ and an Al-Qaida recruit?

By the time, the counsellor, Jack Levy starts to take an interest in Ahmad, it’s too late for him to have much influence over the boy as he himself recognises. But even if it were not, he would still be repeatedly distracted from his mission to persuade Ahmad to go to college, to develop a broader view of the world. Mostly, Jack is distracted by Ahmad’s mother, Teresa Mulloy, with whom he ends up having an affair. Teresa cannot see what is happening to her son or the danger he is in. Many reasons contribute to this thing- introvert and secretive nature of her son, her own job and long working hours along with overtime painting and above all, her sexually playful nature pulled her away from her son- again the emphasis is on theme of contemplation, close attention and observation. She says:

I’m trying to work bigger and brighter. Life is so short, I suddenly figured, why keep fussing at the details? Perspectives, shadows, fingernails- people don’t notice and your peers, the other painters accuse you of being just an illustrator.

(Terrorist, 81)

But, for Updike, this precisely what gives life, however short, its point. When the subject changes from her art to her son, she says, ‘Ahmad’s sheets are un-spotted. . . They were not always.’ (Terrorist, 165) But the reality is that she has stopped ‘observing’ his sheets. Jack, unlike Teresa but like his creator, is a close ‘observer’ of the world. And so, too, despite himself, Ahmad is. If anything gives him a chance for redemption, it is this, not martyrdom. After all, a human being with fermenting
natural instincts in his teenage – cannot help being distracted by sex. Joryleen’s physical details never escape him.

Interestingly, each of the main characters is from a different racial or religious group- they could almost be referred to as the ‘young Arab’, the ‘old Jew’, etc. This suggests that one of the absences that Ahmad has fallen through, is the absence of a community. The characters’ names are freighted with meanings – Charlie Chehab hires Ahmad for truck driving and calls him a ‘madman’ and inside the novel we find the gaze of imam Sheikh Rashid being thought of, by Ahmad, as ‘kafir woman’s’ to enhance his negative character. Jack Levy says his name is Levy, like those things keep the Mississippi from overflowing, so Teresa, flirting back, calls him ‘Mr Down-by-the-Levee’; she signs her paintings as ‘Terry’ and Jack riffs on ‘terry cloth’, ‘terrible’, ‘terrify’ and ‘terry-toons’ though not ‘terrorist’- the novel’s title occurs nowhere in the text. This technique is not new of Updike as he did it before in Rabbit series. The difference here is that he saw a need to labour the significance. The character with the heaviest symbolic burden is Jack Levy’s wife, lovingly called Beth; the overweight Protestant, whose people have been in America almost as long as it has been America. Addicted to consuming and living in fear of terrorism but incapable of anything about either of them – She is America. Jack’s feelings towards her, a paradoxical combination of irritation, disgust and affection are pretty much identical to his feelings towards America.He wonders if she had once been as thin as the young dynamic women on T.V screen, a way of wondering if America was ever coextensive with its myth of itself- the unsurprising answer, to both questions, is ‘NO’. The moral of the novel emerges in the moments when the book is at its least fabular, when the myth collapses under the weight of its mess and variety of the everyday in all its accumulated detail. The world repays ‘careful attention’ – the key
to all current worldly problems and few writers are as good as Updike at looking at and describing it so precisely. (London Review of Books, Vol. 28)

The theme of religious criticism is prevalent throughout the novel. Islam is eulogised by the fervent protagonist, Ahmad, whereas Christianity is blamed for poor spiritualism which is rendered responsible for religious ignorance. Islam has the Almighty Allah as its owner and the master. Prophet Mohammad is His messenger to this earth with a grave responsibility of preaching and spreading Islam as a message of peace and love and thereby a religion which conveys moral teachings as they are near to God. The prophet was assigned this duty and was to accomplish it in a time-period spanning his entire life. Since the death of Allah’s most beloved slave, teachings of Islam have been carried out by the religious leaders and scholars through the generations. Being a follower of such sublime religious values, when Ahmad glances at other religions and particularly Christianity, with Islam’s reverend eye, he perceives Christianity either a Godless religion or a religion without permanent Lord. The idea of Godlessness is disgusting to him as he believes that such void brings a religion to fruitlessness and stagnation. Ahmad’s conscience asserts that only a just, powerful and merciful God has humble, kind and obedient believers. The Almighty can make his slaves bend before him.

Once Ahmad encounters Christians in Church, when Sunday Mass is in full vigour and is surprised to see the followers of such a fruitless religion looking livelier than he is. Values of Islam as taught to him by Imam of a mosque, Sheikh Rashid, have turned him into a conservative and orthodox person. He is annoyed with the liberty of both genders in Church whereas Islam prefers worship in a segregated form as it promotes reverence for God and prevents arousal of feelings and consequent distraction from worship. God likes to see his worshippers squatted on floor in groups,
busily chanting his name instead of sitting dispersedly and enjoying their freedom with opposite sex in the pews.

Ahmad’s Islam is to be believed, respected and its creator to be worshipped. Islam is not to be portrayed on wooden frames as paintings of Jesus crucifixion because God’s work is ‘Inimitable.’ The marvel of God’s work lies in its originality and an imitation can’t create spell on the viewer. Ahmad knows that the Prophet had always been aware of the fact that ‘only the imagery of words could grip the soul’ with its own spiritual substance.

Ahmad is invited to Sunday Mass by his High School mate, Joryleen, and is welcomed to the Church by the Christians who are unaware of his real religion. He is unable to repel their friendly emotions inspite of his hatred for their moral as well as religious values. Moreover, he is attracted towards Joryleen but is unable to accept a ‘Christian Joryleen’. As he was sitting in the pews with the Christians, he had to lend his ears to the sermon. The priest was mocking the sense of duties allotted to people holding posts to render divine services. He talked of the pleasure and comforts he could have enjoyed at home while sending a mock priest in his place to deliver the sermon in the Church. This was just to enhance the value of such duties which could never be discharged but with purity and honesty. The sermon of the priest was about faith and richly supported with example of the Prophet Moses who was not allowed to enter the Promised Land due to his weak faith in God. The priest emphasized the wickedness, adultery and disgraceful conduct of the Egyptian Pharaohs in Moses’ time, whereas Ahmad could attribute all these qualities and the anticipated punishments to the Christians whom he called ‘disbelievers’. He sees all these examples in his everyday life. During regular intervals, the spontaneous
applauds, comments and slogans from the audience surprised Ahmad because his Islamic guidelines assert the silent belief and noble reverence.

This sermon can also be interpreted as the pretention of faith or no faith by Christians. The people of Moses and Aaron symbolize Americans, who, if taken out of adulterous luxury and slavery, always want to return to it. They cannot bear to be snatched off their materialistic and fleshy pleasures. They never struggle for revival of their faith, to strive for the up-liftment of their morals and spiritual betterment. As in words of Ahmad:

Western culture is Godless.’ Then he says, ‘And because it has no God, it is obsessed with sex and luxury goods. Look at television, Mr. Levy, how it’s always using sex to sell you things you don’t need. Look at the history the school teaches, pure colonist. Look how Christianity committed genocide on the Native American and under mined Asia and Africa and now is coming after Islam, with everything in Washington run by the Jews to keep themselves in Palestine.

(Terrorist, 38)

The kingdom of Pharaohs represents the American hypocritical system. The people of Moses, the Israelite Jews, in the wilderness of Zion ignored the signs of mercy and generosity of God, while He continued to provide them with life-sustaining material from nowhere. Even then, when they betrayed God by not following His Prophet Moses, they were like the Americans who betray God, the Ultimate Power, which selected America to surpass other nations in terms of advancement, awareness and modernism. Instead of utilising its gifts for the benefit of mankind, Americans exploit other nations ruthlessly without giving it a thought that they are defying morality. As the novel relates the utter selfishness of American administrative sector over a decade:
. . .the clashing claims of privacy and security, convenience and safety, are daily diet . . .the Secretary’s colleagues in the administration were born rich and have made additional fortune in the private sector. . .from public service under Clinton . . .all the Clintonians. . .are getting pig-rich with their tell-all memoirs. . .

(Terrorist, 47)

Even inside their nation, Americans have their own heinous ways of earning money; some girls succumb to prostitution out of their own will or driven into adultery by their sexual partners who use them as temporary means for making easy money (as Joryleen has been pushed into prostitution by her classmate and boyfriend, Tylenol). These young girls, fresh pass outs from colleges can also take up a reputed job but still they go ahead and work as whores under the whim that they will be cherished by men whom they are working for.

Surprisingly, the lecture stirs Ahmad somewhere. As far as the matter of faith is concerned, Ahmad is convinced that the priest had been fighting against all kinds of devils in his own manner and Ahmad respects his struggle.

As presence of Joryleen never fails to arouse Ahmad, he frequently tries his best to attract her towards Islam whereas Joryleen tries to convince him that every religion can be easily modified towards liberalism. As Joryleen says that she doesn’t ‘take religion all that seriously.’ For Americans, religion is more or less a way to adjust in a variant society. On the other hand, for Ahmad, religion is an eternal identity by which a person not only gets through his worldly problems but also guarantees his salvation. However, he manages to chill his anger towards her as his love for her does not snatch away his reason. He knows that the kind of society she lives in can never produce but the likes of her. It is not she, but her surroundings,
mindset and demands of body and life, is what compels her to degrade herself to the
level of adultery, an immoral profession that she is barged into, on demand of Tylenol. As Ahmad is aware of her personal compulsions, he finds an excuse for her
prostitution and explores all his desires in such a girl. He is fascinated by Joryleen’s
receptive mind which has the ability to recognise Ahmad’s stirred feelings. He lacks
the courage to express himself openly because, disappointingly, he finds the image of
his American mother’s adultery and materialism in Joryleen. He knows that their
union will prove a mismatch because like his Egyptian father, he won’t be able to
adjust with American dealing and she, as his own mother had done once, would press
upon him for more money and luxury, the Westerners are obsessed with. However,
being a child to an American woman and having American blood in his veins, Ahmad
accepts Americanism as a part of his identity. This might be the reason why he seems
to surrender before an American mother and never openly claims to meet his Egyptian
father. His mother, who still fancies herself being with Ahmad’s father, projects her
reminiscent love for him by drawing Ahmad to pursue Islamic education and values
under the supervision of an Imam in a mosque. The Imam, Sheikh Rashid, is a queer
person who teaches in a mosque ‘out of a converted ballroom studio’. Most of his
teachings might mislead us and present before us the Islam as one of the most violent
religions, based on hatred, suppression, bloodshed, cruelty, acute physical restraints
and sadism. In fact, he never advised Ahmad to be kind or friendly with unbelievers;
instead, he insisted on their killing. He fills Ahmad’s heart with hatred for infidels
making The Holy Quran his medium to exploit Ahmad’s feelings. All he does is, to
take verses from a particular Sura in Quran where God expresses his hatred for the
infidels and says that their lives are just duration to increase their sins. God also says
that they will be subjected to a shameful punishment on the Judgement Day. But now,
Ahmad, after listening to the priest’s lecture in the Church, is baffled at how God could be so merciless for his own creatures. Sheikh Rashid never tries to point out the element of mercy in context of God. He never satisfies Ahmad by telling him that the Almighty always has His eyes over the world, making the disbelievers feel His presence and beware of His wrath. He disappoints Ahmad, saying that God hates the unbelievers and will rejoice at their suffering. Instead, Sheikh Rashid commands Ahmad to kill the disbelievers as they will meet no better fate in Hell and if he leaves them alive, he would be placing himself above ‘Almighty’.

(Alexander C. Kafka, 2006)

No doubt that such flamboyant faith arouses in Ahmad a desire to kill the non-Islamic people. He tells Joryleen that he is a faithful follower of his religion whereas other religions just mock faith. It is his way to provoke Joryleen and arouse her curiosity for himself and his religion. Their strolling outside the Church is a debate between being a good follower and being a good part of God’s creation. Ahmad wants to assert his goodness as a person, truth as a lover, chastity as a follower of the best religion. On the other hand, Joryleen, insists that earth is a place for social animals and to exist here one needs to feel good. Ahmad has to accept her point and thus brings a balance between ‘being good’ and to ‘feel good’. At the same time, some of her indications leave Ahmad speechless as when she says that natural instincts of a human body and its hormonal demands always remain within it, though sometimes they are coagulated and suppressed deliberately by people like him. She illustrates an example by pointing out at the behaviour and activities of martyrs who get to heaven ‘all full of spunk’ whereas for Ahmad, physical restraints count for the purity of the soul. In the course of their discussion, it comes out that the scales on Joryleen’s side are heavier because Ahmad, for no reason, finds himself lost in her warmth, thinks of sinking into
her body and experience its richness. Ahmad is also subjected to a brainstorm when Joryleen expresses her doubt about the existence of ‘dark eyed virgins’ in heaven to entertain the martyrs. Her questions are quite rational and Ahmad, due to his inadequate knowledge regarding Islam, is unable to provide satisfactory answers.

The pool of afternoon lectures through Islamic scriptures, by Sheikh Rashid, amazingly, leave Ahmad a crippled scholar, short of tools for dealing with his own self as well as the world. It’s not that Sheikh Rashid is unaware of Quranic explanation but the way he modified his teachings, laying stress on specific verses, without creating least doubt in Ahmad’s heart, was enough to produce a nutshell of hatred out of a sensitive being like Ahmad. ‘The abysses and heights of this religious preacher descend into darkness and their so-called ascent into fake reverence and martyrdom so dominate the plot that even his disciple is flattened to seem a mere foil.’ Not to mention his indoor instructions against the disbelievers, Sheikh Rashid has also decided the kind of profession that Ahmad is going to take up in his near future. He induces in Ahmad that every activity in life, ranging from thoughts to actions, should be carried out with an ultimate purity and the same should be followed when it comes to opting a career. The lessons are given to Ahmad for dual purpose. Sheikh Rashid is not educating Ahmad to enlighten him with religious values but he is also preparing a fervent follower with blind faith in killing as well as dying at his signal on the pretext of unquestioned salvation. Sheikh Rashid is a mediator of terrorist Titans whose plans have to be executed. Updike is mapping out locations which work as terrorist centres. Traitors have no work benches as such; they have to build up puppets to carry their work forward. The mosque Imam here, is the right hand of master planners and is assisting them by trapping young and delicate minds with an illusion of glorious life-after-death. Immature children, whose parents think
that their children are in the safest hands; hands of apostles of love and humanity, are in reality getting hit in their back, for such children no longer remain their parents’ fruits but become sort of victimized minds and for them, life is no more important; attacking other religions without reason and killing the followers become their sole aim. In the same way, Ahmad’s brain is vigorously washed in the name of the explanation of Quranic verses. Sheikh Rashid never misses an opportunity to discuss with Ahmad, the misguided meaning of some verses – God rejoicing over disbelievers’ suffering in Hell fire, Muslims killing disbelievers are honoured in heaven, Muslims dying out of their own will in suicide bombing are labelled as martyrs, the believers who keep themselves detached from the opposite gender and die pure and virgin, are gifted with black eyed virgins who wait upon them in heaven. In this way, Sheikh Rashid is all satisfied with Ahmad as an upcoming executor for already planned terrorist attack in New Jersey. Only one thing remained, is to guide to a profession which is quite apt for his plan proceedings and goes with the restrictions and regulations which are ‘almost religious in quality’. When he reads the Study Course Booklets, he is pleased to find that even least precaution is taken with greatest care. His further applying for a CDL becomes easy as Sheikh Rashid supports him by writing a check on mosque’s account. (Green and Updike, 2001)

Though the counsellor in Central High, Mr. Jack Levy, was taken by surprise at the mention of driving being opted as a profession by a brilliant graduate as Ahmad Ashmaway Mulloy, yet Ahmad’s determination leaves Mr. Levy, funnily helpless, like the rest of the teachers, trying to civilize the students without any authority and with a toy gun in their possession.

Gradually Ahmad began to notice something weighing upon Sheikh Rashid. He seemed to ensoulder some secret responsibility which keeps him tense and spoils
his temper. He is being demanded for something from someone. At times, he says that Ahmad is a tender being and is asked for too much from this world, thus making him feel weak and think of escapism; he pretends to be sympathetic with Ahmad to win his trust and confidence. He trusts the power of his polluted teachings and knows that such a critical situation intermingled with concept of another world of heaven could be a beautiful and fascinating outlet.

On the other hand, Mr. Jack Levy’s dissatisfaction with Ahmad’s future plans and his subsequent interference by visiting Ahmad at his mother’s apartment, made Ahmad denounced him as a guest and suspect him as the next partner for his sexually desperate mother, Teresa Mulloy. During the conversation that takes place in Teresa’s bedroom which is also her workroom for oil-paintings, we manage to penetrate into Teresa’s Psyche as well as into her acute lonely world which is the result of her deserted husband, Omar Ashmaway. She is an unsupported female who has to have a very liberal mind so as to lead her life with a number of male partners to make her living easygoing. Besides, she has to give a tough impression of herself so that no one in this selfish world could crush her identity as a female. Still, she has to compromise and sign herself as ‘Terry’ like a male artist because in spite of harping upon modernity and liberal mindset, gender is a prominent factor in American psychology where personal feelings, dealings and even wages vary with gender factors. As mentioned earlier, Teresa, in spite of being a single and hopeless mother due to a husband’s banishment, still takes refuge in the realm of dream and imagination while describing him. A victim of marriage turned betrayal, feels ashamed before her son, of being without a permanent and faithful life-partner. Her deserted husband is also the reason for Ahmad’s queer nature. Ahmad hates him and further unrestrained pessimism is welcomed to his heart by Sheikh Rashid who teaches him that a
photograph is an imitation of God’s original work and thus admiring it is a blasphemy. In this way, he manages to scratch away the least imprints of bond and natural belongingness in Ahmad for his father, giving way to his own being as a pseudo-father for Ahmad. To accomplish his task, it is very necessary to strip Ahmad of all relations which would act as a source of moral as well as spiritual support for him in his need. Only then, the poor boy would take his tutor as an apostle of reliance and without him Ahmad had to be made to feel lonely, cold and crippled.

As far as the youthful spark and courage are concerned, Teresa believes that her only son should be grateful to her European-American blood. She owes him all the worldly flexibility one needs to possess to deal in a powerful nation such as American subcontinent. She attributes her courage and spirit with her Anglo Saxon ancestors whose roots were spread beyond North-European borders to Scandinavia; the spirit of struggle through Scandinavian wilderness, adventurous voyages and warriors. Unaware of the approaching storm of ‘terrorism’ that her son would have labelled her with, she is happy that Ahmad opted driving; a career full of risks. She would like to see Ahmad controlling the steering wheel and struggling his way through American mainland and be proud of him as Son of America, having American blood in his veins, thus repaying for the sense of loss that she had experienced with stillness turned escapism by Omar Ashmaway.

Teresa has negative feelings for both, her husband and Sheikh Rashid, both Arabs. She describes her husband, Omar Ashmaway, as an opportunist and Sheikh Rashid as a terrible teacher who is unable to satisfy Ahmad’s inquiries with conviction. Updike introduces a misguided student deliberately, so as to intensify the need for right and moral and spiritual guidance for the readers of both religions and also gives a number of clues and terms that lead people succumb to terrorism. He also
leads us to the birth places with a very sincere request that not the place which is to be hated but the worms trying to gnaw it down, are to be abhorred. Ahmad needs a straight forward and robust guide at this tender age when he can best utilize his time moulding and shaping his child nerves for benefit of mankind and self-progress but his doubtful teacher produces a weak and tense student.

This time Updike is quite sympathetic with his female character, Teresa or Terry. He does not objectify or degrade her. Instead, she represents the void experienced by a lonely, restless soul longing for a divine refuge which could satiate her physical as well as emotional thirst in beautifully mysterious way. Updike leaves behind imprints of jealousy on the part of Teresa and the rejection she faced from Sheikh Rashid who treats her ‘as a piece of dead meat’. Somewhere, she wanted to get introduced to Islam from a different angle, with her son this time and not as a secondary domestic object as she had tasted of Islam bitterly, earlier with Omar Ashmaway for whom Islam was just a warrant of restriction for women.

Another reason, why Ahmad sought to rigidity and orthodoxy in every sphere of his life and be extra precautionary, is his mother’s extra flexibility towards her personal relationships. At one instance Ahmad says to Mr. Levy: ‘I think my mother sleeps with people easily. A nurse’s aid is at home with the body, and she sees herself as a liberated modern person.’

(Terrorist, 301)
When he sketches his own future running behind temporary partners and seeking shelter in their apartments just like his mother’s boyfriends, sleep with girls already slept with numerous gloating boys, sometimes spending a single night with a girl on bed-sheet stained by her previous amorous meeting or his own wife betraying him with other men similarly if he happens to leave the place temporarily or to be more
particular, if he would leave permanently like his father. As the novel reveals his mother’s Americanism,

. . .a typical American, lacking strong convictions and the courage and comfort they bring. She is a victim of American religion of freedom, freedom from all, though freedom to do what and to what purpose is left up in the air. 

*Bombs bursting in air* – empty air is the perfect symbol of American freedom.

*(Terrorist, 167)*

Ahmad has never tried to explore and changing ways of other Muslims. The exploration of his Islamic identity starts with the entrance of the mosque and ends with the stiff teachings of Sheikh Rashid, who never lets Ahmad know the value of mankind love. He was never taught to love life in its every form, size and shape. He was never made to appreciate Almighty for His creation, no matter how trivial it is. In the beginning, Teresa took Ahmad’s obsessive belief as a source of deviation from his father’s thoughts so as to divert his attention towards something else and she to get ample time to satisfy her urges. Once having gone with the onset of her sexual sojourn, she got addicted to the frequency of partners in her apartment. In midst of this journey, Mr. Levy hops into her apartment but this time, Ahmad as the subject of his attention. Gradually captivating Mr. Levy by flaunting her charms, she manages to pull him into her bed and both of them sneak few hours from their places of work to satisfy themselves while Ahmad is out learning to drive heavy vehicles. Mr. Levy on an occasion in his school noticed Teresa in a stole and to his surprise her covered head looked more attractive and innocent than when he saw her without it. Updike is not neglecting the values of Islam which not only enhance the feminine beauty but also contribute to its charm, as Levy, for the first time then, felt drifting towards her for no
reason. As a matter of fact, Mr. Levy is a caring counsellor and a responsible husband to a wife for whom he has lost his love juices long before.

This Updikean character throws a critical eye on American educational system and in most of the pages in the novel, he is attributed with human voice of reason and morality. In spite of sitting in the American system of education, he disapproves of it as ‘enlightenment of youthful spirit’. He says:

They never knew structure. They can’t imagine a life that goes beyond the next fix, the next binge, the next scrape with the cops or the bank or the INS. The poor kids, they’ve never had the luxury of being kids. You see them come into the ninth gradewith a little hope left in them, a trace of that eagerness second – graders have. . .and by the time they graduate if they do, we’ve knocked it all out of them. Who’s we? America, I suppose, though its hard to put your finger exactly on where it goes wrong. . . .capitalism was doomed, destined to get more and more oppressive until the proletariat stormed the barricades and set up the workers’ paradise. . . .To be on the safe side, they changed the label ‘capitalism’ to read ‘free enterprise,’ but it was still dog-eat-dog. Too many losers, and the winners winning too big. . . .The basic problem the way I see it is, society tries to be decent, and decency cuts no ice in the state of nature. . . .We should all go back to being hunter – gatherers, with a hundred – percent employment rate, and a healthy amount of starvation.

(Terrorist, 136)

In fact he sees the system as ‘a garden of rote teaching which is more or less ignored’. It prefers to neglect the students’ personal interests. The products of this system are just as wanton as their teachers and nurturers. Dominators are ignorant of values but lead the timid and dutiful. The students are called to serve America by joining the
democracy and by being recruited in American army. But in all this what really America demands? America is not the right place for such seeds to sprout. One of the most important values the students lack there is, ‘self-restraint’. Their concept of life is just to say ‘yes’ to anything liked by them, no matter where this ‘yes’ may lead them to – ‘yes’ to more money from nowhere, ‘yes’ to prostitution, ‘yes’ to adultery, ‘yes’ to single life as long as the kaleidoscope of partners foster each others’ needs in terms of desires, finance, maintenance and temporary solace. Therefore, even if American educational system is taken as a garden, it’s no more than ‘a weedy patch of hopes, a rough and ill-tilled seedbed of what this nation wants itself to be’. All these changing traits and flashing tendencies of youngsters are carefully observed by Levy, the counsellor, who can sometimes study the smiles, eyes and unseen behaviour of people as well. While harping the same lamenting tune to his wife, he says:

What really gets me is they refuse to grasp how bad off they are. They think they are doing pretty good, with some flashy – trashy new outfit they’ve bought at half – price, or the latest hyper – violent new computer game, or some hot new CD everybody has to have, or a ridiculous new religion when you’ve drugged your brain back into the Stone Age. It makes you seriously wonder if people deserve to live – if the massacre masterminds in Rwanda and Sudan and Iraq don’t have the right idea.

(Terrorist, 136-137)

Mr. Levy is one of the most virtuous characters of Updike who will readily agree to enshoulder the responsibility of purifying American subcontinent. He is the only character who minutely observes the variations of his nation starting from his neighbourhood and endlessly expanding to cover the domain of American political boundary and he is the one who shamelessly criticizes human behaviour, ranging
from his own-self to the familiar and unfamiliar people. This mysterious feeling full of responsibility is the result of his irreligious but the upright and pious values that he had chalked for himself.

In spite of all this humane personality, Levy has American restlessness imbibed deep in his veins. A Jewish American, he has spent a fair lifetime with his Lutheran wife, Elizabeth, not to that extent for mutual love between them as much to his sense of responsibility towards her as a legal bond signed in presence of priest and some witnesses. Being a cynical atheist, Jack embraces life not as a religious or ideological tool or even as a gift but rather as a Sisyphean burden. He goes on dragging his marital life with mixed feelings of kindness, pity and antipathy for his obese wife.

Updike rotates his telescope now, to pick up the root words for restlessness – ‘tyranny’ and ‘insecurity’ of American spiritualism leads to such obscene mishaps. The entire nation harbours such anxious souls who are ready to drift anywhere for satisfying their urges and sometimes misuse other religions’ values to achieve their interests. Teresa applies this trick on Levy and was thoroughly successful by exhibiting her spontaneous feelings, claiming that she covers her body and head only to satisfy Ahmad that she doesn’t look like ‘a whore’, thereby, sending sizzling signals through Levy’s instincts that without those outfits she is just the right kind of woman that a man would desire to be with; not failing to mention before Levy the nuns who envied her freedom and asserting that now after that her husband left her, she has learnt to value her charms. No doubt, Levy would never have failed to understand that some female is opening herself to him. Moreover, she makes her son an instrument to evoke a sense of tender sympathy in Levy for herself by suggesting the void created by her husband, Ahmad’s father, waiting to get filled up. In this way,
an opportunity to visit a cradle of feminine charisma and partially throwing a fatherly
gesture for introducing some change in Ahmad’s psychology, Levy enters Teresa’s
apartment to plough his temporary dreamland and enjoy an American seasonal crop.
Updike steals away some moments from the gruesome topic of terrorism, bloodshed,
atheism, obstinate concept of Godliness preached by Sheikh Rashid, and all that is
going on under the nose of Uncle Sam, to wander as a spirit in Teresa’s house and
write some grotesquely descriptive passages in his familiar style on the private
meetings of Levy and Teresa. With these steaming lovers, Updike is also distracted,
apparently unable to help himself sliding the dreamy way down to sex, away from
Ahmad, to write instead about middle-aged adulterers – an old familiar theme for his.
Even in bed, after the firing spark plugs are drained out, Jack is over burdened with a
husbandly responsibility and a sense of guilt. From time to time he keeps asking about
Ahmad who, after securing a CDL, is working for a furniture dealer- Excellency
Home Furnishing, owned by a Lebanese father and son-Arab by origin and overtly
hire Ahmad’s services for delivering and picking up furniture to both, near and far
away places from New Jersey; most of the customers are black families and
sometimes strange places unfrequented by usual visitors. Even Ahmad, after repeated
experiences of insults and statements drowned in humiliation by his mother’s each
time’s new lover who would ‘vie with him for dominance of the premises’ (Terrorist,
168), thinks that this time she has a human lover who has no intention of pushing
Ahmad out. Updike laments this pathetic family setup and also calls it an ‘American’
way. According to him:

. . .this valuing of sexual performance over all family ties. The American way
is to hate one’s family and flee from it. Even the parents conspire in this,
welcoming signs of independence from the child and laughing at disobedience. (Terrorist, 168)

As the primitive aim of literature is to instruct, Updike is being intensely honest with this tradition by clearly mentioning some very beautiful verses from Quran where the prophet Mohammad exhibits his pure fatherly love for his only daughter, Fatimah, and bids all Muslims to behave well with his daughter because whoever hurt her, would hurt him and indirectly would hurt God. By saying this, the Prophet has taught his Muslims to respect their daughters and sons, as hurting the delicate feelings of one’s children and making them feel insecure in their elders’ presence, could infuriate God. Examples given by Updike are apt in their places thereby the valuable instructions from a divine book (Quran) against most of degraded and decayed trends of a nation boasting of its Superiority and Titanism.

Jack Levy is one of those fathers who have given a stable life to their children but he was prompted to do this more out of a sense of duty than doing it for a fruit of his marital life. Here and there, Updike blames his American character and tries to teach him the value of love over sense of duty because Levy attributes his duties to guilt as if he was paying off the cost of his marriage. His Lutheran wife, Elizabeth, tries to tackle the household with her relaxed and light hearted nature. Presently working in Clifton Library, this two hundred and forty-pound lady who once angered her parents by marrying a Jew, usually passes her time watching soap-operas and nibbling into so-called low-fat cookies, cheesecake, oatmeal-raisins and leftovers of previous night microwave. Though her mention is not so important in the novel but she is a vital instrument around whom Updike explains the mystery of health upheavals in American Mainland. Along with her description, Updike exploits the chance of dealing with advancement of technology with changing time, an American
wife’s vague guesses as to why her husband’s outing sessions are getting longer, American personal and political problems, etc. Once been lighter, ‘more lithe and promising’ (Terrorist, 129) than her heavy footed elder sister, Hermione Fogel, who is currently ‘landing an important Washington job with one of the administration’s key players’ (Terrorist, 138), Elizabeth, now, finds it difficult to extricate herself from her favourite rocker recliner, to move about in the house nimbly and do errands, to the extent that she wants to add up more facilities in the house so as to minimize her movements even more. Elizabeth does not feel comfortable with new marvels of technology, the changing shapes and sizes of equipments, increasing complexity of hardware along with Levy’s penny-pinching attitude with her specially when he blames ‘electronic revolution’ for extracting unnecessary money. He says:

. . .its a racket, the charges add up, like on cable TV. . .The so – called electronic revolution. . .has brought about a wealth of schemes for painlessly extracting money from us in monthly charges for services we don’t need. . .

(Terrorist, 121)

Sometimes Levy seems more hateful than responsible as when he refuses to get her a cell phone lest she should disturb him in his work place or when he seems terribly disappointed if his wife missed the chair, fell on the floor but was not injured. There is a level where ‘he would not mind if she were dead, he would be relieved of two hundred and forty pounds on his shoulders’. (Terrorist, 122)‘On the other hand she knows he will never leave her’ for he was bound to his ‘Jewish sense of responsibility’. (Terrorist, 122) He did not believe in Jewish God and was successful in thrusting himself at Elizabeth never caring if she might have ever hoped that he should accompany her to the Church.
It is rightly said that more the person loves, more possessive he becomes and
the more he rebukes. Updike should be patted on his back for criticizing
even minute
deteriorations of his country which lead to its degrading rank among other nations.
Such awkward valuelessness was not always there but the so-called changing trends
and fads contributed in their introduction. Once peaceful places such as parks,
cemeteries and libraries, now, have become noisy with their attached restaurants
attracting dating couples rather than families, contemplators and elderly. Divinity
scholars and clergymen used to be young, handsome and dedicated but now they fail
to maintain even the eye-contact with their audience due to lack of faith. Now the face
of this nation is really pathetic:

The young people. . .talk out like they’re in their own living rooms, it’s the
same at the movies, there are no manners any more, television has ruined
everybody’s. . .the disrespectful way the other passengers wear shorts and
what look like pajamas on the plane; television has made people at home now
everywhere, not caring how they look, women absolutely as fat as she wearing
shorts; they must never look in the mirror.

(Terrorist, 124)

Shamefully, all motivation and competition in almost every field is driven by murder,
sex, jealousy and financial greed. Not only this, Updike aptly magnified his vision at
regularly increasing level from personal and domestic life to communal feelings
shattering their nation. Internet chatter is up every now and then with each genuine or
fake thread of news. Other religions are unnecessarily blamed, made fun of and
innocent young followers are criticized and Muslims are at the top of the list. It is
believed that mosques are the centres for training young fervents in terrorism and
such fanatics are produced who don’t care if they die because they are perfectly
modified to take it as sure way to their salvation; to kill non-Muslims and that will be a noble cause. Things that add much to American insecurity is the routes leading into its interior body – sea ports, airways, tunnels, local trains, etc. In words of Levy’s sister-in-law, Hermione:

Hundreds of container ships go in out of our American ports every day, and nobody knows what’s in a tenth of them. They could be bringing in atomic weapons labelled Argentinean cowhides or something. Brazilian coffee – who’s sure it’s coffee? Or think of these huge tankers, not just the oil, but say, liquid propane. That’s how they ship propane, liquefied. But think of what would happen in Jersey City or under the Bayonne Bridge if they got it with just a few pounds of Semtex or TNT. . .it would be a conflagration: thousands dead. . .Capitalism has been so open – that’s how it has been to be, to make it work. Think of a few men with assault rifles in a mall anywhere in America. . .

We can never be happy again – we Americans.

(Terrorist, 132)

These transportations mean that some local hands are actively playing a dominant role and assisting in such illegal and destructive acts. Hermione is Updike’s opponent who keeps defending American system and also keeps pitying it that the world wants America to stagnate but Updike wants the reader to stand before her to get the ‘other side’ of it. If America is suffering from such shaking insecurities then Americans themselves should be taught to be honest with their motherland. Otherwise, Updike’s ideology of American mainland also grieves over the aggressive hands demanding their share from it:

. . .it’s the Japanese and Chinese and Mexicans and Guatemalans and those others in these low – wage platforms who are doing us in, putting our work –
force out of work. We come to this country and pen the Indians into reservations and build skyscrapers and super highways and then everybody wants a piece of our domestic markets, like a whale being gutted by sharks in that Hemingway story. . .

(Terrorist, 138)

To some extent Updike is sympathetic with the immigrants who once came to America but gradually individualism crept into their minds with the time and they want their share from American investments, property, etc. in lieu of their services. In the same way, Jack Levy is typically mournful for his motherland and wonders what would be left of America in the end.

Now-a-days this statement could be referred to as – after terrorist attacks, what would be left of American solid image. Americans are just left with an acute sense of hatred for Muslims. As far as Teresa is concerned, she is full of pessimism and insecurity on the part of Arab-Muslims. Teresa conveys a vague image how Americans perceive Islam and its teachings after such mishaps in their nation. An escapist husband and not-at-all generous mosque Imam, Teresa tries to reveal to her son that he no longer manifests any belongingness to her because he is under the influence of outsiders and does not experience any special attachment with her anymore. Gradually her concept becomes radical to the extent that she implies that Islam teaches nothing except disobedience which starts at home by ‘disowning’ one’s parents and ends in ‘terrorism’. Almost all Updike’s novels depict a woman’s plight of insecurity on her husband’s part which turns into a rebellion of its own kind and the woman tries to catch hold of her son, a living caricature of half-her husband’s genes and longs to assert her possession for him or at least cherish his attachment to her. Somewhere it denotes her revenge and domination over her husband’s fifty-percent
self. At the other end of the rope, holding Ahmad is Sheikh Rashid who acts like a girl claiming her share from this mixed-blood boy. Rashid moulds Ahmad’s hobbies as to go with the teachings he is imparting him. Ahmad is made to hate action movies full of assassins as professional killers whereas the great irony lies here about what Ahmad here is being groomed for. Updike is trying to make a cobweb of warnings and emotions around Ahmad so that he would be able to resist such moments of killing others in his life but all of these things are ignored by Ahmad once Rashid makes him dream of garden of Eden which becomes his ultimate place in heaven with black-eyed virgins waiting upon him. Rashid also takes proper care not to let the opposite gender creep into Ahmad’s life as woman symbolises life and means of struggle and such things could pull away the boy from Rashid’s deadly mission. All the time Quranic verses are at Rashid’s finger-tips to dismantle worldly dreams if they happen to exist. Moreover, his way to urge Ahmad to cry out that he is an Arab-Muslim boy and has nothing to do with the infidel American system, never misses its target; even after developing close attachment with Ahmad he cheers him up: ‘Charlie will – what’s the phrase? – show you the ropes. You’ll like him, Ahmad. He’s very American’. 

(Terrorist, 145)

In these words Rashid leaves behind an Ahmadful of hatred for America and thus fulfils his own desire, as Ahmad now tries ever harder to prove himself such a Muslim as Rashid needs.

Mr. Habib Chehab, seemingly, eulogises America to some extent whereas his son Charlie form a pair of ‘fire’ and ‘ice’ with his own father to drag Ahmad into their conversation, thus, preach him venom against this land. Charlie says:

There are problems. The Zanj weren’t given any rights, they had to fight for them. They were being lynched and not allowed in restaurants, they even had
separate drinking fountains, they had to go to Supreme Court to be considered human beings. In America, nothing is free, everything is a fight. There is no *ummah*, no *shari’a*. . . They forced a country of Jews into Palestine, right into the throat of the Middle East, and how they’ve forced their way into Iraq, to make it a little U.S. and have the oil.

(Terrorist, 147)

Also opposing the point of his father, Charlie says:

. . . the U.S has the biggest prison population in the world. . . Plenty big, enough – going on two millions. The young black women don’t have enough guys to go around. They’re all in jail. . .

(Terrorist, 147)

He throws a significant point about unequal distribution of income in America as the Blacks are so under privileged that they take to stealing. At another instance he implies that Muslim nations, smaller in size with a tinge of morality in them, can be monitored but America with its large size and immoral population can hardly be instructed. He says: ‘. . . they can’t. It’s like animals. You don’t hold rats and rabbits to the same standard as lions and elephants. You don’t hold Iraq to the same standard as the U.S. . .’

(Terrorist, 157)

Charlie rides with Ahmad most of the time, deliberately, to knock the boy out of humanity and stuff him with aversion for American self. Sheikh Rashid was assigned to impart spiritual training but Charlie has a bigger duty of diverting him practically against American media, products that only promote flesh stimulation, investments that lavish on sports celebrities and the kind of society Americans are promoting is chiefly, consumer society. He says:
. . .What else do they give us, these media moguls? The news is sob – sister stuff – Diane Sawyer, the poor Afghani babies, boo-hoo-hoo or else straight propaganda; Bush complains about Putin turning into Stalin, but we’re worse than the poor old clunky Kremlin ever was. The commies just wanted to brainwash you. The new powers that be, the international corporations, want to wash your brains away, period. They want to turn you into machines for consuming the chicken-coop society. All this entertainment. . .kept the masses zombified in the Depression, only then you stood in line and paid a quarter for the movie, where today they hand it to you free, with the advertisers paying a million a minute for the chance to mess with your heads.

(Terrorist, 172-173)

He also goes on to express the funny way the commercials allure older generation to go back in their twenties, thus bringing up the discourse for Americans fearing ‘death’ and in this way conjuring Rashid’s teachings about ‘True believers don’t fear death’ because ‘they know that paradise awaits the righteous’. (Terrorist, 174) Ahmad goes forward confidently to recite before him verses from the Holy Book which summarises as ‘God is the only giver of life and he will give you a cause to die.’ (Terrorist, 175) Charlie cleverly seems to offer himself for such a cause and inwardly inviting Ahmad for such an opportunity which could be missed if Ahmad let it go.

Further in the course of their discussion, Charlie shares with him a lot of views on American history which never lacked bloodshed, where innocent and easy-going immigrants were ruthlessly slain by imminent personalities like Washington, thereby, driving home the point that everything is fair in love and war. Charlie adores a specific kind of history just like the American history. In this context, Charlie
Terrorist says: ‘One revolution led to another. . .History isn’t something over and done, you know. It’s now too. Revolution never stops. You cut off its head, it grows two.

(Terrorist, 182)

What he is trying to say is that the revolution or more precisely ‘rebellion’ grows more intense every time it is curbed. This example is very significant because Ahmad attributes it with ‘Hydra’ and simultaneously reminds him of ‘the image’ that ‘recurs in Sheikh Rashid’s sermons in illustration of the futility of America’s crusade against Islam.’ (Terrorist, 183) Totally satisfied with his fruitful endeavour in giving birth to a future terrorist, Charlie relates the revolutions with ‘Jihad’ and is quite pleased when Ahmad quotes from Quran,

Mohammad is Allah’s apostle. Those who follow him are ruthless to the unbelievers but merciful to one another.

(Terrorist, 183)

It is a stamp for what he is going to demand from Ahmad in near future. A little more brain storming for Ahmad and re-conformation was there for Charlie’s intentions. He further inquires about Ahmad’s desires in his life, asks him to love life as it is, if he is not interested in clinging to women. Along with conversation, Charlie was given the responsibility to hang around with Ahmad so close to Twin Towers of former World Trade Centre. Charlie loves the space without them. He says:

It’s nice to see those towers gone. They were ugly – way out of proportion. They didn’t belong. . .Those people worked. . .furthering the interests of American empire. . .sustains Israel and inflicts death everyday on Palestinians, Afghans and Iraqis. In war, pity has to be put on hold. . .think of it as a war. . .War is not tidy. There is collateral damage. . .The enemies around us, the children and fat people in shorts giving us their dirty little looks. . .do not see
themselves as oppressors and killers. They see themselves as innocent, absorbed in their private lives. Yet, out of all this innocence, somehow evil emerges. The western powers steal our oil, they take our land.

(Terrorist, 187-188)

After making sure of everything, he charges Ahmad with a thumping question, ‘Would you fight them? . . . ‘Would you give your life?’ (Terrorist, 189) Getting a positive reply, Charlie’s mission is accomplished.

The ottoman delivery to an anonymous Mr. Karini, on the Upper Shores, leaves Ahmad baffled as the cottage was dark and inhabited by four men who did not at all seem to be the owners of the place and Ahmad’s suspicion was changed to confirmation when he stealthily managed to peep into the window and all four men, whose native language was Arabic, were taking ‘quantities of green American currency’ out of the ottoman’s leather top. (Terrorist, 194) The incident haunts Ahmad for a considerable time, he wonders how many other deliveries were similarly loaded in their crevices and interior hollows and also if Charlie was aware of the stuffed contents in the furniture. To his utter surprise, Charlie already knew every detail of the wads of money inside the furniture. According to Charlie, ‘source of money are the fortunate true believers, within U.S. and abroad, who believe in Jihad full of action. He arouses a good feeling in Ahmad’s heart by mentioning the ‘starving Muslim peasants, the Bangladeshi children, Egyptian villagers and Palestinians’ for whose welfare this money is consumed, so that the ‘Muslims are not exploited by the great global Satan who grows fat on sugar, pork and under priced petroleum’. (Terrorist, 198) Ahmad expresses his desire to play a part in such plots of welfare and Charlie indicates that an upcoming anniversary somewhere in September could be his D-day.
Updike is very careful in taking his protagonist as far as making him slip into a female’s warmth, Joryleen, though now a hooker, to make it clear that listening to a female voice with full attention and love and getting aroused due to one’s feelings is an alternative Jihad, to be near God. That’s why Ahmad, after meeting Joryleen, hearing her sing and coming in her presence, Ahmad did not mind to sleep that night, never to wake up again. Apart from his own mother, Joryleen was the second person to warn him against that truck business as both women grew suspicious of something ‘fishy’ about this furniture delivery matter. Within a week’s time after meeting with Joryleen, Charlie sent Ahmad to Sheikh Rashid who wanted to see him urgently and to his amazement, Sheikh Rashid had already been informed of the private conversation between Ahmad and Charlie in Liberty State Park and Ahmad was told that it had been a pre-planned interview to see if Ahmad was liable to be assigned for such a mission. Sheikh Rashid leads him to a plot to die for ‘Jihad.’ This plot would involve a truck and the action would take place sometime around an anniversary of 9/11 to send a message to the global Satan – ‘We strike when we please’. Sheikh Rashid also pointed out the precautionary measures that would be taken – an unidentified truck and all ‘the physical clues would be obliterated.’ (Terrorist, 236) Before Ahmad could deduce that he would burst with the truck, Sheikh Rashid quickly insisted: ‘You will not be there to experience it. You would already be there in Jannah, in Paradise, at that instant, confronting the delighted face of God. He will greet you as His son.’ (Terrorist, 237) He also promises Ahmad a huge compensation for his family which Ahmad transfers to another female friend, who, he believes ‘is lost to God but is giving her life for another, so that person, Tylenol, can live.’ (Terrorist, 227)
The other day Charlie accompanies Ahmad in the truck and takes upon sixteenth down to West Main, into that section of New Prospect, extending some blocks west of the Islamic Centre (Mosque), where Ahmad, in an area of non-domestic structures is introduced to a white truck, GMC 3500, with four-thousand kilograms of ammonium nitrate in its back, enough to break steel sheath of Lincoln Tunnel, the plot scheduled to be operated on 9/11 at morning’s rush hour.

On the other hand, not every citizen knows how to react or ‘what to do’ (Terrorist, 75) if the level of alert in some area goes up. Here, Updike comments on the range of unawareness among the common American citizens when only the authorities have time, space and strategy to evacuate the place or resist any anti-social activity whereas, the common man has a vague idea about what to do and the entire situation seems funny to him. Somewhere in the nation, thrive such people who, even after knowing the range of terror, are not able to do anything for it.

The utter impotency of the Homeland Secretary is reflected in these words:

My trouble is... I love this damn country so much I can’t imagine why anybody would want to bring it down. What do these people have to offer instead? More Taliban – more oppression of women, more blowing up of statues of Buddha. The mullahs in northern Nigeria are telling people not to let their children be given polio vaccine, and then the kids are brought in paralyzed to the health – aid clinic! They wait until they are totally paralyzed to bring them in, if they’ve gone all the way with the local mumbo-jumbo.

(Terrorist, 258)

There is also extensive pondering by Hermione over the beliefs which do not allow Muslims to help their generations sprout into healthy ones and this contributes to ignorance and ultimate evil activities. Hermione is as comfortable with the President...
in the office as her soul-mate. Updike’s ‘novels are anchored in time and each for instance has a clearly identifiable President of the United States’ and the characters comment on the political events through them. (Bodmer, 1988)

The American government laments lack of honesty on the part of Muslims contributing to their capitalist sector. Updike also emphasizes on lack of importance given to one’s own language, the moment one steps in America. The internet chatter brings Arabic messages wherein the sense does not clearly open up. Information is provided in bits and pieces, the people connected with the mission have been given a chance to flee. The ones in their captivity are either not questioned well or their translators are not blurting out the complete thing. Altogether, everyone around seems to be giving space to the truck and his driver to reach the appointed destination.

Moreover, at such a crucial time the Homeland Secretary fears the cease of hoarded facilities for him if he fails to detect the terrorists and beat them up. Helplessly but shamelessly, he babbles his inner motives before his secretary, whom he regards as close to his self as one’s consciousness, he says: ‘If this thing in New Jersey blows up, there’ll be no sitting on fat-cat boards for me. No speaker’s fees. No million-dollar advance on my memoirs.’ (Terrorist, 261)

Such revelation is as shocking to Hermione as it should be. To her, he simply symbolises Mammon. At last moment it is Hermione who turns out to be a nation’s saviour in an indirect manner as she calls up Mr. Levy and reminds him of a Muslim-American boy in Central High who took to truck driving on the advice of his Imam in mosque. Mr. Levy realises the co-incidence and smells the danger and with a Jewish sense of responsibility, he took upon himself not to let the nation encounter another 9/11. In his hurry, he waits for Ahmad near off Route 80 (the only one New Prospect interchange), three blocks north of interchange and one-mile South of Central High, in
his mismatched suit. Ahmad lets him in the truck lest he should raise an alarm and alert the entire traffic. He gave Ahmad an important set of information – Charlie was dead, tortured before he was killed and the body was thrown in the Meadows by the canal south of Giant Stadium along with a note saying ‘he who breaks his oath, punishes himself’, God will not deny him his recompense’ (Terrorist, 290) as the doers wanted to reveal their deed. Charlie was CIA undercover and the other side figured it out. His father was in hospital with a stroke; his uncle was in Florida with the feds’ eyes on him; Sheikh Rashid had vanished from the scene; others gone underground and scattered or caught flying abroad. Basically, Charlie, all this time, had been instigating Ahmad for this deadly deed and was using Ahmad to flush out the others. With the discourse on religion and soothing conversation of Mr. Levy, as he was trying his best to deal with truck driver and the explosives in his possession, Ahmad had become less bitter and somewhere accepted oneness in human beings, though still with an underlying distaste of hostility for Westerners. He says:

I don’t mind. It is good for us to seek agreement. Before Israel, Muslims and Jews were brothers – they belonged to the margins of Christian world, the comic others in their funny clothes, entertainment for the Christians secure in their wealth, in their paper – white skins. Even with the oil, they despised us, cheating the Saudi princes of their people’s birthright.

(Terrorist, 295)

Mr. Levy, a character, though rarest his kind but still angelic in sense. A man with a job, family and home does not mind hesitating in sitting in a truck full of explosives that with a ‘thumb down’ could be ignited ‘to ripple up through the enhancing pentrite and racing fuel into tons of nitrate.’ (Terrorist, 289-290) He also gives some guidance to Ahmad on American oneness: ‘. . . we all are Americans here. That’s the idea, didn’t
they tell you that at Central High? Irish-Americans, African-Americans, Jewish-Americans; there are even Arab-Americans.'

But at the same time, he also feels that he has lived long enough and should not wait for something in vain because America fails to give token of belongingness even to its most loyal residents. He, tells Ahmad woefully:

. . .Race, sex – they spook us. Once you run out of steam, America doesn’t give you much. It doesn’t even let you die, what with the hospitals sucking all the money they can out of Medicare. The drug companies have turned doctors into crooks. Why should I hang around until some disease turns me into a cash cow for a bunch of crooks. . .I’ve become a drag on the world, taking up space.

(Terrorist, 304)

At another instance he says, ‘. . .I’m going to relax. Jesus, I’ve been tired lately.’ In the context of deadly pain he does not regret undergoing it himself in case the explosives are set off but he is concerned about the pain of others, in his words, ‘. . .there will be for plenty of others.’

(Terrorist, 306)

The way Mr. Levy ignored his own death agony as compared to others’pain and also expressed his disappointment about the horrible way he is going to die, whereas a person is destined to die peacefully in his bed, giving Ahmad a clue as to what the thousands of others will be snatched of. Suddenly Ahmad thinks about Quranic suras which have mention of life as God’s gift. In the end, with Levy next to him in his truck bomb, Ahmad chooses not to go forward with his plan, it remains unclear whether he still presents a threat or is ready to begin abandoning his intolerant ideology. But ultimately, this indecision seems consistent with the larger theme of elusiveness of the terrorist threat and of the concept of ‘evil’ in general. If the key
lesson that emerges from the novel is that in order to be ‘good’, people should not need to commit ultimate acts of ideological commitments, a related lesson might be that America should give up the pretence that it could ever exactly pin down the potential threat. Therefore, the ‘evil’ in the suicide bomber’s ultimate act needs to be reduced to its horrible consequences because it is already present in its pursuit of the extremist ideological premises. To kill this ‘evil’, a nation must learn to inculcate a feeling of belongingness and security in every individual who comes in its contact in one way or the other. Each soul should be awestruck with the rich values, noble attitude, honest dealings and the pious spirit of a particular federation. Here Updike has obviously confined himself to the American domain but morality has no shape or size; it can be perceived by every genuine soul and followed truthfully. Every nation can safeguard itself, not with the help of its defence panel comprising of military, artillery and explosives but with its integrity and conscience. Such kingdom will always give birth to patriots and legends.
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Chapter 8

CONCLUSION
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Rarely a soul burdens itself with the question of personal, national or universal reformation. The American author, John Updike is one of those extraordinary names that has borne the risk of putting his literary career at stake more than once, not for demoralising the human reason but for pulling it from the pit of darkness and raising it above the level of petty dreams, deeds and desires.

In the present work, it has been discussed as to how Updike’s select novels bring forth the sketch of an American portrayal that basically rests on the blind belief in the possession of the land, false notion of belongingness, corrupt political and educational system, deplorable process of construction and destruction in all spheres of consumerism, adultery, deteriorating values and wavering faith or more precisely, atheism.

The novels of Updike tend to toil tirelessly for the reformation of American mainland. For this he employs numerous techniques; very often he wears fatherly attire giving nostalgic sermons on the foregone time and despising the present changes and warning his countrymen about the near future. Sometimes he fits himself into the character of a punishing mother and thrashes upon the readers a volley of questions as to what they have done for America; at other times he is an innocent animal or ‘Nature’ itself, struggling to meet its basic fulfilments and begging the mankind to spare its existence.

If put together, his select novels are like dots, when joined with a pencil, make a closed circle, which indicates the closed arms of American possessive Self that has stopped to welcome the world towards itself or share its own prosperity with other nations, thereby failing to extend towards them a message of love, friendship and respect. Instead, America has developed a habit of spying on other nations to check their progress.
and interfere in their private network by sending its troops there under the notion that ‘war is glory’.

While inside the mainland, administration hardly cares about the young enthusiastic souls who travel overseas to fight with full valour, dreaming of promising prospects for themselves if they return alive to America. At the end of each phase of war, the dead soldiers’ names are inscribed on the charts as a tribute while the survivors are rendered jobless.

On the other hand, the corrupt educational system has useless teachers as its pillars. These teachers, who are merely drunkards, have wantons eyes, distracted minds and unstable sexual lives which leave them with less or no time for their disciples. As a result, the administrative heads of such institutions give away hoards of money as salaries to the workers without getting anything in return except terrorists, whores and faithless scholars as products. Same is the case in the divinity schools where the innocents and fervent aspirants grow bushy tails and white hair till they grow faithless, under the guidance of their already proud teachers who claim to possess full knowledge about Divinity and therefore themselves have lost their faith in God.

Moreover, a society which worships the inventions in every field of technology along with ruthless rejections of the already existing ones is the least reliable one. New means of transport and communication, factories, furniture and even gadgets are welcomed warmly and pockets are emptied for them whereas the older things are mercilessly discarded, forgotten and left to rot. Thus, the sense of insecurity has crept everywhere. Even the human mind is full of such insecure feelings that he will also be thrown away as soon as his utility ends. All time round, people are aware of their irresponsible attitude and fear the moment when they shall be treated the same way by the
next coming generations but these concepts have been so internalized by the Americans that none of them can avoid them.

As far as the values are concerned, their situation is no better than the forgotten technology and gadgets. Young generation shows signs of disobedience to their single or both parents and surprisingly these signals are promptly welcomed, as the parents or elders themselves are all prepared to manage their own routine with their own changing sexual partners in a childless house. An empty space and parentless children are a perfect symbol of American existence. Adultery has crept deep into the roots of the society where temporary partners, embarrassingly or shamelessly, go on ‘receiving the smiles of the outside world’. Theses incidences are not just confined to high class, porn production or middle class society but also in such pious families as those of the divinity professors or parsons. Most of the same age-group partners are found struggling for divorce, some years after their marriage. In almost all the cases it is the husband who kicks out his wife and that also under the influence of another woman, most probably younger than his first wife. It is easily expected that the divorcee is more than compensated with her alimony. The tragedy is that the second wife, after attaining marital and financial security, goes on attempting stunts with her sexually playful nature, thus following a series of affairs under the older husband’s nose.

In rare cases, the woman goes on marrying one man after the other, driving them to commit suicide, because her motivating factor is not sex but the resultant accumulated inheritance which becomes ‘like layers of sedimentary rock compacted by the pressure of the time’, besides the cherishable position of being a widow after every husband passes away. Apart from natural sex partners, gay and lesbian trend also finds a fair space in American society.
In terms of the preservation of ‘Nature’, America is regarded as the least responsible. Large scale deforestation, plotting of land for commercial purpose and construction of housing complex, chemical factories, nuclear reactors, callousness towards plantation projects, indifference towards wildlife and reckless poaching in the name of saving ‘house-gardens’ gives the true image of American ecology. After witnessing the biological side-effects of nuclear attacks on Japan during World War-II, Updike grabs the opportunity to come up with the idea of ‘Pseudozoans’, which are even more dangerous than just biological impairments because they devour not only life but everything that they find in their way, ranging from plants to petroleum.

Some years of his life had seen Updike in a spiritual crisis and with divine grace he got the revival of his faith with Roland Bath and Kierkegaard. Significantly, almost all his novels have God in abundance. He begins with a protagonist overwhelmed with a biological soundness, possession of full divine knowledge or with vanity of being the superior organism in the chain of animate things of Divine Kingdom. Through these three levels, Updike categorises American Self and also states, very frankly, the causes that have consumed human reason. On these grounds, we can discuss the last and the most important image or idea of America that has been brought through the printed pages in Updike’s novels. People soaring high in distinguished amplitudes of knowledge regarding theology, be it Professor Roger Lambert or Rev. Clarence Wilmot or Sheikh Rashid, ultimately end up as vain fanatics disdaining divine power. Updike gives such characters a hateful image where the once angelic fountain has turned into a contaminated devilish heap with qualities such as intolerance, contempt, depression, doubt, hatred, restlessness and inferiority complex. An American theology department or an American clergyman belonging to such dark mindset can produce nothing except lost scholars, who eventually turn as atheists as their teachers. Another class of people that remains at distance from
God are the young generation with sound health because this health is used ironically. In fact, it is handed down to adultery instead of serving God by extending their love towards orphans and the needy. It is also clear from some novels like the Roger’s version of his imaginations of Dale’s gradual fall that faith seeps out as soon as one commits adultery. Even the novel *Villages* has Owen who is an example of adulterous American nature. The third category belongs to people who almost forget the fact that death would ever take them back to God where even the unicellular amoeba is equally placed with the bearers of reason and intelligence.

Last but not the least, Updike’s novels are intertwined with each other with elements like adultery, guilt and the forgone faith that is revived after generations through a deed of ultimate nobility or self realization. If one of the novels deals with the salvation of the soul, the other one works upon the reformation of the same, thereby giving the readers a panacea for the perpetual decay in culture.

This study is providential to have Updike as its pivotal force; an author, who selflessly worked for rehabilitation of his nation. He was always sure that evidence helps us to improve ourselves and purify our souls. His protagonists are distinguished individuals representing the short-comings of human nature. For each of these imperfections, Updike starts his tale with the prevailing depressed or cursed state of the concerned character. Then, he goes on to describe, in a flashback, the phases of the protagonist’s past and at the same time contrasts the once gone blessed and confident self with present degenerated image. Be they Owen Mackenzie, Roger Lambert, Ben Turnbull or Clarence Wilmot, Updike takes them for oscillating swings between past and present and in this way gives their complete biography thereby warning the nation of its consequent future. This work is a benevolent attempt to reorganise the civilization that once carved itself out of the wilderness and storms and its sense of extreme belongingness
caused it to get shrivelled up in itself. The resultant insulated individuals, therefore, have to be counselled to loosen and open up themselves to the world which is a temporary home for human beings and all kind of wildlife, and not a division of continents, oceans or nations.
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