CHAPTER - VI

TECHNIQUES

1 Updike’s Use of Myths

Ever since James Joyce made a break through with his *Ulysses*, it has become favourite device of novelists to use mythical situations or characters in a modern context, thereby seeking to illuminate the predicament of contemporary man, viewing him in a larger perspective of time. Faulkner’s *The Hamlet*, ironically comparing the battle of the local swains over Eula Verner to the Trojan War and his *The Town*, comparing Eula to such mythical temptresses as Lilith, Eve and Helen, Frederick Buchner’s *A Long Day’s Journey*, using the Tireus myth, and Malamud’s *The Natural*, using the legend of Sir Perceval - these are some among the prominent American novels using a mythical framework.

Some other notable literary works using myth prominently are Faulkner’s *Light in August* (in which Joe Christmas is presented as a Christ figure), Hemingway’s *The Old Man and The Sea* (which presents the old fisherman as a Christ figure), Eugene O’Neill’s *Mourning Becomes Electra* (which is based on the Greek myth of Electra), and his *Desire Under the Elms* (which contains Biblical symbols).

Updike belongs to this rich tradition of myth using writers. None of his writings is devoid of mythic elements. Updike is drawn to myths, for myths offer parallels to characters and situations in his novels. He finds that
myths, in spite of their distance from contemporary reality, enshrine the fundamentals of human nature.

The second purpose for which Updike uses myth is to manipulate a contrast between the glories of antiquity and the ugliness of contemporary society. The past and the present are juxtaposed and the degeneration of the present is left to be deduced by the reader. This is the method followed by Joyce and Eliot. As Eliot puts it:

"It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history"

Thirdly, Updike uses myth to elevate and ennoble matters which are usually considered low and indecent. Matters like homosexuality and adulterous sex are purged of their profane associations by being invested with sacred mythological characters.

Myths as Parallels

Talking about the part played by myth in The Centaur, Updike said in The Paris Review interview:

"(the mythical element in The Centaur is) a serious expression of my sensation that the people we meet are guises, do conceal something mythic, perhaps prototypes or longings of our minds"
Many of the mythological figures mentioned in *The Centaur* and other novels serve as prototypes and parallels to the characters in the novels. Venus in *The Centaur* serves as prototype for the sexually arid Vera Hummel (pp.22-31). Venus dismissing all the gods as being incapable of meeting her demands is akin to Vera’s feeling that none of the men around her can give the sexual fulfillment she wants. It is worth quoting John B. Vickery’s observation in this context:

> "The wanton Venus enshrines for Updike an ideality and a value rooted in the incalculable mystery of life as a matter of unpredictable action and unpremeditated experience."  

Updike thus glorifies the flirt and sanctifies her incontinent sex, by associating a scandalous flirt with Venus goddess.

Zimmerman, the principal, is equated with Zeus. Zeus was tyrannical towards all gods and Zimmerman tyrannizes over the teachers, especially over George Caldwell. Zeus is known for his uncontrollable libido. This is reflected in Zimmerman seducing lady teachers and girl students indiscriminately.

Such evil qualities apart, Zeus was also benevolent at times least anticipated by others. This is parallel to Zimmerman offering a sabbatical to George Caldwell. By associating Zimmerman with Zeus, it looks as though Updike implies that, when the gods are bedeviled by evil qualities, it is wrong to expect perfection of poor mortals.
Another equation in the novel is that of George Caldwell with Chiron. Chiron being half man and half animal, his external appearance attests to the balance of animal and human traits, the two sources of total wisdom, the instinctive and the intellectual in mutual harmony. To attain this equipoise is to achieve selfhood. George Caldwell can be said to have attained this equipoise.

Unlike Deifendorf, Zimmerman, and Vera who have all let loose their libidinous impulse, Caldwell has restrained his sex. He turns down Vere's sexual overtures. But, unlike most puritans condemning fallen people with bell, book and candle, George is all sympathy for Vera. When his colleague Phillips talks ill of her, George does not attach any importance to it. He says affably, in her favour: "She 's cheerful -looking .... And when you get to my state , that's all that matters" (p.209). Thus, by restraining his sexual impulse and showing sympathy for 'sinners', Chiron-Caldwell has risen above the animal in him.

Sally of Marry Me is associated with Cinderella. Just as Cinderella is cruelly used by her step-mother and step-sisters and left languishing at home, Sally is neglected and left thirsting for love by her husband. Jerry, like the prince in the fairy tale, is bewitched by Sally and wants to marry her. What Updike implies by the Cinderella myth is that just as Cinderella was trapped at home, the marriage institution is a trap to sensitive women like Sally and they find it extremely difficult to break away from the trap. The other details of the fairy tale do not correspond with Sally's plight.
Myths for Contrast

It is customary with writers to use mythic material for the effect of contrast. They achieve a contrastive effect by juxtaposing "a noble ideal of perfection against the ignoble, the tawdry, and the flawed" T.S. Eliot in The Waste Land and James Joyce in Ulysses have used such shock tactics. The novelist's use of the Chiron myth in The Centaur is also of this kind because it offers "a counter point of ideality to the drab real level" as he has observed in The Paris Review interview.

The Centaur opens at 'the drab real level'. George Caldwell is seen futilely trying to teach an indifferent set of students. He talks to them about the genesis of life, about the laptothrix, the volvox, the trilobite, and the tyrannosaurus rex. But nobody listens to him. The visiting principal sits next to a girl and keeps kneading her breasts when the lesson goes on. Another boy tries to copulate with a girl right in the presence of the teacher!

This disorderly scene is meant by the author to be contrasted with Chiron's teaching of the princely children of Olympus in chapter III. Here the teaching takes on the characters of a religious rite. The teacher and the students begin with an invocation – they sing a hymn to Zeus. While singing, Chiron and his students see a black eagle arrow across the sun. Seeing this their god, the students are awe-struck. With this initial invocation completed, Chiron proceeds to his daily lesson, the Greek explanation of the genesis of All things. This is clearly a contrast to Caldwell's previous lecture.
Whereas Caldwell talks of the evolutionary scheme, Chiron talks of the universe set in motion by love. There is difference not only in the behaviour of the two sets of students, there is glaring differences in the things that are taught to them also. Chiron's students have a religious sense and are disciplined. But Caldwell's students are impatient of both religion and science. Their sole interest is sex. Contrasting the two worlds, Edward P. Vargo observes:

"The contrast could be stronger. Here there is pure love:

in the first chapter there is unbridled sex. Here there is harmony: in the first chapter there is chaos". 

While glorifying the past and denigrating the present, a writer has to be very careful. David Craig, in his article "The Defeatism of The Waste Land", convincingly showed that many of the evils for which T.S. Eliot condemned the present civilization marred the civilizations of the past also which were upheld as models by Eliot and that the poet is not justified in writing off the present.

Updike does not indulge in such a facile glorification of the past. He shows that the set of students listening to Chiron is by no means perfect. There are some black sheep also. Achilles, one of Chiron's students, is sucking the marrow from a bone while listening to his teacher. He usually gives his teacher "the most trouble" (p.89). Ocyrhoe, Chiron's daughter, is another trouble maker. While all students jointly worship Zeus, Ocyrhoe wants him to be branded a criminal and banished from Olympus. Thus
there is as much trouble brewing in the Chiron world as in the Caldwell world. It is therefore wrong to consider, as John B. Vickery does in his article “The Centaur: Myth, History, and Narrative” that the Chiron episode has a “romance quality” or that it represents “a Golden Age, pastoral simplicity, beauty, and wisdom”. ⁸

A third-rate writer would merely condemn the present generation for its flaws but would not better to examine the causes of such a development. Updike, on the other hand, tries to show why things have gone wrong at present. Updike shows that it is not proper to blame Caldwell’s students entirely for their mischief. Deifendorf, an articulate student voices the reason why he and the other students do not like Caldwell’s teaching: they “don’t see the point of memorizing lists of animals that’ve been dead a million years”. (p.93).

Students resent being fed compulsorily on irrelevant knowledge. Updike thus does not blame the students. Nor does he blame the teacher. Caldwell is shown to be as helpless as the students. He is aware that the curriculum is meaningless but that is what “they” the higher authorities have given him to teach.

Caldwell is a mere cog in a complicated machine. He is not free to draw up a meaningful syllabus and implement it. The curriculum is absurd but if he proves inefficient in teaching it, he will lose his job and starve himself and his family. Students try to ‘kill’ the teacher in a bid to gain a meaningful education and the teacher tries to ‘kill’ the students in a
desperate attempt to retain his job. Thus, both students and teachers are shown to be victims of an absurd system.

To sum up, Updike never uses myth to blindly attack the present and extol the past. He is sober enough to show that neither the past nor the present is absolutely good. He refuses to look at the past through rose-coloured spectacles.

**Unconscious use of mythological stories**

C.G. Jung says in his *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* that some literary works have a special significance going beyond any definite meaning conveyed and he attributes it to the presence of ‘primordial images’ or ‘archetypes’ beneath the surface of the literary work concerned. These archetypes he describes as psychic residua of a number of experiences which have happened not to the individual but to his ancestors, and of which the results are inherited in the structure of the brain, a priori determinants of individual experience. Now, these archetypal images stored in the ‘collective unconscious’ manage to infiltrate into, and influence the pattern of, a literary work, without the writer being conscious of it. The archetypal myths unconsciously embedded by writers in their works are detected by critics like Maud Bodkin and Northrop Frye equipped with sharp critical sensibility.

Now, critics have discovered mythic patterns in many of Updike’s works. Updike has not given us any hint, either overt or covert, about these patterns, because he is quite unconscious of their presence in his works. It was left to critics like Detweiler and Joyce C. Markle to unearth these
patterns. Let us now consider some of the myths used by Updike unconsciously in his fiction.

(1) The Sisyphus myth

The Sisyphus myth is traceable in The Centaur. Sisyphus of Greek mythology lived a life of sensual enjoyment. He dismissed the gods, and was condemned by them to push a rock to the top of a hill in perpetuity. Each time he reached the summit, the rock would roll down again, and his task would be renewed. Camus uses the Sisyphus myth in his book Le Mythe De Sisyphe to denote the man who faces the absurdity of life without thinking of committing suicide and without cherishing any false hopes.

There is a touch of Sisyphus in George Caldwell rolling his car up the snow-covered hill and in the car sliding down repeatedly. This literal parallel shows that George, like Sisyphus, has accepted the absurdity of his life and decided to struggle with the senselessness of his condition in full consciousness that it will never be alleviated. The only difference between Sisyphus and George Caldwell is that, whereas Sisyphus was sensual and irreligious in the past, Caldwell is neither.

2) The Grail myth

Ever since J.L. Weston and Sir James Frazer published their studies of the rites and rituals of several hoary culture, novelists started using them as a framework in their works. The Grail myth, in particular, has fascinated novelists. In Rabbit, Run, one can trace the archetype of the quest for the Holy Grail in Rabbit's striving to attain an inexpressible excellence — the kind
of excellence which he could experience while playing basketball or while having intercourse with his class-mate Mary Ann. Detweiler finds Rabbit's Grail hunt ironic¹¹, because, unlike the legend according to which only the pure in heart have hope of finding the elusive Grail, the perverse Rabbit considers himself in terms of that purity. Rabbit's sexual quest is dignified and ennobled by being associated with the Grail hunt. Rabbit's quest is certainly not deflated by what Detweiler considers an ironic contrast with the Grail hunt.

3) The Don Juan Myth

In his review of the de Rougemont books, Updike states that “Don Juan loves woman under the guise of many women, exhaustingly” (Assorted Prose, p.298). Piet, having sex with almost all the women in Couples, is a Don Juanic character. His promiscuity is traced by critics to a variety of factors. Detweiler traces it to Piet’s wish ‘to outdo death in frenzy - of virility.’¹² Some other critics trace it to his mother-fixation and restless search for a mother-figure. A third explanation would be that Piet wants to have a variety of women to satisfy his multifarious needs. Josh Greenfeld says that Updike is pointing, through Piet, to the need for a variety of sexual partners:

“(there is) the difficulty any men... has in finding a one-stop service station for all of his spiritual and physical, diverse and perverse needs in regard to the female. For example, he requires at once a mother and a wife, a mistress and a lover, an upright pillar of the community and a down and dirty sex partner, a personification of
gentility and a suppository of vulgarity at its most venturesome; hence his inability to really make a lasting commitment to any one woman.”

As man and woman are so possessive, Don Juanic men cannot have the partners they like. Updike shows this through the sufferings of Piet caused by the possessive Gerogens. Updike implies that, as long as society is stuck up in Victorian moral values, Don Juans are doomed to suffer.

4) The Tristrem-Iseult myth

Critics like Joyce C. Markle have drawn attention to the subterranean presence of the Tristram and Iseult myth in Couples. According to Robert Detweiler, Angela is “both Iseult the Fair and Iseult of the White Hand; for her whiteness, her temperamental blend of passion, and aloofness, and the other worldly echo of her name all suggest her two roles”.

According to the legend, of course, Angela should be Piet’s mistress instead of his wife; but Updike changes some angles of the tale. “Foxy also has the roles of the two Iseults; she is described in terms of whiteness (her name is ‘Whitman; her clothing and surroundings are often depicted through white imagery) and in terms of the combination of passion and unavailability. Ken Whitman, Foxy’s unimaginative husband, might have been derived from King Mark, Iseult’s brutal husband. Both the husbands are highly intolerant towards their erring wives but their intolerance only increases the gap between themselves and their wives.
In his book *Love in the Western World*, Denis de Rougemont develops the thesis that men and women in the West have a love of unsatisfied desire\(^\text{15}\). Speaking of lovers like Tristram and Iseult, de Rougemont says that they are bent on prolonging the passion and keeping it unsatisfied rather than satisfying it. “What they need is not one another’s presence but one another’s absence. Thus the partings of lovers are dictated by their passion itself, and by the love they bestow on their passion rather than on its satisfaction or on its living object” (*Love in the Western World*, p.43). Piet has this tendency. When he lives a lonely life in the hotel, he discovers that no woman can satisfy him and that he is seized with “a nostalgia for adultery itself... the tension of its hidden springs” (p.475).

De Rougemont contends that lovers create obstacles of possession, if they are absent. For example, Tristram places a sword between himself and Iseult before going to sleep. “The most serious obstruction is thus the one preferred above all; it is the one most suited to intensifying passion” (*Love in the Western World*, p.45). Piet’s adultery has certain natural obstacles, such as the danger of discovery. But he himself creates obstacles which will make it difficult for him to get at his wife Angela. His refusal to let Angela have psychotherapy is one such artificially created obstacles. If she is allowed to have psychotherapy, she will be better sexually. If she becomes better sexually, it will remove the obstacle created now by her frigidity and aloofness, and bring her within his reach. Piet does not want this to happen. He wants her to remain unattainable always.
The need for an obstacle leads to the love of danger for its own sake. De Rougemont calls this the "lovers secret" (Love in the Western World, p.45). He cites as an example Tristram's leap from his own bed to the queen's - a leap which opens up his recent wound. The leap is necessary to avoid discovery since the floor between the beds has been spread with flour to guarantee the queen's chastity. De Rougemont says that Tristram wants only the leap and not the final embrace with Iseult. Piet jumps from the Thornes' bathroom window to escape being caught out by his wife. But, as Foxy says later, Piet is "clearly in love with the idea of jumping". (p350)

De Rougemont says, "To love love more than the object of love... has been to love to suffer" (Love in the Western World, p.52). He says that secretly Westerners love to suffer and be unhappy. Piet loves suffering and tells Angela that children should suffer in order to learn to be good. While making love to Bea, he beats her. Georgina complains that because Piet has lost his parents, he is paining others. De Rougemont suggests that suffering leads to understanding. "Sufferings are a privileged mode of understanding" (Love in the Western World, p.54).

Piet echoes this idea when he says that adultery is a way of "getting out in the world and seeking knowledge" (p.380). De Rougement says that Tristram and Iseult, pursuing suffering, end up with the desire for death. Death is desired because it separates the lovers permanently (which is what the lovers want) and also because death inflicts the utmost suffering on the lovers who are in love with suffering. Like Tristram, Piet is also in love with
death – his many reflections on death scattered all over the novel testify to this.

Thus Updike seems to have unconsciously made Denis de Rougemont’s interpretation of the Tristram – Iseult myth the basis of the tangled love affairs of his novel Couples. Just as John Livingston Lowes, in his The Road to Xanadu, establishes a connection between “The Ancient Mariner” and the books with which Coleridge was acquainted, so Joyce C. Markle has traced a connection between Couples and De Rougemont’s Love in the Western World.  

Updike is very ambitious and goes to the extent of fusing the Chiron myth with the very structure of his novel The Centaur on the Joycean model. But this experiment is considered to be a failure by most critics. Such perceptive critics as Richard Cilman, Granville Hicks, and Arthur Mizener are of the opinion that George’s sacrifice could have made an equally powerful impact, even if there had been no myth, and that the myth is a vexing intrusion.

George Steiner, a distinguished critic, comparing The Centaur with Joyce’s use of myth in Ulysses, said that the Homeric myth in Joyce “acts from inside as a central impulse of shape and wit”; whereas the myth in The Centaur is merely an obtruding “allegoric scaffold”. Despite such adverse criticisms, some critics feel that Updike has definitely succeeded in fusing myth and reality.
J.A. Ward, a prominent critic, is all admiration for *The Centaur*. He says that Updike, by blending mythic and topical elements, achieves two major effects: the creation of comic surprises and a preternatural view of the actual. Says Ward:

“the mythic plane eliminates the temporal and spatial plans, even while problems of time and space most engage the minds of Caldwell-Chiron and Peter-Promotheus”

He feels that the Centaur myth takes us beyond the confines of the immediate and objectifies the implicit religious intuition which the characters feel throughout the novel. Peter Buiten huis says that Updike enjoys an advantage in using the Greek mythology. Because the religious content of Greek mythology is alien to moderns, this mythology can be used for Updike’s own purposes, without having the tenets of any institutionalized belief attached to it.

Despite such warm appreciations by sophisticated critics, the fact remains that most readers do not respond to the myth. R.P. Blackmur’s objection to Yeat’s use of myth on the grounds that the myth he uses is very obscure and that it cannot support all that Yeats wants to say, applies to Updike’s use of myth in *The Centaur*. The Chiron myth is very obscure and even the key provided by the author at the end of the novel does not enlighten many readers.
Also, George's existential angst and death wish are powerful feelings which the Chiron myth is too weak to support. Furthermore, investing even minor incidents with mythic touches shows only the author's ingenuity and does not add to artistry of the novel. Compared to the myth in *The Centaur*, the mythical elements in his other works are far more effective, as they are used in connexion with one or two characters and so are manageable. Updike's unconscious use of myth is far more effective than his conscious use. The reader is delighted in bringing the myth to the work, while reading. As Joseph L. Blotner says:

"It is like laying a colored transparency over a sheet covered with a maze of hues to reveal the orderly pattern which otherwise resides within them unperceived".  

We see a gradual change in Updike's novels. With *Couples* he shifts the emphasis away from the ideal and mythical past, he realizes a commitment to this world. This commitment also creates an amalgamation of celebration and satire in his later novels. In *Rabbit Redux* Updike presents symbols like flower power from the historical present. Updike turns to contemporary history because the myth failed to provide a common basis of references between the writer and the reader. By adopting this contemporary history he shares a store of common assumptions with the reader, the assumptions which are confined to this world only.

In *A Month of Sundays* he makes a commitment to the present, but the mythical part is not totally abandoned. In this novel, Updike does not compare
the present in terms of the past, which would have showed the present. Instead, he redefines the past so that it will be meaningful in the present. Updike presents a union of the past and the present in this novel, and hence its theme results in a unified vision of this world and the other. There is a reconciliation between man’s body and soul, faith and good works.

II. Updike’s use of The Bible

The Bible forms the basis of many of Updike’s novels. The Hamiltons have convincingly shown how almost every other line in Updike’s fiction bristles with allusions to the Bible. Even when Updike does not explicitly allude to the Bible, he seems to have unconsciously derived many of the characters and situations in his fiction from the Bible. Lot, Adam, Eve, Jesus Christ, Eden, Paradise – these are at the back of some of the prominent characters and situations in Updike’s fiction. Let us consider each of them in some detail.

Critics Joyce C. Markle and B.D. Sharma are of the opinion that the close of Couples, with its description of the church destroyed by rain and fire, connects Tarbox with Sodom and Comorrah destroyed by rain of fire in the Genesis. Though Tarbox is as full of sexual perverts as Sodom there are many marked dissimilarities between Sodom and Tarbox. Whereas Sodom and all its inmates are destroyed, in Tarbox only the church is destroyed and the people are not harmed in any way. In fact, when the church burns, these couples remain in their closed cars, listening to radio music.
So, one cannot share Dr. Sharma's view that the Tarbox couples are exposed to God's wrath. When the church crumbles, people do not feel sorry but wonder how the church, with its walls so very weak, managed to remain undestroyed for such a long period. This symbolizes Christianity having resisted destruction all these years in spite of its anti-sexual stand and at last giving way. The rain of fire on Sodom signalled the triumph of God over paganism. But the rain in Couples signals the triumph of paganism over God. After the destruction of the church, Piet is free from guilt and has intercourse with Carol with a light heart.

Dr. Sharma observes that Piet has close resemblance with Lot, the man who fled from the burning city of Sodom with his two virgin daughters and left his wife behind as she turned into a pillar of salt. Lot is virtuous and obedient to God. Piet, on the other hand, is a sinner according to conventional Christianity. Thus, Tarbox is contrasted and not paralleled with Sodom. By making the sexual quested Piet leave Tarbox and its intolerant inhabitants, Updike implies that intolerance of sexuality is a sin. This is a far cry from the stand taken in Genesis which regards sexual incontinence as a sin from which one should flee. The conclusion reached at the end of Couples is thus diametrically opposed to the conclusion reached at the end of the Sodom episode.

Angela of Couples has been identified with Eve by critic Jose Yglesias. The picture on the cover of Couples is William Blake’s ‘Adam and Eve sleeping’ which, according to Jose Yglesias, helps Updike “give the book coherence.” In the opening scene of the novel, Piet tries to see
Angela naked, when she undresses. But “like Eve on a portal she crouched in shame, stone” (p.16). The Biblical Eve, as portrayed by Milton, proudly exhibits her nakedness to her husband. But ‘Updike’s Eve is cold and frigid. She withdraws from her husband and starves him of sex. Angela is thus an ironic contrast to the Biblical Eve.

Marcia, with her frank interest in sex, appears as a more successful Eve figure. She and her husband going for nude swims together strike one as naked Adam and Eve. After their adultery, like Adam and Eve after their fall, Marcia and her husband lose their innocence and simplicity, never to recover them. Their attempts at finding them through uninhabited sexuality bring only frustration and complexity, as Larry E. Taylor has shown.²⁷ Foxy is also identifiable with Eve, who gave the Fruit of the Tree of knowledge to Adam and brought about his fall. When she becomes pregnant by Piet, Piet connects her with the Eve who brought knowledge to Adam and destroyed his innocence and caused him irremediable suffering. Piet reflects as follows:

“She had intruded a drastic dimension. He had been innocent amid trees. She had demanded that he know straight string of his life, knotted. The knot surely was sin”. (p.416).

Sexual fulfillment is presented in Couples as a paradisiacal state. At the same time Updike also points out how difficult it is to attain this state. Georgene welcomes her lover to the ‘post-pill paradise’. But his is ironic, for
it turns out that more pills cannot guarantee happiness to the illicit lovers. Pills may prevent unwanted pregnancy but they cannot prevent guilty feeling and fear of God from worrying them. Georgene can take to adultery with ease, but not Piet who is plagued by fear and guilt. Later, with Piet's permission, Freddy seeks to enter the post-pill paradise with Angela, but this too proves to be an abortive attempt. Freddy becomes impotent and cannot enjoy what is made available to him. Thus sex is found to be not a key to paradise.

Discussing how Piet is simultaneously associated with a multiplicity of archetypal figures such as Christ, Adam, Lot, Tristram, Don Juan, etc., Tony Tanner makes a pointed observation:

"I do not see that these references or analogues operate to any great effect in the book; their very multiplicity in itself suggests something a bit too easy".28

Tony Tanner's impressionistic view is open to criticism. Some of the analogues (such as the Lot analogue) serve to bring out the difference between Piet and the particular archetypal figure and thus serve to indicate the areas where Updike breaks with the past. Some other analogues (such as the Christ analogue) serve to dignify and ennoble Piet's sexual pursuit. None of the analogues is pointless. The 'very multiplicity' of the analogues to which Tony Tanner objects bears eloquent testimony to the complexity and multi-dimensional nature of Piet.
The idea of America as Paradise, a lush green land unspoiled by man, has stubbornly persisted in American literature. Writers evoked a picture of Edenic America by moving their descriptions back in time or westward across the continent. In the nineteenth century, America's population moved westward also and so Melville transferred the imagery of Paradise to the South Seas. Also, Melville explored the inner paradise in the mind of man. Thus Ishmael asserts that "in the soul of man there lies one insular Tahiti, full of peace and joy, but encompassed by all the horrors of the half-known life."

In twentieth-century American literature, the stress is not on paradise preserved but on paradise lost. This is the recurrent note in Faulkner, in Hemingway, in Robert Frost and the lush, last-world imagery of Wallace Stevenes's poetry. When in 1942, Faulkner described, in The Bear, a train vanishing into the wilderness like a "small, dingy, harmless snake", the reference was obviously to the loss of paradise. This was the position taken in R.W.B. Lewis's The American Adam (1935), and Henry Nash Smith's Virgin Land (1950). Howard Mumford Jones's Q Strange New World (1964) and Leo Marx's The Machine in the Garden (1964) are recent additions.

Both in Rabbit, Run and Rabbit Redux Updike presents a picture of Edenic garden threatened with extinction. In Rabbit, Run, the lavish garden on Mrs. Smith's wealthy estate is a version of Eden. A friend of Mrs. Smith's directly compares it to Heaven (p.114). To the mother-fixated Rabbit, Mrs. Smith is a mother-figure and to Mrs. Smith, Rabbit is a surrogate for
her lost husband. The two are evidently in love with each other, strolling through the Edenic lanes arm-in-arm, at peace.

Larry E. Taylor calls the two “the strangest Adam and Eve in Literature”. Finally, however, this Edenic pair separates not only because Rabbit gets another job but because of the temperamental incompatibility between the two. Mrs. Smith is a realist who prefers alfalfa to expensively unique flowers. Rabbit, on the other hand, is a sex-mad dreamer.

In *Rabbit Redux* also, Edenic life is shown to be threatened with extinction. In this novel, America is viewed as a garden taken over by the tropical plant, the Negro, crushing out the native plant, namely, the Whites (p.17). And later Mim views America as a garden gradually being changed into a desert inhabited by cockroaches. Reporting her loveless life as a call-girl in Nevada and California, Mim says that even the Far West, the last Edenic frontier holdout, has fallen and that men and women are living like cockroaches in order to survive. She predicts that this way of life is moving eastward and that America as a whole will soon be swept by strategies of maintaining borderline existence. The allusion to cockroaches might be from Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*.

Though the ‘desert’ is fast spreading out, Updike shows that the situation is not entirely hopeless. In Mt. Judge, outside the house Rabbit grew in, the maples have been mutilated to make room for electrical wires, but, Rabbit observes, the seeds still fall plentifully. Open countryside, cattle and forming do exist beyond the expressways. Mt. Judge is still natural, but
the star-like light on the Pinnacle Hotel is blurred – as if this man-made Bethlehem beacon is becoming impotent, guiding less securely”.  

With the idea of America as paradise goes the idea of the American as Adam. Kay S. House, talking of the recurrent Adamic figure in American fiction, views Cooper’s Matty Bumppo, Hawthorne’s Donatello and Zenobia (who reminds the narrator of Eve), Melville’s Pierre (who came “from the embower’d ... home of his fathers... dewily refreshed and spiritualized by sleep and Billy Budd (who “might have posed for a status of Adam before the fall”), Henry James’s Christopher Newmen and Adam Verver, Scott Fitzgerald’s Gatsby and the free but inchoate heroes of Salinger and Bellow as Adamic figures. Gerry Brenner says that Rabbit of Rabbit, Run is an Adamic figure. Like Adam, Rabbit has an implicit faith in God. But, unlike Adam, Rabbit uses his religions in support of his sexual adventures. Just as he plants seeds and leaves them at that, so also he would like to give his seeds to women and then get rid of them. He believes firmly that, after life is created, it will be taken care of by God:

“God himself folded into the tiny adamant structure, self-
destined to succession of explosion, the great slow
gathering out of water and air and silicon” (p.110).

Unlike Adam who wanted Eve and Eve only, Rabbit wants to have variety of sexual partners. Hence Gerry Brenner’s statement that Rabbit is an Adamic figure cannot be accepted without qualification.
The St. Stephen myth

In *The Poorhouse Fair*, Conner, prefect of the poorhouse, tries to establish order but is misunderstood and hated by the inmates and is stoned by them. This is an echo of the fate of St. Stephen who was hated and stoned to death by the populace for his attempt at creating order and organization. Conner, trying to do good to people in spite of their resistance, is thus divinized.

Thus, even when there are no explicit references to the Bible, the reader can perceive in Updike's fiction a number of characters and situations that are either parallel to or contrastive with Biblical characters and situations. The fictional characters are lent depth and dignity by being associated with the Bible.

III. Updike’s use of the Waste Land Myth

Edmund Wilson shows in *The Axel’s Castle* how waterlessness has been fashioned by Eliot as a profound symbol of spiritual aridity and desolation in our times. Many of Eliot's characters are agonized by acute thirst. Gerontion, “an old man in a dry month”, thinks of the young men who had fought in the rain; Prufrock fancies riding the waves with mermaids and lingering in the chambers of the sea: Mr. Apollinax is imagined drawing strength from the deep sea-caves of coral islands: the protagonist of “The waste Land” making water the symbol of all fecundity and flowering of the soul invokes in desperate need the memory of an April shower of his youth, the song of the hermit thrush with its sound of water dripping and the vision of a drowned phoenician sailor, sunk beyond “the cry of gulls and the deep
sea swell", who has at last died by water, not thirst. Like Sir Perceival, the quester for the Holy Grail, journeying to the waterless Kingdom of the Fisher King, the protagonist finds himself travelling in a country cracked by drought.

"Here is no water but only rock
Rock and no water and the sandy road
The road winding above among the mountains
Which are mountains of rock without water".36

Now, many of the people in the Updike world are also seized with thirst. Rabbit Redux shows Rabbit emerging from the printing plant parched with thirst. In the same novel, Mim talks of people in America living like cockroaches – an image of dry, barren life which Updike could have borrowed from Kafka’s Metamorphosis. Peter Caldwell, at the end of The Centaur, is weak with thirst and fever. The dogs in Of the Farm, with which Mrs. Robinson and her son are associated, are always thirsty. Eccles of Rabbit, Run moves about, agonized by thirst.

But, unlike the Eliotians, the Updikeans manage to assuage their thirst somehow or other. When water is not available, they got on with some other substitute. Thus, Rabbit in Rabbit Redux assuages his thirst with daiquiri, Eccles gets iced water, Peter gets orange juice. All this symbolizes the ways in which these people have achieved limited success in enriching their arid lives. Rabbit’s sex, Eccles’s social service and Peter’s art – with such pursuits, Updikean characters partially succeed in infusing meaning
into their lives. Joyce C. Markle's thesis that Updike presents in his fiction, especially in *Rabbit, Run* "a wasteland without life-giving water". is, therefore, not quite acceptable.

Joyce C. Markle has shown that the dentist Freddy Thorne of *Couples* is derived from Tiresias of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Of course, Freddy has some of the physical features of Tiresias. Like Tiresias, with his wrinkled female breasts, Freddy is also androgynous. He tells Angela: "I want to be everybody's mother. I want to have breasts so everybody can have a suck. Why do you think I drink so much?. To make milk" (p. 410).

Tiresias was blind. Freddy without his glasses is also blind. Tiresias was changed into a female and then back to male again. Freddy also displays changes of sexual identity. Playing the male role, he expresses a desire to sleep with Janet (p. 186). On another occasion, he praises her beauty "as a disinterested party, girl to girl" (p. 166). Thus Freddy's sexual identity, like Tiresias's keeps shifting back and forth.

In spite of such physical resemblances between Tiresias and Freddy, their attitudes to life are strikingly different. Tiresias who is "the central consciousness" of the poem is "spiritually embittered". He is a mouthpiece of Eliot's aversion to sex. Freddy, on the other hand, is a humanist and serves to air Updike's views on salvation through sex. He considers the sex-crazy inhabitants of Tarbox as constituting a church:

"a magic circle of heads to keep the night out ....

We've made a church of each other" (p. 14).
Unlike Tiresias who views sex with undisguised disgust, Freddy embraces the human condition in spite of its defects:

“People hate love. It threatens. It’s like tooth decay, it smells and it hurts. I’m the only man alive it doesn’t threaten, I love you, all of you, men, women, neurotic children, crippled dogs, monkey cats, cockroaches” (p.164).

As Paula and Nick Backscheider point out, Freddy “ignores the spiritual ... recognizes and justifies the human, even animal, in man.” Thus, Tiresias and Freddy, despite physical resemblance, are polar opposites and serve to voice the diametrically opposed philosophies of their authors.

**IV Use of Imagery**

In *A Month of Sundays* Updike adopts a technique in which the physical world becomes spiritually significant through his use of imagery. The imagery reflects his concern with the schism between man’s body and soul, and attempts to convey it to the readers. His metaphorical language makes it clear that a reality exists beyond the literal. It is the use of imagery or symbols that creates a connection between the physical experience and the mental or spiritual experience. These two experiences can also be distinguished as two areas, the literary and theological respectively, which become for Updike, the mode and meaning in his novels.
It is a special trait of Updike that he can make a connection with theology through the use of images. In all of Updike's novels, except *Rabbit Redux*, at least some of the metaphorical language reflects his view that to live only in this physical world is not enough, that there are higher values also, that there is another world also, the spiritual or theological world. The literary experience mirrors the religious experience and two experiences provide the central conflict of his fiction.

We will see that the use of images in the novels makes obvious the intentions of the author. His literary experiences imitates the theological experience, for which he longs. Or, to put it in other words, by repeated use of metaphorical language Updike creates a hope that connection between the two worlds can be made in the mind of man, which, in fact, becomes the mind of his reader.

Through the use of imagery, Updike not only manipulates the reader's response but also often attempts to make the imagery a reflection of the novel's theme. For instance, in *The Poorhouse Fair* the imagery leads us to connections, which are clear and simple, reflecting the meaning of the novel. In *Rabbit, Run*, the imagery, reflecting the theme of the novel, is ambivalent and complex, but it concerns with a spiritual connection between this world and the other.

In the following novels till *A Month of Sundays* this connection gradually seems to be no longer possible. Updike not only reduces the implication of imagery, but also makes it more secular. His metaphorical
language presents a reality beyond the literal, the external world as the only real world. The theological dimension, on which Updike stressed from the very beginning, diminishes from Rabbit, Run through Rabbit Redux. For instance, sex is a metaphoric means to religion in Rabbit, Run. In Couples, sex is the religion because it has failed as a connection between this world and the other. In Rabbit Redux recent history becomes dominant, when images do reach to convey the empty space of Rabbit Redux.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


12. Ibid, p.139.


15. Denis De Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, trans. Montgomery Belgion (Greenwich: Conn: Fawcett Publications, 1967). All future references to this book will be to this edition and will be cited in the body of the text.


23. See the Hamiltons, *Elements of John Updike*. 


30. Ibid., p.15.


38. Ibid., pp.132, 133.