CHAPTER - IV

THE TREASURE TROVE OF UPDIKE’S TECHNIQUES

Updike as a writer was always conscious of the limitations of language and has wondered:

Whether the syntactical sentence is plastic enough to render the flux, the blurring, the endless ennuendo of experience as we feel it? No aesthetic theory will cover the case; what is needed is a habit of honesty on the part of the writer. He must, rather athletically, instill his wrists with the refusal to write whatever is lazily assumed, or hastily perceived, or piously hoped. Fiction is a tissue of literal lies that refreshes and informs our sense of actuality. Reality is – chemically, atomically, biologically – a fabric of microscopic accuracies. Language approximates phenomena through a series of hesitations and qualifications; I miss, in much contemporary writing, this sense of self-qualification, the kind of timid reverence toward what exists that Cezanne shows when he grapples for the shape and shade of a fruit through a mist of delicate stabs. (*Picked-up Pieces.*207)
Updike’s observation shows his sincerity and concern to “transcribe” reality as perceived by him. Further more Updike’s remarks on Creative Imagination especially on the processes of creation of his favorite story “The happiest I’ve been” illustrates his veneration and sincere adherence to reality.

The Story “The happiest I’ve been” (SD) was published in 1958 and had been reprinted in a number of anthologies. This story was found to be “exciting”. It is exciting even though there is no great violence. In one of his book reviews regarding the success of the story Updike as a realistic writer has remarked: “The correctness, the actuality, I suggest, is exciting. In 1958, I was at just the right distance from the night in Shillington, Pennsylvania, when 1952 became 1953; I still remembered and cared, yet was enough distant to get a handle on the memories, to manipulate them into fiction.” (p.184)

Updike believed that memory played a major role in fashioning the creative imagination for that particular story and that the creative imagination is a tripartite phenomenon: there is the artist, keen to express himself and to make an impression. But there also has to be a genre, a pre-existent form or type of object and attached to that genre and inextricable from its growth is the audience that finds in the contents of this form some causes for consolation, amusement, or enlightenment.
According to Updike the first part of creative imagination is the author and the second part of it is the genre- at the time it was the American short story especially the “New Yorker” short story. In the fictions of 1950s non–southern small towns and teenagers were both customarily treated with condescension, or satirically. The indictments of provincial life by Sinclair Lewis and Ring Lardner were quite alive among the American readers. Updike’s mission was to stand up and cry, “No, this is life, to be taken as seriously as any other kind” (p.184). By this prophetic light tiny details, like “the shaved armpit gleaming like a bit of chicken skin or the two triangular punctures in an empty oil can acquire the intensity of symbolism” (p.184). The blurred sexuality of this playful moment is ominous, for it is carrying the participants away from their childhoods, into the dizzying mystery of time.

The third part of the creative process is the audience. Updike imagined that the audience needed a wholesome middle – American change from the then customary diet of Westchester adultery stories and reminiscences of luxurious Indian or Polish childhoods. He believed that there was a body of his fellow Americans to whom these modest doings in Pennsylvania would be news. Such was the state of his imagination when he wrote the story. As a consequence of such assumptions and state of imagination, the story was “fresh and authentic” by authentic Updike means:
“actual and concrete. For the creative imagination, in my sense of it, is wholly parasitic upon the real world, what used to be called Creation. Creative excitement, and a sense of useful work, have invariably come to me only when I felt I was transferring, with a lively accuracy, some piece of experienced reality to the printed page. . . . The will toward concreteness, the fervor to do justice to the real, compels style and form into being. No style or form exists in the abstract; whatever may be true in painting or music, there is no such thing as abstract writing. Words even when shattered into nonsense struggle to communicate meaning to us; and behind the most extreme modernist experiments with the language of fiction – Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake*; the late writing of Gertrude Stein; the automatic writing of Dada – some perception about the nature of reality seeks embodiment”.

(p.184)

It was the strong conviction of Updike that Creative Imagination wants to please the audience with nothing less than the life as savored by the artist “in the memory and fantasies most precious” (p.183). George Searles opines that Updike can be most accurately described as a social realists, as he generally prefers the literal rendering of relatively commonplace actualities and avoid highly esoteric flights in the manner of John Hawkes and other contemporary American writers.
Updike’s novels and more than three-fourths of his numerous short stories employ the third person authorial voice, a narrative perspective whose quality of comprehensive, “objective” omniscience is well suited to his purposes. Congruently, Updike’s protagonists tend to be far more diverse. Updike has portrayed young boys whose age range from ten to sixteen, adolescents on the verge of maturity, students, young husbands, young fathers, matured adults striving to strike balance between his parents and wife, technicians, craftsmen, officials, professionals, creative artists, eccentrics, ecclesiastics, even celestials like the Arch Angel and Christ Himself as his protagonist. Updike’s choice of the historical present tense creates a sense of verisimilitude without sacrificing the obvious stylistic advantages of third person viewpoint.

In the story “Ace in the Hole” (SD) Freddie Anderson is the protagonist. His high school makes him a foot ball hero. But the society has no need for his talent. Likewise he enters into a marriage and struggles to salvage it as required by the society. The story portrays his struggle. John Gerlach has closely studied the story “Ace in the Hole” and has pointed out how Updike as a social realist draws the attention of the readers to the complexity of Ace as a character who has both the progressive and regressive element. The ironic note of the ending stresses his regression: “The music ate through his skin and mixed with the nerves and small veins, he seemed to be great again, and all the other kids were around them, in a ring, clapping time” (p.26): he has conjured up the past as a
salve to self-esteem, as a way to see himself great again. Ace is the boy who will never grow up, a boy who has conceived the unfortunate idea of holding together an impossible marriage solely to replicate himself and has compelled his wife into stunned acquiescence in his dreamy, regressive dance.

But a substratum of the text suggests that Ace’s progression cannot be ignored. Unlike the males in the stories of Shaw or Hemingway, he wants to sustain a marriage, not to evade or destroy it. His transition to adult life has been difficult, and in the ending he retreats to images of the past. But in this story, unlike the others, the wife is part of the scene he constructs. The closing scene in “Ace in the Hole” is still moving; the dance goes on suggesting that Ace’s regression at the end may be temporary, and his ability to survive may outweigh the pull backward. He is not, as his mother would like him to be, eager to return to his past as if his present does not exist. His wife’s silence, if not shared dreaming, may at least indicate a willingness to stay. The dance is an ambiguous ending, for it can be read both as a close and opening. But the elements of openness can be ignored only at the cost of the richness of the story.

“Ace in the Hole” is typical of the suspension we have come to favor in the short story. The reader will provide a close based on what he or she takes to be the dominant tone, but the suspension is necessary for the final effect. Anything
thoroughly closed might not seem modern, might appear to portray life dishonestly.

Verbal elegance is a constant feature of Updike’s stories. Almost all acknowledge Updike’s stylistic flair and verbal facility but some critics point it out to denigrate him. If Updike is a chronicler of the every day, his rendition of this “middleness” never becomes itself middling; through his use of language, he both elevates and transcends his material, adroitly reawakening the reader to life’s small wonders by creating striking new perspectives. For the most part, this sharpness of perception is achieved by virtue of the extreme specificity that invests Updike’s presentation of physical detail.

Equally central to Updike’s method, however is his selectivity in choosing vivid often onomatopoeic unusual but precise modifiers. Moreover, Updike’s descriptions do not rely exclusively on visual detail alone. There is also considerable emphasis on other sensory impressions, as well: the tactile, the auditory and the olfactory. Updike records the moment in a very total way, drawing the reader into a feeling almost of participation in the events described.

Robert Detweiler has suggested that Updike’s metaphors are akin to those of the metaphysical poets, demonstrating an “elegant control of the delicate tension between the tangible and the fanciful”. The comparison is apt: repeatedly, the reader is struck by the simultaneous appropriateness and oddity of Updike’s
images, remarkably original figures of speech that evoke vivid mental pictures. They also afford new perceptions of the external world. This metaphoric inventiveness characterizes all of Updike’s work. Updike is very much in control, maintaining a highly polished stylistic brilliance that – far from becoming counterproductive – is quite well suited to his purposes, enabling him to invest his rather commonplace subject matter with fresh vitality. Updike’s background is unusual. His experience at Oxford, Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Arts have been instrumental in fostering the individuality of Updike’s style. Like Hemingway, who claimed to have learned much from Cezanne, Updike has been greatly influenced by his knowledge of painting and illustration, and his easy familiarity with the principles of versification also contributes to the tenor of his writing.

A highly pictorial quality informs his work, combining with an acute sensitivity to the patterns and nuances of language, to create a style that is unmistakable in its precision and beauty. The story “Pigeon Feathers” which Burchard Praises as “Updike’s most sustained stylistic achievement” has descriptive passages typical of his prose style. As she points out, in describing the pigeons, Updike’s style becomes lyrical and precise.

The sound of their cooing “flooded the vast interior with its throaty, bubbling outpour.” David aims at a pigeon that is “preening and cooing in a
throbbing, thrilled, tentative way” and shoots at its “tiny, jauntily cocked head.” The bird, “pirouetting rapidly and nodding its head as if in frantic agreement,” finally falls. As the cooing of the remaining pigeons becomes shriller, their “apprehensive tremolo made the whole volume of air seem liquid”. When David buries his victims, he notices, for the first time, the intricate individual design of each bird. The pattern of each feather is carefully and precisely colored. Each feather is trimmed to fulfill its purpose. One pigeon has plumage “slate shades of blue”, another is “mottled all over in rhythms of lilac and gray”. David becomes convinced that “the God who had lavished such craft upon these worthless birds would not destroy His whole Creation by refusing to let David live forever”.

(PF.150)

In the lyrical description of the birds, Updike frequently uses words associated with the arts, with music, with dancing, and in the burial scene, with painting. Words like “tremolo” and “pirouetting” and the detailed description of the color and pattern of the feathers reinforce Updike’s ultimate purpose, to suggest the existence of a design, and thus a Designer, in the natural world. While philosophical objections could be (and have been) made to the argument of design as proof of God’s existence, the tone of gentle irony in the final paragraph assures us of Updike’s control of his theme. As Robert Detweiler writes: “The point is that Updike, through symbolic action and analogy, has written a moving religious narrative that does not presume to convince one of the
objective truth of Christian faith, but that does testify to an individual’s achievement of it.” (p.50)

In the life of Western man traditional Christianity has been a unifying force. The decay of Christianity whether it is mourned, celebrated, or merely acquiesced to cannot be ignored. Since the death of the Genteel Tradition the theme of the exiled individual in a meaningless universe -- a universe in which precepts of religious orthodoxy seem increasingly less relevant -- has challenged the imagination of American writers with an almost overwhelming urgency. Despite the persistence of institutional Christianity as measured by church construction and attendance modern man seems continually less able to find order and meaning in his life. While he seems increasingly reluctant to take the leap into faith, nihilism rarely produces card-carrying agnostics. Thus, what might be called the “religious quest” continues to exert a powerful influence on the minds of Western thinkers.

Albert Camus suggested the reason for this determined questing when he said that “A world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world”. The world ceases to be familiar when even the worst reasons fail to be of any help in explaining or ordering it. All of the old explanations both ethical and scientific have alike failed and man is left face to face with an alien universe in which orthodox systems can offer at best only a superficial reassurance. The
drastically changed value system and the flux of the modern world have goaded
the writers to the realms of experimentation and innovation.

Updike too has produced certain experimental fiction. Generally sportive
and quirky, these idiosyncratic departures nevertheless tend in most cases to
reflect the writer’s ongoing concerns. Moments of crisis and perception, more
dependent on the ability to sketch an evocative image than on a facility for
plotting, are the center of Updike’s Short fiction and they emerge more naturally
from his verbal gifts. While the traditional Epiphanic story may be Updike’s
forte, he has also been a technical innovator whose experiments with the lyric,
the montage and the sketch exhibit his ability to stretch the flexible genre of the
short story.

Hence applauding Updike’s special achievement William Abrahams notes
in his 1976 citation for Updike’s Special O.Henry Award for continuing
Achievement: “the majority of short story writers continue to conduct their
explorations within the hardly visible confines of the tradition itself. Few have
done so as consistently, or with such rewarding results, as John Updike . . . . His
story, ‘Separating’, characteristics of him in its maturity, control, stylistic ease,
authenticity of emotion, and accuracy of observation, provides the occasion to
honor him once again.”
The short stories of Updike may be classified, as suggested by Jane Barnes as Experimental including such stories like “The happiest I’ve been” (SD) “The Packed Dirt” (PF) “Harv is Plowing” (TMS) “During the Jurassic” (MW) or descriptive like the story “The Indian” (TMS), “The Hillies” (MW), “Wife Wooing” (PF), “The Alligators” (SD) and Journalistic like the story “One of my Generation”(MW), “Jesus on Honshu” (MW).

The experimental stories are of different types – vintage, montage, baroque, epistolary stories, lyrical stories, and lyrical mediations besides monologues and inversion. Some of them are called Vintage stories as they are set in the author’s home town with typical protagonist pitted against typical problems. *The Same Door and Pigeon Feathers* collections have many of these stories.

The protagonist is always a young boy or an adolescent on the verge of adulthood. The stories depict the pangs of loss experienced by missing the familiar and fortifying milieu, school life, parents and grand parents, sweet hearts and the lovable life. The stories generally mourn the loss of childhood and past as the protagonist enters into the challenging and often confusing present and future, necessitating him to lose his innocence and gain painful experience.

In *pigeon Feathers* the montage technique is more evident. Most impressive technically is Updike’s montage effect achieved by juxtaposition of entirely separate scenes in the same story. Three stories in the *Pigeon Feathers* especially
demonstrate the effect. The story “Home” portrays Robert’s return from England with his wife and child. He plans to spend a month (July) with his parents before going to teach mathematics at a girl’s college. Robert’s father, an amiable Pennsylvania high school teacher understands almost nothing of modern ways. His simple reactions to situations are open and genuine; they embarrass his sophisticated son.

The first half of the story tells of the many small corruptions involved in this homecoming – corruptions of feeling, loyalty, and speech. Robert’s values are always in motion, it seems; but his father gives them substance in an unexpected encounter. The second half of the story recounts his only triumph, that won by default over a belligerent Pennsylvania Dutchman they pass on the highway.

The Dutchman pursues them down the road; the father pulls off on the shoulder and stops. The Dutchman also stops, ahead of them, and trots back to them howling obscenities. The father gets out to speak to him, but the Dutchman, suddenly afraid, turns and runs back to his car. Robert’s father is ignorant of his triumph. He comments in a puzzled manner: “That man had something to say to me and I wanted to hear what it was” (PF.167) and gets back into the ancient Plymouth and begins to drive on. The two parts of the story move Robert to a feeling of joy. In the person of his father, home once more becomes real for
Robert. His father’s awkwardness, his hopeless innocence, his openness to the world makes him genuine. He symbolizes the ceremonies of the land, the rural Pennsylvania of his son’s youth, unchanged by scholarship and sophistication.

“The Blessed Man” juxtaposes three characters: a smiling china-man, serene amidst the mob scrambling out of Fenway Park; the narrator’s grandmother, who had clung to life tenaciously and left him her only possession, a silver thimble; and a nameless Polynesian, the last of his tribe, writing a journal on Fanning Island. Each character is the custodian of a tradition that is handed down to the narrator and then to reader. Writing the story thus celebrates filial piety, a sense of the goodness and continuity of experience. The reader, like the narrator, must make the leap of faith as the author suggests, in the story “Packed Dirt, Churchgoing, A Dying Cat, A Traded Car”. Although Updike’s method here is innovative, these stories are far more realistic in texture. Updike seeks always to suggest the surrealistic quality that lurks just beneath the surface of quite commonplace events and situations, and his method is accordingly more reserved.

Richard Rupp says that in the story “Wife Wooing” and “Lifeguard”. Updike is experimenting with unreliable narrators. Each narrator takes himself and his situation far too seriously, indulging his capacity to formulate sense impressions. The narrator in “Wife Wooing”(PF) defines the import of his
experience in a way which seems quite ornate: “Monday’s wan breakfast light bleaches you blotchily, drains the goodness from your thickness, and makes the bathrobe a limp stained tube flapping disconsolately, exposing sallow décolletage. (PF.114)

Technique of inversion is used in “A Gift from the City”(SD) the title signifies the inversion that gives the story its rationale. James tells the Negro to accept the thirty dollars from them “as a gift from city”. What he and his wife do not see, in their genteel materialist pride, is that the Negro himself is the real gift from the city to them. He is offered to them as a unique introduction to the destitution that characterizes the other side of metropolitan living. But James and Liz, for all their humanitarian impulses and notions of decency, do not really want to know the Negro.

“Dear Alexandros” (PF) uses the epistolary style in a manner reminiscent of “For Esme – With Love and Squalor”, of J.D.Salinger. In the story “Four Sides of one story” (TMS) the same epistolary style is employed. In yet another deviation some stories are written as dramatic monologues. “The Arch Angel”, “Life Guard” and “Wife Wooing”, are some of the memorable stories involving this technique.

Eileen Baldeshwiler observes that in a discussion of the American lyrical short story, “one would want to mention the work of a young writer of varied
talents, John Updike. As a far reach from the expansive Olinger stories is the kind of achievement hinted at in ‘Sunday Teasing’ (SD). The technique is brought much closer to fruition in the title story of The Music School as well as in ‘Harv is Plowing Now’ (TMS) and ‘Leaves’ (TMS)” (p.199)

Though the story “Leaves” has a variety and disparate materials they are faultlessly integrated, a union is created far above the level of story –line, “Leaves” may best be described as a sophisticated quest story in the modern manner; at the same time it is an intense probing of the perennial question of moral guilt and of man’s movement in and out of purely natural processes, and it is overlain with a profound sense of beauty, reflected or “expressed” in its own art.

The manner is ostensibly descriptive and essayistic; details of action are presented in hints and indirection and kept carefully subordinate to an estimate of their effect and meaning. The issue of How to be gradually modulates to the question of what to say, thus the reflexive references to the writing of the story: “And what are these pages but leaves? Why do I produce them but to thrust, by some subjective photosynthesis, my guilt into nature, where there is no guilt”? (TMS.45) Updike’s method of construction is to present isolated blocks of description that are yet joined by a continuity of persistent inquiry in the narrative voice. In “Leaves” the author also creates a unifying motif in the grape
leaves, with their analogue in Whitman’s “Leaves of Grass”: to which the author refers in the unexpectedly dramatic close of the story.

According to R.B. Larson “It is in the lyrical meditation that Updike allows precise intelligence and linguistic delicatessé, their greatest play”. Larson has described the short stories of Updike as lyrical meditation and has also defined the term lyrical as meaning imaginative and image-filled subjective prose-poetry meditation as meaning contemplation of large, problematic areas of human experience. Lyrical Meditation is not a story in the conventional sense: it bears only vestigial characterization and makes no concessions to standard devices of plot. It is more closely related to Hawthorne’s “pure essays” as Poe has termed such pieces as “Snow-Flakes” and “The Sisters Years” or Washington Irving’s sketches.

Like Irving, Updike too has had intensive art training and hence exhibit the painterly eye. It is also related to Dubliners or Go Down, Moses of James Joyce. Ranging uninhibitedly but always anchored to a central image or concept, it is often incremental in manner: meaning accrete through small revelations as the story works toward making concrete one or more monadic abstractions. Drawing upon story and essay and poem for its form, it succeeds in overcoming the usual limitations of its models: the storyline of the story, the prosaic logic of the essay, the often obscure ellipticality of the poem. It is a sophisticated writer’s most
sophisticated accomplishment. Ambiguity itself is one of the many delights of
the lyrical meditation.

Subsuming whole worlds of experience under the abstractions it engages, it
ensures against facile exhaustion of meaning and thus more greatly rewards the
sedulous reader. Ignoring what are often called the “conventions” of the short
story, it is an autonomous form that arrogates to itself what it needs of poetry and
the essay and offers, where appropriate, universal problems in place of plot and
archetypes in place of character. R.B. Larsen states: “and in celebrating the
concrete and minute in experience as a vital aspect of the human condition, it
becomes perhaps the most infrangible accomplishment of an author around
whom critical whirlpools will continue to swirl.”

Updike has utilized experimental effects to pursue certain of his dominant
interests: the unique quality of American small-town life, the tentative gropings
of adolescence, and the undercurrent of sensuality that so largely motivates his
characters’ behavior. He has periodically indulged the experimental impulse, but
almost always in a selective and restrained fashion. At no point in his career has
he yielded totally to the temptation of the experimental. Such effects operate in
Updike’s work to create an impression of literary counter-point to the
predominant realism of his stories. Only in “Other Modes” section of Museums
and Women – in which he toys with a variety of avant-garde formulations in the
manner of Donald Barthelme and other recent practitioners of highly innovative fiction – does he depart at length from conventional technique. George Searles points out that Updike is far more effective when he adheres to conventional realism and employs experimental effects in a secondary and complementary manner.

R.B. Larsen opines that “even after the strikingly modish Rabbit Redux, the short story seems as significant a part of Updike’s achievement as it was for Hemingway and Fitzgerald. Many of Updike’s efforts bear the hallmarks of good short fiction in America since Poe: discipline, structural soundness, a unity of theme or effect, a sense of wonder at life – all results of the “care and skill” which, Poe said, the form demands” (p.197). Updike’s Short stories do not follow the direction taken by Poe. Nor do they portray “the more smiling aspects of life”, as desired by Howell’s. Updike’s short stories detail those nonviolent, sublunary events that form the backbone of contemporary American experience. If Updike’s characters are not happy, their frustrations drive them neither to madness nor to morbidity. The intelligent, rational, yet sensitive minds of the protagonists preclude psychopathic behavior merely as a function of their observation of life’s stable minutiae.

Being a romantic Updike was attracted by Proust and Henry Green. Their style influenced him. In this regard, Updike has stated in his memoir:
My models were the styles of Proust and Henry Green as I read them (one in translation); styles of tender exploration that tried to wrap themselves around the things, the tints and voices and perfumes, of the apprehended real. All this saving a child does! At one point I even saved the box scores of an entire baseball season, both leagues, since Philadelphia played, haplessly, in both. How precious each scrap of the world appears, in our first years’ experience of it! Slowly we realize that it is all disposable, including ourselves. (p.103)

Updike’s confession stands as testimony to his romantic tendencies. Typical of a romantic, Updike filled his fictional world with his sense of wonder and seriousness. This Sense of wonder enriched his short stories with detailed descriptions of objects and events in a vivid and fresh manner.

The most obvious characteristic of Updike’s style is his exhaustive exploration of minute physical detail. Even in his first collection, *The Same Door* (1959), the scene is microscopic. The following passage from “Who Made the Yellow Roses Yellow” can be taken as an instance:

He was perfect; the medium-short dry-combed hair, the unimpeachable brown suit, the button less collar, the genially dragged vowels, and the little edges of efficiency bracing the consonants. Some traces of the scholarship- bothered freshmen from Hampton
(Md.) High School who had come down to the Quaff on candidates’ Night with an armful of framed sports cartoons remained – the not smoking. The tucked-in chin and the attendant up look of the boyishly lucid eyes, and the skin allergy that placed on the flank of each jaws a constellation of red dots. (SD.73)

The cadences fall smoothly. The catalogue of physical traits is complete, down to the shape of the rash on Clayton’s jaws. Such catalogues, rhythmic phrasing, proper nouns, and brand names are all marks of Updike’s style. But their primary function is to establish the writers’ authority; the story itself is secondary. This is a new look at experience, a new voice speaking. We remember the voice far longer than the story.

Another notable skill is Updike’s artistic method of juxtaposition. The story “Toward Evening” (SD) tells of a young married man, Rafe, returning home after work with a mobile for his daughter. Half-dreaming, he is aroused by the sight of a beautiful redhead at the back of the bus, then by a mulatto. The bus, the two women, and Rafe’s dreams are juxtaposed against his apartment, wife, and baby girl. At the end of the story, Rafe has finished his favorite meal, which, like the clumsy mobile for the baby, is vaguely disappointing. Husband and wife are balanced against each other and against the outside world in a silent struggle to find the right way. Their life is dominated by a huge Spry sign, white and red,
blinking through their window from the Jersey shore. In a brisk rondo, Updike explains how of the unfestive, commercialized existence that Rafe can feel but cannot explain to Alice. In the most important romantic way the story ends with a comment.

Similarly Updike juxtaposes the simple and sweet childhood or past with the challenging, chaotic and confusing present in almost all his story. In many of his stories a symbolic juxtaposition of colors like Black and White, Red and White, Yellow and Brown is seen. As Robert Detweiler points out “tension of opposites” is used by the author. In the story “Ace in the Hole” the protagonist is foiled against his opposites, so that his plight his made more obvious. The prowling high school youths who insult him at the traffic light only show him the reckless innocence that he has lost. His weary and dispirited wife, with her dogged common sense, makes him seem more of a loser.

Updike’s Jewish author Henry Bech (to some extent, a persona) speaks of his desire to “place beneath the melody of plot a counter-melody of imagery”, and Updike himself has remarked that his “deepest pride” as an author is in his “ability to keep an organized mass of images moving forward”.

Hence his stories abound in images. They are not merely decorative. They gain metaphorical significance George W.Hunt observes that Symbol or image clusters as they interact with each other will point up, the extraordinarily
complex texture and multi-referential quality of his fiction. Furthermore, it is
Updike’s often subtle employment of the techniques of irony, humor, and myth
that enables him to maintain both an ambiguous tone and an artistic tension amid
this interaction.

Symbolism is an important feature of virtually all of Updike’s novels and a
great many of his short stories. Referring to the role of myth and scripture in his
work, Updike has said, “I don’t think basically that such parallels should be
obvious. I think books should have secrets, like people do. I think they should
be there as a bonus for the sensitive reader… as a kind of subliminal quavering”.
On the most obvious level, myth enables Updike to invest his subjects with
considerable grandeur without becoming guilty of sentimentalization.

Mythological references illustrate the narrowness and mediocrity of the
modern environment and suggest the overriding, universal significance of the
human struggle. By conflating two worlds, that of ancient mythology or the
world of childhood with that of mundane actuality, Updike further develops the
idea that contemporary existence is a disappointing proposition. In this, Updike
is indebted to Joyce, who also devised in *Ulysses* an ongoing juxtaposition of
classical and modern subject matter.

As Joyce Markle, suggests many of Updike’s stylistic characteristics seem
to relate to his skills and interests as a graphics artist, painter and cartoonist. He
also has mentioned an envious appreciation of cinematic art, because of its visual dimension. He uses the present tense to present the scenario for internal movies playing on the screen of memory. Updike’s graphic tendencies also appear in the strangely spatial quality of his imagery which provides the geometry for a spatial system of circles and holes, ups and downs and horizontals, and nets and spaces. Such imageries project the theme into a physical dimension.

Updike has in the Paris Review interview described reality as “many layered and his stylistic techniques seem related to his view of reality. Mythic underpinnings, a system of colors, interrelations between elements of the environment, the reality of dream visions all reveal aspects of the unsimple nature of our surroundings. The sudden overlay of two perceptual moments is one of Updike’s favourite devices; he seems to identify this experience with our basic human tendencies to be artists. The major function of art is to “Outmuscle time and tide”.

Art is valuable because it can freeze a few passing seconds. The many-layered quality of reality and its appearance only in “illusions” prompts Updike to go not only to the “gate of horn” for his vision but also to the “gate of ivory.” Reviewing Harry Levin’s *The Gates of Horn*, Updike quotes the lines from Homer: Two gates for ghostly dreams there are: one gateway of honest horn, and
one of ivory. Realistic visions come through the gates of horn; the gates of ivory are the gates of myth and dream.

There are no figures of real evil in Updike’s fiction. It reflects Updike’s view that evil is accidental and inherent in the scheme of things, and may even arise from a misguided righteousness. The gas chambers at Dachau and the vaporization of Hiroshima, were the end results of certain notions of righteousness. Updike shows that man achieves goodness by wanting the freedom of others, and by unselfish love. Morality, insofar as it is imposed from outside, is meaningless.

Each select collection is enriched with the author’s generous offer of technical gift. Detweiler Robert comments that “Friends from Philadelphia”, the first tale, of The Same Door shows some evidence of “a neophyte author in search of a style; but the result is not a week story by any means: it is, at its worst, a narrative that does not sound like the later, familiar Updike” (p.9). The sentences are often short and choppy, dialogue predominates, and very little of the metaphoric interplay that marks the later fiction is present.

The story succeeds, however, along other lines. Through careful characterization via dialogue, Updike reveals the sensitive uncertainty of late adolescence in contrast to the bluff confidence of adults who have located their secure little niches in society. “Dentistry and Doubt” concerns an American
divinity student at Oxford who, plagued by Luther-like struggles with the devil, finds solace in a visit to an English dentist when the man working on his teeth prompts him into recalling a faith-restoring quotation. The story ends with an apt natural metaphor: as the student watches birds through the window, he sees two wrens snatch a crumb from a blackbird – like a pair of weak humans outsmarting Satan.

“Pigeon Feathers”, The title story of the collection was included among the O.Henry Prize Short stories of 1962; and it exemplifies Updike at his best. “Pigeon Feathers” employs a design and designs to attest to the fact of, or at least the faith in, cosmic design. Beyond that, the action represents an archetypal maturation ritual, a personal coming-of-age of a young man who is not satisfied by the formal ecclesiastical rites (catechism and confirmation) but who uses worldly implements (above all the gun) to fight through the trauma toward adulthood. The story “Lifeguard” has the traditional sermon format: an introduction, statement of the text, exposition, bountiful illustrations, and concluding exhortation. But it is also a sermon parody and, withal, a confession—an expose by one formally inside yet privately outside the edifice of theological endeavor. The irony of the story is that, despite the young student’s insight, he does not see at all. He is surrounded by people to whom he is supposedly learning to minister, but he has no relationship with humanity. He is caught in an
immense egotism that feeds on theology when theology ought instead to show him the way of humility.

Here again Updike has employed design to explicate design. The formal sermon structure is a vehicle, in this instance, that destroys the very substance of its text. The student preaches on the affinity of spirit and flesh, but his discourse is, in more ways than one, all about flesh. It is a model of design, but it has no vitality.

In a final irony, the young man disproves, by what he is, the very contention that he so skilfully argues. Spirit and flesh may very well be more intimately related than Pauline and Augustinian dualism have comprehended them to be; but, if they are, the way toward realizing that unity is through a passionate involvement – not a logical exercise – that the young man can elaborate upon but has never experienced. “Wife-Wooing” employs the rare second-person singular perspective; the speaker addresses his wife throughout the narration in the “you” form. Plot is almost wholly lacking; instead one finds descriptions of domestic action that carry archetypal and symbolic significance.

The story “A & P” is perhaps his most popular; it has been anthologized in many college texts. “A & P” derives its impact from the narrative voice, comic contrast, and the ironic distance between the intentions of the protagonist and what he actually accomplishes. Sammy, the protagonist of the story narrates the
story in a breezy, late-teenage vernacular; the brashness of the language balances
nicely the inherent sentimentality of the action. Updike also alternates between
the past and historical present tenses to provide a tight little dramatic episode that
his fiction does not often exhibit. Technique of the present tense description
heightens the precise moments of strain and offers the reader, at the same time, a
vicarious participation. Most of the humor in the story comes from Sammy’s
response to the girls. The Irony of Sammy’s heroism reflects Updike’s
conviction, obvious in many of his works that the heroic gesture is often
meaningless and usually arises from selfish rather than unselfish impulse. Hence
in Updike’s short stories there are no heroes in the true classical sense.

While most of the stories of The Music School strike a common thematic
chord, they exhibit an impressive variety of technique. The collection’s modes
range from the traditional linear narrative of “The Rescue” to the meditative or
lyrical mode of “leaves” to the Hawthornesque historical sketch of “The Indian”
to the epistolary style of the modern mythic adaptation, “Four Sides of One
Story”.

As Updike departs from Olinger and the unexpected gifts of youth, he
deliberately seems to seek new modes of fictions to capture the differing texture
of experience that confronts characters who have crossed into Tarbox and
beyond. The lyricism of what Updike calls the “abstract-personal mode” is
especially suited to many of their conditions: at some crux in their lives (often the end of a relationship), they are more disposed to reflect than act – a condition perhaps best depicted in a plotless mediation. Nonetheless, even the more experimental stories in *The Music School* have some precedent in Updike’s first two collections, creating continuity among Updike’s attempts to extend what many critics decry as the limitations of his realism, poetic style, and focus on the middle range of experience.

The collection’s headnote, a stanza from Wallace Steven’s “To the One of Fictive Music”, accentuates the characteristic paradox of maturity: our essential separation from but continued existence in nature. Consciousness of this gulf, often allied with a perception of mortality, is the impetus to make “fictive music”, and to capture, in art’s “laborious weaving”, a “perfection more serene” than that which is accessible in the present. In *The Music School* those who endure suffering and learn to compose a fictive music synthesizing the complexities of experience most closely approach the poetic aim Stevens describes in “Of Modern Poetry” since they create tales of “the mind in the act of finding / what will suffice”

Such an attempt is the substance of the opening story, “In Football Season,” which weaves an intricately detailed hymn to the past that very nearly belies the narrator’s final proclamation of loss by the immediacy of the evocation. With the
texture of an extended prose poem, “In Football Season” uses second person narration to involve the reader more intimately in the nostalgic descent. As the conclusion to *Olinger Stories*, it functions as a coda to the protagonists retrospectively realized idyll, highlighting the joys and fears of the local boy who grows to transcend his milieu. As the opening to *The Music School*, it serves as an affectionate backward glance, a prelude to music in a new key.

For instance “The Music School” has no plot, no narrative continuity; it borrows the format of the informal essay but is fiction. How then are the Motifs organized to produce an artistic integrity? For one, at the end of the tale, the narrator suggests that a “coda” is fitting to conclude the piece, hinting at a direct musical analogy. One can observe thematic variations, contrapuntal effects, and a polyphonic like manipulation of motifs that strengthen the parallel to musical composition.

The eating motif, for example, is mentioned in the initial section in the description of the Communication wafer; it is varied and continued in the second section: the computer expert is murdered while he sits at the breakfast table. In the third section it appears briefly in the self-denial of the daughter (she doesn’t ask her father for candy), and in the final section it is developed through the narrator’s memory of the Lutheran Eucharist celebration, a consubstantial eating
of the body of Christ, the image of which is transferred at the end of the metaphor of the world that must be chewed to be fully experienced.

The title “The Rescue” carries an ambiguous but not an ironic connotation. The central physical action of the story, the rescue of the injured woman on the mountain side, parallels Caroline’s own deliverance. It is revelation via metaphor, Caroline “did not as a rule like self-pitying women, but here in this one she seemed to confront a voluntary dramatization of her own inner sprain”. In watching the other, she sees herself reflected; in helping her, she begins to heal herself. There is no implication that she mends her marital situation, for her doing so might be too much to expect in the pilgrim’s progress toward divorce. But she does regain her sense of fidelity, the healthiest antidote she could possess against her husband’s suspected or actual unfaithfulness.

The epistolary “Four Sides of One Story”, a quasi-modernization of the Tristan and Iseult legend, exists, like The Centaur, in a tension between the accepted unbelievability of folklore and the more insistent realism of modern fiction. The story “The Morning” reinforces its emotional effect through two expanded puns. The one is the concept of the nurse. “My nurse”, the young man calls his love, he means it affectionately, it also hints at the psychological sickness he endures: he needs her as a substitute for the city outside. She has
been the mediator and buffer between the world and him; and, in relating to her, he finds his surrogate and fulfillment for all responsibilities and desires.

The success of the story “Bulgarian Poetess” depends not so much on the East-West romance theme as it does on the varied, repetitive use of mirror imagery that sustains the emotionality. How the mirror device works is described by Bech as he discusses the structure of his one good novel: “a counter-melody of imagery, interlocking images which had risen to the top and drowned his story”.

In Updike’s story, the image of ghosts from Hawthorne’s tale “Roger Malvin’s Burial”, the “shadow world” of the American embassies, the reflection from the polished table, the mirrors of the Moscow and Sofia ballets, and the Communists “behind the mirror” merge to suggest the enigmatic identity of the participants in the context of international tension. Bech’s self-consciousness is dissolved in the encounter with Vera Glavanakova, the Bulgarian poetess; but his new sense of being remains intact only through the necessary separation from her.

_Museums and Women_ collection has a separate section entitled “the other mode” which embodies Updike’s innovative attempts. Besides, there are many stories which are technically significant. In the story “The Orphaned Swimming Pool” (M&W) a suburban community attends a long ritual of separation; in “I
Am Dying, Egypt, Dying” an international fellowship of travelers imitates a lengthy rite of passage. The thirty-three page tale is one of Updike’s longest, comprehensive enough to contain the complexity of interaction between Clem, a wealthy young American from Buffalo, and more than twenty other characters accompanying him on a luxury boat trip down the Nile in 1967 during the Israel-Egypt conflict.

One could profitably engage the old “Ship of Fools” motif to interpret this story, for the motley group floating down the river, dressed in often outlandish costumes and indulging in antic behavior, reminds one of the mad passengers of the stultifera navis set adrift on European rivers during the Renaissance and constituting a popular them of iconography. Stock elements of the Ship of Fools symbolism included a wine glass and naked woman, and Updike reproduces these in scenes of heavy drinking and of the bikini-clad Swedish girl who desires Clem. Yet Clem himself is too sober to fit such a designation, and his neutral demeanor reminds one far more of Robert Musil’s “man without qualities” – an apt typos for expressing the superficiality an over-adaptability supposed to characterize homo technicus.

Edward Vargo while analyzing the story “The Crow in the Woods” observes about Jack, the protagonist that “accepting the joy in every moment will make of it a praise of god”. Jack’s behaviour and following description of it by the author
testifies the statement. “The child absent mindedly patted the back of his neck as they descended the tricky narrows steps. These weak touches made his interior tremble as if with tentative sunshine. Downstairs was darker. The reflection of the snow was absorbed by the dank and porous furniture rented. Good Morning, Mr. Thermostat. The milkman would be late today: “Chains slogging a tune on his stout tires: glory be,” (PF.224). What should be apparent from the analysis of such stories is that Updike’s religious concerns have also influenced his literary techniques. In attempting to create metaphors that make transcendent realities like immortality and resurrection conceivable, he has fused the spiritual with the physical, presenting us with a heightened, or better, sacramental understanding of the material universe. To invest the familiar objects and gestures of everyday experience with religious meaning, he has had to attune himself to the significance of the least details. Structurally, the maintenance of spiritual tensions has sometimes led to static physical appearances, devoid of much action, as in “Lifeguard”. His writings then take on the character of illuminated moments, of prayer. They become a “liturgy of life,” a dirge for the passing of time and a canticle of praise for Nature in all its forms.

Updike’s style Richard H. Rupp comments: “bears the double burden of making a world and making it festive. At its worst the feast is merely verbal, an indulgence of poetic epiphanies bursting like Roman candles in the summer sky. At its best, however, in stories like “Packed Dirt,” “The blessed Man of Boston”
and *The Centaur*, the private feast becomes a joyful public action, liberating the isolated sensibility in a communal song of love. At such times style finds it center” (p.42). His attempts to visualize the experience of the transcendent, to bring it within our focus, have led him into a sophisticated use of ritual, of which the three basic elements are pattern, myth, and celebration.

According to Edward Vargo, the popular idea of ritual is that of an action which is done over and over again without any thought and without any significant meaning. There is a recurrence and the repetitions that make time intelligible to man. The sun rises and sets to measure the day; the moon waxes and wanes to measure the month; the seasons go through their cycle to outline the year; birth and death delimit a life. Rituals cluster around these cyclical movements and, by imitation, extend beyond them. (p.17) some examples that emphasize the element of pattern are the recurrent acts of symbolic communication, such as baptisms, weddings, funerals, or the liturgical holidays of the churches. In this sense of pattern, the paths produced by the packing of human feet, driving an automobile, acts of human kindness, even churchgoing without faith “represent a spontaneous ritual of human beings giving shape to their lives.”

The chief function of ritual as pattern is to sustain whatever belief man has and to make it meaningful by a “rehearsed attitude”. When one related pattern to
the workings of the story, it can apply to any element -- a character, a sense, a gesture, a word, Updike’s own preoccupation with his “blindly spun web of words,” with the stars as signs of religious permanence, with the mysteries evoked by nostalgia. In dealing with the smaller elements within his works, Updike reveals his belief that pattern is enjoyable in itself. When critics have complained about the coyness of Updike’s details and his lack of caring for the concerns of real life, they may be simply responding to his exuberance for pattern.

Vargo observes that the second basic element of ritual; myth, which expresses the rational level of experience may seen misleading. Too often myth is still understood as a primitive attempt at philosophical explanation for the phenomena of nature, now discredited by the advance of science. In the first place, myth is a dramatic human tale, a narrative which is a product of the human imagination. Since the content of myth is generally the supernatural, or at least the preternatural. Myth views what has always existed and always will exist, the timeless problem of life and death. Myth speaks of what really happened, whether this as in the time of the gods or in our own mythic childhoods, and becomes the paradigmatic model for actions in the present. Ritual as pattern, pre-logical and pre-verbal, is incompletely human. Its rhythms, deeply felt but unanalyzed, link man with plants and animals to a biological dependence on the natural cycle. The interaction of myth with these rhythms is a distinctively
human action by which man is able to make his life more meaningful in a larger sense.

Alice and Kenneth Hamilton have analyzed the story “You’ll Never Know Dear how Much I Love You” to point out the unique stylistic features of Updike. Though the same technique of epiphany is used by Joyce and Updike, Updike’s treatment is unique, since he is a religious writer.

 Critics have remarked that Updike’s early stories have much the same flavor as *Dubliners*, and that Updike shows an intimate knowledge of Joyce’s works. The resemblances between “Araby” and “You’ll Never Know, Dear” are very strong in subject matter, situation, and even in some incidental details. If the points of contact between these two stories may be coincidental only, or the result of wholly unconscious recollections of “Araby”, but even if Joyce’s story in no way influenced Updike, the convergences and divergences in their treatment of a common theme still make a comparison of the pair by the Hamiltons informative.

“Araby” tells of a boy (unnamed) who, like Ben, arrives late at a fair he has been eagerly anticipating and has been held back from reaching earlier by the slowness of adults. He comes hoping to buy a gift for the sister of a school friend, a girl he worships with childish devotion. But the fair, though it carries the exotic name of “Arbay”, proves to be a most common-place affair set in a
big, unbeautiful Dublin hall. The boy sees nothing he can buy at the bazaar. Disillusioned, he is ashamed and angry with himself and the world.

Thus both Joyce and Updike write of a boy at a fair who sets out with urgency and expectation only to find disappointment and frustration. And like Ben, Joyce’s boy holds three coins in his hand when he begins to look round the stalls. But at that moment, whereas the Olinger boy feels himself infinitely rich after changing his money, the boy in “Araby” considers that he has already been robbed. He has had to pay for transport to the fair and then was forced to spend one shilling of his original two shillings. And he finds nothing worth buying with the sixpence and two pennies he has left to spend.

What has drawn the Dublin boy to the fair is the magic that he felt must materialize out of its romantic name. Like Ben, he comes to give rather than to get. Yet all his expectations are based on a wholly ideal vision, one that must inevitably vanish at the touch of hard reality. He sees himself in relation to his pure and remote love as a devotee with a chalice in his hand and prayers and praises on his lips. He will bring back, so he has promised, “something” from Araby.

The disillusioning experience lies in the passage from the ideal Araby to the actual Araby, from fancy to fact. Araby proves to be no magical or sanctified place. It contains nothing worthy of being a love-offering. The large hall, in its
near emptiness at this late hour, reminds him of church after the service has
ended. The girl looking after the stall that he approaches speaks with a foreign,
English voice; and he hears her say to another adult a sentence in which the word
“fib” sounds emphatically. Vanity Fair has dragged down the ideal to the level of
a common lie.

Joyce’s story draws on both Bunyan and the Bible to make its effects. The
boy’s passage from innocence to experience is marked by references to the
Garden of Eden, where man’s first fall from innocence took place, and also to the
money-changers in the Temple-symbolic of the invasion of the sacred by the
profane. The boy entering Araby, like Bunyan’s pilgrims entering Vanity Fair, is
conscious of the “foreign” language spoken there. (Bunyan describes how
Christian and Faithful, because they speak the language of Zion, are not
understood by the men of the fair.) In this alien environment Joyce’s boy sees
himself as one “driven and derided by vanity”, which is a description applying
precisely to the experience of Bunyan’s pilgrims.

Joyce makes use of Christian parallels solely to present the opposition
between two antithetical approaches to reality. For him it adds up to the same
thing whether we label the contrast other-worldliness-worldliness, sacred-
profane, idealism-cynicism, utopianism-realism, or innocence-experience. We
are dealing in every case with the human desire to live in a world of dreams that
is frustrated by the actual world contradicting those dreams. Updike also tells the story of this perennial human experience. You have shattered all my dreams is the desolate lesson which Ben learns from the song of the fair.

At the same time, “You’ll Never Know, Dear” is a fair more complex story than “Araby” because Updike’s boy is not the single minded romantic that Joyce’s boy is, but one whose sensitivity is far more open to the actual world around him in spite of his lack of experience of its ways. This complexity makes itself felt in the tone of Updike’s story which, though it has its own pathos, contains too many touches of irony to be as directly pathetic as “Araby”. Instead of a head-on collision between the ideal and the actual, “You’ll Never Know, Dear” presents a dialectical relationship between the two.

For the boy in “Araby” the uncomplicated truth is that money does not buy dreams, His ignorance is made wise, to his own shame, because he is young enough and vain enough to think such a purchase possible. His first contact with actualities defects him. Ben too meets an initial shock of disappointment over the lack of magic in a half-empty fair; yet, instead of despairing, he continues to search. Seek and you shall find. Ben’s faith in the fair is childish and naive, but at the same time has the quality of perseverance indicative of all genuine faith. The boy is rewarded, for a short while, and this makes his final disillusionment all the more bitter.
Nevertheless, his consciousness has never been one of simple self-satisfaction or of hope unclouded by fear. He has been acutely aware of the "treacherous stratum" underlying the world of the fair; he has been acutely aware that the happiness he has found in that world may be taken from him. When he finds everything pouring down a tiny, dime-sized hole, his fears are agonizingly confirmed. His tears climax the working out of those dualities in existence that he has already discovered. He realizes that choices in life are never simple or free from risk, but he is too young to estimate the full complexity of living and to continue through loss to gain. As Updike says in Rabbit, Run, it takes "the mindful will to walk the straight line of a paradox" (p.237). Ben has the will, but not the mind to help him in his moment of exposure by the tattooed man at the stall.

The interplay of dualities and the experience of life as a series of paradoxes bulk large in Updike's fiction. This is the result of his viewing the world in the perspective of Christian faith. Taking such a stance, he does not simply use Christian motifs (as Joyce does) in order to point to the universality of the fall from the ideal to the actual, from the sacred to the profane. He sees existence as that which simultaneously hides and reveals the truth about itself, since truth ultimately lies beyond the bounds of space and time and yet must be grasped by creatures who are temporally and spatially limited.
Thus he regards passage from innocence to experience as neither a triumph nor a disaster, as neither a casting off of foolish illusion nor a fall from eternity into time. Insofar as innocence means an intuition of the eternal and the scared, men should never travel so far away from it that they cannot return to the vision it gives; and insofar as experience means encounter with the actual world in all its ambiguity and complexity, mean that they can somehow escape the risks inherent in the human condition.

On one level, “you’ll Never Know, Dear” is a realistic story of a ten-year-old’s disappointment when he is forced to leave a child’s imaginative universe and return to the factual one inhabited by adults. He had hurried to get away from a life that was slow, poor, and sad. The tinseled world of the fair provided a momentary glimpse into the land of heart’s desire. But “they” would not allow him to remain there, calling him back to his poverty and sending him walking slowly and sadly home. In his own experience, Ben recapitulated the rapture and disillusionment described in the song of the fair.

On another level Updike’s story is a parable of the human condition. It tells of man’s infinite desires and of his persistent illusion that he can make a deal with fate in order to achieve their realization. Updike’s suggestion is not that our dreams are too large but that they are misplaced. We rightly seek the eternal and the scared, but that we seek them in the wrong way, imagining that through the
intensity of our willing we must be granted fulfillment; whereas we will find our peace, not in devotion to the god of chance, but in the paradoxical discovery that gain comes through loss, and to lose our life is to find it.

Ben is the youngest of Updike’s fictional heroes, but all the rest encounter his problem or some aspect of it and try to cope with it according to the insights they happen to possess. Sometimes they are wiser than Ben is. But often they are less wise, for Updike does not imagine that added years or wider experience necessarily bring extra wisdom. Rather, perplexities become more far-reaching and the consequences of folly more serious. As much as Ben, this society stands to be remained of its position in space and time; and the reminder will certainly come, mediated through the implacable forces of history, though the cost may well be world catastrophe instead of one small dime.

“You’ll Never Know, Dear” provides a useful preliminary glimpse of the riches of the ground to be worked. Almost any other story might have been chosen instead, but this one illustrates with particular clarity how Updike can take an incident of seemingly slight importance and invite the reader to see within it a microcosm of the human condition. “You’ll Never Know, Dear” shows how every individual Adam eats anew the apple of the knowledge of good and evil; how, once man has come to the point where he must leave the innocence of Eden, he is forced to make choices having consequences that his
small stock of knowledge is inadequate to foresee, so that experience exacts its price; and how every choice is ultimately a decision between desolating idolatry and faith in the true God who gives the gift of peace.

Updike is a writer, not a preacher or a moralist. But he reports on the world as he sees it; and the real world, in his estimate, is only fitfully perceived by the inhabitants of Vanity Fair since their vision of “the world” is limited to that part of actuality that is ruled by chance and fortune.