

## A Word from the Editor

It's been five years since our first issue appeared in November 2011, which calls for modest celebration, some self-examination, and thoughts on where we're headed.

From the beginning, the objective of the *John Updike Review* has been, simply, to provide a space where those interested in writing about John Updike can participate in discussion. In five years we have released eight issues, containing thirty-six essays, fifteen critical responses to five works of fiction ("Leaves," "Gesturing," "Trust Me," *The Widows of Eastwick*, and *Villages*), twelve book reviews, two tributes, one panel discussion, and one bibliography—sixty-seven pieces in all, excluding the three reprinted short stories. A respectable start.

Though the novels, particularly the Rabbit novels, have historically garnered the lion's share of attention in Updike studies, in our pages the short stories have drawn the most interest: ten essays, nine responses in the "Three Writers" section, and two reviews, which comes to twenty-one pieces, nearly a third of our offerings. This is good news. Many have argued that the short story is Updike's strongest suit, a genre in which he has few rivals, so this focus is gratifying, especially given how often short fiction is neglected. As for the novels discussed in the *JUR*, attention has been spread rather evenly, with the Rabbit books holding a slight edge over *Couples*, *In the Beauty of the Lilies*, *Toward the End of Time*, *Gertrude and Claudius*, and *Villages*. I'm hesitant, though, to read much significance here—one or two new essays could alter these preliminary findings. Further, if recent conference papers are any indication, *Terrorist* is mounting a charge.

As for the subjects of and critical treatments in our published essays, there has been considerable examination of the author's biography, including his childhood and juvenilia, his college years, his politics, and his travels. This is not surprising. An artist's death is usually followed by biographies—two have already appeared

since 2009 and more are surely coming. Related to this growing interest in his life, Updike's volume of memoirs, *Self-Consciousness*, has been one of the more frequently cited texts in these pages. Essays in the *JUR* have focused on language and aesthetics, form, gender, religion, ecocriticism, politics, critical reception, textual matters, and the visual arts—again, no strong discernable pattern so far.

While we welcome essays on the Rabbit novels and *Terrorist*, which together drew the most attention at the 4th Biennial Updike Society Conference in October 2016, we are equally interested in other writings, including the poetry, nonfiction, and criticism. As evidence, the current issue of the *JUR* features two essays on the author's poems, one on his short fiction, and three response pieces on the seldom-discussed *Villages*.

As I noted in my introduction to our inaugural issue, our hope has been to publish pieces by not only critics and scholars, as is typical for an academic journal, but also by fiction writers and poets, which is less customary. We opened the first issue with an essay by Ann Beattie, included a piece on *The Centaur* by novelist Michael Griffith, then closed with tributes from poet J. D. McClatchy and fiction writer (and son) David Updike. Our aim, among other things, is to demonstrate how deeply Updike's works resonate with his fellow writers. This was visibly apparent upon his death, in January 2009, when a flood of tributes poured forth from Ian McEwan, Julian Barnes, Joyce Carol Oates, Nicholson Baker, E. L. Doctorow, Jeffrey Eugenides, Richard Ford, Claire Messud, George Saunders, Jonathan Lethem, Jane Smiley, Lorrie Moore, and ZZ Packer, to name just a few. While the majority of our content is written by critics and scholars, we also have published twelve pieces by novelists, story writers, and poets. Our current issue includes essays by four writers—David Updike, John Drury, Aristi Trendel, and Marshall Boswell—who have, like Updike, published volumes of poetry or fiction. We anticipate that this trend will continue.

Another important feature of the *John Updike Review* has been the significant contributions of international scholars. Our pages have been enriched by work from critics and writers in Japan, India, France, the UK, Ireland, Israel, and Serbia. The John Updike Society itself is comprised of nearly three hundred members from seventeen different nations, including, in addition to those above, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iran, and Mexico. This intercontinental enthusiasm is apparent at the biennial gatherings of the Society, where participants travel across many time zones to deliver papers, and it will be even more notable at the next conference, to be held in June 2018 in Belgrade, where Ian McEwan will be the keynote speaker.

The *JUR* is also committed to celebrating the work of younger scholars. Our inaugural issue included an essay by Liliana Naydan, a doctoral student who had just finished her dissertation on Updike, Pynchon, Roth, and DeLillo. In the years since, Liliana has gone on to publish other essays as well as her first book, *Rhetorics of Religion in American Fiction* (Bucknell UP 2016), which includes a chapter on Updike. In that first issue we also launched our Annual Emerging Writers Prize, which is awarded for an essay on Updike composed by a young or emerging writer (anyone under forty is eligible). The prize of \$1,000, which comes with publication, has been awarded to an array of promising scholars: Vidya Ravi, Jeffrey Ludwig, Matthew Shipe, Yoav Fromer, and Scott Dill. Their work has already been impressive, and their efforts will likely play an increasingly prominent role in assessing Updike's *oeuvre* and legacy.

The study of single authors, of course, continues to remain less fashionable in academia. There are fewer monographs published and more encouragement for dissertation projects focused on issues and problems than on individual *oeuvres*. That said, attention to Updike has remained fairly steady since the late 1960s, when longer studies of his work began to emerge. While early critical interest may have peaked during the 1980s and early 1990s, a steady stream of scholarship has continued into the twenty-first century. Books on Updike (in English) were, perhaps, at a low between 2007 and 2011, when only one volume appeared (a portion of a second was also devoted to Updike, along with two volumes in German). More recently, there has been an uptick in interest. Between 2012 and 2016, the number of books increased to ten, more if you include studies written in other languages, such as Serbian. Further, several edited volumes as well as monographs are slated for publication in 2017 and 2018. To handle as well as encourage this upswell, the *JUR* transitioned, in 2015, from publishing one issue per year to two.

The *JUR* could not have easily made this transition were it not for our managing editor, Nicola Mason, who is a woman of many talents: visual artist, writer, editor, beekeeper, and much more. We are immensely fortunate to have Nicola's keen and discriminating eye, her editorial guidance, and her high standards. We have also had a knowledgeable and experienced copy editor in Gary Kass. Though Gary has recently taken on new responsibilities and cannot continue with us, we remain grateful for his early assistance. And of course we are thankful for the talented Barbara Neely Bourgoyne, our designer. Barbara not only creates wonderfully appealing and memorable covers but gives the pages within a clean and warm elegance. We are also grateful to the Department of English at the University of Cincinnati and to the John Updike Society for their support during these early honeymoon years.

Going forward, we have much to anticipate. The John Updike Society, under the tireless and adept leadership of president Jim Plath, continues to thrive and add new members. The John Updike Childhood Home in Shillington, Pennsylvania, owned by the Updike Society, courtesy of the financial support of the Robert and Adele Schiff Family Foundation, has been undergoing an extensive, museum-quality renovation. And the author's writings, through the wisdom and patience of the John H. Updike Literary Trust, continue to appear in new editions from Knopf, Everyman's Library, the Library of America, and Random House Trade Paperbacks.

Yet the best news of all is that a lifetime of extraordinary writing is just sitting there, waiting to be discussed, and debated. The quality as well as quantity of Updike's literary output is startling. Readers and writers will likely be engaged for a very long time. As always, the *JUR* encourages new voices to join the discussion. We're also interested in hearing what our readers think, so please don't hesitate if you have thoughts or suggestions.

Most of all, though, I would like to say, very simply, Thank you for your support over these first five years.

JAMES SCHIFF, EDITOR