

UNIT 8

JOHN UPDIKE (1932-)

PIGEON FEATHERS, THE HERMIT & THE MUSIC SCHOOL

I. INTRODUCTION: BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

"To transcribe middleness(medianía, mediocridad) with all its grits(suciedad), bumps (golpes, frustraciones) and anonymities, in its fullness of satisfaction and mystery: is it possible *** or worth doing?" John Updike's novels and stories give a positive answer to the question he asks in his memoir, *The Dogwood Tree: A Boyhood*; for he is arguably the most significant transcriber, or creator rather, of "middleness" in American writing since William Dean Howells. Falling in love in high school, meeting a college roommate, going to the eye-doctor or dentist, eating supper on Sunday night, visiting your mother with your wife and son -these activities are made to yield up(defer, succumb) their possibilities to a writer as responsively(answering, sensitively) curious in imagination and delicately precise in his literary expression as Updike has shown himself to be.

Updike was born in 1932 in Shillington, Pennsylvania, a remote suburb of Reading. His parents moved to a nearby farm in Plowville when he was thirteen. He grew to love Pennsylvania and has become something of a regionalist, using its people and landscapes as the explicit or implied setting for much of his fiction. He graduated *summa cum laude* from Harvard in 1954 and went with his wife of one year to the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Arts in Oxford, England. Updike had long been interested in drawing and painting; his innate talents as a graphic artist along with his intense training at

Ruskin have invested his fiction with a highly visual quality -a concentration on color, texture, form, space, and motion which gives it a cinematic character.

In 1955 he joined the staff of the *New Yorker* where he worked for more than two years, absorbing the sights and sounds of New York and acquiring polish(burnish, perfect) and sophistication as a writer. His first stories appeared in the *New Yorker* and he is still a regular contributor. In 1957 he moved to his present home in Ipswich, Massachusetts, where he began writing fiction full time. There he pursued "his solitary trade as methodically as the dentist practiced his" (*The Dogwood Tree*), resisting the temptations of university teaching as successfully as the blandishments(halagos) of media talk-shows. Like Howells, his ample production has been achieved through dedicated, steady work; his books are the fruit of patience, leisure(ease, free time), and craft.

Since 1958 when his first novel, *The Poorhouse Fair*, appeared, Updike has published not only many novels and stories but also four books of poems, a play, and much occasional journalism. He is most admired by some readers as the author of the "Olinger" stories, about life in an imaginary Pennsylvania town which takes on its colors from the real Shillington of his youth. The heroes of these stories are adolescents straining(striving) to break out of their fast-perishing(condemned, cold) environments, as they grow up and as their small town turns into something else. Updike treats them with a blend of affection and ironic humor that is wonderfully assured in its touch, while his sense of place, of growing up in the Depression and the years of World War II, is always vividly present. Like Howells (whose fine memoir of his youthful days in Ohio, *A Boy's Town*, is an ancestor of Updike's *The Dogwood Tree*) he shows how one's spirit takes on its coloration from the material circumstances

-houses, clothes, landscape, food, parents- one is bounded(attached, hindered) by.

This sense of place, which is also a sense of life, is found in the stories and in the novels too, although Updike has found it harder to invent convincing forms in which to tell longer tales. His most ambitious novel is probably *The Centaur* (1964), memorable for its portrayal of three days of confusion and error in the life of an American high-school teacher seen through his son's eyes; but the book is also burdened with an elaborate set of mythical trappings(caparison) that seem less than inevitable. *Couples* (1968), a novel which gained him a good deal of notoriety as a chronicler of sexual relationships, marital and adulterous, is jammed(blocked, crushed) with much interesting early-1960s lore(knowledge, lesson) about suburban life but seems uncertain whether it is an exercise in realism or a creative fantasy, as does his more recent *Marry Me* (1976).

It is the two "Rabbit" novels that Updike found his most congenial(pleasant, sociable) and engaging subject for longer fiction. In each book he has managed to render the sense of an era -the 1950s in *Rabbit, Run*; the late sixties in *Rabbit Redux*- through the eyes of a hero who both is and is not like his creator. Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom, ex-high school basketball star, a prey to nostalgia and in love with his own past, perpetually lives in a present he can't abide(bear). *Rabbit, Run* shows him trying to escape from his town, his job, his wife and child, by a series of disastrously sentimental and humanly irresponsible actions; yet Updike makes us feel Rabbit's yearnings(longings) even as we judge the painful consequences of yielding to them. Ten years later, the fading(declining) basketball star has become a fortyish, dispirited(deprived of enthusiasm) printer with a wayward(voluntariosa, variable) wife and a country (America in summer, 1970) which is both landing

on the moon and falling to pieces. *Rabbit Redux* is masterly (superior in skill) in presenting a Pennsylvania small town rotting away (degenerating) from its past certainties; it also attempts to deal with the Vietnam war and the black revolution. With respect to these large public events there is sometimes an identity, sometimes a divergence, at other times a confusion between Rabbit's consciousness and the larger one of its author, resulting in a book one must argue with as well as about. Still, his best work is in his stories: *Of the Farm* is a distinguished short novel, and *Separating* an example of his careful, poised (sereno) sense of how things work, a sense which can also be observed at work in the poem *Dog's Death*.

Near the end of his memoir he summarized his boyish dream of becoming an artist:

He saw art -between drawing and writing he ignorantly made no distinction- as a method of riding a thin pencil line out of Shillington, out of time altogether, into an infinity of unseen and even unborn hearts. He pictured this infinity as radiant. How innocent!

Most writers would name that innocence only to deplore it. Updike maintains instead that, as with the Christian faith he still professes, succeeding (following) years have given him no better assumptions with which to replace it. In any case his fine sense of fact has protected him from fashionable extravagances in black humor, and experimental narratives, while enabling him to be both a satirist and a celebrator of our social and domestic conditions.

II. READERSHIP, TOPICS & LITERARY TECHNIQUES

For almost a generation, John Updike has been considered one of the leading literary figures in contemporary America. A prolific writer, he has already produced eight book-length works of fiction, several dozen short stories, book reviews, prose essays, poetry, and children's books. His wide readership includes not only professional critics and students of literature but also a reading public large enough to keep each new novel on the best-seller list for months. Criticized by some readers for being too melodramatic and by others for being too philosophical, Updike has apparently managed to maintain a delicate balance between the romantic and the reflective, between the appeal of the popular novel and the critical esteem of more esoteric (limited to a small circle) fiction.

Updike is a highly autobiographical writer, and his various travels as well as the births and advancing ages of his four children are chronicled, one way or another, in his fiction. Also chronicled is his reluctant emergence (apparition, exit) from the Christianity which seemed so natural to previous Americans, into the practical but comfortless existentialism which marks the scientific modern era. This dialectic -between the reassuring of God-given order of religion and the manmade order of the sciences- forms the basic tension of Updike's fiction.

In Updike's work, religion assures humans of their special place in creation and justifies their desperate refusal to accept death as final; but it remains unproven, fails to alleviate man's sense of alienation from his world, and requires a trusting society, not a cynical one. Science thrives (prosper, improve) in a cynical era, where it can demonstrate the workability of its propositions, and fits man nonchalantly (calmly, negligently) into the physical universe of matter and motion, chemicals and processes; but it is cold and

sterile, denies both hope and anguish, and gives man no reassuring way to deal with the fact of his own mortality.

The thing man needs in order to accept both the negative and the positive truths is a concept of God which allows for all life's discrepancies, ambiguities, and changes. The search for such a concept, the search for a religion for our time, is the philosophic goal of the artist, Updike. There is much, much yet to learn and much yet to write, but for the moment, the assertion that God exists is the most important of John Updike's "yea sayings".

Taken as a sequence, Updike's book-length fictions show gradually aging protagonists, living through the era of transition from a society which still instinctively yearns for its older religions to one that accepts atheistic humanism as its norm. The main characters are usually survivors from the fading(vanishing, declining) era of belief; they are reluctant to abandon their upward-directed vision which invests humans with special dignity, which thus makes them lovable, and which would give meaning to their death. Although these characters are shown to be life-givers -people who can offer, through their love, this sense of specialness- they also appear to be unhappy: at odds with their community, doubtful of their own instincts, and overwhelmed by a dread of death. Often these protagonists are pitted(enfrentados) against an antagonist who recurs in various forms as a modern man of science who does not believe "in anything" and who is unprepared to deal with the disorderly and unpredictable world of human emotion.

Indeed, Updike sometimes appears to be writing a scenario for a film rather than the text of a short story or novel. In addition to the detailed settings, panned(criticize severely) slowly and with obvious pleasure, he often includes the characters' moment-to-moment perceptions and movements -the kind of material scriptwriters supply for films. Updike allows us to absorb

things slowly, visually. He frequently stops the action to study the setting or pauses to watch the character's mundane comings and goings, the intimate moments of play or anger which all together make up the quality of one's life. Yet with the deft(dexterous; clever; artful) economy which marks art, he designs these scenes in such a way as to control and shape the reader's perceptions until each story's delicate logic seems no longer arbitrary or unique; the story can successfully pretend the realism of a documentary, which views scenes, not sets; people, not characters.

John Updike is one of the most important writers on the contemporary scene because of his superb literary artistry and because he has something to say. He is followed closely by the reading public because he is a searcher of integrity, one who accepts no for answer when no is the answer. Accordingly, the yes aspects of his assertions are valid, too. Yes, there is some virtue in man. Yes, goodness lives. Yes, the individual is significant, at least minutely. He may even be intuitively aware that God seeks him. Yes, life in all its complexity can be good.

III. THE SHORT STORIES

Publication dates of the collections range from 1959 to 1966: *The Same Door* (1959), *Pigeon Feathers* (1962), *Olinger Stories* (1964), and *The Music School* (1966). Updike reaches his highest range of accomplishment in this medium. In the short stories he presents all of his major themes with intensity and artistic discipline more refined than that of his novels, with poetry more eloquent than in "The Great Scarf of Birds", and with religious *empressement*(impresión) to compare with that of the Psalms. Updike, through

a wealth of situations, characters, and points of view, has artistically examined the problems of the individual in relation to his fellows, has enriched our scope of acquaintance with fictional persons, and, more specifically, has continued his search for a faith adequate for the contemporary thinking man.

There is one figure, almost an Updike stereotype, which appears again and again. He is young (either a boy or a young man), sensitive, aware of people and their complexities, responsive(sensitive, answering) to nature, curious, and intelligent. He is often lonely, awkward, and misunderstood. He is an "outsider"(marginal) in that as a unique individual he cannot find his place in established social coteries(exclusive groups). His name is either David, Alan, Bill, Mark, or, most often, John. In any event, it seems safe to say that "John" is a character with whom Updike identifies either emotionally, physically, mentally, or in more obscure ways.

The author says of the younger "John" in the foreword to *Olinger Stories*:

He wears different names and his circumstances vary, but he is at bottom the same boy, a local boy...The locality is that of Olinger, Pennsylvania ... audibly a shadow of "Shillington", the real name of my home town, yet the two towns, however similar, are not at all the same. Shillington is a place on the map and belongs to the world. Olinger is a state of mind, of my mind, and belongs entirely to me.

In many ways "John" of the Updike stories is typical of characters created by "post modern" novelists whose true subject is the "recurrent search...for personal identity and freedom" in the complex society of post-World War II. Yet John remains cool(composed, imperturbable), expectant(expecting), and sane. Unlike James Baldwin's young men, angry victims of modern society which both creates and destroys them, John of

Updike's short stories is gentle, hopeful, loving, and optimistic. His moral judgment and standards of behavior would be acceptable in the most particular circles. He loves life and is conscious of its precious moments and its exquisite details. In his thoughts he often lives in the past, where there was something valuable which seems lost to the present, but he is always ready for the future, eager for its answers, anxious to be taught. He examines each new experience for its values and its hazards, taking from it a positive good even when the experience becomes a shattering(disintegrating) one. He learns and loves and seeks answers for tomorrow, for change is certain. Disappointment is certain, but so is joy. He searches for God. In his search he listens to life and from its sobs(sollozos) and its songs composes a poignant(intense, pathetic) melody which becomes the motif of Updike's short stories.

One theme appears again and again: that of man's bewilderment (perplexity) as he searches for meaning in his existence. (In "Dentistry and Doubt", John is called Burton; in "A Gift from the City", John's name is Jim). Almost every story in John Updike's published collections illustrates the complexity of life in some way, but another emphasis is also apparent. In the short stories as in the novel *The Centaur*, Updike tells us that goodness lives. There is always hope because man is capable of goodness. ("Still Life", "His Finest Hour"). Illustration of the goodness of man is supported in Updike's short stories by another theme: Life is good in little things. There are moments of joy, beauty, and insight(lucidez) which, even though fleeting(short, momentary), are as valuable in time's vast spaces as are diamonds caught here and there in the voluminous earth. A few critics notice Updike's tendency to dwell on(keep attention directed) the commonplace events and the small moments of life but fail to realize the significance of this emphasis.

Man is prone(inclined, for) to overlook the obvious. Updike seems to be saying that our vision is out of perspective. We need to see the little things and to recognize their value in our lives. ("You'll Never Know, Dear, How Much I Love You", "A & P"; "In Football Season" of *The Music School* collection, and "Archangel").

Updike, it seems, would have man accept life's little rewards and press on toward understanding his role and his relationship to his Creator. John of the Updike short stories is a seeker after Truth. Sometimes he is just discovering his uniqueness and hardly aware of his search. Sometimes he seeks answers in the scriptures, again in nature, and still again in mystical revelations. There is some aspect of search in almost every Updike short story. ("The Happiest I've Been", "Flight", "Lifeguard", "The Crow in the Woods" and "The Great Scarf of Birds")

There are other Johns and other searchers in the short stories, their experiences sometimes attesting not only the mystery of life but also the certainty of God's existence. But whatever the theme, there is always a delicate but certain buoyancy(resilience, ability to recover) that lifts everyday experiences of Updike characters a bit above the ordinary. If man's immortality and God's reality are not clearly declared, they are hopefully implied. The search for their certainty never ceases. ("The Astronomer", "Dying Cat", "Churchgoing")

III.1. *PIGEON FEATHERS* (1962)

The same new vision is almost caught in "Pigeon Feathers", a title selection and the finest of the stories in the first three collections. The leading

character is a fourteen-year-old boy who lives on a Pennsylvania farm. His name is David but he seems to be the same boy who appears as Peter in *The Centaur* and also as John in other short stories. Sensitive, serious, lonely and introspective, his family has moved from nearby Olinger and he now feels uprooted(removed) from his home and childhood. Restless and agitated, he searches for something to do until he comes across H. G. Wells's *The Outline of History*, which talks, between others, about Jesus's story as "a kind of hobo(homeless vagabond), in a minor colony of the Roman Empire".

David is now fascinated and terrified, because he suddenly sees mankind, society, and his parents as frauds. He is thrown into the adult world where all is a lie, a pretense, and a perplexity. The confusion is compounded(aggravated) when he has a distinct vision of death. The fear of the cosmos in its magnitude and limitlessness, a theme which appears in some of the Updike poetry, is repeated. Now he discusses his frantic(very anxious) terror, when he goes to the catechetical class at the Lutheran Church and he begins to ask questions that the good man in the white collar, the minister, cannot answer. There is no better example anywhere in Updike's fiction of the failure of Christianity as man practices it and preaches it. It does not even answer the needs of a sincere, faithful child. As a matter of fact, it makes the child a sinner in the eyes of his peers(equals) simply because he yearns for truth. Its answers are inadequate for our time.

But David doesn't give up with his search. As the story progresses, David's fear change to anger, for his mother cannot answer him. Like Harry Angstrom of *Rabbit* and George Caldwell of *The Centaur*, he continues his search alone and unguided. David is a restless(unquiet, discontented) seeker after truth. His mother tries to dissuade him:

"David," she asked gently, "don't you ever want to rest?".

"No. Not forever."

"David, you're so young. When you get older, you'll feel differently."

"Grandpa didn't. Look how tattered(ragged, disrupted) this book is."(136)

Like Updike's other searchers, David continues to look to the Church, even after it has failed him. Updike's belief that within Christianity or beyond it lies a solution, appears once again. Finally a second comfort presents itself. Another Updike theme unfolds. The little everyday wonders may lead to some answers. It is the little things that bring joy. Even the dog's fur has been planned. There is no doubt. *Something* planned it. Something there is which needs understanding.

Still silently searching for comfort and answers, still trying to expand his religious beliefs to fit his needs, the boy goes about his tasks on the farm. His grandmother, fearing damage to useless furniture stored in the barn, wants him to shoot the pigeons nesting in its rafters(roofs). When the birds are dead, David comes out of the barn, the "small night" of carnage(massacre, slaughter), and his dawn(begin to grow light; be perceived) begins. He discovers the intricate and elaborate designs of the pigeon's feathers: "each filament...shaped within the shape of the feather, and the feathers in turn...trimmed(arranged, embellish) to fit a pattern that flowed without error across the bird's body"(149). No two are alike.

The young boy experiences knowledge. God exists. There are answers. Life -his life- will go on forever. Triumphantly, exultantly, the story of David is concluded. His questions have not all been answered; his search has only begun. To question -to search- to wish to know, and now and then to be

"robed(dressed) in certainty" by the discovery of so wonderful an answer as pigeon feathers- is to begin to know.

IV. THE COLLECTION *THE MUSIC SCHOOL* (1966)

In *The Music School*, the fourth volume of short stories, very few of the characters "begin to know". Most of them are suffering from life's complexity, and most are searching one way or another, for a way out of their bewilderment. In these stories (and in the fourth and fifth novels which are chronological neighbors), a new dimension of the search theme develops. The characters are, in general, older than those of *Pigeon Feathers*, *The Same Door*, and *Olinger Stories*. Their quandaries(dilemmas, hardships) are those of the young-to-middle-aged who are experienced in marriage and sex. They search for some kind of sex utopia. Eight of the twenty stories in *The Music School* deal with the dilemmas of illicit love affairs, dissatisfaction with a mate, emotional disturbances growing out of divided loyalties between the wife to whom one is pledged(promised) and the mistress whom his sexual appetite demands. Sexual conflicts create the perplexities which give the search theme a new impetus.

Many of his problems stem from his unwillingness or inability to relate over a long period of time to one and the same sex partner. Love has many facets, most of them reflecting sex drives(forces), each of these a slightly different cut. The jewel of life is manysided. As it turns in the sun, man sees the beauty of first one reflection and then another, each a seemingly perfect cut of the gem until another catches his eye. Society says, "select one"; he is unable to limit himself, and complete confusion is the result. Searching for a

solution to his dilemma, he usually finds, instead, still another glittering(sparkling, flashing) sex experience which in turn will fade when the light strikes a newer one -or such is the overall impression of the stories in *The Music School*. ("My Lover Has Dirty Finger Nails", "The Music School")

In these sex-problem stories there are a few "victims" of life who make an effort to correct their errors and to understand themselves. Updike's searchers of integrity reappear. "Leaves" tells of near madness experienced by a young man who, in his search, tries to return to the wife he had wronged and left. His vision begins to clear when he looks outward toward nature for assistance. Another of Updike's themes unfolds: nature has some answers. The young man says,

It comes upon me as strange, after the long darkness of self-absorption and fear and shame in which I have been living, that things are beautiful, that independent of our catastrophes they continue to maintain the casual precision, the effortless abundance of inventive 'effect', which is the hallmark and specialty of Nature. Nature: this morning it seems to me very clear that Nature may be defined as that which exists without guilt. (52)

Updike themes of human perplexity, the beauty of little things, perpetual search, and Nature as a possible answer all emerge. The theme of search leads in significance and continues.

IV.1. THE HERMIT (1966)

The finest story in this collection, one which does not dwell on sexual maladjustment, is "The Hermit". It suggests that the man who tries to discover

life in its most exquisite purity and who reaches a threshold of understanding or fulfillment is so rare that society will destroy him. "The Hermit" tells about a searcher who almost finds something. It is the soul and summit of Updike's art. Updike themes found in this treasure of a short story are all carefully laced and interlaced into a delicate but elaborate pattern, a rich fabric textured and shaded, finished without flaw: a) *each man is alone*; b) *Man is forever perplexed*; c) *Nature can help solve our dilemmas* (the sex theme is shaded into a subordinate position); d) *in our slenderest tenuity(thinness) are we significant*; e) *All things have purpose*; f) *His search is intuitive*, not intellectual; g) *Something communicates with him*; h) *God exists* (Karl Barth's influence in that man cannot find God, but God can reach man as Present, Alone and One). But in the story's tragic conclusion, the artist permits no final revelation. At the moment of discovery, a man on the threshold of understanding is jerked back(move abruptly) into the meanness of life as lived by "reasonable" people. The sound beneath the silence will not be heard amidst the clamor and clatter(noise; rattling sound) of civilized confinement to which he will be returned.

Sharing the agony of Stanley's loss, the reader is nevertheless still free to question. The optimistic tone of Updike's earlier works is not present here. Hope has no place in Stanley's world. Has it a place in any man's world? The Stanleys are destined to fruitless seeking, for man cannot of his own will reach God. And yet the message is hopeful. It is simply that God exists. To believe we can reach Him is our folly. To be reached by Him is our chance in ten million. To search for Him without reward is our destiny. That He exists is our hope.

V. THE SHORT STORY *THE MUSIC SCHOOL* (1966)

In "The Music School" Alfred Schweigen is the humanist who longs for a belief or a world view that would give purpose and dignity to human life; the computer expert is this story's version of the man of science.

It is a curious feature of Updike's style that although his central characters seek meaning beyond the physical, Updike himself relies heavily on physical details to formulate his meaning. Through careful handling of his imagery, he enables the visual details of his settings to establish values and control reader response.

Updike's talent and training in the graphic arts is complemented by an enthusiasm for motion pictures. The highly cinematic quality of his fiction is therefore no accident. Though "The Music School" is, in its short-story form, less obviously cinematic than Updike's novels, the story consists of the meditations of an artist who, like Updike, instinctively puzzles over (bewilders, entangles) matters of order and arrangement. Meticulously descriptions of settings have been a characteristic of Updike's style from the beginning. Like any artist he outlines his characters against a background which gives their features meaning; he relies heavily on details of color to establish such backgrounds. In addition to color, Updike's imagery systems often reveal a highly elaborated spatial pattern.

In the title selection, "The Music School", Alfred Schweigen tells his own story. He begins by saying, "I exist in time"(346/1). Immediately we know that he is a man of our time -or of any time in which one must exist as that era dictates. He relates several of the circumstances which make up the texture of his life: a tragically meaningless murder about which he has heard but can do nothing, a trusting daughter to whom he is committed, forced

compliance(flexibility) with a bold change in a sacred church ritual which, supposedly ordained by God, had existed unquestioned for more than a thousand years, a wife who visits a psychiatrist because of his unfaithfulness - all circumstances which hold him and shape his life, he thinks, without his influence. He just "exists in time". He comments, "Each moment I live, I must think where to place my fingers, and press them down with no confidence of hearing a chord"(350/3). He is unaware that he gives his life any direction; he is adrift(a la deriva) in a steam(momentum; power) of humanity. He continues: "My friends are like me. We are all pilgrims, faltering(stumbling; hesitating) toward divorce"(350/3). Life is a perplexity over which we have no control. Together we are swept(slanted backward; wiped out) toward divorce with the tide of the time. There is little promise that arriving there, we will be any better off, however. Choices are made for us, and we are forced to accept them. All is one chaotic sequence of loves and hates in which we are forced to take part but on which we have no influence and for which we can accept no responsibility.

"The Music School" is a picture of a man's mind. Its scenery is internal, not external; its dialogue is a monologue spoken to oneself; and its visual elements depict memories and meditations which, as a group, portray the man Alfred Schweigen. It is important to notice that it is not really the computer expert we learn about but Schweigen's reactions to the computer expert. Though Schweigen says "let me describe the music school"(348/2), after a few words we get not one of Updike's familiar detailed descriptions, but an impressionistic sense of Schweigen's experience while he waits there and meditates on the nature of music.

Schweigen's reflections center around two dominant metaphors -music and food (eating)- and two subdominant metaphors- religion and mathematics. Music represents order and harmony; religion and mathematics resemble

music because they provide an orderly system for viewing reality. The computers produce, Schweigen imagines, "the music of truth"(349/2). And when the churchgoers would assume a kneeling position, he recalls, "there was a kind of accompanying music"(350/2).

The computer expert in Schweigen's imagination has the cool assurance of Updike's recurrent character, the scientist. Schweigen describes him as "a typical specimen of the new human species"(347/1) participating "not in this century but in the next"(347/1). The priest in "The Music School" is also called "a man of the future"(348/1); he displays the secular nonchalance(unconcern; indifference; negligence) associated with the figure of the scientist. Perhaps more comfortable at a party than in church, at home with Protestants and nonbelievers, he plays a guitar and smokes while casually chatting about the Eucharist. Such men of theory as the priest and the computer expert appear to Schweigen sublime -lacking a sense of an animal nature. "They have solved or dismissed the paradox of being a thinking animal"(349?), he decides. Such men seem to strike a basic harmony with the orderly universe they see. They are able, like the priest, to play chords every time. Schweigen sees them as "scrupulous", "fine", and "translucent (transparent, clear)"(349/2). Yet the translucent host(multitude) is being discarded as inappropriate to the reality which Christ saw and which Schweigen also recognizes. What Schweigen senses is a tough, coarse(vulgar, common), opaque world with disorderly passions beyond the comprehension of men like the computer expert to whom shame and guilt are also unknown.

Schweigen says he had once tried to learn music. He had also once been religious. But he has long ago given up being either musical or religious; apparently he cannot feel comfortable with systems which envision an orderly universe. Although he feels unable to learn music himself, however, he loves

his daughter's hopeful attempts to play. She returns from her lesson "refreshed"(350/3) just as the churchgoers of Schweigen's early memories leave the services refreshed. Though these are no longer Schweigen's modes, he admires those who find them still efficacious. And he realizes that each of us chews(masticar) the world in his own way.

Yet the story does not have a simple melody line; there is a faint counterpoint of irony. Alfred Schweigen, for all his intelligence and sensitivity, is not a very good novelist. His intended novel sounds trite(vulgar, trivial) and precious(affected, great) -even, it would seem, to him. If he is an artist who cannot come to terms with the concept of an orderly universe, then how will he produce the patterned verbal music of literature? And one wonders whether such a cool and aloof(reserved, cold) man chews the world as he says one must. Even his confessional and meditative essay is strangely formal and distant. He will tell us nothing of that moment so important it almost produced a novel, although he is not above teasing(coax; worry; annoy) our curiosity a bit by mentioning it. Nor will he admit that his adulteries could cause his wife to suffer enough that she seeks someone else for guidance and support.

For all of his joy at his daughter's lessons, his voice remains anemic, dry, tired, overly(to an excessive degree) formal, and tense. He says he is not religious, yet he reveals a longing for the religion which formerly gave him harmony with the universe and with himself. Caught between two worlds, he knows he is too old-fashioned to become a modern man even as he senses that his older rhythms of belief and behavior have receded (withdraw, diminish), have diminished to a distant music.

"The Music School" offers us an encompassing metaphor for Updike's view of his own art -perhaps the reason he used the title for a whole collection

of short stories. The change to a chewy(correoso, duro) host(multitude, guest) and the death of the computer expert are both products of a transubstantiation - from the world of ideas to the world of matter. Art, too, is such a transubstantiation. In sonata, or novel, or film, one moves from the realm of idea through the corridors of form to those flashes of sound or color which are the stuff of experience. The artist grapples(take, grasp) with the tough and confusing world, searching for those combinations which, when struck, produce music.