

## Abstract

This thesis explores the approach to death in the novels of John Updike published in the 1960's, namely *Rabbit Run*, *The Centaur* and *Couples*. The importance of death in Updike's prose is universally acknowledged, but most critical works are concerned with other themes. The main focus of this thesis is the development of the approach to death of the main characters in the aforementioned novels as well as the overall change of Updike's approach to death over the three novels.

The first chapter presents the theoretical background for two perspectives on death: death in Christian teachings and the theory of life and death drives by Sigmund Freud. Christianity is an important aspect of Updike's prose, not only because he is Christian himself, but the majority of his focal characters either are Christian or share Christian values. Traditional Christian notions are expanded upon by the concept of The American Religion, introduced by Harold Bloom in *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation*. The selection of Freud's theory is based on the close connection between sex and death in the novels, which is in accordance with the theory explained in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

In the following three chapters, the individual novels are analysed. Each chapter examines the initial position to death of the main character, its relevance regarding the theoretical background provided, and finally the character's attitude towards death at the end of the novel. The crucial secondary sources used in all three chapters are *John Updike Revisited* by James A. Schiff and *Conversations with John Updike* by James Plath. In each analytical chapter, there is one prominent secondary source; in chapter two it is "Rabbit Angstrom as a Religious Sufferer" by Lewis A. Lawson, in chapter three "The Questing Fear: Christian Allegory in John Updike's "The Centaur"" by David Myers, and in chapter four "Updike's "Couples": Eros Demythologized" by Robert Detweiler. The core ideas explored

by the sources are used to analyse the main characters and the progress of their approach to death in conjunction with the two perspectives on death.

Chapter five provides the comparison of the findings established in the previous chapters. Firstly, a summary of the changes of attitude towards death of each character is presented. The characters are then compared to one another in respect to their initial position to death; faith; the relevance of Freud's drive theory and their final attitude towards death. This chapter concludes with an overview of each novel's development, producing a representation of the evolution of Updike's attitude towards death.

The conclusion includes a short summary of the results of the analysis. Closer examination of the secondary sources and the ideas contained within is presented in relationship to this thesis, placing it in the context of Updike's scholarship. Other possible perspectives on the three selected novels and themes are mentioned, hopefully providing plausible suggestions for future research.