

**Opponent's report on B.A. thesis by
Magdalena Müllerová**

"Evolution of the Approach to Death: John Updike's Novels of the 1960s"

In her well-structured, insightful, and richly researched thesis, Magdalena Müllerová examines the evolution of approaches to death in the novels of John Updike published in the 1960s, namely *Rabbit Run*, *The Centaur* and *Couples*. Combining close readings of the novels with theoretical work from Sigmund Freud and Harold Bloom, among others, the thesis arrives at focused, insightful interpretations of the novels and reveals a central theme of Updike's oeuvre.

The thesis contains an introduction, five chapters, a conclusion and a bibliography. The first chapter, "Religion, Freud and Death," provides a theoretical foundation for the thesis, presenting death in Christian teachings and Sigmund Freud's theory of life and death drives. This chapter forms the generative framework of the rest of the thesis.

The next three chapters analyze the novels individually through close readings. Each of these chapters examines the main character of the novel and the development of his approach to or relationship with death. These readings are informed by the theories detailed in the first chapter. These chapters are: "*Rabbit, Run*: The Running Man;" "*The Centaur*: A Change of Heart;" and "*Couples*: Setting Death in Motion."

The fifth chapter, "The Journey to Acceptance of Death," synthesizes the findings of the previous chapters. First summarizing the evolution of characters' approaches to death, the chapter concludes by providing an overview of each novel and argues that, taken together, they represent the evolution of Updike's attitude towards death. Ultimately the thesis provides insight to these novels from a key period in Updike's career, and suggests an intriguing parallel between the texts and the author's life and thought.

There are a few formatting issues in the thesis, such as on pages 26 and 27, but these do little to detract from the success of the argument, which is especially convincing when the thesis deals with *Couples*. Overall the thesis is well-structured, detailed and knowledgeable. I have several questions to pose.

- 1) Does Updike's exploration and portrayal of death in these novels distinguish him from other authors of his era?
- 2) Would a lack of knowledge about theoretical approaches to death detract from an understanding of the novels?
- 3) Does your argument that Updike's characters tell us something about Updike's own attitude toward death contradict an approach to the text, for example in "The Death of the Author" by Roland Barthes, which considers details of the author's biography extraneous to the text and therefore irrelevant?

In light of the foregoing, I hereby recommend the mark of 1 (výborně) for this thesis work.

Stephan B. Delbos, MFA, PhD

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