

Under Gallic Eyes: The Case of John Updike's Ambivalent Reception in France

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I am fairly sure American literature is not where most French readers would like to live, but they love the thrills of repeated visits.

—MARC CHÉNETIER, "American Literature in France: Pleasures in Perspective"

In his 1946 essay "American Novelists in French Eyes," Jean-Paul Sartre declared: "There is one American literature for Americans and another for the French" (114). The reception of authors abroad is indeed an interesting indicator of national preferences and cultural differences. It also can turn out to be a sometimes crucial factor of influence on the reception of artists in their homeland. We may recall here how Poe, Melville, and such modernist authors as Faulkner and Dos Passos were, so to speak, "discovered" and acclaimed in France long before they became classics at home. In the case of John Updike's reception in France, what is immediately obvious is that, even though his works are translated and sell well, he does not enjoy the same kind of privileged status or academic prestige as, say, Philip Roth and Toni Morrison, or even writers like Richard Ford and Paul Auster, whose fame abroad perhaps outweighs their reputation within the United States. So, in keeping with Sartre's categories, is John Updike an American writer for the French?

"THE REAL AMERICAN THINGS IN FRANCE"

Before tackling the question of Updike's ambivalent reception among French critics, it may be useful to briefly survey the general context in which to inscribe it. Marc Chénétier, one of the most prominent American literature specialists in France, once submitted this riddle: "This is a test: in literature, the *real American* things in France are: the hard-boiled novel, Charles Bukowski, John Fante, John Steinbeck, Ernest Hemingway, Raymond Carver, John Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne. One error has slipped into this list. Find it" (1993, 360). (My own guess would be that the error is Hawthorne.)

Broadly speaking, American literature enjoys the favor of the French public, not just the ubiquitous bestsellers of Mary Higgins Clark, Stephen King, and John Grisham—"railway station literature," as it is referred to in France—but works by Roth, Morrison, Ford, Auster, Fante, Carver, Jonathan Franzen, Jim Harrison, Russell Banks, and Cormac McCarthy, to name but a few of the most popular contemporary American writers.

The French foreign book award, the Prix Médicis étranger, created in 1970 and meant to promote authors whose "fame does not yet match their talent," has been awarded nine times to American novels (three times over the past four years, which seems to indicate a certain acceleration of rhythm).¹ As for the older Prix du Meilleur livre étranger, a French literary prize for foreign books created in 1948, Updike was the first American writer to receive it, for *The Centaur* in 1965—the sole literary prize that he ever won in France.² It has been awarded to American novelists only seven times, John Hawkes and Philip Roth being the only two authors rewarded by both the Prix Médicis étranger and Prix du Meilleur livre étranger.³

The fortunes of a writer may of course be considerably at variance when one considers sales to the general public and the critical reception in the more secluded circles of the academic world. Yet this public-academic dividing line can turn out to be a porous one,⁴ with Paul Auster perhaps the most vivid example of a writer who crossed over from the academy toward the larger reading public. Not only did he stand out in the 1990s as an academic favorite, the subject of university conferences, scholarly articles, and Ph.D. dissertations and required reading for the national competitive examinations (*agrégation* and *CAPES*), but he became a popular phenomenon in France, a celebrity whose translated paperbacks are everywhere to be found in bookstores and whose presence graces numerous literary festivals as well as prime-time broadcasts.⁵ Pondering the discrepancy between Auster's reputation in France and in his homeland, Charles Holdefer

wittily suggests that “[t]he skeptical (or jealous) might cast Auster as a literary Jerry Lewis,” while “[t]rue believers see him as a complex and underappreciated figure who, like Faulkner, will be rescued by the French” (51).

Auster’s case is but one in a long series of this particular phenomenon of American writers gaining in France a reputation not yet acquired at home. If Gertrude Stein could claim, early in the twentieth century, “America is my country, but Paris is my hometown,” the tradition of hospitality to American writers, both literally and figuratively speaking, is an ongoing one. From the Lost Generation through the 1950s—Chester Himes and Henry Miller, Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison—to the present, many American writers have enjoyed in France a critical reception far more benevolent than in their own country.⁶ “Jerome Charyn and John Hawkes,” Chénétier reminds us, “have more readers in France than in the United States” (1991, 93). The trend continues into the twenty-first century: in spite of the fact that for many years he could not find a publisher in the United States, Douglas Kennedy has been a best-selling author in France. An even more peculiar case of French adoption is that of the American writer Jonathan Littell, who writes in French to great acclaim and whose highly controversial second novel, *Les Bienveillantes* [*The Kindly Ones*], the fictional memoir of a Nazi officer, was rewarded in 2006 with the French equivalent of the Pulitzer Prize, the Prix Goncourt, as well as the Grand Prix du roman de l’Académie française.

The role played by French specialists of American literature has of course been crucial in the selection of certain writers and the recognition of certain works that in turn have led to the establishment of certain norms. Over the last four decades, French Americanists have contributed to the building of a serious public interest in American new fictions, starting, from the 1970s onward, with the postmodernist writings of Raymond Federman, Walter Abish, Donald Barthelme, William Gass, and Robert Coover, not to mention Don DeLillo and Thomas Pynchon. The number of Ph.D. dissertations written on these experimental writers in France has far outweighed those written on more classic or mainstream writers.

As for the new fictions of the twenty-first century, two recent issues of the most respected journals in the field of Anglo-American literature have blazed the path and helped start to draw the new maps: first, a 2002 issue of the *Revue Française d’Études Américaines* (*French Review of American Studies*) called *Proses pour le siècle nouveau* (*Writing for the New Century*) and edited by Marc Chénétier included studies of Donald Antrim, Richard Powers, Jonathan Franzen, Gilbert Sorrentino, Rick Moody, Lorrie Moore, David Foster Wallace, and Mary Ca-

ponegro, as well as the lesser-known George Saunders, Rikki Ducornet, Jaimy Gordon, Katherine Dunn, Joanna Scott, and A.J. Verdelle.⁷ This first foray into fictions of the new century was followed by the April-June 2010 issue of the Sorbonne journal *Études anglaises*, titled *Contemporary American Fiction: An Update*, which featured essays on Ben Marcus, Percival Everett, Jayne Anne Phillips, Steve Tomasula, Mark Danielewski, and Shelley Jackson.⁸

Finally, what should also be mentioned in this survey of the terrain is one of the peculiarities of the French university system, namely its close link to the national civil service competitive examinations, the most prestigious being the *agrégation*. As regards the American literature programs for the *agrégation d'anglais*, the lists of assigned works traditionally tend to favor the canon (Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman, Dickinson, Crane, Faulkner, Steinbeck, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Nabokov, etc.) but also give recognition to contemporary works considered of academic status: these have recently included *Moon Palace* by Paul Auster, *A Multitude of Sins* by Richard Ford, *Carpenter's Gothic* by William Gaddis, and *The Knife Thrower and Other Stories* by Steven Millhauser, as well as Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. For 2012, American literature will be represented by *The Sun Also Rises* and Roth's *American Pastoral*. Symptomatically, over the last forty years, Updike has appeared only once on the *agrégation* program, in 1973, with *The Centaur*, his most "intellectual," Joycean fiction and the very novel for which he had won the French prize for best foreign book in 1965.

TRANSLATION, ENDORSEMENT, DISSEMINATION

Translation of course plays a major role in the accessibility and popularity of American literature within a foreign culture. As a brief survey of landmark translations of American works shows, it has also been instrumental in helping a number of American writers gain status not only abroad but in their homeland, the most famous examples being Melville, Faulkner, and Dos Passos, who "had a name in Europe before their own country paid attention to them" (Chénétier 1986, xii).

Historically speaking, the most singular case of French adoption remains Poe. "Poe has become a French writer," Arthur Ransome wrote in his 1910 critical study of the author. "Poe is read [in France] as if he were a native" (219). Not only did the French, under Baudelaire's incentive, adopt Poe, but this recognition reverberated into the world.⁹ Poe's fortune in France signaled what would become one of the dominant trends in the French critical take on American literature, namely the role played by French writers in the translation, endorsement, and dissemination

of a number of American authors, resulting in a kind of schizophrenic fate for those representatives of American literature elected by the French as their own:

Marcus Cunliffe, his usual witty self, mentions the presence in world literature of two contemporary writers: a Frenchman by the name of Edgarpo and an American better known as Edgar Allan Poe, vituperated in his own country for his light-headed and gratuitous “tintinnabulations.” Edgarpo, much admired by Baudelaire and by Mallarmé, . . . later praised by Paul Valéry, this most intellectual of French poets, stands, somehow, as an icon of . . . the “Frenchness” of critical approaches to the literature of the United States. (Chénétier 1991, 81)

Melville's is another emblematic case of this “writers' writer” syndrome: *Moby-Dick* was translated into French and praised by the French writer Jean Giono in 1941, but, as Chénétier notes, “as early as the 1910s and 1920s, in French circles, *the* book by Melville to read was *Moby-Dick* rather than *Omoo* or *Typee*.” Similarly Faulkner, whose novel *The Sound and The Fury* was out of print in the United States by 1940, “was transformed from a regional hick writer into a novelist of Nobel stature under the influence of Maurice-Edgar Coindreau's translation, relayed by Sartre, Claude-Edmonde Magny, and André Malraux.” And, as had been the case for Poe, “it was Faulkner's *writing* that launched his reputation [in France], then in the United States” (81-82). While Malcolm Cowley's 1946 Viking edition of *The Portable Faulkner* is usually understood as the turning point in Faulkner's reputation in the United States, he was hailed in France as a major novelist in the 1930s by such writers as Sartre, Malraux, and the poet Valéry Larbaud. Sartre praised *Sartoris* before the war, Larbaud wrote a preface to Coindreau's translation of *As I Lay Dying*, and Malraux wrote one for the translation of *Sanctuary*. Thus “[i]t was most often . . . French writers or highly literary translators—Coindreau taught the French symbolists for over thirty years at Princeton—praising American writers that launched the critical reputation of these Americans” (Chénétier 1991, 82).¹⁰

Inversely, and typical of these cultural crosscurrents, the discovery of the great modernist novelists, the “Big Five” as they were called by French critics in the 1940s and 1950s—Faulkner, Dos Passos, Hemingway, Caldwell, and Steinbeck—came to be seen as the greatest literary development in France before World War II. The “Age of the American Novel” (the title of Claude-Edmonde Magny's famous study published in 1948) was hailed as a revolution, breathing new life into the art of writing. Sartre, writing about French and American novelists in his 1946 essay, was thus one of the first to acknowledge the debt of a whole generation of French writers to the works of “les cinq grands.”¹¹

CULTURAL "RATES OF EXCHANGE"

It then becomes apparent that the reception of authors abroad involves wide-ranging questions having to do with what Chénétier has called the cultural "rates of exchange" (1986, xi). What do readers read, what are they taught to appreciate, what are the conditioning factors of reception? The answers to these questions can only serve as precious indicators of a given culture's preferences. And foremost among them is the imprint of ideological choices: "[T]he way in which one culture engages another reveals much that would otherwise be hidden or ignored in each of the two cultures, as they saw revealed time and again how in even seemingly nonideological cultural preferences one could see traces of political choices and implications" (Gutman 5).

Relations with the United States and domestic political concerns, along with the importance of national history and ideology, all play a crucial role in these transcultural interactions. Thus the study and reception of American literature abroad becomes an enlightening revelator of national identity and helps to define what Norman Holland called the "identity themes" of the receiving culture (Gutman 16).

So what of Updike, then? If it is true that, as Bruce Allen writes, "he and Philip Roth divide the post-Bellow-dominated American landscape between them" (492), why is it that Roth fares so much better among the general public but even more so in the world of academe? What makes for one writer's fortune and another's misfortune when they are in many ways so close?

The oft-phrased question "Who reads Updike anymore?" is one that is apparently asked on both sides of the Atlantic. Fortunately, the answer to that question is not altogether negative. Updike's works are not only translated and reviewed (mostly favorably), but they sell well as paperbacks, the Rabbit saga and the short stories ranking highest, as might be expected, in the public's favor.¹² However, Ph.D. dissertations and scholarly work on Updike's oeuvre remain scant,¹³ and this disaffection is a baffling phenomenon.

Let us consider the "usual suspects" in the debunking or ignorance of Updike's writings among scholarly critics in France. Are the most frequent criticisms—his choice of subject matter (too traditionalist, bourgeois, and mainstream), his alleged misogyny and narcissism, his conservatism—essentially the same as those formulated in the United States,¹⁴ or do they reflect a different type of critical bias?

David Foster Wallace's notorious dismissal of the GMN, "the Great Male Narcissists of postwar American fiction," namely Updike, Roth, and Norman Mailer, does not seem too helpful a clue to account for the academic reticence in France

toward Updike's works, insofar as Roth and Mailer, as radically absorbed in themselves as they may be, do not arouse the same critical objections as Updike does.

Is it his style, then, that is the main bone of contention? The old critical sing-song "Has Updike anything to say?" (Gingher), which can be traced back to the beginning of his career, has had its ups and downs since then, but it resurfaced in recent years in connection with his *New Yorker* piece on 9/11,¹⁵ giving new life to James Wood's question whether "violent truth" could ever "make his words short-winded" (46). But here again, the usual suspect does not seem to hold up as the real culprit in French eyes. Updike's style may be his "private vice" (Aldridge), but in Flaubert's country, there is great indulgence for such a vice.

If not his style, is it his subjects that are to be incriminated? Updike is reputed to be "the model of mainstream American literature" (Olster 11), the chronicler of middle-class white masculinity and of a mostly WASP East Coast universe, at the expense of a more pluralistic, ethnic, and gendered otherness. Even his sexual liberation novels of the 1960s and 1970s appear by French standards too anchored in a teleology of marriage to achieve the subversive status that would grant his fiction the welcome seal of transgression. As for his concern for godliness and his religious questionings, they remain somewhat alien in a country stamped by Voltaire and Rousseau and the ideals of a lay Republic. So, seen in a transcultural perspective, the "rates of exchange" clearly appear to work in Updike's disfavor.

In the context of the development of American studies in France, we may then submit two hypotheses: one of an aesthetic nature, that Updike's art, brilliant as it may be, has been shadowed by a critical predilection, particularly within the French university, for more subversive and experimental forms of narration (at the expense of social realism); the other, of an ideological nature, that has to do with what Jean Kempf, in his critical review of American studies in France, defines as an often left-wing agenda which tends to give preference to the study of texts dealing with or emanating from the underprivileged, the margins, the minorities.

IDEOLOGICAL CONCERNS

Historically speaking, American studies in France, which had been practically nonexistent or largely overshadowed within English departments, underwent a profound change in the late 1960s.¹⁶ Not only did the study of American literature and American culture gain a more legitimate place in the stronghold of English departments, but the general tonality of academic teaching became violently colored by political considerations. Ideological concerns, in tune with the period,

were foregrounded, and the leftist overtones which dominated not only French intellectual life but the French university entailed a major change within American literary and cultural studies, a shift from what had been so far a form of veneration to a more explicitly critical stance. This evolution from a general feeling of Americanophilia in the postwar period to the development of more critical attitudes toward the United States over the next two decades is related not only to the geopolitical concerns of the period but also to the domestic struggles shaking American society in the 1960s. As a consequence, the stress was laid “more willingly on dissenting views within American literature than on the presentational or the hagiographic” (Chénétier 1991, 84).

In this context, Updike’s perceived conservatism, his avowed love of middle-ness and middles, “where,” in his words, “ambiguity restlessly rules” (qtd. in Howard 11), offered easy targets to his detractors:¹⁷ in terms of rates of exchange, the extremities of Mailer and Roth get better ratings than the ambiguities of middle-ness.

Along with the attraction of a radical America came an exploration of the margins of the culture: postmodernist rather than mainstream fiction; women’s, African American, native American, or Chicano culture rather than white, male, middle-class America. Paradoxically, this venture into an exotic otherness and predilection for an “out there” strangeness came perhaps easier, as Chénétier shrewdly points out, “than to try and come to terms with the infinite complexities of, say, the WASP mentality, in the light of a long and even more alien tradition that one would then have to master, realizing painfully that the apparently closest aspects of the culture are not necessarily what they appear to be” (1991, 85).

How does Updike stand in this ideologically pregnant landscape?

Having survived, as he put it, “the khaki-brown Forties and the grit-gray Thirties” (*More Matter* 25), Updike repeatedly asserted that he was happy in the Fifties and, in many ways, he became identified with the ideology of the 1950s, the period of his literary blooming and a period which indelibly colored the psychology of his most memorable hero, Rabbit. Like his creator, Rabbit is a creature of the Cold War and a staunch believer in the myth of American exceptionalism.¹⁸ This identification—personal, historical, and political—with the world of the Cold War may be what cost Updike the favor of the French critics, generally more inclined toward the radicalism of the Beat writers or the militancy of the African American writers who made Paris their home and the Left Bank the so-called Black Bank (Fabre).

The question then becomes: can a writer “admittedly often distinctly out of sync with his culture” (Olster 2) gain popularity or, more importantly, recogni-

tion? Defining himself as “a sort of helplessly 50’s guy” (“Why Rabbit Had to Go” 24), Updike ruefully admits that the liberal political position by which he defined himself “had unfairly gone unfashionable on [him]” during the late 1960s (*Self-Consciousness* 125). In this respect, his essay “On Not Being a Dove” is probably his most enlightening piece on the cost of his ideological stance on Vietnam: even if there is a gap between “not being a dove” and being a hawk, Updike’s position is clearly a jarring one in the French overall consensus of condemnation of the Vietnam war (following France’s own colonialist war in Indochina, which had turned into a debacle as well).

AN ANACHRONISTIC WRITER?

In Updike’s case, ideological differences are compounded by another Continental bias, having to do with aesthetics. The two flaws, ideological and aesthetic, might be presumed to be unrelated, but they in fact converge insofar as literary criticism, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, became governed by an ideological take on the literary object and the methodological tools to approach it. The new schools of criticism that evolved in the writings of Roland Barthes, Jean Ricardou, Gérard Genette, Julia Kristeva, Tzvetan Todorov, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault, to name but a few, were themselves “offshoots of, or inspired by, political and ideological choices” (Chénétier 1991, 85). Radicalism in politics was mirrored in the theoretical and critical tools developed within what was retrospectively baptized “French theory.”

In this context, Updike’s allegedly old-school approach, seen through a somewhat simplistic and biased lens, tends to make of him an obsolete writer. He remains associated with a form of realism and an aesthetics of representation that have fallen out of favor since the 1960s. In spite of his own various experiments in the postmodernist mode,¹⁹ he himself brought grist to this mill in an interview given to the French daily *Le Monde* in January 2007 when, referring to the “yea-saying” to the goodness and beauty of the world that characterizes his vision, by contrast with his contemporaries’ prevalent mood of pessimism and black humor, he called himself an “anachronistic” writer in his homeland.

This is where, by way of conclusion, the two hypotheses submitted here meet: the rejection of what is perceived as his political conservatism and his unabashed Americanism branches out from the thematic into the aesthetic. In the end, Updike’s critical reception in France cannot escape the paradigms of our own “identity themes,” revealing as much, or more, about our national identity as about the

defining essence of Updike's writings. Neither "redskin" nor "paleface," in Philip Rahv's typology, Updike falls perhaps into a kind of no man's land that seems to be alien to Continental biases and clichéd perceptions. Interestingly, though, the news of his death brought about an unexpected turnaround: in its homage to the writer, the leftist journal *Marianne* asked why it is that Updike leaves no heir, and the answer was that he remains the unique representative of a totally original fictional form (Liebaert). If we try to reflect upon what makes Updike an original, we may surmise that, prolific as he is, he defies categories; American as he is—certainly an author to be placed "in the American grain"—he is nevertheless unafraid to ruffle expectations and move countercurrent. So, unlike writers who breed epigones, he seems, like J. D. Salinger, to stand in a class of his own. The French novelist Jean-Paul Dubois, a great admirer of Updike's art, concludes that "pour ceux qui n'ont ni foi ni maître et que tenaille l'intranquillité, je dirai simplement que John Updike est ce que l'on peut espérer de mieux au fin fond de la nuit" ("for those who have neither faith nor master and who are haunted by intransquility, John Updike is simply the best to be hoped for in the dead of the night").

NOTES

1. The American recipients of the Prix Médicis étranger are: *Edwin Mullhouse: The Life and Death of an American Writer 1943–1954* by Jeffrey Cartwright (Steven Millhauser, 1975); *God Knows* (Joseph Heller, 1985); *Adventures in the Alaskan Skin Trade* (John Hawkes, 1986); *Leviathan* (Paul Auster, 1993); *The Tortilla Curtain* (T. Coraghessan Boyle, 1997); *The Human Stain* (Philip Roth, 2002); *The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million* (Daniel Mendelsohn, 2007); *What Is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng* (Dave Eggers, 2009); *Sukkwan Island* (David Vann, 2010). The jury is composed of French writers and journalists.

2. In 1995, Updike received the honorary distinction of Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. The Order of Arts and Letters, which is part of the Ordre national du Mérite, was established in 1963 by the French Minister of Culture. Its purpose is the recognition of significant contributions to the arts and literature or the propagation of these fields. It is composed of three grades: the highest, *Commandeurs*, include T. S. Eliot (1960), Nadine Gordimer (1991), and Ray Bradbury (2007).

3. The American recipients of the Prix du Meilleur livre étranger are: *The Centaur* (John Updike, 1965); *The Blood Oranges* (John Hawkes, 1973); *The Things They Carried* (Tim O'Brien, 1990); *Theory of War* (Joan Brady, 1995); *American Pastoral* (Philip Roth, 2000); *The History of Love* (Nicole Krauss, 2006); and *Searching for John Ford* (Joseph McBride, 2007). The jury is composed of French critics and publishers.

4. In the conclusion to his review of American literature in France, Chénétier notes that "the osmosis between public and academic audiences is growing" (1991, 95).

5. Auster is an example of Francophilia as well. He lived for several years in Paris, where he earned a living translating various French writers (Mallarmé, Sartre, Simenon) and developed close

links with the literary establishment. His star seems to have waned among French critics in recent years, the novelty of his devices being increasingly perceived as somewhat hackneyed and his late production tending to be judged repetitive.

6. Many sulfurous works such as *Tropic of Cancer*, *Lolita*, and *Naked Lunch* met with the censorship of American publishers and were first published in France.

7. See Holdefer 50. Back in 1986, Chénétier made the point that “many of the authors European academics interested in contemporary American literature may talk about when they visit or teach in the United States will be largely unknown to their students and often despised or looked askance at by their colleagues. Donald Barthelme and Thomas Pynchon might occasionally grace coffee tables along with copies of the *New Yorker*, but few English departments in [the United States] offer courses on contemporary American literature, and writing one’s Ph.D. dissertation on William Gass or Robert Coover is hardly the best way of landing a job” (1986, xii–xiii). Sartre expressed the same kind of disappointment in 1946: “First, it was impossible to meet any of these men [the great modernist novelists] . . . Also, the majority of the cultivated Americans whom I met did not share my enthusiasm for them” (115).

8. In terms of the general public, the 2010 edition of the biennial Festival America, which has been held since 2002 in the Vincennes suburb of Paris, featured, among others, Bret Easton Ellis, Jay McInerney, Dan Fante, Jayne Anne Phillips, Douglas Kennedy, Adam Haslett, Richard Russo, Claire Messud, Nick Flynn, Louise Erdrich, and Richard Price.

9. As Huck Gutman writes, “Baudelaire would read Poe, and the world of letters, not solely in France, would never be the same” (4).

10. Coindreau’s translations for Gallimard before World War II include *Manhattan Transfer* (1928); *A Farewell to Arms* (1932, with a preface by the novelist Drieu La Rochelle); *The Sun Also Rises* (1933, with a preface by the poet Jean Prévoist); *As I Lay Dying* (1934, with a preface by the poet Valéry Larbaud); *Light in August* (1935); *God’s Little Acre* (1936); *Tobacco Road* (1937); *The Sound and the Fury* (1938); and *Of Mice and Men* (1939).

11. Mathy notes that “Sartre was extremely attracted to the American literature of the 1920s and 1930s, perhaps more so than any other French writer of his generation, with the exception of Simone de Beauvoir” (129).

12. All of Updike’s novels and most of his short story collections have been translated (usually by renowned translators) and published by prestigious presses (Gallimard and Éditions du Seuil). *The Same Door*, *Olinger Stories*, and *The Early Stories* have not been translated. Neither have the play *Buchanan Dying* or the poetry collections except *Facing Nature* (*La Condition naturelle*). About half of the critical works have been translated (not yet translated are *Assorted Prose*, *Odd Jobs*, *More Matter*, *Still Looking*, and *Due Considerations*). The title of one of the novels, *Memories of the Ford Administration*, has been substantially altered in translation to *La parfaite épouse* (*The Perfect Spouse*)—a less alien and more appealing catch phrase. For the collections of short stories, the title of the eponymous story has sometimes been changed, as in *The Music School* (*Les Quatre faces d’une histoire* or *Four Sides of One Story*) and *Problems* (*La Concubine de Saint-Augustin* or *Augustine’s Concubine*).

13. To the best of my knowledge, only two Ph.D. dissertations have been written on Updike in France: mine (“The Daily and the Sacred in John Updike’s Fiction,” defended at the Sorbonne in

1980) and Aristie Trendel's ("John Updike's Short Fiction: Promises of Immortality," defended at the University of Strasbourg in 2004). My monograph *John Updike: La nostalgie de l'Amérique* (2002) is the only one on Updike to be published in French to this date. None of the major critical works on Updike have been translated into French.

14. Olster sums up the standard criticisms leveled at Updike in the United States: "[H]is representation of American normativity in terms—exclusively, according to detractors—of middle-class white masculinity and apparent denigration of everyone else in terms of racialized, ethnic, and/or gendered otherness has provoked controversy since the start of his career" (8).

15. The piece ends: "The next morning, I went back to the open vantage from which we had watched the tower so dreadfully slip from sight. The fresh sun shone on the eastward façades, a few boats tentatively moved in the river, the ruins were still sending out smoke, but New York looked glorious" (Updike "Talk of the Town" 29).

16. As Roger Asselineau and Simon Copans write, "American Studies in the French universities did not really come of age until the late 1960s" (58). The first French chair in American literature and civilization was created at the Sorbonne in 1926 for Professor Charles Cestre, the same year that the first panel on American literature was finally allowed to run at the MLA convention (as English 11, "Commonwealth Literature"), after three years of unsuccessful petitions by Fred Lewis Pattee (information provided by Professor James Nagel). Before World War II, only the Sorbonne and the universities of Lille and Lyon were offering courses in American literature and civilization, which remained a very marginal, optional subject. After the war, things changed radically and such courses were taught in most universities but always as part of a degree in English. The growing number of graduates specializing in American rather than English literature as well as in a range of American "civilization" topics—*civilization* being the standard term used in French universities to designate the various fields that make up what in the United States is referred to as "American studies"—led to the foundation in 1967 of the Association Française d'Études Américaines (French Association of American Studies).

17. Such criticism, of course, is not a French exclusivity. In a 2009 essay, Sanford Pinsker, while admitting that Rabbit's political stance on Vietnam, his xenophobia and misogyny "melted into thin air when propped against [Updike's] exquisitely honed paragraphs," nevertheless adds: "Many members of the academy were not so forgiving, and at meetings of the Modern Language Association I found myself defending Updike against those who found him both facile and politically incorrect" (494).

18. See Greiner.

19. See Duvall.

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John Hoyer Updike (18 March 1932 – 27 January 2009) was an American novelist, poet, critic and short-story writer. I was twenty-four, and the religious revival within myself was at its height. Earlier that summer, I had discovered Kierkegaard, and each week I brought back to the apartment one more of the Princeton University Press's elegant and expensive editions of his works. They were beautiful books, sometimes very thick, sometimes very thin, always typographically exhilarating, with their welter