The Regulating Daughter in John Updike’s Rabbit Novels

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Abstract
This article considers the ways in which John Updike creates female characters who suffer in some way so that their family units can remain intact. His Rabbit novels privilege the so-called nuclear family as an abiding family form, one which rests upon the sacrificial choices made by girls and women. It uses Family Systems Theory as a tool of interpretation in reading the texts and establishing their underlying ethos.

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John Hoyer Updike (March 18, 1932 – January 27, 2009) was an American novelist, poet, short-story writer, art critic, and literary critic. One of only three writers to win the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction more than once (the others being Booth Tarkington and William Faulkner), Updike published more than twenty novels, more than a dozen short-story collections, as well as poetry, art and literary criticism and children's books during his career. John Updike's style of writing has often been praised because of his detailed descriptions and his skilful and extensive use of metaphors. Hence, the critic Hermione Lee says that Updike’s novels and short stories are “the most metaphorical writing in American fiction, except for Melville’s” and goes on commenting on the way Updike describes Rabbit’s heart in metaphors.[12] Thus, Lee argues that the metaphor is of central importance in Updike’s work, for “every ordinary object and event can be seen. Hence, among critics Updike’s work is admired because of his “meticulous taxonomy” of “the material nature of the world” and his “memorializing American superabundance”. [15] In point of fact, Updike describes the scenes of his novels in a very detailed and lively His second novel, Rabbit, Run (1960) introduced Updike as a voice that would forever change American literature. Updike authored 61 books, including more than 30 novels and short story collections, nine separate volumes of essays, a play (Buchanan Dying, 1974), a memoir (Self Consciousness, 1989), and a number of children’s books. In the sequel to the classic Rabbit, Run, John Updike revisits Harry “Rabbit” Angstrom at a point of personal and national crisis. Against the backdrop of the 1969 moon landing, the Summer of Love, and the Vietnam War, Rabbit struggles to keep his family together and to keep up with the fast moving tides of social change in America. Rabbit’s life has been turned upside down. His elderly mother is dying. His wife, Janice, has left him for another man.