



# The Achievers Journal

Volume 5, Issue 4

ISSN (ONLINE): 2395-0897 / ISSN (PRINT): 2454-2296 October- December 2019

---

## **Terrorism: Problem of Survival in John Updike's *Terrorist***

**Dr. Jit Pal Aggarwal**  
**Associate Professor**  
**Department of English**  
**Lovely Professional University**  
**Punjab, India**

**Yang Zhao**  
**Regd. Number 11719891 of LPU, Phagwara**

### **Abstract**

*The career of John Updike is pivotal as he is one of those writers who personified the World War era. He wrote for fifty years publishing one novel each year consistently. When a reader comes from the world of Rabbit novels of John Updike and enters in the world of Terrorist, he feels a unique experience. In this novel, Updike deals with a global problem of terrorism that concerns the humanity and the people of America. Updike has selected a historical event with his visionary motive to explore the causes and the solution of the cancer of terrorism threatening the peace and stability of the world.*

**Keywords: terrorism; violence; love; sex; religion; angst; adultery**

Kakutani lambasted Updike for his use of unbelievable phrases such as “one-dimensional stereotype and “lousy job” James Wood wrote a long essay in *The New Republic* flaying Updike for not providing the enough background to show how young Ahmad “developed from fatherless youth to potential terrorist”. Ahmad is neither Islamic enough nor American enough. Wood says:



# The Achievers Journal

Volume 5, Issue 4

ISSN (ONLINE): 2395-0897 / ISSN (PRINT): 2454-2296 October- December 2019

---

“Updike has created a wonderful character offering his resistance to the New culture of America containing the elements of American postmodern novel, (Wood 25). The critics have not appreciated Updike’s novel *Terrorist*. Kristiaan Versluvs considered it is a bad “novel and even a very bad book” (Versluvs 170). Mitra Benerjee accused Updike of racial profiling. Many have attempted to ignore the novel as it lacks the vitality, vigor and strength of his Rabbit novels. Richard Gray condemned it a dry and insipid novel of John Updike. Robert Appelbaum (2008) comments thus about the terrorist novel:

The cultural work of the terrorism novel from 1970 to 2001 has been by and large to legitimate the position of innocence occupied by terrorism’s victims and the political society to which they belong...these novels tell us that terrorism is the violence of an Other; it is an illegitimate violence perpetrated from an illegitimate position. (Appelbaum 127)

The shifting vision of John Updike is revealed through the plot of *Terrorist*. He moves beyond the “middle –class mundane” to handle a global problem concentrating on the issues from the wider world to create a new American world view at the critical period of American history. In his interview appearing in *Book*, Updike discussed the rationale for writing the novel thus:

And as a novel like *The Coup* shows, I’m interested in Islam as a more fiery and absolutist and some would say, fanatical brand of theistic faith.

So it was not just my happening to have been there but my sensation that I



# The Achievers Journal

Volume 5, Issue 4

ISSN (ONLINE): 2395-0897 / ISSN (PRINT): 2454-2296 October- December 2019

---

was qualified to speak about why young men are willing to become suicide bombers. I can kind of understand it, and I'm not sure many Americans can. (Updike 12)

The text of *Terrorist* is about the sociological and historical trauma as Updike depicts the fast transforming nature of American culture. Updike ridicules the Americans who trade their physical freedom for freedom to pursue consumerism. Jack argues that "America is paved solid with fat and tar which keeps people bloated and satisfied, but allows religious fanatics and computer geeks free region" (Jack 27) George Washington is portrayed as the hero of the Revolutionary War. C. Wright M explains how the cultural machine is used to create self, calling it "the lens of mankind through which men see...interpret and report what they see...it's the semi-organized source of their very identities" (Wright 406).

John Updike takes up the contemporary issue which confronts the contemporary American society; the issue of terrorism. The novel is a cultural study as Ronald Grimes observes: "September 11 has become a sacred time, a ritual date. You don't think so, listen to the incessant incantation:9/11. 9/11. Everyone repeats it, gets the allusion, feels its weight. The date, utterly symbolic in force, binds "us" together and, in so doing defines 'them'.(74). The attack on American Trade Centre on 26<sup>th</sup> November, 2011 shook the world and each politician and intellectual expressed his own opinion about the dastardly killing of three thousand Americans. The attack on America by the militants supported by Osama Bin Laden challenged the survival



# The Achievers Journal

Volume 5, Issue 4

ISSN (ONLINE): 2395-0897 / ISSN (PRINT): 2454-2296 October- December 2019

---

of American democracy and life of the American people who had been proud of their safety, security and fool proof defense system. Grimes suggest that the American response to 9/11 was a form of religious expression: “Our wars are no less holy than theirs just holy in a different way. Holy war: war for which price is too high. Holy war; the kind that is waged when God is our side” (75). The novel is focused on the scenes of aftermath of 9/11 attack depicting the reactions of the American people. Mary Marshall Clark conducted series of interviews in *The New York Times* after the tragedy. She recorded the mood of hatred, revenge and discrimination, suspicion and disintegration. Updike chronicles the same mood in his *Terrorist*; he explores the impact of the tragedy on the American people envisaging the future of Americans. America turned more patriotic after the tragedy of 9/11 attack and Bush administration took several steps to control the situation and reaffirm the faith in democracy and liberty. Updike wrote *Terrorist* not as a literary piece of art but a political novel dealing with the contemporary situation and expressing his views for the future of America. President Bush geared up the administration and launched a vigorous attack to uproot the network of Al-Qaeda. He resolved to flush all the terrorists from America. He attacked Afghanistan to destroy al-Qaeda headed by Osama bin Laden. When the novel appeared the people were surprised to note that Updike could deal with such a challenging topic. With his experienced imagination, Updike bluntly illuminates the theme of violence and growing threat of terrorism in the contemporary America. In *Book Page Magazine* Interview, he wrote that *Terrorist* performed two functions; it chronicled all the facts about the attack and it



# The Achievers Journal

Volume 5, Issue 4

ISSN (ONLINE): 2395-0897 / ISSN (PRINT): 2454-2296 October- December 2019

---

explored the approach and attitude of the fundamentalists toward American democracy. Updike's vision of post 9/11 America centers on the idea of faith and lack of faith in the modern world. He exposed the growing consumerism of American society and the lust of the people for luxuries of life ignoring the demands of the poor and the downtrodden people represented by Ahmad. People have scraped the old ideals of American Dream in their mad race for money, love and sex. Updike laments the impulse to purchase "tawdry junk that fills people's daily lives" (20). The lack of faith, passion, or commitment to "the right path leads to world lead to a world full of nuzzling" (10). In the *Rabbit, Run* Harry's actions wreck havoc on his family; he dehumanizes his wife Janice. The novel symbolizes man's place in the family and in society. But in his *Terrorist*; his perception is focused on the issue of security and stability in the country and the challenges before the country. For the first time the liberty and democratic sprit is at stake and Updike raises the main social and political issues in this novel. In *Terrorist*, Updike's primary concern is not family of an individual but the survival of the community. Characters such as Ahmad and Charlie have ties to the larger world. Now the emphasis shift from the axis of the immediate family to the larger community. The critics found the character of Ahmad problematic. Michiko Kakutani labeled the characters a "completely unbelievable individual", "cliché", "static" and "one-dimensional stereotype" Ahmad is the main hero of John Updike and he portrayed as an outsider in the American society. He is American-born Muslim and different from the other Muslims. He is not Arabic as the first language and is certainly not a part of the



# The Achievers Journal

Volume 5, Issue 4

ISSN (ONLINE): 2395-0897 / ISSN (PRINT): 2454-2296 October- December 2019

---

Black Nationalist Muslim movement which has a special mission to control militant activities. Updike is seriously concerned about the survival of people and the consequences of 9/11. Updike has witnessed the scene of the tragedy of the collapse of the Twin Towers. Updike frankly observed that he was fully qualified to speak on the issue of terrorism since he had personally witnessed the gruesome tragedy. He tried his best to understand the psychology of the suicide bomber. (quod. in Mudge, 12). Updike observes that officers are “benign onlookers” more interested in flirting with the beautiful girls than actually guarding the tunnel” Jack tells Ahmad that he will not get past the tollbooth just before the entrance; but to his surprise, there is no one inside. Ahmad is the lone terrorist on his suicidal mission. Updike clearly affirms his faith in democracy presenting his country fighting for the ideals of liberty and democracy. Updike vividly portrays the scene of the day of tragedy: “people are walking that fateful day as ash drifted from the sky. Freedom...felt palpable. It’s mankind elixir, even if a few turn it to poison” (118). Mitra Benerjee opines that Updike’s religious “discourse occasions the parallel development of a racial one, which appears to some reviewers predictable if not jingoistic” (Benerjee 12). Ahmad emerges as an idealized character obsessed with doubts and suspicions struggling to forge his identity in new America. He unmask the decay of American society through his moral mission exposing the cultural inertia of his country. The novel is set in a lifeless industrial town of New Jersey ironically called New Prospect. It is a city where economic development is stagnant and life is hellish. He keenly observes the “inner city fields turning into



# The Achievers Journal

Volume 5, Issue 4

ISSN (ONLINE): 2395-0897 / ISSN (PRINT): 2454-2296 October- December 2019

---

“congested slums” (96). Updike has dramatized the pictures of ethnic, cultural and religious differences.

Many novelists wrote about the trauma people experienced on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2011. John Updike’s *Terrorist* and Joseph O’Neill’s *a Netherland* belong to the category of the fiction of violence. Drawing on the postmodernist theory of Frederic Jameson it is argued that John Updike differs from the other novelists because his approach is conciliatory. He wants to solve the problem of terrorism and believes that only through love, understanding and religious faith the problem of terrorism can be solved in America. The attack alarmed the Americans who were too much confident and complacent about the security of the people. John Updike’s novel *Terrorist* (2006) deals with the “homegrown” Muslim American terrorist and the problem of militancy expressing his apocalyptic vision. Updike has been examining the social, cultural and political problems of America for fifty years in his fiction, essays and stories. The characters in his novels and stories have demonstrated the desperation and frustration confronting the cruel and oppressive capital system. Updike has given an insight to the psyche of a terrorist examining out the struggle of the Americans to survive in the harsh capitalistic society. The plot of the novel hinges on imagined views about the way America is and the way life goes on America. The plot focuses on a Muslim born American teenager Ahmad Ashmaway Mulloy, who is eighteen years old school boy; half –Irish, half-Egyptian by background. He is intoxicated by Islam taught by Yemeni imam who is his religious teacher. John Updike explores in this novel the Islamic



# The Achievers Journal

Volume 5, Issue 4

ISSN (ONLINE): 2395-0897 / ISSN (PRINT): 2454-2296 October- December 2019

---

fundamentalism from the postmodern perspective. He was brought up by his freethinking single mother, he may be regarded a typical of the generation who came of age in the new millennium. The important thing in the novel is Ahmad's chosen identity, that of a radicalized Muslim.

When the novel appeared the critics and the reviewers of John Updike expressed divergent views about the theme and style of the novel. He was Krienbenegg (2011) called him "essentialist", "cliched" and a caricature" (219). Charles McGrath reviewed Updike's novel *Terrorist* In *The New York Times* and expressed his opinion of Updike's concern for the future of America thus:

Updike thought he had something to say from the standpoint of a terrorist...I think I felt I could understand the animosity and hatred which an Islamic believer would have for any system. Nobody's trying to see out here a number of ways, but that's what writers are for, may be. (McGrath3)

The religious views of Ahmad presented by John Updike are simplistic and unconvincing while his planned terrorist action is terrifying. In the plot of the novel it seems that Updike is writing the story to humanize the Muslim terrorist by making his cause and actions explicable on the grounds of psychology. The main focus of John Updike is on the exploration of the matrix of violence and terrorism in this novel. There are many definitions of terrorism, Jeff Goodwin observes that "there is no commonly accepted definition of terrorism" (2027). He further argued that "the deliberate use of violence in order to influence some audience's common





# The Achievers Journal

Volume 5, Issue 4

ISSN (ONLINE): 2395-0897 / ISSN (PRINT): 2454-2296 October- December 2019

---

to most definitions” (2028). He reiterates that certain groups “view terrorism, for the most part, as a political strategy” (2079). The hero of Updike’s *Terrorist* is Ahmad who is a Muslim and Islam seems to be his prime reason to carry out violence. Robinson (2009) says: “Islamist terrorism is rooted in the social strains created by modernization, the competition between Islam and other religions, and the growth of secular government” (209). This kind of terrorism is based on a perceived threat against the religion and its follower’s culture and way of living America. Victoroff gives his own rational choice theory and opines that the terrorist knows what he is doing; their decisions are rational and calculated” (14). There are many reasons which motivate them to follow the path of terrorism. The majority of the critics are of the view that terrorism means ”brainwashing and “manipulation of the thoughts and actions of others” The actions and thought of Ahmad are manipulated and Carl’s actions are controlled by others. Even the thoughts and ideas of Carl are manipulated and influenced by others has grown up. The plot begins with a monologue of Ahmad:

Devils, Ahmad thinks. These devils seek, girls away and sneer and expose their soft bodies and alluring hair. Their bare bellies, adorned with shining navel studs and low-down purple tattoos...” (1)

John Updike gives the image of “shifty eyes and hollow voices” to describe the dull and insipid life of the people of New Jersey. The teachers and Christians and the Jews “make a show of teaching virtue and righteous self-restraint” (2).At the outset of the novel, Updike gives



# The Achievers Journal

Volume 5, Issue 4

ISSN (ONLINE): 2395-0897 / ISSN (PRINT): 2454-2296 October- December 2019

---

description of the chaos in the life of Americans. Men and women “like any others are full of lust and fear and infatuation” (2). The life of the students is horrible; their live away from the school are “disorderly and wanton and self-indulgent” (3). The government servants are paid money to instill virtue and democratic values by the state government down in Trenton. John Updike is a critic of society; he gives a running commentary of the men and the manners of his age. The students believe that machine and lethal weapons manufactured by the business tycoons are responsible for bringing human degradation and the erosion of values held by the Americans.

Updike gives an insight into Ahmad’s mind who is feeling sick and depressed. Updike give the images of “insects and worms” to describe the death consciousness of Ahmad.: “Their bodies so quickly absorbed by eardi and weeds and road tar, devilishly strive to tell Ahmad that his own death will be just small and final” (3). Ahmad is seen flirting with his girlfriend Joryleen with sexual impulses but he represses them. Ahmad feels solace in the mosque and reads Quran under the instructions of Imam. His mother Teresa Mulloy; an Irish American has abandoned her faith because of her openness toward sexuality and relationships with men. Ahmad hates his mother who is whorish and an object of sexuality. Ahmad idolizes his absent father who was an Egyptian immigrant. His father had abandoned his mother and him when he was three years old. Jack Levy is a reputed suitor of his mother who often visits his house and acts as a counselor of Ahmad. The majority of characters of the novel are cynical about the American culture. Ahmad finds that people in America have lost their communion with God and are running after easy



# The Achievers Journal

Volume 5, Issue 4

ISSN (ONLINE): 2395-0897 / ISSN (PRINT): 2454-2296 October- December 2019

---

money and the main cause of their depression is the naked greed and lust for money. Ahmad becomes a truck driver on the advice of his Shaikh since he has no taste for academic studies. He loves driving because it gives practical exposure and is full of adventure. Trucking is also the path that leads him toward involvement in a terrorist plot directed against the infidels of Americans. He plans to blow up the Lincoln Tunnel under the Hudson River. He discovers that his accomplices are not in their planned meeting place, so he decides to carry out the mission alone. He drives the truck loaded with lethal weapons alone and blows himself up. Ahmad avoids arrest by Federal official and continues the suicide mission alone. But he meets Jack who dissuades him to carry out the attack. Jack's sister –in-law Hermione Fogel has alerted Jack to be careful of Ahmad who is in a suicide mission. Jack tells Ahmad that he has an affair with his mother. Ahmad begins to interpret Islam and comes to the conclusion that God doesn't want to kill anyone and thus reason prevails and he aborts his terrorist mission. He rides with Jack through Manhattan together towards the George Washington Bridge to return to New Jersey.

Briefly stated, the plot of the novel *Terrorist* is a story of a young man who has grown up with an absent father, and whose search for his father leads him into a tunnel with an armed truck ready to detonate it in the peak hour of traffic. But this tragedy is averted by a Jewish counselor Jack Levy who is also like a father figure. The psychological realism depicted by John Updike is the main strength of the novel. Jack Levy intercepts and enters the truck with Ahmad in the culminating scene. Through his reconciliation Updike strives in creating a sense of



# The Achievers Journal

Volume 5, Issue 4

ISSN (ONLINE): 2395-0897 / ISSN (PRINT): 2454-2296 October- December 2019

---

understanding for the terrorist. But the critics have lashed John Updike for the logical gaps found in the plot as there are many improbable coincidences that create confusion. Christopher Hitchens (2006) in his scornful review for *The Atlantic* observed thus: “ It is highly unlikely that the desire of a “green young Islamist’s fervent desire to learn to drive a truck in immediate post 9/11 New Jersey would set off no bells at all” (123). John Updike gives a broader perspective of a new America as he expressed his apocalyptic vision in *The New Yorker* after watching the fall of the World Trade Center. He wrote *Terrorist* to give hope and faith to the pessimistic Americans. Ahmad also experiences an epiphany:

The pattern of the wall tiles...explodes outward in Ahmad’s mind’s eye in the gigantic fiat of Creation, one concentric wave after another, each pushing the other farther and farther out from the initial point of nothingness. He realizes that God wills life and does not want people to desecrate His Creation by willing death. (John Updike, *Terrorist* 306)

René Girard who is a philosopher has argued in a 2007 interview that 9./11 has been “normalized and politicized,” becoming an ideological item on the agendas of different particular groups: The radicals use this event of terrorism in order to put an end to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Charlie is an important character in the novel who is manipulative and uses his influence over the boy to his advantage. In response , Ahmad thinks: “Lebanese (Charlie) are not fine-honed and two-edged like Yemenis (Shaikh Rashid) or handsome and vanishing like Egyptians (Omar



# The Achievers Journal

Volume 5, Issue 4

ISSN (ONLINE): 2395-0897 / ISSN (PRINT): 2454-2296 October- December 2019

---

Ashmawy)” (175). Clearly, Charlie identifies as his replacement father. Charlie uses the statues to further influence the teen, planting ideas that change the mid -set of Ahmad. He motivates him to become a suicide bomber and he often compares Muslim revolutionary forces in the modern world and refers to Jihad comparing it with the American Revolutionary troops led by George Washington. Charlie explains: “The old revolutionaries...have much to each our jihad” (183). When Charlie finds that the boy is fully committed to life and death, he calls Ahmad a “good boy” out of ecstasy. When he comes to know that he has made up his mind to serve the Muslim community, he exults: “Madman, you’re a good brave kid” (189). He doesn’t allow to know the mind and the feelings of Ahmad. He thinks and believes that he is on the “Straight path” and he always longs to continue the straight journey of life. He drives the explosive-laden “truck into the New York City after deciding to not detonate his cargo” (309). Ahmad realizes at the end of the novel that “These devils...have taken away my God” (310). In his anguish and turbulent state of mind Ahmad cannot understand his dilemma; he cannot take his step as a symbol of victory. The devils took away his angry, misguided God and replaced it with a God who rejoices in creation and hates destruction. Jack is an important character in the novel; he enters into a relationship with Ahmad’s mother. This diversion has little significance in the plot but it strengthens this association. Jack is a fallible character in multiple ways. He has nihilistic and pessimistic view of life; he is an outsider to mainstream society given his Jewish background. Being a practicing Jew he is an outsider to his faith. It may be said that Jack Levy has lost his



# The Achievers Journal

Volume 5, Issue 4

ISSN (ONLINE): 2395-0897 / ISSN (PRINT): 2454-2296 October- December 2019

---

way as much as Ahmad has but all these have no relevance in the plot. He is a school counselor having an influence on Ahmad. He plays very significant role to change the mentality of Ahmad. He is successful in healing the deficiency of Ahmad. The socialization of Ahmad largely depends on depends on Levy. He feels compassion for a child ahead of him and chooses not to detonate his explosives.

Ahmad and Jack pass slowly through the streets of the Big Apple with people and automobiles swirling around them in rush to get somewhere. The new Yorkers are unaware about the impending danger waiting for them. Each person is “impaled live upon the pin of consciousness, fixed upon self -advancement and self-preservation” (310). The Americans are lost in the world of consumerism and money culture and are ignorant of the impending doom” “while blips of hope dot the landscape, blind, fat, and stupid America lurches toward the apocalypse, sidetracked by media-generated distractions as the end draws near” (123). John Updike gives full freedom to the characters to think about the metaphysical questions confronted man in his life. When Joryleen questions whether God’s existence and the possibility that no after life exists, Ahmad feels physically ill, explaining: “if none of it is true...the world is too to cherish, and I would not regret leaving it” (72). He longs for his sexuality, despite his religious training, which advocates purity. In the passage, the boy is proud of his height and stands above like “short, ripe girl,” catching glimpses of the “tops of her breasts...still glazed with the excitement and exertion of her singing” (67). .



# The Achievers Journal

Volume 5, Issue 4

ISSN (ONLINE): 2395-0897 / ISSN (PRINT): 2454-2296 October- December 2019

---

In his June 2006 interview with *Book Page* saying, "I thought it was important to show how much Ahmad needed to make his own philosophy, as it were, because the environment wasn't coming up with any" (Interview 23). In the same interview Updike argued that religious mania can be destructive in any society. The critics observed that Updike tried to understand and to dramatize his world. Muslims alone are not killing others in America; there are many students who bring guns in the school to kill others out of hatred. In the schools there are many organizations such as Protestantism, Judaism which poison the feelings and thought of the young children in the schools. Kakutani has discussed the vision of John Updike who came under the influence of Joseph Conrad, Fyodor Dostoevsky and Don DeLillio. Updike explores the turbulent psyche of Ahmad and his religious fanaticism. There is a discord inside the mind of Ahmad; he experiences mental anguish and Updike has depicted the spirit of directionless and chaos in the mind of Ahmad. He is moved by the sermon of the black pastor and he is motivated to rethink his suicide mission. He is overpowered by the sexual desires for his girl friend Joryleen and exhibits his sexual repression. He lashes out at Joryleen as his meeting ends: "You have a good heart Joryleen, but you're heading straight for Hell, the lazy way you think" (73). Ahmad is portrayed as a divided soul; he is trapped in the abyss of faith and doubt as he imagines a "world too terrible to cherish" (72). John Updike depicts the conflict of Ahmad thus:

Ahmad could always sense his teacher's doubts, since it was important to him that there not be any. Now fear invades Ahmad. His face feels swollen. A curse has



# The Achievers Journal

Volume 5, Issue 4

ISSN (ONLINE): 2395-0897 / ISSN (PRINT): 2454-2296 October- December 2019

---

been laid on this peaceful place, which had been favorite spot in the world, a waterless oasis. (206)

Ahmad looks confused and bewildered as he fails to overcome the feelings of doubt and despair. In his journey of life, he grows mature as he decides to put off the mission of explosion. It reveals that he has undergone a kind of maturation process. Many critics have applied the theory of trauma of Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra. The attack on World Centre and killing of people is considered as a tragic loss in New York City by the Islamic terrorists. The Islamic fundamentalists consider the non-Islamic people as the “Other.” This type of thinking is the product of perverted mind-set and is against the principles of Christianity. Updike has given a fine blend of an Islamic fanatic and self-marginalized eighteen years old school boy with a Jewish Levy; the counselor. Ahmad is depicted as a good but irresponsible boy leading a lonely life in America; fatherless and trapped in doubt and despair. His association with Yemeni Shaikh Rashid lives in a downtown studio fashioned into a mosque. Ahmad is sick of his mother who is “trashy and immoral woman.” Doren argues that religion is a “private affair” but the Muslims believe that religion is connected with culture in both spheres of existence. Doran states that the Muslims consider the Westerners as Christians and treat the other Americans as the “Other.” (187). Ahmad’s fundamental ideas are linked with his fanaticism. Initially he thinks that he is doing the job of his God but when he comes in contact with the Imam his belief in violence is driven away. Updike argues that the growth of capitalism is also responsible for the divide in





# The Achievers Journal

Volume 5, Issue 4

ISSN (ONLINE): 2395-0897 / ISSN (PRINT): 2454-2296 October- December 2019

---

America. In the early part of the novel, Ahmad is presented attending the mosque, working weekend shifts and loving his job. He tells his classmates: “ All America wants of its citizens, your president he said, is for us to buy; to spend money we cannot afford and thus propel the economy forward for himself and other rich men” (72). The readers don’t approve the language, attitude and path followed by Ahmad but his courage, commitment and religious fervor is commendable. He is critical of the cultural values of American society as he feels marginalized. John Updike commented thus in his Mudge interview: “ I thought it was important to show how much Ahmad needed to make his own philosophy, as it were, because the environment wasn’t coming. Updike reverses the stereotype that promotes violence. Gregory Orfalea pointed out that “we hope that Updike’s humanity will not desert us” (Orfalea 190). It is not surprising to note that Ahmad does not kill anyone in the end of the novel. He has the killing instinct but it is controlled by his teacher. John Updike employs the strategies of inversion and moral displacement in an ironical style to indict the materialism of America.

Peter Bailey argues that Updike’s main concern is about the importance of faith in life and his hero Ahmad is grappling with the problem of faith. There is a streak of nihilism in almost all his novels. Bailey argues that in Updike’s fiction from *Rabbit* tetralogy to the last novel *Villages* his characters withdraw from God. They become seculars abandoning faith in God. No Wonder, like Ahmad, Harry Angstrom, Owen McKenzie lost faith in God and lead independent life. Bailey observes that in all his novels, Updike has described the darkened vision of life, sex



# The Achievers Journal

Volume 5, Issue 4

ISSN (ONLINE): 2395-0897 / ISSN (PRINT): 2454-2296 October- December 2019

---

and religion. According to Bailey “the chronic unresponsiveness of God has cumulatively darkened Updike’s vision” (243). He detects in his novels what he calls “the reluctantly expanding secularism of Updike’s aesthetic” (33). According to John Leonard, the story of Ahmad is a swan song of John Updike. Ahmad’s mother is doing a dreary job and the plot is about the middle class Americans struggling in mercantile America for survival. Ahmad is a young boy with his white, well-ironed shirt and sexual repression. He has great respect for God; he is pleased to find the trucking “regulations a concern with purity and religious in quality” (75). He represents the experience of spiritual grandeur and fullness of life. Jorg Richter contends thus:

Updike omits any clear-cut judgment of the moral rights and wrongs of terrorism but instead accentuates the paradoxical nature of religious experience within a secular and technologically dominated world. (Richter 483).

To conclude, John Updike expresses his disgust exposing the hollowness of American “population.” Jack Levy is portrayed as a “savior” at the end of the novel; fighting against the odds and preventing the catastrophe. His humanitarian gesture disavows the violent mania of Ahmad as he reasserts the boys’ spiritual innocence. Updike gives his apocalyptic vision contrasting Islam, Catholicism and atheism in the text of Terrorist. Updike launches a vigorous attack on the racial discrimination arguing that “if Islamic fundamentalism is a force that can



# The Achievers Journal

Volume 5, Issue 4

ISSN (ONLINE): 2395-0897 / ISSN (PRINT): 2454-2296 October- December 2019

---

thrive in the “lack of rubbles” of New Prospect, the racial discrimination will also follow. At the end of the novel he realizes the difference between God’s role as a creator and destroyer on his own. Banerjee argues that biological skin color has become a major tool for the denial of citizenship. But it must be noted that Ahmad is not racist. Updike has used Ahmad as an eye of the camera projecting the world and the reaction of the people to the great tragedy of the American people. He mistrusts everyone and reasserts his own cultural tradition in loneliness: “Ahmad feels his pride of isolation and willed identity to be threatened by the masses of ordinary, hard pressed men and plain, practical women who are enrolled in Islam as a lazy master of ethnic identify” (177).

## Works Cited

- Allen, Mary. “John Updike’s Love of ‘Dull Bovine Beauty’” 1976. *John Updike*. Ed. Harold Bloom. Chelsea House, 1987. 69-95.
- Alley, Alvin D. “*Centaur*: Transcendental Imagination and Metaphoric Death” *The College English*, 56, (October 1967), 982-985.
- . John Updike's Love of Dull Bovine Beauty, *The Necessary Blankness: Women in Major American Fiction of the 1960s*. University of Illinois Press, 1976.
- Altheide, David L. "Terrorism and the Politics of Fear." *Cultural Studies Critical Methodologies* 6.4 (2006): 415-39.



# The Achievers Journal

Volume 5, Issue 4

ISSN (ONLINE): 2395-0897 / ISSN (PRINT): 2454-2296 October- December 2019

---

---. "The News Media, the Problem Frame, and the Production of Fear." *The Sociological Quarterly* 38.4 (1997): 647-68.

---. "The Mass Media and Terrorism." *Discourse & Communication* 1.3 (2007): 287-308.

Banerjee, Mitra. "'Whiteness of a Different Color'? Racial Profiling in John Updike's *Terrorist*." *Neohelicon* 35.2 (2008): 13-28.

Barnes, Jane. "John Updike: A Literary Spider." *John Updike*. Ed. Harold Bloom. Chelsea House, 1987. 111-25.

Beisecker, Thomas D. *The Process of Social Influence; Readings in Persuasion*. Englewood Prentice-Hall, 1972. 7.

Bellis, Jack De. *The John Updike Encyclopedia*. Greenwood Press, 2000.

Bertens, Hans. *The Basics, Literary Theory*. Routledge, 2001.

Blessington, Francis C. "Politics and the Terrorist Novel." *Sewanee Review* 116.1 (2008): 114.

Bloom, Harold. *John Updike*. Chelsea House, 1987.

Batchelor, Bob. *Running Toward the Apocalypse: John Updike's New America*." University of South Florida, 2009.

Caruth, Cathy. *Listening to Trauma: Conversations with Leaders in the Theory and Treatment of Catastrophic Experience*. The Johns Hopkins UP, 2014.

---. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. The Johns Hopkins UP, 1995.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism*. Routledge, 1988.

---



# The Achievers Journal

Volume 5, Issue 4

ISSN (ONLINE): 2395-0897 / ISSN (PRINT): 2454-2296 October- December 2019

---

Horney, Karen. *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time*. Oxon (London): Routledge, 1999.

Updike, John. *Terrorist*. Knopf, 2006.