

Vision and Form in John Updike's Short Fiction

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Abstract

This thesis studies the visual aesthetics of the twentieth-century American writer John Updike's short fiction. Exploring the related issues of form and vision, temporality and visuality, the thesis seeks to combine two analyses: a study of visuality in the short fiction of Updike, and a re-consideration of the short story as a genre. I shall argue that the two levels of analysis are interrelated, for it is at the point of the epistemological uncertainty in the act of 'seeing' that Updike offers something unusual to the short story form; it is also around this stubborn issue of the relationship between vision and knowledge that contemporary short story criticism seems to fall short. The thesis unfolds first with a negotiation for an understanding of the short story's special narrative space and then with a formalist analysis of Updike's short fiction and its respective involvement with three visual media: painting, photography and cinema. Exploring the complex interrelationship between 'seeing' and 'reading' through the lens of Updike's visually rich texts, the thesis aims to come to a better knowledge of vision and form in the short story.

Acknowledgements

My idea of writing a PhD thesis on John Updike's short fiction came from my experience as an unsuccessful Chinese translator of Updike's early stories and my standing interest in the short story. I still remember how excited I was when I first received the task of translating *The Early Stories 1953-1975* (2003) from the editor and how disheartened I turned out to be in looking for Chinese equivalents for Updike's exquisite descriptions of details. It was from those strenuous moments of translation that Updike's special capacity for describing, for creating visual images, came to my interest. I became curious about the function of description and the possible relationship between Updike's use of description and the short story as a genre. I also began to wonder, in part to rescue my self-esteem as a translator, to what extent faithfulness and accuracy, namely an illusion of reading the original text, can be achieved in translation; and whether the gap between the original text and the translated text is always present. These random thoughts on translation between languages were the starting points in my search for a better understanding of translation in a broader sense, whose major issues - storytelling, reading, and interpretation - constitute the central topic of this thesis.

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Vision and Form in John Updike's Short Fiction

Introduction

The 'Lucid' Eye and the Short Story

We can begin to understand what might well seem like a non sequitur: the contribution of an often visually obsessed modernist literature [...] to the antiocular discourse we are examining in this study.¹

Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes* (1994)

I. The 'lucid' eye

I shall start the discussion of the visual aspects of John Updike's short stories with James Schiff's 'A Conversation with John Updike' at the Cincinnati Short Story Festival on 18 April 2001. In this interview, Updike reflected on the tradition of the American short story, lauding the nineteenth-century American writer Nathaniel Hawthorne as a forerunner of the genre:

Hawthorne is an instructive case in the saga of the American short story because, as you know, he for a long time wrote only tales, and tales of a peculiarly delicate and elusive substance. It seems that Hawthorne could only write on the edge of parable, on the edge of allegory. Real life was something that the English could do. [...] That is, we don't have the kind of brimming social structure that produces a Trollope or a Dickens. [...] So what do we have in America? We have these glimpses, these spiritually based moments of a kind of penetrating ghostliness. I don't know. But Hawthorne and Poe write stories on the edge of the unreal, as if the whole continent is on the edge of the unreal, and we [...] haven't quite worked our way into the ground. [...] And I think he [Hawthorne] is with us, we love him still because of this, because of his sense of the unreal, the thing seen out of the side of your eye instead of the thing posed right in front of you and written about.²

There are at least three pertinent insights in Updike's remarks on Hawthorne and the

¹ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 180.

² James Schiff, 'A Conversation with John Updike', *The Southern Review*, 38 (2002), 420-43 (pp.439-40).

short story. In the first place, instead of the sense of ‘real life’, which is, in Updike’s view, often the case with an English novel, ‘the sense of the unreal’ is mentioned repeatedly as something quintessential in an American short story. Here, Updike leans towards an understanding of the genre promoted by Henry James in his book *Hawthorne* (1879) and a tradition of American literary criticism, of which Richard Chase is probably the best-known exemplar, but introducing the short story as a reference point.³ It is because Hawthorne writes ‘stories on the edge of the unreal’, and his tales are ‘of a peculiarly delicate and elusive substance’ that he remains, in Updike’s opinion, a master of the short story. Secondly, by stressing the visual experience in the process of reading a short story, ‘glimpses’ and ‘moments of a kind of penetrating ghostliness’, Updike pinpoints a visual preoccupation in the short story and a special relationship between reading and seeing. Thirdly, in stressing that a good story brings ‘the thing seen out of the side of your eye’ instead of only ‘the thing posed right in front of you and written about’, Updike warns the reader that reading and seeing, though related, cannot be equated at face value; nor can either of them lead directly to a certain sense of knowing.

Like Hawthorne’s ‘evanescent, delicate, elusive works’, Updike’s own words (‘glimpses’, ‘the sense of the unreal’, and ‘the thing seen out of the side of your eye’) on the short story are similarly elliptical and elusive.⁴ Nonetheless, awkward insights can sometimes be the most stimulating and warrant scrutiny. Although Updike does not offer a clear definition of the short story as a genre, the notion of genre persists as an important and perplexing concept. Even at this early stage of the thesis, it is worth bringing out in Updike’s own practice of the short story: the ‘glimpses’, the sense of ‘the unreal’, and

³ Richard Chase, *The American Novel and its Tradition* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 12.

⁴ James Schiff, ‘A Conversation with John Updike’, p. 439.

‘the thing seen out of the side of your eye’ in comparison to ‘the thing posed right in front of you and written about’.

One Updike story, ‘The Lucid Eye in the Silver Town’ (1964), may well give us a helpful ‘glimpse’ of Updike’s own short stories. Though it is one of, what Updike calls, the ‘stray stories’, which somehow ‘got left out of a collection’, the writer still considered it ‘really a pretty good piece’ and later included it in *The Early Stories 1953-1975* (2003).⁵ The story is about the eye and ‘seeing’. It recalls the narrator’s first trip to New York City at the age of thirteen. This trip with his father combines two tasks: to meet Uncle Quin, who has become rich in Chicago and happens to be in New York for business, and to buy a book about the seventeenth-century Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer, whom the narrator admires.

In common with many Updike protagonists, the narrator, Jay, has a strong interest in visual art. As the story’s title intimates, when the narrator and his father arrive in New York, his acute sense of ‘seeing’, his ‘lucid eye’, is at work. He pays special attention to details: he observes his father’s way of talking and facial expression; he pays attention to the three businessmen in Uncle Quin’s room and carefully delineates their postures; he compares these businessmen’s manner of greeting people to that of his father; he studies Uncle Quin’s bedroom and his open suitcase and even describes the texture and pattern of Uncle Quin’s underwear inside the suitcase; and he leans out of the window to look at the New York landscape.⁶ By describing faithfully what the narrator sees, his ‘glimpses’, Updike offers the reader a visual world with which the reader is able to

⁵ Ibid., p. 442.

⁶ John Updike, ‘The Lucid Eye in Silver Town’, in *The Early Stories 1953-1975* (London: Penguin, 2005), pp. 129-37 (pp. 129-30).

communicate; that is to say, the reader can relate what is ‘posed right in front of’ the narrator’s eye to, as Pam Morris considers in a discussion of literary realism, his/her own ‘knowledge of the extra-textual world’.⁷ In short, a sense of ‘the real’ is established through Jay’s observation, his lucid eye.

The authority of Jay’s observation seems to be confirmed by the conversation between him and Uncle Quin on how to look at Degas’s painting:

I said, ‘I’d like to look for a good book of Vermeer.’

‘Vermeer,’ Uncle Quin pronounced slowly, relishing the *r*’s, pretending to give the matter thought. ‘Dutch school.’

‘He’s Dutch, yes.’

‘For my own money, Jay, the French are the people to beat. We have four Degas ballet dancers in our living room in Chicago, and I could sit and look at one of them for hours. I think it’s wonderful, the feeling for balance the man had.’

‘Yeah, but don’t Degas’s paintings always remind you of colored drawings? For actually *looking* at things in terms of paint, for the lucid eye, I think Vermeer makes Degas look sick.’

Uncle Quin said nothing.⁸

While Jay’s uncle sees the illusion in Degas’s painting, the ballet dancers, Jay dismisses Degas’s work as ‘colored drawings’ and maintains that it is in Vermeer, rather than in Degas, that one’s lucid eye works better and succeeds in unifying the two-dimensional ‘paint’ into depth. It is likely that Jay, as an art lover, has a good knowledge of the difference between Impressionist painting and Dutch genre painting and has a liking for the latter. The intricacies in painting implied here and their relationship to the mode of ‘seeing’ in the short story will be analysed in depth in a later chapter. Yet, simply from

⁷ Pam Morris, *Realism* (Oxford: Routledge, 2003), p. 31.

⁸ John Updike, ‘The Lucid Eye in Silver Town’, p. 133. The italicised expressions in the quotations, if not advised otherwise, are from the original text.

the conversation itself and from Uncle Quin's inability to respond, Jay comes across as having a better understanding of 'things in terms of paint' than Uncle Quin, who, in Jay's eyes, is a business man and only 'took an interest in money'.⁹ As a result, the reader is very likely to take Jay to be 'an all-seeing narrator', as in a work of literary realism, and receive the short story as a story of the visual and objective reality observed by this 'all-seeing' narrator.¹⁰

However, while the reader follows Jay's 'glimpses', his lucid eye, Updike does not allow Jay, nor the reader, to remain at ease with what he sees and what he knows. If we regard the narrator's lucid eye as Updike's celebration of the visual, we discover equally a frustration associated with vision, that is, an uncertainty about what Updike calls 'the thing posed right in front of you and written about'. If we read closely, Jay is more often puzzled by what he sees than satisfied. He wonders why businessmen do not stare others in the eye as his father does; he is confused at seeing New York taxis violating traffic rules; and, while waiting for the train back home, Jay and his father see a bookstore with a lighted window but are unsure if the store is open, and the story ends without giving the answer.

This ambiguity and uncertainty towards vision and knowledge is highlighted more than once. When Jay and his father stand side by side at the hotel window, looking at the New York landscape, he is confused by the sight outside. Yet, to his surprise, his father is able to answer all his questions concerning the landscape. Jay, then, realises: 'As a young man, before I was born, he had travelled, looking for work; this was not *his* first

⁹ Ibid., p. 131.

¹⁰ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, p. 180.

trip to New York'.¹¹ Making a point by italicising '*his*', Updike reminds us that the present story is, and only is, about the narrator's first trip to New York, seen and told from the narrator's own perspective. The father must have his own perspective and therefore his own story about his first trip to the city. Later in the story, Jay's vision is, once again, challenged when he looks up for the Empire State Building. His left eye is blocked by something sharp. After examination by a doctor, the sharp object is removed. It turns out to be Jay's own eyelash.

Both scenarios, together with other visual uncertainties mentioned earlier, create a distance between the narrator's seemingly reliable eye and his visual world. In the first case, there is an obvious highlight, a reminder, of the father's vision; in the second, there is an ironic denigration of the narrator's lucid eye and his authority over seeing and knowing. This distance, or borrowing Karen Jacobs's more ambitious words, this '*crisis of belief in the continuity between seeing and knowing*', brings us back to Updike's earlier words on Hawthorne.¹² What was previously 'posed right in front of' the narrator and 'written about' starts to give way to 'the thing seen out of the side of' the narrator's eye; what previously has been established as 'the real' start to lose its authority and edge towards the sense of 'the unreal'.

In reading the short story 'The Lucid Eye in Silver Town', we see Updike's rather complicated engagement with the visual. It is by no means simply a means to achieve visual verisimilitude through the narrator's seemingly all-seeing eye; nor does it work only to encourage the reader to relate the fictional reality to the reader's own empirical reality and to accept the former passively as it is. Rather and more importantly, we see

¹¹ John Updike, 'The Lucid Eye in Silver Town', p. 131.

¹² Karen Jacobs, *The Eye's Mind: Literary Modernism and Visual Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 19.

two efforts at work in Updike's short story: establishing a visual world through the narrator's eye, while simultaneously raising doubts and challenging what he sees. Accordingly, the story opens up space for different readings of sight in fiction and tells the reader that a straightforward lucid eye or an absolute realist reading of a story may not exist.

Updike's preoccupation with the visual in his writing can be traced back to an early interest in both writing and drawing, which seem to him one art: both he says are: 'a matter of graphic symbols'.¹³ 'Letters are originally little pictures,' remarked Updike in an interview, 'so let's combine graphic imagery, photographic imagery, with words'.¹⁴ This acceptance of writing and drawing as one art involves, it is to be stressed, two levels of openness that cannot be considered separately: an openness to treat graphic symbols in a broader sense, that is to view verbal and visual symbols on the same level; at the same time, there is an openness to the uncertainty in graphic symbols in general. In the following passage, Updike explains how intricate the relationship between graphic symbols and vision can be, and on what condition verbal symbols and visual symbols, reading and seeing, can be compared or equated:

My models were the styles of Proust and Henry Green as I read them (one in translation): styles of tender exploration that tried to wrap themselves around the things, the tints and voices and perfumes, of the apprehended real. In this entwining and gently relentless effort there is no hiding that the effort is being made in language. [...] [S]urely language, printed language, is what we all know we are reading and writing, just as a person looking at a painting knows he is not looking out of a window.¹⁵

While critics tend to summarise Updike's style as 'descriptive', the writer himself seems

¹³ John Updike, *Self-Consciousness: Memoirs* (London: André Deutsch, 1989), p. 100.

¹⁴ Charles Thomas Samuels, 'The Art of Fiction XLIII: John Updike', in *Conversations with John Updike*, ed. by James Plath (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), pp. 22-45 (p. 24).

¹⁵ John Updike, *Self-Consciousness: Memoirs*, pp. 98-99.

to feel a need to further explain his preferred style rather than simply regarding it as descriptive.¹⁶ It is a style of exploring and approximating, in language, ‘the things, the tints and voices and perfumes, of the apprehended real’. Borrowing the notion of the ‘window’, a metaphor used by Leon Battista Alberti to refer to linear perspective and pictorial realism, to describe writing, Updike hints at something important for this thesis: the language on the page, similar to the surface of a painting, allows space for the relentless exploration of epistemological possibility.¹⁷ While the page can be seen as a transparent medium offering a window onto the world, the page is also opaque, with printed alphabetical symbols on it. In other words, while reading a story, or looking at a painting, can bring an illusion that one is ‘looking out of a window’, it is nevertheless an illusion. A fictional or a pictorial world, therefore, is generated in the process of perception and interpretation; and it is based on this affinity in terms of perception and interpretation that reading and seeing can be related and, sometimes, equated.

All this said, perhaps it is not surprising that Updike’s first ambition was to become an ‘animator for Walt Disney’ or ‘a magazine cartoonist’.¹⁸ During his undergraduate years at Harvard University, he worked for *The Harvard Lampoon*, an undergraduate humorous magazine, where he ‘began as a cartoonist, did a lot of light verse, and more and more prose’.¹⁹ After graduating from Harvard, he spent one year studying art at the

¹⁶ As pointed out by Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, while critical reception of Updike’s style differs, no one can make a comment on Updike without referring to his ‘descriptive prose’. Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, ‘John Updike, a Lyrical Writer of the Middle-Class Man, Dies at 76’, *The New York Times*, 28 January, 2009, p.A28 <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/28/books/28updike.html?_r=0&pagewanted=print> [accessed 5 December 2013]. I shall examine critical reception of Updike’s style in the next section of the Introduction.

¹⁷ Leon Battista Alberti refers to the painting’s surface as ‘an open window through which the subject to be painted is seen’. I shall argue in the thesis that Updike uses the ‘window’ as a broader visual rhetoric for storytelling in the short story, which goes beyond pictorial realism. Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. by Cecil Grayson (London: Penguin, 1991), p.54

¹⁸ Charles Thomas Samuels, ‘The Art of Fiction’, p. 24.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 23. Updike also talks about his interest in being a cartoonist in his autobiography *Self-Consciousness*, pp.75-106; in ‘My Cartooning’, in *More Matter: Essays and Criticism* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999), pp.787-89; and in ‘Cartoon Magic’, in *More Matter: Essays and Criticism*, pp. 790-96. Updike includes his own cartoons

Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art in Oxford. It was not until he returned to the United States that he began his career as a writer and a life-long short story contributor to *The New Yorker* magazine. Although Updike's ambition to be a cartoonist was not fully pursued, his perception of writing has been nonetheless influenced by his visual sensibility and his openness to interpretation. He writes, as he puts it again in the manner of a visual artist, with a 'willingness to withhold judgement, and a cartoonist's ability to compose within a prescribed space'.²⁰

I have taken a digression to one short story written by Updike and his general view of graphic symbols, verbal or visual, and their relationship with knowledge. Yet, such a digression will turn out to be illuminating, when we come to understand Updike's short story *oeuvre* and what turns out to be a stubborn problem in short story criticism.

II. Updike's short fiction

Having written more than two hundred short stories and published fourteen independent volumes of stories, not to mention the stray stories, Updike exhibits a craftsmanship of the genre as much as he does of longer fiction. His stories have been frequently included in American short story anthologies and he himself was the editor of *The Best American Short Stories of the Century* (2000). Although Updike devotes a separate category, 'other modes', to some 'more far-out stories' in *Museums and Women* (1972), the majority of Updike stories are written, in Updike's own expression, 'directly out of my own experience', yet functioning 'through a basic resistance to tidy stories, or stories that end

from *The Harvard Lampoon* in 'Writers and Artists', in *Just Looking: Essays on Art* (Boston: MFA Publications, 2001), pp. 191-200.

²⁰ John Updike, *Self-Consciousness: Memoirs*, p. 103.

with a moral'.²¹ This 'resistance to tidy stories' is often picked up by critics, who tend, then, to group Updike's stories into lyric prose or the 'lyric' story, a term coined by Eileen Baldeshwiler in her study of the modern short story 'The Lyric Short Story: The Sketch of a History' (1969).²²

The lyric story, observes Baldeshwiler, still includes 'the essentials of storytelling — persons with some degree of verisimilitude engaged in a unified action in time'.²³ Yet, the story plot, the conventional cause-and-effect narrative, in a lyric story is subordinated to give way to 'internal changes, moods, and feelings'; the story, then, 'relies for the most part on the open ending, and is expressed in the condensed, evocative, often figured language of the poem'.²⁴

On the one hand, the familiar scene of Updike's short fiction, as in 'The Lucid Eye in Silver Town', is middle-class domesticity and the subjects are immediately recognisable. That is to say, as we have discussed earlier, it is possible for the reader of Updike's stories to relate to a reality evoked by but beyond his fiction: the only child, the small town life, the grandparental home, the high school life, the family's move from a town flat to the countryside, married life, raising children, extramarital affairs, divorce and aging. These subjects reflect what Baldeshwiler notes as 'the essentials of storytelling' and persist from Updike's first story collection *The Same Door* (1959) to his last one *My Father's Tears and Other Stories* (2009).²⁵ On the other hand, Updike's

²¹ John Updike, 'Foreword', in *The Early Stories 1953-1975*, pp. viiii-xv (p.xiii); James Schiff, 'A Conversation with John Updike', p. 428, p. 431.

²² Eileen Baldeshwiler, 'The Lyric Short Story: The Sketch of a History', in *The New Short Story Theories*, ed. by Charles E. May (Athens: Ohio University Press. 1994), pp. 231-41.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Most of Updike's short story volumes are chronologically arranged in terms of the protagonists' age. While the protagonists of the first two collections *The Same Door* and *Pigeon Feathers* (1962) are teenagers or young adults coming of age, those in *The Music School* (1966), *Museum and Women* (1972), *Problems and Other Stories* (1979), *Too Far to Go* (1979), and *Trust Me* (1987) are middle-aged men or women reflecting upon their domestic life. The later collections *The Afterlife* (1994), *Licks of Love* (2000) and *My Father's Tears* (2009) are more about aging men

stories are loaded with exquisite descriptions of things carefully and curiously observed through a connoisseur's unbiased perspective. Short story critic Robert M. Luscher summarises Updike's style as follows:

From the beginning of Updike's career, however, his stories have consistently subordinated the traditional emphasis on plot and dramatic action, privileging instead reflection and the rhythmic dimension created by rich figurative language and imagery.²⁶

Baldeshwiler, in her essay on the lyric short story, identifies Updike's manner as 'ostensibly descriptive and essayistic' and regards his stories as 'overlain with a profound sense of beauty, reflected or "expressed" in its own art'.²⁷ For this reason, Baldeshwiler considers Updike an important figure in the development of 'the American lyrical short story'.²⁸

The stories written in 'other modes' seem to venture beyond the 'essentials of storytelling' and test out more experimental styles. Some adopt a meta-narrative style. 'The Sea's Green Sameness' (1960), for example, is a writer's monologue about his frustration in looking for words to describe the colour of the sea; in 'Slump' (1968), we hear an aging baseball player's voice about his diminishing energy. There are also four stories with illustrations: 'Under the Microscope' (1968), 'During the Jurassic' (1966), 'The Baluchitherium' (1971) and 'The Invention of the Horse Collar' (1972), which evince, in Updike's own words, a 'would-be cartoonist's flirtation with graphic elements'.²⁹

However, it is worth noting that while the stories of 'other modes' are separated from

and women reminiscing about the past.

²⁶ Robert M. Luscher, *John Updike: A Study of the Short Fiction* (New York: Twayne, 1993), p.x.

²⁷ Eileen Baldeshwiler, 'The Lyric Short Story: The Sketch of a History', p. 241.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ John Updike, 'Foreword', in *The Early Stories 1953-1975*, p.xiii.

those of the lyric mode in *Museums and Women*, they are intermingled in Updike's 2003 short story collection *The Early Stories 1953-1975*. Moreover, the illustrations are taken out from the four graphic stories in the later collection upon the writer's insistence: 'I have decided that pictures don't mix with text. Text, left to its own devices, enjoys a life that floats free of any specific setting or format or pictographic attachments'.³⁰ It can be argued, then, that this removal of graphic elements, instead of showing an effacement of the visual, reflects on the contrary the writer's full trust in the descriptive and lyrical function of language. It is not that 'any specific setting or format or pictographic attachment' is useless; rather, it is redundant and unnecessary to have graphic attachments, for language itself is also 'a matter of graphic symbols'. Following this vein of thinking, the stories composed in 'other modes' can be, nevertheless, seen as Updike's experiment with the lyric style. Particularly, if we consider, as we will in the next section, the critical reception of the lyric short story where plot is claimed to be not only subordinated, but also abandoned, Updike's stories of 'other modes' seem to fit into the category of the lyric story even better than any other stories.

Updike's practice of the lyric short story can be examined not only through close attention to his single stories, but also by looking at his way of arranging his stories into collections. A lot of Updike's stories can both stand alone and be considered as a 'short story sequence'.³¹ The best known sequences are the Olinger Stories, the Bech stories, and the Maples stories. *Olinger Stories* (1964) gathers stories which take place in a fictional Pennsylvania town, Olinger. *Bech: A Book* (1970), *Bech is Back* (1982) and *Beck at Bay* (1998) tell the stories of Henry Bech, a novelist from Manhattan, and his

³⁰ Ibid., p. xiii-xiv.

³¹ Robert M. Luscher, 'The Short Story Sequence: An Open Book', in *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads*, ed. by Susan Lohafer and Jo Ellyn Clarey (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), pp. 148-67.

experience as an American writer. *Too Far to Go: the Maples Stories* (1979) collects stories which were originally scattered in different short story volumes and which trace the unhappy marriage of Richard Maple and Joan Maple from its early stage to the end of the marriage.³² To avoid the reader from confusing his Bech books as novels, Updike stressed in an interview that ‘the whole texture of the book [*Bech: A Book*] was that of short stories, and I couldn’t bring myself to call it a novel’.³³ This refusal of a tightly-knit narrative, often representative of the traditionally longer novel, or the ‘epical’ story, according to Baldeshwiler, can also be seen as Updike’s practice, in a loose sense, of the lyric short story.³⁴

The critical reception of Updike’s distinctive lyric style is often mixed and divided. There are critics who respond to his descriptive prose as to ‘a kind of poetry, a sensuous engagement with the world’, and those who argue that ‘it was more style than content’.³⁵ Claire Messud, for instance, regards Updike as ‘lyrical and elegant a prose stylist’, who never ‘compromised the rigorous precision of his observations; he saw clearly, and described vividly what he saw’.³⁶ Eric Homberger calls Updike ‘an acclaimed writer with an unerring feel for the poetry of ordinary American life’.³⁷ If these observations are to

³² Whereas the short story sequences mentioned here are based on either a common setting or recurrent protagonists, it is to be noted that Updike’s recurring settings and characters are not limited to those sequences. In terms of setting, several Updike’s stories are set in Tarbox, a fictional Massachusetts town. These stories are grouped under the sub-title ‘Tarbox Tales’ in *The Early Stories 1953-1975* (2003). Moreover, a few stories have New York City as the setting. They are ‘Who Made Yellow Roses Yellow?’ (1956), ‘His Finest Hour’ (1956), ‘Toward Evening’ (1955), ‘Snowing in Greenwich Village’ (1956), and ‘A Gift from the City’ (1957). Updike’s recurring characters in his short fiction, apart from Henry Bech and the Maples, also include: David Kern in ‘Pigeon Feathers’ (1961), ‘Packed Dirt, Churchgoing, a Dying Cat, a Traded Car’ (1962), ‘Lunch Hour’ (1996), ‘The Walk with Elizanne’ (2003), and ‘The Road Home’ (2005); Allen Dow in ‘Flight’ (1959) and ‘His Mother Inside Him’ (1994); John Nordholm in ‘Friends from Philadelphia’ (1954) and ‘The Happiest I’ve Been’ (1959); and finally the young married couple Jack and Claire in ‘Walter Briggs’ (1958), ‘The Crow in the Woods’ (1960), and ‘Should Wizard Hit Mommy’ (1959).

³³ Charlie Reilly, ‘A Conversation with John Updike’, in *Conversations with John Updike*, ed. by James Plath (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), pp. 124-50 (p. 136).

³⁴ Eileen Baldeshwiler, ‘The Lyric Short Story: The Sketch of a History’, p. 231.

³⁵ Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, ‘John Updike, a Lyrical Writer of the Middle-Class man, Dies at 76’, p.A28.

³⁶ Claire Messud, ‘The Alchemist of the Mundane’, *Newsweek*, 9 February 2009, Obituary, <<http://www.the-dailybeast.com/newsweek/2009/01/30/the-chemist-of-the-mundane.html>> [accessed 5 December 2013]

³⁷ Eric Homberger, ‘John Updike, 1932-2009’, *The Guardian*, 27 January 2009, Obituary,

be dismissed as laudatory obituary articles written after the writer's death, remarks from long-term Updike scholars, particularly those who specialise in Updike's short fiction, are similarly appreciative. Robert M. Luscher claims that 'Updike's most distinctive formal contributions to the art of short fiction [...] have been his sustained lyric pieces and his montage stories, related vignettes driven less by plot than by a coalescing network of incidents and images'.³⁸ Donald J. Greiner lauds Updike as 'the master of the elegantly lyrical sentence and the precisely observed detail' and adds that Updike 'used his astonishing facility with language to paint the particulars of the middle-class domestic scene in the latter half of the American twentieth century'.³⁹

On the other hand, some critics, after acknowledging Updike's attentive observation and meticulous description, question his style. James Wood, in his essay 'John Updike's Complacent God' (1999), remarks that, Updike's fiction 'cancels genuine drama', which makes him 'a prose writer of great beauty, but that prose confronts one with the question of whether beauty is enough'.⁴⁰ Harold Bloom, while compiling critical essays on Updike's longer fiction, notes that Updike is 'a minor novelist with a major style', for he seems only capable of crafting detailed verisimilitude, yet not able to create 'authentic exuberance or narrative gusto'.⁴¹ These negative readings of Updike's work seem to echo one by John W. Aldridge, who claims, in his essay 'The Private Vice of John Updike' (1966) that Updike's prose is filled with 'tinily inward observations of people, in which

<<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/jan/27/john-updike-obituary>> [accessed 5 December 2013]

³⁸ Robert M. Luscher, *John Updike: A Study of the Short Fiction*, p. xii.

³⁹ Donald J. Greiner, 'John Updike: The Literary Vermeer', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 51(2010), 177-84 (p. 177).

⁴⁰ James Wood, 'John Updike's Complacent God', in *The Broken Estate: Essays on Literature and Belief* (New York: Random House Modern Library, 2000), pp. 208-15 (p. 208, p. 212).

⁴¹ Harold Bloom, 'Introduction', in *John Updike*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), pp. 1-8 (p.7, p. 2).

nothing discernible *happened*'.⁴² 'Behind the rich, beautiful scenery of the descriptive prose,' Aldridge further concludes, 'Mr. Updike has nothing to say'.⁴³

Interestingly, both complimentary and disparaging commentary stem from a very similar judgment of Updike's writing; that is, in Robert S. Gingher's summary, 'his exquisite, photographic ability to capture and preserve the small details, the quotidian minutiae which fill the spaces of his characters' lives'.⁴⁴ Gingher also rightly points out that 'more than anything else, it is this unique, carefully refined style which compels certain critics to admit the extent of his [Updike's] talent and others to slight him for the lack of it'.⁴⁵ Praise or criticism, there is no denying among the critics that there is an incompatibility between Updike's descriptive style and narration. While the complimentary side refers to this incompatibility as Updike's talent in creating visual precision in prose, the disparaging side takes it as Updike's failure in conventional storytelling. The dispute between the two critical camps, as it turns out, may well reflect their respective preferences over the two basic modes in fiction composition: description and narration. The complimentary camp prefers description, while the disparaging one prefers narration.

These critics exemplify a seminal demarcation between narration and description offered by Georg Lukács in 'Narrate or Describe?' (1936). In dealing with Updike's richly descriptive text, the critics seem only capable of either celebrating or denigrating description from a pure aesthetic perspective. And this is precisely Lukács's point:

⁴² John W. Aldridge, 'The Private Vice of John Updike', in *Time to Murder and Create: The Contemporary Novel in Crisis* (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1972), pp.164-70 (p.166).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

⁴⁴ Robert S. Gingher, 'Has John Updike Anything to Say?', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 20 (1974), 97-105 (p. 98).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

Description contemporizes everything. Narration recounts the past. One describes what one sees, and the spatial ‘present’ confers a temporal ‘present’ on men and objects. But it is an illusory present, not the present of immediate action of the drama. The best modern narrative has been able to infuse the dramatic element into the novel by transferring events into the past. But the contemporaneity of the observer making a description is the antithesis of the contemporaneity of the drama. Static situations are described, states or attitudes of mind of human beings or conditions of things—still lives.⁴⁶

Here, Lukács explains the image-making function of description: when the writer makes his/her protagonist an observer and describes what he/she sees, the writer ‘contemporizes’ everything and achieves the aesthetic, the ‘picturesque’, effect in writing.⁴⁷ And this aesthetic effect, ‘the contemporaneity of the observer making a description’, is achieved at the expense of ‘the dramatic element’, the temporal dimension in prose narrative. To put it differently, for Lukács and a number of Updike’s critics, description and narration are two methods of composition that are, when assessments need to be made, exclusive of each other: to describe is to stop narrating; to narrate is to stop describing.

However, the case between narration and description, I argue, is far more complicated than these mutually exclusive demarcations. I will show later in the thesis that there may well be a narrative or a temporal dimension in description and vice versa. While description does have an image-making function as Lukács informs us, it does not mean that there are no narrative aspects in the images that description generates. Even visual verisimilitude in Updike’s stories, I shall contend, has a temporal dimension which cannot be overlooked, let alone visual uncertainty which often exists alongside visual verisimilitude. To this end, the critics in question are just as helpful as Lukács in pointing

⁴⁶ Georg Lukács, ‘Narrate or Describe?’, in *Writer and Critic and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. by Arthur Kahn (London: Merlin Press, 1978), pp. 110-48 (p.130).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

to a relationship between Updike's descriptive style and 'seeing'. The two critical positions are also useful, as we shall see in later chapters, in our exploration of different narrative aspects in Updike's literary images. Yet, the critics in question still make hurried assessments. They have not stayed with the visual aesthetics in Updike's description long enough; nor have they carefully attended to the act of seeing, which is ubiquitous in Updike's short fiction.

The short story 'The Lucid Eye in Silver Town' is hardly unique in its subtle understanding of 'seeing'. 'Seeing' here may be summarised as a visual engagement in writing that involves, at once, a determination to achieve graphic precision and a reminder of the uncertainty or ambiguity of what one sees. Despite the wide range of Updike's subject matter, seeing remains an important and persistent motif in his short fiction. His characters are often art students or those who work with word and image and take a strong interest in different visual media. Their visual sensibility, similar to that of the narrator in 'The Lucid Eye', makes them more of a vigilant and skeptical observer than a satisfied all-seeing one; or simply, they encounter more problems with what they see.

In 'The Persistence of Desire' (1958), for example, the protagonist encounters his high-school girlfriend at the hometown eye clinic. After being diagnosed as having 'middle-aged eyes' and given some eye drops, he is 'dismissed into a tainted world where things evaded his focus'.⁴⁸ He is unable to read the note from an ex-girlfriend. In 'Still Life' (1959), the main character is an American student majoring in art in the UK. While possessing a talent in painting, the more he succeeds at still life painting, the more

⁴⁸ John Updike, 'The Persistence of Desire', in *Pigeon Feathers and Other Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), pp. 7-17 (p. 16).

miscommunications he has with his British classmate Robin, whom he would like to court. In 'The Crow in the Woods' (1962), the protagonist observes a big crow which is disturbing the tranquillity of the snow-covered woods outside his window. Yet it seems he alone witnesses the incident, for when he calls upon his wife's attention, the crow has already gone and what she sees is only snow. In 'The Sea's Same Greenness' (1960), the protagonist, a writer, conducts a monologue about his frustration and failure in looking for the right words to describe the colour of the sea, this being a classic challenge for visual artists. In 'The Day of the Dying Rabbit' (1969), the narrator is a professional photographer, who suffers a loss of confidence in the photographic medium, claiming that 'the shutter clicks, and what is captured is mostly accident' and that 'the camera does lie, all the time. It has to'.⁴⁹ And in a later short story 'Metamorphosis' (1999), the protagonist has his skin cancer removed from his face. Out of his admiration for the Korean-American female surgeon, he asks for further plastic surgery including the addition of an epicanthal fold to his eyes. It is not until he finally has an oriental face with a 'smooth, hardened surface' that he notices in a photograph that the doctor's husband is of his age and has a 'craggy, Caucasian, grinning, big-nosed' face just like his previous one.⁵⁰

In Updike's stories, the complexity of the eye brings so many uncertainties that it would be too hasty to settle with the claim that there is only an aesthetic dimension to Updike's fiction and all the narrative aspects are cancelled. Arguably, though, 'seeing' is not only a motif, but what Martin Scofield calls a '*leitmotif*', with which Updike tests

⁴⁹ John Updike, 'The Day of the Dying Rabbit', in *Museums and Women and Other Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), pp. 28-40 (p. 29, 32).

⁵⁰ John Updike, 'Metamorphosis', in *Licks of Love* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2001), pp. 165-76 (p. 176).

‘various facets of modern relationships with an eye that is partly clinical (he [Updike] is fond of hospitals, and doctors’ and dentists’ surgeries as locations for his stories) and partly sacerdotal’.⁵¹ The visual, in this sense, extends well beyond its immediate aesthetic confines and has significance for the process of perception. Updike reminds us of how visually dependent and obsessed the modern society is when he calls for creativity in literature in a speech:

Artistically, this century has belonged to the eye; concrete poetry, medieval manuscripts, and Egyptian hieroglyphs all hint at paths of accommodation in an ecumenical movement among eye-oriented media.⁵²

In observing that literary genres ‘hint at paths of accommodation in an ecumenical movement among eye-oriented media’, Updike expresses a broader visual concern in representation. Scofield is, then, perceptive in detecting this important preoccupation in Updike, which has been neglected by most Updike’s critics. His observation, however, remains only an assertion, for his study is a general introduction to the American short story and there is little space for a textual analysis of what Updike’s short story characters see and how perception has been altered by ‘eye-oriented media’.

It is precisely what Updike short story characters see that provokes the first task of this thesis: to offer a formalist analysis of Updike’s ‘eye-oriented’ stories and their respective involvements with three major visual media of the modern society: painting, photography and cinema. It is my intention to study the particulars of each visual medium instead of staying with the visual rather broadly. I argue that if Updike critics tend to

⁵¹ Martin Scofield, ‘Aspects of the American Short Story 1930-1980’, in *The Cambridge Introduction to the American Short Story* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 195-207 (p. 206).

⁵² John Updike, ‘The Future of the Novel’, in *Picked-Up Pieces* (Greenwich: Fawcett Books, 1975), pp. 34-40 (p. 39)

regard his efforts to describe what his characters see as efforts simply to achieve visual verisimilitude, this is in part because they make no distinction between different visual media. While painting, photography and cinema all strive for a representational dimension and the end of that dimension does seem similar, their modes of seeing, that is how and to what extent these three visual media achieve visual verisimilitude differ in many important ways. These differences should not be ignored; nor can they be clarified when discussed in a general manner but need the specifics of examples. Moreover, the characters in Updike's stories are involved with images clearly from different visual media and Updike himself has written extensively on painting, photography and film so much so that one has reason to expect different types of seeing in Updike's stories.⁵³ In looking into the epistemological possibility/impossibility which informs Updike's short fiction and three visual media alongside, I hope to uncover the narrative aspects of the visual which have long been overlooked by some Updike critics, and, as we shall see in the following section, by some short story critics.

III. The short story and short fiction

The second task of the thesis is to examine how a visual study of Updike's short fiction can make us look differently at the short story as a literary genre. I argue that Updike's visually rich text and his awareness of 'various facets of modern relationships with an eye' offer a new lens on the existing, yet 'patchy and repetitive', short story criticism, wherein critics seem to be perplexed by the issue of form and vision.⁵⁴

⁵³ Updike was a constant reviewer of art exhibitions for *The New York Review of Books*. His essays on art are collected in *Just Looking: Essays on Art* (2001), *Still Looking: Essays on American Art* (2005) and *More Matter: Essays and Criticism* (1999).

⁵⁴ Dominic Head, *The Modernist Short Story: A Study in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University

There is an overriding preoccupation with genre definition in short story criticism. Yet, attempts to define what a short story is are seldom rewarding. Martin Scofield rightly points out that, ‘attempts have been made to identify the short story form with particular modes of cognition or attitudes to life, but these usually stumble over counter-instances’.⁵⁵ Any genre definition creates a dilemma. Here, we cannot initiate a research project on the short story without having a definition to it; yet the definition, in turn, imposes a delimitation which excludes ‘counter-instances’, the cases which do not, completely or partially, fit into the definition. As a result, this method of analysis seems to be trapped by its own limitations. Norman Friedman has little sympathy for a ‘deductive’ approach:

If we assume that an a priori definition is needed to call the field of study into view, then we are proceeding deductively. [...] A deductive definition is, in the present context, like a self-fulfilling prophecy: assuming there is *something* in the field of study that it points to, it can never be wrong — nor, by the same token, can it ever be right either, for that which is not falsifiable cannot be verified.⁵⁶

Friedman might be too harsh in claiming that an a priori definition is ‘self-fulfilling’, yet he does point to a common defect with critics who start their work with attempts to look for a clear-cut genre definition and are less able to explain, what Scofield calls, ‘counter-instances’.

Scofield, after identifying the problem in genre definition, nonetheless goes on with a deductive definition himself, where Friedman turns to the opposite, the ‘inductive’ approach, in which ‘we already have a working knowledge of what is included in the

Press, 1992), p. 8.

⁵⁵ Martin Scofield, *The Cambridge Introduction to the American Short Story*, p. 4.

⁵⁶ Norman Friedman, ‘Recent Short Story Theories: Problems in Definition’, in *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads*, ed. by Susan Lohafer and Jo Ellyn Clarey, pp. 13-31 (p.16).

field of study, and that all we need is a way of conceptualizing it'.⁵⁷ However, no research is based on such an either-or polarity; there is often a mix of the deductive and the inductive, just as each short story can be a borderline case of both the conventional short story and the unconventional type.

Therefore, a sensible approach to the genre study of the short story, or perhaps to genre studies in general, is to look at genre through a historical perspective; that is, a genre is a series of works that share certain attributes over time, yet each work also has its own particularities which in turn, as Douglas Tallack observes, 'disturb generic consistency because they do *not* get left behind or put aside' in a close reading or re-reading.⁵⁸ To put it differently, genre is rather a fluid, or 'dynamic', concept, instead of a solidified one.⁵⁹ This historical approach is recalled in Dominic Head's consideration of the genre in his study of the modernist short story: 'literary forms are continually evolving, even when they rely heavily on conventional gesture and device'.⁶⁰ Therefore, discursive as it is, it would nonetheless be prudent to look at the 'conventional gesture and device' of the short story, with an acute awareness of the genre being a 'continually evolving' thing, which can be disturbed and conditioned by discontinuities. This is very much the example left to us by the Russian Formalists, who, importantly, wrote some key early studies of the short story and related genres.

This stance on genre studies, in part, accounts for the presence of both terms, the short story and short fiction, in the thesis. It is convenient to keep the term short fiction

⁵⁷ Norman Friedman, 'Recent Short Story Theories: Problems in Definition', p. 16. Scofield applies the notion of 'the idea as hero' as the working definition in his study of the short story, arguing that the notion suggests broadly a mode of story in which the overall idea 'dominates the conception of the work and gives it its unity or deliberate disunity'. Martin Scofield, *The Cambridge Introduction to the American Short Story*, p. 5.

⁵⁸ Douglas Tallack, *The Nineteenth-Century American Short Story: Language, Form and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 7.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁶⁰ Dominic Head, *The Modernist Short Story: A Study in Theory and Practice*, p. 2.

because it is quite elastic, compared to the designation short story, which may evoke a quite definite form in a reader's mind. Though short fiction as a term is dismissed by some critics, such as Head, for being 'an imprecise, all-purpose term which subsumes "sketch", "story", and "novella" - any fiction which is not a novel', it is precisely this 'imprecise, all-purpose' term that brings about a flexibility capable of compensating for the delimitation and the rigidity in the term, 'the short story'.⁶¹

What, then, is the rather definite form in our mind when we refer to the short story? Eileen Baldeshwiler has given us some clues in her introduction to the lyric short story:

When the history of the modern short story is written, it will have to take into account two related developments, tracing the course of the larger mass of narratives that, for purposes of clarification we could term 'epical', and the smaller group which, to accentuate differences, we might call 'lyrical'. The larger group of narratives is marked by external action developed 'syllogistically' through characters fabricated mainly to forward plot, culminating in a decisive ending that sometimes affords a universal insight, and expressed in the serviceably inconspicuous language of prose realism. The other segment of stories concentrates on internal changes, moods, and feelings, [...] and is expressed in the condensed, evocative, often figured language of the poem.⁶²

Baldeshwiler points out two trends in the development of the modern short story: the epical story and the lyrical story. The two terms seem to imply a change in the idea of the short story. If we had in mind only a narrative driven by plot with 'external action' and 'a decisive ending' when we referred to the short story in the past, we now would also have another form in mind, the lyric short story driven more by internal feelings than plot. Baldeshwiler's division between the 'epical' story and the 'lyrical story' corresponds to Clare Hanson's study of the genre, *Short Stories and Short Fictions, 1880-*

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 17.

⁶² Eileen Baldeshwiler, 'The Lyric Short Story: The Sketch of a History', p. 231.

1980 (1985):

In the short story the primary distinction which can be made is between those works in which the major emphasis is on plot and those in which plot is subordinate to psychology and mood. This distinction is a simple but fundamental one which immediately clarifies our picture of the development of the short story in English.⁶³

Hanson also feels the term 'the short story' itself is not sufficient enough 'to cover all the fiction written in the short form over the last hundred years'.⁶⁴ For this reason, she introduces sub-genres. Instead of using Baldeshwiler's terms 'epical' and 'lyrical', Hanson refers to 'short narrative writing' as 'the short story', while calling those 'in which plot is subordinate to psychology and mood' 'short prose fiction', or even 'plotless fiction', because reading this type of stories 'we are entering a world which properly speaking has no plot'.⁶⁵

Baldeshwiler's and Hanson's analysis of the development of the short story seems to point to a 'continually evolving' genre, and their neat division of the two different modes seems to suggest possible ideas of what a short story is. However, their distinction between the 'epical' story and the 'lyrical' story, 'the short story' and 'short prose fiction', is still rather exclusive with one focusing on plot, the other 'plotless'. As is discussed earlier, genre is more of a dynamic concept and a short story is more often than not a borderline case of both the conventional story and the unconventional one. It is very likely that in the 'epical' story there are lyrical elements and vice versa. This simple division between the 'epical' and the 'lyrical', narration and description, is reflected in the polemical dispute between the two camps in Updike criticism discussed earlier, the

⁶³ Clare Hanson, *Short Stories and Short Fictions, 1880-1980* (London: Macmillan, 1985), p. 5.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.7.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.6-8.

result of which tends to place Updike's prose fiction into the pigeonhole of the 'lyrical' short story.

Baldeshwiler's and Hanson's studies take what is the majority line in according much more weight to the 'lyrical' short story, or 'short prose fiction', than to the 'epical' story, or the conventional 'short story'. While there is, of course, much to recommend this preference, the conventional emphasis on plot retreats, and what replaces it seems to be moods or feelings expressed in the lyrical language of the poem. Short story theory does, indeed, seem to be monopolised by a discourse built around the lyrical effect of the short story, with an open denigration of narrative.

This curious phenomenon, the dominance of lyricism in the genre, can be traced back to Edgar Allan Poe's 1842 review of Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales*, or to be more accurate, to a rather reductive reading of Poe's review. This reliance on a single writer's understanding of the genre is perhaps because of, diagnoses Dominic Head, 'a lack of critical concentration and development', for the short story, as a serious literary genre, did not come to the field of study until the end of nineteenth century.⁶⁶ According to Kasia Boddy's study of the American short story, it was Brander Matthews in his essay 'The Philosophy of the Short-Story' (1885) who identified the short story as a new literary genre, different from 'stories which merely happened to be short'.⁶⁷ 'The most valuable critical remarks made about the form' as Charles E. May observes, 'have been made not by the critics but by the short story writers'.⁶⁸ Accordingly, Poe has become a name that one cannot circumvent on the way to understanding short story theories.

⁶⁶ Dominic Head, *The Modernist Short Story: A Study in Theory and Practice* p. 9.

⁶⁷ Kasia Boddy, *The American Short Story Since 1950*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 1.

⁶⁸ Charles E. May, 'Introduction: A Survey of Short Story Criticism in America', in *Short Story Theories*, ed. by Charles E. May (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1976), pp. 3-12 (p.3).

In his 'Review of *Twice-Told Tales*', Poe draws attention to 'the poetic sentiment' in the prose tale and summarises it as 'the unity of effect or impression'.⁶⁹ He contends that only 'a short prose narrative' is able to achieve such an effect because it can be read 'at one sitting', while a longer narrative cannot and hence 'deprives itself, of course, of the immense force derivable from *totality*'.⁷⁰ The shortness of the tale, in other words, brings about more easily a metaphorical sense of completeness, in which 'there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to be the one preestablished design'.⁷¹

Advocating a lyrical effect in the 'short prose narrative', Poe's essay does seem to offer an important reference point for Baldeshwiler, Hanson, and other later critics. Yet, this does not mean that Poe simply equates the tale, by which he means the short story, with the poem; nor does he overlook the narrative effect in the prose tale as the critics in question do. To clarify his more subtle demarcation, he posits the 'short prose narrative' between the epic and the poem:

Epics were the offspring of an imperfect sense of Art, and their reign is no more. A poem *too* brief may produce a vivid, but never an intense or enduring impression. Without a certain continuity of effort—without a certain duration or repetition of purpose—the soul is never deeply moved. There must be the dropping of the water upon the rock.⁷²

While pointing out that the short story is not the epic, Poe equally reminds us that it is different from the poem. A poem is too brief, for 'the unity of effect or impression' in the prose tale also depends on narrative: 'a certain continuity of effort', 'the dropping of

⁶⁹ Edgar Allan Poe, 'Review of *Twice-Told Tales*', in *The New Short Story Theories*, ed. by Charles E. May, pp. 59-64 (pp. 60-61).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

the water upon the rock'. This reminder of 'continuity' in the short story is important and 'continuity' and disruption to 'continuity', as we shall see later in the thesis, are two key aspects in Updike's storytelling. In addition, there is a pragmatic aspect in Poe's attitude towards the short story, which should not be ignored. Poe's advocacy of 'the poetic sentiment' in the genre and his apparent harshness towards longer narrative was made at a time when the magazine was the only market for the short story. As Boddy reminds us, Poe had to become 'a great propagandist' for magazines, simply to promote the genre for his livelihood.⁷³

Few critics take the pragmatic aspect of Poe's essay into consideration, and insufficient attention is given to the difference between the short story and the poem, which is, observes Boddy, just 'as important to Poe' as the difference between the short story and the novel.⁷⁴ The consequence of this reductive reading of Poe is, as Tallack points out, a simplified 'orthodoxy' in the idea of the short story monopolised by the lyrical effect:

It is the short story, at its best, which more naturally assimilated the Romantic preference for intense lyric effects, achieved through metaphorical condensation. In this more than casual association with the lyric we can appreciate the importance of the shortness of the short story: expressivity, autonomy and "literariness".⁷⁵

Poe's 'poetic sentiment', 'the unity of effect or impression', the sense of 'totality', to the exclusion of anything else in his review, offer a permanent underpinning to the critical vocabulary for examining the genre in the years to come. At its extreme, the lyrical effect is reduced only to sentiments, feelings, impressions, or moods, as a result entering a

⁷³ Kasia Boddy, *The American Short Story Since 1950*, p. 6.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁷⁵ Douglas Tallack, *The Nineteenth-Century American Short Story: Language, Form and Ideology*, p. 13.

private domain beyond expression, simply the domain of ‘wordlessness’.⁷⁶

New Criticism tends to be associated with the teaching and analysis of poetry but, in the 1940s and 1950s, there was also a focus on the teaching and analysis of short fiction. Without openly referring to Poe, Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren promoted the view that all the elements in the fictional structure should function together to contribute to ‘the total effect of the story’, namely the writer’s ‘own feelings’.⁷⁷

A piece of fiction is a unity, in so far as the piece of fiction is successful. Its elements are so related that we feel an expressive interpenetration among them, a set of vital relationships. [...] Some sort of resolution, however provisional and marginal, must be implicit in the tensions of the fictional structure, if the unity is to be achieved—if the revelation is to be had.⁷⁸

Relying primarily on Poe’s ‘poetic sentiment’ and ‘unity of effect or impression’ and overlooking the short story’s difference from the poem which is also implied in Poe’s essay, New Critical orthodoxy discourages interpreting the story’s meaning; instead, what is encouraged is only feelings, to ‘feel an expressive interpenetration’ and to sense ‘unity’ or ‘revelation’. As a result, the basis of New Critical discussions of the short story is, notes Boddy, ‘advocating the fastidious chiselling of an *object* in order to produce a transcendent *experience*’.⁷⁹

A similar emphasis on sentiments, or the moment of revelation, in the short story, which encompasses verbal expression can be found in Jean Pickering’s essay on time and the short story: ‘the moment of revelation that stands at the heart of the short story, that moment of insight that comes before language, constitutes a discrete moment of

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 3.

⁷⁷ Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, *Understanding Fiction* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1959), p.645.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. xviii.

⁷⁹ Kasia Boddy, *The American Short Story Since 1950*, p. 25.

certainty in a nebulous universe'.⁸⁰ The moment of revelation, in Pickering's view, is a moment of crystallisation yet beyond language. Mary Rohrberger pushes this 'wordlessness' sentiment even further, asserting the moment of revelation is 'the epiphany, a point of frozen energy resonating just beyond understanding'.⁸¹ Poe's 'poetic sentiment', at this moment, enters the domain of the unknown, bordering that of myth or mystery. This poetic aesthetic derived from a similarly single-minded reading of Poe's theory can be found in many other critics' discussions: Charles E. May's mystery theory, Clare Hanson's linking of the short story to the dream, and Frank O' Connor's reference to the form as the best one for 'the lonely voice', the 'submerged population group', in society.⁸² These critical positions will be considered in depth alongside Updike's stories in the chapters to follow.

By and large, the critics' preference for the lyric over the narrative, the nonverbal over the verbal, evinces a visual aesthetic in the short story form, even if this is not formally acknowledged. Precisely, it is the visual, rather than the verbal, that is associated with epiphany, a notion used by Pickering and Rohrberger to identify the short story. In Robert Langbaum's book *The Poetry of Experience* (1971), he explains the aesthetics of the epiphany and traces it back to literary romanticism:

Joyce has taught us, in connection with the latest form of the short story, to call this way of meaning an *epiphany* — a manifestation in and through the visible world of an invisible life. But the epiphany

⁸⁰ Jean Pickering, 'Time and the Short Story', in *Re-reading the Short Story*, ed. by Clare Hanson (London: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 45-54 (p. 53).

⁸¹ Mary Rohrberger, 'Origins, Development, Substance, and Design of the Short Story', in *The Art of Brevity: Excursions in Short Fiction Theory and Analysis*, ed. by Per Winther, Jakob Lothe, and Hans H. Skei (Columbia: the University of South Carolina Press, 2004), pp. 1-13 (p. 10).

⁸² Charles E. May, 'Why Short Stories are Essential and Why They are Seldom Read', in *The Art of Brevity: Excursions in Short Fiction Theory and Analysis*, ed. by Per Winther, Jakob Lothe, and Hans H. Skei, pp. 14-25; Clare Hanson, '“Things out of Words”: Towards a Poetics of Short Fiction', in *Re-reading the Short Story*, ed. by Clare Hanson, pp. 22-33; Frank O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story* (Brooklyn: Melville House Publishing, 2004), p. 17.

does not begin in literature with the short stories of Joyce or Chekhov. It is the essential innovation of *Lyrical Ballads*.⁸³

What is emphasised here is that ‘the poetic sentiment’, ‘the sense of unity or impression’, offers a visual aesthetic that is purely spatial. By showing, rather than telling the events, epiphany collapses time into a moment of vision, words into feelings. It is not surprising that the critics who advocate the lyric, epiphanic effect of the short story, often argue for, directly or indirectly, a visual analogy of the short story. We can also helpfully read these critics closely alongside Updike’s stories in later chapters. But just to give an idea, Clare Hanson considers the evolution of the traditional tale to ‘plotless fiction’ as ‘part of a wider movement from “discourse” to “image” in the art and literature’ at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁸⁴ She contends that Poe ‘anticipates much Symbolist aesthetic theory’ and invites a spatial reading, a pictorial analogy, of the short story.⁸⁵ Following this symbolist reading of Poe’s theory, Valerie Shaw suggests that the short story has its own aesthetic, which reveals affinities with painting and photography.⁸⁶

Whereas the visual analogy between the short story and visual art is very enlightening, discussion of vision and form, that is, how does the short story make us see, tends still to be at a rudimentary level. The visual aspect claimed by the short story critics above is no more than what has been seen in the praising of Updike’s work: a Lukácsian reading of the genre, which only highlights the representational function in the act of seeing and ignores its narrative dimension. To put it another way, critics read Poe’s ‘poetic moment’ as simply a moment of resolution, or a moment of insight, in which a character or a narrator sees, but only receives passively what he/she sees. This given, it

⁸³ Robert Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience* (New York: Norton, 1971), p. 175.

⁸⁴ Clare Hanson, *Short Stories and Short Fictions, 1880-1980*, pp. 1-2.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁸⁶ Valerie Shaw, *The Short Story: A Critical Instruction* (Essex: Longman House, 1983), p. 13.

is indeed rather predictable that short story critics and theorists, when they happen to comment on Updike, apply a similar set of terms to those of specialised Updike critics. In analysing Updike's story 'Pigeon Feathers' (1962), Shaw asserts that the beautifully patterned feathers of the pigeons shot by the protagonist serve as a symbolic platform for the protagonist's epiphanic moment, thus transferring the narrative to the spatial, the verbal to the nonverbal: 'interest in narrative action falls away to be replaced by thoughtfulness about what the entire story signifies. A boundary is crossed, but not felt as a barrier, because the ending is stylistically and tonally in harmony with the rest of the piece'.⁸⁷

We have been talking about what looks like, on close inspection, a dominant ideology in short story theories: a spatial reading of the genre. Yet, there are also critics who challenge the ubiquity of a spatial reading and try to rescue or re-justify what has been overlooked in genre discussions, namely a narrative aspect of the short story. Head, for instance, argues against Shaw, rejecting the visual analogy of the short story and stressing that while painting is a spatial medium, literature remains primarily a temporal one.⁸⁸ The spatial metaphors, in Head's view, 'imply a structural unity and also some kind of thematic unity, but there is an unwarranted methodological tidiness in such criticism'.⁸⁹ Tallack, too, points out that narrative has been unjustifiably 'consigned' to a lower sphere in theories of spatial form 'which have stubbornly retained their authority in short story criticism', but a careful re-reading of a short story will lead us to 'traces of narrative'.⁹⁰ Similar insight, emphasising the existence of stories or narrative clues in the

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 194.

⁸⁸ Dominic Head, *The Modernist Short Story: A Study in Theory and Practice*, p. 9.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 10.

⁹⁰ Douglas Tallack, *The Nineteenth-Century American Short Story: Language, Form and Ideology*, p. 16.

short story and in fiction in general can be found in Kasia Boddy, Frank Kermode, and in the work of critics who approach fiction with structuralist or formalist scrutiny, such as Walter Benjamin, Boris M. Éjxenbaum, Robert Scholes, and Victor Shklovsky. We shall look at these in the following chapters, at points when they are helpful to an understanding of Updike.

While these critics introduce important qualifications into discussion of the short story, they could still say more about the visual dimension, or, more precisely, about the narrative power to be found in the visual. Head rejects the visual reading of the genre altogether because ‘the perception of story unity, in a spatial sense, is at odds with the inherent temporality of reading and writing’.⁹¹ But approaching a story through the lens of vision and form, rather than through spatial form, may not be at odds with the temporality of reading and writing. When Head discovers disunity, what he calls the ‘non-epiphany principle’, in James Joyce’s stories, he has, arguably, already entered the realm of the visual reading of the genre.⁹² An open acceptance of a visual analogy of the short story would have assisted, rather than hindered, his study of modern short stories. Tallack seems to have a better understanding of the complexity of seeing in literary images and suggests that the ‘*re-narrativizing*’ impulse is the obverse of the gravitation of the short story genre towards image’.⁹³ However, he considers such a relevant insight beyond the scope of his book and therefore only recommend it for future discussion.⁹⁴

The second task of the thesis departs from what has been left out by both sides of

⁹¹ Dominic Head, *The Modernist Short Story: A Study in Theory and Practice*, p. 10.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁹³ Douglas Tallack, *The Nineteenth-Century American Short Story: Language, Form and Ideology*, p. 229. Here Tallack analyses the pattern of the wallpaper in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s short story ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ (1892) and remarks that ‘time also comes back into the space of the pattern with references backwards and forwards to the narrator’s reading time’. p.229.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

short story criticism, with a view to re-establishing the visual analogy of the short story by discovering the temporal dimension, ‘the re-narrativizing impulse’, in literary images. I contend that a formalist reading of what Updike’s short story characters see can help both sides of short story criticism re-think their assessments. This is possible because tracing Updike’s efforts at graphic precision and his openness to the uncertainty of seeing and knowing, helps us, as readers, to remain inside the visual without having to rush to over-determined conclusions. As mentioned earlier, the story in ‘The Lucid Eye in Silver Town’ is set up around seeing, while also questioning that process. On the one hand, following the narrator’s supposed lucid eye, and with the opening sentence (‘The first time I visited New York City, I was thirteen and went with my father.’) and the closing sentence (‘Years passed before I needed to go to New York again.’) functioning as a frame, we see a well-structured short story about a boy’s first trip to New York. On the other hand, this unity is destabilized when we are reminded that the narrator’s vision is no more important than his father’s and that his story is no more important than his father’s story about New York. Just as the absolute lucid eye does not exist, Updike’s implication that there are stories inside a short story subverts the possible existence of ‘a perfect story’.

In the following part of the thesis, I shall read more Updike short stories, with a view to studying the genre’s special relationships with three visual media: painting, photography and film, to which the short story is often compared analogically. A formalist reading will be given to Updike’s texts and the corresponding works in the visual media, with the assistance of short story theories and the critical history of the visual culture. Much as is the case with Updike criticism, it is necessary, in my view, for short story criticism to enter the particulars of each visual medium, their respective

modes of seeing, instead of staying with the visual in general terms. Approaching the visual aspect of the short story, the critics tend only to focus on the representational end of visual art, namely the achievement of visual verisimilitude. This limited understanding of the visual, I argue, partly comes from neglecting the particulars, especially the differences, in the modes of representation in painting, photography and cinema. There is, once again, too much emphasis on what, rather than how, a visual medium makes us see. I, therefore, propose close yet separate visual readings of the short story as a genre, using Updike's short fiction as an example. The end is not to look for a particular visual medium that best suits the literary genre; rather, it is to explore different facets of the short story's relationship with the visual, different epistemological possibilities and impossibilities in the involvement between text and image, and finally to come up with a reasonable approach to the study of Updike's short fiction that also has relevance as to the short story as a genre.

IV. The thesis

The first chapter aims to negotiate an understanding of 'time', a mode of temporality, in the narrative space of the short story. It is an effort to look for a reasonable starting point, something similar to a working definition, for a visual analysis of the short story. As discussed earlier, when short story critics apply or refuse to apply a visual reading, the lyrical effect, to the genre, their theories seem to be grounded on genre negotiation, comparing and contrasting the short story to its adjacent genres: the novel and the poem, for instance. However, their comparisons and contrasts are unbalanced. Either too much difference is given to the short story and the novel and too little to the short story and the poem, or the other way around, too much similarity between the short story and the novel

and too little between the short story and the poem. This imbalance, I argue, stems from a lack of attention, firstly, to the relationship between temporality and literature in short story criticism and, secondly, to the temporal aspect in visual representation. With the assistance of Victor Shklovsky's notion of 'defamiliarization', Ferdinand de Saussure's structuralist understanding of signs, and Paul de Man's 'rhetoric of temporality', I shall seek to re-define temporality in representation, with Updike as my focus: temporality does not simply refer to the fictional time inside the art work, but also lies in the relationship between representation and the empirical world.⁹⁵ Based on such an understanding of temporality, literature, regardless of the genre, is entitled to a visual reading, yet between different genres there is, crucially, a difference in degree in terms of the mode of seeing. In this process of making general claims, Updike's longer fiction, poetry and short fiction will serve as examples. Updike is a very self-conscious author who worked across genres and has reflected on literary genres in different essays. It is reasonable to believe a detailed analysis of his work will throw some light upon larger generic issues. Inspired by Updike's genre taxonomy and his exploration of the same theme, 'to show a high-school athletic hero in the wake of his glory days', in three different genres, a spectrum will be sketched, placing his novel series the Rabbit tetralogy (1961-1990) and his poem 'The Ex-Basketball Player' (1954) at both ends, with his short story 'Ace in the Hole' (1953) in between.⁹⁶ The three genres' respective visual concerns will also feature prominently. The chapter thus negotiates, within the spectrum, a particular mode of seeing for the short story and the narrative dimension therein.

⁹⁵ Victor Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique', in *Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. by David Lodge (London: Longman, 1988), pp. 15-30; Ferdinand de Saussure, 'Nature of the Linguistic Sign', in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. by David Lodge, pp. 10-14; Paul de Man, 'The Rhetoric of Temporality', in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1983), pp. 187-228.

⁹⁶ John Updike, 'Afterword by the Author', in *Rabbit, Run* (London: Penguin, 2006), pp. 265-80 (p. 267).

After locating the short story's position and its mode of seeing in the literary spectrum, the second chapter deepens the exploration of vision and form by looking into the painterly analogy, as it bears upon Updike's short fiction. Focusing on the notion of 'the window' in pictorial representation, the chapter re-considers Updike's title as a 'Verbal Vermeer' and what is often regarded as the short story's unique identity, its 'incompleteness'.⁹⁷ Negotiating a particular painterly aspect in Updike's practice in the short story between the nineteenth-century Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer and the twentieth-century American painter Edward Hopper, the chapter will reveal how the short story's 'incompleteness' is constructed and how a frank acceptance of this 'incompleteness' as the condition for representation can move the short story beyond its commonly accepted identity as a genre best suited for expressing private sentiment.

The third chapter re-examines the photographic analogy and the short story. Drawing attention to Updike's protagonists' photographic awareness and taking into consideration the complex nature of the photographic medium, its capacity and its predicament, the chapter evaluates what a short story can do and cannot do. The widely accepted critical claim that the short story is an ideal form for depicting 'moments of being' and the possible existence of a well-framed story will be both considered and challenged.⁹⁸

The fourth chapter escalates the study of Updike's visual engagement and that of the short story genre to the moving medium of visual art: film. In attending to the cinematic mode in Updike's text, the chapter discovers a stronger sense of continuity and equally a stronger sense of discontinuity in terms of vision and form. The chapter goes on to argue

⁹⁷ James Plath, 'Verbal Vermeer: Updike's Middle-Class Portraiture', in *Rabbit Tales: Poetry and Politics in John Updike's Rabbit Novels*, ed. by Lawrence R. Broer (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000), pp. 207-31; Mary Louise Pratt, 'The Short Story: The Long and the Short of It', in *The New Short Story Theories*, ed. by Charles E. May, pp. 91-113 (p.99).

⁹⁸ Clare Hanson, *Short Stories and Short Fictions, 1880-1980*, p. 55.

that it is at these moments of cinematic discontinuity in Updike's short fiction that the short story reminds us of the end of a piece of fiction, the re-continuation of life, and the beginning of other stories.

While summarising what has been discussed in the previous chapters, the conclusion looks into possible ways of extending the visual reading of the genre to the short story sequence. Appealing for a broader approach to the study of literature and visual art, text and image, the thesis serves as a beginning for further studies that reconsider the visual aesthetics both in Updike's short fiction and in the evolving genre of the short story.

Chapter One

Narrative Space in the Short Story: a Case Study in John Updike

Time, that immense invisible in our midst, is part of the substance of narrative, as it is of music.¹

John Updike, 'Introduction to *The Best American Short Stories 1984* (1984)'

I. Form in representation

The short story, I have suggested, is a slippery term to define. In many critics' attempts to come to an understanding of the genre, two issues arise at the centre of the polemics: first, whether or not a short story can make us see; second, if yes, whether or not this seeing has a narrative dimension. On the one hand, there is a dominance of attention to spatial form in short story criticism, which, as seen in most critics' readings of Edgar Allan Poe's review of Hawthorne, places emphasis on the 'lyrical' effect of modern short fiction. These critics hold a positive yet superficial answer to the issues in question: reading a story brings about an experience of seeing, yet it is a unified visual experience that borders timelessness. On the other hand, critics such as Dominic Head and Douglas Tallack defend the temporal aspect of the short story, yet claiming a fundamental difference between reading and seeing.² They are, in other words, reluctant to acknowledge or do not encompass a visual reading of the short story.

What both sides have in common in their discourses, however, is that in their effort

¹ John Updike, 'Introduction to *The Best American Short Stories 1984*', in *More Matter: Essays and Criticism* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999), pp. 178-87 (p.184).

² Dominic Head, *The Modernist Short Story: A Study in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Douglas Tallack, *The Nineteenth-Century American Short Story: Language, Form and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1993).

to negotiate a genre definition, they, explicitly or implicitly, compare and contrast the short story to other literary genres such as the novel and the poem and to visual media such as painting and photography. In doing so, regardless of reaching an agreement on a visual dimension of the short story or not, they nonetheless keep four elements in play: the short story, the novel, the poem, and the visual. As a result, it is not surprising to see a passage such as that quoted below, justifying a visual reading of the short story by excluding the novel:

The painterly analogy for the novel must, ultimately, break down, for in our response to a painting we are predominately involved with space: our response to the novel involves us primarily with time. However, the analogy between a short story and a painting is much closer because, as Poe remarked, the short story is read over a relatively short period of time and can therefore more readily be grasped as an aesthetic whole. Its 'spatial' and structural elements can be exploited for aesthetic effect in ways not possible over the longer time-course of the novel.³

Clare Hanson's remark represents the general position of the advocates of spatial form, who arrive at a genre understanding of the short story by viewing the genre's shortness as something primarily spatial, 'an aesthetic whole', while disposing of the novel's relatively long length as something primarily temporal. As a result, they put the four forms mentioned above into two categories mostly separate from each other: a spatial one hosting the poem, the visual and the short story and a temporal one hosting only the novel.

Length, or narrative space, in different literary forms matters and that is what this chapter aims to explore. Yet, Hanson's reading risks being reduced to a simplified equivalence between narrative space and what that space represents: that is, she seems to

³ Clare Hanson, *Short Stories and Short Fictions, 1880-1980* (London: Macmillan, 1985), p. 68.

say because the short story is short in length, or as limited in space as a painting or a poem, it represents a motionless moment; whereas because the novel is long in length, it represents a 'longer time-course'. This reductive genre taxonomy is voiced by Mary Louise Pratt in a more overt manner. For Pratt, a full-length life can only be satisfactorily narrated by the novel form, the 'full-length' narrative, whereas the short story tends to narrate a fragment or an excerpt from a life, which has the capacity to represent that life in a moment.⁴ However, in building a hierarchical relationship for longer and short fiction merely based on the assumption that the longer the length the more the form lends itself to totality, Pratt's theory enters an inevitable fallacy. If we follow her line of thinking, no fiction would be satisfactory unless it is a complete record of a life from birth to death, for even a novel series, a *roman-fleuve*, does not reflect every second of the protagonist's complete life.

On the other hand, the critics of temporal form have their own way of positioning the short story among the four forms. In diagnosing the problems with spatial theory, Head points out that features of modern short fiction conform to those of modernist literature in general: 'the limited action and an associated ambiguity and preoccupation with personality; and the self-conscious foregrounding of form and the concomitant reliance on pattern'.⁵ Recognising the formal dimension in literature in general, yet rejecting any visual analogy to literature, the critics who advocate temporal form also divide the short story, the novel, the poem, and the visual into two different categories: one spatial and the other temporal. Literature is, then, put in the temporal category; while

⁴ Mary Louise Pratt, 'The Short Story: The Long and the Short of It', in *The New Short Story Theories*, ed. by Charles E. May (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994), pp. 91-113 (p.99).

⁵ Dominic Head, *The Modernist Short Story: A Study in Theory and Practice*, p. 8.

visual art in the spatial.⁶

The critics' genre taxonomies, as we shall see through analysis of a selection of Updike's longer fiction, poetry and short fiction, are hasty and unbalanced. Yet, it is nonetheless reasonable to take other genres and media into consideration, for the short story, a genre with 'a hybrid nature', cannot be fully understood in isolation from other genres and media.⁷ What remains to be discovered, then, is in what sense the critics' genre taxonomies are hasty and how to come to a better understanding of the short story by looking at what the critics have overlooked. The polemics over genre taxonomy cited above not only reflect different concerns over form and vision in the short story, but also reveal broader attitudes towards the relationship between representation and the external world. While the advocates of spatial form tend to blur the boundary between art and what it represents, those of temporal form bring attention to the formal matter in literary representation only and overlook similar issues in visual art.

We have discussed briefly the visual dimension of Updike's short fiction in the Introduction. What, then, is Updike's attitude towards the short story when it comes to its relationship with its adjacent forms: the novel and the poem? And how do these three forms link to the visual in Updike's consideration of art? In his introduction to *Self-Selected Stories of John Updike* (1996), Updike considers that the short story is a form 'situated between the novel and the poem, and capable of giving us the pleasures of

⁶ There might be potential dispute between Dominic Head and Douglas Tallack over poetry's position. They have done relatively little work on poetry, but in their in-passing comments on poetry and its relation to the short story, one may deduce their genre taxonomies. In discussing the complex use of symbolism in the short story, Head notes that the ambiguity inherent in symbolism 'is commonly detected in poetry'. From this, we may tell Head would have put poetry in the temporal category. Whereas Tallack brings back history and narrative to the short story and sets the genre aside from poetry. The latter, according to Tallack, belongs to image-making or 'aesthetic' categories. Dominic Head, *The Modernist Short Story: A Study in Theory and Practice*, p. 25; Douglas Tallack, *The Nineteenth-Century American Short Story: Language, Form and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 232.

⁷ Valerie Shaw, *The Short Story: A Critical Introduction* (Essex: Longman House, 1983), p. 9.

both'.⁸ Putting the three forms on the same line of a spectrum, Updike does not seem to hurry into a clear division of genre, as the critics do. Nor is he eager to put a clear line between text and image. We may still recall his persistent interest in writing and visual art and his consideration of both as one art: 'a matter of graphic symbols'.⁹ When Updike talks about his journey to becoming a novelist, he often sketches a gradual spectrum: from his interest in drawing in black and white, later in writing light verse, short stories, and finally to his experiment in the novel form, which is, in his own expression, 'the end-term of a series of reproducible artifacts' in regard to 'the form's capacity'.¹⁰ Unlike the critics' taxonomies, which, at some point, depend on a distinction either between the verbal and the visual or between short form and long form, Updike's spectrum, his 'series of reproducible artifacts', is made on the basis of the capacity of form, that is, on degree rather than kind. In other words, without losing an overall concern about form, Updike treats the four different forms, the visual, the poem, the short story, and the novel, within the same category of art. Each form, as he considers, equally involves 'an act of communication' invoked by the relationship between 'a prescribed space' and what that space represents.¹¹

This relationship, the formal matter of representation, and its claim on the epistemological process, have been theorised by the Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky in the concept of 'defamiliarization'.¹² In his seminal essay 'Art as Technique' (1917), Shklovsky discusses what makes art artistic. The technique of art, he notes, is to remove

⁸ John Updike, 'Introduction to *Self-Selected Stories of John Updike*', in *More Matter* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999), pp. 767-70 (p. 770).

⁹ John Updike, *Self-Consciousness: Memoirs* (London: André Deutsch, 1989), p. 100.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

¹¹ James Schiff, 'A Conversation with John Updike', *The Southern Review*, 38 (2002), 420-43 (p. 431); John Updike, *Self-Consciousness: Memoirs*, p. 103.

¹² Victor Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique', trans. by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, in *Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. by David Lodge (London: Longman, 1988), pp. 16-30 (p. 21).

people from their habitual perception:

Habitualization devours objects, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war. [...] Art exists to help us recover the sensation of life; it exists to make us feel things, to make the stone *stony*. The end of art is to give a sensation of the object as seen, not as recognized. The technique of art is to make things 'unfamiliar', to make forms obscure, so as to increase the difficulty and the duration of perception. The act of perception in art is an end in itself and must be prolonged. *In art, it is our experience of the process of construction that counts, not the finished product.*¹³

Shklovsky offers a reasonable explanation for the relationship between art and life, between representation and the empirical world. Art uses mimetic techniques to achieve verisimilitude, yet its purpose, contends Shklovsky, is not to comfort or confirm people's habitual sensation and perception. Any reading that celebrates how realist a work of art is cannot go far. Rather, the purpose of art is to make people see a familiar object as if 'seeing it for the first time' and to make people read about an event as if 'it were happening for the first time'.¹⁴ An art work, then, involves two types of perception at the same time: one that makes people recognise what is represented, and the other that removes people from their comfort zone, their 'usual perception' of an object or an event, into 'the sphere of a new perception'.¹⁵ While the first type of perception is about relating art to the real world, the second involves the realisation of the boundary between the space of art and the external world; that is, as Shklovsky would say, the laying bare of

¹³ Victor Shklovsky, qtd. and trans. by Robert Scholes, in *An Introduction: Structuralism in Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), pp.83-4. All the quotations from Shklovsky in the thesis are taken from Lemon and Reis's translation, except this paragraph, which has been re-translated by Scholes and which is, in my view, a clearer interpretation. Lemon and Reis's version of the paragraph is: 'Habitualization devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war. [...] And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar", to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. *Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important*' (p. 20).

¹⁴ Victor Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique', p. 21.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

the formal matter of representation.¹⁶

The concept of ‘defamiliarization’ enables us to view art, verbal or visual, on the same wavelength of representation and its relationship to the external world. This approach brings art to our attention both at its macroscopic level and its microscopic level. At the macroscopic level, defamiliarization informs that any work of representation, as Frank Kermode observes in *The Sense of an Ending* (1967), a study of fiction, will come to an end; we will recognise it as an ‘alienation from “reality”’, no matter how life-like it is.¹⁷ We may, therefore, free up the four forms pigeonholed separately by the short story critics and put them all together in the big category of art. At the microscopic level, defamiliarization corresponds to a structuralist view of language introduced by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure.¹⁸ Saussure challenges the referential function of verbal signs, which forms the base of literary realism: language in literary realism tends to be thought of as transparent and ‘words are the means by which we transmit or reproduce experience and knowledge of the physical and social worlds’.¹⁹ Yet, Saussure contends that the meaning of a sign depends more on its relationship with other words than on its reference to an object in the empirical world. The relationship between the signifier and the signified, between what is represented and what is meant, is therefore arbitrary and accidental.²⁰ For this reason, there is always an epistemological uncertainty, a perpetual ‘wandering, an *errance*, a kind of permanent exile’, in the process of signification, which

¹⁶ Victor Shklovsky, ‘Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*: Stylistic Commentary’, in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), pp. 25-57 (p. 30).

¹⁷ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 50.

¹⁸ David Lodge, ‘Introducing Victor Shklovsky’s “Art as Technique”’, in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. by David Lodge, p. 15.

¹⁹ Pam Morris, *Realism* (Oxford: Routledge, 2003), p. 24.

²⁰ Ferdinand de Saussure, ‘Nature of the Linguistic Sign’, in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. by David Lodge, pp. 10-14 (p. 12).

prevents signs from reaching their meanings and proposes, in other words, a reminder of the limitation of any signification.²¹

As I discussed in the Introduction, my analysis of Updike's story 'The Lucid Eye in Silver Town' in the Introduction is consistent with defamiliarization in representation at a macroscopic level. The analysis is a good example of bringing reading and seeing, literature and the visual, together for discussion: the narrator's habitual perception and defamiliarized perception of what he sees bring about the epistemological uncertainty of the short story. However, aside from the claim that literature and visual art can be considered within the broad realm of representation on the basis of the signifying process of signs, our analysis of Updike's story is not detailed enough to reach a generic understanding of the short story, that is, a special mode of seeing that belongs particularly to the genre, different from the modes of seeing in other genres. Whereas Saussure's structuralist view of signs tells us that a clear-cut definition of a genre is not possible, it does not, by any means, discourage a discussion of genre. On the contrary, Saussure's insight that the signifying system of signs is a 'system of differences' allows the possibility of negotiating an understanding of a genre by relating it to other genres and forms within that 'system of differences'.²² In other words, to conduct a genre study, it might be illuminating to draw attention to, rather than moving away from, the genre's 'wandering' or *errance* among different genres and forms, wherein one may discover small but important differences. The short story, as discussed in the review of short story criticism in the Introduction, is often defined through comparisons or by what it is not or

²¹ Paul de Man, "Conclusions": Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator", in *The Resistance to Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), pp. 73-105 (p. 92).

²² David Lodge, 'Introducing Victor Shklovsky's "Art as Technique"', p. 15.

by setting up an ideal form, which no piece of short fiction can achieve. In this regard, my approach to the genre study of the short story is to continue the critics' method: a negotiation through comparisons, yet in a more careful and detailed manner.

I propose that it is necessary for a visual study of the short story and of Updike's practice of the genre to unfold in two steps. The first step, which is also to look for a working definition of the short story for the thesis, is to sort out the difference in terms of vision and form between the short story and two adjacent literary genres: the novel and the poem. We have made the claim that the three forms can all be read visually; yet, this does not mean that there is no difference in the modes of seeing in between them. Although the difference is that of degree rather than kind, I argue that the difference in degree is important and worth addressing. After discovering the visual concerns of the three literary forms and having a better idea of the short story's position, or to be more accurate, of where the short story is 'wandering', we come the second step of the thesis: a detailed analysis of the short story's respective relationships with three visual media, painting, photography and film, to which the genre is often compared analogically.

This chapter's task, then, is to address the issue in the first step: negotiating a formal concern, a mode of seeing, of the short story by placing it within a certain spectrum with the novel and the poem at the two ends. To explore detailed differences between the narrative space of the three forms, I shall selectively concentrate on Updike's practice in the three forms. Updike's Rabbit Angstrom novel series (1961-1990), his poem 'Ex-Basketball Player' (1954), and his short story 'Ace in the Hole' (1953) will be the central texts. The rationale is that the three texts, though different in form, share a kindred theme:

‘to show a high-school athletic hero in the wake of his glory days’.²³ Considering carefully the differences and similarities between the three genres within the spectrum, the chapter aims to find a formal, and visual, understanding of genre and to elucidate why the short story is, in Updike’s eyes, ‘situated between the novel and the poem, and capable of giving us the pleasures of both’.

II. The mapping impulse in Updike’s novels

In a 1978 interview with Charlie Reilly, Updike compares his impression of short story and novel writing:

When you write a novel you become aware of the enormous amount of ‘stuff’ you ought to know.

When I have to compare short story writing to writing novels, I think of what happens with a box when you double the linear dimensions. You wind up with something four times the volume—at least

I think you do. What I am getting at is, the bigger the work the more you have to put into it.²⁴

Resorting to colloquialisms (‘stuff’, ‘box’, and ‘the more you have to put into it’), Updike dispatches any thought of generic precision, while still using the generic terms. Using ‘box’ as an analogy for narrative space, he compares a writer’s effort with that of ‘put[ting] into’ the box the ‘stuff’, namely ‘a packaging problem’ as he puts it in another interview.²⁵

The short story and the novel, as two forms within what he calls a ‘series of reproducible artifacts’, find their identity through difference in this analogy of a ‘box’: the novel is much bigger in ‘volume’ than the short story, and, accordingly, the writer needs to put more ‘stuff’ into its narrative space, and by implication, leave more out in the short story.

In this sense, Updike’s Rabbit Angstrom novel series, the only tetralogy in Updike’s

²³ John Updike, ‘Afterword by the Author’, in *Rabbit, Run* (London: Penguin, 2006), pp. 265-80 (p. 267).

²⁴ Charlie Reilly, ‘A Conversation with John Updike’, in *Conversations with John Updike*, ed. by James Plath (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), pp. 124-50 (pp. 126-27).

²⁵ James Schiff, ‘A Conversation with John Updike’, p. 425.

oeuvre, obviously is the biggest 'box' in terms of 'volume' and requires a lot of 'stuff'. Although it might appear anachronistic to dwell on a tetralogy in a thesis on Updike's short fiction, reading the tetralogy alongside some short story criticism can offer revealing insights. We shall find that spatial form, the prevailing theory in short story criticism, can be applied more easily to the novel form than to other forms. In short, exploring how Updike deploys such a big narrative form or space and the ramifications for representation may evoke something important about Updike's practice in the short story.

The Rabbit tetralogy was published over a span of thirty years, from 1961 to 1990. It traces the life of an ex-basketball player, Harry Angstrom, nicknamed Rabbit, across three decades from his early adulthood to his death. The first novel *Rabbit, Run* (1960) is set in 1959. Rabbit, a twenty-six-year-old kitchen gadget seller, feels trapped in his family and attempts to run away to the south; in *Rabbit Redux* (1971), the thirty-six-year-old Rabbit, working as a linotype operator in Brewer, Pennsylvania, is confronted with both domestic and national crises; ten years later, in *Rabbit is Rich* (1981), Rabbit becomes an automobile dealer and co-owner of Springer Motors, a company inherited by his wife after her father's death; *Rabbit at Rest* (1990), the final novel in the tetralogy, finds the fifty-six-year-old Rabbit overweight and unhappy in 1989. In crisis with his family, he chooses once again to run away from his Pennsylvania home to Florida.

To understand how Updike deploys the novel form in this expanded version, it might be useful to look at a passage to see what kind of 'stuff' is put into its narrative space. In *Rabbit, Run*, Rabbit sets out to drive from his hometown Mt. Judge, Pennsylvania, all the way to the Gulf of Mexico. Yet, he fails to find the right direction and ends up driving back to Mt. Judge. Here is the description of one stretch of his journey:

He drives too fast down Joseph Street, and turns left, ignoring the sign saying STOP. He heads down Jackson to where it runs obliquely into Central, which is also 422 to Philadelphia. STOP. [...] It takes him a half-hour to pick his way through Lancaster. On 222 he drives south through Refton, Hessdale, New Providence, and Quarryville, through Mechanics Grove and Unicorn and then a long stretch so dull and unmarked he doesn't know he's entered Maryland until he hits Oakwood.²⁶

Filled with authentic road numbers and town names, the very stuff of the realist novel, Rabbit's southbound drive gives a feel of a real journey rather than a fictional one. The representation of factual and precise topographical details is not a unique case. Rather, one sees this almost cartographical attitude to topographical information throughout the tetralogy: from Rabbit's bus ride home from the printing plant in *Rabbit Redux* to the test drive in the greater Brewer area with a young couple in *Rabbit is Rich*; from Rabbit's own neighbourhood of Mt. Judge, whose topographical features and changes in those features are described at length throughout the tetralogy, to the derelict Florida town of Deleon where Rabbit takes solitary walks at the end of his life in *Rabbit at Rest*.²⁷

In the afterword to the Rabbit tetralogy, Updike admits that the locales in his novels have 'an exceptional geographical density'.²⁸ However, Updike's special interest in 'geographical density' should not be taken at face value. There is a link between the tetralogy's narrative space and representing a comprehensive and precise knowledge of a journey or a territory in that space, as Updike explains:

To give substance to Harry's final, solitary drive south, I drove the route myself, beginning at my mother's farm and scribbling sights, rivers, and radio emissions in a notebook on the seat beside me, just as, more than three decades previous, I turned on my New England radio on the very night, the

²⁶ John Updike, *Rabbit, Run* (London: Penguin, 2006), pp. 22-28.

²⁷ John Updike, *Rabbit Redux* (London: Penguin, 2006), pp. 10-13; John Updike, *Rabbit is Rich* (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 10-21; John Updike, *Rabbit at Rest* (London: Penguin, 2006), pp. 434-43.

²⁸ John Updike, 'Afterword by the Author', in *Rabbit, Run*, pp. 265-80 (p. 277). In this afterword, Updike also tells us that the models of his fictional locales of Mt. Judge, Brewer, and Deleon are two Pennsylvania towns, Shillington and Reading, and the Florida city of Fort Myers.

last night of winter, 1959, and made note of what came. Accident rules these novels more than most, in their attempt to take a useful imprint of the world that secretes in newspapers clues to its puzzle of glory. [...] I became, as I have written elsewhere, ‘conscious of how powerfully, inexhaustibly rich real places are, compared with the paper cities we make of them in fiction.’²⁹

Updike’s insistence that ‘real places’ are ‘powerfully, inexhaustibly rich’, allied to his attempt to ‘take a useful imprint of the world’, reveals a writer’s commitment to empirical reality, which serves as a basic underpinning of literary realism. As Pam Morris observes, the development of the realist novel ‘coincided with and aligned itself to the modern secular materialist understanding of reality. Realist plots and characters are constructed in accordance with secular empirical rules’.³⁰ In this sense, Updike’s practice as a realist writer is not unlike that of a cartographer; that is, both need to do so-called ‘field work’ to take ‘an imprint of the world’. Real things such as ‘sights, rivers, and radio emissions’ become his substance.

In Updike’s quite comprehensive engagement with literary realism, we detect a similar density and precision in almost everything described, over and above topographical details or radio emissions along Rabbit’s journeys. When he sneaks back home to fetch clothes in *Rabbit, Run*, for example, Updike provides a lengthy description of his bedroom:

Their bed sags in the filtered sunlight. Never a good bed. Her parents had given it to them. On the bureau there is a square glass ashtray and a pair of fingernail scissors and a spool of white thread and a needle and some hairpins and a telephone book and a Baby Ben with luminous numbers and a recipe she never used torn from a magazine and a necklace made of sandalwood beads carved in Java he got her for Christmas. Insecurely tilted against the wall is the big oval mirror [...] A glass on the windowsill, half full of stale, bubbled water, throws a curved patch of diluted sun onto the bare place

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 277-78.

³⁰ Pam Morris, *Realism*, p. 3.

where the mirror should have been fixed. Three long nicks, here, scratched in the wall, parallel; what ever made them, when? Beyond the edge of the bed a triangle of linoleum bathroom floor shows.³¹

In offering an inventory of bedroom objects, from the bed to the needle, from the glass on the windowsill to the nicks on the wall, Updike's text gives us a world filled with things, or, as Roland Barthes has it, 'an oddly joined miniature version of encyclopedic knowledge [...] [of] everyday "reality"'.³² In this manner, the Rabbit tetralogy renders the boundary between fiction and reality unclear and creates an illusion that the fiction is a contiguous part of the external world. This impulse towards 'packaging' minute details of everyday life as narrative substance goes beyond an interest in cartography and constitutes what Morris calls 'the empirical effect' in literary realism: spatial and temporal reality are translated into the novel's narrative space in such a contiguous way that the boundary between fiction and reality is rendered invisible.³³

Although treating Updike's mapping impulse at face value would be reductive, 'the empirical effect' still offers a possibility for us to look at the Rabbit tetralogy together with the notion of 'mapping' at a rhetorical level. The novel series and mapping may be connected in ways that offer generic insights into the novel and its difference from other literary forms. Composed of geographical icons, a map, as Svetlana Alpers studies the cartographical tradition in the Netherlands, captures 'on a surface a great range of knowledge and information about a world'.³⁴ Although maps are drawn by cartographers, whose craftsmanship can be considered within the sphere of art, there is a pre-supposed objectivity attached to mapmaking, which brings it closer to science. 'The objects in the

³¹ John Updike, *Rabbit, Run*, pp. 85-86.

³² Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), p. 185.

³³ Pam Morris, *Realism*, p. 101. The question of contiguity in representation will be discussed later in this chapter with reference to Roman Jakobson's rhetorical distinction between metonymy and metaphor.

³⁴ Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Penguin, 1989), p.122.

world to be mapped’, notes cartographic historian J. B. Harley, ‘are real and objective’ and ‘they enjoy an existence independent of the cartographer’.³⁵ To convey this scientific objectivity, that is to build a visual and epistemological authority over what it represents, a map needs to invoke a sense of ‘representational transparency’ to cover up its own nature of being just a representation.³⁶

This impulse to cover up the map’s own fictional status to create a seamless contiguity between the map’s surface and the real world it represents points to a mode of representation akin to realism in representation. A notion of mapping is particularly important in any art work, verbal or visual, composed in the tradition of realism and relying upon a realist perspective so to speak. Art critic Rosalind Krauss’s insight into pictorial art is highly representative of realism in a broader sense:

Perspective was, after all, the science of the real, not the mode of withdrawal from it. Perspective was the demonstration of the way reality and its representation could be mapped onto one another, the way the painted image and its real-world referent did in fact relate to one another—the first being a form of knowledge about the second.³⁷

In Updike’s Rabbit tetralogy, what we discern is this realist perspective described by Krauss, ‘the way reality and its representation could be mapped onto one another’. On the one hand, much as on the surface of a map, the tetralogy’s narrative space is essentially filled with language, verbal signs. On the other hand, the tetralogy eagerly lends itself to a real world. This impulse of tracing between the tetralogy’s linguistic surface and the external world it represents corresponds to what has been discovered in

³⁵ J. B. Harley, ‘Deconstructing the Map’, *Cartographica*, 26 (1989), 1-21 (p. 4).

³⁶ Jose Liste Noya, ‘Mapping the “Unmappable”’: Inhabiting the Fantastic Interface of “Gravity’s Rainbow”, *Studies in the Novel*, 29 (1997), 512-37 (p. 512).

³⁷ Rosalind Krauss, ‘Grids’, in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Boston: MIT Press, 1986), pp. 8-22 (p. 10).

mapmaking. In literature, it seems that a realist perspective works more comfortably with the novel, and more comfortably, still, with a novel series. A novel's narrative space, standing at the very end of Updike's spectrum of literary genres, is able to accommodate the substance of every reality and, therefore, can be 'mapped' onto the real world to the greatest extent.

The rhetorical underpinning of this tracing mode between the novel and reality is 'the predominance of metonymy', one of the two fundamental principles of arranging a discourse in Roman Jakobson's formalist theory of language.³⁸ According to Jakobson, one topic leads to another either through their 'similarity' or their 'contiguity'; while the former finds its expression in metaphor, the latter resides in metonymy.³⁹ For the moment, we mainly focus on metonymy; yet, just to give an idea of the two modes and how they function, it might be useful to look at an example given by Jakobson. If 'child' is the topic of a verbal discourse, the metonymic principle tends to combine 'child' with words such as 'sleeps, dozes, nods, naps' to build up a contiguous verbal sequence; on the other hand, the metaphorical principle tends to select words through 'equivalence, similarity and dissimilarity, synonymity and antonymity' such as 'kid, youngster, tot' to look for an equivalent, or a substitute, for the original word 'child'.⁴⁰ In short, the metonymic principle builds up a sequence and has a tendency of expanding or developing it, whereas the metaphorical principle cuts off or condenses the sequence by replacing the precedent word with another. In this sense, metonymy seems to be compatible with length, while

³⁸ Roman Jakobson, 'Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances', in *On Language*, ed. by Linda R. Waugh and Monique Monville-Burston (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 115-33 (pp. 129-30).

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Roman Jakobson, 'Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics', in *Style in Language*, ed. by Thomas A. Sebeok (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960), pp. 350-77 (p. 358). In metaphor, the discourse has the possibility of progressing either through similarity or dissimilarity. This reveals the instability of metaphor and its underpinning rhetorical figure: irony. I shall elaborate irony in the next section of this chapter.

metaphor is perhaps more at ease with shortness.

Reading the Rabbit tetralogy with some knowledge of the metonymic principle, we start to understand why a realist perspective finds its most comfortable form in the novel. Stressing that ‘accident rules these novels more than most’, Updike combines and packages, instead of selects, his fictional substance, relying on the sheer duration afforded by the tetralogy comfortably to accommodate such tactics. The result is that the novels amass a contiguous sequence, an accentuated sense of ‘going-on’, which maps the reader’s perception of ‘the ordinary going-on of time’, tending towards infinity.⁴¹ Published over three decades, with the time span of its main narrative mapped with the real historical time span and its content interwoven with historical occurrences, the tetralogy seems to go beyond, as Catherine Morley observes, ‘the confines of the fictional text’.⁴² James Wood notes that Updike offers ‘a belief that life will go on, that it will be thickly unvaried, that things will not come to a stop. The very form of the Rabbit books incarnates a belief that stories can *be continued*’.⁴³

An appreciation of the mapping impulse in the novel form, its impetus of ‘going on’, enables us to follow Rabbit’s visual world and to read the novels visually, a possibility in the novel as a genre that has been excluded by some short story critics. It is even arguable that the tetralogy lends itself more easily to epiphany, a literary effect most often associated with the short story or even called ‘the short story effect’.⁴⁴ Updike’s lyrical style in the tetralogy, I argue, allows a contiguous process to achieve visual unity, an

⁴¹ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*, p. 50.

⁴² Catherine Morley, ‘The Bard of Everyday Domesticity: John Updike’s Song of America’, in *The Quest for Epic in Contemporary American Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 57-83 (p.60).

⁴³ James Wood, ‘John Updike’s Complacent God’, in *The Broken Estate: Essays on Literature and Belief* (New York: Random House Modern Library, 2000), pp. 208-15 (p. 208).

⁴⁴ John Bayley, *The Short Story: Henry James to Elizabeth Bowen* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1988), p. 9.

element essential for epiphany, for without a realist perspective in the visual, there will not be ‘a manifestation in and through the visible world of an invisible life’.⁴⁵ An epiphany, according to David Lodge in *The Art of Fiction* (1992), is essentially ‘a showing’.⁴⁶ It is a term loosely applied to ‘any descriptive passage in which external reality is charged with a kind of transcendental significance for the perceiver’.⁴⁷ This said, it is rather understandable that Lodge, when looking for an example for epiphany, chooses a passage from the Rabbit tetralogy, which is full of descriptive passages.⁴⁸

Rabbit’s epiphany, according to Lodge, comes at a golf session between Rabbit and the local minister, Jack Eccles, in *Rabbit, Run*. The latter asks Rabbit why he left his wife, in hoping to persuade him to go back home. Rabbit answers: ‘there was this thing that wasn’t there’.⁴⁹ But when Eccles asks Rabbit to explain what is ‘this thing’, Rabbit cannot tell. However, in a well-struck tee-shot following Eccles’s moralist lecturing, Rabbit seems to ‘see’ it:

They reach the tee, a platform of turf beside a hunchbacked fruit tree offering fists of taut ivory-colored buds. ‘Let me go first,’ Rabbit says. ‘’Til you calm down.’ His heart is hushed, held in mid-beat, by anger. He doesn’t care about anything except getting out of this tangle. He wants it to rain. In avoiding looking at Eccles he looks at the ball, which sits high on the tee and already seems free of the ground. Very simply he brings the clubhead around his shoulder into it. The sound has a hollowness, a singleness he hasn’t heard before. His arms force his head up and his ball is hung way out, lunarly pale against the beautiful black blue of storm clouds, his grandfather’s color stretched dense across the north. It recedes along a line straight as a ruler-edge. Stricken; sphere, star, speck. It hesitates, and Rabbit thinks it will die, but he’s fooled, for the ball makes its hesitation the ground of

⁴⁵ Robert Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience* (New York: Norton, 1971), p. 175.

⁴⁶ David Lodge, ‘Epiphany’, in *The Art of Fiction* (London: Penguin, 1992), pp. 146-48 (p. 146).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 146-47.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 146-48.

⁴⁹ John Updike, *Rabbit, Run*, p. 114.

a final leap: with a kind of visible sob takes a last bite of space before vanishing in falling. ‘That’s it!’

he cries and, turning to Eccles with a grin of aggrandizement, repeats, ‘That’s it.’⁵⁰

By showing the whole process of the strike and having the reader follow closely Rabbit’s seeing, the passage offers visual unity, even with a vanishing point (‘vanishing in falling’) critical for pictorial unity as we shall see in the next chapter. With this visual unity, Rabbit seems to reach epistemological certainty, which aligns his epiphany to the New Critics’ notion of ‘an expressive unity’, or what Joseph Frank calls ‘an organic unity’ in literature.⁵¹ Recognising that fiction is ‘the words on the page’, the New Critics emphasise that all the elements in a fiction should function together to contribute to ‘the total effect of the story’, rather through showing than telling.⁵² Later short story critics tend to pick up Frank’s and the New Critics’ stance and relate this ‘expressive unity’ to lyricism, tagging epiphany as ‘the short story effect’, in John Bayley’s words. However, it should be noted that if epiphany, a visually ‘organic unity’, in literature, is to be achieved, it cannot do so without verbal signs, that is, language. A tetralogy, with its relatively big capacity to accommodate verbal signs, is able to carry the mission of an epiphanic seeing better than shorter forms. In a tetralogy’s big narrative space, the ‘going-on’ of verbal signs, if we apply Kermode’s observation to the visual, tends to map the reader’s perception of ‘the ordinary going-on’ of a visual world, thereby making possible ‘a manifestation in and through the visible world of an invisible life’.

However, the discovery of a visual aspect of the novel and the form’s compatibility with the so-called ‘spatial form’ does not mean that a novel’s narrative space unfolds

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 115-16.

⁵¹ Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, *Understanding Fiction* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1959), p.646; Joseph Frank, ‘Spatial Form in Modern Literature’, *The Widening Gyre: Crisis and Mastery in Modern Literature* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1963), pp. 3-62 (p. 10).

⁵² M. H. Abrams, ‘New Criticism’, in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Fort Worth: Harcourt, 1999), p. 180; Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, *Understanding Fiction*, p. 645.

without disruption. Or, in Shklovsky's terminology, while the novel confirms the reader's sensation of empirical reality, it does not mean that metonymy is the only functioning power and that the reader does not encounter a perception of defamiliarization in the process of reading. Form is often laid bare in the novel even within the predominant mode of contiguity. Kermode reminds us that a novel must exist 'without losing the formal qualities that make it a novel'.⁵³ Paying attention to some details in the Rabbit tetralogy, we encounter 'formal qualities', something that stands in the way of the straightforward mapping of fiction onto reality. Our reading, once again, begins with Rabbit's first escape from home in *Rabbit, Run* and with the map.

It was a sudden decision for Rabbit to run away from home. Not very familiar with directions outside his home city of Brewer, he quickly feels lost. After a failed attempt to find a map in a hardware store, he finally buys one in a diner hoping it can direct his way to the Gulf of Mexico. At the beginning, he drives with confidence. The signs, the lines, and the names on the map add up to meaning; that is, they conform to the metonymic reading and correspond to topographical details along the way. However, this contiguity between the map and Rabbit's driving does not last long. Rabbit soon gets lost again. The metonymic function of the map consequently falls apart. The signs no longer hold together and they become instead illegible marks. And Rabbit, unable to read through the marks, notices nothing but the surface of the map:

There are so many red lines and blue lines, long names, little towns, squares and circles and stars. He moves his eyes north but the only line he recognizes is the straight dotted line of the Pennsylvania-Maryland border. [...] His eyes blankly founder. [...] He burns his attention through the film fogging his eyes down into the map again. At once 'Frederick' pops into sight, but in trying to steady its

⁵³ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*, p. 130.

position he loses it, and fury makes the bridge of his nose ache. The names melt way and he sees the map whole, a net, all those red lines and blue lines and stars, a net he is somewhere caught in. He claws at it and tears it.⁵⁴

Instead of giving directions, the map introduces discontinuity into the contiguous process of Rabbit's reading. It reminds him and the reader of the formal boundary between the map itself and the territory to which it refers. As a result, Rabbit's map, even before he tears it into pieces, loses at least some of its function.

This attempt to disrupt the tracing mode of the map is informed by metaphor, the other basic principle, apart from metonymy, of arranging a discourse according to Jakobson's theory of language.⁵⁵ To read a text critically, as Lodge explains in a close reading of Jakobson, one cannot avoid conducting a 'metaphorical' reading, which involves selecting substitutes for the original element in the text in order to reach an interpretation.⁵⁶ Admittedly, to apply the word 'mapping' to the mode of representation in the novel form is, in itself, a metaphor. Furthermore, apart from the fact that a metonymic text cannot escape metaphorical interpretation as a whole, there are also 'a good deal of local metaphor[s], in the form both of overt tropes and of submerged symbolism' inside the text itself.⁵⁷ It is at those moments of local metaphors, such as the moment when Rabbit destroys the map, that reminders of the tetralogy's fictionality, namely the gap between fiction and reality, start to present themselves.

This incidence of local metaphor can be found in each novel of the tetralogy. In *Rabbit Redux*, Rabbit works for Brewer's local weekly newspaper, *The Brewer Vat*, as a linotype operator. When it comes to the news report about the US's space travel to the

⁵⁴ John Updike, *Rabbit, Run*, p. 33.

⁵⁵ Roman Jakobson, 'Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics', p. 358.

⁵⁶ David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 111.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

moon, Updike lays bare the printing process through Rabbit's operation of the linotype machine. The news report is, then, presented in pieces, much as Updike describes the printing process complete with Rabbit's hesitations and corrections.⁵⁸ The reader is reminded of the formal aspects of representation by a reminder of the textual nature of anything in print. In *Rabbit is Rich*, Rabbit's past glories as a basketball star are recalled briefly through 'those sports clippings hanging framed in his showroom'.⁵⁹ Rabbit's escape from home at the age of twenty-six in *Rabbit, Run*, is referred to by Rabbit himself in a conversation with Charlie Stavros as only 'a story': "One time when we were pretty newly married I got sore at Janice for something, just being herself probably, and drove to West Virginia and back in one night. Crazy."⁶⁰ In *Rabbit at Rest*, Rabbit has a coronary angioplasty to his heart and he is particularly conscious that the procedure of the operation is monitored on 'several TV screens that translate him into jerking bright lines, vital signs: the Rabbit Angstrom Show'.⁶¹ Alone in the Florida condo, when Rabbit meditates on his Pennsylvania home, he feels remote and removed, and his whole life seems 'to have been unreal, or no realer than the lives on TV shows'.⁶² And above all, playing golf with his friends in Florida, the fifty-six-year-old Rabbit starts to doubt his faith in 'the inner magic, the key' and 'infinity', an epiphanic insight gained by himself thirty years ago at the gold session with Eccles.⁶³

In having Rabbit, his fictional character, work with words, articulate the view that his life is only 'a story' or 'the Rabbit Angstrom Show', and throw doubt at his own

⁵⁸ John Updike, *Rabbit Redux*, pp. 24-25.

⁵⁹ John Updike, *Rabbit is Rich*, p. 27.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁶¹ John Updike, *Rabbit at Rest*, p.246.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 427.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 49, p. 58.

epiphany, Updike interrupts the reader's contiguous tracing of Rabbit's life with the real and draws attention to the fictional nature of the novels. These local metaphors, Morley observes, contribute to a sense of irony 'reflective (and indeed reflexive) of the processes of the writer', which 'aligns the author and the protagonist in their efforts to create, and of course to sell, words themselves'.⁶⁴

However, despite the local reminders of fictionality commented upon above, that impression of 'the ordinary going-on of time', as Kermode has it, persists strongly throughout the tetralogy, which functions as a resistance to interpretation. The metaphors are integrated, or 'naturalised' as Pam Morris observes in literary realism, in Rabbit's life to the extent that everything feels natural, and indeed 'real', when Rabbit dies from a heart attack at the closure of the tetralogy.⁶⁵ As if to endorse such an illusion, when Rabbit dies, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* gave obituary notices which are usually reserved for people existing in the external world rather than in fiction.⁶⁶ This sense of continuation also enters the short sequel 'Rabbit Remembered' (2000), in which the lives of Rabbit's family members and friends, as is the case in the empirical world, do continue.

Updike expresses this accentuated sense of 'going-on' in the tetralogy, an impression that 'accident rules these novels more than most':

Thought and act exist on one shimmering plane; the writer and reader move in a purged space, on the travelling edge of the future, without vantage for reflection or regret or a seeking of proportion. [...]

A non-judgmental immersion was my aesthetic and moral aim.⁶⁷

If this 'non-judgmental immersion' is successful and if Updike and the reader do move

⁶⁴ Catherine Morley, 'The Bard of Everyday Domesticity: John Updike's Song of America', pp. 69-70.

⁶⁵ Pam Morris, *Realism*, p. 113.

⁶⁶ Catherine Morley, 'The Bard of Everyday Domesticity: John Updike's Song of America', p. 60.

⁶⁷ John Updike, 'Afterword by the Author', in *Rabbit, Run*, p. 269.

in a 'purged space' without a vantage view for judgment, I argue that this is made possible by an 'immersion' in words in the tetralogy. This 'immersion' in words is transformed contiguously into 'the quality of existence itself that hovers beneath the quotidian details, what the scholastic philosophers called the *ens*'.⁶⁸ In other words, the 'going on' of language afforded by the tetralogy's own length traces so strongly the 'quotidian details' that constitute 'existence itself' that the metaphorical efforts which would lay bare the tetralogy's fictional identity have been skilfully 'submerged' in the narrative.⁶⁹ 'The so-called realist literature', informs Jakobson, 'intimately tied with the metonymic principle, still defies interpretation'.⁷⁰ But at the same time, it is also this very resistance to interpretation that makes Rabbit's fictional life, when the tetralogy eventually ends and a sense of an ending has to be acknowledged, 'valid and valuable'.⁷¹ In the afterword to the Rabbit tetralogy, Updike has to lay bare the novel series' form. Yet, in the meantime, he expresses an unwillingness to stop writing, to part with his fictional character, Rabbit Angstrom. The fictional journey of Rabbit's life has accompanied, at least, part of Updike's and the reader's life: 'even after a tetralogy, almost everything is still left to say. [...] But by then it was time to say goodbye'.⁷²

Updike's recognition of what a tetralogy can do (it creates an impulse of 'going on') and cannot do (even a tetralogy has to end) represents a good response to some critics' complaints about the tetralogy and, above all, evinces a special relationship between his descriptive style and the novel form. His attitude makes it possible to turn some negative critical assessments towards an understanding of the particular mode of seeing in the

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing*, p. 111.

⁷⁰ Roman Jakobson, 'Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics', p. 375.

⁷¹ David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing*, p. 111.

⁷² John Updike, 'Afterword by the Author', in *Rabbit, Run*, p. 278.

novel as a genre, and the novel's difference from shorter forms. Derek Wright, for instance, also pays attention to Rabbit's first unsuccessful road trip and the map in the first novel of the tetralogy.⁷³ Starting from the concrete spaces in the novel, examining urban and domestic landscapes, and then moving to the novel's narrative space, Wright looks for reasons behind Rabbit's inability of finding direction both in the road trip and in his life.⁷⁴ Discerning that Updike's protagonist is always trapped in 'an oppressively commodity-packed world', that is, 'the mundane, concrete visible world' being all that Rabbit can perceive, Wright seems to find the answer to his question:

If the novel's religious dimension remains tenuous it is, of course, in part the fault of Updike's style, which pays massive attention to material detail. This style, which habitually gives the descriptive and decorative priority over the interpretative and interrogative, seems at times to live in awe of surfaces and to proliferate the objects of suburban life with an almost hallucinatory fervour. The material world is, simply, too much with us in this book, its inescapable clutter too well done, walling the reader in with detail. The visible is so substantially created that it blots out the invisible.⁷⁵

What Wright hopes to see in the novel is that Updike gives Rabbit's life more direction or meaning. Yet, by claiming Rabbit's life is 'mapless motion', Wright only refers to the end or the purpose of the map: getting directions. Wright does not realise that a map, before offering any direction or signification, has to stay with, to map, 'the concrete visual world' and to describe on its own surface as faithfully as possible the world's 'material detail'. Mapping, rather than arriving at a 'vantage', is precisely what Updike chooses to do in the Rabbit tetralogy; this is also what the tetralogy's narrative space allows him to do.

⁷³ Derek Wright, 'Mapless Motion: Form and Space in Updike's *Rabbit, Run*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 37 (1991), 35-44.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 37, p. 43.

Viewed this way, what Wright finds problematic about *Rabbit, Run* turns out to be an important insight for understanding the narrative space in the novel and its difference from shorter forms. Passing judgment on the novel at the end of the essay, Wright's analysis offers a kind of summary of what has been discussed in this section:

Rabbit, Run [...] [has] the air of being too deliberately done and with a self-conscious artfulness which suggests that they finally exist nowhere outside of the protagonal psychology and the fiction in which it is framed. The implication appears to be that only novelistic form is able to accommodate the kind of space and spacious freedom – the uninhibited, uncluttered movement and entropic flight from form – which Rabbit Angstrom yearns for. This mapless motion exists only in purely imaginative, verbal space.⁷⁶

But what Wright disclaims is precisely what needs to be recognised: no art work can do without form, without 'a self-conscious artfulness'. Literature exists in 'verbal space', just as Updike tells us early on that there is no hiding that the effort of a writer 'is being made in language. [...] Surely language, printed language, is what we all know we are reading and writing'.⁷⁷ It makes little sense to talk about any work of representation or to conduct any genre study, if representation's 'prescribed space', as Updike calls it, is not acknowledged.⁷⁸ A novel, or even, a novel series, eventually ends, but its verbal space, as Wright rightly points out, is big enough to accommodate a relatively 'spacious freedom', which seems to be a 'flight from form'. While critics such as John W. Aldridge, echoing Wright's negative assessment, blame Updike for writing too much only to 'cover a lapse of book-length duration', he overlooks that a novelist's work is, first of all, to fill up the novel's space with words.⁷⁹ Aldridge and Wright fail to recognise the fundamental

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp.43-44.

⁷⁷ John Updike, *Self-Consciousness: Memoirs* (London: André Deutsch, 1989), pp. 98-99.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 103.

⁷⁹ John W. Aldridge, 'The Private Vice of John Updike', in *Time to Murder and Create: The Contemporary Novel in Crisis* (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1972), pp. 164-70 (pp. 166-67).

structure of narrative, which exists, notes Paul de Man, ‘in the tendency of the language toward narrative, the spreading out along the axis of an imaginary time in order to give duration to what is, in fact, simultaneous within the subject’.⁸⁰ By writing extensively, Updike says a lot, instead of having ‘nothing to say’.⁸¹ And by saying a lot, Updike creates a resistance to interpretation or judgment of the Rabbit tetralogy. This resistance and the delayed interpretation of the tetralogy, qualified by the tetralogy’s very length, is not available in shorter forms such as the poem or the short story.

III. The gridding impulse in Updike’s poetry

If the novel, in Updike’s hands, is a literary form mainly dominated by contiguity and its mode of seeing revealed through the mapping impulse, how might we characterise the mode of representation in the short story, a form with smaller narrative space? Before attending to this question and in an effort to broaden the generic claims, albeit hedged around with inevitable qualifications, it may well be useful to look at the poem, a form of even smaller space than the short story and situated at the other end in Updike’s literary spectrum.

Updike’s poem ‘Ex-Basketball Player’ (1954) can be the central text in this section of the chapter because it stands at the other end of the Rabbit tetralogy in terms of ‘volume’, while at the same time maintaining a kindred theme. If the tetralogy’s realist perspective is mainly achieved by the contiguity between its own length and narrative, in other words, an attempted mapping between the narrative and life, the poem certainly fails to offer a realist perspective due to its own shortness. What, then, would be the

⁸⁰ Paul de Man, ‘The Rhetoric of Temporality’, in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 187-228 (p. 225).

⁸¹ John W. Aldridge, ‘The Private Vice of John Updike’, p. 170.

counterpart for this shortness in the visual sphere in terms of its mode of representation?

If a realist perspective tends towards expansion, development, continuation and narrative, the grid, a visual structure ‘emblematic of the modernist ambition’ in art, announces a will to silence and a hostile attitude to literature, to narrative, and to discourse.⁸² While from a realist perspective, reality and its representation are mapped on to each other, everything about the grid, as Rosalind Krauss proposes, ‘opposes that relationship, cuts it off from the very beginning’.⁸³ Reduced only to vertical and horizontal lines, the grid immediately ‘defamiliarizes’ the viewer’s habitual perception of looking for something that he/she can relate to the external world. That is, if the grid really refers to something, it only refers to ‘the surface of the painting itself’.⁸⁴

To claim a connection between poetry and the grid seems to be a farfetched idea: the romantic, lyrical, and symbolist side of the former and the angularity and high rationalism implied in the latter. But I argue that poetry corresponds to the grid in many aspects and Updike’s poem ‘Ex-Basketball Player’ may be usefully studied alongside the structure of the grid. In exploring the gap between the grid and the external world and the complexity in terms of space and time in the grid’s dominant rhetorical mode, metaphor, I hope to respond to two questions. Firstly, what is it that contributes to the mode of representation in the characteristics of poetic form that most critics cannot forego in defining the modern short story; secondly, in what way does temporality manifest itself in that lyricism, a literary trend that, according to most short story critics, only relates to an organic aesthetics and eschews or relegates temporality. In responding to these key questions, I hope to make my way, gradually yet visually, towards a better understanding

⁸² Rosalind Krauss, ‘Grids’, p. 9.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

of the short story's special narrative space.

Flat as a map, yet geometricised and ordered, the grid crowds out 'the dimensions of the real' and replaces them with 'the lateral spread of a single surface'.⁸⁵ The grid is immediately spatial; or, if there is any temporal dimension, it seems to only reside in the 'now', in its being there in the present moment.⁸⁶ Likewise, reduced to lines and stanzas and written normally on one or a few pages, a poem gravitates towards wordlessness and resists narrative. The poem's limited space and tight organisation makes it similar to the grid: both are highly self-conscious and both remind the beholder of the 'now', the present moment, in terms of content and form. If the Rabbit tetralogy has the reader trace gradually the life of Rabbit Angstrom and defers the reader's realisation that the tetralogy is, in New Critical language, 'words on the page', the effect given by the poem 'Ex-Basketball Player' (Appendix 1) is a reversed one: in five stanzas, the poem presents both the 'now' of Flick and the fact that it is 'words on the page'.⁸⁷

Once the best player in the high school team, Flick works in a local garage. In the first stanza, expressions of location ('Pearl Avenue', 'high-school lot', 'trolley tracks', 'blocks', 'Colonel McComsky Plaza', and 'Berth's Garage'), together with those of direction ('runs', 'bends', 'stops', 'cuts off', 'on the corner facing west'), demonstrates something similar to grid drawing.⁸⁸ In providing the geographical coordinates, Updike not only gives the location of Flick's job, Berth's garage, but also illustrates the grid plan of a small American town. At the first glance, one may say that this impulse of offering a grid structure bears little difference from the mapping of Rabbit's road trips, for a town

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 9.

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 9-10.

⁸⁷ M. H. Abrams, 'New Criticism', in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Fort Worth: Harcourt, 1999), p. 180

⁸⁸ John Updike, 'Ex-Basketball Player', in *The Carpentered Hen and Other Tame Creatures* (New York: Knopf, 1982), pp. 4-5 (p.4).

can be originally designed in a grid plan and the map of the town can be in the shape of a grid.

However, if the duration of the Rabbit tetralogy is long enough to promote a metonymic mode in order that Rabbit's life over three decades seems to spread out over the pages, the shortness of the poem certainly cannot do the same. Its shortness can only provide an almost abstract structure, in a grid image or a grid-like map, of where Berth's Garage is located. The last line of the first stanza ('and there, most days, you'll find Flick Webb, who helps Berth out') poses an end to the metonymic mode of geographic mapping and brings the reader quickly to the destination.⁸⁹ On the other hand, the metaphorical mode seems to prevail because the images, primarily in the form of lines or grids, and Flick's life mainly refer to each other on the basis of, what Roman Jakobson notes earlier, 'equivalence, similarity and dissimilarity, synonymity and antonymity'.⁹⁰ If we read the third stanza, which introduces Flick's past as a high school basketball star, we start to note a similarity-based metaphor between 'Pearl Avenue' and Flick's life: both once had a chance to go far, yet were 'cut off' early.⁹¹ Yet, not every metaphor is based on similarity or synonymity. The five short 'idiot pumps' in the second stanza refers to the opposite, posing a dissimilarity-based metaphor between themselves and Flick's tall figure. In the last stanza, the 'applauding tiers of Necco Wafers, Nibs, and Juju Beads' at Mae's Luncheonette recall the prime of Flick's time when he is surrounded by, and very different from, the applauding crowds.⁹²

The lines and grids in the poem promote a spatial impression, crowding out history

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Roman Jakobson, 'Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics', p. 358.

⁹¹ John Updike, 'Ex-Basketball Player', p. 4.

⁹² Ibid, pp. 4-5.

and the future by presenting the ‘now’, the present moment of Flick.⁹³ But, this does not mean that these lines and grids do not deal with temporality.⁹⁴ On the contrary, the spatial impression, the ‘now’ of Flick, can barely exist without being disturbed. This is because grids are structured by crossroads, where vertical and horizontal lines meet; each of these lines has a tendency of going in its own direction, spatial or temporal. The image of crossroads in the grid seems to visually represent the metaphorical mode of discourse organisation discovered in Updike’s poem: the tendency of visual continuity is cut off or condensed by the fact that the precedent image is replaced by an equivalent. Yet this replacement is not a stable one because the equivalent can come from either way, a similar image or a very different image, each juxtaposing the other as if posing a parody to each other. We may reread Updike’s poem and find that the poem is filled with ‘crossroads’ of different metaphorical images for Flick. As we have noticed, the beginning of the poem, ‘Pearl Avenue runs past the high-school lot, bends with the trolley tracks, and stops, cut off before it has a chance to go two blocks’, seems to recall that Flick once has the potential of going further as a basketball player. But ‘Colonel McComsky Plaza’, where Pearl Avenue bends and stops, also tells us something about Flick: he works at ‘Berth’s Garage’ at the corner of the plaza. In other words, the geographic crossroads, the grid so to speak, structured by ‘Pearl Avenue’ and ‘Colonel McComsky Plaza’ is a metaphor of the crossroads between Flick’s glorious past and his possible future of staying as a mediocre garage worker. Viewed in this vein, the five ‘idiot pumps’ not only poses a juxtaposing image of Flick, but also can be seen as alluding to

⁹³ Rosalind Krauss, ‘Grids’, p. 10.

⁹⁴ When artists talk about grids, they not only talk about space, but also, and most often, talk about time and depth. Many grid paintings bear temporal elements in their titles: Edwin Mieczknowsky’s *New Year’s Eve 1970* (1970), Kenneth Noland’s *Until Tomorrow* (1971), and Agnes Martin’s *Tremolo* (1962), which borrows a term in music, a medium which progresses through time.

Flick's present identity: he works among the pumps and, therefore, is no longer very different from them. Much the same may be said of the 'bright applauding tiers of Necco Wafers, Nibs, and Juju Beads'. While, in a first reading, they appear only to represent the applauding crowds for Flick when he is a basketball star, in a second reading they remind us of Flick's reality: he is as trivial as 'Juju Beads'. The discovery of the 'crossroads' of these images brings us back to the theme of the poem, which is not simply to show a garage worker at the present moment, but rather and similar to that of the Rabbit tetralogy, 'to show a high-school athletic hero in the wake of his glory days'.⁹⁵ While the tetralogy has the space to spread out the duration between Rabbit's early adulthood to his death, the poem can only cut off that duration and replace the sequential features with metaphors, which appears, at the first sight, a 'spatial organization' and portrays only Flick's present.⁹⁶

What is implied in the 'crossroads' of these different metaphorical images in Updike's poem, and visually in the structure of the grid, is discontinuity, a gap, between an image and its meaning. Indeed, a discrepancy between a word and its meaning, gained through 'relations and differences', is the basic feature of language in Saussurian linguistics.⁹⁷ This insight, in turn, recalls, Victor Shklovsky's notion of 'defamiliarization'.⁹⁸ By using metaphors, a poet lays bare form, the boundary between the poetic world and the external world. But there is something more specific about defamiliarization in poetry. By saying this, we come across an important rhetorical figure for the poetic form: irony. M. H. Abrams's has a rather detailed definition of verbal irony

⁹⁵ John Updike, 'Afterword by the Author', in *Rabbit, Run* (London: Penguin, 2006), pp. 265-80 (p. 267).

⁹⁶ Rosalind Krauss, 'Grids', p. 13.

⁹⁷ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. by Wade Baskin (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), p. 117.

⁹⁸ Victor Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique', p. 21.

here:

Verbal irony is a statement in which the meaning that a speaker implies differs sharply from the meaning that is ostensibly expressed. The ironic statement usually involves the explicit expression of one attitude or evaluation, but with indications in the overall speech-situation that the speaker intends a very different, and often opposite, attitude or evaluation.⁹⁹

Abrams points to a possible binary opposition in verbal irony: what one says and what one means can be sharply different, or even opposite. And this is what we see in the 'crossroads' of Flick's images in 'Ex-Basketball Player'; that is, there is not only a difference, but rather a sharp difference, between the image and its meaning. Ironies are evident in different images of Flick: between 'Pearl Avenue' and 'Berth's Garage'; between Flick's tall figure and 'the idiot pumps'; between 'his hands were like wild birds' and the lug wrench's indifference to his hand; and finally, between the implication that Flick's was once surrounded by applauding crowds in the basketball stadium and that he now hangs around Mae's Luncheonette facing the 'bright applauding tiers of Necco Wafers, Nibs, and Juju Beads'.¹⁰⁰

The issue being raised here is the dominance of a symbolist aesthetic in the poetic form. That is, as Frank Kermode diagnoses it,

The human mind is so constituted as to be able to recognize images of which it can have no perceived knowledge – the magic assumption, or the assumption that makes so much of dreams. [...] Magic came, in an age of science, to the defence of poetry.¹⁰¹

This symbolist aesthetic provides the underpinning of some short story critics' understanding of poetry, on which 'the lyric short story' or lyricism in the short story is

⁹⁹ M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Fort Worth: Harcourt, 1999), p. 135.

¹⁰⁰ John Updike, 'Ex-Basketball Player', p. 4.

¹⁰¹ Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1986), pp. 110.

grounded.¹⁰² It is also based on this referential understanding of symbol, namely the whole work of art being regarded as an image, that the New Critics' 'an expressive unity', Joseph Frank's 'organic unity', and above all, an epiphanic reading of literature are developed.¹⁰³ However, as we have discussed in the previous section, if epiphany, a visually 'organic unity', in literature, is to be sustained, it cannot do without discourse and discourse needs space and duration. While in the Rabbit tetralogy, we have perhaps seen some images getting closer to their meanings, in the limited space of the poem 'Ex-Basketball Player', this seems impossible. So what Updike chooses to do, and this is also what romantic poets tend to do in Robert Scholes's observation, is to use images with the assistance of irony: presenting one image and then quickly juxtaposing it with another image, a 'renewal though parody', which lays bare their own formal properties.¹⁰⁴ In our process of understanding the poetic form, it is important to keep in mind Scholes's thoughtful reading of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). Whereas the book remains a classic for the study of poetry and the origin of epiphany, Scholes draws our attention to the limits, the dead end, of symbolism confronted by William Wordsworth, a romantic poet who wants so much to rely on the magic power of the symbol but fails:

Wordsworth, as a poet, faced the problem of worn-out forms, conventions degenerated into clichés, a whole poetic language which had itself hardened into a film of familiarity, obscuring both natural objects and human nature. With the instincts of a great poet, he set about to lay bare the devices of this stultifying poetic tradition.¹⁰⁵

Scholes tells us that the poetic form depends on the interplay between two key elements:

¹⁰² Eileen Baldeshwiler, 'The Lyric Short Story: The Sketch of a History', in *The New Short Story Theories*, ed. by Charles E. May (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994), pp. 231-41.

¹⁰³ Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image*, p. 110.

¹⁰⁴ Robert Scholes, *An Introduction: Structuralism in Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), p. 175.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

symbol and irony. While the faculties of the former quickly dry up and become clichés, the latter effaces or mocks the former, laying bare the fact that the former is a cliché. Once a symbol is about to establish itself as a magical or ‘mystified’ image, there is tendency towards its rapid effacement by a ‘demystified’ image, which once again, would become a cliché and be quickly effaced by another image.¹⁰⁶ This tends to be a non-stoppable process, of which irony is its fundamental driving force. The constant parting and crossing of clichés and ironies to the clichés, resembles a grid structure whose horizontal lines and vertical lines seem to cut off each other in an ‘infinite continuum’.¹⁰⁷

After discovering irony in the structure of grid and the poetic form, we may be clearer as to why there is an unsettling tension in the poem. The tension comes from the ironic relationship between Flick’s ‘mystified’ past and his ‘demystified’ future, each tends to mock the other with no intention to reconcile.¹⁰⁸ The crossroads where Flick’s ‘now’ stands has the tendency of bending towards either Flick’s glorious past or his mediocre future. Whenever there is something referring to Flick’s past as a basketball star in the lines mentioned above, a mystification of Flick so to speak, we see almost immediately a demystification, a clear ‘but’, to indicate discontinuity or change of direction as if in a grid. Therefore, the poem reads with a strong sense of binary opposition, sentimental and comical. Pearl Avenue runs past the high-school lot, (but) stops, cut off before it has a chance to go two blocks; Flick stands tall, (but) among the idiot pumps; his hands were like wild birds, (but) it makes no difference to the lug wrench; the bright tiers are applauding, (but) they are only Necco Wafers, Nibs and Juju Beads.

All these lines are ironic, but the irony of the poem does not stop at this level. As

¹⁰⁶ Paul de Man, ‘The Rhetoric of Temporality’, p. 222.

¹⁰⁷ John Elderfield, ‘Grids’, *Artforum*, X (1972), 52-59 (p. 56).

¹⁰⁸ Paul de Man, ‘The Rhetoric of Temporality’, p. 222.

suggested earlier, irony, like a grid structure, has the momentum of duplication, which is ‘a self-escalating act of consciousness’ and needs to engender more discontinuities.¹⁰⁹ Irony has a self-mocking nature and can go beyond the ironic level that we have seen just now and arrive at an ‘irony of irony’.¹¹⁰

In the fourth stanza of ‘Ex-Basketball Player’, there is a curious line: ‘once in a while, as a gag, he dribbles an inner tube, but most of us remember anyway’.¹¹¹ While Updike allows the reader to see the crossroads, the irony so to speak, of Flick’s mystified past and de-mystified future, we would think Flick himself is still in the mystified mode. However, the line quoted above tells us that Flick sometimes ‘dribbles an inner tube’ to pose a joke at his own expense; that is, he is not only able to demystify his past, but also rise above the gap, the irony, between his past and his future. This is a higher level of ironic consciousness, the level of ‘irony of irony’. Therefore, the whole poem has achieved an insight, which is, as Paul de Man would say, ‘no longer vulnerable to irony’.¹¹² It is a consciousness that ‘fully recognizes a past condition as one of error and stands in a present that, however painful, sees things as they actually are’.¹¹³ To this extent, one may say that Flick has arrived at a stance of wisdom.

However, it is in this stance of wisdom, a seemingly united and comfortable self, that the poem’s temporality, its fundamental formal discontinuity, becomes manifest. Flick’s stance of wisdom can only be gained within a temporal experience; that is to say, Flick is only able to mock himself after experiencing his own fall from a basketball star to a garage worker. And this experience takes time. In other words, if this rather long

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 220.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 218.

¹¹¹ John Updike, ‘Ex-Basketball Player’, p. 4.

¹¹² Paul de Man, ‘The Rhetoric of Temporality’, p. 224.

¹¹³ Ibid.

temporal duration can be accommodated in the novel form, it cannot easily exist in the poetic form. It is in this challenge, and perhaps this impossibility, of accommodating the real duration of Flick's experiences in the poem's short space on the one hand and the poem's presentation of different stages of consciousness necessarily acquired over time on the other hand that the poem starts to reveal its discontinuity in relation to the world: it is an irony of the actual time and thus an irony of narrative.

At this point, we can usefully recall something similar in the Rabbit tetralogy. Rabbit gains a similar stance of wisdom on his death bed in *Rabbit at Rest*: 'His consciousness comes and goes, and he marvels that in its gaps the world is being tended to, just as it was in the centuries before he was born'.¹¹⁴ Both Rabbit and Flick have acquired a sense of self-mocking and are able to assume a distance from themselves in order to reflect rather objectively upon their own positions in relation to the world: they are no more special than other ordinary human beings. This insight, this degree of wisdom, however, is achieved in the Rabbit tetralogy and in the poem 'Ex-Basketball Player' through the dominance of two different modes of representation. In the case of the Rabbit tetralogy, it is contiguity, 'the spreading out along the axis of an imaginary time in order to give duration' that allows the reader to follow Rabbit's different stages of life closely.¹¹⁵ Above all, that Rabbit's wisdom arrives right before his death can be seen as an irony, a discontinuity, given that the tetralogy begins with the twenty-six-year-old Rabbit, who has already passed his glory days, though remaining trapped in his memory. Seen this way, one might almost claim that the Rabbit tetralogy is the narrative or duration of an irony. Looking at the poem 'Ex-Basketball Player' on the other hand, we find a different

¹¹⁴ John Updike, *Rabbit at Rest*, p. 465.

¹¹⁵ Paul de Man, 'The Rhetoric of Temporality', p. 225.

treatment of the experience of time. Flick is still young, but he already mocks himself. The poem's theme, as that of the tetralogy, is the duration between Flick's past and his ordinary life. Yet, the poem's short form ironically juxtaposes the two different stages of consciousness within one brief moment: Flick's 'now'. In this sense, we may call, somehow turning the assessment of the tetralogy around, Updike's poem the irony of a narrative or a duration.

IV. The window in Updike's short fiction

Following this exploration of the two ends of Updike's spectrum of literary genres in terms of length, the novel and the poem and their respective modes of representation, the map and the grid, we come back to the short story. Given that the short story is 'situated between the novel and the poem, and capable of giving us the pleasures of both', it is reasonable to assume that this special pleasure of the short story resides within the spectrum set by the map and the grid, metonymy and irony.¹¹⁶ And if we look for a visual structure to represent the type of seeing in the short story, it might, then, be something that contains the rhetorical attributes of both the map and the grid, representational on the one hand and anti-representational on the other. Of course, every work of art, as we have discussed in the previous sections, entails both and partakes of the map and the grid to different degrees. There is always a predominance of one over the other in these two cases: the map, as it is traced, is overwhelmingly controlled by metonymy and its ironic reading comes later; the grid, on the contrary, is overwhelmingly governed by irony and the metonymic reading comes later. We would, then, assume that this visual structure for

¹¹⁶ John Updike, 'Introduction to *Self-Selected Stories of John Updike*', in *More Matter*, p.770.

the short story is something that can be viewed in both ways at one and the same time. Yet, how exactly the two modes of representation function in the short story is the concern of this section.

‘Ace in the Hole’ (1953) traces one afternoon in Fred Anderson’s life. Once a high school basketball champion and nicknamed Ace, Fred goes back home after losing his job as a garage worker. He is worried about telling the news to his wife. The story starts with him driving back home after his last day of work:

No sooner did his car touch the boulevard heading home than Ace flicked on the radio. He needed the radio, especially today. In the seconds before the tubes warmed up, he said aloud, doing it just to hear a human voice, ‘Jesus. She’ll pop her lid.’ [...] The Five Kings were doing ‘Blueberry Hill’; to hear them made Ace feel so sure inside that from the pack pinched between the car roof and the sun shield he plucked a cigarette, hung it on his lower lip, snapped a match across the rusty place on the dash, held the flame in the instinctive spot near the tip of his nose, dragged, and blew out the match, all in time to the music. He rolled down the window and snapped the match so it spun end-over-end into the gutter.¹¹⁷

Ace driving with the radio on reminds us of Rabbit’s radio-accompanied road trips, the radio helping the reader to trace his movement fairly smoothly. Such a metonymic reading is confirmed by Updike’s detailed description of Ace’s lighting a cigarette. The passage conforms to a realist perspective both spatially and temporally. The result is that the narrative duration can be mapped contiguously onto a movement in reality easily recognised by the reader: Ace starting the car, switching on the radio, thinking to himself, a song coming out from the radio, Ace plucking a cigarette, snapping the match, lighting the cigarette, dragging, blowing out the match, rolling down the window and snapping the match into the gutter. Metonymy is the dominant principle in the passage and

¹¹⁷ John Updike, ‘Ace in the Hole’, in *The Same Door* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), pp. 17-25 (p. 17).

everything progresses in time to the radio music.

Yet, even as the reader traces Ace's moves continuously, the spatial boundaries of his moves are delineated: the car roof, the sun shield, the cigarette, the match, and the car window. All these lines frame Ace's movement in a limited space: his car. While waiting for the traffic light and singing to 'Blueberry Hill', Ace is provoked by a teenager from a nearby car. A conversation between Ace and the teenager ensues through their car windows:

'Go, Dad, bust your lungs!' a kid's voice blared. The kid was riding in a '52 Pontiac that had pulled up beside Ace at the light. The profile of the driver, another kid, was dark over his shoulder.

Ace looked over at him and smiled slowly, just letting one side of his mouth lift a little. 'Shove it,' he said, good-naturedly, across the little gap of years that separated them. He knew how they felt, young and mean and shy.

But the kid, who looked Greek, lifted his thick upper lip and spat out the window. The spit gleamed on the asphalt like a half-dollar.

'Now isn't that pretty?' Ace said, keeping one eye on the light. 'You miserable wop. You are *miserable*.'¹¹⁸

A conversation usually requires two visual fields as the two sides of the conversation look at each other, a formal structure we will return to in the context of cinematic representation and the short story. And this is the case between Ace and the teenager at the beginning: they look over through the car windows at each other. However, while studying the features of the teenager, Ace seems to reflect on himself. He realises that he is only a little older than the teenager and he understands how teenagers feel. This self-reflective consciousness of Ace, relating himself to the teenager, renders Ace's seeing a less straightforward one. The car window from which Ace looks over at the teenager

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 17.

becomes more of a mirror to reflect himself than a transparent medium onto a world. Yet, while the reader may assume that Ace would be like Flick, who has acquired a sense of self-irony and might respond, in a case like this, with silence to the provocation, Ace does something different. Seeing the boy spitting out the window, he confronts the boy calling him 'you miserable wop'. Ace's car window at this moment regains its transparency and continues to offer Ace a view outside.

Although Ace quickly drives away when the traffic light changes, cutting short the confrontation, tension nonetheless persists in the story. What underlines this tension is the unsettling nature of Ace's seeing, which enters an on-going negotiation between the unfolding or the expansion of a view, a narrative, to create duration and the disruption of that duration to create reflection. And this seeing, well represented by the car window, offers a framed visual surface simultaneously transparent and reflective.

The shining surface of a window can both reveal and reflect back, but these two functions are never in a calm equivalence. On the contrary, the relationship between the two, the window's transparency and reflectiveness, is an inverse one: the more straightforwardly the window offers a view beyond itself, the less it reflects or mirrors the view on the other side.¹¹⁹ One may take the surface of a shop window as an example. The window at once reveals the shop displays behind and reflects the view outside the shop. If a person stands outside the shop, the more he/she sees the view revealed, the less he/she sees the view reflected, and vice versa. Meanwhile, in this process of discovering two viewing possibilities of the window, particularly when one notices the window's pane's reflectiveness, one cannot avoid noticing the window's surface, its own framed

¹¹⁹ Jonathan Miller, *On Reflection* (London: National Gallery Publications, 1998), pp. 59-61.

existence. As Rosalind Krauss has it, the frame and the bars of a window form a structure of grids, which freezes and locks the view into an autonomous space, the space of its own being.¹²⁰ As entertained earlier, it is precisely the grid, with irony being its predominant rhetorical figure, that offers an unstable borderland between the inside and the outside of a surface, both of which have a tendency of collapsing into each other.

Given that the window exists in reality yet is also a structure of grids, it is reasonable to claim that it combines the rhetorics of the map and the grid at one and the same time. And this combination is a rather complex one: on the one hand, the window reveals a view that can be traced within a duration; on the other hand, the window frame, the grid, tends to disrupt the view revealed, cutting short the duration and foregrounding its own framed surface. As a result, there is a precarious equilibrium between the view revealed and the view reflected, the foregrounding of the surface. Neither is able to continue for long, for before they have a chance to continue moving forward, the window frame has collapsed one view into the other. This precarious equilibrium derives from the ongoing juxtaposition and negotiation between the two modes of representation, between the rhetorics of the map and the grid. Whereas the window frame prevents the view revealed from developing into a long narrative, the existence of duration itself, even if a short one, nevertheless prevents the window from laying bare too much its own surface or gravitating too much towards a hostility to narrative.

Coming back to Updike's 'Ace in the Hole', there are more 'windows' in Ace's seeing, providing more precarious surfaces that have the tendency of revealing a world and reflecting itself, even when there are no concrete windows. While talking to his

¹²⁰ Rosalind Krauss, 'Grids', p. 17.

mother, Ace cannot help paying attention to the teenager across the street playing basketball. A remark to himself, 'kids just didn't think', locates Ace as still trapped in his identity as a champion and superior to the 'kid'.¹²¹ Later, waiting anxiously at home for his wife Evey and knowing that she will take his unemployment badly, Ace goes to the bathroom and combs his hair in front of the mirror. He notices that his hairline gets higher every day and finally 'mussed the hair in front enough for one little lock to droop over his forehead, like Alan Ladd. It made the temple seem lower than it was'.¹²² Ace's seeing, either on his mother's porch or in the mirror, is ironic. It offers an invisible 'frame' that juxtaposes Ace's two different identities: Ace Anderson, the basketball star (the word 'Ace' represents the card of the highest value in card games) and Fred Anderson, the unemployed garage worker, neither able to be reconciled with the other. We are reminded of Harry Angstrom in the Rabbit tetralogy and Flick in the poem 'Ex-basketball Player'. Yet, having its narrative space situated between the novel and the poem, just as a window is more realist than a grid structure yet more self-conscious than a view without the window frame, the short story nonetheless allows space for a continuous struggle, a negotiation, between the unfolding of Ace's afternoon and Ace's self-reflection.

The interruptions of a contiguous reading that we have noted earlier would sooner (in the poem) or later (in the novel) draw the reader's attention to defamiliarization, to form in representation. The gap between the narrative of the story and the story's 'framed' space cannot avoid this destiny. Yet, due to the constant interaction between creating duration and setting limits to that duration, defamiliarization in the short story presents itself in a more subtle and complex way. Still, the idea of the window may cast some

¹²¹ John Updike, 'Ace in the Hole', p. 19.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 20.

light on the matter.

This complexity of form presents itself when Ace reads a newspaper article that includes his name:

He had trouble finding his name, because it was at the bottom of a column on an inside sports page, in a small article about the county basketball statistics.

‘Dusty’ Tremwick, Grosvenor Park’s sure-fingered centre, copped the individual scoring honours with a season’s grand (and we do mean grand) total of 376 points. This is within eighteen points of the all-time record of 394 racked up in the 1949-50 season by Olinger High’s Fred Anderson.¹²³

Quoting the entire article and rendering it in a different size in the text as if the article was directly taken from the newspaper, Updike represents what Ace sees from a realist perspective. It is similar to what Updike does in the Rabbit tetralogy, integrating empirical details into narrative space to create contiguity. However, what is curious here is that Ace, the fictional character of the story itself, appears in the news. In *Rabbit Redux*, Rabbit also finds himself in the press after Jill’s death. Morley studies Updike’s installation of newspaper fragments in the Rabbit tetralogy and points to a curious border between fiction and fact: ‘Rabbit, a fictional character, steps into the real world while the events that surround him step from the newspapers into the work of fiction’.¹²⁴ While Morley’s observation for the Rabbit novels is thought-provoking, I argue that this precarious border between fiction and reality demonstrates itself most vigorously in the short story and its mode of seeing: the window.

In a similar way to the window for Ace, the newspaper offers a world that no longer belongs to him. Although his ‘all-time record’ has not yet been broken, his name only comes back when people need to compare the record to celebrate the performance of

¹²³ Ibid., pp. 20-21.

¹²⁴ Catherine Morley, ‘The Bard of Everyday Domesticity: John Updike’s Song of America’, p. 70.

current basketball players. Unhappy that the sportswriter uses his real name 'Fred Anderson' instead of 'Ace', he throws away the paper. However, having Ace complain that the journalist does not use his preferred name in the printing process, Updike reminds us that even reports of real events are based on the use of language and, above all, the arrangement of verbal signs, thereby drawing our attention to the fictionality of the newspaper. The newspaper article at this moment becomes a 'framed' narrative space, independent from the story 'Ace in the Hole'. The article becomes a short story itself. It is a very short story about another basketball player, 'Dusty' Tremwick. Yet, the story's shortness, its limited narrative space, renders the story, as Tallack observes, an immediate 'acknowledgement of, and defence against, language going on'.¹²⁵ In other words, the story of Tremwick is a window which both unfolds a short duration and disrupts that duration by drawing attention to its fictional being, its language. The dual nature found in this short story renders the story of Tremwick both self-celebrating and self-mocking: it is a story, yet no more important than many other basketball champion stories such as that of Fred Anderson from Olinger High.

Treating the newspaper article as a short story helps us to see the story 'Ace in the Hole' in a different light. The article about Tremwick is not only a window for Ace to relate to the outside world, but also a mirror to reflect the 'framed' narrative space in 'Ace in the Hole'. Just as new stories come out in the story of Tremwick, the limited space in 'Ace in the Hole' also draws our attention to other short stories. The presence of other teenagers in the story starts to make sense. The teenager in the '52 Pontiac, the boy playing basketball across the street and Tremwick can all be read not only metonymically

¹²⁵ Douglas Tallack, *The Nineteenth-Century American Short Story: Language, Form and Ideology*, p. 20.

as a continuous part of the short story 'Ace in the Hole', but also metaphorically as other Aces. There is not much difference between Ace and them, except 'the little gap of years'. They are yesterday's Ace, the champion, but they are very likely to become today's Ace, the man in his twenties, in a few years' time. Introduced yet limited by Ace's seeing, the lives of these teenagers are presented as short stories read by Ace just as Ace's story is presented as a short story to the reader.

The idea of the window, both literally and rhetorically, helps us locate Updike's 'Ace in the Hole' between the Rabbit tetralogy and the poem 'Ex-Basketball Player' and bring together particularity and generality. The Rabbit tetralogy unfolds contiguously around one character. Its dominant mode of representation, metonymy, gives the reader certainty that it is a narrative about Rabbit Angstrom, although Rabbit is only one of the ex-basketball stars. The poem, on the other hand, is dominated by metaphor and irony; it cancels itself out rather quickly and brings the reader's attention to ex-basketball players in general. 'Ace in the Hole', with its constant allusion to the window, demonstrates how the short story form can equally accommodate one particular character and ex-basketball players in small-town America.

This co-existence existence of particularity and generality in the short story draws our attention to the genre's special relationship to narrative and representation. Although every genre evolves over time, it seems that the short story is the one that is most prone to, what Boris M. Éjxenbaum calls, 'regeneration', and that short story writers are most likely to take the role of 'the narrator-humorist'.¹²⁶ Éjxenbaum offers a good summary of what we have been discussing in this chapter and is so crucial for the thesis that it is

¹²⁶ Boris M. Éjxenbaum, 'O. Henry and the Theory of the Short Story', in *The New Short Story Theories*, trans. by I. R. Titunik, ed. by Charles E. May (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994), pp. 81-88 (pp. 85-86).

worth quoting at length:

Stages in the evolution of every genre can be observed when the genre, once utilized as an entirely serious or 'high' one, undergoes regeneration, coming out in parodic or comic form. Such was the case with the lyric poem, the adventure novel, the biographical novel, and so forth. Local and historical conditions bring about the most diverse variations, of course, but the process itself, as a sort of *sui generis* law of evolution, maintains its effect: an initially serious treatment of the *fable*, with its painstaking and detailed motivation, gives way to irony, joke, parody; motivational connections grow slack or are laid bare as conventions, and the author himself steps to the forefront, time and again destroying the illusion of genuineness and seriousness; the plot construction takes on the character of a play on the *fable*, while the *fable* turns into riddle or anecdote. It is in this way that the regeneration of a genre comes about – a transition from one set of possibilities and forms to another.¹²⁷

Situated between the novel and the poem, the short story's narrative space gives the genre a possibility of both narrating and being self-mocking. It has the duration to tend towards 'serious or "high"' sentiment; it is also short, and therefore quick, enough to come to its self-consciousness to lay bare 'the illusion of genuineness and seriousness'. It is, then, possible to claim the short story offers the irony of a duration and the duration of an irony at one and the same time. With duration and irony working together and both trying to be in the foreground, a good short story, such as Updike's 'Ace in the Hole', gives us a never-ending journey where form and the world never stop mirroring and regenerating each other.

This perhaps explains why the beginning and the ending of a short story are important and are often worth re-reading. We may re-read the beginning and the ending of 'Ace in the Hole' in a different light. After an argument with his wife Evey, Ace turns on the radio. With dinner music playing, he invites Evey for a dance. Reluctant, yet led

¹²⁷ Ibid.

by Ace, Evey nonetheless accepts the invitation. The story closes with Ace dancing and feeling better: 'He seemed to be great again, and all the other kids were around them, in a ring, clapping time'.¹²⁸ Listening to the music, Ace forgets his predicament; the story seems to suggest some serious sentiment, tending toward a unified impression. But we all know this is only an illusion. Once the music stops, he will be thrown back to his reality: he is no longer Ace Anderson; he is Fred Anderson, an unemployed garage worker whose wife does not believe that he has a future.

Music, here, can also be in read in the vein of the window: music progresses through time, but music also comes to an end. Much as what is suggested in lyricism, a term often used to define the short story, a short story is similar to a piece of music. But lyricism should not be the end of genre consideration; rather it should shed light on form and time, as Updike suggests in the epigraph to this chapter. The fact that Updike's story ends with the beginning of dinner music somehow points to narrative 'regeneration', particularly so if we recall that the short story begins with Ace listening to music on his way home. Introduced yet framed by music, the narrative of the short story goes through an ongoing juxtaposition of continuity and discontinuity. Ace's story ends, but together with the ending is the beginning of the story of another Ace: Rabbit Angstrom, Flick Webb, Tremwick, or any former high-school athlete who once had the 'adolescent impression of splendor' yet has outlived his prime.¹²⁹ As a short story, 'Ace in the Hole' calls for other Aces and other stories. It is, as Walter Benjamin notes in his essay on storytelling, 'less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning the continuation of a story which is just unfolding'.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ John Updike, 'Ace in the Hole', p. 25.

¹²⁹ John Updike, 'Afterword by the Author', in *Rabbit, Run*, p. 268.

¹³⁰ Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller', in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (London:

While critics are not quite sure how to position Updike as a writer due to his meticulous description of details, it might be reasonable to regard him as a ‘narrator-humorist’ with an acute visual consciousness in his practice of short fiction. In its obituary to Updike, *The New Yorker*, the magazine where Updike started his literary career and to which he contributed most of short stories, reminds us that the childhood dream of being ‘a cartoonist and a humorist and a parodist’ persists in the writer’s work:

Updike the humorist is probably the least known or recognizable Updike of them [Updike’s identities as a novelist, a short story writer, an essayist, and a critic] all, but something of the White-cum-Thurber sound of the *New Yorker* that he joined – that bemused, ironically smiling but resolutely well-wishing, anti-malicious comic tone – lingered in his work till the very end. In the last year of his life, he wrote to an admirer that ‘humor is my default mode,’ and that he still dreamed of being the new Benchley, the next Perelman. [...] the material of comedy remained implicit in almost every sentence he wrote.¹³¹

In his efforts to be a ‘narrator-humorist’ in his short stories, Updike, I argue, resorts to the rhetoric of the window: its self-celebration and its self-consciousness or self-mockery. A brief browse through his short story *oeuvre* will offer an idea of the ubiquity of the window; it is almost impossible to find a story by Updike that does not have a window in it. It is in the writer’s self-confessed ‘cultivated fondness for exploring corners’ and things framed, that his preoccupation with storytelling is made manifest.¹³²

But at the same time, if we look into the windows and frames, physical and rhetorical ones, from which Updike’s characters see, we may still find differences in the nature of the views and the acts of seeing. Taking ‘The Lucid Eye in Silver Town’ and ‘Ace in the

Pimlico, 1999), pp. 83-107 (p. 86).

¹³¹ Adam Gopnik, ‘John Updike’, *The New Yorker*, 9 February, 2009, Postscript, <http://www.newyorker.com/talk/2009/02/09/090209ta_talk_gopnik> [accessed 1 March 2013].

¹³² John Updike, *Self-Consciousness: Memoirs* (London: André Deutsch, 1989), p. 136.

Hole' as examples, a careful description of a static landscape of New York City from Uncle Quin's hotel window might bring Jay's seeing closer to the way one perceives a painting; Ace's flashback of the past, of himself playing basketball with other kids clapping, corresponds somehow to a photographic image; and Ace's moves of lighting a cigarette in the car and his conversation with the teenager through the car window is similar to a cinematic motion. All these seem to say that the rhetoric of the window exists in visual art in general, but the window and its frame function differently in painting, photography and cinema, hence in their relationships to storytelling. A study of form and vision in the short story, if only exploring the overall rhetoric of the window in visual art, would be too sweeping and not sufficiently persuasive. It is, therefore, necessary to move onto the second step of the analysis: to look for, in Updike's practice of the genre, the particular connection between each visual medium and the short story, each different in important aspects. Each of the following chapters will be devoted to one visual medium and Updike's short fiction. Studying Updike's visual techniques in storytelling, I hope to explore how he resorts to the short story's involvement with the three visual media to reaffirm his commitment to visual realism on the one hand, and to demonstrate the limits of representation, his self-consciousness as a writer on the other hand.

Chapter Two

‘On the Verge of Telling a Story’:

A Painterly Reading of John Updike’s Short Fiction¹

In short anything painted in oil anywhere on a flat surface holds my attention and I can always look at it and slowly yes slowly I will tell you all about it.²

Gertrude Stein, ‘Pictures’ (1957)

Before becoming a professional writer, Updike received a year’s professional training in drawing and painting at the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art in Oxford. This year in Oxford remained important for understanding Updike’s writing, because it can be seen as the formative year not only for his artistic expertise, but also for his craftsmanship as a writer. In an interview, the writer considered his writing to have been improved due to the artistic training at the Ruskin:

I’ve never done anything harder than try to paint things the way they are. The amount of concentration it takes to try to mix a color and put it in the right spot was really a very good lesson for me as far as accuracy in all things artistic.³

Training in drawing and painting sharpens one’s sense of ‘accuracy in all things artistic’,

¹ The chapter title is borrowed from Updike’s description of the American painter Edward Hopper. John Updike, ‘Hopper’s Polluted Silence’, in *Still Looking: Essays on American Art* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2005), pp. 179-93 (p. 180).

² Gertrude Stein, ‘Pictures’, in *Lectures in America*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), p. 60. This quotation is cited by John Updike in the ‘Introduction’ of *Still Looking: Essays on American Art*, pp. x-xv (p. xv).

³ Lorrie Dispenza, ‘John Updike: 20 Books and Still Counting’, in *Conversations with John Updike* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), pp. 105-10 (p. 105).

a quality, in Updike's eyes, equally important for a writer. With his faith that 'words should also make pictures to give the reader something he can visualize', Updike voices, once again, his opinion on the difference, and indeed the in-difference, between painting and writing: in the former one paints with colours and shapes, whereas in the latter one paints with words; but no matter which method, it is important to 'paint things the way they are'.⁴ It is, then, little surprising that in an earlier essay 'Why Write?' (1974), Updike offers an analogy between his writing and painting and remarks that the aesthetic sensation he hopes to achieve in his writing is 'the graphic precision of a Dürer or a Vermeer'.⁵ Comparing himself to painters rather than to writers, Updike builds a more than random connection between fiction and painting, reading in verbal space and seeing in pictorial space.

More than a few Updike stories variously engage with painting: either his own experience in Oxford becomes fictional material for his plots or his characters are fascinated by painting and approach the world, as I shall elaborate in a moment, with a painterly eye. In 'Still Life' (1959), the protagonist is an American fine art student, who studies drawing and painting in Oxford; similar experiences are shared by the protagonists in 'Home' (1960), 'Packed Dirt, Churchgoing, a Dying Cat, a Traded Car' (1961) and 'A Madman' (1962). In Updike's 1963 story, 'Museums and Women', the narrator recalls his experience of looking at paintings and other art objects in different museums with women at different periods of his life. In 'Nakedness' (1974), his mistress's naked body reminds Richard Maple of nudity in paintings from Titian, Manet, and Goya. In 'The Rumor' (1994), the main characters, Frank and Sharon Whittier, are

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ John Updike, 'Why Write?', in *Picked-Up Pieces* (Greenwich: Fawcett Books, 1975), pp. 45-54, (p. 51).

owners of an art gallery selling representational paintings and abstract sculptures. In 'New York Girl' (1996), the narrator works in a company that sells picture frames and he encounters a woman who works in a New York art gallery, with whom he starts an extra-marital relationship. Above all, the first Updike short story character to appear in this thesis, Jay in 'The Lucid Eye in Silver Town' (1964), goes to New York not only to see his uncle, but also to buy a book on the seventeenth-century Dutch genre painter Johannes Vermeer.

This chapter will study Updike's practice of short fiction through the lens of painting. While some attention will be given to painting as part of the topicality of Updike's short fiction, the chapter is more focused on how he renders everyday spaces and introduces narrative. Making a case for the short story's narrative space and painting's pictorial space on the basis of a similar relationship between surface and depth, I hope to bring a different light to both Updike criticism and short story criticism.

Of Updike criticism, I contend that although some Updike critics take his admiration of the Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer seriously and call Updike the 'verbal Vermeer' or the 'literary Vermeer', they may, reasonably, have taken Updike's words at face value.⁶ Although Updike expresses openly his admiration of Vermeer in an interview and refers to the painter very often in his writing, it would be limiting to align him solely with any one painter.⁷ At least in his short fiction, while we do see influences of Vermeer, there are also traces of other painters. My discussion of Updike's painterly text is not

⁶ James Plath, 'Verbal Vermeer: Updike's Middle-Class Portraiture', in *Rabbit Tales: Poetry and Politics in John Updike's Rabbit Novels*, ed. by Lawrence R. Broer (Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 2000), pp. 207-31; Donald J. Greiner, 'John Updike: The Literary Vermeer', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 51 (2010), 177-84.

⁷ Christopher Lydon, 'Interview with John Updike', in *Conversations with John Updike*, ed. by James Plath, pp. 217-20 (p. 219).

primarily interested in which painter's work is the best painterly representation of Updike's short fiction or vice versa. My concern is in how the type of seeing and knowing particularly found in the art of painting is used by Updike as a narrative aid in his art of short fiction.

As for short story criticism, this chapter re-examines the idea of epiphany as 'the short story effect' through the medium of painting.⁸ I argue that when some short story critics claim that it is the genre's unique identity to transcend its own ending, its 'incompleteness', tending toward completion, what lies behind their reasoning is a painterly reading based on pictorial realism, where spaces are unified into a comprehensible depth and hence into a visual illusion.⁹ The chapter challenges this stubborn view by giving a painterly reading of a selection of Updike's stories. Looking into what spaces are organised, and how they are organised, in moments of revelation in Updike's stories, I argue that Updike leaves the sense of 'incompleteness' there to remind us of the unstable nature of pictorial unity. In doing so, Updike helps us understand that while the short story does sometimes show a pictorial world similar to a realist painting, it does not, as seen in painting as well, merely collapses time into a timeless pictorial vision. Exploring narrative clues attached to the moments of revelation in Updike and his storyteller's self-consciousness, the chapter hopes to de-mystify the genre, which has been defined by elusive terms such as 'mystery', 'dream' or 'loneliness'.¹⁰ Rather than

⁸ John Bayley, *The Short Story: Henry James to Elizabeth Bowen* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1988), p. 9.

⁹ Mary Louise Pratt, 'The Short Story: The Long and the Short of It', in *The New Short Story Theories*, ed. by Charles E. May (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994), pp. 91-113 (p.99).

¹⁰ Charles E. May, 'Why Short Stories are Essential and Why They are Seldom Read', in *The Art of Brevity: Excursions in Short Fiction Theory and Analysis*, ed. by Per Winther, Jakob Lothe, and Hans H. Skei (Columbia: the University of South Carolina Press, 2004), pp. 14-25; Clare Hanson, '“Things out of Words”: Towards a Poetics of Short Fiction', in *Re-reading the Short Story*, ed. by Clare Hanson (London: Macmillan Press, 1989), pp. 22-33; Frank O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story* (Brooklyn: Melville House Publishing, 2004), p. 19.

turning against these sweeping borrowings from psychological analysis, the chapter hopes to fill a gap in short story criticism by showing how the short story's 'incompleteness' is constructed. The chapter, then, proposes that a frank acceptance of this 'incompleteness' as a general condition for any work of representation, rather than only for the short story, may open the door for, what Boris M. Éjxenbaum calls, narrative 'regeneration' and become a voice for more stories.¹¹

I. A window onto a world

In his introduction to *The Best American Short Stories 1984* (1984), Updike uses painting as an analogy for the short story. This approach is consistent with that of some short story critics: to understand the genre by referring it to visual art. Yet, a former art student and respected art critic, Updike is more careful in his comparison:

I tried to enter each microcosm as it rotated into view and to single out those that somehow, in addition to beginning energetically and ending intelligibly, gave me a sense of deep entry, of entry into life somewhat below the surface of dialogue and description; this nebulous sense of deep entry corresponds to the sensation we get in looking at some representational paintings that render not merely the colors and contours but the heft and internal cohesion of actual objects, which therefore exist on the canvas not as tinted flat shapes but as palpables posed in atmosphere.¹²

As discussed in the previous chapter, Updike has an acute consciousness of the formal matter in representation: that is, the relationship between art and what it represents. In the passage above, we find this consciousness of form persists and becomes the base for

¹¹ Boris M. Éjxenbaum, 'O. Henry and the Theory of the Short Story', in *The New Short Story Theories*, trans. by I. R. Titunik, ed. by Charles E. May (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994), pp. 81-88 (p.85).

¹² John Updike, 'Introduction to *The Best American Short Stories 1984*', in *More Matter: Essays and Criticism* (New York: Ballantine Books, pp. 178-87 (p. 184).

a link between painting and the short story. Instead of broadening the case to the visual in general, as some short story critics do, Updike chooses to pause at painting and its mode of representation, for there seems a lot to say about this visual medium and the short story.

For Updike, pictorial space involves constructing on the flat canvas an illusion so that what the viewer sees is not ‘tinted flat shapes’, but visual depth, ‘palpables posed in atmosphere’. This structural insight into pictorial representation reminds us of the way an art critic or an artist perceives painting. William V. Dunning, for instance, opens *Changing Images of Pictorial Space: A History of Spatial Illusion in Painting* (1991) with something similar: ‘When painters write about art, they write about pictorial space—the illusion of depth on the flat surface of a painting—and its relationship to this flat surface’.¹³ Noting the special relationship between surface and depth in the medium of painting, Updike claims something similar for the short story’s narrative space, its ‘microcosm’: a short story involves the construction of ‘a sense of deep entry’ into life on ‘the surface of dialogue and description’.

How can a short story correspond to a painting? How does ‘the surface of dialogue and description’, in Updike’s practice of the genre, relate to the ‘tinted flat shapes’ on a painting surface? Likewise, how does Updike render those verbal ‘tinted flat shapes’ into ‘the heft and internal cohesion of actual objects’ so that there is a deep entry into life in the short story?

A close reading of some descriptive passages in Updike’s short fiction may provide

¹³ William V. Dunning, *Changing Images of Pictorial Space: A History of Spatial Illusion in Painting* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1991), p. ix.

answers to these questions. Here is a passage from 'Flight' (1959) which describes what the narrator sees from a small hill in his Pennsylvania hometown:

There the town lay under us, Olinger, perhaps a thousand homes, the best and biggest of them climbing Shale Hill towards us, and beyond them the blocks of brick houses, one- and two-family, the homes of my friends, sloping down to the pale thread of the Alton Pike, which strung together the high school, the tennis courts, the movie theatre, the town's few stores and gasoline stations, the elementary school, the Lutheran church. On the other side lay more homes, including our own, a tiny white patch placed just where the land began to rise towards the opposite mountain, Cedar Top. There were rims and rims of hills beyond Cedar Top, and looking south we could see the pike dissolving in other towns and turning out of sight amid the patches of green and brown farmland, and it seemed the entire county was lying exposed under a thin veil of haze.¹⁴

The text offers the reader a visual experience by describing what the narrator sees. What guides the narrator's seeing, I contend, is a painterly eye and the visual experience offered by Updike's literary images is similar to that of representational painting. One may come to this understanding through two steps.

First of all, the text is organised mainly by metonymy: an 'entire' view of Olinger from the top of the Shale Hill is described on the basis of contiguity. One thing leads to another. The narrator's eye begins with the best and biggest houses 'climbing Shale Hill' in the foreground; slowly moves to the background, 'the blocks of brick houses' 'sloping down to the pale thread of the Alton Pike'; and then proceeds to the local facilities 'strung' by the Alton Pike. Turning to the other side of the valley, a similar metonymic mode is at work. The view unfolds itself contiguously: we see first some houses including that of the narrator, and then things laid further beyond, 'rims and rims of hills beyond Cedar

¹⁴ John Updike, 'Flight', in *Pigeon Feathers and Other Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), pp. 33-49 (p.33).

Top’, and finally ‘the pike dissolving in other towns and turning out of sight amid the patches of green and brown farmland’. This contiguous tracing of a sight conforms to the mapping mode, a realist perspective, explored in the previous chapter.

But, there is more to discover in this passage, bringing in a second step of the analysis: Updike’s description not only complies with literary realism, but also and more specifically, fits into the rules of perspective in pictorial representation. Linear perspective, sometimes also called one-point perspective, was formulated and explained by the fifteenth-century Florentine painter Leon Battista Alberti in his writing *De Pictura* in 1435.¹⁵ Painting, Alberti states, should represent things seen.¹⁶ Pictorial space concerns the position of a viewer, an object which occupies a space, and the distance between the position of the viewer and the object.¹⁷ Based on the relations between these three elements, the construction of a painting begins with drawing a rectangle on the surface of the painting, which can be regarded as ‘an open window through which the subject to be painted is seen’.¹⁸ Alberti’s ‘open window’ corresponds to the notion of the ‘window’ discussed in the previous chapter: it is a reminder of defamiliarization, form in representation. But one should make sure, stresses Alberti, that the rectangle, serving as the ‘open window’, is delineated ‘with the finest possible, almost invisible lines’.¹⁹ The ‘open window’ itself does little to claim its own existence as ‘circumscription’ in pictorial representation.²⁰ Authorised by the scientific base of optics, linear perspective, as Dunning puts it, is a complex system for ‘depicting what appears to be a unified,

¹⁵ Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., *Perspective, Optics, and Delft Artists Around 1650* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977), p. 24.

¹⁶ Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. by Cecil Grayson (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 64.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

mathematically correct illusion—of volume, depth, and the accurate placement of figures and objects in space—on a two-dimensional surface’, which is typically found in pictorial realism.²¹

Coming back to Updike’s story, we find the laws of linear perspective informing his account. Standing on the top of the Shale Hill, which offers a fixed viewing position, the narrator looks at his hometown with a strong sense of depth and distance: closer to him the houses are big, while in the distance houses and roads become smaller and local facilities appear as if ‘strung’ together by ‘the pale thread of the Alton Pike’. The narrator’s own house, due to its distance from the narrator’s viewpoint, becomes only ‘a tiny white patch’. To ‘paint’ views further in the distance, Updike gives the impression that things diminish proportionally and that his lines are converging and vanishing, but nevertheless continuing: ‘there are rims and rims of hills beyond Cedar Top’, ‘we could see the pike dissolving in other towns and turning out of sight amid the patches of green and brown farmland’. While following the narrator’s visual field, we barely notice any ‘outline’ that would circumscribe that visual field. As the narrator informs us, ‘it seemed the entire county was lying exposed under a thin veil of haze’. In short, Updike follows Alberti’s instructions and offers the reader a window onto a pictorial world.

For an art student, perspective is one of the fundamentals of the discipline and Updike most certainly studied the laws of perspective at the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art in Oxford, if not earlier. In the short story ‘Still Life’ (1959), Updike has his protagonist practise perspective. A first-year American student at a British art school, Leonard, together with his fellow students, is told to do still life of classical statues and

²¹ William V. Dunning, *Changing Images of Pictorial Space: A History of Spatial Illusion in Painting*, p. 35.

casts, that is, to ‘draw from the antique’ according to his tutor Professor Seabright.²² Moreover, when Seabright corrects students’ works, he keeps stressing that the shape and position of the statues should be correct on the canvas and that outlines should be rendered with subtlety. ‘We don’t fit *in*,’ teaches Seabright, ‘we build *across* the large form. Otherwise all the little pieces will never read’.²³ While Seabright’s aesthetic appears out of fashion at the beginning, Leonard realises, slowly, how important and how difficult, as Updike himself observes, it is to ‘paint things the way they are’.

When Updike’s characters are not art students, he nonetheless reminds the reader that linear perspective plays an important role in the characters’ visual world. In the opening paragraph of ‘Kinderszenen’ (2006), Updike tells how Toby, a small child, views the world: ‘windows frame pictures of the world outside’.²⁴ In ‘My Father’s Tears’ (2006), the narrator looks at his parents from a moving train and offers the ‘foreshortened’ images of his parents, who stand on the platform:

The train appeared, its engine, with its high steel wheels and long connecting rods and immense cylindrical boiler, out of all proportion to the little soft bodies it dragged along. I boarded it. My parents looked smaller, foreshortened.²⁵

Updike picks up what is essential in Alberti’s method of linear perspective: the perception of foreshortening in painting. A viewer will not be able to perceive depth or distance, ‘a miniature view of the universe’ from a painting’s surface, if he/she cannot detect the visual separation of the planes.²⁶ The planes need to be rendered one behind

²² John Updike, ‘Still Life’, in *Pigeon Feathers and Other Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), pp.18-32 (p. 19).

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

²⁴ John Updike, ‘Kinderszenen’, in *My Father’s Tears and Other Stories* (London: Penguin, 2009), pp.212-29 (p. 212).

²⁵ John Updike, ‘My Father’s Tears’, in *My Father’s Tears and Other Stories*, pp. 193-211 (p.195).

²⁶ William V. Dunning, *Changing Images of Pictorial Space: A History of Spatial Illusion in Painting*, pp. 40-41.

the other in graduated increments of distance, with the size of people and things diminishing from the foreground into the background.²⁷ In addition, it might not be a coincidence that Updike borrows the train tracks to give perspective to the image of the narrator's parents. In John Spencer's translation of Alberti's *De Pictura*, he explains in the note that perspective is often illustrated by train tracks in elementary drawing books, because parallel tracks do seem to meet, if viewed from a distance.²⁸

With this notion that pictorial realism, governed by linear perspective, is an important element in Updike's painterly aesthetic in his short fiction, we can appreciate Updike's admiration for Johannes Vermeer, and his title as the 'verbal Vermeer' or the 'literary Vermeer'. If a relationship between the two figures is to be established, their commitment to pictorial realism should be, first and foremost, considered. It is Vermeer's 'graphic precision', his ability to 'paint things the way they are', rather than anything else, that Updike appreciates and attempts to achieve in his writing. I shall argue, in the meantime, that whereas in some critics' opinion Updike's style is basically Vermeeresque, the Dutch painter may only demonstrate one aspect, optical objectivity, of the writer's painterly aesthetic in his short fiction. There are other painterly aspects in Updike's short fiction, which, in my opinion, do not come from Vermeer. But optical objectivity is indeed important and should not be overlooked, for without it other painterly aspects in Updike's short fiction do not become apparent.

Viewed in the vein of linear perspective, the description of the hometown of Updike's narrator in 'Flight' reminds us of the way Delft, Vermeer's hometown, is

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ John Spencer, 'Notes to Text', in Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. by John Spencer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), pp. 99-136 (p.107).

represented in *View of Delft* (1660-1661) (Figure 1).²⁹ The painting easily lends itself to a realist reading: it is Delft viewed from across the water. A golden sand bank is rendered diagonally in the foreground, with a boat at anchor and some human figures chatting by the bank. In the middle, some boats are perched on the water, which leads us to see the other side of the river with human figures in reduced proportions. Beyond the waterfront on the opposite side, we have a ‘profile’ of Delft: its wall, bridge, church towers, trees, house roofs, and the canal.³⁰ The word ‘profile’ is to be stressed here, following Svetlana Alpers, for although we only see the local sites partially painted on the canvas, we can be confident that they exist and, above all, continue beyond what we can see. Specific details, such as those Professor Seabright in ‘Still Life’ pays attention to, add up to a metonymic reading: the diagonal of the sand bank in the foreground, the foreshortened human figures on the opposite side of the river, the rather logical disposition of the buildings in shadow and sunlight, and the town gate and the bridge placed at the centre of the painting, all functioning in the direction of a vanishing point. These elements create, in one way or another, converging lines. They are in compliance with the rules of linear perspective, which in turn deepens the painting surface into a visual world: a view of Delft. Vermeer’s method, as a result, is quite similar to that used by Updike to depict his narrator’s hometown, ‘the entire county’ of Olinger. Re-reading Updike’s description with Vermeer’s painting in mind, we find that the way the local buildings, the Alton Pike, Cedar Top, the hills beyond Cedar Top, and farmland are constructed in Updike’s

²⁹ Johannes Vermeer, *View of Delft*,

<<http://www.mauritshuis.nl/index.aspx?Contentid=18400&Chapterid=2423&Filterid=988>> [accessed 25 January 2014] Reproductions of Vermeer’s *View of Delft* can also be found in John Updike, ‘An Outdoor Vermeer’, in *Just Looking: Essays on Art* (Boston: MFA Publications, 2001), pp. 23-26 (p. 25); in Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Penguin, 1989), p.153; and in Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., *Perspective, Optics, and Delft Artists Around 1650* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977), p.291 (fig. 96).

³⁰ Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century*, p.123.

narrative space conforms closely to Vermeer's organisation of his painting. While Updike's reader is firmly convinced that, as Updike concludes, the Alton Pike dissolves 'in other towns and turning out of sight amid the patches of green and brown farmland', the viewer of Vermeer's *View of Delft* is also confident that Delft extends beyond what one can see from the painting's surface.

The accuracy of Vermeer's view is often remarked upon. It is sometimes mentioned that some of his paintings, including *View of Delft*, may have been painted with the aid of optical equipment such as that of *camera obscura*.³¹ In his essay 'An Outdoor Vermeer' (1982), Updike, as an art critic, reiterates Vermeer's 'graphic precision', acknowledging that Vermeer renders 'optical sensations with a fidelity that would not be appreciated until the era of photography and Impressionism two hundred years later'.³² We may recall that Joey, the narrator and young Vermeer admirer in 'The Lucid Eye in Silver Town' (1964), prefers Vermeer to Degas for a similar reason: 'For actually *looking* at things in terms of paint, for the lucid eye, I think Vermeer makes Degas look sick'.³³ 'I'm not sure I would like to meet Vermeer,' says Updike in an interview, 'except to thank him for painting so terribly, terribly well'.³⁴

Updike's unreserved compliment and frequent references to the Dutch painter makes it understandable to compare him to the latter rather than to other painters. This is the case for many Updike critics, for it seems Vermeer provides a comfort zone to study the painterly, and to most critics the visual, aesthetic of Updike's fiction as well. Here is

³¹ Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., *Perspective, Optics, and Delft Artists Around 1650*, p. 291.

³² John Updike, 'An Outdoor Vermeer', in *Just Looking: Essays on Art* (Boston: MFA Publications, 2001), pp. 23-26 (p. 26).

³³ John Updike, 'The Lucid Eye in Silver Town', in *The Early Stories 1953-1975* (London: Penguin, 2005), pp. 129-37 (p. 133).

³⁴ Christopher Lydon, 'Interview with John Updike', pp. 219-20.

Donald J. Greiner introducing a link between Updike and Vermeer:

He was the master of the elegantly lyrical sentence and the precisely observed detail. [...] he used his astonishing facility with language to paint the particulars of the middle-class domestic scene in the latter half of the American twentieth century. He became our literary Vermeer.³⁵

Greiner continues to claim that there is an overall Vermeeresque aesthetic in Updike's *oeuvre* including his novels, short fiction, poems, essays, and art criticism.³⁶ In his essay 'Verbal Vermeer: Updike's Middle-Class Portraiture' (2000), James Plath makes a similar remark:

With Updike, however, it *is* enough to find radiance in the commonplace, because his characters find in such moments a means of elevating the quality of their otherwise ordinary lives, and in the process they experience a reaffirmation of life itself by noticing, as did Vermeer, how light brings substance to life.³⁷

Agreeing, Quentin Miller adds that 'setting is never merely background in John Updike's fiction'.³⁸ Attending to 'precise, unvarnished reality' and 'rely[ing] on his "subjective geography"', Updike, similar to Vermeer, converts detailed description of spaces and places into 'breathtaking beauty'.³⁹

The critics are right in noting the two artists' common commitment to describing details and their preferred subject matter: 'the commonplace', or to be more accurate, everyday spaces. Miller also perceptively points out that 'details are the core substance

³⁵ Donald J. Greiner, 'John Updike: The Literary Vermeer', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 51 (2010), 177-84 (p.177).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

³⁷ James Plath, 'Verbal Vermeer: Updike's Middle-Class Portraiture' in *Rabbit Tales: Poetry and Politics in John Updike's Rabbit Novels*, ed. by Lawrence R. Broer (Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 2000), pp. 207-31 (pp. 209-10).

³⁸ Quentin Miller, 'Updike, Middles, and the Spell of "Subjective Geography"', in *The Cambridge Companion to John Updike*, ed. by Stacey Olster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 15-28 (p. 15).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 15, p. 23.

of Updike's artistry'.⁴⁰ However, the critics' reading ends up as, essentially, a New Critical one, as set out in the Introduction and Chapter One. To begin with, it is primarily a spatial reading of Updike, accepting, as Plath does, 'Updike's fiction as deliberate attempts at visual-to-verbal transformations in the manner of Vermeer'.⁴¹ Updike's method of organising spaces and his meticulous attention given to daily detail, in the critics' eyes, is an effort to produce 'radiance in the common-place', to transform the mundane into a timeless aesthetic experience. As a result, when Greiner says 'he [Updike] wrote so well, because, like Vermeer, he wanted his readers to *see*', what Greiner refers to as seeing is little more than an epiphanic seeing.⁴² None of the three critics makes the connection between the two artists on the formal basis of the signifying process of signs. Moreover, calling Updike 'literary Vermeer' or 'Verbal Vermeer', these critics, in common with the New Critics' pronouncement on fiction, make too broad a claim for Updike's whole *oeuvre* and pay little attention to possible different modes of seeing in his practice of different literary forms. Greiner and Miller both talk about Updike's novels and short stories in their essays and their Vermeeresque analogy of Updike's writing is an *a priori* acceptance as if Vermeer is simply a synonym of Updike's visual aesthetic in his writing. However, in noting Updike's 'astonishing facility with language to paint the particulars of the middle-class domestic scene' and observing that 'details are the core substance of Updike's artistry', Greiner and Miller could have taken into account the relationship between language and narrative space, namely form, in different genres. Adroit at different genres, Updike's painterly techniques vary according to each form's capacity for language. What we have discovered about the modes of seeing in the

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 15.

⁴¹ James Plath, 'Verbal Vermeer: Updike's Middle-Class Portraiture', p. 209.

⁴² Donald J. Greiner, 'John Updike: The Literary Vermeer', p. 180.

novel, the short story, and the poem can be useful here.

Vermeer's painting, notes Svetlana Alpers in her study of Dutch art in the seventeenth-century, is distinguished by a craftsmanship that requires an attentive descriptive mode, 'a sincere hand and a faithful eye', something characteristic of northern painting of the time.⁴³ An excellent practitioner of this mode, Vermeer records on his canvas 'the multitude of things' that make up a visible world, a visual world that tends to map the external world to the greatest extent.⁴⁴ Conceiving of the picture 'as a flat working surface, unframed, on which the world is inscribed', Vermeer's method very much corresponds to Alberti's teaching of linear perspective: pictorial space is a window onto a world, which renders its own existence transparent.⁴⁵ But, it is not to be noted that Vermeer's style, marked by its high-level realism, requires a lot of pictorial space so that 'the multitude of things' can be accommodated to make up a visible world. Considering Vermeer's space alongside Updike's analogy of the novel as a box with bigger dimension to be filled with 'enormous amount of "stuff"', we may find that a pure Vermeeresque method in description, the epiphanic seeing we found in Updike's stories, is just beyond

⁴³ Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century*, p. 72.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 138. There are disputes over whether or not Vermeer and northern painting apply linear perspective as southern artists do; the disputes also entail discussion of whether the Renaissance movement of painting is primarily a movement in the southern European countries. Alpers herself makes a demarcation between these two major art circles in Europe, arguing that linear perspective is 'vanishing point perspective', while what is favoured by artists of the north is the 'distance point method'. Albertian perspective, Alpers maintains, 'posits a viewer at a certain distance looking through a framed window to a putative substitute world', whereas northern painters such as Vermeer adopt 'distance-point perspective' and take the picture as a surface 'unframed'. Because of this difference, concludes Alpers, southern painters tend to narrate 'the drama of human events', while northern painters tend to give a faithful record, a detailed description, of what is seen at an event. However, this reading of Vermeer, in my opinion, represents a New Critical, understanding in pictorial representation, which does not see the narrative dimension in description or vice versa. Martin Jay argues that although Alpers wants to emphasise a 'passive', thereby objective, concept of optical experience in the northern tradition of painting and to claim its difference from the southern tradition, which involves actively the human mind, the two traditions are in fact in accord with each other. In both cases, the science of optics functions as the fundamental rule for perspective, for without visual contiguity that is seen both in Alberti's teaching and Vermeer's painting, no painting can be recognizable by the human mind. Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century*, p. 138, p. 161; Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 63.

the narrative capacity of a short story and therefore cannot be sustained.⁴⁶ At some point in a short story, there must be reflections of the author's accentuated consciousness of form, a foretelling of the end of the story, of the story's own existence as fiction. As Douglas Tallack reminds us, 'the simple fact that there is less language in a short story – even a long short story stops short – draws attention to beginnings and endings, when limits must be drawn and the consequences acknowledged'.⁴⁷ Although traces of Vermeer, just as the mapping impulse in the novel, can sometimes be found in Updike's stories, they only represent one aspect of Updike's painterly techniques in the short story, a form, Updike suggests earlier, 'situated between the novel and the poem, and capable of giving us the pleasures of both'.⁴⁸ By saying this, I propose a better and more sustainable connection between Vermeer's painting and Updike's novels. But, as this is not within the scope of this research project, I am suggesting this for future discussion.

Looking back at those Vermeeresque passages in Updike's stories, we do find that the impression of visual unity in those passages only stands for a short while. There is often an uneasiness accompanying those passages. This uneasiness poses a difference between these images in Updike's stories and Vermeer's painting. The latter seems to defer or defy interpretation and offers a relatively sustainable visual contiguity. In 'Flight', having the 'entire county' in front of him, the narrator does not seem to be at ease. 'I was old enough to feel embarrassment at standing there alone with my mother', who expects the narrator to fly out the confines of Olinger to pursue bigger ambitions.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Charlie Reilly, 'A Conversation with John Updike', in *Conversations with John Updike*, ed. by James Plath (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), pp. 124-50 (pp. 126-27).

⁴⁷ Douglas Tallack, *The Nineteenth-Century American Short Story: Language, Form and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 20.

⁴⁸ John Updike, 'Introduction to *Self-Selected Stories of John Updike*', in *More Matter* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999), pp. 767-70 (p. 770).

⁴⁹ John Updike, 'Flight', p. 33.

In 'Still Life', Robin, the English girl just does not understand Seabright's point, although his point seems too easy to miss: to represent faithfully on canvas what one sees in reality. On the contrary, Robin often gets the outlines so black that, complains Seabright, 'they rather take my eye'.⁵⁰ In 'My Father's Tears', before introducing the 'smaller, foreshortened' image of his parents seen from the moving train, the narrator reminds himself, and the reader, that in a couple of decades from that moment of seeing, the local train station would eventually be 'padlocked and boarded up'.⁵¹ Comparing books to the dying train service in his hometown, the narrator seems to lay bare, defamiliarize, book form: 'both [the train station and the library] had been built for eternity, when railroads and books looked to be with us forever'.⁵²

If Vermeer can somehow retain this illusion of eternity in representation and hide the circumscribing nature of the window for a bit longer, which painter's or painters' style can both give us a short moment of illusion and at the same time tell us frankly, much as a short story has to do, that completion or an absolute unity in representation is never there? How does Updike render the uneasiness mentioned above through his painterly techniques in his short fiction?

II. A window and a world

In Updike's short story 'The Blessed Man of Boston, My Grandmother's Thimble, and Fanning Island' (1960), the narrator finds resemblance between his grandmother and a woman in Vermeer:

⁵⁰ John Updike, 'Still Life', p. 20.

⁵¹ John Updike, 'My Father's Tears', p. 195.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 194.

The night we moved, my mother and I came through the wet black grass around the edge of the sandstone farmhouse and saw, framed in the doorway, close to us yet far away, like a woman in a Vermeer, my grandmother reaching up with a trembling match to touch the wick of a lamp on the high kitchen mantel.⁵³

Vermeer is still there and we do see something that seems to lead our way to a Vermeer's painting, 'my grandmother reaching up with a trembling match to touch the wick of a lamp on the high kitchen mantel'. However, we are prevented from perceiving a relatively complete Vermeeresque image, a detailed description of his grandmother, with which we may trace for a certain duration as is the case with the image of Olinger in 'Flight'. Phrases such as 'the edge of the sandstone farmhouse' and 'saw, framed in the door way' stand in the way and disturb an otherwise metonymic reading. The image of the grandmother, then, is a compelling yet ultimately static one, representing a frozen moment. The image seems to be, if we borrow Updike's remark on the American painter, Edward Hopper, 'on the verge of telling a story. [...] Dramatic tension is in the air'.⁵⁴

There is, as mentioned earlier, no intention in this thesis to look for a one-to-one connection between Updike and any particular painter. However, reading Updike's art criticism on painting or, even taking into account his personal preference for certain painters can be useful in our examination of the writer's preoccupation with storytelling and painting. Hopper is a good company to Updike's texts after Vermeer. For one thing, Updike's acquaintance with, and appreciation of, Hopper's art is evident in his art criticism; for another, if we cause at a couple of main characters of the two artists, the idea of reading Updike's short fiction alongside Hopper does not seem too far-fetched in

⁵³ John Updike, 'The Blessed Man of Boston, My Grandmother's Thimble, and Fanning Island', in *Pigeon Feathers and Other stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), pp. 157-69 (164).

⁵⁴ John Updike, 'Hopper's Polluted Silence', in *Still Looking: Essays on American Art*, pp. 179-93 (p. 180).

our search for a further connection between the short story and pictorial representation.⁵⁵

To begin with, like Updike, Hopper is considered a great American realist. Hopper's works remain 'at least superficially, representations of ordinary American scenes' and 'are immediately recognizable in the subject matter'.⁵⁶ A Hopperesque reading will not, in other words, subvert straightforwardly the Vermeeresque side of Updike's stories; rather, it will, as we will see in a moment, build upon the previous analysis. Moreover, Hopper's subject matter, similar to Updike's, is 'the spaces of everyday life': trains, streets, theatres, hotel rooms, diners, and offices in Hopper's paintings of American scenes.⁵⁷ These spaces play a more important role than simply being settings or backgrounds. Although Vermeer also organises his spaces into narrative, I argue that Hopper has a special way with spaces, different in degree from Vermeer's method. There is a particular narrative dimension in Hopper, which prompts Updike to say that Hopper's painting seems to be 'on the verge of telling a story' instead of 'telling a story'. Using the word 'verge', Updike seems to imply that Hopper's paintings not only make visible the spaces of everyday life, but also the space of his painting. Indeed, windows are important motifs in Hopper and this seems to propose a connection between Hopper's painting and the short story, whose narrative space, as discussed earlier, offers a rhetoric of the window, revealing at once a commitment to realism and a self-consciousness about that realism.

One of Hopper's distinct compositional features is that he tends to paint 'with

⁵⁵ In Updike's *Still Looking: Essays on American Art* (2005), two essays are devoted to Edward Hopper: 'Hopper's Polluted Silence' (1995) and 'Early Sunday Morning' (1999). The former is Updike's review of a 1995 Edward Hopper exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art for the *New York Review of Books* and the latter a contribution to *Frames of Reference: Looking at American Art, 1900-1950* (1999).

⁵⁶ Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper: The Art and the Artist* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1980), p. 7.

⁵⁷ Douglas Tallack, 'Edward Hopper, Modernist: The Spaces of Everyday Painting', in *American Images* (Copenhagen: United States Information Service, 1995), pp. 107-27 (p. 109),

unusual angles of vision', introducing more diagonals into the picture plane.⁵⁸ In his oil painting *New York Pavements* (1924) (Figure 2), for example, the scene is viewed from an elevated viewpoint from an acute angle.⁵⁹ The house, the major object of the painting, is not rendered parallel to the picture plane. The diagonal lines in the painting, instead of converging to a vanishing point, form edges and angles. A nurse pushing a baby carriage is put at the lower left corner and only part of the figure and the carriage can be seen. This angular vantage viewpoint challenges the traditional Albertian standard of composition in which a horizon line, with its vanishing point, should be located near the middle of the painting in order to maintain linear perspective or, pictorial contiguity.⁶⁰ While still adhering to the realist conventions of pictorial representation, that is still

⁵⁸ Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper: The Art and the Artist*, p. 39.

⁵⁹ Edward Hopper, *New York Pavements*,

<[http://collection.chrysler.org/emuseum/view/objects/asitem/search\\$0040/6/title-asc?t:state:flow=cd32c8ac-fbf3-43c5-943f-cdd34fb03299](http://collection.chrysler.org/emuseum/view/objects/asitem/search$0040/6/title-asc?t:state:flow=cd32c8ac-fbf3-43c5-943f-cdd34fb03299)> [accessed 25 January 2014]. A reproduction of this painting can be found in Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper: The Art and the Artist*, p. 188.

⁶⁰ William V. Dunning, *Changing Images of Pictorial Space: A History of Spatial Illusion in Painting*, p. 125.

offering a view, by introducing angles and edges, Hopper ‘prevent[s] a total view of the scene, and equally prevent[s] us from receiving a unified visual impression’.⁶¹ If Vermeer’s painting offers a relatively sustainable visual unity, a window onto a world, Hopper’s painting gives a frozen moment, a short-lived visual unity, as if a view from the edge of a window.⁶²



Figure 2 Edward Hopper, *New York Pavements*, 1924-1925, Oil on canvas, 24 3/4 x 29 3/4 inches. Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Virginia.

It is this Hopperesque visual edge that renders our perception of a Vermeeresque image in Updike’s story ‘The Blessed Man of Boston, My Grandmother’s Thimble, and Fanning Island’ a short-lived one. Instead of placing the grandmother at the centre of the image and positioning the lines according to the laws of linear perspective to construct a

⁶¹ Rolf G. Renner, *Edward Hopper: 1882-1967: Transformation of the Real*, trans. by Michael Hulse (Cologne: Benedikt Taschen, 1990), p. 21.

⁶² Kangqin Li, ‘Presenting the Real: Hopperesque Updike in “In Football Season” (1962)’, *Swiss Papers in English Language and Literature: The Visual Culture of Modernism*, 26 (2011), 153-67 (pp. 156-57).

woman's image, Updike applies an angular viewpoint: to see the grandmother 'framed in the doorway'. The result is a moment frozen, an unsettling intersection between narrative and space, similar to Hopper's *New York Pavements*. We see at once a view and its limits. This foregrounding of perspective, in both Hopper and Updike, seems to invite readings from different visual media. Hopper's angular viewpoint renders his painting, observes Levin, 'as though seen through a shifting camera lens', suggesting a pre-history and a post-history of the image.⁶³ Considered as part of a sequence, the painting also proposes a cinematic motion. But, for the moment, we shall not be distracted by other visual media. The task is to specify the particular rhetoric of the window in pictorial representation and to look into a special connection between painting and the short story in Updike that cannot be discussed in the same way when the genre is compared to photography and film in the following chapters.

'In Football Season' (1962) describes a few symbolic objects and moments and depicts the atmosphere of Friday night football in small town America in an adult's reminiscence of his adolescence period. One finds a lot of spaces: the high school office, the football stadium, the slope of the stadium, the viewing booth, the sky, the car, the streets, the doors and windows, as well as imaginary spaces. These spaces are described with more Hopperesque visual edges rather than Vermeeresque horizontal planes. Here is the opening paragraph of the story:

Do you remember a fragrance girls acquire in autumn? As you walk beside them after school, they tighten their arms about their books and bend their heads forward to give a more flattering attention to your words, and in the little intimate area thus formed, carved into the clear air by an implicit

⁶³ Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper: The Art and the Artist*, p.58.

crescent [...] ⁶⁴

Constant use of positional expressions such as ‘beside’, ‘tighten their arms about the books’, ‘bend their heads forward’, ‘the little intimate area thus formed’, ‘carved’ and ‘crescent’, reinforces the geometrical circumscription necessary for a painter to locate perspective and forms a basic structure of Updike’s ‘painting’ of spaces. ⁶⁵ There are many visual edges, angles and corners. The narrator walks beside the girls and the girls are portrayed from an angle, which might be an equivalent of Hopper’s angular viewpoint. The girls’ movements when they ‘tighten their arms about their books’ and ‘bend their heads forward’, introduce more angles. In the last sentence of the paragraph, with the fragrance being ‘banked a thousandfold’ and lying ‘heavy as the perfume of a flower shop on the dark slope of the stadium when, Friday nights, we played football in the city’, the reader’s eyes are brought to the stadium slope which is, as in a painting, a slanted horizontal plane. ⁶⁶

As one goes on reading, one encounters more angles when the narrator waits for his father ‘beside half open doors of varnished wood and frosted glass’; when he sees his father ‘taking tickets at the far corner of the wall, wedged into a tiny wooden booth’; and when he escorts a girl to her door and bows his face ‘into that silent crescent of fragrance’. ⁶⁷ There are views seen through windows as well. After seeing the girl home, the narrator would go to Mr. Lloyd Stephens’s house to wait for his father. Before entering the house, he would look through the window:

There, looking in the little square window of his front storm door, I could see down a dark hall into

⁶⁴ John Updike, ‘In Football Season’, in *The Music School* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), pp. 9-13 (p. 9).

⁶⁵ Kangqin Li, ‘Presenting the Real: Hopperesque Updike in “In Football Season” (1962)’, p. 157.

⁶⁶ John Updike, ‘In Football Season’, p. 9.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-12.

the lit kitchen where Mr. Stephens and my father and Mr. Jesse Honneger were counting money around a worn porcelain table.⁶⁸

Like Hopper's angular viewpoint in *New York Pavements*, angles and edges in Updike's short story offer a special temporal dimension, different from the kind of continuity found in the Vermeer-esque image of Olinger in 'Flight'. The reader is made conscious that there is something going on, but again the 'going-on' is, like Hopper's 'frozen moment', framed and frozen within the visual edges. Each visual edge in the story, in other words, informs us with both the narrator's viewpoint and the narrator's self-consciousness about the limits of his viewpoint. This self-consciousness evokes stories untold or scenes unpainted. As we continue reading, those who expect a sequence of narrative may wonder about the words to which the girls listen when bending 'their heads forward' in that 'little intimate area'; they may be curious about what is being discussed inside the doors when the narrator waits for his father 'beside half-open doors'; they may want to know what happens between the narrator and the girl before he is allowed to 'bow his face into that silent crescent of fragrance'; they may also wonder about the lives of the narrator's father, Mr. Stephens, and Mr. Jesse Honneger, and the crossroads which brings them together to count money after the football match in Mr. Lloyd Stephens's kitchen. Indeed, the angles and edges in Updike's story visually offer narrative edges and clearly frame each moment, as Updike describes Hopper, 'on the verge of telling a story'.

However, Updike's effort in narrowing spaces into visual edges and multiplying them in 'In Football Season' does not make the short story a relatively more complete narrative of the football season than any of the small narrative edges mentioned above.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 12.

On the contrary, the short story, framed by its own narrative edges, beginning and ending, seems to have an angular viewpoint, rendering itself ‘on the verge of telling a story’ rather than telling a story. One may understand this better by looking at Hopper’s oil painting *Night Windows* (1928) (Figure 3).⁶⁹ One sees a room with its three windows at the corner of a building. Framed by the black walls, each window forms an angular viewpoint and each affords a partial view of the room. Yet, having the three windows in view does not give a sense of completion or contiguity. We do not feel that more scenes in the room are disclosed. On the contrary, the big edge given by the window sill in the foreground lays bare how the three windows are being viewed: from a window of the opposite building. Like Hopper’s painting, Updike’s story ‘In Football Season’, instead of giving a relatively unified impression of the football season of an American small town, shows a consciousness of its own limited narrative point of view.⁷⁰

‘In Football Season’ is a story of four pages. The story’s relative shortness, even as a short story, foregrounds the notion of edges, but translated from a visual mode to the beginnings and endings that mark the edges of fiction.⁷¹ ‘In Football Season’ lends itself particularly easily to Mary Louise Pratt’s earlier claim that the kind of self-consciousness concerning the story’s ‘incompleteness’ discussed above only belongs to the short story and thereby establishes a unique identity of the genre.⁷² Some critics take the short story’s ‘shortness’ or ‘incompleteness’ as a difference, in kind, from the novel, which represents,

⁶⁹ Edward Hopper, *Night Windows*, <http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=79270> [accessed 25 January 2014]. A reproduction of this painting can be found in Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper: The Art and the Artist*, p. 265.

⁷⁰ Kangqin Li, ‘Presenting the Real: Hopperesque Updike in “In Football Season” (1962)’, pp. 157-58.

⁷¹ Douglas Tallack, *The Nineteenth-Century American Short Story: Language, Form and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 20.

⁷² Mary Louise Pratt, ‘The Short Story: The Long and the Short of It’, in *The New Short Story Theories*, ed. by Charles E. May, pp. 91-113 (p.99).

in their opinion, a form of completeness. It is out of this understanding that they feel a strong need to defend the genre's 'incompleteness' in order that this is not perceived as a deficiency. The critics do not want to denigrate the short story's value; nor do they want the genre to appear downgraded as a sub-genre in front of 'the inclusive universal power of the novel'.⁷³ To this end, critics devote considerable efforts to seeking extra significance in the short story, to finding something that lies beyond its 'incompleteness', its very ending. One sees this endeavour in Georg Lukács's writing on the genre. Here is Lukács on the short story's identity and his suggestion for short story writers:

The difference in length between a novel and a short story is only a symbol of the true, profound, genre-defining difference—namely, that the novel gives us the totality of life by its very contents, by inserting its hero and his destiny in the full richness of an entire world, whereas the short story does this only formally, by giving form to an episode in the hero's life in such a strongly sensual way that it renders all other parts of his life superfluous.⁷⁴

An advocate of literary realism, Lukács prefers the novel to the short story because of the novel's power of giving 'the totality of life'. Yet, Lukács nonetheless offers his way of rescuing the short story: to choose one moment in the hero's life and give special significance to that moment so that all other moments seem 'superfluous'. But, how can one decide that the moment represented in the short story is so significant that other moments all seem unnecessary? That is, when a story ends, stopping at 'the verge of telling a story' so to speak, how can we judge that the 'verge' is already so powerful that telling the story is no longer needed? Lukács does not give a concrete answer.

⁷³ Clare Hanson, "'Things out of Words": Towards a Poetics of Short Fiction', in *Re-reading the Short Story*, ed. by Clare Hanson (London: Macmillan Press, 1989), pp. 22-33 (pp. 24-25).

⁷⁴ Georg Lukács, 'The Bourgeois Way of Life and Art for Art's Sake', in *Soul and Form*, trans. and ed. by Anna Bostock (London: Merlin Press, 1974), pp. 55-78 (p. 73).

No critics can really give a concrete answer, but some certainly seem to agree with Lukács and find it necessary to justify the moment represented in a short story as a fundamentally different one from other textual moments. As a result, attempts are made to enhance the significance of the ending of the short story. Detecting an inconsistency between a story's 'shortness' and a need to give a spatial reading so as to render the meaning of the story complete, critics are short of a proper vocabulary. They tend to find recourse in the unexplainable. Clare Hanson, for instance, refers to the short story as 'closely associated with dream'.⁷⁵ The formal property of the short story, claims Hanson, 'can allow images from the unconscious mind to fuel a short story and to present themselves in the text in a relatively *untranslated* state. Such images retain an air of mystery and impenetrability, an air of dream'.⁷⁶ Charles E. May justifies the genre's 'shortness' as a way of focusing 'all forces on a single point', and in doing so, he relates the genre to the sacred:

The short story form manifests this impulse toward compression and demands this intense focussing for the totality of the narrative experience primarily because it takes for its essential subject the mysterious and dreamlike manifestation of [...] 'momentary deity'.⁷⁷

Hanson and May look into the sphere of the mythic for completeness and totality to justify the short story's 'fragmented' being, its narrative edge.⁷⁸ The meaning of a short story, it seems to Hanson and very possibly to May, can be expressed 'through the non-verbal image-token in the world [...] of the Imaginary'.⁷⁹ Although the critics do not specify which visual medium they refer to when they apply spatial form to the short story,

⁷⁵ Clare Hanson, "'Things out of Words": Towards a Poetics of Short Fiction', p. 26.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁷⁷ Charles E. May, 'The Nature of Knowledge in Short Fiction', in *The New Short Story Theories*, ed. by Charles E. May (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994), pp. 131-43 (p. 139).

⁷⁸ Clare Hanson, "'Things out of Words": Towards a Poetics of Short Fiction', p. 25.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

the kind of visual unity or totality in their reasoning seems to come from pictorial realism. In turning the genre's lack of narrative space into an impulse to 'allow images from the unconscious mind to fuel a short story' and a quest for 'mysterious and dreamlike manifestation', Hanson and May seem to say that the end of a story is the moment when telling becomes showing, whereby spaces are unified into pictorial depth to the maximum extent, sight into insight. This stance, to some extent, reveals the underpinning ideology for epiphany as 'the short story effect': when a story meets its end, its narrative edge, the end brings about a transcendental experience, essentially an all-knowing seeing, that goes beyond the story's narrative edges.⁸⁰

It is based on this ideology that Updike's stories, particularly their endings, are sometimes regarded as highly visual and epiphanic. This is the case with Updike's most frequently anthologised story 'A & P' (1961).⁸¹ The narrator, Sammy, recalls an incident when he was a teenager working as a cashier for a local 'A & P' supermarket. On a summer day, three teenage girls come into the supermarket in bathing suits. While the girls attract attention from Sammy and his colleagues, they are rebuked by the store manager Lengel for not dressing decently in a public space. Feeling a need to defend the girls and to show his refusal of Lengel's puritanical stance, Sammy quits the job on the spot. Taking off his working outfit and placing a 'No Sale' tab on the register, he walks out of the supermarket. The story ends with what Sammy sees after coming out of the supermarket:

I looked around for my girls, but they're gone, of course. There wasn't anybody but some young married screaming with her children about some candy they didn't get by the door of a powder-blue

⁸⁰ John Bayley, *The Short Story: Henry James to Elizabeth Bowen*, p. 9.

⁸¹ Donald J. Greiner, *The Other John Updike: Poems, Short Stories, Prose and Play* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1981), p. 117.

Falcon station wagon. Looking back in the big windows, over the bags of peat moss and aluminium lawn furniture stacked on the pavement, I could see Lengel in my place in the slot, checking the sheep through. His face was dark grey and his back stiff, as if he'd just had an injection of iron, and my stomach kind of fell as I felt how hard the world was going to be to me hereafter.⁸²

The story's ending, particularly what Sammy sees from outside the supermarket, is often the focus of critical discussion. Some critics apply transcendental significance to Sammy's vision. His sight becomes an insight, a manifestation. Robert Detweiler notes that 'Sammy is left with a sharp, painful revelation of "how hard the world was going to be to me hereafter"'.⁸³ Toni Saldívar regards Sammy's seeing as a sad but 'highly idiosyncratic aesthetic vision', because Sammy's narrative is 'Updike's gesture to give Eros a form that will both ennoble and extend it as an aesthetic pleasure – while intensifying the impossibility of that desire's completing itself in anything other than art'.⁸⁴ Claiming that Sammy arrives at an aesthetic completion, an impression of visual totality, Saldívar adopts the position of Hanson and May and advocates spatial form, a transcendental power, in the short story. Examining Saldívar's reading of the story with some knowledge of painting, it is not difficult to ascertain that she applies linear perspective to Sammy's visual field. To put it differently, she regards Sammy's view as a Vermeer-esque one: spaces are unified into a visual illusion, which a reader can trace for a certain duration without registering the existence of the frame, the visual edges.

However, if we pay attention to the ending of 'A & P', we find more or less a Hopperesque angular viewpoint, which reveals not only what Sammy sees from outside

⁸² John Updike, 'A & P', in *Pigeon Feathers and Other Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), pp. 130-36 (p. 136).

⁸³ Robert Detweiler, *John Updike* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984), p. 53.

⁸⁴ Toni Saldívar, 'The Art of John Updike's "A & P"', *Studies in Short Fiction*, 34 (1997), 215-25 (p. 224, p. 216).

the supermarket, but how Sammy sees. Making Sammy look back at Lengel through ‘the big windows’ and having ‘the bags of peat moss and aluminium lawn furniture stacked on the pavement’ and ‘the door of a powder-blue Falcon station wagon’ in the middle of the view, Updike lays bare lines that do not converge into a vanishing point and thereby introduces visual edges, rather than producing a relatively stable visual unity as seen through linear perspective. As a result, these visual edges in Sammy’s vision renders his epiphany, if there is any, a very short and unstable one. If some critics conclude that Sammy’s seeing confirms his revelation, that the world will no longer be the same again, a discovery of the visual edges in his seeing scales back the effect of his revelation. Sammy’s view is little different from the one in ‘In Football Season’, where the narrative is left on the ‘verge’ without being told.

Reading short stories such as ‘In Football Season’ and ‘A & P’, we negotiate narrative edges, beginnings and endings, sooner than when reading a novel, because there is less narrative space in the form. However, this difference in degree between short fiction and longer fiction, that is longer fiction taking longer to reach its end, has been misunderstood by critics as a difference in kind, a difference between incompleteness and completeness. But if we recall Hopper’s painting *Night Windows*, which, with three windows inside, still does not disclose more scenes of the room than a single window, we may come to an awareness that what the painting tells us is not that some viewpoints are complete and others are not, but that no viewpoint is complete. Any perspective, linear or non-linear, is limited. When Alberti asks painters to render the outlines of their paintings as invisible as possible to achieve maximum visual depth on painting surface, there is no denying that ‘setting down the outline, appropriately, circumscription’ is a

necessary, or even a foremost, step of painting.⁸⁵ To paint, one has to establish a viewpoint and this process of establishing a viewpoint is a ‘process of delimitation’, similar to setting out the beginning of a narrative.⁸⁶ Ferdinand de Saussure points out the issue of ‘viewpoint’ in linguistic activities:

Far from it being the object that antedates the viewpoint, it would seem that it is the viewpoint that creates the object; besides, nothing tells us in advance that one way of considering the fact in question takes precedence over the others or is in any other way superior to them.⁸⁷

For Saussure, it is essential to establish a ‘viewpoint’ if one wants to begin a narrative. It is also impossible to judge which ‘viewpoint’ is relatively more complete than another. This insight, that ‘incompleteness’ is at once an essential requirement and a fundamental frustration in linguistic activities, is implied in Alberti’s emphasis on locating the position of the beholder before setting out to paint: it is the position of the viewer that defines how an object is seen rather than the position of the object itself.⁸⁸

This said, it could be productive to re-think pictorial realism and the painterly reading of literature underpinned by linear perspective, given that even linear perspective is incomplete. We may wonder if non-linear perspective, a narrative edge that both offers a view and reveals its own limits as seen in Hopper and Updike, might represent the external world in a better, and more honest, way. Representational painting, informs Updike, the art critic, ‘asks a double response from the viewer: to the subject depicted and to the manner of depiction’.⁸⁹ In this respect, we may modify our understanding of

⁸⁵ Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, p. 64.

⁸⁶ Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (London: Granta Books, 1997), p. 36.

⁸⁷ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. by Wade Baskin (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), p. 8.

⁸⁸ Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, p. 64.

⁸⁹ John Updike, ‘Violence at the Windows’, in *Just Looking: Essays on Art*, pp.117-26 (p. 117).

painting or literature read in a painterly manner: it is a window and its world rather than a window onto a world as discussed earlier. This modification sheds some light on the position of the short story and helps us discover something about the genre and its relation to representation. If there is anything special about the short story, it does not lie in its mysterious or inexplicable power of transcending 'incompleteness' into something complete as claimed by Lukács and other critics; rather, it lies in its acute self-consciousness, in its having no choice but to face the edges, the limits of representation, more straightforwardly.

We start to appreciate why there are so many visual edges and corners in Updike's short fiction and why Updike, a writer very much dedicated to graphic precision, is quite relaxed about them and shows no intention of hiding them. In his 1979 story 'The City', the protagonist suffers from appendicitis on a business trip and has to be hospitalised in the city that he is not familiar with. Having to stay in hospital after the operation, Carson has no choice but to look at the city from the hospital windows. Yet, no matter from which window he looks, what Carson sees is either the wall of another wing of the hospital or other windowsills, allowing only 'a fractional view of the city below'.⁹⁰ After a period of frustration, Carson slowly comes to appreciate these visual edges: 'the drab housing and assembled rubble that he saw through the grid of the cement barrier, which permitted no broader view, nevertheless seemed to Carson brilliantly real'.⁹¹ In making his characters recognise visual edges in the stories, Updike makes it clear that the visual edge does not only belong to the short story. It is rather the fundamental frustration of representation itself.

⁹⁰ John Updike, 'The City', in *Trust Me* (New York: Knopf, 1987), pp. 34-53 (p. 52).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

In 'The Blessed Man of Boston, My Grandmother's Thimble, and Fanning Island', his narrator is a would-be novelist. With his intention of tracing, 'painting' stroke after stroke, every moment of the life of the man he encounters outside a baseball game and that of the life of his grandmother by 'set[ting] sequentially down with the bald simplicity of intrinsic blessing, thousands upon thousands of pages', he knows he would still fail to give a complete picture.⁹² By laying bare the novelist's failure in the short story, Updike does not have his novelist protagonist give up writing. Instead, with a frank recognition that nothing is complete and that no story can be 'fully told', the novelist still believes in 'details', a painterly method in writing, and continues to 'paint' with every brushstroke one after another.⁹³

Although critics do not approach Updike's epiphany in his short fiction from a formalist angle as we have done above, some do question the stability and epistemological certainty of Updike's epiphany. Walter Wells, for instance, points to the fact that Sammy in 'A & P', at the moment of storytelling, is much wiser than his younger self in the story.⁹⁴ This difference between Sammy now (the narrator) and Sammy then (Sammy in the story) creates a distance from Sammy's epiphany. As a result, Wells concludes that Sammy 'sees nothing very clearly, only indefiniteness'.⁹⁵ Placing the ending of 'A & P' alongside that of James Joyce's 'Araby' (1914), a classical example of epiphany, Kasia Boddy claims that the short story, a form that features a 'turning point', suits adolescence, a state of mind and body that in itself constitutes a 'turning

⁹² John Updike, 'The Blessed Man of Boston, My Grandmother's Thimble, and Fanning Island', p. 158.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

⁹⁴ Walter Wells, 'John Updike's "A & P": A Return Visit to Araby', *Studies in Short Fiction*, 30 (1993), 127-33 (p.128).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

point'.⁹⁶ But similar to Wells, Boddy also hints at a difference between the narrator of the story and the seer in the story, thereby pointing to a certain level of self-awareness in the narrator.⁹⁷

In reviewing critics' doubts about the epiphany in Updike's short fiction, we also find some voices that go slightly further; they not only question the stability of the epiphany, but also wonder if an epiphany is ever present. Ronald E. McFarland and Lawrence Jay Dessner both detect a strong ironic note at the end of 'A & P' and turn Sammy's epiphany almost to what Dominic Head calls the principle of 'non-epiphany'.⁹⁸ In these critics' understanding of the short story, Sammy's epiphany is not even a short-lived one, as we have discussed in this section; rather, his epiphany is only an illusion, what McFarland calls a 'Quixotic type' of comedy.⁹⁹ What, then, is this 'non-epiphany' and how does it present itself in pictorial representation? Although the Updike critics, once again, do not approach the issue through a formalist method and Head himself refuses to recognise a visual reading of the short story, it is still possible, given Updike's unusual painterly sensibility, to try to explore this higher level of self-consciousness of storytelling through the medium of painting. While still focusing on perspective, we shall look, instead at how it offers a view, at how it denies a view.

III. A window that denies a world

⁹⁶ Kasia Boddy, *The American Short Story Since 1950*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p.102.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁹⁸ Ronald E. McFarland, 'Updike and the Critics: Reflections on "A & P"', *Studies in Short Fiction*, 20 (1983), 95-100; Lawrence Jay Dessner, 'Irony and Innocence in John Updike's "A & P"', *Studies in Short Fiction*, 25 (1988), 315-17; Dominic Head, *The Modernist Short Story: A Study in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp.37-78.

⁹⁹ Ronald E. McFarland, 'Updike and the Critics: Reflections on "A & P"', p. 96.

Perspective in pictorial representation, as Updike has noted, involves what is viewed and how it is viewed. In this section, we continue to examine the interplay between ‘what’ and ‘how’ in perspective and to study other painterly techniques applied by Updike in his short fiction.

In ‘In Football Season’, the smoothness of the girls’ fragrance is associated with the sharpness of various edges in a passage describing the football stadium and the night sky:

In a hoarse olfactory shout, these odours ascended. A dense haze gathered along the ceiling of brightness at the upper limit of the arc lights, whose glare blotted out the stars and made the sky seem romantically void and intimately near, like the death that now and then stooped and plucked one of us out of a crumpled automobile.¹⁰⁰

While the ‘odours ascended’, we encounter phrases such as ‘the ceiling of brightness at the upper limit of the arc lights’, ‘the stars’ and ‘the sky’. We are given a lowered viewpoint, what William V. Dunning calls a ‘worm’s-eye’ view in painting.¹⁰¹ But the second half of the sentence, ‘like the death that now and then stooped and plucked one of us out of a crumpled automobile’, introduces an elevated ‘bird’s-eye’ viewpoint and has the reader look at these human beings and crumpled automobiles from the sky.¹⁰² If, with angular viewpoint, one still has a glimpse of the visible, the juxtaposition of two different viewpoints offers two viewing surfaces at the same time and creates a stretching tension between the two. As a result, one’s eyes, instead of perceiving any visual unity, stay on the visual surface of the description stretched by the two viewpoints. We may, then, wonder whether perspective in this passage presents itself through ‘lack of perspective’, as obviously enough lowered and elevated viewpoints exclude each other

¹⁰⁰ John Updike, ‘In Football Season’, p. 10.

¹⁰¹ William V. Dunning, *Changing Images of Pictorial Space: A History of Spatial Illusion in Painting*, p. 125.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

and deny access to depth.

If visual depth, as we have discussed earlier, opens the opportunity for narrative, the passage above seems to open the way even as it very quickly denies it. If the visual edge in the previous section renders itself ‘on the verge of telling a story’, the contradicting viewpoints here seem to be, and we may modify the phrase, on the verge of denying a story. Once again, Edward Hopper’s work can help us understand how ‘perspective’ turns into ‘lack of perspective’.

Apart from paintings with non-linear perspective as seen in *New York Pavements*, Hopper sometimes plays with perspective in a more complicated way. His 1925 painting *Stairway* (Figure 4), for example, seems to represent the view of someone standing on the stairs.¹⁰³ However, if we dwell on it, literally standing close to the painting for a longer time, we find the painting has a very confusing perspective and traditional rules of proportion are not followed. There is no vanishing point, achieved by, as we have explained earlier, diagonals at mid-height in the painting, which seem to converge as do the parallel railroad tracks. As a result, the foreground of the painting seems flattened. One would expect the steps to be steeper as the viewpoint appears to be floating and is higher than the viewpoint of someone who would stand on the stairs. The position of the wooden beam above the top of the painting is difficult to locate too. If it is a beam above the doorframe, it seems too close and too imposing; if it is a beam above the stairway, the view outside the doorframe should have been blocked off a little more. Similar questions can be asked about the dark mass outside. Is it a storm? If so, why does one see the blue sky beyond? In the end, all these questions converge on the question of

¹⁰³ Edward Hopper, *Stairway*, <<http://www.pinterest.com/igori/art-hopper/>>, [accessed 25 January 2014]. A reproduction of this painting can be found in Gail Levin, *Edward Hopper: The Art and the Artist*, p. 174.

viewpoint. Yet, the questions remain unsolved as whenever we assume one viewpoint on which one narrative can be projected, we always find something that contradicts it. The more we look, the more we lose a view, or, the more what is assumed to be a view turns out to be just an illusion. Like Updike's juxtaposition of the 'bird's-eye' view and the 'worm's-eye' view, which keeps one's eyes on the visual surface of the description, the confusing perspective in Hopper's *Stairway* makes the painting visually impossible and prevents us from looking into the depth of painting.¹⁰⁴ The result is that one sees only the two-dimensional painting surface and wonders whether the representational objects, the walls, the doors, the beam, and the stairway and the black mass outside, are only painted spaces.

In both Updike's description and Hopper's *Stairway*, elements that could have held together to create an image break down. It seems, in both cases, the artist either forgets to complete the painting or the description or intentionally adopts a 'self-mocking' attitude, as Updike notes in Hopper, to keep the image 'sketchy'.¹⁰⁵ Painting and representation, in other words, part company, given that when viewed briefly Updike's passage and Hopper's painting appear to unify into an image, but when viewed closely, that image disappears. It was, notes T. J. Clark, 'as if a space had to be kept between painting and representating: the two procedures must never quite mesh, they were not to be seen as part and parcel of each other'.¹⁰⁶ This aspect of pictorial representation corresponds to what Dominic Head calls 'the non-epiphany principle' in James Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914), a classic collection for the study of epiphany.¹⁰⁷ Detecting a critical

¹⁰⁴ Douglas Tallack, 'Edward Hopper, Modernist: The Spaces of Everyday Painting', p. 118.

¹⁰⁵ John Updike, 'Hopper's Polluted Silence', in *Still Looking*, p. 183; T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 62.

¹⁰⁶ T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers*, p. 20.

¹⁰⁷ Dominic Head, *The Modernist Short Story: A Study in Theory and Practice*, pp. 37-78.

tendency of focusing on ‘simplified symbolic effects’ to give the book ‘a simple, unified meaning’, Head argues that ‘the Joycean epiphany’ is made problematic in Joyce’s story technique.¹⁰⁸ He observes that there is ‘a nexus of a *variety* of forces rather than a *single* effect’ in Joyce, which draws our attention to ‘disunity’, to what is not there, in what is invariably considered the key epiphanic moment.¹⁰⁹ Head’s insight is similar to what Clark has noted in some Impressionist painters. What seems to be representational turns out not to be at a second look. Description and what is hoped as an image cannot be mapped; the two are kept at a distance due to ‘disparity and conflict’.¹¹⁰ As a result, there is ‘falsity’, ‘a lack of illumination’, in many of the epiphanies in *Dubliners* and the moments of revelation or illumination are only moments of ‘illusory unity’.¹¹¹

This interplay between visual unity and disunity, illumination and lack of illumination, is the theme of Updike’s story ‘The Stare’ (1965). As the title suggests, it is a story about looking and seeing. But as the story unfolds, we find that whereas the protagonist recalls his ex-lover’s stare during his business trip in New York, he constantly has the illusion of running into the person, meeting her stare. The story is, then, not only about seeing, but also about non-seeing or denial of seeing, for the protagonist’s seeing only turns out to be illusory and false. One finds this denial of seeing at different levels, yet all at the point when vision is about to crystallise, or, as the protagonist notes himself, ‘in the instant between recognition and turning’.¹¹² To begin with, the protagonist constantly mistakes the person he sees as the person in his mind. Eating with his colleagues at a restaurant, he saw a woman whose facial features seem to

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 49, p. 44.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.49-50.

¹¹² John Updike, ‘The Stare’, in *The Music School* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), pp. 50-56 (p. 50).

on the edge of unifying into an image of his ex-lover. Yet, when he gives these features a closer look, the image disappears and shows another person:

It was someone else, a not very young women whose hair, not really the colour of her hair at all, had, half seen, suggested the way her hair, centrally parted and pulled back into a glossy French roll, would cut with two dark wings into her forehead, making her brow seem low and intense and emphasizing her stare.¹¹³

The woman resembles the woman in his mind only when she is ‘half seen’. His vision of the ex-lover is based on a gap between his ex-lover and the facial features he sees, between ‘recognition and turning’. When he gets closer and sees the face, the gap disappears and so does the illusion: it is not his ex-lover. ‘Trying to press this unknown woman’s appearance into the appearance of another,’ he explains to himself.¹¹⁴ His illumination turns out to be a false one, a ‘lack of illumination’.

The second level of visual disunity exists in the protagonist’s vision of the city during this business trip. Wherever he goes, almost everything that he looks at, from human faces to his hotel room, from city streets to his borrowed office, seems to be nothing but a blank surface which denies entry. One thinks of Hopper’s painting *Stairway*, where spaces, instead of opening up to visual depth, are flattened and one sees only the blank surface of the painting. Each face in the street is a ‘pale disc’; another person that resembles his lover turns out to be woman with a ‘wrinkled painted’ face; her stare, then, seems to disappear ‘in the wavering wall-window’ of a bank; he looks through the mirror of his room, only to find ‘the door drifting shut’; he rushes out of the ‘suffocating vacant room’, only to mistake ‘the rubble of a face’ as, once again, ‘a certain momentary plane

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

of her face'.¹¹⁵ The more blank surfaces his eyes encounter, the more futile his vision is, and the more it proves the absence of his ex-lover. If those surfaces could have been 'windows' that afford a view, Updike's emphasis that they turn out to be blank surfaces reminds us that a window can not only afford a view, but also deny it.

This brings us to the theme of the story: the stare of the ex-lover. At the beginning of the relationship, the protagonist finds the lover's stare 'curiously wide, and even open'.¹¹⁶ If the eye is considered the window to the soul, her wide and open stare perhaps suggests an invitation, an entry, into her world. Yet, at the end of the relationship when the protagonist has to make a choice between his wife and the lover and finally opts for the former, her stare becomes a different one:

The last time he saw her, all the gentle months had been stripped away and her stare, naked, had become furious. [...] her stare revived into a life so coldly controlled and adamantly hostile that for weeks he could not close his eyes without confronting it—much as a victim of torture must continue to see the burning iron with which he was blinded.¹¹⁷

A thematic concern is evident here. The passage describes the painful breakup of a relationship. A once familiar person gives a stare 'coldly controlled and adamantly hostile', showing a confrontation with or a denial of communication. Such a confrontation, like 'a burning iron', not only blocks the protagonist's vision, but also, as described, blinds him. But if all the description of her stare is from observation, one may also turn the theme around and claim that it is a short story about his seeing, or rather, his stare.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 53-55.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 51.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 52-53.

This inversion enables us to approach the ongoing interplay between the protagonist's sight and his 'blindness', his epiphany and his 'non-epiphany'. We find that an absolute seeing, or what has been identified in the Introduction as a lucid eye, does not exist. Rather, there is a precarious co-existence of seeing and non-seeing. In 'The Stare', other women's faces, visual surfaces, and her stare in his memory all indicate that seeing and non-seeing are just two sides of one coin, one existing at the expense of the other. Staring might bring about a clearer vision; but at the same time, staring, that is when we keep on looking at something, is rather like repeating a word over and over, only to find that it has lost its familiar moorings and is cut loose. Every seeing, or every insight, as Paul de Man notes, can only be gained at the cost of some degree of 'blindness', requiring one's method to be 'oblivious to the perception of this insight'.¹¹⁸ Given that epiphany and 'non-epiphany', insight and 'blindness', cannot be separated from each other, we may modify Robert Langbaum's initial definition of literary epiphany: while epiphany is 'a manifestation in and through the visible world of an invisible life', it is also a manifestation in and through the invisible life of a visible world.¹¹⁹

That said, we may now look at the ending of 'The Stare' and understand why no reader, after following on-going illumination and lack of illumination, would take the protagonist's seeing seriously without noting the ironic tone:

A few well-dressed young women, of the style that bloom and wither by thousands in the city's public places, were standing waiting for an escort or an elevator; as he pressed, no doubt redundantly, the button, a face cut into the side of his vision at such an angle that his head snapped around and he

¹¹⁸ Paul de Man, 'The Rhetoric of Blindness: Jacques Derrida's Reading of Rousseau', in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1983), pp. 102-41 (p. 106).

¹¹⁹ Robert Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience* (New York: Norton, 1971), p. 175.

almost said aloud, 'Don't be frightened. Of course I love you'.¹²⁰

Reading 'a face cut into the side of his vision', one is almost certain that the protagonist's epiphany is once again an illusion. The fact that the story ends here offers an irony, a 'self-parody', a term used by Updike to describe the special trait in Hopper's realist painting, to the story itself.¹²¹ It is 'on the verge of telling a story', but it is also on the verge of denying a story.

Assisted by Head's notion of 'non-epiphany' in epiphany, we may usefully recall the critics who raise doubts about Updike's epiphany. As Lawrence Jay Dessner suggests, the ending of 'A & P' demonstrates Sammy's inability to perceive his position in the world by overrating the consequences of his renunciation of a summer job.¹²² Ronald E. McFarland notes that the story is told in a manner of 'colloquial comedy' by a much older narrator who takes a distance and mocks at his younger self.¹²³ Writing on Updike's 'Pigeon Feathers' (1962), another short story known for its epiphany, George J. Searles argues that Updike, instead of celebrating his protagonist's epiphany, implies with irony that 'spiritual fulfilment may now be achievable only through just such a transcendent, child-like faith'.¹²⁴

Facing the critics' discovery of parody, or 'non-epiphany', in epiphany, we may come across a degree of isolation in the reading process due to the denial to communication, the inability to enter a visual world. This perhaps explains why many people resort to, once again, psychological terms such as 'loneliness' to describe their

¹²⁰ John Updike, 'The Stare', p. 56.

¹²¹ John Updike, 'Hopper's Polluted Silence', p. 191.

¹²² Lawrence Jay Dessner, 'Irony and Innocence in John Updike's "A & P"', p. 315.

¹²³ Ronald E. McFarland, 'Updike and the Critics: Reflections on "A & P"', p.96.

¹²⁴ George J. Searles, 'The Mouths of Babes: Childhood Epiphany in Roth's "Conversion of the Jews" and Updike's "Pigeon Feathers"', *Studies in Short Fiction*, 24 (1987), 59-62 (p. 62).

feeling in front of a short story or a Hopper painting.¹²⁵ Frank O'Connor, in a similar manner, attributes 'an intense awareness of human loneliness' as the short story's special mood.¹²⁶ By highlighting 'loneliness', though, we risk falling into what we have been criticising so far: identifying the short story with a private sentiment that tends towards silence and wordlessness. However, the formal method that we have relied upon to look at Updike's stories is able to help us take the issue more positively and move beyond this private sentiment. Epiphany and the irony of epiphany are two sides of the same coin and as de Man suggests, every insight is achieved at some degree of blindness. While Old Masters dismiss a painting that fails to bring us an illusion of the world as bad art, such as Hopper's *Stairway* and passages in Updike's 'In Football Season' or 'The Stare', modern artists and critics 'regard these same limitations as positive factors that are to be acknowledged openly'.¹²⁷ Calling for accuracy in writing on the one hand, Updike refuses to compose on the other hand 'whatever is lazily assumed, or hastily perceived, or piously hoped'.¹²⁸

This is what Updike's protagonist, a writer, chooses to do in 'The Sea's Green Sameness' (1960). Short of artistic conventions to offer anything new 'to contribute to human knowledge of the sea', the writer opts for expressing honestly his suspicion towards representation.¹²⁹ The story ends with his heart-felt soliloquy:

All I expect is that once into my blindly spun web of words the thing itself will break: make an entry and an account of itself. Not declare what it will do. This is no mystery; we are old friends. I can

¹²⁵ Douglas Tallack, 'Edward Hopper, Modernist: the Spaces of Everyday Painting', p. 114.

¹²⁶ Frank O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story* (Brooklyn: Melville House Publishing, 2004), p. 19.

¹²⁷ Clement Greenberg, 'Modern Painting', in *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Francis Francina and Charles Harrison (London: Harpers & Row, 1982), pp. 5-10 (p. 6).

¹²⁸ John Updike, 'Accuracy', in *Picked-Up Pieces* (Greenwich: Fawcett Books, 1975), pp.33-34 (p. 34).

¹²⁹ John Updike, 'The Sea's Green Sameness', in *Museums and Women and Other Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), pp. 135-39 (p. 138).

observe. Not cast its vote with mine, and make a decree: I have no hope of this. The session has lasted too long. I wish it to yield only on the point of its identity. What is it? Its breadth, its glitter, its greenness and sameness baulk me. *What is it?* If I knew, I could say.¹³⁰

Instead of abandoning expression, the protagonist chooses to continue writing, even if it is only to lay bare his frustration and blindness as a writer. We may recall O' Connor's book *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story* and read the title in a different light. Acknowledging the writer's loneliness, the story does not remain silent. It is nevertheless a 'voice' for writing, for stories. Although O'Connor focuses more on the short story's content and claims that the genre is most suited for portraying the 'submerged population group' of a society, his observation can equally be used for a formal understanding of the genre.¹³¹ That is, the self-consciousness found in the short story form does promote a public function instead of only a private one. A story mocks its own limited being and appeals for more writing, for stories which would otherwise be 'submerged'.

We can end the chapter with Updike's story 'The Corner' (1969), a story about seeing and storytelling through visual corners, and about community. The story describes a dangerous corner in a residential neighbourhood, where car accidents take place frequently. In recalling one accident and the accounts of those who live around the corner, Updike makes it very clear that each account is given by a person who witnesses the accident from his/her own window and therefore it is his/her own version of the accident. As a result, the short story ends up not giving any comprehensive linear narrative of the accident. At the end of the story, the police listen to the story from a driver involved in the accident, whose version is, once again, different from others:

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 139.

¹³¹ Frank O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story*, p. 17.

The driver's story had been strange, but no stranger, to the people who live here, than the truth that the corner is one among many on the map of the town, and the town is a dot on the map of the state, and the state a mere patch on the globe, and the globe insignificant from any of the stars overhead.¹³²

Being strange and different seems to be what Updike wants to say about the short story and fiction. No story is superior or inferior to other stories. Each story is different, therefore respecting and recalling more storytelling. What is important about storytelling is, as Updike explains in an interview, the 'feeling of making discrete [...] verbal tales that have an interest in relation to the society, in relation to what [a storyteller] perceive[s] to be human issues'.¹³³

¹³² John Updike, 'The Corner', in *Museums and Women and Other Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), pp.56-63 (p. 63).

¹³³ James Schiff, 'A Conversation with John Updike', *The Southern Review*, 38 (2002), 420-43 (p.428).

Chapter Three

‘The Camera Eye’ in John Updike’s Short Fiction¹

The shutter clicks, and what is captured is mostly accident – that happy foreground diagonal, the telling expression for ever pinned in mid-flight between two plateaus of vacuity.²

John Updike, ‘The Day of the Dying Rabbit’ (1969)

The previous chapter re-considered a painterly analogy with the short story and Updike’s painterly techniques in his short fiction. In exploring how Updike deploys the window in the special relationship between the short story and pictorial representation, we have discovered that Updike resorts to the short story’s involvement with painting to reaffirm his commitment to ‘groping for visual precision’ through his painterly techniques on the one hand, and to demonstrate the ‘incompleteness’ of representation on the other.³ However, a painterly analogy should not be taken as to encompass a visual reading of the genre; nor would it do justice to Updike’s overall visual aesthetics in his short fiction. Another visual medium, photography, is equally important in Updike’s visual preoccupations within his short stories.

Relations between literature and photography are a common critical concern. From photography’s official appearance in 1839 and through the period of its development, the new medium’s mechanical yet mostly faithful capacity for producing ‘replicas of the

¹ The term ‘the camera eye’ is borrowed from John Dos Passos, *U.S.A* (London: Penguin, 2001). Dos Passos uses the term to refer to fragmented autobiographical narrative, one of his four narrative modes in the trilogy. The other three modes are fictional narrative, newspaper narrative, and biographical narrative.

² John Updike, ‘The Day of the Dying Rabbit’, in *Museums and Women and Other Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), pp. 29-40 (p. 29).

³ John Updike, ‘Why Write?’, in *Picked-Up Pieces* (Greenwich: Fawcett Books, 1975), pp. 45-54 (p. 51).

visual world' has illuminated the intersection between representation and realism.⁴ Flaubert's method of describing the physical surfaces of objects, remarks Alan Spiegel, is achieved 'with an eye that sees like a camera' and since Flaubert photographic verisimilitude has been widely applied in nineteenth-century realist literature.⁵ This visual medium has not been overlooked by short story writers and critics. Valerie Shaw, for example, perceives a connection between the two media based on their shared capability for creating 'a self-sufficient illumination which does not require the help of "plot" or "story" to give it meaning'.⁶ Martin Scofield proposes an affinity resting on the two media's shared aesthetic of 'revealing a world through the catching and framing of a transient moment'.⁷ The South African short story writer Nadine Gordimer, although not pointing directly to a short story and photography analogy, deploys the image of the firefly, which reminds us of the flash of photograph taking:

Short story writers see by the light of the flash; theirs is the art of the only thing one can be sure of—the present moment. Ideally, they have learned to do without explanation of what went before, and what happens beyond this point.⁸

Other critics such as Clare Hanson and Julio Cortázar also apply, explicitly or implicitly, a similar reading of the genre, which will be considered alongside Updike's short fiction in this chapter.

More than a handful of Updike's short stories are related to photography through the protagonists' vocation as professional or amateur photographers. Quite intriguingly, in

⁴ Alan Trachtenberg (ed.), 'Introduction to Charles Baudelaire's "The Modern Public and Photography"', in *Classical Essays on Photography* (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980), p. 83 (p. 83).

⁵ Alan Spiegel, *Fiction and the Camera Eye: Visual Consciousness in Film and the Modern Novel*, p. 33.

⁶ Valerie Shaw, *The Short Story: A Critical Instruction* (Essex: Longman House, 1983), p. 14.

⁷ Martin Scofield, *The Cambridge Introduction to the American Short story* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 110.

⁸ Nadine Gordimer, 'The International Symposium on the Short Story: South Africa', in *The Kenyon Review*, 30 (1968), 457-63 (p. 459).

including photographers and photographs in his stories, Updike seems to build a special link between photography and his abiding themes: loss and memory. In 'Flight' (1959), the narrator looks closely at an old photograph of his mother in search of hints of family quarrels. In 'The Day of the Dying Rabbit' (1969), the source for this chapter's epigraph, the narrator is a photographer for an advertising agency and applies technical words from photography to his description of domestic life. In 'White on White' (1962), Henry Bech is invited to a cocktail party celebrating the publication of a book by a photographer, who once took pictures of him. In 'Atlantises' (1978), the photograph of a mass murderer on the front page of the local newspaper arouses Mr. Farnham's remote memory of his first marriage. And, in 'Here Come the Maples' (1979), Richard Maple tries to bring back memories of his wedding by recalling a few snapshots of the day. Just to name a few more among many, chiefly to pinpoint Updike's sustained interest in photographic visual representation but also to note the ubiquity of photography in twentieth-century American culture: in the 1982 story 'Death of Distant Friends', the narrator merges his memory of his first wife with the old framed studio photographs of some distant friends; Joey, in 'A Sandstone Farmhouse' (1990), resorts to old family photographs to piece together the life of his recently deceased mother; in 'My Father's Tears' (2006), the snapshots of the narrator's first wife become one of the key clues in his reminiscence of his earlier life.

Frequent references to photography in Updike's stories should not be treated as simply part of the topicality of his writing but as confirmation that the painterly reading described in the previous chapter on its own does not do justice to Updike's effort to make his reader see in his short fiction. Although Updike himself does not mention explicitly a special connection between the short story and photography, it would make

sense to assume one, given that Updike is a writer of high visual consciousness, who claims that ‘this century has belonged to the eye’ and that different art forms ‘hint at paths of accommodation in an ecumenical movement among eye-oriented media’.⁹ It is arguable that he gives equal seriousness to photography, as he does to painting, in his practice of short fiction and in his meditation and mediation of the short story as a genre.

When Updike, as an art critic, talks about photography, he puts emphasis upon its difference from, rather than similarity to, painting. In ‘The Domestic Camera’ (1999), he remarks:

The painter can imagine or reconstruct, whereas the photographer must have his subject physically present. [...] Always we are aware, in looking at photographs, that something lies beyond the edges, in the dimensions both of space and time. Unlike the older, more humanly shaped arts, which begin with a seed and accumulate their form organically, photography clips its substance out of an actual continuum.¹⁰

Updike notes that in a photograph the relationship between space and time, between its edges and the world, is different from those relationships in a painting. While a painting is, above all, about reconstructing and representing an image on a surface, the photograph is, essentially, a clipped reproduction of the outside world. The photograph and things ‘beyond the edges’, in other words, are related on the basis of ‘an actual continuum’. This important observation is consistent with Stanley Cavell’s distinction between painting and photography:

You can always ask, of an area photographed, what lies adjacent to that area, beyond the frame. This generally makes no sense asked of a painting. [...] The world of a painting is not continuous with the world of its frame; at its frame, a world finds its limits. We might say: A painting *is* a world; a

⁹ John Updike, ‘The Future of the Novel’, in *Picked-Up Pieces* (Greenwich: Fawcett Books, 1975), pp. 34-40 (p. 39)

¹⁰ John Updike, ‘The Domestic Camera’, in *More Matter: Essays and Criticism* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999), pp. 667-71 (pp. 668-71).

photograph is *of* the world. What happens in a photograph is that *it* comes to an end.¹¹

Upon first reading, Updike's and Cavell's insights belong to art criticism and have little to do with literary genres, let alone the short story. However, I argue that their perception of the medium of photography, particularly their stress on its difference from painting, is critical for the process of re-assessing the analogy between the photograph and the short story. Unless the difference in the two media's modes of representation as identified by Updike and Cavell is acknowledged, a central problem arises in short story criticism: the critics do not distinguish a photographic reading from a painterly one and tend to use the word 'visual' or 'spatial' to encompass both.

This issue in the literary criticism of the short story and in criticism of Updike's short stories is not unlike the major problem in photography criticism detected by Victor Burgin in his perceptive introduction to *Thinking Photography* (1982):

So far as this content is concerned, to a very great extent our ways of conceiving of photography have not yet succeeded in breaking clear of the gravitational field of nineteenth-century thinking: thinking dominated by a metaphor of *depth*, in which the surface of the photograph is viewed as the projection of something which lies 'behind' or 'beyond' the surface; in which the frame of the photograph is seen as marking the place of entry to something more *profound* – 'reality' itself, the 'expression' of the artist, or both (a reality refracted through a sensibility).¹²

In claiming that 'the gravitational field of nineteenth-century thinking' is a thinking dominated by depth, Burgin seems to express a realist view of painting and this view can be challenged by Updike's denial to a visual world in his painterly images as seen in the last section of the previous chapter. Yet, Burgin nevertheless points out something

¹¹ Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 23-24.

¹² Victor Burgin, 'Introduction', in *Thinking Photography*, ed. by Victor Burgin (London: Macmillan Press, 1982), pp. 1-14 (p. 11).

important concerning the central problem in photography criticism; Updike and Cavell would most probably agree with him, insofar as they both draw attention to the difference between the two visual media. What is implied in Burgin's message is that two steps are necessary in our understanding of photography. First, in order to understand photography, one cannot circumvent the study of painting. As far as pictorial representation is concerned, the two media and their historical contexts are related to each other. Secondly, there exists an important discontinuity, rather than continuity, in terms of seeing between photography and painting. If a discourse dominated by a metaphor of depth is still indispensable for painting, whether a painting is to conform to that discourse or to intentionally abandon it or to do both at the same time, the same discourse will not take us far in understanding photography. Therefore, to understand the mode of representation in photography, one has to break clear from the mind-set that a photograph is, to a greater extent than the painted surface of painting, 'the projection of something which lies "behind" or "beyond" the surface'.

This chapter re-considers a photographic reading of the short story as a genre and of Updike's short fiction, arguing that the mode of seeing in painting not only dominates photography criticism, but also the critical discourse of the short story. The chapter first aims to reach an idea of what painting and photography have in common and to see how this commonality is reflected in Updike's short fiction. After this is made clear, the chapter moves on to explore a special relationship concerning vision between photography and the short story. I argue that although some critics do recognise a temporal dimension in the short story, by likening the genre to photography, they place too much importance on what Gordimer calls 'the present moment', which is little more than applying the mode of seeing in painting to photography and further applying the

same mind-set to the short story. The result is only to use another visual medium to justify, once again, a spatial reading of the short story. Examining how Updike borrows the medium of photography to present moments of 'now', I contend that those moments in Updike's stories are made problematic and have an unsettling nature. Drawing attention to Updike protagonists' photographic awareness and taking into consideration the special mode of seeing in the photographic medium, its capacity and its predicament, the chapter hopes to evaluate what, comparatively speaking, a short story can do and cannot do.

Of Updike criticism, I argue that while memory and death, or what David Heddendorf calls 'mortality and the fragile legacy of the individual', are indeed recurring themes in Updike's short fiction (themes also noted by other critics), Updike also expresses a visual, and formal, preoccupation with the short story by choosing these themes.¹³ Past moments in his stories are often evoked by photographic images, whose unsettling nature accounts for those past moments' fragility. By having his characters cling to photographs in their efforts to recapture lost time and by going on to show how their efforts fail, Updike makes us see not only the melancholy, the 'nostalgic sadness', of his characters, but also the melancholy, the very irony, regarding vision and form, which links the short story and photography together.¹⁴

I. As beautiful as a photograph

Updike's characters often look at photographs. Curiously, though, when some photographs are described, one detects a sense of formal composition and design as if these images were paintings. We may look at the description of an old photograph of the

¹³ David Heddendorf, 'The Meaning of All', *Sewanee Review*, 118 (2010), lxxiii-lxxv (p. lxxiii).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. lxxv.

narrator's mother in 'Flight':

My mother stands at the end of our brick walk, beside the elaborately trimmed end of our privet hedge - in shape a thick square column mounted by a rough ball of leaf. The ragged arc of a lilac bush in flower cuts into the right edge of the photograph, and behind my mother I can see a vacant lot where there has been a house ever since I can remember.¹⁵

Special attention is given to the formal structure of the photograph. The lines, the edges, the shapes of the brick wall, the hedge, the lilac bush and the vacant lot are highlighted; so is their relationship to the standing position of the mother. As a result, we see a well-composed picture. Frequent positional expressions such as 'at the end of', 'beside', 'cuts into the right edge of', and 'behind' not only give an impression that this is a well-composed photograph or painting, but also reveal a discourse that belongs to painting. It is a discourse that concerns a visual world composed and constructed in the hands of an artist. The lot that is vacant in the photograph, but is no longer vacant at the moment of the narrator's observation strengthens such a reading, as if whether to have a house in the lot or not is in the hands of the photographer.

The following description of the same photograph continues to draw our attention to same composition:

She poses with a kind of country grace in a long fur-trimmed coat, unbuttoned to expose her beads and a short yet somehow demure flapper dress. Her hands are in her coat pockets, a beret sits on one side of her bangs, and there is a swank about her that seemed incongruous to me, examining this picture on the stained carpet of an ill-lit old house in the evening years of the thirties and in the dark of the warring forties.¹⁶

The mother's 'pose', as well as her dress and hairstyle, are emphasised, which is often

¹⁵ John Updike, 'Flight', in *Pigeon Feathers and Other Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), pp. 33-49 (p.36).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

the case when we describe a portrait painting where there is a model, or an early portrait photograph where one poses in front of a background and waits for the long exposure. Furthermore, the narrator reminds us that the photograph is inspected in the dim light of the old house and there is a kind of inconsistency between the mother's image in the photograph and the narrator's austere environment. All these set a distance between the narrator and the photograph and this distance reveals the narrator's attitude towards this old photograph: it is something unique yet remote, mysterious yet irreplaceable, like a precious object made through craftsmanship, a piece of art.

Having his character perceive his mother's photograph as a painting, Updike draws our attention to what painting and photography have in common and the very early function of photography as a mechanical aid for painters to achieve lifelikeness. Since the sixteenth century, or perhaps even earlier, one optical device, the *camera obscura*, has been applied as an important aid for the making of paintings.¹⁷ A number of sixteenth-century painters had their own *camera obscura* devices and when they were not certain about their perspective composition, they referred to the image on their devices. In this regard, the *camera obscura* is seen, informs Svetlana Alpers, 'as the untutored craftsman's shortcut means to perspective'.¹⁸ This said, it is, not surprising that when photography, as a new visual medium, first appeared in the art milieu in the mid-nineteenth century, it emerged as a continuation, a step forward, in pictorial representation. 'No one', Alan Trachtenberg reminds us, 'questioned the appropriateness

¹⁷ The *camera obscura* is based on an optical phenomenon: when light passes through a small hole into a dark interior, an inverted image will appear on the wall opposite the hole. Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), p. 27.

¹⁸ Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (London: John Murray, 1983), p. 32.

of calling the photograph a “picture”¹⁹. In addition, during the developing stage of the medium, the time a photographer took to take a photograph was not necessarily much shorter than that for a painter to make a portrait painting. The photographs produced from the daguerreotype process are, in Walter Benjamin’s account in ‘A Short History of Photography’ (1931), ‘iodized silver plates exposed in the *camera obscura* which could be turned back and forth until, in the proper light, one could make out a delicate, light gray image’.²⁰ Characterised by these ‘jewel-like properties’, early photographs were costly and were frequently kept as decorations.²¹ They share the characteristic of a work of art before the age of mechanical reproduction: ‘aura’, a term coined by Benjamin to refer to ‘the here and now of the work of art’, namely its ‘genuineness’, which is beyond ‘technological reproducibility’.²² This ‘genuineness’ brings a work of art closer to the status of an object of worship in a ritual.²³ Because of the absolute weight placed on ‘genuineness’, one tends to perceive a work of art, a painting, a photograph, or a short story, within its autonomy, an enclosed world created by the internal relations within its composition.

This way of viewing photography as reconstructing an illusion of reality, the way Updike’s character in ‘Flight’ perceives old family photographs, seems to reveal a stance of pictorial photographers, whose works appeared in the early issues of *Camera Work* (1902-17), a quarterly magazine established and edited by the American photographer

¹⁹ Alan Trachtenberg, ‘Introduction’, in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. by Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven: Leete’s Island Books, 1980), pp.vii-xiii (p. ix).

²⁰ Walter Benjamin, ‘A Short History of Photography’, in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. by Alan Trachtenberg, pp. 199-216 (p. 201).

²¹ Allan Sekula, ‘On the Invention of Photographic Meaning’, in *Thinking Photography*, ed. by Victor Burgin, pp. 84-109 (p.94).

²² Walter Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, trans. by J. A. Underwood (London: Penguin, 2008), pp. 1-50 (pp. 5-6).

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Alfred Stieglitz.²⁴ There is no need to digress to the details of this early movement in the history of photography. But a brief look into what pictorial photographers advocated for the medium, mainly expressed in Stieglitz's early thoughts on photography, and how their efforts ended in vain, detected by Updike himself in his review of two exhibitions on Stieglitz, can help us both appreciate a pictorial reading of the photographs in Updike's stories and at the same time understand the limits of that reading.²⁵ In doing so, we shall not only review the status of 'aura' in traditional art forms, but explore why it is just not possible to use 'aura' to understand photography, a visual medium born in the age of mechanical reproduction. This should put us in a position to break away from thinking of photography and the short story in the manner of painting and to move onto reading the photographs in Updike's stories in a different light.

²⁴ Alfred Stieglitz, *Camera Work: The Complete Illustrations 1903-1917* (Köln: Taschen, 1997).

²⁵ The two exhibitions are the 1983 exhibition *Alfred Stieglitz: Photographs & Writing* at the National Gallery and the 1999 exhibition *Stieglitz, O'Keeffe & American Modernism* at the Wadsworth Atheneum.

Stieglitz's *Winter-Fifth Avenue* (1893) (Figure 5) is a good example of pictorial photography and one can read it in the same manner as Updike's character reads his mother's photograph.²⁶ On the one hand, the photograph is a well-composed one. One first notices the ruts in the snow in the foreground. Close to the foreground is a man riding a horse-drawn carriage, with another carriage in the not very far distance. A couple of human figures seem to be walking on the pavement. If one did not know that the image



Figure 5 Alfred Stieglitz, *Winter – Fifth Avenue*, 1893. Photogravure, 8 9/16 x 6 inches. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia.

was a photographic image and mistook it for a painting, one would find that the image obeys the rules of perspective in pictorial composition, thereby conforming to pictorial realism. The perpendicular lines marked by the rutted snow, the linear line linked by the

²⁶ Alfred Stieglitz, *Winter-Fifth Avenue*, <<http://www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/270042>>, [accessed 3 March 2014]. A reproduction of this photograph can be found in Alfred Stieglitz, *Camera Work: The Complete Illustrations 1903-1917*, p. 241.

two carriages, the cornice-line of the buildings, and the receding lines of the pavements with the diminishing street lights, all can be seen as converging lines, contributing to visual unity that is found in a realist painting. On the other hand, the photograph, much as the one in Updike's story, also contains a tone, a kind of sensation, that seems to go beyond a realist reading. *Winter-Fifth Avenue* first appeared in *Camera Work* and was printed, similar to other photographs in the magazine, on extremely fragile tissue, tonally superior to the original.²⁷ Presenting his work in such an elegant manner, Stieglitz wants his viewer to appreciate that his photograph is a product of fine craftsmanship. The photograph depicts, as Updike describes, 'the sensation of a city in a snowstorm, down to the texture of the slushy rutted snow and the American flag distantly whipping in the gray sky, has been brought eternally fresh from the era of horse-drawn carriages'.²⁸ This eternal sensation endows the photograph what Benjamin calls 'aura' in a work of art. The image appears to offer a unique and autonomous world created by the internal relations within its composition.

As one of the founders of pictorial photography, Stieglitz regards photography as fine art and contends that the form should be considered in line with other art forms such as poetry, painting and sculpture.²⁹ The photographer, like the painter, 'has to depend upon his observation of and feeling for nature in the production of a picture', for 'the originality of a work of art refers to the originality of the thing expressed and the way it is expressed'.³⁰ Emphasising the photographer's 'authority' in the process of making an image, while including the medium in the bigger sphere of art, Stieglitz advocates the

²⁷ Allan Sekula, 'On the Invention of Photographic Meaning', pp. 92-93.

²⁸ John Updike, 'Evangel of the Lens', in *Still Looking: Essays on American Art* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2005), pp. 133-44 (p. 138).

²⁹ Alfred Stieglitz, 'Pictorial Photography', in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. by Alan Trachtenberg, p. 118

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 119, p. 118.

auric value of photography, maintaining that each photograph possesses its irreducible merit as a work of art, despite the medium's mechanical process.³¹ Acknowledging the medium's craftsmanship, Stieglitz voices the necessity for photographers not only to learn 'the correctness of their composition', but also to observe and study 'light and atmosphere' as the landscape or portrait painter does.³²

Placing almost all the weight on 'the totality of an experience' in photography, and in art in a broader sense, Stieglitz, as Allan Sekula observes, abandons all contextual reference linked to the photograph, thereby dropping entirely the suggestion of narrative from the image.³³ This attitude, in effect, reflects a spatial reading of artistic representation, which has been discussed at length in the previous chapter. Although Stieglitz seldom made comments on literary forms, his view on the short story, if he had expressed any, might have been quite similar to his on art. This brings him to the camp of those short story critics who advocate spatial form, lyricism, in the genre. Accordingly, if he were asked to build a connection between the short story and his working medium, it is likely that the connection proposed by him would correspond to Valerie Shaw's photographic reading of the short story: the short story, like a photograph, can be seen as 'a self-sufficient illumination which does not require the help of "plot" or "story" to give it meaning'.³⁴ What underpins Stieglitz's and Shaw's attitudes towards photography and the short story is 'aura', a value that renders an art work free of temporality or narrative; and this spatial reading of artistic representation has been put into question in our discussion of painting and the short story.

³¹ Ibid., p. 118.

³² Ibid., p. 122.

³³ Allan Sekula, 'On the Invention of Photographic Meaning', pp. 100-01.

³⁴ Valerie Shaw, *The Short Story: A Critical Instruction*, p. 14.

However, the fact that Stieglitz and Shaw include photography in the category of artistic representation and apply an auric view to photography makes their problem a two-fold one. The first is their spatial reading of art in general, their ‘humorless absolutism’ and ‘agonized purism’, as Updike notes regarding Stieglitz. The second is their application of this attitude to photography, a medium based on mechanical reproduction.³⁵

As we have proposed, almost since the beginning of this thesis, each art work is driven by what Paul De Man calls ‘the rhetoric of temporality’.³⁶ No matter how unified and autonomous a work seems to be, it is still a divided moment, therefore narrative rather than symbolic, temporal rather than spatial, discursive rather than imagistic. In other words, one should, and this is my argument, consider Benjamin’s ‘aura’ in the vein of defamiliarization in artistic representation proposed by Victor Shklovsky.³⁷ The ‘unique existence’ or the ‘genuineness’ of an art work lies in the art work’s revealing its own ending, foregrounding its identity as a work of art, different and distanced from what is represented.³⁸ When Benjamin introduces ‘aura’, he does remind us that the notion involves ‘a unique manifestation of a remoteness, however close it may be’.³⁹

When Updike’s characters perceive photographs in the manner of painting, the photographs’ ‘remoteness’ to and distance from the characters’ circumstances are evident and are often emphasised. In ‘Flight’, the mother’s photograph is ‘one of the curling photographs kept in a shoebox’ and it was taken before the narrator was born.⁴⁰ Similar

³⁵ John Updike, ‘Evangel of the Lens’, p. 134, p. 136.

³⁶ Paul de Man, ‘The Rhetoric of Temporality’, in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1983), pp. 187-228.

³⁷ Victor Shklovsky, ‘Art as Technique’, in *Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. by David Lodge (London: Longman, 1988), pp. 15-30 (p.21).

³⁸ Walter Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, p. 5.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴⁰ John Updike, ‘Flight’, p. 36.

‘remoteness’ can be found in the photographs in other stories and it very often occurs when Updike’s protagonist goes through the objects of the deceased family members or the objects that exist in an epoch ahead of the protagonist’s times. In ‘A Sandstone Farmhouse’ for example, Joey returns to the old farmhouse in Pennsylvania after his mother’s recent death. Like the narrator in ‘Flight’ going through the old shoebox, Joey encounters a photograph of his mother among her ‘long-buried treasures’.⁴¹ Apart from this photograph, he also discovers ‘plush-bound old-fashioned albums, with little mildewed mirrors on the covers, of stiffly posed ancestors he could not identify’.⁴² In ‘The Brown Chest’ (1994), the protagonist finds old family photograph albums with ‘fat pages edged in gold, thick enough to hold, on both sides, stiff brown pictures, often oval, of dead people’.⁴³ In ‘His Mother Inside Him’ (1994), when the mother passes away, the protagonist becomes the ‘sole custodian of hundreds of small mental pictures’ of the life of the mother and the world of her time.⁴⁴ The fact that these photographs evoke, at once, a sense of familiarization and defamiliarization makes it possible for Updike’s protagonists to perceive them as objects of art. In short, it is to be noted that, ‘aura’ is evoked only when the difference between a work of art and life, rather than a unity of the two, is made clear to the beholder of the art work.

We, thus, come to the second problem for Alfred Stieglitz, writing about and practicing photography, and Valerie Shaw, synthesising dominant strands of short story criticism and theory. If in painting, a visual medium before mechanical reproduction, ‘aura’ can still be used as a standard of judging a work of art, ‘aura’ in photography, its

⁴¹ John Updike, ‘A Sandstone Farmhouse’, in *The Afterlife and Other Stories* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1994), pp. 107-40 (p. 109).

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁴³ John Updike, ‘The Brown Chest’, in *The Afterlife and Other Stories*, pp. 232-40 (p. 234).

⁴⁴ John Updike, ‘His Mother Inside Him’, in *The Afterlife and Other Stories*, pp. 241-48 (p. 244).

‘self-sufficient illumination’, cannot stand alone without being disturbed. The reproducibility of photography complicates the otherwise clear boundary between the original and the copy, therefore challenging the ‘genuineness’ of the work of art. Benjamin reminds us that what should be taken into consideration in understanding a photograph, is not its ‘aura’, but its ‘display value’, the function of the work of art to record and to inform.⁴⁵ Photographs, instead of calling for ‘free-floating contemplation’, argues Benjamin, ‘become exhibits in the trial that is history’.⁴⁶ If we look back at the magazine *Camera Work*, the very site where pictorial photography was born and put to its demise, we find that it is not that the ‘display value’, the contextual information, of the photographs is not there, but that it was intentionally hidden to give way to approximate the appreciation of the images as products of extraordinary craftsmanship. Titles or any contextual information were printed on a separate page prefacing each section of photographs.⁴⁷ Deprived of all contextual information and in front of a beautifully presented image, the reader/viewer is encouraged to approach the image as a work of art.

However, concealing the contextual information of the photograph does not mean that it is not important. On the contrary, contextual information is a critical element in understanding the photograph, for the medium is ‘grounded in empiricism’ and the relationship between the photograph and the real world is a literal metonymy: ‘the photograph stands for the object or event that is curtailed at its spatial and temporal boundaries, or it stands for a contextually related object or event’.⁴⁸ We recall the

⁴⁵ Walter Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, p. 14.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Allan Sekula, ‘On the Invention of Photographic Meaning’, p. 93.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 94.

reminder from Stanley Cavell and from Updike himself on the difference between painting and photograph at the beginning of this chapter: a painting is a window onto a world, whereas a photograph is a window of the world. And adding Sekula's insight, the relationship between the window in painting and the world it represents is after all a metaphorical one, while that between the window in photography and the world is a metonymic one. In reviewing Stieglitz, Updike does pick up the metonymic information concealed in the first place by the photographer yet crucial in our understanding of his famous photograph *Winter—Fifth Avenue*. 'My picture, "Fifth Avenue, Winter"'[sic], advises Stieglitz and quoted by Updike, 'is the result of a three hours' stand during a fierce snowstorm on February 22d [sic], 1893, awaiting the proper moment. My patience was duly rewarded'.⁴⁹ Updike draws our attention to something important in Stieglitz's photograph, its spatial and temporal information. 'After a life spent vigorously contesting that it [photography] is an art', Updike summarizes Stieglitz's life and the short-lived movement of pictorial photography, 'photography is facts'.⁵⁰

Re-reading the painterly description of the photographs in Updike's stories, one realises that it is not that Updike's protagonists do not want to take their family photographs as photographs, but that they are simply given no other choices. In front of remote family photographs, deprived of all necessary context, they cannot but become painters. They have to invent and reconstruct a world, which, as Victor Burgin points out, lies 'behind' or 'beyond' the photograph's surface. However, this does not mean that Updike's protagonists are not conscious of the informative details of old photographs. On the contrary, they pay special attention to those details of the images in their quest for

⁴⁹ Alfred Stieglitz, cited in John Updike, 'Evangel of the Lens', p. 137.

⁵⁰ John Updike, 'Evangel of the Lens', p. 141.

clues, plots, stories and narratives of their family histories. In the next section, I shall study the photographs in Updike's stories, together with their contextual information, and I shall argue that context plays an importantly narrative role in these stories, complementing the limited narrative space of the short story as a genre.

II. As telling as a photograph

We have remarked that in Updike's story 'A Sandstone Farmhouse', the protagonist, Joey, discovers an old photograph of his mother. Yet, before the image of the mother is introduced in a painterly manner, there is a passage which curiously offers some contextual information about the photograph, much as Updike points out the 'facts' around Stieglitz's painting *Winter-Fifth Avenue* in his essay 'Evangel of the Lens' (1999):

When, over forty years after that summer of 1946, his mother died, and the at last uninhabited house yielded up its long-buried treasures, he came upon a photograph of her at the age of ten, posing in front of the porch. Someone in pencil, in a flowing handwriting not his mother's—hers was tiny, and cramped, and back-slanted—had marked on the back, *Taken August 1914. Enlarged August 1917*. Someone had loved this snapshot enough to have it enlarged and mounted on thick gray cardboard: who?⁵¹

This preparatory passage which ends with a note of uncertainty shows that Updike is fully conscious of photographs' 'display value', namely, their narrative power. At least four narrative threads are attached to the mother's photograph here: the time when the photograph was first taken; the time when the photograph was enlarged; the time when someone noted down the details of the photograph on the back; and the time when the photograph is looked upon by Joey after his mother's death. Furthermore, the highlighted

⁵¹ John Updike, 'A Sandstone Farmhouse', p. 109.

intersection of image and text, the handwriting on the photograph, serves as an important supplement to the image. The existence of such supplement, then, challenges the image's autonomy, its 'aura', from a photographic perspective, for, as we have learned, the auric image, strictly speaking, is complete; it needs no supplement to complete or to deplete it. In front of an old photograph as such, even though Joey gives a careful description of the image, his understanding of the image still highly depends on the 'facts' or the narrative surrounding the image.

In 'The Domestic Camera' (1999), Updike draws our attention to 'the display value' of the photograph and addresses its inherent dependence on contextual supplements:

A photograph presents itself not only as a visual representation but as evidence, more convincing than a painting's because of the unimpeachable mechanical means whereby it was made. We do not trust the artist's flattering hand; but we do trust film, and shadows, and light. [. . .] Many of us learn to operate a camera only when we have children, and a record of their growth and change seems suddenly necessary, as once our own seemed to our parents, whose brittle, yellowing snapshots accumulated in shoeboxes and albums out of the same devotional, conservative impulse that collects our color slides in carousels—priceless evidence, when the moment comes to investigate the baffling death of former selves and the strange disappearance of precious days.⁵²

Almost like a footnote to his stories, Updike justifies his characters' fascination with old family photographs. They are 'a record', 'priceless evidence', of reality and they provide an entry for the characters to 'investigate' their past and that of their family members. In front of a photograph, 'our aesthetic response,' adds Updike, 'is inextricably entwined with the actuality, the *thereness* of the subject, though it may have been there for only a

⁵² John Updike, 'The Domestic Camera', in *More Matter: Essays and Criticism* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999), pp. 667-71 (p. 667).

thousandth of a second'.⁵³ This emphasis on 'thereness' and the time, even time that is as ephemeral as 'a thousandth of a second', involved in taking a photograph, suggests that the photographic medium is, fundamentally, about time.

When mechanical reproduction became dominant in the image-making industry, namely with the arrival of the mass markets for Kodak cameras and family snapshots, painting and photography turned in two separate directions, the demarcation of which, foretold by Benjamin, became unprecedentedly clear. While looking at a painting, we still read its composition, the internal relation of the shapes, in order to reach behind the surface in order to enter a constructed world. Looking at a photograph is another experience, again. This brings us back to the second point implied in Victor Burgin's analysis on photography: there exists an important discontinuity, rather than continuity, in terms of seeing between photography and painting. To understand a photograph, one no longer talks about a three-dimensional world represented on the two-dimensional surface; rather, one talks directly about reality itself and about history. Roland Barthes introduces this special discourse about photography in *Camera Lucida* (1980):

The Photograph was an image without code. [...] the realists do not take the photograph for a 'copy' of reality, but for an emanation of *past reality*. [...] To ask whether a photograph is analogical or coded is not a good means of analysis. The important thing is that the photograph possesses an evidential force, and that its testimony bears not on the object but on time. From a phenomenological viewpoint, in the Photograph, the power of authentication exceeds the power of representation.⁵⁴

Barthes's focus on photography's 'evidential force', its testimony 'not on the object but on time', and its sense of the 'power of authentication' exceeding the power of

⁵³ Ibid., p. 669.

⁵⁴ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. trans. by Richard Howard (London: Vintage Books, 2000), pp. 88-89.

representation recalls what Updike discovers in Stieglitz's failure, as he sees it: 'photography is facts', no matter how artistic it seems to be. Instead of referring internally to a visual world constructed or represented, or offering a window onto a world, a photograph functions more as a reference to the real world, a window of the world so to speak. What stands out here is the photograph's power as 'evidence and souvenir', its commitment to, as Updike considers in a very Barthesian manner, 'the actuality, the *thereness* of the subject'.⁵⁵

While Stieglitz and those who shared his commitment to the new medium as art tried to rescue the pictorial aesthetics in photography, another group of photographers, such as Berenice Abbott and Walker Evans, fought for the realistic and documentary function of photography. A photograph of Updike himself and his own understanding of it may be usefully included at this point.

Originally published in *Life* magazine, this photograph of the writer at the age of nine (Figure 6), together with the accompanying essay 'A Bookish Boy', is included in a later collection of Updike's essays and criticism entitled *More Matter* (1999).⁵⁶ Pervasive throughout the essay is the 'evidential force' of the photograph:

My mother took this photograph, and dated it precisely on the back: September 21, 1941. I was, therefore, nine years, six months, and three days old. Consulting the perpetual calendar, I find that date fell, as I suspected, on a Sunday; my little suit coat, my solid laced shoes, and a sabbath gleam in the dappled sunshine suggest a day apart. No amount of peering, even with a magnifying glass, at the photograph revives in me any memory-sensation of the moment that has been preserved, but the site is very familiar. It was one of my favorite places in the world: the side porch of the house at 117

⁵⁵ John Updike, 'The Domestic Camera', p. 667.

⁵⁶ John Updike, 'A Bookish Boy', in *More Matter: Essays and Criticism* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999), pp. 671-73. The photograph can also be found on the website: <<http://www.todayinliterature.com/biography/john.updike.asp>>, [accessed 3 March 2014].

Philadelphia Avenue, in Shillington, Pennsylvania.⁵⁷

While Updike himself has forgotten the moment of the snapshot, the details in the photograph serve as important evidence, authenticating the existence of the moment of photograph-taking and thereby offering traces for the writer to recollect his boyhood. The photograph certainly evokes his memory about what is captured in the photograph. And his memory seems to be certified or enforced by the fact that it is a photograph rather a painting. He tells us about the ‘facts’ of the photograph: the house that belonged to his maternal grandmother, the reason why the three generations lived together, what he would do on the porch, and what his mother and his grandmother would do in the kitchen, where the door behind him leads to.

Updike’s account recalls precisely what Stanley Cavell tells us about the medium: ‘You can always ask, pointing to an object in a photograph— a building, say – what lies behind it, totally obscured by it’.⁵⁸ Each detail evoked by the photograph serves as a piece of evidence, a narrative clue, leading the reader to the family history of Updike: the family’s city life during the Depression, the move to the country during the war, and the mother’s death more than forty-eight years after she took the picture. Whereas it is undeniable that Updike describes the details in the photograph with accuracy and a sense of composition that can be found in painting, these painterly renderings are somewhat extraneous and what is emphasised in his essay is time and history rather than the autonomy of an image. The foremost function of a snapshot such as this one of the writer himself, as Updike tells us, is ‘priceless evidence’ of ‘the baffling death of former selves and the strange disappearance of precious days’.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 671-72.

⁵⁸ Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, p. 23.

⁵⁹ John Updike, ‘The Domestic Camera’, p. 667.

It might be exaggerating to call Updike's essay 'A Bookish Boy' a short story or a full biographical narrative. Yet, it does narrate part of the writer's family history: his childhood, his mother's life, and her later death. In this regard, this snapshot of the writer and the explanatory essay are not unlike the passages on family photographs in his short fiction, whose narrative role in the stories should not be overlooked. In 'Flight', it is the photograph of the mother at the age of twenty that gives the clues to the mother's life and the other lives of those around her, including that of the narrator himself. Similarly, in many other of Updike's stories with a similar theme, reminiscences of one's childhood, deceased family members, previous marriages, old friends, photographs either serve as an important part in the narrative itself or suggest threads of narratives that cannot be fully told in the limited space of the short story. In 'The Brown Chest' (1994), the protagonist does not like to look at the family albums with 'stiff brown pictures, often oval, of dead people', because they remind him of a 'well of time'.⁶⁰ In 'His Mother Inside Him', when the mother passes away, the protagonist becomes the 'sole custodian of hundreds of small mental pictures' of the life of his mother and the world of her time.⁶¹

While Valerie Shaw dismisses too quickly the existence of 'plot' or 'story' in the photographic analogy she draws with the short story, some other critics do seem to give credit to the temporal dimension of the two media. Julio Cortázar, for example, elaborates his understanding of a photographic reading of the short story in his essay 'Some Aspects of the Short Story' (1971):

The photographer or the story writer finds himself obliged to choose and delimit an image or an event which must be meaningful, which is meaningful not only in itself, but rather is capable of acting on

⁶⁰ John Updike, 'The Brown Chest', p. 234.

⁶¹ John Updike, 'His Mother Inside Him', p. 244.

the viewer or the reader as a kind of opening, an impetus which projects the intelligence and the sensibility toward something which goes well beyond the visual or literary anecdote contained in the photograph or the story.⁶²

Cortázar's photography-short story rationale recalls Martin Scofield's earlier discussion of the two media's shared 'aesthetic of revealing a world through the catching and framing of a transient moment'.⁶³ Moreover, Cortázar makes the connection even more precise through his emphasis upon photography's ability to act as an 'opening, an impetus'. He points to the medium's distinct feature, its difference from painting as informed by Cavell and Sekula; one can always ask what lies beside, or behind, an object in a photograph, whereas this question makes little sense in a painting, for the relationship between the photograph and the external world is a metonymic one.⁶⁴

I shall now focus on 'Here Come the Maples' (1979), the last of the Maples stories. I will first study how and to what extent the two media's metonymic effect as an 'opening' or an 'impetus' for narrative is reflected in Updike's deployment of photographs in the short story. After that, I will pose the question: is this narrative power of a photograph, its metonymic relation with the external world, unlimited? To put it another way, while a photograph or a short story does offer plots or stories, do they really function as powerfully as critics claim?

This last story of the Maples stories presents one day in Richard Maple's life and his preparation for divorce from Joan Maple. In order to obtain a joint affidavit for a no-fault

⁶² Julio Cortázar, 'Some Aspects of the Short Story', in *The New Short Story Theories*, ed. by Charles E. May (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994), pp. 245-55 (p. 247).

⁶³ Martin Scofield suggests that Diane Arbus's photographs of American suburban life 'seems to come from one of the more disenchanted stories of John Cheever or John Updike'. Although the assertion has potential insight, Scofield is not able to pursue an analysis as his book is a general introduction to American short story. Martin Scofield, *The Cambridge Introduction to the American Short Story*, p. 110.

⁶⁴ Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, p. 23; Allan Sekula, 'On the Invention of Photographic Meaning', p. 94.

amendment, Richard has to return to Cambridge City Hall where he got married to get a copy of his marriage license. On his way, he recalls his wedding day:

He had not been in the Cambridge City Hall since the morning he had been granted the licence, the morning of their wedding. [...] It was June, and steamy. When, toward noon, they got to Cambridge, and dragged their bodies and boxes of wedding clothes up the four flights to Joan's apartment, on Avon Street, the bride was taking a bath. Who else was in the apartment Richard could not remember; his recollection of the day was spotty—legible patches on a damp gray blotter.⁶⁵

Like Updike himself who does not remember the details of the moment when his photograph was taken, Richard's recollection of the wedding is not clear either. It is 'spotty—legible patches on a damp gray blotter', just like the 'brittle, yellowing snapshots accumulated in shoeboxes and albums' noted by Updike himself in his art criticism.⁶⁶ However, this does not mean that Richard makes no effort to remember the details of the day. In his attempt to recall the past, he seems to cling to photographs, even if they are 'legible patches' and, as Updike comments, 'may have been there for only a thousandth of a second':

There were a few slides, Richard remembered. A cousin of Joan's had posed the main members of the wedding on the sidewalk outside the church, all gathering around a parking meter. [...] Another image was captured by Richard's college roommate, who drove them to their honeymoon cottage in a seaside town an hour south of Cambridge.⁶⁷

Both the wedding and the honeymoon are events, as Pam Morris notes in her discussion of realist narratives, 'beyond the beginning and ending of the temporal span of the main narrative'.⁶⁸ As we read on, we appreciate that the temporal order of the narrative is by

⁶⁵ John Updike, 'Here Come the Maples', in *Too Far to Go: The Maples Stories* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1979), pp. 236-56 (pp. 237-38).

⁶⁶ John Updike, 'The Domestic Camera', p. 667.

⁶⁷ John Updike, 'Here Come the Maples', p. 241.

⁶⁸ Pam Morris, *Realism* (Oxford: Routledge, 2003), p. 107.

no means a linear continuity but it is complicated by different threads of time. Events in the past are interwoven with the temporal span of the story: between Richard going to the City Hall to apply for the copy of the marriage license and him returning home with the copy.

Deploying photographic images, Updike makes us aware of not only the wedding day of the Maples, but also of their honeymoon after the wedding, and their courting days before the marriage. In other words, in a short story, which only seems to contain one moment, in this case the divorce of the Maples, Updike is able to elongate the temporal dimension of the narrative. If in other writers' works this complex narrative order, as Morris remarks, is achieved through 'flashbacks to earlier events or foreshadowings of what is to yet come', Updike does the same, but he handles it more adroitly and more convincingly with the assistance of photography.⁶⁹ A writer with good knowledge of visual media, Updike seems to be aware of the metonymic relationship between photography and reality: instead of it being a visual representation, a photograph is evidence of past reality, thereby of time. Each snapshot mentioned in the story 'Here Come the Maples' endorses the existence of a moment, thus suggesting an 'opening' or an 'impetus', for more narrative.

However, while Scofield and Cortázar rightly point to the narrative dimension of the photograph and a photographic reading of the short story, they seem to confer an unlimited metonymic power on photography and endow it with a high degree of contiguity as if reality equates with, or can be replaced by, the photograph. Scofield maintains that by focusing on a scene or a moment, short story writers evoke a larger and

⁶⁹ Ibid.

more general condition, thereby revealing a world.⁷⁰ Cortázar holds that photographers and short story writers cut out a fragment of reality, giving it certain limits, but in such a way that ‘this segment acts like an explosion which fully opens a much more ample reality, like a dynamic vision which spiritually transcends the space reached by the camera’.⁷¹ Placing too much weight on the photograph’s spatial and temporal context, Scofield and Cortázar seem to say there is a mapping impulse not only between the photograph and what it records, but also between the photograph’s narrative power and what Frank Kermode calls ‘the ordinary going-on of time’ in the real world.⁷² The photograph, in these critics’ understanding, reflects our impression of the external world: totality and infinity achieved by a contiguous sequence, an accentuated sense of ‘going-on’. Viewed this way, the critics’ approach to the connection between the photograph and the short story, although a certain level of temporality is acknowledged, is little different from Georg Lukács’s earlier cited prescription for the short story in *Soul and Form* (1911): to choose one moment in the hero’s life and give special significance to that moment so that all other moments seem ‘superfluous’.⁷³ This photographic reading of the short story, we may be in a position to acknowledge, is quite similar to the epiphanic reading of the short story analysed in the previous chapter. The point of that latter reading is, as Cortázar suggests, to justify a transcendental power in the medium’s limited space so that a ‘much more ample reality’, a sense of completion and totality can be reached.

However, while it is important to be aware of the photograph’s capacity for freezing

⁷⁰ Martin Scofield, *The Cambridge Introduction to the American Short Story*, p. 110.

⁷¹ Julio Cortázar, ‘Some Aspects of the Short Story’, p. 246.

⁷² Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 50.

⁷³ Georg Lukács, ‘The Bourgeois Way of Life and Art for Art’s Sake’, in *Soul and Form*, trans. and ed. by Anna Bostock (London: Merlin Press, 1974), pp. 55-78 (p. 73).

time and serve as the evidence of a fragment of reality, it is also important to know that the photograph is, as Roland Barthes observes, ‘an emanation of past reality’ and that this fragment of reality is not a present moment, but a moment that has already passed.⁷⁴ Accordingly, if a photograph tells a story, it is more of a re-telling, than an original telling, of the past moment. The shortcoming with Scofield and Cortázar, I argue, is that they overlook Updike’s point: the photograph, even if it is looked at ‘a thousandth of a second’ after the taking of the photograph, is already a past moment, therefore a re-telling of its own story. The critics’ attention, as we have seen above, is much more focused on the way in which a photograph brings back a past reality to the present, to the ‘now’. This stance recalls Nadine Gordimer’s earlier remark on the short story cited at the beginning of the chapter: the art of short story writers is ‘the art of the only thing one can be sure of—the present moment. Ideally, they have learned to do without explanation of what went before, and what happens beyond this point’.⁷⁵

The focus on ‘now’, ‘the present moment’, once again, reflects the persisting theory of spatial form in short story criticism: the genre is one of the best forms in which to present ‘a moment of being’, no matter which visual medium, painting or photography or film (which we shall discuss in the next chapter), the genre is compared to.⁷⁶ We have commented on Clare Hanson’s spatial reading of painting and the short story in *Short Stories and Short Fictions, 1880-1980* (1985). Although she does not directly offer a photographic reading of the short story, one may think that her stance is not very far from that of Scofield and Cortázar:

The short story or fiction may present a discrete moment or unit of experience, with suggestions of

⁷⁴ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, p. 88.

⁷⁵ Nadine Gordimer, ‘The International Symposium on the Short Story: South Africa’, p. 459.

⁷⁶ Clare Hanson, *Short Stories and Short Fictions, 1880-1980* (London: Macmillan, 1985), p.55.

possible links with past and future events and experiences, but an ambivalent attitude towards these links can be maintained for they will always extend beyond the confines of the story.⁷⁷

In stressing that the moment in a short story encompasses ‘past and future events and experiences’, Hanson, like Gordimer and Lukács, regards the moment in the story as of special significance. However, if we go back to Updike’s ‘Here Come the Maples’ and have a look at how Updike’s protagonist, Richard Maple, treats photographic images and later to his own divorce, the ‘present moment’ of the story, we find how thin ‘the present moment’ is and how much Richard already regards the photographs that he sees and the moment that he is experiencing as the past.

When Richard waits for a second woman in the City Hall, he pays attention to the family photographs on her desk:

He followed her directions and found a young black woman at a steel desk bristling with gold-framed images of fidelity and solidarity and stability, of children and parents, of a somber brown boy in a brown military uniform, of a family laughing by a lakeside.⁷⁸

The photographs of the woman’s happy family seem to tell us about her life. And the actuality of the past moments, the children and the parents gathering for the family snapshot, the boy in his uniform, and the family laughing by the lakeside, is authenticated by the fact that they are photographs. However, as seen by Richard, a person completely out of the photographs’ circumstances and absent from the photograph-taking moments, the photographs can only be a re-identifying, a re-telling, of the woman’s life, rather than an original identifying or telling (if such an original telling exists). This reading is confirmed by the following scenario. This time it is the woman who observes Richard’s photograph. In order to confirm Richard’s identity, she checks his ID photograph on his

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 56.

⁷⁸ John Updike, ‘Here Come the Maples’, p. 242.

driver's license and 'compared its face with his'.⁷⁹ Although the woman decides that the two faces match each other and carries on with the notarization, the necessity for a process like this seems to suggest that the image on the ID photograph and Richard's face in front of her are two different images. The ID photograph records an image of Richard, a form of him, yet only belonging to a past moment and which is no longer there. What is presented to the woman, therefore, as what is presented to Richard earlier, is not a telling of Richard's identity, but a re-telling of his identity.

A number of critics might well argue with me and maintain that it is the main narrative of the story, the divorcing process of the Maples, that is the present moment of the short story, while the other photographic images refer to past moments. However, I would like to contend that despite the obvious time difference between Richard's present and past, there is a strong indication that the moment he is experiencing, the divorce, has already been viewed by Updike, and gradually by Richard himself, as a past moment, little different from Richard's other past moments in the form of photographs. So not only is Richard's past a story retold, but the short story itself, Richard's 'now', is also a story retold, just like a photograph.

Updike implies this at the beginning of the story by giving out the Maples's joint affidavit, from which the short story borrows its title:

It went, 'Now come Richard F. and Joan R. Maple and swear under the penalties of perjury that an irretrievable breakdown of the marriage exists'.⁸⁰

There is a 'now', which may mislead the reader into thinking that this is an ever-present moment, but the fact that Richard has already read it and found the wording amusing

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 236.

suggests that he is, albeit gradually, able to see it from a distance. It is a moment that has nevertheless merged into other past moments in his life. Indeed, he expresses this attitude to Joan:

‘I did it, yesterday. What was shocking about it? I thought it was funny, the way it was worded. Here we come, there we go.’⁸¹

Richard becomes aware of the power of time, which does not stop either at the moment of marriage or at that of divorce. Once the woman ‘set a seal of irrevocability beside his signature’ on the affidavit, his divorce is the past.⁸² Everything that seems to be present immediately becomes the past; hence each telling is a re-telling and each story is a story retold. This insight is given to us in the short story by a scholarly extract on the forces of nature that Richards reads on his way home from the City Hall. ‘But time,’ the extract says, ‘lacking a minus charge, accumulates inexorably, and with its brother boredom levels all’.⁸³ The broken texts of the extract are embedded in the text of the short story.

To some extent, the embedded texts (the joint affidavit, the copy of the Maples’ marriage license, and the broken texts of the extract) are not very different from the woman’s photograph or Richard’s ID photograph. Each of them carries the narrative potential of becoming a story, equally as important as the main narrative of the Maples’ divorce. Therefore, it is not that critics are wrong in claiming that the short story presents a crucial moment which renders, as Gordimer suggests, ‘the explanation of what went before, and what happens beyond this point’ unnecessary; it is just that they fail to recognise the metaphorical value in the short story. The point is not that ‘the moment of being’ in the current story is important, but, rather, that ‘the moment of being’ in the

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 251.

⁸² Ibid., p. 242.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 249.

current story is no more important than those that are untold. Each story is a story of stories. Updike brings this illumination to us through the medium of photography.

III. As silent as a photograph

In this review of the 1995 exhibition, *Nadar*, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, Updike has more to say about the medium of photography:

Photography is a matter of time. The time of exposure is part of a photograph's credentials, and from even mediocre photographs flows the uncanny power of temporal authenticity: things looked this way at one certain moment, a moment now irrevocably gone.⁸⁴

He respects the photograph's power as evidence, as discussed in the preceding section, but goes on to identify the medium's 'uncanny power of temporal authenticity'. This 'uncanny power' derives from the fact that a photograph not only certifies the existence of a past moment, but more importantly suggests a relationship between that moment and the present: 'things looked this way at one certain moment, a moment now irrevocably gone'.

Roland Barthes shares a similar view of photography and studies this particular feature of photography at length in *Camera Lucida* (1980) and 'Rhetoric of the Image' (1964). Looking at a photograph, Barthes reminds us, is a strange experience. We are confronted with a paradox, a juxtaposition of the past and the present at one and the same time.⁸⁵ The surface of a photograph suggests the form of the subject of the photograph is no longer the same, however close and present that form appears at the moment of viewing. Therefore, instead of defining the generic nature of the photograph as 'that was

⁸⁴ John Updike, 'Nadar's Swift Tact', in *More Matter: Essays and Criticism* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999), pp. 696-702 (p. 696)

⁸⁵ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, p. 77.

there', Barthes offers 'That-has-been' and describes the experience of looking at a photograph as: 'It has been here, and yet immediately separated; it has been absolutely, irrefutably present, and yet already deferred'.⁸⁶

This paradoxical feature can also be seen in Updike's treatment of photographic images in his short fiction. It is voiced by his short story characters or evident in their treatment of photographs. As the epigraph of this chapter indicates, the photographer in 'The Day of the Dying Rabbit' tells us about how limited the narrative power of a photograph can be, because 'the telling expression' is 'for ever pinned in mid-flight between two plateaus of vacuity'.⁸⁷ In 'Brother Grasshopper' (1987), Carlyle, the protagonist's brother-in-law, is a fervent photographer and takes family gatherings as opportunities of taking photographs. Yet, when Carlyle's photographs become a cherished record for family memory and tell the stories of those gatherings, the protagonist reminds us of something else about the photographs:

One cherished photo, turned into the Slaughterfields' Christmas card, showed all nine children squeezed into the Emmets' old workhorse of a Fairlane station wagon, each hot little grinning face smeared by an ice-cream cone. What the photo did not show was the drive away from the ice-cream stand: the cones melted too rapidly in the August heat and had to be thrown out the window when they became, in the mass of flesh, impossibly liquid. 'Over the side!' Carlyle called behind the wheel, and an answering voice would pipe, 'Over the side!,' and another gob of ice cream would spatter on the receding highway, to gales of childish glee.⁸⁸

Giving an even more detailed account of what the photograph does not show than what it actually shows, the protagonist challenges the photograph's role as evidence, as a

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 77.

⁸⁷ John Updike, 'The Day of the Dying Rabbit', p. 29.

⁸⁸ John Updike, 'Brother Grasshopper', in *The Afterlife and Other Stories* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1994), pp. 29-45 (p. 35).

vehicle for memory, and draws attention to the moment when the telling power of a photograph ends. While introducing the story told by the photograph, he feels the need to recall the related story that is untold by the photograph.

In her essay in memory of Updike, Sylvie Mathé remarks that many of Updike's early stories 'hark back to the seasons of the past and their precious kernel of truth' and that Updike's characters, Clyde Behn in 'The Persistence of Desire' being the reference here, experience 'moments of fusion with life's essence in which past and present are blissfully merged'.⁸⁹ 'Mixing memory and desire', Mathé further concludes, the story 'exudes a kind of melancholy wistfulness' about the past.⁹⁰ Mathé's understanding of Updike's stories appeals for a kind of unified and sacred experience, and is, once again, a spatial reading which has been critiqued. Yet, Mathé's reliance on nostalgia evoked by memory in Updike's stories can also be read and questioned by Updike's use of photography and memory. As discussed above, while memory, or what Mathé calls 'the seasons of the past', is a recurring theme in Updike's stories, the fact that those past moments are often evoked by photographic images accounts for those past moments' fragility and challenges the comfortable stability implied in the 'melancholy wistfulness' detected by Mathé.

Updike's reminder of the limits of the photograph's telling capacity is manifest in 'Here Come the Maples'. The snapshots of Richard's wedding day, aside from telling (re-telling) his past, also work to deny the narrative. When Richard recalls those snapshots, it is often observed that he cannot remember much; or, once he recollects something, his memory dries up quickly. Hence he keeps asking himself about the event:

⁸⁹ Sylvie Mathé, 'In Memoriam John Updike (1932-2009): That "Pennsylvania Thing"', *Transatlantica*, 2 (2010), 2-7 (p. 2).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

Who else was in the apartment Richard could not remember. [...] Who? Her sister? Her mother? [...] What else survived of that wedding day? There were a few slides, Richard remembered. [...] But what grieved Richard more, wincing as he stepped from the brown archway into the summer glare, was a suspended detail of the wedding.⁹¹

On the one hand, the ‘slices’ of the wedding certify the existence of the event; on the other hand, these slices, instead of narrating the event to Richard, put an end to the narrative, because the narrative power of the slices is immediately, as suggested by Barthes, ‘separated’ and ‘deferred’ due to the loss of the original context. ‘Not only is the Photograph never, in essence, a memory,’ Barthes notes, ‘but it actually blocks memory, quickly becomes a counter-memory’.⁹²

Following this line of thinking, even though Richard recalls a snapshot of himself juggling three balls outside their honeymoon cottage, this snapshot, recalled at the moment of Richard’s divorce, confirms little but Richard’s oblivion, his ‘counter-memory’. This is reflected in his own doubt over seeing the deer on the island:

The light changed from red to green, and he could not remember if he needed orange juice or bread, doubly annoyed because he could not remember if they had ever really seen the deer, or if he had imagined the memory, conjured it from the longing that it be so.⁹³

The unreliability of Richard’s memory is made evident by the unreliability of photographic images. The medium’s generic relation to realism becomes its own predicament. In other words, the surface of the photograph tells, but only tells the subject has been there and nothing else. Therefore, if, alongside Richard, there is any memory or story conjured up, based on a photograph, that story is destined to be unreliable. Joan Maple’s complete denial of having seen the deer further confirms the unreliability of

⁹¹ John Updike, ‘Here Come the Maples’, pp. 237-43.

⁹² Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, p. 91.

⁹³ John Updike, ‘Here Come the Maples’, p. 250.

Richard's story of the honeymoon, whereby suggesting that if the story of the Maples' marriage, from wedding to divorce, were told by Joan Maple, it is very likely that the story would be a different one.

We can, finally, return to Victor Burgin's assertion regarding photography and seek to extend it to illuminating the short story:

The surface of the photograph, however, conceals nothing but the fact of its own superficiality. Whatever meanings and attributions we may construct at its instigation can know no final closure, they cannot be held for long upon those imaginary points of convergence at which (it may comfort some to imagine) are situated the experience of an author or the truth of a reality.⁹⁴

Seemingly, Burgin anticipates the discussion of Updike and photography: the photograph is silent. It is telling; yet, it is precisely because of this telling power that the narrative of the photograph cannot be reached.⁹⁵ However, by mentioning the photograph's 'superficiality', or that any story derived from the photograph can know 'no final closure' or 'cannot be held for long', Burgin inadvertently sheds some light on the short story as a genre.

Like a photograph, a short story is both telling and silent. This inherent paradox is determined by the simple fact that there is more form than language in the short story; that is, as with the photograph, the short story's narrative power is incongruent with the limited space it is given to narrate. Some critics accept this paradox rather openly. John Bayley, for example, stresses the importance of keeping the paradox, the 'incompatibility', in the story:

Fully to succeed the short story must forgo its self-conscious emphasis on concentration, and appear both leisurely and enmeshed in the speculative, as any other genre may be. It must seem both formally

⁹⁴ Victor Burgin, 'Introduction', p. 11.

⁹⁵ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, p. 106.

to preclude, and secretly to accept, speculation on matters excluded by itself [...] The incompatibility between its art and its mystery must become its own justification.⁹⁶

Similarly, Dominic Head challenges the absolute importance given to the moment in the short story's main narrative and maintains that the paradox of the short story lies in its 'formal convention' and narrative disruption.⁹⁷

While Barthes and Burgin talk about photography, Bayley and Head address the issue of the short story; none of them stretch their arguments to the other medium. However, they talk in the same language and reveal something generic shared by the short story and photography. The confines of both media serve simultaneously as an entry and an end to a narrative. Barthes's claim about the photograph that 'if the Photograph cannot be penetrated, it is because of its evidential power' is indeed an 'incompatibility between its art and its mystery', and this aspect is echoed by Bayley when discussing the short story.⁹⁸ Burgin's remark that the narrative power of a photograph 'can know no final closure' or 'cannot be held for long' may be reflected in the short story's 'formal convention' and narrative disruption described by Head.

While critics try to elucidate the paradox of the short story through different expressions, Updike is able to elaborate the point by incorporating photography, a paradoxical visual medium, in his stories. The last scene of 'Here Come the Maples' once again illustrates, rather photographically, the short story's 'formal convention' and narrative disruption.

Obsolete at their own ceremony, Joan and Richard stepped back from the bench in unison and stood

⁹⁶ John Bayley, *The Short Story: Henry James to Elizabeth Bowen* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1988), p. 36.

⁹⁷ Dominic Head, *The Modernist Short Story: A Study in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 26.

⁹⁸ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, p. 106.

side by side, uncertain of how to turn, until Richard at last remembered what to do; he kissed her.⁹⁹ The Maples have just divorced, yet they stand ‘in unison’ and ‘side by side’, and also kiss each other as if they just got married. Like the snapshot of the Maples’ honeymoon taken by Richard’s roommate, it is a moment immediately present, on the precipice of a story. Yet, the fact that the short story ends precisely at this point immediately denies the narrative. The short story is a medium, borrowing Barthes’s description of the photograph, ‘without future’ and this is where the medium’s ‘pathos’ and ‘melancholy’ are based.¹⁰⁰ By having Richard Maple cling to photographs in his efforts to recapture lost time and by showing how his efforts fail, Updike not only reveals the melancholy of Richard as Sylvie Mathé would say, but evinces the melancholy, the very irony, regarding vision and form, which links the short story and photography together. It is time that ‘levels all’. This is expressed quite clearly by the writer in the foreword of *Too Far to Go: The Maples Stories*: ‘That a marriage ends is less than ideal; but all things end under heaven, and if temporality is held to be invalidating, then nothing real succeeds’.¹⁰¹ Every photograph and every short story is like the last snapshot of the Maples, a story of, borrowing Richard Maple’s joke, ‘here we come, there we go’.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ John Updike, ‘Here Come the Maples’, p. 256.

¹⁰⁰ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, p. 90.

¹⁰¹ John Updike, ‘Foreword’, in *Too Far to Go: The Maples Stories*, pp. 9-10 (p. 10)

¹⁰² John Updike, ‘Here Come the Maples’, p. 251.

Chapter Four

Make the Images Move:

A Certain Continuity in John Updike's Short Fiction

To create motion, frame by frame, [...]¹

John Updike, 'The Old Movie Houses' (1994)

In the previous chapter, I drew attention to how Updike's short story characters treat photographs and how photographs help or fail to help them bring back memory. We have also discerned something more particular in the connection between photograph and the short story. Both media's narrative capacity is incomplete, for while they are able to narrate the story of a past experience, they are also unable to narrate because of a permanent loss of context. The two media's capacity is also their predicament. Like a photograph, a short story's telling cannot but be a re-telling of a past experience.

Updike's preoccupation with the visual in his practice of the short story does not stop at photography. He is also interested in film, a visual medium, derived from photography yet characterised by motion. His short story characters are often regular cinema-goers. To name a few among many, in 'A Gift from the City' (1957), a young married couple enjoys going to the movies on weekends. But their viewing of a John Wayne film is disturbed by the wife's encounter with a young African American who keeps stopping by their house and asking for money. In 'Incest' (1957), the protagonist

¹ John Updike, 'The Old Movie Houses', in *More Matter: Essays and Criticism* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999), pp. 641-43 (p. 642).

tells his wife about a dream he had, in which he watches a movie version of Marcel Proust's novel *Remembrance of Things Past* with an attractive girl. In 'Still Life' (1958), an American art student in Oxford invites the girl that he would like to court to a Japanese film. In 'Home' (1960), the protagonist, once again an American art student in England, watches a Doris Day movie in the American-style cinema in Oxford and cries. In 'Nevada' (1972), the newly divorced protagonist brings his children on a road trip. On the road, the family video that he once recorded for his ex-wife runs through his head and when he stops at a small Nevada town, he watches a Western film with his children in the town's only cinema. In 'The Wallet' (1985), the sixty-five-year-old protagonist, Fulham, has been a keen cinema-goer since childhood; yet he finds it difficult to appreciate Hollywood blockbusters with his grandchildren in the theater complex at a shopping mall. In 'Brother Grasshopper' (1987), Brother Grasshopper, the protagonist's brother-in-law, is a fervent photographer, who later becomes involved in film production and dies in a cinema. And in 'New York Girl' (1996), the narrator and his mistress watch an art film in an underground cinema of New York and the film has no plot that he can remember.

As is the case with the previous chapters, while topicality cannot be ignored in Updike's short fiction, what is more interesting seems to be Updike's consciousness in making or not making his characters see. That is, Updike is more focused on how seeing is created rather than what is being seen. In attending to this 'how' question, Updike evinces as much awareness of film as that of painting and photography. When we claim, as in the stories mentioned above, that his characters watch films, it seems that we are already convinced by Updike that there is a certain continuity and coherence between the act of seeing and what is seen. In 'The Wallet', for example, when Updike has Fulham sit in the cinema complex, we are made confident that 'the mechanical dragon' and

'starships' on the screen are what he and his grandchildren see.² This presumption also provides ground for the previous discussion on the painterly and photographic readings in Updike's short fiction. In 'A & P' (1961), once Updike has Sammy walk out of the supermarket and look back through the big windows, we are given the impression that the description of what is inside the supermarket reveals what Sammy sees.³ Similarly, in 'A Sandstone Farmhouse' (1990), when Joey discovers a photograph of his mother in her treasured belongings, we are quite confident that the following description of the photograph demonstrates Joey's visual field.⁴

Possibly, some would argue that the kind of continuity and coherence mentioned above comes from the basic rule of causality, one looks and what follows is what one sees, and that this rule can be commonly found in any literature, so long as it wants to make sense; therefore, the type of motion evoked by continuity and coherence cannot be counted as revealing Updike's special consciousness of moving images forward in his short fiction. However, it is precisely the signifying process, the matter of making sense, that is the theme of this research on Updike's practice and consideration of the short story as a genre. Given that Updike does not assume continuity and coherence in painting and photography, it is possible that he also has something to say about how seeing is created in film and how that seeing relates to the short story. If we recall the visual edges in Updike's stories discussed alongside Edward Hopper's painting *Night Windows* in Chapter Two, we may discern that Updike's visual edges, like Hopper's three lighted windows, evoke the frames in a reel of film: the three linked images and the gaps between

² John Updike, 'The Wallet', in *Trust Me* (Knopf: New York, 1987), pp. 222-37 (p. 224).

³ John Updike, 'A & P', in *Pigeon Feathers and Other Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), pp. 130-36 (p. 136).

⁴ John Updike, 'A Sandstone Farmhouse', in *The Afterlife and Other Stories* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1994), pp. 107-40 (p. 109).

these images are presented at one and the same time. This observation, together with Updike's comments on film and on composing moving images in his fiction, makes a study of the relationship between Updike's short stories and film possible.

We might recall that Updike's unfulfilled childhood dream was to become an animator for Walt Disney.⁵ He remained a frequent cinema-goer throughout his life, and his desire to create motion did not disappear in his career as an author. In an interview, he discussed motion and the literary image:

The author's deepest pride, as I have experienced it, is not in his incidental wisdom but in his ability to keep an organized mass of images moving forward, to feel life engendering itself under his hands.⁶ Moreover, he openly expressed his intention to achieve the effect of the 'motion pictures' in his novel *Rabbit, Run* (1960):

My novella was originally to bear the sub-title 'A Movie', and I envisioned the credits unrolling over the shuffling legs of the boys in the opening scuffle around the backboard, as the reader hurried down the darkened aisle with his box of popcorn.⁷

Updike's sustained interest in film and in involving motion in writing is also reflected in his 1996 novel *In the Beauty of the Lilies*, which traces the four generations of an American family and, with the family's involvement with film, the rise of the Hollywood cinema industry. Finally, the Maples stories *Too Far to Go* (1979) was published together with a two-hour television movie on the NBC network.

This chapter aims to unpack what I will reveal as Updike's cinematic techniques in his short fiction and propose a cinematic reading of the short story as a genre. With patterns of Updike criticism in mind, the chapter first studies how Updike applies

⁵ Charles Thomas Samuels, 'The Art of Fiction XLIII: John Updike', in *Conversations with John Updike*, ed. by James Plath (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), pp. 22-45 (p. 24).

⁶ John Updike, 'One Big Interview', in *Picked-Up Pieces* (Greenwich: Fawcett Books, 1975), pp. 473-97 (p. 497).

⁷ John Updike, 'Afterword by the Author', in *Rabbit, Run* (London: Penguin, 2006), pp. 265-80 (p. 269).

techniques of cinematic continuity to make his narrative move forward, thereby establishing and encouraging the reader's identification with his characters. The chapter, then, goes on to draw attention to Updike's use of cinematic discontinuity in his short fiction. The point is to argue that while Updike is sometimes praised (by Robert H. Sykes, Albert J. Griffith, and Bruce H. Tracy for instance) or criticised (by David Foster Wallace, Jay Prosser and Edward Jackson amongst others) for inviting the reader's identification with his fictional characters' 'selves', one can discern in his short fiction a strong self-consciousness in that identification and therefore an open recognition of his characters' limited selves, their imperfections.⁸

As for short story criticism, the task of the chapter is also a twofold one. Firstly, I aim to examine the connection between literature and film and to bring the short story back to a final visual form. I contend that the exclusion of a serious link between the genre and film by André Bazin, Robert Jay, Jean Pickering, and Julio Cortázar, among film and short story critics, is grounded in a mind-set similar to that with which some critics exclude the novel from a painterly or a photographic analogy.⁹ What the critics assert is a difference of kind, rather than of degree, between the novel and the short story and their respective relationships with film; that is, they maintain that the difference

⁸ Robert H. Sykes, 'A Commentary on Updike's "Astronomer"', *Studies in Short Fiction*, 8 (1971), 575-79; Albert J. Griffith, 'Updike's Artist's Dilemma: "Should Wizard Hit Mommy"', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 20 (1974), 111-14; Bruce H. Tracy, 'The Habit of Confession: Recovery of the Self in Updike's "The Music School"', *Studies in Short Fiction*, 21 (1984), 339-55; David Foster Wallace, 'John Updike, Champion Literary Phallocrat, Drops One; Is This Finally the End for Magnificent Narcissists?', *The New York Observer*, Style, 13 October 1997, <<http://observer.com/1997/10/john-updike-champion-literary-phallocrat-drops-one-is-this-finally-the-end-for-magnificent-narcissists/>> [accessed 1 March 2014]; Jay Prosser, 'The Thick-Skinned Art of John Updike: "From the Journal of a Leper"', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 31 (2001), 182-91; Jay Prosser, 'Under the Skin of John Updike: Self-Consciousness and the Racial Unconscious', *PMLA*, 116 (2001), 579-93; Edward M. Jackson, 'Rabbit is Racist', *College Language Association Journal*, 28 (1985), 444-51.

⁹ André Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, trans. by Hugh Gray, 2 vols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), Vol. I (1967); Robert Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985); Jean Pickering, 'Time and the Short Story', in *Re-reading the Short Story*, ed. by Clare Hanson (London: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 45-54; Julio Cortázar, 'Some Aspects of the Short Story', in *The New Short Story Theories*, ed. by Charles E. May (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994), pp. 245-55.

between the short story and the novel is one between incompleteness and completeness, between spatial and temporal, between static and moving. Laying bare the editing process in his short fiction, as not unlike that in film, I argue that Updike reveals, once again, that incompleteness belongs not only to the short story, but to any work of art, therefore making it possible to identify a kind of affinity between the short story and film. After justifying such an affinity, the chapter goes on to explore the particular cinematic seeing of the short story, different in degree from the novel. I argue that while a short story sets up its own narrative, a 'self' regarding form and vision, it also lays bare a discontinuity to that 'self'. The chapter, once again, hopes to demonstrate a formal understanding of literature and its fundamental incompleteness by way of putting the short story alongside a final visual medium.

I. As continuous as a film

1) Eyeline matching and the 'self' in Updike's short fiction

Updike's 1954 story 'Friends from Philadelphia' opens with a conversation between the protagonist John Nordholm and his schoolmate Thelma and, integral to the conversation, the connecting glances between the two characters:

In the moment before the door was opened to him, he glimpsed her thigh below the half-drawn shade.

Thelma was home, then. She was wearing the Camp Winniwoho T-shirt and her quite short shorts.

'Why, my goodness: Janny!' she cried. She always pronounced his name, John, to rhyme with Ann.

[...] 'What on earth ever brings you to me at this odd hour?'

'Hello, Thel,' he said. 'I hope - I guess this is a pretty bad time.' She had been plucking her eyebrows again.¹⁰

¹⁰ John Updike, 'Friends from Philadelphia', in *The Same Door* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), pp. 9-16 (p. 9).

The conventions of literary realism inform such an opening. This is because the sequence between John's action and Thelma's, as revealed in her words to him, is undisturbed by any discontinuity between the actions, whether temporal or spatial, and by the details of description: 'her thigh below the half-drawn shade' and 'she was wearing the Camp Winniwoho T-shirt and her quite short shorts'. A metonymic organisation of language underlines the conversation and the act of seeing between the two characters.

But there is more to say about visual contiguity in this passage from a filmic perspective especially if we put the conversation alongside a critical discussion of one of the staple features of cinematic realism or, to be more accurate, of a formal paradigm of so-called classic Hollywood cinema, the shot/reverse-shot:

Eyeline matches appear in films; in this device, the character glances into a point offscreen in one shot, and a cut reveals the seen space [...]. If a single eyeline provides a strong spatial cue, then a second eyeline on the other side of the cut should create an even stronger spatial anchor for the spectator. This principle is commonly used to create the shot/reverse-shot (SRS) schema, one of the most prevalent figures in the classical Hollywood cinema's spatial system.¹¹

Adapting Bordwell *et al.*'s methodology for analysing a film, the opening of 'Friends from Philadelphia' can be treated as a visual sequence based on eyeline matches, showing Thelma first before switching to John. The passage continues as if in a film scenario, the aim of which is to guarantee 'a continuously coherent narrative' in order that the reader can trace tightly the actions of John Nordholm, the protagonist of the story.¹²

In some ways, film theory, such as that of Bordwell *et al.*, reveals even more clearly than does literary theory – for instance that of Gérard Genette or that of Robert Scholes

¹¹ David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristen Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 207-08.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 195.

and Robert Kellogg - that narrative continuity is not an inherent element in any narrative, either in film or fiction.¹³ A film is the result of film editing. The temporal dimension of reality and the motion on the screen are two completely different spheres: a seemingly very direct visual medium, 'motion pictures' or 'moving pictures' as Updike sometimes calls it, is heavily dependent on construction.¹⁴ Filmmaking process, Walter Benjamin reminds us, reveals little but a paradoxical nature of film's representation of reality:

In the film studio the camera has penetrated so deeply into reality that the pure aspect of the latter, uncontaminated by the camera, emerges from a special procedure, namely being shot by a piece of photographic equipment specially adapted for the purpose and then pasted together with other shots of the same kind.¹⁵

While shots are made separately and may have little to do with the narrative on the screen, the editing procedure links together shots of 'the same kind' in order that the narrative on the screen appears real and natural as if the role of the filmmaker or the editor does not exist. In short, shots add up to reality rather than revealing it, yet the adding-up process, Robert Ray summarises, needs to be concealed 'both to establish the cinema's illusion of reality and to encourage audience identification with the characters on the screen'.¹⁶

We may detect a similar attitude in Updike, though expressed more personally and less theoretically. As a keen cinema-goer, Updike talks about his childhood dream of becoming an animator in his essay 'The Old Movie Houses' (1994):

What I really wanted to be when I grew up was an animator. To create motion, frame by frame,

¹³ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980); Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966).

¹⁴ John Updike, 'Afterword by the Author', in *Rabbit, Run*, p. 269; John Updike, *In the Beauty of the Lilies* (New York: Knopf, 1996), p. 3, 104.

¹⁵ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, trans. by J. A. Underwood (London: Penguin, 2008), pp. 1-50 (p.24).

¹⁶ Robert Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980*, p. 34.

appeared Godlike, and appealed to both the boundless egoism of the small movie-attending boy and his obscure passion for order, for pattern.¹⁷

Updike's longing to create motion, to 'keep an organized mass of images moving forward', persists in his writing. By highlighting his desire 'to create motion, frame by frame', he is obviously conscious of the procedure of film editing; that is, motion created by linking together separate shots. Yet, on the other hand, noting that his idea of the animator 'appeared Godlike', Updike, in his own terms, identifies the paradox in the filmmaking procedure outlined by Benjamin and Ray. No matter how much editing work goes into a film, the narrative on the screen should appear real and seamless as if it were perfected not by a filmmaker but by a 'God'. For Updike, an author hardly differs from a scriptwriter or a filmmaker. It is in his/her hands that images are made, selected, and above all 'organized' so that the reader's attention is focused, and only focused, on the 'moving forward' narrative and the going-on of the protagonist's life in the fiction without being distracted by the formal workings of the author.

It is out of this paradoxical concern that the shot/reverse-shot figure based on eyeline matches becomes a typical as well as an essential tactic in Hollywood film editing. It efficiently matches successive shots at logical points in the action and dialogue and covers up the role of the filmmaker.¹⁸ Examples of the shot/reverse-shot structure can be found in almost every Hollywood film. A short sequence in a rather typical Hollywood film made in the classical period, *Casablanca* (1942) (Figure 7), demonstrates this clearly. The film, according to Ray, employs the reverse-field structure in more than fifty percent of its shot transitions.¹⁹

¹⁷ John Updike, 'The Old Movie Houses', p. 642.

¹⁸ Robert Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980*, p. 39.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

The scene depicts a conversation between the protagonist Rick and Captain Renault. They discuss whether Rick would help the resistance leader, Laszlo, get out of Casablanca.²⁰ The conversation is rendered in a strict shot/reverse-shot format. It begins with Shot 1, a proper establishing shot, which sets the 180° axis between the two characters, thus establishing the eyeline match.²¹ The following shots are all taken along the two sides of the 180° axis. While Shot 1 ends with Rick telling Renault that Laszlo will choose between the exit visa and his wife, Shot 2 shows Renault at the centre of the screen looking off-screen left, disagreeing with Rick. Adhering to the 180° axis and the eyeline direction, Shot 3, as the reverse shot of Shot 2, shows Rick at the centre looking off-screen right, telling Renault that Laszlo might not be as romantic as Renault himself. The rest of the conversation is rendered primarily in the shot/reverse-shot structure achieved or, to use a more telling word, realised through consistent screen direction and unbroken eyeline matches. As a result, the viewer of *Casablanca* is encouraged to identify with Rick and follow his conversation with Captain Renault regarding the destiny of Laszlo rather than paying attention to all the cutting and pasting of the reverse shots. We see the functioning of ‘an implied contract’ in *Casablanca* and other classic Hollywood cinema: ‘at any moment in a movie, the audience was to be given the optimum vantage point on what was occurring on screen. Anything important would not only be shown, but shown from the best angle’.²²

²⁰ *Casablanca*, dir. by Michael Curtiz (Warner Bros., 1942). The film clips are available at ‘Casablanca (1/6) Movie Clip-Secret Sentimentalist (1942) HD’, < <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IBJGHvt7I3c/> > [accessed 7 January 2013]

²¹ The application of eyeline matches and the shot/reverse-shot rules is based on screen direction. Only when the filmmaker has a good knowledge of screen direction and makes sure that screen direction in the film is consistent can he/she match the eyeline and render character glances in a shot/reverse-shot manner. This way of orienting and maintaining the audience’s attention to the film narrative is called the ‘180° rule’ or the ‘axis of action’. David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristen Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, p. 202.

²² Robert Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980*, p. 33.

This 'implied contract' illuminates Updike's 'Friends from Philadelphia' too by showing the workings of technique. The opening scene conforms to the shot/reverse-shot structure. In the spirit of this work's associating of Updike's short fiction and visual media, the conversation between John and Thelma can be seen as a film scenario composed by three linking shot-reverse shot figures: the first shot, like that in *Casablanca*, is taken from a position behind John and shows Thelma's figure, the half-drawn shade, and the way she dresses herself and hence identifies the direction for the eyeline match between John and Thelma. The second shot shows John at the centre of the scene. The third shot, following John's glance, cuts back to Thelma showing her at the centre looking outward as if off-screen so that the reader can identify with John and his observation regarding Thelma's plucked eyebrows. By applying the eyeline match and linking reverse-field figures as if in a film, Updike is able to 'keep an organized mass of images moving forward' and to bring the reader's attention to the narrative sequence from one scene to another without undue disturbance.

As we read on, this tight connecting of reverse scenes continues to function and it remains difficult to detect the workings on the side of the writer. One follows John's point of view tightly, when he enters Thelma's house and is greeted by Thelma's mother:

'Don't keep John Nordholm standing there,' Mrs Lutz said. Thelma's mother was settled in the deep red settee watching television and smoking. A coffee cup being used as an ashtray lay in her lap, and her dress was hiked up so that her knees showed.

'Hello, Mrs Lutz,' John said, trying not to look at her broad, pale knees. 'I really hate to bother you at this odd hour.'

'I don't see anything odd about it.' She took a deep-throated drag on her cigarette and exhaled

through her nostrils, the way men do.²³

This scene offers an introductory ‘shot’ of Thelma’s mother, Mrs. Lutz. Next, the ‘camera’ cuts to John. Mention of John ‘trying not to look at her broad pale knees’ creates, at Bordwell’s prompting, ‘a stronger spatial anchor’, confirming that John is at the other end of the first shot and what we see about Mrs. Lutz is from John’s perspective. Finally, within the reader’s expectation, the ‘camera’ reverts to Mrs. Lutz showing her masculine manner of smoking cigarettes. Motion is created ‘frame by frame’, but motion should, as Updike tells us, appear ‘Godlike’.

We have been discussing for quite a while the shot/reverse-shot structure, an important technique in Hollywood cinema, as it might be perceived in ‘Friends from Philadelphia’. However, the point of a detailed analysis as such is not to claim that Updike has spent his time reading classic Hollywood film theory or that he would have been an excellent scriptwriter. Rather, as Updike points out himself in an interview, what he intends to achieve is ‘an equivalent of the cinematic mode of narration’; that is, he could come closer to the effect of a film by writing than by really directing a film.²⁴ Through this cinematic mode of narration, that is by employing techniques associated with film editing to arrange narrative spaces, Updike is able to maintain visual contiguity, cinematic realism in other words, in his fiction. Updike’s short story characters are often keen observers and have a special obsession with seeing. To this end, eyeline matches provide an efficient method of linking the point of view of the observer and what he/she observes, thereby encouraging, to a great extent, the reader’s identification with the observer.

²³ John Updike, ‘Friends from Philadelphia’, p. 9.

²⁴ Charles Thomas Samuels, ‘The Art of Fiction XLIII: John Updike’, in *Conversations with John Updike*, ed. by James Plath (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), pp. 22-45 (p. 40).

It is not an exaggeration to say that there is no single Updike story that does not have eyeline matches. Just to name a few more examples, simply to bring this important narrative technique out of what seems to be the monopoly of 'Friends from Philadelphia'. Conversations in the following scenes and stories are rendered in a shot/reverse-shot structure: the quarrel between Ace and a teenager through their car windows in 'Ace in the Hole' (1955), the discussion of *Macbeth* between the young English teacher Mark Prosser and his charming student Gloria in 'Tomorrow and Tomorrow and So Forth' (1955), and the exchanging glances during the lunchtime talk between Fred and his college friend Clayton in 'Who Made Yellow Roses Yellow?' (1956), or we see it deployed in the first encounter of the narrator and his mistress in her gallery in 'New York Girl' (1996).²⁵

When conversation is used in a very economical way, the rule of eyeline matches apply, and, sometimes become the only indication of what Updike's characters look at. In 'The Music School' (1964), the narrator looks at the newspaper and following his eyeline, we read about the murder of his acquaintance.²⁶ In the story 'The Happiest I've Been' (1968), an eyeline match presents Neil Hovey from the narrator's perspective:

Neil Hovey came for me wearing a good suit. He parked his father's blue Chrysler on the dirt ramp by our barn and got out and stood by the open car door in a double-breasted tan gabardine suit, his hands in his pockets and his hair combed with water, squinting up at a lighting-rod an old hurricane had knocked crooked. [...] 'You're all dressed up,' I accused him immediately.

'I've been saying good-bye.' The knot of his necktie was loose and the corners of his mouth

²⁵ John Updike, 'Ace in the Hole', in *The Same Door* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), pp. 17-25 (p.17). ; 'Tomorrow and Tomorrow and So Forth', in *The Same Door*, pp.26-35 (p. 31); John Updike, 'Who Made Yellow Roses Yellow?', in *The Same Door*, pp.65-77 (pp. 66-67); John Updike, 'New York Girl', in *Licks of Love* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2000), pp. 28-43 (pp. 29-31).

²⁶ John Updike, 'The Music School', in *The Music School* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), pp. 146-51 (p. 146-47).

were rubbed with pink.²⁷

There is not much conversation between the narrator and Neil, yet the reader has little problem following the narrative by seeing the scenario through three linking reverse-field figures: Neil, the narrator, and Neil again. When the narrator and Neil are about to start their road trip to Chicago, the narrator says good-bye to all his family. The spatial and temporal continuity is again undisturbed due to the linkage between the narrator's glance and what he sees: 'I embraced my mother and over her shoulder with the camera of my head tried to take a snapshot I could keep of the house, the woods behind it and the sunset behind them, the bench beneath the walnut tree [...]'.²⁸

All these eyelines contribute to a tracking mode in which the reader is able to associate with Updike's characters and to follow the 'camera[s]' of their heads. The authority of their seeing is established in such a way that it does not seem to allow any space for the reader to doubt that authority of seeing or to question Updike's characters' identities. With this in mind, it is possible to re-consider the critical attention on self and identity in Updike's fiction. I argue that although critics do not make a direct link between identity and the visual in Updike, Updike's preoccupation with visual realism and his capability of having his reader closely follow his characters' point of view underline most of the critical consideration on identity and self in Updike's work. While opinions differ, some complimentary and other negative, what seems to be at consensus among the critics is that Updike's characters focus on themselves: they are, as David Foster Wallace asserts, 'self-indulgent' and 'narcissistic' white males; and this diagnosis is sometimes passed onto the writer himself.²⁹ In his review of Updike's novel *Towards the End of Time* (1997),

²⁷ John Updike, 'The Happiest I've Been', in *The Same Door*, pp. 170-85 (pp. 170-71).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

²⁹ David Foster Wallace, 'John Updike, Champion Literary Phallocrat, Drops One; Is This Finally the End for

Wallace starts with an assessment that John Updike, Norman Mailer and Philip Roth, are ‘the Great Male Narcissists who’ve dominated postwar realist fiction’.³⁰ Jay Prosser, too, criticises the unconscious white ‘self’ in Updike’s fictional characters, claiming that ‘the white protagonist has been constructed as an ideal American self through his counterpart, a cringing black other’.³¹ By referring to Updike’s own skin problem revealed in the autobiographical essay ‘At War with My Skin’ (1989) and fictionalised in the short story ‘From the Journal of a Leper’ (1973), Prosser further assesses that by being self-conscious about his own skin, Updike demonstrates a binary attitude towards his white ‘self’ and the coloured other, thereby ‘a racial unconscious’.³² Positive critics, such as Donald Greiner, tend to see Updike’s characters as symbols of America, as characters who ‘first absorb and then define the national culture’.³³

This thesis is a formal study of the short story as a literary genre through the visual aspects in Updike’s short fiction. A focus on the identity in Updike’s fictional characters does not seem to have direct relevance to the thesis. Whereas I shall not be involved in the critical debate over identity issues in Updike, I argue that the critics’ opinions, no matter praise or criticism, do offer, although partially and superficially, some insight about Updike’s characters and even about himself as a writer. And this insight is relevant

Magnificent Narcissists?’, n. p. Although the debate over identity in Updike mentioned here concerns race, Updike critics have also studied Updike’s characters’ identity as a male and their attitude towards women. They tend to assess Updike’s position on gender issues on the basis of Updike’s fictional characters’ sexist attitudes. Feminist criticism of Updike’s fiction can be found in Mary Allen, ‘John Updike’s Love of “Dull Bovine Beauty”’, in *John Updike*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), pp. 69-95; and also Ramchandran Sethuraman, ‘Writing Woman’s Body: Male Fantasy, Desire, and Sexual Identity in Updike’s *Rabbit, Run*’, *Literature Interpretation Theory*, 4 (1993), 101-22.

³⁰ David Foster Wallace, ‘John Updike, Champion Literary Phallocrat, Drops One; Is This Finally the End for Magnificent Narcissists?’, n. p.

³¹ Jay Prosser, ‘Under the Skin of John Updike: Self-Consciousness and the Racial Unconscious’, p. 580.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 582.

³³ Donald J. Greiner, ‘No Place to Run: Rabbit Angstrom as Adamic Hero’, in *Rabbit Tales: Poetry and Politics in John Updike’s Rabbit Novels*, ed. by Lawrence R. Broer (Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 2000), pp. 8-16 (p.8).

to the thesis. His characters are keen observers and by applying techniques of cinematic realism, eyeline matches for instance, Updike does seem to give the reader, as the ‘implied contract’ in Hollywood encourages, the optimum vantage point on what is happening to the protagonist. This open encouragement of the reader’s full involvement with his characters’ fictional world gives the impression that Updike’s story characters, and even the writer himself, are ‘self-indulgent’ and ‘narcissistic’. However, what the critics confuse is the difference, the gap, between Updike’s fictional world and the world, between Updike’s interest in rendering his characters observant or sometimes self-indulgent ones and Updike’s own sense of self as a white American male writer. These distinctions are particularly important and, indeed relevant, for a thesis on the short story and Updike’s practice of the genre, for, as we have discussed earlier, the short story form has both a narrative dimension and a certain degree of self-consciousness to that narrative dimension.

Yet, before attending to the gap between the fictional world and the world, between Updike’s fictional characters and the writer himself, I shall stay with Updike’s ‘cinematic mode of narration’ for slightly longer. It is necessary, I argue, to examine Updike’s cinematic treatment of the ‘others’ in his stories as opposed to the ‘selves’: the *other* events subsidiary to the main narrative or events that happen to *other* supporting roles rather than the protagonist in his short fiction, as opposed to his cinematic attitude to the main narrative and the *self* of the protagonist as discussed above.

2) Montage and the ‘others’ in Updike’s short fiction

In the previous chapter on the short story and photography, I argued that in handling short story’s limited narrative space, Updike resorts to photography’s metonymic relationship

with reality, as seen in ‘Here Come the Maples’ for instance, to refer to earlier events of the main narrative. This way, Updike is able to elongate the temporal dimension of the narrative, while still maintaining a continuous narrative in a short story. In this chapter, I argue that Updike adopts a special type of film editing, montage, to maintain narrative continuity, particularly when a long duration of time needs to be presented in the narrative or other parallel yet supporting events need to take place at the same time as the primary narrative.

To different schools of cinema montage means different things and we shall discuss montage as a means of disturbing narrative continuity in the next section, but at the moment for this section our working definition of montage will be that of ‘the montage sequence’, a type of editing that has been incorporated into Hollywood cinema’s continuity system.³⁴ Bordwell *et al.* summarise the function of the montage sequence as follows:

The narration shows the important events and skips the intervals between them. [...] The montage sequence lets the narration represent, however briefly, those intervals. The montage sequence does not omit time but compresses it. A war, a prison sentence, or a career can be summed up in a few shots.³⁵

Although montage brings about discontinuity both spatially and temporally, it can also, much as the shot/reverse-shot structure, contribute to the continuity of the main narrative. In Bordwell *et al.*’s summary of Hollywood’s use of montage, a narrative consists of

³⁴ For French cinema or Soviet filmmakers of the 1920s and early 1930s, montage is the basic constructional activity in filmmaking, namely shot-assembling, which is referred to as cutting or editing in Hollywood cinema. Moreover, montage is sometimes referred to as an alternative method of editing, opposite to continuity, the notion of which was first introduced by the Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein. We shall discuss this alternative method of editing in the next section, but at the moment stay with ‘the montage sequence’ in Hollywood cinema. David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristen Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, p. 60, p. 44.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

‘important events’ and unimportant events, or the ‘intervals’ between ‘the important events’. Yet the unimportant events are compressed by the montage sequence in order that narrative continuity is not disturbed or distracted. In this sense, the function of the montage sequence is to link shots and to advance the action of the story rather than breaking it down. Hence, the montage sequence is only employed by classical Hollywood cinema in the interests of a film’s narrative, for the purpose of maintaining narrative continuity. That is, the montage sequence is under, what Bordwell *et al.* call, ‘its strict codification: it is, simply, the sequence which advances the story action in just this overt way’.³⁶ For this reason, montage sequences are also called ‘time-lapse’ sequences.³⁷ A good example of the montage sequence is the training montages in the *Rocky* film series (1976-2006), in which a few training shots are put together to cover the entire training period before the narrative focuses back on important events again.³⁸ Here in the case of the *Rocky* films, the important event is usually a decisive or difficult fight.

Similar montage sequences can be found in Updike’s short fiction. The function of montage here is, like those in Hollywood cinema, to link the intervals between important events in order that the story action can be advanced. In ‘The Christian Roommates’ (1963), for example, the narrative is focused on how Orson’s life has been changed by his university roommate Hub and an incident involving a parking meter, which prompts Orson’s open expression of a grudge against Hub and a fight between the two. While the two characters’ first encounter, several later conversations with their other roommates, and the incident itself are rendered with continuous motion, quite a lot of Orson’s time

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.44.

³⁸ *Rocky*, dir. by John G. Avildsen and Sylvester Stallone (United Artists, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, and United International Pictures, 1976-2006).

in Harvard is portrayed through montage. For instance, after the parking meter incident, a montage sequence compresses the rest of their first academic year in a few images:

Orson didn't speak to Hub for two days after the parking meter incident. By then, it seemed rather silly, and they finished out the year sitting side by side at their desks as amiably as two cramped passengers who have endured a long bus trip together. When they parted, they shook hands, and Hub would have walked Orson to the subway kiosk except that he had an appointment in the opposite direction.³⁹

We may visualise a first shot of Orson and Hub remaining silent with each other; next, a cut to a shot showing them 'sitting side by side at their desks', and finally a cut showing that they 'parted' and 'shook hands' possibly at a crossroad where Orson turns to the direction of the subway and Hub turns the opposite way. Furthermore, Orson's remaining years in Harvard and his life trajectory after graduation are also compressed into a passage linking a few events, which signifies the lapse of time:

For the remaining three years at Harvard, he roomed uneventfully with two other colourless pre-med students, named Wallace and Neuhauser. After graduation, he married Emily, attended the Yale School of Medicine, and interned in St. Louis. He is now the father of four children and, since the death of his own father, the only doctor in the town. His life has gone much the way he planned it, and he is much the kind of man he intended to be when he was eighteen. He delivers babies, assists the dying, attends the necessary meetings, plays golf, and does good.⁴⁰

Although this long duration of time is compressed into a short passage, the story is presented in a primarily continuous way and can be visually summed up by a montage sequence of a few shots: Orson's 'two other colourless' roommates in Harvard, his wedding, him entering the Yale School of Medicine, St. Louis, the births of his children, the death of his father, and his life working as a doctor. As Updike puts it, all these events

³⁹ John Updike, 'The Christian Roommates', in *The Music School*, pp. 105-31 (p. 130-31).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

seem ‘uneventful’ and Orson’s life ‘has gone much the way he planned it’. The uneventfulness of other events seems to justify the need to sum them up in montage so as to give way to what are supposed to be ‘the important events’ of the main narrative: those directly or indirectly related to Orson’s time with Hub in Harvard.

The montage sequences stop when Hub’s influence on Orson seems to come back to the scene, and with this the story ends: ‘In one particular only – a kind of scar he carries without pain and without any clear memory of the amputation – does the man he is differ from the man he assumed he would become. He never prays’.⁴¹ The ending refers back to the relationship between the two Christian roommates, Orson and Hub, and the traces left on Orson by this experience: ‘he never prays’, which makes Orson different from ‘the man he assumed he would become’ before meeting Hub. The reiteration of Orson’s time in Harvard with Hub and the underlining of its importance seems to confirm not only cinematic narrative continuity, but also a Lukácsian view of establishing the identity of a fictional hero in the short story, as we have discussed earlier: ‘the short story does this [portraying a hero and his destiny] only formally, by giving form to an episode in the hero’s life in such a strongly sensual way that it renders all other parts of his life superfluous’.⁴² Viewed this way, the montage sequences mentioned above correspond to the shared narrative purpose by Hollywood cinema and a Lukácsian understanding of the short story: to highlight the main narrative of the story by linking the actions together rather than breaking them down. So long as this purpose is the primary concern, montage sequences in the short story, as is the case of the ‘The Christian Roommates’, are not only naturalised in a continuously coherent narrative, but also play an important role in re-

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Georg Lukács, ‘The Bourgeois Way of Life and Art for Art’s Sake’, in *Soul and Form*, trans. and ed. by Anna Bostock (London: Merlin Press, 1974), pp. 55-78 (p. 73).

confirming the reader's association with the protagonists.

Similar use of montage sequences can be found in the events and lives of the unimportant or supporting characters in Updike's stories. They might be relevant to the main narrative, but it seems that too much of these 'others' will distract the reader's attention from identifying himself/herself with the protagonist 'on screen'. Still in 'The Christian Roommates', the other roommates in the same residential hall with Orson and Hub are introduced through further montage images.⁴³ In 'Home', a transatlantic boat journey from England to America is summed up in a few shots: 'a downpour in Liverpool', two singing girls, golden sunlight in Cobh, an American girl 'coming out on the pilot boat in tight treading pants and with the Modern Library *Ulysses* ostentatiously under her arm', 'the flawless circular horizon', and finally the Statue of Liberty.⁴⁴ Without skipping the journey, the journey, together with the scenery and the people the protagonist meets along the way, are presented in a montage sequence so as to move the main narrative forward to depict: Robert's return to his homeland after one year in the UK. In 'The Music School', after the narrator reads about the murder of his acquaintance, the life of the acquaintance and the encounters of both are presented in summarised montage images.⁴⁵ And in 'The Lucid Eye in Silver Town', the past of Uncle Quin, a character who plays a supporting role in the story, is rendered in just one sentence with one or two images: 'A generation ago, my uncle had vanished in the direction of Chicago and become, apparently, rich'.⁴⁶ Through the montage sequence, the reader is given some

⁴³ John Updike, 'The Christian Roommates', p. 112.

⁴⁴ John Updike, 'Home', in *Pigeon Feathers and Other Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), pp. 104-16 (p. 104).

⁴⁵ John Updike, 'The Music School', p. 146-47.

⁴⁶ John Updike, 'The Lucid Eye in Silver Town', in *The Early Stories 1953-1975* (London: Penguin, 2005), pp. 129-37 (p. 129).

clues regarding the intervals between events and some ideas of the supporting characters in the story; yet at the same time his/her attention is not drawn away from the main narrative or from their association with the protagonist 'on screen'. As Bruce H. Tracy points out, taking 'The Music School' as an example, the narrative is 'a highly condensed and coherent piece' and by evoking an impression that the narrative exists 'in the present time', the world of the narrator, his self, is revealed to the reader.⁴⁷

3) The short story as cinematic motion

The discussion of Hollywood continuity style in Updike's short fiction prompts the possibility of re-considering the relationship between literature and film and the role of the short story in that relationship. At the moment, reading literature alongside the filmic medium seems to be a domain dominated by the novel. In film criticism, when it comes to the comparison between fiction and film, most of the comparison is made between the novel and film. Short story critics tend to agree with this position in that longer fiction fits better with the cinematic mode of narration. When they do advocate a filmic understanding of the short story, they seem reluctant to pursue the link rigorously.

André Bazin, for example, claims that a similar experience is shared between a novel reader and a film viewer:

The reader of a novel, physically alone like the man in the dark movie house, identifies himself with the character. That is why after reading for a long while he also feels the same intoxication of an illusory intimacy with the hero.⁴⁸

As we have learnt from Hollywood's 'implied contract', the viewer of a Hollywood film

⁴⁷ Bruce H. Tracy, 'The Habit of Confession: Recovery of the Self in Updike's "The Music School"', p. 339.

⁴⁸ André Bazin, *What is Cinema?*. trans. by Hugh Gray, 2vols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), Vol. I (1967), p. 100.

is encouraged to be fully involved with what appears on the screen, to feel ‘the same intoxication of an illusory intimacy with the hero’, rather than noticing the workings behind the story. This ‘habitual subordination of style to story’, confirmed by Ray, is ‘the basic tactic and goal of the realistic novel’, in which ‘conscious “style” would be effaced both to establish the cinema’s illusion of reality and to encourage audience identification with the characters on the screen’.⁴⁹

Talking about what happens when literature is made into a film, short story critic Jean Pickering claims that films which are made from novels tend to be successful, whereas ‘short stories translated into film seem to lose a whole dimension’.⁵⁰ The film, Pickering further explains, ‘pulls against the nature of the short story, which is essentially towards stasis’; therefore, if there were an equivalent for the short story much as the film is the equivalent for the novel, Pickering proposes the photograph.⁵¹ Julio Cortázar takes a similar stance and builds the analogies between the short story and the photograph, the novel and the film:

In this sense, the novel and the short story can be compared analogically with the film and the photograph, since the film is, essentially, an ‘open order’ like the novel, while a successful photo presupposes a circumscribed limitation, imposed in part by the reduced field which the camera captures and also by the way in which the photographer uses that limitation esthetically.⁵²

Whether ‘an illusory intimacy with the hero’ as proposed by Bazin, a non-static dimension implied by Pickering, or the ‘open order’ noted by Cortázar, the affinity between longer fiction and film and the exclusion of the short story from that affinity are

⁴⁹ Robert Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980*, pp. 33-34.

⁵⁰ Jean Pickering, ‘Time and the Short Story’, p. 52.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Julio Cortázar, ‘Some Aspects of the Short Story’, in *The New Short Story Theories*, ed. by Charles E. May (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994), pp. 245-55 (p.246).

established by the critics on a similar yet false ground: a comfortable merging between the fictional world and the empirical world.

However, as we have learnt from the mapping impulse in the novel form in Chapter One, a novel or even a novel series, no matter how long it is, cannot represent a life. What is possible in the novel is a relative delay or deferral in the reader's realisation of form, the fictional and circumscribed being of the novel. The same is the case with cinema or, to be more accurate, cinema underlined by narrative continuity. A viewer realises rather late that motion is, as Updike reminds us earlier, created 'frame by frame'. This delay is made possible by the ongoing cancelling of style, or, what Ray calls 'the "suturing" procedure' in Hollywood cinema: 'one shot "completed" a predecessor' in order that the gap between each shot is covered up and the illusion of reality on the side of the viewer achieved.⁵³

The cinematic mode of narration described above does not only belong to the novel. As we have seen in Updike's short stories, images are not static ones; they move forward as if part of film scenarios. It would be unfair to overlook the cinematic mode of narration in the short story by claiming that the genre, only because it is shorter than the novel, is close to photography rather than to film, static rather than moving. The suturing procedure is certainly at work in the short story, as it is in cinema. Bordwell *et al.* remind us that film has learnt something important from the short story regarding the viewing time of a film and narrative unity: the short story, Edgar Allan Poe being the reference point here, 'could be read at a single sitting, and thus should convey a unified

⁵³ Robert Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980*, p. 39. The term 'suture' is originally a medical term meaning 'a stitching or tying as in the surgical joining of the lips of a wound' and sometimes borrowed by film critics to refer to the linkage of certain shots in order to cover up the fact that filmmaking is a heavily decision and editing based process. Stephen Heath, 'On Screen, in Frame: Film and Ideology', in *Questions of Cinema* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 1-18 (p. 13).

impression'.⁵⁴ There are many readings of Poe's 'unity of impression' in later short story criticism, yet the fact that the short story is usually read at one sitting does not estrange it from the film, which is usually viewed in one sitting as well.⁵⁵ In addition, since the short story is shorter than the novel, it is likely that the genre lends itself to more codification, more 'rules' in terms of image construction. This is, again similar to Hollywood cinema, which is, as we have seen, highly reliant on editing, or, the suturing procedure. Therefore, instead of excluding the short story from the novel and film analogy, I would argue for an inclusion of the genre. The three media, the short story, the novel, and film, all depend on the suturing procedure in stitching the gaps between images in order to make the images move forward without being disturbed by any discontinuity.

All this said, it is still to be noted that there is a difference in degree, between the short story and the novel in the fiction-film analogy, which should not be ignored. That is, an inclusion of the short story within the cinematic reading of literature has not told everything about the particular relationship between the short story and film. The literary genre's limited space brings something special in its affinity with film, which may not be shared by the novel. The ending of a novel, the final gap, comes relatively late to the extent that the suturing effect could possibly have a stronger effect on the reader. The novel would leave a longer illusory impression as if the fictional world of the protagonist, 'the moving world before us', becomes '*the world*'.⁵⁶ The short story, on the other hand, is different in degree in this respect. Due to the form's limited space, the moment of

⁵⁴ David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristen Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, p. 167.

⁵⁵ Edgar Allan Poe, 'Review of *Twice-Told Tales*', in *The New Short Story Theories*, ed. by Charles E. May (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994), pp. 59-64 (pp. 61).

⁵⁶ André Bazin, *What is Cinema?* Vol. I, p. 102.

closure of a story comes earlier than in a novel, which means even though there is an on-going suturing of cinematic elements to the interest of the story narrative, the narrative will have to come to an end. No matter how many gaps have been sutured to create an illusion of reality, this illusion will be finally stopped by reality and the reader has to come to realise the existence of the final gap, which after all cannot be sutured.

This becomes quite evident when we find cinematic continuity techniques at the end of story. In 'The Lucid Eye in Silver Town', for example, a montage sequence is used to cover the waiting time for the train, the journey back home and the time lapse before the narrator's second trip to New York:

I kept on, shrilly flailing the passive and infuriating figure of my father, until we left the city. Once we were on the homeward train, my tantrum ended; it had been a kind of ritual, for both of us, and he had endured my screams complacently, nodding assent, like a midwife assisting at the birth of family pride. Years passed before I needed to go to New York again.⁵⁷

To render the lapse of years in just one phrase, a montage image so to speak, 'years passed', Updike demonstrates at once a recognition of time passing and a need to erase time in fictional representation. The fact that the story stops at this sentence with such a 'moving' image signals the necessity for montage in storytelling and setting up the self in Updike's characters; yet at the same time, the ending, as we shall see in the next section, also reminds us of the falseness of narrative continuity techniques and Updike's sceptical attitude to his 'self-indulgent' characters.

So here is the remaining question: how can the medium of film used in Updike's practice of short fiction demonstrates a different cinematic mode of narration in the short story?

⁵⁷ John Updike, 'The Lucid Eye in Silver Town', p. 137.

II. As discontinuous as a film

1) Disturbed eyelines and the destabilised 'self' in Updike's short fiction

Eyeline matches are commonly found in Updike's stories. This, however, does not guarantee that every act of seeing from Updike's characters is as coherent as that in a Hollywood film. While some eyelines, such as the connecting glances between John and Thelma in 'Friends from Philadelphia', are sutured in an invisible manner, other eyelines are made problematic or at the edge of challenging the undisturbed point of view, on which a continuously coherent narrative and the authority of John's world are based.

In the same story, while the narrative proceeds rather straightforwardly in a conversational mode between John, Thelma and Mrs Lutz, the narrative flow is disturbed when Mr Lutz returns home. Mrs Lutz tells John that 'Now don't be surprised if he has a bit of a load on'.⁵⁸ If this sentence showed Mrs Lutz 'on screen', the reader would expect that the following sentence would be coming from Mr Lutz as he enters his home and starts a conversation with the people in the house. The organisation of the sequence would then continue to conform to eyeline matches and carry on the cinematic flow of the story. However, this is not the case. The story switches to John's observation of Mr Lutz from a distanced point of view as if he was a spectator of, rather than having a role inside, the film:

Actually, he didn't act at all drunk. He was like a happy husband in the movies. He called Thelma his little pookie-pie and kissed her on the forehead; then he called his wife his big pookie-pie and kissed her on the mouth. Then he solemnly shook John's hand and told him how very, very happy he was to see him here and asked after his parents. 'Is that goon still on television?' he said finally.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ John Updike, 'Friends from Philadelphia', p. 11.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

John's observation does not effect a drastic alteration to the narrative: Mr Lutz indeed enters home and what John sees, 'actually, he didn't act at all drunk', matches Mrs Lutz's earlier warning that Mr Lutz might be drunk. However, the change of perspective, from direct dialogue to indirect dialogue, introduces discontinuity in the reading process. Additionally, the comparison of Mr. Lutz to 'a happy husband in the movies' almost lays bare the workings behind moving images in cinema. The reader is, as a result, defamiliarised from the illusion constructed by cinematic techniques and possibly made aware of his/her habitual assumptions in facing literary or cinematic realism. Furthermore, the passage ends with Mr Lutz turning to the television screen, commenting 'Is that goon still on television?'. This question, as a direct quotation, might re-introduce a shot/reverse-shot structure responding to an earlier description of what is on television, 'Some smiling man was playing the piano', and, indeed, the story at this moment switches back to its shot/reverse-shot conversational mode after this passage.⁶⁰ Yet, the fact that the various dialogues in this passage are all rendered indirectly except this last one is obvious enough to be a reminder that both Mr Lutz and John are fictional characters, who are 'on screen' and similar to the man on television. What comes together with this reminder is a reduced effect regarding the visual world of John in the short story, which has been otherwise set up by eyeline matching in the shot/reverse-shot structure as discussed in the previous section.

Similarly, in 'Ace in the Hole', while undisturbed eyelines lead the narrative flow, there seems to be some implicit questioning of the coherence of Ace's seeing. For instance, there are different renderings of the newspaper article in which Ace's name

⁶⁰ Ibid.

appears. When Ace reads the article, as discussed in Chapter One, the article is put in a separate quotation as if taken directly from the newspaper. The reader can possibly visualise two linking reverse-field figures: a first shot showing Ace 'on screen' examining something 'off-screen' and a cut to what he sees: a close-up of the newspaper article.⁶¹ Yet, the newspaper, which is obviously important to Ace and presented with visual emphasis, does not receive a similar appreciation by Ace's wife Evey. When she returns home, the newspaper becomes one of many things scattered in the room. She 'stuck the newspaper in the wastebasket' and then 'shoved the paper deep into the basket with her foot'.⁶²

Furthermore, on close inspection, the eyelines of Ace and Evey seldom match. When Ace tries to persuade Evey into the idea of having a baby boy, their eyelines are not only disturbed but also lost:

'She is a natural,' Ace said, 'and it won't do her any good because she's a girl. Baby, we got to have a boy.'

'I am not your baby,' Evey said, closing her eyes.

[...]

'Fred Junior. I can see him now,' he said, seeing nothing.

'We will have no Juniors.'⁶³

In having Evey scoff at the article featuring Ace's name, throw it in the wastebasket, and refuse to look back at Ace, Updike poses a challenge or, rather a denigration, to the authority of Ace's seeing and the otherwise undisturbed narrative flow established by the eyeline matches at the beginning of the story. This denigration of seeing can be read not only from Evey's attitude, but also from the narrative itself. There is an irony, mocking

⁶¹ John Updike, 'Ace in the Hole', in *The Same Door* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), pp. 17-25 (pp. 20-21).

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

the continuity in motion between Ace's claim that 'Fred Junior, I can see him now' and the fact that he sees 'nothing'. Ace's seeing and knowing have become, at this moment, his inability to see and to know.

Paul de Man's dialectical relationship between insight and blindness reoccur here as a useful reference point for the discontinuous nature of cinematic continuity as noted by Robert Ray:

Editing adds the further possibilities inherent in every shot-to-shot articulation. Not only do things on the screen appear at the expense of others not shown, the manner in which they appear depends on a selection of one perspective that eliminates (at least temporarily) all others.⁶⁴

While Ace's seeing and knowing seem to dominate the short story narrative, Updike reminds us, with the assistance of disturbed eyelines, that there is no absolute seeing or knowing. Every sight, and insight, is gained at some degree of 'blindness', that is, at the expense of other seeing and knowing possibilities.⁶⁵

The irony, Ace's sight/insight being blindness, is brought forward by the closure of the short story. Although it was discussed at length in Chapter One, I argue that it is still worth re-reading the ending in the light of the filmic medium. It is not only an irony to Ace's life but also an irony to narrative continuity or the unified impression recommended by some Hollywood scenario books and short story handbooks.

In her crib, Bonnie whimpered at the sight of her mother being seized. Ace fitted his hand into the natural place on Evey's back and she shuffled stiffly into his lead. When, with a sudden injection of saxophones, the tempo quickened, he spun her out carefully, keeping the beat with his shoulders. Her hair brushed his lips as she minced in, then swung away, to the end of his arm; he could feel her toes dig into the carpet. He flipped his own hair back from his eyes. The music ate through his skin and

⁶⁴ Robert Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980*, p. 32.

⁶⁵ Paul de Man, 'The Rhetoric of Blindness: Jacques Derrida's Reading of Rousseau', in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1983), pp. 102-41 (p. 106).

mixed with the nerves and small veins; he seemed to be great again, and all the other kids were around them, in a ring, clapping time.⁶⁶

Cinematic discontinuity is evident at the moment of closure. In the first place, the perspective suddenly switches to that of Bonnie, the baby, and the scene is given from her angle in the crib as if Ace is indeed blind. This identification with Bonnie estranges the reader from an identification with Ace, an angle assumed and encouraged by the continuity style established at the beginning of the story. This estrangement from the dominant perspective, similar to the scenario in 'Friends from Philadelphia' when Mr Lutz comments on what is on television, lays bare the existence of the film screen, which has been sutured and rendered invisible.

The film screen brings us back to the rhetoric of the window in Updike's short fiction, where the writer himself is able to allow two identities to dwell at the same time: a narrator and a humourist. In being a narrator-humourist, Updike is able to at once establish the identity of Ace and mock his self-celebration. The fact that the story opens with music and closes with music is, once again, helpful in our understanding of discontinuity in cinematic narration and characterisation. The closing scene in which Ace and Evey dance to the dinner music seems to conform to a classic Hollywood ending: 'the embrace of the male and female stars and the disappearing into the sunset of the main character or, occasionally, characters'.⁶⁷ However, the case with Ace and Evey is obviously a different one. Ace has just lost his job and Evey has just refused to have a second child with him. All these give the closing sentence, 'he seemed to be great again, and all the other kids were around them, in a ring, clapping time', an ironic tone. Even

⁶⁶ John Updike, 'Ace in the Hole', p. 25.

⁶⁷ Douglas Tallack, *Twentieth-Century America: The Intellectual and Cultural Context* (London: Longman, 1999), p. 57.

the detail that ‘he flipped his own hair back from his eyes’ as a gesture to improve or re-establish his sight cannot but only reinforce Ace’s ‘blindness’, thereby adding an element of incoherence to the narrative.

Broken eyelines would be considered a failure in Hollywood narrative; yet, they are often found in European avant-garde films, which do not always obey the ‘180° rule’ on which Hollywood’s continuity style is based. Updike is not unfamiliar with the avant-garde movement in Europe. Although not completely in harmony with some claims of the movement, he acknowledges the movement’s importance and calls for attention to the *nouveau roman* and the French New Wave cinema in the English-speaking world.⁶⁸ In the same essay, Updike expresses his appreciation of *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961), a film directed by Alain Resnais from a screenplay by Alain Robbe-Grillet, for inducing a special kind of participation on the side of the audience different from a Hollywood film.⁶⁹

In Resnais’s film, X the man insists that he met A the woman the previous year and that she promised to elope with him if he could wait for a year.⁷⁰ However, X’s narrative is disturbed by A’s denial of having met X and her denial of knowing X at all. Throughout the film, the two characters carry on the same conversation, with X’s insistence and A’s refusal, in a French chateau and its garden. The film is full of mismatched eyelines. As a result, the narrative’s spatial and temporal continuity is subverted and the two characters’ identities remain extremely unclear. All the possible cinematic elements, a man and a

⁶⁸ While empathising with the avant-garde movement’s appeal for ‘Make it new’, Updike insists that the appeal is by no means a new one; ‘Make it new’ is a fundamental question that confronts every artist. John Updike, ‘Grove is My Press, and Avant My Garde’, in *Picked-Up Pieces* (Greenwich: Fawcett Books, 1975), pp. 343-55 (p. 344).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 348.

⁷⁰ *Last Year at Marienbad*, dir. by Alain Resnais (Terra Films, 1961). The film clips are available at ‘L’ANNEE DERNIERE A MARIENBAD (1961)’, < <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DorkfnxQkAs> > [accessed 7 March 2013].

woman, a location name (Marienbad), and a timeline (last year and this year), which could have been switched, or sutured, into a continuously coherent narrative as in Hollywood cinema, do not add up to any storytelling.

However, Updike reminds us that *Last Year at Marienbad* demonstrates a different cinematic language, a ‘full syntax of splicing, blurring, stop-action, enlargement, panning, and fade-out’.⁷¹ It encourages us to see the gaps between the shots, namely ‘the stopping - the functioning of the suture in imaginary, frame, narrative, etc’.⁷² Resnais’s deliberate subversion of narrative, instead of projecting ‘a transparent presentation of “reality”’, lays bare ‘the marks of cinematic practice’: its framings, its cuts and its intermittences, thereby bringing our attention to the suturing process itself.⁷³ There is little doubt that any viewer of *Last Year at Marienbad* would be frustrated by not being able to enter the film’s fictional world; nor can anyone follow or make sense the film characters’ identities. Yet, by pushing his film to the opposite end of the Hollywood continuity style, Resnais, like Updike at the end of ‘Ace in the Hole’, encourages a critical attitude to what has been assumed by film viewers as the norm of the cinematic mode of narration and characterisation. All this said, it is rather clear why the critical debate over the identity issue in and of Updike mentioned earlier is perceptive in one way but problematic in another. If Updike does set up his short story characters’ visual world in a continuous and coherent manner and encourage the reader’s involvement with that seemingly ‘self-indulgent’ and ‘narcissistic’ world, he is also able to reveal the gap between the fictional world and the world by applying cinematic discontinuity. In doing so, Updike, as Catherine Morley observes, looks at his characters ‘with an extremely critical eye’ and

⁷¹ John Updike, ‘Grove is My Press, and Avant My Garde’, p. 347.

⁷² Stephen Heath, ‘On Screen, in Frame: Film and Ideology’, p. 14.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

hints at a discomfort, rather than comfort, with representation.⁷⁴ And this self-celebratory and self-critical attitude is made possible and works efficiently in the space of the short story, a form characterised at once by its self-celebration and its self-consciousness.

2) Dialectical montage and the reminder of 'others' in Updike's short fiction

In Updike's 1967 story 'Museums and Women', the narrator, William Young, tries to bring back his memory of his school's educational expedition to the museum of his hometown and to recall the girl that he likes at the time. Yet, he seems 'to be embedded among boiling clouds straining to catch a glimpse of her, or tapped in a movie theatre behind a row of huge heads while fragmented arcs of the screen confusingly flicker'.⁷⁵ The whole story seems to be a collection of seven separate incidents loosely related to museums and women in William's memory. Robert Luscher, as most critics of spatial form would do, offers an epiphanic reading to reclaim story's coherence and unity:

By focusing wholly on the experiential and metaphoric alliance of museums and women, he [Updike] creates a focused series of lyrical mediations that constitute a museum gallery hung with pictures of William's past. In splicing together seven interrelated memories, 'Museums and Women' achieves a remarkable balance between the lyric and narrative impulses.⁷⁶

However, Updike does not seem to feel the need to reach the kind of lyrical coherence and unity claimed by Luscher. He does not hide the gaps between the incidents. On the contrary, he seems to draw attention to the fact that each incident, like a fragmented arc of the film screen, is an independent piece of William's memory. A blank line is given to

⁷⁴ Catherine Morley, 'The Bard of Everyday Domesticity: John Updike's Song of America', in *The Quest for Epic in Contemporary American Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 57-83 (p. 73).

⁷⁵ John Updike, 'Museums and Women', in *Museums and Women and Other Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), pp. 11-22 (p. 14).

⁷⁶ Robert Luscher, *John Updike: A Study of the Short Fiction*, p. 91.

separate the incidents from one another.

A similar attitude of laying bare narrative discontinuity can be found in other Updike's stories. In 'Trust Me' (1962), four separate incidents are loosely linked by the theme of trust and distrust. In 'Believers' (1972), eight short scenes involving Credo, a believer, are put together, yet separated by blank lines. 'My Father's Tears' (2006) is an assembly of the narrator's fragmented memories of his father, his first wife, and his ex-father-in-law. In Updike's last short story 'The Full Glass' (2008), the narrative gathers some of the narrator's past experiences with water and the sense of fullness. While these stories still bear titles that seem to offer a theme to link the fragmented stories together under lyrical unity (as Luscher suggests is the case), two stories would make this effort rather difficult. Updike's 1965 stories 'The Blessed Man of Boston, My Grandmother's Thimble, and Fanning Island' and 'Packed Dirt, Churchgoing, A Dying Cat, A Trade Car' bear lengthy and discontinuous titles. In these two stories, narrative fragments are not related by any spatial coherence or temporal continuity as if they should be read with, rather than without, gaps.

Updike critics find it difficult to assess these two stories. They try to extract something useful by looking for the writer's own comments on them. In an essay, Updike remarks that the two stories are 'a montage of aborted ideas', the ideas which failed to become stories.⁷⁷ Luscher picks up 'montage' in the comment, yet only seems to use 'montage' in a very loose way. He describes Updike's montages as 'related vignettes driven less by plot than by a coalescing network of incidents and images'.⁷⁸ Talking about 'The Blessed Man of Boston, My Grandmother's Thimble, and Fanning Island', Luscher

⁷⁷ John Updike, 'On One's Own Oeuvre', in *Hugging the Shore: Essays and Criticism* (New York: Knopf, 1983), pp. 837-80 (p.851).

⁷⁸ Robert M. Luscher, *John Updike: A Study of the Short Fiction*, p. xii.

acknowledges the story as ‘an experimental work’, but then tries to force it into another sense of coherence and unity:

Ostensibly, the story chronicles three successive artistic failures, yet this narrative pretense [sic] has too often been taken at face value. Using a triptych of images from aborted works, Updike’s narrator, a ‘would-be novelist’, successfully fuses them into a coherent work of another order.⁷⁹

Luscher is so eager to rescue coherence in Updike that he confines his notion of montage to a very limited scope, even narrower than the Hollywood montage sequence. That is, he does not recognise the narrative dimension in Updike’s short fiction. For him, Updike deploys narrative fragments only to create another method of ‘connecting past and present’, the spatialising of time so to speak.⁸⁰

Robert Detweiler, on the other hand, picks up the words ‘aborted ideas’ in Updike’s remark and takes it at face value:

Encumbered by the unwieldy title of ‘The Blessed Man of Boston, My Grandmother’s Thimble, and Fanning Island,’ the story, one guesses, has only the thinnest veneer of invention over autobiography; indeed, it seems to serve as a catch-all for the reminiscences that Updike has not completely refined into fiction. The family memories and personal recollections are beautifully recorded; but, because the author has not provided the universality of true fiction, the artistic relevance is limited.⁸¹

While Detweiler assesses that the story is Updike’s failure in turning ideas into stories, what underpins his judgement, ‘the universality of true fiction’, is little different from what Luscher advocates in the short story: lyricism and spatial form. What both Detweiler and Luscher fail to notice is that Updike, by mentioning ‘montage’, possibly refers to a different kind of film editing, unlike the montage sequence found in Hollywood continuity editing. In addition, by saying the two short stories above are ‘a montage of

⁷⁹ Robert Luscher, *John Updike: A Study of the Short Fiction*, p. 38.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁸¹ Robert Detweiler, *John Updike*, (New York: Twayne, 1984), p. 60.

aborted ideas’, Updike may hint at a special relationship between montage and the ‘aborted ideas’ or abandoned stories.

In the first sub-section of this section, I have examined how Updike employs cinematic discontinuity, broken eyelines, to cast an ironic attitude on his characters and on the notion of narrative continuity. In this sub-section, I shall argue that Updike borrows a different kind of montage to do the same thing, yet from the angle of the ‘others’ instead of the self. By laying bare cinematic discontinuity in montage, he draws attention to the existence and importance of the ‘others’ in his short fiction: other events, other characters and other story possibilities. I shall approach this point through a close reading of ‘The Blessed Man of Boston’ alongside the notion of montage, with an awareness that the montage here is different from the montage sequence in classic Hollywood narrative and in the Updike’s stories discussed in the first section.

The narrator of ‘The Blessed Man of Boston’ is a ‘would-be novelist’, who, in a pique of frustration, writes about his three attempts in storytelling.⁸² The first attempt is to write a novel about the life of an old Chinese man of whom the narrator catches a glimpse coming out of a Red Sox game; the second is to tell the story of the narrator’s own grandmother; and the third unwritten story is about a group of Polynesian tribesmen trapped on Fanning Island after a shipwreck. The three unwritten stories, put alongside one another like in the lengthy short story title, are far from being connected by any spatial or temporal continuity. Whereas the Chinese man is a stranger to the narrator, the grandmother is one of his closest family members, and the Polynesian tribesmen belong to a different epoch.

⁸² John Updike, ‘The Blessed Man of Boston, My Grandmother’s Thimble, and Fanning Island’, *Pigeon Feathers and Other Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), pp. 157-69 (p. 158).

However, the fragmentation of the three narratives does not mean that one cannot find any traces of cinematic continuity, the metonymic mode of narrative, in the story. In each story fragment, there is a montage sequence, which seems, superficially, to compress events into a list of images and corresponds to the type of montage in continuity editing. In the story about the Chinese man, the narrator assembles the images that he wants to include in his novel:

I thought then to write a novel, an immense book, about him, recounting his every move, his every meal, every play, pitch, and hesitation of every ball game he attended, the number of every house he passed as he walked Boston's Indian-coloured slums, the exact position and shape of every cracked and flaking spot on the doorways, the precise scumble and glitter of every floriate and convoluted fancy of ironwork that drifted by his legs, the chalk-marks, [...] every sizzle of a defective neon sign connexion, every distant plane and train, every roller-skate scratch, everything: all set sequentially down with the bald simplicity of intrinsic blessing, thousands upon thousands of pages; ecstatically uneventful; divinely and defiantly dull.⁸³

Arranged 'sequentially' and marked as 'uneventful', the images above could have been taken as parts of a montage sequence for the purpose of summing up uneventful events and guaranteeing that the main narrative is not disturbed or distracted. Similarly, the narrator attempts to do the same with the story of his grandmother, in trying to build a chronological catalogue for her life: 'her marriage to a man ten years older, the torment of her one childbirth, the eddies of fortune that contained her constant labour. The fields, the hired men, the horses, the stones of the barn and the fireplace, the three-mile inns on the road to market'.⁸⁴ And finally, in the last story fragment, the narrator gives a list of images to demonstrate how unlikely human beings are to survive on the Polynesian

⁸³ Ibid., p. 157-58.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 165.

islands.

However, after reading the short story, we find that these montages do not function to ensure narrative continuity such as the montage sequence in 'The Christian Roommates'. The problem with these fragments is that there is not, in each story, a main narrative, an important event, to make other events 'uneventful'. For the story of the Chinese man, the narrator notices him when he leaves the baseball game. That moment is described in details. While the reader might think that the moment may bear special significance, the narrator denies the possibility: 'from the dew of the few flakes that melt on our faces we cannot reconstruct the snowstorm'.⁸⁵ The moment, therefore, rather than being an important moment in a hero's life as Bazin and Lukács would call it, is reduced to one of many 'uneventful' and 'dull' incidents in a common human being's life. As for the story about the narrator's grandmother, one may assume that the narrator is able to achieve a level of continuity and establish the grandmother's identity, for the person is a close member of the family. Yet, the grandmother's story is narrated with no more continuity than the one about the Chinese man. The images of the grandmother come from the fragments of the narrator's memory and imagination. He confesses that his story of the grandmother is only 'a child's unknowing way of seeing' and that there are many facets of his grandmother unknown to him; these facets make 'a woman whom I must imagine, a woman who is not my grandmother at all'.⁸⁶ Finally, in the third story, the story of the Polynesian tribesmen, there are two different narrative voices: one from the voice of a commentator and the other from that of one tribesman. In addition, the two voices are separated by a piece of French text by Pascal, which foregrounds the

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 158.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 166.

fragmentation of the narrator's story about Fanning Island and the discontinuity between the two voices. In short, although each fragment bears the appearance of advancing and unifying a main narrative, the fact that there is no main narrative in each instance moves montage away from its function of contributing to narrative continuity.

Updike's use of montage reflects an alternative method of film editing introduced by the Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein. Terming this method of editing 'dialectical montage', Eisenstein considers montage as 'the collision of independent shots' rather than the blending of independent shots 'into an appearance of motion'.⁸⁷ To Eisenstein, it is important that the viewer knows a film is the product of the mounting of the various parts of 'a machine'.⁸⁸ Unlike the montage sequence in classical Hollywood cinema, which covers up the gaps between shots, dialectical montage encourages that shots be put 'next to' one another rather than 'on top of' one another; namely, dialectical montage is in favour of the juxtaposition of different shots.⁸⁹

Eisenstein's film *October: Ten Days that Shook the World* (1928), for example, is a film which represents and celebrates the tenth anniversary of the October revolution.⁹⁰ Yet, the revolution is not represented in the commonly-assumed manner of a continuously coherent narrative, by focusing on one event in the life of one character. When Eisenstein tells about General Kornilov's march on Petrograd, the phrase 'In the Name of God . . .' appears on the screen, followed by different images of God, including a Russian Orthodox church, a baroque Christ, Goddess of Mirth, a Chinese dragon, a

⁸⁷ Sergei Eisenstein, 'A Dialectic Approach to Film Form', in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, trans. by Jay Leyda (San Diego: Harcourt, 1977), pp. 45-63 (p.49).

⁸⁸ Jacques Aumont, *Extracts from Eisenstein's Dairy*, cited in David Bordwell, *The Cinema of Eisenstein* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 120-21.

⁸⁹ Sergei Eisenstein, 'A Dialectic Approach to Film Form', p. 49.

⁹⁰ *October: Ten Days that Shook the World*, dir. by Sergei Eisenstein (Soviet Union, 1928). The film is available at 'October: Ten Days That Shook the World - Sergei M. Eisenstein', <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k62eaN9-TLY>> [Accessed 15 October 2013].

Buddha, a Hindu Shiva, and an Eskimo idol. These images, rather than being sutured into a unified idea of God, pose a conflict and a disagreement ‘between the concept and the symbolization of God’, between ‘idea and image’.⁹¹ Viewed this way, Eisenstein is not different from Resnais in that they both leave the gaps between shots unsutured and adopt a critical attitude to narrative continuity. Yet, there is something more to Eisenstein’s dialectical montage. By using dialectical montage, namely by juxtaposing different images without putting them in a hierarchical order, Eisenstein goes further than laying bare the gaps; he prompts thought and stimulation within the viewer through a series of unexpected connections. This way, montage reminds the viewer of different narrative possibilities and of the fact that filmmaking, as Robert Ray notes earlier, is an ‘intensely decision-based’ process.⁹² Deciding on one event eliminates other events; deciding on establishing the identity of one character cancels out other characters; deciding on one direction of storytelling excludes other storytelling possibilities. In front of Eisenstein’s dialectical montage, a viewer is brought to an intellectual position. He/she is given a chance to understand the film language and is encouraged to see how a film is made and, above all, other ways that a film could have been made rather than that on the screen.

While the content of Updike’s story ‘The Blessed Man of Boston’ bears no similarity with Eisenstein’s film *October*, the form of the short story can be read in the light of dialectical montage. Updike’s description of the story, ‘a montage of aborted ideas’, is no longer a writer’s confession of his failed projects; rather, it is particularly illuminating in helping us understand how cinematic discontinuity reveals Updike’s attitude toward storytelling. The narrator’s three story fragments can be seen as three independent images

⁹¹ Sergei Eisenstein, ‘A Dialectic Approach to Film Form’, p. 62.

⁹² Robert Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980*, p. 32.

put, as Eisenstein says, ‘*next to*’ one another rather than ‘*on top of*’ one another. Like the different images of God in *October*, which pose nothing but a distance between the image and the meaning, the juxtaposition of the three images, confirm the narrator’s inability, rather than ability, to reconstruct any complete story. But this failure is the failure faced by any attempt of storytelling and representation. By not hiding the fact that the story comes from ‘aborted ideas’, Updike indicates that a writer should not be ashamed of this failure. No story can be complete, covering all or, as Updike has his narrator speak out for him, be ‘fully told’.⁹³ Yet, at the same time, by offering a dialectical montage of ‘aborted ideas’, Updike demonstrates a democratic attitude to storytelling, drawing attention to the ‘others’: the character, events, and stories untold. As Updike himself notes in his autobiography as a response to the critics who consider him ‘self-indulgent’:

My own style seemed to me a groping and elemental attempt to approximate the complexity of envisioned phenomena and it surprised me to have it called luxuriant and self-indulgent; self-indulgent, surely, is exactly what it wasn’t – *other-indulgent*, rather.⁹⁴

‘Aborted ideas’ are not necessarily bad ideas. After all, a writer has abort ideas to make possible one particular idea. Yet, unwritten characters, events, and stories, will have a chance to be regenerated, made eventful and written at the hand of an ‘other-indulgent’ writer such as Updike, as is the story of ‘The Blessed Man of Boston, My Grandmother’s Thimble, and Fanning Island’.

3) The short story as cinematic discontinuity

Updike’s story ‘Snowing in Greenwich Village’ (1956) is a good example of challenging

⁹³ John Updike, ‘The Blessed Man of Boston, My Grandmother’s Thimble, and Fanning Island’, p. 169.

⁹⁴ John Updike, *Self-Consciousness: Memoirs* (London: André Deutsch, 1989), p. 98.

the authority of seeing and storytelling through a kind of cinematic discontinuity.

The second evening after moving to an apartment in Manhattan, the Maples invite their friend Rebecca over because she lives very nearby. Rebecca is a good storyteller and seems to have many 'odd' stories.⁹⁵ Although the occasion should have been a chat among the three people in the apartment, 'Rebecca's slight voice dominated the talk'.⁹⁶ Very few words come from the Maples and it seems the only chance for them to talk is to offer food and drinks to their guest. Nor is there any mention of eyeline matching during the talk. Rebecca is too engrossed in her own storytelling to give her listeners attention. When she does not talk, she either 'lowered her lids and looked in her purse for a cigarette' or is shown 'dropping an ash into the saucer behind her'.⁹⁷

In the intervals of Rebecca's storytelling, eyeline matches do appear. Yet, they appear in a rather complex way. When Rebecca finishes the story about her rich uncle, they all hear a clatter 'beyond and beneath the window' and so all go to the windows to look. Yet, the three of them are shown as experiencing different levels of curiosity and excitement. 'Joan reached the windows first, Richard next, and lastly Rebecca, standing on tiptoe, elongating her neck'.⁹⁸ The view outside the window shows 'six mounted police, standing in their stirrups, were galloping two abreast down Thirteenth Street'.⁹⁹

While everybody looks at the view outside the window, Joan, Rebecca and Richard see different things and offer different responses. Joan is the most excited, particularly when she notices that it starts to snow. Rebecca, on the other hand, passes a rather

⁹⁵ John Updike, 'Snowing in Greenwich Village', in *The Same Door* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), pp. 56-65 (p.61).

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 57, p. 59.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 59

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60

unimpressed remark on the policemen ‘They do it every night at this time. They seem awfully jolly, for policemen’. And while Joan is so happy to see the snow that she embraces Richard, Rebecca ‘retained without modification her sweet, absent look and studied, though the embracing couple, the scene outdoors’. Richard is the one in between. He remains a rather neutral and objective observer of the night and of the two women’s different reactions. A rather neutral and sober description of the snow is given at the end of the scene: ‘the snow was not taking on the wet street; only the hoods and tops of parked automobiles showed an accumulation’.¹⁰⁰

In front of the view of the snow in Greenwich Village, three separate eyelines seem to be at work at the same time and so do three possible narratives. Joan’s eyeline matches the policemen on horses and the snow, both of which are amazing to her, and if she were to tell a story, both certainly would be included. Rebecca, having lived in the neighbourhood for a long time and accustomed to ‘odd stories’, considers the view very commonplace. Her eyeline, as a result, would match nothing but one of many evenings in New York City and it seems unlikely that she considers the police on horses or the snow worth narrating. Richard’s eyeline, which describes the evening and observes the two women, seems to match the perspective of the narrator of narrative. However, as the story proceeds, Richard also poses questions into his own seeing and storytelling. A subversion of the authority of storytelling begins with Richard’s observation of Rebecca’s storytelling.

After hearing many ‘odd stories’ from Rebecca, Richard starts to doubt if her stories are really odd and begin to question her stories and her storytelling. After another odd

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 60.

story from Rebecca:

The Maples laughed, less at the words themselves than at the way Rebecca had evoked the situation by conveying, in her understated imitation, both her escort's flamboyant attitude and her own undemonstrative nature. [...] Rebecca's gift, Richard realized, was not that of having odd things happen to her but that of representing, through the implicit contrast with her own sane calm, all things touching her as odd.¹⁰¹

Rebecca's storytelling, as Richard realises, does not lie in the fact that 'odd things happen to her', but in her method of storytelling, her ability of defamiliarizing things: 'all things touching her as odd'. This insight makes Richard reflect on his own observation of the evening. While the current story possibly reflects what Richard sees and tells, the same evening may appear differently to Rebecca. Richard, then, imagines Rebecca's story. It is a story, not about the snow or the policemen, but about the Maples:

This evening too might appear grotesque in her retelling: 'Six policemen on horses galloped by and she cried "It's snowing!" and hugged him. He kept telling her how sick she was and filling us full of sherry.'¹⁰²

Telling the story, yet also presenting rather frankly other storytelling possibilities, Richard's insight recalls the methodology of Resnais and Eisenstein. If a sense of continuity is achieved in seeing and storytelling, that continuity is realised at the sacrifice of other methods of seeing and storytelling, and those other storytelling possibilities need to be recalled. If Richard's version of the Maples' reactions to the snow and the horses and each other constitutes the main narrative of this story, and all the Maples' stories, the other versions of the Maples which have been eliminated, those from Joan and Rebecca for instance, need to be brought back into the realm of narrative possibility.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 60-61.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 61.

Towards the end of the story when Richard walks Rebecca home, one finds more ambiguous eyelines and discontinuities in storytelling. This time the view is outside Rebecca's window. While Rebecca points to the big windows facing her apartment across the street, claiming 'Someone's always there; I don't know what they do for a living', Richard sees something different, 'Though all the lamps were on, the apartment across the street was empty'.¹⁰³

The story ends with Richard turning to Rebecca and telling a joke upon leaving. Yet the conversation is rendered with so many unresolved discontinuities that reading the ending reminds us of both cinematic motion and the end of that motion:

'Don't, don't let the b-butchers get you.' The stammer, of course, ruined the joke, and her laugh, which had begun as soon as she had seen by his face that he would attempt something funny, was completed ahead of his utterance.

As he went down the stairs she rested both hands on the banister and looked down towards the next landing. 'Good night,' she said.

'Night.' He looked up; she had gone into her room. Oh but they were close.¹⁰⁴

The ending of the story, Richard's failed joke and his feeling that they were 'close', can be seen as an encapsulation of the story and as a reflection of the conditions of storytelling. On the one hand, there is the effort of stitching, of suturing, the gaps between the actions of a story to guarantee the continuity of the storytelling: Richard tells a joke and Rebecca, accordingly, laughs. On the other hand, the suturing process fails because of Richard's stammer and Rebecca's untimely laugh, which originally is supposed to complete Richard's joke. The failure exists not only in the conversation, but also in the lost eyeline between the two: when he goes down the stairs, she looks down towards the next landing;

¹⁰³ Ibid., pp. 63-64.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p.64

when he looks up, she has gone into her room. The result of such failure is, as with Resnais's film, when the suturing process in storytelling is made visible, that is, when the stopping and gaps in the narrative are laid bare. This said, the last sentence 'oh but they were close' can only be viewed as a self-mocking gesture. This cherished 'closeness' in Richard's memory, instead of being a resolution to the relationship between Richard and Rebecca, actually draws attention to the gap, between the two and between their perspectives, thereby further disturbing the story's continuity. The fact that the story closes just at this moment not only brings the reader's attention to the disturbed communication between Richard and Rebecca, but also to the final stopping of the short story, which, like Richard's failed joke, no longer has a chance to be sutured. Reading the end of 'Snowing in Greenwich Village' is similar to the experience of seeing 'the End' at the end of old movies. It is at that moment of cinematic discontinuity that the short story reminds us of the end of fiction, the re-continuation of life, and the regeneration of other stories.

Conclusion

Endings and Beginnings

I sing, lacking another song.¹

John Updike, 'Midpoint' (1969)

Since reality is incomplete, art must not be too afraid of incompleteness.²

Iris Murdoch, cited in Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (1967)

This thesis began with John Updike's 'The Lucid Eye in Silver Town' (1964), a short story that focuses on the eye and challenges the epistemological certainty of seeing. The thesis then offered a formalist analysis of Updike's 'eye-oriented' short fiction and its respective involvement with three major visual media of the modern society: painting, photography and cinema.³ By exploring how Updike employs the particular narrative mode of each visual medium in his short fiction, we have been able to uncover the narrative dimension in Updike's otherwise lyrical stories. Moreover, in laying bare the incomplete nature in his short story characters' seeing and knowing, Updike reveals a critical distance between himself and his seemingly 'all-seeing' fictional characters. In doing so, he evinces a dialectical attitude towards the establishment of his protagonist's identity and a parody of that identity, towards the relationship between 'self' and 'other', thereby reminding the reader of the stories of other characters existing in his short stories.

¹ John Updike, 'Midpoint', in *Midpoint and Other Poems* (New York: Knopf, 1969), pp. 3-44 (p. 3).

² Iris Murdoch, cited in Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 130.

³ John Updike, 'The Future of the Novel', in *Picked-Up Pieces* (New York: Knopf, 1975), pp. 34-40 (p. 39).

Parallel to the visual study of Updike's short fiction is a re-consideration of the short story as a genre. Using Updike's short fiction as a case study, we have discussed how a study of the genre cannot do without form and vision. While some short story critics apply visual analogies to the genre, most of them only regard visual art as a spatial medium and borrow it simply to justify their epiphanic reading of the short story. That is, in spite of the short story form's incompleteness, it reaches another level of completion and unity through spiritual or emotional revelation. Therefore, a majority of short story critics considers that the genre's unique identity is its turning towards its own artistic being, becoming a form best suited for expressing private sentiment. However, with the assistance of Updike's visually rich stories and, above all, his consciousness of temporality in different visual media, we are able to see the short story through the broader lens of representation, without abandoning the genre's affinity with the visual. We have discerned that the short story is incomplete, but this incompleteness is the destiny of any work of art; no genre or literary artwork can escape that destiny. What is special about the short story is that it encounters that destiny sooner than longer forms and it therefore has to be more straightforward regarding its own incompleteness. As a result, one also sees a dialectic attitude towards 'self' and 'other' in the short story in terms of form and vision. While a short story establishes its own fictional world, it also mocks its limited being. This way, a story expresses a reminder of and recognition for the other stories within it that are untold. The genre, therefore, is able to go beyond the confines of spatial form, regain narrative power, and generate more stories.

What I have not done, although this might be relevant to the thesis, is a study of the form and vision of what some critics would call the 'short story sequence', the 'short

story cycle’, or the ‘linked story collection’ and Updike’s practice of this genre.⁴ As briefly mentioned in the Introduction, Updike’s *Bech: A Book* (1970), *Bech is Back* (1982) and *Bech at Bay* (1998), *Too Far to Go: The Maples Stories* (1979), and *Olinger Stories* (1964) are well-known short story sequences and are sometimes studied in the critical considerations of the short story sequence.⁵ Robert M. Luscher, for instance, reads Updike’s *Olinger Stories* and claims that the sequence is a ‘unified volume’ due to the fact that the sequence focuses on a common locale.⁶ Although the male protagonists of those stories bear different names, Luscher maintains that Updike nevertheless arranges ‘his semiautobiographical “love letters” [to Olinger] into a sequence that chronicles the maturation of a young man’.⁷ Kasia Boddy, on the contrary, detects inconsistencies and discontinuities in Updike’s *Too Far to Go: The Maples Stories*. Noting that the Maples stories do not follow a very strict temporal line and that Updike wrote another Maples story ‘Grandparenting’ (1994) fifteen years after the publication of the sequence, Boddy draws attention to a loose sense of ‘accumulation’ and an open ending in the Maples stories; for this reason, she suggests that ‘sequence’ might not be the right word to describe the Maples stories and re-defines the stories as an ‘accumulative short story collection’.⁸

The idea of ‘sequence’ and ‘unity’ in Luscher’s observation and that of ‘loose

⁴ For the ‘short story sequence’, see Robert M. Luscher, ‘The Short Story Sequence: An Open Book’, in *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads*, ed. by Susan Lohafer and Jo Ellyn Clarey (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), pp. 148-67; for the ‘short story cycle’, see Forrest L. Ingram, *Representative Short Story Cycles of the Twentieth Century* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971) and James Nagel, *The Contemporary American Short-Story Cycle* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001); and for the ‘linked story collection’ see Kasia Boddy, ‘Sequences and Accumulations’, in *The American Short Story Since 1950* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 117-42.

⁵ I shall continue using the term the ‘short story sequence’ in the Conclusion, yet with an awareness of the critical dispute over the notion ‘sequence’.

⁶ Robert M. Luscher, ‘The Short Story Sequence: An Open Book’, pp. 161-62

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁸ Kasia Boddy, *The American Short Story Since 1950*, p 124.

collection' and 'discontinuity' in Boddy's consideration are both useful in a study of form and vision in the short story sequence. I propose that Updike's practice of the genre, if this thesis were to be continued or expanded, could be arranged around two coordinates: the sense of unity and consistency to the limits of that unity and consistency in Updike's well-known short story sequences mentioned and in his short story collections in general.

To some extent, the thesis has already offered some clues on 'sequence' and 'collection', 'unity' and 'disunity', 'continuity' and 'discontinuity' in fiction. The notion of 'sequence' corresponds to the principle of metonymy in language organisation as proposed by Roman Jakobson.⁹ In organising his stories in a certain order, even if very loosely, Updike tends towards a sense of completion and unity by creating contiguity between his fictional world and the external world. The notion of 'collection', on the other hand, tends towards completion through the principle of metaphor. When a book is called a collection, it becomes a coherent universe; as Susan Stewart observes, its relation with the world becomes 'the invention of a classification scheme which will define space and time in such a way that the world is accounted for by the elements of the collection'.¹⁰ However, this thesis has also cautioned that a sense of narrative completion, no matter from metonymy or metaphor, will necessarily come to an end; that is, it will, sooner or later, reveal its incompleteness as just a representation and undergo what Boris M. Éjxenbaum calls narrative 'regeneration'.¹¹

One can also detect Updike's consciousness of narrative endings and regenerations.

⁹ Roman Jakobson, 'Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances', in *On Language*, ed. by Linda R. Waugh and Monique Monville-Burston (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 115-133 (pp. 129-30).

¹⁰ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 162.

¹¹ Boris M. Éjxenbaum, 'O. Henry and the Theory of the Short Story', in *The New Short Story Theories*, trans. by I. R. Titunik, ed. by Charles E. May (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994), pp. 81-88 (p.85).

The stories in his *The Early Stories 1953-1975* (2003) are arranged chronologically according to the protagonists' ages, similar to the arrangement in the short story sequence *Olinger Stories*. However, Updike does not encourage the reader to follow the sequential order. He stresses that 'no attempt is made at an overall consistency' in both books and the reader is 'free to read the stories in any order he chooses'.¹² In terms of Updike's short story collections in general, although each of them bears a title which may lend itself to the metaphorical theme of the collection, the writer does not seem to take the authority and unity implied in those collection titles very seriously. On the contrary, by publishing most of his stories in *The New Yorker* magazine, then arranging them in short story collections, and by continuing to re-arrange the same stories into different collections, Updike encourages re-readings of his stories rather than respecting the stories' fixed positions within the collections.¹³ This way, Updike challenges the authority and unity implied in his collections.

Like the protagonist in his last short story 'The Full Glass' (2008), Updike never seems to give up his search for a sense of fullness, a brimming moment of 'full-glass feeling'.¹⁴ Yet, also similar to his protagonist, he knows that it is easy to have the sense of fullness leak away.¹⁵ What he and his protagonist can do is to keep looking forward to the next moment of fullness, 'one brimming moment after another'.¹⁶ We may well use the story's ending as the ending of the thesis. The almost eighty-year-old protagonist

¹² John Updike, 'Foreword', in *The Early Stories 1953-1975* (London: Penguin, 2005), pp. viiii-xv (pp. xi-xii).

¹³ The stories in *Olinger Stories* are included in the short story collections *The Same Door* (1959), *Pigeon Feathers* (1962) and *The Music School* (1966). The Maples stories are scattered in *The Same Door*, *Pigeon Feathers*, *The Music School* and *Museums and Women* (1972), and *Problems* (1979). And almost all the stories in Updike's early collections reappear in *The Early Stories: 1953-1975* (2003).

¹⁴ John Updike, 'The Full Glass', in *My Father's Tears and Other Stories* (London: Penguin, 2009), pp.276-92 (p. 281).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 281.

stands in front of his shaving mirror, holding a full glass of water:

My life-prolonging pills cupped in my left hand, I lift the glass, its water sweetened by its brief wait on the marble sink-top. If I can read this strange old guy's mind aright [sic], he's drinking a toast to the visible world, his impending disappearance from it be damned.¹⁷

No matter how long life can be prolonged it will come to an end, much as even a seemingly complete short story collection has to come to its last story. Updike passed away on 27 January 2009, shortly after the publication of 'The Full Glass'. However, with the protagonist's, and Updike's, toast to the visible world, it is possible that a new short story collection or a new reading of a short story collection is generated, with its visual world, be it a painting, a photograph, or a film.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 292.

Appendix 1

Ex-Basketball Player (1954)¹

John Updike

Pearl Avenue runs past the high-school lot,
Bends with the trolley tracks, and stops, cut off
Before it has a chance to go two blocks,
At Colonel McComsky Plaza. Berth's Garage
Is on the corner facing west, and there,
Most days, you'll find Flick Webb, who helps Berth out.

Flick stands tall among the idiot pumps—
Five on a side, the old bubble-head style,
Their rubber elbows hanging loose and low.
One's nostrils are two S's, and his eyes
An E and O. And one is squat, without
A head at all—more of a football type.

Once Flick played for the high-school team, the Wizards.
He was good: in fact, the best. In '46
He bucketed three hundred ninety points,

¹ John Updike, 'Ex-Basketball Player', in *The Carpentered Hen and Other Tame Creatures* (New York: Knopf, 1982), pp. 4-5.

A county record still. The ball loved Flick.
I saw him rack up thirty-eight or forty
In one home game. His hands were like wild birds.

He never learned a trade, he just sells gas,
Checks oil, and changes flats. Once in a while,
As a gag, he dribbles an inner tube,
But most of us remember anyway.
His hands are fine and nervous on the lug wrench.
It makes no difference to the lug wrench, though.

Off work, he hangs around Mae's Luncheonette.
Grease-gray and kind of coiled, he plays pinball,
Smokes those thin cigars, nurses lemon phosphates.
Flick seldom says a word to Mae, just nods
Beyond her face toward bright applauding tiers
Of Necco Wafers, Nibs, and Juju Beads.

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