

# Johnny got his gun analysis persuasive essay



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Existence is like a creature that hides and then reveals itself. Existence is defined in Webster's New World Dictionary as the "state or fact of being." This existence strives to reach truth which is located beyond space and time, yet truth must be grasped by existence nevertheless. This is accomplished through ritual, which can bring about the capturing of the inconceivable.

Edward P. Vargo stated that John Updike uses ritual "to fulfill the great desire of capturing the past, to make the present meaningful through connection with the past, to overcome death, and to grasp immortality" (Contemporary Vol. 7 487). He combines the aspects and meaning of seemingly unimportant ritual along with mankind's desire for a relationship with God to form truth and value for the past, present, and future. Updike uses his talents as a writer to bring together the conceivable and the inconceivable.

John Updike implements his philosophies and ideals in a way that brings together existence with meaning. "Updike is in the best sense of the word an intellectual novelist, a novelist of paradox, tension and complexity who as a college wit in the fifties learned that we are all symbols and inhabit symbols" (World 3752). Updike uses his beliefs to form stronger meanings in his writings.

John Updike has a strong faith in human intelligence. He believes that people can use it to explore the universe. He finds the world "to be a place of intricate and marvelous patterns of meaning" (Contemporary Vol. 5 449). With this faith he is able to bring things into focus that would not ordinarily be seen. "I describe things not because their muteness mocks our

subjectivity but because they seem to be masks for God. . .” (Contemporary Vol. 7 486). Updike is able to see past the facade of normal, ordinary life.

John Updike uses his insights in his writing to emphasize human feelings. He suggests in his writings that “ the human conscience constantly suffers guilt for transgressing the laws of two different moralities” (World 3754). John Updike recognizes this feeling of guilt and is more able to clearly show the connections of the past to the present. His writings are also able to capture a “ sense of human incompleteness, of the sense of discrepancy between actual and the ideal” (Magill’s 1988). He shows how humans strive to overcome these feelings. John Updike fulfills his philosophies with the usage of his characters. He sees them as “ many-sided and intellectual designs.” He takes an interest in them, and they have meaning. Updike sees his books “ as objects, with different shapes and textures and the mysteriousness of anything that exists.” He feels that an artist “ brings something into the world that didn’t exist before” and does not destroy something else at the same time (World 3752). The implementation of his characters brings out his beliefs to their fullest.

John Updike uses his talents in his writing to connect humanity to all things present in the universe. He shows how existence is meaningful through the past and the present. He writes in a way that creates new ideas and frames of thought. To him, everything must have a purpose and a meaning; and he is able to use his insights to draw that to attention. Since the beginning of time, man has struggled to comprehend God and the heavens. John Updike writes about God and the relationship with man. Man has always sought to reach immortality, yet is impeded by humanity. John Updike shaped his

religious beliefs from the teachings of “ Karl Barth and his predecessor Kierkegaard.” He Updike was drawn to the insistence that God is the “ Wholly Other,” and that “ man cannot reach God and that only God can touch man” (Broadening 280). This suggests that God has a great hold over man and that He has a power to change things in our daily routines.

Morality is an issue in religion and in aspects of humankind. Man has tried to become more moral through God, yet there are great differences between God and the role of God that Mankind assumes. “ Updike has often quoted approvingly of Barth’s remark that one cannot speak of God by speaking of man in a loud voice.’ For both men the distinction between the divine and the human is absolute” (World 3754). Man will never reach the standard of God, yet they will continue to try through religion.

Morality, even though it may take on many forms, is an aspect of life that is a necessity. Updike shows that people are drawn between two forces. One is a type of morality that is abstract and the other is “ a sort of response to an inner imperative.” He says that “ morality tries to keep us from pain. . .” (World 3754). By being moral, mankind places itself next to God. With the worship of God, ritual is able to grasp immortality. By obeying God, George Caldwell feels that he will be able to work longer and be more favored.

God and human instincts conflict in Mankind’s mind. The ritual of the worship of God and the ritual of love are impeded as man tries to decide between the two. There are religious and moral questions that arise from an attempt at a relationship with both (World 3758-3759). Humans must work hard to salvage this relationship. There are questions about “ the difference between

man and God, and consequently between ethics and faith” (World 3754). Man obtains a relationship with both themselves and God through the ritual of worship. Mankind is confused at times with the conflict of morality and human instinct. “ The world Updike creates in his fiction is morally ambiguous. And it is so, in a large part, because of the perpetual conflict between two antithetical forms of human morality” (World 3754). John Updike illustrates the problems of faith and the difficulty of moral decisions in *The Centaur*. “ Venus attempts to seduce Chiron,” and he Chiron hesitates, “ listening for the rumble of Zeus’s thunder.” Chiron is then left alone feeling that he had displeased God (World 3755). This shows how Chiron, George Caldwell, was afraid of what might have happened if he had actually done something to implicate himself in the eyes of God. *The Centaur* is a good example of the everyday conflicts felt by man. It illustrates the hesitation felt by man to transgress the laws of morality while being captivated by human temptations.

People believe that when one dies, one has a chance of going to heaven. Man attempt to understand all that will happen once their time has come in their present life, but they cannot. “ The inconceivability of heaven is an index of creative, imaginative limitation, whereas the conceivability of earth circumscribes the ordinary scope of the human imagination” (Contemporary Vol. 5 451). Man believes that through religion and worship they will one day reach the greatest truth and the greatest extent of existence. Religion, immortality, and morality are all issues that John Updike addresses in his writings. He shows that they are all intricately connected to mankind’s search for the truth and perfection of existence. Man always has at least two

parts of him to contend with, the moral side and the more human side. He is able to come to terms with himself through ritual. With worship, man is able to grasp a small understanding of immortality and God. Ritual is the tool with which John Updike uses to reach the point of existence and meaning. What seems to be dull and monotonous is actually a celebration of life. Most people associate ritual as a process that is repeated “ without any thought and without any significant meaning” (Contemporary Vol. 7 486). Society has become empty and petty, degenerating ritual into “ an empty form” that fills “ the void with meaningless, unthinking activity” (Contemporary Vol. 7 487).

Ritual plays a very important role in life. John Updike uses ritual in a way that points out the significance of actions in a normal life. The daily routine has a fierceness that is not normally seen or noticed (Broadening 278). He uses ordinary situations and actions and draws out their “ emotional significance.” He presents ceremonies and makes their usage meaningful (Contemporary Vol. 7 487). Through this usage of ritual, man is better able to understand time through “ this human principle of recurrence” and through repetition (Contemporary Vol. 7 486). Ritual may still hold strong if it can “ discover new patterns, new myths, and new ways to reintegrate man” (Contemporary Vol. 7 487). John Updike recognizes the importance of routine. Ritual put meaning into life, and it fights for recognition of itself and time. Rituals are present in every aspect of life. There are the obvious and the subtle ones, weaving in and out of the people themselves. Humans have come to depend upon them. The first is that of living itself. Life is dear to everyone, and there are many steps that are steps in it. Our bodies breathe, our blood circulates,

and our individual cells live. Food is eaten to give the power of life, and sleep is needed to sustain that life. These rituals are then meaningful.

Another ritual evident in daily life is love. People have always sacrificed for the people they love. Love, unfortunately, has also become a ritual that has lost meaning and has become commonplace, but for some in *The Centaur* love is all that they have. That love “suffreth long, and is kind. . . seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, and thinketh no evil.” Though this, there is meaning (World 3758). Thus, love can also hold things together and give purpose to living. Caldwell feels that his love for his family is all that he has to offer, and love will be able to help them in the future after he has passed away. The ritual of love is very important to him, for he has come to depend upon it to sustain his life along with that of others. Celebration has also become a part of human existence. People use celebration to make others aware of themselves and each other. Celebration can also be seen as a ritual because of the exaltation of “the union of past and present, of the sensual, emotional, and rational.” The main purpose and function of celebration is “the externalization of man’s religious feelings and the tangible embodiment of the transcendent” (Contemporary Vol. 7 487). Celebration allows one to become part of the greater picture of truth and existence. The celebration of joy and triumph is also part of that of the universe.

Death is the last path taken in life. It is the final step as one moves from his present world to the next one. Death can be seen as a ritual of sacrifice or passage from the mundane and overwhelming details of life (Broadening 285). For example, in *The Centaur* the father George Caldwell sacrifices himself for his son Peter. He hopes that from his efforts his son will go on to

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live a better life. This can be compared to how Chiron, the centaur, sacrifices himself for Prometheus (Magill's 1993). By undergoing the monotonous, drudgery, and painfulness of his normal life, Caldwell feels that his family will benefit from a fixed source of income and location. He gives all that he can of himself to everyone else, almost to the point that he has nothing left to sustain his own life. Caldwell has sacrificed in a way that many people nowadays also have to sacrifice for their families and friends. In this way, death can actually overcome itself as it prolongs life for others. Myth is also a strong part of ritual. "Myth is a dramatic human tale," one from the "human imagination." It deals with existence, life, and death. Myth tells a tale of "what really happened." It serves "as a dynamic guide for mankind's present life and activities." Here, "myth is linked with ritual" (Contemporary Vol. 7 486). Myth adds substance to the present by capturing the past. In a way, the figures and characters involved in the myths have become immortal. In The Centaur myth is used to bring the past alive. It adds meaning to the book and the characters themselves. Myth helps explain some of the actions and the consequences placed upon George Caldwell. Through ritual, though at first unchanging and unimportant, existence is better understood through the patterns of everyday actions. The symbolism of ritual is very strong. It holds many things together and gives them a place in time. The presence of ritual cannot be escaped. It has become a necessary part of us. With myth, ritual has found a connection to the past. Ritual will always point out the truth.

John Updike has many philosophies and beliefs that he has incorporated in his writings. He shows that there is conflict between man and God on the



issues of morality. Worship can bring a better understanding to man of God. Man uses religion to retain a bit of immortality, to reach the greatest section of existence and truth, and to overcome death. Ritual gives substance to the present. It has connections to the everyday world, to the past, and to the future. Thus, ritual is able to symbolize life itself as it discovers new patterns for growth and fulfillment. Through myth, the past becomes immortal and meaningful. Ritual, along with worship of God, is able to satisfy the great desire for truth, existence, and meaning.

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