

REVIEW

“Afterlife” (1987)

John Updike

(1932-2009)

“Afterlife” radiates with significance from many symbolic details and motifs, in the tradition of Realism enriched by Modernism. A retired American couple visit another American couple who have retired in England, a kind of heaven. The social vision, brilliant phrasing and some of the themes bring to mind Henry James. At the same time Updike displays, as always, one of the ambitious prose styles in American literature. Here, his art is scaled to an English village church rather than to the cathedrals of James, invigorated by a whiff of brimstone in the air: “Women had the passion of conspirators, the energy of any underground, supplied by hope of seizing power.” A painterly writer informed by tradition--vivid, witty, richly textured at his best--Updike is a pleasure.

Michael Hollister
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