



Something and Nothingness: The Fiction of John Updike and John Fowles

Assistant Professor John Neary B.A. M.A. Ph.D.

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John Neary shows that the theological dichotomy of *via negativa* (which posits the authentic experience of God as absence, darkness, silence) and *via affirmativa* (which emphasizes presence, images, and the sounds of the earth) is an overlooked key to examining and comparing the works of John Fowles and John Updike.

Drawing on his extensive knowledge of both Christian and secular existentialism within the modern theology of Barth and Levinas and the contemporary critical theory of Derrida and J. Hillis Miller, Neary demonstrates the ultimate affinity of these authors who at first appear such opposites. He makes clear that Fowles's postmodernist, metafictional experiments reflect the stark existentialism of Camus and Sartre while Updike's social realism recalls Kierkegaard's empirical faith in a generous God within a kind of Christian deconstructionism.

Neary's perception of uncanny similarities between the two authors—whose respective careers are marked by a series of novels that structurally and thematically parallel each other—and the authors' shared long-term interest in existentialism and theology support both his critical comparison and his argument that neither author is "philosophically more sophisticated nor aesthetically more daring."

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