BBI and none in Reum (easy/difficult of is a fixed phrase). The comparison of the three dictionaries shows that BBI is smaller in extent when compared with Rodale (which was not compiled for learners of English) but certainly better organized than the other two dictionaries. It is also based on current American (and British) English and includes a number of usage notes (e.g., dissertation and thesis in American and British English, private practice in British English, girl).

There are a few collocations in the BBI dictionary whose inclusion may be questioned: Canadian French, French Canadian, Old English, the Holy Land, a registered Republican, Russian roulette. They may be regarded as technical terms or even as multi-word lexical units in which the meanings of the individual words are not fused.

The BBI combinatoric dictionary of English certainly fills a sorely felt gap (see under gap). It is well devised and well suited to the needs of learners of English.

Josef Hladky


At Brno in April, 1986, responding to a question about work in progress, John Updike said that his forthcoming novel, Roger’s Version, is a re-telling of The Scarlet Letter, a sequel to A Month of Sundays, and heavily researched. One of the characters is named Esther, very near Hester; her husband, whom she apparently betrays, is named Roger; her lover is Dale, simplifying Hawthorne’s Dimmesdale; and there is a custody fight over an infant named Paula, similar to a scene involving Hawthorne’s Pearl. The deeper connection to The Scarlet Letter, however, is in the development of the conflict between science and religion, with a Hawthornian ambiguity in a scientist who has faith and a professor of theology (and former minister) who is a skeptic. Even more convincing than that connection is the way Updike embeds the novel’s actions and meanings in New England, laying claim to being the twentieth-century New England writer most significantly in the tradition of Hawthorne. For all of his concern about the New England ethos, Updike’s sharpest focus, like Hawthorne’s, remains on the characters’ inner feelings rather than social relationships.

As a sequel to A Month of Sundays, Roger’s Version is an advance, but perhaps A Month of Sundays is not one of Updike’s stronger novels. They share a self-pitying middle-aged male as central character, but it is a bit difficult to see the suave Bostonian, Roger Lambert, evolving very naturally out of Rev. Marshfield. The form of Roger’s Version is more ambitious and more effective, for the most part, and if Marshfield’s cure worked he might become as pretentious as Lambert.

The heavy research that went into the novel results in considerable attention to theology and to computer science. The purpose is to sharpen the contrast in values into a major conflict, centered around using a computer to prove the existence of God. The climax occurs on Good Friday. Neither Dale’s computer graphics nor Roger’s heresies, however, are satisfactorily woven into the fabric of the novel — the seams always show — with the result that the heavy research gives the impression of existing alongside the story rather than at its core. Whatever interest Updike has (or had) in these fields is so far from the center of the insights that produce his best writing as to seem irrelevant.

A writer so talented and charming — a writer who produced such compelling works at such a young age — always runs the risk of having his recent work compared with his earlier work, usually to the disadvantage of the newer work. Such is the case with Updike. Roger’s Version forms a triad of New England novels with A Month of Sundays and The Witches of Eastwick. In depth of characterization, strong story line, and basic control of tone (and in spite of his success in conveying New England), these novels don’t compare with the three Rabbit novels. Or, of stories partaking most convincingly of New England, the Maple stories in Too Far To Go compel attention and invite re-reading, unlike Roger’s Version and its companions. Still, John Updike remains one of America’s pre-eminent story tellers, and Roger’s Version rises above its flaws to be a good story, told with Updike’s characteristically subtle touch.

Allen Flint