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[Updike, John. Roger's version]

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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 combinatory 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 Hladký

John Updike, *Roger's Version*, Knopf, New York 1986, 329 pp.

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

