



More Matter: Essays and Criticism

John Updike

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In this collection of nonfiction pieces, John Updike gathers his responses to nearly two hundred invitations into print, each “an opportunity to make something beautiful, to find within oneself a treasure that would otherwise remain buried.” Introductions, reviews, and humorous essays, paragraphs on New York, religion, and lust—here is “more matter” commissioned by an age that, as the author remarks in his Preface, calls for “real stuff . . . not for the obliquities and tenuosities of fiction.” Still, the novelist’s shaping hand, his gift for telling detail, can be detected in many of these literary considerations. Books by Edith Wharton, Dawn Powell, John Cheever, and Vladimir Nabokov are incisively treated, as are biographies of Isaac Newton, Abraham Lincoln, Queen Elizabeth II, and Helen Keller. As George Steiner observed, Updike writes with a “solicitous, almost tender intelligence. The critic and the poet in him . . . are at no odds with the novelist; the same sharpness of apprehension bears on the object in each of Updike’s modes.”

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