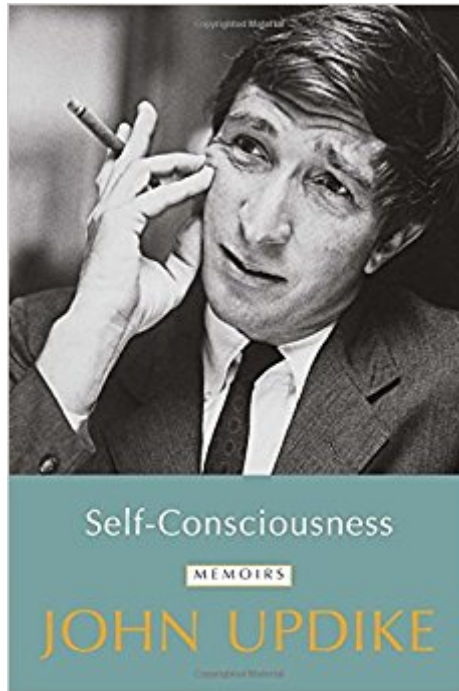




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Self-Consciousness: Memoirs



Synopsis

John Updike's memoirs consist of six Emersonian essays that together trace the inner shape of the life, up to the age of fifty-five, of a relatively fortunate American male. The author has attempted, his foreword states, "to treat this life, this massive datum which happens to be mine, as a specimen life, representative in its odd uniqueness of all the oddly unique lives in this world." In the service of this metaphysical effort, he has been hair-raisingly honest, matchlessly precise, and self-effacingly humorous. He takes the reader beyond self-consciousness, and beyond self-importance, into sheer wonder at the miracle of existence.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Updike's memoir is by no means an autobiography, but rather, as the title brilliantly suggests, a thoughtful communing with past selves, as expected, wonderfully written. It is also disarmingly frank about certain aspects of the writer's life. He seems, for instance, to have suffered an unusual number of physical and psychosomatic liabilities: psoriasis (which he attempted to alleviate by soaking himself in Caribbean sun and eventually by living in Ipswich, Mass., where he could sunbathe in the dunes); stuttering, less than chronic but anxiously erratic; and crippling bouts of asthma. Updike writes of them with extraordinary and thoughtful intensity. He recalls also, tenderly, his hometown in Pennsylvania, his parents, and later, at exhaustive length and detail, a coterie of Updikes, seemingly every one who ever lived. He also talks of his politics (he was unfashionably a centrist on Vietnam) and the ways in which God permeates his life. About what one suspects has

probably been a very lively sex life he throws out only occasional hints while admitting to failures as father and husband. Above all, he emerges as a most profoundly committed writer: "To be in print was to be saved. And to this moment a day when I have produced nothing printable . . . is a day lost and damned." BOMC and QPBC alternates. Copyright 1989 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

This work by Updike is not an autobiography; that is, it is not a chronicle of events that have made up the author's life. Rather, as the subtitle states, it is a collection of memoirs, of memories. Updike is smart enough to know that though memory is not always accurate, it is still the essential element in a consciousness of self. Here Updike's consciousness frequently focuses on his struggles--with psoriasis, with stuttering, with dental problems, with his lack of doveishness during the Vietnam era. Readers will recognize in these memories scenes and snippets from his novels, fragments of which are provided. As always, Updike is an intelligent writer, and this book is essential.- John Budd, Graduate Lib. Sch., Univ. of Arizona, Tucson Copyright 1989 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

I'm so glad I finally read John Updike, starting with this book. It's a very touching, personal, well written diary, really. Updike is very open about having been self-conscious his whole life due to a skin condition he had that isolated him quite frequently as he tried to fight it by lying in the sun. The book is a revelation about the famous writer and how his life revolved around this condition and the self-consciousness it engendered. Being very self-conscious myself about certain things, I almost cried reading his revelations and honest self-assessments. I highly recommend this book if you want to understand the workings of self-consciousness or of the famous author.

Self-Consciousness This book of John Updike's memoirs is a revealing view of how he viewed his life as he passed through various stages. The overly detailed descriptions of specific streets and houses led me to boredom frequently and seemed to have way too much space for the stories needs. His introverted image of himself is inconsistent with how his peers viewed him. The class rascal is missing of Shillington High School 1950 is missing. Memorable book that follows the personal life of this great author through many stages of his life.

None better at remembering his time and his thinking through that time.

One of Updike's weaker works. The first two essays are indeed self-conscious to the extreme. The final essay is worth a couple of careful reads.

thanks

One of my favorite books by this author. Can't think of more honest, self-targeting and life-revealing confession. Upon reading this autobiographical essay-like work, I understood many previous books by John Updike. His struggle with an illness, skin problems and other unpleasant part of life, I feel closer to the author.

One of the main regrets of my five years in Shillington (ages 12-16) was that I did not realize that I was walking in the footsteps of one of the greatest authors of all time. John Updike's autobiography, especially as it concerns Shillington, was like reading a bit of my own life. He was an altar boy at the church that is behind my old Miller Street home. I was a busboy at the restaurant that used to be his doctor's office that used to be a house. He used to walk up New Holland Avenue to the cemetery, passing number 39, which would years later be a home (apartment) to me. The hallowed halls of Governor Mifflin Jr. High, where I labored from 7th to 9th grade, were once the halls of the old high school that Mr. Updike once passed through. I wonder if we shared the same locker? The old movie theater, in which I saw my first movie alone, still holds a special place in my history. But through my many walks up and down Philadelphia Avenue, I am saddened by the fact that I was never drawn to number 117. My visits to Shillington in the past decade have been unfortunately too brief, and even before reading Mr. Updike's autobiography I have wanted to return to retrace my old footsteps. However, the walk up and down Philadelphia Avenue will include a stop, a reverential pause, at number 117, the shadow of my life in Shillington.

I enjoy his memoirs better than his fiction. The essay titled "Getting the Words Out" was especially well done.

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