

## An Analysis of the Liberation of Eros in Updike's Works

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### Abstract

Updike's novels often involve the survival dilemma of modern people, such as the lack of love, interpersonal tension, personal life depression, monotonous work and other contemporary problems. These problems have a variety of forms of expression, have deep social and historical roots, and involve the complex relationship between people, people and themselves. In the past, the academic circle has explored these issues, but there have been few discussions from the perspective of Eros liberation, resulting in a lack of research in this area. Based on Herbert Marcuse's theory of the liberation of Eros, this paper explores the solutions contained in Updike's works by discussing Rabbit's development of individual potential, the sublimation of Eros, Rabbit's mutual love and Caldwell's fraternity, and analyzes these solutions from different aspects. Through these analyses, it is hoped that a new perspective can be provided to solve these problems and a new dimension can be added to the study of Updike's works.

**Key words:** Rabbit; Caldwell; Sublimation; Mutual love; Fraternity

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of modern productivity, especially science and technology, has brought about changes in

various aspects of production, life, and communication patterns. The process of modernization has broken the traditional social structure, and industrialization and urbanization have enabled people to break away from narrow family and regional relationships and become more involved in more complex social relationships. With the acceleration of modernization, the material wealth of society is becoming increasingly abundant, and people's living standards are constantly improving. However, the relationship between man and nature is in an unprecedented state of opposition; the mental pressure that humans bear is increasing, and the conflicts between their body and mind are intensifying; the relationship between people is also becoming increasingly tense, and moral indifference is becoming increasingly common. The concern of "love" between people, which is filled with strong warmth, is slowly disappearing. It can be seen that during this critical period of social transformation, people's ability to love has experienced decay and degradation to some extent, and beautiful and creative emotional relationships such as love, friendship, and righteousness are gradually disappearing. Instead, they are replaced by mutual indifference, isolation, disputes, contradictions, and even hostile relationships.

According to Herbert Marcuse's theory, the term "Eros" includes both the satisfaction of sexual desire and the acquisition of other biological desires, such as rest, entertainment, and appetite. This joy is wholehearted and long-lasting, which eliminates human pain and promotes the free and comprehensive development of individuals. The concept of "the Liberation of Eros" is proposed in response to the suppression of Eros, and it means that there was a time when Eros was repressed. The results of "the Liberation of Eros" are quite different for the individual and for society. The individual gains a comprehensive and lasting pleasure in the process of "liberating his Eros", as the entire body of a person is a tool for happiness, and all human activities are linked

to happiness. What society establishes in the process of "liberating the Eros" is a new type of relationship. It plays a role in ensuring and promoting the satisfaction of Eros.

In the Rabbit series, whether working as a kitchen gadget salesman in several five-and-dime stores or as a typesetter in a printing factory, it is far from the ideal job of Rabbit, which will only bring him frustration and make him feel that he is a failure in life. Rabbit sells a magical peeler at several retail stores, and after returning home from work, he also does various household chores and goes out shopping, with no time at his disposal. As a salesman selling peelers in retail stores, Rabbit's work experience has led him to experience the distortion and destruction of human nature caused by working under a bureaucratic system. Factors such as alienated labor, alienated consumption, and loveless marriage are like nets that tightly cover him. However, the persistent pursuit of freedom and liberation has led Rabbit to constantly evade and struggle to explore the meaning of life. Caldwell in *The Centaur* also finds himself living in a cold, tense world with a lack of warmth between people. In response to these situations in modern society, Updike explores in his works, attempting to find solutions to these problems.

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## 2. SUBLIMATION OF LOVE

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### 2.1 Development of potential

In *Rabbit, Run*, Rabbit in the net tries several times to run and finally finds its place in the sublimation of Eros. Eros refers to the expansion and qualitative improvement of sexual desire, which is the impulse of the entire organism. In other words, sexual desire is only about the desire for sex, while Eros contains more content, including both sexual desire and other biological desires such as appetite, rest, and leisure. Sexual desire brings partial happiness to people, while love brings a lasting whole-body happiness.

At the beginning of *Rabbit, Run*, Rabbit works as a mediocre peeler salesman in a small shop. In modern society, sales work has also achieved standardization and standardization. The solitary and creative salesman has disappeared, and the people who replace them have neither independence nor originality in their original sense. Compared with the traditional small community shops, the work of each salesman in the big shopping mall is regulated and standardized. For Rabbit, the job of a salesman does not fully unleash his initiative. This socially regulated labor makes people lose their individuality, has a standardized and trivial nature, leaves little room for personal development, cannot unleash their creativity, and is difficult to achieve a sense of achievement. It does not allow individuals to fully satisfy themselves in every socially regulated activity. In such work, one's Eros are suppressed, and one is trapped in infinite monotony. This should be the true motivation for Rabbit to find his true self and achieve his personal ideals, but he chooses to

express his resistance to social reality by running away from home. In the history of human civilization, when a person's Eros is suppressed, it is not only a constraint on a certain function of human, but more importantly, it replaces the pleasure principle with the reality principle, suppresses the liberation of Eros with survival struggle, and thus completely changes the essence of human. In this situation, in order to restore human nature and liberate people from the abyss of pain, it is necessary to liberate Eros and reverse the process of constantly distorting human nature. Only by enabling humans to truly restore their nature in the process of liberating their desires can they truly enjoy the pleasure of realizing their essence.

As a teenager, Rabbit was a shining basketball star in a county high school, and he regarded basketball as a very important aspect of his life and thoughts. He was admired and respected by many people when he played basketball on the basketball court. That period can be called Rabbit's golden age. When playing basketball, Rabbit felt that he could do everything: running, stopping the ball, passing the ball, shooting, and everything was so excellent and perfect. On the basketball court, he was handy, "He sinks shots one handed, two handed, underhanded, flatfooted, and out of the pivot, jump, and set. Flat and soft the ball lifts. That his touch still lives in his hands elates him." (1990, 11) From this we can see that Rabbit was in high spirits on the basketball court. For Rabbit, the basketball court is a good stage where he can get appreciation and a sense of glory. Deep in his heart, his experience as a high school basketball star is great, giving him a rare, pure sense of success, almost perfect. For example, early in the novel, Rabbit remembers his excellence while watching basketball. It is on the basketball court that Harry gets this funny feeling that "I can do anything, just drifting around, passing the ball, and all of a sudden I know, you see, I know I can do anything." (1990, 65) During the basketball game, Rabbit gets almost sexual pleasure from a perfect shot, which passes through the high ball frame with a pretty mesh skirt. Rabbit thinks that his basketball skills at that time were of first-class standard, so he thinks he has done some meaningful and serious things. His unparalleled performance on the court won him the appreciation of the coach, the admiration of his teammates and the love of the girls. In the process of playing basketball, Rabbit's libido has been sublimated and his Eros is released. According to Freud, sublimation refers to socially acceptable activities such as work, entertainment or charity, which represent the retransmission of sexual energy on socially acceptable things; in short, it is the realization of unacceptable impulses in a socially acceptable way. In other words, in the process of playing basketball, Rabbit releases his excess sexual desire that was socially unacceptable and regained the feeling of transcendence and satisfaction.

It is worth noting that most players on the court try their best to score points, but unlike them, Rabbit does not play basketball just for scoring points -- he runs all over

the field, not just for the score, as the audience thinks, but for himself to relax, without a little burden. He's all about himself. For Rabbit, playing basketball and scoring points is not the main purpose, but the important thing is playing itself. On the court, he is handy, skillfully dribbling and throwing the ball, dominating the game. Because he can tap his potential, give full play to his ability, and confirm his existence when he is running freely on the court, and the score on the court is just a byproduct. As Jimmy says in the TV show at the beginning of the novel, "Learn to understand your talents, and then work to develop them. That's the way to be happy." (1990, 15) In this sense, the basketball court is a paradise for Rabbit, where he can find his free, perfect and unrestrained self. Rabbit is always looking for "something". The freedom, perfection, glory and self that Rabbit prays for are the essence of "something", and finding "something" becomes his dream. When playing golf, Rabbit finds the feeling of playing basketball in high school again. He gets the true meaning of "something" in an insight when he makes a perfect shot on the golf course. When Rabbit sees the ball rolling into the hole, he suddenly cries out in excitement, "That's it!". It seems that there is something in Rabbit's mind, which he calls "it" because he cannot accurately express it. Rabbit uses "That's it!" to express the state of physical and mental release. "It" is the "something" he is looking for. Therefore, in the process of playing golf, Rabbit successfully shifts his attention from the heavy reality of life and turns the repressed impulse to the socially acceptable alternative goal. According to Marcuse, the realization of erotic desire is completely free and conscious, which expands the function and time of the original desire and can eroticize most of the body organs. On the golf course, Rabbit's sexual desire sublimates to erotic desire, and the sexual instinct is elevated to life instinct; the natural expression of Rabbit's life instinct brings about the freedom of life. From these happy experiences, Rabbit can easily feel the feeling of transcendence, excitement and victory, and his frustration and dissatisfaction are replaced by an appropriate alternative goal. Therefore, Rabbit can release his repressed sexual desire and find sublimation in his excellent basketball game.

In addition to playing basketball and golf, he often goes swimming with Ruth, climbs mountains, goes to the movies, goes bowling, and takes walks with Mrs. Smith. In these activities, he is freed from the repressed reality and his erotic desire is satisfied. As Ruth says to him, "look at all you've got. You've got Eccles to play golf with every week and to keep your wife from doing anything to you. You've got your flowers, and you've got Mrs. Smith in love with you. You've got me." (1990, 134)

Working in Mrs. Smith's garden is a pleasant job for Rabbit. Rabbit loves the grass and trees in the garden, and loves the birds and the stream. He pours his feelings into

the garden and into his gardening. In *The Symposium*, Diotima says that Eros drives the desire for one beautiful body to another and finally to all beautiful bodies. Out of this truly polymorphous sexuality arises the desire for that which animates the desired body: the psyche and its various manifestations. (Marcuse, 211) Gardening frees Rabbit from a single sexual desire and makes him satisfied with many beautiful things.

In the process of planting flowers and trees, Rabbit easily finds the meaning of life and realizes his dream of the Garden of Eden. The garden work condenses Rabbit's great enthusiasm and wisdom, and contains freedom. Rabbit can arrange the working time freely, which is a flexible working system. In the process of working, he uses both hands and feet, and puts his thoughts and emotions into the work, giving full play to his initiative and creativity, making gardening work equal to handicraft work, even almost a kind of game. In the gardening work, Rabbit realizes the pleasure principle. Gardening work is not an ordinary work, because it not only has the significance of the struggle for survival, but also becomes a kind of recreation to some extent, from which Rabbit feels free and happy. In this case, the boundary between labor and recreation is no longer obvious. Labor is no longer painful, but close to recreation and enjoyment, and creativity, aesthetics and game occupy the main position in labor. Marcuse believes that the truly meaningful work should be the free recreation of human organs, and should be the joy of erotic desire, which must originate from the whole body that is acting, and originate from the erotic organs that are active.

In gardening, Rabbit works in a happy mood, giving play to its own potential and realizing self-worth in the process of labor. The boundary between work and life is not very obvious. Rabbit does not hold a rejecting attitude towards labor, and he will not feel so monotonous and painful in labor. Because labor is no longer a paid labor that he has to do to earn a living, but a way to achieve self-worth and happiness. According to Freud, poverty causes the struggle for survival, which is bound to lead to the repression of erotic desire. He equates the struggle for survival with the repression of erotic desire. Marcuse believes that under non-repressive conditions, the liberation of labor is the liberation of erotic desire, and the struggle for survival and the realization of erotic desire can be carried out simultaneously. In fact, under certain conditions, the struggle for survival to eliminate poverty will not only restrain erotic desire, but also promote the satisfaction of erotic desire. If alienated labor is transformed into a kind of erotic activity, it not only creates material wealth necessary to solve poverty, but also provides opportunities for the realization of human erotic desire. In this way, the opposition between Ananke and instinct satisfaction will not exist, "Not only would the struggle for existence not necessarily cancel

the possibility of instinctual freedom; but it would even constitute a "prop" for instinctual gratification." (Marcuse, 213-214) He believes that the process of transforming sexual desire into Eros is also the process of establishing lasting labor relations, and the process of eroticizing labor. The transformation of libido into Eros and its extension into lasting Libido Labor relations, he says, presuppose the reasonable organization of vast industrial facilities and highly specialized social divisions of Labor, the full use of destructive capacities, and the full co-operation of the masses. Looking at Rabbit's labor in Mrs. Smith's garden from this perspective, we can find that Rabbit's work is paid monthly, and at the same time he feels joy and liberation in the labor, that is, the alienation of labor has been transformed into a kind of erotic activity, and the liberation of labor is also the liberation of erotic desire.

## 2.2 The sublimation of sexuality

In sex, Rabbit transcends pure carnal love. Rabbit never gives up the pursuit of the spirit, seeking to improve his spiritual realm. In his relationship with Ruth, Rabbit values not only sex itself, but also looks for spiritual beliefs beyond sex. Rabbit finds something in Ruth that he has not seen in Janice before. However, it is not the sexual indulgence with Ruth that makes him enjoy pleasure. It is the fact that he finds something different in her than his previous sexual experience. In fact, Rabbit does not desire her body, but her heart, which he wants to grind into his own, to comfort her completely, and to be comforted by her, just as Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden -- natural and innocent. In his sexual relationship with Ruth, Rabbit can seek sexual and spiritual relief. His sexual intercourse with Ruth restores a kind of physical freedom to him. In his first sexual contact with Ruth, Rabbit turns her into a goddess. He sanctifies sex and turns it into the most beautiful thing. He kneels before his naked lover and kisses her empty ring finger, and he calls their first meeting "our wedding night". Rabbit does not just seek the thrill of pleasure, but an incredible union of souls, not sweaty sex, but supernatural happiness. Rabbit does not deny sex, but sanctifies sex. Eros has natural and spiritual attributes. In *The Symposium*, Plato divides Aphrodite, the goddess of love, into two deities, namely the goddess of pure love and the goddess of lust and the patron of prostitutes: Aphrodite in heaven is Aphrodite Urania, who represents the lofty spiritual sex life, and Aphrodite Pandemos, who represents the vulgar sensual love that everyone can have on earth, and is in charge of the love of crude sensuality. Rabbit pursues sacred sex beyond vulgar sex, in which he can get spiritual transcendence.

Rabbit's pursuit of sacred love can be said to be rooted in his religious beliefs. Rabbit still believes in God in his heart and is in awe of God, so he pulls down the shutter curtain to block off the church with guilt before making love with Ruth. When he hears the church bell ringing, Rabbit feels guilty. It excites him to see parishioners

dressing up for church on Sundays. The idea that these people (regular churchgoers) have the nerve to leave their homes and dress up for Sunday prayers makes Rabbit feel happy and comforted. Considering the historical background, Rabbit's pursuit of sacred love can be said to be a reverse of the sexual liberation of the West in the 20th century.

Rabbit really starts to regard sex with Ruth as a kind of mystical power, hoping to transcend mediocre love with the help of Ruth's body. So when he and Ruth are climbing the mountain and nearing the top, he suddenly shouts to her excitedly and inexplicably "My queen" and "my good horse". With the help of Ruth, he seems to reach a higher level. Because he finds in Ruth a sense of transcendence that he doesn't find in Janice. Rabbit doesn't want to think of Ruth as a prostitute, but as a goddess. He asks Ruth, "were you really a whore?" Ruth's answer disappoints him. Although Rabbit still lived with Ruth after that, he already regards Ruth as a real prostitute to satisfy his lust.

In *Rabbit, Run*, Rabbit tries to find ways to sublimate his sexuality and achieve transcendence. So he wants to realize himself in sports, work and activities. Through these attempts, Rabbit strives to find pure physical feelings that allow him to reconfirm his special feelings that he was born with. Whether on the golf course or the basketball court, in sexual relations or in Mr. and Mrs. Smith's garden, Rabbit wants to achieve transcendence, find himself and realize his value.

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## 3. THE EROTICISM OF HUMAN RELATIONS

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In his works, Updike also explores the tension between man and man, and tries to liberate the relationship between man and man with fraternity. Fromm gives his definition of fraternity: By this I mean the sense of responsibility, care, respect, knowledge of any other human being, the wish to further his life. Brotherly love is love for all human beings; it is characterized by its very lack of exclusiveness. If I have the ability to love, I will love the people around me. It is not a conditional love, not because the other side is lovely to love, but unconditional, regardless of return, regardless of the object of completely selfless love, is eternal love. (Fromm, 47) As human beings, we should respect and love each other even if we are not capable or qualified to help each other. This higher level of love is the love of God, which does not hesitate to sacrifice oneself and does not ask for anything else; it is the love that regards all human beings as equals; it is the love that comes from the heart, from the soul, and on the initiative. Fraternity denies the previous love based only on blood, reason and sexual desire, and emphasizes that as long as he belongs to human beings, it should be the object of love. In the process of having sympathy

developing compassion for those in need of help, man begins to develop his fraternity. In loving himself, he also loves those in need, the weak and the frightened. Love for those in need, for the poor and for the stranger is the basis of philanthropy. Marcuse says: "There is an unbroken ascent in erotic fulfillment from the corporeal love of one to that of the others, to the love of beautiful work and play, and ultimately to the love of beautiful knowledge." (211) According to his view, the love of the bodies of others is a higher level than the love of the body of one person.

In Updike's work, he portrays a series of lack of love and growing alienation between people. At the beginning of *Rabbit, Run*, Rabbit joins the five boys playing basketball, but they treat him coldly. They also wonder if he wants them to follow him to the back of the ice plant, and they are full of mistrust. On the way to escape by car, Rabbit asks for directions at the gas station, which arouses the suspicion of the gas station attendant, who suspects Rabbit is a criminal. This is a vivid portrayal of the cold social relations of the time. In *The Centaur*, Caldwell tries his best to teach his students, but they fight in class and shoot him in the ankle with an arrow. He comes across a female colleague coming out of the principal's office with her hair unkempt and her clothes disheveled, and he thinks that he is in danger of being fired. On the way to school, he would rather risk being late for class than give a lift to a tramp, who steals the leather gloves his son gave him as a birthday present when he gets off. When the old Buick breaks down on a hillside, no passing car stops to help them. Caldwell treats the world with loyalty and kindness, and the world do not take it for granted to treat him the same way.

There are profound social and historical reasons for this. With the development of the modernization process, the whole society has undergone comprehensive and profound changes: with the establishment and popularity of the production line, people only engage in their own partial work in the whole production process, and the communication between each other is less and less. People's lifestyle, values, ways of thinking and behavior patterns are undergoing drastic changes, while the traditional value system has been strongly impacted, and the new value system has not yet been established, resulting in a certain degree of chaos and disorder in society. While people are rich in material, they fall into spiritual emptiness, lack humanistic care and social morality, and disregard the meaning of life and moral realm. People often lament that although life is becoming more and more affluent, the distance between people in society is becoming increasingly far away, and the care between each other is becoming less and less. The sense of trust between people is declining, and interpersonal relationships are becoming increasingly cold, hypocritical and mercenary, lacking true communication of the heart. The emotional connection between people has

been ruthlessly cut off by the cruel reality, replaced by the strangeness between people, just like a thick wall obstructing the communication between people and alienating the feelings between people. To some extent, people's ability to love has declined, and feelings such as love, friendship, benevolence and justice have gradually faded, while indifference, isolation, contradiction and even hostility are increasing. This indifference to each other, or the spectator mentality at a respectful distance, has become a real obstacle or a potential threat to social identity and cohesion, and to the construction of a harmonious society.

### 3.1 The Eroticism of Labor Relations

After running, Rabbit took up gardening in Mrs. Smith's garden. While Rabbit is engaged in free and voluntary labor in the garden, his spiritual realm is greatly improved and he finds opportunities to put it into practice, which is mainly reflected in his help to Mrs. Smith, serving and contributing to her consciously and happily. Rabbit accompanies Mrs. Smith for walks in his leisure time, helping her get rid of the feeling of loneliness and making the old widow alive again. Through this unpaid and voluntary behavior, Rabbit achieves harmony in his relationship with his employer, Mrs. Smith. It not only helps Rabbit find his own value of existence as a gardener, but also helps the old widow shake off her loneliness temporarily. After her husband died, Mrs. Smith could only find happiness in her garden. When she sees bees fluttering in the leaves, hidden birds calling, and flowers blooming, she knows that the joy of life is still there. When Rabbit later tells her that he has quit his job as a gardener, Mrs. Smith could not help saying:

You kept me alive, Harry; it's the truth; you did. All winter I was fighting the grave and then in April I looked out the window and here was this tall young man burning my old stalks and I knew life hadn't left me. That's what you have, Harry: life. It's a strange gift and I don't know how we're supposed to use it but I know it's the only gift we get and it's a good one. (1990, 207)

She is very thankful to Rabbit, and with his help she finds the joy of life, so she knows that life has not left her. Through his giving, he enriches Mrs. Smith's life. For him, "giving" is not for "getting", but for the joy he gets in the process of giving, which is also a way of love mentioned in the Bible: love others as you love yourself. Rabbit gives Mrs. Smith something of his own vitality. He enhances others' vitality by enhancing his own vitality. He does not "give" for the sake of receiving. "Giving" is an elegant pleasure in itself. Creative people think that "giving" is the highest expression of power, indicating the surplus of personal power, and it is precisely through "giving" that I can experience my power, my "affluence", my "vitality". The experience of the sublimation of vitality fills me with joy. The expression of one's own vitality through "giving" makes one feel alive and full of vitality. It is therefore a great joy to experience the joy

of spiritual improvement. "Giving" brings more joy than "getting", not because "giving" is a sacrifice, but because through "giving" I express my vitality.

What can one give to another? He can give the most precious thing he has, his life. But this does not necessarily mean that he must give his life for another. He should give what is alive in him. Rabbit shares with Mrs. Smith his joy, his interest, his understanding, his experience, his knowledge, his humor, his sorrow-- in short, everything that is alive in him. By increasing his own sense of life, Rabbit increases Mrs. Smith's sense of life. He does not give to get, but by giving, he inevitably awakens something alive in her. So his giving also involves making the receiver a giver, and both are filled with joy because something alive is awakened in them. In the act of giving, something new is born, and both the giver and the receiver are grateful for this new power. It presupposes that the giver should not see the other person as the object of his help, but should establish a real and creative close relationship with the other person.

Rabbit shares his vitality with Mrs. Smith and at the same time shares part of her troubles. He enhances Mrs. Smith's vitality and satisfies her need for affection. In this process, Rabbit's own vitality is objectified, and Mrs. Smith is full of happiness because of the restoration of vitality. On the other hand, by cheering up the lifeless old widow, Rabbit finds a lot of fun in life. In this way, he is accepted by society and his own value is recognized by others. As Ruth says to Rabbit: "All the world loves you." (1990, 135) Marcuse believes that: "In the non-repressive way of life, people not only lift the repression and taboo in material and spirit, but also create a good interpersonal relationship, so that united individuals can get along well. Society and individuals are no longer hostile to each other, and the social relationship is eroticized in harmonious and coordinated love, forming an environment suitable for people's all-round development."(Xu, 257)

The liberation of Rabbit's erotic desire not only means the release of the repression of individual life, but also reflects in the harmonious and free relationship between him and his employer, Mrs. Smith. Rabbit and Mrs. Smith develop a new type of close working relationship. There is a lot of love between people, which means that a new type of interpersonal relationship has been generated. There is no tension and confrontation between employer and worker, no contradiction and conflict between human and society, but in a relationship of mutual affection and love, human erotic desire is satisfied to the maximum extent. Fromm says: The full answer lies in the achievement of interpersonal union, of fusion with another person, in love. (8) So the repressed sexual energy of Rabbit is re-guided to the path acceptable to society, and he successfully shifts his attention from the disappointing chaos in real life. Eros can produce interpersonal relations that neither damage human civilization nor suppress instinct. Marcuse

believes that the purpose of Eros liberation is not only to liberate individuals, but also to build a society of Eros. People in the non-repressive lifestyle can create a good interpersonal relationship, and society and individuals can achieve the eroticization of interpersonal and social relationships in the harmonious mutual love, thus forming a social environment suitable for people's all-round development. By "mutual love", he means the different ways in which people fill their actions and relationships with care and warmth. In Mrs. Smith's garden, oppression and domination are eliminated, there is no hostility between the employer and the employee, and the two can realize the eroticization of social relationship in a harmonious mutual love, full of harmony and friendship, and people are in an environment of coordination and friendship and all-round development, and people truly become free subjects to survive and develop.

All this is due to the change in economic relations, the realization of economic democracy in Mrs. Smith's garden. According to Marx, if the economic relations between people have changed, then the social relations between people, and even the relationship between people and nature will change sooner or later. Economic democracy changes the social and moral relations in the workplace. Rabbit working in the garden is no longer to increase the profits of the capitalist as one does in the factory, but providing help to an ordinary old lady. <sup>1</sup> There are no inhumane working conditions in the garden, and the technical tyranny in the factory is replaced by a humanistic management method. Labor is carried out in certain social relations, and the erotic liberation of labor will inevitably lead to the erotic liberation of other social relations. These social relations will no longer be interest relations, but relations of erotic liberation, that is, a new working relationship between employers and workers permeated with mutual love. People will learn to respect each other, rather than take advantage of each other; they will learn to unite and love each other. Only economic democracy can overthrow all the relations that make man humiliated, enslaved, abandoned and scorned. People will be more harmonious, friendly and respectful to each other, so that people's moral and spiritual level will be improved.

### 3.2 The Fraternity in *The Centaur*

In *The Centaurs*, Updike gives us a series of selfless dedication of fraternity, which includes Cardwell, Chiron, and volvox. In the work, the character of dedication to others appears in the fields of daily life, nature, and myths and legends. The novel begins with the description that Chiron in Greek mythology, who is wounded by a poisoned arrow, uses his life to exchange for the liberation of Prometheus, offering him selfless help, which embodies the noble spirit of dedication. The nobleness of Chiron is not that he saves Prometheus, but that he shows a spirit of sacrifice and courage in the

face of self and others. The wound on his ankle caused by the poisoned arrow is a constant torment to Chiron. He would rather die, but because he is a god, death does not seem so easy to him. Then he meets Prometheus. It saddens him that another man is suffering such a terrible pain caused by punishment. Since he can not get out of the predicament, why can he not seize the opportunity to help someone else? Then he goes to see Zeus and asks for the release of Prometheus. As a trade-off, he would give up his immortality, his position as a god, and even his right to life. He would rather die than live. Zeus is moved by him and agrees to his request. Prometheus is set free at last, and he is no longer pecked by the eagles, and exposed to the sun and rain. Chiron dies of his greatness and kindness. His sacrifice for Prometheus is brave and selfless, and transcends self. He loves those who are in need, the weak and the fearful. Eventually, he himself is spared from suffering and placed among the stars of Sagittarius, to be immortal.

The volvox that Caldwell explains to his students in class also has features of altruism: while each cell is potentially immortal, by volunteering for a specialized function within an organized society of cells, it enters a compromised environment. The strain eventually wears it out and kills it. It dies sacrificially, for the good of the whole. These first cells who got tired of sitting around forever in a blue-green scum and said, 'Let's get together and make a volvox,' were the first altruists. The first dogooders. (1963, 42)

And Caldwell's sacrificial spirit is similar to Chiron in Greek mythology and the creatures volvox in nature. Although Caldwell is clumsy, humble, incompetent, and prone to surrender to failure and difficulties, he is sincere, thoughtful, selfless and endures lasting pain. He devotes himself to others almost cruelly. The real Caldwell helps not only his students, his wife and son, but also those whom he does not know, even some rogues in the street. He devotes his life to "his wife's joy in the fields, Papa Kramer's joy in the newspapers, his son's joy in looking forward to the future." Caldwell's main concern is his son Peter, and he can do everything for his son Peter. He worries about his son, his son's education, his son's skin disease, his future and everything about him. He tries to give his son a better life. He often complains about his wife, but he will buy her an expensive hamburger in the restaurant, even though it is his last money. From his envy of the free and easy life of the hitchhiker and his longing for the exciting life in the city, we can know that he yearns for freedom and city life. His wife is full of love for the farm, and he sacrifices all his life for his wife's love by living on the farm with her. Besides bringing warmth to his loved ones, Caldwell also spreads love to those around him. He is also devoted to his students, even though they are rude, impolite, and hurt him mentally. Unbelievably, he even tells one girl the exam questions in advance.

Caldwell's love for others is also selfless, and he tries his best to give to all who can help. His devotion of love also extends to strangers, even to those who do not deserve his love. In his son Peter's eyes, Caldwell often bursts into what he considers a silly "Christian love" for others. One thing in the novel reveals Caldwell's love for others: on a cold morning, he urges Peter to get up early and does not allow him to eat more breakfast in case he is late for school. On the way, he picks up a hitchhiker who is standing on the roadside asking for a ride and sends him home, which makes him late for work. Although he loves his son deeply and knows that his son has psoriasis and is not suitable for long exposure outside, he rides the extra three miles beyond the established route to help the stranger. Here, Caldwell shows a love beyond kinship, a spirit of selflessness. Fromm believes that love of the helpless one, love of the poor and the stranger, are the beginning of brotherly love. To love one's flesh and blood is no achievement. The animal loves its young and cares for them. In his love for himself, he also loves the one who is in need of help, the frail, insecure human being. (48) Peter complains about this. Not only does the stranger not even say thank you, but he also takes the precious pair of gloves that Peter gave his father when he gets off the car. To this, Caldwell only says gently: "He needs 'em more than I did." (1963, 92) Compared with Chiron, Caldwell's dedication is more secular, more common, but more impressive. Caldwell loves people who are not related to him. This kind of love is not based on blood relationship, but requires people's generosity, kindness and self-sacrifice. All this requires people to pay their own kindness and love.

In his selfless dedication, Caldwell influences those around him, some of whom benefited for life. Chapter 5 of *The Centaur* is an obituary, supposedly written by one of his former students, Deifendorf, which speaks highly of Caldwell's selfless dedication. Years later, Deifendorf, who has also become a teacher himself, understands his former teacher, Caldwell, and is filled with gratitude and admiration for him. Through his countless acts of charity and kindness, which are often anonymous and unprofitable, Caldwell has woven himself so securely into its fabric of citizenship and fellowship. As his obituary puts it, George Caldwell's "countless nameless works of charity and good will" saves him from the dying despair of his clergyman father, who might have been "forgotten forever". In a lesson, Chiron tells his students: "The Genesis of All Things is love. Love set the Universe in motion. All things that exist are her children-- sun, moon, stars, the earth with its mountains and rivers, its trees, herbs, and living creatures." (1963, 99) In Chapter 9, the white width is covered with whiteness, the color of death. Gaia suffers from terrible infertility and desperately cries for help, and the sky also loses its reproductive ability, which symbolizes the destruction of nature by

the modernization process, making human society lack humanistic care and social morality, and making people lose their vitality. Later, Caldwell (Chiron) "discovered that in giving his life to others he entered a total freedom. Sky and Gaia mated again. Only goodness lives." (1963, 297) It can be seen from here that love is the factor that makes the world run again, which is the fraternity and altruism that Caldwell has been insisting on.

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#### 4. CONCLUSION

With the development of modern society, the relationship between man and nature, between man and man, and between man and himself is becoming more and more tense, the mental pressure on man himself is getting bigger and bigger, the contradictions and conflicts inside and outside the body and mind are intensifying, the phenomenon of moral indifference among people is becoming more and more common, and the care of "love" permeated with thick warmth between people is slowly disappearing. In response to these conditions in modern society, Updike explores them in his works. From Marcuse's perspective of erotic liberation, Updike tries to make a useful exploration on this issue by developing people's own potential and giving full play to individual initiative, realizing the sublimation of Eros, and realizing

mutual love under the premise of changing economic relations, and other ways. Through these ways, people can ease the tension between man and man, and man and himself, which is a positive attempt to solve the survival dilemma of human beings and the problems of the time faced by modern society.

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#### NOTES:

1. In the United States, movements such as community service and caring for the socially disadvantaged reached their peak in the 1960s, which were aimed at solving a series of social problems brought by industrialization. Their role was to alleviate social unrest through new forms of service, helping the socially disadvantaged and individuals better solve various problems and provide them with various services.

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