



5-27-2009

English chair to lead international Updike society

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Recommended Citation

Julian '07, Sarah, "English chair to lead international Updike society" (2009). *News and Events*. 287.

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May 27, 2009

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English chair to lead international Updike society

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – A newly formed organization devoted to the works of Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist John Updike will be headed by Illinois Wesleyan University English Department Chair James Plath.

At the American Literature Association's annual conference in Boston May 24, Updike scholars formed The John Updike Society. The group, which includes 40 scholars from five countries, plans to publish a journal of Updike studies and to host conferences in places where the author worked and lived, like Pennsylvania and Boston. Illinois Wesleyan will host the society's Web site.

"What John Updike has done for American literature is astounding," Plath said. "His work connects us with our American literary past, and he is forever a part of that now." Plath has studied Updike for more than 20 years. His interest in the novelist was first piqued during an English class at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Plath began a correspondence with the author, and eventually wrote his dissertation on "The Painterly Aspects of John Updike's Fiction." He also worked closely with the novelist while editing the book *Conversations with John Updike* in 1994.

Updike was the featured speaker at a Founder's Day Convocation celebrating the opening of The Ames Library in February 2002. At that Convocation, he was awarded an honorary Illinois Wesleyan degree.

"Education is not an entirely pleasant experience," Updike said during his Convocation speech at IWU. "It can be painful as we go from caterpillars to butterflies."

The novelist, who had written more than 50 books, numerous short stories, poems and critical essays, died in January at age 76.

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