Call for Papers

9th Biennial John Updike Society Conference

Salem, Massachusetts, April 13-15, 2026



Salem photos: Zarina Mullan Plath

Celebrating *The Witches of Eastwick*, the 40th anniversary of the film adaptation, and Updike's Ipswich

Keynote speaker: *NYTimes* best-selling novelist Jenny Jackson

Special Guest: Filmmaker-artist Ben Wickey

Hotel & Venue: The historic Hawthorne Hotel in Salem

Program director: Peter J. Bailey

Conference committee: James Plath, James Schiff, Olga Karasik-Updike, Michael Updike, Miranda Updike

Conference Highlights



—Keynote talk/reading by **Jenny Jackson**, who grew up in Ipswich when Updike lived and worked there and whose second novel, *The Shampoo Effect*, was inspired by *Couples*.

—Special appearance by Updike fan **Ben Wickey**, director of the award-winning claymation film *The House of the Seven Gables* and author of *More Weight: A Salem Story,* a graphic novel about the witch trials.

—Walking tour of Ipswich led by **Michael Updike**.

—Visit to Castle Hill on Crane Estate, where Updike reviewed concerts, with a Crane Estate tour by docent and scholar **Olga Karasik-Updike**.

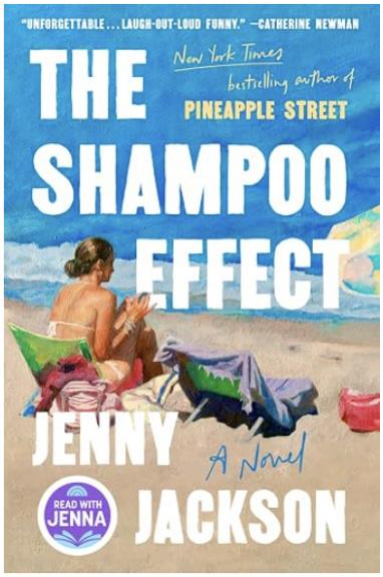
—Trip to the Beverly Farms area to see Updike sites, and possible trip to Concord to see author manuscripts, houses, and final resting places of Hawthorne, Emerson, Thoreau, and Louisa May Alcott.

—Film/discussion of *The Witches of Eastwick* (1987)



Keynote Speaker: Jenny Jackson

Jenny Jackson Jackson is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Shampoo Effect* and *Pineapple Street,* a *New York Times* Notable Book. As Vice President and Executive Editor at Alfred A. Knopf (Updike's publisher), she publishes a range of literary and commercial fiction, from Caro Claire Burke's #1 *New York Times* bestseller *Yesteryear* to Gabrielle Zevin's *Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow,* to Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven,* to Kevin Kwan's *Crazy Rich Asians* trilogy. She counts Dolly Alderton, J. Courtney Sullivan, Chris Bohjalian, Ayobami Adebayo, Peter Heller, Katherine Heiny, Jennifer Close, Caroline O'Donoghue, Erin Morgenstern, and Lauren Fox among her writers. She is a graduate of Williams College and attended the Columbia Publishing Course. She grew up in Ipswich, Massachusetts, and lives in Brooklyn Heights with her family.





Credit: Joe Schickman (ComicsOnline)

Special Guest: Ben Wickey

Ben Wickey is a Massachusetts-born artist, writer, and animator who graduated from the California Institute of the Arts. He is one of the contributing illustrators of Alan Moore and Steve Moore's *The Moon and Serpent Bumper Book of Magic,* the illustrator of Ki Longfellow's *The Illustrated Vivian Stanshall,* and the director of several stop-motion animated short films, including the award-winning *The House of the Seven Gables*. After a decade of development, he marked his solo graphic novel debut with *More Weight: A Salem Story* in 2025. He lives in California with his beloved wife and cats.





Call for Papers (or Panels)

Papers (15-20 min.) and panels (submit names of participants) on any aspect of John Updike's work or life will be considered, but solicited topics that are especially appropriate for this conference are:

—*The Witches of Eastwick* and the 1987 film version directed by George Miller, starring Jack Nicholson, Cher, and Michelle Pfeiffer; TV spinoffs
—Comparative essays on *Witches* and *Widows of Eastwick*
—*Couples* and *Marry Me: A Romance*
—Other works associated with Ipswich and Updike's time there
—New considerations of Updike, Hawthorne, and New England writers
—New approaches to Updike related to ecocriticism, environmental humanities, digital humanities, posthumanism, queer and trans studies, and affect theory

SUBMIT PROPOSALS by **November 1, 2026** to Peter J. Bailey (pbailey@stlawu.edu). Acceptances are rolling, but the number of presenters may be capped, so if your participation is dependent upon having a paper accepted, submit ASAP. Presenters and moderators must be members of The John Updike Society or join after their papers have been accepted. **The John Updike Society** is a welcoming organization of 260+ members from 18 countries and 37 states that also owns and operates The John Updike Childhood Home in Shillington, Pa.





Schiff Travel Grants

Thanks to the generosity of The Robert and Adele Schiff Family Foundation, the John Updike Society will award up to FOUR $1500 travel-to-conference grants for scholars under 40 to be able to attend the Tucson conference. Applicants need not be members at the time, but must join before grants can be paid.

In addition, up to THREE $1000 travel-to-conference grants will be awarded to current society members at any career stage who need assistance to be able to participate in the conference.

Both grants are merit- *and* need-based, and paid after travel-to-conference has been booked. Interested scholars should **apply by Dec. 1, 2026.**

To apply, send a one-page proposal for a 15- to 20-minute paper that aligns with the solicited conference topics, along with one paragraph about yourself, what grant you are applying for, and why the grant is important to you, to society president James Plath (jplath@iwu.edu). The selection committee will make their decisions and contact successful applicants by the end of December.



Conference site: the historic **Hawthorne Hotel**

—Built in 1925 near Salem Common, the hotel has a restaurant, tavern, and ballroom. It's been home-away-from home to such notables as George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, Gen. Colin Powell, Shimon Peres, Bette Davis, Johnny Cash, Liza Minelli, Vanessa Redgrave (who stayed a month while filming), Alan Alda, Elizabeth Montgomery and the cast of *Bewitched* (which filmed its "Salem Saga" in June 1970), Robert De Niro, Jennifer Lawrence, Bradly Cooper (*Joy* was filmed there), and Walter Cronkite.

—The seven-story hotel only has six stories available; the seventh is private, built to look like a ship for the Salem Marine Society, which sold the land to builders with this stipulation and still meets there. We will have one event in the Library, which is also designed to look like a ship's interior. The hotel features a tavern and restaurant, and the conference package includes breakfast and lunch at the hotel.

—For those fascinated by Salem's past, Bridget Bishop, the first accused witch to be executed, is rumored to have owned an apple orchard upon which the hotel was later built. The Hawthorne is considered one of the most famous "haunted" hotels in America. In 2007 SyFy Network's *Ghost Hunters* visited the hotel to conduct an investigation, and the hotel leans into rumors of haunting, having held a séance in 1990 to try to contact (unsuccessfully) Harry Houdini and hosting its first Haunted Halloween in 1991.

—The hotel is just a short walk from Hawthorne's birthplace, House of the Seven Gables, Peabody Essex Museum, The Witch House, Salem Witch Museum, the Custom House, the *Bewitched* statue, Town Hall (where a big scene from *Hocus Pocus* was filmed), and other historic homes and shops.

—Some may wish to add an extra day or two to see Boston or Cambridge, as the Hawthorne Hotel is just a 10-minute walk and 30-minute commuter rail trip away. Updike's papers are at Harvard's Houghton Library, for those in the midst of research.