

Urban Poetics in John Updike's Sonnet "New York City"*

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Based on Robert E. Park's theoretical frame of social urban study, the "psychophysical mechanism", urban poetics mainly researches the mutual relations between the physical and the moral organizations of a city in urban poems, novels and dramas. This article considers John Updike as an urban poet since his poem collection *Americana* (2001) is a collection of urban poems. One of the representative poems, the sonnet "New York City", depicts a despairing "separate nation" by presenting three typical physical cityscapes: television, beggars and skyscrapers. Each physical cityscape reveals its cultural value and social tradition of the city, and the psychological problems of the city dwellers. Tracing Updike's personal urban experience and the poem's intertextual space, this article explores his criticism on American big city: the alienated human relations, the anxiety of city life and the smallness of solipsism. His intention to parody John Milton's Pandemonium in *Paradise Lost*, and to pay homage to Walt Whitman, reveals that this sonnet embodies rich connotations of urban poetics.

Keywords: urban poetics, Updike, "New York City", Milton, Whitman

John Updike is generally regarded as a great artist who "gave the mundane its beautiful due" (Updike, 2003, p. vx) by writing the American small town and Protestant middle class. Almost all of his works are about the people and their life in small towns except his eight early short stories and his last novel *Terrorist* (2006) set in New York city. The sense of place, or a sense of life, is described not only in his short stories and novels, but also in his poems. His ninth poem collection *Americana and Other Poems* (2001) conveys his poignant sense of place and of life (Updike, 2001). However, unlike his usual suburban subject matter, poems in this collection write about American big cities, its airports and the big cities he had traveled around the world. These urban poems reveal Updike's fine observation and criticism of America urban development and humanity in the post-modern society. A lifelong "suburban writer" who wrote "urban poems", Updike provides us with fresh perspectives of America cities and his urban poetics in these poems.

In 1916, Robert E. Park defined the connotations of the word "city" in his ground-breaking essay, "The City: Suggestions for the Study of Human Behavior in the Urban Environment". The city is not simply a physical artifact or a congeries of facilities and conveniences. Rather, it is "a state of mind, a body of customs and traditions, and of organized attitudes and sentiments that inhere in these customs and are transmitted with this

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tradition" (Park & Burgess, 1967, p. 7). He put forward the idea of "psychophysical mechanism" as a basic approach to urban study. This approach can also be applied to the practice of literary criticism—that is to say, we can interpret urban poems through the perspective of "psychophysical mechanism." The moral order and physical organization of the city mutually interact in characteristic ways to mold and modify one other. This article attempts to find out in Updike's poems, how New York City's cityscapes (its physical organization), and New York culture, the people's mentality, etc. (the moral organization) interact, mold and modify each other.

Ubiquity of Television: The Cause of a "Separate Nation"

"New York City" is one of the representative poems in the collection *Americana*. The city New York to some extent is the best emblem of American city. How a person views New York City is the way he views American urban life. There are one physical image and one dramatic situation in the first stanza, both of which present a state of separation felt in the poet's mind. The opening lines of the poem present an image of the city culturally dominated by television—the powerful mass media:

The television's just like everywhere—
the news, the so-called comedies. One feels
let down; this is a separate nation, no? (Updike, 2001, p. 21, lines 1-3)

Television is ubiquitous, which makes the poet disappointed. In fact, TV is a recurrent image in many of Updike's novels and poems. For instance, in his "Rabbit" series, there are many descriptions of TV as family property and watching TV as daily domestic life. Many detailed TV programs, news and comedies, are embedded into his literary works, which helps characterization and turns in the plots. Watching TV is depicted as an important part of Rabbit's dull and tragical life (JIN, 2015, pp. 26-30).

The city New York has been renowned as the cultural centre of the United States or even of the world. Walter Winchell wrote that New York is a glorious monument of the 20th century. Walter Benjamin also asserted that New York had already replaced Paris in the 20th century as the Capital of World Culture. He said, "if the capital of the 19th century was Paris, New York is undoubtedly that of the 20th century" (Sharpe, 2008, p. 146). Similarly, Oswald Spengler commented that it was the most significant development that New York became the capital of the world, which marked not only the dominant position of international power, but also the historical moment when the American city attracted an increasing number of immigrants (Christopher, 1993, p. xv). New York needed to have its own cultural emblem. To his disappointment, like Brewer—the small town depicted by Updike in his "Rabbit" series—the cultural taste of the capital of the world is no different than anywhere else. Therefore, the physical image "Television's just like everywhere" implies Updike's poignant criticism on current New York culture.

The ubiquity of television also reveals Updike's worry for the decay of literary value. During the 1990s, Updike's readership was dwindling. His *Collected Poems, 1953-1993* received less attention, not because his poems were bad, but because the amount of Americans who read poetry increasingly reduced. Although reviews of this collection were not as many as he expected, there were more than twenty positive reviews. X. J. Kennedy in *The New Criterion* declared, "John Updike is a far better poet than the sort of now growing up". But he also added, "Updike isn't better enough to be our American Larkin" (Begley, 2014, p. 413). In response to Kennedy, Thomas Disch said, the "entertainment quotient" in Updike's verse "offends the poetry establishment and

provokes its resolute inattention to his works... Updike was one of the best poets writing today and could be [the] American Larkin—only if there were an American audience for poetry” (Begley, 2014, p. 414). Updike indeed felt the pressure of dwindling readership as he wrote in one poem titled “An Author Observes His Birthday, 2005” which is collected in his last book of poems, “For who, in that unthinkable future/when I am dead, will read? The printed page/ was just a half-millennium’s brief wonder” (Updike, 2009a, p. 10, lines 2-4). Readership is undoubtedly important to authors. Updike was an industrious and versatile professional writer. From the 1950s to the new century, he wrote poetry, novels, short stories, literary reviews, plays and children’s books. He published one book each year on the average. Meanwhile, his literary talent and diligence was rewarded—he won all kinds of influential literature prizes, except for the Nobel Prize. For a long period, especially from the 1960s to the 1980s, Updike’s works attracted a multitude of readers. However, since the 1990s, his books have received some negative critiques, especially from feminists. In 1998, James Wood even wrote, “Updike is not, I think, a great writer.” In a letter Updike called Mr. Wood “a great annoyance, in part because he is so intelligent, in a needling, fussy kind of way” (Begley, 2014, p. 425). It’s no wonder that on his 73rd birthday, he could not help lamenting the loss of traditional literary value—printed pages.

Decay of literary value and dwindling readership can be partly attributed to the ubiquity of television. Updike tried to defend the fort of literary value, especially since the 1990s, but he tried in vain and often felt “let down”. This conflict between television and literary value is just a case in point of “a separate nation.”

Embarrassing Encounters with Beggars: A Sign of Separation

Following the image of television in the poem, Updike presents a street scene to show the state of the “separate nation”:

For here one speaks *ingles* self-consciously,
embarrassed to be speaking it so well
amid the toehold accents and the slurs
of knit-capped beggars whining, “Some loose change?” (Updike, 2001, p. 21, lines 4-7).

As to the poet-speaker in NYC, there is not an “I,” but a “one” in the poem. “One” refers to the poem-speaker and the poet himself as well. Compared with “I”, the first person reference, “one” is less personal and more objective. Although “I” is replaced with “one”, the word “feel” expresses a very subjective experience. The following line, “this is a separate nation, no?” reveals the reason for feeling “let down”. Then, the following four lines give us a case in point to prove that “this is a separate nation” by describing a scene on an NYC street. It is the typical NYC street view: various people congregate into the madding crowd. The poet renders it dramatic by characterizing himself in the scene. “One” refers to the poet, like the “one” who “feels let down”. He speaks English “self-consciously” because he is “embarrassed to be speaking it so well” among beggars. He does not feel at ease among the crowd on the street. Or he feels uneasy to see those beggars who cannot speak English well. William Blake wrote in his poem “London” that he wandered through the chartered street and saw the marks of weakness and woe in people’s faces. Deep sympathy was expressed for the deprived working people. Unlike Blake’s “London”, Updike’s NYC street scene aims not to express sympathy, but to feature a language conflict.

Language is a label of social status. Although the two kinds of people speak the same language, different manners of speaking expose different social statuses. The poet speaks English very well; while the beggars

cannot. Instead, they struggle to speak accented English, slurring and whining. The poet represents the well-educated and financially privileged class—a Harvard graduate and a prestigious best seller writer. His personality was always shy and self-conscious, as the title of Updike's autobiography *Self-Consciousness* indicated (Updike, 1989). In contrast, beggars represent the poorly-educated and financially deprived class. Higher class and lower class—class difference is the evidence of separation in NYC. However, Updike's writing does not usually focus on the class conflicts as William Blake did in his London poem. The accented beggars are most likely immigrants, outsiders from the mainstream society. Ironically, Updike was also an outsider from NYC, which will be explained in the latter part of the essay. He once fled from NYC just because he could not put up with the increasing feeling of being an outsider in that big city. In the scene, he feels self-conscious and embarrassed to witness the other kind of outsider. The conflict between the good English speaker and the toehold accented English speaker is indeed a sign of separation.

The street scene reveals language conflicts. New York City is a city with diversity, full of people of different skin colors, speaking different languages. However, English is the universal language. Beggars struggle to speak English because English is not their first language. The implied meaning of the scene is that in NYC, language is still a barrier to immigrants. Updike is very sensitive to the changing world. On the street, he feels the inner conflict of immigrants. His targeted reader or his implied reader of his works is the American middle-class. Almost his entire writing career was devoted to the middling. After the 1990s, Updike tried to update his subject matter in order to please the reader, and to respond to the changing wind of the world. For example, he wrote the immigrants in his last novel *Terrorist* (2006).

Pandemonium: A Parody of John Milton's Hell

On the street scene, the poet portrays himself as a self-conscious English speaker, embarrassed to be speaking so well among immigrants. As a result, in the first stanza, the voice of the poet speaks aloud in the foreground. He shows his feelings—"let down" and "embarrassed"—and his action as well—"speaks *ingles* self-consciously". However, in the second stanza, the poet removes himself from the foreground and into the background, becoming an observer. This second stanza of the sonnet presents New York cityscape as Pandemonium, an allusion to Milton's *Paradise Lost*:

This Pandemonium whose sky is like
the unfilled spaces of a crossword puzzle,
whose bad breath underground makes sidewalks shudder,
whose sheets of windows rise like thirsty thunder
above the glaze of blinding expectation—
this hell holds sacred crevices where lone
lost spirits preen and call their pit a throne. (Updike, 2001, p. 21, lines. 8-14)

This stanza describes a specific New York cityscape—the oppressive skyline resulting from the forest of skyscrapers of the city, the unpleasant smell of underground, the glass-walled high-rise buildings whose façades glare and even momentarily make people feel blind. The diction—*puzzle*, *shudder*, *thirsty thunder*, *blinding*—gives us a negative impression of the city: crowded, smelly, alluring, etc.

Updike was particularly fond of Milton's epics. As a voracious reader of John Milton at Harvard College, he won the Dana Reed Prize for distinguished writing for his parody of Milton in the campus magazine, *Lampoon*. In

his autobiographical short story, *My Father's Tears*, Updike exposed the character's sentiments by his alternative reading of Milton's poems. There is a farewell scene between the parents and their only child, Jim, at the railway station in the small town Alton. Jim is returning to Harvard after spring break. The train approaches and Jim boards: "My parents looked smaller, fore-shortened. We waved sheepishly through the smirched glass. I opened my book—*The Complete Poetical Works of John Milton*—before Alton's gritty outskirts had fallen away" (Updike, 2009, p. 227). The next paragraph finds us already in Boston, where his girlfriend has been waiting and embraces him on the platform, and we learn the name of the poem he'd been reading as the train headed northward: *Paradise Regained*. From the autobiographical main character, the Harvard University student, Jim, we see the self-portrait of young John Updike as an enthusiastic reader of Milton. Besides that, the part Jim was reading when he arrived the big city Boston was *Paradise Regained*, which implies he, as a young man, was fed up with small town like Alton, and yearned for big city like Boston.

When Updike was young, he had an ambivalent sentiment towards urbanity. At 12, Updike was upset when his mother insisted on moving their home to a small farmhouse. As a teenage boy, he craved the city life—theatre, roaming on the streets, comic books, etc. Therefore, once he went to college, he felt happy to live in a big city like Boston where he felt like "paradise" had been "regained". However, in the depths of his heart, he still regarded himself as a small town boy and felt linked to the small town Arlington, where he was born and lived until they moved to the farmhouse. Leaving city was like his "paradise" was "lost". When depicting NYC cityscape and the psychological and spiritual being, he echoed some images of Pandemonium in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Book I, such as thunder and thrones.

"Thunder" is God's punishing power in Milton's context, while in Updike's poem, thunder is associated with the rising sheets of windows. NYC was boasting of a forest of skyscrapers since the 1920s. The city had witnessed two upsurges of skyscrapers construction. The first period was after the WWI and before the Great Depression; the second period was in the 1960s. High towers with mirrored slabs, famous for panes of reflective glass, mold city people's inner world. In 1974, Updike once lived nearby John Hancock Tower in Boston when he was experiencing a marriage crisis. This tower then was a trendy design with panes of reflective glass in the whole facades. The designer Ieoh Ming Pei and the contractor were blamed by the media because the costs of the building far exceeded the budget. Making it worse, the glass curtain wall fell down before the building was delivered. "In the wake of the separation from his wife Mary, he felt like damaged goods, and the Hancock Tower became his secret sharer, a companion in his loneliness" (Begley, 2014, p. 332). This empathy with skyscrapers was written in his short story "Gesturing", the building "spoke to him...of beauty and suffering" (Updike, 2009, p. 138).

Updike's thunder is "thirsty thunder" because the reflective glass is visually like blue thunder, while it is not the real thunder that brings rain. "Dry sterile thunder without rain" is an image in *The Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot (Eliot, 1996, p. 2477, line 342). "Thirsty thunder" is similar to "dry sterile thunder" in connotation. The derived meaning of "thirsty" is desirous of something—consumption or aspiration for fame and wealth. More intensively, it is "above the glaze of blinding expectation". Visually, when people look up the high rising glass tower, especially in the sunshine, they feel dizzy and blinded. Symbolically, however, the "expectation" is too unrealistic to be realized since it is "blinding expectation". Therefore, the image of "thirsty thunder above the glaze of blinding expectation" is not only the effect of modern art and architecture but also the symbol of the

unconsummated desire of city people. If Milton's thunder is a punishing force for those rebellious angels, Updike's "thirsty thunder" is a punishing force for those city people who dream to be bigger than they are.

Then, what is their way of being in NYC? The last two lines of Updike's poem parodies the ending of *Book I, Paradise Lost*:

And in their own dimensions like themselves
The great Seraphic Lords and Cherubim
In close recess and secret conclave sat
A thousand Demy-Gods on golden seats,
Frequent and full. After short silence then
And summons read, the great consult began. (Milton, 2005, p. 46, lines 793-798)

The scenes of the two poets are similar, which both present figures seated. "Sacred crevices" echoes "secret conclaves". They are similar in sound but different in meaning. We would say that Updike coined the phrase "sacred crevices" after Milton. "Sacred crevices" is by no means a random similar diction to Milton's "secret conclave". Instead, it is a parody of it. In Milton's Pandemonium, the great Seraph summoned all the fallen angels to consult how to wage a war to God and shake his throne. It was a secret conclave indeed. There is also an irony. Since the original meaning of "conclave" is "secret meeting", Milton emphasized the meaning of secret by adding a redundant adjective "secret" before "conclave". However, their meeting was too conspicuous to be a secret, although it should have been a secret to God. The Seraph was very ambitious and he declared to do an ambitious thing—to shake the throne of God.

Etymologically, the stem "clave" in the word "conclave" means "to split". "Crevice" is a noun form, meaning "split". Therefore, "conclave" and "crevice" are semantically relevant. Meanwhile, the connotation of "split" also echoes the key word of the whole poem "separate nation". Like the "conclave" is a place where the great Seraph sat, "crevices" are the spaces and places where New York people live and work—apartments, houses, offices, cubicles, etc. Moreover, "crevices" may not necessarily be the physical reality where people dwell. Metaphorically, it may refer to a psychological reality—the separation and alienation of the metropolitan. Milton's "secret conclave" was not secret. Likewise, Updike's "sacred crevices" are not sacred since "lone/lost spirits preen and call their pit a throne". In Milton's Pandemonium, the fallen angels' pursuit was to shake the throne of God—a big undertaking. Ironically, in Updike's NYC Pandemonium, the lone and lost spirits choose not to ascend, but to stay in the pit—the hell-like working and living situation, and declare themselves rulers of their domain. To put it simply, the contrast between Milton's fallen angels and Updike's lone lost spirits in NYC lies in their different purposes of life. To the former, it is to be summoned and pursue a great career; to the latter, it is to preen and to be satisfied with the present situation. In essence, to "preen and call their pit a throne" is an urban sophistication. It reveals the smallness of reflexive solipsism which has been criticized by Updike.

In a word, the central image of Updike's poem "New York City" is a "separate nation". Ubiquity of television reveals individuals separation from face-to-face human contact; a good English speaker encountering beggars reveals separation between different social ranks; the Pandemonium scene exposes separation resulting from reflexive solipsism.

Separation and Connection: Updike's Homage to Whitman

"Manhattan is like poetry", E. B. White wrote in 1948. "[I]t is without any doubt the greatest human concentrate on earth, the poem whose magic is comprehensible to millions of permanent residents but whose full meaning will always remain elusive" (White, 1999, p. 28). NYC is such a fascinating place that it has attracted many poets who try to define its meaning. Walt Whitman, who creatively set the tradition of American poetry, wrote two poems about NYC that present a contrasting image with that of Updike's. One is "Crossing the Brooklyn Ferry" (1856, 1881), the other "Mannahatta" (1860, 1881) (Whitman, 2013).

Updike's collection *Americana* can be regarded as his salute to Whitman. In his collection, there is one long poem strikingly entitled "Song of Myself," which obviously pays homage to Whitman's famous poem of the same title. More significantly, the subject matter of Updike's collection is similar to that of Whitman's gigantic *Leaves of Grass*. The latter is generally regarded as a national epic to eulogize the American city, American common people, and individual life (Whitman, 2003, pp. 989-1003). Likewise, the former consists of four sections which are respectively about American cities and airplanes (section 1), the poet's childhood, birthdays, and ailments (section 2), foreign travels (section 3) and daily life (section 4). Updike was widely praised as America's "last true man of letters" (Pritchard, 2000, p. 122). It is reasonable that Updike—a successor of American poetry tradition—paid tribute to Whitman—the precursor of American poetry tradition.

Born in Brooklyn, Whitman called himself "the son of Manhattan." He desired to define the meaning of New York. The first line of "Mannahatta" points out his purpose in writing the poem—"I was asking for something specific and perfect for my city". What indeed are the specific and the perfect of the city? As a city roamer, Whitman gathered the sights that could signify the city.

Firstly, Manhattan¹ is an island surrounded by water—"Rich, hemm'd thick all around with sailships, and steamships, an island sixteen miles long, solid-founded" (line 6). Whitman obviously favored water as many water-related or ship-related images can be found in his poems, such as, "Tide swift and ample", or "city of hurried and sparkling waters! the city of spires and masts!" Water, in this context, is an image of connection, for it can absorb other things and carry ships. In contrast, Updike's "New York City" does not touch upon the fact that the city is an island, nor any water-related image. It is a "separate nation" surrounded by TV; Whitman's Manhattan is a beautiful island surrounded by water.

Secondly, specific physical images of streets and buildings were shown: "numberless crowded streets—high growth of iron, slender, strong, light, splendidly uprising toward clear skies" (line 7). In the 1860s, Manhattan witnessed a period of reconstruction. The era of skyscraper was yet to come. Whitman passionately praised those newly built tall buildings. Updike's NYC poem does not describe the material, shape, height, or imposing manner of the tall buildings, but it highlights the effects of skyscrapers—"the sky is like/ the unfilled spaces of a crossword puzzle". Obviously, Updike's NYC sky is not as clear as Whitman's. The skyscraper was assuredly one of the "specific" features of NYC in the late 20th century. The newly built ones were encroaching upon the skyline, which made people feel narrow and stifled. Furthermore, the image "thirsty thunder" describes the psychological effect of skyscrapers—"sheets of windows rise like thirsty thunder/above the glaze of blinding

¹ When English explorer and navigator Henry Hudson and his Dutch crew arrived on the island in 1609, the land was called Mannahatta by native American Indian the Lenape, meaning "mountainous island".

expectation". The dazzling visual effect of reflective glass of high towers is associated with the alluring aspiration and anxiety of city life.

Thirdly, seasonal landscapes and happiness were found in Whitman's city: "the summer air, the bright sun shining, and the sailing clouds aloft, /The winter snows, the sleigh-bells, the broken ice in the river, passing along up or down with flood-tide or ebb-tide" (lines 14-15) According to the poem, it is always pleasant to enjoy seasonal changes in the NYC of the 1860s. The more urbanized the city, the further away from nature. Whitman personified a NYC, endowed it with life and captured its history. It kept growing not only in time—seasonal change, but also in size, in population—"Immigrants arriving, fifteen or twenty thousand in a week" (line 12). By contrast, Updike neither described NYC with seasonal beauty, nor rendered the city any natural scenes. He compared it to Pandemonium, which was an imaginative vision of John Milton's in *Paradise Lost*. Hell does not have four seasons at all. Instead, the smell of underground is highlighted. The New York underground is an integral part of the city, growing up with the city and shaping its culture. The underground has become one of the spectacles of NYC. Without it, how can the city be New York? Updike personified it in an unpleasant way—it smells and makes people shudder.

Fourthly, people of all trades, mostly workers were another "specific" Whitman found. Whitman aligned himself with the working class as he portrayed himself on the frontispiece of his *Leaves of Grass*. "A million people—manners free and superb—open voices—hospitality—the most courageous and friendly young men" (line 19). Likewise, in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry", people encountered on the street were not simply strangers. They had a certain connection. They could be called by "nighest name by clear and loud voices" when they approached, which is a perfect image of human interaction. By contrast, Updike dramatized a scene of language conflict in which a good English speaker encounters toehold accented beggars. Their verbal contact makes one feel embarrassed.

Whitman's "Mannahatta" is a condensed edition of the other longer NYC poem, "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry": the former expresses the theme of connection directly, while the latter renders the same theme more elaborately and more philosophically. The poet-speaker, or the city roamer, observes New York people, the city and himself on a Brooklyn ferryboat, trying to connect himself with the people and the city in particular, to connect the body with the soul, past and present with future. As D. H. Lawrence commented, "merging with everything" (Shapiro, 1962, p. 250).

All in all, Whitman's NYC poem's aim is to find something specific and perfect. After crossing that ferry, he finally realized that perfection: "we plant you permanently within us; /... You furnish your parts toward eternity; /Great or small, you furnish your parts toward the soul" (lines 129-132). Through human integration, we achieve eternity. Brooklyn Ferry is a metaphor for the ferry on Styx River in Hell. Lucky for Whitman, he found perfection after crossing the ferry. Unfortunately for Updike's New York people, "the lone lost spirits preen and call their pit a throne". They neither take rebellious action to shake God's throne, nor to cross the Styx ferry and find their soul and eternity; they just remain in Hell.

Updike felt "let down" with the "separate nation"—New York city; while Whitman in "Mannahatta" asked for "something specific and perfect" in his city, and finally he found its perfection: a beautiful island with tall and straight buildings, seasonal beauty, courageous and friendly young people. In "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry", the poet meditated on the ferry and at last he achieved a philosophical realization or an epiphany: the connection

between himself (the poet) and the others (the readers); between body and soul. Two poets rendered the same city in different themes. One is separation, the other connection. The reason for this difference lies in their different poetic propositions. They were both ambitious poets and devoted themselves to writing poetry for a lifetime. However, confronted with different social backgrounds, they held different propositions of poetics.

For Whitman, his ambition was to be the poet Emerson called for, to be the American Bard—Bards of Ensemble. In Emerson's inspiring essay, *The Poet* (1844), he described American as, "America is a poem in our eyes; its ample geography dazzles the imagination, and it will not wait long for metres" (Emerson, 1990, p. 226). He sought poets who were capable of shaping and developing American society by imagination and by words, who were "not only beholding intensely the present as it is, ... but also beholding the future in the present" (Emerson, 1990, p. 228). In other words, Emerson's American poets are the ones who are capable of embracing new American life and connecting themselves with the ever-growing society and with all other American people, connecting the present with the past and the future as well. Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* was a perfect practical response to Emerson's poetics. The *Preface to Leaves of Grass* (1855) and his *Letter to Ralph Waldo Emerson* (1856) repeatedly proclaimed his poetical propositions on what American poetry was and what kind of poet he would be.

In his letter to Emerson, Whitman declared his life pursuit and his ways of doing it, "I much enjoy making poems. Other work I have set for myself to do, to meet people and The States face to face, to confront them with an American rude tongue; but the work of my life is making poems" (Whitman, 2003, p. 1047). He was determined to be the American Bard. He intended to write in the American spirit, that is, for the United States and the peoples as a whole, as a new and free land, escaping the European tradition as he proclaimed, "lands of ensemble, bards of ensemble! Walking freely out from the old traditions, as our politics has walked out" (Whitman, 2003, p. 1052). Therefore, to Whitman, the American bard is the bard of ensemble and of connection. His main task was to connect himself with the country and the people of all trades, men and women. Moreover, he also emphasized the connection of body and soul in his *Preface to Leaves of Grass* (1855): "The spirit receives from the body just as much as it gives to the body" (Whitman, 2003, p. 1000). Body has long been denied in literature. He said, "the body of a man or a woman is so far quite unexpressed in poems, but that the body is to be expressed, and sex is" (Whitman, 2003, p. 1052). In poetical practice, he became the incarnation of the "poet of the Body" and the "poet of the Soul" in his epic poem *Song of Myself*. If one word can be used to summarize Whitman's poetics, it is "connection," similar to "merging," the word D. H. Lawrence employed to comment on Whitman's poetics.

Whitman's poetics of connection is credited to Emerson. Therefore, to some extent, his poetics belonged to Romanticism, although D. H. Lawrence applauded him as "the one pioneer"—"In Europe the would-be pioneers are innovators. The same in America. Ahead of Whitman, nothing. Ahead of all poets, pioneering into the wilderness of unopened life" (Shapiro, 1962, p. 239). Whitman was essentially a Romantic. His poetics of connection was a transformation of Romantic poetics. His identification with New York City and unconditional praise originated from Romantic imagination, the overflow of powerful feelings. Such powerful feelings were motivated by his era. Whitman depicted a growing NYC: the flood-tide, changing seasons, flowing people on the ferry, etc. The city was an organism that conformed to the Romantic faith in nature as a model for their poetics.

As for Updike, he solidified his intellectual and artistic ambition when he was a Harvard college student: to be an artist "who desires both to be great and to be popular", a writer who loved America, who could "produce an epic out of the Protestant ethic" (Begley, 2014, p. 83). Young Updike was determined to be as great an American poet as Whitman, but even more popular. Whitman did not proclaim that a desire for popularity, but he indeed tried to promote his *Leaves of Grass*. For example, he himself wrote reviews of his poetry and published them anonymously. He even published Emerson's private letter sent to him without authorization. Therefore, Updike and Whitman were both intellectually and artistically ambitious. To be great and popular were their lifelong pursuits.

Updike, however, had a very different experience with New York than Whitman did. He lived in NYC for two years from 1955 to 1957 when he then was a staff member of the magazine *The New Yorker*. He realized his teenage dream—to become a contributor of his favorite magazine. His life in NYC was typical of any ambitious young man who, born a small town, went to college, found a desirable job after graduation in a big city, in this case, in Manhattan. He and his wife Mary rented a small apartment in the city. They had one son and a second child at the end of their Manhattan life. During that period, Updike wrote eight short stories which were all written in opposition to Manhattan, about young people adjusting to urban life and expressing their anxieties and aspirations. These stories explored the treacherous allure of big-city sophistication and its potentially corrupting influence. Updike began his professional literary career in Manhattan and had a very good beginning: "Updike and *The New Yorker* in the fifties, it was indeed a perfect fit" (Begley, 2014, p. 119).

However, Updike and the City were not made for each other. In fact, he was always feeling like an outsider in the big city. In 1957, he decided to flee from Manhattan because he felt uncomfortable with becoming a metropolitan. He wanted neither to be a New Yorker, nor to write New York stories. On one hand, in his mind's eye, to embrace New York was to betray his hometown. To some extent, to identify him as one of the urban people meant to deny his parents, both of whom embodied a kind of anti-urbanity. To become a city slicker was to turn his back on the awkward small-town kid who had been the object of his family's attention. On the other hand, to him, the excitement and glamour of living in New York had always come bundled with less agreeable sensations. He felt "crowded, physically and spiritually" by the city's "ghastly plentitude, its inexhaustible and endlessly repeated urban muchness". In addition, he felt "whatever you might do or achieve in New York, you could never feel important because there was always greater or at least noisier stuff going on around you" (Begley, 2014, p. 114). In that big city, he felt his road was narrow; he only knew the old classmates and colleagues of *The New Yorker*. One evening he took part in a cocktail party at one of his colleagues' luxurious town houses where many well-known writers and his colleagues presented. At that moment, an overwhelming feeling prompted him—he would not be one of the competitors among them. He made up his mind to move out of Manhattan the next morning.

For the rest of his life, Updike lived in the New England area. Since he had been a contributor of *The New Yorker* for 50 years and he was still fond of the museums in the city, he occasionally visited New York. Therefore, emotionally, he still had some connection with that city. During the 1980s, owing to the dwindling of his readership, he felt extremely disappointed in New York's cultural atmosphere. He wrote in 1987, "I feel confident in saying that disadvantages of New York life which lead me to leave have intensified rather than

abated, and that the city which Le Corbusier described as a magnificent disaster is less and less magnificent" (Begley, 2014, p. 386). This disappointment was revealed in the line, "the Television's just like anywhere".

Conclusion

In contrast with Whitman's complete identification with NYC, Updike's opinion of NYC changed with time. His aspiration to live in the big city was realized, but later evolved into disappointment. He finally chose to live in a small town and to write for the all the American people.

On September 11th, 2001, Updike witnessed the whole catastrophe in his stepson's house in a Brooklyn building. He preserved his impressions of the attack for the September 24 issue of *The New Yorker*. His perception of the disaster was so: "suddenly summoned to witness something great and horrendous, we keep fighting not to reduce it to our own smallness" (Begley, 2014, p. 430). Here, he wrote about how to resist the smallness of reflexive solipsism. Forty-four years previous, Updike left Manhattan because he could not bear the muchness of it. He would rather retire to his small town and write about the "smallness" of American middle-class. This time, however, he called for resistance of the smallness of being. At the end of the article, he employed his usual poetic language to praise the city:

The next morning, I went back to the open vantage from which we had watched the tower so dreadfully slip from sight. The fresh sun shone on the eastward facades, a few boats tentatively moved in the river, the ruins were still sending out smoke, but New York looked glorious. (Begley, 2014, p. 430)

The style of this description is less like Updike, and more like Walt Whitman. He finally use "glorious" to praise the city in that special moment.

We have found the moral order of New York City of the late 20th century in Updike's sonnet "New York City" and that of Whitman's in his "Mannahatta" and "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry". The former is a disordered "separate nation," reflected in the alienated human relations, and the decaying of city culture and reflexive solipsism, while the latter is orderly organic "connection." Different moral orders of the city is shaped by different physical structures according to Park's psychophysical mechanism. For Updike, the moral order of New York city in the late 20th century is like a "seperate nation" which is shaped by the city's physical structures, such as the ubiquitous TV, the street beggars, the skyline, underground, skyscrapers, etc. Of course, the poet John Updike himself, as a dweller of it, was one part of the city. His urban experience and his poetic propositions also participated the process of mutual shaping of this psychophysical mechanism.

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