



## The Rural and the Urban: A Spatial Reading of Selected Poems by Stephen Spender and Badr Shakir al-Sayyab

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### Abstract

The countryside and the city are considered among the most frequently tackled themes in British and Arabic poetry. They are viewed as two inseparable aspects of man's life in the modern age. Many poets write about them because they appreciate the rural since it is still where man finds tranquillity, spontaneity and outlet from all urban life pressures. On the contrary, the city is presented as a place of stress, chaos, loss and instability. In the present paper, the main concern is to discuss selected poems by Stephen Spender (1909-1995) and Badr Shahr al-Sayyab (1926-1964) in terms of three intrinsic elements of space theorized by Henri Lefebvre, a French Marxist philosopher and sociologist, along with Raymond Williams, to critically examine both Spender's and al-Sayyab's rendering of a variety of poetic devices to portray the countryside represented by the village with all its images, and the urban landscape defined by the city which is depicted in terms of corruption, pollution and isolation. It also aims to elucidate the essential components of space, applying modern poetry to the presentation of the countryside and the city to explicate how they are both oriented in Spender's and al-Sayyab's selected poems. One of the noteworthy conclusions is that both of them employ spatial practices and representational to portray the rural and urban images of life as conceived by the reader.

**Keywords:** Countryside, city, space theory, poetry, urban, rural

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The city is a spatial phenomenon, subject to temporal evolution. Through this process, movement, and relative change, people's views of the city and their attitudes towards it differ, whether they desire to live in it or not. Thus, the city is frequently tackled by contemporary literature with different symbols, dimensions and connotations, to occupy a relatively complex intellectual significance (Akkak, 2001). Similarly, greater attention has been paid to spatial organization within societies, including the purported divisions between the rural and the urban, and this has emphasized the degree to which geography conditions even the most mundane aspects of everyday life. The rapid industrialization of the so-called Third World, combined with, and closely related to, the apparent de-industrialization of the First World, has transformed the geographical spaces and how such spaces are understood (Tally, 2013). For Lefebvre, the experience of everyday life is mediated and structured by the multifarious ways in which space is produced because social space is the product of human agency and it, in turn, helps to shape social, economic, legal and political relations (Butler, 2014). Henri Lefebvre's theory of space gives a structure for the comprehension of the spatial production of individuals, an experiential concept, and a notion of space of meaning. For Lefebvre, space is not just the physical environment in which we live, but a multilayered socially constructed entity that is changing constantly with the activities and power relations within it, as well as cultural meanings connected to it. When it is applied to the study of poetry, Lefebvre's theory of space can give readers relevant and interesting perspectives about how poets manipulate spatial environments, which are the portrayals of the real world, in their creative works. This concept holds that space is socially constructed through social relations, utterances, and power relations. Poets are shown to be the actors of the spatial universe when employing this part of Lefebvre's theory, the ecology of language demonstrates that poets utilize real and symbolic space to communicate, inspire emotions and dispute dominant spatial discourses. Poets may use personal experience, cultural symbols, history as a source of their spatial imagery which would be seen as a social reality and the experiences which people live through. Lefebvre argues that space creates and inspires different social rites as well as cultural beliefs. Through spatial representations in poetry literature, these metaphors, symbols, and narratives are often used to communicate vital societal, cultural, personal, and human issues symbolically. Spatially oriented-poets may tackle such themes as place, position in society, displacement, or power. Through exploration of the visages of these locations, they open our eyes to brand-new truths and help us to view humanity more holistically.

In his theory, Lefebvre refers to various kinds of space. The most influential kind is the social one since the abstract and concrete spaces are the general means, medium and milieu within which all social practices operate and allow considering their specificity within that society (Stanek, 2011). He hypothesized three aspects of space as internally related within an open totality. He coins a conceptual triad which elucidates the complicated interaction of spatial relations. They consist of three main components: *Spatial practices* which are the physical ones, everyday routines, networks and pathways through which the totality of social life is reproduced. These practices include both individually embodied social rhythms and collective patterns of movement within cities and regions. *Representations of space* are forms of abstract knowledge generated by formal and institutional apparatuses of power engaged in the organization of space. Obvious examples include the work of planners, bureaucrats, social engineers, cartographers and various scientific disciplines holding socially recognized 'expertise' in the management and control of spatial form. *Representational spaces* are closely associated with the social and bodily

functions of lived experience. They form part of the social imaginary of inhabitants and users of space through which complex symbols are linked to non-hegemonic forms of creative practice and social resistance (Lefebvre, 1991). He adds:

Is space a social relationship? Certainly—but one which is inherent to property relationships (especially the ownership of the earth, of land) and also closely bound up with the forces of production (which impose a form on that earth or land); here we see the polyvalence of social space, its “reality” at once formal and material. Though a product to be used, to be consumed, it is also a means of production; networks of exchange and flows of raw materials and energy fashion space and are determined by it. Thus, the means of production, produced as such, cannot be separated either from the social division of labour which shapes it, or from the state and the superstructures of society (1991, p. 85).

The countryside and the city are two different, contradictory environments created by man, and they became the arena of conflict over time as these two environments require each other. However, rural people migrate to the city for many reasons like questing for job opportunities. It is apparent that the migration of most contemporary poets, especially the Iraqis, from the countryside to the cities has widened the arena of conflict between the countryside and the city, due to the existence of a contradiction and a gap between them that is not easy to cross over as it is based on a long legacy of isolation, hostility and superiority. Thus, this deep and wide gap is obvious in Arabic literature in general and poetry in particular (qtd. in Ballawi and Abdul-Aziz, 2019). Furthermore, Robert T. Tally Jr. argues that writers play a pivotal role in mapping the space in a literary work and give the reader the role of a map reader in terms of spatiality:

If writers map the real and imagined spaces of their world in various ways through literary means, then it follows that readers are also engaged in this broader mapping project. A map-reader is also a reader of a text, after all, and the reader of a literary map also envisions a space, plots a trajectory, and becomes orientated to and within the world depicted there. Moreover, the reader is never simply a passive receptacle for the spatial messages transmitted by the map or text but actively determines the often shifting and transient meanings found in the map. To the writer’s literary cartography, we might add the reader’s literary geography. The critical reader becomes a kind of geographer who actively interprets the literary map in such a way as to present new, sometimes hitherto unforeseen mappings (2013, p.79).

“Country” and “city” are very powerful words, and this is not surprising when remembering how much they seem to stand for in the experience of human communities. In English, the word “country” means both a nation and a part of the “land”; “the country” can be the whole society or its rural area. In the long history of human settlements, this connection between the land, from which directly or indirectly we all get our living, and the achievements of human society, has been highlighted. And one of these achievements has been the city: the capital, the large town, a distinctive form of civilization (Williams, 1973). Both these two concepts reveal the ardent feelings provoked by them and the incited emotional response regarding these concepts within a cultural environment. They include a geographical and cultural way of characterization. The word country is double needed to designate both nation and countryside to accentuate the significance of the parallelism between human society and

nature that are rooted in the environment. Williams also highlights the historical growth of urban settlements and the unique accomplishment that cities represent as something that differs from any other pattern of civilization. The description of the city as a nerve centre where culture, economy, and society interplay served to underscore how it plays an indispensable role in forming human progress and development. Provocatively, he establishes, in the reader, a thought about the interlinked nature between the rural and urban landscapes, which is perceived as a separation of the dimensions of human experiences and as successive achievements of humanity. In his notable book entitled *Green Voices: Understanding Contemporary Nature Poetry*, Gifford writes “I have always thought that while ‘poetry makes nothing happen’ [...], it can contribute to a shift in sensibility rather than lifestyle. It can raise questions, often conveying a sense of the complexity of their contexts, which get resolved, even provisionally, in other discourses” (2011, p.8). In this context, he contemplates the question of the effect of poetry in shaping thoughts and feelings. The wording ‘poetry makes nothing happen’ by W.H. Auden associates that poetry like the one that aims at occasioning an action is not in parallel with the direct action that has its actual results in the physical world. Nevertheless, it is the last sentence that declares poetry as the greatest possibility to alter the outlook of observers with the immediate context changing to the perceptions the audience holds. It can provide refreshing mental detoxification by urging questions and examining complex issues like man and the environment. Having been related to space and environment, the language and imagery of poetry imbue life with intricacies and nuances of many contexts and call readers to wrestle with complex realities of life through which human beings achieve meaning and contentment. The enigma created by the poetry questions raises enlightening questions that are not geared towards finding definite answers but simply ask individuals to look at poetry as an alternative perspective wherein complex aspects of life are tackled. Though poetry may not give direct resolutions or solutions, it is capable of putting the reader in a mood for a self-dialogue which might end up with a new insight and point of view.

Stephen Spender is a notable poet who portrays both the rural and the urban in many of his poems. In Spender’s poetry, it can be observed that he is very much educated and can skillfully dramatize the country and city landscapes in many of his poems. He manages to adequately show these scenes of the country and city equally using natural imagery in a very speculative way while keeping authenticity. Much of his poems that inspire images of the countryside are through the lens of nostalgia and idyllic charm. In his writing, he wields both vivid imagery and lyrical language to recreate visually appealing and harmonious natural settings, where the search for simplicity can be realized. Spender reveals his adoration of the landscapes and the eternal values of the rural places; being transported to the idyllic scene freely for enjoyment. However, Spender’s images of urban life display just the opposite image, where the unique vibrancy and vitality emerge in the scenes. He reveals the vivacity of the city, thus reflecting streets overflowing with life, the entire spectrum of various communities, and all types of problems, which are the core of city life. To Spender, the city doesn’t look like just a space of homeless and suffering people, but this is like an active and diverse web of contradiction. Through the jerky communications between those from the country and those from the town, Spender illustrates how the opposites and/or relates of these two contrasting environments interact. In his literary manifestation, nature becomes the prism through which humanity is interpreted by readers with multiple facets being shown. This is done through the

poetic lens as it demonstrates the interaction between civilization and nature, tradition and modernity, and offers a variety of aspects of human existence and the landscape we live in.

In *The Making of a Poem*, he focuses on the use of ruins or deserted places, as they can “make a hideous modern building seem beautiful, maybe that destruction celebrates the triumph of the useless over the useful ...” (15). He thinks “[a] city should belong at the same time to the inhabitants, who use it, the dead who have invented forms which give pleasure to the eye, and the unborn in whom the delights enjoyed by the dead will live. In towns where the dead and the unborn are omitted, there are simply buildings and thoroughfares used by contemporaries. The inhabitants of modern industrial cities have a look of complete expressionlessness, of disregard for their surroundings, when they walk through streets or go on buses and trains. This is the ‘utility’ look, the look of those who know that they are in a particular place simply for a particular purpose, and not in a sacred relation with its past and future” (15-16). Here lies the importance of Lefebvre’s concept of space that enhances a modern understanding the social reality which shapes the given space as “social space thus remains the space of society, of special life. Man does not live by word alone; all ‘subjects’ are situated in a space in which they must either recognize themselves or lose themselves” (Lefebvre 35). Although the past and future aspects are erased and ignored by the contemporary generation of metropolitan areas, a utilitarian way of treating one’s environment develops and subsequently becomes ingrained in people’s personalities. The utilitarian ideology being promoted by the look also sends out a message that the practicalities of functionalism and efficiency are way over emotional or spiritual interactions with the environment. Merely taking knowledge from the past and future, or severing the link between the sacred and the deep-rooted culture, gives rise to a homogeneous personality without any sort of soul among urbanites. The skepticism casts the rate of urbanization on the impacts on social identity, memory, and connections.

The pertinence of Lefebvre’s theory of social space is tackled here since it plays a pivotal role in the perception and understanding of the sophisticated relationship between man and the spaces he initiates. According to Lefebvre, social space stands interconnected with things like social worth and activities. This concentrates upon the fact that physical surroundings also play a crucial role in determining the life experiences and social interactions of humans. This reveals how impacting the urban spaces are collective to human beings. Such conception provides enough space for the consideration of questions related to the form and character of the designs, planning principles, and socio-spatial systems which mould human behavior, perception, and interrelationship in modern society.

Lefebvre, then, clarifies that people play an intrinsic role in producing the space in any modern society. As in al-Sayyab’s poetry, Spender views the city as a production of the social space which is the result of the triad components of Lefebvre’s theory of space. In their poetry, space is the production of various codes that they employ in writing their poems. The spatial practice is the perceived space, the representation of space is the conceived space and the representational space is the lived space (Lefebvre, 1991).

Spender’s “The Pylons” expresses the idea of the urbanization of the countryside by the spread of the “black wire” (Spender, 1965, p. 58) across the villages and the hills. Although these pylons are viewed as precursors of electricity, they represent the negative impact of urbanization on the countryside, hovering over its purity and spontaneity. Spender further clarifies this drastic change, describing them in an outrageous image: “Pylons, those pillars/

Bare like nude giant girls that have no secret” (Spender, 1965, p. 58). Through this simile, Spender likens the wires to nude giant girls to exaggerate the harsh impact it brings to the countryside despite its importance as a source of growth and development. He wants to say that the spread of the pylons brings industrialization which menaces nature and makes the countryside devoid of spontaneity and purity:

The valley with its gilt and evening look  
And the green chestnut  
Of customary root,  
Are mocked dry like the parched bed of a brook

(Spender, 1965, p. 58)

The valley, chestnut tree, and brook are objects reminiscent of a landscape molded by nature and human presence. The ‘green chestnut / Of customary root’ accentuates rootedness and the ingrained connection between nature and human vision. The transformation of the valley to something ‘mocked dry,’ much like a ‘parched bed of a brook,’ reflects the rupture in spatial practice, perhaps brought forth by drought, environmental concerns, or the malfeasance of modernity’s forces upsetting the natural equilibria. From a Lefebvrian standpoint, these images convey the loss of once-lived organic space, now alienated from common function, an allegory for larger discourses on modernity’s attacks on lived spaces. The aesthetic view of the valley, as portrayed by Spender, is one that possibly glorifies nature. Yet the image of being mocked dry intervenes with this idealization and critiques conceptualization and management of space. Should this dry mocking have been brought about by human intervention, urbanization, climate change, and/or industrialization, then Spender reflects on how the representations of space—the way authorities conceive of and manage landscapes—discrepancies the lived existence with environmental degradation.

The ‘gilt and evening look’ evokes emotion along nostalgic lines, indicating personal and poetic attachment. However, this attachment is interrupted by the brook in distress, proclaiming death and the feeling of field displacement. The term ‘mocked dry’ adds a flavor of disenchantment; as if the speaking voice witnesses the desecration of a sacred place.

This aligns with Lefebvre’s proposition that lived space is produced by memory, artistic expression, and individual subjective experience. In Spender’s lines, the lived space exhibits the scars of an unceasingly exiting rebellion against its own life in the valley through careful utilization of memory, encouraged by art and personal memory.

The blunt exclamation of the pylons is contrasted with the understatement of the countryside they have invaded. Thus, “Spender has made an architecture of his poetry which exists by reference to his reaction to the industrial towns and the distressed areas (Southworth, 1937). The diction of the first two stanzas indicates that the blatant presence of the pylons is objectionable to the poet and that he yearns for the secretness and hiddenness of the non-industrialized countryside. But the last two lines of the poem assert that the pylons are welcomed as a symbol of progress (King, 1970). As far as the concept of space is concerned, Spender reveals the complexity of the transition from countryside to urbanization through this poem. According to Raymond Williams, the transition from country to city—from a predominantly rural to a predominantly urban society—is transforming and significant. The growth of towns

and especially of cities and a metropolis; the increasing division and complexity of labor; the altered and critical relations between and within social classes: in changes like these any assumption of a knowable community, a whole community becomes harder to sustain (1973, p.165). Moreover, Cox and Dyson (1963) further that the poem also expresses very poignantly the poet's compassion for those who must live surrounded by the ugliness of the modern town. The poem puts two different pictures. The areophane floats gently towards the town; it is contrasted with the chimneys and factories, the landscape of hysteria. Here, Spender concentrates on the literary geography that, according to Tally, implies a form of reading that focuses attention on space and spatiality in the texts under consideration. But it also means paying attention to the changing spatial or geographical formations that affect literary and cultural productions. This can involve looking at the ways that literature registers the shifting configurations of social space over time, as well as how texts represent or map spaces and places (2013).

In another notable city poem entitled "The Landscape near an Aerodrom", the speaker reflects his discontent against the moral and spiritual decadence which is caused by the merciless growth of urbanization. The speaker describes how an aeroplane is in descent while its passengers can take a look at the landscape below them. The scenery is in contrast with the naturalistic description of the aeroplane and its passengers. A division is set up between what is natural and what is artificial, the aeroplane serving as a 'bridge' between the natural and industrial world. Spender uses the landscape as a metaphor for British society as a whole, which is transformed into an industrial, urban society. An example of this can be found in the first stanza, in which the features of the areophane are described by using the metaphor of a moth and the expression of the speaker's affection for the natural world (Jacobs, 1956). In his book entitled *World within World*, Spender states "My poems were all attempts to record, as truthfully as I could, experiences which, within reality, seemed to be poetry. Whenever the poetry, to end satisfactorily a poem, seemed to require something which was not true to my own experience, I abandoned it" (1964, p. 59). The poet's frustration with a looming industrialism, which impairs nature, is accentuated by the image of an aeroplane in descent and the transformations in the farms and nature, observed from the sky. The contrast between the natural beauty and the manufactured aeroplanes blends the opposites between the untouched environment and the devastated urban settlement. As a metaphor, the aeroplane performs the architectural function of a bridge between the natural and industrial realms to manifest the changes in the British countryside into an exclusively urbanized landscape, which represents the general social transformation experienced during that time. The speaker's feeling for nature through the moth and subsequent description focusing on the detail of the aircraft is a way of portraying the loss and the sadness of the vanishing natural scenery. Spender's intention of saturating the poem with the feelings that have projection isn't merely a trend; instead, it is a signature of his love letter to the truth before the objectivity of the poems, and it embodies his ethos and the things he sees. Spender makes it clear in his citation that he doesn't pursue a poetic resolution even at the expense of serious compromise on his individuality and creative integrity, strengthening his artistic credibility.

In "Poem XI", the poet is riding a train moving through the countryside. While speculating on the rural spectacle, he bemoans the merciless change from rural to urban life. The scene is viewed as passing very quickly to accentuate that the countryside is invaded by industry and urbanization which are symbolized by the train. Here the train is wielded as a vehicle that

associates the poet's experience of this callous change to the urbanized city which is marked by spiritual deadness and disorientation:

By imagination scourged rose to a fight  
Like the town's roar, pouring out apprehension.  
I was in a train. Like that quick spool of a film  
I watch hasten a way the simple green which can heal  
All sadness.

(Spender, 1965, p. 16)

The spatial practices are material and banal interactions with space and how spaces are produced and experienced physically in daily life. The train conjures up images of modernity, which perpetrate their own power on those natural landscapes as the reality of rapid industrialization impacting spatial reality. The countryside, once glorified for being a site of stability and healing that becomes a fleeting, momentary spectacle. In a way, the poet's train journey destroys the symbol of a formerly known rural space in the face of sweeping urbanization and its disruption of traditional ways of life. This aspect relates to the dominant ideologies and planning behind spatial organization-how urbanization and an industrial system are rationalized and ordered by the powers that be. In the poem, the ushering away of the countryside mentions how spatiality is altered through technological devices, the train and the film reel imagery. The 'town's roar' speaks of the smothering auditory environment of industry that is taking over the soothing quietude of the pastoral. The train, being an instrument of modernization, illustrates how urban planners and industrialists envisage space solely in terms of economic efficiency and not in terms of lived human experience.

Furthermore, the poem implies two main points. The first is the countryside as a part of memory and the second is the poet's move towards the urban real world. Even though this world is contradictory and sprawling, the countryside has remained - for the most part - preserving its lofty traditions. It is a source of comfort, tranquillity and stillness, and a breathing space for people in moments of distress, while the city remains an arena of intense conflict and chaos, in which one feels a kind of isolation, and the singularity between crowds and instability, he is silent in his depths, oppressed in himself, he may carry misery with him as a shadow inherent to him. The new city today destroys the life of the village, turning it into a city against its will (Jrew, 2014).

As for the circumstances al-Sayyab lived in the countryside, they were constantly changing, and all of these circumstances contributed to the formation of his personality, so they represent the repertoire of memories with which he delved into his inner world. Thus, they appeared in his behavior and wholeheartedly descended from his emotions, so Jekur and the patches of houses, rivers, brooks and palms were the pillars of his imagination (Al-Mawish, 2006). Perhaps, Jekur was in the same way essentially stemming from the city. It was deeply rooted in an optimistic vision of the future, not limited to a specific period in his emotional or intellectual maturity. However, he was getting more alienated from the bitter reality of the city as he got older. So, with the increase of his alienation, Jekur bursts in solace, ruralization, nature and splendid village paradises, which always occupy his mind instead of the agony and sorrow that plague him in the city (Abu Ghali, 1978). In "Afya'a Jekur" (Jekur Shadows), al-Sayyab

recalls his lovely memory of his youth in Jekur in all its beauty, spontaneity and fascinating nature and, at the same time, reflects in inner feeling which is full of misery as living in the city:

Jekur, Jekur, a fete of glow,

O brook of butterflies we chase

At night, in the world of dreams and the moon

They spread wings dewier than the rain

In early summer.

.....

Where we came from to thee? From which destiny?

From which wrongfulness?

And what times in the night did we roam?

Until we came to thee, approaching from nowhere?

Or from a life forgotten?

(Al-Sayyab, Diwan, 2016, p. 261, translation mine)

جيكور، جيكور، يا حفلاً من النور،

يا جدولاً من فراشاتٍ تُطاردها

في الليل، في عالم الأحلام والقمر

ينشرن أجنحة أندى من المطر

في أول الصيف.

.....

من أين جئتُك؟ من أيّ المقادير؟

من أيما ظلم؟

وأيّ أزمنةٍ في الليل سرناها

حتى أتيناك أقبلا من العدم؟

أم من حياة نسيناها؟

Jekur, the poet's village, is a mere dream and its resurrection is unattainable for the poet. He is attached to this dream although he realizes that it cannot be achieved. Hereafter, the resurrection of Jekur represents the rebirth and liberation of the nation. When Jekur is oppressed, it represents death and destruction, and when it is green it is a symbol of life (Neimneh and Zainab, 2015). Jekur for the bereaved poet is an archetypal image of innocence, simplicity, and happiness. It is also a mode of spiritual being for the speaker. Thus, Jekur becomes a symbol of innocence, purity, and virtue. The strong feeling of being under sorrow and distress while living the appetites of life in the dystopian city is like cords that coil around the poet's neck stifling his very being (Neimneh and Zainab, 2015). The lived space is created by al-Sayyab's inspiration as a poet and his mental faculty which depicts the conflict of both the rural and the urban in one poetic arena. He reconceptualizes his memory in Jekur as opposed to his bitter experience when he moved to Baghdad. Although it represented a drastic watershed in his life, the romantic sense of the countryside remained dominant in his poems. Lefebvre's theory maintains the social and lived place therefore, giving a firm truth that it is not solely a physical exposure but in addition where life and interactions, perceptions and experiences are produced and influenced. The mention of al-Sayyab's inspiration as a poet and the ability of his mental faculties to represent the conflict between rural and urban spaces convinces the reader that Lefebvre's theory intends to discuss the idea of lived space. Lived space is the space where everyday life is going on and where people are living their daily routines, and therefore relationships are formed in social space. Not only does al-Sayyab employ creative rhetoric and the power of description in his poetry for this purpose, but also the created lived space bears in itself the rural and urban elements that symbolize its mental and physical experiences. Al-Sayyab transforming his memories of Jafur, a rural place and in contrast to the dismal revolution experience in Baghdad gives you an analytical insight of space in the theory of dialectics of Lefebvre. Lefebvre is

convinced that space is not static; it is continuously produced or remodelled inside out by social practices and representations. However, by juxtaposing the peaceful landscapes of Jekur, which he romanticizes, and the biting truth of urban Baghdad, al-Sayyab initiates a redefinition of memory that brands his poetic composition and his self-expression. The way reverse transformation phenomenon in the works of al-Sayyab by moving to the city has been affected is the persistent romantic view of the countryside and vivid impressions of the homeland that can hardly fade. This principle of space as a socially constructed and experienced factor emphasizes the point that it is the personal recollections, emotions, culture and other related representations of things that helps him to shape his perception of space and place. It is particularly evident that the rural countryside is the most characterizing element in his poetry as a form of symbolic return to the country life as he lives it in an urban surrounding which seems to be complicated.

"Madinatu al-Sindibad" (The City of Sindbad), opens with destructive rainfall. Although the poet has prayed for rain, he is astonished by its huge consequences when it falls. In part IV, Tammuz is persecuted by the wolves; and instead of Christ, Cain is born to extract life from the womb of the earth. A similar contrastive scene is pictured in Cerberus in Babylon, when Ishtar comes, picking up the flesh of Tammuz, Cerberus runs after her, bites her legs and hands and tears her dress, mixing the new blood with barking. This blood will enlighten the new life. In this poem, al-Sayyab reflects his disappointment with the consequences of the Iraqi July Revolution which are interpreted using myth. The idea of fertility referred to by the myth of Tammuz is contrasted with the idea of barrenness embodied in Cerberus and the wolves (Ibrahim, 1976). Spatial form is the perceptual basis of our notion of time, that we literally cannot tell time without the mediation of space (Mitchell, 1980). In this poem, what establishes the space is a myth which associates specific events that the city witnessed.

Spatial practice consists of materials, functions, and everyday uses of space-an-other experiences of sorts of living in their environment. In the poem, the rain starts like the awaited blessing carrying fertility and renewal. But too much of it would destroy the forecasted harmony between nature and civilization. This new balance, lived by the flooding, mirrors the spatial reality back in Iraq with the July Revolution which was awaited to be the birth of the nation; instead, it became a scene of chaos. The werewolves' mundane persecutions of Tammuz allude to the betrayal of the revolutionary ideals, an evil which, along with the image of Cain's birth, interrupts life in its expected renewal. This transformation exhibits rupturing expectations from reality, an essential reading of Lefebvre's conception of spatial practice, where ideal discourses don't match the lived environment.

Representations of space, constituted by dominant ideologies, state machinery and intellectual discourses, are in turn spaces made by those representations. Mythic territory acts as a conceived order of space organizing the urban landscape within a cosmic battlefield of fertility and barrenness, fruitful and decaying. The space of the city is formed not just from concrete reality, but rather by layering the real with historical and mythical connotations. In this sense, the first two symbols of the Tammuz-Ishtar cycle are fertility and renewal, while the latter two are Cerberus and the wolves, united under the themes of oppression, destruction and existential despair. This ideological structuring of space exemplifies Lefebvre's notion of mapping out modes of representation, whereby dominant power structures impose meaning upon space, dictating its understanding and utilization.

Hence, as the modern poets speculate the world of the city, they were horrified by what they saw of loss and humiliation, what deepened the feeling of alienation and depression. This idea remained dominant in the Iraqi poetry of the 1960s because the city drew them psychologically in an inseparable manner. So there was a kind of spiritual loneliness between them and the city, what al-Sayyab embodies in many of his city poems like "City of Sinbad" (Al-Khalidi, 2015). Hence, "al-Sayyab's poetry is a unique expression of contemporary attitudes toward the urban landscape Arab city and its inhabitants. Functioning as a central poetic image in al-Sayyab's anthologies, the city is negatively used as a symbol of political corruption, persecution, stagnation and spiritual death. His antagonistic approach to the city does not change considerably over time due to the continuity of the state of corruption and stagnation it stands for. Therefore, the unfavorable image of the city which frequently occurs in al-Sayyab's poetry is not only reflection of the poet's romantic tendencies toward the country but also a representation of his hostile attitude toward what the city symbolizes in the Arab world- political hegemony and tyranny (Gohar, 2007). With this unrelenting hostility toward the city, a deeper existential crisis is being formulated whereby the city is turned into a site of alienation rather than belonging. Al-Sayyab's vision of the city is thus not only a melancholy for something pastoral lost, but a set of powerful arguments against the very structures that stifle individuality and freedom. His poetry expands the city as an area of existential life, where the collision between memory and modernity, tradition and tyranny is a basis for the treatment of urban life as of exile not of homecoming. His stanzas, therefore, become a testimony to the tinted psychological and political alienation that has continuously characterized the relationship of the Arab intellectual with the modern city.

In "Al-Suk al-Kadeem" (The Old Marketplace), al-Sayyab depicts the market as dominated by emptiness at night, except for the murmurs of passers-by. It reflects the isolation among people despite their mutual relation which is based on materialistic treatment devoid of any spiritual and humanistic values:

Night and the old marketplace

The voices were dimmed by, except for the murmurs of passers-by

And the footsteps.. of the stranger

And what wind sent a sad melody

In that awful night

The night, the old market, the mutterings of passers-by

And the light was squeezed by the sad lamps in the pallor

Like fog on the road

From every antique shop.

الليل، والسوق القديم

خفتت به الأصوات، إلا غمغمات العابرين

وخطى .. الغريب

وما تبتَّ الريح من نغم حزين

في ذلك الليل البهيم

الليل، والسوق القديم، وغمغمات العابرين

والنور تعصره المصابيح الحزاني في شحوب

مثل الضباب على الطريق

من كل حانوت عتيق

(Al-Sayyab, Diwan, 2016, p. 285, translation mine)

The poet portrays his inner desolate thought which is revealed in a carefully selected place, the marketplace. It reflects the poet's rejection of the urban, and the crowded marketplace which symbolizes urbanity with all its roaring and crowds. Here, the poet harmonizes times and space to situate the market in the reader's mind as "space is the body of time, the form or image that gives us an intuition of something that is not directly perceivable but which permeates all that we apprehend. Time is the soul of space, the invisible entity which animates the field of our experience" (Mitchess 545) The marketplace should be the site of mercantile activity; on lonely nights. It is empty and melancholic. The sounds of 'murmurs of passers-by' and 'footsteps of the stranger' describe an urban experience shrouded in fragmentation and alienation. No longer defined by cordiality and conviviality, the market becomes a means to a transactional end of any meaningful social life. This alienation is consistent with Lefebvre's standpoint: Urban spatial practices in the modern capitalistic era led to alienation and depersonalization .

This aspect of the triad speaks to planned, designed, and conceptualized space formulated by the concerted efforts of authorities, architects, and urban planners. The marketplace is deemed to be the chief urban structure and a focal point of economic and social activity. However, al-Sayyab subverts that expectation by representing it as a soliloquy-like, dead organism; half-lit, emptied by the sorrowing velocity of the wind, seemingly enveloped in fog-a spectre against any creativity. It reflects the idea that modern planning in cities reflects an economic rationale but leads to the cities being unable to forge human connections. It describes the poet's defiance against the imposed order of the marketplace, which has woefully failed to satisfy its purpose of social interaction . The marketplace marks the intersection between the material and existential worlds in al-Sayyab's poem. It is not just an urban site. It is a monument to loneliness, loss, and the spiritual emptiness of the modern world. The poet's suffering and resistance to this reality are what exists in his memory.

To sum up, images of the countryside and the city are both spatially constructed in Spender's and al-Sayyab's poems by three spatial elements: the spatial practice which embodies the everyday routine; the representation of space which abstract knowledge which is generated by institutional apparatuses of power. They are mostly represented by symbols in their poems. The third element is the representational space which is associated with social and bodily functions of lived experience. It also forms the social imagination of the inhabitants whose thoughts and perceptions shape the lived space of the city. As for Spender, the image of the rural life comes from his memory as being based upon the spatial practice and the lived experience through which he accentuates the triumph of the city over the countryside or, namely, the domination of materialism over all the spiritual values. In al-Sayyab's poetry, both the rural and the urban are rendered in terms of conflict that comes from his personal experience when he moved to Baghdad. He employs representational spaces to depict the modern city as dystopian. Both of them poeticize the rural and the urban as socio-spatial phenomena rather than mere historical and social documentation of given past experiences.

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