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Research article

Urban Space, Memory, and Human Consciousness in Modern and Postmodern Poetry: A Humanistic Spatial Reading

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ABSTRACT

The article investigates the urban landscape as a geographical context and a symbolic framework for identity and moral perception. It applies the theories of Henri Lefebvre (1901 – 1991), Paul Michel Foucault (1926 – 1984), and Michel Jean Emmanuel de Certeau (1925 – 1986) to analyze the poems of Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888- 1965), Wystan Hugh Auden (1907 – 1973), Carol Ann Duffy (1955), Seamus Justin Heaney (1939 – 2013), and Mark Apter Strand (1934 – 2014). Whereas Eliot focuses on spiritual disunity in his 'Unreal City', and Auden deals with personal relations within the framework of mechanized time, postmodern poets present the city as alive. The article contends that modernist pessimism and postmodern multiplicity are equally concerned with the issues of belonging and human vulnerability to urban instability. It argues that even amid fragmentation, urban poetry sustains a moral humanism and that close reading is a way to expose the ethical and social consequences of urban living, thereby improving our knowledge of communal identity in ephemeral settings.

الفضاء الحضري والذاكرة والوعي الإنساني في الشعر الحديث وما بعد الحداثة: قراءة مكانية ذات منظور انساني

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المُستخلص

نوقشت الشعرية الحضرية غالبًا من زاوية التفتّت والاغتراب، غير أنّ التقاطع بين النظرية المكانية والنزعة الإنسانية لم يُعالج على نحوٍ كافٍ. تبحث هذه الدراسة في المشهد الحضري بوصفه سياقًا جغرافيًا وإطارًا رمزيًا لتشكّل الهوية والإدراك الأخلاقي. كما تعتمد على نظريات لوفيفر وفوكو ودي سيرتو لتحليل قصائد إليوت وأودن ودوفي وهيني وستراند، في حين يركّز إليوت على الاضطراب الروحي في "المدينة غير الواقعية"، ويتناول أودن العلاقات الشخصية ضمن إطار الزمن الممكن، فإن شعراء ما بعد الحداثة يصوّرون المدينة بوصفها كيانًا حيًا. ويرى المقال أن تشاؤم الحداثة وتعدّدية ما بعد الحداثة يتشاركان الاهتمام بقضايا الانتماء والهشاشة الإنسانية في مواجهة عدم الاستقرار الحضري. كما يذهب إلى أن الشعر الحضري، حتى في ظل التفتّت، يظل محافظًا على نزعة إنسانية أخلاقية، وأن القراءة المتعمقة تُعد وسيلةً لكشف العواقب الأخلاقية والاجتماعية للحياة الحضرية، بما يعزز فهمنا للهوية الجماعية في البيئات العابرة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الشعر الحضري، الإنسانية، النظرية المكانية، الشعر الحديث، الشعر المعاصر

1.Introduction

The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have witnessed the growth of industry, urbanization, and technological acceleration, which has transformed not only the physical topographies but also the imaginative limits of modern poetry (Al-Ani & Al-Zubbaidi, 2024, p. 242). With the rural hinterlands giving way to the burgeoning metropolises, the classic terrain of agrarian pastoralism was displaced in poetic expression by concrete and mechanized topographies. Streets, elevated railroad tracks, underground transportation tunnels, commercial cafes, and tiny household apartments were the main settings of daily life (Shernazarova, 2026, p. 29). Importantly, these spatial forms were not mere receptacles for creativity rather, agents involved in the transformation of human perception, psychological interiority, and moral selfhood. The shift to modern urban life made people come into contact with new forms of spatial compression, social anonymity and institutional regulation, leading to a strong existential conflict between individual agency and the collective dynamics of the city.

Literary criticism of the early twentieth century treated these geographical alterations primarily as issues of industrial alienation and modernist despair. Urban images of early modernism are often viewed by scholars as visual markers of spiritual failure, with the city often imagined as a natural maze of rot. By contrast, later spatial critique, based on post-modernism and post-structuralism, was concerned with urban plurality, fluid identities, and a joyous destabilization of borders. These theoretical ideas have been productive for cultural geography, yet contemporary work often creates a strict dichotomy between modernist spatial paralysis and postmodern joyful fragmentation. In so doing, dominant critiques often remove formal textual mechanics—syntax, lineation, rhythm, and aural texture—from spatial and sociological theory (Tally, 2013, p. 4). More importantly, modern literary discourse, by favoring anti-

foundationalist spatial theories or solely political interpretations, has frequently under-theorized the ongoing ethical and humane qualities of urban poetry.

This article addresses these critical limitations by advancing a humanistic spatial reading of modern and contemporary urban poetry. Examining selected works by T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, Carol Ann Duffy, Seamus Heaney, and Mark Strand suggests that spatial fragmentation is not an absolute erasure of human significance. Rather, it contends that poetic language is a location of active ethical negotiation where memory, empathy, vulnerability, and moral presence survive in the face of environmental instability (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 48). Using Henri Lefebvre's spatial triad, Michel Foucault's heterotopic counter-sites, and Michel de Certeau's tactical pedestrian narration, the article demonstrates how poets in different historical moments manipulate poetic form to reclaim abstract cityscapes as lived, affective, and ethically meaningful human environments.

2.Research Problem

Much scholarship has been devoted to urban poetry, notably in relation to modernism and postmodernism, spatial theory and cultural geography, among others, including its fragmentation, alienation and identity. However, criticism tends to disjoin the formal analysis of a poem from geographical and sociological theory, and explore neither the links between poetic form, spatial experience, and ethical selfhood nor the formal and geographical aspects of a poem in relation to ethical selfhood. The separation between modernist and postmodernist stances inhibits the ability to value continuities in the manner in which poets work with memory and human experience. Furthermore, the theories of Lefebvre, Foucault, and de Certeau emphasize abstraction rather than specific text analysis, ignoring the construction of urban consciousness by poetic language. Moreover, recent scholarship has ignored the ethical implications of urban poetry, focusing instead on poststructuralism and identity politics, and avoiding meaningful conversations about empathy and moral responsibility.

Accordingly, the present research addresses the following questions:

1. How do modern and postmodern poets transform urban space into a symbolic structure where identity and memory are negotiated?
2. How do poetic form, grammar, imagery, and rhythm work toward the formation of urban consciousness?
3. How can a Humanist perspective disclose ethical continuities between diverse traditions of poetry?
4. How can the chosen poems sustain modes of human presence and emotional significance within fractured or unsteady urban settings?

3.Methodology

The article is qualitative interpretative research based mainly on textual analysis. The poetic voice is probed, with special reference to syntax, lineation, imagery, metaphorical framework, rhythm, spatial symbolism, and transitions. Instead of using poetry as an example of theoretical ideas, this method examines how language and formal elements construct geographical and ethical meanings.

It is a selection of poetry from Eliot, Auden, Duffy, Heaney, and Strand. The poets have been selected based on their works, which together trace important developments in urban poetic consciousness in

modern and contemporary literature. The poems chosen all address questions of spatial movement, memory, displacement, or urban identity directly and lend themselves to a comparative analysis of the influence of poetic form on ideas of modernity.

This comparative strategy does not seek to establish a clear-cut division between modernism and postmodernism. It considers continuities and discontinuities in the representation of urban identity. All the chosen poems deal with vulnerability, dignity, memory, and emotional resilience; therefore, humanism is the prevailing moral perspective.

Spatial theory is the fundamental tool of interpretation. The theory of socially constituted space by Lefebvre, the concept of heterotopia by Foucault, and the interpretation of the spatial tale through movement by de Certeau create a similar theoretical platform to explain how poetry compositions modify the metropolis as a lived and symbolic site.

4.Theoretical Framework

4.1 Lefebvre and the Production of Urban Space

Henri Lefebvre's concept of space is the principal way of elucidating the symbolic significance of the city in modern and contemporary poetry. According to Lefebvre, in The Production of Space, space is an active entity that is continuously produced and reproduced through ideology, work, recollection and social interactions (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 26). Urban spaces are thus not just physical, but are power and culture.

This theory is particularly relevant to the analysis of poetry as generally city poetry no longer gives an objective picture of the city today. Poetic language recreates urban environments by way of a fragmented perception, an emotional disorientation, the detail of the senses and the symbolic movement. Streets, crowds, railway stations, bridges, and flat rooms are made psychologically charged, and leave individuals to be confronted with the paradox between individuality and social control.

A very interesting way of looking at poetic urban consciousness is provided by Lefebvre's differentiation between perceived space, conceived space and lived space. Perceived space is the physical structure of a life lived every day, conceived space is the ideological and institutional dimension, and lived space is the affective and imaginary dimension (Lefebvre, p. 39). The poems chosen are in constant movement through these aspects. In Eliot’s work, London is at once a real city, a symbolic ruin, and a psychic landscape.

The urban dynamics in the poems also mirror Lefebvre’s concern with spatial activity. Identity is formed by modern urban structures as illustrated by human relations with streets, crowds, and public spaces. This study looks at poems that depict the urban landscape as an active agent in emotional and ethical experiences rather than as a static backdrop.

Recent work has suggested that Lefebvre is increasingly important for literary urban studies. Robert Tally Jr. argues that authors “creatively build social experiences through the process of 'spatial mapping ‘” (Tally, 2013, p.4). This study seeks to reveal the complex patterns of spatial dynamics inscribed in narrative structures by means of close readings of selected texts. It will show that a closer reading of

language and form not only deepens our understanding of urban spaces but also lays bare the social tensions underlying their development.

4.2 Foucault and Heterotopic Urban Consciousness

Lefebvre emphasizes the social production of space, and Michel Foucault the instability and symbolic complexity of spatial formations. In *"Of Other Space",* Foucault presents the idea of heterotopia, spaces that are simultaneously within and outside of the normal social structures (Foucault, 1986, p.24). Heterotopias reflect social reality and simultaneously unsettle or reshape it.

In the poetry of the contemporary city, the city is often a heterotopic space. The metropolitan spaces combine different experiences, memories, and identities in common physical spaces. Railway stations, cafés, underground passages, busy streets, and run-down neighborhoods become liminal spaces where temporal and psychological boundaries collapse. One particularly critical example is Eliot's *"Unreal City."* The phrase appears in "*The Waste Land"*, in one of the poem's most famous sections: *"Unreal City,",* "Under the brown fog of a winter dawn" (Eliot, 1922, ll. 60–61)

The syntax of the phrase is worthy of close analysis; part of what makes the poem abrupt and disorienting is that Eliot omits the definite article before *"Unreal City"*. The statement makes London into a metaphorical state, not a physical metropolis. The enjambment between *"Unreal City"* and "Under the brown fog" accentuates the instability and threatens to make the city appear translucent and opaque.

Fog is a familiar cliché in modernist literature to express ambiguity and fragmentation, but Eliot's *"brown fog"* also points to industrial pollution and moral fatigue. The word "brown" does not evoke the romantic vagueness of mist or of twilight. It talks about contamination and stagnation. Eliot transforms the metropolis into a psychologically oppressive environment through compressed imagery. The crowd scene that follows further develops heterotopic fragmentation: "A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many, I had not thought death had undone so many." (Eliot, 1922, ll. 62–63).

The verb 'flowed' dehumanizes the mob, turning pedestrians into mechanical beings. The presence of people dissolves into vague movement. So does Eliot's invocation of the Inferno of Dante, which also transmutes London into a hellish landscape peopled by spiritually bankrupt people. The time barriers are broken down so that medieval and modern images now exist in the same urban setting.

Foucault's heterotopia accounts for the symbolic complexity of such passages. Eliot's London is neither a realistic geography nor an abstract space. It is a contradictory space where memory, death, history, and industrial modernity meet at the same time.

More and more contemporary critics are recognizing the importance of heterotopic reading in literary urban studies. According to Bertrand Westphal, the literary space often contradicts the usual geography by overlapping symbolic structures (Westphal, 2011, p.156). This article draws on these arguments, however, to show how heterotopic instability is achieved through poetic syntax and lineation, rather than thematic abstraction alone.

4.3 de Certeau and Spatial Narration

The work of Michel de Certeau can also be used to interpret urban poetry, in another important way. According to de Certeau, in the city, travelling itself is a form of storytelling, as is The Practice of Everyday Life. Walking can be understood as creative practice in which people re-interpret institutional space and create meaning for themselves, or, according to de Certeau as the reinterpretation of institutional space, resulting in personal meaning (de Certeau, 1984, p.97).

This is very helpful for poetry—in a lot of poetry relating to cities, poems are arranged by movement. Speakers stroll along streets, peer over crowds, overbridges or navigates through confusing circumstances. Not only descriptive but the process of psychological interpretation and existential negotiation which constitutes it.

Auden's *"As I Walked Out One Evening"* exemplifies a form of spatial narrative. The word suggests mobility and the passage of time. The opening line, "As I walked out one evening, walking down Bristol Street" (Auden, 1938, ll. 1–2) offers rhythmic continuity with the repetition of the participle "walking." The terminology restricts the lyrical flow, putting the observable experience above narrative progression. Unlike Eliot's fragmentary representations of crowds, Auden's speaker has a meditative relationship with the metropolitan setting. Nevertheless, the city is progressively taken over by mechanized time: "But all the clocks in the city, Begin to whirr and chime". (Auden, 1938, ll. 29–30)

The audio texture of "whirr and chime" is a blend of mechanical and musical sounds. Institutional time breaks off human feeling. However, Auden's rhythmic lyricism is not completely dehumanized. The poem is about city transience, but it maintains emotional intimacy.

De Certeau's theory shows how poetic movement turns the urban space into a subjective experience. In these poems, walking is a form of interpretation in which speakers negotiate memory, mortality, and identity.

5. Humanism and Ethical Selfhood

Although the main analytical model of this article is spatial theory, Humanism is relevant because the selected poems continue to evoke ethical questions of vulnerability, memory, emotional continuity, and human dignity. Moral conscience is still there in poetic expression. However, current scholarship on urban poetry is often concerned with fragmentation and instability.

This analysis does not mean that humanism is naïve optimism or absolute certainty. It's rather literature's long-term obsession with the lived human experience, with ethical relations. Martha Nussbaum maintains that reading literary works promotes moral imagination by enabling the reader to empathize with points of view other than their own (Nussbaum, 1995, p.48). Likewise, Edward Said defines Humanism as a critical practice, which is based on interpretation, historical consciousness, and ethical involvement (Said, 2004, p.15).

Such beliefs are especially pertinent to the poetry of cities, since the modern city tends to threaten originality with anonymity, bureaucracy, and technological progress. The chosen poems continually deny

the erasure of emotional being at the expense of a foregrounding of memory, sensitivity, and relational awareness.

Humanism is not a substitute for spatial theory; instead, it serves as an ethical supplement to it. The emotional and spiritual inhabiting of the urban setting of this poetry gives it meaning. Fragmentation does not annihilate ethical experience, but complicates the task of maintaining human presence in risky conditions.

6. Modernist Urban Fragmentation

6.1 Eliot

Among the various representations of urban experience in twentieth-century poetry, T. S. Eliot's depiction of London in "*The Waste Land"* has received considerable critical attention. A number of scholars have examined the poem as a reflection of fragmentation, cultural instability, and the complex transformations of modern urban life. Taking Eliot's vision of the city as one of gloom alone is to miss the formal complexity of the poem, as well as the ethical and psychological complexities of its make-up. An examination of the language, rhythm, imagery, and allusion uncovers a moral longing and spiritual exhaustion in Eliot's fractured metropolis. The urban sequence, with which Eliot opens *"The Burial of the Dead"*, is a good illustration of this instability:

"Unreal City"
"Under the brown fog of a winter dawn"
"A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many."
"I had not thought death had undone so many"
"Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhale"
"And each man fixed his eyes before his feet" (Eliot, 1922, ll. 60-65).

There's a grammatical defect in the word *"Unreal City"*. Instead of an article before the noun, Eliot uses an article before "sisterhood," for "sisterhood" is more abstract than "sister. Eliot does not use an article before the noun, giving a sense of suddenness and abstraction, as sisterhood is more abstract than sister. The grammar not only does not locate London but rather brings it to a consciousness or condition of London. The meaning is unstable – it is never fixed. The city is real, and yet it is a figment of the imagination, an apparition, a dream, an unreachable place. Lineation is used to emphasize this effect. The fast and abrupt ending of the music after *"Unreal City"* helpfully and stylishly signals a sentence's end. The following lines beneath the 'brown fog' start an underwater journey to the dark. The building becomes unstable and falls, reflecting the speaker's mental instability.

In Eliot's diction, the complexities are compounded if one looks at it more closely. The word "brown" contrasts sharply with its common use in literature with connotations of mystery and sadness. Tarnished - the romantic aspect of the industry has been stripped away. The air is dirty; London's air is breathing its last. Lawrence Rainey portrays Eliot's attitude as a city "as a civilization saturated by mechanical repetition and historical fatigue" (Rainey, 2005, p.112).

The next crowd scene develops the fragmentation thematically and syntactically: “A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many, I had not thought death had undone so many”. (Eliot, 1922, ll. 62-63)

The use of the verb “flowed” reduces the agency of the mob. Human beings are not discrete; rather, they are flexible in characteristics. The rhythm of the line helps to depersonalize, as well. Monosyllabic stresses crush mechanically: “crowd flowed.” The caesura before “so many” disrupts the rhythm and highlights anonymity.

Eliot’s allusion to Dante’s Inferno adds to the moral weight of the piece. The people of the city are ghosts passing through hell; that is, spiritual stagnation, and not only social alienation. However, the reference also maintains cultural memory at the same time. Today, mediaeval religion and industrial London inhabit the same poetic realm. The paradox of fragmentation is that the cultural continuum remains in fragmented historical echoes.

The poem demonstrates an increasing instability in space. Michel Foucault identifies streets, bridges, underground passageways, and packed interiors as the components of what he calls heterotopic landscapes, in which diverse temporalities are brought together (Foucault, 1986, p. 24). London is all these things: classical myth, wartime trauma, commercial modernism, and religious decay. The city can never be reduced to a symbolic reading, because it is always in motion, spanning historical layers.

Eliot’s treatment of speech fragments further sustains urban psychological separation. In “*A Game of Chess”*, the dialogue is broken and emotionally volatile:

“What are you thinking of? What thinking? What? I never know what you are thinking. Think”. (Eliot, 1922, ll. 113-114)

The repetition of interrogatives produces a tension of syntax and a lack of communication. The language itself is decaying. In close interaction, emotional withdrawal is exhibited by short pauses and cut-off questioning. Industrial modernity affects the urban space and the individual's consciousness. To interpret “*The Waste Land”* as merely a nihilistic breakdown gives the moral richness of the poem short-change. Throughout Eliot's works, he is frequently dealing with theological and mythological themes which suggest a need for union. The final movement, for example, is on the way to potentiality as ritual and spirituality (words hint at optimism in the face of despair, the promise of renewal and regeneration). The conflict between the fragmentation and the yearning for unity is not only Eliot's own but has an underlying universal meaning: it's an expression of the human condition in a world that has been broken. “Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.” (Eliot, 1922, l. 433)

The moral language writes the shattered Sanskrit commandments (imperatives) – give, feel, reign – in the shattered metropolis. Their unexpected appearance is a disorienting presence for Western modernity and its spiritual signification from another cultural history. Concise, highly expressive syntax. The disintegration is then followed by a consideration of the possibilities of rebirth with a new order.

Fragmentation and moral continuity are viewed more and more in a different light in modern studies. In his interpretation of Eliot's poetics of the city, Jahan Ramazani argues that it is not simply a pessimistic cultural stance but a way of safeguarding “an attempt to protect forms of historical and ethical memory in the face of modern dislocation,” in the midst of dislocations of the modern world (Ramazani, 2009,

p.204). The readings emphasize the relevance today of "*The Waste Land"* to literary studies in an urban context and its fragmented forms as a representation of the instability of the present, they also retain their emotional force. His poems convey a sense of fragmentation, which demonstrates the fragmented nature of modern life; the feeling of fragmentation that permeates the experience of ageing, loss, and spiritual yearning, which are felt in the wider social context. (Yousif, 2025).

6.2 Auden

W. H. Auden's concern with the precarious state of the city is similar to Eliot's, but is lyrically expressed – and not at all in the same way. The contrast of lyrical movement and philosophical thought occurs throughout Auden's work, often in place of a radical division. His urban poetry explores temporality, intimacy and mortality in a way which is both rhythmically controlled and engaged with the emotion of uncertainty. "*As I Walked Out One Evening"* begins deceptively simple:

"As I walked out one evening,"
"Walking down Bristol Street" (Auden, 1938, ll. 1–2)
"The crowds upon the pavement" (l. 23)
"And down by the brimming river" (l. 27)
"But all the clocks in the city"
"Began to whirr and chime" (ll. 29–30)
"Time will say nothing, but I told you so,"
"Time only knows the price we have to pay" (ll. 36–37)

The repetition of "walked" and "walking" delays the beginning flow of the poem. Moving in space is a meditative thing, not a chaotic one. Unlike Eliot's mechanically flowing crowds, Auden's speaker occupies urban space reflectively. The city initially appears navigable through individual consciousness. Yet instability gradually emerges through the intrusion of institutional time: "But all the clocks in the city, Began to whirr and chime." (Auden, 1938, ll. 29–30)

However, the conjunction "But" suddenly breaks the spell of romantic lyricism. The mechanical time is part of the emotional experience. Here, Auden's use of auditory imagery is especially important. "whirr" is the sound of industrial machinery; "chime" is the sound of ritual and harmony. The human experience lies between mechanical repetition and delicate lyrical continuity. Syntax also contributes to the thematic tension. It was not merely that the clocks chimed; they "began" to chime, as if they had been interrupted in the middle of something. The poem is very time-specific. Love does not meet death abstractly, but in the shape of the noise of the city.

Auden's picture of the city differs from Eliot's in another crucial respect: everyday human connection has emotional significance despite its impermanence. Recall the well-known lines: "Time will say nothing, but I told you so, Time only knows the price we have to pay" (Auden, 1938, ll. 36–37).

Auden personifies time as a powerful and imposing force that governs human experience and shapes the individual's relationship with the changing urban world. However, the conversational phrase - 'I told you so'–is a hilarious familiarity, not apocalyptic dread. Death is, maybe, inevitable. Nevertheless,

sentiments matter because they are fragile. A recent critique has discovered a moral problem with metropolitan modernism in Auden's work.

As Edward Mendelson argues, Auden's poetry is always reflective of "how private feeling survives within immense impersonal systems" (Mendelson 1981, p.178). Survival is mostly dependent on the very structure of the poem. Auden's rhythmic patterns are emotionally coherent even when describing turbulence.

The city of Auden's metropolitan setting, unlike the densely populated infernal London of Eliot, remains open for intimacy, sarcasm, and contemplative tenderness. Nevertheless, one worries about lyrical control. There is little time for human interaction. Urban living is impersonal and historically ambiguous.

7. Postmodern Urban Multiplicity

7.1 Duffy

The urban consciousness in the poetry of Carol Ann Duffy does not manifest itself in the catastrophic fragmentation of early modernism but rather as a movable, layered, and spatially active identity. Yet, instability is still the overriding factor. Duffy's poetic landscapes often mix body, geography, memory, and language, turning urban space into an intimate yet fragile framing of selfhood. In Carol Ann Duffy's poetry, urban consciousness is not articulated through the catastrophic fragmentation of early modernism; instead, identity is conceived as dynamic, multi-faceted, and spatially performative. Nevertheless, instability remains the most significant concern. Duffy's lyrical landscapes tend to blur the boundaries between body, geography, memory, and language, rendering the city a fragile, intimate structure of identity. *"The Map-Woman"* is one of the best examples of this spatial embodiment. The poem describes a woman whose body is slowly inscribed with cartographic signs:

"A woman's skin was a map of the town"
"where she'd grown from a child" (Duffy, 2002, ll. 1–2)
"the A-Z street-map grew, a precise second skin" (l. 8)
"a précis of where to end or go back or begin" (l. 10)
"her veins like shadows below the lines of the map"
"the river an artery snaking north to her neck"(ll. 14–15)
"what was familiar / was only façade" (ll. 29–30)
"Deep in the bone"
"old streets tunnelled and burrowed, hunting for home" (ll. 129–130)

On the surface, its syntax seems simple, yet the language's grammar has significant symbolic importance. The reflexive verb phrase "tattooed itself" admits of no visible human intervention. The map is not an outside agent; rather, memory is inscribed on the body. Therefore, identity seems to be constructed from the accumulation of spatial experiences rather than from individual agency. Duffy's line breaks emphasize this sluggish lettering. Between "town" and "skin", the phrase "where she'd been born" acts as a mediating term between geography and physicality. Embodied space memory.

Duffy foregrounds corporeality and intimate experience, unlike Eliot's depersonalized urban crowds. Nevertheless, fragmentation remains present in a different form. In corporeal consciousness, multiple places are always overlapping, and the self is no longer coherently bounded. Streets, rivers, districts, and borders become part of the identity itself. The cartographic language is connected to ageing and temporality. The body is a story of increasing complexity, a story of historical development.

Critical analysis of Duffy often centers on gender and performativity, yet little attention has been paid to the role of spatial vision in the creation of ethical identity. As Sara Upstone says, modern spatial writing destabilizes borders, while also generating new forms of subjectivity (Upstone 2009, p.88). Duffy's poem shows that fragmentation does not destroy identity, but redefines it relationally through memory and movement.

The spatial logic of the poem is in keeping with the theory of lived space as developed by Henri Lefebvre. Cartography often represents institutional and abstract geography; however, Duffy reconfigures mapping as an emotional manifestation. The city is experienced from the inside, not viewed from the outside. The urban area functions not merely as a site but as a mental inscription.

Nevertheless, the poem does not reduce multiplicity to celebration. "Expansion in space creates vulnerability. The marked body is made legible, intelligible, and disjointed through entangled histories. The poem's imaginative fluidity is based on emotional volatility.

7.2 Heaney

Although associated with the pastoral and with collective memory, Seamus Heaney's later poetry is increasingly preoccupied with issues of spatial instability, historical complexity, and urban shift. Instead of Eliot's apocalyptic cityscape or Duffy's cartographic representation, Heaney's spatial poetics stresses sedimentation: traces of history are embedded in modern settings.

"The Tollund Man in Springtime" is particularly important as it is the point at which old ritual memory and present historical awareness meet. The poem returns to the preserved Iron Age body that had already appeared in Heaney's writings, while the later poem stresses temporal coexistence and ethical continuity more strongly. In these lines :

"Into your virtual city I'll have passed"
"Unregistered by scans, screens, hidden eyes" (Heaney, 2006, ll. 1–2)
"Coming and going, neither god nor ghost"
"Not at odds or at one, but simply lost" (ll. 4–5)
"out under seeding grass"
"And trickles of kesh water, sphagnum moss" (ll. 6–7)
"Panicked snipe offshooting into twilight"
"Then going awry, larks quietened in the sun" (ll. 12–13)
"The soul exceeds its circumstances.' Yes."
"History not to be granted the last word" (ll. 57–58)

Heaney's environments, unlike the mechanized sterility of Eliot's London, have an organic temporality. Nevertheless**,** the stability of this temporality remains uncertain.. The image of the 'dried bead' implies preservation on the cusp of fossilization. Memory lives on, but in a fragile way. Spatial layering is particularly important in Heaney's later poetry. Common symbolic realms include ancient rituals, contemporary life, and political violence. This coexistence is like Michel Foucault's idea of heterotopic overlap, where incompatible temporalities meet in singular spatial frameworks (Foucault 1986, p.25).

However, Heaney's poetry places a greater emphasis on ethical presence: a different thing from Foucault's more abstract theorization of space. Heaney recognizes that the power to remember history is linked to a responsibility to 'responsiveness to human suffering'. The landscapes in Heaney's poetry are "ethical sites where historical violence is re-imagined through acts of linguistic preservation", as Eugene O'Brien has stated (O'Brien, 2002, p.142). The ethical dimension is also explicit when reading the literary analysis with closed eyes. Heaney's rhythm does not fragment, occasionally through an auditory effect. The musical architecture of assonance and consonance is subtle yet builds a place to stand and to keep things together despite references to violence and death. This stylistic consistency is just one of the poem's broader moral issues: memory amidst historical forgetting.

Moreover, Heaney's landscapes are populated, not allegorical, and Heaney's songs are elegies, not epics, as his reference to the Bliadares, the animals once more, would suggest. Human labor, ritual, interment, and seasonal metamorphosis are evident throughout the poetry. Spatial experience is not anonymous; rather, it is collective. That is what makes Heaney so different from the depersonalized mob vision of early urban modernism.

7.3 Strand

Mark Strand's urban consciousness in his poetry appears quieter and more existentially abstract than either Eliot's or Heaney's. Nevertheless, beneath the apparent simplicity of Strand's style is a sustained meditation on absence, continuity, and the fragility of selfhood in modern spatial environments.

"The Continuous Life" repeatedly explores thresholds between presence and disappearance. The most significant lines of this poem state:

"What of the neighborhood homes awash"
"In a silver light" (Strand 1989 , ll. 1–2)
"you live between two great darks" (ll. 13)
"you live in a blur / Of hours and days, months and years" (ll. 15–16)
"you are slipping away with nothing completed, nothing"
"To prove you existed" (ll. 17–18)
"Small tremors of love through your brief, / Undeniable selves" (ll. 30–31)

At first, the phrase "continuous life" may seem reassuring. However, the conceptual vagueness of the phrase works against reassurance. Continuity is not an automatic index of stability or satisfaction. Instead, life goes on almost automatically outside the awareness of the individual.

The ambiguity here is mostly a matter of syntax. The denial Nothing could stop us stresses inevitability before the poem states what remains. The movement itself subordinates human agency. If Auden's walker is a contemplative one, Strand's speakers often seem driven by abstract temporal dynamics.

It is important, however, not to confuse emotional detachment in Strand's poetry with emotional emptiness. The poems exert a quiet existential pressure through understatement and syntactic restraint. The repetition of the word forms a conceptual circle. The gap is made by absence. However, the sentence is emotionally delicate.

While recent criticism has increasingly read Strand through the prism of postmodern indeterminacy, his poetry remains infused with fundamental Humanist concerns with mortality and emotional endurance. Strand's austere surfaces conceal "intense meditations on human finitude and relational fragility," as Charles Altieri comments (Altieri, 2006, p. 201).

Strand's environment often seems to be devoid of specific geographical characteristics. Thoroughfares, chambers, and vistas are abstracted, almost faceless. The abstraction does not reduce the emotional impact, but rather spreads the existential uncertainty. Urban modernism is sociological in the mode of the ambient rather than the overt.

A careful analysis shows how this result is achieved formally by Strand. Short declarative sentences create rhythmic suspension, while repetition creates circularity of contemplation. Strand's is a deliberate minimalism, in contrast to the complex allusiveness of Eliot and the voluptuous materiality of Heaney. Emotional intensity is generated by silence, pauses, and grammatical brevity. Strand's poetry is an example of the impossibility of understanding postmodern urban plurality simply as excess or fragmentation. Absence takes on spatial meaning. So, identity appears uncertain, not because of chaotic experiences but because of the collapse of certainty into uncertain continuity.

8. Comparative Discussion (Continuity and Discontinuity)

The critical literature on urban poetry of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries generally insists on a sharp opposition between the fragmentation of modernism and the diversity of postmodernism. Such labels, important historically, threaten to obscure the profound continuities between the writers examined here. A close reading reveals that the divides between Eliot, Auden, Duffy, Heaney, and Strand cannot be viewed as merely oppositional. We share a concern with the persistence of human awareness in unstable spatial environments, beyond the formal and philosophical distinctions.

The central aspect of the consistency is the connection between moral doubt and location in the metropole. The geographical setting of the poems is not an imaginative setting; rather**,** it provides the poem with a frame of reference that affects its mood and message. The street, crowd, bridge, map of the body, ritual area, and nameless rooms are all spaces that encounter memory, alienation, and fragility.

For Eliot, *"Unreal City"* serves as a jumping-off point for spiritual weariness: fragmentation, starkly and awful images. And it is also the poem's polemic's frailty of style that evokes an ethical craving. Where all cultural references are faulted, their syntax is fractured, and voices search for meaning,

communication, and spiritual direction. Auden's urban lyric manages his sensibility and his sense of past, present, and future in spite of the cacophony. The rhythm and speaking act as 'reflecting' consciousness while the unity between people is endangered by mechanical modernity. Consider the crowd sequence from "*The Waste Land" again*: "A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many." (Eliot, 1922, l. 62).

The crowd appears depersonalized and mechanically collective. The distinctiveness of man fades into motion. Auden, by comparison, seems to have more lyric continuity. His syntax can be conversational, rhythmically balanced even in the face of death: "But all the clocks in the city, Began to whirr and chime." (Auden, 1938, ll. 29–30).

The sonic interruption breaks the intimacy, but the poetry maintains a lyrical continuity. Yet the rhythmic arrangement nonetheless maintains a continuity of emotion formally. Postmodern poets take these approaches one step further. Duffy's images are intimate and material; however, their individuality is weakened by spatial portrayal. For Heaney, the historical memory can dwell alongside the living consciousness. His method, not violent fragmentation, is chronological stratification. For minimal abstraction, Strand chooses the least lyrical, with stillness creating existential ambiguity and not pure allusion.

The selected poetry depicts the evolution of the temporal consciousness. "Time is often a crisis in much of modern urban poetry. The broken chronology of Eliot is a symbol of cultural fragmentation; the clocks of Auden are symbols of mortality and transience. Later poets employ intricate or recursive patterns of time. Heaney's landscapes of old and new histories; Duffy's demarcated body accumulates memories through spatial representation; Strand keeps time in a state of contemplative continuity.

The article's comparative paradigm adds to present studies by demonstrating that spatial instability and Humanist concern are not mutually exclusive, yet, co-exist. Fragmentation is likely the most common criticism of modern urban poetry, and its most defining characteristic. But by careful textual examination, we find that there are certain patterns that fragment and which serve to preserve emotional consciousness.

It portrays the study's contribution towards knowledge in a broader context. Modernism and postmodernism are considered to be engaged in tenuous processes of ethical identity in precarious urban contexts, not revitalizing binary understandings of the two eras. Not methods that abstract humans away, but means by which poetry rethinks vulnerability, memory, and continuity under modernity's terms. Geographic diversity, formal experimentation, and symbolic fragmentation are not means of extirpating humans, but rather means of constructing that vulnerability, memory, and continuity under modernity's terms.

Urban poetry can be considered an integration of humanism and spatial theory, beyond social or philosophical abstraction. Lefebvre's socially constructed space, Foucault's heterotopia, and de Certeau's spatial narrative contribute to unveiling the structural and symbolic functioning of poetic situations. The humanists can explain their emotional and ethical values. Urban environments are relevant when they are populated by vulnerable people fighting to preserve memory, intimacy, and moral conscience.

This process of interpretation takes close reading. Very general theoretical arguments concerning fragmentation or spatiality are in danger of getting overgeneralized if not textually specific. Analysis of

syntax, lineation, repetition, rhythm, and imagery indicates the formation of urban consciousness through poetic form. Eliot's sudden enjambments, Auden's rhythmic intrusions, Duffy's corporeal inscriptions, Heaney's layered materiality, Strand's austere reiteration: these offer different spatial experiences in the verbal realm.

9. Conclusion

Urban poetry in contemporary and postmodern literature deals with the instability created by industrialization, historical brutality, and spatial relocation. This study reveals the urban poetic realm as a psychological and ethical construction in T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" that shows London as a heterotopia of fragments morally cohesive through ritual and communication. W. H. Auden's lyric translates the urban restlessness into an existential understanding. Later poets - Carol Ann Duffy, Seamus Heaney, Mark Strand - reuse fragmentation and plurality, looking at ethical issues of vulnerability and identity. The study shows the importance of joining Humanism with spatial literary criticism by emphasizing the importance of syntax and rhythm for the building up of spatial consciousness. It argues that urban poetry is not just a record of the problems of modernity; it is an attempt to approach the moralizations and affective experiences of modernity in broken down, yet partially reconstructable, fragments that end up in a search for the human in the sense of the "changing reality" of the city.

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