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PLACE, SPACE, AND THIRDSPACE IN SELECTED POEMS BY JAWDAT HAYDAR

Abstract

The spatial turn of the 20th century reshaped the examination of space in literary research, with works by De Certeau and Soja being some of the most prominent in that area. Numerous pieces of writing were revisited following the spatial turn, and Mahjar poetry was part of that reexamination. Indeed, Mahjar poetry is rife with spatial imagery, and Jawdat Haydar's poems, four of which are the subject of this paper's analysis, are no exception. This paper argues that the representations of Lebanon and Baalbeck in Haydar's poetry are self-conscious reconstructions created thanks to the speaker's emotions, thoughts, and descriptions. By adopting Michel de Certeau's theory on place and space and Edward Soja's First and ThirdSpace, this paper examines the role of space in four of Haydar's poems: "Lebanon" and "Baalbeck and the Ruins" from *Voices* and "Lebanon 1983" and "The Temple in Baalbeck" from *Echoes*. Indeed, in the poems of the first collection *Voices*, the speaker simply presents a static portrayal of the subject of description, whether it is Lebanon or Baalbeck. This depiction, however, becomes much more mobile in *Echoes*, where the speaker vitalizes the scenery and invites the reader to take part in these reconstructions. Thus, the shift from *Voices* to *Echoes* presents a transition from a static subject of description to a much more dynamic one, which clearly shows the speaker's active involvement in the production of the spatial imagery of his country and homeland.

Keywords

space studies, place, Thirdspace, Jawdat Haydar, Mahjar poetry, Lebanese Anglophone literature, Arab Anglophone literature

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the 19th century, time and history dominated the discourse of literary and cultural studies. The 20th century gave center stage to the modernist aesthetic and the individual psychology instead (Westphal, 2011), but it was not until after the Second World War that space reasserted itself in critical theory (Westphal, 2011), and in recent years, space has become a key term in literary and cultural studies. This comes as a result of "the spatial turn", an intellectual movement that has been announced and established by theoreticians such as Michel Foucault, Michel de Certeau, Edward Soja, and Bertrand Westphal. In their book, *The Spatial Turn* (2009), Barney Warf and Santa Arias argue that the developments in social theory shifted the attention from space as merely static to one that is not only dynamic and produced, but also where identity and power relations exist and may clash (Warf & Arias, 2009). Indeed, studying space is not only important because "everything occurs in space", but also because space shapes how events unfold. In other words, space is not to be seen as a simple and passive reflection of social and cultural trends but rather an active participant in them (Warf & Arias, 2009, p. 10).

In poetry, space and spatial imagery are condensed, and according to Tarlo, "landscape poetry takes a view or perspective on land, linguistically or philosophically shaping the specific or generic land with which it engages" (as cited in Alexander & Cooper, 2014, p. 3). This interplay between linguistic and spatial elements is heavily reflected in the writings of Jawdat Haydar, one of the Lebanese Mahjar poets. Much like Khalil Gebran and Mikhail Naimy, Haydar lived most of his life outside of Lebanon, and his poetry evokes similar personal experiences centered on nostalgia and longing to the Lebanese homeland (Layoun, 2011). In contrast to other Arab-American writers whose dual identity may have caused them cultural dilemmas, Haydar embraced both the Lebanese and American cultures. This can be clearly seen in his poetry, which features not only Lebanon as its central stage but also the United States. Indeed, according to Kozah (2016), Haydar is "well aware of this dual identity", and he "never struggled to resolve it but preferred to celebrate this harmonious hybridity through his poetry" (p. 5).

Moreover, in his book, Jawdat Haydar, a Voice from Baalbeck, John Munro draws a clear distinction between Haydar and the rest of the Mahjar poets. While it is true that, similarly to other Mahjar poets, Haydar believes that love is "the prime mover and positive regulator of the universe", this love is exclusively spiritual for Mikhael Naimy yet "more deeply rooted in the earth" for Haydar (Munro, 2016, p. 153). In "The Greenhouse of Creation", featured in his second poetry collection Echoes, Haydar demonstrates the importance of the homeland when he says, "I went out wandering in a forest near by/ Seeking amongst the grass of history/ The roots of mankind". Haydar, the poet, has his feet placed firmly on the ground, and yet, to the best of our knowledge, none of the studies on his poetic legacy tackle the role of space.

Using two poems from Haydar's first book Voices, "Lebanon" and "Baalbeck and the Ruins", and two from his second book Echoes, "Lebanon 1983" and "The Temple in Baalbeck", we were interested in answering the following questions: (1) How does the description of these two locales differ between the four poems? (2) What can those differences tell us about Haydar's changing relationship with his home country? and (3) How can this change be explained through De Certeau's theory of "Place and Space" and Soja's theory of "Thirdspace"? The aim of this paper is to show how Haydar's Lebanon and Baalbeck cannot be simply equated with their respective geographical entities; rather, they are a self-conscious reconstruction of war-torn and timeworn locations using emotions, memories, history, and myths.

2. METHODOLOGY

The spatial turn and postmodernity significantly reduced the gap between the world and the text to the point where the distinction between real space and transposed space has become blurred (Westphal, 2011). The postmodern city is a mixture of a physical reality and a state of mind: "The city takes on the meaning of pure text, to be created by each individual and then read" (Lehan, 1998, p. 287). This speaks to the relativity of the city as a spatial structure in relation to the postmodern individual, whether in real life or in virtual scenarios, and it highlights the importance of looking at space not only as a combination of physical elements but also as the product of social relationships.

Philosopher Michel De Certeau distinguishes between the terms "place" and "space", explaining that "place" is "an instantaneous configuration of positions", whereas "space" is created thanks to the "intersections of mobile elements" (De Certeau, 1984, p. 117). In other words, in "place", all elements coexist in order, and there is a sense of stability and immobility; in contrast, in

"space", these elements are set in motion, hence making space a "practiced place" (De Certeau, 1984, p. 117). In order to illustrate this distinction, De Certeau gives the example of people walking on the street. The street, initially a place that is simply "geometrically defined by urban planning", is turned into a space thanks to the movement of pedestrians on it. Each individual "practices" the street in their own way, thus turning it from a stable and immobile structure into one that is social and in motion (De Certeau, 1984, p. 117).

Edward Soja drew on De Certeau's concept of space and elaborated on it in his book Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory (1989), where he added that the meaning of space is the result of "social translations, transformations and experiences" (p. 80). In the introduction of his book Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places, Soja distinguishes between three different types of space: "Firstspace", which corresponds to the concrete material spatial forms and aligns with De Certeau's definition of "place", "Secondspace", which corresponds to "thoughtful representations of space" (Soja, 1996, p. 10) in mental or cognitive form, and finally, "Thirdspace" which encompasses both. Thirdspace merges the components of both First and Secondspace and is the product of an interplay between the material and mental elements that one witnesses. As Soja puts it:

Everything comes together in Thirdspace: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history (1989, p. 10).

Seeing the important role that Lebanon and the city of Baalbeck play in Haydar's poetry, this paper uses Michel de Certeau's theory of "Place and Space" and Edward Soja's theory of "Thirdspace" as framework to look at the spatial representations of Haydar's hometown and home country. The analysis will thus follow the speaker's descriptions, thoughts, and emotions as they explore Lebanon and Baalbeck in the poems, transforming them from mere static stages of events to interactive scenes set in motion by the speaker. To this end, four of Haydar's poems will be closely examined: "Lebanon" and "Baalbeck and the Ruins" in Voices and "Lebanon 1983" and "The Temple in Baalbeck" in Echoes. The analysis will juxtapose the same locales depicted in the selected poems and scrutinize, through a spatial lens, the sensory details, imagery, history, and mythology employed by the poet to better understand the function of Baalbeck's and Lebanon's reconstructions as spaces and thirdspaces.

3. HAYDAR'S LEBANON

A comparison between "Lebanon" from *Voices* and "Lebanon 1983" from *Echoes* shows how Haydar, on one hand, dynamizes the place turning it to space and on the other hand, transcends referential descriptions by mystifying the landscape, thus moving, in Soja's terms, from Firstspace to Thirdspace. In "Lebanon", the speaker finds themselves standing in front of a natural scene that they attempt to describe in detail, going from the mountains, to the shore, and to the sky, all while expressing their immense admiration of the scenery. The speaker invites the reader to join them and share their appreciation of the mesmerizing landscape (lines 1-2: "I would that you were with me hence, sharing/ This celestial view"). The speaker is painting a tableau of Lebanon, hence the abundance of visual imagery in the poem exemplified in terms and phrases such as "view" (line 2), "seen" (line 2), "unseen" (line 2), "staring" (line 3), "glaring" (line 4), "look" (line 9), "see what I see" (line 13), etc.

The view that the reader is invited to share is a static, stable, and immobile Lebanon. In this tableau, the mountains are the backdrop, fixed in the background: "The green mountains capped with snow behind" (line 6). The description of the sky reveals a stable and harmonious configuration of elements, as there are "stars above, stars below, moon in between" (line 14). In addition, as it is the case with paintings and photographs, the landscape that this poem captures is immortalized: The cedars are eternal ("The cedars are living eternally" in line 22), and the flag of Liberty is not susceptible to wilting ("The flag of Liberty is always unfurled"). Lebanon, as presented in *Voices*, is a place: The landscape is stable, static and constituted of elements that coexist in harmony.

Moreover, the referentiality of the poem is achieved by the use of indicators of spaces that allow the reader to point to a recognizable place; examples include "before" (line 2), "up" (line 3), "east" (line 5), "behind" (line 6), "miles apart" (line 10), "topping" (line 11), "above", "below", "in between" (line 14), etc. The description of the landscape focuses on concrete material spatial forms that can be mapped empirically such as the sea shore, the green mountain, the sky, and the cedars.

Even abstract concepts such as liberty and monarchy are concretized; liberty is represented by a flag that is “always unfurled” (line 23), and monarchy is represented by a throne (line 24). Haydar is satisfied and enchanted with the natural beauty of the physical forms of Lebanon that he never leaves the realm of the Firstspace in this poem; In lines 17 and 18, the speaker states that “[t]here's nothing more to enchant me/ Than this vision of growing ecstasy”. However, the speaker appears to be on the precipice of transcending the physical referential world and going into Thirdspace; This is signaled in lines 19 and 20 when the speaker admits: “I feel dissolved and carried fancy-free/ Where beauty and dreams meet in poesy.”

In parallel, in “Lebanon 1983”, the speaker is a messenger of peace sailing to America to convince Lady Liberty to halt the war that is tearing their beloved Lebanon apart. In this poem, the static visual imagery encountered in “Lebanon” from *Voices* is replaced by a dynamic imagery expressed in phrases such as “sailing away” (line 1), “sail” (line 4), “driven” (line 4), “surging wild” (line 8), “racing fore’er” (line 12), “in speed” (line 13), “coursing fast” (line 15), etc. Even the mountain, Sannin, which was confined to the background of “Lebanon” in *Voices*, is now seen “strolling down to our beloved sea-shore green” (line 18). By relying on kinesthetic imagery, the speaker not only reflects the turbulence and the tensions that Lebanon underwent during the war but also paints a dynamic picture of Lebanon. The landscape in this poem is found at the intersection of various mobile elements. It is no longer a place; it is a space. In this space, immortality is lost, and everything is susceptible to destruction, including the eternal cedars (“We left waste our beloved Cedarland” (line 65)) and Liberty, which is not merely a concrete inanimate flag but has a soul and could be killed (“Leading to halt those killing fancy-free/ The soul of Liberty until it dies” (line 51-52).

Moreover, Haydar combines the real, physical scenery with elements of his own imagination, hence creating Lebanon as a Thirdspace. Haydar constructs his own Lebanon out of the physical and geographical Firstspace combined with his cognitive and mental Secondspace. Thus, Sannin is no longer just “capped with snow”; it is wearing a white turban. It is not just a mountain; it is “land of love and might” (line 19) and the “bed of culture” (line 20). The result of this combination is a Thirdspace vision of Lebanon in which the speaker seems to recollect memories they never experienced, such as an ancient Victory against the Romans: “Once before Roman legions passed over/ The shelving reaches of our liberty; /We sharpened our spears and pushed them over, /Hastily to free our caged freedom free” (lines 77-80). This shift from Firstpace in “Lebanon” to Thirdspace in “Lebanon 1983” is accompanied by a transition in the emotive state of the speaker: As opposed to the first poem, where the speaker is a mere spectator of the scene, the second poem offers a deeper connection between the speaker and the space that surrounds them, and it is in this intersection that Space and Thirdspace are born.

4. HAYDAR’S BAALBECK

“Baalbeck and the Ruins” from Voices and “The Temple in Baalbeck” from Echoes follow the same pattern. In both poems, the speaker is presenting a picture of the temple of Baalbeck, highlighting its significance and connection to the past as well as the present moment. However, unlike in “Lebanon” from Voices, where the speaker seems to be on the verge of transcending Fistspace into Thirdspace, in “Baalbeck and the Ruins”, the speaker begins in a dynamic space and a half-imagined location (“Take yourself charioted to the city/ Of the gods” lines 1-2). Nevertheless, the speaker immediately shows restraint and returns to concrete referential static Baalbeck. In “Baalbeck and the Ruins”, the speaker presents the reader with the poetic equivalent of a postcard; it is static description of the Roman ruins that are found in the Lebanese city of Baalbeck. Verbs connoting stability are recurrent in this poem, such as “remain” (line 3), “stay” (line 5), “left” (line 7), and “have passed” (line 14).

Moreover, the only movements detected are that of the wind and the degradation of stones. In a beautiful kinesthetic imagery, the movement of the air through the columns of the temple of Jupiter is described as playing the harp (“With the fingers of the wind a harp played” line 16). The second kinesthetic image used is that of decay. The speaker describes the walls of Baalbeck as “shattered” and “falling down”. Baalbeck in this poem is portrayed as “sand on sand” (line 18). Despite the use of dynamic imagery, the poem maintains the harmonious and stable configuration of its elements; thus, Baalbeck, in De Certeau’s terms, is a place.

In addition, Baalbeck is described in concrete terms and a referential manner: It is a “temple built on the plain” (line 2), and while it is a “wonder, of the seven” (line 12,) it is still a “structure”

(line 4) that is "made" (line 12). The landscape in this poem is lifeless, hence the title "Baalbeck and the Ruins". The speaker takes a pessimistic tone and describes the city as a "relic" (line 17), an "heirloom of the Roman Empire" (line 7), a "thought of a heart dead long ago" (line 8). Baalbeck in this poem is devoid of any mysticism or enchantment; the gods which had occupied this land, with the passage of time, left it. The speaker even admits in line 9 that "[m]an has nothing more of magic to show". Therefore, in Edward Soja's terms, "Baalbeck and the Ruins" presents the geographical location of Baalbeck as a Firstplace.

However, a shift is seen when looking at the two poems in the second collection, as the elements forming the city of Baalbeck are no longer in accordance. The ancient stones of the temple are no longer passively accepting the aggressions of the atmosphere and age; they are actively resisting them. Conflict is detected in the relationship between the sky and the temple: The "thunder bolts" attempt to "crack the adamant stone" (line 5), and the stones are defying them (line 6). Moreover, age is trying to "resolve the walls into sand" (line 8) but is failing miserably and mourning its defeat ("[…] and the walls still stark stand/ Against the contending years passing thus moan/ Their failure […] (lines 6-8). The chaotic relationship between these different elements, these "various varieties that make the whole" (line 18) is proof that Baalbeck in "The Temple in Baalbeck" is a space. In fact, the speaker refers to it as "stage" (line 19) where "groups of actors" (line 19) interact, converse and dynamize the landscape.

Furthermore, the speaker in this poem puts in juxtaposition Baalbeck, the city of gods, and Baalbeck, the touristic location. In fact, the opening line of this poem puts the tourists face to face with the ancient deities that lived in the temple. By incorporating mythology, Baalbeck is no longer "ruins" and "relics"; it becomes the "ancient enigma" and the birthplace and homeland of Time ("where nature gave birth to Age residing stay"). Unlike the temple in Voices, which is lifeless and deserted, the temple of Baalbeck in Echoes is not abandoned and has many inhabitants. Here, Haydar calls upon time and ancient gods to people and revitalize the city. Haydar reminds the reader that Baal, Bacchus, and Zeus live in this city and that they can communicate with the tourists. The city of gods is thus reminding the tourists that it is both timeless and alive. The Baalbeck depicted in Voices draws heavily from the senses and denies the reader any mysticism or magic. However, Haydar's depiction of Baalbeck in Echoes transcends the sensory and merges it with the imagination of the poet and the mythology linked to the place to create a Thirdspace that captures in its dynamism and fancy the Baalbeck that Haydar loves and wants the world to see.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper tackled Haydar's poetic representations of Lebanon and his hometown Baalbeck in order to highlight the shift from place to space and from Firstspace to Thirdspace. Jawdat Haydar spent most of his life outside Lebanon; Professor John Munro describes Haydar's return to civil war Lebanon as entering "an inferno, a country where even his beloved Bekaa Valley had been touched" (2016, p. 166). According to another critic, Dr. Pamela Layoun, Haydar's poems reflect "his unwillingness to live" in the recently destroyed Lebanon (2011, p. 35). However, as Bertrand Westphal points out in his book *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*, literature is actively involved in the production of space. Haydar's dissatisfaction and chagrin about the state of his beloved country prompt him to look beyond the destruction and the carnage. When the war is rumbling, Haydar resigns from painting a static tableau of Lebanon, embraces the turbulence, and puts the landscape into motion. When the beauteous physical forms of Lebanon are being mutilated, Haydar rebuilds his home country with his words and myths. He takes a dismantled Lebanon and reconstructs it after the war; he takes a deserted ancient city and makes it "peopled" again.

As a result, paying attention to Haydar's relationship with space is very telling, as it not only signals the poet's emotional attachment to it but also his refusal to succumb to despair. From his first poetry collection to the second, Haydar goes from a faithful sensory representation to a landscape where all mobile elements intersect and where the real and the imagined meet. Following De Certeau's theory, Haydar moves from place to space and following Edward Soja's theory, Haydar transcends the Firstspace, merges it with his internalized Secondspace, and offers his reader Lebanon as a Thirdspace. If the first collection is seen as the object, then the second is undoubtedly its distorted mirror image. It is therefore no coincidence that when Haydar gave us *Voices*, it was not long before we heard their *Echoes*.

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