

The City in Man: Foregrounding Psychogeography in *The Blind Owl* and *City of Glass*

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ABSTRACT

New York City in Paul Auster's *City of Glass* and Ray in Sadeq Hedayat's *The Blind Owl* testify to the presence of a wasteland, setting in motion an unavoidable sense of nostalgia, confusion and fragmentation upon the protagonists. The present article argues that the pictures painted of the two metropolises with their specific cramped urban spaces function as culpable agents influencing Quinn as a New Yorker and Hedayat's narrator as a resident of Ray. The paper builds its argument upon Merlin Coverley's concept of psychogeography which supports transformation of the city as an integral part of the main characters' fates. Further, the article illustrates how in Hedayat and Auster's pieces the city reigns triumphant as the main characters fall victim to hallucination and isolation, or are left with desperate choices: in Hedayat's novella murder or acceptance of misery and in Auster's the sudden disappearance from the city and the plot horizons. To further support the argument advanced in this research, we take into account Tötösy de Zepetnek's method of comparative literature and culture and its idea of parallelization that emphasizes the existence of similar social evolutions represented through the literature of various nations and carried out through the use of comparable literary conventions and symbols to stress their concerns.

Keywords: *The Blind Owl*; *City of Glass*; psychogeography; nostalgia; urban space

“One man's city is the sum of all the routes he takes through it, a spoor as unique as a finger print” (Jonathan Raban, *Soft City*, 1998).

INTRODUCTION

Literary perception of a landscape works as an alternative means to present the experiences and tendencies of writers in different periods whose subjective perceptions and motives seem markedly different from those of objective geographers. Eric Prieto believes that “literature provides a precious resource for geographers because of its ability to document in the most intimate, innovative, and detailed ways the personality of a place” (2012, p. 9). Malpas relates living place to “human identity and claims, and states “there is good reason to suppose that the human relationship to place is a fundamental structure in what makes possible the sort of life that is characteristically human” (2004, p. 13). As such, novels, poems, short stories, plays, and memoirs are literary forms that pass on valuable sources of information and mirror deeply the sensibilities and predilections of individuals or ethnic groups in various regions. However, while terms like literary geography or geographical literature do seem to

be the product of recent scholarship, the fusion of literature and geography in works of art reveals not to be a completely new idea.

Fittingly, the role of urban space and its contribution to memory-making and shaping people's lived experiences runs throughout many modern and postmodern literary works. This undercurrent theme is primarily neglected as a determinate and conclusive factor in studying characters and their roles in the advancement of plot and its resolution. Maria Beville writes, "the city, in varying literary approaches, is regarded as both a physical and a metaphysical space, an artistic and a socio-political site," (2013, p. 603) showing how a city can function in various ways. She continues to argue that "as society and subjectivity have become increasingly urbanised in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, literary portrayals and interpretations of the idea of the city have proliferated along these lines" (2013, p. 603). Hence, we can contend that studying urban conditions can prove crucial in reading many of the contemporary literary texts as a site of struggle over the politics of loss and nostalgia to critique the present.

The provocative sense of nostalgia, triggered by multiple side-effects of modernity, is occasionally traced to the construction of the city space and the associative environment. Typically, the residents of such places are swayed by the duality of whether to live an unwelcome alien life of the present or give in to the debilitating consciousness of the past. Tormented by the dilemma, they set out on a journey of acquiring a stable identity and inner acknowledgement to put a halt to their unending sense of exile and displacement. In certain occasions, individuals influenced by this feverish state tend to form a close bond and come to a resolution with their environment by direct experience of, or at times total, unification with the surrounding spaces. This incessant attempt for integration gradually comes to be internalized and is symbolized by aimless moves in and around the nooks and crannies of physical space, allowing itself to imprint entirely on one's psyche.

In her book, *Postmodern Urbanism*, Nan Ellin (1996) identifies a widespread modern paradigm shift that began around 1960s. Her comment chiefly concerns a renewed interest in the sphere of modern geography, and how it has "wrought havoc on behavior and thinking as well as on the landscape" aiming to revisit the notions of "city" and "culture" (1996, p. 267). She recognizes this shift as "a search for meaning featuring a fascination with the past" (1996). To her it is "a profound sense of loss and a corresponding deep nostalgia for the "world we have lost" (1996, p. 14). Her claim on the issue of nostalgia and the ensuing search for a lost home corresponds to and builds up one of the recurrent themes among the popular labels and mottos in twentieth-century fiction.

As a modernist piece, John Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* (1925) represents a New York that exerts a direct influence upon characters and their fates. It pictures inhabitants of a metropolis in quest for a lost, more serene type of life amid deep poverty and class struggle. Skyscrapers, polluted environments, and unprecedentedly fast machinery surround the characters and trouble them with a psychic damage. Using stream-of-consciousness to present its characters and their struggles and interactions with the repressing landscape, the novel works well as an expression of modernity and cultural decay in 1920s. It is a prime instance of "anti-Bolshevik feeling and defeat for progressive expectations that opened the way to cynicism, flaunted capitalism, pure materialism, isolationism, and intolerance" (Bradbury, 1992, p. 79).

The Blind Owl and *The City of Glass* grapple with the same relation of modern individual and his environment. In *City of Glass*, the American novelist Paul Auster presents a setting and a set of characters entangled with this notion of space. Initially, in analyzing the text, one can identify two different readings of the city space running throughout the plot.

First is a modern city equipped with machinery, speed and productivity associated with Quinn and other people as twentieth-century individuals. Gradually, this viewpoint is shadowed by a joint opposite force. This second voice is that of confusion, memory, and dislocation in a constant search for salvation and order summed up in the “Tower of Babel”. The two worldviews sketched by the two protagonists, in essence, display a New York moving toward increasing modernization and, at once, plunging into loss and destitution rife with class struggle. Levitan and Wieler (2008) describe New York from 1979 to 1999 as “a period marked by a stable but stubbornly high poverty rate” featuring an “increase in inequality” (p. 14). Giles (2010) verifies the role of these opposing voices and relates to New York as a “seductive space of exotic adventure and fresh opportunity, and just as often as a suffocating, closed space corrupted by racism and economic oppression” (p. 24). It would not come as a surprise for one to find the text teemed with depictions of streets, routes, and claustrophobic urban spaces as a main setting along with characters whose lives are bound up with its atmosphere and residents. The theme of search and longing proves consequential since all characters are at loss and the city streets function as their central focus of anxiety and their locus of yearning for change.

On the other hand is *The Blind Owl*, hailed to be one of the foremost pieces of modernist Persian literature, that exhibits a leading character in an exhaustive battle with the physical environment. Since the prominent features of psychogeographical novels appear chiefly in postmodern fiction, it will be quite to the point to read *The Blind Owl* as a postmodern text as well. Multiplicity of identities, extreme minimalism in narration and characterization, intense fragmentation of its first-person modern protagonist along with its famous chronological disorder, and unclear ending are among many of its several postmodern traits. Talking about its precise imagery and dazzling mode of narration, Baraheni (2007) reads “*The Blind Owl*, a 1935 postmodern novel by the Iranian author Sadegh Hedayat” as a text to put forward “the surgical detailing of things” (p. 45). However, what is left unnoticed among scholars of Hedayat’s oeuvre is the representation of city as an agent of destruction and doom for the protagonist. We argue that Ray in Hedayat’s novella plays a crucial role in framing a character hovering on the borders between illusion and reality, retrospection and anticipation. This is well in parallel with socio-geographical and socio-cultural significance and decline of Ray as an ancient city with a history of nearly six thousand years that was once the capital city of Iran during Seljuk Empire (1043-1051) when it was at its highest point of wealth and beauty. The city, however, experienced a gradual decline until the time when its neighboring city, Tehran, was chosen as the capital of Iran in late 18th century and is now a southern district of Greater Tehran Area.

Ironically, for the protagonist, living the present life echoes no sound of a past where his ethnical and cultural values were at their peaks of stature. To put it in its socio-historical context, the novella makes subtle allusions as to how for centuries, the emergence of a new religion and the arrival of a non-native culture had gradually set the nation to drastic changes. Additionally, it was in the middle of the twentieth century that cultural and political upheavals climaxed and shifted the focus of many individuals to a far off golden time before transformations had made the social fabric vulnerable. Yavari (2008) points out that “nostalgia pervaded the period’s literature, both poetry and prose” (p. 44). She explains this longing for past as a “nostalgic image of an idealized pre-Islamic Persia [and] a part of that identity construction” (2008) which haunts the memory of the nameless protagonist in *The Blind Owl*. Throughout the text, one can witness the battlefield of the forces of the past and the present as an arena of conflict through which the leading character feels exiled and in search of a home in a constantly changing world. For him this feeling of nostalgia always

possesses a critical potential and a call for action. This denies him the secure space for living the routinely oblivious life of the present. Nevertheless, his constant rambling around the city spectrum gives him a rare chance of pleasure and content, and a way of holding on to possible flashes of the past.

A review of literature on *The Blind Owl* and *City of Glass* demonstrates how they have been examined from a variety of angles. Beville (2013) puts *City of Glass* alongside McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* and Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, and argues that their metropolitan cities are made up of zones of "uncanny spectralities" as settings that are "decentered, fragmented, and defined by the otherness encountered in the crowd" (p. 603) which, indeed, cause the fragmentation of the characters as well. Russell (1990) finds *The New York Trilogy* amenable to Derrida's deconstructive reading strategy of texts and part of her paper stresses how the novella "employ[s] and deconstruct[s] the conventional elements of the detective story, resulting in a recursive linguistic investigation of the nature, function, and meaning of language" (p. 71). Norman Rowdy's (1991) essay discusses *City of Glass* and dedicates itself to the study of a detective's underlying quest for a "prelapsarian language, the tongue of the innocent Adam by which alone things can be reunited with their right names" (p. 225). Both texts color the notion of identity in status of crisis with each character possessing multiple names, roles, or appearances. Much related to this viewpoint, using a Baudrillardian framework, one research takes *The Blind Owl* to offer "identical characters [that] obscure the work; [a] resemblance amongst them [that] seemingly originates in some mysterious old man" creating a "language-game" (Mansouri, 2013, p. 553). It further claims that the character of the old man is "argued to be non-existent; all the characters, therefore, become Baudrillardian simulacra" (p. 553). Vatanpour (2007) explores Baudrillard's hyperreality in *City of Glass* and believes that "names, physical descriptions, and garments as guise or as disguise contribute to the construction of shifting and intertwining identities" (p. 251). One recent research reviewed *The Blind Owl* using Henri Bergson's notions of *durée* and simultaneity. It argues that certain features in the narrative structure of the text particularly "relativity and subjectivity of time and place and the constant intersection of memories and experiences can be aligned with Bergson's interpretation of temporality and consciousness" (Farahbakhsh & Haghshenas, 2014, p. 1).

It seems, however, that deservedly attention has not been paid to the nature of urban structure in any of these two texts where urban vicinity pervades the psyche of the leading characters. This point well features the aporetic moment each character as a city-dweller must confront as the result of his struggle with his environments. This paper, hence, attempts to demonstrate that these specific cramped urban spaces with their unique twentieth-century settings function as culpable agents forming the behavior of Quinn as a New Yorker and the *Blind Owl's* narrator as a resident of Ray. As its building blocks, this research presents an analysis of the texts based on Merlin Coverley's concept of psychogeography which supports the transformation of the city as an integral part of the novellas' main characters' fates and how the characters' mind and body eventually fall apart under the sway of the city space.

The research draws on Tötösy de Zepetnek's (1999) discipline to parallelize works of art to make possible a cross-cultural and comparative study of literature and culture. What he proposes as a discipline for analysis, initially takes a reactive stance against the idea of 'influence' launched by the French movement, in which a comparative study was tethered to a cause-and-effect system of hierarchy through which a set of stereotyped images in one earlier work could be traced in a later one. In contrast, de Zepetnek's (1999) discipline, borrowing partly from the American approach, is a suggestion to "pluralize and parallelize the study of culture without hierarchization" (p. 3). In his view, culture is defined as "all

human activity resulting in artistic production” (1999, p. 15), as a dynamic entity which “has the ability to acquire new characteristics and forms” (Lee, 2003, p. 3). This perspective makes each culture and its evolution a unique phenomenon for investigation. The result is that a comparative approach needs to try a procedure that fairly juxtaposes literary pieces as two socially similar narratives. That is the reason why he states that “it is not ‘what’ but rather ‘how’ that is of importance” (de Zepetnek, 1999, p. 15). As for the argument of this paper, one should probably remember Dionýz Ďurišin’s (1993) interliterary theory of comparative literature. In his contention, “the development, the progression, and the ways of the literary rise, the growth of literature” (p. 14), specifically world literature and national literature, come about because of how “literary groups are created, and how they determine some dominant directions of world literature” (Saussy et al., 2015, p. 22). This explains how the two pieces of fiction under study, though from far east and the west of the world, can be parts of literary communities that follow similar interests and share related themes and sociological affinities.

DISCUSSION

Emerged out of the Letterist International (LI) and Situationist movement, psychogeography became known as a movement in the sphere of sociology and urban life in latter part of 1950s onward. Like other twentieth-century social or literary phenomena that typically resist clear-cut definitions, psychogeography has attracted many interpretations and modes of application by scholars of different fields. Among all its various applications, however, Guy Debord (1931-1994), the Marxist forerunner of the movement, aptly defines the term as “the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals” (2008, p. 23). For him, walking in the modern city, as the stock-in-trade of psychogeography, has the potential to reawaken a critical spirit to observe the condition of humanity under the tether of modern life. These strollers witness a range of urban spaces, and gradually create psychographic maps that for them “express not subordination to randomness but complete *insubordination* to habitual influences” (2008, p. 26), which comes about as a general reaction toward the capitalist modes of life. The distinctions the stroller observes along with his walks into the city spectrum lead to the reason why “some neighborhoods are sad and others pleasant” (2008, p. 25), which in turn can cause gradual psychic transformations in the engaged individual. This can be a pertinent point in order to claim that indeed “there is a connection between space as a material and physical entity and space as a cultural and metaphorical presence” (Teimouri, 2016, p. 31) which better reflects the entanglement of man with space.

Accordingly, psychogeography appears to function as a means of opening up new opportunities and possibilities to the onlooker and a dynamic mode of freeing the human psyche. It involves the process of “exploration of the physical and psychological landscape of the city” (Pinder, 2005, p. 386) through which the bygones can resurface or the entities on the margin dare to cross into the forefront. It provides one with the possibility of toppling down the values, promoting what is ignored or deemed low and a chance for a possible recreation of identity. It is responsible for establishing a reciprocal influence in an urban setting where the “residents’ self-perception is defined by the city as they in turn help define the spaces they inhabit” (Nersessova 2010, p. 3). However, what runs closely in line with both literary featured texts is the way psychogeography views the “present through the prism of the past” and its significance in “contrast[ing] a horizontal movement across the topography of the city with a vertical descent through its past” (Coverley, 2006, p. 14). It is no surprise that in its

broader sense psychogeography “approximates more to a form of local history than to any geographical investigation” (Coverly, 2006).

The two works under study in this paper create pictures of metropolises demonstrative of psychogeographical underpinning. In *The Blind Owl*, Ray is an associative element of the protagonist’s confusion and delusions as is New York in Quinn’s projections while he is wandering in the city. The narrative in *The Blind Owl* is comprised of fragmented descriptions at times touched by the effects of drugs and hallucinations, picturing an urban space much akin to that of Quinn’s ever-enclosing setting walled with grimy streets of New York through the same lens of hallucination, sheer isolation and loss of consciousness. Both are residents of cities whose hopes and dreams of regeneration and glory have been dashed and in turn seek out a past that looks more like places to which they belong. Quinn’s incessant and apparently aimless drifting throughout the streets of New York along with his inability to leave the area of Stillman’s lodging after days and nights of sleeplessness, with no food or comfort reduce him to an almost unconscious entity that becomes an inseparable ingredient of that very urban space. Likewise, in Hedayat’s novella, the nameless character roams around ceaselessly as it “become[s] a habit with [him] to go out for a walk everyday” to an extent that he “become[s] addicted to these walks in the same way as [he] had become addicted to opium” (Hedayat, 1957, p. 17).

In fact, both characters’ retreat into the streets of their locales stem from a psychological urge through which they can confront the sources of their loss, or by which are enabled to nostalgically recover the loss. Among many others, one source of their ending failure is the underlying complicity of the city in their consequent actions and decisions. In these two texts, the twentieth-century urban-dwellers are overcome by the looming shadow of the city streets they inhabit to the extent that they become an integral and inseparable part of their body and psyche. This integration becomes the ever-increasing and living organism of their routine life reaching to a point that in *City of Glass* “it seems, no one ever notice[s] Quinn. It was as though he had melted into the walls of the city” (Auster, 1985, p. 95) or that even with his eyes closed “the blurred shadows of the city all take substantial form and rise before [him]” (Hedayat, 1957, p. 44), signifying to what extent the urban space has affected their whole existence. Despite their conscious states of mind, their repetitive act of walking the streets has made possible the pattern not only to turn into fixed mental images, but to become a constitutive part of their persona.

The patterns created by Quinn’s repetitive walks in New York prove the dynamics essential to an experience of psychogeography; a stage where “psychology and geography collide” (Coverly, 2006, p. 8). His repetitious act of walking as a hired detective following Stillman helps the city atmosphere imprint in his mind that shows the “effects of the environment on emotion and behavior of the individual” (ibid). Despite his apparently aimless walks, Quinn is in no way a *flâneur* and his story deals with history and metaphysics to a certain extent. Coverly sets the foundations of psychogeography upon poles of aesthetic ends and political purposes. The latter is revealed to be the outcome of Quinn’s expeditions in the city. He consciously follows Stillman’s movements from the moment he departs his hotel room to the time he returns. Yet, by Stillman’s abrupt disappearance, Quinn’s search does not come to a halt as searching around has become habitual and zeroing in on the city an integral part of his psyche. His way of perceiving the city changes for the first time he starts to notice “the tramps, the down-and-outs, the shopping-bag ladies, the drifters and drunks. They range from the merely destitute to the wretchedly broken. Wherever you turn, they are there, in good neighborhoods and bad” (Auster, 1985, p. 88). To him this appears to be a sudden realization of what he has been through, but has never been much aware of. He

intuitively starts to ponder that “for the first time since he had bought the red notebook, what he wrote that day had nothing to do with the Stillman case” (ibid), and was in fact part of a larger scheme. No wonder that he “feels an urge to record certain facts, and he wanted to put them down on paper before he forgot them” (ibid).

While having lost contact with Stillman haunts his obsessive mind, Quinn critically details his communication with the surrounding environment through a different outlook. He comes across groups of people wrapped up in “hulks of despair, clothed in rags, their faces bruised and bleeding, shuffle[ing] through the streets as though in chains” facing their fates as “some will starve to death, [while] others will die of exposure” (Auster, 1985, p. 90). He continues to stray around as he feels a certain affinity with the surrounding spaces and drowns himself in blending with the people of his community. His mere investigation of the city streets functions as what Coverley (2006, p.9) calls “an act of subversion”. He witnesses the deplorable life of poor groups and surprisingly rejoices in spending time in that area and socializing with them. This illustrates his deep-seated tendency to bring into notice the despair he feels for the cast-outs and mingle with individuals he never caught sight of before. Quinn’s ramble around the overpopulated regions is a journey of retrieving landscapes now by-passed. It is an act of rebellion to “challenge the official representation of the city by cutting across established routes and exploring those marginal and forgotten areas often overlooked by the city’s inhabitants” (Coverley, 2006). It is no surprise to interpret his act of exploration as an effort to call attention to an order by whose absence he suffers and feels lost.

The opening scenes of *The Blind Owl* strike the reader with a feeling of nostalgia kindled by the protagonist’s purposeless walks. He desperately drifts through the routes and alleys of his living area in search of a girl he once spots through the ventilation hole of his room. The innocence and the ethereal beauty of the dying girl, which proves in stark contrast to the corrupted conditions of that time and space, impels him to murder her out of desperation in order to preserve her from the rest of the people. Among all, his dwelling city space, which was once “Bride of the World, with its thousand-fold web of winding streets” (Hedayat, 1957, p. 44) can account as an agent of destruction. His bewilderment in seeing a girl with such unworldly beauty arises since he would never anticipate a human being with such pure innocence to appear in the blasted locale of his hometown. Having seen her once beside a stream and a cypress tree, he starts to “trod every hand’s-breadth of ground in the neighborhood of [his] house” (Hedayat, 1957, p. 16) to find the slightest traces of her.

As the narrator continues to search out for the girl, the abandoned and lifeless space of his living area limits his perception of the surroundings and intensifies his isolation. He describes his house as being “far from the noise and bustle of life” which “is completely isolated and around it lie ruins” (Hedayat, 1957, p. 10). His house, for him, functions as a safe house in which he affords himself safety and tranquility of mind. In his routine life he never sets foot out of his house since he finds himself a traditional painter whose creative mental cosmos feels livelier and more reliable when conceived in closed spaces. Such sensitive mind offers no fondness for the outside space. Nevertheless, remembering the image of the ethereal girl at the foot of a cypress tree near the vicinity of his house overwhelms his existence, pushing him to a nostalgic search. Similar to Quinn, the narrator can by no means be labeled a *flâneur*, for what he is after symbolizes a glorious entity whose fleeting presence signifies remote residents of that place. For two months and four days his only obsession becomes finding the girl who overwhelmed his existence and was his only reason to leave his hiding place. His compulsion and preoccupation in his routine life to seek the girl proves so repetitious and habitual that with no sense of direction can he find his way

back home from desperate quests. He walks around the city roads and routes to find a single trace of the girl, and this space permeates his sight and thoughts to the extent that with his eyes closed he remembers the paths and buildings and can “feel every detail of their structure and the weight of them pressing on [his] shoulders” (Hedayat, 1957, p. 10).

The protagonists’ quests in both stories testify to the presence of short-lived signs of order and hope in a hopeless present time. However, in both cases the reader can find their integrative city scopes as obstacles where order never finds the chance to reappear. Quinn starts his job as a vigilant detective set to follow Stillman round the clock. To Stillman, who comes from a family of long tradition, New York stands as the microcosm of the whole world. He specifies that his return to New York is part of a larger plan since “the world is in fragments [...] And it’s my job to put it back together again” (Auster, 1985, p. 62). He says: “I have come to New York because it is the most forlorn of places, the most abject. The brokenness is everywhere, the disarray is universal [...] The broken people, the broken things, the broken thoughts” (ibid, p. 64). The pattern he creates as walking through the streets of New York ending up in “Tower of Babel” astonishes Quinn, since he stands out as the only agent attempting to bring order to the heap of disarrays. Quinn interprets Stillman’s sudden disappearance as the death of all his hopes to stabilize the conditions. Nevertheless, his inability to let go of his only clue to hold on to the last sparkles of hope makes him reside near Stillman’s lodgings where, although unsure of his presence, he keeps in motion the last chances of finding Stillman.

As Stillman symbolizes the agent of reconstruction and hope, the ethereal girl of *The Blind Owl* represents a fading picture of Ray and its long gone residents. After searching for two months and four days, the narrator who “takes on an Orientalist façade ... allud[ing] to the culture and traditions of his people as stagnant” (Coulter, 2000, p. 5) feels astonished since such purity and beauty belong not to that time and space but to a long glorious past, probably twenty four centuries ago, when civilization was at its height. His act of sketching her face with penetrating eyes demonstrates his last attempts to preserve that innocence and glory. To the narrator “she no longer belongs to this mean, cruel world” (Hedayat, 1957, p. 10) and “[is] not fated to live long in this world” (1957, p. 13). The world he refers to is composed of the surroundings that have gradually paralyzed his perception either by his daily walks or by his sudden exploration of abandoned houses. Like the disappearance of Stillman, the absence of the girl gives the narrator an opportunity to identify with his environment in a new fashion. On his way to the cemetery, he describes the city as “a new and singular landscape unfolded before me, one such as I had never seen; sleeping or waking” (Hedayat, 1957, p. 28). This new outlook of Ray and its buildings to him “possess the property of instilling intense cold into the heart of the passer-by. One felt that no living creature could ever have dwelt in those houses. Perhaps they had been built to house the ghosts of ethereal beings” (Hedayat, 1957). His observation is greatly in tune with a twentieth-century picture of urban space as cold and deserted that pushes one to the edge to hopelessly recall the past, signifying –in this text–an attempt to carry on the memories of a vanished landscape and culture.

As their contributing urban settings and specifically the city streets are not merely by-paths but markedly associative agents, their role in affecting the characters magnifies as a repressive and complementary part of their persona. Two associative drives make this happen: first, mental obsession with repetition connecting the characters’ internal world to the urban space. Second, physical repetition lets the urban space frame the characters’ body image, making it a reflection of itself. Quinn’s walking in the streets and as such his final taking of shelter in the dumps and filths near Stillman’s apartment make him an entity on a

sliding scale acquiring features from the external forces of the urban setting while at the same time minimizing humanistic internal needs. His repetitious walks echo psychic instabilities, and his union with the outside world represents his attempts to master his condition and eventually himself. Kitron (2003) calls this repetition a “twofold expression both of the wish for a new benign relationship and of the dread of traumatic, repeated disappointment” (p. 427) which Quinn mirrors by mingling with the physical space. His is an act of hope to find Stillman as representative of order. Simultaneously, he dreads to lose his last clues to find Stillman. He is proven the victim of the circumstances as he denies himself food and comfort resembling hermits who by disturbing the body mechanism seek control over the self and resultantly a separation of the two. To him, outside space takes the shape of an obstacle that brings him confusion, and his act of residing in the cramped streets rises from his effort for coming into terms with the alien environment.

The second half of *The Blind Owl* offers similar repetitions and obsessions. The leading character is in a state of delirium, and finds himself living with a girl he abhors in a city to which he feels no sense of attachment. Influenced by the same feeling of dislocation, confusion, and nostalgia, he begins “automatically to walk” completely unaware of his surrounding like “some force beyond my control compelled me to keep moving” (Hedayat, 1957, p. 63). His rambling around the city space is indicative of a struggle to return to the place where he has supposedly lost the girl. For the narrator of *The Blind Owl*, his city (Ray) makes up for the whole world, yet “the greatest city of the world” (Hedayat, 1957, p. 44) is now weathered “under deathly clouds which weighed heavily upon the whole city” (ibid, p. 76). The presence of “rabble men”, “white-haired old man” and, above all, his disgraceful wife has already tormented him. His daily walks as a means of regaining sparkles of hope and belonging function as motives to fight the suffering of loss and remember the past in the times of glory. However, the more he searches around his locale the better he understands that nothing is readable but “ruins of thousands of ancient houses” (ibid, p. 43). In essence, he becomes completely united with the city as he frantically ventures to obtain signs of a remote past. Yet what he observes offers no more than the sight of destruction and alienation.

Both protagonists reflect the repressive influence of the urban settings upon their appearance as their contact with the environment deepens. In this perspective, the notion of body image can give a different account of their psychogeographical experience. Grosz (1994, p. 79) describes body image “as something that is as much a function of the subject’s psychology and socio-historical context as of anatomy”. She further elaborates that “the body image is extremely fluid and dynamic; its borders, edges, and contours are “osmotic” — they have the remarkable power of incorporating and expelling outside and inside in an ongoing interchange” (Grosz, 1994). Quinn appears to have grown long, tangled hair crawling down to his shoulders showing the long period of attempts for seclusion. He describes his clothes as “discolored, disheveled, debauched by filth” (Auster, 1985, p. 96). His face is covered by a “thick black beard with tiny flecks of gray in it. More than anything else, he reminded himself of Robinson Crusoe” (Auster, 1985, p. 97) presenting a parallel picture of his life in the dumps. Achieving stability through unity with the environment, Quinn grants himself the chance to balance his situation and make up for a loss – with the picture of Stillman the senior who can liberate him with a harmony he sought. Additionally, what seems to be a means of control over the self and the surrounding space comes to stand as a way of obtaining security and peace of mind. The nameless protagonist of *The Blind Owl* bears up with all the changes and concomitantly makes every effort to nostalgically stick to the past, but his very house turns out to be another reflection of the atmosphere outside. He specifically lives in a house which makes life and breathing ever harder, a place where “the

smell of sweat, the smell of by-gone illnesses, the smell of people's mouths, the smell of feet, the acrid smell of urine, the smell of rancid oil" (Hedayat, 1957, p. 44) easily make a person's routine life the site of suffocation. Interestingly, in the end, he sees the characteristics of the old rabble man in his own appearance that confirms the total obliteration of all his values and proves that all his efforts have been in vain.

Auster (1995) describes a clear experience of psychogeography as Quinn's tendency to live a low life affirms the impact of the urban setting upon individuals' behavior. This is in tandem with what Coverley (2006, p.9) explains, as "crime and lowlife in general remain a hallmark of psychogeographical investigation". Quinn's various itinerary city-ranged movements following Stillman the senior make the environment and its impoverished state reflect in his persona. His unconscious ignorance in sticking to the case as a detective, and instead turning the case into a personal concern contributes to his deep involvement with and growing interest in Stillman and the pattern he has created in Quinn's mind. He lives a low life in a cramped space letting the city permeate the world inside his mind and define his perceptions. He turns deeply blissful of the surroundings, and the only observation he makes is limited to the life and conditions of the city. The idea of a hidden city layered under and modeled by Stillman drives his motivations to explore a space never witnessed before — one that can only be penetrated by the fragmented hallucinative mind of an alienated writer. For him, the body image "always functions as a unity moving from the state of amorphousness to increasing differentiation and specialization" (Grosz, 1994, p. 83). In other words, the possession of the newly customized body image for Quinn parallels a desirous unconscious move from a shapeless traumatic locale to a potentially promising place in need of reconstruction and order.

This desire for transformation resides in his sense of place and displacement that drowns him around the city spectrum in hope of regeneration. From the beginning, he finds himself an exile in a place he never constructed. To him, New York is "an inexhaustible space, a labyrinth of endless steps, and no matter how far he walked, no matter how well he came to know its neighborhoods and streets, it always left him with the feeling of being lost" (Auster, 1985, p. 12). Resembling the city planners, Quinn attempts to figure out a way to shape up his city outlook, and engages in excursions near the vicinity of New York possibly to end the chaos. He finds his mission aborted with Stillman being gone for good, and from then on it all seems to rely on "chance, a nightmare of numbers and probabilities" (Auster, 1985, p. 77) he has to figure out. Shane (2001) points out that Stillman's movements in the city streets confirm the belief that a "city could address heaven and be redemptive" (p. 219). He did not believe in modern technology or science. He still lived in a "City of Faith dreaming of a paradise regained after passing through a period of abjection" (Shane, 2001).

The streets of Ray share as much significance in framing the protagonist's mind as they do in defining the perception of a justified crime. Like Quinn, the narrator appears to have self-internalized the concept of displacement. He lives in a world of "wretchedness" and "misery" and soon enough finds himself lost "in the whirlpool of darkness" (Hedayat, 1957, p. 9). He is unable to attune himself to the present conditions, and keeps on walking as a form of subversion in order to establish a reconnection. He believes the identity of the city lies in its past and walking is the best way to conceive of it, allowing the underlying fiction buried in its very spirit to reveal itself. In its truest sense, his actions serve to enliven a "conservative sense of national identity and a belief in the enduring power of the city" (Coverley, 2006, p. 51). The city to him looks plagued and while in the first section he buries the ethereal girl in the old cemetery of his town in order to protect her from the modern decay, in the second section he murders the girl with only a similar appearance since her very being is evocative

of a falling land. Daneil reminds us of an account written by Qazvīnī, the modern Persian epic poet, telling us that Ray is remembered and symbolized for the outbreak of a plague during which “one morning” the poet sees “the angel of Death/Fleeing barefooted from the hand of the Plague of Ray,” (1978, p. 78) displaying and symbolizing the critical situation the city went through. Thus, the narrator links himself to his ancestors, and finds himself the “result of a long succession of past generations which had bequeathed their experiences to [him]” (Hedayat, 1957, p. 88). This justifies his job as a pen case painter and the “two months and four days he spend[s] walking like a criminal around his house before she reappeared” (Daneil, 1978, p. 82).

In the Persian novella, the only pattern the narrator ever describes falls to the spaces he observes in his room or in the outdoor routes he traces out recurrently. He identifies his room as a “fortress which I have erected around my life and thoughts” (Hedayat, 1957, p. 43) in addition to an urban space that walking through it resonates the sound of “a strange, unknown city” (Hedayat, 1957, p. 64). His unbending contact with the closing environment can be studied in line with the idea of Repetition Compulsion which Freud labeled in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) through which the individual tries to come to terms with his traumatic condition by repetition as a defense mechanism or a force of resistance. Kubie further develops the idea and argues that the repetition for compulsion is fuelled by libidinal drive and does not support the idea of “compulsion to repeat for repetition’s sake”, but opts for its inherence in the person’s pleasure principle (1939, p. 399). In other words, Repetition Compulsion is “activated partly by the id—as drive libidinal activity—and partly by the ego—serving the goal of mastery and control” (Kitron, 2003, p. 430). Interestingly, the narrator’s courses of journey can be linked much less to the drive to repeat for repetition’s sake than to the idea of struggle for mastery over his environment. Fittingly, his repetitive movements stem from his inability to cope with his current situation which is intensified with the sense of non-belongingness. In addition, it maximizes his chance of holding on to the rare memories of the past. His constant contact with the rabble-men of his time, living in the hopeless and ruined city of Ray, along with his morally degenerate wife, push him to his limits, and in order to gain mastery over his conditions, murders his wife to end the misery.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study on Hedayat’s *The Blind Owl* and Auster’s *City of Glass* in the light of Merlin Coverley’s concept of psychogeography demonstrate that the two cities reign triumphant as the characters fall into extreme hallucinations, losses of consciousness, and absolute loneliness, or are left with desperate choices. Stillman’s suicide turns out to be the death of all of Quinn’s hopes and he is, in essence, left with no clue to follow order but a set of lost affinities. As such, he disappears or becomes one among many individuals who become the victims of the city. In *The Blind Owl*, too, the narrator’s inability to change or revive a long lost memory of grandeur leads him to a path of wretchedness. To fight back, he murders a girl who embodies the misery in his present time. In other words, the despair he feels as he sees the sight of ruin and darkness in the city streets parallels for him with the abjection that the presence of the girl represents. The discussed commonalities between the two works that support transformation of the city as an integral part of the main characters’ fates exemplify the shared features found among the literatures of different nations with similar social evolutions. The significance of outside space or geographical dimension upon people’s lives or even one’s psyche can underline its function as a collective unconscious entity voiced by peoples of different lands through the properties of artistic phenomena. This

helps us understand how nations struggle in similar veins, and, more importantly, how it paves the path for the arduous journey of fulfilling a promising future in comparison to the past.

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