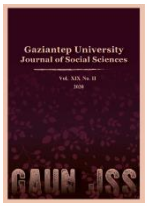

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Fragments of the Urban Space: A Psychogeographical Reading of Szirtes's Poetry

Kentsel Mekânın Fragmanları: Szirtes'in Şiirinin Psikocoğrafik Okuması

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the complex interplay between urban spaces and individual identity in the poetry of George Szirtes through a psychogeographical reading. By analysing selected works from various decades, including "Metro," "The Looking-Glass Dictionary," "Meeting Austerlitz," and "Reel" the study reveals how Szirtes articulates the significant effects of consumerism, migration, and nostalgia on both personal and collective identities. The poet's observations of his experiences as a Hungarian immigrant in England represent the complexities of language and belonging and display the tension between the familiar and the foreign. Also, Szirtes's poetry reflects themes of loss, memory, absurdity, and belonging, particularly in the context of cultural and social displacement and alienation. While discussing those themes, the paper employs the elements of psychogeography concerning its relationship to historical events. The paper also refers to the works of theorists such as Merlin Coverley and Guy Debord, who emphasized the emotional and psychological effects of urban landscapes on individuals. Through this evaluation, the study signifies the importance of engaging critically with our urban landscape to unveil the hidden narratives that shape our experiences within city life. Therefore, the findings offer an appreciation for the troubled stories embedded in poems and encourage a fresh connection to the spaces we inhabit.

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ÖZ

Bu çalışma, psikocoğrafik bir inceleme yoluyla kentsel mekânlar ve bireysel kimlik arasındaki karşılıklı ve karmaşık etkileşimi George Szirtes'in seçilmiş şiirleri üzerinde incelemektedir. Çalışma, "Metro", "The Looking-Glass Dictionary", "Meeting Austerlitz" ve "Reel" gibi farklı yıllarda yayımlanmış kitaplarından seçilmiş şiirleri analiz ederek Szirtes'in tüketim, göç ve nostalji gibi temaları hem kişisel hem de kolektif kimlikler üzerindeki önemli etkilerini nasıl dile getirdiğini ortaya koymaktadır. 1948'de Budapeşte'de doğan Szirtes, 1956'daki Macar Ayaklanması'nın ardından mülteci olarak İngiltere'ye göç etmiş ve şiirlerini İngiltere'de yazmıştır. Şairin İngiltere'de bir göçmen olarak yaşadığı deneyimlere dair gözlemleri, dil ve aidiyetin karmaşık ilişkisini temsil etmekte ve tanıdık olan ile yabancı olan arasındaki gerilimi gözler önüne sermektedir. Ayrıca Szirtes'in şiiri, göç etmek zorunda bırakılan insanların yerinden edilmesini ve yabancılaşmasını, özellikle kültürel ve toplumsal duyarlıkla kayıp, hafıza, anlamsızlık ve aidiyet temalarının içinde yansıtmaktadır. Bu temaları tartışırken, psikocoğrafyanın tarihsel olaylarla olan ilişkisine dair unsurlardan yararlanmaktadır. Makale ayrıca Merlin Coverley ve Guy Debord gibi kentsel mekanların bireyler üzerindeki duygusal ve psikolojik etkilerini vurgulayan teorisyenlerin çalışmalarına da atıfta bulunmaktadır. Bu değerlendirme ışığında, kent yaşamındaki deneyimlerimizi şekillendiren gizli anlatıları ortaya çıkarmak için kentsel mekânı yeniden ve eleştirel bir şekilde değerlendirmenin önemine işaret ettiği söylenebilir. Çalışmanın sonunda ulaşılan bulgular, şiirlerde örtük şekilde var olan travma hikâyelerinin ortaya çıkarılmasını sağlamakta ve yaşadığımız mekânlarla yeni bir bağ kurulmasını teşvik etmektedir.

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Introduction

The concept of a lone individual strolling in an urban landscape is not new, although the term psychogeography is relatively new. This newly founded field is an interdisciplinary field that brings together studies ranging from geography, psychology, urban studies and cultural theory. In the broadest sense, psychogeography is the study of the dynamic relationship between geography and psychology that investigates how the physical environment of cities influences the human psyche. In this context, psychogeography is shaped by some other factors such as the identity of the urban walker, his/her background, and his/her interaction with the city. Accordingly, walkers produce a mutual relationship with places they visit, but this relationship also includes a sense of criticism of society and culture. Thus, the walker is completely different from an ordinary and passive sightseer; the walker establishes a deep and critical connection with the urban landscape.

Aiming to figure out how urban landscapes have an effect on emotions, behaviours, and social interactions, psychogeography uncovers the hidden emotional and psychological layers of city life with various figures like flâneur and derive. Guy Debord originally coined the term psychogeography in his essay, "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography" (1955). According to Debord, psychogeography aims to analyse the specific "laws" and distinct "effects" of geographical environments on the emotions and behaviour of individuals, whether these environments are intentionally designed or not. This field seeks to understand how different physical spaces influence people's feelings and actions. Debord claims that the "adjective *psychogeographical* can be applied to the findings arrived at by this type of investigation, to their influence on human feelings, and more generally to any situation or conduct that seems to reflect the same spirit of discovery" (qtd. in Knabb 2006, 8).

The origin of psychogeography dates to the 19th century. The figure of flaneur was initially used by Charles Baudelaire who described the term in his essay "The Painter of Modern Life." He traces the literary origin of the flaneur to Edgar Allan Poe's short story, "The Man of the Crowd." According to Coverley (2006), Poe's story is "one of the earliest examples of the use of the crowd as a symbol for the emerging modern city" and it explores "the role of the detached observer who becomes intoxicated by its movement" (p. 58). Baudelaire (1965) reproduces the role of the detached observer in the figure of the flaneur and defines this character as a "passionate observer" who finds joy in being part of a crowd (p. 9). Thus, the crowd is a natural habitat for a flaneur, Baudelaire writes, "[t]o be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world" (p. 9). In such an urban experience, the flaneur observes its movement and variety while feeling a sense of independence and detachment.

An Immigrant Poet: George Szirtes

Poet and translator George Szirtes, born in Budapest in 1948, immigrated to England as a refugee after the Hungarian Uprising in 1956. Brought up in London, Szirtes studied Fine Art in London and Leeds. Szirtes began publishing his poems in national magazines in 1973. His first poetry collection, *The Slant Door* was published in 1979 and won the Faber Memorial Prize the following year. His poetry collection *Reel* (2004) was awarded the T.S. Eliot Prize. He is married to the painter Clarissa Upchurch and has two children ("George Szirtes," *britishcouncil.org*). After his first return to Budapest in 1984, Szirtes began translating poetry, novels, plays, and essays from his mother tongue and earned multiple prizes and awards for his translation work. Additionally, his own books have been translated into numerous languages.

Sean O'Brien, a British poet, critic, novelist, and short-fiction writer, notes that "Szirtes's position in English poetry is unique" because he engages with the poetic forms and

traditions of his adopted homeland ("One who lies alone"). According to O'Brien, Szirtes has a direct connection to European history, the Holocaust, and the struggles of small nations against larger neighbour countries. Since he was born in the wake of fascism and Stalinism, he possesses an awareness of the dire consequences of these regimes that hold for the Jewish communities of Europe. O'Brien points out that this unique position of Szirtes's makes him "a political writer" who is "a concerned, intelligent citizen" ("One who lies alone"). However, what gives a distinctive force to his work is its "powerful aesthetic impulse," and this is especially evident in his engagement with the visible world ("One who lies alone").

Alastair Bonnett in "The Dilemmas of Radical Nostalgia in British Psychogeography" (2009) claims that the "political history of nostalgia is used to explore two forms of British psychogeography;" the first form is embodied by the travel narratives of Iain Sinclair, and the second one covers the Revolutionary Psychogeographical Groups (p. 47). Sinclair's travel writings portray the modern landscape as a site of creative purgatory, in which the writer engages with marginal histories and spaces to depict cultural and social loss. According to Bonnett, Sinclair's approach to the evaluation of urban space involves "a kind of necessary violence … that simultaneously anchors [him] in modernism" (p. 47). Just as modernist writers like T.S. Eliot or James Joyce dealt with the theme of alienation brought on by WWI and urbanization, Sinclair projects how the urban life is shaped by histories of decay and loss. Secondly, the Revolutionary Psychogeographical Groups emerged in various British cities in the mid-1990s and shared a quixotic relationship with the past similar to Sinclair. The point they focused on was the "historical re-readings of the everyday landscape" and the "uneasy combination of deracinating modernism and folksy localism" (p. 47).

However, at this point, the difference between the two sides turns out to be more precise in their evaluation of nostalgia. Bonnett claims that "nostalgia is also simultaneously refused and deployed" in *Revolutionary Psychogeography* (p. 48). Stephen Legg notes that "nostalgia has accompanied the rise of modernism" (p. 488) and it has been "'depsychologised' from a mental illness to a condition of modernity" (p. 482). Legg also points out that "nostalgia can actually be radically critical" and "a melancholic relation to the past could in fact represent a refusal to accept dominant narratives" (p. 488). In other words, it signifies the refusal of grand narratives, which is also asserted by Peter Fritzsche:

> Nostalgia stalks modernity as an unwelcome double, a familiar symptom of unease in the face of political and economic transformation, plain evidence also for the persistent inability to acknowledge the destruction of tradition or to work with the materials of the present. Nostalgia typically illustrates the incapacity of contemporaries; it takes the measure of the distance people have fallen short in their efforts to make themselves "at home in a constantly changing world. (p. 62)

Therefore, Fritzsche argues that nostalgia symbolises the discomfort and unease people experience in the middle of political and economic changes. It reveals a collective struggle to understand the loss of tradition and the challenges of adapting to present realities. This feeling of nostalgia illustrates a failure to feel at home; thus, nostalgia is not simply a longing for the past but a criticism of the inability to provide a sense of continuity and comfort, which is directly related to the opposition between modernism and nostalgia. Fritzsche argues that modernism often disrupts traditional structures and creates a sense of dislocation among individuals due to political and economic troubles. On the other hand, nostalgia is a coping mechanism that displays a yearning for the past and stability. The feeling of nostalgia reveals the difficulty many people face adapting to the rapid changes of the modern world. Accordingly, many people struggle to reconcile the destruction of tradition with the demands of contemporary life.

Metro: Loss of Identity in Consumerism

Szirtes employs the representations of Hungary in his book *Metro*. The poem with the same title portrays Hungary between 1944 and 1945. This is a significant period because of the change of power in Hungary. In this period, radical fascist forces seized power and led to the deportation of many Hungarian Jews to concentration camps including Szirtes's mother. In the poem, his mother functions as a guide to a modern European city and its world of underground. This rather long poem, "Metro" consists of ten parts, in the first one, "At My Aunt's" the speaker depicts her aunt "sitting in the dark, alone / Half sleeping" (Szirtes, 1988, p. 17) and in her position, the aunt is portrayed to be happy along with her sister "in their roles," "And the child / Is happy in the reading of a tale / That ends in triumph over the wild" (p. 18). In this picture, the speaker points out the domestic harmony and happiness of her family members. And the repetitive use of "happy" indicates the acceptance of their duties. However, the happiness of a child is different from that of the aunt and her sister due to his/her state of satisfaction by reading. Also, the tale the child is reading illustrates the theme of the struggle between good and evil, between culture and the wild. In such tales, goodness and culture become victorious, and the order is restored at the end of the story.

Then, the representation of the interior place changes into the outer place where happiness is found after a particular pursuit. The speaker says, "There are certain places healthy to have lived in: / Certain Streets, hard cores of pleasures / Their doorways are ripe fruit, stay soft and open" (p.18). These lines portray the diversity found in different parts of the city. Healthy places suggest that while some places influence people's health positively some streets are "hard cores of pleasures" giving hedonistic experiences. At the end of the stanza, the speaker says, "There are places to be happy in if only you can find them" (p. 18). The speaker's remark signifies a hopeful message about the quest for happiness. Therefore, happiness is not inherent in some places; instead, it must be sought and discovered. This implies personal awareness and effort of the individual on the street as an onlooker. In the broader context, the pursuit of happiness in the city signifies the importance of a personal journey in finding joy in the middle of the difficulties of life.

In *Psychogeography*, Merlin Coverley (2006) discusses the sense of emptiness in contemporary life and argues that it is masked by a display of consumer goods. Coverley writes, "[t]he essential emptiness of modern life is obscured behind an elaborate and spectacular array of commodities and our immersion in this world of rampant consumerism leaves us disconnected from the history and community that might give our lives meaning" (p. 102). Coverley suggests that the focus on consumption and materialism detaches people from the historical and communal contexts that could fill their lives with a deeper sense of purpose and significance. Indeed, Coverley criticises the modern consumer culture; according to him, by being engrossed in consumer culture, individuals lose touch with their heritage and the communities they belong to, and tradition is an essential source of identity and meaning. Coverley's criticism refers to the harsh nature of consumerism and its influence on individuals, which can be followed in the representation of the city and citizens in Szirtes's "Metro." At the beginning of the second part of "Metro" titled "Undersongs" the speaker points out the complex relationship between the city and its inhabitants. The speaker expresses his adoration towards the city; however, the city is portrayed to have a consuming nature with the phrase "eats you up," (p. 20). Urban life not only eats you up but also "melts you into walls along with stone" (p. 20). The phrase "melts you into walls along with stone" implies the imagery of loss of individuality as the speaker becomes one with the physical fabric of the city. Hence, personal identity merges with the urban landscape. The speaker says,

> I love the city, the way it eats you up
> And melts you into walls along with stone

And stucco till your voice assumes a tone
As crinkled, crenellated, creviced as itself,
And you can recognize it in a shop
Like something heard through windows. Human forms,
Detail, allegory. (p. 20)

In the lines above, the imagery of melt indicates the loss of individual identity emphasising how the city changes and neutralises personal differences in society. Individuals turn into goods in a shop "like something heard through windows," thus the speaker indicates that the city consumes one's voice and turns it into a good in a shop symbolising the loss of individuality in urban space. Accordingly, in "Undersongs," Szirtes revolves around the consuming impact of urban life that echoes Coverley's criticism of the influence of consumerism on individual identity and community.

Otherness in *Portrait of My Father*

Ten years after the publication of *Metro, Portrait of My Father in an English Landscape* was published in 1998. The book contains biographical sonnets about the poet's memories in Hungary. Especially, Szirtes employed images, anecdotes, stories to recount his memories about his father. Judith Kitchen found Szirtes "a master of iambic pentameter, of the sonnet" and *Portrait* "one of the most elegantly formal books" (1999, p. 371). Thus, Kitchen notes, it is the "wedding of form and content that gives the book its characteristic tensions" (p. 371). This combination of form and content in *Portrait* not only highlights Szirtes' technical power but also deepens the emotional significance of his reflections on his father's legacy and their shared history. One of the main tensions of the book, Kitchen argues, arises from the traditional opposition between father and son, and the other one is between homeland and exile (p. 371). The *Portrait* narrates the story of the family's immigration to England after the Hungarian Revolution and how the poet is perplexed about his father's second language. Accordingly, it is revealed that the main obstacle the poet faces originates from the organic relationship between language and politics. Each time he hears a second language, he feels like the *other* in society.

In *Portrait*, Szirtes deals with the themes of space, migration, language, and otherness, portraying a vivid picture reflecting the poet's own experiences and familial history. This complex relationship is embodied in the particular poems within the sonnet sequence, where the tension between personal expression and cultural displacement becomes obvious. In the first poem of the sonnet sequence, "The Looking-Glass Dictionary," the speaker says, "Words withheld. Words loosed in angry swarms," which portrays the tension between two different actions. On the one hand, the speaker emphasizes keeping words secret. On the other hand, it is the act of releasing them, particularly in a burst of anger. Then, the speaker says, "An otherness. The whole universe was other," which indicates a sense of alienation of the speaker (p 40). Besides, the world is perceived as foreign and indefinite. In such a world, nobody "knows what the neighbour does behind closed doors," which reinforces the theme of alienation and otherness (p. 40).

The metaphor of language as a foreign language indicates the alien nature of communication. It suggests that one can feel unfamiliar or insufficient when trying to express deep emotions in his/her native language. In a foreign country, it becomes more difficult to adapt to society because a foreign language can create barriers between individuals. In the 9th sonnet, the speaker discusses the differences between the mother tongue and the foreign language. The speaker revolves around the idea that our external communication is directly connected with an inner, dream-like language and says, "The language outside meets the ur-language within / with the consistency of dream / which sits like a faint moisture on the skin" (p. 44). Here, the speaker points out the link between external language and an inherent form

of communication, referred to as the "ur-language." By means of this "ur-language" one has dreams, in other words, people talk in their native language in their dreams. Thus, Szirtes emphasizes the tension between the mother tongue and foreign language drawing attention to the nature of this internal-external language complexity and the idea that inherent forms of communication always exist within us. This conflict between two forms of language indicates the difficulty of immigrants getting used to their new environments. The poet deals with the alienation of speaking a "different language," dreaming in another language and also living a different experience than his father. Szirtes's discussion of having a different experience from his father originates from the tension between inherited identity and present reality, especially in the terms of the themes of exile and language.

Hungarian-born Szirtes experienced the troubles immigrants face while adapting to their new environments. He particularly looks through the lens of language and identity to the issue of experiencing the otherness. In his article, "What Being Bilingual Means for My Writing and Identity" Szirtes underlines the vulnerability of communication, especially how language can fail to deliver our intentions or emotions and writes,

> language seems no more than a piece of tissue paper carried on the wind: flimsy, semi-transparent, endlessly vulnerable, like a deflated talks-bubble, almost weightless. At other times it is a brick wall, or worse still a room with dense walls and no exit, with only the sense of voices beyond the wall, faintly audible and never clear enough. (*The Guardian*, 2014)

In the lines above, Szirtes compares language first to a piece of tissue paper and then to a brick wall. The imagery of tissue paper signifies its delicate and fragile nature. Similar to tissue paper, language can be easily torn or swept away by external forces. On the other hand, the imagery of the wall suggests that language can also be a barrier that isolates individuals from one another. According to Szirtes, the wall is the symbol of frustration of incomplete or obstructed communication, and it is "never clear enough."

The theme of otherness can also be followed in "The First, Second, Third and Fourth Circles" where the multicultural aspect of a city is emphasized. The speaker starts the poem by signifying the circular form of Budapest separated by the river Danube. In the nineteenth century, Budapest was divided into two different cities, Buda and Pest, and united in the 1870s. This divided nature of the city is initially embodied in the natural imagery; on one side, the city is snuggled to "cliffs and hills where the cool air shuffles through a park with cedars" (Szirtes, 1998, p. 10). Then, the speaker gives various urban images from his perspective, such as "a cog-wheeled railway, a deserted tram stop, / some concrete tables for ping-pong or for chess, / and benches where migrant workers from Romania / sleep to shave in the morning by a working fountain" (p. 10). The imagery of the cog-wheeled railway as a symbol of the city evokes a strong sense of nostalgia and the history of Budapest. The image of transformative forces reflects the duality of the city: a place where past and present intersects. However, the "deserted tram stop" indicates the feeling of abandonment and also the transformation of the city. The speaker refers to the leisure time of the citizens by employing the images of the "tables for ping-pong or chess" (p. 10). Hence, this layering of imagery—railways, tram stops, and recreational tables—represents the urban life and its ability to encompass collective memory and individual experience.

Nostalgia is perceived as a yearning for the past, a sentimental longing for what has been lost. This theme is more complex and active in discussing the relationship between memory and landscape. Alastair Bonnett (2015) claims that "nostalgia "acted not as a retreat from time but as a challenge to 'frozen time,' not a desire for all things gone but for landscape as an arena of popular identity and memory" (p. 77). According to Bonnett, nostalgia in psychogeography challenges the notion of 'frozen time'—a static, unchanging view of the past. This particular form of nostalgia focuses on the landscape as a dynamic space where popular

identity and collective memory are continually negotiated. In this sense, it can be concluded that nostalgia becomes a means of interacting with the past in such a way that shapes present identities. Consequently, nostalgia transforms the landscape into a site of memory and engages with the past to enrich the present.

In the following lines, the speaker changes the theme to otherness, he says, "benches where migrant workers from Romania / sleep to shave in the morning by a working fountain" (Szirtes, 1998, p. 10). He focuses on the lives of others in society through the images of Romanian migrants sleeping on benches to shave by a working fountain. Thus, the speaker-observer informs the reader about the daily routines and difficulties of the immigrants representing the city as a shelter and a place of anguish for those who seek better life conditions. Accordingly, Szirtes expresses the multilayered structure of city life to display various images of history, nostalgia, migration and geography. The representation of public spaces and the life conditions of immigrants indicates the difficulties of urban life. In such a picture, a space of leisure turns into a site of shelter, and historical places exist together with modern structures and witness the harsh transition of the city.

Apart from the immigrants and their life conditions, Szirtes mentions the architectural diversity of the city. The speaker-observer recounts "lightbulbs and shopsigns over the gentler slopes / which are peopled with villas and baroque excrescences / belvederes, weathervanes, cherubs and furies, cupolas and turrets, / a wrought-iron gate with doorbells and nameplates" (Szirtes, 1998, p. 10). Villas and baroque excrescences signify the multilayered history and multicultural urban life. In such a vivid portrayal, the speaker-observer also illustrates the tension between the beauty of the city and the darker aspects of urban life. He depicts a "street where two drunks are fighting / and the police pick up girls from discos just for the hell of it, / doing handbrake turns by domed turkish baths / sweeping down the embankment, past the Olympic pool" (p. 10). The picture in which police picking up girls and drunks fighting is a typical urban image. The juxtaposition of the images of order and chaos reveals the dualistic characteristics of urban life. According to Coverley (2006), creating juxtapositions by drifting is one of the predominant characteristics of psychogeographical ideas along with "urban wandering, the imaginative reworking of the city, the otherworldly sense of spirit of place, … the unexpected insights [and] the new ways of experiencing familiar surroundings" (p. 31). Employing juxtapositions and scenes from a street, the speaker wanders like a flaneur on streets, allowing the reader a chance to look at some familiar urban surroundings from a different angle. Also, in terms of the otherworldly sense of spirit of place, Szirtes can be compared to Dante Alighieri. Some critics argue that Szirtes employs a "Dantean trope to give Budapest an infernal character," which underlines the consuming characteristics of urban life comparing it to Dante's hell. This trope empowers Szirtes's representation of the city as a Dantean place for the others in society.

Absurdity: Urban Emptiness in *Reel*

Awarded the T.S. Eliot Prize, Szirtes's Reel presents his childhood memories blended with his contemporary concerns. The collection begins with the poem "Reel" which is dedicated to his wife, Clarissa Upchurch. According to Mason, *Reel* "encounters versions of his past, the way we experience history in cinematic images" (2005, p. 320). Through rich imagery and an awareness of history, Szirtes embodies some images of Budapest, hovering between its past and present. Consisting of three parts, "Reel" begins with the auditory experience of the speaker, and he says, "You wake to car sounds, radios, the cold sunlight" (Szirtes, 2004, p.11). The auditory imagery is followed by a visual metaphor of "Burning holes in windows, and [one] sense[s] The missing fabric of the previous night" (p.11). Here, the missing fabric indicates the theme of loss and forgetfulness. In other words, Szirtes's imagery creates a sense of loss, disconnection and alienation from society. which reminds Coverley's criticism of modern life.

Here, through the metaphor of "fabric," Szirtes compares life to fabric arguing that with all its dreams, events, and thoughts the night does not provide continuity of time and memory. The speaker goes on to underline Coverley's idea of the essential emptiness of modern life, saying "The city offers you no evidence" (p. 11).

In this urban life, the city fails to present a real meaning, leaving individuals fragmented and insecure. In such an atmosphere, the city provides "the collage of the overheard / Extended clauses of a broken sentence … It is the Theatre of the Absurd" (p. 11). The imagery of the collage suggests the collection of diverse things, events, voices, noises and images. Szirtes's line "The city offers you no evidence" can be considered a latent reference to the idea that the city is the Theatre of the Absurd where people and actions are meaningless and irrational. Accordingly, the lack of evidence can be seen as part of this absurdity, which often triggers the existential crisis of the citizens amidst the emptiness of life. Szirtes emphasises the essence of the city as a place of ambiguity and absurdity. The city is not depicted to be a place of truth; rather, it is a chaotic place.

In *The Art of Wandering* (2012), Coverley claims that "walking and writing are so clearly complementary activities" and for some writers "the act of walking provokes and engenders the act of writing" (p. 13-4). Coverley's observation highlights how the physical act of moving through space can stimulate creative thought. Thus, the journey through a city or urban landscape becomes a catalyst for creativity. This psychogeographical practice can be traced in the poem "Reel," where the dérive, or drifting walk, is used to explore the urban environment and uncover hidden or overlooked aspects of the city. Throughout "Reel," the speaker-observer continues to depict various scenes from the chaotic urban life, while doing this, he is meant to walk around the city. In this way, walking becomes both a literal and metaphorical journey, where the writer strolls not just the streets but also the territory of ideas and emotions. In the third part of the poem, the speaker says,

> On balmy afternoons you walk for miles
> Trying to listen to the architecture.
> It mutters continually, waving dusty files
> Of unsolved grievances. (Szirtes, 2004, p. 15)

This stanza presents a vivid and contemplative exploration of the relationship between the individual and the cityscape. The speaker engages in an introspective journey and attempts to "listen to the architecture" as s/he walks miles on "balmy afternoons." The phrase "balmy afternoons" evokes a sense of calm, warmth, and introspection, serving as the emotional backdrop for the speaker's contemplative journey. This act of listening to the structures of the city suggests an effort to identify her/himself with the unknown narratives embedded in the urban environment. Accordingly, walking and listening to the architecture becomes a metaphor for the quest of the individual quest to connect with the urban landscape.

In one of his interviews, Szirtes says, "Now that I am in my seventies I am curious as to how I got here. The poems are an exploration of that. There are key narratives embedded in there that must, I assume, exist in a complex, not-entirely personal realm. They are not so much a sense of me, as of the world within which a figure like "me" existed" (qtd. in Bialer). Here, Szirtes revolves around the role of poetry in understanding his life and existence, particularly while celebrating his seventies. There are two realms in Szirtes's poetry, firstly, poetry is a means of comprehending life in general and how he "got there." Secondly, his idea that narratives exist in a "complex, not-entirely personal realm" suggests that his poetry deals with universal themes and experiences. Szirtes's poems illustrate that individuals are influenced by larger historical, social and cultural forces, as he experienced during the Hungarian uprising as a child, and how these forces are represented in personal narratives.

In such an absurd life, Szirtes searches for meaning in some other places such as friendship and remembrance. Following the opening poem of the book, "Meeting Austerlitz" appears. Szirtes dedicates his poem to Winfried Georg Sebald, a renowned novelist, poet, and scholar whose life is similar to that of Szirtes. Sebald also immigrated to England and became a lecturer at the University of East Anglia. Since Sebald is the author of the novel Austerlitz, Szirtes entitled his poem "Meeting Austerlizt," in which he discussed the themes of "friendship, loss and memory" (Long and Whitehead, 2004, p. 9). Szirtes feels himself kin of Sebald due to the experiences of exile and displacement; according to Sears, Szirtes shares "exclusion, and the experiences of the located self as excluded from itself and from the histories and geographies in which it seeks its own location" (p. 323).

Szirtes juxtaposes the image of cold urban life with the image of friendship. The poem begins with a particular representation of harsh climatic trouble; the speaker says, "The cold sat down with frozen fingers. Cars / were iced up, the pavements were treacherous" (Szirtes, 2004, p. 17). While "The air was frosty, oddly tobacco-scented" (p. 18), the speaker "was taking a quiet stroll / in the nearby fields when [he] met Austerlitz" (p. 17). The following part of the poem turns out to be the dream-like recollections of the speaker since, in the second part of the poem, it is revealed that Austerlitz is dead when "It was winter in the sun. / His voice moved in the frozen field" (p. 19). While the speaker was fifty, he says, he was "feckless / and wanted to listen to what Austerlitz / might say on the subject, however ridiculous" (p. 19). In the following lines, Szirtes makes Austerlitz speak, which is found "unconventional" by some critics (Long and Whitehead, 2004, p. 9).

Szirtes wrote three poems about the prominent photographer Sebastião Salgado's works on human conditions, such as migration, exile, and displacement. The three-poem sequence was commissioned by an art gallery for Salgado's exhibition. The first poem, "Preface to an Exhibition" begins with a significant focus on suffering, and the speaker says, "How beautiful suffering is, and how sad" (p. 114). Szirtes depicts the emotions of socially alienated people. In the following lines, the speaker presents the themes of alienation and dislocation. The image of "home as a distant speck" conveys a sense of alienation and dislocation (p. 114). Here, "home," a place of safety and belonging, is reduced to a small, almost minor point on the horizon that symbolizes the emotional and physical distance that the speaker feels. Through this line, the speaker emphasises the experience of exile and migration, in which the concept of home turns out to be remote and inaccessible. Also, the "distant speck" signifies what has been lost and underlines the emotion of longing and the sense of irretrievability of the past. Accordingly, Szirtes discusses the themes of suffering and displacement and draws a portrait of the human condition of suffering in an absurd world.

In the second poem, "The wicked boy by the pylos," the speaker portrays an alienated but rebellious character who compares himself to the famous French poet Arthur Rimbaud. The speaker begins the poem by introducing himself as "the wicked boy," which sets the tone of the poem as nonconformist. The speaker walks "by pylons," which are markers often used to signify something to be avoided in a dangerous area or work zone. This setting suggests a sense of isolation and disconnection from society; the speaker walks by a hazardous place marked by some pylons. Thus, the pylons symbolize the difficult aspects of modern life and emphasize the speaker's alienation. In the following stanza, the speaker changes the tone of the poem to a more meditative mood, he says to be "lost for ever in sand, / In the industrial wasteland of the desert, grey / As the sky, as this, my very own wicked hand" (Szirtes, 2004, p. 116). The imagery of wasteland signifies the theme of desolation and emptiness, and the portrayal of the landscape reflects the speaker's inner troubles. Also, the image of the grey sky suggests a life devoid of colour and warmth, reinforcing the theme of emptiness and alienation.

Stephen Hardy (2000) claims that "it is poets rather than philosophers who tend to promote the significance of place, particularly from around the second half of the eighteenth century" (p. 86). Through poetry, according to Hardy, place became more than a conceptual or physical category. Poets thus expanded our understanding of the relationship between humans and their environments and created a legacy that continues to inform how we view and interact with the spaces around us. Szirtes, as a poet, draws a parallelism between himself and Rimbaud; the speaker of "The wicked boy by the pylos" says, "I am Rimbaud and the dead, and the black faced owl / In the ruined shed, I am the whoo" (Szirtes, 2004, p. 116). Rimbaud is considered a rebel of his time as an intellectual and youth. By referring to Rimbaud, the speaker not only praises Rimbaud but also suggests that they share a similar spirit of revolt and a desire to push the boundaries of everyday experience. On the other hand, the imagery of the "black-faced owl in the ruined shed" signifies darkness, mystery, and the unknown. The "ruined shed" also represents abandonment, creating an eerie setting. The owl's presence in this desolate environment is connected to the representation of the wicked boy walking by pylons. The closing remark, "I am the whoo" reinforces the idea that the speaker is both the alienated and the wise man of society.

Conclusion

In terms of psychogeographical reading, George Szirtes's poetry reveals the complex relationship between individuals and their urban environments. This study analysed Szirtes's poetry from three different decades: the 80s, the 90s, and the millennium. In the 80s, his poems such as "Metro," "At My Aunt's," and "Undersongs" proved how consumerism affects individual identity and community causing the loss of identity of the citizens. The poems in *Portrait of My Father in an English Landscape* epitomizing Szirtes's poetics in the 90s displayed that Szirtes inclined to the relationship between the themes of otherness, migration and place, for example, in "The Looking-Glass Dictionary" and "The First, Second, Third and Fourth Circles" Szirtes employed the representation of urban walking to discuss the theme of nostalgia along with spatial elements. In the last part, the loneliness of the speaker-observer turns into absurdity in an urban emptiness. Through the poems of Szirtes such as "Reel," we see how the act of walking transforms into a representation of identity, memory and the human experience. Again in "Reel," Szirtes captures the essence of urban life and unveils the layers of meaning embedded in the architecture and landscape. Szirtes also dealt with the themes of loss and belonging, particularly for those who experienced the challenges of displacement and social alienation. This interplay between the physical and emotional realms emphasizes the significance of psychogeography in understanding how landscape shapes our perceptions and experiences.

Furthermore, in this study, by recognizing the emotional and psychological dimensions of urban life, we can develop an awareness of the experiences that shape our narratives, for example, as an immigrant, Szirtes experienced the difficulties of displacement and cultural estrangement. However, he turned this problem into an advantage by integrating the elements of immigration and alienation into his poetry. Since Szirtes did not forget the dark details of his childhood memories, Szirtes employed his recollections about exile, diaspora, and the holocaust in his poetry. Although the number of poems analysed in the paper could be increased, but it would exceed the scope of this study. The poems discussed here were aimed to display Szirtes's concerns with immigration, otherness, and space. Szirtes's three poetry collections published over three different decades enrich our understanding of the urban landscape and illuminate the broader historical and cultural forces. Accordingly, Szirtes's poetry proves that psychogeography allows us to walk through our cities within the lines of the poems, revealing the hidden stories that define our human experience.

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