

**The Dialectic of Spacebetween the Self and the Other
inSuheilIdriss's*The Latin Quarter***

**La dialectique de l'espace entre soi et l'autre dans Le
Quartier latin de Suheil Idriss**

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Date of receipt: 03-09-2025

Date of revision: 29-10-2025

Date of acceptance: 10-12-2025

Abstract

This article aims to examine the dialectic of spacebetween the Self and the Other in SuheilIdriss's novel *The Latin Quarter*; through a critical approach grounded in the achievements of contemporary narratology and anthropology. The study reveals that narrative space is not confined to being a mere geographical frame for events, but rather becomes an active semantic element that exposes identity conflicts and establishes a cultural dialogue between the Arab self and the Western milieu. Drawing on a range of theoretical references, the analysis demonstrates that the Latin Quarter in the novel functions as a symbolic space in which openness and estrangement intersect. Furthermore, it operates as a textual map that reflects the dialectical relationship between the referential and the fictional, between the Self and the Other.

Keywords: Narrative space; The Latin Quarter; Suheil Idriss; Self and Other;

Anthropological dimensions; Narrative structure

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Résumé

Cet article vise à examiner la dialectique de l'espace entre le Soi et l'Autre dans le roman de Suheil Idriss, *Le Quartier latin*, à travers une approche critique ancrée dans les acquis de la narratologie et de l'anthropologie contemporaines. L'étude révèle que l'espace narratif ne se limite pas à un simple cadre géographique des événements, mais devient plutôt un élément sémantique actif qui expose les conflits identitaires et établit un dialogue culturel entre le soi arabe et le milieu occidental. S'appuyant sur diverses références théoriques, l'analyse démontre que le Quartier latin du roman fonctionne comme un espace symbolique où se croisent ouverture et éloignement. De plus, il fonctionne comme une carte textuelle reflétant la relation dialectique entre le référentiel et le fictionnel, entre le Soi et l'Autre.

Mots-clés : Espace narratif ; quartier latin ; Suheil Idriss ; Soi et l'Autre ; Dimensions anthropologiques ; Structure narrative

Introduction

Narrative space constitutes one of the most prominent structural elements in the novel, whose function extends beyond the geographical framework of events to encompass symbolic and anthropological dimensions that reveal the relationship between the self, space, and the Other. As Gaston Bachelard observed, "space is not perceived merely as a physical dimension, but as a dwelling of memories, emotions, and the awareness of existence" (Bachelard, 1994, p. 26). Space, therefore, becomes a field of dialogue and conflict, endowed with symbolic energies capable of shaping human perspectives of the world.

Within this framework, Suheil Idriss's novel *The Latin Quarter* (1953) stands out as a narrative text that transforms space into a site of complex dialectics between the Arab Self and the Western Other. The passage from Beirut to Paris is not merely a geographical displacement, but an existential and cultural transition, whereby the

Latin Quarter emerges as a symbolic space of interaction and collision between two cultures. Ihsan Abbas noted that the novel "seeks to depict the experience of estrangement not merely as a pursuit of knowledge, but as a civilizational struggle between a self searching for identity and a dominant Western reality" (Abbas, 1971, p. 212).

The Latin Quarter, laden with intellectual and civilizational symbolism, becomes the stage for a struggle between fascination and withdrawal, between identification and resistance. This aligns with Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the "chronotope," the interweaving of time and space in shaping consciousness, whereby space is configured as a semantic structure that reconstructs the self in confrontation with the Other (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 84). In the novel, space thus becomes a mirror for the Arab self, torn between its roots and its openness to French culture.

This interpretation resonates with Abdullah Ibrahim's analysis of the representation of the Other in the Arabic novel, in which he stresses that "Western space in Arabic fiction is more than a stage for events; it is a site of dialectic between the Arab self and its awareness of the Other, embodying counter-cultural and epistemic values" (Ibrahim, 1998, p. 57). The Latin Quarter, accordingly, offers a narrative model that embodies the persistent tension between the self's quest for recognition and the dominance of the Other.

Thus, the central question guiding this study is: How does space in *The Latin Quarter* contribute to highlighting the dialectical relationship between the Self and the Other? What narrative and semantic functions does the Latin Quarter assume in unveiling the intellectual and psychological transformations of the characters?

The significance of this research lies in its attempt to interrogate space not merely as a frame for events, but as a semantic and cultural element that reveals the

depth of Suheil Driss's narrative experience, shedding light on the complex relationship between the referential and the symbolic, the real and the imagined, the Self and the Other.

The cortical Framework: Space in the Novel between Narrative Structure and Anthropological Significance

In contemporary narratological studies, space is regarded as both a structural and semantic component. It is no longer conceived as a mere external framework for events, but has rather evolved into a parallel text that participates in the production of meaning and in exposing the cultural and anthropological tensions underlying the literary work. To highlight this, space can be approached through three essential dimensions:

Axis One: Space as a Narrative Structure

In narratological studies, space is one of the central pillars in shaping the novelistic text. Its function transcends the physical containment of events and characters, to reach the level of structural construction that determines narrative trajectories and configures both time and meaning. Since the second half of the twentieth century, Western criticism has developed the concept of space as a narrative structure, from Gaston Bachelard to Mikhail Bakhtin and Gérard Genette, and later to modern theories in semiotics and new narratology.

1. Space and Memory – Bachelard

In his *The Poetics of Space* (1957), Gaston Bachelard argues that space is not merely a neutral geometric expanse, but a "reservoir of memories and emotions." He notes: "The house, the room, the corners - all these are places in which human emotional memory is stored, becoming shelters for the self's deepest experiences. Space is not only a framework, but also an image of existence, an echo of dreams and repressed desires, reflecting the intimate relation between the inside and the outside, between the familiar and the unknown." (Bachelard, 1957, p. 26). Bachelard thus emphasizes the intrinsic bond

between human beings and space, showing that space is inseparable from personal memory and the unconscious. This opens the door to a narrative reading of space not merely as an organizing structure, but as a locus laden with psychological meanings that shape character construction.

2. Space and the Chronotope – Bakhtin

Among the most influential theories that established space as a narrative structure is Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the *chronotope*. He asserts: "The literary event cannot exist outside the unity of time and space. Every narrative event is situated within a specific chronotope that grants it meaning. Time and space in narrative are not separate entities, but rather form together a single fabric that makes storytelling possible and gives it its internal logic." (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 85). For Bakhtin, the intertwining of space and time renders the novel incomprehensible outside of this chronotope. Thus, narrative cannot be divorced from its spatio-temporal coordinates. This conception opens vast interpretive horizons for understanding how characters and events are embodied within space that are themselves invested with cultural and historical meanings.

3. Space as Narrative Coordinates – Genette

In the same vein, Gérard Genette holds that narrative cannot unfold without spatial determination. He writes: "No story can be told outside of a spatial frame, even if such a frame appears absent or concealed. Narrative necessarily entails a specification of the spatial coordinates within which characters move. This specification is never neutral, for it provides temporal density and ensures coherence of events within a network of spatial relations." (Genette, 1972, p. 121). Genette reinstates the strict structural role of space as a prerequisite for grasping narrative time. He thus links spatiality and temporality as interdependent conditions for organizing the novelistic text.

4. Space in Arabic Narrative – Yaqtin

In Arab criticism, Said Yaqtin advances a similar vision, remarking: "Space in the novel is not merely a container for events or a determinant of their trajectories, but rather a parallel text that operates within the text and interacts with other narrative elements. The novel, in opening up to space, creates a world parallel to the real one, but it does not transfer it as it is; instead, it reshapes it according to the requirements of artistic construction." (Yaqtin, 2006, p. 178). Here, Yaqtin stresses that space is an active element in textual construction: not a direct reflection of reality, but a "text within the text." This highlights the dynamism of space in modern Arabic fiction, where it is reconfigured artistically to reflect both narrative and symbolic structures.

5. Space as a Modern Narrative Aesthetic – Tally

In recent spatial narratology, Robert T. Tally Jr. asserts: "Space in the novel is not to be understood merely as a geographical site or backdrop for events, but as a narrative aesthetic in its own right. The novel invents its own maps, which may not correspond to the real world but allow readers to live an alternative spatial experience. This aesthetic dimension makes spatial analysis a privileged entry point into the symbolic and imaginative structures of the text." (Tally, 2019, p. 14). Tally expands the function of space by granting it a fully aesthetic dimension. Space becomes not only a frame for narrative, but a device for shaping the very experience of reading—opening up the field of "narrative cartographies."

6. Space as a Psychological Structure – Massey

Doreen Massey proposes that: "Space is not a fixed surface, but a process, a network of interwoven and constantly changing social relations. It is simultaneously psychological and social, defined not by geographical fixity but by the relations that are woven within it." (Massey, 2015, p. 9). This perspective reconceptualizes space as a shifting, open structure -resonant with the

novel's tendency to depict not static places, but dynamic milieus constantly reshaped by the unfolding of events and characters.

Synthesis

From these perspectives, it becomes clear that space is not a secondary or silent backdrop, but an interactive narrative structure intertwined with time and characters. It is a repository of memory (Bachelard), an embodied time (Bakhtin), an organizing coordinate system (Genette), a parallel text (Yaqin), a narrative aesthetic (Tally), and a mutable network of relations (Massey). Space thus emerges as a fundamental entry point for understanding the novel, as a complex structure encompassing structural, aesthetic, and psychological dimensions.

Axis Two: Space as a Cultural Discourse

In recent scholarship, space is no longer treated merely as a narrative component to be analyzed within the text's structural framework, but has been redefined as a cultural discourse that exposes the social, political, and symbolic relations underpinning human experience. Space is not a neutral or static geographical datum; it is rather a historical and cultural construct, continually reproduced through texts and discourses.

1. Henri Lefebvre: The Production of Space

In his seminal work *The Production of Space*, which has been revisited extensively in modern studies, Henri Lefebvre asserts: "Space is not innocent, nor is it neutral. It is socially produced and constantly reproduced through social, political, and economic practices. Space simultaneously reflects class structures, ideology, and cultural symbols that endow it with meaning." (Lefebvre, 1974, p. 31). This proposition opens the way for reading narrative space as a discourse parallel to the social one. When the novel represents a given space, it does

not simply reproduce a geographical entity, but reveals a network of relations and conflict embodying class and power dynamics.

2. Michel de Certeau: Everyday Practices

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau explains: "Space is not merely a location defined by maps or borders, but a practice enacted daily. The paths we follow, the words we exchange, and the gestures we repeat in familiar settings all transform space into a living discourse, filled with symbolic and social meanings." (de Certeau, 2016, p. 91). Applied to narrative, this perspective highlights space as a locus of daily practices. The novelist captures the minutiae of everyday life and converts them into semiotic signs that reveal the depth of human experience.

3. Abdullah Ibrahim: Space as a Cultural Structure

In his book *Space in Arabic Narrative*, Abdullah Ibrahim emphasizes: "Space in the Arabic novel is no longer a mere background for events, but has become a cultural structure representing the social world in all its transformations. It exposes the mental frameworks governing human relationships with their environment. Narrative space unveils what official discourses attempt to conceal." (Ibrahim, 2009, p. 44). From this perspective, space in Arabic fiction becomes a critical mechanism for deconstructing cultural and political systems, functioning as a discourse that contests authority and hegemony.

4. Contemporary Studies – Robert Tally

According to Robert T. Tally Jr.: "Space in literature is not simply a reflection of external reality, but a means of re-imagining the world. Every narrative space is a cultural discourse that generates an alternative map of reality, allowing readers to reconsider their position within the social and political order."

(Tally, 2020, p. 23). This view situates space at the heart of what is termed *narrative mapping*; space is not treated as a replica of reality, but as a device for producing an

“alternative world” that addresses the reader and prompts reflection on their relation to real-world environments.

5. Modern Arabic Writings – Abdel Salam al-Messadi

In his book *Identity and Space in the Arabic Novel* (2020), Abdel Salam al-Messadi observes: “The contemporary Arabic novel has turned space into a mirror of identity, not in the sense of a mere geographical site, but as a carrier of both belonging and estrangement. Neighborhoods, cities, and homelands are transformed in narrative into cultural symbols that transcend the tangible, becoming signs of self and Other, presence and absence.” (al-Messadi, 2020, p. 57). Here, space is cultural discourse par excellence: it does not merely situate characters, but encapsulates questions of identity, belonging, and difference-making, making it a crucial entry point for analyzing the dialectic of Self and Other in fiction.

6. Doreen Massey: Space as a Network of Relations

Doreen Massey similarly contends: “Space is not a fixed point but a node in a web of social relations extended across time and space. Every place contains within it conflicts and negotiations, and thus space itself becomes a discourse reflecting networks of power, identity, and memory.” (Massey, 2015, p. 12). This approach resonates with the way novels portray space: always saturated with memory, history, and power -making a cultural reading essential for grasping its symbolic significance in the text.

Synthesis

It becomes evident that in modern narratology, space has ceased to be a silent backdrop or neutral frame for events. It has instead become a complex cultural discourse. For Lefebvre, it is a socially produced space; for de Certeau, a daily practice; for Ibrahim, a cultural structure exposing hidden systems.

Contemporary scholarship (Tally, Massey, al-Messadi) stresses its symbolic and identitarian dimensions, making it a privileged gateway to reading the novel as a re-imagining of reality and as a revelation of the dialectic of identity, power, and memory.

Axis Three: Space as an Anthropological Symbol

If, in its structural dimension, space constitutes one of the key elements organizing narrative, and if, in its cultural discourse, it reflects networks of social and historical relations, then from an anthropological perspective, space becomes an existential symbol that encapsulates humanity's relationship with the world, mirroring conceptions of identity, memory, and the Other. Here, space is not merely a material datum, but is imbued with symbols, rituals, and meanings that confer upon it the aura of sacredness, estrangement, or familiarity.

1. Paul Ricœur: Space as Narrative Memory

In *Time and Narrative*, Paul Ricœur writes: "Space in narrative is not merely the site of events, but a reservoir of memory that reconnects the past with the present. Through space, history becomes a tangible experience, as geographical space turns into embodied memory, allowing characters to live their identity between presence and absence." (Ricœur, 1983, p. 215). Ricœur thus situates space at the core of human memory, making it indispensable for understanding the identity of individuals and communities. In the Arabic novel, this often appears in depictions of exiled or lost spaces, where nostalgia merges with estrangement.

2. Claude Lévi-Strauss: Space as a Symbolic Structure

Claude Lévi-Strauss insists that: "Space is not innocent; it is framed by symbols and relations that confer value upon things. Places can only be understood through their rituals and myths, for they function as signs that reproduce the society's symbolic structure." (Lévi-Strauss, 1958, p. 182). This approach permits the reading of narrative space as a mythical or

ritualistic structure, where collective pasts are retrieved, and fears and dreams are re-enacted through places. In *The Latin Quarter*, the Parisian neighborhood assumes a quasi-mythical quality, embodying the Arab student's struggle between his Eastern memory and his European exile.

3. Marc Augé: Places and Non-Places

In *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, Marc Augé distinguishes between "places" and "non-places": "Places are spaces saturated with memory, identity, and history, whereas non-places are transitory spaces such as airports, hotels, and highways, where human bonds dissolve and the individual merges into a rootless functional environment." (Augé, 1992, p. 45). This distinction is crucial for understanding modern fiction, where identity-laden places coexist with spaces of estrangement and anonymity. In *The Latin Quarter*, student apartments and Parisian cafés can be read as "non-places" that deepen the protagonist's isolation and reveal his existential alienation.

4. Yuri Lotman: Space as a Text within the Text

Yuri Lotman observes: "Space in the literary text should not be understood merely as a simulation of external geography, but as a text within the text, possessing its own codes and systems, producing autonomous meanings that enrich the narrative." (Lotman, 1990, p. 202). This claim allows for a quasi-anthropological approach, treating space as a self-contained semantic unit that reflects collective perceptions and enters into dialogue with other textual components (characters, time, events).

5. Contemporary Studies (post-2015)

In *Spatial Anthropology* (2018), Christopher Tilley explains: "Space is not an empty surface upon which humans inscribe their lives, but a reciprocal relation between humans and their environment. Every human practice reproduces space as

a symbol, which is why the novel is capable of providing us with an alternative anthropology of places.” (Tilley, 2018, p. 67).

Similarly, in *Anthropology of Space and Place in Literature* (2021), Elisabeth Holt emphasizes: “Novels, especially in postcolonial contexts, reproduce space as a site of symbolic struggle. Places become signs of cultural hybridity, exposing the tension between Self and Other, between belonging and displacement.” (Holt, 2021, p. 93).

These recent anthropological perspectives illuminate the Arabic novel, where space becomes a field of debate between interiority and exteriority, self and Other- as exemplified by the experience of Arab students in mid-twentieth-century Paris.

Synthesis

Anthropological approaches demonstrate that space transcends its role as a narrative backdrop to become a symbol of memory, identity, and power. For Ricœur, it is a reservoir of memory; for Lévi-Strauss, a symbolic structure; for Augé, a place of identity or non-identity; for Lotman, a text within the text. Recent studies (Tilley, Holt) reinforce this perspective by positioning space as a tool for producing alternative anthropological knowledge that unveils symbolic and cultural conflicts in fiction.

Axis Four: Space in Postcolonial Criticism

Space constitutes one of the key concepts for understanding postcolonial literature. Its role is not confined to being a geographical backdrop for events, but it emerges as a contested arena where Self and Other, center and periphery, power and identity confront one another. In this context, space becomes a vessel for experiences of exile, displacement, and cultural hybridity, as well as a locus for the reconstitution of the self in resistance to colonial representations.

1. Edward Said: Space as Colonial Discourse

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said affirms: "Colonialism was not merely a military or economic conquest; it was also an occupation of symbolic space. The places described by travelers and Western novelists were never innocent but were reconfigured within the discourse of colonial domination, turning the Orient into a space of strangeness and subjugation." (Said, 1993, p. 87). Thus, Said demonstrates that colonial literature's spatial representations were complicit in symbolic domination. In turn, the modern Arabic novel attempts to rewrite space from a local perspective, resisting these representations and restoring agency to the Self in its confrontation with the Other.

2. Homi Bhabha: Space and Cultural Hybridity

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha explains: "Postcolonial space is never pure or homogeneous; it is a site of hybridity where cultures meet in a contact zone that produces a third space. Identity is forged there through negotiation and intermingling, not through fixity or purity."

(Bhabha, 1994 [2016], p. 56). Bhabha's notion of the "third space" allows for a reading of narrative places as hybrid sites, where Arab identity interacts with Western space (as in *The Latin Quarter*), generating a new identity oscillating between belonging and estrangement.

3. Gayatri Spivak: Space and the Voice of the Subaltern

In her influential essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, Gayatri Spivak argues: "The space occupied by the subaltern is not merely physical, but also a space of silence within the dominant discourse. Rewriting space from the perspective of the subaltern means reclaiming voice and the right to self-representation." (Spivak, 1988, p. 104). From this perspective, narrative space becomes an arena of resistance, granting marginalized figures (Arab students, women, migrants) a voice that reconfigures spatial experience outside the Western Other's monopoly.

4. Robert Tally: Postcolonial Cartographies

In *Spatiality* (2019), Robert T. Tally Jr. contends: "Postcolonial literature engages in a form of counter-mapping. It reconstructs space as an alternative map, exposing the power relations that colonial cartographies sought to erase. Through narrative, literature becomes a tool of resistance against dominant geography." (Tally, 2019, p. 122). Thus, Arabic fiction formulates "counter-maps," turning Paris in *The Latin Quarter* from a hegemonic Western space into a site reflecting Arab students' inner struggles and reconfiguring its meaning beyond orientalist representations.

5. Recent Studies (2015–2023)

In *Postcolonial Geographies* (2016), David Harvey stresses: "Postcolonial geography is not merely about redistributing maps, but about reconstructing the very experience of place, infused with collective memory and histories of exile and displacement." (Harvey, 2016, p. 211).

Likewise, Anna Bernard argues in *Mapping Postcolonial Spaces in Literature* (2021): "Arab, Asian, and African novels reappropriate Western spaces not as centers of domination, but as sites charged with estrangement and negotiation, where marginalized selves assert their presence within the formerly colonial milieu." (Bernard, 2021, p. 67).

This approach enables us to read *The Latin Quarter* as a work intersecting with exile and migrant literature, where the Parisian neighborhood becomes a symbol of the dialectic between the Arab self seeking voice and the European Other attempting to impose stereotypical frames.

Synthesis

In postcolonial criticism, space is not a mere geographical location, but a symbolic and cultural battleground. For Said, it embodies colonial hegemony; for Bhabha, it is the locus of hybridity; for Spivak, it represents the silence of the subaltern. Contemporary critics (Tally, Harvey, Bernard) enrich this vision by

conceiving of space as a counter-map that exposes power relations and restores marginalized voices within Western environments.

A Close Reading of the Novel

At first glance, the reader of Suheil Idriss's *The Latin Quarter* will notice that it belongs to contemporary Arabic fiction portraying the dialectical relationship and age-old conflict between East and West, or between North and South, between the "underdeveloped" world and the "developed" one, between the Arab Self and the Western Other. The novel also depicts the encounter between the Self — representing the Third World — and the Other — representing the advanced world; a civilizational meeting between the East, with its customs, religions, and spiritual values, and the West, with its traditions, religions, material culture, and scientific-technological advancements. This relationship may take the form of mutual understanding, intellectual and political dialogue, and cultural exchange, or it may rest on dialectical conflict, hostility, hatred, and clash.

1. The Significance of the Parisian Image in *The Latin Quarter*

From the very beginning, it is clear that the protagonist travels from Lebanon to Paris to pursue a doctoral degree in literature. Accordingly, his perception of Parisian space is of central importance to the novel, for it constitutes the primary setting where the events unfold, even though certain passages depict the Lebanese environment in concise terms. The Latin Quarter in Paris symbolizes freedom, a source of knowledge and the arts, and a center of progress and civilization. Paris may have represented for Idriss an "ideal city," where the hero's dreams and desires could materialize — in stark contrast to the Lebanese setting, marked by poverty, deprivation, repression, and the restrictions of tradition. Thus, the novel constructs a comparative framework between the lived realities of Paris and Lebanon.

Given the central role of the Latin Quarter, this study will focus on the effects of Parisian space on the protagonist's character.

A. Paris in the Protagonist's Eyes

The protagonist's view of Paris differs markedly from that of other Arab writers who described the French capital. For example, Rifā'a al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, in his travelogue *The Extraction of Gold in a Summary of Paris* (*Takhlīṣ al-Ibriz fī Talkhiṣ Bārīz*), reveals both admiration and criticism, as he immersed himself in French sciences and culture. Likewise, Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm in *A Bird from the East* depicts his protagonist as spiritually nourished by Paris's museums, libraries, and music halls. Yet, as Georges Tarabichi observes: "Although both Muḥsin, the hero of *A Bird from the East*, and the protagonist of *The Latin Quarter* came to Paris ostensibly for study, the reality was otherwise: Muḥsin went to immerse himself in Paris's cultural treasures, while Idriss's protagonist did not come to Paris as the 'City of Light' but rather as the 'City of Women.'"

(Tarabichi, 1977, pp. 72–73).

This is evident when the protagonist laments after a week in Paris: "A whole week has passed since I arrived in Paris, and all I have encountered is failure with women, any woman. A whole week, and within me burns a fire, with a thousand images of naked girls stretched across beds." (Idriss, 1953, p. 28).

Elsewhere he compares his repressed Eastern experience of women with the freedom he imagines in Paris: "In the East, I knew women as fear, deprivation, repression, abnormality, withdrawal, and sickly imagination. Imagination - that was my only refuge from myself, my surroundings, and my society. This imagination took hold of my mind and carried it far, far away..." (Idriss, 1953, p. 29).

The "far away" becomes attainable in Paris: "And one day, your whole being yearned to draw near to this faraway, to move into it, to test its

reality. And now where you are, living with it—this once-distant dream now close, intimate, in your very hands.” (Idriss, 1953, p. 29).

Even the very name of the Latin Quarter provoked contrasts in his imagination. At first, he associated it with modest Beirut neighborhoods, only to be astonished by its wide, orderly streets unmatched in the East (Idriss, 1953, p. 12).

Thus, the protagonist is portrayed as searching for his authentic self through diverse experiences, dominated by an anxiety linking his Arab past with his Parisian present (Idriss, 2000, p. 114), leading to an inner conflict that underscores Paris as the world he desired.

B. Paris as a Space of Power and Superiority over the East

As noted earlier, Idriss's *The Latin Quarter* constantly juxtaposes Paris with Beirut, establishing a dialectical relationship wherein the West is portrayed as superior to the East, France as dominant over Lebanon, Christianity over Islam, and Western traditions over Eastern ones. Paris, during the period of Idriss's stay, emerges as the place where he encountered knowledge, culture, literature, and theater—a clear reflection in the intellectual capital he later carried back to the Arab world.

The protagonist's voyage across the Mediterranean is depicted as a passage from dream to reality, echoing the journeys of countless Arab students in the 1940s and 1950s. Paris appeared to them as the lighthouse of the world. As the narrator remarks at the outset: “No, you are not dreaming, and it is time you believe your eyes. Can you not feel the ship trembling as it cuts through the waves, carrying you away from the shore toward that city which, until now, lingered in your imagination as an unattainable vision?” (Idriss, 1953, p. 5).

Later he adds: "In a short while you will be in the Latin Quarter, fulfilling the impossible dream. Soon, life will begin - the life you have lived only in imagination ever since you first prepared for this journey to Paris." (Idriss, 1953, p. 11).

From his arrival, the protagonist continuously contrasts the aesthetic and cultural sophistication of Paris with the conditions of Lebanon, confessing that what he witnessed in Paris surpassed even his wildest dreams. His imagined parallels between the two cities quickly collapsed before the grandeur of Paris. For Idriss, his scholarship to study at the Sorbonne - with its vast library and renowned professors - as well as his intellectual exchanges with fellow Arab students, became formative. He later admitted in an interview: "I lived in that great scholarly atmosphere at the Sorbonne library, and forged literary and cultural ties with Arab youth who, at that time, were in Paris. They later became the nucleus of a cultural generation that would steer the course of thought and literature throughout the Arab world." (Idriss, 1985, pp. 81–87).

This statement confirms that Paris represented a cultural and civilizational superiority, with the knowledge he acquired there fueling his intellectual contributions back in Lebanon.

C. Paris as a Space of Fascination and Beauty

The protagonist was captivated by the Latin Quarter and Parisian civilization. He marveled at the chimes of various clocks he had never heard before - the Pantheon, the Sorbonne, Notre Dame (Idriss, 1953, pp. 26–27). He frequented cultural landmarks such as the Pantheon cinema and Café Dupont, places renowned for their association with Parisian intellectual life (Idriss, 1953, pp. 15, 28).

He was dazzled by intellectual figures represented in cinema - Jean-Paul Sartre, André Gide, Picasso, and Jean Rostand - and critiqued their portrayals with surprising acuity (Idriss, 1953, p. 30). This reflects the extent to which Parisian cultural life enthralled him,

pulling him away from Eastern repression toward a world of art, philosophy, and desire.

Even fleeting encounters with Parisian women- in cinemas, cafés, or the streets-filled him with a sense of liberation and discovery, underscoring his deep fascination with Parisian life (Idriss, 1953, pp. 31–32).

D. Paris as a Space of Artistic and Literary Fusion

The novel highlights numerous Parisian spaces devoted to art. The city itself is portrayed as a vast stage -with countless theaters and cinemas, many of which date back centuries. Idriss emphasizes the liberating role of these cultural spaces.

The protagonist and his friend Subḥī even dedicated part of their modest budget to attending a play each week (Idriss, 1953, p. 68), acknowledging that theater was a vital experience absent in the East (pp. 68–69).

Dance also features prominently. Parisian cafés, cabarets, and private soirées are depicted as embodiments of joy, vitality, and excess, drawing the protagonist into experiences he could neither resist nor fully master (Idriss, 1953, p. 24).

Music, too, played a profound role. Upon hearing Chopin's *Tristesse* performed in a Paris metro tunnel, the protagonist was overwhelmed by memories of Lebanon - blending Eastern nostalgia with Western cultural immersion (Idriss, 1953, p. 78).

In addition, he attended lectures at the Sorbonne on aesthetics and modern French poetry, further cementing Paris as a city of intellectual and artistic awakening (Idriss, 1953, pp. 38, 92). For the protagonist, Paris became synonymous with theater, art, and literature, shaping his worldview in contrast to the Arab East

The Significance of the Eastern Lebanese Image in *The Latin Quarter*

The contrast between the protagonist's perception of Parisian life and his view of Eastern life in Lebanon is stark. Whereas Paris evokes fascination and immersion in the Other, returning to Lebanon signifies a rejection of the Self or, at best, a painful negotiation with it. The protagonist perceives his Lebanese existence as oppressive, where personal freedom is crushed by social and familial constraints. The return home thus becomes an anguished regression — from freedom to repression, from love to separation, from cosmopolitanism to provincialism.

A. Paris as a Lost Space-Tears of Lebanon

The protagonist's tears upon his return to Lebanon are, in essence, tears of longing for Paris - for Janine, his Parisian beloved, for his friends, and for the life of leisure and liberation he left behind. As the ship approaches Beirut, he recalls those he has left: "A tear welled in his eyes as images of those he had abandoned passed through his mind: Janine, his friends, even Thérèse the hotel maid... Soon after, images of those awaiting him in Lebanon arose—it was as if Thérèse had reminded him of his mother- and the tear lingered in his eyes." (Idriss, 1953, p. 202).

Only upon seeing the Lebanese coast does he finally weep: "He shed that tear when, after seven days, Lebanon's headland finally came into view- the homeland." (Idriss, 1953, p. 202). Thus, his return to Lebanon signifies both estrangement in his homeland and the torment of separation from Paris and Janine.

B. The House as a Space of Alienation

One might expect the protagonist to find solace at home, surrounded by family and familiar belongings. At first, he does: "When he reached home and entered his old room, finding all his things exactly as they were, he was filled with a sense of comfort and a smile of contentment crossed his lips."

(Idriss, 1953, p. 203).

Yet this comfort quickly turns to estrangement. His mother dominates the household, intruding even upon his private correspondence with Janine, which she reads before him. She disregards his Parisian experiences and insists he marry Nahida, an Eastern woman, instead of a French woman. Overcome with tears, she accuses him of losing his love for his family and country, declaring that the West -its women and its ways- had stolen him away (Idriss, 1953, p. 209).

Thus, his home becomes a site of repression, producing alienation and despair akin to that of any migrant who, after tasting freedom abroad, finds himself suffocated upon returning to his homeland (Idriss, 1953, p. 226).

For the protagonist, Janine symbolized liberation and cultural vitality, while in Lebanon women were confined by patriarchal structures. As the narrator notes: "He saw the Eastern girl, the Arab girl, retreat before any man, whether Arab or foreign, here eyes brimming with fear- the sediment of centuries of fear."

(Idriss, 1953, p. 213).

His family embodies this repressive heritage, preventing Nahida from continuing her studies despite her success in the baccalaureate, compelling her instead toward marriage. As Hisham Sharabi remarks: "There exists a deep-seated hostility in Arab society toward women, a denial of their social existence as human beings, and a resistance to every attempt at their liberation-even when the slogan of 'women's liberation' is raised." (Sharabi, 1993, p. 16). Thus, the protagonist feels compelled to leave home once more, for it brings only alienation and suffocation

Conclusion

The analysis demonstrates that space in Suheil Driss's *The Latin Quarter* is far from being a neutral backdrop to events. Rather, it functions as a narrative and anthropological agent, shaping the construction of characters, guiding their trajectories, and unveiling their psychological and existential dimensions. Space, in its dual reality and fictionality, embodies the complex dialectic between the Arab Self in search of identity and the Western Other imposing its symbolic and cultural authority.

The Latin Quarter, therefore, is more than a geographical location in Paris: it is a mirror of identity conflict and a site of interrogation and interaction, where the individual's dream of freedom and openness intersects with the constraints of estrangement and cultural distance.

Theoretical frameworks such as Bakhtin's chronotope, Robert T. Tally's narrative mapping, and postcolonial counter-mapping illuminate this reading of space in Arabic fiction. *The Latin Quarter* emerges as a textual map that records Arab presence within the Other's space and redistributes the boundaries between center and margin. Space, here, is not a passive container but a "text within the text," endowed with its own semiotic system, intertwining with time, memory, and identity in a complex narrative network.

The novel also operates on multiple levels: it captures everyday details of Parisian life (cafés, streets, apartments, the university), transforming them into cartographic nodes that trace the protagonist's transformations. At the same time, it recalls Beirut as a parallel space that intensifies the dialectic between Self and Other. Narrative space thus becomes both a site of tension and estrangement, and a horizon for cultural negotiation.

In light of this analysis, several comparative research avenues may be proposed:

- A comparative study of *The Latin Quarter* and Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, both of which stage European spaces

(Paris/London) as loci of cultural tension between the Arab Self and the Western Other.

- A comparison with Tawfiq al-Hakim's *A Bird from the East*, which also situates Paris as a space of intellectual and cultural estrangement, thereby enabling an exploration of multiple images of the city in the Arab novelistic imagination.
- A cross-reading with Francophone migrant literature, such as Amin Maalouf's *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes* or *Samarcande*, to examine the construction of hybrid cultural spaces.
- A joint analysis with Arab women's novels portraying Paris as a space of freedom and cultural collision, such as the works of Leila Abouzeid or Ahlam Mosteghanemi, to highlight the gendered dimensions of space in identity formation.

Ultimately, narrative space in *The Latin Quarter* demonstrates that the novel is not merely an aesthetic discourse, but also an anthropological and cultural document that reveals the dynamics of identity in its contact with the Other, and opens new avenues for understanding the interrelation of space, narrative, and identity in modern Arabic literature.

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