

Disillusionment, Confinement and Liberation in Stephen Spender's Poetry

Mohamed Ahmed El-lathy (*)

Abstract

This research, entitled "Disillusionment, Confinement and Liberation in Stephen Spender's Poetry", explores and analyses the three main phases of development in Stephen Spender's Poetry: disillusionment, confinement and liberation.

In the first of these, that of disillusionment, the research focuses on the poet's discovery of the reality about the world around him at the time of war and how this caused the poet to be horror-struck.

In discussing the second phase, that of confinement, the research explores the most important images of confinement as revealed in Spender's poetry and the poet's sense of being helplessly confined.

The third phase shows how the poet decided to free his soul and fly to the world of the sky, beyond the barriers of time and place.

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يقوم هذا البحث باستكشاف و دراسة مراحل ثلاثة فى شعر شاعر الحرب الانجليزى ستيفن سبندر (1909 – 1985) وهى اكتشاف الحقيقة، الانحصار و التحرر فى شعر ستيفن سبندر .

فى المرحلة الاولى من هذه الثلاثة ، مرحلة وهى اكتشاف الحقيقة، والتي يستكشف فيها الشاعر حقيقة العالم من حوله ،، يركز البحث على مشاعر سبندر بالذهور و الرعب بعد ان اكتشف هجمية الانسان فى الحرب.

فى المرحلة الثانية ، يركز البحث على الصور التى يقدمها الشاعر فى شعره و التى تصور شعوره بالانحصار و الضيق .

فى المرحلة الثالثة ، يوضح البحث كيفية ان الشاعر قرر التغلب على الحواجز الزمانية و المكانية التى تحيط به و ذلك من خلال إطلاق روحه تسبح فى عالم السماء ، بعيدا عن الارض بمشكلاتها و حروبها .

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Stephen Spender (1909-1995) is one of the greatest English poets. He belongs to a lively, pugnacious generation of war poets to which many labels have been attached. The poets of such a generation have been referred to as the Thirties poets, the Group, the Generation of Auden (Durrell, 205), the Auden disciples (Williams, 1). The Macspaunday Group (Corcoran, 15; Herbert, 72) and the Pylon poets (Childs, 111). Wystan Hugh Auden (1907-73), Cecil Day Lewis (1904-1972), Louis MacNiece (1907-63) were among the notable members of such a group of poets. The poetry of this group is "still enormously readable, enlivening, amusing: it comes off the page with a zing and a zest that few poets of our time can match" (Barnard, 172).

When WWI broke out Stephen Spender was five years of age and he was thirty when WWII broke out. He was an eye witness of both wars and was deeply influenced by these events. In addition, these wars were, undoubtedly, the greatest of all the formative influences on Spender and his poetry since they essentially crystalised his outlook to life. The political events of such times, as Burgess puts it, "provided an inspiration" for Spender, as they did to many others (223). Spender's poetry can simply be looked at as a cry of opposition against the barbarism and the savagery of war. It is simply a poetry of great instability or, to use Spender's own words, of "a world exploding", "(108). Overwhelmed by his sense of grief, disappointment and horror as such, the poet lost any and every hope of remedy. The following lines from 'To T.A.R.H.', elegiac of tone as they are, are telling of the poet's overwhelming sense of despair:

Night when my life lies with no past or future
But only endless space. It wakes and watches
Hope and despair and the small vivid longings
Gnaw the flesh, like minnows. (40)

Spender's poetry went through three phases of development: disillusionment, confinement and liberation. This paper aims at exploring and discussing these three stages as revealed in Spender's poetry. It is important to note from the beginning, however, that it is not easy at all to draw any chronologically dividing lines to distinguish any of these three veins from another; together, they comprise Spender's poetic vision and together they form the mosaic of Spender's poetic oeuvre. Traces of such phases can be detected early in the poet's career.

II. Disillusionment

Disillusionment is a key concept in Spender's poetry. Spender once said, "The period between 1918 and 1930 was, amongst the intellectuals and the writers, a period of very great disillusionment" (Books, 204). Elsewhere, he refers to his experience of discovering as that of "unmasked agony" (182). Disillusionment is a key word and it is an important clue to understanding Spender. That period was, indeed, a very crucial one in Spender's life. It was a transitional one in the sense that many of Spender's ideas and concepts about the world around him were changed and others were adopted. By disillusionment, Spender meant discovering the facts about the world around him. That was a period marked by loss of trust and hope and, above all, discovering the ugly face of the world.

"Common suffering" (Spender, 98) was what moved Spender most. His interest was in man, irrespectively of any other considerations. The poem 'Ultima Ratio Regum', Latin meaning 'The Last Argument of Kings', is an elegy for a young boy killed under the olive tree:

But the boy lying dead under the olive trees
Was too young and too silly
To have been notable to their important eye.
He was a better target for a kiss.

... ..
Consider. One bullet in ten thousand kills a man.
Ask. Was so much expenditure justified
On the death of one so young and so silly
Lying under the olive trees, O world, O death? (99)

The image drawn, i.e. that of a boy lying killed under olive trees, is a very moving one. Innocence and peace, connoted by the young boy and the olive trees, are savagely violated. In the first two lines the poet is very much moved by the killing of such a young boy. The adjectives "young and silly" are mentioned twice to emphasise the boy's innocence. According to The Concise Oxford Dictionary, "silly" meant "innocent, simple, helpless" in its archaic use (Sykes, 1064). It is interesting also to remark that the young boy was shot dead not while being in the battlefield but he was away under the olive

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trees. Elsewhere, in the poem 'The Room above the Square', the poet speaks of how, "Torn like leaves through Europe is the peace / that through us flowed" (95).

Discovering the reality about man's harshness and barbarity and realising, as he says, that "Man shall be man" (64), and that "this time never heals" (59), he saw that the earth has turned into "hell / Made by Man-self" (132) and that man has proved to be a heartless, foolish creature. Combatants fight using artillery, but in fact they themselves are the machines; they are manipulated by Satan, "the men are the machines" (74), and they are carrying out "That programme of the antique Satan" (65).

Spender was so horror-struck to discover the reality about his world that there came times when the poet had doubts about his own very existence and if he was living or dead. He says, "Shapes of death haunt life" (38), and adds, "Perhaps it is we- the living- who are dead" (109). At other times, he came to see himself as a ghost amid the living. In the poem entitled, 'Meeting' he says, "You are a ghost amid wild flares of guns / Less living than / The shattered dead ", (75), and goes on to speak of his voice as posthumous, "This voice my voice posthumous voice" (.89). In 'Rejoice in the Abyss', he rejects the idea of being a ghost and asserts that he is, "resurrected from dust" (136).

It was by no means easy for the poet to cope with that world. During that period of discovering the reality about this world, Spender was greatly confused as to how to devise a way to deal with the world. It is not true that Spender, "tried to come to terms with [his] age and accept it as a time of beauty and order" (Jovanovich, p.830) since his was never a world of beauty or order.

There was a time of reconciliation, however. 'Meeting' shows us a poet reconciling with himself. The poet goes on confirming his being through a heavy use of the first person singular pronoun "I" which appears extensively in poems many poems such as '6', '8', and 'Sirmione Peninsula'. In this last poem, the poet uses the pronoun "I" more than ten times. In poem '8', the poet says:

Central 'I' is surrounded by 'I eating',
'I loving', 'I angry', 'I excreting'

... ..
'I tiring' and 'I sleeping' (26)

As a matter of fact, war exposed the poet to himself. He discovered that he is a big coward, "I am the coward of cowards. The machine-gun stitches / My intestines with a needle, back and forth" (107). As A. Thwaite puts it, "self-revelation turn[s its] focus on weakness, impotence, the incapacity to act and, as a consequence, pity" (Twentieth, 71).

This prompted another question, i.e. the question of whether poetry and poets had any real, important role to play. This was, indeed, a very important occupation for the poet. Like his fellow poet W. H. Auden, Spender came to believe that "poetry makes nothing happen" (Reeves, 2). Poem '16' starts as follows:

Who lives under the shadow of war,
What can I do that matters?
My pen stops, and my laughter, dancing, stop,
Or ride to a gap.

... ..
I am shot with thought (36)

The poet's greatest quarrel, expectedly enough, was that with words. This was, indeed, the quarrel for identity. There came times when, as Spender himself confessed, "words gave way". The ellipses that appear occasionally in Spender's poetry can speak volumes of the poet's inner quarrel with words. His poems 'Meeting', 'The Uncreating Chaos' and 'The Dream' are such good examples in this respect. Words are sometimes "furious", sometimes "mutilated".

The poet's remarkable struggle with words can simply be attributed to two reasons. First of all, he was so greatly panic-stricken by wars that he could not express himself. The poet's grief was incommunicable. The second reason why Spender found it difficult to express himself as a poet was the political pressures of his time. Poets were always expected to be commenting on the political situation, particularly at such times. This, indeed, harassed Spender greatly since he disliked the idea of yielding to the yoke of politics. Spender hated the idea of being "hounded by external events", O'Neill says (2). This was not, of course, an escape from the role he was entitled to play as a poet but, rather, that he realized that his role as a poet was different from the roles of politicians and journalists.

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Such was a very perplexing situation to the poet. It was indeed a stumbling block for sometime. There came times when the poet resorted to loneliness and silence. In 'Song', for instance, he speaks of his "exiled misery" (116) and thinks of committing suicide. Thus, amidst war, the poet saw himself as standing alone, "I am left alone" (107), "Every sensation except being alone / Drained out of your mind" (108). Addressing himself, he says, "You'd stand alone in a silence that never muttered / Face to face with your emptiness in an empty room (74). In 'The Room above the Square', the poet says, "now I climb alone to the high room/ Above the darkened square", (95) and in 'Song', he says:

...I climb
Alone to a high room of clouds
Up a ladder of the time
And lie upon a bed alone. (116)

Silence was another distinctive feature of that time. Spender was so much appalled by such events that he stuck to silence occasionally. It is interesting to remark that Spender resorted to silence from one time to another and that late in his career as a poet, i.e. since 1955, silence turned out to be a characterizing feature, as Legouis asserts; and, in fact, "he suffered from [this] silence" (1448).

His silence, it is to be noticed, was not optional; the poet resorted to it at a time when he suffered from "incommunicable grief" (Spender, 96). His silence was, therefore, never that of quiet and tranquillity, rather it was similar to the silence that sometimes dominates at times of war, charged with fear and restlessness.

Spender settled his quarrel with words by deciding to be honest to himself and to write what he wanted to write rather than what was dictated by his people's expectations. As one critic, Bernard Spencer, commented, "[Spender's] best poems seek to move beyond, even as they acknowledge, the political pressures of the period" (O'Neill, 42).

Indeed, many critics saw this attitude on the poet's part to be detachment and separation and this added greatly to the poet's sense of trouble and confusion. Spender was severely criticized due to this. B. Spencer says:

The capacity for pity and the capacity for scientific detachment may both be valuable [to the poet] in the rest of

his life but they are dangerous to him as a poet. Pity and disgust and the scientific attitude are all attitudes of separation, not of joining. ... True poetry is a dance in which you take part and enjoy yourself. (O'Neill, 42).

There followed a time of a very hard struggle and negotiation between the word and the world which was difficult for Spender to settle. Out of this very quarrel the poet was born. Once commenting on the poets of the thirties, of whom he himself was one, Spender said, "They were extremely non-political with half of themselves and extremely political with the other half" (O'Neill, 116). A very notable critic, Anthony Thwaite, summarises Spender's dilemma by saying, "The struggle in Spender had always been between the public man and the man of letters" (Poetry, 24). The poet's hesitation is cleverly stated by Spender himself as he remarks that such a time witnessed him "restlessly searching for forms in which to express the stages of development" (Thwaite, 24). In another poem, he speaks of his "own wavering uncertainty" (78). Importantly enough, Spender gives us an account of the experience in his Forward to his volume of verse entitled *The Still Centre*, published in 1939 as follows:

I think that there is a certain pressure of external events on poets today, making them tend to write about what is outside their own limited experience. The violence of the times we are living in, the necessity of sweeping and general and immediate action, tend to dwarf the experience of the individual, and to make his immediate environment and occupation perhaps something that he is even ashamed of. For this reason, in my most recent poems, I have deliberately turned back to a kind of writing which is more personal, and I have included within my subjects weakness and fantasy and illusion. (O'Neill, 137)

What is really important to bear in mind about such a period in Spender's life is that it was that very time that proved to be essentially formative to the poet and that by coming to such inner and outer reconciliations, i.e. with the self and with the world around, the poet was born.

III- Confinement

Confinement is another important phenomenon in Spender's poetry. Spender's sense of confinement resulted from a sense of disillusionment. He announced that, "No spirit seek here rest" (64) and in, he says "I cannot sleep" (70). Images that highlight such a stage in Spender's life are many. These include images of the poet being imprisoned and unable to achieve his freedom, the image of the heart being imprisoned behind the ribs, images of birds shut in cages and images of the poet being choked. Such images appear recurrently in Spender's poetry revealing a poet suffering from the barriers of place and time. Poems such as 'Exiles from their Land, History their Domicile', 'An Elementary School Classroom in a Slum', 'The Prisoners' and "can speak volumes of the poet's sense of incarceration.

To begin with, Spender's sense of confinement was an overwhelming one. The poet expressed such an obsession in a number of ways. The concept of being imprisoned and confined is, indeed, omnipresent throughout the poet's whole poetic output. As a poet, he always suffered from a sense of being entangled in a world he never liked. The speaker in the poem 'Exiles from their Land, History their Domicile' the speaker summons angels to save him:

O angels, fire your guns
O save and praise
Recall me from exile
Let me join
Those who kneel there and kiss the sacred shore
And let my words appear
A heaven-printed world! (79)

Spender's regret of being space-and-time-bound is dwelt upon time and time again. In the poem entitled 'An Elementary School Classroom in a Slum', the poet speaks of how the school children are time-and-place-confined. The As Jem Poster remarks, "the first stanza ends with a reference to the imaginary world of a child whose vision seems to carry him beyond the confines of the classroom" (34):

All their time and space are foggy slum.
So blot their maps with slums as big as doom (80).

The poet protests against the confining of such children and suggests

throwing open the windows and taking the children to the open fields:
Break O break open till they break the town
And show the children to green fields (81)

The poet takes the idea of confinement a step further as he speaks of prisoners who spend "years on years" in utter despair and darkness in prisons. In 'The Prisoners', he says:

Far far the least of all, in want,
are these,
the prisoners
turned massive with their vaults and dark with dark.

... ..
The silted flow
Of years on years
Is marked by dawns
As faint as cracks on mud-flats of despair. (41)

As the poem proceeds, however, an important shift in the use of pronouns takes place. We find out that the poet who was telling us about the prisoners at the beginning of the poem using the pronoun "they", has now become one of the prisoners. In the fifth stanza, the poet shifts from using the third person plural pronoun "they" to using the first person singular pronoun "I":

Then, when I raise my hands to strike,
It is too late,
There are no chains that fall
Nor visionary liquid door
Melted with anger.
When have their lives been free from walls and dark
And airs that choke?
And where less prisoner, to let my anger
Like a sun strike? (42)

There came a time when body and soul were at discord. The body was looked at as the cell of the soul. It is the body that hinders and entangles the soul. The poet suffered from a sense of humiliation and "ultimate inferiority" (87) due to being a human being. In 'The Trance', he says:

...we are committed

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Beneath the windows of our flesh
And shuddering horror of our dream,
Where unmasked agony is permitted. (182)

One of the most interesting images of confinement Spender offers his readers is that of his heart lying helplessly imprisoned behind the ribs which are themselves the bars of the prison. Addressing himself, the poet says:

Your heart looks through the breaking ribs-
Oiled axle through revolving spokes.
Unbroken blood of the swift wheel,
You stare through centrifugal bones
Of the revolving and dissolving world. (109)

The function of the ribs, as the poet observes, is not to protect the heart; they are breaking ones. The cramped heart lies groaning behind the ribs.

The ideas of being choked and confined are two weighty ones in Spender's poetry. "Choked" is, indeed, a key word to understanding Spender as a poet; and a word he preferred most. Indeed, Spender felt "choked", from the smoke, of bombs, guns, explosions, killing and suffocating the inhabitants of the earth. At a time when two armies were "digging" their machinery, his "voice was choked" (97). In one of his poems, he says, "rain / And fog choke every sigh; round corners of day (43).

In poem '21', he, further, asserts that "This century chokes me under roots of night./ I suffer"and goes on, in the lengthy poem entitled 'Variations on my Life', to assert:

There is never enough air
There is never wide enough space
There is never blue enough for heaven
There is never white enough for light
There is never a three dimensional sheet of paper
Where words may climb and dive
And praise loop the loop of aeroplanes (88)

Indeed, the idea of suffering from this feeling of being choked is asserted repeatedly throughout Spender's whole poetry. it has, duly

enough, turned out into a constant motif in Spender's poetry.

We hear of towers long broken off from sight
And tortures and wars, smoky and dark with rumour,
But on Mind's buried thought there falls no light.
Watch me who walk through coiling streets where rain
And fog choke every sigh; round corners of day,
... ..
the city climbs in horror to my brain,
the writings are my only wings away. (43)

The idea of choking stated repeatedly and affirmed by Spender can disclose the poet's inner conflict and division, i.e. the quarrel with the self, and hence, quarrel with words an experience out of which his poetry saw light. As W. B. Yeats once remarked, "We make out of the quarrel with the others rhetoric, but out of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry" (O'Neill, 117).

Images of birds in cages looms large in Spender's poetry. Such are, indeed, the most striking and the most characterizing images of such a stage in Spender's poetry. This is another way in which the poet expressed his suffering of being confined. He feels extremely sorry for the birds in cages:

...and we're Birds
'shut in steel cages by the Devil, ...
'Like the Miners in their pit cages
'And us in our Chimneys to climb, as we should.'
-Ah, twittering voices
Of children crawling on their knees
... ..
You are the birds of a songless age (82)

Such is an important image, one that ushers us into the very mentality and psyche of the poet. He laments ever being born at such ignorant time and place. Unfortunately, he was born to an ignorant, songless age in which birds are caged and the music heard is only that of the "rage of drums" (138), being beaten, of course, to announce war accompanied by the "pom-pom-pom" (107) rhythm of the heavy, mass-destructive weaponry. Sadly enough, this was the music of the age.

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Further, in one of these poems, '22', despite being confined like this "only suns" find their way to reach the prisoner to illuminate the bird's neck. The "neck" is a synecdoche of the body. A synecdoche is a figure of speech in which a part of something stands for the whole thing. The rays of the sun that flash on the birds neck symbolise hope. By this "flash", the "suns" give the "prisoner" a ray of hope:

Passing, men are sorry for birds in cages
And for unrestricted nature, hedged and lined.
But what do they say to your pleasant bird
Physical dalliance, since years confined?

Behind three centuries, behind the trimmed park,
Woods you felled, your clothes, houses you built,
Only love remembers where that bird dipped his head,
Only suns, light-years distant, flash along his neck.

Dance, will you and sing? yet swear he is dead.
Invent politics to hide him and lawsuits and suits.
Now he's forbidden, and quite banned like grass,
where the fields are covered with suburban houses.

I never hear you are 'happy' (44)

Poem '22' concludes very tellingly with the poet warning his people against going on depriving their bird from freedom since this will be an unforgivable sin. Using the possessive adjective "your" in "your bird" is a very clever remark of the poet. He is one of them; he is their bird and they should protect him:

Yes! And if you still bar your pretty bird, remember
Revenge and despair make their home in your bowls.
Life cannot pardon a purity without scruple
The knife in one's own flesh, the angel and destroyer,
inventor of self-martyredom, serene and terrible. (45)

Finally, the world turned unbearable to the poet. It was a very crucial point in the poet's career when he got claustrophobic about the world in which he was living. Speaking of the children in 'An Elementary School Classroom in Slum', Spender says "All of their

time and space are foggy slum" (80). This exactly applies to Spender himself, who was himself one of those school children early in his life. In the poem entitled 'Explorations', the poet makes clear his intention that he wants to go "far far far from these wars", (149); only there can he perform his "dance of life" (149). Spender sought new vistas for release and emancipation. The best and the final resort he yielded to was the world of the sky. Throughout Spender's poetry, it is not at all difficult to identify his aggrandizing of the world of the sky. The sky has always proved to be a source of inspiration and relief for the poet. Furthermore, in Spender's poetry, the sky symbolizes freedom.

IV- Liberation

Stephen Spender was a passionate lover of the sky. Among the English poets, it is believed, he will ultimately be remembered for this trait since his love of that world has finally proved to be the poet's source of inspiration. His poetry shows an unprecedented and unrivalled preoccupation with the world of the sky; a permanent fascination and obsession that lasted lifelong and which was addressed by the poet recurrently. Indeed, Spender's poetry surges with references to that world or images drawn from it. To give a few examples, in Spender's poetry, you can read about "the listening sky" (47), "cloud ...with swan-white neck" (58), "how strangely this sun reminds me of my love!" (18), his anger that is like "a sun strike"(42), the "foreign moon" (56), the "dying sky" (57)and "amber clouds" (98). Indeed, one can hardly expect to read any of Spender's poems without a clear reference to the sky; the sky, the sun, the moon, the planets, the stars, the comets, the clouds, etc. are, in fact, all omnipresent and ubiquitous in his poems. Even birds are looked up to and held in such a high esteem for being close to the world of the sky, and, undoubtedly, for the freedom of life they enjoy.

What is really interesting to note about such a phenomenon in Spender's poetry is that it has either escaped the attention of critics or else that it was misinterpreted. To give a few examples, while some critics interpreted Spender's infatuation with the world of the sky as romanticism (Willhardt, 306; Everett, 210), others believed that he was a metaphysical poet; and a third group asserted that he was a transcendental poet. Still, others believed that he was such an

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"ornithologist" (Draper, 114), due to Spender's remarkable interest in birds. Each of these groups of critics approached Spender's poetry through a rather limited perspective and, therefore, was truly unable to reach a true, comprehensive appreciation of Spender's poetic outlook or even to account for his obsession with that world of the sky. One critic, A. Kingsley Weatherhead was, indeed, clever enough to remark that "Ubiquitously in Spender's work we find the poet covertly or overtly using the outside world for inward symbolic purposes" (O'Neill, 42).

Having discovered the reality about the world and having found how choking, confining and unbearable his world has become, Spender the poet resorts to the world of the sky, a world that has always been an aspiration for the poet. Throughout his poetry, the poet has often and often addressed it and aspired for it. He is confirmed that his destination is sky and not anywhere else and that is why he urges himself to, "creep skywards" (195). He is sure now about where to direct, "unfold thy wings" (183), he says to himself. He devised a way by which he could join the world of the sky.

At last, the poet managed to solve the problem of confinement and get over the barriers of time and place. In poem '7', he says:

Different living is not living in different places
But creating in the mind a map

...

but with no change of place. (p.25)

Spender goes on to announce that:

I grow towards an acceptance of that sun
Which hews the day from night. The light
Runs from the dark, the dark from light
Towards a black or white total emptiness. (p. 92)

It is worth mentioning that the idea of liberation was referred to early in the poet's career since the sky was a very early obsession to the poet. The first poem in Spender's Collected Poems 1928-1953 is untitled; it is given the Roman number 'I'. This is one of Spender's most cryptic and mysterious poems; intensely loaded with implications. The speaker, in this poem, importantly enough, compares himself to Icarus. Like Icarus, Spender will set himself free by flying to the sky. Spender's freeing of himself is not, it is to be

noticed, in any sense physical, as Icarus's was, rather it is a freeing of the soul. In poem 'I', he says "like Icarus mid-ocean-drowned,/ Hands, wings, are found" (19). With these wings, the poet will release himself from the terrestrial to the celestial world and will join the much aspired for free, peaceful world of the sky.

This poem derives a lot of its importance from being located at the very beginning of the Collected Poems and, therefore, it is deliberately intended to inaugurate the Spender's vocational career as a poet. The intrinsic value of the poem lies in the fact that it unveils the poet's early interest in the world of the sky; an interest that proved to last lifelong. From such standpoint, the poem can be accepted as a manifesto of the poet's creed in the same way Seamus Heaney's first poem 'Digging', for instance, is seminal and essential to a true understanding of his whole poetry.

In this first poem, Spender, deliberately enough, introduces us to the world his soul aspires for, through the numerous references he makes to "the hawk", "eagles", "the enormous cloud", "the sun" and, most importantly of all is that reference to "Icarus" and his "wings". The poem opens very simply telling us about how the speaker in the poem, at a time of despair, decides not to aspire for the sky world anymore, "He will watch the hawk with an indifferent eye/ or pitifully" (19). The poem, then, proceeds landing us again to the earth with the poet's telling us about the "weapons men use... with death [being] close linked" (19). Once again, the poet soars with his wild imagination telling us about how the personae in the poem "had paced the enormous cloud" (19). The way in which the poem comes to a close matters greatly. It is, indeed, inseparable from the poet's whole oeuvre since it announces the poet's most important goal: joining the world of the sky.

The journey of the imaginative and the realistic the poet takes us through in this short poem is not as simple as it may appear at a first look. Indeed, the poem is only ostensibly clear and its simplicity is therefore, deceptive. A scrupulous reading of the poem can provide us with clues essential to understanding Spender as a poet.

The poem reveals a very deliberate writer behind the lines. To begin with, in itself, that oscillation between the world of the sky and that of the earth reveals the sense of hesitation and restlessness the

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personae in the poem is experiencing. This can, indeed, expose the poet's state of mind and the inner quarrels "He" has experienced

In their turn, the shifts the poet makes in this short poem are worth considering. By shifting from the celestial world to the terrestrial one and then back again to the celestial one, though through quite a new, perspective, as will be pointed out, the poet divulges his desire of joining the sky. In such an experience of looking upwards, downwards and then upwards again, the poet can be compared to a bird that is going to launch on its first flying attempt. Like the bird, the poet is full of anxiety, hesitation and fear when it is about to fly for the first time. As the poem discloses it, after gazing at the world of the sky, the poet is quickly reminded of the evils that have befallen the earth by a mere look at the earth: artillery is destroying everything and, the world is exploding. Having realized that the sky is his real destination, the poet then, gazes up again and makes up his mind to take the journey; a journey that will take him a lifetime to complete. The poet gets determined to take his journey to his destination, i.e. the sky, after the image of Icarus gets crystalised before the poet's eyes. The poet is, thus, reminded that his won't be the first journey to the sky.

The shifts made in the use of tenses are also worth considering. The variation of tenses used by the poet in this first poem are revealing of the poet's feelings of indeterminacy. There are tense shifts from the future simple tense "will watch" to the past simple tense "feared" and the present simple tense "use" and then back to the future simple tense "will not know" to the past simple "paced" and the past perfect "had won" and, finally, the present simple tense, passive "are found".

To take the question of the shifts made in this poem a step beyond, let's consider the phonological scheme of a few lines that show how adroit and dexterous Spender was as a poet. To give one example, let's consider the manipulation of the /w/ sound in the first two lines, "will watch the hawk with", when the poet tells us about the world of the sky. This is surly no mere coincidence. In other words, the recurrence of such sound schemes in such a way is deliberately intended to imply and represent the lucidity of movement the bird enjoys in the vast, free, peaceful world of the sky. Such an idea gets clearer if we contrast the sounds manipulated here with the ones the

poet employs when referring to the earth:

Weapons men use, stone, sling and strong-thewed bow;
He will not know. (p.19)

The heavily consonantal use of the nasal sounds /m/ and /n/, the velar nasal sound /ŋ/ as well as the dexterous employing of the sibilant /s/ and /z/ sounds used help portray the atmosphere of war. The recurrence of the nasal sounds /m/ and /n/ can be accepted to imply the humming noise of war planes in flocks similar to swarms of bees. In their turn, the /s/ and /z/ sounds, in addition to implying the harsh, loud sounds of the war aircraft, are also meant to imply the high sounds of the explosions on earth. Due to their hissing quality, sibilants, it is to be observed, are louder than the other sounds, and this makes them more suitable here. In addition, the forceful utterance of the velar /ŋ/ adds to the difficulty of the situation. This is also supported by the employing of monosyllabic hard words that sound like bombs. It may be interesting here to refer to Geoffrey Leech's classification of the English consonants in terms of their "impressionistic" value in his book entitled *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry*. Leech also classifies the English consonants on a scale of hardness. (98).

To round it up, the combination as well as the manipulation of such sounds in such a way is no coincidence. Spender was a connoisseur, a poet quite aware of his tools and of the influence he wanted to create in his readers. One wonders here if the wings found are those of poesy Keats referred to in his poem 'Ode to a Nightingale':

Away! Away! For I will fly to thee,
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy (Harrison, 328)

In poem '24', Spender returns to the same idea once again. The poem opens as follows:

I think of those who were truly great.
And it reaches its close by hinting at Icarus and those who yearned for the world of the sky:
Born of the sun, they traveled ... toward the sun
And left the vivid air signed with their honour. (47)

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Poem '21' is essential to understanding Spender as a poet. In this poem, Spender makes the idea of the wings clearer as he says, "The writings are my only wings away". This statement is, indeed, crucial to understanding Spender's poetry. It is, so to speak, the cornerstone of his philosophy and thought as a poet. The words "wings" and "away" are two key words to understanding Spender's philosophy as revealed in his poetry. Indeed, it is this very announcement that the poet abides by henceforth.

Spender must have written this first poem after long contemplation of his position as a poet. The significance of this poem lies in that it not only shows a poet at a crucial turning point in his career, but also in the determination and the confirmation the poet shows when deciding upon his goal. The poem opens with the poet stating that he has identified his aim clearly and that he will fly to reach that aim, but that flight will take him a lifetime to complete. The poet is satisfied, however, to take the journey since it will be his only means of escape from the world that chokes him:

Without that once clear aim, the path of flight
To follow for a life time through white air,
This century chokes me under roots of night.
I suffer like history in the Dark Ages, where
Truth lies in dungeons, too deep for whisper. (43)

As the poem progresses, the poem implies that the poet's path on earth was not at all clear, as that of the flight he is going to launch. The world around him now is no more than "coiling streets where rain / and fog choke every sigh" (43). The poem comes to a close with the poet asserting, "The writings are my only wings away" (43). The image of the wings is the most important and the most prevailing image of this stage in the poet's career (43).

Poem 'O' is one of Spender's most interesting poems. It derives a lot of its importance from the fact that it seems to provide a continuation of thought to that proffered in poem '21'. In addition to the carefully selected diction of the poem, the poem's simplicity and lyricism are important in revealing the poet's ease of mind as he releases his transcends up through the world of the sky:

O
O thou O
Of round earth of round heaven,

Unfold thy wings,
Then beyond the colour blue
Pass, beyond light
Pass, into space, out of sight

Beyond sight
O, into pure sound
Where one trumpet
Sustains the final note,
O pass beyond sound
Into pure silence

Beyond silence
O at the throne of God
Beyond flesh pass
Beyond form to idea (p.183)

Only when the poet joins the world of the heaven, when beyond the confining, choking limits of the terrestrial world that he is free and able to sing. Only in the open world of the sky can the poet achieve "timelessness" (p.64) and "eternity" (p.59). Only then, can the poet achieve self-recognition. 'Meeting' shows a poet who has reconciled with himself. The id and the ego are on good terms now. The differences that once existed are almost gone and the poet has bridged such gaps:

'At last', you sang, 'there comes this pace
Beyond War's separating will,
Where we are alone, face to face.
'If tomorrow divides us, we shall fill
That space with this peace as today the space
Which, when we are closest must divide us still.
Distances between us are of crystal
Traversed with diagonals of rays
In which our eyes meet when, near or far, they gaze.
'Gazing into that crystal, behold the possible
Nakedness nakeder than nakedness
Where, stripped of Time and Place, as of a dress,
We shall meet again, although invisible,
'Farewell now-----' (p.177-178)

At last, he poet could emancipate his soul and reach a destination at which the flesh-bound troubles disappear altogether. His means to reaching his ultimate goal is his poetry and writings which are his wings.

IV- Conclusion

Stephen Spender's poetic vision was largely formed by his sense and experience of being confined by a world and a time that he regretted belonging to. This sense of confinement is a ubiquitous one that underlies all his poetry. It is a motif that crosses and recrosses throughout the whole fabric of Spender's poetry bringing about some kind of internal unity.

If the planet of the earth did not provide the poet with consolation, "there is no consolation, no, none, (59), the sky with its open space could provide the poet with the consolation and the relief he needed. Proving finally not only to be the poet's source of inspiration but his source of relief and consolation as well.

Stephen Spender is a poet of the sky. Heavenly bodies twinkle throughout his poetry. Spender's interest in the world of the sky turned into idealization of that world. He believed that he could achieve his liberation only through joining the world of the sky.

Spender remains unique among the English poets due to his distinctive interest in the sky and his poems remain as unique as a fingerprint. The poet's individuality is, undoubtedly, asserted through his poems. The hopes expressed in the poems as well as the world dreamt of are particularly the spender's own.

Moreover, the idea of flying to the sky looms large above all the poet's other themes. The sky was his only way to freedom, which he appreciated most. His words and poems were his wings, a means, with which he flew and soared high in the world of the sky transcending all the limits and the restraints of the earthly world.

The poet's development has been traced through the three stages of disillusionment, confinement and, finally, liberation. After finding out the reality of the world, and after realizing his inability to cope up with his world, the poet sought a solution within himself. After exploring the world, he dwelt upon explored himself.

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