



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Blue Neon, Empty Streets: How Cityscapes Shape Love and Loneliness in Modern Literature

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Abstract

Urban life is often seen as a space of endless possibilities, yet beneath the surface, it carries a weight of isolation, exhaustion, and longing. This dissertation explores the impact of industrialization, modern cityscapes, and shared spaces on human emotions and relationships through three contemporary novels, *Love in the Big City* by Sang Young Park, *Beautiful World, Where Are You?* by Sally Rooney, and *If Cats Disappeared from the World* by Genki Kawamura. Each of these works presents a unique perspective on how people navigate love, memory, and identity within the urban world.

Through the lens of industrial poetics, this study examines how the modern city influences emotional and psychological experiences. In *Love in the Big City*, Seoul becomes both a place of liberation and confinement, where the protagonist's personal struggles are shaped by the city's evolving social landscape. *Beautiful World, Where Are You?* moves through the complexities of friendship and intimacy in an Ireland shaped by capitalism and housing crises, questioning the role of shared spaces in human connection. *If Cats Disappeared from the World* explores the consequences of loss in an increasingly disconnected society, highlighting how the absence of seemingly small things can reveal the deeper significance of human relationships.

By analyzing these novels, this dissertation aims to show how industrialization and modern urban life shape the ways people love, grieve, and remember. It argues that the city is not just a backdrop but an active force that alters human interactions, pushing individuals toward both connection and solitude. In a world that is constantly expanding and accelerating, these works remind us that the true essence of life often lies in the small, unspoken moments that survive within the vast machinery of modern existence.

Introduction

Cities are more than just landscapes of concrete and steel; they are living, breathing spaces that shape human emotions, relationships, and identities. Beneath their mechanized exteriors, cities pulse with stories of love found and lost, of fleeting connections, of solitude in a crowd. Literature has long engaged with this dynamic, using urban spaces not as static settings but as forces that actively shape the narratives unfolding within them. My dissertation, *Urban Hearts: The Role of Cityscapes in Shaping Stories and Selves across Irish, Japanese, and Korean Narratives*, explores how industrial poetics the interplay between urbanization, mechanization, and storytelling—manifests in the works of Sally Rooney, Genki Kawamura, and Sang Young Park.

Industrial poetics examines how the industrialized world influences literature, not just thematically but structurally. The mechanical becomes metaphorical subway lines mirror the routine yet relentless passage of time, neon-lit streets reflect internal turbulence, and towering buildings create both freedom and entrapment. In *Beautiful World, Where Are You?*, Dublin becomes an emotional battleground where characters navigate intimacy, distance, and self-exploration against the backdrop of gentrified cafés, coastal isolation, and digital conversations. In *If Cats Disappeared from the World*, Tokyo transforms into a space where existential dread and memory intertwine, its flashing billboards and crowded streets emphasizing the transience of human life. *Love in the Big City* presents Seoul as both exhilarating and alienating, its nightlife and public spaces mirroring the fluidity of identity, especially within the queer experience.

The theoretical framework for this study is rooted in Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*, which argues that space is socially produced rather than passively existing. His exploration of spatial production, relational dynamics, and the tension between urban and rural landscapes is key to understanding how industrialized settings shape human narratives. Edward Soja's *Thirdspace* extends this by emphasizing how physical spaces are also psychological and imagined, while Marc Augé's concept of "non-places" helps explain the detachment and impermanence found in hyper-industrialized urban spaces. Zygmunt Bauman's *Liquid Modernity* further contextualizes the instability of modern life, where relationships and identities are constantly shifting, much like the cities in these novels.

By applying these perspectives, this dissertation examines how cityscapes influence the emotional and psychological landscapes of characters. Across Dublin, Tokyo, and Seoul, the industrialized world shapes love, loss, and memory in ways that transcend cultural boundaries. In doing so, this study highlights how literature reflects the deeply intertwined relationship between cities and the people who inhabit them, capturing the poetry of urban existence.

Literature Review

The exploration of industrial poetics in contemporary literature reveals the deep entanglement between human emotions, societal structures, and urban spaces. Sally Rooney's *Beautiful World, Where Are You?*, Sang Young Park's *Love in the Big City*, and Genki Kawamura's *If Cats Disappeared from the World* offer nuanced perspectives on how modernity shapes personal experiences, relationships, and the ways individuals engage with space. These texts resonate with critical theories by Pierre Bourdieu, Guy Debord, Yi-Fu Tuan, Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja, Doreen Massey, Raymond Williams, Marc Augé, and Zygmunt Bauman, all of whom provide valuable frameworks for understanding the intersection of industrialization, urban landscapes, and emotional lives.

Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital (*Distinction*, 1984) highlights how class structures shape access to space and relationships in *Beautiful World, Where Are You?*. Alice, a successful writer, and Felix, a warehouse worker, embody opposing social positions, revealing the ways economic privilege dictates access to both physical and emotional spaces. Alice's rural retreat, while isolating, symbolizes her financial freedom, whereas Felix's detachment from literary culture exposes the silent divisions of class. Similarly, Dublin's urban spaces reflect socio-economic hierarchies—Eileen's precarious living situation contrasts sharply with Simon's stability, illustrating Bourdieu's argument that "social space tends to function as a symbolic space" (1984, p. 241).

Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) provides insight into *Love in the Big City*, where Seoul's consumer-driven landscape turns personal experiences into performative spectacles. The protagonist, Young, experiences relationships through the lens of urban nightlife, cafés, and university spaces, where identity is both constructed and commodified. Debord's notion that "the spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images" (1967, p. 4) is evident in Young's romantic and social life, which unfolds in spaces shaped by visibility and consumer culture. As he matures, these once-exciting spaces become sites of disillusionment, echoing Debord's claim that "all that was once directly lived has become mere representation" (1967, p. 12).

In *If Cats Disappeared from the World*, Yi-Fu Tuan's space and place theory (*Space and Place*, 1977) helps unpack the protagonist's shifting relationship with his surroundings. Initially, his apartment is merely a functional space, but as he faces mortality, it transforms into a place imbued with memory and emotional weight. Tuan's distinction that "place is security, space is freedom" (1977, p. 3) captures this evolution, as objects like a clock gifted by his late mother take on profound meaning.

Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1991) and Edward Soja's *Thirdspace* (1996) emphasize that space is socially produced and actively lived. In *Beautiful World, Where Are You?*, Alice's retreat to rural Ireland represents both an escape and an unresolved tension with urban life, demonstrating how space is never neutral but shaped by individual and societal forces. Similarly, Doreen Massey's *For Space* (2005) argues that space is constantly in flux, mirroring Young's changing perception of Seoul as he navigates love, loss, and self-discovery.

Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* (1973) offers a framework for understanding Alice's retreat to the countryside as a nostalgic response to urban alienation. While she seeks peace, her emotional struggles persist, challenging the romanticized notion of rural escape. Meanwhile, in *Love in the Big City*, Seoul's shifting urban landscape reinforces the protagonist's transient relationships and emotional instability, reflecting Williams's argument that city life, though chaotic, is where identity is actively negotiated.

Marc Augé's *Non-Places* (1995) deepens this discussion by analyzing impersonal, transitory spaces such as train stations, highways, and rented apartments spaces where modern individuals experience isolation. In "If Cats Disappeared from the World", the protagonist's movement through such non-places underscores his detachment from life itself, reinforcing Augé's claim that "non-places create solitude and anonymity" (1995, p. 103).

Bauman's *Liquid Modernity* (2000) further contextualizes the instability in these novels, particularly in their depiction of relationships and identity. His theory that "in liquid modernity, nothing is meant to last" (2000, p. 23) is reflected in *Love in the Big City*, where Young's fleeting romances mirror the impermanence of urban spaces, and in *Beautiful World, Where Are You?*, where digital communication replaces stable, in-person intimacy.

Together, these critical perspectives highlight how these novels use industrial poetics to explore class, consumerism, and emotional landscapes. They reveal how space, whether physical, emotional, or psychological, shapes human experience in an increasingly industrialized and transient world.

Analysis

Love In The Big City - Sang Young Park

1.1

Sang Young Park's *Love in the Big City* is a deeply personal exploration of love, grief, and identity, intricately woven into the fabric of Seoul's urban landscape. At the heart of this novel is Namsan Tower, which serves as more than just a landmark—it becomes a site of transformation for Park Young, mapping his journey from youthful naivety to emotional resilience. The tower's presence evolves with his experiences, reflecting both the promise of love and the weight of its loss.

Namsan Tower, built in 1971 and opened to the public in 1980, stands as a testament to South Korea's rapid modernization. Its rigid steel structure mirrors the novel's thematic exploration of modernity, fragility, and resilience. Young's first visit to the tower with his first love is a moment of romantic idealism, where the city beneath them seems boundless, much like the possibilities of their relationship. However, the relationship dissolves, and the tower transforms from a symbol of joy to one of painful nostalgia. Years later, when Young returns with a different partner, he takes on the role of a guide—an act that signifies his personal growth. No longer just a passive participant in love, he begins to reclaim his narrative.

Beyond Namsan Tower, Seoul itself becomes an active force in Young's emotional world. Spaces such as cafes, nightclubs, and apartments become metaphors for his evolving identity. Cafes, designed for intimacy, often amplify his isolation, while nightclubs reflect the transient, hedonistic nature of many of his relationships. His apartment, though physically small, holds the weight of his longing for both independence and connection.

Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1991) highlights how locations gain meaning through human experiences. Namsan Tower, for Young, is not static—it is rewritten through his emotions, shifting from a place of love to grief, and finally, to healing. Edward Soja's *Thirdspace* (1996) further emphasizes this transformation, arguing that space is a site of emotional and psychological negotiation. Similarly, Doreen Massey's *For Space* (2005) suggests that space is fluid, changing alongside history and personal experience, much like how Seoul in the novel reflects Young's internal conflicts.

Through these perspectives, *Love in the Big City* becomes not just a novel of personal growth, but an exploration of how urban spaces mediate human relationships. Seoul's streets, illuminated with neon signs and haunted by unspoken memories, mirror Young's search for meaning in love, loss, and selfhood.

1.2

If Namsan Tower maps Young's romantic evolution, then the Seoul City Wall and Sungkyunkwan University reveal the broader tensions between tradition and modernity that shape his identity. The Seoul City Wall, built during the Joseon dynasty, stands as both a historical relic and a site of personal reckoning. Young first visits the wall with his first love, finding solace in its enduring presence. Yet, when he returns years later, the same wall becomes a silent witness to his heartbreak. This shifting significance aligns with Lefebvre's theory that space is never neutral; it absorbs and reflects human emotions, becoming an evolving part of the self.

Sungkyunkwan University, founded on Confucian ideals, presents another paradox. While it is an institution of knowledge, it also enforces societal conformity. Young's choice to study French literature here is a quiet rebellion—a way of seeking intellectual freedom within rigid academic structures. His friendship with Jaehee, a woman who embodies independence and unapologetic selfhood, further challenges the university's conservative ethos. Their bond is an act of defiance in a society that demands adherence to expectations.

Korea's modern cultural landscape is riddled with contradictions. While K-pop idols push boundaries in gender and fashion, real-world queerness remains stigmatized. Young's struggle with his identity is not just personal but systemic, shaped by a culture that aestheticizes queerness while erasing its reality. Jaehee, having lived in France, carries a sense of sexual and intellectual freedom that does not sit comfortably within Korean norms. Her authenticity is admired from a distance but judged up close—a reflection of the hypocrisy in how individuality is perceived.

Even mundane spaces, like laundromats, become symbols of introspection. In these sterile, transient spaces, Young confronts his loneliness and heartbreak. Seoul, a city in perpetual reinvention, mirrors his own struggle—offering both freedom and alienation in its relentless pace.

1.3

Hospitals and religious spaces in *Love in the Big City* serve as sites of both care and coercion, forcing Young to confront familial duty, institutional oppression, and his own need for self-preservation.

Young's mother, suffering from a terminal illness, is frequently hospitalized, and her declining health becomes an emotional tether that binds him to societal expectations. South Korea's rapid economic rise has built an advanced healthcare system, but it has also reinforced traditional family roles. Sons, in particular, are expected to provide care, regardless of their personal desires. Young, while not resentful of his mother, finds himself suffocated by her expectations. The hospital, meant to be a place of healing, becomes instead a space of obligation and silent emotional warfare.

His mother's devout Christianity further complicates their relationship. She sees her faith as a source of strength but also wields it as a tool of control. Her love is conditional—tied to the belief that Young can be "fixed." This culminates in one of the novel's most harrowing moments: her forcing him into a conversion program.

The conversion camp is a stark reminder of how institutions attempt to police queerness. While hospitals treat the body, the camp seeks to "correct" what it perceives as moral corruption. South Korea's conservative Christian movements have long promoted such programs under the guise of religious salvation. For Young, the experience is not just traumatic—it is a violent erasure of self. The camp does not succeed in changing him, but the psychological scars remain.

Young's relationship with the conservative writer further explores this theme of internalized repression. The writer, unable to reconcile his sexuality with his religious upbringing, is both drawn to and repelled by Young. Their relationship is marked by attraction, guilt, and inevitable collapse. Unlike Young, who refuses to erase himself, the writer chooses denial—a fate the novel presents as tragic.

Jaehee's return in the novel's final moments offers a quiet but powerful contrast to these oppressive forces. Unlike his mother, unlike the conversion camp, and unlike the writer, she does not seek to change him. Their friendship, flawed yet unwavering, is one of the few spaces in Young's life that offers unconditional acceptance.

2.1

In *Beautiful World Where Are You*, Dublin is not just a setting but an active force that shapes the inner lives of Alice, Eileen, Simon, and Felix. The novel explores school, housing, and the beach as spaces where personal struggles intersect with economic and social structures. Similar to *Love in the Big City*, where institutions like hospitals and religious spaces shape the protagonist's experiences, Rooney's characters navigate an Ireland still marked by industrialization, economic inequality, and shifting cultural norms.

Alice and Eileen both graduate from university, an institution that places them within Ireland's educated middle class, yet their paths diverge. Alice, now a successful author, grows disillusioned with the literary world, while Eileen, despite her education, struggles financially at a Dublin literary magazine. This highlights how education no longer guarantees security in an industrialized economy. Just as *Young in Love in the Big City* experiences hospitals as both spaces of care and control, Eileen's disappointment with her work reflects the contradictions of academia. Knowledge alone does not dismantle inequality, and Dublin, like Seoul, is a place where education is valued but economic realities often fall short.

Housing in Dublin plays a crucial role in shaping the characters' lives. Alice's financial success allows her to retreat to the countryside, while Eileen remains trapped in a precarious rental situation. Felix, a warehouse worker, exists outside the intellectual elite, his relationship with the city dictated by labor rather than artistic ambition. Unlike Alice, who isolates herself, or Eileen, who struggles within an uncertain financial space, Felix embodies the industrial worker, essential yet overlooked. His presence challenges Alice's and Eileen's class assumptions, exposing the gap between those who analyze labor and those who perform it.

The beach in the novel symbolizes an escape from urban life, yet this freedom is temporary. Eileen and Simon share intimate moments by the sea, but the vastness of the water does not resolve their problems. The scene reflects a common theme in industrial poetics, the tension between nature and urbanization. Like *Young in Love in the Big City*, who longs for freedom but remains bound to Seoul, Eileen experiences a fleeting release before returning to the constraints of city life. Simon, much like Jaehee in *Love in the Big City*, provides Eileen with a grounding force. However, love remains shaped by economic and social expectations, never truly separate from the pressures of industrialized life.

2.2

Shared spaces in the novel define interactions between Alice, Eileen, Simon, and Felix. From rented apartments to bars and offices, these environments facilitate conversations, reveal tensions, and shape relationships. Traditionally, communal living was a norm in Ireland, particularly in rural areas where families relied on each other for survival. In Dublin's past, wealthy Georgian townhouses were transformed into overcrowded tenements, fostering strong community ties but also exposing the struggles of urban

poverty. As the city modernized, new forms of shared living emerged, reflecting changing economic conditions.

Alice and Eileen's friendship, sustained through digital communication, changes when they meet in person. Physical space becomes significant, whether they are in Alice's countryside home or walking through Dublin. Shared spaces are more than just locations; they allow for moments of connection, conflict, and understanding. Alice, socially isolated despite financial independence, longs for connection, while Eileen moves constantly through shared environments but finds little comfort.

Eileen's rental situation reflects a harsh economic reality. Unlike previous generations, where homeownership was attainable, Dublin's high property prices force young adults into shared housing well into adulthood. This shift illustrates how housing, once a marker of independence, has become a source of instability.

Public spaces like pubs and city streets also play a crucial role. Historically, pubs in Ireland served as community hubs where people gathered for news and conversation. In the novel, they remain central to the characters' lives, places where personal and social dynamics unfold. While these spaces offer familiarity, they also highlight the alienation characters feel in their private lives.

Eileen and Simon's relationship is shaped by a geography of shared experience. Their love is tied to the places they have inhabited together, from childhood homes to city streets. Similarly, *Young in Love in the Big City* navigates structured spaces like hospitals and religious institutions, where love and connection are constantly tested. The physical world in *Beautiful World Where Are You* is not just a backdrop but an active force shaping intimacy and emotional distance.

Felix, in contrast, experiences space differently. As a warehouse worker, he moves through environments dictated by labor rather than social privilege. Alice intellectualizes space, Eileen exists within networks of shared housing, but Felix inhabits a world of necessity rather than choice. The novel contrasts those who think about space and those who simply live within its constraints.

Shared spaces in *Beautiful World Where Are You* offer both freedom and limitation. While they allow for interaction, they also expose vulnerabilities. Conversations in public places, whether in bars or at parties, often reveal unspoken tensions, while private spaces allow for raw emotion but also isolation. The historical evolution of shared spaces in Dublin mirrors this duality. In modern Dublin, co-living arrangements and high rent prices continue to shape urban existence, making shared spaces unavoidable yet emotionally complex.

2.3

Communication in Beautiful World Where Are You is both a means of connection and a source of failure. The novel is structured around conversations, both spoken and written, as well as silences that stretch between characters. Their relationships rely on language, yet often, the most significant moments are shaped by what is left unsaid.

Alice and Eileen's emails are deeply personal, yet distant. They pour their thoughts into long messages, but this digital intimacy contrasts with their real-life struggles to communicate. Emails offer clarity, while in-person interactions are messier, filled with pauses and hesitations. When they finally meet, the safety of distance is gone, replaced by awkward silences and the difficulty of articulating feelings face to face.

Eileen and Simon's relationship is built on unspoken emotions. Unlike Alice and Eileen, who express themselves through long letters, Simon and Eileen communicate in hesitations, gestures, and playful deflections. They orbit each other, unable to fully bridge the space between them. Their love is inevitable yet undefined, comforting yet terrifying.

Felix and Alice's dynamic is marked by misunderstandings. Alice intellectualizes everything, while Felix is blunt and uninterested in analysis. Their conversations are filled with frustration, exposing the limits of language. Alice wants words to fix things, while Felix relies on honesty rather than interpretation. Their disconnect illustrates that sometimes language itself is not enough to bridge the gap between people.

Dublin shapes these interactions. Public spaces, from bars to beaches, become places where emotions unfold or remain unspoken. A bar is not just a bar; it is where Eileen and Simon sit too close, where Alice watches Felix with uncertainty. A street is not just a street; it is a space where people pass by without speaking, where thoughts remain suspended in the air.

Rooney captures the contradictions of modern communication, where technology creates both closeness and distance. Her characters live in a world where it is easier to write a long email than to say "I love you" in person. Silence carries more meaning than entire conversations. Missed calls and unread messages become their own kind of heartbreak.

By the end of the novel, there are no grand revelations. Conversations remain unfinished, relationships remain unresolved, and words continue to be both a bridge and a barrier. The novel suggests that communication is not about finding the perfect words, but about the ongoing effort to reach across the silence, hoping that someone will hear.

3.1

Cities are meant to bring people closer, yet they often do the opposite. In a world filled with movement and noise, loneliness lingers. The weight of work, the pressure of survival, and the endless distractions of modern life leave little room for reflection. In *If Cats Disappeared from the World*, the protagonist experiences this firsthand. A quiet man working as a postman, he moves through the city without truly belonging to it. When he is diagnosed with a terminal illness, time itself shifts. The life he had taken for granted now feels painfully finite.

Alone in his small apartment, he begins to think about what he will leave behind. There are no grand legacies or sweeping love stories, only the small things that make up his life. His daily routines, the films he loved, the cat that keeps him company, the phone calls he once had. He realizes that in the face of death, it is not the extraordinary that matters but the quiet moments that shape a person's existence. Just as he begins to accept his fate, the Devil appears with a proposition.

The offer is simple. If he agrees to erase something from the world, he will gain an extra day to live. At first, the idea seems absurd, but as he considers the deal, he begins to wonder what, if anything, is truly irreplaceable. The Devil starts removing things one by one, small at first, then larger, testing the limits of what can be sacrificed. Then comes the suggestion of erasing telephones.

The protagonist reflects on the meaning of telephones in his life. The telephone changed communication forever, first introduced to Japan during the Meiji era when the country was modernizing. The first telephone exchange was established in 1890, connecting Tokyo and Yokohama. At first, phones were a luxury, but as Japan industrialized, they became a necessity. Gotō Shinpei, a key figure in Japan's early telephone development, saw communication as the backbone of modernization, ensuring wider access.

For the protagonist, the phone is more than just a device. It is a lifeline to his past. He recalls the voices of people now absent, his father and their strained relationship, the conversations they never had. He remembers an old love, the missed calls, and the silence that grew between them. Phones connected him, but they also created distance. Now, he wonders what would happen if they never existed. Would people have found other ways to stay close, or would they have drifted further apart?

The Devil watches him, waiting for an answer. If he chooses to erase the phone, he will gain another day. But what is a day worth if it means losing the ability to hear a familiar voice? The city hums with conversations, yet so many people are alone. He looks at his phone, now something far heavier than before. He thinks about time, about connection, and about what truly matters. And for the first time, he hesitates.

3.2

Movies are more than just images on a screen. They capture moments, emotions, and lives that would otherwise be lost. They offer escape, a sense of belonging, and a way of making sense of the world. The protagonist has always loved movies, not just as entertainment but as something that shaped his life. But now, as he faces death, he wonders whether movies really matter when the end is near.

Before he can fully process this, the Devil appears again with another offer. If he erases movies from the world, he will gain an extra day to live. It is an impossible choice.

Cinema arrived in Japan during the Meiji era, changing the way people saw the world. The first known screening took place in 1897 when Thomas Edison's films were shown to an intrigued audience. At first, films were a novelty, but soon Japan developed its own cinematic identity. Early films were influenced by Kabuki and Noh theater, and benshi narrators were used to explain stories. By the 1920s, Japanese cinema flourished, capturing the struggles of ordinary people. Directors like Ozu and Mizoguchi brought Japanese cinema to international recognition, focusing on themes of family and loss. Then came Kurosawa, whose films reshaped cinema forever.

For the protagonist, movies were more than stories. He worked in a movie rental shop, surrounded by films, recommending them, and rewatching the ones that made him feel something real. More than anything, movies were tied to memories, especially those with his best friend. Their friendship was built on late-night movie marathons, debates over classics, and laughter at films that were supposed to be serious. Over time, life got in the way. The movie nights became less frequent until they stopped. They convinced themselves there would always be time. But time had run out.

Movies were never just about watching something on a screen. They were about the people you watched them with, the feelings they evoked, and the way they imprinted themselves onto life. He tries to imagine a world without them. No laughter in crowded theaters, no whispered conversations after the credits, and no late-night marathons. A world where his friend and he had never sat together in front of a screen, where those memories never existed.

The Devil watches, waiting for his answer. One more day. But at what cost? Standing in his apartment, surrounded by DVDs, he realizes that memories are fragile. It is not movies themselves that matter, but the way they connect people and the way they hold onto the past. And so, he truly hesitates.

3.3

Everything comes back to nature. No matter how much the world modernizes, nature lingers. It waits in the silence, in the wind through empty streets, and in the quiet presence of a stray cat watching from the shadows. When the Devil appears for the final bargain, it is nature that makes the protagonist finally see what has been invisible all along.

“If cats disappeared from the world,” the Devil says, “you would get another day.”

Time slows. The words do not settle easily. The other things erased before were painful, but they were man-made. Cats are different. They breathe, they feel, and they exist beyond human invention. To erase them would be to erase something beyond human control. Worse than that, it would be the loss of Cabbage.

Cabbage, his small, quiet companion. The one presence that remained constant. While people left and love faded, the cat stayed. Sitting by the window, curling up beside him, offering nothing but quiet existence. Unlike humans, cats do not ask for reasons or demand explanations. They are simply there.

The weight of the decision settles on him. He looks outside at the darkening sky, the trees bending under the wind, and the distant sound of birds. Everything is connected. Humans, despite their efforts to control and create, are still just another part of it. If nature disappears, what is left?

The Devil’s previous bargains were about human inventions. But nature is not something humans made. It existed before them and will outlast them. Without it, there is no life left to extend.

The Devil tilts his head, smiling, as if he has seen this realization before.

“Well?” he asks.

The protagonist looks at Cabbage, the cat blinking slowly, unaware of the choice being made. He thinks of the things already erased, the parts of his world lost in exchange for borrowed time. He thinks of what he has learned. And for the first time, he is sure.

“No.”

The Devil raises an eyebrow.

“No more deals. No more erasing.”

The Devil laughs softly, as if he knew this would be the answer all along. Then he is gone.

The air is still. The world continues. The trees sway, the wind moves through the streets, the birds call to each other, and Cabbage stretches, curling into a content ball of fur. Life will end eventually. That is inevitable. But it is not about how long it lasts. It is about the moments within it, the connections that shape it, and the things that cannot be replaced.

He looks outside. The sky is vast and endless. The world breathes.

And in the end, that is enough.

Conclusion

Cities shape people in ways they do not always realize. The noise, the speed, the endless movement create a kind of loneliness that is different from solitude. In *Love in the Big City*, *Beautiful World, Where Are You?*, and *If Cats Disappeared from the World*, the city is not just a backdrop but an active force that influences the characters, their relationships, and the way they see themselves. These stories explore love, loss, memory, and the struggle to find meaning in a world that often feels indifferent. Through them, it becomes clear that cities do not just house people they shape them.

Sang Young Park captures the restless energy of Seoul, where love burns bright but rarely lasts. His protagonist navigates fleeting romances, friendships that hold on despite time and distance, and a search for meaning in a city that never stops moving. Sally Rooney presents a different kind of urban loneliness, where characters long for connection but struggle to bridge the gaps between them. The modern world makes communication easier, yet true understanding feels increasingly difficult. Genki Kawamura's story takes this idea even further, forcing his protagonist to confront what truly matters when time is running out. The choices he faces erasing parts of the world in exchange for more time reveal how much of life is tied to small, quiet moments that are often taken for granted.

Across these stories, love is not about permanence but about the traces it leaves behind. Friendships fade and lovers part, but the feelings they create linger. Memory becomes a way of keeping people close even when they are gone. Cities, for all their chaos, become repositories of these emotions. A familiar street can hold the ghost of a conversation, a café can bring back a love that was once all-consuming, and a park bench can still carry the weight of someone who sat there years ago. These novels remind us that love is often fragile, but its impact is lasting.

Technology and modernity promise connection, yet they also create distance. Phones, social media, and instant messaging make it easier to reach people, but they also make relationships feel disposable. The characters in these books struggle with this contradiction, seeking something real in a world where everything feels temporary. The city amplifies this feeling, offering endless possibilities but also endless isolation. In the end, the question is not whether love or connection can survive in such a world it is whether people can learn to see what truly matters before it is too late.

In all three novels, love, memory, and the city become inseparable. The protagonists search for meaning in fleeting moments, knowing that nothing lasts forever. But even in loss, there is beauty. Even in loneliness, there is a kind of connection. And even when love is gone, its echoes remain. These stories remind us that cities are not just concrete and glass—they are built from the people who pass through them, from the memories they leave behind, and from the love that lingers long after they are gone.

Key Words

Urbanization, city life, loneliness, modern relationships, love and loss, memory, identity, industrialization, globalization, urban hearts, cityscapes, cultural displacement, nostalgia, technological advancement, human connection, social isolation, personal growth, emotional detachment, self-discovery, existential crisis, fate, choices, sacrifice, literary adaptation, cinematic storytelling, Korean literature, Irish literature, Japanese literature, urban melancholy, postmodernism, materialism, emotional resilience, nostalgia in media, psychological depth, nature and humanity, urban alienation, metropolitan experience, temporality, transience, literary criticism, philosophical themes, narrative structure

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