

Gendered Space in Seamus Heaney's *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) and Ahmed Abdel Muti Hijazi's *A Heartless City* (1959): A Feminist Geo-Critical Approach

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Abstract

Gendering spaces is one way of reinforcing a culture's gender norms and maintaining hierarchical relationships between men and women. Women's identities are effaced when they are used as a symbol for a nation; they are seen as inferior to men when they are assigned the private space of home as opposed to men's public space. The most efficient way of examining whether these dichotomies and hegemonic relationships exist across different cultures, as Linda McDowell suggests, is by conducting comparative studies. The present study examines how space is gendered in Seamus Heaney's *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) compared to Ahmed Abdel Muti Hijazi's *A*

Heartless City (1959). The findings show that space is gendered in the same way in Eastern and Western cultures: the homeland is portrayed as a woman; men are assigned public space while women are confined to the private space of home; moreover, a woman's body is portrayed as space for men's sexual acts. These findings suggest the persistence of gender stratification, masculine hegemony and women's inferiority across cultures, which is alarming given the fact that they have been so deeply engraved in collective consciousness that they have come to be viewed as natural.

Keywords: Egyptian poetry, gendered space, geo-critical approach, Irish poetry

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Gendered spaces are areas in which particular genders of people, and particular types of gender expression, are considered welcome or appropriate, and other types are unwelcome or inappropriate. Gendering spaces is a means of reinforcing a culture's gender norms and maintaining hierarchical relationships between men and women. Women are often used to symbolize homeland, but in so doing their identities are effaced. Moreover, women are often associated with the private place of home as opposed to men's public space. Setha M. Low and Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga define the concept of "separate spheres" as "an oppositional and a hierarchical system consisting of a dominant public male realm of production (the city) and a subordinate private female one of reproduction (the home)" (4). The female body itself is treated as the receiver of the male body: it is "the womb, the lap, the land, and the place where emotional interactions take place" (Nakhil 20). To find out how space is gendered in Western and Eastern cultures, Seamus Heaney's *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) and Ahmed Abdel Muti Hijazi's *A Heartless City* (1959) are analyzed using a feminist geo-critical approach.

The Irish poet and playwright, Seamus Heaney (1939-2013), received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1995. Among his best-known volumes of poetry are *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), his first major published volume, *Wintering Out* (1972), *North* (1975), *The Haw Lantern* (1987), and *Human Chain* (2010). He also produced numerous translations and two dramatic adaptations of Greek tragedy: *The Cure at Troy: A version of Sophocles' Philoctetes* (1990) and *The*

Burial at Thebes: A version of Sophocles' Antigone (2004). *The Independent* described him as "probably the best-known poet in the world" (Craig para. 1). The Egyptian poet, Ahmed Abdel Muti Hijazi, born in 1935, has remained one of the prominent poetic voices in contemporary Arabic poetry for sixty consecutive years since the publication of his volume, *A Heartless City* (1959) and through his successive volumes, *Only Confession Remains* (1965), *Elegy of Good Time* (1972), *Cement Trees* (1989) and *Time Remains* (2011). Hijazi's prolific production has engraved his name among the leaders of poetry revival in the Arab world.

Both Seamus Heaney's *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) and Ahmed Abdel Muti Hijazi's *A Heartless City* (1959) employ the age-old land-as-woman trope. While it is not easy to trace the origin of this trope, scholars such as Gillian Rose place this connection within the patriarchal tradition that equates woman with nature and man with culture. Throughout history, women have had a paradoxical relationship with national collectivity: they are seen as equal members of this collectivity, yet they are restricted by rules and regulations – not to mention perceptions and attitudes – specific to them. Though symbolizing the nation, women are often treated as outsiders because of all those restrictions on their participation in public, political and military spheres (Yuval-Davis and Anthias 6).

According to Linda McDowell, "The symbolic representation of the Irish nation as female is particularly strong: 'Mother Ireland' as a protective and suffering figure is a potent image in response to British imperialism. Yet

public representations of female figures are often seen as transgressive or highly destabilizing” (196 - 7). In “Digging,” Heaney writes,

But I've no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb

The squat pen rests.

I'll dig with it. (2)

Heaney treats Ireland like a woman for the act of digging stands for the sexual act that aims at fertilizing the female womb just as digging with a spade aims at fertilizing the land. However, Heaney discontinues his ancestors' tradition and breaks masculine stereotypes because he uses a pen rather than a spade in digging for Celtic rituals and myths that might symbolize the present. This image seems to reinforce man's power and activity in contrast to woman's powerlessness and passivity. Echoing Robert Graves' volume of poetry titled *Man Does, Woman Is* (1964), Heaney writes: “Ideally women are, meaning that they possess innate magic ... but theirs is not doing in the male sense” (Graves, *Poetic Craft* 114-15). Graves argues that “would-be poets experiment in loveless Apollonian techniques”, whereas true poets “who serve the Muse wait for the inspired lightning flash of two or three words that initiate composition and dictate the rhythmic norm of their verse” (Graves, *Mammon* 147). For Heaney, as for Graves, ‘craft and determination,’ ‘the marks of English influence,’ are masculine, whereas ‘image and emotion,’ ‘the lure of native experience,’ are feminine (Heaney, *Preoccupations* 88). Heaney thus genders the very act of writing poetry. In a frequently quoted passage from the 1972 essay ‘Belfast,’ Heaney writes:

I have always listened for poems, they come sometimes like bodies out of a bog ... surfacing with a touch of mystery. They certainly involve craft

and determination, but chance and instinct have a role in the thing too. I think the process is a kind of somnambulist encounter between masculine will and intelligence and feminine clusters of image and emotion. I suppose the feminine element for me involves the matter of Ireland, and the masculine strain is drawn from the involvement with English literature. (34)

Regarding Ireland as a woman, traditionally associated with nature and emotions, is derogatory as much as it is exalting. Once more this image of earth as woman recurs in “At a Potato Digging.” Heaney writes:

Split

by the spade, they show white as cream.

Good smells exude from crumbled earth.

The rough bark of humus erupts

knots of potatoes (a clean birth)

whose solid feel, whose wet insides

promise taste of ground and root.

To be piled in pits; live skulls, blind-eyed. (19)

The sexual image of the spade that splits the earth figures in this poem, but added to it is the image of birth in the form of the sprouting potato seeds and the wet insides of the earth. However, just as mother earth gives birth to plants, it claims the lives of men because it is a femme fatale seducing her lovers to violent death.

The rich land of the farm in the first half of *Death of a Naturalist*, which stands for fertile women, is set in contrast with the barren Aran Islands in the three Aran poems. As Angelopulo Byron Dimitri notes, “The Aran Islands--bare, inhospitable, sparsely populated--present a challenge to the poet in

the sense that the aridity of the landscape demands that he find a form of poetic representation that is responsive to an "empty" landscape" (40). In "Storm on the Island," Heaney writes,

This wizened earth has never troubled us

With hay, so, as you see, there are no stacks

Or stooks that can be lost. Nor are there trees

Which might prove company when it blows full

Blast: you know what I mean---leaves and branches

Can raise a tragic chorus in a gale

So that you listen to the thing you fear

Forgetting that it pummels your house too.

But there are no trees, no natural shelter.

You might think that the sea is company,

Exploding comfortably down on the cliffs,

But no: when it begins, the flung spray hits

The very windows, spits like a tame cat

Turned savage. We just sit tight while wind dives

And strafes invisibly. Space is a salvo,

We are bombarded by the empty air.

Strange, it is a huge nothing that we fear. (38)

Space is gendered in this poem too. However, in contrast to the rich land of the countryside that Heaney equates with fertile women, the

empty Aran Islands represent barren women. Heaney describes the Islands as wizened; that is, wrinkled like old, infertile women. Just as infertile women cannot conceive children, the sea cannot fertilize the barren islands. In contrast to the often idyllic view of islands as peaceful space, Heaney describes the Aran Islands in military terms as "a salvo." Because there is not any natural shelter, the storm is seen all the more as a threat and the sea as a bomb that hits the cliffs and "spits like a tame cat/ Turned savage." The raging sea and strong wind thus correspond to male violence inscribed on the female body of the barren islands.

The image of man's interference with nature is furthered in "Synge on Aran," a poem that pays tribute to the famous Irish Playright and Poet, John Millington Synge, who spent some time in exile of the Aran Islands. Heaney writes:

Salt off the sea whets

the blades of four winds.

They peel acres

of locked rock, pare down

a rind of shrivelled ground;

bull-noses are chiselled

on cliffs.

....

There

he comes now, a hard pen

scraping in his head;

the nib filed on a salt wind.

and dipped in the keening sea. (39)

The overarching image here is that of sculpture. The sword blades of the four winds, sharpened by "salt off the sea" act on sculpting the island just as sexual intercourse leaves its violent traces on the female body. Neither do "the locked rocks" nor the "rind of

shriveled ground” stand the cutting edges that chisel cliffs into round-edged shapes or “bull noses.” Just as the four winds have a radical effect on changing the landscape, so does man when he has sexual intercourse with woman, and so does the poet Synge with his sharp pen, the ink of which is drawn from “the keening sea,” on paper.

In his poem “In Small Townlands,” however, man's invasion of the landscape is as artistic and productive as man's sexual intercourse with woman. Heaney writes:

In small townlands his hogshair
wedge
Will split the granite from the clay
Till crystal in the rock is bared:
Loaded brushes hone an edge
On mountain blue and heather grey.
Outcrops of stone contract, outstared.
The spectrum bursts, a bright
grenade,
When he unlocks the safety catch
On morning dew, on cloud, on rain.
The splintered lights slice like a spade
That strips the land of fuzz and
blotch,
Pares clean as bone, cruel as the pain
That strikes in a wild heart attack.
His eyes, thick, greedy lenses, fire
This bare bald earth with white and
red,
Incinerate it till it's black
And brilliant as a funeral pyre:
A new world cools out of his head.
(41)

In this poem, man's invasion of the landscape is artistic, the artist being Heaney's friend Colin Middleton. Middleton's brush plays

with the landscape distinguishing “the granite” and “the clay” and using muted colour “blue ... grey” until contrast emerges: “Till crystal in the rock is bared.” As a result of Middleton's strong brushes, nature cowers “outcrops of stone contract.” His brush technique removes unwanted blur and “strips the land of fuzz and blotch” to leave edges “pared clean as bone,” as “cruel as the pain /That strikes in a wild heart attack.” Dimitri comments, “The violence presented in the poem is strangely productive: ‘A new world cools out of his head.’ The artist is involved in a paradoxically creative desecration of landscape: the interrelation of violence and creativity that finds expression in the first part of North is prefigured here” (43).

In contrast to the male poet's violent conquest of the female landscape in “In Small Townlands,” “The Diviner,” suggests a harmonious relationship between the poet and the landscape. Heaney writes,

Cut from the green hedge a forked
hazel stick
That he held tight by the arms of the
V:
Circling the terrain, hunting the pluck
Of water, nervous, but professionally
Unfussed. The pluck came sharp as a
sting.
The rod jerked with precise
convulsions.
Spring water suddenly broadcasting
Through a green hazel its secret
stations.
The bystanders would ask to have a
try.
He handed them the rod without a
word.
It lay dead in their grasp till,
nonchalantly,
He gripped expectant wrists. The
hazel stirred. (47)

The Diviner is a wise man because he can discover water springs. In the poem, the diviner refers to the creative, male poet who can explore the hidden depths of the female landscape with his "forked hazel stick," an image that compares sexual intercourse with woman to man's exploration of nature and equates both with the divine act of creation. The water-diviner is portrayed "Circling the terrain, hunting the pluck/ Of water." When he finds it, we see "Spring water suddenly broadcasting/ Through a green aerial its secret stations." The image of the water broadcasting its position makes the diviner-poet the receiver of messages that ordinary people cannot understand. This is exemplified in the poem by the image of the rod that lies dead in the hands of common men. As Dimitri notes, "the diviner-poet is the gifted human being, linked by an inexplicable bond to a submerged reality inaccessible to others, who acts as a conduit in the production of value. Like the farmer who "produces" potatoes, the diviner is a medium rather than the source of production. (19-20)

In addition to representing the land as a woman, Heaney's poetry recognizes the traditionally constructed spaces that separate man and woman. In "Scaffolding," Heaney draws a visual image of separate gendered spaces:

So if, my dear, there sometimes seem
to be
Old bridges breaking between you
and me,
Never fear. We may let the scaffolds
fall,
Confident that we have built our wall.
(37)

In these lines, man and woman have their own separate spaces. The poet's confidence that a wall has been built before the scaffolds supporting broken bridges fall is ill-

grounded. Unlike the bridge, the wall will continue to separate men and women rather than join them. In his poem, "Twice Shy," the same idea of separation is emphasized:

A vacuum of need
Collapsed each hunting heart
But tremulously we held
As hawk and prey apart,
Preserved classic decorum,
Deployed our talk with art.
Our juvenilia
Had taught us both to wait,
Not to publish feeling
And regret it all too late---
Mushroom loves already
Had puffed and burst in hate. (31)

The male and female lovers are as separate as the "hawk" and the "prey." The metaphor is so outrageously patriarchal: man is the violent hawk that is hunting the weak woman who is no more than a prey. Theirs is an uneasy relationship; one that is based on anticipation and fear. The man is waiting for the right moment to attack the female body. Another interesting metaphor Heaney employs is that of learning from "juvenilia," his early works. The metaphor is extended through the choice of the verb "publish." Having learnt from earlier works that swelling love ends in hate, the couple have decided to wait and not to rush announcing their feelings of love.

If Heaney has gendered space on the level of the land, the restriction of women to the private space of home and the treatment of the female body as space, Hijazi has done the same in his volume, *A Heartless City* (1959). In "The Way to ElSayed," Hijazi describes the first moments he got in touch with the city. Just as Ireland figures as a

femme fatale in Heaney's poetry, Cairo features as a heartless woman that shows no pity towards poor strangers. Hijazi writes:

Hey Man!
Show me the way,
the way to "ElSayeda!" (23)

ElSayeda is a local neighborhood in Cairo, named after the ancient "ElSayeda Zainab's Mosque," granddaughter of Prophet Mohammad, peace be upon him. However, the name also refers in Arabic to woman, but not any woman. It is a title given to a very well-respected woman; for example, ElSayeda Om Kulthoum, the famous iconic singer. Though a local neighborhood, ElSayeda is chosen by Hijazi to represent the big city, Cairo. Full of awe, he seeks a way to her heart, but he only feels

Penniless, dying of hunger,
friendless,
a foundling abandoned by a whore,
unworthy of pity by passersby! (24)

Despite his suffering, he is happy to set out on this journey. He writes: "Light filled my heart with joy like a rainbow" (24). However, when he arrives, he witnesses

Indifferent people move quickly;
Their ghosts follow them blindly.
When the metro passes by,
they do not panic.
But I fear the metro!
Every stranger here fears the metro!
(25)

The poet expresses his feeling of uneasiness at the big city. Having no money, he has to risk walking while the metro, a civil means of transportation that stands in sharp contrast with traditional horse and camel rides in the countryside, makes its way through the crowd. He ends this turmoil by taking a

decision not to return to Cairo without money. He writes:

No, I will never return.
I'll never return without money.
O Conqueror "Cairo"!
O giant settled domes
and atheist minarets!
O unbeliever!
I am nothing here,
I am dead,
a transient vision,
dragging my aching feet
to ElSayeda,
to ElSayeda! (27)

According to Hijazi, Cairo is atheist because it does not have pity on the poor strangers who have no money. As a penniless countryman, the poet feels dead. However, he keeps dragging his aching feet to reach ElSayeda, hoping that the shrine of ElSayeda Zainab would relieve his plight and let people have mercy on him. However, all he finds is an unwelcoming neighborhood that is represented as a heartless woman. Hijazi's feelings towards the city, therefore, are a mixture of awe and hate.

Similarly, in "The Story of the Princess & the Young Man who Addresses the Night," Hijazi treats the city as a heartless, faithless princess who has many lovers but pities none of them. Hijazi, the poor poet, is only one of her lovers who were enchanted by her alluring voice and ostensible sympathy with the poor. Describing his relationship with her, he writes:

Her lover tonight is an elegant poet
Yes, she gets bored with him
If he stays with her till dawn.

Her wardrobe has a thousand dresses.
Her heart has a thousand lovers. (44 - 45)

The city thus figures as a heartless princess who changes lovers as often as changing garments. She gets bored with her lovers quickly even if they happen to be as sensitive and talented as the poet. She pretends to be sympathetic with the poor villager's plight; however, her true nature soon becomes apparent to the naked eye:

She asked: "what'd you give me if we lived together?"

He cried and answered in a sad voice:

"My lady! I am a poor lad

I neither own diamond nor silk

and you need no precious pearls.

Your heart is a gem,

a rare gem on top of our era.

If I spend my years searching the seas
spreading sails,

throwing and drawing fishing nets,

I'd never find its like.

But I found it here.

I found it when I heard your lullaby
pitying a child who slept hungry.

She smiled and said: "You are a great poet!

But I need a prince! I need a prince!"
(48-49)

In the city, there is no place for the poor; only affluent people are welcome. The extended metaphor of the city as a greedy woman who cares only about money and luxury is derogatory. Women are often stereotyped by the patriarchal society as unfaithful, greedy lovers.

In contrast to his portrayal of the city as a heartless woman, in "I once had a heart," Hijazi represents his village as a pure lover whom he had to desert in search of a job opportunity. Addressing his beloved village, he says:

My angel! My absent bird!

I packed my empty luggage in search
of a living,

and left my twenty years behind.

A sailor pitied me and welcomed me
on board.

I threw my luggage and slept in the
boat!

The seven seas separated me from
home

to face my hard night without love.

I envied those who had lovers

and remained a stranger in empty,
cold

and deserted countries

that swallow strangers. (20)

In contrast to the city, where the poet feels like a complete stranger swallowed by its coldness and lack of sympathy, Hijazi feels at home in his beloved village. Although Hijazi's portrayal of the village as a pure lover seemingly elevates the status of woman, it has the counter effect of effacing the female gender altogether. In both cases, the poet lacks connection with women: he has to leave the pure and faithful village to make a living, but feels quite alienated from the affluent but heartless city.

As Zaynab Farghali notes, Hijazi revives in his poem, "Night Song" (1966), the old metaphor equating fertile women with fertile land. He writes:

If we, two bare flowers,

felt suddenly cold at night

because of the movement of time,
 we'd shake and bend
 till thorns meet the dew
 and fragrance spread all over the
 place!
 The night, my love,
 is a song
 with hot senses,
 a festive dance
 joining eastern and northern winds,
 arousing in every soul longing for
 another,
 so the land licks plants' fingers,
 the wind gets pregnant,
 the beak sleeps in the wing,
 and the rain falls!
 My love,
 What if the moon saw us? (73-74)

The couple's sexual intercourse in Hijazi's poem, which parallels the fertilization of the land, is reminiscent of James Frazer's description of our ancestors' beliefs, sex practices, rituals and festivals in *The Golden Bough* (1935):

The Baganda of Central Africa believe so strongly in the intimate relation between the intercourse of the sexes and the fertility of the ground that among them a barren wife is generally sent away, because she is supposed to prevent her husband's garden from bearing fruit. On the contrary, a couple who have given proof of extraordinary fertility by becoming the parents of twins are believed by the Baganda to be endowed with a corresponding power of increasing the fruitfulness of the

plantain-trees, which furnish them with their staple food. (128b-129a)

Since the beginning of time, the barren land is equated with barren women while fertile land is compared to fertile women. Not only is space gendered in Frazer's account of primitive old beliefs but also barren women are blamed for the lack of abundance and shunned away for bringing bad luck. In his description of the barren Aran Islands, which cannot be fertilized by sea water, Heaney expresses these age-old beliefs. Similarly, in Hijazi's poem, "Night Song," intercourse with women is compared to the fertilization of the land by the wind pregnant with clouds. In addition, references to rituals and festivals through words like "song," "festive dance," and "the moon" help reiterate these old beliefs that equate fertile women and lands.

In "Baghdad and Death" (1966), Hijazi uses the same metaphor of digging, which Heaney uses to search for rituals and myths that represent the current status of Ireland. Hijazi writes:

Baghdad is a land the plough has
 tilled
 to grow a million *saq*¹; it swarmed.
 With drowsiness in her eyes,
 and alley scents in her dress,
 it swarmed.
 Woe to Abdulillah
 from the revolution of the dead
 and the revenge of life!
 The poor dead casts death
 in the face of soldiers
 searching for survival.

 O Iraqi people!
 You came back with a new name.

O dead child!
 You were reborn.
 O people of Baghdad!
 Get out! Today is *Eid*!
 Your enemy is a shadow
 on the defense gate,
 a shadow with no features, no arms,
 a shadow the birds loathe, so bury it!
 (94-95)

In these verses, Hijazi uses the same metaphor of digging or tilling the land that Heaney used in his poem, "Digging", to portray Baghdad, the capital of Iraq, as a woman who is fertilized to give birth to a million Iraqis. He also uses pun in "to grow a million *saq*" to reinforce the metaphor of the city as woman. Just as there is hope in Heaney's poem of rebirth and resurrection, there is hope in this poem of a new life despite the death of Iraqis, an image that is reinforced by the choice of words such as "survival, came back, reborn, and Eid."

In his poem, "Syria and the Winds," Hijazi again portrays Damascus, the capital of Syria, as a woman. He writes:

My Damascene lover, I wish
 I had carried an old gun
 preowned by a Port Said martyr
 and flown to your strong gate
 O home! O Syria! (109)

Although feminizing one's home country elevates women, it reduces them to ornamental status. In such poems as "Syria and the Winds," therefore, women as humans are absent. Moreover, portraying homeland as a woman who is passively waiting for the rescue of man is derogatory. Women have always taken part in the emancipation of their countries and stood by men in various national struggles. Portraying them as

helpless and powerless, however, seems to reinforce the socially constructed stereotypes of women as weak and men as powerful.

In Hijazi's *A Heartless City*, as in Heaney's *Death of a Naturalist*, the female body is treated as space for men. In "The Bedchamber," Hijazi writes:

When she woke up, her pure fingers
 hushed fancy birds away,
 hiding her fair chest, a pub
 the corrupt leave bloody traces on,
 She bent, hiding her bare charms,
 desired by those praying in
 Jerusalem.
 A virgin lacing her ripped garment,
 what for, O tortured soul?
 Slamming the door behind, she left
 tears
 chasing heaven every morning. (56-
 57)

In this poem, the female body figures prominently as space for men. The woman's "chest," Hijazi writes, "is a pub/ the corrupt leave bloody traces on" (56). The image brings to mind not only male desecration of the female body, but also usurpers' violation of occupied land: both men and soldiers leave bloody traces behind them. The image thus emphasizes the equation of woman with homeland and reinforces the strong relationship between gender and space.

In his poem, "A Passerby" (1966), Hijazi again treats the female body as a property of man that exists only for his pleasure, he writes:

For whom did the artist spend his
 nights
 baring and repeating,
 watering flour with milk,

and sprinkling raisins on the chest
 so one raisin hits him and sits on his
 forehead?
 For whom did she walk in the blazing
 summer sun?
 If her perfume and soft, tender palm
 were not mine,
 if they were not mine,
 the only kind and loyal man,
 why did she pass by me then? (147)

In this poem, the female body seems to exist only for the sake of fulfilling man's sexual desire. She is there to be watered by man's milk; her breasts are created to receive man's touches; "her perfume and soft, tender palm" are man's own property.

According to Linda McDowell, space is as much a social construct as is gender. Just as the mind/body dichotomy was socially constructed to assign women a status inferior to men, so was the public/private spatial divide established to restrict women's freedom and confine them to domestic housework. In his debut poem, "The Sixteenth Year," Hijazi describes a teenager's view of women:

I was sixteen when I first saw a
 woman.
 My face turned pale,
 I was enchanted!
 I fell in love with a dark window
 I walked underneath to see her.
 I did not hear her voice,
 but she waved with her hand.
 Her wave was enough for me. (11-12)

Space is gendered in this poem too. The poet regards the dark window as his beloved because it is through this window that he can see his lover waving to him. The fact that the

only way he could see her was through the window of her house reinforces the stereotypical image of women's restricted movement and confinement to the private place of home. Feminism has long worked on deconstructing the space dichotomies of public and private based on gender. Similarly, it has worked on deconstructing the mind/body dichotomy that has long placed women as inferior to men.

In "The Citadel Massacre," Hijazi describes how women are restricted to the house waiting for men to achieve their dreams of wealth, luxury, freedom and even happiness:

Through the old oriels²,
 run the soft smiles
 of maidens dreaming
 of silk, perfume, freedom,
 noise and laughter.
 Every glimpse,
 every cry - if a cry is joyful -
 leaves deep sadness behind,
 the trumpet sound! (66)

Similar to the woman who could only be seen through the window in "The Sixteenth Year," these maidens can only be seen through the oriels, old protruding windows. However, these maidens are completely passive, compared to the woman who used to wave to the sixteen-year-old boy. They have accepted their confinement to the house and kept waiting for the knight who would achieve their dreams of wealth, comfort and freedom. Again, this reinforces the patriarchal view of women as inactive citizens who need to be taken care of. Places, therefore, are not just physical or spatial surfaces; they are also boundaries that codify women's and men's "proper place."

In "I once had a Heart" (1966), Hijazi describes the private space that is traditionally assigned to women:

On the mirror, there is some dust.

On the worn bed, there is sleep scent,
and a faint light bulb.

All bedroom features are the same,
as they were the first night kiss,
even the dress, even the dress.

You were sitting on the edge of the bed

returning your protruding breast
behind the dress. (17)

Locked inside her home, the poet's lover is portrayed as a lonely woman who is clinging to the old memories of their first night kiss. The woman feels that the purpose for which she lived no longer exists; her man left her to search for work in the city. Therefore, she stopped looking at the mirror, cleaning the bedroom, or boasting of her charms. The emphasis here is that woman has no separate life from man. She constantly needs his attention and care.

The above comparison shows that space is gendered in very similar ways in Hijazi's *A Heartless City* and Heaney's *Death of a Naturalist* despite the differences between the two poets in terms of culture, language and religion. In both volumes, the homeland is portrayed as a woman. Fertility of the land corresponds to women's fertility, whereas its lack of abundance is the result of women's barrenness. In both volumes, the socially constructed dichotomy that assigns men public space while confining women to the private space of home is maintained. Last but not least, women's bodies figure in both volumes as spaces for men's sexual acts. These findings suggest the persistence of gender stratification, masculine hegemony and women's inferiority across cultures, which is alarming given the fact that they have been so deeply engraved in collective consciousness that they have come to be viewed as natural.

Notes

- ¹ Saq is an Arabic word that has two meanings: stem of a plant and man's leg. The poet uses this pun to associate the two meanings in the reader's mind.
- ² An oriel is a window projecting from the upper storey of a house.

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