

The Image of Cairo in Hejazi's *A City Without Heart*

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*This article critically investigates the poetry of Ahmed Abdul-Muti Hejazi's controversial anthology *A City Without Heart* in order to explore the image of Cairo in contemporary Egyptian poetry. The paper argues that in spite of the existence of some similarities between western and Arabic city poetry, which primarily results from the impact of major western poets on their counterparts in the Arab world, there are still wide cultural and ideological differences between these two poetic traditions. While the hostile attitude of the western poet toward the city is formulated through an existential crisis resulting from the loss of faith in the values of a mechanized and commercialized culture, the negative image of the city in Arabic poetry is attributed to the Romantic trend integrated into the Arabic poetic canon distinguishing between city and country life and having its roots in pre-Islamic poetic traditions. In this context, the paper points out that due to the impact of the Romantic attitude in Arabic literature toward the city, the famous Egyptian poet, Hejazi, fails to integrate or appropriate modern western city images, inspired by poets like Baudelaire and Eliot, to fit indigenous purposes. Attempting to imitate his masters, the modernist Euro-American models, while being influenced by the local Romantic trend, Hejazi exaggerates the urbanization motif particularly the negative consequences of the industrial process on the Arab city. Ignoring the wide technological gap between the Arab city and its western counterpart and constructing an image of Cairo emulating western models, the poet creates a distorted literary city that does not exist either in the East or the West.*

Key words: city , Cairo , urbanization , Romantic , East and West , crisis , technology , ideology .

Introduction

In his well-known essay, "The City in Literature", Irving Howe attributes western hostility toward the city to the pastoral conventions dominating western culture for centuries:

We can assume that pastoral at its best represents a special, indeed a highly sophisticated version of a tradition of feeling in Western society that goes very far back and very deep down. The suspicion of artifice and cultivation, the belief in the superior moral and therapeutic uses of the "natural", the fear that corruption must follow upon a high civilization – such motifs appear to be strongly ingrained in Western Christianity and the civilization carrying it. There are Sodom and Gomorrah. There is the whore of Babylon. There is the story of Joseph and his brothers, charmingly anticipating a central motif within modern fiction: Joseph, who must leave the pastoral setting of his family because he is too smart to spend his life with sheep, prepares for a series of tests, ventures into the court of Egypt, and then, beyond temptation, returns to his fathers. And there is the story of Jesus, shepherd of his flock (Howe 1973:40).

According to Howe, western culture and literature bear a deeply grounded tradition that sees the city as a place both inimical and threatening due to the dominance of pastoral

conventions in western thought. Likewise, the hostile attitude toward the city in Arabic poetry may be traced back to the pre-Islamic era when the dichotomy between city and village was similar to the differences between the sedentary (urban) and the Bedouin (rural) way of existence. In the pro-Bedouin poetry of the pre-Islamic era, there was a tendency to praise the simple healthy, traditional way of life of the Arab Bedouins in the desert emphasizing their natural wisdom and their superiority to the sophisticated inhabitants of the sedentary / urban communities. Due to his natural environment, the Bedouin is depicted – in the pre-Islamic poetic tradition as liberal, free, intelligent and egalitarian who refuses to advocate the standards of hierarchy and status adopted in sedentary / urban communities 1.

Unlike the inhabitants of urbanized communities, the Arab Bedouin is portrayed as a brave and strong person who is able to challenge and withstand the pains and hardships of life. Moreover, in the early Islamic era, there was a feeling of uneasiness toward the city and urban life in general. For example, the Bedouin poetess, Maysoun Bent Bahdal, one of the wives of the Umayyad caliph, Moawiyya bin Abu Sofyan, migrated from her Bedouin community to live in the caliph's palace in the city of Damascus but she was not satisfied with her urban life. In her poetry, she expresses an antagonistic attitude toward life in the city. She longs for her hard life in the Arabian peninsula and she finds the barking dogs in her Bedouin environment and the howling wind in the surrounding desert more attractive than the sound of music and the singing of slave-girls in the caliph's palace: "A barking dog on the desert roads is closer to my heart than a domestic cat in the palace / and the sound of the howling wind in the desert is more attractive to my ears than the sound of music 2" (Cited in Abu-Ghali 1995: 9).

Like Maysoun, who prefers the simplicity of the desert community to the complications and sophistication of living in the caliph's palace in the city of Damascus, the capital of the Islamic empire during the Umayyad dynasty, Beshr bin al-Hareth, a famous Sufi in Arab history, escaped from Baghdad because he was astounded by the manifestations of urban life in the city. Furthermore, Beshr bin Al-Hareth, known as Abu Nasr al-Hafi came from the Arabian desert to the city of Baghdad during the reign of the Abbasid empire but he was astounded by the urban environment of the city, thus he took off his slippers, put them under his arm and ran back toward the desert and he never returned to the city of Baghdad. Therefore, Beshr bin al-Hareth was given his nickname "al-Hafi" which means the one who walks barefooted.

Historically, the hostile attitude toward the city and what it represents reached a climax in the Romantic trend in Arabic poetry. Due to western influence, the Arab Romantic poets have emphasized the negative aspects of the city in contrast with the village / countryside which remained the symbol of purity, harmony and blessing of nature. Like their European counterparts, the Arab Romantic poets escaped from the horrors of the modern city into a visionary utopia or through an imaginary return to nature associated with their villages. In a related context, Hannah Aboud argues that the attack against the city in western poetry is due to the fact that the city, in the West, is the center of industrialization which crushes human beings. To Aboud, Eliot's prostitutes and homosexuals—in *The Waste Land*—are victims of the city. Aboud also points out that Eliot shares Baudelaire's vision about the city as a prostitute and W.H. Auden, like Eliot, criticizes the mechanical life in the modern metropolis. To Aboud, the Arab poets are nothing but imitators of western city poets like Eliot who hates the city and is interested in the rural community of the country (Aboud 1988: 156).

In spite of the notion that both Arab and western poets express their feeling of nostalgia for the village and for a pre-urban past, there is a wide difference between these two kinds of nostalgia. For example, Eliot's nostalgia is the result of his condemnation of western industrial civilization that dehumanizes man, thus the poet calls for a return to a medieval, agricultural and agrarian society, an abandonment of a mechanized civilization and a return to the church and Christianity. Nevertheless, the Arab poets long for the country simply because many of the poets who write about the city have rural roots, thus the village, for them, is associated with their families, childhood years and past memories.

Since the Arab city is still a big village and does not have the same complicated structures of modern Euro-American cities, it is relevant to argue that the hostile attitude toward the city in Arabic poetry is partly due to the fact that most of the city poets descend from rural communities. However Ali Al-Jerbawi, in "The Arabs and the Cultural Crisis", states that the "Arab people, including the intellectual elite, due to their failure in the fields of industry and economics, attempted to incorporate different manifestations of western civilization - represented by the industrial city - bringing it to their countries in an attempt to cope up with the new developments in the world" (Al-Jerbawi 1985: 5). In a counter argument, Ghali Shukri argues that the attitudes toward the city is universal not regional. He states that there is no difference between Arab cities and western cities. He adds that though the city motif was initiated in western literature, several Arab poets developed it giving it new dimensions (Shukri 1987: 45). Furthermore, Saad Dabees points out that all the Egyptian poets who have dealt with the city motif are influenced by "Eliot's vision of the modern metropolis - in the West - as a locale for alienation, fear, industrialization, hollow civilization and materialistic squalor" (Dabees 1984: 153).

Nevertheless, the fear of the city and the hostile attitude toward modern machines and technology in Arabic poetry is not always due to Eliot's influence or to feelings of alienation and frustration but it is an indication of escape from the social realities of the new era. By idealizing their villages and demonizing the city, Arab poets reveal - in their poems - an unrealistic image of the village born out of their morbid imagination. In spite of descending from primitive villages where life is dominated by illiteracy, ignorance and superstitions, some Arab poets dealt with the city motif from a particular perspective. In other words, they amplify the negative aspects of the city affirming the existence of a one-sided subjective / romantic attitude in Arabic poetry toward the city.

With the rise of a new generation of poets who were influenced by the socialist ideologies such as Ahmad Abdul-Muti Hejazi and others, the image of the city in Arabic literature began to acquire new philosophical and intellectual dimensions. However, the advocates of the Socialist / Realistic trend in Arabic poetry, in general, condemn both city and country as symbols of evil and ignorance. With the exception of few poets, particularly the famous Egyptian poet, Ahmed Abdul-Muti Hejazi, most Arab Socialist / Realistic poets dismissed the Arab village because of the backwardness and taboos inherent in its feudal life. In the post-feudal era, Arab poets started to express their attitudes toward the city / village dialectics from different perspectives. For example, the central persona in Hejazi's well known anthology, *A City Without Heart*, is shocked by the city's lights and noise. He suffers from the glimmering lights of its shops. One night the rustic persona was attracted by the lights of a barbecue shop and he was very hungry but unfortunately he did not have money to afford a meal.

The persona is also annoyed by the noise of the city cars, trains and trams. Criticizing the ecological pollution in Cairo, the poet expresses his anger because he is suffocated in the

crowded streets of the city where he cannot breathe because of the hot weather and the car waste. Hejazi is also annoyed by the indifference of the city people who do not have time to speak with strangers or outcasts. Surprisingly the attitude of Hejazi toward the city will be changed once he is settled in Cairo. He castigated the city simply because he was passing through a transitional period undergoing a crisis of cultural adjustment with the city life. Further, Hejazi's concept of time as applied to the city people is over-exaggerated because people in the Arab cities are not "running like ghosts between the city buildings" to catch up the train on their way to their work (Hejazi 1978: 43). However, Hejazi says the truth when he speaks about people in the Arab city as "numbers" (Hejazi 1978: 57) because human beings in the Arab world are considered as objects without souls or opinions.

Moreover, Hejazi does not tackle the conflict between the city and the village as a topic to be discussed merely in terms of differences in traditions and customs. He does not deal either with the problems of the city inhabitants as specific individual ones, isolated from the rest of human existence. But Hejazi explores the urban /moral/ existential problems of the city as being humanistic and universal in scope and eternal in character. In this context, the Egyptian poet came under the impact of Baudelaire's urban poetry due to his interest in French literature. He was also influenced by T.S. Eliot's criticism of the western city. In his works, Eliot points to its spiritual emptiness, cruelty and loneliness in his attempt to illuminate the ugly realities of modern life.

In the late fifties, Hejazi migrated to Cairo as a rural stranger seeking assimilation in the capital city. This aspect of his life is of crucial importance to a study of his early poems in *A City Without Heart* which are characterized by the appearance of provisional figures who resemble the poet himself – lonely and exiled in the city. Hejazi's *A City Without Heart* is basically concerned with the experience of a young man from rural roots confronting the sinful city (Cairo) for the first time. Like his multiple speakers, the poet himself comes from a poor village called Tala located in the Nile Delta. In touching and poignant terms, Hejazi's book depicts the young poet's anguish at his loneliness and alienation in Cairo during the sixties. The young intellectual was astounded by the nature of city life where the rural traditions, associated with his village, are disregarded and abandoned.

Obviously, this sense of disinheritance has contributed to Hejazi's growing realization of the unreality of cities. This sense of alienation and exile certainly invoked in the to the poet something more disabling than a mere loss of his one-time pastoral abode. It definitely reveals feelings of estrangement from his present abode — the city — wherein his citizenship, as it seemed to him, was no more than dubious. The "unreal city" (Eliot 1980: 39), to use Eliot's words in *The Waste Land*, made the poet an unreal citizen, an alien resident who exists on the urban periphery but does not legitimately belong to the urban core. This forlorn attitude disappears momentarily, but it reappears again in a subsequent collection of poems titled *Beings of the Kingdom of Night* delineating Hejazi's realistic experience as an alien stranger living in Paris. Like other European cities, Paris manifests itself to the Egyptian poet as a place where a mercantile and mechanized way of life seals the fate of millions and imposes on them the same dilemma which has always frightened him particularly his deep sense of alienation, loneliness and anonymity within a vast and heartless city.

The Tortured Souls in the Hejazi's City and the Impact of the West

Irving Howe, in "The City in Literature", identifies two trends in the American poetry of the city: The first trend is traced to Walt Whitman and the second one is initiated by Eliot and his followers (Howe 1973:52). Howe claims that while Whitman's city poems "do not capture the terrible newness of the industrial city" because "Whitman's city flourished in harmony with surrounding forests and green" (Howe 1973:51), Eliot's city poems are an appropriation of Baudelaire's vision of the city [Paris] which "embodies the fear of a life reduced from evil to the merely sordid, a life sinking into the triviality of nihilism" (Howe 1973:52). Howe adds that in spite of appropriating Baudelaire's city in *The Waste Land*, "Eliot lacks Baudelaire's capacity for surrendering himself to the quotidian pleasures of a great city". Howe claims that Eliot narrows the poetic vision of Baudelaire into something of enormous power. Howe elaborates on this issue as follows:

Eliot's idea of the city has become assimilated to that of the great 19th century writers, though it is imperative to insist on the difference between madhouse and wasteland, even prison and wasteland. Eliot's vision is then taken up, more and more slackly, by the writers of the last half-century, charting, mourning, and then – it is unavoidable – delectating in the wasteland. Life in the city is shackled to images of sickness and sterility, with a repugnance authentic or adorned; and what seems finally at the base of this tradition is a world view we might designate as remorse over civilization (Howe 1973:53).

Scrutinizing contemporary American poetry on the theme of the city, it becomes obvious that the city as an image, a symbol and a text seems to be more complicated than what Irving Howe discusses in his essay.

In this context, it is important to illustrate that one of the basic characteristics integral to American literary modernism has been the American poet's growing recognition of the city as the most compelling paradigm of his nation's industrial power. As a sensitive chronicle of his own age, the American poet has responded to the vast transformations that overwhelmed America at the turn of the century. To the poets of the 1920's and the 1930's, a peaceful adjustment with the nation's urban-industrial developments was hard to achieve. The poets developed a new rhetoric of outrage and alarm, new modes of feeling and form peculiar to the American poetic tradition. However, the American avant-garde poetic tradition was rooted in the city. Explicitly, it was in the city that the modern American poet has found his/her voice. The emergence of industrial cities in America was coupled with the development of significant poetic voices that enriched the American literary scene. There is no doubt that city poets such as T.S. Eliot and Ezra perceived of the phenomenon of urban-industrialization. They criticized the modern morality associated with the city culture and broke with a civilization that sought to dehumanize people.

These poets possess an urge to confront the social realities of their own times. To them, the destiny of man is inseparable from the realities of his age and his life in the modern city. They envision the fate of the modern man within the confines of the city. They compare the gloomy conditions of modern cities with ideal communities in history legends and myths. Thus, we have Eliot's city of God and Pound's city of Dioce. Thus, their poetry mirrors the anguish of the provincial poet in urban-industrial America. The poetry of these poets is marked by nostalgia and revolt against the policy of the American urban-industrial

expansion. Victimized by the modern metropolis, Eliot's city people are alien residents, cut off and lost in the labyrinth of the modern metropolis. For example, Eliot's city man is a lonely walker who is desperate because the "unreal city" makes him an unreal citizen.

Like Eliot, Hejazi, in *A City Without Heart*, chooses to project the image of the central persona, in his anthology as an unreal citizen (Hejazi 1978: 54), an alien resident, the lonely singer (poet / artist / sensitive soul) pitted against the hostile environment of the city. The voice or the consciousness that moves throughout the poems comprising *A City Without Heart* and the voice that speaks, yet stays disembodied, belongs to the alien resident. He is either the single speaker in poems such as "I Once Had a Heart" and "Lemon Basket" or the composite persona of other poems. In other words, the alien resident is a figure who grows, matures and dissolves its identity from time to time in many voices that enliven the poet's personas. Such speakers, the desolated characters in Hejazi's poetry, who live in the desolating urban /commercial/ industrial environment and who tread Cairo from the city's downtown area to its popular suburbs are the victims of cultural dispossession. Existing on the periphery of the unreal city, they often fail to seek transcendence beyond what they might perceive to be unreal.

This archetypal image of the city dweller in Hejazi's poetry is apparently the result of western influence. "All art begins in physical discontent (or torture) of loneliness and partiality", noted Ezra Pound in his "San Trovaso Notebook" (Cited in Pound 1976: 14). The lonely speaker in Pound's early poetry takes the shape of the victim-self sojourning in alien Venice. The image of the victim is one which rows continually in Pound's early poetry and matures into an identity associated with the poet himself. Wylie Sypher traces the history of this "type" of the victim-self to the nineteenth century "when the romantic ideals of selfhood were being continually affected by the law of collectivity and large numbers" (Sypher 196:36).

Furthermore, many important writers of the nineteenth century, Flaubert and Baudelaire in particular, popularized this post-romantic self. Sypher standardized this type in the figure of the dandy who takes different shapes in the poetry of the western city. This figure, who appears roving the city in Baudelaire's poetry or the lonely speaker in the poetry of Eliot and Pound is an alien resident moving through urban blight and squalor. The alien resident/dandy, observes Sypher, "is one of the most ambiguous figures in Romantic and post-Romantic literature. The dandy is a middle-class aristocrat, a "figure who lost caste, a figure who could make his entrance only in the cities that were becoming the milieu of the bourgeoisie" (Sypher 1962:36).

The poets of the industrial city in the West were apt to find the figure of the "dandy" quite useful for their impersonal art. Figurative variants of the dandy are easy to identify in western city poetry: Eliot's Prufrock, Burbank, the young man in "Portrait of a Lady", the lonely walker in poems like "Rhapsody on a Windy Night", "Preludes" and others. Explicitly, different versions of the dandy appear in the poetry of Pound (The Cantos), Crane (The Bridge) and other modernist poets. For example, Lindsay, among the Chicago school of poets (Carl Sandburg, Vachel Lindsay, and Edgar Lee Masters) shares with Eliot, Pound and Crane the same kind of disorientation as a result of his confrontation with the city dominated by arrant commercialists and atheists. Given the poet's extremely refined sensibility and the city's crudities of life and manners, the rift between the poet and his city is almost pre-ordained. Reviewing the artists' relationships to their world-wide public, Nigel Abercrombie rationalizes this rift in sociological terms:

Sociologically, the modern conurbation consists of producers and consumers. There is, in strict theory as well as in practice, precisely no place in that world for the creative artist except the rebel camp (or the concentration camp, if he is unlucky); he is ineluctably at odds with both the constitutive elements of society (Abercrombie 1975:30).

Like the alien strangers in the city poetry of Eliot, Pound and others, the central persona of Hejazi's city poetry is cut off from his roots. The experience of Hejazi's central persona/narrator reveals the shock of a country young man as he encounters Cairo for the first time. The tragedy of Hejazi's persona- the speaking consciousness of the poet - is expressed in the title of his first anthology *A City Without Heart*. In a poem entitled "I Once Had a Heart", Hejazi expresses the feelings of alienation and frustration of a disappointed village lover deserting his birthplace and coming to live in Cairo. In the big city he feels lonely and isolated. Cairo is cruel and brutal to strangers who are lost among the crowds and multitudes of people in its streets: "I live my miserable nights without love or compassion/I envy all city lovers/I continue my life in sadness, suffering from emotional emptiness/living in exile, coldness and loneliness like all the other strangers in the city/ I live in a city which devours its strangers and outcasts" (Hejazi 1978:110). Hejazi's rustic persona adds: "walking in an extremely cold and deserted vacuum/ an alien visitor in a land devouring the strangers" (Hejazi 1978: 111). The village persona who reflects the poet's consciousness, feels abandoned in the fearful streets of the city, lined with luxurious houses and palaces on both sides. In Cairo, Hejazi's speaker suffers from hunger, humiliation and loneliness. Depicting the city as a sinful woman, he says in agony: "I am a young man abandoned by a prostitute /and the passers-by have no mercy on me" (Hejazi 1978:115).

The persona's feelings of inferiority and alienation are emphasized when he walks along the streets of Cairo with a bundle of clothes in his hands while other young men in the city walk along confidently, hand in hand with their pretty/seductive girlfriends. In his frustration and despair, he calls on his village beloved to join him in order to ease his loneliness in the bastard city. As a villager he is horrified by the scene of the tram: "every stranger here fears the tram". The people of the city themselves are frightening – they look like machines. This image is an echo of Eliot's "The Waste Land":

at the violent hour, when the eyes and back
turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits
like a taxi throbbing, waiting
at the violent hour, the evening hour that strives
homeward and brings the sailor home from sea
the typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast, lights
her stove, and lays out food in tins (Eliot 1980: 44).

Unlike the warm, friendly environment of his village, the people of the city look austere and they are indifferent to one another. In his agony and despair Hejazi's central speaker attacks Cairo calling it "the city of infidels" and "heretical minarets" (Hejazi 1978:138).

In the eyes of Hejazi, Cairo is the city of stones, dust and eternal summer which whips people with its heat. In Cairo, the poet finds no spring, no autumn, no winter and no gardens. Its people are always busy running from one place to another. In their endless and morbid state of motion, the city people do not have time to talk to each other: "I have anchored in the city of glass and stone/ The city which has only one season – its permanent

summer/ there is no other season in the city/ I looked for a garden but I did not find a trace of any gardens"(Hejazi 1978: 167). The people in Hejazi's city suffer from moral barrenness and sterility and the lack of genuine human feelings of love and compassion. The city, in Hejazi's poetry, turns into a kind of hell where human beings are transformed into machines and robots. Feelings of alienation are not limited to the city people but are extended to include its streets, its days and nights. The city's weather turns into flames that burn its inhabitants. Suffering from lack of moral guidance and religious support, people in Hejazi's city, like Sisyphus, in the Greek myth, are inflicted with eternal pains as they seek to earn their daily living.

In his poem "Goodbye", Hejazi in an Eliotic manner, describes Cairo as a barren city, a wasteland. The barrenness motif adds a new dimension to the sterility of life in the big city (Gohar1998: 45). In Cairo, the roads of the city are described as riverbeds of fire, a kind of hell, reminiscent of Dante's *Inferno*. In the big city, the alien stranger encounters the burning rays of the blazing sun, giant buildings, long fences, big squares, triangles and glass. There is no human life in the city of Cairo. Describing the night life of the city, the poet states that its nights are short feasts of light, singing, reckless youth, crazy drivers and drunk people, but soon the flowers droop and sadness penetrates the soul. In his misery, the poet's persona yearns for his village and its simple inhabitants crying out: "I love you who are there in the faraway village" (Hejazi 1978:95). Apparently, the poet's persona is alienated in the city because he is originally a village boy "a son of the village" who finds it difficult to forget his family house or his father's grave surrounded by Indian fig trees.

In *Aspects of Modern Arabic Poetry*, critic Ihsan Abbas demonstrates that Arab city poets like Ahmad Abdul Muti Hejazi and others are shocked by the city not because of the city's complicated civilization but because they were not familiar with the new environment (Abbas 1980 : 112). Moreover, Abbas clarifies that Hejazi's anthology *A City Without Heart* is "an assault on modern cities which kill human relationships and ethics" (Abbas 1980:124). The hostile attitude of Hejazi - the rural poet - toward the city which results from his feelings of aberration, loneliness and confusion constitutes a major motif in the poet's early works particularly *A City Without Heart*. He vividly reflects the feelings of a country boy as he encounters a city crowded with busy, indifferent, indignant inhabitants who rush along neither greeting each other nor caring for the warm social relations he is familiar with in his village.

For example, in "A Basket of Lemons", he describes the brutality and indifference of the city of Cairo which gives no attention to the village, represented by a rural boy who sells lemons in the streets of the crowded metropolis. The poet's persona recalls his village memories as he confronts a village boy selling lemons in the streets of the city. The journey of the lemons basket from the village to the city reminds him of his own journey to Cairo where he suffers from misery and frustration: "a basket of lemons! / Under the sharp rays of the blazing sun / And the boy hawking in a sad voice / "Twenty lemons per piaster / Per one piaster twenty lemons!" (Hejazi 1978:183).

Using the lemons basket as an objective correlative signifying how the simplicity of the village is being humiliated in the streets of the city, the poet seeks to affirm his own dispossession as well as that of the lemons because both of them come from the village. Explicitly, the village in the poem is associated with a sense of freedom, innocence and purity echoing the romantic attitude deeply rooted in Arabic poetry. In a related context, the city people in the train are exhausted and tired due to the psychological pressures inflicted upon them by the city. Undoubtedly, Hejazi's poem, "A Basket of Lemons", aims to depict

the cruel city's indifference toward the village. The lemons, which were picked in the village, remind the poet of his rural community. The fresh lemons, picked in the village, were brought to the city characterized by suffocating streets and over-crowded places where feet never stop running. Replete with feelings of sadness, the poem depicts a city where cars pollute the atmosphere with their waste and where a poor village boy runs after them selling lemons at a cheap price, but nobody cares.

Moreover, the poet expresses his sadness at the hostile attitude of the industrial city toward the lemons, a product of the village: "A basket of lemons left the village at dawn / It was until this damned time, / Green moistened with dew / Swimming in waves of shed / It was in its green nap the birds' bride / Oh! Ah! / Who frightened it? / Which hand got hungry, picked it this dawn! / Carried it at twilight / To narrow, crowded streets, / None stop feet, cars? / Going on by burning patrol! / Poor!" (Hejazi 1978:185). The people of the city, overwhelmed with their daily problems, do not know the value of lemons which, like the poet's speaker, is lost in the city. The rural persona identifies himself with the lemons because both of them come from the same village: "No one smells you / Oh lemon! / And the sun dries your dew, oh lemon! / And the tanned boy runs, doesn't catch the cars! / Twenty lemons per piaster / "per one piaster twenty lemons!" / My eyes fell upon it, / So I remembered the village!" (Hejazi 1978:184).

In *A City Without Heart*, Cairo is delineated as a hostile metropolis where the poet's persona starves because he has no sufficient money. The city people in the Cairo train station are described as "immigrants running toward a ship", "wounded soldiers coming from the battlefield", "smoke coming from their noses like the waste that gets out of the train chimneys" (Hejazi 1978:186). Those over-exhausted people are victims of the city which "crushes their nervous systems" on its "gambling tables" (Hejazi 1978:188). Hejazi visualizes a horrible image of the inhabitants of Cairo to personify the pressures and suffering one may face in the big city: "its inhabitants are silent under the blaze in the dust / They are constantly on the move / If they were to speak to you, they could only ask: What is the time" (Hejazi 1978:189).

In the city of Cairo, the poet feels as if he were a mere "leaf moving in the wind". Hejazi's speaker adds: "I am evicted from my room / I am lost, without name / This is me/ And this is my town" (Hejazi 1978: 191). Surprisingly, when the poet recalls his love affair with "his mistress who came from the village" (Hejazi 1978:192) the lights of the city become more friendly and cheerful. Consequently, he feels as if "the city enters his heart" and he is no longer lonely or desperate. In spite of emphasizing that life in the city is a kind of slow death, Hejazi, like other Arab poets, stays in the city and never goes back to his village to live near "the tomb of his father" (Hejazi 1978:195).

Criticizing the materialistic aspects of life in Cairo, Hejazi reveals how the city is indifferent to the suffering of the poor and the marginalized. Unlike his own village where one can knock the door of any peasant house and ask for food, Cairo is a city without heart: "I walked at night in the streets of the city / dragging my aching legs / on my way toward al-Sayyeda suburb / I was hungry and bankrupt / I wished I had little cash in my pockets / I will not come back without money to Cairo" (Hejazi 1978:117). The district of al-Sayyeda Zeinab is an old popular quarter located in the center of Cairo. It attracts the rural visitors of the capital city because of its cheap hotels and shops. Apparently, the problem the poet faces in the city is not philosophical or existential or ethical but it has to do with money and shelter. Obviously, Hejazi does not find in the city life a personal predicament. Unlike the complex vision of the city, integral to western poetry, the lack of money and shelter are the reasons for

Hejazi's feelings of alienation and hostility toward Cairo. Once this problem is settled, there is no more alienation on the part of the poet. Unfortunately, this is a superficial way of dealing with the city motif. The distinguished Egyptian critic, Raja'a Al-Naqqash, in his introduction to Hejazi's anthology *A City Without Heart*, justifies the poet's suffering attributing it to the lack of love and intimate relationships associated with the village, not to technological and industrial complications in the city community (Al-Naqqash 1978:19).

The same city motif is explored in Hejazi's poem "Death of a Boy" included in *A City Without Heart*. Narrating the tragic story of a village boy killed in an accident, in the streets of Cairo, the poet reveals the ugly face of the big city. To him, Cairo is a city which smashes the innocent and victimizes the weak. Only in Cairo, a city without a heart, nobody mourns the tragic death of a boy killed in a car accident: "They said: Whose son is he? Nobody answers / Nobody knows his name/ 'Poor boy'/ Someone said in sadness and disappeared/ Eyes meet each other/ Nobody answers/ people in the big city are just a number/ A boy was born/ A boy has died" (Hejazi 1978:221). In those moments of aberration and despair, the poet recalls the image of his rural community. In order to overcome the indifference of the city toward the death of the boy, the poet alludes to the village: "A greenfly came from the sad country graveyards / It flutters its wings on a boy who died in the city" (Hejazi 1978:222).

The reference to the greenfly invokes the image of the village which is symbolized, in Hejazi's poetry, by trees, lemons, birds, animals, palm trees, sky, sun, fields and the dawn while the city is epitomized by streets, palaces, lamps, doorkeepers, fences, buildings, massive walls, glass, squares, haste, crowds, drunken men, curtained rooms, fatigue, loneliness speeding cars, trams, trains and other machines. Wearing the mask of the poet of urban-industrialism, Hejazi openly opposes the machine with the same fear and outrage as he opposes the city. To him, the city - Cairo - suggests itself as the abode of machinery going on wheels, the vast storehouse of energy that keeps the automatons in order. Either word, the "city" or the "machine" would serve as a metonymy for the other which is an exaggeration because Cairo in the early sixties — when *A City Without Heart* was published for the first time — was still an under-developing city.

Furthermore, the city - in Hejazi's poetry - stands for things such as vice and prostitution. In "The Lonely Woman's Room", Hejazi is engaged in a dialogue with an urban girl who meets him in her humble flat in the city. Hejazi's girl recalls to one's mind Eliot's London girls of "*The Waste Land*" who suffer from boredom and exile. The girl in the poem is a typical city type, alien and lonely: "Casting the city off her shoulders / Closing the door behind her / she draws the curtains/ and turns on her light in broad day" (Hejazi 1978:145). Then the poet continues to describe her small flat which turns into a prison cell: "Those are her things / A gas stove, sink/ and shelves for groceries / A small exile / a bed and night table / books to bring on drowsiness / an ashtray and small candles" (Hejazi 1978:145). The boredom which shrouds the girl's life is part of the city's environment that she has been accustomed to: "she has the feel of a body familiar with loneliness" (trans. by John Asfour 1988: 121). The poet's meeting with her ends in frustration: "It was not me / she was talking to, but someone else / observing his borrowed face" (John Asfour 1988: 121).

Explicitly, Hejazi, like most of contemporary Arab poets, does not develop a consistent philosophy toward the city. Unlike western Romantic poets, he does not either seek to escape the city by returning to his rural roots and to the harmony, love and warmth of nature. Although there are some indications in his poetry which point to the poet's desire to return to his peasant community, it is obvious that Hejazi's yearning for his village is

essentially a longing for his birth-place. Once he has a friend in Cairo and a beloved to ease his loneliness, the poet is quite happy to live in the city. He does not want to leave the city, thus he asks his village sweetheart to join him there instead of encouraging her to stay in the village. Ironically, the poet himself prefers to stay in the capital city rather than return to his home, his relatives, his mother and his father's grave.

In *A City Without Heart*, Hejazi exaggerates the feelings of exile experienced by his rustic persona who migrates to Cairo. As a peasant coming from the village of Tala in the Nile Delta, the poet / persona is shocked by the type of life advocated by the inhabitants of the capital city who are depicted as "ghosts". While Eliot's alien residents - in *The Waste Land*—fail to cope up with the perverted morality of an industrialized / commercialized metropolis, Hejazi's city dwellers are scared of trains and trams running in the streets of Cairo. Both of Eliot's alien residents and Hejazi's city inhabitants suffer from alienation and frustration because their moral values contradict with those advocated by a mechanized civilization. However, there is a wide difference between Hejazi's city people who are afraid of the monstrous vehicles running in the streets of the city and Eliot's "human engines" who behave like machines even during the sex act and who are represented by some alienated figures in "*The Waste Land*" and other poems.

In Hejazi's Cairo, strangers and peasants are those who express fear of the machine because they are not city people: "But I am afraid of the train / Every stranger here fears the train" (Hejazi 1978:116). Like the train, the car is another symbol of the city that represents a threat to the rural poet who does not have one. To him, the car is more powerful than man and it is able to reach the suburb of al-Sayyeda Zeinab - located in the old part in historical Cairo - within a short period of time while the rustic persona, tired and bankrupt, is forced to reach his destination on foot: "The passengers in the car are laughing / The car disappeared, it is supposed to be very close to Al-Sayyeda region / while I am walking slowing / dragging my tired feet in the streets of the city" (Hejazi 1978:117).

Obviously, Hejazi is interested in staying in the city in spite of the nonexistence of relationships that bind people together. The city people in his poems are exhausted, gloomy and indifferent to strangers, outcasts and even to children killed under the wheels of the city vehicles. There is no doubt that the poet suffers from alienation and psychological fragmentation in a city that assassinates innocence and murders children. It is clear that Hejazi's Romantic approach to the city recalls the poetry of William Blake and William Wordsworth which is concerned with the impact of the industrial city on the poor and the downtrodden. However, the complicated cultural and technological factors associated with the western metropolis which paved the way for the collapse of human relationships and the alienation / exile of the city's inhabitants could not be applied to modern Arab cities because these cities lack the sophisticated scientific / industrial conditions considered as prerequisites to the failure of human relationships which in its turn leads to an existential crisis on the part of the poet. Due to the impact of western poetic traditions on Hejazi and other Arab free verse poets, he over-exaggerates the phenomenon of urbanization and its consequences on the city inhabitants in the Arab world.

Nevertheless, in some of his city poems, Hejazi presents the city motif in a simple way attributing his exile in the city to lack of friends and money. Life in the city has cut him off from his rural roots and family. Suffering from nostalgia for his home in the village, Hejazi feels loneliness as he walks along the roads of the city. He is crushed by its walls and buildings. Addressing his rural girlfriend he says: "two years after our separation, I knocked the doors of friends but none answered / the doors and the doormen dismissed me out to the

street/ even the pale deserted streets have rejected me, knocking me down / the gigantic walls of the city crushed me, suffocated me” (Hejazi 1978:135). On this basis, it is relevant to point out that Hejazi, like other poets in the free verse movement, exaggerates the impact of the machine on life in the Arab city. The failure of human communication and the lack of human relationships in the Arab city are also magnified in Hejazi’s poetry. For example, he claims that time “is a crucial issue for people in the Arab metropolis which is a myth: “If the city people speak with you / they only ask you about time” (Hejazi 1978:223). Moreover, Hejazi expresses his feelings of alienation in the big city, an abode of moral stagnation, political corruption and police oppression. In Hejazi’s city, the naïve rustic poet is afraid of cars, trains, trams, lights and electricity, a notion which reveals the big difference between the western metropolis and the Arab city.

Regardless of the drawbacks in Hejazi's philosophical approach toward the Arab city, there are some interesting points that deserve critical attention. For example, critic Jaber Asfour in his study, *The Memory of Poetry* speaks about the political dimension which Hejazi gives to the Arab metropolis affirming the importance of the city as a political symbol in his poetry (Jaber Asfour 2002:340). He refers to Hejazi’s poem “*The Prison*” which signifies a mysterious confrontation between the poet and the secret police in the streets of Cairo. Moreover, Hejazi in “*Song of a Dead Pilot*” speaks of a worn-out city, a rotten metropolis which is suffering from stagnation: “In your evenings, I smell rotteness, O my city / where does it come from? / Your face in the desert wind is as pure as rain/ your arms in the Nile waters as clouds and trees”. Then the poet asks a question: “where, my city, does the rotteness come from?” (trans. by Boullata 1976:83). Apparently, the rotteness of Cairo stems from a dictatorial political regime which dominates the city tyrannizing people through a network or repressive apparatuses. The same rotteness emanates from the city’s prisons overcrowded with victims. In fact the rotteness of the city is rooted in a whole decadent system of worn-out laws and traditions that suffocates human life in the big city.

Conclusion

While being in Spain in the early twentieth century, Ahmed Shawqi, the prince of Arabic poetry, expressed his yearning for Egypt revealing his deep love of the city of Cairo. To him, “Cairo is a spring of paradise”, it is benevolent like the vine, "which provides both fruits / grapes and wine” (Shawqi 1960:128). Unlike Shawqi, the famous Egyptian poet, Hejazi depicts Cairo as a prostitute, a city which crushes the innocent and suffocates the marginalized and the strangers. This inhospitable image of Cairo is inspired by western literature particularly the poetry of Eliot and Baudelaire. In this context, it is noteworthy to point out that Hejazi's city is at once an anarchic profusion of streets, railways, trams, motors, buildings and palaces and a compulsive paradigm of Egypt's urban development. In Hejazi's poetry, the satiric depiction of the Cairo community rife with the dismal patterns of the metropolis – filth, ugliness, squalid death, desolation, deceit, bondage and exploitation – reveals his dissatisfaction with the ancient city. There is no doubt that Hejazi in *A City Without Heart* basically aims to express his convulsion at the complex world of the city revealing his sense of alienation in Cairo.

Hejazi’s unreal city with its alienated inhabitants emerge in the preceding anthology, a collection of poems comprising sharply drawn sketches of the urban scene: The roving consciousness in these poems is that of a resident alien. *A City Without Heart* includes

samples of dispossessed individuals who personify metropolitan life in Cairo. Hejazi's city is a location where only aliens and strangers live in poverty among ruin and plight. In the gloomy streets of Cairo, there is a confrontation between Hejazi's rural persona and the alienated inhabitants of the city – they meet across a gulf of boredom. The city dwellers are presented via portraits of spiritual vacancy, associated with the middle class Cairo society. Their behavior signifies a contemptuous disregard of village conservative values and lack of respect for country traditions.

Contemporary Cairo is unmistakably Hejazi's private focus in *A City Without Heart* particularly the poetic sequences which portray the cityscape. During his early days in Cairo, the city seemed alien to the young poet. The poet's knowledge of Cairo specifically the old city where he lives affects his vision. He was interested in the city's ancient monuments and its glorious traditions but he was appalled by its present life, affected by a mercantile culture which repelled the young poet. This ambivalent attitude toward the city of Cairo punctuates the poems in *A City Without Heart* to some extent. However, modern Cairo, to him, was drifting hopelessly further from grace. *A City Without Heart*, in one context, is not merely an elegy for the historic city, but more significantly, for a lost community of human values. The Cairo scenes viewed in *A City Without Heart* are infused with such a profound feeling of deprivation as cited in the poems. Like Eliot's "*Waste Land*", the Cairo of Hejazi's poetry is "unreal" and its people are phantasmal gnomes. The "unreal city" lives in the awareness of an alien resident, a rustic who mourns the lost horizons of the "real".

Fear dominates the life of the inhabitants of Hejazi's waste land. The rustic narrator is afraid of the machines stretching in the streets of the city. Hejazi borrows the idea of fear from Eliot's "*The Waste Land*". In Eliot's poem, Marie is "frightened" on the sled, the "son of man" is afraid of his shadow and the lover in the hyacinth garden utters no word of love due to the fear of his dubious existence: "I was neither living nor dead". Madame Sosostris warns the speaker to "fear death by water". She is herself afraid of interception: "Tell her I bring the horoscope myself: / One must be so careful these days" (Eliot 1980:38). Fear also haunts the crowd on the London Bridge. The speaker accosting Stetson down King William Street, fears "sudden frost" (Eliot 1980:39) that might disturb the corpse's bed. In "*The Waste Land*", one must take care to keep the truth – "seeking dog far hence, lest it dig up the corpse" (Eliot 1980:37).

Furthermore, Hejazi attacks the city because of its indifference to the suffering of the poor and the down-trodden. The poet confessed that during his early years in Cairo, he was dismissed out of his room because he did not have enough money to pay for the rent. Due to the curse of exile and alienation in the city, Hejazi searched for a way out of the limbo world of the city. Thus, he recalls memories of a pre-industrial past in order to overcome his feelings of loneliness in the city. Like other Arab poets who tackled the city motif, he expressed a sense nostalgia for his rural past revealing his desire to return to his village, depicted as a kind of paradise. These feelings, in fact, are not genuine but incorporated in his poetry for aesthetic purposes. Ironically, there is no Arab city poet who originally descends from rural origin including Hejazi has returned to his village in reality. Like his fellow city poets, Hejazi insisted on staying in Cairo forever.

Contrary to the vision of the Romantic poets, in the west, who escaped from the city to the country, modern Arab poets manifested their fantasies about the village as a paradise which only existed in their imagination. Unlike the nineteenth-century western poet who left the industrial city and stayed in the country, the Arab poet never escaped from the urban metropolis because he did not confront a complicated urban civilization that would force him

to escape from the city. The Arab poets, particularly the advocates of the free verse movement came to the city to pursue their careers and to settle forever, never to return to the village. Hejazi, for example, expresses a superficial desire to escape from the city and return to his village where his father was buried but he never did this. Further, the great Iraqi poet, Abdul-Wahhab Al-Bayati, spent his life moving from one city to another, the Syrian poets, Adonis (Ali Ahmed Said) as well as Nizar Qabbani left Damascus to settle in the city of Beirut and the Kurdish-Iraqi poet Buland Al-Haydari prefers to settle in the city of Baghdad claiming that his village has been transformed into a city as well.

Notes

¹ Shmuel Moreh wrote many significant studies on the dialectics of the city and country in Arabic literature. Moreh also translated selections from Arabic city poetry and incorporated them in his articles on Arabic literature.

² All citations from Arabic poetry and prose are translated into English by the writer of this article unless names of other translators are mentioned in the text of the paper and the "Works Cited".

³ Like Hejazi who speaks about the murder of a boy under the wheels of the train in the city, the famous Egyptian poet, Mohamed Ibrahim Abu-Sinna refers to a similar event: the murder of a female child under the wheels of the city tram because she is not aware of the meaning of the traffic lights. Like Hejazi's boy who is killed by a vehicle in the streets of the city, the girl in Abu Sinna's poem is also a victim of the machines which run in the city streets: "Yesterday I went out to the streets of the city to read the sorrows and woes in the eyes of those who were crossing the sad street of the city / red light means "stop" / green light means "go", get out of here/ Suddenly the tram stops and a crowd of people surrounds the corpse of a girl lying in a pool of blood" (cited in Abu-Ghali, 25).

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