

The Dual Female Space in Byron's Turkish Tales

Savo Karam

The English Department, Lebanese University, Tripoli, Lebanon

"Time and Space are real beings.... Time is a man, Space is a woman" (William Blake)

ABSTRACT: Since our existence is defined by the concept of space, our social lives therefore are defined by spatial relationships. The theory of space has developed a dynamic representation of the conception and creation of relationships, especially gender relations. Gender cannot be considered by neglecting the issue of space since both are interrelated. Females, however, occupy restricted spaces in spite of the multifarious positions males freely occupy. In fact, space is a maternal/feminized entity according to Luce Irigaray, Elaine Showalter, Gayatri Spivak, Julia Kristeva, Plato, William Blake and I. A. Richards. To feminists, space is perceived through the lens of male power and female resistance. The urge of women writers to reduce gender discrimination and sexual stereotyping during the Romantic Movement was visible in Lord Byron's poems. Byron's controversial sexuality—awareness of his feminine side—is in itself a unique existential space placing him among artists that reveal both gender sides: the meek and bold. This study investigates how Byron pictured the space his feminine heroes occupied in his Turkish tales and distinguishable version of the "female other." It offers a feminist reading of three of Byron's Turkish tales: *The Giaour* (1813), *The Bride of Abydos* (1813) and *The Corsair* (1814) and explores the figurative spaces that Byron allocates for his Turkish heroines.

KEYWORDS: *Lord Byron, Byronic heroines, Turkish tales, theory of space, figurative space, spatial symbols, seraglio*

I. INTRODUCTION

The connection between a suffocating patriarchal community and a resisting subdued female is what motivates females to resist. Thus, feminism attempts to rupture the barrier between the sexes and to modify women's spatial behavior.

The theory of space entails two sides of the coin: freedom and oppression. The idea of race, gender, class, space and feminist segregation is indispensable in interpreting the masculine and feminine world, especially in fathoming the concept of women's oppression and envisioning of emancipation in an oppressive patriarchal domain. Caroline Franklin asserts that 19th century feminists endeavored to expand their sphere and "minimize sexual difference, preferring humanist universalism... and ... to assert a difference in women's favor, thus adopting the notion of women's unique mission to call for civil equality" (129). Reading space is reading a piece of literature critically. Since spatiality is a type of literary expression that critically examines the gender social status, the relationship between the sexes is based on the concept of space and place defining the struggle of power between genders.

Plato was among the first to highlight the notion of space; moreover, this wily, crafty sage associated space with the image of a female. Similarly, according to Julia Kristeva, woman's experience is perceived more in term of space than time. Kristeva famously states, "when evoking the name and destiny of woman, one thinks more of the space generating and forming the human species than of time..." (qtd. in Best 181). Elaine Showalter further attributes the female enclosed space to the muted sphere of an exiled female; the female space to Showalter is "the space of the Other, the gaps, silences and absences of discourse and representation, to which the feminine has traditionally been relegated" (qtd. in Salvaggio 262).

No other Oriental poet effectively reflects the aspect of feminine space the way Lord Byron does in his Turkish tales—the marginalization of the female space and manner he represents gendered body spaces. The Byronic heroines under discussion are evidence of Byron's accomplishment that elevated his artistic repute, firmly establishing him as an acclaimed romantic poet. Such flamboyant female figures were ingeniously portrayed and typical of the Oriental female prototype. Byron's subjugated women stood in stark contrast with his 19th century British female readers that read his tales and veritably encountered their romantic Oriental counterparts. Decidedly, Byron depicted such Oriental heroes not only to a male Western audience but also to a female one. He realistically revealed that both Eastern and Western females share similar traits: noble yet isolated; they crave the power to make decisions and venture outside their limited space.

Leila

Transgressing social laws is fatal not exclusively for males but for females too. Leila is exclusively blamed: how dare she escape the space of her gender and community by betraying her spouse, Hassan, fully entrusting her heart and loving a Christian? Leila, *The Giaour's* protagonist, is restricted by the social and religious code that limits her space and freedom. Living in a limited space, Leila's clamorous cry, demand for liberation is never heard since she is socially secluded and merely an entity (among others) in the harem; quite clearly, by heeding the voice of her heart, she confirms her seclusion from society. Thus, both arranged marriage and forbidden sexual freedom limit Leila's space. It is deduced that Franklin's analysis of Byron's female heroine as "triplely oppressed: by her class, race, and sex" (36) easily applies to Leila. Moreover, Spivak in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" further explains the predicament of the mute, colonized female: "the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (28). Class, race, gender, religion, politics and history reduce Leila to a taciturn, mute Oriental female, subdued by patriarchy, occupying a dark, shadowy space.

After studying Byron's poetic compositions, Gavin Hopps infers the concept of "ghostly" and "negative" space in Byron's treatment of female space (Murray 129). The "ghostly" space that Hopps refers to best represents Leila, the infidel wife, who "... sleeps beneath the wave" (l. 675). The narrator of the tale dramatically describes Leila's disappearance, as if she were a handful of dust: "... that woman is but dust," (l. 489) or a grain of salt that vanishes swiftly like a ghost as soon as it is dropped in the water:

Sullen it plunged, and slowly sank,...
I gaz'd, till vanishing from view,
Like lessening pebble it withdrew;
Still less and less, a speck of white
That gemm'd the tide, then mock'd the sight;
And all its hidden secrets sleep, (ll. 374, 380-83)

An indistinct, hazy space is associated with Leila. She is reduced to a speck of white; she is not solely veiled in the harem to avoid the avaricious male's gaze but also obscure in her death. Her shape resembles a shadow or outline hard to decipher. Sealed in a sack, Leila occupies a dark area, neither seen nor heard. Her physical space is negatively limited, akin to her oral/verbal space since her voice is suppressed/unheard in life and death. She does not oppose her death; she sinks willingly and silently (ll. 375-79), unwilling to resist her limited space. The little, modest space that Leila was assigned is further reduced after being accused of disloyalty. This is witnessed in the words of Hassan's mother (ll. 689-722) who urges her son to replace his disloyal wife. It is remarkably ill fated that the limited space available to females is not only a patriarchal perspective but also a matriarchal one.

A physical and private indoor space is the harem, a fortress-like female domain inaccessible to males. The seraglio is a female's spatial domain; it assumes a domestic space to which the identity of females is linked throughout their lives. In addition, the seraglio has its rules and regulations and symbolizes a smaller dungeon. Hence, the harem is a negative, patriarchal symbol, suppressing its female inhabitants. This is a feminine space, created by a masculine perspective, which Leila cannot escape.

A female "has received the false treasures of her 'femininity'" in return of her freedom; ironically speaking, the male will consider the female as subservient or inferior but at the same time he convinces her that she is royalty (De Beauvoir 678). How is Leila an 'enslaved' queen? She is incongruously depicted as an idealized diva who "stood superior" when compared to other harem females: "As midst her handmaids in the hall/ She stood superior to them all," (ll. 498-99). Byron idealizes her beauty: "And shining in her white symar,/ As through yon pale grey cloud- the star/ Which now I gaze on, as on her/ Who look'd and looks far lovelier;" (ll. 1273-76). She is the prettiest among all other females; even the Mufti gazes at her beauty: "On her might Muftis gaze..." (l. 491). Hence, she pays a price for her exceptional beauty—she loses the freedom to confront a man's gaze in order to preserve her purity.

Hindrance from leaving the harem sphere is incontestably a sign of gender subjugation. Simon de Beauvoir contends, "... when two human categories are together, each aspires to impose its sovereignty upon the other.... If one of the two is in some way privileged ... this one prevails over the other and undertakes to keep it in subjection. It is therefore understandable that man would wish to dominate woman" (56). De Beauvoir, continues, "to be a woman would mean to be the object, the Other" (46), and this Other remains an object as long as she does not transcend her assigned space. Indeed, Leila is associated with a discarded "freight" (l. 362) as an object or a sort of merchandise. She is even described as "breathing clay" (as an animated object): "That form was nought but breathing clay" (l. 481). Hence, she occupies a dialectical, luminal space, on the boundary between humans and objects.

Luce Irigaray, in *Speculum de L'autre Femme*, elucidates how males reduce females to negative, sexual objects. For Irigaray, it is "the constitution of women as 'objects' that emblamatises the materialisation of relations among men"; females are rendered as "fetish objects... in the world of commodities ... they are the manifestations and the circulation of a power of the Phallus" (185). Leila is confined to a sexual cocoon; her

physical, sensual attraction is what identifies her: a plaything admired by two males. In his dramatizing painting of *The Giaour*, Delacroix portrays Leila with a silent femininity. Leila is a trophy to a Western lover who claims his prize in a duel with Hassan. This emphasizes her position as an object, even in the eyes of her lover who says: “But place again before my eyes/ Aught that I deem a worthy prize;—/ The maid I love— the man I hate/ And I will hunt the steps of fate,” (ll. 1016-19).

Leila is treated as an object, game and prize for the strongest male. Her space is limited to mere sexual enslavement. These symbols oppress her and enchain her: a source of pleasure that feeds the male’s sexual passion. Byron depicts both antagonists, Hassan and the Venetian Giaour, as tough lovers and warriors simultaneously, so Leila fits in perfectly in this context. Her enslavement/subordination is in her reduction to a chattel and a possession, which further restricts her space.

Throughout the Turkish tales, Byron delineates the confinement of women to a limited space. This virtual slavery galvanizes some females to resist the power exercised by males on them. Thus, Byron more or less is indirectly concerned with female emancipation. The only ray of hope on their arduous path of freedom consists of loving a man of their choice. Byron joins his voice to Hélène Cioux who in “The Laugh of Medusa” recommends that females should break free of their restricted space: “Women should break out of the snare of silence...they shouldn’t be conned into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem” (881).

The flight to freedom has always been related to romantic features. Female freedom, according to Byron, is conceived through the lens “of personal relationships which will challenge the individual to extend the boundaries of self” (Franklin 132). When marginalized females or any social category of people sense oppression by the chain of any kind of power, they resist it. A woman tied in place while attempting to expand the contour of her space are two opposite roles played by the colonized female, Leila, doubly suppressed by two males; however, this “Circassia’s daughter,” speaks her mind endeavoring to transcend her domestic arena and follow her own desire at the cost of her life. Leila wishes to pursue her dream—the autonomy to love and be sexually independent. Therefore, she chooses a Western not an Eastern lover, resisting the notion of sexual possession. Consequently, Leila is no longer a passive love object awaiting men to be her masters; she tragically and stridently ventures out of her space, marking a social change and cultural revolution at the cost of her life.

Zuleika

Spatial clues play a great role in our culture providing social information. For example, spatial symbols or archetypes such as towers, cages and caves expose information about culture, the social status and relationships of those inhabiting such spaces. It is Henri Lefebvre who accentuates the underlying meaning of symbols and the importance of certain spaces. To Lefebvre, specific studies in literature change “space itself to the status of a message, and the inhabiting of it to the status of a reading” (7). The architecture of space is metaphorically and symbolically analyzed. Through his artistic vision, Byron creates an expressive dimension for Oriental females, isolating his heroines in chilled, restrained places and suppressing their voices and their movements. He portrays females being oppressed by their fathers and husbands—and even their lovers—in other words, by Oriental patriarchy.

Some Turkish women are silent in Byron’s representation of the seraglio that symbolizes a cage, as mentioned in *Childe Harold Pilgrimage* Canto II: “... the sacred Haram’s silent tower” (LVI). Oppressed by males, women are not allowed to express their opinion: “Here woman’s voice is never heard: apart./ And scarce permitted, guarded, veil’d, to move./ She yields to one her person and her heart./ Tamed to her cage, nor feels a wish to rove:” (CHP II, LXI).

The virtue of a female is intimately linked to a man’s honor: the more virtuous the female, the more honorable the man, as if the female’s virginity is sacred and guarantees male’s honor, and as Pierre Bourdieu says in “The Berber House,” “man’s point of honour is the protective ‘barrier’ of female honour” (155). Spatial symbols (the seraglio, towers, caves and cages) signify limited movements and metaphorical shelters to protect female sexuality, to guard her honor—and in the process—sustain the male’s honor. The harem is a secure, restrictive fortress that permits neither women to escape nor men to access it (it is especially fortified against the opposite sex). A woman is limited twice: first, physically through a secluded place, and secondly, by male discourse of power or oppressive language. Such an enclosed secret arena is associated with the mysterious, forbidden, sexual and intimate. The seraglio, compared to a jail, is where Zuleika, the protagonist of *The Bride of Abydos*, is shut in: “...that gorgeous room:/ But yet it hath an air of gloom” (ll. 565-66).

The bride-to-be, Zuleika, is associated with meekness, gentleness and virtuousness; she lives “Where the virgins are soft as the roses they twine,” (l. 14). This setting is a stark portrayal of the female dwelling in a feminized space safeguarded from the male gaze. This sheltered spot also provides women—bound by shackles of a patriarchal society—the opportunity to escape the invasive male regard. Though this physical limitation serves as a refuge for women, it is nevertheless oppressive, leaving them with a permanent desire to escape it. The woman has to attract the man physically—she has no existence if she fails to do so—De Beauvoir elucidates: “it is necessary for her to be attractive, to please; she is allowed to hold on the world save through

the mediation of some man. What is to become of her when she no longer has any hold on him" (542). Thus, females are imprisoned to elude the male's gaze, which further limits their space.

The harem is associated with the spatial setting of a tower since it seems far from intruding eyes. Locked in the harem, she is supposed to safeguard her purity or more specifically her virginity by averting the male's stare. Zuleika resides in a secluded "tower's retreat" (l. 453), an inaccessible, secure indoor location away from phallic dominance and fatal man's gaze (representative of the outdoor space), a vehicle that leads to pleasure and passion. Such a gaze elicits the power of submission, imprisons a female and restricts her space since veiled females are never to be looked at. If the gaze is misplaced, it is deadly not solely for females but also for males. For example, the gaze of Selim, Zuleika's supposed brother, but who turns out to be her cousin, is deadly: "That pause, that fatal gaze he took,/ Hath doom'd his death, or fix'd his chain" (ll. 1047-48). In order to sustain his social and political power as a father and as a ruler, Giaffir controls the concept of the prying gaze: he dominates who watches whom and who is looked by whom. His daughter Zuleika knows the rules of the game since she assures, "To meet the gaze of stranger's eyes/ Our law, our creed, our God denies;" (ll. 429-30). No one is allowed to gaze at the veiled Zuleika; thus, her father makes it clear with a threatening tone, "Woe to the head whose eye beheld/ My child Zuleika's face unveil'd!" (ll. 38-39). For this reason, females are secluded behind the well-protected doors of the harem. They are not to be gazed at and denied the chance to return the look—this could pave the way for seduction causing the social and gender control to be shaken. The harem is purportedly a confined area that regulates the space of females and males. However, this does not apply to the despot or ruler who views a female anytime he pleases: "More than an architectural structure, the harem is a power structure based on the regulation of the gaze: a blind spot which renders women... invisible, and a Foucauldian institution materializing the power of the tyrant who can call them into his sight at any moment" (Mole 3).

Pertaining to the depiction of a female character, Byron confesses:

To describe woman, the pen should be dipped... in the heart of man... When I attempted to describe... Zuleika, I endeavoured to forget all that friction with the world had taught me; and if at all succeeded, it was because I was, and am, penetrated with the conviction that women only knew evil from having experienced it through men; whereas men have no criterion to judge of purity of goodness but woman. (qtd. in Franklin 59)

Leila pays a dear price due to her contact with two males. It applies to Zuleika, as well; she also suffers dire consequences due to her relationship with her cousin and refusal to marry her father's choice of sultan.

The harem or remote tower serves as a dungeon since it prevents Zuleika from strolling in the beautiful vicinity around it. The time when she stealthily runs to the "cypress grove" is clear-cut evidence that her movement is restricted; Selim states:

I on Zuleika's slumber broke,
And, as thou knowest that for me
Soon turns the Haram's grating key,
Before the guardian slaves awoke
We to the cypress groves had flown,
And made earth, main, and heaven our own! (ll. 65-70)

In *The Giaour*, the harem is not described as a place with an architectural extension. However, in *The Bride of Abydos*, the seraglio is a more flexible space since there are a few spots around it that Zuleika and Selim stealthily escape to and enjoy a little privacy/freedom such as the cypress groves that are also guarded. The pirate grotto is another space that these cousins enjoy frequenting; Zuleika delights in it further since she can play music and read the holy Koran. This location provides some space away from her major confinement, permitting her to speculate about the freedom she longs for: "She dream'd what Paradise might be:/ Where woman's parted soul shall go" (ll. 587-88). She indirectly links the liberating space of the grotto to that of paradise. Thus, the groves and the cave are semi-paradisiacal places to Zuleika enabling her to resist the tyrant's strict regime and experience short-lived liberty at the harem's outskirts by eluding the destructive gaze of intruders.

Not only is Zuleika disgruntled concerning her limited space in the harem; so is Selim, who seeks to approach, draw closer to Zuleika. He attempts to extend the contours of her space in order to be with her. Accordingly, both Selim and Zuleika transcend the realms of the harem, extending its space in the natural vicinity around it. Hence, the harem is not as isolated and restricted as it seems; it extends to caves and groves where Selim and Zuleika secretly flee and spend time together. These two spaces offer an extension to her personality that transcends what Lacan refers to as the strict limitations of a patriarchal society or the Law of the Father and shifts to that of the brother/cousin. Both extend the limitation of the seraglio despite the fact that "That none can pierce that secret bower/ But those who watch the women's tower" (ll. 79-80). Zuleika also proves that she manipulates her space, making it markedly apparent that she is an unconventional female.

Analyzing “virtual space” in Byron’s oeuvre, J. M. Bury observes that the notion of the “Bower” in the Oriental tales is associated with a “postlapsarian” sphere “where the fallen man can escape society to explore his definition of self and his relationship with others”; dark spaces that assume the shape of caves are connected to “postlapsarian wombs” that serve as a catalyst to offer rebirth to individuals who acquire new traits (Payne 167-68) and a fresh revolutionary ideology defiant of cultural and traditional attitudes, thus finding a new space that ensures additional freedom and creating a new identity. These dark spaces are endowed with an immense power that empowers whoever passes through them by undergoing metamorphoses.

Even Selim has designed a dark bower for Zuleika to further seclude her from the light of public life and eyes of other males: “But Selim’s mansion was secure,/ Nor deem’d she, could he long endure/ His bower in other worlds of bliss/ Without *her*, most beloved in this! (ll. 590-93). She is an object to be possessed by patriarchal figures; Selim wants to own her as his wife: “Now thou art mine, for ever mine,/ With life to keep, and scarce with life resign;/ Now thou art mine, that sacred oath,/ Though sworn by one, hath bound us both” (ll. 347-50). Like Leila, she becomes a symbol of property; she appears to be passive as she withdraws “mute and motionless,” like “a younger Niobe,” the mythic “statue of distress”: “Zuleika, mute and motionless,/ Stood like that statue of distress;/.../ Was but a younger Niobe!” (ll. 973-74, 978).

With two suitors she never marries, Zuleika is a fetishized possession, using Irigaray’s term, described by Byron as an exotic Oriental possession that would enjoy ownership by three males. When Byron says, “The spoil of nations shall bedeck my bride” (l. 895), this shows that females exist to please man’s gaze, to be craved and desired by such a gaze.

Locked in a tower, Zuleika is alienated from society to please her master’s lust for power (Giaffir) and lust for sex (Osman). This well-protected “women’s tower,” according to Franklin, “symbolizes her femininity: it is described as a refuge from the world and a treasure-house for the life of the senses” (50). This lofty tower protects her virginity, preserving/conserving her intact and veiled since she is valuable prize and commodity for her masters.

A woman shines in darkness by illuminating her dark and alienated space; she is an internal inspiration supplying significance to the ghostly, farfetched space she dwells. To Marx, females bestow valor and consequence to the notion of space because they “illuminate or illustrate” such concept (Best 185). Similarly, Bourdieu says in “The Berber House” that a female is “the light of the darkness, the dark light” (160). In other words, females might be physically or orally passive but spiritually dynamic, partaking in man’s spiritual guidance. Zuleika has a spiritual space as Byron displays—while praising her beauty—more related to light than to beauty of the flesh. Throughout the tale, she is associated with such expressions: “dazzling”, “transcendent vision”, “dreams Elysian”, “revived in heaven”, “a fairy form”, “memory”, “pure as ... prayer”, “the majesty of loveliness”, “the light of love” and “the purity of grace.” Moreover, Zuleika is “The star that guides the wanderer”, “Dove of peace and promise to mine ark”, “the rainbow of the storms of life” and “prophetic ray.”

Surprisingly, Zuleika is not the typical Oriental female expected, as her father utters at the tale’s inception: “But hark!— I hear Zuleika’s voice;” (l. 146). This foreshadows she will voice her opinion later. Hence, she is not passive or mute; she possesses a distinctive voice of her own. The following lines describe Zuleika as not a ‘pure’ and submissive lady; this is how Selim regards her: “Fair, as the first that fell of womankind,/ When on that dread yet lovely serpent smiling,/ Whose image then was stamp’d upon her mind—/ But once beguil’d— and ever more beguiling,” (ll. 158-61).

The Oriental females are depicted by Byron as having a double personality: static and dynamic. Zuleika is one such Oriental female who disrupts the Law of the Father or the social order. As an untraditional, dynamic female figure she accepts Selim’s opinion (not her father’s) concerning her marriage. The Law of the Father or the social order was explicitly disrupted by Zuleika who chooses not to abide by the marriage contract her father proposed, thus resisting his authority: “His wrath would not revoke my word:” (l. 416). She dares to replace the authority of the father with that of Selim (revealed as her cousin at the end). This is how she expresses to Selim her defiance:

... I swear by Mecca’s shrine,—....
Without thy free consent, command,
The Sultan should not have my hand!
Think’st thou that I could bear to part
With thee, and learn to halve my heart? (ll. 310, 315-18)

Because she yearns to transcend the space that governs her, she boldly defies social and political norms to act in accordance with her conscience. Challenging the symbol of social order, Zuleika opens her own grave. Because she loves Selim, Zuleika challenges her father, but dies of grief after Selim’s demise in battle; consequently, the tomb is her final, limited space.

Medora and Gulnare

The two female characters in Byron’s *The Corsair* are Medora, the meek and Gulnare, the revolutionary. The fair female Medora has a minimal space in society. Although she does not endure Oriental

patriarchy, she is a submissive character who occupies a significantly limited space due to her inactivity. Her veiled face and sad eyes, her “meek” personality and her sensitive and fragile nature make her faint when faced with difficulty. This “still” character: “O'er every feature of that still, pale face,” (l. 489) barely moves throughout the tale. In fact, she is emotionally silent and inactive: “Again— again— that form he madly press'd./ Which mutely clasp'd— imploringly caress'd!” (ll. 474-75). Her lover Conrad calls her “the dim and melancholy star,/ Whose ray of beauty reach'd him from afar,” (ll. 509-10), metaphorically associating her with a far-fetched star, with passivity. Nevertheless, such gendered figure with limited agency is content inhabiting her traditional confinement. High up in her remote, secluded tower she resides as a caged pretty bird “bird of beauty” (l. 344). Associated with the caged bird metaphor, she spends time singing, awaiting her lover's return: “He heard those accents never heard too oft;/ Through the high lattice far yet sweet they rung./ And these the notes his bird of beauty sung:” (ll. 342-44).

De Beauvoir depicts the male's space as limitless, while that of the female, limited: “He is the transcendent, he soars in the sky of heroes; woman crouches on earth, beneath his feet” (233). Women are permitted to move about, circulate solely indoors; wandering outside is unconventional, in other words prohibited since a female might encounter peril and, more significantly, encounter males with a sharp, sensual gaze, thus endangering the female's honor. In other words, the external/outdoor space is linked to males while the internal/indoor one to females. Moreover, according to Foucault, “social power in its relation to gendered geometries of space accounts for the fact that in patriarchal societies women, rather than men, are asked to avoid allegedly dangerous spaces in order to prohibit the occurrence of rape” (qtd. in Ganser 71-72).

In the major two settings in the tale, the female's sphere is meager since females inhabit enclosed areas—whether the harem or pirate's island—while males roam freely. Medora is confined to her appropriate boundary (the tower) in order not to fall prey to a man's lustful gaze. Unlike Zuleika who expands the harem's contour to the open areas around it, Medora is barred from straying into open outdoor male spaces. Even when she descended from the tower to await her lover, the sea proved hostile to someone ignoring her allegedly correct female margin: “And there she wandered heedless of the spray/ That dash'd her garments oft, and warn'd away:” (ll. 1245-46). Medora possesses a feminine domestic space: she passively inhabits the tower longing for her lover's visits; her role is palpable/plain in her prayers and despondent songs.

The character of Medora, for instance, is hinted at in the dismal song about unreturned love she sings for Conrad; the song associates her with the passive metaphors of darkness, vulnerability, annihilation, stillness and inaction. Her space/existence is consequential only when viewed in terms of love: when it is sexualized. Because of her love, she is alive; otherwise, her existence is meaningless. Medora dies of grief, adding more silence to the domestic space that is designed to her. Not attempting to resist her death, Medora solely requests a tear while envisioning her grave: “Then give me all I ever ask'd— a tear,/ The first— last— sole reward of so much love!” (ll. 359-60). Unfortunately, Medora is the only female character in the tales under discussion who neither speaks nor acts.

As a male author, Byron displays a feminine identity that makes him eligible to speak in a woman's voice. In this respect, the subaltern can be considered to have spoken, expressed and acted upon both her repression and oppression. In “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak believes that the Oriental female is doubly colonized: domestically by her husband and publically by society since she is colonized by belonging to an inferior race. However, Gulnare, the dynamic, vibrant Byronic heroine of *The Corsair*, surmounts the space of gender, race and class. She not only affirms that the subaltern can speak (contrary to Spivak's conviction that she cannot), but also acts to prove her new, well-deserved status: being man's equal.

In a society where man is sovereign, the female pays the price: she is controlled by man. In order to resist the current situation, a female responds by the “masculine protest”: either she endeavors to masculinize herself, or she makes use of her feminine weapons to wage war upon the male” (De Beauvoir 38). The queen prisoner of the harem and Seyd Pasha's wife, Gulnare, becomes a ‘manly woman’ and employs a masculine weapon (the dagger) to free herself. She boldly breaks, overcomes the norm to achieve a ground-breaking rebellious identity.

An unconventional heroine, Gulnare is dissatisfied with her marriage because she is a mere slave in the harem. She never freely chose her husband and was forced to love him: “I never loved— he bought me— somewhat high—/ Since with me came a heart he could not buy” (ll. 1496-97). Her spouse Seyd, who keeps her indoors, restricts her freedom, making her passive and mute. That is why she detests such a patriarch who has no affection for her and whose main concern is her body and the pleasure it entails. In reality, Gulnare notices that the barbarous Pacha offers imprisonment while Selim, the gentleman, offers safety and freedom, physical and emotional; this sentimental freedom is an essential ingredient of a female's right: “The Pacha woo'd as if he deem'd the slave/ Must seem delighted with the heart he gave;/ The Corsair vow'd protection, soothed affright./ As if his homage were a woman's right” (ll. 870-73). Thus, Conrad satisfies Gulnare whose ambition could be a symbol of Greek's independence from the Ottoman grip.

Moreover, she is conscious that such a cruel, oppressive union is unbearable and unsuited for her untraditional and revolutionary personality; she realizes the authentic meaning of love which encompasses

liberty and autonomy: "I felt- I feel- love dwells with- with the free" (l. 1107). Driven by love, she is audacious, adventurous; by possessing such qualities, she redesigns her space—it assumes unconventional, masculinized properties. In other words, she experiences freedom; liberty from her destiny which is "worse than bondage": "I am his slave- but, in despite of pride,/ 'T were worse than bondage to become his bride" (ll. 1128-29) is what Gulnare longs for most.

Akin to Leila and Zuleika, Gulnare represents a resistant force in the Seraglio, but Gulnare is the strongest threat to patriarchy. The mobility of females imparts autonomy while resisting man's oppression and dominance. By being fluid, Gulnare occupies a dynamic space rendered as a continuous process; a powerful space is the outcome of activities that characters undergo affecting their social connections.

Suspicious about Gulnare's actions, Byron views her as conceived from the womb of darkness: "I come through darkness- and I scarce know why-" (l. 1044). In his essay "The Question of Lay Analysis," Sigmund Freud compares females to a "dark continent" since they are enigmatic; they require perseverant, dogged exploration by males (qtd. in Leitch 1944). Resistant femininity is associated with the symbol of the depth of darkness, and so is Gulnare, who possesses dark feminine beauty: "... the wildness of her eye/.../... threw back her dark far-floating hair," (ll. 1575, 1577). Not only her beauty but also her heroic and daring behavior is associated with the concept of darkness. The adjective "wild" associated with her gaze metaphorically indicates she attains freedom by transcending the gaze of her oppressor, the male's space and suffocating patriarchy. An untamed and dark gaze is associated with male Byronic heroines; the concept of darkness is indicative of sensual and physical beauty. Darkness ironically enlightens her and provides the power to join the triumphant status of male leaders, thus undergoing mutation by shedding the old identity and assuming a new role—and a new space—similar to the one occupied by males. The wild and dark gaze has raised Gulnare to the pedestal of heroism. She no longer exists in the harem's shadow; she is no longer marginalized. Byron associates Gulnare with darkness and brand of violence that kindle Oriental hearts: "the fire that lights an Eastern heart;" (l. 1520). Her complexion and wild beauty associated with the aura of Gothic darkness imparts a more precise shape to her resistant and untraditional personality.

Conrad who rescued the odalisque Gulnare from the blazing harem is now vulnerable, emasculated and impotent vis-à-vis the daring Gulnare. He is ineffectual as she impressively holds a flexible phallic symbol (to use psychoanalytic terminology) of strength—the dagger—assertively challenging her oppressor's authority. The dagger transforms Gulnare, providing a space that asserts and defines her, thus abandoning the cocoon of oppression. What seems "defenceless beauty" (l. 823) becomes the emblem of defense and action allowing her to transcend the feminine arena by committing homicide, an act usually regarded as a male feat. Ironically, Gulnare undergoes a reversal of roles vis-à-vis the ineffectual Conrad who rescues her from the burning harem and introduces her to a new realm, to freedom. The "unmanned" Conrad occupies a feminized space as he is caged by the Pacha: "In the high chamber of his highest tower/ Sate Conrad, fetter'd in the Pacha's power" (ll. 971-72); this places him on the same level of oppressed females. While Gulnare is full of action, Conrad is passive and enslaved: "...bound and fix'd in fetter'd solitude,/ To pine, the prey of every changing mood;" (ll. 1389-90). The male's passivity inspires Gulnare to be a woman of action, conspicuously compensating for male's inaction. She challenges the norms of tradition and of culture; she is no longer mute and passive. Her hands are firm while Conrad's fail him; notice the expression "firmness of a female hand" (l. 1548) versus his "failing hand" (l. 1628). In return for Conrad's favor (saving her from the blazing harem) and to assert her new space and identity, she miraculously saves Conrad, escorting him to a ship under the command of the Byronic pirate, Gulnare. Her brave actions convert her into a masculinized hero with a distinctive spirit, altering the nature of her space that is no longer feminized.

Gulnare breaks the shackles of a limited space and shifts into an experienced, independent, manly woman. One telltale of her act of heroism and manliness is the spot of blood on her forehead as the result of Seyd's murder; such stain symbolizes her metaphoric freedom from her gendered prison: "A traditional sign of men's ownership of women, the blood stain of marital consummation and proof of virginity is reclaimed by Gulnare, enabling her to take control of her body and her actions" (Bridgwood 498). Retaining her purity and virginity usurped by patriarchy, Gulnare becomes emotionally and physically independent. Free to act as she wishes, she experiences a rebirth—control of her life and emotions—and her destiny assumes a new path. The conspicuous spot on her brow is alarming since it is not hers; instead of incursion or access by a male body, she injects masculinity and assumes control of it: "Gulnare discovers the ability to penetrate the male body... giving her power over it... the spot of blood ... functions ... as an emblem of her empowerment. By murdering Seyd, Gulnare... frees herself from the bonds of masculine oppression, transgressing the boundaries of gendered expectation" (Payne 196). The spot is an expression of her liberty and key to inhibit the masculine space; nevertheless, she never loses her femininity: "The worst of crimes had left her woman still!" (l. 1689) observes Conrad. Gulnare is the sole Byronic heroine who leaves her traditional space and boldly enters an undesignated, unassigned one. She is a towering charismatic figure who fortunately survives the tale's termination.

Byron's female heroines, such as Gulnare, challenge the definition of females as coined by a repressive patriarchal society. She creates a new space herself, altering her identity from a "slave unmurmuring" (l. 1498)

and mute object into an articulate subject and active female hero aware of her oppression, voicing and resisting it simultaneously. In control of circumstances, she handles the plot deftly so that it is fully dependent on her, propelling the action forward and achieving a heroic status in the process.

Similar to Leila and Zuleika, Gulnare symbolizes the oppressed, colonized and feminized Greece that endured Ottoman captivity struggling for independence. This proves the extent Byron trusts such a female figure; he readily provides her the capacity to alter the space she occupies as an object to the status of a female hero. Indeed, she deserves the title that Byron confers upon her. Being faced with passive males, she devises her own devious plan and challenges both Conrad and Seyd. Hence, she disputes the norms of society, culture and tradition by having the entire exploit echo her dominant, impressive voice. In other words, her character has the flexibility of both accessing and exiting the gender space.

Sufficiently bold to transcend the traditional spatial order she is confined to, she ventures to an unknown space on a self-discovery quest. She is a unique heroine that resists her conventional life style by challenging domestic stereotyping of gendered identity, thus inhabiting an untraditional space. Through Gulnare, Byron proves that the space of Oriental females is gripping, enterprising and mobile.

Conclusion

Although the ambiance of melodrama hovers around the tone of Turkish tales, Byron is exceedingly optimistic and persuasive in his authentic portrayal of such a feminist issue: female oppression that transforms eventually as the basis of a feminist revolt. Patriarchy is to blame for significantly oppressing and hindering female activity. Females clearly merit the space Byron provides them.

The themes of sentimental love, altruistic unreturned love and sexual independence are utilized by Byron as a romantic technique through which he describes the concept of a female's space. The stereotype of a sympathetically victimized female evolves from a passive, oppressed protagonist—existing as a silhouette and residing in a stagnant space—to a rebellious and androgynous hero who expands the boundaries of her limited space by becoming masculinized and expropriating the space of man, thus merging the two opposite spheres: the masculine and the feminine. In brief, some females utilize space as a catalyst for social transformation (Gulnare); others strive to transcend their enforced, traditionally inherited domain but do not succeed (Leila and Zuleika); others are content with the conventional, limited sphere of influence they inhabit (Medora).

A cloud of ambiguity shrouds a female's status in Byron's Oriental tales. Does he wish to establish that an Oriental female is not straightforward and undemanding but instead inhabits an aura, a distinctive quality of mystery and ambivalence? Considered a chattel, vassal, toy or slave—a female evolves—resurrecting amid her subjugation and resisting male's dominance by destroying his authority, being his equal and effectively sharing his masculine sphere. Byron attempts to eliminate the gender gap that leads to differences in the variables of power, freedom, authority and mobility that define the spatial movement of males and females. Eliminating gender differences paves the way for the space of a modern, independent female, something that De Beauvoir praises and recommends. According to the latter, "the 'modern' woman accepts masculine values: she prides herself on thinking, taking action, working, creating, on the same terms as men... she declares herself their equal" (676).

Byron candidly states that while writing his Turkish tales, especially *The Corsair*, he considered, kept in mind, his female audience. His primary concern was "to please the women": "I am sure I was more pleased with the fame my *Corsair* had than with that of any other of my books. Why? For the very reason because it did shine, and in boudoirs. Who does not write to please the women" (qtd. in Franklin 15). In fact, Byron faithfully portrayed the oppressed circumstances of Oriental females to a Western male and female reader keen to be enlightened further about the Orient. He eventually concentrated on appealing to Western and Eastern females by reliably reporting on the genuine state of affairs concerning Oriental female status. Admittedly, he profitably mastered the art of delighting, pleasing and praising the female reader.

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