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Georgian Terrains:

The Islamic Orient in James Elroy Flecker's *Hassan*

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Abstract: This study is mainly concerned with Georgian representations of the Islamic Orient. In placing it in a Saidian framework, it investigates how James Elroy Flecker's *Hassan* treats the Islamic motifs. This play constructs the Orient as a network of destructive sexuality, alluring wealth, astonishing superstitions, and wonder in the exotic and the unfamiliar. Islam is blackly pictured, the Quran is undermined and the Abbasid Caliphate is severely attacked as an authority of corruption. By way of concluding, it can be suggested that Flecker's misrepresentations of the Islamic Orient are attributed to his ideological hatred of Islam.

Keywords: Orientalism; Georgian Poetry; The Arabian Nights; Abbasid Caliphate; the Bible; Islam, Christianity; Baghdad; Schizophrenic; Sufism; Lasciviousness; Houris; Islamic Sexuality; Oriental promiscuity; Femme fatale; Exoticism; Oriental superstition; Cruelty; Aggression; Violence

This paper examines the oriental aspects of Georgian poetry in James Elroy Flecker's *Hassan* (1922). Doing so, it suggests that *Hassan* is a medley of Romantic and Parnassian elements[2]. What these two schools have in common paves the way for the prevalence of oriental leitmotivs in Georgian poetry in the sense that *Hassan* celebrates distant places and exotic social behaviours and codes. Dangerfield (1936) considers Flecker's poetic heritage as typical of Georgian poetry[3] (353). He is greatly touched by Parnassian poets, who place more emphasis on the emulation of classical works, mythology, epics, and

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[2] See Thouless, Priscilla. (1977). *Modern Poetic Drama*. Oxford: Blackwell Basil.
[3]Similarly Waugh suggests ""In James Elroy Flecker and Rupert Brooke we gladly recognize two other poets of indisputable and glowing promise, whose influence upon their contemporaries might possibly have had the most salutary and formative results. Without them much that is left of the movement fades into a feverish confusion of experiment; but one of these two possessed intuitively, and the other was on the point of acquiring by experience, just that quality of artistic self-control which would save them from excesses with which they were surrounded, and leaven the modern movement as a whole with a powerful leaven of beauty and spirituality. Flecker, indeed, had little to connect him with rebellious modernity. He indulged in no half-fledged experiments, and made no attempt to shock his readers`s susceptibilities. His passion was chiefly for the old - ships, old buildings, old legends, and old loyalties, and he sang their praise in haunting melodies which recalled the immemorial music of the old, unchangeable sea: "Evening on the olden.../where the fleet of stars is anchored, and the young /Star-captains glow."Such a melody and such imagery as this are in the true succession; they owe nothing to any passing fashion" (qtd. in Rogers 150-51).
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sagas of distant places like the Orient. Like Parnassian poets, their Romantic counterparts, who have their influence on Flecker, orientally colour their poetry with the supernatural, the occult, and the wonder in the unfamiliar—topos that can be found in that distant Orient. In this context, Thouless (1977) is worth quoting: "The discovery of the East heightened all Flecker's gifts as a poet and confirmed him as a Parnassian; but Flecker was not wholly objective and Parnassian, he was also to some extent a Romantic, for his nature was a divided one" (31). Therefore, Flecker's obsession with topos Arabian and particularly *The Arabian Nights*[4] comes natural – an obsession that culminates in writing *Hassan*, which is seen as a revolt against the late-Victorian tediousness in its revival of the dramatic verse (Ross 142) and is historically important for it was published immediately after the 1st World War and simultaneously with modern masterpieces – not the least of which are Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, (1922), T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) and James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922).

In writing *Hassan*, Flecker relies on Richard Burton's translated versions of *The Arabian Nights*, particularly the tale of "Ala Al-Din Abu Al-Shamat." In this sense, it is important to remark that Squire (1916) emphasizes the oriental affinity between Flecker and Burton (xxvii); and Sherwood (1973) reiterates how Flecker was greatly touched by Burton (34, 43). Flecker, to a limited extent, embraces the original source which can be hence added to other famous stories that Scheherazade spins in many Western translations such as "Aladdin's Lamp," "Sinbad the Sailor," and the tale of "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves." In this play, Flecker celebrates the oriental bazaars, places and cities such as Cairo, Damascus and, above all, Baghdad. In addition, oriental figures such as Haroun ar Raschid, Hassan, Ja'far, Ishak, Selim, Rafi, Yasmin and Pervaneh are the prominent characters that appear in the play. It is not surprising that Flecker integrates Islamic, Jewish and Christian characters into *Hassan* for implicit justifications that will be explored later on. It is therefore worthwhile taking a closer look at religious encounters in Flecker's *Hassan*.

This study is located within an oriental context since it does not debunk Edward Said's thesis regarding the Western representations of the Orient. Said (1978) emphasizes that Islam is considered as a menace and evil. The observations of Said (1978) merit quoting in this regard:

> The Islamic lands sit adjacent to and even on top of the Biblical lands; moreover, the heart of the Islamic domain has always been the region closest to Europe, what has been called the Near Orient or Near East. Arabic and Hebrew are Semitic languages, and together they dispose and redispose of material that is urgently important to Christianity. From the end of the seventh century until the battle of Lepanto in 1571, Islam in either its Arab, Ottoman, or North African and Spanish form dominated or effectively threatened European Christianity. That Islam outstripped and outshone Rome cannot have been absent from the mind of any European past or present (74).

In *Covering Islam*, Said (1981) argues that "There are, of course, many religious, psychological, and political reasons for this, but all of these reasons derive from a sense that so far as the West is concerned, Islam represents not only a formidable competitor but also a latecoming challenge to Christianity" (4). It is important to suggest that the stereotypical process is reversed since Christianity is viewed as a threatening menace according to Islam.

Hassan can be *par excellence* classified as mock-epic since it is an indictment of the vanities and idleness of the Abbasid Caliphate and casts against the grandeur, the bravery and fortitude of Abbasid Caliphate. It satirizes Oriental and Islamic ideals and codes of honour and chivalry that the Abbasid Caliph represents. In so doing, the play first opens with a reference to the Quran. In Hassan's shop are Persian hangings: "geometrical designs, with crude animals and some verses from the Koran hand-printed on linen" (*Hassan* Act I, Scene i). Locating the Holy Quran in such a setting along with

[4] Thouless (1977) emphasizes that "The East of Flecker is not the East of immortal longings; it is the East of Arabian Nights, in which the extravagant is made believable by the vividness of the detail. Flecker, steeped in these legends, comes to the East and finds the brilliant sky, the vivid colors, the feeling for beauty, the cruelty he has seen reflected in its literature, in the world before him" (33).

trivial and controversial accessories, one might suggest, undermines its significance in the way it deprives it of its holiness since it is traditionally known in Islam that picturing animate beings is a taboo:

> A room "behind the shop" in Old Bagdad. In the background a large caldron steaming, for the shop is a sweet-stuff shop and the sugar is boiling. The room has little furniture beyond the carpet, old but unexpectedly choice, and some Persian hangings (geometrical designs, with crude animals and some verses from the Koran hand-printed on linen). A ramshackle wooden partition in one corner shuts off from a living room what appears to be the shop (*Hassan* Act I, scene i).

The above passage is reminiscent of Alexander Pope's following lines:

> And now, unveil'd, the Toilet stands display'd,
> Each Silver Vase in mystic Order laid.
> First, rob'd in White, the Nymph intent adores
> With Head uncover'd, the cosmetic Pow'rs.
> A heav'nly Image in the Glass appears,
> To that she bends, to that her Eyes she rears;
> Th' inferior Priestess, at her Altar's side,
> Trembling, begins the sacred Rites of Pride.
> Unnumber'd Treasures ope at once, and here
> The various Off'rings of the World appear;
> From each she nicely culls with curious Toil,
> And decks the Goddess with the glitt'ring Spoil.
> This Casket India's glowing Gems unlocks,
> And all Arabia breathes from yonder Box.
>
> The Tortoise here and Elephant unite,
> Transform'd to Combs, the speckled and the white.
> Here Files of Pins extend their shining Rows,
> Puffs, Powders, Patches, Bibles, Billet-doux.
> Now awful Beauty puts on all its Arms;
> The Fair each moment rises in her Charms,
> Repairs her Smiles, awakens ev'ry Grace,
> And calls forth all the Wonders of her Face;
> Sees by Degrees a purer Blush arise,
> And keener Lightnings quicken in her Eyes.
> The busy Sylphs surround their darling Care;
> These set the Head, and those divide the Hair,
> Some fold the Sleeve, while others plait the Gown;
> And Betty's prais'd for Labours not her own (*The Rape of the Lock* 1841)

The above lines, excerpted from Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*, show how the Bible is placed side by side with trivial accessories. In so doing, Pope's point is that the Bible in Belinda's life becomes of no significance at all.

When the play proceeds on, the attack against the Quran becomes more insulting, bitter, gloomy, mocking and, above all, hostile. In mocking the Quran, Rafi wonders: "What wine do they grow in the desert of Meccah, or on the sandhills of Medina? Ah, had the Prophet tasted wine of Syria or the islands, the book would have been shorter by that uncomfortable verse" (*Hassan* Act II, Scene i). These excerpted lines indicate that the Quran is a human's product and not Allah's. By implication, Rafi underlines the great influence of the wine on the Quran since he thinks that the wine makes it more enjoyable and acceptable because of its boring length -- an implication that desecrates the sacredness of the Quran because it is traditionally acknowledged in Islam that the wine is banned altogether.

By the same token, the play depicts the revelations of the Quran in an eccentric way. The first loiterer thinks that the paper thrown by Ja'far is a chapter of the Quran: "Here comes a new chapter of the Koran falling down from heaven" (*Hassan* Act II, scene ii). In this context, Ali similarly addresses the blessed ones in paradise about the letters he cannot decode, thinking that the Quran is revealed in this strange way. The Quran was revealed to Mohammed gradually and not in its entirety by an archangel- Gabriel. In 610 AD when Mohammed was in a cave in Mecca, he was visited by Gabriel, asking Mohammed to "read." Mohammed twice rejected to read. In the third time he wondered what to read; Gabriel asked him to "Read by the name of his Lord who created" (*The Quran* 96:1). The Revelations continued until Mohammed's death in 632 AD. It is, therefore, of great significance to highlight that the revelations of the Quran, taking 23 years, is respectably sacred. Therefore, Rafi's attempt can be interpreted as a sign of heresy from an Islamic perspective.

It is not unreasonable to emphasize that Flecker attacks Islam through building up the character of Haroun ar Raschid[5]. In *Covering Islam*, Said (1981) considers Haroun ar Raschid along with Omar Khayyam, Sindbad, Aladdin, Hajji Baba, Scheherazade, Saladin as the Islamic figures that prevail the literary arena in the West (13). In particular, Haroun ar Raschid is constructed as the epitome of Islam and "the representative of God on earth, the sole Priest of Islam," to use Pervaneh's words, and thus asks him not to defile God's image[6] (*Hassan* Act III, scene iii). Elsewhere he is considered as the Ruler of the Moslem World, the Commander, Caliph and Emir of the Faithful, the Splendour and Caliph of Islam. One might suggest that, in stereotyping the Caliph, Flecker intends to reconstruct the West's traditional signification of Islam. His character is a mixture of negative features, and thus can be seen as a collage of many different inferior stereotypes in an attempt to reinforce the Western dominant ideology of constructing Islam as the ideology of menace, destruction, sexuality, savagery and immorality.

Flecker directly mocks the Caliph. While being trapped, the Caliph displays signs of confusion, anxiety, fear and lack of control. In fury, he addresses Ja'far:

> Thou dog! Thou dirt! Thou dunghill! Thou duscheap! Did I make thee Vizier to ask counsel or to give it? Find out what we shall do! Thou hast let me fall into a trap, and now dost quiver and quake and shiver and shake like a tub of whey on the back of a restive camel: my kingdom is reduced from twelve provinces to twelve square cubits: my subjects from thirty millions unto three, but Bismillah! one of my subjects is the Executioner, and Mashallah! another one merits execution: and Inshallah! if thy head doth not immediately devise a practical scheme of escape it shall dive off my shoulders and swim across the floor (*Hassan* Act II, scene i).

These lines in fact satirize Haroun as typical of great Muslims Caliphs. The words he uses-- "dog," "dirt," dunghill" and "duscheap" -- indicate that he is offensive, aggressive, and, above all, ill-mannered. He is unable to control himself since he becomes furious easily. Then as an extrapunitive, he blames Ja'far for his imprisonment even though he urges him to enter the house in his enterprise of entertainment, seeking for women and pleasure. Furthermore, he realizes that he has lost most of his Kingdom which has dramatically decreased to three millions. It is not surprising to point out that Flecker mocks the Caliph in like manner Alexander Pope, in *The Rape of the Lock*, mocks Baron, who steals Belinda's lock. In so doing, Flecker mocks all the ideals that the Abbasid Caliph represents since he is no longer brave, strong, loyal, helpful, sacrificing himself for the sake of his subjects. In the dervish's eyes, he becomes "[a] clay thing, a plaything, a shadow," a massacrer in Rafi's eyes, and "[a] hideous tyrant, torturer from Hell" in Hassan's words (*Hassan* Act V, scene i).

The Caliph is, furthermore, depoliticized and schizophrenic in the sense that in the course of the play he does not display any codes of politics; he is driven from the affairs of Muslim to the abyss of fulfilling his own desire, as revealed in the above excerpted lines. In responding to Hassan's reaction against

[5] Some Western poets celebrate Haroun ar Raschid such as William Butler Yeats, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Alfred Lord Tennyson.
[6] He was named after Haroun, Moses' brother.

El-Mahdi's killing of the Christian artists, the Caliph warns Hassan against being involved in political matters since politics is his own business:

> I forgive you with all my heart, but, I advise you, speak in conformity with your character and of things you understand, and never leave the Garden of Art for the Palace of Action. Trouble not your head with the tyranny of Princes, or you may catch a cold therein from the Wind of Complication. Keep to your poetry and carpets, Hassan, and make no reference to politics, for which even the market of Bagdad is an insufficient school (*Hassan* Act III, scene i)

Hassan is set in an oriental setting through which Flecker offers deep insights into his stereotypes of Islam. The Caliph's palace, set in Baghdad, embodies the Western traditional views of the Orient as exotic and eccentric through visual imagery. Along with "the Caliph's coffers" (*Hassan* Act II, scene i), the Caliph's crown, sparkling "like diamonds and rubies," (*Hassan* Act I, scene ii) and his palace mirror the Caliph's luxurious taste and his wealth. This affluence paves the way for the Caliph's moral deterioration from an occidental perspective, as will be anatomized below. Hassan reassures that the Caliph's palace in the collective mind reflects his affluence:

> Master, I find thy friendship like thy palace, endowed with all the charm of beauty and the magic of surprise. As thou knowest, I am but a man of the streets of Bagdad, and there men say, "The Caliph's Palace, Mashallah! The walls are stiff with gold and the ceilings plated with silver, and the urinals thereof are lined with turquoise blue." And hearing men say this, many a time hath Hassan the Confectioner stroked the chin of Hassan the Confectioner saying, "O, Hassan, thy back parlour is less ugly than that, with its tub for boiling sugar, and its one good Bokhara carpet hanging on the wall. And twelve months did I work at the tub, boiling sugar to buy that carpet (*Hassan* Act III, scene i).

Ishak similarly reveals how the Caliph uselessly spends his gold and money:

> [T]hen fling him gold, and fling him gold, and dream you have made a friend! Those bags of gold you fling, O my generous master, to a mistress for night, to a poet for a jest, to a rich friend for entertainment, to a beggar for a whim, are they not the revenues of cities, wrung by torture from the poor? But the sighs of your people, Haroun, do not so much as stir the leaves in your palace garden! (*Hassan* Act I, scene ii)

Then he proceeds to reveal that the Caliph's earthly paradise is a prison: " And I--I have taken your gold, I, Ishak, who was born on the mountains free of the woods and winds. I have made my home in your palace, and almost forgot it was a prison"(*Hassan* Act I, scene ii). However, in refuting such attitudes, the Caliph affirms that his palace is very simple and not complicated, and thus it echoes the simplicity of his own true nature- a kind of simplicity that, one might remark, represents Sufism.

The Caliph's palace, in Baghdad, echoes his immorality, luxury and lechery. For instance, Rafi resolves to sack the Caliph's possessions including his gardens, fountains, summer houses, palaces, horses, mules, camels, elephants, statues of Yoonistan, wines of Ferangistan, carpets of Bokhara, great sealed boxes bursting with unbeaten gold, beads of amethyst, his bracelets of sapphire, eunuchs of Egypt, and all his chosen flower-like women (*Hassan* Act II, Scene i). Rafi considers the palace as a place of slaves, eunuchs and women – a consideration that highlights the Caliph's ungratified sexuality. Rafi's intention of sacking the Caliph's palace along with his desire to take his women shows how the palace itself is a place where beauty is tinged with violence and brutality. In this context, the palace itself becomes Baghdad in miniature and of no importance in Ishak's eyes. At the end of the play, Ishak decides to leave Baghdad to Samarkand: "I am leaving this city of slaves, this Bagdad of fornication. I have broken my lute and the generosity of kings. I will try the barren road, and listen for the voice of the emptiness of earth" *(Hassan* Act V, scene i). At this point it can be suggested that the Caliph's palace, as a major source of Oriental corruption and immorality, reflects on Flecker's construction of the Caliph's identity as the other being inferior, deteriorated and, thus, passionate.

In addition to the oriental setting, Flecker associates Islam with lasciviousness and uncontrollable sexuality through the characterizations of the Caliph, Hassan, Selim and Yasmin. Thematically speaking, identification of the Orient with sexuality has become very fertile in the landscape of English literature. In this regard, Said (1978) is worth quoting:

> Virtually no European writer who wrote on or travelled to the Orient in the period after 1800 exempted himself or herself from this quest [….] What they looked for often-correctly, I think-was a different type of sexuality, perhaps more libertine and less quilt-ridden; but even that quest, if repeated by enough people, could (and did) become as regulated and uniform as learning itself. In time "Oriental sex" was as standard a commodity as any other available in the mass culture, with the result that readers and writers could have it if they wished without necessarily going to the Orient (190).

By the same token, Kabbani (1994) iterates that the Orient is the locus which "traded in voluptuousness, a land where sexual desires could be gratified to the hilt, acquired currency" (16). She also remarks that the idea of the paradisal houris is used to reveal "that Muslims were not only lewd in everyday life, but that conceived of a heaven that would permit endless sensual gratification" (17).

The Caliph's sexual desire dominates him. Flecker's point is that the Caliph's wandering for entertainment, singing and dancing is an Islamic sexual ritual. In addressing Ishak, the Caliph says: "my heart is heavy and still the night drags on, and still we wander in the crooked streets, and still we find no entertainment, and still the white moon shines" (*Hassan* Act I, scene ii). Then the Caliph proceeds to unravel his sexual intentions: "But I hear music, and see lights. Come on, come on, we will snatch profit from this cursed night even yet, my friends, even at the eleventh hour" (*Hassan* Act I, scene ii). Nevertheless, Ja'far expresses his dissatisfaction with the Caliph's perverted behaviour, suggesting that it is extremely inappropriate for the Caliph to behave in such a way because "[i]t is a late hour to seek for entertainment" *(Hassan* Act II, scene i). As a result, Ja'far is rebuked as "prudent" by the Caliph. Once the play progresses, the Caliph identifies the Islamic version of paradise with sexuality; he becomes aware of his obsession with the houris. He becomes happy when he hears the music, and the pattering of their feet, expecting to "see dancing women worthy of Paradise" (*Hassan* Act II, scene i). Then he envisions them as if they were the houris in Paradise who will charm his eyes.

The Caliph's gaze of women is transformed from being holy into being physical. Such a gaze is quite insulting since he visually reduces them to mere bodies of sex: "What rosy breasts, what silver shoulders, what shapely legs, what jasmine arms" *(Hassan* Act II, scene i). It is very reasonable to suggest that Flecker visually makes the Caliph see only female sexual organs and liken them to roses and jasmines to highlight their unratified sexuality. The Caliph is obsessed with dancing as a sexual ritual when he tells that Abu Nawas has found him "a young Kurdish girl who can dance with one leg round her neck, and knows by heart the song of Alexander" (*Hassan* Act V, scene i). Pervaneh herself unravels her disgust of Islamic sexuality by attacking the sexual behaviour of the Caliph: "Is there no shame in the World of Islam? Will you unclothe your lust in full Divan?" Her attack comes in response to the Caliph's stereotyping her as a gratifying object and a source of "consolation" and "charm" on one hand, and to betrothing her on the other hand. What rages her is the Caliph's urging her to unveil in his presence: "It is written in the Sacred Law: In the King's presence a woman may unveil, without fear of censure" (*Hassan* Act III, scene iii).

The oriental woman is reduced to a mere object of no significance other than a source of sensual satiation. Flecker instances Yasmin as a symbol of oriental promiscuity. From Act I onward, she is represented by Hassan, Selim and even by herself as an object of voluptuous desire. At the beginning, she tempts Hassan, then she flirts with Selim accusing Hassan as extremely coward. After Hassan is promoted by the Caliph, she offers her body to him – an offering harshly refused by Hassan. What is even more important is the fact that she sexually objectifies herself. Like Pope's Belinda, in *The Rape of the Lock*, she constructs herself as a narcissist woman, whose beauty transcends that of the women in the Caliph's serai and that of the most charming flowers such as lilies and roses:

There are lilies by the thousand in the meadows: there are roses
by the thousand in the gardens, and all as like as like--
but there is only one shape in the world like mine.
There is only one face in the world where the eyebrows arch
and the eyes flash--where the nostrils are set just so,
and the lips are parted thus. There is no other arm beneath the skies
that has here this curve and here this dimple,
and here the light soft golden hairs. There are rows and rows
of young fair girls in the Caliph's harem and many as fair as I,
but none whose veins are these veins, whose flesh is this flesh,
fiery and cool, whose body swings like mine upon the heel.
(Flinging off her cloak) Will you see and will you touch?
(Approaching.) Will you see and will you touch?
(Putting her arm round his neck) Will you touch? (*Hassan* Act III, scene i).

After she flings off her cloak, she puts her arm round Hassan's neck, and invites him to touch her "fiery and cool" body (*Hassan* Act III, scene iii).

Hassan's view of Yasmin in fact is ambivalent in the sense that he oscillates from falling in love, undermining, objectifying to sanctifying her. The first time he sees her he falls in love with her depicting her as the moon. When he realizes her unattainability, he resorts to magic in order to possess her though he thinks she deserves no more than ten dinars. Later on, he realizes that he cannot protect himself from her temptation and love. Like Yasmin's gaze of herself, Hassan therefore envisions her as an object of promiscuity. His gaze sexually targets her body. He visually celebrates her face, her eyes as "the twin fountains in the Caliph's garden," and "love's hyacinths," her lips "like roses hidden in moss," her cheeks like "love's lilies," her waist "as a palm-tree swaying in the wind," and her hips as "large and heavy and round, like water melons in the season of water melons"(*Hassan* Act I, scene i). Hassan divulges his determination of seducing her. He asks her to unveil herself since he desires to sleep with her:

And some to Mecca turn to pray, and I toward
thy bed, Yasmin,
Or when the wind beneath the moon is drifting like
a soul aswoon,
And harping planets talk love's tune with milky wings
outspread, Yasmin,
Shower down thy love, O burning bright! for one
night or the other night Will come the Gardener in white, and gathered
flowers are dead, Yasmin!" (*Hassan* Act I, scene i/ii).

Hassan sanctifies her body, identifying her with the houris: "Gracious lady, your eyes look down through your veil like angels/ through a cloud. Dare I ask to see your face, O bright perfection?" (*Hassan* Act I, scene ii). Such an alluring body drives him crazy. His love of Yasmin can be seen as an Abbasid version of the medieval hero. She is a source of his inspiration and empowerment and hence the last leg of his decline. He considers himself a great hero who can do anything for the sake of whom he loves:

I burn with love of you, Yasmin. Put me to the proof, my lady; there was nothing I could not do for your bright eyes. I would cross the salt desert and wrest a cup of the water of life from the Jinn that guards it; I would walk to the barriers of the world and steal the roc's egg from its diamond nest. I would swim the seven oceans, and cross the five islands to rob Solomon ben Dawud of his ring in the palace where he lies sleeping in the silence and majesty of uncorrupting death. And I would slip the ring on your finger and make you mistress of the spirits of the air-- but would you love me? Could you love me, do you love me, Yasmin? (*Hassan* Act I, scene ii).

Hassan's sexual desire brings out a sense of premonition. At the beginning of the play, he associates her with the moon twice and with "the Queen of the Stars of Night" (*Hassan* Act I, scene ii). It is traditionally acknowledged that such an association highlights her beauty. However, Al-Garrallah (2005) argues that it underlines the destructiveness of the female:

> But more interesting here is the fact that the moon is associated with insanity, loss, destruction and fatalism. It is believed that those who look deeply at the moon will lose their minds. In this sense, both moon and love lead to insanity and destruction. In his Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery, De Vries (1974 362), explains that the moon is associated with lunacy in three ways: "a. the dismemberment-myths […] generally performed by women in a bacchantic frenzy, may be related to the phases of the moon; b. in the Bible the moon is believed to regulate the periods of epilepsy (a form of 'lunacy'); c. "It is the very error of the moon, She comes more near the earth than she was wont, And makes men mad": Oth. 5,2." (224).

It is dubiously apparent that there is a kind of transformation from the other as alluring to the other as the femme fatale. Yamin's body is identified with the macabre, especially when she wonders: "Are not my arms like swords of steel, hard and cold, and thirsty for blood?" and "[a]re not my lips two rubies drenched in blood?[7] (*Hassan* Act I, scene ii). Hassan is haunted with death and hell when thinking of touching her body; complaining that touching her is a "[t]orment of death!" and a "[f]ire of hell" (*Hassan* Act I, scene ii). Hassan likens her to the moon and to the queen of Jinns in order to underline her unattainability, invincibility, invisibility and annihilation, as is suggested above (*Hassan* Act I, scene i). After he discovers her scoundrel, he decides to kill her: "There is blood dripping from the wall. (Banging on the gate) I will break the house in. I will kill you [….] Ya Allah, I am dying. Oh, Yasmin, so beautiful, so brutal. O burning bright; you have killed me!" (*Hassan* Act I, scene ii). Also, he identifies her with poison and snakes to depict her as evil and considers her a whore who sells her body, which becomes "tainted meat" and "merchandise" (*Hassan* Act III, scene ii).

In addition to identifying Yasmin with Jinns as an indication of the Orient's sexual destructiveness, the Orient is identified with exoticism, superstitions, evil eye, magic, monsters, ghouls and devils. Said (1978) suggests that "Rather than listing all the figures of speech associated with the Orient- its strangeness, its difference, its exotic sensuousness, and so forth- we can generalize about them as they were handed down through the Renaissance. They are all declarative and self-evident" (72). In this regard, Preut (1984), in *Orientalism Islam and Islamists*, is worth quoting: "Islam is the institutionalization of the experience of the unseen" (147). The play is teeming with references to such superstitious and exotic things and apparently portrays the Orient as the locus of the supernatural, the exotic, the invisible, magic and the occult. To begin with, the Arabic letters are seen as strange and mystic. Ali cannot easily decode the letter written by Ja'far, asking for helping the Caliph; he considers the Arabic writing as mystical: "Ha, alif, alif, re wow wow 'ain jeem--ah, ye blessed ones in Paradise, is it thus ye write a jeem? Nun--but art thou a nun, O letter, or a drunkard's qaf? Verily an ape has written this with his tail[8] (*Hassan* Act II, scene ii). Then he reiterates the same notion: "Here it is written, and do thou listen, O Abdu, for this is the strangest of the strange writings that are strange" (*Hassan* Act II, scene ii). In so doing, he reacts in like manner to Adso, in Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, who wonders about the strangeness of Arabic writing:

> I picked out a book at random. "Master, it is not written!" "What do you mean? I can see it is written. What do you read?" "I am not reading. These are not letters of the alphabet, and it is not Greek. I would recognize it. They look like worms, snakes, fly dung. ..."" Ah, it's Arabic. Are there others like it?" (Eco 173)

[7] "Yasmin's body is not described in the spiritual style of a lover romanticizing the object of his love [….] Her body is described by Selim in the Eastern style" (Thouless 35).

[8] We think that these Arabic Alphabets indicate Flecker's lack of knowledge in Arabic orthography because their combination is a corrupted spelling of Haroun in Arabic.

Like the Arabic writing, oriental social practices are also strange. For instance, Ali recalls how the son of Abdullah is dressed as a woman and is placed in Grand vizier's harem (*Hassan* Act II, scene ii).

The first oriental character which undoubtedly believes in the infinite powers of magic is Selim-Hassan's friend, through whom Flecker promulgates his theory of Oriental superstition. In a successful attempt to persuade Hassan, Selim refers to Zachariah, the Jew, who in Bokhara flings a stone at the man's head because he calls him an offensive Jew, so the man is suspended in the air, is walking over the heads of men and is allowed to enter his house only through the upper window (*Hassan* Act I, scene i). The Jew, more strangely, in Ispahan, takes off the dome of the Great Mosque, turns it round, has a bath in it and puts it again. Similarly, he turns all people in Cairo into apes for half an hour in order to amuse the Sultan. It is not surprising to emphasize that Judaism itself is associated with tales of superstition according to Selim.

Selim himself displays his faith in the unusual power of the Jinn when warning Hassan against "jesting with the Jinn," and attributing Hassan's anxiety to being in love with the Queen of all the Jinn. Selim tells Hassan that the Jew's shop is crowded with old rich women whose hearts are, to use Hassan's words, "strong" and whose "heads as cold as the mountains of Qaf" (*Hassan* Act I, scene i). It is not exaggerating, therefore, to suggest that Flecker's point is that Oriental women are superstitious and thus very vulnerable to the impact of magic.

Faith in and resort to magic is a sign of oriental weakness and total submission. Selim thinks that the only way to help Hassan is to resort to magic. Hassan sends Selim to consult a Jewish magician, who can prepare him some philter to help him win Yasmin's heart and love. In so doing, Yasmin eats "the magic sweets," made by the Jew, and thus she falls in love. She confesses:

> I think I have been enchanted, Hassan; how, I cannot tell. Till this afternoon the thought of your appearance made my heart narrow with disgust. But since I ate your present of comfits-- and they were admirable comfits, and I ate them with speed-- my heart is changed and inclined toward you, I know not why or how. except it be through magic (*Hassan* Act I, scene ii).

Yasmin's confession indicates her emotional transformation and her realization of the rapid impact of magic because of its popularity in the Orient. Furthermore, the Orientals, by the force of magic, can control love which becomes no longer spontaneous. Hassan, in response, thinks that he can even control the whole world because of magic, but he expresses his hatred of magic and the Jews since his philter does not work at all. Then he starts hallucinating when being transformed into a cat, and walking on the roofs after the female cats. He regrets believing in magic and becomes very anxious about the impact of evil eye on him.

Rafi's house of the moving walls in which he imprisons the Caliph along with his companions embodies another sort of deadly magic. The Caliph describes it as a "house of grand proportions and eccentric architecture" (*Hassan* Act II, scene 1). The farther he goes inside, the more puzzling and deadly it becomes: "Allah! and this room is a box within a box like a Chinese toy. And that man will surprise my soldiers in the chill of dawn, and sack my palace and burn Baghdad. He will discover my identity and bury me alive!" (*Hassan* Act II, scene i). In that house, Islamic identity becomes hidden and lost because Rafi's religion overpowers it at the beginning. Manichaeism, which is a mixture of Zoroastrian, Christian and Gnostic thought, divides the world into good and evil, so Rafi considers the Caliph as a heretic and representative of evil, the "devil of Eblis" the "massacrer of good men "a fool tyrant," a "mean tradesman" and a "dog-hearted spy" (*Hassan* Act III, scene iii). However, on the grounds that Islam itself is more evil it triumphs at the end of the play when Rafi is cruelly punished.

Along with Flecker's associating the Orient with cruelty, aggression, violence, he presents Islam as a sadist religion. The Caliph's new way of punishment is described as "savage" in the way that Rafi is nailed for his lunacy, stretched for his conspiracy and split for his blasphemy. After they cut Rafi's head, they pour blood upon Pervaneh's eyes. This is the worst torture that a human being will undergo in Hassan's eyes. The Caliph is seen as a "frigid tyrant" in Pervaneh's eyes (*Hassan* Act III, Scene iii) and as a "[h]ideous tyrant," and "torturer from Hell" in Hassan's eyes (*Hassan* Act V, Scene i). The Caliph,

who is very skilled in "the art of pain," not only asks Masrur to punish Rafi and Pervaneh, but also enjoys watching them suffer:

> I have been ordering executions all my life. There is only one thought that can haunt me--the thought of a coffin closing on open eyes, the sway of the coffin carried to the grave, the crash at the bottom of the pit, the rumble of earth on the lid, the gasping for breath and light (*Hassan* Act III, scene iii).

Like the Caliph, Masrur, the executioner, reinforces Oriental sadism. As the executioner, he kills Rafi and Pervaneh and then enjoys drinking his blood. His blackness hints to his evil; his name means "happy" in Arabic language. Flecker ironically gives the black executioner such a name with such a meaning in Arabic to underline his sadism in the sense that he enjoys killing people.

Islam is apparently hostile to other religions- Judaism and Christianity. Muslims think, as the Caliph does, it is more superior to other religions. For instance, Judaism is underestimated and of no significance. In describing Ishak (his poet), the Caliph addresses Ja'far: "He is talking to shadows. He has one of his evil fits tonight. Do not trouble your head or mine about him. He presumes on our friendship, and forgets the respect due to us. Am I to be kept waiting like a Jew in a court of justice, I the Master" (*Hassan* Act II, scene i). These lines undoubtedly echo the Caliph's inferior attitude towards Judaism. He emphasizes that the relationship between Judaism and Islam becomes slave-master and/or criminal-judge. The Jew, who resembles Charles Dickens's Fagin in *Oliver Twist* (Chapters 8-53) is a murderer and a criminal who deserves punishment in the Caliph's eyes. Moreover, Yasmin classifies the Jews and gypsies together—a classification that deprives them of anything good.

Similarly, Islam is portrayed as hostile to Christianity. The Christian is seen as an inferior animal and is killed very cruelly from an Islamic perspective. Consider the following passage:

> A Greek of Constantinople made it, who came travelling hither in the days of my father, the Caliph El Madhi (may earth be gentle to his body and Paradise refreshing to his soul!). He showed this fountain to my father, who was exceptionally pleased, and asked the Greek if he could make more as fine. "A hundred," replied the delighted infidel. Whereupon my father cried, "Impale the pig." Which having been done, this fountain remains the loveliest in the world (*Hassan* Act III, scene i).

In response to Hassan's attitude towards killing the Christian, the Caliph angrily wonders: "Do you accuse my father of tyranny, O fellow, for slaying a filthy Christian?" (*Hassan* Act III, scene i). This constructs Islam as very hostile to Christians who are seen as the Muslim's Other. This negative attitude represents that Islam bans arts apparently fostered by Christianity. The Caliph has inherited his religious enmity from his father Al-Mahdi – an inheritance that suggests the stability of hostility in the way it is transmitted from one generation to another. That the Caliph and Al-Mahdi are constructed as dangerous and barbarous de facto implies that history does not change Islamic perceptions of the *Other*.

Islam in short appears as a religion that wars against other religions, unable to embrace and cope with them. The Islamic standard of judging the other is based on faith. The Christians and the Jews are seen as filthy, offensive Other in an attempt to present them as negatively different from Muslims. For example, the whole Roman Empire, along with its impress – Irene- and her ambassador – Anastasius Johannes Georgius, are viewed as infidels. Any attempt to kill them is highly appreciated. The chief of Police praises the Caliph as the "breaker of infidel bones" (*Hassan* Act III, scene iii). Ja'far associates the Christians with the murderers, drinkers of wine and thieves. The Christians are, nevertheless, associated with arts and knowledge. Similarly, the artist who draws the picture of the fountain is Greek. This is why the Caliph wants Hassan to be wiser than Aflatun. Greek lore and science are more superior to their Muslim counterpart.

By way of concluding, Georgian significations of Islam in reference to other religions are to a great extent based on religious hostility. In other words, Flecker hates Islam because he is Christian. Flecker admits: "I loathe the East" (qtd. in Thouless 31) and Squire (1916) remarks: "He confessed that he had not greatly liked the East always excepting, of course, Greece and that his intercourse with

Mohammedans had led him to find more good in Christianity than he had previously suspected" (xiv). Moreover, the oriental landscape, though charming, does not have enough power to swallow Flecker and hence change his hostile attitudes toward Islam.

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