

The West Meets the East: A Study of Jason Elliot's *Mirrors of the Unseen*

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Abstract

Travel writing, as a literary genre has a special place in the history of English literature. Among the many travelogues written about Persia, *Mirrors of the Unseen: Journeys in Iran* (2006) by Jason Elliot is an outstanding one. In documenting the history, culture and civilization of the people it follows a different approach. The present research is going to depict the differences and affinities in Elliot's writings and objectives to other travel writers' objectives in travelling to Persia and presenting this country. In *Mirrors of the Unseen*, architecture plays an important role through which the possibility of understanding the 'Other' and the 'Self' are matched with each another. The method Elliot follows to understand the nations is through their narrations embodied in their architecture, which narrate the nation's past and present history, desires and motives. Reaching this job, one of Elliot's objectives is to find the origin and character of Islamic architecture. In doing so, in addition to studying architecture, he makes a bridge between East and West by comparing and contrasting different signs and symbols hence approving or contrasting his pre-knowledge. In dealing with architecture signs and objects Elliot appears as a Barthesian critic *avante la lettre*, whose focus is on the underlying meanings behind each sign and who decodes them based on his insight. Relating to this objective, I am concerned with showing Elliot's aesthetic reflection and analysis of Persian architecture. Through

these personal discoveries and explorations Elliot follows the tradition of modern travel writing started with Byron and creates a turning point in the history of travel writing of the East.

Key words: Travel Writing; Architecture; Persia; Self and Other

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INTRODUCTION

Every text requires some sort of interpretation as a part of the effort to appraise, improve, and enlarge the text's achievement, typically as a means to find a unifying structured framework through which we can make sense of an author's work. To understand and interpret a text is to "get beneath the accumulated crust of misinterpretation [...] and take a stand in the center of what is said and unsaid" (Palmer, 1969, p.147). Metaphorically speaking, a text is a mirror, and is often a very good place to discover the conventions and codifications of a certain period; i.e., as a social product, the text might be "marked in the light (or shadow) of power" (Barthes, 1989, p. 107-8). From another vantage point of discussion, whoever holds *this mirror* before himself will see his own image, whereas the mirror has no image of its own; simultaneously, it reflects the image of every reader; in short, the image is at once "present and empty" but "unreal and full", and it masks the absence with an illusion of presence (Barthes, 200, p.

¹ Jason Elliot is a notable, prize-winning British travel writer, whose works include *An Unexpected Light: Travels in Afghanistan*, a *New York Times* bestseller and winner of the Thomas Cook/*Daily Telegraph* Travel Book Award, and *Mirrors of the Unseen: Journeys in Iran*. *The Network*, published by Bloomsbury in July 2010, is his first novel.

110).

In much the same way, culture is a “symbolic [sign] system,” an “acted document” and “consists of socially established structures of meaning” (Geertz, 2000, p.10-17). It is like a text, a mirror, and a galaxy of signs, objects, and codes. The thing that a reader/traveller (here Jason Elliot¹) does is to decode those codes. It is like a never-ending field full of divergent flowers, each is different from the others, while organized in a (dis)orderly manner. A traveller, through his journey and encountering this galaxy, finds himself at the centre, where his eyes can see a certain spectrum of the signs. In understanding the signs and recording them in his travel book, he acts as a translator and translates the unfamiliar travellers to his readers. As he moves from one place to another, from one sign to the next one, a new batch of meaning shows itself to him, whereas the social and cultural galaxy rarely shows itself completely to him; therefore, some parts of the travellers remains un-translated for the travellers, readers as well as critics. The traveller focuses his gaze on those signs and objects which he considers as master signs, whereas the other signs elude his gaze. Even those master signs might be mistranslated; hence, the traveller’s blindness. My understanding is that “truth is [...] reached [...]dialectically” (Palmer, 1969, p. 165); in this regard, a travel writer can understand the truth of the travellers provided that he has a dialectical dialogue with the objects, signs and codes during his expedition. We must bear in mind that this might not be a full understanding. To understand the culture of the travellers means to experience and understand what is meant by a dialogue between the traveller and the travellers. Metaphorically, the traveller and the travellers, these two participants, begin in conversation, continue it and try to understand each other not only through language. It is an understanding that enables the traveller to translate and reword the conventions and codes of the travellers for his own people; in other words, his function is to familiarize them with the unfamiliar world. For instance, Jason Elliot, who pays a special attention to architecture, tries to engage in a dialectical dialogue with such artistic creations. For him, the truth of architecture makes itself apparent in its being, thus he who “understands is always drawn into the event whereby the meaningful validates itself. ... When [he] understands, [he is] drawn into an event of truth” (Weinsheimer, 1985, p.165-6).

This is one of the features of modern travel writing which dissociates itself from traditional conventions, which is a step towards the modernization of travel writing. This is a shift from travel writing as an act of objective informative-oriented representation to a subject-oriented representation of the travellers, which focuses on understanding the author’s Self and the “Other’s” Self. Elliot exemplifies what other travellers were *blind* to observe and discover through their journeys to the East.

He, by means of his *insight*, is able to perceive and affirm the splendor of the Persian world, for instance, through “the country’s most famous ancient site, Persepolis” (Elliot, 2006, p. 339). Unlike mere tourists, whom he considers “blind,” Elliot disapproves of the systematic stereotyping of the East by Western colonizers. Elliot familiarizes his own people with the unfamiliar world of the exotic lands. He articulates his experiences and understanding throughout his travel books, which bring out the hidden meaning of what is unknown to light.

Here, what I am mostly concerned to argue is that, Elliot is different from the preceding travel writers, since he encounters and illustrates the Orient differently from the preceding travel writers. This shows how Elliot “dissociates himself emphatically from the nineteenth century and aligns his virile Orientalism with certain anti-Romantic moves of High Modernism” (Dissanayake, 1993, p.12-13). For Elliot, travel means to experience, understand and recognize what other travellers are not able to see. For instance, “to travel in farther Asia is to discover a novelty *previously unsuspected and unimaginable*” [my emphasis] (ibid, p. 3). By means of travelling to the East, his “lighthouse vision” moves from Europe to “touch new horizons,” located in the East (ibid, p. 3-4).

Edward Said, in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), argues that, “nations themselves are narrations” (xiii-xiv); to go a bit further, nations narrate their history also through monuments and architecture. Similarly, Jason Elliot believes that history and architecture go hand in hand, noting in *Mirrors*, that when he moved from one place to another: “... , the architecture had changed again” (2006, p. 396). In addition, Mohammed Arkoun, in his article “Spirituality and Architecture,” quotes from Charles Jencks that “architecture is ‘built’ meaning. It fatefully expresses who we are” (2002, p. 3-18). What we must bear in mind is that nations manifest themselves in architecture. In this regard, for Elliot one of the prominent objectives in travel is the study of architecture, through which he illustrates the underlying meaning behind each structure and more important than that understanding the ‘Other’ out of Orientalism. He articulates this explicitly when he deals with the historical monuments in Persia. In *Mirrors of the Unseen*, architecture plays an important role through which the possibility of understanding the ‘Other’ and the ‘Self’ are matched with each other. For instance, in visiting Yazd he notes that: “I had imagined Yazd, unique among Iranian towns for its desert architecture and setting, to be a sleepy sort of place, where donkeys padded along dusty lanes. I was of course wrong again” (Elliot, 2006, p. 360).

1. DISCUSSION

1.1 Preview

Travel in its literal meaning is a movement from one place to another in time. Etymologically the word refers to *travail* rooted in Latin *tripalium* which means “very hard work.” Both time and place are important component parts in travel. In a descriptive and prescriptive definition of the term by Sir Francis Bacon in his essay “Of Travaile,” travel is defined in this way:

Travaile, in the younger Sort, is a Part of Education; in the Elder, a Part of Experience. [...] But in Land-Travaile, wherein so much is to be observed, for the most part, they omit it. [...] The Things to be seen and observed are: [...] the Monuments, [...] Antiquities, and Ruins. [...] And to conclude, whatsoever is memorable in the Places; where they goe. [...] And let his Travaile appear rather in his Discourse. (Kiernan, 1985, p. 56-8)

Travel is based on a mutual interaction between home and abroad, which I call *self* and *world* respectively. For travellers, home will find meaning in close connection with abroad; i.e., *self* can find its identity and significance only when it is exposed to the *world*. Through such a reciprocal interaction, abroad is considered as a fundamental principle for the traveller to work on, to read it as a text and finally to reach an understanding of the world and his own Self. Andrew Hadfield states that to undertake the venture of travel “involves a series of reflections on one’s own identity and culture, which will inevitably transform the writer and will call into question received assumptions, including a sense of wonder at the magnificence of the other, or reaffirming deeply felt differences with a vengeance” (1998, p.1). Concerning the impact of travel on the traveler’s perception, Mark Cocker argues, “travel has also provided the enterprising individual with opportunities to attain the status of national symbol, akin to that of the war hero” (1992, p. 138-9). In relation to this view, Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs state that the real power of travel is to enrich our knowledge of human societies; that is “travel broadens our mind” (2002, p. 2-3). From another vantage point of discussion, one can argue that “to talk about travel is to enter into a terrain redolent with markers of imperialism” (ibid, p. 1) and cultural confrontation; i.e., travel and power go hand in hand. In addition, Mary Louise Pratt claims that travel is a “charged space of transcultural encounter usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (1992, p. 6).

There are two kinds of traveller: first, those who suffer *travail*, undergo a transformation and metamorphosis during their journeys, and gain a new insight and reach a *self-understanding*. Their epistemology, identity and horizon of understanding will be transformed in the course of travel by means of experiencing and encountering the travelleses. Metaphorically speaking, they leave behind the unfitting old clothes of their previous life when they return home. I call them *dynamic travellers*. Second, those travellers who travel not for the sake of interaction, and have nothing to do with suffering, I call them *static*

travellers: or, the mere tourists.

The perception of the interconnectedness of things and the role of traveller/narrator in collecting data leads the modern travel writer, literally and metaphorically, to associate himself with the world. Self-reflexivity, both thematically and stylistically offers the writer a way to show the effects of his own presence in the exotic lands and to expose the uncertainty of truth and the absence of norms. The task of travellers from Herodotus to Darwin was to bring back facts and ‘true’ stories for their readers. The late twentieth century travel books, in contrast, are metaphors of a quest for ground zero—a place where values are discovered along the way, not imported; a place where other cultures can have opportunities to express their views; and a place where the self and the other can explore each other’s fictions. For travellers of the twentieth century, travel experience is similar to going deeply into the core of life and ultimately to achieve a self-recognition by means of encountering otherness.

At the outset, I would like to classify the construction of the Orient through various Western discourses into different categories. The first category denigrates the Orient, as being ‘underhumanised’, ‘antidemocratic’, ‘backward’, ‘unnatural’, and ‘disordered’, ‘wrong’, ‘retrogressive’ and ‘evil.’ It looks at the Orient through a distorted looking-glass and sees a deformed and distorted image of the Orient. Such a contextual systematic knowledge of the Orient is best viewed in Foucauldian terms as a discourse which is the textual manifestation of power/knowledge. In addition, it creates a relationship between the Occident and the Orient that Said believes is a “relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony” (2003, p. 5), more to the point, it is the “hegemony of European ideas [...] [the] European superiority over Oriental backwardness” (ibid, p. 7). This view emerges from the commercial and political practices of the European governments.

The second category focuses on the beauties of the Orient; it is the representation of the authors’ personal impressions about the beauties and fascination of the Orient. In this regard, the traveller focuses his gaze on the beauties of the travelleses without reducing the people’s normalness and particularity, and by means of his insight, sees what the other travellers were blind to see. This way of presenting the Orient as will be indicated in Elliot’s *Mirrors of the Unseen*, is at odds with the first category; i.e., where the first category of travellers can only inhale the odour of corruption and decay, and despised people for their cruelty, insincerity and dishonesty, the second category, for instance Vita Sackville-West, finds a purely romantic atmosphere and a charming people full of kindness, courtesy and simplicity.

Contrary to those travellers who consider the Orient as ‘effeminate’, ‘disordered’, ‘underhumanised’, and ‘retrogressive’, Elliot, in *Mirrors of the Unseen*, opens

a new phase in dealing with the Orient. He shows the impact of the East on the West, analyses the dynasties, exposes and scrutinizes the way through which one can understand a “nation’s past and present history”; i.e., architecture. Therefore, What I am interested to show is a different picture of the East and Persia in particular, which deflate[s] the Western discourses of Orientalism. Travel writers like Elliot, Byron, Sackville-West, Ronald Sinclair, and Robert Payne show a picture of the Orient contrary to the Western discourses of the Orient. Even in terms of history there has been a lot of misunderstanding because of the different circumstances occupying the atmosphere of the era. For instance, The accounts of the Persians by the “Classical Greeks”—the *Histories* of Herodotus is the most voluminous—were written in the background of long and problematic relationship between them and against the general condition of the bewildering victories of the Greek over the Persians at Marathon and Salamis in the fifth century BC (Elliot, 2006, p. 211-12). “Greek histories of Persian motives and behavior,” had to have the tendency to throw their former superpower in a “grand but decadent light” (ibid). In the descriptions of Persian character, in the pages of Aeschylus, there is always a tendency towards “vanity and irrational brutality, a suggestion of perfidity” (ibid, p. 212); or “Xenophon calls them hysterical and effeminate” (ibid, p. 212). Recently a more balanced reading of the “Graeco-Persian drama” has been made possible by a more sympathetic, “readings of Persian sources”, as well as a “cautious re-evaluation of the glorious conquest of Alexander, whose sacking of Persepolis in 324 BC signaled the death blow to Persian rule in the Near East” (ibid, p. 211-12).

1.3 Application

Scott Wilson considers history, as a “discourse, consisting of realist narratives, [a] master signifier” (1995, p. 122-3); and in Clifford Geertz’s words, history is fundamentally “semiotic [...] web of significance” that is essentially a narrative account, the product of a national heritage written by and through a culture (2000, p. 5). The architecture, relics and monuments of a land, which depict the past as well as the present, are its constitutive elements and, as Geertz argues, the “people’s ethos—the tone, character, quality of their life, worldview, its moral and aesthetic style and mood” is the outcome of this narration (ibid, p. 89-90). When these signs (in Wilson’s terms, the “cultural products shaped by a particular knowledge or discourse” (1995, p. 8-9)) are deciphered, traced and recounted by a travel writer—who like an ethnographer, as Geertz argues, is “establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts, taking genealogies, mapping fields, keeping a diary, and so on,”—they convey the narration of a nation, the cultural vicissitudes, a nation’s history and its life in continuum (2000, p. 5-6). The reading of these monuments illustrates the process of constructing the past. They, implicitly, give some

intelligible account of the objectives and intentionality that are gorged and fused into them at their time creation; at the same time, they reveal their interrelationship with the social order.

The buildings, monuments, signs, customs, etc., which exist in every social and cultural structure reveal their underlying meanings and thoughts, as Wilson argues, being “political and politically analyzable,” since, I believe, they are “historical and historicizable” (1995, p. 121). With an eye on Michel Foucault, one can see that Elliot gazes at these signs from “behind or beyond [...] for a hidden meaning,” and searches for the “mentality of the civilization,” while establishing a system of relations and the possibility of significations in the master signs (1998, p. 430). John Ruskin had already stated, “architecture is the art which so dispose and adorns the edifices raised by man, for whatsoever uses, that the sight of them may contribute to his mental health, power, and pleasure” (1907, p. 27). Like Roland Barthes who is the lover of “both the city and signs” (1994, p. 191), Elliot is interested in architecture. Byron, in *The Appreciation of Architecture*, asserts that “architecture is the most universal of the arts. It enshrines the past in a form more extensive, more varied, and more easily apprehensible than any other form of culture” (1932, p. 9); it is a “visual art” (ibid, p. 13).

My argument in this chapter is to show Elliot’s aesthetic analysis of the “splendor of design[s]” in architecture, and the way through which he comes to understand the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’ out of the influence of Orientalism by means of thickly described, and clipped “photographic illustrations,” of Persian pre-Islamic and Islamic architecture. Regarding this point, for Elliot, the substantial factor in dealing with architecture is to study the “building’s historical antecedents” in relation to the objectives in its construction. More precisely, the “type of men who commissioned it, with the religious, social, and political thought of the time—with, in fact, all the extraneous factors that contributed to and reinforced the personal impulse of the architect” (Byron, 1932, p. 16). As a result, each architectural design conveys the substantial factors in the process of its construction in relation to the intention of the ruler who orders it to be built. Byron claims, “there are occasions when architecture resolves into history. The emotions, aesthetic and historical, refuse to be disentangled” (ibid, p. 17).

1.3 Persian Islamic Architecture

After the invasion of Islam, even though the victory in the political and religious fields was for the Arabs, in art, thought, and culture, it was Persia which survived and gained victory. In Rice’s words, “Persian art, Persian thought, Persian culture [...] flourish[ed] anew in the service of Islam, and impelled by a new and powerful driving force, their effect was felt in a widely extended field from the early eighth century onwards” (Rice,

1973, p. 41). With the arrival of Islam in Persia, several renaissances occurred in Persian art and architecture. Persian architects establish new methods in the construction of buildings, hence Persianizing the effects. Elliot in his architectural descriptions and analysis, tracing the impacts of Persian dynasties on art and architecture, highlights the Timurid renaissance, as a significant period in Persian architectural achievement. For instance, during the reign of Shah Rukh, the most important monuments are those erected by Gohar Shad, Shah Rukh's wife, in Herat, and one mosque adjoining the shrine of Imam Reza at Mashhad.

Arthur Upham Pope argues that Persian architecture and monument are "the most beautiful and majestic structures the world has ever seen. In meaning and purpose, monumental Persian architecture [is] primarily religious—at the beginning, magical, and invocational in character—by which man [is] brought into communication and participation with the power of Heaven" (1976, p. 1). Understanding the form and meaning of Islamic Architecture, which is a harmonious arrangement of signs, is a complex phenomenon; it is related to the Islamic faith, putting stress on the "maintenance of unity and discipline" (Rehman, 2002, p. 27). The significance of Islamic architecture in Barthes's words, "occurs as soon as it is fabricated, [and] normalized" (1994, p.182). It provides us with a prominent sign system of the Islamic world, which illustrates a cohesive unity of theology, commerce, war, private pleasure, mysticism, power and technology. The concept of unity is manifested in the design and construction of Islamic architecture, blending straight and curved lines, the former as static and the latter as dynamic symbolising motion and life. They illustrate an organic unity, harmonic proportions and, to quote Ruskin, "beauty, [which are] derived chiefly from the external appearances of organic nature" (1907, p. 144-5). Tracing the beauties of a building, one can understand that "all perfectly beautiful forms must be composed of curves; since there is hardly any common natural form in which it is possible to discover a straight line," and Islamic architecture has this characteristic (ibid, p. 151).

Persia's huge domes derived from such prototypes as the rubble masonry domes of Sasanian, which are constructed without any support, and decorated with various divine names, as corresponding to divine beauty, are the best examples of such an organic unity and beautiful perfect form composed of curves. The Persian word *Gunbad*, meaning dome, connotes the Heaven, the Universe, the Fortune's Wheel, and when attached to other words it forms symbolic meanings, such as *Gunbad-i-Abgon* (the blue dome); *Gunbad-i-Peer* (the old dome), *Gunbad-i-Daewar* (the circulating dome), *Gunbad-i-Zar* (the golden dome), *Gunbad-i-Kabood* (the dark-blue dome), all connoting the blue sky, Fortune, universe and life. In this regard, the dome of the mosque is an

element presenting a strong resemblance to the universe, a symbolism which "serves as a reminder to the Muslim of his earthly duties" (Wilkes, and Packard, 1989, p. 465).

Basically, the construction of a building is conceived as the interrelationship between the whole and the component parts, and the creation of a harmonious, single organic unity. Islamic architecture, having such a unity at core, converts and transforms the "material world into a spiritual one," merging with a system of values, and simultaneously, embodying these values (Petrocilio, and Pirani, 2002, p. 63). Like other forms of artistic constructions, Islamic architecture is a response to and a product of the interaction of cultural, social, economic and environmental factors of the time, as well as the people's worldview and their ways of life. The adjective *Islamic* which is attached to architecture underlines the ethos of the Muslim world; it symbolises "the ideal order of the world as perceived and understood by Islam" (ibid).

One of the significant signs through which Islamic ontology and cosmology finds an opportunity to impart its particular message is the mosque. With the advent of Islam and its expansion into the conquered lands and regions, the occupiers used the existing buildings as the first mosques. Accordingly, in the early days of Islam, "the first mosques were churches and temples which were converted to serve the needs of the new Muslim rulers"; for instance, in Persia, "the Muslims converted many temples and existing buildings into mosques" (Wilkes, and Packard, 1989, p. 461).

Elliot, in Barthes's words, "sketches a semiotics" of the travellers, and considers a city and any other object as "a discourse, and [...] actually a language" (1994, 195). Elliot analyses the signs in Islamic architecture in a Barthesian way *avant la letter*. Each sign accords with the significance underlying it, such as the inscriptions, the colours mainly blue, the physical constructions, the substances, the direction of their doors or Mihrabs, which is towards Mecca, the domes, the minarets, and the images on the tiles. Barthes states that a "sign is what repeats itself. Without repetition there is no sign, for we could not recognize it, and recognition establishes the sign" (Barthes, 1994, p. 237-8). In Persia, the mosque, as an Islamic sign and a recurrent *motif*, is constructed, reshaped and perpetually repeated.

Elliot traces the strata of meaning in Islamic designs and constructions, as well as Persian renaissance which occurred in architecture, with regard to the history of Persia. He starts his journey, as the title of the book suggests, following the route to Persia in search of hidden meaning and sign (mirrors), to express his aesthetic appreciation of Persian architecture and then solving the mysteries under such designs.

One of the outstanding theorists of Persian architecture is Arthur Upham Pope. Elliot calls him in addition to Phyllis Ackerman, and André Godard as "the giants of

Persian architecture and archaeology” (2006, p. 111). According to Arthur Upham Pope, “during the tenth century Persia again produced its own constellation of poets, philosophers, mathematicians, astronomers, physical scientists, historians, geographers and lexicographers. [...] In comparison, the same years in Europe were dark indeed” (1976, p. 49). This is an important factor which shows the influence of an intellectual atmosphere on architecture. The rulers rivalled each other in patronizing poets, artists and scholars, such as Qabus-ibn Wushmgir, XIth century, who was a poet, a scholar and patron of the arts, and a leading proponent of a new authority in astrology. Paul Fussell and other critics, misspelled the word *Gunbad-i-Qabus* as *Gumbad-i-Kabus* (the word *Gumbad* does not exist in Persian). Fussell’s remark is worth quoting here:

from the desert [of Gurgan] a thousand miles away, in adjoining Persia, rise a number of odd and beautiful medieval brick tomb-towers of startling height and purity, preeminently ‘masculine,’ even phallic. Byron had seen photographs of some in a book while he was in India, and Sykes remembers Byron’s wondering whether they weren’t somehow the source of much that was admirably un-dainty in early Islamic architecture. One of the brick towers had impressed him especially. It was the [Gunbad-i-Qabus], the tower of Qabus [*mistakenly written* ‘Gumbad-i-Kabus’]. (Abroad, 1980, p. 95)

Elliot has a very brief description of the monument and describes it as “a misplaced monument from the future” (2006, p. 107). The tower reflects, in Arthur Upham Pope’s words, the “moral combat with Fate, as it were, a monarch-poet wrestling with eternity” (1976, p. 44), and it shows the period, local style and the genius of the individual architect. It is a sign of the Saljuq architecture that is “noble and powerful, structurally inventive and sophisticated, [...] neither sudden nor accidental” (ibid, p. 49). More precisely, it is the “culminating expression of a Persian renaissance that had begun in the early tenth century with the Samanids, [and] reached its apex under the Seljuks” (ibid). It connotes the world of Qabus, and concerning the meaning of *Gunbad*, it illustrates the fate and fortune of Qabus and other monarchs who survive in history by means of stone and brick.

At Isfahan, known as *half the world*, he encounters a complex of buildings at the Maidan-i-Shah (Maidan-i Naqsh-i Jahan), Chihil Sutun, Bazaar, Masjid-i-Shah, Ali Qapu, Mosque of Sheikh Lutfullah, and the Friday Mosque, all marking the apex of Persian Islamic architecture during the Safavid period. The city’s golden age began in 1598 when Shah Abbas I, the Great, who reigned 1588-1629, made it his capital and rebuilt it into one of the largest and most beautiful cities of the seventeenth century. At the centre of the city, he created the immense Maidan-i-Shah as well as the noted Masjid-i-Shah, which was not finished until after his death, and the Mosque of Sheikh Lutfullah, or “one of the wonders of the architectural world,” as Elliot describes it (2006, p.

72). The Maidan and its buildings reflect the religious, economic and political institutions of the empire.

The expansion of the Islamic empire opened up new horizons of communication, “augmenting commerce, and creating an expanding economy which in time supplied the wealth needed for a new and urgent era of building—both secular and religious” (Pope, 1976, p. 38). Therefore, the mosque, as a master sign, which is “spiritually coextensive with the whole life of the people, becomes physically integrated with the [cities]” (ibid, p. 39). The presence of Islamic buildings in Persia means the disappearance of the classical dynasties and the acceptance of Islam. Accordingly, there emerged varieties of Islamic constructions in Persia that reflect the processes of crystallizing an ideology. Islamic architecture, as the master sign in the Islamic world, is one of the means through which the new empires engraved their will on the people’s life.

The first reference, Elliot points out, is the date of their constructions, for instance, the mosque at Isfahan, which dates from 17th century. Then it refers to the physical description of these constructions plus the innovations created by Persians or other nations throughout history; for example, that the construction of the dome is the work of Persian architects. The material used in the architecture is another point Elliot emphasizes, since different materials indicate different periods in the course of the buildings’ construction. Each period introduces a new material to the architecture that reflects the characteristics of a tyranny which rules the country. Elliot puts emphasis on both the external and internal factors, as well as the amalgamation of them, in the architectural design.

It is noteworthy to know that having the Kufic frieze, inscription, and Koranic texts recounts various changes, which occurred throughout the history of Persia. For instance, the use of Kufic inscriptions in Persian architecture shows the impact of external influences on Persian architecture. The use of Koranic verses and the Kufic inscription indicate the impact of Islam and Islamic ideology on Persian social and cultural life. The script was called Kufi because it was thought to have been developed at Kufah in Iraq—an early Islamic centre of culture. It ties the architecture and the people, who repeatedly encounter it in their early life, to the ideology of Islam.

Here once more “three distinct world” are the characteristics of Persian art: “nature”, “order” and the “word” (Elliot, 2006, p. 262). Each of these dynasties produced a new Renaissance on Persian soil. The Safavids inspired Persian art and gave Isfahan the character it has today. Shah Abbas, in 1618, built the Mosque of Sheikh Lutfullah that Elliot considers as “one of the wonders of the architectural world” (ibid, p. 72). The grandeur of the Mosque is such that Elliot rhapsodises: “Shape, space, colour, and number had all been combined with dizzying

ingenuity, each with the aim of evoking allied meanings within the sensitive onlooker,” and “Its surface is unique among Persian mosques in both colour and texture” (ibid, p. 60, 298).

There is also the Sheikh Lutfullah mosque situated on the eastern side of the maidan. “This was the first of the great structures to be built around the maidan,” Elliot notes (2006, p. 70);

work began in 1602, a decade before the building of the Royal Mosque. It is said to have been the private oratory for Shah Abbas, named in honour of the Shah's father-in-law, a Shi'ite scholar originally from Lebanon.¹ An official leaflet has it as the Sheikh's place of teaching; a popular theory suggests it was a mosque for the women of the Shah's harem, and linked to the royal palace opposite by a tunnel. Unlike mosques throughout almost all the Islamic world, there is neither courtyard nor minaret. At only twenty paces square, the sanctuary is a fraction of the size of the Royal Mosque, making its closest architectural relative a single-chambered mausoleum. It is also said to have a lower storey, which may explain the raised level of entrance. Its original function, like the building itself, has an enigmatic strain. (ibid)

You need to pass five steps upwards from the maidan to reach the doorway. This leads not into the sanctuary itself, but to a tunnel. You move forward, between walls tiled in “Neptunian greens and blues, and under the first of three elaborately vaulted ceilings” (ibid). The brightness and noise of the maidan quickly fade. To one side, a door-like lattice, through which “filters a suggestion of space and luminosity, provides an intimation of what is to come” (ibid). But it is distinct; you move on. After forty feet there is a right-angled turn, and the tunnel grows even more dim. Then, after almost the same distance again, and just as you begin to feel you might be losing your way, a doorway opens to the right (ibid, p. 70-1).

Beyond it, the sanctuary materializes in a “shimmering incarnation of light” (Elliot, 2006, p. 71). Eight pointed arches, “outlined by corkscrewing ceramic cable glazed in brilliant turquoise,” enclose the square chamber. Four are flat; four enclose the right-angled corners (ibid). Their bases are hemmed by “a carpet design in tile which, as if draped from the walls, would once have merged with the carpeted floor” (ibid). The flat walls display, in turn, “the design of a flower-studded carpet panel”, “the intricately tiled merhrab or prayer-niche”, “the grille through which the chamber is first glimpsed from the entrance tunnel”, and “the entrance doors” (ibid). Each is pierced above with an arched window, through which the light is softened at the same time filtering through swirling arabesques. The surfaces of the right-angled walls are covered with “complex repeating designs”; “these tease

the eye, resolving at the very moment they are deciphered into an altered pattern” (ibid). “Wide bands of brilliant white calligraphy on a lapis field” run everywhere, moving like foaming torrents beside the abundant gardens of spiraling vines (ibid). Then he describes the dome and finds meaning in every segment of it:

Above these reciprocating melodies of light and colour stretches the dome, some eighty feet high at its apex and resting effortlessly on the thirty-two smaller arches which encircle its base. Half of these are blind, studded with turquoise medallions; half are windows, which permit a further injection of light and disguise the magical fusing of the square beneath with the circle above. An extraordinary decoration covers the interior of the dome. At one moment it is a glittering web, whose parabolic traceries are defined by biscuit-coloured unglazed brick. Within lie lemon-shaped, flower-filled lozenges growing harmonically from the apex as they descend, spilling at the base of the collar over the supporting verticals. The next moment, as the medallions dominate, it displays the template of a peacock's fan, or the gleaming head of a sunflower of cosmic proportions. (ibid)

One of the most famous and enigmatic sites which Elliot visited during his journey was Naqsh-e Jahan Square. So enigmatic because he wondered about its most curious feature: “the glaring lack of alignment between the dome of the Sheikh Lutfullah Mosque and its entrance portal” (Elliot, 2006, p. 277). Elliot regarding his objective as a whole and the puzzle of the maidan as a factor in travelling to Persia expresses his view in this way:

I had not intended, when I began to trespass on the borders of the world of this art, to go deeply into it; much less to entrap the reader into my own haphazard investigation. Nor had I realized the extent to which Islamic art as a whole is seen by the great majority of art historians as essentially decorative, and lacking in any underlying principles. This and the puzzle of the maidan seemed a valid reason to continue the line of enquiry; the mystery of the cave, another. But a third finding, at home this time, convinced me that it was worth taking the risk. (ibid, p. 287)

First of all he pored over the “conventional explanations” (Elliot, 2006, p. 227). “Byron's observation—that ‘the outside of the mosque is careless of symmetry to a grotesque degree,’ and that the discrepancy is a ‘deformity’—sets the tone for nearly all later explanations” (ibid). He states that in all but one of the explanations given are the same: “that the orientations of the mosque to the qiblah, the direction of Mecca, required an adjustment relative to the orientation of the maidan to which it is attached”²(ibid). The problem was that: “Like the Shah Mosque on the southern end of the maidan—like all mosques, in fact—the qiblah of the Lutfullah Mosque is oriented towards Mecca. The maidan is not; and since

¹ “Though in contemporary Safavid documents it is referred to as the Masjed-e Sadr or Masjed-e Fath-Allah. The original portal inscription names the builders as Muhammad Riza ibn Husein and Ali Reza al-Abbasi” (Elliot, 2006: 70).

² The exception is that of Professor Robert Hillenbrand, who notes in *The Cambridge History of Iran* that ‘it is only when one analyses the relationship between the avian (portal) and the dome that a discord is apparent, and it is highly significant that this discord is unnecessary’ (qtd. in Elliot 277-78). However, he interprets the conflicting axes of mosque and maidan as an effort on the part of the architect ‘to reveal, not to conceal, that the dues of Caesar conflicted with those of God’ (278). Vol. 6, *The Timurid and Safavid Periods* (Cambridge University Press, 1987). (qtd. in Elliot, 2006: 278)

the mosque is joined to it, a corresponding reorientation is required” (ibid, p. 72). According to the size of this reorientation, “forty-five degrees from the axis of the maïdan,” it is unreasonable, from the architectural viewpoint, to relate to coincidence (ibid).

According to Elliot above this exiting prospect, there appears to be another question. If you look from the outside, the portal of the entrance and dome are not aligned; therefore it is observable that the dome is skewed to the right. “Visually, this strikes a troubling note in a piazza of such grandeur and formality” (Elliot, 2006, p. 72). It seems to be “an awkward oversight”; Byron describes it casually as “careless of symmetry to a grotesque degree” (qtd. in Elliot, 2006, p. 72). According to Elliot: “... Architecturally, the failure in alignment could have been easily solved: only the length or angle of the tunnel leading to the sanctuary would have had to have been altered. It was impossible not to conclude that the alignment of portal and dome, so obviously attainable, was deliberately forsaken” (ibid).

This diagnosis is illogical, in the case of Elliot “only half-convincing” (ibid, p. 278). In the case of the Royal Mosque, which is similarly skewed, it is valid enough. But it is insufficient to explain the ‘deformity’ of the Lutfullah Mosque” (ibid). Elliot explains the process by which he solved the puzzle:

Perhaps the lines themselves might speak ... bisecting the square of the dome chamber, I found the centre, and put one end of the ruler on the point. A few inches away, I lined up the ruler with the mid-point of the portal, and began to draw. I pictured the line, four thousand miles away, creeping from the magic gloom beneath the dome, and heading west. Out it went: through the corner of the western wall and under the apex of the portal, and creeping towards the far side of the maïdan, until it reached the western wall about fifty yards north of the Ali Qapu Palace. I cleared off the paper and leaned back to look. (ibid, p. 278-79)

The result was inescapable: the layout of the entire maïdan was an expression—whatever else it was—of the formula or Φ , *phi*.

After solving the mystery of the dome, Elliot enters into the Mosque itself to discover more about the significance of templates and designs. The lower tilework panels, which depict carpets, were made of painted tiles in the “*haft-rang* style”, but the “upper walls were all made from mosaic and astonishingly intricate” (2006, p. 296). Within the “swirling lapis-coloured vines,” ran secondary trails of tiny flowers with yellow and white petals and red centres, each fragment was individually cut; and “another thinner interweaving tendril” moved around gently behind the dominant pattern, “linking more flowers in complementary colours” (ibid). When he probes more carefully in the mosque he says: “For the first time I

noticed how many of the shapes complement and resonate with each other and lead the eye into ever deeper levels of enquiry” (ibid). Then in the Mosque itself, he could discover the “shape depicted in the heart of the sanctuary arch, the *mehrab*: it was a dervish *kashgul* in turquoise, suspended from a diamond-shaped lozenge studded with flowers” (ibid).

Then it was revealed that “the boat-shaped begging bowls [was] used by dervishes for the collection of alms” (ibid, p. 296). Their similarity was not mistaken, as they had a similar symbolic intention. Here this is another discovery, at the “sacred focal point of the city’s most sublime place of worship” (ibid, p. 296-7). It was not only an “allusion to the dervish’s abandonment of worldliness, but a reminder of the poverty of man in front of the Divine” (ibid).

Soon, it was revealed that there were many more “symbolic devices at work” in the Lutfullah Mosque, which some were unique to the place and some common to many other mosques. The chamber’s emptiness, similar to the darkness of the entrance tunnel and expressing the maximum effect, implies the “importance of emptiness in the spiritual tradition of Islam; a placeness-ness, if such a word exists, where the materiality of the world is dissolved and the way cleared for a greater Presence” (ibid, p. 297). Also the “visual motifs” which were life-affirming—“abundant flowers and plants, and in particular the ubiquitous depiction of the vase, bursting with floriated tendrils”—can be related perhaps to the “most primordial category of visual symbolism”¹ (ibid). One of the functions of “the overwhelming effect of the designs on the walls, ... , [is] both as a void—a place where the invisible is felt most strongly—and as an idea” (ibid).

Furthermore, he observes that “a cryptic form of numerology” has been applied to the tilework to “affirm notions expressed elsewhere by shape and symbol” (297). On the southern wall, a panel depicts a carpet having sixty-six floral rosettes. The number is significant: “it is one of the most common numerical symbols derived from the *abjad* notation, whereby each letter of the Arabic alphabet is assigned a number. Sixty-six is the number derived from the letters comprising *Allah*, God” (ibid, p. 297). The narrator left room for coincidence but when he faced several other same features connected with the *abjad* system and central to Islamic metaphysics he was out of dubitancy (ibid, p. 297-8). He further describes his observations to prove his argument better:

The intricate design covering the interior of the dome, itself a geometrical masterpiece, is made up of 9 levels of 32 lozenges and a single uppermost shape, giving a total number of 289 shapes, representing *al-rahim*, the divine characteristic or attitude of universal mercy. 289 is also the numerological

¹“I didn’t know it at the time, but the extraordinarily beautiful tilework of the dome, so reminiscent of the head of a sunflower, has an antique precedent in Mithraic iconography, where it is presumed to express the solar principle. Pope notices these symbols at Persepolis, where ‘on the underside of the pivot stones of doors is carved a large open sunflower placed face down....’” (qtd. in Elliot, 2006: 297)

equivalent of the *takbir*, *Allahu Akbar*. At the base of the dome, 256 white flowers represent *nur*, or light, the most universal symbol of divinity. It is also here that the visible light of the outer world enters the mosque by the grilles that encircle the base. There are other alliances of number and design in the mosque which I do not feel equipped to comment on; I hope someone better qualified will take up the challenge of bringing them to greater notice. (ibid, p. 298)

He believes that these buildings, as part of world culture, reflect the history of the renaissances of architectural designs as well as the vicissitudes of dynasties in the history of Persia. More to the point, his surprise is at the blindness of those travellers who are not able to associate even the external factors with the changes in the material, design and construction of the buildings, for instance, the effect of space on the construction of building at Yazd. Since Yazd is located in the desert, there the orchards and gardens are rare and a large part of the “traditional architecture” has been preserved, and emits a “powerful sense of antiquity” (Elliot, 2006, p. 364); accordingly, the town is constructed with an emphasis on space. Even the appearance of the buildings, for instance, the wind-towers, is constructed in accordance with the climate of the place. Or homes were supplied with “water by underground *qanats*” from distant mountains up to twenty miles (ibid).

1.4 CAVEAT LECTOR: The Origins and History of Islamic Art and Metaphysics

It is not reasonable to believe that Islamic art has only just reached the West. Lots of Islamic artefacts, during the Middle Ages, went into—“often through trade, but more often as booty—into the palaces and aristocratic homes of Europe,” Elliot believes this out of the frame of Orientalism (Elliot, 2006, p. 319). They were so admirable for “their level of craftsmanship,” so rarely founded in Christendom. For instance, “European monarchs were crowned wearing robes woven in Muslim Sicily” (ibid, p. 318), which were one of the great creative workshops of the Muslim artist (Elliot, 2011); “silk fabrics from Central Asia cradled the bones of Christian saints” (ibid); and “Turkish and Persian carpets were widely favoured as royal wedding presents” (ibid) (much of what we know “Turkish carpets” comes from their existence in paintings by “court artists” such as “Holbein and Lorenzo Lotto,” the names of the carpet they painted bear after their names. Cardinal Wolsey ordered his own collection directly from Venice). “Islamic silks and wall-hangings” are a valuable part of church and cathedral treasuries, along with “iridescent rock-crystal ewers and reliquaries” carved in Fatimid Egypt (ibid). “Glassware, ceramics, and metalwork” were specifically praised (ibid), and created their own corresponding schools in Europe. Here, a lot of Persian artefacts helped transferring the Persian skills into Europe: “Mamluk brassware” helped transferring the arabesque as a decorative motif into “Tudor and

Elizabethan bookbinding,” and “the widespread importation of Middle Eastern textiles” brought new names into the languages of their destinations: in English we have “damask (Damascus), fustian (Fustat), and muslin (Mosul)” (Elliot, 2006, p. 319).

The obvious characteristics of Islamic art are not difficult to identify. The most accessible—being presented to Western understanding and developed by naturalism—is “the absence of those figurative forms through which European art has traditionally found its highest expressions” (ibid, p. 321). It is exactly the “abstract designs of Islamic art,” which attire it with paradoxical attractiveness (ibid). It is paradoxical, since it is hard to quantify its attractiveness “beyond its purely formal aspects” (ibid). But this attractiveness is undeniably improved by a second characteristic: “the mysterious resonance between its hugely varied expressions” (ibid, p. 321-22). There seems to exist a “single aesthetic language,” running in all its varied forms, which one can hear from the banks of “the Guadalquivir to the fringes of the Gobi Desert” (ibid, p. 322).

One can think of a few of these treasures—“miniature versions of the Qur’ān, smaller than matchboxes and exquisitely illuminated in inks made from gold and pulverized lapis lazuli and etched with microscopic precision onto dried leaves thinner than paper” (ibid, p. 322); “the majestically somber column-forest of the Great Mosque of Cordoba, and the numinous spaces of the Taj Mahal” (ibid, p. 320); “the gravity-defying stonework of the Hall of the Abencerrajes in the Alhambra” (ibid); “the swirling, triple-layered stucco *mehrab* of Uljeitu in Isfahan’s Friday Mosque” (ibid); “sapphire- and ruby-studded Moghul daggers and scimitars” (ibid); “Ottoman battle headgear encrusted with liquid gold calligraphy” (ibid); “the geometrical marvels of mosaic *faience*, whose colours enliven half the ancient buildings of the Persian world” (ibid); “the architectural and acoustic mysteries of the Gombad-e Qabus, the engraved *coco-de-mer kashguls* of Persian dervishes” (ibid); “the intricate star-maps of bejeweled astrolabes” (ibid); “the copper, gold, and silver inlay on bronze ewers and pitchers and flasks and pen-boxes and candlesticks and monumental incense-burners” (ibid); and the “thirty million knots woven across the silken wefts of the Ardabil carpets—each is unmistakably Islamic, each representative of an artistic genius bridging fifteen centuries and half the landmass of the planet” (ibid).

In spite of the varied forms of Islamic art,..., “there are unifying factors that make it immediately distinctive,” Elliot believes. All their purpose is for “beauty based on coherence and harmony” (Elliot, 2011). What Prophet Muhammad said, ““God is beautiful and He loves beauty,”” shapes “the artist’s aesthetic ideal”; and what just Qur’an said about the “fundamental goodness and significance of life” is the [final] purpose of creation of works of art again reflecting the “order, goodness and

purpose of creation itself" (ibid). Again Elliot states his understanding about the common elements of Islamic Art in his observation:

But there common elements, I was beginning to realize, in all their different styles: a love of symbolism and visual metaphor; an irrepresible urge to exploit the technologies and materials of construction to the limits of their potential; a humanness and sophistication to even the most utilitarian of structures; a profound sensitivity to the effect of space, light, and sound on the human organism; and, allied to this, a passion for geometrical harmony and precision. It was satisfying to be able to formulate all this without having to visit a library. (2006, p. 168)

Therefore, one might summaries the important aspects of Persian art in this way: This idea is in direst relation to "a distinct and threefold visual structure," to which a number of panels in the gallery follow the rule. The first of these is "calligraphy": for the people of faith, the attractive ciphers of the "Arabic script" reflect the "voice of the Divine," and are "the substance of revelation made visible." We cannot find such "an exalted role" in any art form; sultans and peasants in a same level tried to learn its many styles, "which became disciplines in themselves," and "an entire science of numerological symbolism" evolved around it (Elliot, 2011). The second is "geometric design," intelligently applied in varied forms—and enticing and confusing simultaneously. The third panel offers examples of "idealised plant shapes drawn from the natural world": "tendrils", "vines", "buds and flowers", which all alludes to "the fecundity and abundance of nature," and "symbolically linked to the Qur'anic evocation of paradise as a luxuriant garden" (ibid).

Furthermore, behind these arts exists "aesthetic as well as symbolic considerations," which represents a kind of respect in Islamic culture for "the philosophical dimension of mathematics, for numbers and the shapes derived from them" (Elliot, 2011). According to Elliot: From this point of view, Islamic art creates a fascinating bridge between the "intellectual heritages of east and west," and elucidated the "Islamic role as a transmitter of classical learning into Europe through the medium of Arab culture" (ibid).

CONCLUSION

The West and the East work on the basis of a particular logic and they are generally seen as opposed, West versus East. If the West is to be considered as the West and to have meaning as the West, it has to be defined in relation to the others. As Derrida argues, "the same cannot be the same except by being the other's other" (1978, p. 128). The West must negate the identity of the East to be distinguished as the West. In Edward Said's critical remarks, by virtue of defining itself against the 'Others,' the West "[gains] in strength and identity" (2003, p. 3). Through the detour of the 'Other,' the West arrives at a

self-understanding. However, in Wimal Dissanayake's and Carmen Wirkramagage's words, "in the process of the representation of the other, there is also the domestication, distortion, simplification, and even caricaturing of the other" (1993, p. 3). Robert Young remarks that such a mastery shows itself in an "implicit violence of ontology itself, in which [the West] constitutes itself through a form of negativity in relation to the other, producing all knowledge by appropriating and sublating the other within itself" (1990, p. 13). The West consolidates its sovereignty by defining and denigrating its colonies and identifying them as "Others" (ibid, p. 17). By reducing the 'Others,' the West stabilizes itself, at one time by means of colonizing the 'Others,' yet at another time by means of war as a "form of the appropriation of the other," which legitimizes the Western foreign policy to expand its 'democracy abroad' (ibid, p. 13)! Moreover, the West's "other has been a narcissistic self-image through which it has constituted itself while never allowing it to achieve a perfect fit" (ibid, p. 17). From another vantage point of discussion, in terms of identification, the West and the East are inseparable from each other, for identity is defined in a reciprocal interaction between these two poles. To omit one part means to disregard the other side as well as both of them; thus, their identities rely on the presence of both. Thus as seen though dimly in the text, there are a lot of traces of East and West in both cultures.

Travel to the Orient was and is one of the prominent media through which the Western traveller enters into the process of understanding both his own culture and the culture of the 'Other.' Travel, as a productive activity produces knowledge. During his travels, the traveller is in the act of becoming, growing and developing. He learns through the travails and experiences of travel. From this viewpoint, Elliot explains the role of a traveller as an in-between in translating the undercurrent of a structure in contrast to a camera, in describing a mosque later in the book:

I had seen pictures of the mosque—or rather, portions of it but the inadequacy of the camera is driven home here; the camera can only convey a surface. But here the resonance and counterpoint of shape and colour and light all conspire together in an alchemy of exquisite balance. It has nothing of the monumental expanse of the Royal Mosque, but is jewel-like in its intensity. (2006, p. 71-2)

In the preceding chapters my argument was focused on dealing with Elliot's travel book based on Barthesian and Foucauldian analyses. Even though semiotics and hermeneutics are totally two different analytical and interpretive perspectives (I am not concerned with conflating them or making a bridge over the gap between them), what I am interested to show in this chapter is Elliot's position as a go-between in coming out of Orientalism, knowing the Other by delving into the underlying meaning of Persian monuments, in other words going to the process of travail and solving some mysteries

about Persia; like Hermes, the traveller is “associated with the function of transmuting what is beyond human understanding into a form that human intelligence can grasp” (Palmer, 1969, p.13) and his attempt in representing/translating the unfamiliar travellers to his own people paves the way for expanding his horizon of understanding. My understanding is that Elliot, through encountering the ‘Other’ (here the great works of art or architecture, for instance), deflates the dominant discourse about the East; in other words, his confrontation with the great works of art, architecture and people transforms and refreshes his gaze, which results in understanding his own self and the other better. In Gadamer’s words “our experience of the aesthetic too is a mode of self-understanding. Self-understanding always occurs through understanding something other than the self, and includes the unity and integrity of the other” (2004, p. 83).

One of the prominent changes which Elliot creates in the mode of travel writing is a shift from an objective-informative-representation into a subjective representation of the travellers. That’s why we might comment that he has made a turning point in the history of travel writing of the East. Unlike Western philosophy which considers the West as present, masculine and on the other hand the Orient as absent, feminine, one will find that through Elliot’s travel book, *Mirrors of the Unseen*, such binary oppositions, masculine/feminine, presence/absence, civilized/primitive, rational/irrational are not stable and seem to disappear. He, like a Derridian critic destabilizes these hierarchical oppositions, and thus dissociates himself from the preceding Western stereotyping of the Orient which undervalues the Orient as ‘inferior’, ‘irrational’, ‘passive’, ‘undisciplined’ and ‘sensual.’ The placement of such dichotomies are changed; i.e, when he is in the East (Here Persia), the East turns into present, masculine, rather than feminine and absent. Elliot’s insight (which differentiates him from the mere tourists) enables him to represent the Orient differently from the preceding travellers. It is an attempt to inscribe the ‘Other’ as Other, “outside the sphere of mastery” (Young, 1990, p.12). Elliot’s encountering and understanding the ‘Other’ is not based upon presenting the absence of a presence in order to be a presence, rather it is a matter of self-understanding. The image of the ‘Other’ functions as a hinge between Elliot and his self, which results in a self-formation.

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