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An Imagological Study of Literary Representations in Robert Hichens's *The Garden of Allah* (1904)

Presented by

GHAZALI Rebiha

GUECHOUD Lydia

Supervised by

Dr. NAAR/GADA Nadia

Board of Examiners

Chair, **Pr. SIBER Mouloud, UMMTO**

Supervisor, **Dr. NAAR/GADA Nadia, UMMTO**

Examiner, **Dr. SEDDIKI Sadia, UMMTO**

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Dedications

I dedicate this work to my beloved ones

To my parents; Dalila and Mahmoud for their endless love, support and encouragements.

To my lovely sisters Soumia and Bahdja.

To my dearest brothers Abdelmalek and Faissal with his wife Noara.

To my two nieces Rimas and Amira and my nephew Amir.

To all my friends and the people who were by my side.

Rebiha

I dedicate this work to these dearest people

To my father and mother; Mokrane and Rachida for their support and love

To my precious brother Hakim

To my sweet sisters Zina and Silia

To the person closed to my heart Hakim

All my family, thank you for being by my side.

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Abstract

The core of the present dissertation is an imagological study of literary representations, also called the analysis of “Cultural Images”, in *The Garden of Allah* (1904): a sensational and dramatic love story written by Robert Hichens. Through a close reading of the text, we investigated the ways in which the English author expresses his Western point of view through a narrative voice that emphasizes the spiritual significance of the landscape while ignoring the culture of its inhabitants. The dissertation is structured into two main chapters: the first examines the depiction of characters and how they reflect the dichotomy of "Self" versus "Other," while the second analyses the portrayal of the setting, focusing on how the desert landscape is depicted as "alien," "exotic," and "spiritual." In addition, we studied the main theme of the travelogue. In order to achieve our work, we relied on “Imagology” or the study of cultural images, “the image of”, one of the most important subdivisions of Comparative Literature. The aim behind this textual analysis using is to explore how Hichens constructs these dichotomies in the context of his own background, ideology, and audience. The results of our study revealed that Hichens depicts the British and Europeans as 'civilized' in contrast to the populations of the Algerian desert, who are portrayed as 'primitive' and 'backward.' The desert itself, on the other hand, is depicted as 'strange,' 'exotic,' and 'spiritual.' It reveals also how, as a romantic author, Hichens focuses heavily on the romanticized narrative of love between Androvsky and Domini rather than providing an objective description of the Algerian landscape and its people.

Keywords: Imagology, Cultural Images, Exoticism, Portraying, Stereotypes, Hostility, Travelogue.

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I. Introduction

> All seeing is essentially perspective, and so is all knowing. The more emotions we allow to speak in a given matter, the more different eyes we can put on in order to view a given spectacle, the more complete will be our conception of it, the greater our "objectivity." [1]

The above quote by the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche explains clearly our own perceptions and sensitivities of things and the knowledge we gain about other people's conceptions of the same things. This will be the starting point of our analysis of literary representations in *The Garden of Allah*, a novel set in the desert, which has been and is still a popular destination for travellers whether for exploration, profit, or the discovery of new lands.

The desert has been a cultural space for writers appearing in numerous reports and works by geographers, soldiers, explorers, adventurers, and tourists. Through its exciting landscapes, its symbols, and the unusual things happening there, it also inspired a variety of authors to write on it as an unlimited space. We can refer, for instance, to travel writers like Gustave Flaubert and Eugène Fromentin in the nineteenth century, Pierre Lotti and Isabelle Eberhardt in the twentieth century, Albert Camus, Mohammed Dib, Tahar Djaout, Rachid Boudjedra, Mouloud Mammeri, and many others.

However, the descriptions and images constructed by the different writers vary in many aspects according to the author, the time, and the context. The images provided of this infinite space by one of the foreign writers will be the focus of our study. *The Garden of Allah* (1904) is among the literary works that depicted the desert. It is a long romantic novel written by Robert Hichens, who liked travelling and became a travel writer. Hichens spent some time in Egypt and visited Switzerland, which was his favourite destination as a traveller. The focus of our analysis is to examine not his biography but his narrative, which belongs to travel writing genre and is inspired by his journeys to African countries like

Egypt and Algeria. However, before starting the examination of the text, it might be interesting to provide a brief definition of the literary genre we are mainly concerned with.

In the introduction of her thesis entitled *The Image of Spain in Dutch Travel Writing (1860-1960)*, Lily Coenen describes travel writing as "a complex and not easily definable genre".[2] The reason for its complexity is due to the fact that travel writing incorporates many other genres such as autobiography and ethnography. Yet, it may roughly be explained, according to this critic, as the possible encounter of the "Other" who is different from the "Self". It can also be the result of the meeting of two divergent cultures. According to Carl Thompson in his *Travel Writing* (2011), travel writing is a product of a movement in space, which involves an encounter between "Self" and "Other". This encounter leads to the negotiation of two various races. [3]

As said above, Hichens was among the many English travel writers who visited the Orient and portrayed it in their literary works. His dramatisation of the Algerian Desert in his travelogue made it wonderful. Through the narrative, Domini tries to escape the religious and social constraints that shaped the Western society during the Victorian age. To make it sensational, Hichens dramatises her story by focusing on her emotions; a feature of Romance. The latter opens up a wide field for expressing one's emotions and feelings, especially towards nature while it rejects exaggeration in glorifying the mind. Romantic writers took nature as a raw material for their literary works and escaped to it from the restrictions and rules of their societies, making it a place of peace and leisure, where they could meet new cultures and portray them through literary images.

An image is the main working concept in the field. On the one hand, image is understood as communication, especially visual communication or presentation. On the other hand, image is understood as a "mental picture" or idea. Imagology has adopted the latter meaning, whereby image is "the mental or discursive representation or reputation of

a person, group, ethnicity or 'a nation'.[4] At this point, it is essential to consider the critical reception of the novel.

Literature Review

The Garden of Allah is a long romantic novel written by Robert Hichens. The events of the story are set in the North African Desert, more precisely in Beni-Mora. It was published in 1904. It is worth mentioning that *The Garden of Allah* did not receive much critical acclaim when compared to Hichens's *Bella Donna* (1909). *The Garden of Allah* has received scarce criticism and it is more popular as a film thanks to Marlene Dietrich and Charles Boyer. The novel is also performed on the stage and was produced at the Century Theatre, New York on October 21st, 1911.

May Bateman is among the critics who studied the novel. In her article entitled *In "the Garden of Allah"* she claims that Hichens's novel is "a fine book, but still a finer play."[5] Her assertion is based on particular reasons. She writes that the play, the art of acting, the intonation of the spoken words and the appeal of the stricken human figures touch the audience more than the vision of suffering evoked by mere letterpress can do[6]. Moreover, she describes the play as a great religious play, which provided the possibility for the protagonists Domini and Androvsky to prioritize their faith over their desires. After examining and summarizing the events of the story, the critic concludes with the idea that human principles make our souls glorious, and no matter how much we try to break or transcend them, we return to them. Readers can observe in Boris's personality how he initially abandons his principles to marry Domini, only to ultimately leave her and return to the monastery.

In her review of the novel, Edna St. Vincent Millay, in her book *Rapture and Melancholy: the Diaries of Edna St. Vincent Millay* (2022), writes:

> People read "The Garden of Allah" and think the end is sad. Sad! They don't know anything about it. Domini finds her Man; she has him all to herself for a little

> while, and in that little while she lives all a woman can live. Then she loses him, and what has she left? Faith in God; the memory of a wonderful passion, and the child. They might have lived together longer, but not more.[7]

From this quotation, we understand that Edna St. Vincent Millay describes the novel from the point of view of a woman who had lost faith, who wants something and feels afraid of never finding it. She is comparing her emotional life to Domini's. According to her, loss does not mean the end; "what you have had is always yours"[8], even if you lose it, as Domini lost her man and is left with faith and memories.

Furthermore, the novel was studied from a postcolonial perspective by the Arab-American professor of history, Ussama Samir Makdisi. In his paper entitled *"Anti-Americanism in the Arab world: an Interpretation of a Brief History",* Makdisi addresses the issue of Anti-Americanism in the Arab world and offers a brief and interpretive account of the Arab American interactions over the past two centuries. According to him, *The Garden of Allah* (1904), along with other literary works such as the books of Mark Twain and the missionaries, the landscapes of Frederick Church and other artists, "contributed to the rise of a specifically American genre of Orientalism"[9]. This Orientalism portrayed the East as "premodern"[10], envisioned it as dreamy but squalid, separated the sacred landscape of the Holy Land from its native Arab inhabitants animating them as "Levantine dragomans, dirty natives, impious Mohammedans, or "nominal" Christians"[11] and misrepresented the Orient through promotions, novels, advertisements, trinkets, postcards and ultimately films.

Issue and Working Hypotheses

It follows from the above review of literature that most of the critical studies devoted to The Garden of Allah (1904) so far are limited merely to analysing the events of the story and describing the setting and the characters from different perspectives. However, to our limited knowledge, no work up to the present moment has undertaken the task of studying

the novel in depth through an imagological standpoint or suggested revising it through a reading based on such an approach. Therefore, our main objective is to carry out a new study, which consists of analysing this romantic travelogue, through finding the various literary representations as the main aspects of the novel. To achieve our goal, we shall read the novel, as mentioned earlier, under the theoretical concept of "Imagology" through our analysis of the novel's characters, setting, and themes in relation to the political, social and cultural context of the author himself since he depicts new cultures and tends to create a series of "images" about those called, "Others". In other words, Hichens reinforces the intellectual tradition of the Orient by stressing the differences rather than the common points between "East" and "West".

Methodological Outline

This dissertation is composed of two chapters. It opens with an introduction that outlines the main purpose of the study and includes a review of critical studies written on the work. It also raises the central issue and working hypotheses. In the Method and Materials section, we define the key concept of "Imagology" in relation to Travel Writing, which takes into consideration the different ways an author uses "Otherness" as a process of difference. Imagology has been regarded, by literary scholars, as a valuable tool in developing critical reading skills and enhancing an intercultural understanding. The concept can also be used when we have a world where reality is differently perceived, expressed and experienced across a great divide of mutual misunderstanding. After that, we introduce the connection between the author's life and the historical context that inspired him to write his romantic travelogue. This section will be followed by a synopsis of the novel. The results section outlines the key findings of our research. The discussion section is divided into two chapters. The first chapter is related to what René Wellek calls an "intrinsic analysis" where we analyse the form of the literary work. We examine the

characters of the novel by drawing parallels between English and Algerian figures, with particular attention to the representation of the English and Algerian women. The second chapter explores the description of the setting and the main theme of the novel. Finally, the dissertation concludes with a summary of the main ideas that we treated in this piece of research and offers suggestions about further possibilities for studying the novel. A selected bibliography is provided at the end, listing the references used in this study.

Endnotes

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11. Ibid.

II. Method and Materials

Imagology

Our study of literary representations in *The Garden of Allah* will be based on the theoretical concept of 'Imagology' which refers to the scientific study of the images provided by authors, especially travel writers, who engage in encounters with new and different cultures, regions and peoples. In these encounters, they construct consciously or unconsciously a set of images and sometimes stereotypes about the encountered races. Such representations often originate from preconceived ideas that travellers carry before their journeys.

Imagology, a long established specialism rooted in Comparative Literature, analyses the discursive articulations of such national characterizations; it studies them as a cross-national dynamics and from a transnational point of view. Imagology – an appellation which is less than perfect but by now too ingrained to tamper with – began as the study, in literary history, of images and representations of foreigners – l'etranger tel qu'on le voit – and was hailed, more than a half-century ago, by Jean-Marie Carré as a domaine d'avenir.[1]

Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen write that Imagology can be explained as "the critical analysis of national stereotypes in literature."[2] In this sense, Imagology "applies to research in the field of our mental images of the other and of ourselves."[3] Its significance resides in the fact that it is linked to these images. As Leerssen maintains, "Imagology is not a sociological pursuit seeking to question the truth of representations of national characters: '[t]he ultimate perspective of image studies is a theory of cultural or national stereotypes, not a theory of cultural or national identity."[4]

From the two theorists' explanations of this concept, we can say that "Imagology" is relevant to our study of Hichens's narrative, which focuses on an encounter between the

"Self" who is European, and the "Other" who is Algerian. Such a meeting also forms the basis of travel writing as a literary genre. Moreover, the analysis of the origin and function of stereotypes is the one of the main subjects of Imagology. As an area of literary studies, literary Imagology studies the way in which these stereotypes are presented in literary texts.[5]

Travel writing is a "popular genre that offers the reader a movement between the familiar and the unknown"[6] by "reinstating a firm sense of the differences that pertain between cultures, regions and ethnicities, and by dealing in stereotypes that are frequently pernicious."[7] According to Carl Thompson, the author of *Travel Writing* and a senior lecturer in English at Nottingham Trent University, the writing of travellers depicts new and different cultures in ways that make these cultures strange and unfamiliar. He writes:

> All travel writing must, arguably, engage in an act of othering in the first sense, since every travel account is premised on the assumption that it brings news of people and places that are to some degree unfamiliar and 'other' to the audience. More debatable, however, is whether all travel writing inevitably 'others' other cultures in the second, stronger sense of the term.[8]

The excerpt suggests that travellers tend to highlight the differences between themselves and others in the way they represent the latter. Travel writing played a major role in the 19th century, after travellers were given the opportunity to explore the "Other" and his lands.

When referring back to *The Garden of Allah,* we can notice that the narrative contains positive as well as negative images of the Algerian desert and its people. Therefore, in studying the origin of the negative images, we can often rely on Edward Said's observations in his book *Orientalism,* which examines the differences in literary works between the East and the West, since our novel is an example of such an encounter. According to Said, Europeans created an imaginative boundary by dividing the world into two distinct parts; the East and the West, the Orient and the Occident or the uncivilised and

the civilised for the purpose of distinguishing themselves from other cultures, which appear to them as "strange" and "exotic".[9]

Hichens's narrative is not an exception. The author chose North Africa -the Algerian Desert specifically- to be the setting of his travelogue. For him, it was the best place for an adventurous quest -a characteristic of Romance- and a place of leisure and peace. For Europeans, Africa, and the Orient in general, represented "a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences."[10] Travel writing has a long history in European culture. Its origins can be traced back to ancient Greece, although some examples from beyond Europe can be dated back much earlier. Homer's *Odyssey* often considered a model in European literature for the possibility of enriching the plot of story-telling by introducing the theme of travel.[11]

Considering the history of travel writing as a whole, we can conclude that the objective of travel as reflected in travel writing became mainly touristic (travel for recreational purposes) from the beginning of the 18th century. Secondly, there have been changes in travel writing that led to changes in the way travellers have perceived and defined themselves in encounters with others. This last development resulted, in the middle of the 19th century, in a traveller-tourist opposition where travellers highlighted the differences and contrasts between their own norms and those of the discovered land in terms of civilisation, culture and way of life.[12]

Subsequently, in the process of creating national stereotypes, the ideology of Romanticism, including its distinct exoticist viewpoint with its accent on diversity, proved to be strong and persistent. Literary contact thus became an essential means through which humanity could gain knowledge about the "Other" and the unfamiliar. *The Garden of Allah* is a narrative that depicts and describes an unknown land and its strange inhabitants through which Hichens reveals hidden aspects and where the English fascination with the

Algerian world and its desert population was developed in the minds of English writers. According to Beller and Leerssen, the main function of Imagology is to encourage the questioning of images and improve people's awareness of their purpose and impact. Its objective is to describe the origin, process and function of national prejudices and stereotypes to bring them to the surface, analyse them, and make people rationally aware of them.

After explaining the concept of "imagology" as a fundamental approach to be followed in our study and its relevance to the analysis of the novel. The present section provides a short biography of the author, the major events of the time in which he lived. These events shaped his standpoint, ideas, and beliefs which are reflected directly or implicitly in his novel. A synopsis of the novel follows.

Robert Hichens's Biography

If the historical context played an important role in shaping Hichens's narrative, his life trajectory and his multicultural background are transposed into his literary creations. In *The Garden of Allah*, Hichens ingeniously translates his experience into writings that combine fiction, biography and documentary to captivate his Western readers by engaging them in a sort of literary complicity. What follows is a short biography of the author, which is important not only for our understanding of the literary representations in his text, but also for discovering his impressions of the foreign countries he visited as well as his meetings with the native Algerians who are depicted as alien and different. The story is inspired by his own life and travel experiences and the dominant ideology of his time.

Robert Smythe Hichens was an English novelist, journalist, music lyricist and a short story writer who collaborated on successful plays. He is best remembered as a satirist of the "Naughty Nineties".[13] He was born on November 14th, 1864 in Speldhurst, Kent, a region situated in the South East of England. He was educated at Clifton College[14] as well

as a variety of other schools. His father, H. G. Hichens, served as the Canon of Canterbury. He wanted his son to study at Oxford, but Robert preferred a musical education[15] and his early ambition was to be a musician. Therefore, he studied for some years at the Royal College of Music. Later in life, he worked as a music critic for *The World* succeeding George Bernard Shaw[16]. He studied at the London School of journalism for a year, and after leaving it, he began to write, first for newspapers as a journalist and then as a short stories writer.[17]

One of the great aspects reflected in the novel is his love of travel. Hichens travelled to Tunisia and Egypt, which were among his favourite destinations. He was particularly drawn to it and first went there in the early 1890s for his health. For most of his later life, he lived abroad.[18]

Regarding his literary career as a writer, Hichens demonstrated early literary talents. His first novel *The Coastguard's Secret* (1886) was written when he was only seventeen. He became well known among the reading public with *The Green Carnation* (1894), a satire of his friends Oscar Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas. He wrote many fiction and nonfiction books, including: *An Imaginative Man* (1895), *Flames* (1897), *The Londoners* (1898), *The Slave*(1899), *Tongues of Conscience* (1900), *The Folly of Eustace* (1896) and *Felix* (1902).

In 1904, he produced *The Garden of Allah*, a romantic novel that gave him an international best-selling success.[19] Its narrative is based on the author's point of view about the Orientals and their way of living, particularly the Algerians of the Sahara. It tells the story of a young woman named ‘Domini’ and a trappist monk named ‘Boris’ who experience a new life in the North African desert (Algerian Desert). Hichens was a sociable man among writers; he was friends with many, including E.F. Benson and Reggie Turner as well as the composer Maude Valérie White. Sophie Fuller describes his

friendship with White in the following words: “White also had friendships with several gay men, [...] but her closest male relationship was with the novelist Robert Hitchens, whom she met in the late 1890s.”[20].

Hichens was known for his orientalist writing in some of his works. Egypt and Algeria served as settings for his *Bella Dona* and *The Garden of Allah*. He died in 1950 at the age of 85. Like Domini, Hichens wanted to flee the claustrophobic atmosphere of England and his travels made him a resourceful writer. It is important to mention the fact that like Oscar Wilde and Bernard Show, Hichens was a homosexual, who lived in a restricting society. Dennis Denisoff confirms that in *Aestheticism and Sexual Parody 1840-1940,* saying " like Douglas and Turner, Hichens was sexually attracted to men.”[21] They organized the "Naughty Nineties": which was a kind of revolt of lesbians and homosexuals against the strict laws and sex repression of the Victorian society.

As mentioned earlier, Hichens lived in the Victorian society and was not allowed to express his feelings and realise his phantasms. Therefore, he did it through his literary creations. For instance, he wrote *The Garden of Allah* as a way to recreate the spaces of liberty he longs for. This is evident through the main character 'Domini'; the English woman who is not happy in England because she feels imprisoned. So, she engages in a quest through the Algerian desert seeking for peace and freedom.

At last, Robert Hichens was a sensationalist who played with the emotions of his readers, as sensationalism refers, especially in journalism, to the presentation of stories in a way intended to provoke public interest or excitement at the expense of accuracy.

Synopsis of *The Garden of Allah*

The Garden of Allah is a love story set in Beni-Mora, a desert region situated in the south of Algeria. The events revolve around this romance, which happened during the period of French colonisation. The narrative is one of Robert Hichens’s popular desert

romances, characterized by its richness in the description of the setting and the characters. The author utilizes long sentences to describe the desert to play with the emotions of the reader and to make him feel as if he were really participating in that trip across the desert while reading the travelogue: the undulating sands, the heat, the garden and the passion of the various characters.

The narrative tells the story of an English woman named Domini Enfilden, who leaves England with her French maid Suzanne as her companion. She crosses the sea to Africa for the sake of self-discovery, trying to find relief from the perplexity of spirit and to escape her family problems. After her father's death, she escapes to the desert where no one knows her, hoping to begin a new life.

During her trip, she meets Boris Androvsky, a handsome man with a strange and discourteous temperament. At the train station, she also meets the Arab guide Batouch who offers his services as a servant, which she accepts. As the narrative progresses, Domini falls in love with Boris Androvsky without knowing that he is a fugitive Trappist monk who has taken a vow of silence and escaped the monastery on a quest to find passion.

Domini visits the famous garden of the desert and feels that her coming to the desert was the right decision. After going to a night club with Batouch and Suzanne to watch the erotic dance of Irena, she meets Boris again. The two seem to be caught in a wonderful dream, she has never before experienced such delicious recklessness where heart and mind were lightened by enthusiasm, reckless of thought or love. Although she receives many warnings about Boris from a nobleman, a priest and a sound-diviner, she does not stop loving him. They marry and depart for a honeymoon in the desert through a camel caravan accompanied by Arab retainers.

This story is eventually destined to sink in the sand when a French legionnaire reveals the truth about Boris's broken vows. His Monastery is failing because in his

absence they cannot brew their famous liqueur of which only Boris knows the recipe. Domini is heartbroken but decides that it is Boris's duty to return to the Monastery. After that, she begins a life of loneliness and sorrow brightened only by the birth of her child in whom she centres all her affection in addition to the solace of the desert.

Endnotes

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17- “Robert Hichens – Biography,” IMDb, accessed December 20, 2022, https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0382562/bio/?ref_=nm_ql_1.

18- John Sutherland, *The Stanford Companion to Victorian Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1989), 295.

19-Ibid., 295.

20-Sophie Fuller and Lloyd Whitesell, eds., *Queer Episodes in Music and Modern Identity* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 90.

21-Dennis Denisoff, *Aestheticism and Sexual Parody: 1840-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 115.

III. Results

In this dissertation, we explored the literary representations and the cultural images in Robert Hichens's *The Garden of Allah* (1904). This section presents the results reached through our analytical study of the novel. Overall, we examined how the author portrays Algerians and Europeans by applying the theory of Imagology, which is part of comparative literature. This theory is chosen because it scientifically studies and analyses of the images that authors construct about regions and peoples, including their own. Furthermore, we sought to identify the factors behind such constructions and their relation to the genres of Travel Writing and Romance.

The results of our study reveal that Hichens, in his travelogue, constructs images of the "Self" and the "Other" to depict the British and Europeans in general as "civilised" in contrast to the Algerian populations who are described as "primitive" and "backward" living in a desert that is "strange", "exotic", and "spiritual". The desert, as a central setting, serves both as a backdrop for the narrative and as a space that shapes the characters' experiences and emotions. As a romantic author, Hichens devotes a great amount of his narrative to portraying it as an open limitless space where the romantic love story between Androvsky and Domini took place. What matters most to his European characters is self-rediscovery, leisure, and excitement. The author fails to give attention to the Algerians and their civilisation.

We found that the novel belongs to both the Travel Writing genre -as Domini travels through Europe, then Italy, then the desert- and the Romance genre, reflecting her desire to escape the constraints of the British society and create a new life. We also identified the novel's central theme: the quest, linking the author's own life experiences to the travelogue. The following part will illustrate these findings through an examination of the novel's characters, setting, and theme.

IV. Discussion

This section examines how Robert Hichens represents the setting, characters, and themes in *The Garden of Allah* through the lens of imagology, a branch of comparative literature that "aims to understand a discourse rather than a society."[1] By applying imagology, we can explore how Hichens constructs cultural images and portrays interactions between Europeans and North Africans. The first chapter focuses on key characters, including Domini, Batouch, Hadj, Irina, Boris, Suzanne, and Count Anteoni. It also considers the representation of women, drawing comparisons between Domini, the European woman, and Algerian women—both veiled and unveiled—as well as the belly dancers. The second chapter turns to the novel's setting, highlighting its variety of images and symbolic significance. Finally, we analyse the central theme -the quest- considering how it shapes the characters' journeys and experiences. All of these elements are approached through the intertwined perspectives of travel writing, romance, and imagology.

Chapter One: the Representations of Characters

In this chapter, our focus will be on the literary representations of characters in *The Garden of Allah* and the ways in which they reflect cultural perceptions and imagological constructions. Drawing on the framework of Imagology, which examines how literary texts portray individuals and nations through the interplay of "Self" and "Other," this approach provides a useful lens for analysing how Robert Hichens depicts his European and Algerian figures.

Building on this theoretical framework, Imagology goes beyond the simple "Self–Other" dichotomy that shapes identity formation, by exploring the role of auto-images—the ways a nation perceives itself through history and cultural memory—in sustaining

national identity.[2] Through this lens, one can analyse how characters are depicted, not only as individuals but also as representatives of broader cultural groups. These portrayals reflect collective mentalities, cultural perceptions, and underlying power dynamics.[3]

1. The Representation of the Desert People (Batouch & Hadj specifically)

In Hichens' novel set in the great Sahara, the author narrates his characters' experiences and journeys, driven by what Carl Thompson describes as:

> A desire to escape the stifling moral codes of the Victorian era was also a factor for some travellers. Many Americans and North Europeans, accordingly, sought both authenticity and sensuality in the sunny climes of Italy and the Middle East.[4]

From a tourist's curious eye, Hichens provides a detailed picture of the Algerians by showing to the reader the strange country and its people. From the protagonist's destination to Beni-Mora, the authors' descriptions are negative. For him, the country (Algeria) is underdeveloped and its people live far from modernity: "Arabs in white burnouses, who were vociferously greeting friends in the train, were offering enormous oranges for sale to the passengers, or were walking up and down gazing curiously into the carriages."[5] Hichens, through his narrative, portrays the desert populations as poor and miserable, uncivilized, noisy, and primitive, when compared to the British. The local people, for instance, walk barefoot in the middle of the rainy weather, as the following excerpt illustrates:

> Twice she saw Arabs trudging along, holding their skirts up in a bunch sideways, and showing legs bare beyond the knees. Hoods hid their faces. They appeared to be agitated by the weather, and to be continually trying to plant their naked feet in dry places."[6]

This description illustrates clearly the author's misrepresentation of the Algerians. In another passage he reinforces his "gaze" using the narrative voice by fixing them to a stereotypical image:

> After a few minutes the Arabs she had noticed on the road entered. Their brown, slipperless feet were caked with sticky mud, and directly they found

> themselves under shelter in a dry place they dropped the robes they had been holding up, and, bending down, began to flick it off on to the floor with their delicate fingers. They did this with extraordinary care and precision, rubbed the soles of their feet repeatedly against the boards, and then put on their yellow slippers and threw back the hoods which had been drawn over their heads.[7]

This quotation shows how the Arabs, according to the author, do not know modern manners; they are always barefoot. They are so exotic for the British. The following statement describes their strange clothes: "Three or four Arab touts, in excessively shabby European clothes and turbans."[8] The word "excessively" denotes the way the novelist represents them as strange and exotic creatures. Such a distorted image can also be interpreted as part of an imaginary construction, which stands for the superiority of the British represented in contrast to the so-called and backward Algerians. Therefore, we can deduce that the author's vision is stereotypical. According to Leerssen many elements can make an image ambivalent. He would refer to ambivalent images that can be applied to different kinds of situations . If images change, they do so not because the character of the nation changes, but because the attitude towards the nation changes, as cultural discontinuities and differences (in the form of languages, mentalities, everyday habits, and religions) trigger positive or negative judgements and attitudes.[9]

Nevertheless, imagology remains a comparative enterprise, addressing cross-national relations by drawing attention to the fact that any image is constructed according to a differential principle that restricts identity to particularism. When studied as a multicultural phenomenon, dichotomic coordinates like those established between the pragmatic North and the sensuous South, the backward periphery and the modern centre, or the masculine West.[10]

In this context, Hichens, throughout his novel, offers a specific image of the Algerian people and expresses his sense of difference. This portrayal aligns with Edward

Said's critique of the Western misrepresentation of other races, as reflected in the following passage:

> Reflection, debate, rational argument, moral principle based on a secular notion that human beings must create their own history, have been replaced by abstract ideas that celebrate American or Western exceptionalism, and regard other cultures with derisive contempt."[11]

From this passage we understand that according to Said, Orientalist writers often depict Easterners as naïve, decadent, and strange while Westerners are represented as rational, good and mature which means that "two different races and cultures are represented in binary opposition."[12]

This binary opposition of "they" versus "us" and "their" versus "our" is evident in Hichens's narrative. Domini, for example, observes the desert dwellers as follows:

> She was surprised to find how much at home she felt in the midst of these fierce and uncivilized-looking people. She had no sense of shrinking from their contact, no feeling of personal disgust at their touch. When her eyes chanced to meet any of the bold inquiring eyes around her she was inclined to smile as if in recognition of these children of the sun who did not seem to her like strangers, despite the unknown language that struggled fiercely in their throats. Nevertheless, she did not wish to stay very long among them now. [13]

Through such descriptions, Hichens constructs a visible gap between the British woman and the desert people; terms like, "fierce", "children of the sun" and "strange language" mark instances of Othering, emphasizing their perceived difference. The novel's narrative voice valorises the British self –Domini is portrayed as a goddess-like figure– while devalorising the Algerians, portraying them as childish, ignorant, and primitive. Their culture, traditions, and religious practices are depicted with limited attention to their depth and spiritual significance. One example is the depiction of prayer, where the narrator reduces a profound act of worship to a mere physical movement: The narrator tells:

> As she spoke the thin, nasal cry of a distant voice broke upon her ears, prolonging a strange call. The Mueddin," said Count Anteoni. And he repeated in a low tone the words of the angel to the prophet: "Oh thou that art covered arise and magnify thy Lord; and purify "thy clothes, and depart from uncleanness." The call died away and was renewed three times. The old man and the boy beneath the tower turned their faces towards Mecca, fell upon their

> knees and bowed their heads to the hot stones. The tall Arab under the palm sank down swiftly. [14]

The excerpt portrays Muslim religious worship as unfamiliar to the narrator, reinforcing the idea of otherness. He also expresses this difference through the line: "He called men in from the desert. Domini fancied his voice echoing along the sands till the worshippers of Allah and of his Prophet heard it like a clarion in Tombouctou."[15] The description suggests that the narrator perceives the Mueddin's call as unusual, indicating his lack of familiarity with Islamic practices.

Furthermore, the narrator mentions *al-henna*, one of the Arabs traditions, "He [a boy] rubbed the tip of his brown nose, and she saw the henna stains upon his nails."[16] He also describes Larbi's music -an element of his cultural expression- as "whimsical", "wild and extraordinary"[17] emphasizing his perception of Arab traditions as exotic and unfamiliar.

Hichens depicts the Arabs through Suzanne's perspective, emphasizing their perceived dirtiness and danger: "The porter of the omnibus tells me they are dirty and very dangerous. They carry knives, and their clothes are full of fleas."[18] Suzanne, described as French, reacts fearfully to the crowd: "She felt that they needed a protector in this mob of shouting brown and black men, who clamoured about them like savages, exposing bare legs and arms, even bare chests, in a most barbarous manner."[19] Her remarks reveal the narrator's use of stereotypical and colonial imagery in representing the Arabs.

In imagology, an image is "the mental or discursive representation or reputation of a person, group, ethnicity or nation."[20] It resembles a cognitive schema that shapes one's perception and behaviour toward the 'other'. Imagologists distinguish between the auto-image (self-image) and the hetero-image: the first refers to a self-perception shared within a group, while the latter designates how others perceive that group.[21]

Hichens describes: “two Arabs, in dirty white burnouses and turbans bound with cords of camel’s hair,”[22] suggesting that the Algerians live in poverty and rely on simple, locally available materials, such as camel hair, for clothing. As a member of the bourgeois class, Domini experiences both a geographical and emotional displacement in moving from North to South. She seeks freedom and respite from social constraints by escaping from England to Algeria, as Africa is often portrayed by Europeans as a space offering liberty from strict societal norms. However, her perception of the region and its inhabitants reflects a generalized vision of the East, consistent with Edward Said’s observation that “the Western tradition declares the Eastern as uncivilized in opposition to the Western, who is civilized.”[23] British and French travellers frequently journey to the desert to pursue personal freedom, adventure, and new experiences, often without consideration of the local population or their realities.

The narrator highlights the physical appearances of the Arabs in Biskra through Domini’s perspective:

> She started when a low voice spoke to her in French, and, turning round, saw a tall Arab boy, magnificently dressed in pale blue cloth trousers, a Zouave jacket braided with gold, and a fez, standing near her. She was struck by the colour of his skin, which was faint as the colour of cafe au lait.[24]

This description emphasizes differences in skin colour and traditional dress, which contrast with contemporary Western fashion. Another passage portrays the Arabs in the alleys as “‘wandering ghosts’ intent on unholy errands or returning to the graveyard.”[25] This representation exemplifies a dehumanizing stereotype that casts the Arabs as exotic, uncanny, and fundamentally “other,” reinforcing a hierarchical vision in which European identity is positioned as civilized and superior.

Hichens sometimes depicts the Arabs as careless people who do not care about the future of their children. They send them to dancing-houses instead schools for learning.

> This is the best dancing-house. The children dance here." Domini's height enabled her to peer over the shoulders of those gathered before the door, and in the lighted distance of a white- walled room, painted with figures of soldiers and Arab chiefs, she saw a small wriggling figure between two rows of squatting men, two baby hands waving coloured handkerchiefs, two little feet tapping vigorously upon an earthen floor, for background a divan crowded with women and musicians, with inflated cheeks and squinting eyes. She stood for a moment to look, then she turned away. There was an expression of disgust in her eyes. "No, I don't want to see children," [26]

Hichens represents the Arabs' clothes as pale and do not please the eye of the British.

> Along which many of the Arab aristocracy were, indolently strolling, carrying lightly in their hands, small red roses or springs of pink geranium.in their white robes they looked, she thought, like monks, though the cigarette many of them were smoking fought against the illusion. Some of them were dressed like Batouch in pale-coloured cloth. [27]

In Hichens's narrative, a stark social and cultural hierarchy is established between the British and the Algerians. The British are depicted as dominant figures, while the Algerians occupy a subservient role, functioning primarily as helpers or attendants. This positioning not only emphasizes their "inferior" status but also reinforces a binary distinction between the colonizer and the colonized. The portrayal of Domini exemplifies this dynamic: she is idealized as a "queen" surrounded by obedient servants, described as "the great lady of the most respectable England!"[28] Her authority is uncontested, and even Batouch, when requesting an early meeting and Domini refuses, he is rendered powerless, responding with "an expression that was tragically submissive."[29]

From an imagological perspective, this representation reflects a constructed hetero-image of the Algerians as deferential and subordinate, defined primarily in relation to the British self. The text does not merely describe individual behaviour but situates the Algerians within broader cultural stereotypes that reinforce power imbalances. Domini's elevated status and the obedience of the Arabs serve as narrative mechanisms through which Hichens' work both delineates cultural difference and naturalizes hierarchical relations between "Self" and "Other." Such representations bear "the imprint of a

Eurocentric colonial and imperialist perspective" that retains a haughty and conceited tone, characteristic of the male writers of that period.[30]

In another scene, this hierarchy is reinforced through Domini's encounter with an Arab porter who "made a greedy dive" for a dropped coin, forcing her to wait. The narrator tells,

> He dropped the coin, which fell down between the step of the carriage and the platform. The Arab immediately made a greedy dive after it, interposing his body between Domini and the train; and she was obliged to stand waiting while he looked for it, grubbing frantically in the earth with his brown fingers, and uttering muffled exclamations, apparently of rage." [31]

This brief episode exemplifies how Hichens oscillates between portraying Arabs as loyal servants sometimes –Batouch as an example- and as figures marked by greed or poverty. Even when presented positively, they remain confined within the limits of servitude — their actions and value defined in relation to the European gaze. The porter scene, therefore, underscores how such depictions sustain a subtle but persistent hierarchy between the European observer and the Algerian "Other."

The image of Batouch

Unlike the other Arabs who are mostly portrayed as dangerous and barbarian, Batouch is shaped as a loyal and dignified man who provides help and security to the English lady all over her long journey across the desert. He is the first person Domini speaks to upon her arrival, as the following conversation indicates:

> Batouch, who had emerged from a third-class compartment before the train stopped, followed them closely, and as they reached the jostling crowd of Arabs, which swarmed on the roadway, he joined them with the air of a proprietor. 'Which is Madame's hotel?'[32]

He is represented as a faithful and attentive guide who goes with Domini everywhere whenever she asks him; such as her visit to the new town of Beni-Mora and the Gardens in the desert. She feels safe with him; telling Suzanne, "No, no. Batouch will protect us."[33] Hichens emphasizes Batouch's devotion and reliability towards his lady; he serves,

defends, and protects her. The following expression proves the point: "Madame is my client," he said fiercely. "Madame trusts in me."[34]

The image of Hadj

Hadj is depicted as selfish, treacherous and defective; an image that is given to all Arabs in general. He is represented as a deceitful person, who cares only about getting money and does not know how to spend this money: “He has earned a great deal of money and now he has none. To-night he is very gay, because he has a client.”[35] For Hichens, Hadj is greedy and he exploits the generosity of the tourists to gather money: “Hadj is very anxious to buy a costume at Tunis for the great fete at the end of Ramadan. It will cost fifty or sixty francs. He hopes the Englishman is rich. But all the English are rich and generous.”[36] The character of Hadj is villain because he breaks girls’ hearts such as Aishoush and Irena without regretting his behaviour or feeling sorry about them, all he cares about is his interests. The next image that conveys the extreme barbarism of the Arabs is that of their girls, such as Aishoush and Irina, which will be discussed later.

2. The Representation of the Foreigners (Boris, Count Anteoni, and Suzanne)

In this section, we shall examine how the non- Algerian characters in Robert Hichens novel are depicted and explain why they are portrayed as powerful, wealthy and superior to the local populations.

The Images of Boris Androvsky

Hichens continues his romanticized representations through Boris Androvsky, a man of mixed origins—English by his mother and Russian by his father—whose portrait echoes that of the classic romantic hero. He is a handsome and attractive man, a figure of physical strength and magnetic masculinity who awakens Domini’s emotions:

> She thought it was the most male voice she had ever heard. it seemed to be full of sex […]he was a big man , but very thin , her experienced eyes of an athletic

> woman told her that he was capable of great and prolonged muscular, exertion [….]he had nervous as well as muscular strength .[37]

Yet beneath this manly image lies deep spiritual tension. Boris is a former Trappist monk, a man who has lived in silence and asceticism, withdrawn from worldly and sensual experience. He escaped from the monastery for mysterious reasons to the Algerian desert. This action carries strong symbolic resonance: the desert is the lawless, borderless space where he seeks freedom from religious constraint but ends up confronting his own moral and emotional disorder. Throughout the narrative, Androvsky is most of the time silent and in a state of anxiety and uneasiness. It is through this character that Hichens creates and maintains suspense that catches the reader's attention.

When he encounters Domini, her openness and attraction unsettle him. Accustomed to silence and repression, Boris struggles to adapt to emotional and social interaction. As the passage illustrates,

> He turned round swiftly, yet somehow reluctantly, looked at her anxiously, and seemed doubtful whether he would reply […] he answered, in French: "Very wonderful, Madame." The sound of his own voice seemed to startle him. He stood as if he had heard an unusual noise which had alarmed him"[38]

His nervousness intensifies during their marriage. Hichens stresses his strange reactions while meeting Father Roubier. The priest's presence makes him very nervous and the contact with religious symbols reminds him of the vows he abandoned: "He started, leaned across the table and stared at the crucifix with eyes that were full of amazement mingled with horror."[39] The quote highlights Boris's inner conflict and anxiety, especially around religion, showing his unstable state and fear of spiritual confrontation.

From an imagological perspective, Boris represents the Western self-image in crisis—a man torn between spiritual idealism and human desire. His discomfort in the desert reflects not only his personal guilt but also the broader European anxiety toward the moral "freedom" of the Orient. Through him, Hichens contrasts the disciplined, self-

contained Western man with the sensual and liberating Eastern environment, turning Boris into a mirror of the Western conscience struggling to maintain control in a world that dissolves it.

The portrait of Count Anteoni

This character is also portrayed in a positive way as a sort of spiritual guide who presents the desert and its people to Domini. He willingly answers her questions kindly and helps her to know about these new people with whom he lived for a long time. He is an experienced and great man who knows and mingles with the Arabs. “Evidently the Count was the great personage of Beni-Mora. Batouch spoke of him with a convinced respect, describing him as fabulously rich, fabulously generous to the Arabs.”[40] Count Anteoni is an Italian who spend his life in Beni-Mora living with Arabs as if he belongs to them.

Hichens gives a strong image to this character, the owner of Garden of the desert where the Arabs work: “Twenty Arabs are always working in the garden, and at night ten Arabs with guns are always awake, some in a tent inside the door and some among the trees.”[41] Count Anteoni appear as an interesting character , the man who gives money to poor and needy Arabs “he comes to the gate with a bag of money in his hand, and he gives five franc pieces to every Arab who is there."[42]

Hichens juxtaposes two contrasting images throughout his narration: the power and affluence of Westerners, exemplified by the Italian Count, against the poverty and dependence of the Arabs. This contrast reinforces the imagined divide between the prestigious, civilized West and the backward, inferior East — a dichotomy deeply rooted in the author’s imagination.

In addition, Hichens glorifies the luxury of the Western community by depicting its members as accustomed to a life of refinement and privilege, exemplified by Count Anteoni’s generosity toward the Arabs. This is illustrated in the passage: “he has made

gardens everywhere he has three in Africa alone […] each Friday upon our Sabbath , he comes to the gate with a bag of money in his hand , and he gives five franc pieces to every Arab who is there."[43] Such a portrayal reinforces the cultural opposition between the two races. While Italians are portrayed as generous, the British remain implicitly superior — maintaining the hierarchy within the Western imagination.

The Racist and Paternalist Attitude of Suzanne

In *The Garden of Allah,* the French character Suzanne Charpot, Domain's maid who accompanied her across her journey in the desert of Algeria, embodies the ethnotype of the French in perceiving Algerians as dangerous, inferior, and fearful. This analysis relies on the concepts of imagology introduced by Beller & Leerssen, who explain that the "image" of the other is a mental silhouette shaped by the characteristics of family, group, tribe, people, or race. These images govern opinions and behaviour, where cultural differences trigger negative judgments.[44] Suzanne's character is a literary vehicle for this cultural representation, displaying a deep-seated lack of comfort and dissatisfaction with her surroundings. The author paints her "round, white face… puffy with fatigue" and her eyes, "generally good-natured," as "dreary" as she interacts with locals, establishing her alienation from the outset.[45] Her arrogance is clear as she complains constantly and expresses her disdain, notably refusing "this Arab stuff,"[46] a statement that immediately marks her difference and sense of superiority.

Through Suzanne, Hichens creates an atmosphere of strangeness for the reader; her fear, discomfort, and prejudice toward the Arabs and the desert make the reader also experience the place as strange, distant, and foreign just as she does. Suzanne's attitude widens the gap between the French and the Arabs, a division rooted in her evident feeling of insecurity. This is reinforced when a crowd of Arabs shouts and she "started nervously and looked at Domini with sincere apprehension" and plead to her lady, "We had better not

go, Mam'zelle. It is not safe out here. Men who make a noise like that would not respect us."[47] This reaction clearly reflects the negative imagological construct of Arabs as inherently threatening and chaotic.

Critically, Suzanne is not just any foreigner; she is French. Her attitudes are not merely personal quirks but reflect the specific paternalistic and racist mind-set of the French colonizer in the early 1900s. Through her, Hichens captures a social reality of the time: the deep-seated fear and sense of superiority that many French settlers held toward the Algerian population they governed. Thus, the character of Suzanne moves beyond mere fiction; she becomes a depiction of a prevailing colonial attitude, using the imagological process of "othering" to present the local population as violent, inferior, and disrespectful, thereby justifying the very power dynamics that defined the era.

3. The Idealisation of Domini

Domini is constructed not merely as a character but as an idealized embodiment of Western—specifically British—femininity. Her portrayal serves an imagological function, establishing a hierarchy where the European woman is depicted as superior to her Algerian counterpart.

Domini is different from the other characters of the novel. She is defined by a catalogue of virtues: wealth, intelligence, independence, bravery, and physical strength, being a “strong and active woman, with long limbs and well-knit muscles, a clever fencer, a tireless swimmer, a fine horsewoman.”[48] Her intellectualism is highlighted by her choice of reading material; from theological works to sporting manuals, “Two of the books that she called her "bed-books" lay within easy reach of her hand. One was Newman's /Dream of Gerontius, the other a volume of the Badminton Library. She chose the former and began to read.”[49] These traits collectively illustrate a model of the modern, capable British woman, a figure of sophistication and effectiveness alongside with her longing for liberty

and peace and explain why she is superior to the Algerian woman who is portrayed in a traditional and conservative role — either confined to domestic duties, dependence, and a lack of individual freedom or lubricious.

This idealization is central to the narrative, as all events revolve around her quest for self-discovery. Driven by dissatisfaction with a life in England of "doing dreary things—things without savour, without meaning, without salvation,"[50] she embarks on a journey to Algeria for self-fulfilment and change. Her resolve is emphasized through the hardships she willingly endures—"stormy voyage"[51], sleepless nights, and arduous travel—all of which reinforce her admirable and resilient image. Even her use of drugs is framed not as a moral failing but as an understandable response to her circumstances, further insulating her character from criticism. As the writer says, "She wished to sleep, and drank a dose of a drug. It did not act completely, but only numbed her senses."[52]

The idealization extends to her lineage, grounding her virtues in a superior European heritage. Her mother is described as a "great beauty of the gipsy type" from a prominent Catholic family, and her father was a "life guardsman" from a strong social position[53] and he left her "a large fortune." This portrayal of English society, through her parents, is implicitly contrasted with the Algerian society depicted elsewhere in the novel. Hichens thus establishes a clear racial and cultural dichotomy: he valorises the Western woman as the holder of virtue and agency, while Arab women are relegated to stereotypical roles of dependence or exotic sensuality. Domini's character, therefore, is not just an individual but also a symbolic construct, representing a Western ideological claim to moral, cultural, and gendered superiority.

4. The Images of Desert Women (Veiled Women and Belly Dancers)

The representation of Algerian women in Hichens's narrative serves a precise imagological function: to embody a series of pejorative stereotypes that highlight the

perceived superiority and modernity of the Western woman by contrast. This is established through the figure of Domini, whose independence, strength, and personal agency are explicitly celebrated—she is "in a singularly independent […] situation"[54] and proudly states that "In England there are many strong women."[55] Against this Western ideal, the complexity of Algerian womanhood is erased and replaced by a limiting binary. They are confined to one of two reductive roles: the veiled woman, defined by her perceived oppression and lack of freedom, and the non-veiled or the belly dancer, reduced to an erotic spectacle and a symbol of primitive sensuality. This dichotomy conveys a message; that the Algerian woman, whether portrayed as pathetic or degenerate functions as a foil against which the English heroine appears more civilized, liberated, and virtuous.

What is more important to our analysis of images is the author's stress on the erotic aspects of the Algerian women. The representation of Irina and the other belly dancers illustrates the point.

The Depictions of Veiled Women

Veiled women are generally portrayed as ghost-like figures, their fully veiled bodies evoke mystery and absence. Their physical appearance is described through details that suggest heaviness and excess — the weight of ornaments, the brightness of fabrics, and the strangeness of colours. Hichens writes,

> Once Domini saw two women, in thin, floating white dresses and spangles veils, hurrying by like ghosts in the dark. Heavy silver ornaments jangled on their ankles, above their black slippers splashed with mud. Their sombre eyes stared out from circles of Kohl, and, with stained, claret-coloured hands, whose nails were bright red, they clasped their light and bridal raiment to their prominent breasts.[56]

This description constructs a degrading image shaped by the Western gaze — a fixed vision of Arab women that reduces them to exotic and ghost-like figures. Furthermore, these women are depicted as accepting male domination without resistance, "They were escorted by a gigantic man [...] He pushed the two women into the train as if he were pushing bales, and got in after them."[57]

Through such imagery, Hichens reinforces a vision of Algerian women as submissive and silenced, in contrast to the liberated, independent and strong Western women. In imagological terms, this portrayal exemplifies the hetero-image — the representation of the 'other' shaped by the Western observer's cultural assumptions. The Arab woman becomes a constructed image that mirrors and reaffirms the Western auto-image of freedom and modernity.

The Portrait of the Belly Dancers

The second category of Algerian women is those who are not veiled. Hichens represents them as having only one value-that of their bodies. Deprived of any source of income, they dance to earn money. They are actually prostitutes as the following statement makes it clear by depicting one of them leaning and smoking cigarettes:

> Her features were narrow and pointed. Her bones were tiny, and her body was so slender, her waist so small, that, with her flat breast and meagre shoulders, she looked almost like a stick crowned with a human face and hung with brilliant draperies. Her hair, which was thick and dark brown, was elaborately braided and covered with a yellow silk handkerchief.[58]

The quote indirectly expresses echoes the Western gaze at Algerian women; living in hard conditions that make them look slender and thin and force them to work as dancers to earn their living. That miserable life has made women work with primitive tools and use looks marked by woollen plaits, the barbaric ornaments and the red coral jewelleries; another image that is part of the phantasm of Western authors.

> Halfway up the street, he met three unveiled women clad in voluminous white dresses, with scarlet, yellow, and purple handkerchiefs bound over their black hair. He stopped and the women took the cups with their henna tinted fingers.[59]

This description highlights the strangeness of the local customs, ways of life and the appearance of Algerian women.

Hichens provides a detailed description of the inhabitants of "Djurdjura" and "La Grande Kabylie". What is striking, according to him, is that Kabyle women are so oppressed that they "often sin."[60] They deviate from the socially established norms. Irena,

a belly dancer with legendary charm and beauty, is one example. As many Kabyle women often do, she fled from the oppression that was exerted on her, her Kabyle blood as the narrator tells,

> A brew composed of various strains, Greek, Roman, as well as Berber, were mingling some drops drawn from desert sources, which had manifested themselves physically in her dark hair, mentally in a nomadic instinct which had forbidden her to rest among the beauties of Ait Ouaguennoun.[61]

Her melancholic face reflects an involuntary exile. She dances erotically to please her clients, resembling the belly dancers in the harems of the *One Thousand and One Night*. Irina, like the Ouled Naïl dancers, arouses the curiosity of the western readership.[62]

More importantly, Hichens reproduces Western stereotypes about the Ouled Nail dancers as objects of sexual desires who seduce men at the dance-houses. They stand for seduction, depravity and are associated with prostitution. This excerpt illustrates such a degrading picture:

> The dancing woman had observed him, and presently she began slowly to wriggle towards him between the rows of Arabs, fixing her eyes upon him and parting her scarlet lips in a greedy smile[..] she approached, waving her red hands, shaking her prominent breasts, and violently jerking her stomach, he sat straight up, and then, as if instinctively trying to get away from her, pressed back against the wall, hiding the painting of the Ouled Nail and the French soldier.[63]

Hichens, as a travel writer, projects his blocked fantasies and imagines himself as a master surrounded by beautiful women ready to serve him. In the same context, Simon Henry Leeder writes,

> And what an exciting scene of pulsation, nervous life this quarter of Biskra is when nightfall has caused the little electric street lights to twinkle, the candles to flicker by the doorways, the dancing cafés to wake up to a crowded activity." Sexual gratification was sought in these streets where women were objectified. A visit to these quarters became a must and was associated with youthful rites of passage.[64]

Many travel writers who visited Algeria wrote about the Naïliyat. According to Dr. Sadia Seddiki, Fromentin's *Un été dans le sahara* (1857) is "one of the first books to mention the Naïliyat and link them to light morality and prostitution. Fromentin visited the

Sahara before the 1870s when the Ouled Naïl women became a common theme in most, if not all, travel writings on Algeria.**"**[65] Fromentin writes:

> Boghari, qui sert de comptoir et d'entrepôt aux nomades, est peuplée de jolies femmes, venues pour la plupart des tribus sahariennes Ouled Nayl, A'r'azlia, etc., où les moeurs sont faciles, et dont les filles ont l'habitude d'aller chercher fortune dans les tribus environnantes. Les Orientaux ont des noms charmants pour déguiser l'industrie véritable de ce genre de femmes; faute de mieux, j'appellerai celles-ci des danseuses.[66]

She also cites the American traveller Alexander Powell who travelled to Biskra specifically to watch the "sirens of the deserts", as he calls the Ouled Naïl dancers. He writes, "From earliest childhood they are trained for a life of indifferent virtue very much as a horse is trained for the show-ring."[67] The quote reflects the Western perception of Algeria as a space where women are inherently prepared for sexual display, reinforcing the Orientalist trope of the "naturalized" eroticism of the Orient.

Hichens suggests sensational and erotic images to inform his readers of the possibilities, which the desert offers. He makes his audience sense the sexual liberties that he finds in the Algerian desert and cannot experience in Europe; being in the dancing house, surrounded by dancers, who are represented as objects of sex and women available for sexual experience.

We can deduce that Hichens follows the nineteenth century European literary tradition, which divided the world into Europe, as the centre, and the other countries, as peripheries. The author has provided an illustration of Western dominance over the Orient. His narrative makes Africa appear as a continent that has no significant historical or cultural reality. *The Garden of Allah*, like French and English texts, is based on the stereotypes fabricated by Western imagination and phantasmagorical desires. It reinforces the existing clichés and exotic descriptions, which serve as justifications for the feeling of hostility and strangeness.

To satisfy an audience that wishes to affirm his occidental superiority, Hichens creates a sensational picture of the desert. Intrinsically, the Western characters are regarded as being civilized and advanced, whereas the nameless Arabs are considered as primitive and savage. He then develops the concept of exoticism, which means focusing on difference and otherness; a representation in which people, places and cultural practices are depicted as unfamiliar. Moreover, the desert is considered as a land of mystery, liberty and spirituality as it will be illustrated through our analysis of the setting.

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Chapter Two: The Representation of the Setting

Since this dissertation adopts an imagological framework, the following chapter explores how the Algerian landscape is represented in *The Garden of Allah*. The focus is not on the geographical or historical accuracy of these depictions, but on how they reflect Western imaginative patterns. This tradition has deep roots, as Hsu Ming Teo notes,

> European travellers such as William Lithgow and Laurent d'Arvieux made journeys into North Africa in the seventeenth century, but it was only in the nineteenth century that the Arabian Desert was explored by increasing numbers of European travellers. These men were highly individualistic, observant travellers as well as gifted writers.[1]

This historical context gave rise to a powerful cultural phenomenon. As Osman Bencherif writes,

> The desert has continued, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to hold for Westerners, an almost mystical fascination. Thanks to impressions largely derived from many popular novels of romance and adventures as well as films, the desert became, in the first third of the twentieth century, an essential motif in Western imaginative geography.[2]

The novel's descriptions of the desert, the garden, and the sacred spaces reveal this complex coexistence between fascination and fear- a combination of admiration for the landscape's vastness and beauty, and anxiety about its perceived strangeness. Through this lens, the Algerian setting emerges not as a mere backdrop, but as a symbolic and cultural construct shaped by Western ways of seeing.

1. The Symbolic Aspects of the Algerian Desert

As Beller and Leerssen note, "Ethnotypes take shape in a discursive and rhetorical environment. They are representative of literary and discursive conventions, not of social realities."[3] Accordingly, representations of peoples and nations in literature are rarely neutral or factual; they follow recognizable cultural patterns and conventions that reflect a society's imagination more than its reality. This theoretical insight is crucial for understanding how European writers have historically depicted the Arab world.

They represent it as a distant, exotic and mysterious place full of interracial fantasies. Often, the desert appears as a land of "barbarism and savagery but also, paradoxically, as a space of sensuousness and opulence, sexuality and romantic love."[4] This binary opposition is part of a broader cultural construction. As Imagology scholars explain, "The study of our images of any other nation, as well as of our own, will single out the significantly active prejudices, stereotypes and clichés from the total complex of imaginary images."[5] Thus, Western literary depictions of the Algerian desert reveal as much about European imagination as about the land itself.

Robert Hichens opens his travelogue with a vivid picture of the place where his heroine, Domini Enfilden, resides: the "Hotel de la Mer at Robertville". The scene is surrounded by 'the cafes', 'the sandy Place de la Marine' where Arab boys play, the 'dusky bazaars of the Israelites', the wandering 'gendarmes', a 'few French and Spaniards at the Port' and finally "the steamer Le General Bertrand, in which Domini had arrived that evening from Marseilles."[6] The description, clearly directed to Western readers, signals the departure toward a different land–one inhabited by Arabs, Israelites, French, Spaniards, and now the English newcomer, Domini. Through this opening, Hichens contrasts two worlds: the modern, industrial Marseilles, with "its tangle of tall houses, its forest of masts, its long, ugly factories and workshops,"[7] and the alien environment of North Africa. Domini feels afraid of what might be in this "new and dark country."[8] The passage thus foreshadows the confrontation between Europe and Africa that will shape her journey. As noted in a Master's dissertation analysing Orientalist representations in *The Immoralist* and *The Sheik*, "the desert is associated with freedom, peace and romantic love but it remains conceived as a place of barbarism and danger."[9]

Hsu Ming Teo explains that because of France's prolonged presence in North Africa, "many nineteenth-century British-authored Oriental novels tend to be set in

Algeria."[10] Similarly, Hichens situates his novel in Beni-Mora, drawing inspiration from the desert, which is depicted as a place of peace, solitude and adventure. He fills his work with stunning images of the desert. For instance: "She wanted freedom, a wide horizon, the great winds, the great sun, the terrible spaces, the glowing, shimmering radiance, the hot, entrancing moons and bloomy, purple nights of Africa."[11] The quote conveys her longing for the desert's vastness, warmth, and sense of release from worldly ties. He adds; "She felt the brave companionship of mystery. In it she divined the beating pulses, the hot, surging blood of freedom."[12]

Through his sensationalist description of the desert, Hichens shapes his narrative as the late Victorian romances. His main interest is to present the mysterious Orient through sensational images rather than "documenting and supporting European colonial rule."[13] Moreover, Hichens is a sensationalist writer, which means that he plays with the emotions of the reader through his shaping of setting and characters. As any Victorian writer, he was not allowed to be different from the norm or fashion of his day. Therefore, he needed to express himself elsewhere and his literary work was the perfect vessel where he makes Africa, precisely the desert, the recreation of the Victorian society he longed for.

It is important to note that a key concept, appearing indirectly in *The Garden of Allah*, is the 'Grand Tour', "an extended visit, lasting sometimes as long as two years, to the European continent, and especially to France and Italy."[14] The traveller was also meant to visit the remains of the Roman antiquity. Before journeying to the desert, Domini undertakes a trip through southern Europe, thereby completing this Grand Tour.

Hichens, at times, portrays the place as strange and at the same time empty, as if Domini turns away from the whole world to come to this spot where no one knows her; an unknown land full of rocks, no movement and no life. He states: "Against the terrible rampart of rock the winds beat across the land of the Tell. But they die there frustrated.

And the rains journey thither and fail, sinking into the absinthe-coloured pools of the gorge."[15] In addition to that, before her arrival in the desert, the protagonist explains how she felt from a Western perspective towards that region "an unknown region that remained perpetually invisible, and that must surely be ugly or terrible"[16] and the road, for her, was a mere hollow area that portends poverty:

> "The train was crawling in a cup of the hills, grey, sterile and abandoned, without roads or houses, without a single tree. Small, grey-green bushes flourished here and there on tiny humps of earth, but they seemed rather to emphasise than to diminish the aspect of poverty presented by the soil"[17]

The passage illustrates the bad road, which the protagonist was going through; an isolated semi-deserted place devoid of life and vibrancy. The perception she holds even before arriving reflects a pre-constructed view rather than an objective observation. This is perfectly captured in a quote used by the imagologists Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen, originally from Walter Lippmann: "For the most part we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see."[18] This implies that our way of seeing and judging is conditioned by preconceived notions, prejudice and stereotypes.[19] This idea aligns with the imagological belief that national or cultural perceptions are shaped by inherited images rather than real experience.

Hichens endows Domini with a compelling picture of acceptance and tolerance towards the people of the desert. Europeans tend to feel disgusted by these people's skin colour or manners, but she felt satisfied to be among them, "These people, uncivilised or not, at least live, and I have been dead all my life, dead in life."[20] In this regard, Osman Bencherif expresses, "For some novelists, the desert offered the possibility of escape in an exotic, contemplative word at the opposite pole of the increasingly materialistic civilisation of the west"[21] Hichens, for his part, sees the desert as "the real home of peace" and adds "In the depths of the desert. […] Far away from civilisation, far away from modern men

and modern women, and all the noisy trifles we are accustomed to"[22] to assure his point of picturing the African desert as the uncivilised home of peace, freedom, life and tolerance.

Domini flees England with the personal struggles she has and moves towards the desert that symbolises "the garden of oblivion"; its atmosphere is "full of joy" and peace, it is "the home of the breeze, of gentle sunbeams and of liberty"[23] and in it "one forgets formalities."[24] Hichens is not satisfied with only calling it the home of liberty but makes freedom its centre. The character Boris strengthens the claim and says: "For we're out in the desert, we're right away from anyone, everything. We're in the great freedom."[25] Hichens continues to value it by saying, "where liberty reigns, lifting her cymbals that are as spheres of fire, and the footsteps of Freedom are heard upon the sand, treading towards the south."[26]

Like Domini, Hichens was a great traveller who lived much of his life outside his country. He travelled in an attempt to escape his former life, which was "restrained too much" and he went to the desert "escaping into liberty."[27] In order to touch the Western readers' emotions and create desire in them to come and see the desert, he declares, "a desire for freedom that the normal civilised life restrained too much."[28] To express the point indirectly, he uses Domini's feelings to celebrate the desert: "This desert and this sun would be her comrades, and she was not afraid of them"[29] and praises the beauty of emotions that accompany her in the heart of the desert. He adds:

> The desert has a spell. He who has once seen the desert must see it again. The desert calls and its voice is always heard. Madame will hear it when she is far away, and some day she will feel, 'I must come back to the land of the sun and to the beautiful land of forgetfulness.'[30]

The excerpt portrays the desert as enchanting and inviting, highlighting its allure and the irresistible pull it exerts on visitors: "She had come out of a sort of death to find life in Beni-Mora, and now she felt that she was going back again to something that would be like death."[31] The desert symbolises the outlet through which Domini was able to recognize and

love real life. This creates a concluding symbolic contrast: the desert represents life and vitality, while Europe symbolizes spiritual death and dullness.

2. The Spiritual Dimensions of the Desert

Hichens describes Domini's interaction with nature, which generates deep feelings in her. When she walked across the floor to the open window and adjusted the 'persiennes', "heavy rain was falling. The night was very black, and smelt rich and damp, as if it held in its arms strange offerings--a merchandise altogether foreign, tropical and alluring."[32] He also depicts the deep relief that she felt when lying on her bed because of the sound and scent of the rain pouring on the dry land to transmit strong transcendental feelings to his readers. He tells: "The rain and the scents coming up out of the hidden earth of Africa had carried her mind away, as if on a magic carpet. She was content now to lie awake in the dark."[33] This moment exemplifies the Western spiritual imagination projecting onto the Algerian landscape: the desert, typically seen as harsh and barren, becomes a site of mystical transport. The character perceives the land not as it truly is, but through a Western fantasy of the "East" as a realm of escape, sensory allure, and passive spiritual enlightenment, fulfilling a conventional spiritual longing.

The oasis serves as a transformative destination for Domini, who leaves England with a "perplexity of spirit" in search of change and her lost soul.

> All the contrasts of this land were exquisite to Domini and, in some mysterious way, suggested eternal things; whispering through colour, gleam, and shadow, through the pattern of leaf and rock, through the air, now fresh, now tenderly warm and perfumed, through the silence that hung like a filmy cloud in the golden heaven.[34]

This passage is not a mere exaggeration but a construction of a spiritual reality, a conscious imagological strategy. Hichens transforms the desert into a sacred text where every sensory detail 'whispers' a pre-ordained, 'eternal' meaning, fulfilling the Western expectation of the 'Orient' as a repository of timeless wisdom. He also adds, on the tongue of Father

Robbie, “You have come here to renew your faith which, not killed, has been stricken, reduced, may I not say? to a sort of invalidism.”[35]

We notice that Hichens, in his travelogue, concentrates on describing and representing the desert to the readers more than the tragic romantic love-story of his hero and heroine. He even reserves most of his text to depict it, “with its pale sands and desolate cities, its sunburnt tribes of workers, its robbers, warriors and priests, its ethereal mysteries of mirage, its tragic splendours of colour, of tempest and of heat,”[35] and the “legions of freeborn, sun- suckled”[36] Bedouin tribesmen who live in it. Indeed, Domini was charmed by the desert more than anything else. Breathing in the “pure, clean” desert air creates in the author agitated feelings as he declares,

> When two lovers kiss their breath mingles, and, if they really love, each is conscious that in the breath of the loved one is the loved one's soul, coming forth from the temple of the body through the temple door. As Domini leaned out, seeing nothing, she was conscious that in this breath she drank there was a soul, and it seemed to her that it was the soul which flames in the centre of things, and beyond.[37]

The passage depicts a pantheistic union where the protagonist feels she is inhaling not just air, but the soul of the desert itself, a concept that aligns with Western mystical traditions projected onto the ‘exotic’ land.

The desert provides calmness and peace. It acts as a healing and peaceful force on the character’s spirit from the pressures of her life.

> In flashing out of the darkness of the gorge Domini had had the sensation of passing into a new world and a new atmosphere. The sensation stayed with her now that she was no longer dreaming or giving the reins to her imagination, but was calmly herself.[38]

The writer explains the feeling of that time travellers who thought of going to the desert as ‘passing into a new world’ and projects Western fantasies onto the Algerian landscape, shaping it as a landscape understood not for its local reality but for the emotional and symbolic needs of the Western observer.

Repeatedly, the desert is painted as one of the most exotic places in the world,

> Every palm beside a well, every stunned vine and clambering flower upon an auberge wall, every form of hill and silhouette of shadow, became in her heart intense with beauty and the pathos she used, as a child, to think must lie beyond the sunset.[39]

We notice from the excerpt that Domini regards the desert as a romantic and spiritual place that reminds her of the joys of her childhood. This nostalgic setting provides peace and relief that she was able to feel the beats of all creatures around her in her intensive heart. Then she could leave everything behind when overwhelmed by this feeling of unifying with nature.

In addition, Hichens points out that "entry into the desert had been full of such extraordinary significance."[40] Domini considers Boris and the desert "as one in her mind" but it is the desert that "summons" her and evokes the most affecting sensations described in the novel.

> Domini was filled with a sort of romantic curiosity. This luxury of palms far out in the midst of desolation, untended apparently by human hands--for no figures moved among them, there was no one on the road-suggested some hidden purpose and activity […] As she had felt the call of the desert she now felt the call of the oasis. In this land thrilled eternally a summons to go onward, to seek, to penetrate, to be a passionate pilgrim.[41]

After their marriage, for instance, when the couple goes on a long journey into the desert in a 'palanquin' on a camel's back, Domini shuts her eyes because "she did not want to see her husband or to touch his hand. She does not want to speak. She only wants to feel the uttermost depths of her spirit this movement, steady and persistent, towards the goal of her earthly desires."[42] The desert invades and overwhelms all her senses. "Sad things had no meaning here and grave things no place. […] Nothing mattered here. Even Death wore a robe of gold and went with an airy step."[43]

In conclusion, Hsu Ming Teo explains why Western writers attribute spirituality to the desert; they saw it as a remedy to their own modern, industrial society. She writes,

> It was a space of mysticism and spirituality where, in the tradition of the three great monotheistic religions, spiritual revelation was received. For Europeans struggling to come to terms with perpetual change, industrialization, urbanization, and the

> increasing pace of modern life, the desert seemed timeless, unchanging, and fixed in history.[44]

Hichens reinforces this through passages such as '"The desert is full of truth.", "The man who is afraid of prayer is unwise to set foot beyond the palm trees,", "the Arabs have a saying: 'The desert is the garden of Allah."'[45] and "Could one stay long in such a world as this and not be either intensely happy or intensely unhappy? I don't feel as if it would be possible."[46]

3. The Representation of the Desert as a Hostile environment

Although the desert stands for self-discovery and recreation, it remains a mysterious, dark and hostile land. Hichens presents North Africa not merely as a site of beauty and spirituality, but as a landscape marked by danger, discomfort, and alienation. The weather is unbearably hot, the land is dry and human presence seems to vanish amid vast emptiness.

When Domini's journey begins, even before she reaches the desert, nature already imposes a sense of menace and disquiet on her.

> The incessant murmur of their[the recruits] voices dropped down to her, with the sound of the waves, and of the mysterious cries and creaking shudders that go through labouring ships. And all these noises seemed to her hoarse and pathetic, suggestive, too, of danger.[47]

The sea and the ship become metaphors for the uncertainty awaiting her. The "mysterious cries" and "creaking shudders" foreshadow the desert's menacing silence, suggesting that the journey into the Orient will be shadowed by unease.

Then, Hichens links Domini's coming to the desert to a traumatic and violent act that affects her deeply. He writes,

> The entrance into this land of flame and colour, through its narrow and terrific portal, stirred her almost beyond her present strength. The glory of this world mounted to her heart, oppressing it. The embrace of Nature was so violent that it crushed her. She felt like a little fly that had sought to wing its way to the sun and, at a million miles' distance from it, was being shrivelled by its heat. When all the voices of the village fainted away she was glad, although she strained her ears to hear their fading echoes. Suddenly she knew that she was very tired, so tired that emotions acted upon her as physical exertion acts upon an exhausted man.[48]

The imagery in this passage reveals Domini's overwhelming emotional and physical reaction to entering the desert. Her sense of being crushed, shrivelled, and overtaken by nature reflects the symbolic seduction of the Orient in Western literature, where nature is glorified.

Domini's first physical contact with the setting is the hotel where she stays, the "Hotel du Desert". Hichens creates an image of it as an isolated place far from the world. The hotel pictures beauty, attractiveness and yet lack of comfort as it lacks modern amenities. 'Many tourists stay there to enjoy the warmth': this points to the vast difference in climate between rainy England and the dry, warm Algerian desert. The hotel is characterised by a 'broad terrace' which ran along its whole length and "a second and smaller terrace, from which the desert could be seen beyond the palms."[49] However, it is depicted as empty of visitors; 'few Englishmen come because the French were the ones used to come in abundance at that time'.

Hichens then starts to convey rumours and stereotypes about the locals. Domini hears that the local people are "dirty and very dangerous. They carry knives, and their clothes are full of fleas."[50] Such comments reveal the prejudiced Western gaze that conflates physical hostility with moral or cultural inferiority—an imagological stereotype that reinforces the image of the Orient as both alluring and menacing.

Moreover, the theme of hostility is deepened through local voices and legends, as another character cautions: "Oh, there is danger in Beni-Mora, Madame, there is danger. This startling air is full of influences, of desert spirits."[51] Such language reflects how European travellers imagined the Orient as mysterious and haunted—a space filled with invisible powers that both attract and endanger the outsider.

Perhaps the most striking manifestation of the desert's hostility in the novel is the crimes that occur within it. The character Batouch, one of the locals, warns the British

lady: “those who are in the desert without arms are as birds in the air without wings.”[52] The metaphor conveys both physical and existential vulnerability, turning the desert into a threatening, almost predatory space. Furthermore, Domini, at this stage, is still constructing her vision of the desert —she hasn’t yet directly experienced its violence, only heard of it. Hichens adds,

> "Many of the dancers of Beni-Mora are murdered, each season two or three [...] " The poet's calm and unimpassioned way of alluding to the most horrible crimes as if they were perfectly natural, and in no way to be condemned or wondered at, amazed Domini even more than his statement about Irena.[53]

The poet’s calm tone and words reveal the normalization of violence, suggesting that murder, theft, and superstition are treated with casual indifference, as if they are part of the natural order, reinforcing the stereotypes of moral detachment and cruelty in the desert. “With every moment in Beni-Mora the desert seemed to become more- more full of meaning, of variety, of mystery, of terror.” This shift from fascination to fear reflects the Western imagination of the desert as a paradoxical space: both sacred “the garden of God” and scary “the great hiding-place”: a physical refuge for criminals and a symbolic space where moral boundaries disappear.

The most shocking moment that reveals the desert’s danger is when Domini and Androvsky discover the corpse of a strangled woman in the sand.[54] The silence, the flickering fire, and the howling dog create a haunting atmosphere, turning the desert into a stage for death rather than divine peace. This scene confirms that the desert is not only spiritually challenging but also violent and lawless. Domini’s reaction, feeling that the dark thing lying by the fire was “herself,” shows how she internalizes this horror, sensing her own fragility in the face of such brutality. The earlier story about the murdered dancers foreshadows this moment, turning legend into reality. The desert, once seen as the “garden of God” now appears as “the great hiding-place” where violence disappears into vastness and human life can be erased without traces.

> the events that had followed upon the discovery of the murdered woman by the tent […] Led by Androvsky, they had come to the corpse, while the air was rent by the frantic barking of all the guard dogs and the howling of the dog that had been a witness of the murder.[55]

The depiction of the Arab women's mourning the murdered woman reveals how Hichens constructs the Orient as a space of excess and disorder. Their reaction to the murder: "naked arms gesticulating," "claw-like hands casting earth upon their heads," and bodies "rent by seven devils" transforms grief into a spectacle of savagery. The scene exaggerates their physicality and emotion, reducing them to symbols of uncontrolled passion rather than human sorrow. Through this imagery, Hichens reinforces the Orientalist stereotype of Arab women as primitive, irrational, and bound to superstition. Their wailing that "seemed to pierce the stars"[56] aligns female emotion with chaos and danger. The result is a portrayal that dehumanizes mourning and transforms it into another marker of the desert's moral and cultural otherness.

Finally, when Domini retreats into solitude, the desert transforms into a spiritual exile: "Never before, not in Count Anteoni's garden, had she felt more utterly withdrawn from the world. [...] And beyond them lay the desert, the empty, sunlit waste. She shut her eyes, and murmured to herself, "I am in far away. I am in far away. ""[57] The emptiness that once promised renewal now isolates her completely. The "sunlit waste" becomes a psychological desert—beautiful yet desolate—mirroring her internal struggle.

4. The Western Traces within the Algerian Landscape (the Garden, the Hotel and the Church)

The Garden

The idyllic garden is situated in Beni-Mora and belongs to Count Ferdinand Anteoni. The character Batouch says, "Madame shall see for herself and tell me afterwards if in all Europe there is one such garden."[58] The image of the garden is so beautiful that it

rivals the beauty of the English gardens. Domini defends her region's gardens and says, "Oh, the English gardens are wonderful."[59]

The author draws the reader's attention to the Count Anteoni who despite his generosity, "does not permit the Arabs to enter with strangers,"[60] suggesting that they are perceived as corrupting influences, unworthy of accessing the garden, which is instead reserved for 'strangers'. Moreover, he adds, "Twenty Arabs are always working in the garden, and at night ten Arabs with guns are always awake, some in a tent inside the door and some among the trees."[61] This highlights the intense discipline he exercises over it. When the protagonist stepped into the garden, she wonders "Must the European gardens give way to this Eastern garden, take a lower place with all their roses?"[62] The author praises the paradise-like atmosphere of the garden and Domini feels satisfied in it,

> The villa was most delicately simple, but in this riot of blue and gold its ivory cleanliness, set there upon the shining sand which was warm to the foot, made it look magical to Domini. She thought she had never known before what spotless purity was like.[63]

The author's picturesque style transports the European readers and convinces them of the necessity of visiting such a captivating and unique place situated in the heart of the desert:

> But now, as she walked secretly over the yellow sand between the rills, following the floating green robe of Smain, she rested her eyes, and her soul, on countless mingling shades of the delicious colour; rough, furry green of geranium leaves, silver green of olives, black green of distant palms from which the sun held aloof, faded green of the eucalyptus, rich, emerald green of fan-shaped, sunlit palms, hot, sultry green of bamboos, dull, drowsy green of mulberry trees and brooding chestnuts.[64]

Through this long quote, the author highlights the botanical diversity of the garden. The English woman enjoys its pure air, its warm atmosphere, and the privacy it provides. It fills her with a powerful positive flow of emotions. "A sort of ecstasy was waking within her. The pure air, the caressing warmth, the enchanted stillness and privacy of this domain touched her soul and body like the hands of a saint with power to bless her."[65] Hichens

then resolves the narrative; when coming out, Domini feels "'rather like a new Eve expelled from Paradise,' […] 'Well, Madame?' said Batouch. 'Have I spoken the truth?' 'Yes. No European garden can be so beautiful as that.'"[66]

The Hotel of Count Anteoni

Count Anteoni's hotel is "a huge white palace built in the Moorish style, and terraced roofs and a high tower ornamented with green and peacock-blue tiles."[67] The Moorish style is a style within Islamic architecture, characterized by recognizable features such as the horseshoe arch and it emphasizes on the building's interior rather than its exterior. The Count Anteoni who is "fabulously rich" says to Domini:

> The big hotel you passed in coming here is mine. I built it to prevent a more hideous one being built, and let it to the proprietor. You might like to ascend the tower. The view at sundown is incomparable. At present the hotel is shut, but the guardian will show you everything if you give him my card.[68]

The quote presents the hotel and Batouch remarks on the tower's height by saying "From the tower Madame will see the whole of Beni-Mora"[69] and that it points "like a needle towards the sky."

The Church

The church in the desert represents Catholicism. It is portrayed as a fragile spiritual outpost, isolated and surrounded by an indifferent or even hostile environment. The narrator says that Domini felt "it was her duty in Africa to stand up for her faith,"[70] highlighting her own internal struggle and need to assert her identity in an unfamiliar space. The author further explains,

> Sometimes she felt very protective. She felt protective today as she looked at this humble building, which she likened to one of the poor saints of the Thebaid, who dwelt afar in desert places, and whose devotions were broken by the night-cries of jackals and by the roar of ravenous beasts.[71]

The image of "jackals and ravenous beasts" contributes to the desert's portrayal as untamed and primitive. In this context, the depiction of the church as humble and fragile underscores a perceived duty to safeguard the religious legacy within an indifferent and unfamiliar environment. Hichens describes the church as unpleasant and uncomfortable,

> The interior was plain, even ugly. The walls were painted a hideous drab. The stone floor was covered with small, hard, straw-bottomed chairs and narrow wooden forms for the patient knees of worshippers.[72]

He continues, "In the front were two rows of private chairs, [...] The altar, beyond its mean black and gold railing, was dingy and forlorn."[73] The word 'forlorn' conveys how it is pitifully sad and abandoned, serving as a call to Europeans to preserve the catholic presence. Moreover, "From the roof hung vulgar glass chandeliers with ropes tied with faded pink ribands."[74] The author conveys a picture that even with the existence of the glass chandeliers but they were 'vulgar'; indicating a lack sophistication and good taste.

> There was nothing to please the eye, nothing to appeal to the senses. There was not even the mystery which shrouds and softens, for the sunshine streamed in through the white glass of the windows, revealing, even emphasising, as if with deliberate cruelty, the cheap finery, the tarnished velvet, the crude colours, the meretricious gestures and poses of the plaster saints.[75]

However, despite all the negative images about the structure of the church, the author affirms the spirituality of the place. He declares,

> Yet as Domini touched her forehead and breast with holy water, and knelt for a moment on the stone floor, she was conscious that this rather pitiful house of God moved her to an emotion she had not felt in the great and beautiful churches to which she was accustomed in England and on the Continent.[76]

The quote shows that despite its simplicity, the church elicits a strange effect on her emotions which the luxury churches of Europe did not offer, reinforcing a Western perception of spiritual authenticity; "Bold, little, humble church! Domini knew that she would love it. But she did not know then how much."

The purpose of constructing the image of a discovered church in the desert is to revive the Roman Legacy in Algeria, that witnessed the Roman conquest. In the early 1900s and after, Western writers sought to reclaim the Roman inheritance in Algeria. France even used this legacy to legitimize its colonial project, claiming it as an extension of Europe's ancient heritage. Domini's discovery of the church reinforces this idea, reflecting the author's own thoughts and beliefs as a European writer.

5. The Protagonist's Quest and the Search for Meaning

> Despite its geographical proximity, Europeans have regarded Africa for two thousand years as the 'Dark Continent', a synonym for what was unknown, a distant land of fables which intermittently showed up on Europe's horizon, sometimes as a threat, sometimes as a lure.[77]

This long-standing imagological construct created what János Riesz describes as, "a suspended reality in which European dreams of flight and alterity can be played out."[78] These lines reveal that Europe saw Africa as a fantasy -both frightening and alluring- a place to escape to and to dream about, as we see in the novel.

Although the protagonist's personal quest is central to the narrative, it simultaneously reflects a deeper ideological journey shaped by Western perceptions of the East, as Manfred Beller states, "Our images of foreign countries, peoples and cultures mainly derive from selective value judgements (which are in turn derived from selective observation)."[79] Her search for meaning and identity unfolds within an imagined geography—the Orient—that is romanticized, exoticized, and projected as a backdrop for self-discovery. Thus, her inner journey is inseparable from the external, cultural lens through which the desert and its people are represented.

The theme of the novel mirrors Hichens's life. Through his romantic narrative, he portrays certain events of that period in general, both in Algeria and in England. Moreover, Domini's journey follows the classic pattern of a romantic quest; leaving home, facing challenges, and growing through hardship.

Hichens protests against gender inequality and social restrictions, which characterized the Victorian society. Domini challenges Victorian gender roles by being independent, adventurous, and uninterested in marriage. Unlike most women of her time, she chooses to travel alone to the desert in search of freedom and meaning, driven by personal hardship and a desire to escape her restrictive life in England. "Domini was thirty-

two, unmarried, and in a singularly independent- some might have thought a singularly lonely--situation."[80] In this regard, Carl Thompson in his *Travel Writing*, notes:

> A desire to escape the stifling moral codes of the Victorian era was also a factor for some travellers. Many Americans and North Europeans, accordingly, sought both authenticity and sensuality in the sunny climes of Italy and the Middle East.[81]

Moreover, well-known and reliable Western writers often used the desert as a setting for their works, presenting it as Boumekla Lydia and Keddou Djaouida state in their dissertation "an exotic place that offers a possibility of escape."[82] The Orient was the first destination that came to mind for those writers who were escaping the restraints and conditions of their European societies, like Hichens.

Domini's distinct character aligns with the romantic tradition of setting the hero apart from others—she is wealthy, independent, and driven by ideals of change and freedom, unlike both the locals and her fellow Westerners. Throughout her journey, this uniqueness is highlighted by the supporting figures she encounters: Batouch serves her loyally, the Count offers insight and comfort, the priest strengthens her faith, and Boris stirs emotions that help her rediscover herself. Together, they reflect the classic romance pattern where the hero is guided by allies toward personal transformation.

In sum, Domini's journey is not merely geographical, but also emotional and spiritual, making her see the desert not as it is, but as she imagines it in her Western mind. The desert becomes a canvas onto which she projects her dreams of escape and rebirth. It is described as majestic not for its true essence, but because it serves her need for a vast, empty space in which she can redefine her confused self, in a selective image based on preconceived notions. This act of projection makes travel literature -where fact and imagination intertwine- the perfect medium for expressing such a vision.

Hitchens is not simply writing a story, but a symbolic journey, in which his descriptions of the garden, the hotel, and the church serve as carefully selected evidence to

support his romantic imagination. When he describes the desert as "majestic" and the garden as "idyllic," he is not so much describing the place as reshaping it according to a Western vision that sees the East as a space for spiritual transformation and lost beauty. The concept of a sublime beauty mixed with horror is a Western preconception used by travellers to describe the desert, and Hitchens, by adopting this cultural symbol, is telling the reader that this is not just a desert, but a stage for a profound spiritual experience of the Western soul. The writer, as Lippmann says, first defines and then sees.[83]

Endnotes

1. Hsu Ming Teo, *Desert Passions: Orientalism and Romance Novels*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), 66.

2. Osman Bencherif, *The Image of Algeria in Anglo-American Writings 1783- 1962* (University Press of America, 1997), 181.

3. Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen, *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters: A Critical Survey* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007),xiv. https://books.google.dz/books?hl=en&lr=&id=qrRj1dPvvfAC&oi=fnd&pg=PR13&dq=imagology&ots=uThRDRP-2g&sig=fhW_7G50vKhGN2AR67Rw-CIUQc8&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=imagology&f=false

4. Hsu Ming Teo, *Desert Passions: Orientalism and Romance Novels* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), 6.

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6. Robert Hichens, *The Garden of Allah* (London: Methuen and Company, 1904), 6.

7. Ibid., 8.

8. Ibid., 9.

9. Lydia Boumekla and Djaouida Keddou, *Orientalizing Algeria: André Gide's The Immoralist (1902) and Edith Maud Hull's The Sheik (1919)* (Master's diss., University Mouloud Mammeri of Tizi-Ouzou, 2016), 18.

10. Hsu Ming Teo, *Desert Passions: Orientalism and Romance Novels* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), 71.

11. Ibid., 5.

12. Ibid., 10.

13. Hsu Ming Teo, *Desert Passions: Orientalism and Romance Novels* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), 71.

14. Carl Thompson, *Travel writing* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 56.

15. Robert Hichens, *The Garden of Allah* (London: Methuen and Company, 1904), 29.

16. Ibid., 19.

17. Ibid., 12.

18. Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1997), 54.

19. Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen, *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 4.

20. Ibid., 66.

21. Osman Bencherif, *The Image of Algeria in Anglo-American Writings 1783- 1962* (University Press of America, 1997), 171.

22. Robert Hichens, *The Garden of Allah* (London: Methuen and Company, 1904), 104.

23. Ibid., 230.

24. Ibid., 392.

25. Ibid., 313.

26. Ibid., 279.

27. Ibid., 314.

28. Ibid., 171.

29. Ibid., 32.

30. Ibid., 488.

31. Ibid., 489.

32. Ibid., 10.

33. Ibid.

34. Robert Hichens, *The Garden of Allah* (London: Methuen and Company, 1904), 37.

35. Ibid., 20.

36. Ibid., 152.

37. Ibid., 22.

38. Ibid., 29.

39. Ibid., 20.

40. Ibid., 278.

41. Ibid., 148.

42. Ibid., 297.

43. Ibid., 145.

44. Hsu Ming Teo, *Desert Passions: Orientalism and Romance Novels* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), 67.

45. Robert Hichens, *The Garden of Allah* (London: Methuen and Company, 1904), 82.

46. Ibid., 203.

47. Ibid., 9.

48. Ibid., 30.

49. Ibid., 41.

50. Ibid., 45.

51. Ibid., 74.

52. Ibid., 58.

53. Ibid., 122.

54. Ibid., 266.

55. Ibid., 267.

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57. Ibid., 152.

58. Ibid., 50.

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61. Ibid.

62. Ibid., 62.

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64. Ibid., 64.

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68. Ibid., 82.

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71. Ibid.

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73. Ibid., 51.

74. Ibid.

75. Ibid.

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77. János Riesz, "Africa" in *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters: A Critical Survey*, eds. Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 79.

78. Ibid., 81.

79. Manfred Beller, "Perception, Image, Imagology," in *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters*, eds. Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 5.

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82. Lydia Boumekla and Djaouida Keddou, *Orientalizing Algeria: André Gide's The Immoralist (1902) and Edith Maud Hull's The Sheik (1919)* (Master's diss., University Mouloud Mammeri of Tizi-Ouzou, 2016), 17.

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V. Conclusion

Our study of Robert Hichens's The Garden of Allah has shown that the novel can be effectively explored through the lens of Imagology, as it constructs and circulates cultural images of the "self" and the "other." The narrative reflects Orientalist traits, portraying the desert as exotic and magical and its people as mysterious or underdeveloped. However, Hichens does not adopt a colonial or superior Western stance. He neither presents Algeria as part of the French Empire nor imposes a political view; rather, he depicts the desert as a lawless, symbolic space that appeals to the Western imagination.

This suggests that Hichens's intent was more artistic than ideological. The cultural images present in the novel aim to captivate and appeal to a Western audience eager for sensation and escape. Through the romantic lens, he offers imagined geographies and characters that support the narrative's emotional and symbolic goals. As such, the novel participates in the broader tradition of travel writing and exotic romance, while still reflecting the psychological and cultural tensions of its time.

By analysing the literary representations in *The Garden of Allah*, we see how Imagology helps uncover the mechanisms through which cultural images are formed and transmitted, making it an appropriate and valuable framework for this study.

Future students may also consider other perspectives, such as comparing the novel to its cinematic adaptations or exploring how it has been interpreted through stage performances. These approaches may offer fresh insights into how the text has evolved and been reimagined across different mediums and cultural contexts.

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