

Fleckerania: An Annotated Bibliography of Collected
Materials by and Pertaining to James Elroy Flecker

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James Elroy Flecker (1884-1915) was a poet and dramatist active in the early 20th century. Despite considerable popularity in his day, he never achieved the enduring fame of many of his contemporaries, such as William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) or Ezra Pound (1885-1972). Part of this may be due to Flecker's relatively short life, as he died when he was only thirty years old. At the time, major figures such as T.E. Lawrence (1888-1935) lamented his passing, noting the loss of a potentially great poet, but Flecker has since passed into relative obscurity. There is, today, a paucity of critical writing about him.

Having been interested in his life and work for some decades, first through reading his play *Hassan*, and then encountering his poetry and prose, the present author has gradually built up a collection of materials by, about and connected to Flecker. This is therefore an annotated bibliography listing the publication details and discussing the contents of the items in a single researcher's personal collection, as well as occasional comments on the specific copies owned. It is intended to document them for research purposes. Each summary combines fact with brief opinions, with the latter being written as much for the author's own entertainment as anything else, and it is hoped that, in this combination, there may possibly be some information of both value and amusement for other scholars of Flecker who wish to further explore the life and work of this fascinating figure.

This is not an exhaustive list, and only standalone volumes and other items of which physical copies are held have been chosen for description, rather than journal articles, online materials or book chapters, with the one notable exception of *Three Decanian Worthies*, a remarkable and rare document that discusses Flecker's father at length in one of its three sections. Many of the volumes discussed are first editions, which is, in several cases, simply because

no second edition exists at present. It should be mentioned, however, that, with the rise of Print On Demand technology, this is changing, and works which may have previously been financially impractical to reprint, yet exist in microfilm or digital scanned versions, are now being made available in physical facsimile form. Increasingly, this is via small, non-academic presses, and the volumes do not come into existence until ordered and created. The result is access to material in print form that may not otherwise be accessible, but these are no substitute for originals, as any researcher who has worked extensively with first editions will be more than aware.

Descriptions of the works in the present collection are arranged alphabetically by author. Where there are multiple works by a single author, these are arranged by date of publication of the edition in hand, rather than original dates, and where there are collected letters or poems, these are arranged by author, rather than editor. The full publication details for each entry are given at the end.

The Works

n.a. James Elroy Flecker's Poetic Prose Play "Hassan," Arranged for Production on the Stage by Basil Dean.

This is a twenty-page booklet printed to accompany the March 1924 performance of *Hassan* at His Majesty's Theatre, London. The majority of the pamphlet is composed of short, entertaining written items and advertisements, including several for Henley's Cider as a tonic against rheumatism, the "Jou Jou," apparently "the only bust supporter recommended by Doctors and Nurses," and the mending services of one "Sister Susie" in South Kensington, specializing in the invisible repair of laddered hose. In fact, only pages 9, 11 and 13 concern the play directly, listing the cast, choristers, dancers and others associated with the production, alongside a brief summary of each act and scene.

The value of this pamphlet lies primarily in its charm, rather than any new

information about the play itself. Rather, it helps to build an understanding of the context surrounding the production. The first year of the play on stage was 1923, but this programme is close enough to that initial date that it captures the feel of the times and there is something of the smell of the cloakroom and the shabby elegance of the much-trodden lobby carpet about this item.

Martin Booth, *Dreaming of Samarkand*.

This is a signed, first-edition copy of a rather fanciful 1989 novel about the relationship between Flecker and T.E. Lawrence. It is set largely in Beirut, although the closing chapters take place in Switzerland. Booth draws upon both known events and broad imagination to create a narrative in which Flecker is cast in the role of the most unlikely of spies. Failing to impress at his post and struggling with his language studies, he is drawn into a world of political intrigue by Lawrence, who also becomes the somewhat emotionally remote, exploitative object of both his intellectual and sexual passions. One might argue that the novel perhaps owes more to the suspense writings of John Le Carré and to the sexual tensions of the late Thatcher years in Britain than it does to any historically-verifiable narrative, although Lawrence and Flecker definitely knew each other and were friends, and the general timeline is certainly correct.

The primary interest of this work in terms of Fleckerania lies in the way that it paints a portrait of its central protagonist as a clearly unlikeable, arrogant, frustrated and frustrating individual, eking out a precarious existence on what seems to be always the verge of failure. This is consistent particularly with Goldring and Munro's descriptions of him during this period of his life, and it seems likely that Booth had researched his subject with recourse to the latter author in particular.

That being said, Booth was also the editor of a pamphlet of Flecker's work called *Unpublished Poems and Drafts*, discussed below. This appeared nearly two decades before *Dreaming of Samarkand*, in 1971, and draws upon the correspondence between Flecker and Leonard Cheesman, who was his

friend of many years. Booth's work on this and his engagement with primary sources suggest that he might have taken a long-term interest in the poet and the details of his life.

James Elroy Flecker, *The Bridge of Fire*.

This is a rare first edition of Flecker's earliest collection of published poems from 1907. Gillanders sees in this volume a kind of last flowering of the decadence that characterised the *fin de siècle* period in which Flecker spent so many of his formative years (20). Douglas Goldring was notoriously critical of this collection upon its publication, publishing a sarcastic review in *The Academy*, but the reception amongst Flecker's other friends appears to have been more positive. There are thirty-four poems, and one can sense the stirrings of genius in poems like "Oxford Canal," alongside some pretentious banalities, such as "Mignon." Gillanders notes the pervasive poetic influence of John Davidson (30), upon whose work Flecker first wrote whilst still at Oxford, and whom he considered a great modern poet. Flecker's academic study of Davidson is, incidentally, contained alongside another, more personal reflection, in the *Collected Prose*.

James Elroy Flecker, *The Grecians: A Dialogue on Education*.

Before his play *Hassan* and the novel *The King of Alsander*, Flecker produced a relatively short discussion on education, of which this is a first-edition copy from 1910. It takes the form of a Socratic dialogue between three individuals, Hofman, Edwinston and Smith. The first two are middle-aged and depicted as somewhat set in their ways, but the third, who seems to have been an idealized version of Flecker himself, is a "remarkably splendid young man," whose deep knowledge of history and culture informs his ideas of what education should be (10). These views, though their force and perspicacity, overwhelm in each case the rather hidebound, conventional thoughts of Hofman and Edwinston.

The whole dialogue is framed within a journey through Italy, and covers

the general aims of education, physical and technical training and “True Education.” Although the tone is light and often ironic, there is still always a sense of the pedagogic, and the spectacle of a younger, clearly more brilliant man explaining matters to his experienced elders, who then concede to him, seems like nothing more than the wish-fulfilment of an author who felt slighted and marginalized by many within intellectual society. It is, in many senses, a kind of updating of the educational portions of *The Republic*, but really rather less thorough and more an appeal to aesthetic pleasure in study than a serious guide to developing a comprehensive curriculum.

One interesting aside is in the discussion on “the sex problem” (63), which is heavily implied to be a combination of both masturbation and homosexual activity taking place amongst boys within public schools. Smith’s solution is frankness of discussion, as well as an avoidance of hyperbole and overreaction on the part of those in authority upon the discovery of such activities, and it is tempting again to imagine that Flecker is here drawing upon both his desire and, perhaps, his memory of past transgressions yet unforgiven.

James Elroy Flecker, *The Golden Journey to Samarkand*.

This collection brings together twenty-two poems by Flecker, many of which, as he notes in the Front Matter before the Table of Contents, “appeared in the *Nation*, *English Review*, *Country Life*, or *Poetry Review*.” Within these pages, one can find some of the best of the poetry from *Hassan*, including the epilogue and description of Yasmin. There are, however, many other fragments and short poems to consider. Flecker was not given to particularly lengthy poetic works, and the spacing of these poems makes the volume appear more full than it is in reality. The copy at hand is, like many others in the present collection of Fleckerania, a first edition, in this case from 1913.

James Elroy Flecker, *The King of Alsander*.

This is a 1914 first US edition of Flecker’s longest piece of prose fiction. The

work has been badly reviewed by several critics, including Goldring (168), Munro (93) and Gillanders (364). That being noted, it is neither without charm nor interest. The story follows Norman Price, a shopkeeper's son destined for what he believes must be greater things. He is enticed to travel by a mysterious figure called "the Poet," and travels to the land of Alsander, where he becomes the ruler following a series of bizarre and surreal events, including encounters with cross-dressing princesses and an extended bout of sadomasochistic flagellation. It is a very strange novel, drawing strongly upon the forms and ideals of Romanticism, of which it is also partially perhaps a self-conscious satire. The following passage offers an example of such ironic referencing of the genre, in which the author, whether Flecker himself or the narrator-as-character, imagines himself within the context of an earlier time for the purposes of poetic whimsy:

...the stilted style of this century can ill express the fluctuations of our hero's feelings.

"Who is there" (I should have written in 1820), "or what man of feeling and imagination can be found who, upon contemplating the ineffable grandeur and unspeakable majesty of Nature, does not ardently aspire to hold at the same moment communion with some divinely tender female heart, to read in those liquid eyes his own reflections purged of their dross and transmuted into gold, to press those sensitive fingers and thereby lose himself in rapture among the gorgeous scenes that astonish and confound his gaze, to seal those fluttering lips with the memory of an unforgettable moment?"

To resume the use of the English language, Norman felt lonely...

(35)

There are many other similar parallels and allusions scattered throughout. On the whole, the novel reads perhaps a little better today than it might have in its own time, as the deliberate anachronisms and changes of tone are likely to be somehow less jarring to a modern reader than they might have been in 1914.

James Elroy Flecker, *Collected Prose*.

The posthumous edition of Flecker's collected prose writings from 1922 was almost certainly published in order to take advantage of the interest in his play *Hassan*, which the prefatory note to this volume describes as "certainly the greatest thing he did" (v). It has the advantage of bringing together short stories, criticism and pedagogic musings. This copy, again a first edition, has somewhat sardonic marginal notes throughout. It is unclear as to whether these are by "S.H. Jones," who acquired the volume in April of 1968, or by an earlier owner. Certainly the hand appears similar to the name inscribed on the inside of the front cover, but it is difficult to be sure.

The book opens with the story "The Last Generation," which is a kind of dystopic science fiction work, and has some typically shocking Fleckerian touches, such as the murder of a baby and a "Mutual Extinction Club." It is followed by the short satire "N'Jawk," which makes fun of aspects of spiritualism and rationalism, which were in conflict in Flecker's day. Next comes "Pentheus," a literary experiment in which tenses are mixed to dramatic effect. The handwritten note by a bemused reader at the end of the tale simply says "what on earth does all this mean?" (46). "Mansur" is an orientalist story in the style of Burton, and there are some following literary sketches and reflections, including "The 'Bus in Stamboul" and "Philanthropists." A large part of the volume is taken up by "The Grecians: A Dialogue on Education," which is discussed elsewhere in this annotated bibliography, as it was also published earlier as a standalone volume. Finally, there are some critical writings, of which the most interesting and revealing is "The Public as Art Critic," where Flecker condemns his potential audience for a lack of taste, discernment and education:

Art lives on to-day, but in noble retirement, too proud to ask for pence. The artist hears all around him infinite rubbish talked about his art, and imagines for the moment that the middle classes are

sincere, and will be willing at least to hear his symphony or read his book. You soon undeceive him, you middle classes. You, who have let, are letting, and will let your poets die of hunger, continue to buy your pretty editions of the classics and to frame photo-gravures of the "Sistine Madonna" over your mantel-shelves. You know quite well that vital art bores you and you have never understood it. (250)

James Elroy Flecker, *Don Juan*.

This is another first edition copy, published posthumously in 1925, of a play that Flecker completed for the most part in 1911 and submitted for critical reading to, amongst other people, George Bernard Shaw. The latter was surprisingly kind in his remarks, although he also stated that it was "a bit too lacking in trade finish and conventional presentability for a regular commercial production" (ix). This might have been more generous than a work such as this deserves. It has numerous melodramatic sections, many unconvincing passages of dialogue and the shift to fantasy at the end seems jarring and underdeveloped. The scenes between Don Juan and Tisbea are strong and Anne is an interesting character, but one is taken frequently out of the narrative at other points by what can only be characterised as clumsy writing. Perhaps the most useful aspect of the work is that it offers insight into the development of *Hassan*, which is a vastly superior play on every level.

James Elroy Flecker, *The Letters of J.E. Flecker to F. Savery*.

This collection of letters is number one hundred and seventy-six of a limited run of three hundred and ninety copies of this volume from 1926, with a brief Introduction by Hellé Flecker. This makes it clear that she did not wish to see the letters from the very end of his life, dealing with his decline and depression preceding his early death, preserved for posterity.

The letters themselves span the years 1909 to 1914, and indicate that Flecker was a prolific and energetic writer of personal correspondence. They

show a cheerful nature and quick wit, and topics covered include personal matters, such as his statement that “I am going to marry my Greek Poetess” (28), as well as insights on the development of different works, including *The King of Alsander*, about which he writes as follows:

Nothing in God's earth can infuse any reality into the tale: so I confine myself to polishing, and writing it up less heavily, and hope it may be a popular success – 'tis all it's good for. (32)

The letters are a valuable source of information on the poet's most fecund years, despite his encroaching illness, especially considering that so little else survives – or, at least, has been made available – of Flecker's correspondence. The artwork accompanying the collection is suitably orientalist, given Flecker's penchant for the idealized East, and the whole volume is an attractive addition to Fleckerania.

James Elroy Flecker, *Some Letters from Abroad of James Elroy Flecker*.

John Squire, editor of the *Collected Poems*, published this collection of letters with the assistance of Hellé Flecker, and this is once more a first-edition copy from 1930. They contain some photographs, the majority of which are by Flecker himself, and numerous letters, interspersed with reminiscences. The correspondents include the editor Squire alongside Frank Savery, whose collected letters were published previously in a limited edition in 1926, as noted above, as well as Edward Marsh, John Mavrogordato and Harold Monro. Many of the letters are complaints or pleas for assistance with his career, forcing one to speculate whether Flecker's reputation might be otherwise if more convivial and flattering letters had instead been preserved for posterity, but they do contain enough asides to add to the picture of Flecker's life in the years between 1911 and his death. They also mention other figures, such as Rupert Brooke, and there is a particularly striking photograph of T.E. Lawrence, for once in jacket and tie rather than Arabic dress.

James Elroy Flecker, *The Collected Poems of James Elroy Flecker*.

First published in 1916, this is the seventeenth edition of this collection. It is fundamentally unchanged from the fifteenth edition of 1935, when the type was reset and a supplemental Introduction added. The original Introduction makes the point that, although Flecker was partial towards the precepts of the Parnassian movement, he was not bound by them (xxiii). Additionally, Squire follows the popular view that Flecker matured as an artist, but had some way yet to go in order to achieve genuine greatness. The portrait that emerges is of a flawed figure, but a genuine artist:

The beauty of the world was a continual intoxication to him; he was full, as a man, if not as a poet, of enthusiasms, moral and material, economic, educational, and military. Neither the real nor the spurious disease of pessimism is present in his verse, and in his last autumn he was writing, with an energy that sometimes physically exhausted him, poems that blazed with courage, hope, and delight. (xxix)

The second Introduction considers issues of reception and the subsequent fate of Flecker's reputation up to 1935, and seems to imply that he has gained in status rather than declined. Were it written today, of course, the sentiment might be somewhat different.

This is considered the standard edition of Flecker's poetry, and the poems are arranged in what Squire thought was roughly the chronological order. Note that Booth casts some doubt upon this in his *Unpublished Poems and Drafts* of 1971. There are one hundred and seven poems in total, with several coming from *Don Juan* and *Hassan*. Perhaps the best-known of them today is "To a Poet a Thousand Years Hence," which has been frequently anthologized and even satirized by John Heath-Stubbs.

James Elroy Flecker, *Hassan: The Story of Hassan of Baghdad and How He Came to Make the Golden Journey to Samarkand.*

This play needs no introduction to the scholar concerned with Flecker's works. It is perhaps today his most enduring claim to literary immortality. Originally conceived based on a Turkish farce he read for his studies in the course of his language training for the Foreign Office (Sherwood 139), this dramatic work becomes more of a tragedy, if not in the strictest of Aristotelian senses.

It concerns both the activities of the titular character, a poor confectioner who rises to sudden prominence following his rescue of the Caliph of Bagdad, and the fate of the rebel King of the beggars Rafi, alongside that of his lover Pervaneh. It is a masterful play, but might be difficult to stage today, as audience attitudes have shifted somewhat. This copy appeared first in 1922, although the play itself was completed by 1913. The difficulties caused by the start of World War One, as well as the death of Flecker in 1915, meant that the publishers decided to hold off on publication until a stage version was close to fruition and, indeed, the play was finally staged with music by Delius in 1923, one year after this volume first appeared in print. As a personal aside, this particular copy comes from the collection of the present author's late mother, and is signed with her maiden name and the year 1947 inside the front cover.

James Elroy Flecker, *Unpublished Poems and Drafts.*

In his short introduction to this slender pamphlet (it is only fifteen pages long), the editor Martin Booth notes that two of the four poems within are previously unpublished, whereas the other two are draft versions of existing works. "Propertius I, 20 Hylas" probably belongs to Flecker's Oxford period and "Untitled" sometime afterwards. The most important contribution that this volume makes to an understanding of Flecker's output, however, is that the draft "A Prayer to the Brightness of Day" seems to have come from his early student days and may even have been a school exercise. However, the revised version, "Hexameters," was previously considered a late poem and is

placed as such in the *Collected Poems* of 1916.

The pamphlet itself is not a common thing to find in a library, as only two hundred and five copies were printed in total in 1971.

Ronald A. Gillanders, *James Elroy Flecker*.

Ronald Gillanders has provided a significant study of Flecker's life and works, originally begun between the wars and completed in 1951 as a Doctoral dissertation, but finally published here without revision some thirty years after the fact. Sherwood refers to the dissertation, but, as his *No Golden Journey* was published in 1973, it is obvious that he could not have read the Salzburg edition. In fact, there is a note at the beginning of Volume One that Gillanders had wished to revise his own discussion in the light of the comments put forth by both Sherwood and Munro, but this was not possible. This is a two-volume exploration, published in 1983 for a series on studies in English literature published by Salzburg University. As such, it is a relatively obscure discussion, and did not receive the attention that a release from a major academic publisher might have brought it. He makes it clear at the outset that he focussed only on materials and avoided interaction with Flecker's family and friends, in order to remain as impartial as possible (i), but it is still clear that there is a mix of admiration and caution which one finds in so much of the critical literature on this subject. One point that he makes to considerable effect is that Flecker's various failures were formative in a not wholly negative way. On the poor showing at Oxford, Gillanders notes the following:

...it may well be that his failure was beneficial not only to his character in removing his danger of becoming a prig, which is a pitfall open to aesthetes on leaving the University, but also to his poetry which hereafter gains in quality and significance. (45)

The two volumes cover Flecker's progression as poet, his orientalist aspects, his dramatic works and his prose. Overall, the analysis is sympathetic,

although Gillanders frequently makes note of instances of derivative poetic style in particular, and can be caustic about Flecker's prose works, dismissing them either as inconsistent or immature. He is particularly generous, however, in his analysis of *Don Juan*, considering it of value as an "experiment" (294), and thus part of the formative process that was to culminate in *Hassan*.

Douglas Goldring, *James Elroy Flecker: An Appreciation with Some Biographical Notes*.

The copy in the present author's possession of this work is a Cornell University Library reprint, and is from 2011. It is a facsimile of the 1922 edition. Goldring's work is partly hagiographic and partly caustic in more or less equal measures. He sees Flecker as witty, but not humourous (19) and in possession of an almost painfully self-aware pretension, especially whilst a student. Goldring also notes that Flecker's Jewish heritage was apparent in his appearance, and mentions the consternation this caused the poet (25). Such a fear is apparent in the story about Flecker's dinner with Goldring and "a Cockney dancer named Gertie," who took every opportunity to make jokes to this effect (60). The collection of personal anecdotes and selections from letters make this a valuable document of its time, if somewhat mired in bias, as is the case with almost all materials with regard to the poet. There are also some excellent summaries, including lengthy relevant quotations, from Flecker's works, and the more obscure of these, such as *The Grecians*, benefit from such treatment, which they have scarcely received elsewhere.

Geraldine Hodgson, *The Life of James Elroy Flecker*.

This was the second major discussion of Flecker's life to see publication after the poet's untimely end in 1915. The copy in the possession of the present author is a first edition, with some uncut pages remaining (although another copy has also been consulted). Hodgson was a Lecturer in Education at the University of Bristol, and her other works include the 1912 book *Rationalist*

English Educators, as well as some translations from Old and Middle English. The book is based primarily on materials provided by a fond mother, who was, as Sherwood noted in 1971, still in mourning for several years after her son's death (ix). There are, accordingly, some interesting early photos of Flecker as a child and many recollections of his childhood adventures, including a mention that sand dunes became more attractive to him than cliffs as he grew older (33), a clear reference to the poet's growing fascination with the Orient.

This 1925 book exhibits a very strong partiality to Flecker, not as he was, but rather as he existed in the mind of a grieving parent. His flaws and difficulties are glossed over or excused away as the vagaries of genius, and this is nowhere more true than in Hodgson's discussion of his time at Oxford:

Flecker's bent, as has been said by one and another, over and over again, was not towards academic scholarship, nor towards research. Creation, not acquisition was his aim. ... Flecker was a skirmisher of the infinite. It was neither Oxford's nor Flecker's fault that University rewards do not fit artists. (231-232)

This section also equates him with Shelley and there are frequent implications throughout the volume that his true worth was yet to be apprehended by a heedless public. Overall, this volume contains many important details about Flecker's life, but the interpretation of those facts, as well as the omission of others, means that this is a secondary source to be approached with considerable caution and to be considered only in the light of other discussions.

R.F. McNeile, *Three Decanian Worthies*.

This 1951 pamphlet contains recollections of and brief biographical details about three figures connected with Dean Close Memorial School, Cheltenham. The first is the rather eccentric evangelist Francis Close, who lent his name to the institution and used to attempt to "preach down the races...but without success" (16), the second is William Herman Flecker, the first Head Master of

the School and father of James Elroy Flecker, and the third is Edward Ellam, the first senior House Master.

The description of W.H. Flecker offers great insight into his character, particularly in terms of his general reluctance to express his feelings, as well as a severe religious and scholastic rigour. The only mention of his more famous son is thus:

[W.H. Flecker was upset by] ... the loss in the early months of the war of his eldest son, James Elroy (to use the name he adopted for himself). He had died, not as a war casualty, but in a Swiss sanatorium, having already established for ever his fame as a poet of the first rank, though his output was necessarily small in comparison with his great English predecessors. (27)

This seems both laudatory and grudging simultaneously. One gets the feeling that the author of this pamphlet did not approve of the (largely imagined) decadent extravagances of the poetic life. Again a first edition, it is one of two volumes considered here that examines the life of William Flecker, with the other being by Charles Williams.

T. Stanley Mercer, *James Elroy Flecker: From School to Samarkand*.

Amongst a modest collection of Fleckerania, this is perhaps the strangest volume. Mercer frames his 1952 collection of schoolboy recollections within the conceit that he looked at a copy of Goldring's biography of Flecker in a second-hand bookshop and was surprised to see his former schoolmate in the frontpiece photograph (5). The fact that he goes on from this apparent shock at finally associating someone he knew with a well-known author whose work he admired seems a little odd, even after decades, especially as the stories that follow suggest a more than casual connection between the two as children.

Mercer corrects some details provided by Goldring and offers numerous small anecdotes, such as descriptions of Flecker's interest in philately and

geography, as well as details of a garden party which took place in the famous rose garden that forms a central motif in *The Bridge of Fire* and other works (31). These are the real points of value in this short volume, and the notes on Flecker's reception seen through the eyes of his biographers Goldring and Hodgson are simply reflective. The copy to hand is a first edition (one finds it difficult to imagine that there were others), signed by the author and numbered twenty out of one hundred and sixty. However, it is in poor condition, with the boards close to detaching and is ex-library, so is thus defaced by various stamps and labels.

John M. Munro, *James Elroy Flecker*.

John Munro's 1976 biography of Flecker is a fairly partisan discussion about his life and works. Number one hundred and eighty-five in the *Twayne's English Authors* series, it aims at being a balanced look, considering Flecker's poetry as superior to his prose, yet states at the outset that "though intellectually capable, he was a comparative failure; he was unable to achieve success in either his academic studies or in his career as a consular official" (*Preface*). Flecker is constantly characterised as one of the "relatively minor writers" and the reader is cautioned not to elevate him overmuch (113). There is, however, a general understanding that Flecker has not received the recognition that should, perhaps, be his natural due given his literary gifts and significance. The portrait of the artist as a young cad is graphic and seems to be based on a moral censuring of his romantic preferences, framed by a homophobic description of Oscar Wilde's "passion for stable boys and news vendors, which found expression in the stained bed sheets of the Cadogan Hotel" (32). Munro sees Flecker's poetry as Parnassian (65), and is unflattering in his characterisation of the style. He is unimpressed by the prose, describing *The King of Alsander* as "a failure" (77). The greatest praise is reserved for the play *Hassan*, which is thorough, if not totally effusive (112). Overall, Munro sees – and dismisses – Flecker as a product of his time, and as symbolic of the pre-War generation (116).

Dawn Redwood, *Flecker and Delius: The Making of Hassan*.

This is a first-edition copy of this short, hard-to-find book, here signed by the author for “Bob,” apparently the name of a Delius aficionado from the United States. It covers the collaboration between Flecker and the composer Frederick Delius for the play *Hassan*, first staged, as noted previously, in 1923. It seems unlikely that the two ever met in person. Flecker died in 1915 and Delius did not begin working on the music for the stage production until 1920 at the earliest. Nevertheless, this volume offers a very useful overview of the journey from early poetic fancy to full dramatic presentation, with reviews and overviews of reception, as well as a particularly revealing examination of the similarities between the composer and playwright, such as the fact that neither felt that they were truly of English origin, both had been teachers and both suffered from degenerative medical conditions (30-31).

John Sherwood, *No Golden Journey*.

This is an interesting biography written by Flecker’s nephew. As such, he had access to a broad range of both materials and anecdotes not available to the general public. His discussion is strongly based on the difficulties that arose between Flecker and his father, but also offers an interesting view of late Victorian education and its effects upon the development of Flecker’s character. One can clearly trace the disconnection between the dreamy aesthete and the strict moralism of the society into which he was thrust as a child, including his movement away from organized religion, to the apparent despair of his extremely devout parents.

In general, this is a sympathetic portrait with a great deal of useful information on the times and dates of various events, but attempts to be fair both to Flecker and to his parents, which, given the chasms that opened between them, is something of a doomed narrative. This means that Sherwood has no hesitation in condemning the Foreign Service and characterising an

indifferent public and ambivalent publishers as largely unfeeling and unfair with regard to Flecker's reception in his lifetime. He is also vague about matters such as the rift between Hellé and Flecker's mother, but does record some details of their "battle royal" (165). He is also somewhat patronising about the former's rather touching memorial poem, noting that "English was not her native language" (227). The copy to hand is ex-library, but a first edition from 1973.

Heather Walker, *Roses and Rain: A Biography of James Elroy Flecker.*

Published in 2006, this is the most recent volume in this collection of materials by and pertaining to Flecker, and is exhaustive in its consideration of the life and works of the poet. As far as the present author is aware, there has only been one edition, and this is an ex-library copy of the first. It has details on activities fictionalized by Booth in *Dreaming of Samarkand*, such as the gun-running operation organized by Lawrence (144-146). Walker notes, however, that Flecker was not involved directly, if at all (460-461).

Walker has provided the most extensive and objective examination of Flecker's life of any of the biographers mentioned here. It is readable yet detailed, and offers useful connections between otherwise disparate texts, such as Mercer and Goldring. It also creates a contextual framework for many of the letters collected elsewhere. However it offers little in the way of in-depth literary analysis and the subsequent reception of the works of its subject. That being said, it is an essential text and perhaps the best single point of non-primary source reference for the scholar interested in Flecker.

Charles Williams, *Flecker of Dean Close.*

As with the book by McNeile, this 1946 volume, of which this is again a first-edition copy, is concerned primarily with William Herman Flecker, the father of James Elroy. It is a biography based on notes provided by the wife of the former. Unlike the short mention afforded the poet in McNeile's discussion,

however, this book goes into some depth about the difficult relationship between father and son. The father seems to have been a disciplined, devout man with a strong work ethic and a firm moral compass, yet lacking brilliance and a deep aesthetic sensibility. The son appears as his exact opposite, being unable to concentrate on much for very long, atheistic, obscurely religious and agnostic by turns, yet undoubtedly a mercurial poetic genius. He was aware of his flaws, however, and even described himself as the “disappointing son” in a letter to his father (67). Whilst the overall exploration of their interaction seems revealing, however, given that the description of their relationship here is both in a volume about the father and based on notes provided by a fond mother and wife, the objectivity must surely be considered somewhat questionable.

Conclusion

Reviewing this collection as a whole has revealed several interesting points. The first, which is rather obvious, is that Flecker, as a figure, tends to attract subjective rather than objective analysis. One seems either to be for or against him in the main. Quite why this should be so is something of a mystery, although the relatively small amount of scholarship surrounding his life and works may be part of the reason. Also, many of the accounts surveyed here are based on personal knowledge or connections to his family and friends from the time. Additionally, quite a few of these sources – Goldring, McNeile, Mercer, Sherwood and Williams come most readily to mind – are either by amateur writers or are triumphantly non-academic. Hodgson, despite being an excellent academic otherwise, was obviously doing a favour for Flecker’s mother in telling her side of the story. Munro, who should surely be more clinical, given that he was writing for an established biographical series, is obviously partisan, although why this should be so is unclear. Perhaps there is some sort of family connection to the poet Harold Munro, whom Flecker knew and with whom he corresponded, or perhaps it is because of his own connection to the University of Beirut and his obvious success in a place

where Flecker made so spectacular a failure of his own career.

That being said, all of the sources directly concerned with Flecker's early life make some sort of mention of his difficult character, and most discuss his complex relationship with his parents. His father seems to have been frustrated by him and his mother seems to have idealized him after his death. Mercer notes that she was, however, anxious to point out the brilliance of her other children, so there certainly seems to be a sense that the poet was regarded as something of a failure by his parents, at least.

Flecker's works show a more or less linear development as an artist, culminating, of course, in the magnificent play *Hassan*, yet even his early poems hold a great deal of promise and beauty. He had a sense of aesthetic judgment that transcended form, although he is often accused of precisely the opposite. His prose began by imitation. "The Last Generation," for example, draws heavily upon the speculative style of H.G. Wells, and "N'Jawk" is entirely Georgian in its satiric style. Even *The King of Alsander* is, as noted above, both a satire of yet wholly dependent upon the tenets of Romanticism.

The Grecians is a work which has received very little critical attention. There are some pleasant, if florid, travel descriptions, and there may be an attempt contained within its pages to advance a genuine theory of pedagogy, yet reading it within the context of the other works here leads one to suspect that it is more about Flecker airing his complaints about the marginalization he received at the hands of fellow schoolmasters, and at the high-handedness of his elder superiors. It is a dialogue which must have particularly infuriated his father, who was, as the sources make clear, a devout and sincere educational traditionalist. Had he been otherwise, he would surely not have reached such a position of eminence at Dean Close School. The same sort of concern can apply to Flecker's criticism. He is, alas, no Walter Pater here, although there is a similarity of tone. His discussions of poetry seem to have been written to fill demands from editors rather than out of any personal conviction, and his essay "The Public as Art Critic" is a clear expression of his frustrations at being passed over in favour of other, more populist authors.

The sources discussing the life of James Elroy Flecker and the volumes

of letters suggest strongly that he did not live long enough to move out of what seems to have been a rather petulant, self-absorbed stage of personal development. The biographies paint a portrait of a brilliant poet who, despite enormous potential, was slow to blossom, and this might well account for a general tone of regret amongst all who write of him in the present collection of materials that he did not get the chance to mature and reach the height of his powers as a poet, a dramatist and perhaps even a novelist.

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