

REVIEW
of ‘The Satan’s Shoes’
by Yahya al-Shaar ¹

The plot revolves around the main hero called Muhammad al-Tazij (the ‘Fresh’), more commonly known as ‘Iblis’ (Satan, Devil) for his ill fortune, his acute mind, or the glitter of his frightening eyes. At age 13, the boy is both unwillingly and unconsciously involved in a conflict which breaks out between three powers fighting each other; the Government forces, the al-Rahman (the ‘Merciful’) squad, and the Revolution squad. At first the hero is influenced by the revolutionary-inclined students, but is later interrogated and then recruited by the Government. After visiting the mosque with the help of his mosque fellow Atif, he finds himself in the training camp of the Rahmans. He later comes back to the city and joins the Revolutionaries again.

Iblis doesn’t even suspect that he’s in a difficult position; the ‘Hero’ as people would later say, helps the al-Rahman squad shoot down Government aircrafts with flying balloons which he invents specifically for this purpose. Because of him, the al-Rahman troops then go on to face ‘the toughest ever ambush’ set against them. Later in prison, Iblis slaughters four al-Rahman leaders and the Government puts a price of one million on his head, while the al-Rahmans offer two million. The Revolutionaries however don’t give him up when he rejoins them because ‘the money isn’t what really matters for them’.

Most parts of the novel begin with a dream, probably, to make the mental experiments of the author more suggestive. He dreams about followers of the Prophet, Caliph Abu Bakr, who confesses that he in fact never decreed to kill apostates. In these dreams he also contemplates the demolition of ethics and civilization, the ‘Realm of Compassion to Animals’, Judgment Day and God who emanates like a Pure Light he cannot bear to look at, and the Parting of Ways between Heaven and Hell. The first is destined only for Muslims, Christians before [converting to] Islam, Jews before [converting to] Christianity, and followers of the other Prophets.

A love conflict is also introduced in these dreams; before visiting the ‘Realm of Compassion to Animals’ ruled by the Goat he once fed, he is overwhelmed by thoughts about Zeinab, his neighbor and future bride. While he was in the training camp, Zeinab joined Government forces, but continued to support him as he is named the most dangerous terrorist of the area. When he returns to his ruined city, he turns to Christian Rita whom he met in the basement of a ruined church after she failed to commit suicide, protesting against being converted to Islam. Trying to help her out of the church occupied by the Rahmans, he is executed by Atif by cutting off his head.

The novel ends with a scene one thousand years later where Muhammad al-Tazij is declared Muhammad al-Tahir (the ‘Purest’), al-Rafi’ (the ‘Highest’) and the ‘Messenger of the Messenger’ (the Messenger of the Prophet Muhammad) for – as his fellows conveyed – he had eased some of the religious rites (for example, the prayer). His place of execution has become a place of worship with a big oak tree growing in its center. His shoes which he lost twice during the prayer in the city’s mosque are now the most cherished relic. The followers of the old tradition have been announced infidels.

The novel was written to show the path the hero took to find a proper place for his mental being. He undertook this dangerous search to find a starting point for stability in the collapsed Arabic world, to escape from the ‘the civilization dead-end in which the Arabic youth dwells’.

¹ Al-Shaar, Yahya Nash’at. Hiza’ Iblis. 1st edition. Amjad Publishing house, Amman, Jordan, 2017. 264 p. Dr. Yahya Nashat al-Shaar (1968, Nablus, Palestinian Authority in the present day) is a physicist residing in Moscow, Russia, since 1985. He is a Peoples’ friendship university graduate in 1992, obtained his PhD degree in physics and mathematics in 2002. The ‘Satan’s shoes’ is the first novel of the author in Arabic. Dr. Yahya al-Shaar teaches physics in The Peoples’ friendship university, department of Applied physics, since 2006.

Being a child and having a predominantly religious education, he notices the realm of magic only several times but it doesn't fascinate him much. During the course of the whole novel, he repeats 'My shoes, my shoes, where have you gone, my shoes?'

He turns to be more effective in the heroic image, especially on the battlefield. Inspired by the preacher, he could have agreed that the holy war of Jihad is not only a devotional duty, but also love to God (P. 25) and he is excited to go into action (P. 26). Muhammad also shows how 'a new spirit' has dwelled in him after the initiation and gaining a new name (*Umeir*), and how people in the fighting camp stop thinking because of hard daily trainings and work (P. 165–167). The essence of radical Jihad is completely disclosed just moments before the Government's aircrafts destroy the camp (P. 176–177), which tells us that it brings nothing but death. In the 'first part', he's eager to come back to the city to see Zeinab and his mother, who is in a hospital after a car accident. But he truly fights, protects and dies for the Christian Rita in the 'second part'.

The real battle however unfolds in the search of his religious identities. First, the author traditionally separates the mind from Iblis (P. 9), he writes how the boy enjoyed the popularity of being called by this name (P. 10). But very soon he starts to realize the odd ways in which the Holy Tradition, or the Sunna, is conveyed (P. 13). His actual initiation into the religion was made through money. Muhammad, as many others, studies in a school where the moral education is primary (P. 55). Through students' dialogue he learns about the evident use of the religion for certain, and sometimes personal, political agendas (P. 72, 75). The Holy Tradition's authenticity, as Muhammad is told, can be defined by the Quran first, then by the books of the outstanding scholars and only after that one's personal mind can be called upon as an advocate (P. 97). When he needs money he automatically recalls the mosque in his mind (P. 114). It was most likely his seeing of the icon of Mary that prevented him from killing the soldiers in the ruined building he was hiding in (P.200). He cannot help but to look at the naked body of the Christian Rita, but only after a long fight with his inner devil's voice (P. 211, 225). His washing of the survived Christian girl reminds him of Jesus' sacrifice (P. 212). Rita falls asleep every time he speaks about Islam (P. 217), and craves for personal love (P. 224). Muhammad learns that the religion can make one's personal life cheaper than 'hundreds of things' (P. 248), degrading it to an animalistic level with its land marking and the defending and distribution of resources (P. 249).

Theoretically, the main hero learns from the most radical student Nabil how the world and society could be organized according to the principles of the common sense. From the arguing students he hears about the individuality of the Quran (Pp. 38, 73), the faith (P. 65), and love (P. 42). Out of the discussions about Socrates and Galileo Galilei he learns the idea that history can only be liberal (P. 62). He first comes to the idea of separation between religion (*din*) and faith (*iman*) (P. 71), that God is beyond politics, institutions and state (P. 134). From Nabil he learns that books are not the subject of sale to earn money (P. 116). At the same time he hears about the theoretical possibility of creating a World democracy, and that it is necessarily a process from below, not from above (P. 126). Here, the Arabic world has encountered ample opportunities for another Reformation without that price that was paid by Europe in blood (P. 134). The main goal of this Second Reformation is making the religion a personal matter of an individual life (P. 134). Moreover, he comes to the understanding that the proclaimed universality of the Quran will sooner or later find itself in contradiction with the needs of those interpreting it, i.e. religious aristocracy (P. 135). The author also notices that the individual psychosis resulting from religion will do less harm than when it affects all of society (P. 136). The *people of zikr* here are scientists as they are called to help those who lack the scientific knowledge (P. 138). The author continues that the need for the religion is merely a need for the state and traditions (P. 139). Going into anthropology, he concludes that every human is an individual and is represented by their individual memory (P. 142). He refutes the possibility of memory reduplication (P. 144). He even goes to the further conclusion that every single individual is just a single moment of life that lives in a certain second (P. 145)!

Thus, the general idea is as follows: the boy's fast and eventual development within only one year (at the age of 13–14 years) suggests that it is the average age of a common conscious in the Arabic world nowadays. He's extremely clever but his growing up stops very soon, and in perspective he is

going to need a very long time (*one thousand years*, as the author proposes). The author's idea is that the development of a human has no limits. At the same time, the search of the proper mental state in this particular historic period (today) can lead to the idea of how to become human with a human face (P. 256). Nabil in his novel develops the idea of how to move further, not to stop searching and 'die', which represents the philosophical view on human beings as 'a project that never ends'.

Keywords: Islam, religious radicalism, science, morals, politics, Christianity, reformation.

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Рецензия на книгу: Яхьи Шаара. Сны Сатаны ²

Первый роман арабоязычного автора Я. Шаара, анализирующего современные общественные проблемы, в том числе религиозную жизнь хорошо знакомой ему мусульманской общности (уммы), в связи с грандиозностью задачи и огромной временной дистанцией прогноза ее развития в будущем, был проанализирован при помощи метода эволюционной эпистемологии. Результаты анализа указывают на то, что решение эволюционной проблемы ислама автором видится в постепенном развитии героических форм сознания в религиозные с расширением корпоративных связей между индивидуумами. Одним из главных направлений развития таких связей является, согласно тексту, готовность главного героя, подростка 13–14 лет, к самопожертвованию и любовь. Формы научного сознания также широко представлены в диалогах главного героя со старшими товарищами, которые помогают в формировании его мировоззрения, однако экзистенциально возможными оказываются устремления героя в рамках религии с более широкими, нерегиональными связями.

Ключевые слова: ислам, религиозный радикализм, наука, этика, политика, христианство, реформация.

² Перевод на русский язык названия романа «Хиза' Иблис» ("Satan's Shoes") как «Сны Сатаны» обусловлено желанием автора романа.