

Morocco as an Exotic and Oriental space in European and American Writings

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Abstract:

The engagement of western writers with Morocco is part and parcel of a wider long running encounter with exotic cultures. The exotic world and its chanting appeals stimulated the interest of a host of travel writers and anthropologists around the globe. The exoticist and orientalist appeals associated with North Africa prompted many American and European travel writers to venture to Morocco to embrace a new cultural otherness. This geographical space seems to be totally different from the old and new worlds respectively. This, in fact, is due to the opportunities it offers. After all, both American and European travel writers and novelists headed to this location to look for exoticism and for stories of oriental decadence and splendor. The paper is mainly intended to explore western writers involvement and assessment of the Moroccan cultural difference.

Keywords: cultural otherness. exoticism, orientalism, the exotic

Introduction

Historically and culturally speaking, the Maghreb or the orient in general has always been qualified as a site of exoticism and oriental splendor. Edward Said explicitly maintains that “the Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences”. (Said,1978:1). Such a geographical space had a strong grip on both the Europeans and Americans consciousness. The Orient was a myth, a haven, and hence a locus of exoticism and romance. This was due in great part to the spread and influence of the Arabian Nights and to the fantastic stories found in travelers’ accounts. In fact, the Arabian Nights were first introduced to the west in 1704 when Antoine Galland translated these stories in an attempt to produce narrative accounts which would represent an imaginary geographical space that encapsulated the thousand and one fancies and reveries. The Orient in these stories was, then, conceived as a romantic location where both enthusiastic travelers and perverted European painters could project their own fantasies and at the same time vent their own sensual emotions. This was due to the fact that in this exotic world, both violence and sensuality seemed to be on the move. In other words, they were not controlled by the western rigid rules of rationality.

Still, the orient as a location was associated with the vogue of exoticism and romanticism. The impact of Orientalism on romanticism was indisputable so much so that the former was “a powerful shaper” of the latter. As a matter of fact, it “is difficult nonetheless to separate such institutions of the Orient as Mozart’s from the [wide] range of pre romantic and romantic representations of the Orient as exotic locale”.(Said,1978:118). The Orient in western discourse was conceived as a myth and as a sublimated location. William Beckford, Lord Byron and Thomas Moore, for instance, were not interested in the oriental matter of its own sake. Rather, such a preoccupation with oriental issues was a kind of aperture to their concern with “Gothic tales, pseudo medieval idylls, visions of barbaric splendor and cruelty”. (Said,1978:118).

The orientalist vogue spread and with it a whole myth of the Orient was established with its lasting lures and influences. For Europe, the exotic Orient had a lot to offer. Throughout the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, the West turned its steady gaze on the Orient. It, therefore, positioned itself as a superior subject toward the Orient, which became the target of its gaze. The Orient became the subject of diverse orientalist representations in photography, painting as well as the cinema. Such representations were thought to be significant because they instilled a Eurocentric vision of the location. Whether in travel accounts, paintings or in the cinema, the Orient was represented as a sublimated and exotic location, which was perceived and assessed through the colonial ideological lenses. Such an ideology consolidated colonial power and canonized the different stereotypes, prejudices towards the Orientals or what can be referred to as Europe’s others. The Orient as an exotic location and as a desired myth was in a sense controlled and documented by the west. Its reality was, then, revealed through the colonizers’ gaze.

This location served as a medium of consumption. It was invested and qualified as an exotic land, an elsewhere of romantic fantasy as well as a haven of imagination and diverse types of pleasure. It was there where travelers and painters let their imagination roam in exotic palaces reminiscent of the romantic world of the Arabian Nights. For French and British painters, the orient was a sort of captivating realm, hosting a whole range of sensations and evoking a sense of violence and death. The Orient was also conceived as an imaginary and romantic world. This exotic location hosted different treasures and fabrics. Still, this place was bound up with romantic and sensual passion and shimmered with opportunities. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, travelers were entranced by an orient that promised a sexual space for their repressed desires and an escape from the rigidity of bourgeois moral values.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the exotic Orient was transformed into a myth and metaphor to serve the colonial powers' urgent needs. Travelers of the period be they Europeans and Americans were pretty much intrigued by an enigmatic Orient swathed in a kind of veil encapsulating a sense of mystery as well as voluptuousness. For instance, both European enthusiastic travelers and painters were entranced by an Orient that was full of possibilities, an Orient that promised a sexual space as well as a sort of trip away from the self. The European traveler was obsessed with the encounter with an Orient full of opportunities denied him or her in the western world. This Orient was, then, transformed into a woman substitute to serve the Europeans urgent needs and desires. The European traveler's reaction to the distant Orient was like a man's reaction to his own wife. His relationship and reaction toward the Orient was ambivalent. He manifested strong attraction and repulsion towards it. Edward William Lane's description of Egypt best exemplifies this vogue: "As I approached the shore, I felt like an Eastern bridegroom about to lift the veil of his bride and to see, for the first time the features that were to charm, or disappoint or disgust". (Kabbani,1986:67).

The European travelers and painters in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were led into the Orient by sexuality. This orient was embodied either in the image of a woman or a young boy. Travellers and painters of the period were invited to lift the Oriental's veil and to penetrate an imaginary harem, and hence, to embrace a metaphorical and painted orient marked by a whole range of infinite possibilities and unrestricted longings. The eroticism that the exotic Orient promised was mysterious and tinged with violence. The Oriental woman's tricky physical appearance happened to arouse affection and violence. This woman was like a "femme fatale" to be loved and to be avoided as her charming qualities might bring danger and death in the long run. Oscar Wilde's *Salome* (Kabbani,1986:68) is another case in point which illustrates the eroticism coupled with violence in the East. Oscar Wilde's interpretation of Salome's murderous love and desire for Jokanaan's head, as the source of her sexual pleasure and passion for him provides some hints about the treacherous nature of women and eastern sexuality in general. Salome's dance is sexual. She dances on blood and kisses Jokanaan's head in an attempt to arouse his feelings:

Ah I have kissed thy mouth, Jokanaan, I have kissed thy mouth. There was a bitter taste on thy lips. Was it the taste of blood?.....Nay, but perchance it was the taste of love....They say that love hath a bitter taste...But what matter? What matter? I have kissed thy mouth. (Kabbani,1986:68)

The dance here is intertwined with an exhibitionism that attracts and fascinates the onlooker. The dance is transformed into a metaphor for the whole exotic Orient. Still, in the orientalist paintings of the nineteenth century, such a dance became a sort of trope for the Orient's sense of freedom and abandon. It seemed to be different from the western one. This dance was not a mere social expression, but was meant to please visitors and onlookers who did not take part in it and who just remained passive observers. Salome's dance could, therefore, be conceived as a medium that best exemplified the exotic Orient's inherent qualities. Such a dance revealed the erotic activities that the east promised for its perverted travelers. It was just one example among many that portrayed female nudity, sexual violence and languor. Above all, the dance encapsulated in a sense the exotic Orient.

In a similar fashion, the exotic Orient was revealed to the west through some exalted painters who made the trip there and by those chamber painters who just remained in their studios in Europe and never set foot in the orient. Despite the fact that they were far and detached from the exotic Orient, they managed to create a fabricated orient relying on props and trinkets. The far away East was brought to Europe for consumption. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Orient became the target of imagination and even the source of inspiration for many French and British painters in Europe, who were strongly interested in the picturesque Orient, that is to say, the kind of orient that could be transformed into a kind of tableau and which ultimately would carry "representation into visual expression". (Said,1978:118). The orient was therefore a very suitable theatrical stage in which the European could play out "the egocentric fantasies of romanticism". (Kabbani,1986:11). This distant space provided most chamber naturalists and painters with an unrestricted material to construct their own image of the east and, by the same token, to transform their visions and imagination into a kind of tableau vivant.

It is important to point out here that orientalist painting is essentially a nineteenth century phenomenon which is intrinsically linked to the colonial enterprise and its ideologies. The first French painter who initiated orientalism to France was Gros who was, then, accredited to praise the Egyptian expedition of Bonaparte. He continued to create for a century the "prototypes of oriental landscapes, costumes and faces"(Baker,1985:2) without setting his foot in Egypt in the first place. Relying on certain artefacts and trinkets brought from the east to his studio, Gros was convinced that his paintings were the outcome of a close actual contact with the east and even the result of a direct observation of the oriental setting.(p.2). In the same stream, Bonington,

another eminent English painter was qualified as the first important specialist of harem scenes and odalisques who actually did not travel to the east and just stayed in Italy. Furthermore, there were many other French painters who were extremely fascinated by the exotic Orient and its luring qualities. Among them, there was Theophile Gautier, whose artistic tastes and romantic feelings intermingled to mark his allurements toward eastern objects, enfolding him in what can be called “Europe’s collective day dream of the orient”. (Kabbani,1986:73). His visit to Constantinople is a good case in point which illustrates his intense allurements to oriental objects as well as his great interest in Turkish women’s dress. Most orientalist painters and chamber naturalists managed to depict a romantic as well as an “opulent east” relying on certain imported trinkets which functioned as a kind of buttress in their studios. The painted East turned out to be tinged with sensuality and violence. These painters were very much influenced by the Arabian Nights and its captivating tales that they had read about before, to such an extent that their knowledge and imagination helped them to recreate for instance the cave of Ali Baba as well as other oriental objects as real. In their depictions of the “Opulent East”, many other aspects of barbarity and violence were added in order to represent “what they imagined to be a particularly violent East”. (Kabbani,1986:75).

The exotic Orient seemed to keep its promises for painters. There was so much inspiration for those who made the journey. William Makepeace Thackeray confirmed this while he was in Cairo on his grand tour: “There is a fortune to be made for painters in Cairo. I never saw such a variety of architecture, of life, of picturesqueness, of brilliant colour, of light, and shade. There is a picture in every street, and at every bazaar stall”.(Thackeray,1846:278-279).The exotic and painted orient, following Thackeray’s perspective, was full of opportunities. In Cairo, painters would be exposed to exoticism anywhere they go. The sense of picturesqueness unfolded the whole city. As a matter of fact, a painter could avail of every picture he encountered or saw in the street or in a particular bazaar. All the scenes seen in the East could therefore be transformed into a myth and a metaphor.

Still, this geographical setting was brought to the western public consciousness by the exoticism and romanticism it unfolds. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries respectively, this space was constructed as an exotic realm, a locus of romance, adventure and magic. The location further gained a strong ascendancy with the translation of the Thousand and One Nights. In most travel literature of the period, the Orient was represented as outlandish, strange, mysterious, picturesque and as a romantic haven redolent of the world of the Thousand and One Nights. William Makepeace Thackeray made it clear that the exotic Orient hosted a whole range of opportunities for travelers. According to him, the picturesqueness and the outlandishness of Constantinople and Smyrna, for instance, could then be revealed and made known to the west by a mere trip there:

If they love the odd and picturesque, if they loved
the Arabian Nights in their youth, let them book

themselves on board one of the peninsular and oriental vessels and try one dip in Constantinople or Smyrna. Walk into the bazaar, and the East is unveiled to you. (Thackeray,1846:131).

Constantinople and Smyrna, following Thackeray's account, represent the sense of picturesqueness, outlandishness and strangeness that are associated with the exotic Orient. Yet, such elements are not the sole luring qualities that have pushed travelers of this period to embrace these exotic lands. The body of romantic literature initiated, at the time, by the translation of Antoine Galland's *Nights* made the Orient appear like a locus of romance and adventure. For the romantics in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Orient happened to be a source of inspiration. It offered them an enunciative space as well as a scope to flee into the world of imagination.

Similarly, other British travelers of the period referred to the world of the *One Thousand and One Nights* while they were in the exotic Orient. A case in point here is Lady Mary Montague whose experience in the exotic Orient turned out to be very unique. While she was in Turkey, she was impressed by the oriental setting and its exotic appeals. Upon her arrival there, she revealed her feelings to her sister when she was invited to a dinner in Constantinople prepared for her honor as the wife of the British ambassador:

This is but too like (says you) the Arabian tales, these embroidered napkins and a Jewl [Sic] as large as a turkey's egg. You forget, dear sister, those very tales were written by an author of this country and excepting the enchantments are a real representation of the manners here. (Montague,1965:385).

Constantinople best exemplifies the Orient in its romantic and exotic appeals. It is redolent of the world of the *Arabian Nights*. The setting hosts a whole range of elements that makes it part and parcel of the *Nights*. Embroidered napkins and Jewellery are a sort of oriental costume associated with the exotic Orient. They are a reminder of the romantic appeals inherent to those stories of the *Nights*. Constantinople has here been transformed into a myth and a metaphor reminiscent of the sort of romantic enchantments, exotic abandon and languor happening at the time in most oriental settings. This is due in part to the influence and spread of the translations of Galland's *Nights* on European travelers before and even after embracing the exotic Orient. Most of these travelers mixed the actual Orient with that of the imagination. For them, the oriental world of the *Nights* and the actual Orient were in a sense interchangeable. As a matter of fact, it was not easy to make a distinction between the two.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the strangeness and outlandishness of the oriental world of the *Thousand and One Nights*, and the whole range of images bound up with

the mysterious and sexual Orient, were fused together to enshrine a romantic image of the East. In the accounts of most European travelers of the period, the exotic Orient was represented and conceived as a locus of romance, sensuality and idleness. Thackeray's experience of the Orient's sensuality was unique. The Turkish bath, the harem and the narghile were, for him, the ingredients of sensuality and romance. His experience of the Turkish bath turned out to be an instance of romantic repose:

When the whole operation of the bath is concluded, you are led with what heartfelt joy I cannot say softly back to the cooling room, having been robed in shawls and turbans as before. You are laid gently on the reposing bed, somebody brings a narghile, which tastes as tobacco must taste in Mahomet's paradise, a cool sweet dreamy languor takes possession of the purified frame, and half an hour of such delicious laziness spent over the pipe as is unknown in Europe, where vulgar prejudice has most shamefully maligned indolence, calls it foul names, such as the father of all evil, and the like, in fact, does not know how to educate idleness as those honest Turks do, and the fruit which, when properly cultivated, it bears. The after bath state is the most delightful condition of laziness, I ever knew, and I tried it wherever we went afterwards on our little tour. (Titmarch, 1846:62).

Much emphasis here is on the moments of repose in the Turkish bath. This setting has been transformed into a romantic realm, where the traveler is immersed in sensuality and laziness. The exotic Orient breeds idleness and this is exemplified by the narghile. The after bath scene has in, a sense, plunged Thackeray into a wonderful and dreamy world of freedom and pleasure. It is obvious now that the East is the source of idleness and sensuality. For Thackeray, idleness and indolence are part and parcel of the exotic Orient. According to him, the European traveler can not enjoy such moments in Europe. It is in the exotic Orient that "the pure idleness is the best, but I shall never enjoy such in Europe again". (Titmarch, 1846:63).

Morocco in Western Writings

So far, I have extensively dealt with the orient as an exotic space as well as a locus of romance, adventure and magic. My main objective in the last section of this article is to show how Morocco has been conceived and represented in some European and American travel narratives. My critical reading of the texts would endeavour to explore the notion of cultural otherness. My contention is that Morocco is an exotic space par excellence. Travelers at the time were in constant search of a sort of paradise, freedom, wisdom and ecstasy. For these aspects as well as other reasons and motivations, hosts of European and American travelers headed toward Morocco in an attempt to experience a new cultural otherness that was totally different from the

one they experienced in their homeland. These travelers did not seem to be interested in the center anymore. They had actually left the civilized and mundane world to embrace a new haven and horizon where their imagination and creativity could be “sparked and enlivened by the romance and charm of Moorish culture”. (Hibbard,2004:20). Such was the case with the narrator of Mark Twain’s The Innocents Abroad. Like most American travelers, the narrator was amazed and struck by the Maghreb’s mysteriousness and by Tangier’s exoticness. His descriptions brought to the core the imaginative world of the Arabian Nights:

Tangier is a foreign land if ever there was one, and the true spirit of it can never be found in any book save the Arabian Nights. Here are no white men visible, yet swarms of humanity are all about us. Here is a packed and jammed city enclosed in a massive stone wall which is more than a thousand years old. All the houses nearly are one and two story, made of thick walls of stone, plastered outside, square as a dry goods box, flat as a floor on top, no cornices, white washed all over a crowded city of snowy tombs! And the doors are arched with the peculiar arch we see in Moorish pictures, the floors are laid in varicolored diamond flags, in tessellated, many colored porcelain squares wrought in the furnaces of Fez, in red tiles and broad bricks that time cannot wear, there is no furniture in the rooms (of Jewish dwellings) save divans-what there is Moorish ones no man may know, within their sacred walls no Christian dog can enter. (Mckeithan,1958:26).

Tangier turned out to be the exotic ideal space Mark Twain was looking for. The American traveler was actually driven by an urgent need to embrace a new and different cultural otherness unobtainable in his modern and civilized new world. Away from the mundane life in the west, Twain got in close contact with an orient that was both drastically different and full of unusual aspects. His longing for Tangier was repeatedly stated because there was nowhere else where the “novelty of the situation” could be found (p.26). Such a novelty of situation, in his opinion, might actually lose its value as well as “a deal of its force” (p.26) because both he and his American compatriots on their trip around the globe managed just to find “foreign looking people, but always with things and people intermixed that we were familiar with before”.(p.26). Twain could not just content himself with such an ordinary experience. He further anticipated something new and opted for a novelty of situations that would set him apart, though momentarily, from the modern world he came from. Twain was, in fact, searching for an exoticism defined by its essential foreignness in its true and absolute sense:

We wanted something thoroughly and uncompromisingly foreign-foreign from top to bottom-foreign from center to

circumference-foreign inside and outside and all around- nothing anywhere around it to dilute its foreignness- nothing to remind us of any other people or any other land under the sun. (Mckeithan,1958:26).

The conspicuous repetition of the word “foreign” is very striking as it consolidates the readiness of the American tourist abroad to explore and to discover places wholly different from those available in his homeland. The passage further confirms how totally tourists see the world beyond their national borders as other. Twain and his fellow tourists are now invited in Tangier to a sort of spectacle to be savoured and consumed. The Moroccan city seems to encompass all the characteristics of an imaginary world that is reminiscent of the mysterious world of the Arabian nights. Like all tourists, Twain identifies the “foreign” in terms of its difference from home. Tangier appears to him as “an oriental picture”. His reactions to the city encapsulate all his preconceived images and expectations of what this part of the world should look like. Despite the fact that he has never been to Tangier, he has a preconceived idea of what the city would be like. The inculcated oriental images vibrate in his mind at the mere thought of the North African land. It is, therefore, these pictures that Twain responds to in a deliberate and rapturous way. Tangier is a foreign and mysterious land. It is an oriental space that is redolent to the romantic and fantasized world of the Arabian nights.

In the same stream, the Moroccan cultural otherness haunted the European travelers’ consciousness so much so that some of them headed toward the country to trace some aspects of this geographical space foreignness. An example to illustrate my point is Nina Epton’s experience in Morocco. The British travel writer toured the country and wrote about her experiences, mixing both ethnography and travelogue. Most of her narrative accounts were, in fact, structured around the intertwining subjects of sorcery and magic. In Morocco, Nina Epton went to shrines to look for aspects of exoticism. Still, the different meetings of religious brotherhoods, sorcerers, magicians, snake charmers, stories of djin, legendary accounts of miracles, buried treasure and clairvoyance, were essentially examples of rituals and magical practices that evoked the sense of mystery, foreignness, the bizarre and the exotic associated with the land. In so many instances, Nina Epton was compelled to make sense of the unfamiliar and strange practices taking place in some religious shrines or among members of religious brotherhoods. While traveling across the country, she got in close contact with the exotic other and saw some exotic practices. While visiting the Sheikh of Beni Salim, she witnessed “the ecstatic dance of the Derkaoua” near Ceuta. According to her, “every one of his gestures and attributes was easy and rhythmical”.(Epton,1958:33). Furthermore, “sitting beside him, one shared in the harmonious ebb and flow of his spiritual breathing, it was as peaceful as listening to the tide on a calm summer day. He was one of those blessed people who are totally unencumbered”. (p.33). Here, the exotic journey to the Maghreb turned out to be a sort of magical pilgrimage during which the western traveler was surrounded by an array of new rituals

different from those available at home. After all, to embrace another cultural radical difference, one had to move beyond the outskirts of the center and European modernity in particular.

The mysteriousness of the Moroccan land as well as its people's exotic practices would soon be discerned and accepted as normal. Nina Epton's journey across Morocco enabled her to discover the Moroccan cultural otherness in all its features. For instance, in her cultural assessment of the world of magic, she came to the conclusion that Moroccan people tended to articulate their existence using magical formulae. To clarify better her approach, she provided the example of the "moon foam" which, following the Moroccans perspective, would "make a husband faithful for life and cure him of impotence and make him madly passionate". (pp.44-45). These magical practices might look unusual and unfamiliar to a British travel writer like Nina Epton, who had actually spent most of her life enveloped by the inexorable influence, sprawl of western culture and all its modern features. Yet, the Moroccan bizarre practices ought to be assessed as they are. The exotic, following Graham Huggan's approach, is a cultural entity that is hard to be assimilated easily. It is basically a concept that has to be "kept at arms length rather than taken as one's own".(Huggan,2001:13). At the same time, it is very pertinent not to "neutralize its capacity to create surprises". (p.13). Nina Epton came to Morocco to encounter the exotic other and to preserve it in an anthropological way. Her main objective was to write a travel narrative account which would encapsulate all the diverse exotic magical and ritual practices she witnessed in such a way as to salvage the exotic from a probable negligence and erasure. Following Stephen Foster's approach, the exotic has to be salvaged and incorporated into the "humdrum of everyday routines".(Foster,1982:22).

Such was one of the fundamental preoccupations of Nina Epton. Her exposure to the Moroccan cultural otherness enabled her gradually to salvage, to incorporate and even to commodify the exotic to the western world. Her diverse encounters with the Moroccan exotic paved the way for the incorporation of the Moroccan different exotic practices into what Foster calls the "humdrum of every day routines". Though Nina Epton was culturally enthralled by the Moroccan strange practices, she realized in the long run that such ceremonies and practices were deeply rooted in the country and ought to be accepted and adopted as they were. A good case in point which illustrated clearly the traveler's exposure to the Moroccan cultural otherness was the "hadra" of the famous religious brotherhood, the Aissaoua. There, on the spot she witnessed the members' strange practices. The Aissaoua were involved in a whole range of exotic practices. Epton remained transfixed in front of the group's diverse bizarre acts. Though such practices evoked both admiration and repulsion, Nina Epton was determined now not to miss any thrilling exotic scene. About her experience among the members of the religious brotherhood and the hadra, she wrote with a tone of rapture:

There is fairytale perfection about Moorish hadra that makes them satisfying to watch quite apart from one's private views on their spiritual content. The rustic

performers transformed under the influence of age old esoteric rhythms, transcend their limited personality and slowly become imbued with a secret power. We are not really astonished to see them roll in palm fronds or pierce their flesh with knives that have lost their power to wound, they are characters in fairy tale, beyond time and space, beyond earthly laws and logic, creating magic in themselves under the guidance of an invisible alchemist. (Epton,1958:171).

Nina Epton's exposure to the bloody rituals performed by the Aissaoua revealed her ambivalent attitude to the exotic practices. In fact, she seemed to be enthralled and amazed by the members' strange practices. She was not repulsed or offended by the violent acts in which the Aissaoua were involved. Rather than discarding the exotic and relegating it to a secondary position, she was extremely entranced by the group's diverse movements and acts. The piercing of the cheeks, shoulders and throats with swords did not trigger off or engender the traveler's annoyance or disgust. Rather than being the case, she felt that the Aissaoua's rhythmical dances together with the glowing coals in their mouth could, therefore, be transformed into a spectacle and into an important source of entertainment and pleasure for other travelers.

Another eminent travel writer who was very much concerned with the cultural otherness of the oriental world was Edith Wharton. This American writer was commissioned to write a travel guide book about Morocco at a critical historical period, when the country in question was not made known to the rest of the world. She managed in her own way to fill in this void and deficiency by commodifying her cultural experiences in Morocco in a very special travel guide book conducted under the auspices of the French authorities. Travel guide books were, in fact, crucial linguistic tools for the commodification of the other. Such a contention is revealed in Ali Behdad's chapter entitled "From Travelogue to Tourist Guide: The Orientalist as Sightseer". Behdad strongly argues that the travel guide book in its informational assessment and vision of the other contributes to the "commodification of the orient for tourists belatedly searching for the disappearing exotic". (Behdad,1994:46-47). The guide book, in this respect, consolidates the notion that the orient as an alien and far away destination can, therefore, be commodified to the entire world and be an object of consumption as well as a source of entertainment and pleasure. For Behdad, the Orient and its titillating features have to be geared toward "the use of the tourist consumer".(p.47). In fact, with the rise of tourism, every orientalist traveler has "become a sightseer". (p.48). Behdad further establishes a comparison between the orientalist traveler and the tourist. According to him, the latter is not very much concerned with the capturing of the exotic signified but rather is preoccupied with the "sliding over the signifiers of otherness". (p.48). The tourist, following Behdad's perspective, is different from the orientalist traveler as his main goal is "to identify the already defined signs of exoticism as exotic". (p.48).

Wharton's *In Morocco* fits into the orbit of the orientalist and exoticist approach. In this travel account, Wharton explores Morocco, its people and records her impressions of the exotic non western world. Throughout her journey, Wharton describes many Moroccan cities and offers her observations concerning the country's architecture. She further provides accounts of some religious ceremonies and at the same time depicts the Sultan's palaces. The trip across the country enabled her to have access to the exotic and to the mysterious world of the harem. For Wharton, Morocco is an exotic land par excellence. It is perceived as the exotic other. On the opening page, she asserts that "there is no guide book to Morocco"(p.21), suggesting that the lack of tourist information "rouses the hunger of the repletest sightseer". (p.21). Her observations establish Morocco as "unkown Africa" which is exotic, remote, and hence "untouched by the tourist industry". (p.21). Still, her first Moroccan images show North Africa as a place immersed in mystery. Such a mystery has in fact remained unsolved by Glossam or Baedeker. The Moroccan land's foreignness as well as its mysteriousness haunted much the traveler's consciousness. After all, her main objective of undertaking such a trip was to explore the country's cultural otherness. Such an entity became a sort of blank slate upon which she inscribed both her insights and impressions.

The absence of an established tradition of travel writing on Morocco, at the time Edith Wharton was touring the country might seem in a sense normal and liberating. But, it also signaled a whole range of representational difficulties the traveler was exposed to. In Morocco, Wharton was supposed to formulate her own observations in order to make sense of the mystery, in which the country was veiled and in a way to lift the "vast unknown just beyond" Tangier.(p.21).Wharton's journey to Morocco turned out to be coupled with a throng of impressions, visions, challenges as well as expectations. She was compelled to bridge the gap between her travels in North Africa and to come up with her own signifiers to uncover the mystery and the unknown in which Morocco was immersed. The Moroccan secrets Wharton sought to disclose and, hence, reveal to the western audience remained beyond her reach. *In Morocco*, as a travel narrative dealing with Moroccan otherness seems to trap the American traveler within the trope of mystery. This travel account refers to North Africa and Morocco in particular as an ancient world of mystery and beauty. Wharton's cultural encounter with the Moroccan exotic and her confrontation with the Moroccan otherness, tended to be marked by contradictions. Wharton asserts that she has been brought:

Back to the central riddle of the mysterious North African civilization: The perpetual flux and the immovable stability, the barbarous customs and sensuous refinements, the absence of artistic originality and the gift for regrouping borrowed motives, the patient and exquisite workmanship and the immediate neglect and degradation of the thing once made. (Wharton,1984:127).

Morocco is conceived, here, as a paradoxical site that “cannot be solved by Euro-American gazes”. (Edwards,2001:105). In other words, the country remains a sort of enigma which is hard to decipher. Wharton proceeds her interpretation of the Moroccan cultural otherness by foregrounding the difficulty of penetrating the Moroccan culture and disclosing its secrets to a western viewer. Even the text’s title is ironical. This is due in part to the American traveler’s cultural detachment from North Africa. She remained detached from the Moroccan land and was to some extent unable to position herself in proximity to Morocco as an exotic and oriental space.

Wharton’s travel book on Morocco encapsulates a whole array of orientalist and exoticist representations of the landscape and the inhabitants. Throughout her journey in the mysterious land of Morocco, Wharton managed to establish a sort of analogy between the Moroccan exotic other and Orientals. The trip to the heart of Morocco turned out to be governed by a whole range of preconceived ideas, which in fact found their resonance in the body of orientalist texts, whose cultural and epistemological configurations were unquestionable. Hence, anything written on the orient was taken for granted. To back up her approach, Wharton argued in strong terms that such a body of orientalist texts established a certain hegemonic reality and truth about the Orientals and the orient as an exotic geographical space. The American traveler further contended that “every step in North Africa corroborates the close observation of the early travelers ...and shows the unchanged character of the oriental life as the Venetians pictured, and Leo Africanus and Charles Cochelet described”. (pp.71-72). Wharton found herself in a dilemma. She could not actually get rid of the well established stereotypes, dogmas and preconceived ideas on the orient. Rather than discarding this burden of the past, she reproduced the same preconceived biased judgments and applied them to Morocco and its inhabitants. Her travel narrative is, then, placed within the body of orientalist literature so much so that it echoes Edward Said’s major argument about the orient and orientalism as a system of representation that serves the west’s colonial policies and objectives. Above all, Orientalism for Edward Said is “premised upon exteriority, that is, on the fact that the orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the west”.(Said,1978:.20-21).

Wharton’s journey to Morocco turned out to be an attempt to disclose the country’s foreignness and exoticness to the western world. In spite of the fact, that the country is freezed in the past and is represented as a space that does not change, Wharton managed to position herself to the landscape in such a way as to assess the country’s radical difference. Her trip across the Moroccan cities enabled her to discover the Moroccan other and to assess better its cultural difference. Still, the American traveler’s confrontation with the exotic Moroccan ceremonies is very significant as it both reflects her deep foreign gaze as well as assessment of the Moroccan exotic practices:

The spectacle unrolling itself below us took on a blessed air
of unreality. Any normal person who has seen a dance of

the Aissaouas and watched them swallow thorns and hot coals, slash themselves with knives, and roll on the floor in epilepsy must have privately longed, after the first excitement was over to fly from the repulsive scene. The Hamadchas are much more savage...and, knowing this, I had wondered how long I should be able to stand the sight of what was going on below our terrace. But the beauty of the setting redeemed the bestial horror. In that unreal golden light the scene became merely symbolical: It was like one of those strange animal masks which the Middle Ages brought down from antiquity by way of the satyr-plays of Greece, and of which the half-human protagonists still grin and contort themselves among the Christian symbols of Gothic cathedrals. (Wharton, 1984:54-55).

The above passage is a good instance of Wharton's encounter with the Moroccan cultural otherness. Here, she positions herself as a western voyeuristic traveler gazing at the exotic "bloody" festival scenes from a distance. The expressions which are used to describe the Hamadchas' different exotic practices evoke a sort of linguistic structure within which the western traveler and the exotic dancers are placed. The terms "Bestial" and "Savage", for instance, are meant to reinforce a strong difference between the observer and the participants. The reason why such a differentiation was maintained between the western traveler and the participants in the exotic rituals, was that Wharton wanted to establish herself as a detached outsider and to draw the reader's attention toward her status as a gifted travel writer, connoisseur who had to remain somehow outside the Moroccan culture in order to represent it using her own cultural background, value judgments and lodged sweeping generalizations. The emphasis in Wharton's exposure to the Moroccan ceremonies is on the exotic monstrosity and violent performances of the Aissaouas. Observing these people swallowing thorns, hot coals and slashing themselves with knives for an extended period of time, might engender wonder and repulsion at the same time. Wharton's representation of the bloody ritual dances is ambivalent. At the very first glance, the American traveler seemed to be offended by the violence going on among the participants in the rituals. Yet, the exotic bloody performances were somewhat thrilling to observe and to enjoy. Wharton did not seem to be culturally shocked or hurt by the Hamadchas' violent practices. The bloody performances were far from being repulsive. The ambivalence of such practices resided in the fact that they both evoked wonder and repulsion. Wharton was rather excited by the movement of these people and remained transfixed to the strange and exotic features of their private world. Above all, Wharton's reconstructions of travel narratives in her book *In Morocco* are considered as a sort of contribution to the Saidian orbit of intertexts, which essentially aim at "filling in the textual void with imaginative projections". (Edwards, 2001:112).

To sum up, travel accounts about Morocco became very fashionable in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Many American and European travel writers went to this geographical space in order to see the degree to which that location was different from their own culture and civilization. The Moroccan cultural otherness became, therefore, the target of their investigations. The country proved to be a thrilling space as it encompassed all the exotic features of the amazing oriental world. Morocco seemed to keep its alluring features for the travelers of the period. Edith Wharton, Nina Epton and Mark Twain were not the only travel writers of the era who were enthralled by the Moroccan cultural otherness. There were other gifted travel writers like Vincent Crapanzano, Paul Rabinow and Paul Bowles who were also very much preoccupied with the Moroccan radical difference. These writers managed in their own way to assess the country's radical difference. Their assessment had, in fact, a tremendous impact on the audience in Europe and the United States respectively. The travel writers accounts mentioned in this article were actually spread and read for their portrayals of the exotic customs of the east.

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