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Fictions of Colonial Anxiety: Edith Wharton's "The Seed of the Faith" and "A Bottle of Perrier"

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- 1 Although Edith Wharton is best known for her subtle fictional explorations of the mores of late nineteenth and early twentieth century upper-class society in the United States and Europe, the author's life evidences an enduring fascination with North Africa. She visited the region four times, calling at the ports of Algiers and Tunis during an 1888 Mediterranean cruise; traveling to Algeria and Tunisia in 1914; touring Morocco in 1917 at the invitation of its French Resident-General at the time, Marshal Louis-Hubert Lyautey; and visiting the port of Alexandria, Egypt during a 1926 cruise of the Mediterranean. A significant portion of Wharton's writing correspondingly reflects this interest, as represented in countless letters written during her various journeys; a diary account of the first trip, *The Cruise of the Vanadis* (posthumously published in 1992); her travel volume *In Morocco* (1919), which grew out of the third journey; and two post-World War I works of short fiction, "The Seed of the Faith" (1919) and "A Bottle of Perrier" (1926), which depict interactions between Westerners and natives in North Africa.
- 2 Yet despite some encouraging evidence to the contrary, scholarship on Wharton still neglects this provocative area of her writing, particularly as it engages with vexed issues of race, cultural and religious difference, and Western colonialism. While a few scholars have usefully explored Wharton's relationship to colonialism, including how this relationship is reflected in her travel prose,¹ the two works of short fiction mentioned above have received limited critical attention, particularly the first story. To date, no discussions exist of "The Seed of the Faith" other than passing references in Shari Benstock's biography of Wharton, which incorrectly categorizes it as among her "stories of the supernatural" (393), and in a general study of Wharton's fiction by Barbara White. "A Bottle of Perrier" receives passing mention in biographies or general

studies of Wharton by Benstock, R. W. B. Lewis, Margaret McDowell, and White. The only extended discussions to date of "A Bottle of Perrier" focus on Wharton's use of the Gothic (Singley), or on sexuality, reading the tale as "Wharton's vision of the monstrous and murderous feminine" (Waid 184). While an essay by Cristina Giorcelli does explore racial issues to argue that "A Bottle of Perrier" "sums up... some of [Wharton's] most firmly held social prejudices" (119), this story and "The Seed of the Faith" require critical juxtaposition, for their striking similarities and mutual ironies amplify each other as imaginative renderings of Wharton's experience of North Africa.

- 3 Furthermore, the manner in which the realm of postcolonial theory, from Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) to more recent work by Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, has profoundly revised the approach to texts by Western authors about non-Western subjects compels further exploration of these stories and their relationship to Wharton's *oeuvre* as a whole. Though it might be said that all of Wharton's writing related to North Africa reflects the cultural moment in which it was composed and the *milieu* in which she lived, these two stories uniquely relay Orientalist perspectives on North Africa through the work of her imagination. While they do not deal directly with relations between colonial authorities and their subjects, these texts may represent on various levels the anxieties endemic within colonialist discourse, the objective of which Bhabha has defined as "[construing] the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction" (70). Viewed through the prism of such theory, both stories reveal anxieties of the European colonizing perspective upon North Africa, depicting that region as a simultaneously fascinating yet frightening cultural and religious Other, imbued with destructive powers. In keeping with the irony characteristic of Wharton's *oeuvre*, they also both gesture toward a deconstruction of the binary oppositions through which critics such as Said have theorized Western views of the East, but in the end both texts appear to revert to stereotypical Western assumptions of the primitiveness and violence of North African Arab culture. In so doing, these stories render uniquely through fiction the cultural dynamics that also undergird Wharton's travel writing about this region, further illuminating the extent of her complicity with the European and American colonial enterprise. Moreover, these stories compel us to consider Wharton's characteristic engagement with cultural differences, so often dramatized through juxtaposition of American "old" versus "new" money or American versus European cultures, in a global, rather than merely Western, context.
- 4 "The Seed of the Faith" was first published in *Scribner's Magazine* in January 1919 and later as part of Wharton's story collection *Here and Beyond* (1926). The tale concerns an American Baptist missionary, Willard Bent, who with his mentor Mr. Blandhorn has lived in Morocco for many years. However, they have failed to establish a following in the native community, particularly since the death of the more approachable Mrs. Blandhorn. After Willard and Harry Spink, a former lay assistant turned traveling salesman, witness a service at the Missionary Society which no Moroccans attend, Blandhorn inwardly resolves to attempt more extreme tactics. Blandhorn sends Willard out of town on an errand, but the younger missionary returns to find him at the local mosque, feverishly vowing to command the natives' attention once and for all. Entering the sacred building, Blandhorn seizes the Koran and begins to spit and trample upon it, encouraging Willard to join him. An angry mob closes in upon them and Blandhorn is

stoned to death, while Willard is saved by Spink, who promises to "get [him] out of this" (401).

- 5 The story's atmosphere, particularly its evocative physical detail, is clearly influenced by Wharton's 1917 trip to Morocco. Though Wharton did not discuss at length native interactions with Christian missionaries in her resulting travel volume concerning Morocco, the latter were present in the country during the time of her visit. Indeed, in a passage characteristic of the colonialist discourse and blatant praise for Lyautey that pervades *In Morocco*, she notes that "three years ago Christians were being massacred in the streets of Salé... Now, thanks to the energy and the imagination of one of the greatest of colonial administrators, the country, at least in the French zone, is as safe and open as the opposite shore of Spain" (4-5). As Wharton's observation suggests, although the project of missionaries in North Africa at this time might be regarded a separate enterprise from the political conquest of that region, mission workers—and their converts—relied on the presence of colonial military forces for their safety, and their relationship with European governmental authorities was often mutually beneficial. Such interdependence is alluded to in Wharton's story; Blandhorn, who has benefited from the French government's protection while in Morocco, has returned the favor during a rebel insurgence by hiding a French officer's family in his residence, illustrating the linked nature of western political and cultural penetrations into Morocco in this era. Therefore, the story's engagement with colonial perspectives on native culture, despite its primary focus on the issue of Christianization, cannot be overlooked.
- 6 Furthermore, the Christian missionary movement itself reveals inherent contradictions when regarded from a postcolonial perspective. In its complicity with various imperialist projects, missions work during the early twentieth century often reified categories of difference and of Western superiority that were required to rationalize such enterprises. Yet at the same time, missionary efforts presupposed both the capability and desire of native people to be converted to Christianity, to be made the "same" as their European counterparts, resulting in what Ania Loomba has termed "the fundamental contradiction at the heart of the attempt to educate, 'civilise' or co-opt the colonial 'other'" (90). In Wharton's text, Willard Bent comes close to acknowledging this intrinsic contradiction of his and Blandhorn's position in Morocco, but he fails to articulate it fully or to act constructively in light of it.
- 7 Discourses immediately emerge in "The Seed of the Faith" that expose the racism and anxiety of the colonizing perspective on both narratorial and thematic levels. In its narration, the text repeatedly draws on stereotype, which Bhabha considers the "major discursive strategy" of colonial rhetoric (66), to represent the natives. The third-person narrator, channeling Willard Bent's perspective, reveals a repulsion for the Arabs that coexists with an attraction to their exoticism, in the tradition of countless Western textual representations of the East. In the first scene of the story, as Willard sits in an Arab coffeehouse, he observes the patrons of the establishment lying in "torpid heaps" as they placidly exchange "obscenities" (369). His attention then shifts to a merchant arriving for the day's work in his "dim stifling kennel" of a shop, and he wonders what the man does when not at work, for, as he observes, "no length of residence in that dark land seemed to bring one nearer to finding out what the heathen thought and did when the eye of the Christian was off him" (369). This racist likening of the native population to animals, initiated in the reference to the merchant's "kennel," reappears

throughout the text.² Similarly stereotypical representations characterize the mob at the story's climax, as it descends upon the white men, "swarthy faces lowered, eyes [gleaming] like agate, teeth [blazing] under snarling lips" (398-99). Furthermore, the few instances when the Arab natives are characterized as individuals and speak for themselves do not work to undermine such generalization. While the aged Cadi of the Mosque shows singular restraint, quietly requesting that Blandhorn replace the Koran and leave after the frenzied missionary has snatched the sacred book from its shrine, the only other instance in the story of an Arab speaking is a young onetime convert named Ahmed, whose comments merely reveal his lapse from Christian worship and who makes a homosexual overture toward Spink, hinting at another stereotypical Euro-American view of Morocco (375).³ With few exceptions, then, the Arabs in this text occupy the position of Other, the state of "objecthood" Frantz Fanon asserts in speaking of his experience of racism in *Black Skin, White Masks* (109).

- 8 This narratorial repetition and rehearsal of stereotypes about Arabs in Wharton's story also simultaneously betrays an anxiety about the validity of those stereotypes, as Bhabha has observed of colonial discourse (66). That the colonizer feels compelled to reiterate essentialized notions about the colonized as if to assure himself or herself that such notions are indeed true, in Bhabha's thinking, allows for a space of slippage within colonial discourse, suggesting the possibility of the colonized to resist or transcend those conceptions. Stereotypes, in this view, paradoxically give rise to ambivalence rather than to fixed or stable notions of the colonized. Such ambivalence indeed surfaces in Wharton's text through Willard Bent's questioning of his mission work; as he reflects at one point, he "hated Africa; but it awed and fascinated him" (379).
- 9 Another way in which the story engages in colonial discourse at the level of narration is through the narrator's generalizations about North African Arab life, which strongly recall those throughout Wharton's travel volume *In Morocco*. For example, while commenting in her nonfiction work on the decrepit state of some historical structures in the city of Rabat, Wharton editorializes: "These exquisite buildings... have all fallen into a state of sordid disrepair. The Moroccan Arab, though he continues to build--and fortunately to build in the old tradition, which has never been lost--has, like all *Oriental*s, an invincible repugnance to repairing and restoring, and one after another the frail exposed Arab structures... are crumbling to ruin" (19-20, my emphasis added). To one as concerned with architecture, interior decoration, and historical preservation as Wharton was, this alleged quality of the Moroccan character is deeply problematic and suggests a need for Western intervention. Further on in her travel account, Wharton passes judgment on Moroccan society as a whole, commenting, "Overripeness is indeed the characteristic of this rich and stagnant civilization. Buildings, people, customs, seem all about to crumble and fall of their own weight: the present is a perpetually prolonged past" (85).
- 10 Similarly, throughout the narration of "The Seed of the Faith" threads a Western summation of North African Arab existence as monotonous and stagnant, bowed under the weight of its long history. For example, when Willard sits outside one evening listening to Arab music, he reflects that the discordant sounds of stringed instruments "would go on, unchecked and unchanging, for endless hours more: like the heat, like the drought--like Africa" (382). In another scene, the narrator notes with fascination "the strange Oriental elasticity" of the teeming marketplace mob which parts to accommodate a Pasha's procession (397). As with the stereotypes invoked to describe

the Moroccan people, these generalizations about Arab life epitomize Said's theory of Orientalism, in which Western perspectives construct the East in specific ways in order to reify its perceived contrasts, and inferiorities, to the West. Like those stereotypes, such generalizations similarly reveal an underlying anxiety in the colonial or Western perspective, betraying the ambivalence about such ideas' validity that motivates their repetition.

- 11 More significantly, Orientalist perspectives are also enacted thematically in Wharton's story, chiefly through Blandhorn's inability to see the Moroccan natives in any light other than "heathen" and in need of "saving." The younger missionary tentatively tries to make Blandhorn realize the limitations of his approach, for clearly the older man is a model of the wrong way to do missionary work. Blandhorn never bothered to learn much Arabic, nor to read a single book about Moroccan culture, and as Willard tells him at one point, "We don't understand them any more than they do us" (396). However, the older missionary cannot conceive of regarding the natives in any way other than through the binary oppositions that underpin the Orientalist perspective, and his devastation at the Christian fantasy of conversion not holding true results in his suicidal instigation of the mob attack in the concluding scene. In essence, Blandhorn makes happen the subconscious colonialist nightmare of his own destruction by the unassimilated Other.
- 12 The question that remains is whether Wharton ultimately affirms Willard Bent's perspective as a means of exposing flaws in the Christian missionary movement's attitudes toward native subjects. Barbara White's reading of the story upholds this view, contending that Willard's experience "may provide the seed of a new faith, one based more on Mrs. Blandhorn's healing than on Mr. Blandhorn's racist egotism" (92). However, I would argue that the younger missionary's perspective is not ultimately presented as a meaningful alternative to that of his zealous co-worker. Willard at first does appear to be awakening to a broader consciousness in doubting the validity of their efforts to convert the natives, as when he reflects, "They talked, he and Mr. Blandhorn, of the poor ignorant heathen—but were not they themselves equally ignorant in everything that concerned the heathen? What did they know of these people, of their antecedents, the origin of their beliefs and superstitions?" (394). Willard's seemingly productive acknowledgment of the slippage between categories of "us/them" and "west/east" illustrates Bhabha's assertion of the ambivalence underlying colonial discourse, one that complicates the dichotomies on which Said's schema of Orientalism rests.
- 13 However, the climax and conclusion of the story undermine such a potentially constructive realization. When Willard returns to the aid of Blandhorn on the feast day of Sidi Oman, he has like Blandhorn chosen to resume wearing Western clothing, signifying his allegiance to his misguided mentor as well as their mutual cultural distance from the Arabs. Blandhorn's servant has offered Willard an Arab caftan to wear, as has been his habit, so that he may go unharmed through the streets on this Islamic holiday, but he has decided that he can no longer "go native." Far more disturbing, however, is Willard's joining Blandhorn in spitting on the Koran and tearing it apart, finding himself "seized with the communicative frenzy" (400) of his colleague. Willard reflects that he may yet find value in his work by sacrificing himself alongside Blandhorn in a show of devotion to him, while he also appears impelled by a desire to protect the older man as he enters the mosque, which Willard now regards as a "red

furnace of fanaticism" (397). However, Wharton has hardly provided the motivation for such self-sacrificial commitment to the out-of-touch and inept elder missionary, and in this moment of crisis, Willard's allegiance is telling. Moreover, the concluding lines of the story suggest that Willard may indeed leave Morocco as soon as possible, giving up on any more "enlightened" approach to proselytizing that he might pursue and thus obviating the possibility of providing the "seed" of any new faith there.

- 14 On might argue that Wharton employs colonial discourse deliberately and ironically in this story in order to criticize the Christian missionary movement for its narrow views of Arab culture. Indeed, it is difficult to ascertain at times if Wharton's narrator is not expressing such essentialist ideas about the Arabs in the Bakhtinian sense of double-voicing, invoking such perspectives in order to expose their inadequacies. The tone of the narration, in its characteristic Whartonian restraint, occasionally admits of such a possibility. However, because the native characters are not given a genuine chance to respond to or transcend such stereotypes, Wharton's story ultimately silences the native Other, closing down the possibility for a more thoroughgoing critique. If this text is intended to criticize the misguidedness of Euro-American Christian missionary work in North Africa—or, at least, one particular approach to this work—the story's disturbing conclusion, while admittedly showing such efforts to be a failure, also undermines such a reading. The ending implies Willard Bent's complicity with rather than resistance to his colleague's reductive view of the Moroccan Arabs, one that causes the latter to think he must resort to violent methods in order to "get through" to them. In so doing, the story portrays not only how the anxieties underlying Western perspectives on the East can erupt in destructive and unpredictable ways, but also how the East may equally violently uphold Western assumptions of its barbarism. In the end, despite the fact that the "civilized," Christian white man, Blandhorn, is the first to initiate the violence that brings about his demise—and to that degree Wharton *has* destabilized the dichotomies that underlay Western constructions of the Arab world in the early twentieth century—the story reifies a reductive view of Islamic culture as fanatic, violent, and unredeemable.
- 15 Colonial discourse and its concomitant anxieties about native cultures again emerge, and perhaps in more ominous and complex ways, in Wharton's "A Bottle of Perrier," which first appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post* in March 1926 as "A Bottle of Evian," and was republished in Wharton's 1930 volume *Certain People*. Set in the North African desert, the eerie tale recounts the visit of an American archaeologist named Medford to the remote residence of a British colleague, Henry Almodham. Learning from the Englishman's high-strung servant, Gosling, that Almodham is briefly away on an expedition, Medford awaits the older man's return. As days pass he grows uneasy, particularly as no bottled water is available and the rain cistern's water possesses an increasingly unpleasant odor. When Medford confronts Gosling as to Almodham's whereabouts, the servant hysterically confesses that, enraged at his master's denying him a long-awaited vacation, he killed Almodham and threw his body in the rain well. As with "The Seed of the Faith," this story does not directly treat the dynamics of colonizing authorities and their subjects, though, like Christian missionaries, Western archeologists often relied on the protection of European colonial authorities in order to pursue their studies in foreign countries. However, this tale similarly represents the native population in Orientalist terms, enacting colonial discourse on both narrative

and thematic levels in a way that further reflects the enabling relationship of Wharton's writing to the European colonial enterprise in North Africa.

- 16 Like "The Seed of the Faith," Wharton's text contains rhetoric of the colonizer's gaze on the North African setting, this time through the young archeologist Medford's third-person narration. Exoticizing, essentializing references to the natives abound, similar to those in "The Seed of the Faith" and *In Morocco*, as Almodham's servants appear to Medford as "burnoused underlings" and "gliding presences" (448) that "[vanish] like a wisp of vapor" (451). Indeed, the whole household seems a desert mirage, "vaporous and insubstantial" in the "clear mocking air" (451). Furthermore, the narrator emphasizes the stagnant, stupor-inducing "timelessness" of the atmosphere, recalling similar reflections by Wharton about the Arab world in *In Morocco* and in the previous story: "There were no time measures in a place like this. The silly face of [Medford's] watch told its daily tale to emptiness" (454). In asserting the timelessness of the setting, Wharton's text performs the trope of negation that David Spurr has observed throughout colonial discourse, stripping the setting of senses of time, place, or language so central to Western conceptions of reality.⁴
- 17 Despite its similarity to Wharton's previous story in upholding the conventions of colonial discourse, "A Bottle of Perrier" is perhaps a more complex treatment of colonial anxiety, for the character of the murderer, Gosling, effaces the distinctions between West and East so necessary to the maintenance of a Western sense of cultural superiority, as Said asserted in *Orientalism*. Gosling is initially depicted to be of the (white) British working class and in fact seems to enjoy asserting his racial and cultural superiority over the Arab servants, referring to them as "damned aborigin[es]" (457), "liquor-swilling humbugs" (467), and "eathen[s]" (468). He also cleverly employs stereotypes about Arabs to play upon Medford's own racist insecurities, implying that the natives are duplicitous and murderous. Indeed, Gosling succeeds in convincing the American that the Arab servants have stolen a measure of Almodham's money and want to kill Medford as the only possible informant of their crime.
- 18 On the other hand, Gosling's racial background is repeatedly noted to be mysterious; when first meeting him, Medford wonders, "English, or Italian, or Greek, which was he?" (448), and Gosling claims that he was born on the Mediterranean island of Malta. Furthermore, his speech is described as "a sort of palimpsest Cockney lined with Mediterranean tongues and desert dialects" (448), and the narrator repeatedly refers to Gosling's multilingualism throughout the story. In fact, the manservant's curiously ambiguous, hybrid cultural identity is rather like the first image of the story: Medford's arriving view of Almodham's home, a "Crusader's stronghold" (451) that the British archaeologist settled in many years before. It is a haunting "old building, half Christian fortress, half Arab palace" (448) whose mysterious charms answer Medford's curiosity as to why Almodham would wish to live in the desert. Indeed, the house is an emblem not only of the history of foreign domination that this territory has suffered, but also of the instability of cultural boundaries in this enigmatic landscape, suggesting the anxiety about maintaining the parameters of the (European) self that often underlies colonial discourse.
- 19 Reflecting the cultural ambiguity of Almodham's residence, it appears that Gosling, despite his strident significations to the contrary, is more a part of the "native" backdrop of Wharton's text than he would care to admit. Furthermore, though he does manage the other servants when Almodham is away, he appears to occupy as inferior a

position as they do when his tyrannical master is at home.⁵ In fact, in his oppression by Almodham, his repeated requests for a vacation unheeded for twelve years, Gosling might be seen to suggest metaphorically the voicelessness of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "subaltern," or the "muted racial other" whom she has notably regarded as silenced within both colonial discourse and Western intellectual discourse, though not in the gendered sense that she uses the term. However, while Spivak's argument does rely on an emphasis upon the native Other as female, her noting of the paradox of the subaltern's free will only coming into play in the latter's act of self-destruction is pertinent here. As Spivak's *sati*, or Indian widow who commits self-immolation, is by definition a silenced subject, Gosling's only real act of self-definition is one that, if it does not kill him by his perishing for lack of water, will destroy him when the colonial legal system is brought to bear upon his crime.

- 20 Wharton's delineation of Gosling as a liminal, hybridized presence between West and East thus undermines a singular representation of the man as British, affiliating him instead with the mysterious Arab servants of Almodham's household. Indeed, when Medford inquires how Gosling knows when to trust his master alone with the natives, he replies, "Well, sir, no—you wouldn't understand. It's the very thing that can't be taught, when to trust 'em and when not... But even to begin to understand why I'm not worried about Mr. Almodham, you'd 'ave to 'ave lived among them, sir, and you'd 'ave to speak their language" (458-59). Gosling thus locates himself within the boundaries of exclusive knowledge of the Arab culture so inscrutable to Medford. As a result, the distinctions between Gosling and the natives he disdains are undermined, pointing to the ominous possibility within the colonialist perspective of the European subject being subsumed into the "primitive" state of the non-Western Other. In hinting at this possibility, Wharton's story recalls the concerns of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902). While Conrad's novel invites diverse critical perspectives on the meaning of Kurtz's evolution from European capitalist to violent denizen of the Congo, this text lends itself well to postcolonial readings that unveil its implication that, as one critic has put it, "Africa is a place where the European mind disintegrates and regresses into a primitive state" (Loomba 136).
- 21 When viewed through such a perspective, Gosling's act of murdering his master in Wharton's tale takes on added significance. Gayatri Spivak has been criticized by other theorists for assigning an absolute power to imperialist discourse in asserting the muteness of the subaltern,⁶ as alternative claims have been made for the ways in which subalterns *can* speak subversively through the gaps or lacunae in such discourse. Likewise, the character of Gosling in Wharton's story, despite his seeming disempowerment, has "spoken back" to his master through the murderous act that most emphatically silenced the latter. He may thus symbolize the resistant colonial object, breaking through hegemonically inscribed boundaries to rebel against oppression. Furthermore, this eruption into violence by a metaphoric, if not literal, "native" echoes the conclusion of Wharton's "The Seed of the Faith," in which Islamic Moroccans revenge themselves upon the white Westerner who tyrannically imposes his religion on them. Through the lens of Wharton's imagination, this text again implies the world of North Africa to be a fascinating, exotic, yet threatening place of cultural Otherness.
- 22 Moreover, like the earlier story, "A Bottle of Perrier" might be seen to offer an ironic critique of the conventional dichotomies the West has established about the East.

Gosling's lack of control, despite--or perhaps because of--his self-presentation as a (white) Englishman (other evidence that destabilizes such an identity notwithstanding), echoes the way in which the American missionary Blandhorn, in the previous tale, ironically resorts to violence before the Moroccan natives do. Furthermore, in this story, the violence of Gosling's behavior is underscored by its contrast with that of Almodham's native servant, Selim. Gosling succeeds in causing Medford to think that it is Selim who wants to kill him, when in fact the latter character attempts, if unsuccessfully, to help Medford escape. At the same time, Gosling's attempt to push Medford into the well in which he drowned Almodham at the close of the story proves beyond a doubt the servant's murderous nature.

- 23 Despite the ways in which this text thus calls into question the dichotomies of Orientalist thought that assign violence, chaos, and primitiveness to the non-West while reserving control and "civilization" for the West, however, neither of these stories can be read as truly undermining the problematic bases of colonialist discourse. Nor may they be seen as positively demonstrating the resistant agency of subject peoples, for the stories' conclusions, as much as they destabilize the categories of Orientalism, also affirm stereotypes of the non-Western Other, in either a literal or metaphoric figuration, as fanatical, irrational, and murderous. The Islamic Moroccan natives in the first story, revenging themselves upon Blandhorn for his defilement of their holy text, are described as animalistic rather than spiritually righteous in their efforts, while the murderous act of Gosling, who has seemingly regressed into a primitive state in his "barbarian" surroundings, is the most chilling scenario possible for how a European might "go native." Indeed, both of these stories' endings might be seen to signify upon yet another trope in European writings about the non-Western world, the imperialist nightmare of revenge by the colonized. As such, these tales' conclusions irrevocably compromise the potential for reading their reliance on colonialist or Orientalist stereotypes about North Africa as voiced ironically rather than uncritically.
- 24 In the years after *Orientalism*, Edward Said further explored how Western cultural productions can and should be read as reflections of "the relationship between culture and empire," as evidence such as his influential reading of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* suggests.⁷ As the field of postcolonial theory continues to revise our understanding of literature, it necessitates the locating of Wharton's largely neglected short stories "The Seed of the Faith" and "A Bottle of Perrier" within Said's dynamic global environment to illuminate their ideological accompaniment to European colonialism in her own era. Though she is conventionally viewed as a cultural anthropologist of American and European social landscapes, and of the interactions and differences between those two societies during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Wharton's experiences and writings spanned a global compass during the "Golden Age of Empire," and such a recognition necessitates our considering Wharton as an observer and recorder of relationships between Western and non-Western cultures in that context.
- 25 As her travel volume *In Morocco* repeatedly attests, Wharton was clearly conscious of her role in affirming French imperialism in that country. But that she chose not only to transcribe in nonfiction but to transmute into fiction her experiences of North Africa as an exotic, alluring, yet threatening Other suggests the extent to which she subscribed to the worldview that sanctioned such enterprises. After all, Wharton herself well knew fiction's capacity to render real life in a new way; as she observes in her aesthetic

manifesto *The Writing of Fiction*, "all art is re-presentation—the giving back in conscious form of the shapeless raw material of experience" (16). Read with this awareness, both "The Seed of the Faith" and "A Bottle of Perrier" deserve recognition for the way in which they uniquely fictionalize Wharton's complicity with the colonialist discourse of many early twentieth-century texts written by Westerners about North Africa, evidencing simultaneous fascinations and anxieties about that region that similarly emerge in her personal letters, diaries, and published travel writing. While these two stories, in keeping with Wharton's use of irony throughout her canon, gesture toward destabilizing the racist dichotomies that characterize colonialist perspectives, they ultimately do not succeed in doing so, leaving us with the sense of Wharton's participation in both reflecting and enabling the imperial enterprise.

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NOTES

1. For example, see Wegener, who argues that Wharton's writings reflect an "imperial sensibility" (784), but considers how that perspective informs her works set in the United States or Europe. In addition to exploring Wharton's fiction located in North Africa rather than that set in the West, this argument also uniquely considers the anxieties represented when Wharton writes specifically about native peoples, and about Americans' experience of them, in colonial North Africa. For discussion of the colonialist perspective in her nonfiction travel writing, see Rich, Segalia, and Sensibar.
2. For example, Willard perceives the sound of two women arguing as "a short catlike squabble ending in female howls" (379), and he likens Blandhorn's servant Ayoub, wounded after his participation in the self-mutilating rites of the Hamatcha sect, to a cat after a "gutter fight" (389), and shortly after compares him to a sleeping dog (391). However, other characters in the story also refer to the natives in animalistic terms; for example, Harry Spink compares the Arabs to pigs (373), and Blandhorn tells Willard that Ayoub is "a poor ignorant creature, hardly more than an animal" (383).
3. Sensibar's essay notes that in the early twentieth century, Algeria and especially Morocco were often chosen by European men as destinations for homosexual encounters (155).
4. See Spurr, 92-108.
5. In another irony, Giorcelli and Singley note that Gosling's master's last name is Arabic, further complicating the dynamics of servant and master, and of West and East; in fact, Singley claims, "'Almodham' itself means 'the very black one'" (279), suggesting racial ambiguities as well.
6. For example, see Benita Parry as quoted in Chow, 127.
7. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), xxii. Said's discussion of *Mansfield Park* occurs on pp. 80-97.

ABSTRACTS

L'article de Charlotte Rich "Fictions of Colonial Anxiety: Edith Wharton's 'The Seed of the Faith' and 'A Bottle of Perrier'" traite de la manière dont ces deux nouvelles méconnues de Wharton, dont l'action est située en Afrique du Nord, éclairent le discours orientaliste qui apparaît également dans ses récits de voyage sur cette région. Fidèles à l'ironie caractéristique de Wharton, ces textes tendent à déconstruire les oppositions binaires de ce discours colonialiste ; mais en fin de compte, les deux textes reprennent les préjugés typiquement occidentaux à l'égard de la culture arabe. Ce faisant, ces nouvelles proposent une excellente version fictionnelle des enjeux culturels qui affleurent aux récits de voyage de Wharton, suggérant même l'étendue de sa complicité avec l'entreprise coloniale européenne et américaine du début du vingtième siècle.

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