



# Translation and the Manipulation of Difference: Arabic Literature in Nineteenth-Century England

*Tarek Shamma*

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Translation and the Manipulation of Difference explores the question of difference in translation and offers an extended critique of the advocacy of foreignizing translation as a practice that does not minimize the alterity of the foreign text, and could therefore serve as an antidote to ethnocentrism and cultural insularity.

Shamma examines the reception of Arabic literature - especially the Arabian Nights - in nineteenth-century England and offers a detailed analysis of the period's major translations from Arabic: by Edward Lane, Richard Burton and Wilfred Blunt. He demonstrates that the long, complicated history of interaction, often confrontation, between Europe and the Arab World, where (mis)representations of the Other were intricately embroiled with political struggles, provides a critical position from which to examine the crucial role of context, above and beyond the textual elements of the translation, in shaping the political effects of translation. Examining translation techniques and decisions in the context of the translators' own goals as well as the conditions that surrounded the reception of their work, the study shows how each translator 'manipulated' his original in line with political positions that ranged from (implicit) acquiescence to steadfast resistance to colonialism. In a carefully elaborated critique of totalizing positions, the author argues that the foreignizing-domesticating model is too limited to describe the social and political function of translation and calls for a more complex understanding of the sociopolitical dimensions of translation strategies.

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