



In the Shadow of World Literature: Sites of Reading in Colonial Egypt (Translation/Transnation)

Michael Allan

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We have grown accustomed to understanding world literature as a collection of national or linguistic traditions bound together in the universality of storytelling. Michael Allan challenges this way of thinking and argues instead that the disciplinary framework of world literature, far from serving as the neutral meeting ground of national literary traditions, levels differences between scripture, poetry, and prose, and fashions textual forms into a particular pedagogical, aesthetic, and ethical practice.

In the Shadow of World Literature examines the shift from Qur'anic schooling to secular education in colonial Egypt and shows how an emergent literary discipline transforms the act of reading itself. The various chapters draw from debates in literary theory and anthropology to consider sites of reception that complicate the secular/religious divide—from the discovery of the Rosetta stone and translations of the Qur'an to debates about Charles Darwin in the modern Arabic novel. Through subtle analysis of competing interpretative frames, Allan reveals the ethical capacities and sensibilities literary reading requires, the conceptions of textuality and critique it institutionalizes, and the forms of subjectivity it authorizes.

A brilliant and original exploration of what it means to be literate in the modern world, this book is a unique meditation on the reading practices that define the contours of world literature.

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