



A Taste for the Foreign: Worldly Knowledge and Literary Pleasure in Early Modern French Fiction

Ellen R. Welch

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A Taste for the Foreign examines foreignness as a crucial aesthetic category for the development of prose fiction from Jacques Amyot's 1547 translation of *The Ethiopian Story* to Antoine Galland's early eighteenth-century version of *The Thousand and One Nights*. While fantastic storylines and elements of magic were increasingly shunned by a neo-classicist literary culture that valued verisimilitude above all else, writers and critics surmised that the depiction of exotic lands could offer a superior source for the novelty, variety, and marvelousness that constituted fiction's appeal. In this sense, early modern fiction presents itself as privileged site for thinking through the literary and cultural stakes of exoticism, or the taste for the foreign. Long before the term "exoticism" came into common parlance in France, fiction writers thus demonstrated their understanding of the special kinds of aesthetic pleasure produced by evocations of foreignness, developing techniques to simulate those delights through imitations of the exotic. As early modern readers eagerly consumed travel narratives, maps, and international newsletters, novelists discovered ways to blur the distinction between true and imaginary representations of the foreign, tantalizing readers with an illusion of learning about the faraway lands that captured their imaginations.

This book analyzes the creative appropriations of those scientific or documentary forms of writing that claimed to inform the French public about exotic places. Concentrating on the most successful examples of some of the most important sub-genres of prose fiction in the long seventeenth century?heroic romances, shorter urban novels, fictional memoirs, and extraordinary voyages?the book examines how these types of fiction creatively appropriate the scientific or documentary forms of writing that claimed to inform the French public about exotic places.

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