

Menocal, Maria Rosa. The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History.

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Ethnocentrism has impeded intellectual progress in many cultures and many eras. Even in the relatively enlightened Western world of modern times it imposes insidious subconscious limits on our ability to perceive, much less comprehend, alien cultures and ideas.

In this book, Ms. Menocal ably demonstrates that ethnocentric bias for centuries has prevented "mainstream" scholars from recognizing the large influence of Arabic, Islamic, and Andalusian cultures on the development of European Medieval literature. She does not claim to have discovered this influence or to have proven it: these offices have been exhaustively performed by earlier researchers, and the literature on the subject is immense. Her concern is the ingrained prejudice that will not allow most Medievalists to consider even the possibility of a European debt to Semitic cultures.

Such *a priori* denial creates a frame of reference inimical to professional objectivity, and this helps explain the incapacity of otherwise intelligent scholars to recognize and assimilate mountains of inconvenient data that, if admitted, would ruin their accepted paradigm of European Medieval literature as solely a product of a self-contained Western tradition.

I highly recommend this well-written and stimulating book for college, university, and research libraries.

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