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## Book Reviews

Maria Rosa Menocal. *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History. A Forgotten Heritage*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987. xvii + 178pp. \$27.95.

True to its polemical subject matter, the work before us constitutes a clarion call to arms. Menocal's goal is the academic reconquest of a vast literary and philosophical territory occupied by Semitic, primarily Arabic, authors; her antagonists are those scholars who deny or dismiss Arabic influence on broad areas of European thought. Menocal hopes to stimulate this recovery by demonstrating the pivotal role played by al-Andalus in Europe, and she ultimately hopes for an expanded canon and "a newly-defined Hispanism" (p. 153) to provide a satisfactory answer to the oft-repeated question, Who is a Spaniard?

In the first of the six chapters comprising her analysis, Menocal explores what she terms "the myth of Westernness." As a result of cultural prejudices dating at least from the nineteenth century, scholars have permitted, and in some cases vigorously encouraged, a dichotomy between Europe and the Other, in this instance, the Arab world. In her revisionist scheme, Menocal proposes a reassessment of Europe's indebtedness to, and even reliance on, a marginalized culture.

In the second chapter, Menocal adroitly highlights the pervasive influence of Arabic language and culture in Provence, France, and Sicily from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries. She deftly evokes vibrant, multifaceted centers where Jewish, Christian, and Muslim literati engaged in learned dialogue. Furthermore, it was from these cultural hubs that seminal works in philosophy, mathematics, and literature radiated throughout Europe.

In a broad-based effort to show the extent of Arabic influence in Europe, Menocal devotes three chapters to courtly love, the *muwashshahāt*, and Italian literature. Her reexamination of the Arabist theory to account for the origin of courtly love is important, as is her insightful comparative analysis of the *muwashshahāt* and Provençal poetry. However, Menocal's suggestion that the *Divina Commedia* is a counter-text to "the sacred scriptures of a culture that threatened the integrity of Christianity" (p. 128) requires more evidence than she has provided. Indeed, her claim that Dante's literary peregrination is a calculated response to an incursion of Arabic philosophy and thought rests precariously on an argument of silence; specifically, Dante's silence in the *De vulgari eloquentia* concerning the putative Arabic roots of Provençal poetry. According to Menocal, Dante's fear and loathing of the "menacing Arabic world" (p. 138) resulted both in his tacitness regarding the enemy and in his apologia for Christianity.

Perhaps a more questionable matter is Menocal's definition of Spaniard within literary history. Not unlike those historians who enthusiastically embrace Seneca, Lucan, and Martial as quintessential Spaniards, Menocal unhesitatingly labels Ibn al-'Arabi, Ibn Hazm, Maimonides, Averroes, and Ibn Quzmān "stellar Spaniards and Europeans by any measure" (p. 153). As such, she hopes to see their works incorporated into the canon of medieval Spanish literary history. While I am delighted to see these authors take their rightful place in courses on medieval philosophy, comparative literature, history, etc., I would be as reticent to include them in courses on *Spanish* literature as I would the writings of the aforementioned Latin authors. Linguistic unity must surely weigh heavier than geographical coincidence.

These disagreements, far from detracting from Menocal's forceful study, are evidence that the debate on the extent of Arabic influence in Europe deserves to be reopened. The result promises to be a heightened appreciation of a richly variegated period.