

Menocal, Maria Rosa, *Shards of Love: Exile and the Origins of the Lyric*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1994 . Pp. xvi, 296.
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A book of this title and subtitle could easily have been published at almost any date in the twentieth century. No critical fashion would have excluded it, and in any earlier generation, at least, it would have been relatively easy to calculate its contents, or at least to delimit them once a hint were given. This book is about Dante and Petrarch and Jim Morrison and Eric Clapton: and they are only its pretexts, for the range of its cultural contexts and its concerns is far wider. It is in the end a book about ourselves as readers.

Outwardly its sequence of chapters begins in 1492, with Columbus departing Spain for his first great voyage at just the moment that the last of the exiled Jews are departing Spain from a neighboring harbor. The coincidence in time and certain other traces not often heretofore insisted upon evoke the possibility that Columbus himself, though not at that moment strictly an exile from the place of his departure, was equally an exile from his ancestry and religion -- Columbus the Jew? The possibility cannot be simply scoffed away, and it becomes the point of departure for meditations about the link between the self in exile and the selves that preceded it.

Menocal is on familiar territory, for her earlier work has roamed neighboring waters, on the boundaries between Islamic and Christian middle ages. Indeed her theme (see her earlier *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*) has been that we too readily accept Islamic/Christian as a conceptual dichotomy that implies and necessitates cultural boundaries. But she is deft in deploying the poetry called *muwashshahat* (mixing Hebrew, Arabic, and Latin in the same songs) and the dazzling range of works of Ramon Llull to bring alive the ambiguity and the richness of what was rather on her presentation a meeting and mingling place than a boundary.

The facts of the case, however, are pretext for the book's central concern: how we talk about the facts of this, and other, cases. "Philology" is the object under dissection, and it is given pitiless and almost always fair-minded scrutiny. The patron saints of the book (in a medieval kind of way: they loom over it without necessarily either winning our veneration or conferring their approval) are Auerbach, who believed in Romance culture, and Curtius, who believed in Latin culture. The one was an exile of

extraordinary self-possession, the other a slightly furtive non-exile. (The self-consciousness of Auerbach's exile can best be seen, I think, in that in his first years in Istanbul in the late 1930s, he and his wife -- whose status as a banker's daughter presumably brought some protection -- left exile for summer holidays in their old mountain haunts in Germany every year. The innocence that could be displayed in the shadow of the beast remains one of the most appallingly endearing things about that time.)

The upshot of Menocal's explorations (by now Dante is the text on the table) is a lucid exposition of the relativism of our positivisms, the way in which our most fervently-espoused practices of truth-finding have been their own best commentary and worst enemy. Menocal clearly stands against Grand Narratives and with the postmoderns.

At this point the book turns sharply in an unaccustomed direction, and Eric Clapton appears. This is the early Clapton, and his chief performance for our purposes is *Layla*, recorded in 1972 under the *nom de bande* Derek and the Dominos, with not only Clapton but also Duane Allman lending memorable and crashingly vivid guitar accompaniment. There is an eerie appositeness to evoking this text -- and text it is here. The name Layla (to veil a real-life love, no less than "Lesbia" did for Catullus) comes from medieval Persian legend, the name of the beloved of the lover Majnun, driven as mad as Clapton -- in the last stanza of his song -- fears being driven. Elsewhere on the same album a short and hypnotically lyrical song "I am yours" offers the clue to the connection in an album note that attributes the song to Clapton and "Nizami" -- a medieval Persian poet. Some will find the touch a little less light through these pages, but Menocal is still resolute and firm of grip on her theme, limning a lyric mode of exile and rejection which crosses still the old east/west boundaries as she spins a web from Persia to Miami.

>From there it is a short leap to Petrarch, the serious writer who was also a balladeer, and back to Jim Morrison, buried in Paris after a career as poet and troubadour -- of a sort. Here again, summary does little favor to the discussion, which is never quotidian and always enriched by a wider sense of connections in many directions.

That sense of connectedness is Menocal's great strength and it persists throughout what could otherwise have been a disjointed and unconnected book. Her style is easy, personal, and at the same time based on penetrating vision that the reader is happy to share.

The weakness of the book is one that one little expects: its traditionalism. Traditional practices to be sure are here in abundance, always bracketed very decorously, but that is not what I mean. Instead I point to a deeper implicit Romanticism that remains strongly if silently on display in this book as it does in much else of our critical literature today. The last vestige of the Romantic passion lies in the assumption that literature, the literary text and its connections to other texts and even to real life, is the appropriate place in which to ground a connected sense of human community. To reduce Clapton and Morrison to the level of a Dante or a Petrarch (for all that they enliven the pages of a scholarly book, pressing them into the pages of a scholarly book leaves much of them aside -- and to be sure, Menocal is strong on emphasizing that Dante and Petrarch are similarly "reduced" as we receive them) is a sign of how very important the underlying exercise remains: to exalt "literature" by bringing it under scholarly control. Literature, finally for Menocal, is still worth talking about. That which is not generally thought of

as high literature -- like the *muwashshahat* -- exists to be rescued, revived, and revered.

Accordingly, the philological practices that she brackets so meticulously will in the end suck her in with them. This book does not self-consciously bracket itself, but the effect is almost the same. It is, to be sure, the only scholarly book that I have ever reviewed that led me to the record store to weigh the versions and buy the album. I bought the original, while retaining a decadent affection for the later "unplugged" avatar of the same song by Clapton -- no longer driving electric chords, but a meditative, almost melancholy, acoustic rendition. In indulging that secret affection, I fall away from the philological purity of this book. For it was the textualization of the song in its 1972 version that subjects the later version, in Menocal's words, to a "purist's disdain". That tastefulness is at its heart profoundly philological, and in the end that is the revelation of this book: to be unphilological or postphilological is still to be philological. To be postmodern is not yet to be anything quite new or different.

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