

A SEA OF STORIES:

AN INTRODUCTION

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Passion and intensity were constants in María Rosa Menocal's world. Such were her energy and enthusiasm that everyone she touched –students, colleagues, neighbors, friends, yoga teachers, vendors at the farmers' markets she loved– all felt that they had a special bond with her. She could be counted on to give frank and unvarnished advice on any topic: “Are you crazy?” was the preface to much of the advice she gave us. No matter how busy she was, she managed to find time to host an impromptu dinner party, write an elegant, thoughtful letter of recommendation or an enthusiastic blurb, or arrange for one person in her vast orbit of friends and colleagues to help out another. As Howard Bloch remarked at a remembrance held for her at the Whitney Humanities Center in 2012, that sense of specialness prompted him to wonder, “What are all these other people doing here?” Few could match her energy and even fewer her generosity.

María Rosa brought the same intensity, vision, and poetic grace to her scholarly work, and in so doing, she left an indelible mark on the study of the Iberian Middle Ages. Ever the iconoclast, María Rosa railed against antiquarianism, against seeing the Middle Ages as a stodgy museum or an irrelevant historical category. “We can’t dance together”, she taunted Alan Bloom and all the others who held up Petrarch as a high-culture classic while dismissing his medieval Troubadour predecessors and his modern avatars such as Eric Clapton or Jim Morrison. She may have been on to something important: the classicizing lens most certainly distances and distorts even as it discerns, and for all her love of her colleague and friend Harold Bloom, she would insist that canons are often myopic, impoverishing our sense of history and culture as much as they institutionalize and protect our memorialization of them. She insistently reminded us that the *ways* in which we remember –the songs we sing and the poems we recite and the histories we write– have everything to do with how we live in the present and with who we imagine ourselves and others to be. History, for María Rosa, was not merely a science of the past, but also –and perhaps primarily– a narrative of the present. To claim and act otherwise is, for her, to succumb to the worst illusions of positivism and to misconstrue the noblest goals of the Humanities.

As co-editors of this volume honoring our mentor María Rosa, we fretted about the form that our introduction should take – for, María Rosa’s legacy, like her work and her relationships, is unique. A scholarly overview or a festschrift encomium simply would not do; she had little patience for either form. In thinking about how best to speak to her legacy, we discussed her far-ranging work, her innovative and eclectic perspective, her passionate devotion to her work, her generosity with students and colleagues, but we have returned again and again to discuss her interest in *dialogue* –her commitment to speaking about her work in a meaningful and personal way and her insistence on making her work always open-ended, always the product of collaboration and discussion in the public sphere. “Maybe we could stage a kind of a medieval dialogue”, one of us suggested –between water and wine, youth and old age, body and soul, the philologist and



the historian, María Rosa's twentieth-century- and twenty-first-century students. "Tell me, dear friend, about the impact that Professor Menocal had on the august profession of Spanish medievalists". "Aye, dear sir, why, with pleasure...". Or perhaps, the other replied with a wry smile, a parley among her students would have to be more of a "coloquio de los perros", a lively swapping of humorous anecdotes between Mother Hen's chicks.

In what follows, therefore, we have decided to introduce her work and her ideas not through simple explanation but through a conversation. We have each asked the other three questions about María Rosa's work, and we hope that our candid answers to each other will offer readers a personal and familiar introduction to her work, her vision, and her ongoing influence. We trust that remembering her work will be for others, as it continues to be for us, a reminder of María Rosa's legacy, a legacy in which the study of history was not a cold science but an open human conversation about the value of the past and the meaning of the unfolding present.

Ryan Szpiech (RS): What drove María Rosa Menocal's (MRM) work? What are the key themes that she dealt with and the main problems she wrestled with?

Lourdes María Alvarez (LA): María Rosa's last project, unfinished at her death, was about Cuba. Planned as a family history, the book would recount the stories of colorful relatives from different branches of her family, which through her grandfather Juan Manuel Menocal distantly linked her with the famous Cuban painter Armando Menocal and also Mario García Menocal, the President of Cuba from 1913-21. Researching the book became a pretext for returning to Cuba for the first time since she had left Havana as a child. That trip was an emotional one, one she had long deferred and postponed. As one can imagine, such a trip is about confronting the life one might have lived, the gulf that separates family members, about being Cuban and after decades of exile, about not being of any place, and about tasting the bittersweet and fleeting return to once-familiar places distorted by memory and the passage of time.

Even though Cuba had been largely absent from her writing until that last

project, the experience and sensibility of exile permeate María Rosa's work. In the prologue to *Shards of Love* she tells of writing and rewriting "in the fragmented but powerful company of people who have taught me that in exile a spectacular home can be –must be– crafted out of the love of scattered but kindred souls" (xiii). Working as she did at the crossroads of so many different fields, that company of people included Arabists and Hispanists, Catalanists, specialists in music, Hebrew poetry, art, architecture, Dante and Petrarch and so much more. The home she crafted brought together those kindred souls –many, exiles themselves– not only in the social gatherings and dinners and parties she loved to throw, but in her books, which put the work of all these scholars in conversation.

Menocal explored and celebrated the complex and sometimes competing strands of culture, history, language and belief that gave rise to the European and American heritage we call our own. As a comparatist, trained in French, Italian and Spanish literatures, she was acutely aware of the fact that in many circles, the Spanish contribution to that European heritage was downplayed or minimized. Her insistence that Spanish cultural history fully acknowledge the role of Arabic, Hebrew, Catalan, and other Spanish dialects became, ironically, a way of asserting the importance of Spain –a pluri-lingual and hybrid Spain– in European and American cultural history.

LA: MRM's professional life spanned over thirty years. How did MRM's work evolve or remain constant over the course of her career?

RS: María Rosa was fond of saying she was among the last students to receive a degree in Romance Philology at University of Pennsylvania, a comparative discipline with a very old legacy in the academy. As nineteenth-century philology itself has split into various subfields that today stand alone as different departments (such as linguistics, "medieval studies", and language programs organized by nation, such as Spanish and Italian), modern programs in philology that combine the study of language and grammar with the study of historical and cultural change have mostly disappeared. Thus María Rosa's training was something from a less-compartmentalized, more comparative



age. María Rosa was always drawn to the cultural-studies side of philology, a philology in the tradition of Giambattista Vico and Erich Auerbach that took language and language change as indices of broad, dynamic conceptual worlds, not narrow or rigid systems of signification. This “new science”, in Vico’s words, or “philosophical philology”, in Auerbach’s, is, as Auerbach put it, “concerned with only one thing – mankind” (*Literary* 16).

But María Rosa’s ties to this humanist tradition did not come straight from Auerbach, but through his Spanish contemporary and partner in exile, Américo Castro. (Auerbach ended up at Yale while Castro was at Princeton, and the two knew each other and corresponded.) Castro, as a disciple of Ramón Menéndez Pidal, came out of a more empirically minded philological tradition, but when faced (like Auerbach) with the horrors of fascism and dictatorship, he was forced to construct a larger, interpretive theory of history that ended up drawing on German thinkers such as Dilthey, also in the tradition of Vico. Castro’s unifying theory of history took root in the United States, and among its many proponents was one of María Rosa’s mentors at Pennsylvania, Samuel Armistead, a former student of Castro. Like Armistead and Castro before him, María Rosa used her philological training to seek out a broad and inclusive vision of history that did not allow the disciplinary constraints of working in a single national or linguistic tradition. And like both Auerbach and Castro, her interest was in using her scholarship to make medieval history critically relevant in modern discussions of culture and identity.

Her work evolved along an intellectual trajectory that has much in common with her predecessors. Although a few of her early studies were more philological in a traditional, empirical sense (such as her essay on the possible Arabic origins of the word for “Troubadour”), she quickly turned her focus to a broader canvas that could link the minutiae of a diachronic study of language to the movements of culture and civilization. This push towards a larger and more synthetic vision is already evident in her first monograph, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage* (Pennsylvania, 1987; Rpt 2004), which calls into question many of the assumptions behind our notions of a “Western” tradition and a “Castilian” literary canon. Her

vision then seems to get broader with each successive book, from *Writing in Dante's Cult of Truth: From Borges to Boccaccio* (Durham, 1991), which followed Dante's influence all the way to Borges, to *Shards of Love: Exile and the Origins of the Lyric* (Durham, 1994), which connected the medieval lyric, above all the *jarcha*, with a long tradition of longing and love that stretches all the way to Eric Clapton's "Layla". María Rosa may be the only medievalist with a book jacket based on a modern rock album.

In a way, this trajectory from narrow to broad seems to come full circle in her last works, *The Arts of Intimacy: Christians, Jews, and Muslims in the Making of Castilian Culture* (New Haven, 2008) and her Penguin edition of a dual-language version of the *Cantar de Mio Cid* (London, 2009). Both works demonstrate her commitment to collaboration and dialogue. The former, co-edited with Jerrilynn Dodds and Abigail Krasner Balbale, brings together María Rosa's broad Castro-inspired vision of the origins of Christian Iberia with a focused art-historical study of the material production of Castile's *mudéjar* syncretism. The latter (discussed below by Oscar Martín), edited with translator Burton Raffel, shows her dealing at close range, both as a philologist and as a cultural historian, with the founding work of the Castilian literary canon. Both works show her ability to strike a rare balance between the general and the particular, and her deep commitment to presenting her scholarship in an elegant and rhetorically persuasive way.

But in all of her work, from her early book reviews in the 1970s to her last articles in the second decade of this century (the last posthumously in 2013, covering a span of thirty-four years), her vision of history and culture underwent incremental growth, but not a seismic shift. This gives her writing a remarkable coherence of subject matter and style from beginning to end, and rewards her readers with a rich variety of ideas that are all connected by a single unifying thread of thought and expression. For those of us who knew her and watched her work, that coherence is even more evident, and I can think of numerous ways that I witnessed one idea or project sprout into another.



RS: Although it is abundant, the value of her work goes beyond its quantity. How can we measure her impact on hispanomedieval studies, or on Medieval Studies more generally? What was most original or most valuable about her vision?

LA: It is no exaggeration to say that María Rosa Menocal had a monumental impact on the study of medieval Spain, perhaps most notably in the United States, but far beyond its borders. A devoted student of Sam Armistead, and by extension of Américo Castro, María Rosa never shied away from battles similar to those fought by Castro. A provocative article in *Romance Philology* on the etymology of the word *trobar* was an early indication that María Rosa would make a huge mark on the field. Her first book, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*, (which was also translated into Arabic) was one of those rare scholarly works to achieve a true international following, and it is no exaggeration to say it inspired scholars around the world. Years later, *The Ornament of the World* (which was translated into numerous languages) brought María Rosa's work to the attention of readers of the *New York Times Book Review* and listeners of NPR's *Fresh Air*. It was probably felicitous that the book came out just months after 9/11, a time when many were receptive to learning more about Islam and historical interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims.

But María Rosa's impact was deepest in the scholarly community, where she was so effective at broadening and cross-fertilizing conversations about medieval Spain. Scholars have been looking with ever-greater sophistication at the evidence of cross-cultural contacts there and yielding inspiring results. Whether in the pages of the *Literature of Al-Andalus* volume she co-edited with Raymond Scheindlin and Michael Sells, or in the extensive bibliographical essays in her books, she brought scholars together, helped point out connections, parallels, paradoxes and future directions of inquiry with enormous passion and generosity.

One need only look at the program at the Kalamazoo medieval conference, for example, to realize just how much the field has changed since she came on the scene. When I was in graduate school (in the early nineties), María Rosa told her students to skip Kalamazoo: "Not worth the trip". For many

years, I dutifully heeded her advice. When I finally attended (around 2008), I was surprised to find so many presenters engaging texts, historical evidence or material culture somehow tied to Spain's multicultural past. Practically all these scholars had some tie to her – through reading her work, meeting her at conferences, or studying with her students.

LA: How is MRM understood or misunderstood beyond the North American Academy? How did she answer her critics?

RS: María Rosa's work achieved a very wide audience around the world. She was an invited lecturer at universities and research institutions in numerous countries, including France, Spain, Egypt, Israel, Turkey, and China. She had pieces republished in magazines in Canada, Spain, and France, and at least three of her academic articles were republished in Spanish. As you pointed out, two of her books (*The Arabic Role* and *Ornament of the World*) were translated, the former into Arabic, the latter into French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, German, Dutch, Polish, Arabic, Turkish, Japanese, and Indonesian. Few medievalists, and even fewer hispanomedievalists, have ever achieved such exposure for their work.

Nevertheless, María Rosa was a rebel, and her intellectual project centered on calling into question a traditional Spanish literary historiography that she believed had long been co-opted by a nationalist, Eurocentric bias. Her challenge to hispanomedieval studies called into question both the rigid and artificial organization of knowledge according to modern disciplinary divisions and an overly scientific or detached approach to history in particular. In this, she was methodologically at odds with both literary studies and historiography as they tend to be practiced and taught in Europe. Moreover, the popular, non-academic tone of her best-known book, the *Ornament of the World*, ruffled the feathers of many sober academics, both in Spain and in the United States. It is not a surprise, then, that her work has received at best a mixed and at worst a hostile reception in Spain, when it has received any reaction at all.

This sometimes critical response is not different from that received by Américo Castro even today. María Rosa is part of a Castro-ist tradition



of approaching medieval Iberia that is still at odds with the mainstream academy in Spain. I remember joking with her once that her views had spawned a whole generation of like-minded students, one that might be likened as the “Banu Menocal”, an American version of the so-called “Banu Codera”, the familiar name for the many intellectual disciples of Spanish Arabist Francisco Codera (such as Miguel Asín Palacios, Julián Ribera, Emilio García Gómez). Just as more recent Arabic studies (in Spain and elsewhere, including the US) have distanced themselves from the cultural focus of these early founders, so they are at odds with the cultural-studies approach of María Rosa and all who might be said to fall among the “Banu Menocal”. It is important to understand that this ongoing parting of ways has less to do with María Rosa’s work in particular than it does with the deep methodological divisions between a purportedly objective, “scientific” approach to language and history and a more hermeneutic, interpretive one.

María Rosa’s response to reviews and criticisms was consistent throughout her career: she strongly felt that scholarship in the humanities, especially of a historical nature, should be accessible and relevant, and she held up what she called “writing without footnotes” as one of the greatest goals her students should strive for. While readers may disagree about some of her details or call for more footnotes, María Rosa never flinched in her defense of her method. She understood the challenge she faced: “It is certainly difficult, sometimes overwhelmingly so, to approach those things so close to the heart, or to write with critical nakedness” (“How I Learned” 485). She believed that academics often hide behind their references and citations, and that such pretensions to authoritativeness often obscure the relevance of history beyond the walls of the classroom. Yet she insisted: “It is up to us, the medievalists . . . to play the crucial role of restoring the faith of our society in the Academy’s traditional responsibility to provide intellectual leadership of a compelling public nature” (“Writing” 6).¹ María Rosa was committed to the public relevance of scholarship, and this commitment gave her a voice to speak and teach in spite of what she called “the barbs of the Philistines”, both

¹ Ryan Szpiech has explored this aspect of María Rosa’s legacy in more detail in his remembrance of her, “The Virtues of Exile.”

from within the American Academy and from abroad. She responded to her critics not by quibbling over interpretations, but by offering more examples, answering with anecdotes rather than attacks, poems rather than polemics.

RS: MRM was a committed mentor, at both the graduate and undergraduate level. How can we characterize her relationship with students?

LA: María Rosa was to her many students a mother hen, a force of nature, an opinioned advisor and an intellectually and emotionally generous friend. She had a gift for making each of her students, colleagues, neighbors and friends feel they shared a unique and powerful bond with her. Her outspokenness was one of the ways she asserted that bond. She delighted in saying –and her students reveled in hearing– what no one expected an endowed chair at Yale to say.

No doubt it was her passion, her brilliance and her iconoclasm that made students hang on her pronouncements on scholarship (good or bad), music or baseball. Over and over we saw her genuine excitement about a book that had captured her imagination or about an elegant new translation of a medieval work. She was equally vigorous in her condemnation of academic pompousness, political correctness, narrow-mindedness, and jargon-riddled prose. The life of the mind, of ideas, of culture was central, but always second to a passion for life and for human connection.

LA: What did she strive to teach her students above all?

RS: María Rosa believed that her mission was not to give her students expertise, but vision. She taught a way of seeing history as a network of relationships, a cycle of stories, a series of decisive encounters between individuals. In a way, her view was “microhistorical”, in that she wanted to understand larger cultural trends through intimate relationships. But in another way, her view was altogether different, shunning the pretense of being able to fully document or understand the reality of the past with facts of any kind. She taught her students to believe in the ineffable realities expressed by cultural expression –music, poetry, architectural style– as



more telling of trends and realities than mere facts of physical or legal or economic circumstance.

She also taught her students to read history as literary critics might by seeing larger trends through exemplary individuals and works. She placed a constant emphasis on rhetoric, on presentation as much as content, stressing the importance of avoiding opaqueness and academic jargon. She did not eschew the specialist's insistence on the facts of history, such as they might be uncovered and understood, but she believed strongly that a Romantic vision of the past served as an important propaedeutic to further study, a gateway that provided students with a meaning to history before its particulars and structures might be soberly mapped out. To sacrifice a vision of the whole forest for erudite quibbles over the trees was, in María Rosa's eyes, a grave sin to which many of the historians and philologists of medieval Iberia have fallen prey. The greatest writing and speaking should be meaningful to experts and the general public alike, and no story should be told if it cannot be told movingly.

Above all, María Rosa strove to teach her students a way to be in the world, a practice that combines the logic of the critic with the passion of the poet. She often cited a statement by F. Scott Fitzgerald (from his book of essays *The Crack-Up*) that, "The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function". María Rosa had such a first-rate intelligence and used it to guide her work at every turn (the working title for *Ornament of the World* –I still possess a working draft to prove this– was "A First-Rate Place"). She also often held up (at least to me) Peter Abelard's *sic et non* as a model of modern critical reflection, a medieval embodiment of the "first-rate" mind. It was this kind of sensibility that she sought to instill in her students. In her very last publication, published posthumously but based on a talk I heard her give a few years ago in Toronto, she distilled what I take to be her most urgent lesson: the history of culture is a history of complex contradictions, and our job as cultural historians, as critics, as readers, and as teachers is to make that complexity come alive without reducing it to only one of its aspects: "much of the challenge and the pleasure of our work is to be able to dwell

on these contradictions, rather than attempt to reconcile them or imagine that only one of them can really be true. . . . [W]e should be attentive to the power of paradox and the revelations that lie in contradictions” (“The Finest Flowering” 248). This was a message she strove tirelessly to model in her scholarly career, which so uniquely embraced the paradoxical yes-and-no, the *sic et non*, of careful reading and inspiring teaching.

This cluster includes contributions by nine of María Rosa’s students, colleagues, and admirers, including five articles, a review in the form of a “brief note”, an essayistic and personal “postcard-essay”, and a few translations of poems by Muslims and Jews from the Iberian Peninsula.

The contributions are gathered loosely into three groups: The first two essays address one of María Rosa’s perennial themes of interest, the frame-tale tradition. The last three essays address more broadly the notion of “influence” and the ways to “rethink the Arabic influence” on Spanish literature and culture. In between these clusters are two shorter, more personal pieces. The title of this collection, “A Sea of Stories”, is an allusion to Salman Rushdie’s *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990), an allegorical novel in the tradition of *1001 Nights*. The names of the protagonist, Haroun Khalifa, and his father, Rashid Khalifa, allude to the Hārūn al-Rashīd, Abbasid Caliph in Baghdad from 786-809, who was patron of the great Greek-to-Arabic translation movement that was a precursor to Iberia’s later translations into Latin and Castilian, and who also appeared regularly as a character in the stories of the *1001 Nights*. Like many of Rushdie’s works, the novel deals with the power of storytelling and legend as means of fighting political tyranny and social repression. This work was, along with Rushdie’s *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, a favorite of María Rosa’s. (I remember when she brought Rushdie to Yale to deliver the 2002 Tanner Lectures on Human Values, she organized a private lunch for students with him, and would only let us attend if we could show that we had read and digested both works.) As some of the essays deal directly with the frame-tale story tradition and the rest deal generally with other aspects of the legacy of the translation of medieval Islamic culture



to Christian and Jewish milieux, this title is also meant to gesture toward María Rosa's faith in the social relevance of the historical study of poetry and culture, and above all to the importance of narrative and storytelling in María Rosa's conception of history writing.

The first essay by David Wacks (who is, like María Rosa, a disciple and student of the late Samuel Armistead), looks at the notion of "relics" in the *Libro del caballero Zifar*. Wacks likens the opening anecdote of the text, in which Ferrant Martínez brings the remains of Cardinal Gonzalo Guidiel from Rome to Toledo, to a kind of *translatio* of cultural prestige through the "transfer" of spiritual and cultural goods to Toledo. Such a transfer is not unlike the *translatio* of cultural capital achieved through the translation of Arabic texts into Latin in Toledo in the twelfth century. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's discussion of "cultural capital", Wacks concludes that in both the *Zifar* and in Alfonsine and post-Alfonsine Castilian culture more generally, "the literary representation of the traffic in relics and in translations are symbolic tools for the construction of a uniquely Castilian intellectual and political identity in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries".

The second essay by one of María Rosa's students Juan Pablo Rodríguez Argente, also looks at the *Zifar*, taking it as "a defense of a Toledan identity". Viewing the text on both a religious level and on a social one, Rodríguez Argente notes the particular importance of the figure of Gonzalo Pérez Guidiel (ca. 1238-ca. 1299), a descendant of the "mozarabic" *Banu Ḥārith* family in Toledo who became archbishop of the city in 1280. Like Wacks, the author focuses on the implications of the prologue to the *Zifar*, in which the cardinal's body is brought back to Toledo. Noting the important details about the reception of the archbishop's body by all faiths in the city, he goes on to read numerous details in the *Zifar* as commenting on or referring to the question of Mozarabic identity in Toledo. The *Zifar* emerges as "una de las pocas voces que surgen del entorno mozárabe" in the city, a valorization of Toledo's Mozarabic element on the eve of its assimilation and disappearance in subsequent centuries.

The third contribution is by María Rosa's former colleague at Yale University,

Oscar Martín. It constitutes a personal yet scholarly reflection on her English edition of the *Song of the Cid* (Penguin, 2009). Martín considers a number of the various editions and English translations of the *Cid* that have been published since 1975, beginning with Ian Michael and Rita Hamilton's English version published in Manchester in 1975, and later republished by Penguin. He contrasts this with the recent edition published by Penguin in 2009 containing a new translation by Burton Raffel and introduction and extensive notes by María Rosa. Martín observes how this new edition turns the reading of the poem away from the traditional concerns over its historicity and poetic form to focus on how its interpretation in the twentieth century –politically motivated and ideologically charged– has determined the reception of the *Cid* as a particularly Christian figure and nationalist hero at once violent and anti-Muslim. Reading against the tide of this traditional image of the *Cid*, María Rosa's presentation stresses the multiconfessional and fluid cultural and linguistic world that undergirds the story. Most strikingly, Martín points out how María Rosa's own reading of the *Cid* hinges on the concept of exile – a theme that runs throughout María Rosa's work and finds its most eloquent voice in her 1994 book *Shards of Love*. Martín's sensitive and astute observations show us how this edition of the *Cid* –María Rosa's last book and one of her last publications– develops and successfully punctuates the conceptual work of her writing over the previous two decades by reprising this theme in a critically original and deeply personal way.

While the first three essays all consider aspects of the Castilian canon up to the fourteenth centuries, the last three look more broadly at other aspects of the reception of Arabic culture through translation, the rededication of monuments, and fiction. These last three begin with an essay by María Rosa's student S.J. Pearce who considers the enigmatic Hebrew preface affixed to the Hebrew translation of the Arabic *Treatise on the Doctrine of Resurrection* (*Maqāla fī teḥiyyat ha-metim*), a work ascribed to Moses Maimonides and understood as a self-defense against attacks by Maimonides' critics. The preface is attributed to an unknown figure, one Joseph ben Joel, and describes the alleged process of translation of the original from Arabic to Hebrew,



but it then seems to fictionalize this process by claiming that the Hebrew was translated back into Arabic and that this Arabic was finally translated into the Hebrew version we now possess. This Joseph ben Joel thus offers “a tortured, twisted history of four retranslations and the spectacular loss of text that necessitated them”. As Pearce shows us, the text seems to offer a comment on the symbolic value of Arabic among Andalusī Jews of the thirteenth century, a value that also provoked a sort of anxiety of influence. By tracing the “tortured” invention of this false translation history, Pearce also shows how translation itself was valued as a redemptive process that was deeply implicated in the articulation of cultural identity among Jews just as it was for contemporary Christians in Iberia. Most importantly, Pearce’s fascinating and little-known story speaks to one of María Rosa’s most strongly held, Castro-esque arguments: that all of the cultures of Iberia were products of translation and transfer, and that it was the claims to purity, pedigree, and orthodoxy that led ultimately to the destruction of its many intertwined worlds.

The next essay by Gregory Hutcheson dovetails very logically with Pearce’s story by tracing the history and fate of one of María Rosa’s favorite Toledan monuments, the “Mezquita del Cristo de la Luz”. Erected as the *Bāb al-Mardūm* neighborhood mosque in 999 during the period of the Cordoban caliphate, the building is one of the few remaining Muslim structures in Toledo, having survived the vicissitudes of time in part by being converted into a Christian church known as *La Virgen de la luz* in 1187, a century after the conquest of the city in the late eleventh century. Hutcheson considers the tangled and confused history of the monument and its various stages of archeological recovery and restoration beginning in the nineteenth century and continuing to the present, including the curious phenomenon of Arabic graffiti left behind by recent Muslim visitors. By tracing “efforts to recover the site’s past imaginatively or selectively in the service of contemporary agendas”, Hutcheson shows how the ambiguous and historically layered nature of the site has been simplified in the interest of its modern value as a tourist icon of Toledo’s alleged “three cultures”. A more nuanced reading allows us to see the paradoxical value of the site as “an ongoing series of

scripted and unscripted encounters” produced over the course of Spain’s history.

The final essay by María Rosa’s student Anita Savo turns to *Don Quijote*, and considers the oft-treated question of the Arabic legacy in Cervantes through the question of the significance of eggplants in the novel. While the eggplant (*berenjena*) is certainly tied to the common interpretation of the name of Cide Hamete Benengeli, Cervantes’ fictitious Arabic alter-ego to whom he attributes the text, Savo’s study shows that “the eggplant is replete with other cultural, etymological and medicinal connotations”. Not only does the ersatz author derive his name from the eggplant, but some of the characters themselves all “bear the sign of the eggplant” in the text. Most interestingly, the plant has long been shown to be connected with madness and an imbalance of humors, making its place in *Don Quijote*’s story all the more suggestive. The upshot of Savo’s careful and perceptive consideration of the eggplant is to show how “Cervantes reminds us of the stakes involved in assuming a name and playing a role”. This commentary has important consequences for the reading of *Don Quijote*’s story, and even more for understanding Cervantes’ broader arguments regarding truth, fiction, and history.

These original, penetrating studies, all reflecting in one way or another María Rosa’s vision of history and literature, are embedded (in frame-tale style) within three other contributions, including two translations of poetry and a personal reflection. The first translation, which follows this introduction and opens the cluster, includes four short selections from the *Proverbios morales* of Sem Tob de Carrión, rendered freely and beautifully into English by Peter Cole. Cole was a close friend and collaborator of María Rosa’s at Yale’s Whitney Humanities Center, which she directed, and she often assigned his translations of medieval Hebrew poets of Sefarad in her classes. These selections, gathered under the title “More for Santob”, are taken from the recent volume of poetry by Cole, *The Invention of Influence* (New Directions, 2014), which Cole dedicated to María Rosa. The other poem dedicated to María Rosa, which concludes this special issue, is by another of her longtime collaborators and friends, Michael Sells, with whom



she co-edited (also with Raymond Scheindlin) *The Literature of Al-Andalus* (2000), one of the volumes of the *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*. This poem by Andalusī sufi Ibn al-‘Arabī, which Sells translated from the Arabic, is taken from Ibn al-‘Arabī’s book of mystical love poetry *Turjumān al-Ashwāq* (*Translation of Desires*).

Together with the opening translations by Cole, these poems provide a frame for the academic articles within. The articles are also divided into clusters by Martín’s brief note and by the creative interlude contributed by Israel Burshatin, also a longtime colleague and friend of María Rosa, who has written a number of moving vignettes (which he has called “postcards”) in dialogue with her memory and her legacy. The use of these creative pieces to organize the frame for the literary and historical studies is meant to echo María Rosa’s own vision and way of working, not only by forcing us to read our history and criticism through the lens of poetry, as she always did, but also to make this cluster in her memory be as much an offering of the heart as of the mind. These are words that María Rosa would find moving, and they capture an echo of the beauty of María Rosa’s own critical voice. Like the *Cambridge History* volume co-edited by María Rosa, which ends with Sells’ translation of the famous “Qasīda in nūn” of Cordoban poet Ibn Zaydūn, the translation by Sells here concludes the cluster on a high note of sublime longing, a dedication of love to María Rosa’s memory. Ibn ‘Arabī’s words are a call to us all to carry on María Rosa’s legacy by nurturing and defending her vision in our work and thought:

*For her, we’ll shade together from the noonday heat
in her tent, in secret, and fulfill the promise we made.*

Despite the variety and richness of its articles, reflections, and poetry, this cluster can only but gesture to a few of the many aspects of María Rosa’s work that stood out as memorable and worthy of further discussion. We offer them here as a tribute to María Rosa’s profound impact on hispanomedieval studies and above all as a token of our deep gratitude for all that María Rosa has given us –and given so many others– though her life and her work. Above all, we offer them as the beginning of a conversation – one with each

other, with students, with our sources, with ourselves. And of course, as she would insist, with the past and the future, with our memory and our hope and our unique place in time.

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