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Cosmopolitanism and Medievalism

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Cosmopolitan ideas flourished during the Enlightenment, which also viewed the Middle Ages as antithetical to such ideas. However, some recent representations of the Middle Ages in film and literature focus on heroic defenses of cosmopolitan ideals in the Middle Ages. This essay surveys some arguments about medieval cosmopolitanism and concludes that cosmopolitan and anti-cosmopolitan positions often existed simultaneously within the same discourse or narrative. Chaucer, Gower, and Mandeville are briefly discussed as examples.

KEYWORDS Chahine, Chaucer, cosmopolitanism, Gower, Mandeville, medievalism, Pavic

The general theme of this essay is announced by its title, with a weak “and” in order to indicate the network of connections it develops. Its ethical focus is one belatedly learned from the work of R. A. Shoaf, who from his earliest publications sought to alert us to the ethics of reading and interpretation long before such concerns became general. For the past twenty years, one of the abiding debates surrounding human rights, international relations, and political responsibility has been between cosmopolitanism and communitarianism. These debates usually focus on the heritage of Enlightenment thought, as the eighteenth century reconceived what it meant to be a citizen of the world. While certain medieval notions, such as natural law and the possibility of a Holy Roman Empire, have been invoked as precursors of cosmopolitanism, medieval Christian concepts of the global and the other have been more often dismissed as one dimensional and xenophobic. Yet the Middle Ages is often imagined as a site of conflict between a utopian cosmopolitanism and a repressive theocracy. Moreover, the imaginative literature of the Middle Ages at certain crucial points explores the contradictions between medieval universalism and the closed system from which that universalism emerges.

The question of how we think about our political responsibilities across national boundaries is undoubtedly urgent, and so, therefore, is an account and understanding of how that thinking has come about. Such an attempt is also of importance to some recent developments in medieval studies. I am thinking particularly of the work of

scholars such as Geraldine Heng, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, Lisa Lampert, and others, who have analyzed how medieval texts portray those who are outside the normative community. Their subtle and powerful readings have made medieval works newly important to a wide range of scholars and students, even beyond those specializing in medieval studies. If there is a risk to what we have been doing, and I include some of my own publications in this category, it is that it might seem to reinscribe an Enlightenment view of the Middle Ages as xenophobic, prejudiced, and violent, virtually essentializing Western culture as inescapably imperialist and racist. While we might now look back at someone like William Morris as hopelessly sentimental in his utopian medievalism, it is possible nevertheless to explore a countertendency to a dystopic view both in the Middle Ages and in our thinking about the Middle Ages, and to suggest that such an exploration is not merely a reinscription of liberal idealism. There are moments when thinking about the other emerge as ways of thinking about ourselves and therefore about the responsibilities we owe to a world beyond the limits of our social horizon. Here, too, I am indebted to Shoaf's understanding of the complexities and ironies of representation and its desires, particularly as he articulated them in *Chaucer's Body*, concerning the way a translator "can partner the past and find his way into the future" (Shoaf, 137). In that spirit, I attempt to bring into alignment recent interpretations of medieval literature familiar to specialists with important recent thinking about transnational ethical responsibilities, and I intend what follows to be a speculative essay addressed to that broader conversation.

Medieval cosmopolitanism after the Cold War

I begin with three scenarios.

The first opens in Carcassonne towards the end of the twelfth century. A man is dragged behind mounted soldiers to the town square where he is burned at the stake by the Inquisition for translating the heretical works of Averroës. In the crowd of onlookers is his son, who escapes to Spain to Averroës himself, who takes the young man in. Averroës is a judge, but also adviser to Mansour, ruler of Andalusia, whose father had appointed him, and tutor to the two sons of Mansour. One of the boys, Abdullah, spends his days dancing with gypsies and has a special bond with a singer who becomes something of a second father to him. But Abdullah does not have the strongest character and is recruited and brainwashed by a puritanical Islamic sect, eventually even believing his father (who thinks he is manipulating the sect for his own political aims) is an apostate. The other son, Nassir, is attached to Averroës's rationalist and liberal values and grows alienated from his father. Court intrigue, led by one Abu Raid, who desires power for himself, results in Averroës's banishment, preceded by the burning of his book. Nassir has foreseen this possibility and has escaped to Egypt with Averroës's books. Even as Averroës is sent off into exile, the court intrigue is discovered and the two princes reunite with their father to defeat a Christian invasion, which had been blamed on Averroës but was in fact a plot hatched by the disloyal and hypocritical Abu Raid.

The second scenario also occurs in Al-Andalus. During the last days in Spain of the al-Hudayl clan, the Reconquest tightens its grip and both the armies of Isabella and the Spanish Inquisition purge Cordoba of its cherished literary and intellectual culture. Almost surrendering before it resists, the al-Hudayl clan is the victim of its own dreams, betrayed by defections and conversions of some of its members, and by the incestuous Faulknerian past of others. The fragility of both tolerance and cosmopolitanism, among Christians, Jews, and Moslems, is emphasized by contrast to the fierce prejudices of a vengeful conquistador Catholicism. The family itself is almost entirely destroyed, along with its village and its retainers, dramatized by a horrific image of Cortez himself slaughtering the intellectual, youngest son of the family, after the father has fallen in defense of the castle. The family's daughter had earlier emigrated to North Africa, and the bold, if not brilliant, older son has joined a guerrilla force.

The third scenario takes place in Central Asia, during the eighth century, where the ruler of the Khazars has decided to convert his people from their shamanism and will choose one of the monotheisms — Christianity, Judaism, or Islam — depending on the success of a debate among their agents. This apparent rationalist wisdom of the Khazar polemic does not entirely eliminate the magic of early Khazar culture, in which time can flow both backwards and forwards and in which chosen figures can travel in history through dreams. As Khazar culture is apparently subsumed by the conquests of other Turkic peoples, these figures are said to appear at crucial contests between the great faiths and their civilizations.

Many readers will have recognized that while the scenarios I have just sketched are based on fragments of medieval history and culture, they are in fact descriptions of a film and two novels produced over the past few decades. What they share in common is a counter-view of a Middle Ages not totally dominated by the prejudice, isolation, and xenophobia constructed by the Enlightenment or even by the Renaissance. Instead, the Middle Ages offers moments of almost utopian cosmopolitanism, in which cultures reach out to each other in what turns out to be a fragile and ultimately futile gesture. As I will explain, I find it significant that these works were produced in the historical moment slightly before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the communist governments, the so-called era of the end of ideology, or perhaps even of history, and the events of September 11, 2001 and their aftermath, where the clash of civilizations became both prophecy and pretext. They represent a turn towards the Middle Ages after the Cold War, and they do so in the context of how we should accommodate differences within and between cultures, and how human rights can be extended, defended, or negotiated in those different cultures.

The first scenario is a rough description of the plot of Youssef Chahine's film *Destiny*, released in 1999, and explicitly directed against the worrisome religious fanaticism of the Islamic world as he perceived it. Chahine himself survived a stabbing attack motivated by another of his films that had been condemned as blasphemy. Significantly, the film preceded the attacks of 9/11 and the American-led invasions

of Afghanistan and Iraq. The exiled Averroës is a stand-in for Chahine himself, but also for a culture in which the hope of free expression and inquiry is held hostage to political motivation and willed ignorance. At the same time, it pictures Al-Andalus as at least temporarily more advanced and more open to dialogue within and without than the Christianized Languedoc of the film's opening scenes. Similarly, the second scenario is a description of Tariq Ali's novel, *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (1993), part of an "Islam Quartet" that tracks a series of crises and triumphs in the development of Islamic culture in the Middle East, in Sicily, and here, in Spain. A cultured family in Granada becomes a lens through which to observe the collapse of Andalusian civilization, witnessing book burnings, persecutions and the rise of fanaticism on both sides. Again, also, the history of a possible alternative to polar opposition runs through the book, frustrated by the intransigence of Christian culture and the internal contradictions of the flowering of Islamic civilization. The book paints an elegiac portrait of a culture about to be destroyed, with its lyricism, its tolerance, its sensual love of life and its intellectual appetite. The novel's subplots and love stories allude to the Mozarabic ballads and such famous pan-Islamic stories as Leila and Mejnoun. As in its companion volume, *The Book of Saladin* (1999), the projections of Western Christianity are deconstructed. The Europeans, not the Arabs or Berbers, are intolerant, fanatical, and obsessed with purification. Islamic culture is presented as complex and subtle, deeply learned and respectful of tradition, and at the same time with a certain sense of pessimistic fatalism about the possibility of a humane future.

The third scenario is that of another recent author who has imagined the Middle Ages as a point of both origin and decline — indeed, as a continual haunting of the present. This is, of course, Milorad Pavic in his *Dictionary of the Khazars*, whose archaic title is undone by its postmodern subtitle, "A Lexicon Novel in 100,000 Words." Pavic published the novel in Serbo-Croatian in 1984, and it appeared in an English translation in 1988. Where Ali chose a literary form of historical romance that is indistinguishable from contemporary popular fiction, Pavic constructs novels on the model of what now seems to be a period postmodern style of metafiction, resembling the works of Calvino, Cortazar, Eco, Nabokov, Coover, and others rooted in Borges. It is not uncommon to find him grouped with them as one of the masters of that form, and literary intelligence has it that he has been nominated for the Nobel Prize several times.

Pavic's novel is in the form of an alphabetical dreambook, a "Dictionary." It can, he claims, be read like a dictionary, beginning with any letter, starting at the end, moving to the beginning. So too does his novel structure time, from the seventh to the twentieth century, as an omnipresent possibility. Indeed, he has required that all translations from the Serbo-Croatian follow the order of their own alphabets, resulting in several variations from the original order of the Cyrillic alphabet. As Pavic himself explains, "The original version of *The Dictionary of the Khazars*, printed in the Cyrillic alphabet, ends with a Latin quotation, 'sed venit ut illa impleam et confirmem, Mattheus.' My novel in Greek translation ends with a

sentence: ‘I have immediately noticed that there are three fears in me and not one.’” The English, Hebrew, Spanish, and Danish versions of *Dictionary of the Khazars* end in this way: “Then, when the reader returned, the entire process would be reversed, and Tibbon would correct the translation based on the impressions he had received on his reading walk” (Pavic, *Beginning and the End of the Novel*). Pavic notes the different order of several other languages. He also famously required that the novel be printed in two editions, a “Male Version” and a “Female Version,” which differ only in a single page, which describes the encounter of two contemporary Khazar scholars (293). In fact, the original edition printed the Christian, Muslim, and Jewish books on red, green, and yellow pages respectively. It is common in the relatively sparse scholarly literature in English on Pavic to find analogies, encouraged by him, to hypertext, cyberfiction, and the fate of the novel in the digital era. We might remember that the first full-scale articulation of an electronic future, by Marshall McLuhan in the 1950s and 1960s, imagined that future as something of an amalgam of Joyce (the subject of McLuhan’s early scholarship) and medieval oral culture — even, as some critics then suggested, an analogue to the unity once offered by medieval Catholicism and the dream of a Holy Roman Empire.

The historical fiction of the *Dictionary of the Khazars* is the famous decision of the king of a Central Asian people to convert to whichever religion — Judaism, Christianity, Islam — presents the best case, and these famous Khazar debates weave their way through the fiction. In the novel, the case is not entirely resolved, as indeed it is unresolved in the historical record or contemporary scholarship, though the weight has shifted towards Judaism, and some may be familiar with Arthur Koestler’s inquiry into the question. The mystery of the Khazars and their subsequent history becomes the mystery of history itself; and the irresolution of the debate, of the origin or end of the Khazars, is mirrored in the manipulation of time and space in the novel, not only by its alphabetical and accidental structure, but by the ability of characters, apparently empowered by the magic integral to early Khazar culture or religion, to live on in the dreams of certain elect figures in the future. Time in the Khazar universe can flow backwards or forwards, and the novel’s forty-seven dictionary entries span eight centuries, in which historical and fictional characters often interact, and traditional myth and magic realism are indistinguishable in its narrative. There are two years for every four Khazar seasons, one flowing forward, the other backwards. Manicheistic Bogomil heresies, Kabbalah, Jewish and Islamic mysticism and folklore inform its images. Part of the fiction is that the actual *Dictionary* (which we are now reading) existed in three parts: a Christian book, a Moslem book, and a Jewish book. Three modern researchers (one Jewish, one Moslem, one Christian), who are also dream travellers and reincarnations of characters who inhabit earlier periods in the novel, are seeking the centuries-old quest to collate the three versions. A seventeenth-century monk, Theoctitus, has committed all three sections to memory (despite the efforts of his demonic adversary Nion Sevast who has burned the Christian and Islamic parts, the Jewish part having been scattered by the winds at the Battle of Kladovo in 1689). Theoctitus has written down the three parts as

he has remembered them, and a Polish printer publishes them in 1691, but the Inquisition intervenes. Only a single poisoned copy (the “Gold Copy”) remains and the original copytext (the “Silver Copy”). Indeed, one of the modern readers in the text, Dr Isailo Suk, is convinced he owns the poisoned copy, and in his attempt to read the entire dictionary, only reads four pages at a time because of the danger of dying upon reading the ninth page. The time of the Khazar polemic is the ninth century, where we find the Khazar Princess Ateh (who “never managed to die”: Pavic, *Dictionary*, 23) and her tragically broken-off love for Mokadessa al Safer, having almost achieved the magical unity the text promises and seeks. The novel also recreates scenes from the Khazar polemic — some reconstructed from historical records, including the Khazar letter, some fictionalized — but the rational aspect of the debate is overlaid with magical events that suggest that a deeper struggle between angelic and demonic forces underlies the Enlightenment notion of choosing a religion on a logical basis.

There is, of course, in these novels a reminder of the lesson that medieval scholars are only slowly learning. The exclusively Western bias of Anglo-American medievalism, or at least its strict division of Eastern and Western European cultures, has begun to weaken in the face of more and more evidence for the permeability of Western Europe, and for Central, Eastern, and Byzantine sources and influences. Interestingly, American medieval institutions, including the Medieval Academy, have always offered strong support to Byzantine studies, but the relative compartmentalization of Eastern and Western literary, historical, and cultural studies is striking, and only recently broached by the regional and systemic approaches in the wake of *Annales* historiography. The prominence of Slavists from a methodological point of view in medieval studies, from Parry-Lord through Bakhtin and Gurevitch, has not resulted in a corresponding interest in content. Where there is more acknowledgment of the importance of Islamic medieval culture and its interchange with Western European culture, the process of purification that Ali describes in *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* continues to limit the investigation of that interchange. So Maria Rosa Menocal has argued in her searing and brilliant books *Shards of Love* and *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History*, or, indeed, in her recent studies that seem almost as if they could stand in for the scenarios I mention above, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* and her co-authored *The Arts of Intimacy: Christians, Jews, and Muslims in the Making of Castilian Culture*.

What is interesting about the novels under discussion is the way in which they point to blindnesses in our conventional scholarship, as creative fictions often do, though one hastens to acknowledge the scholarly and intellectual status of their authors. What these novels imagine is a fictional representation of the Middle Ages quite different from that to which we have become accustomed. What these recent novels do, and perhaps this is why neither can be categorized as medievalist, is to represent the Middle Ages as uncertain, as complex and as divided as the present. Moreover, in very different forms, one more or less traditional, the other highly experimental, they insist that the medieval past is not origin or lost paradise, but a

continual double of the present. History turns back on itself, tying itself into complex patterns that do not necessarily meet. The complex questions of national identity raised by the authors' biographies and geographic histories, as well as by the novels themselves, reveal in an important and unexpected way a perspective on the relationship of the representation of the medieval to the theme of exile. *The Dictionary of the Khazars* was published shortly before the civil war that dissolved the former Yugoslavia and that shattered the cosmopolitan image of Yugoslavia's apparent multiculturalism, but in its sense of fate seemed almost to prophesize the crisis. Even hyphenated identities such as "Serbo-Croatian" became historical footnotes as Yugoslavia went the way of Lebanon and Ireland during the Troubles, as a tragic mockery of the idea of a Europe dreamed of by postwar liberalism. What in retrospect is apparently revealed as the artificial unity imposed by Titoism dissolved into visual images and narratives that saturated the Western media, recalling the terrible waste of the end of the Second World War, with its shifting borders, displaced populations, and atavisms we have since preferred to forget, resulting in inescapably literal exiles with none of the romantic associations accorded to exile by Americans or the existential sense of exile that twentieth-century intellectual self-definition rested on, itself borrowing from an Augustinian tradition articulated in the Middle Ages.

Similarly, Ali's fables of unsteady truce and of exile and conversion (itself a form of forced exile) in his historical novels set in the Middle Ages also have a contemporary echo. From the civil wars of the 1940s and the partition of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, the anglophone Indian and Pakistani literature has been dominated by themes of diaspora and exile. It is not hard to read in the plaintive nostalgia of his medieval characters and their intense awareness of injustice and irony a parallel to this contemporary theme. Even the surprising sympathy for aristocratic and noble leaders on the part of a radical British intellectual can be accounted for by a family history that not very long ago was part of an aristocratic elite, true to the history of British romantic radicalism going all the way back to Byron and still faintly traceable beneath the pages of *New Left Review*. That is, what is surprising is that beneath the dazzling cosmopolitanism of Pavic's fictions, and beneath the radical tweaking of Islamic conservatism in Ali, is a reliance on the mythologies of romanticism that have always been part of medievalist revivals and fictions. If *The Book of Saladin* is impossible to read without hearing echoes of Sir Walter Scott, *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* is impossible for an American reader to read without hearing echoes of *Gone with the Wind*. The accommodation of these novels for traditions, myths, and a certain mixture of both folk memory and high philosophy render them less oppositional than one might expect. Nevertheless, Ali has remained rigorously and consistently critical of oppression and abuses on all sides of East–West conflicts. After the NATO intervention and the end of the civil and separatist wars, Pavic was accused of supporting Serbian nationalist sentiments (Ugresic, 41). It is not impossible that medieval settings operate as distancing structures, much like the pyrotechnics of the postmodern metafictional novel, protecting the cosmopolitan intellectual from the anguish of blood and soil as it allows him to meditate on their attraction.

Based on historical sources and events, the scenarios I have just described share a common narrative. At various points in time, medieval civilizations are able to achieve a liberating, cross-cultural cosmopolitanism, often at odds with the general political and social directions of their histories. Inevitably, these moments of Enlightenment are crushed or fade away, but they serve as a model of resistance and liberation even today. But to what extent is such a narrative an enabling fiction of our own time? Was there a premodern, medieval cosmopolitanism?

Medieval cosmopolitan thought

For the past two decades, debates over political ethics have centered on the theory of cosmopolitanism (Beck; Appiah; Robbins; Brennan, “Cosmo-Theory”; *At Home in the World*). Is it possible to be a citizen of the world? Do human rights and responsibilities for others disregard the borders of nation-states (Nussbaum, *For Love of Country*)? What form would concrete actions proceeding from these questions take (Derrida)? These debates have appropriately transcended disciplinary boundaries; scholars in the humanities and the law as well as social scientists and activists have taken part. The original nomenclature of the cosmopolitan can be traced to Diogenes and the Stoics that followed him, a deliberately provocative stand given the local basis for Greek identity: I am not a citizen of any city, I am a citizen of the world. Theories of cosmopolitanism at the present find their starting point in the eighteenth century, particularly the philosophy of Emmanuel Kant, where, according to Martha Nussbaum, “Kant, more influentially than any other Enlightenment thinker, defended a politics based upon reason rather than patriotism or group sentiment, a politics that was truly universal rather than communitarian, a politics that was active, reformist and optimistic, rather than given to contemplating the horrors, or waiting for the call of Being” (“Kant and Stoic,” 3).

A few thinkers, however, have traced the origins of the cosmopolitan back further, to the extraordinary mobility and diversity of the Roman Empire, or, as in Antonio Gramsci, who contrasted cosmopolitan internationalism with the role of the rooted intellectual, to the Middle Ages itself, specifically the Holy Roman Empire. Gramsci questions whether the cosmopolitan intellectual can in fact be a “producer of civilization” (*Selections*, 246). From such a point of view, the Middle Ages, as it were, is always already cosmopolitan. The Church defined itself as transcending regional, ethnic, and linguistic divisions. Feudal patterns of governance could transport cultural values (as well as modes of extraction and oppression) across vast, loosely connected areas. By and large, however, by situating the origin of cosmopolitan thinking in the Enlightenment, the opposite pole of the cosmopolitan is associated with the opposite pole of the Enlightenment, which is to say the Middle Ages, or, in the locution that toggles the Enlightenment’s nomenclature, the Dark Ages.

As a result, while there has been a rich literature dealing with the larger political constitution of the Middle Ages in relation to kingship or the articulation of the estates within a particular medieval society, there has been less attention to the way

in which medieval society looked outward, towards its others. When such attention has been paid, the focus has often been on antisemitism and the intolerance of the Crusades at worst or on fantasies of imagined geographies at best. The medieval, from a certain limited point of view, becomes the opposite of the cosmopolitan. The associations of cosmopolitanism even as a style and an outlook, let alone a political philosophy, are themes that reject narrowness, bigotry, superstition, and provinciality, all associated with the medieval in Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment ideologies. My aim here is to argue that cosmopolitan ideals can be found in the very medieval cultures that the Enlightenment defined itself against, even if, as with modern cosmopolitanism, those ideals are frequently found in conflict with, or even in tandem with, their opposites.

A work such as *La chanson de Roland*, with its refrain that Christians are right and pagans are wrong, could interchangeably slot Islam and pagan antiquity, but many other epics and romances employ a large number of categories and subcategories for non-Europeans, usually in terms of geographic locations. Even in the *Roland*, conversion remains a possibility for the innately heroic Saracen. As Sharon Kinoshita has argued, the network of cultural associations between the apparently opposing sides of Christian and Pagan needs to be redefined during the course of the poem, and “the crusading ethos presumed to permeate the poem from the outset is, instead, produced during the course of it” (15). Arthurian romances, perhaps because of the catalogues of foreign forces in Geoffrey of Monmouth, typically show off their geographic breadth. Malory’s Saracen knights are indistinguishable from their Christian brethren, and their conversion is accompanied by a ritual fraternal and hence purifying violence. The most fully developed consideration of this fraternal identity is Wolfram’s *Parzival*, with its hero’s half-black infidel brother who nearly matches his valor.¹ The global reach of their heritage and the sophistication of their international childhood, however, contrast with the cultic closure of the grail brotherhood at the end of the work.

The usual answer to this question is to point to the universalist claims of the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages. Indeed, the “internationalism” of crusading rhetoric attempted to join together a European Christendom torn by warfare, feud, and competing proto-national claims. More positively, the Church claimed all souls and the entire world as potentially within its spiritual realm, expressed most eloquently, if belatedly, in Boniface VII’s 1302 *Unam sanctam*, which also argues for the possibility of virtue among pagans (*Corpus Juris Canonici*, II, 1159). Canon law provided a legal code that claimed jurisdiction across kingdoms, though it was subject to local modification. Conversely, even thinkers who opposed the secular authority of the papacy propounded a form of universalism, as does Dante in *De monarchia*, arguing for an international community that might transcend religious beliefs as well as national boundaries. By the time of the *Commedia*, Dante has realigned himself with a more traditional Christian universalism, however, offering salvation to all who convert, with only the most minor accommodations for those of other creeds.

The local culture of the high Middle Ages was a communitarian polity. The village, the manor, and even the town were worlds unto themselves in many ways, though in terms more of identity than of political fact. While nationalist and even patriotic sentiments can be gleaned from certain texts and certain records, by and large the nation-state as we know it in the early modern and modern periods had yet to take full shape.² At the same time, the ideology of the medieval Church was not only transnational but universalizing. The Holy Roman Empire aspired to the status of a world government at times. As Brennan has remarked of modern cosmopolitanisms, “if we wished to capture the essence of cosmopolitanism in a single formula, it would be this: It is a banality that is always surreptitiously imperial” (“Cosmopolitanism and Internationalism,” 81)

From such a point of view, medieval political thought tends to look inward, concerned primarily about the order of society, the responsibilities of the ruler, the role of advice as the primary medium of assent by the governed, and the articulation of the estates and strata of society. Relatively less emphasis is placed on whom or what is outside the social order, perhaps because the notion of a nation-state with defined borders is still incipient. Medieval political thought, that is, is so concerned with defining the sameness and commonality that it never quite gets around to thinking about the other. In medieval political thought, the idea of the realm is not necessarily a cartographic entity given a sometimes patchwork quilt of feudal holdings and allegiances. Indeed, as feudalism expands, it imposes its own characteristic patterns on previously underdeveloped or undeveloped territories, providing a symbolic system through which elites in far-flung regions could identify with each other (Bartlett, 197). From this gross perspective, the conception of national identity, as Benedict Anderson has argued, is almost necessarily an aspect of modernity, as opposed to a medieval oral and local memory and attachment (23).

On the other hand, medieval ethical thought, in terms of both institutionalized Christian practice and informal civic piety, offered a rich and complicated system by which individuals and communities could relate to others, though that otherness was often cast in a hierarchical and vertical rather than geographic and horizontal dimension. Since such ethical practices were not necessarily linked to a concept of a nation or a people, they offered a transportable code of responsibility. Contact with Muslim Spain, with cultural interactions in Sicily and elsewhere, led to a more nuanced articulation of how to understand the other. Nevertheless, at least from the point of view of the Church, this understanding was more or less in terms of how to defend against Christian losses or expand Christian dominion. While one might assert the tolerance associated with Franciscanism and its missionary efforts, including translation and language study, Franciscans often practiced a disruptive engagement in non-Christian lands, seeking martyrdom as a way of galvanizing a resurgence of Christian solidarity (Tolan, 213–32). Dominicans, with their logical and interrogative skills honed in the war on heresy, were more interested in understanding the reasoning of Islam and sought to dramatize the superiority of Christianity through debate and demonstration (233–55). Always, however, the engagement of Christian theologians

with their adversaries was both tactical and strategic. Christian polemicists were not particularly interested in transforming their own grounds of belief, but sought to defend and expand Christianity. If and when the writings and arguments of Islam were circulated in the West, it was to demonstrate their inferiority, if not their absurdity, to Christian readers. Eventually, the failure of missionary efforts and the increasing strength of Islam resulted in an attitude that questioned whether Moslems, and by this time Jews also, were even amenable to rational exposition of the superiority of Christianity. The failure of tactical cosmopolitanism resulted in the very opposite of inclusion and understanding, as the later Middle Ages resorted to various forms of isolation and containment.

At one time, William of Ockham held an important place in the history of thinking about human rights. The concept of *ius* in the high Middle Ages referred to that which is right, in moral and ethical terms, but by the end of the Middle Ages it began to be thought of as integral to the individual, to be a subjective and inherent right. In contrast to a concept of right bestowed by the community, a nominalist conception of rights is accorded to the self. More recently, in the work of Brian Tierney, Ockham has been regarded as less innovative and more indebted to developments in canon law and radical Franciscanism, “shifting here from natural law to natural rights” (179). Without reviving the argument that Ockham was the first to articulate a modern conception of subjective human rights, it is nevertheless possible to read Ockham as predicting the rationalist (and even secularist) thinking of Grotius, who, in the sixteenth century, decoupled a providential, scholastic definition of natural law from the concept of *ius*. Rights could be both responsibilities and freedoms, and were not limited on the basis of belief. That is, whether right is a form of justice to be sought by society as a goal, or whether rights are an internal constituent of the human, is not so much a polarity as a microcosmic and macrocosmic parallel. I admit that such a reading of Ockham veers towards reinventing the radical nominalist view that much current scholarship has complicated, but in the area of political theory Ockham is closer to Grotius, and both thinkers do in fact work their way through categories first established by the scholastics, particularly natural law and just war. That they might not be entirely original does not mean that they are less radical in their conclusions.

These limits, or contradictions, in medieval Christian inclusiveness are established because religion and orthodoxy were some of the primary categories by which medieval thinkers categorized others. If Aziz Al-Azmeh is correct, religion was not necessarily the sole or even chief perspective by which Arab writers of the earlier Middle Ages thought of others. For medieval Arab writers, the barbarian was identified not as someone having a different religion but as a culture having no recognizable religion at all. Presumably, the rapid advance of Islam and its subsequent responsibility of governing vast and diverse provinces resulted in a relatively broad perspective on the legitimacy of different practices and beliefs. Al-Azmeh speculates that this perspective built upon already existing Hellenistic, Iranian, and Semitic attitudes as a result of long-standing trade and administrative networks. Comments on northern European cultures by writers from the great Islamic centers of learning

famously focus on their crudity and lack of sanitation. Indeed, in general, climactic zones and their humors formed the matrix by which medieval Islamic writers interpreted the sometimes miraculous civilizations they described. Thus, while the norms of their own civilization remained the base from which they saw things, these writers could nevertheless admire the adaptations and unique qualities of these other cultures. For Al-Azmeh, such ethnography formed part of *adab*, the urbane, court-based discourse of Arab culture, highly developed, for instance, in Spain (18).

As soon as one proceeds beyond these generalizations, however, the idea of a medieval cosmopolitanism seems to become less certain and even takes the form of a paradox. Yes, the late Middle Ages demonstrated an interest in other societies and cultures, as the far-flung tales of a Boccaccio or a Chaucer, or the imaginary ethnography of a Mandeville, demonstrate. According to Christian Zacher, the late Middle Ages was motivated by *curiositas*, a curiosity about the world, and Caroline Walker Bynum has suggested that the medieval subject regarded the world first and foremost through the category of wonder. But as the Enlightenment reminded us, the Crusades, the Inquisition, systematic antisemitism, and other forms of intolerance were also how the medieval West responded to otherness. Indeed, even when it acknowledged the idealism of medieval culture, it ridiculed that idealism as childlike and its understanding of the world as a fantastic invention rather than through realistic observation. Of course, critiques of cosmopolitanism have been equally hard on the motives behind the transnational ideals of the eighteenth century. The right to evade the strictures of sovereignty was a great convenience for the great trading companies and their commercial ambitions, while the free passage of missionaries in order to convert natives to Christianity was cited as a benefit of thinking of the world's borders as porous.

Cosmopolitanism has emerged as a central concern in the study of the early modern period, and nowhere more so than in the accounts of the conquest and colonization of the Americas, accounts now newly energized by cross-Atlantic and postcolonial perspectives. In place of histories based on the emergence of one nation or one language, scholars have emphasized the complex networks of languages, cultures, and even kinship in the conquest of the Americas. Such cultural traffic went in more than one, or even two, directions. Italians like Columbus could be attached to the court of Spain, but others, such as John Cabot, could sail under different flags. Nor were the Italians the only free agents. The heroes of English expansion, such as Francis Drake or Walter Raleigh, were thoroughly at home in the languages and cultures of their ostensible enemies, especially Spain. Like the world of Europe before 1914, a nationalist and unitary ideology coexisted with and eventually conflicted with a cosmopolitan and international array of affinities and allegiances. Subjected populations from American Indians to East Indians could rightly see the Europeans as one antagonist, even as they exploited differences among them, as the Europeans did themselves among the peoples, cultures, and languages they set out to exploit or subjugate. The binary poles of nation-state and alien were subject to constant negotiation and often emerged as strategically deployed rather than as essentially constituted.

If explicit political theory is any guide, thinking about how rights might be or are universal begins to be articulated in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries. When the theory of medieval relations with the other is called upon in the early modern period, it is in a very different context, but it continues the complex dialectic of the cosmopolitan and the question of sovereignty. As Kathleen Davis argues in *Periodization and Sovereignty*, the logic of colonial domination and even of slavery depends upon an analogy with feudalism, even when thinkers such as Bodin argue against slavery as a continuation of feudal tyranny (46–50). Just as serfdom assumed a hierarchical, vertical subordination, colonialism sought to justify a horizontal dominion. But as Davis points out, these are simultaneous rather than causal justifications, in that absolutist theory, as in Bodin, argued that the only definitive relation was between subject and sovereign, a relation which negated other claims of homage. The relation between lord and vassal in medieval feudalism was the basis of the equation of social contract theory, but those theorists (again, such as Bodin) reject a feudalism which considered human beings as feudal property and therefore as a precursor of slavery. For Bodin, the introduction of slavery by Spain in its new dominions reintroduced a feudal past. Davis is especially interested in how periodization plays into these arguments, with the medieval past being projected onto a colonial present, but for our purposes I want to borrow her delineation of the contradictory dialectic of sovereignty and subjection. If freedom requires submission to an absolute monarch who rules a particular state, how can citizenship be imagined outside those borders? In some ways, the reality, rather than the theorized “feudalism” of early modern jurists, often allowed and even encouraged complex negotiations of local and translocal identities.

Literary cosmopolitanism towards the end of the Middle Ages

One of the earliest attempts to locate cosmopolitanism in the context of international literary dialogues occurred in the midst of the Cold War, at the IVth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association, held in Fribourg in 1964 (Jost). The two volumes of proceedings covered a wide range of topics, but generally thought of cosmopolitanism in its pre-political frame of reference, emphasizing the easy exchange of cultures across borders and nationalities. Surprisingly few of the papers gave medieval literature more than a passing glance, perhaps because the theme of the conference was “Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism,” thereby sectoring off medieval literature as pre-national. The exception was Edmund Reiss, “Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism as Subject and Theme in Medieval Narrative” (Jost, 619–27), more or less of a brief position paper. Reiss’s definition of the nation and nationalism might be open to question, since he includes minor kingdoms, including those in *Beowulf*, as examples of “nationalistic societies” (622). However, his description of the place of the cosmopolitan is worth citing. Reiss concerns himself with “the background” (619) of medieval literary works, excluding romances because of their almost exclusive emphasis on individual consciousness and private experience. From

Beowulf on, he argues, epics and sagas and other forms of heroic narrative can be read as a conflict between “nationalism,” the effort to establish secular governments, and “cosmopolitanism,” which he equates with the Augustinian ideal of the City of God. The theme of much medieval literature, he concludes, is the dramatization of “the failure of the worldly” (620), whereas some medieval political theory, especially that inflected by Augustinian ideas, stresses the extent to which the ideals of the City of God can be put into place on Earth. Although Reiss’s ideas about what constitutes cosmopolitanism are arguable — he seems to mean universal Christian values as opposed to local secular values — he does accurately point to Dante and Langland as the late medieval authors who most seriously engage political ideals, cosmopolitan or otherwise.

In addition to the Reiss article, two other essays in the proceedings discuss medieval literature. Y. Batard describes “Le cosmopolitisme du *Décameron*” (Jost, 114–18) by highlighting the varied nature of Boccaccio’s training and education, the place of Naples as a nexus between East and West, and the large number of contemporary people and places from Boccaccio’s own time, as well as importing some of Vittorio Branca’s ideas about the place of merchant culture in the work. Judica I. H. Mendels in “Nationalismus in der mittelhochdeutschen und mitteniederländischen Literatur” (Jost, 298–308) argues that while a full development of nationalist ideas awaits the Reformation, nationalist and protonationalist sentiments can be identified according to a set of clearly identifiable markers in Northern literatures after the twelfth centuries, but Mendels says little about corresponding cosmopolitan ideas.

While Robert R. Edwards’s “‘The Metropol and the Mayster-Toun’: Cosmopolitanism and Late Medieval Literature” appeared well over thirty years after the ICLA congress, in many ways Edwards offers the most coherent account of the place of cosmopolitanism in late medieval culture. Edwards seeks to update what he describes as an obsolete notion of tradition as found in T. S. Eliot, and a desperate one as found in Auerbach and Curtius. Like Reiss, Edwards also begins with Augustine but points to the complexity of the relation between citizenship and community in Augustine. In Edwards’s formulation, “The citizen of the heavenly city is isolated from other earthly communities, while the citizen of the world is alienated from God, his fellow souls, and himself” (36). Where Reiss had defined Augustine’s transcendental category as a form of cosmopolitanism, Edwards more accurately reads it as a rejection of worldly cosmopolitanism at the least. Like Reiss, Edwards also turns to Langland as an example, but again more accurately describes the way in which “Langland deftly inverts Augustine’s categories” (36). From Augustine, Edwards moves to Ambrose in his letter to the bishop Sabinus, which conceives of the entire world as a homeland for mankind. For Edwards, “Ambrose anticipates the Enlightenment paradox of universalism and cultural difference” (37) in the figure of the virtuous pagan.

I would suggest that Edwards’s impressive reformulation of late classical and medieval cosmopolitanism as found in Ambrose might actually predict the debates surrounding postmodern cosmopolitanism since the early 1990s as much as or instead of that surrounding the Enlightenment conception of cosmopolitanism. I have

elsewhere traced the ways in which Chaucer, in this regard an anomalous author, contains within his own narratives and descriptions a debate between local and cosmopolitan perspectives. Edwards's identification of the trope of the virtuous pagan is highly significant, and we might turn to Frank Grady's excellent treatment of this trope in a recent book published after Edwards's groundbreaking essay. Grady's *Representing Righteous Heathens* takes as its subject an interesting problem in medieval Christian culture: what does one do with good people who either predate or lie outside the possibility of Christian salvation? The most famous example of this in world literature is Dante's placement of such figures in the Limbo of *Inferno*. They cannot achieve Heaven, but Hell for them is something like a luxurious desert resort. In other medieval literatures, the question is more complicated and not answered by any official Church teachings. Far from being a theological debate only, it reveals the struggles medieval culture had with the uses of the past. Langland and other late medieval English writers employed medieval popular historical figures: most famously in *Piers Plowman*, the Roman emperor Trajan; in John Gower and in medieval romance, Alexander the Great; in Mandeville's *Travels*, various Saracens and Brahmans. These characters are often engaged in a debate or a contrast with institutional Christianity, and it is not always clear who has God on their side. For often the interlocutors of Christianity are not just its pagan classical predecessors, but its others: Jews, Middle Eastern Islamic figures, as well as non-Catholic Christian sects and figures from the Indian subcontinent and China. Grady thus opens up a wide range of questions, such as how Western subjectivity defined itself in relation to the non-Western before the rise of colonialism and imperialism. Edward Said's *Orientalism* broadly sketched medieval attitudes towards the East, imbued with ignorance and prejudice. Grady makes us see an entirely different world, one in which the other becomes the most searching interlocutor of Western and Christian identity; indeed, in which the cosmopolitan is a necessary if unsettling component of defining occidental identity.

Edwards has pointed to the story of Troy as the paradigm of cosmopolitan values in the Middle Ages. Most obviously, the story is told and retold in different Western European cultures as a way of claiming a *translatio imperii*. The story of Troy, that is, holds together European culture by providing it with a common ancestry. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, especially, Chaucer portrays the Trojan past as a culture that assimilated differences and projected a sophisticated tolerance towards the world. Such utopian impulses also appear in other retellings of the Troy legend. In Homer's *Iliad*, the Trojans are represented as equaling aspects of Greek civilization in order to render the final triumph by the Greeks as worthy and valid. Similarly, in Virgil's *Aeneid*, aspects of Trojan culture, including their values, are represented as elevated over that of the Greeks, and it is that tradition, however occulted in its various tellings and retellings, that late medieval literature inherited.

At the same time, the narrative development tends to complicate cosmopolitan ideals in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, in terms of both the outcomes of the plot and the outlook of the narrator. The narrator describes the worship of the Palladium

(I.105) with some understanding of Trojan customs, though he criticizes them anachronistically as unwilling to change their pagan beliefs, as if Christianity were an option. Yet the Palladium plays a role later in the poem when Criseyde is exchanged for the prisoner of war Antenor, as the narrator foreshadows Antenor's theft of the idol leading to the downfall of Troy. At the opening of the poem, the imagery and procedures of courtly love emphasize how little temporal or geographic distance mean when describing human emotions. The ancient characters act and look, as often in medieval literature, like fourteenth-century contemporaries. By the end of the poem, this commonality of experience is open to question. The doctrine of love, at least as articulated in Book I of the *Troilus*, is a universal emotion, and Chaucer's narrator describes it almost as a force or an energy. As the *Troilus* develops, however, the universal becomes much more historicized and even relativized, culminating in the narrator's rejection of what earlier, here in Book I, he had celebrated as a common denominator among humans. Love in Book I is a horizontal condition, affecting people everywhere. In Book II, it can be expressed in different languages and customs (II.22–28). In Book V, it becomes a vertical condition, differing as to its object and its origins. Even Criseyde's beauty is historicized, by reference to her strange eyebrows (V.813–14). If Troilus seems uniquely and specifically Trojan in his early persona as a young man about town, Criseyde stands in for the cosmopolitan by her status as between two camps as a result of her father's defection to the Greeks.

Part of a cosmopolitan ethic is understanding the other, and for medieval culture that often meant translation, in its many different senses. One sense is metaphoric, alluding to the ways in which one culture adopts the traditions and values of another. The setting and literary tradition of *Troilus and Criseyde* is to be understood, for instance, in light of fourteenth-century London's sense of itself as a "New Troy," broadening the traditional notion that Western aristocratic culture descends from Trojan and Roman émigrés to include an entire *polis* (Federico). Another is the process of the poem itself, and perhaps of medieval literature in general, quite literally translating previous versions and shaping them into a coherent whole. Translation involves both the descent and the exchange of ideas and values. At the same time, as is often the case with Chaucer, the limits of that cosmopolitan exchange are emphasized. As has often been noted, Criseyde, in her malleability and ambiguity, stands in for language itself, especially in regard to her own "translation" from the Trojan city to the Greek camp. The motivation for this transfer is, of course, her father's defection. Having divined the future fall of Troy and joined the Greeks, Calchas asks for his daughter as part of the negotiations that take up Books IV and V. In fact, Calchas's treachery enrages some Trojans, who react with a nativist backlash. Threatening his life and his family, specifically by burning (I.85–91), these Trojans equate treason with heresy or blasphemy, and thereby define local identity as equivalent to orthodoxy. Choosing rootlessness and the lack of civic identity as a way of ensuring his and his daughter's safety, Calchas serves as a negative example of a translation and of border crossing and mobile citizenship. Pandarus, moreover,

in his ability to manipulate and master situations and to make differences disappear, becomes a link to the fluid nature of cosmopolitan behavior in its limited societal sense. Pandarus might seem to stand in for the citizen of the world, but in fact he is more a citizen of worldliness. His ability to adapt, and to change course, as he does in Books IV and V, are contrasted with Troilus's steadfastness. If such changeability parallels the political changeability of Calchas, it seems to be justified, at least by Pandarus himself, as a means of continuing to help his friend. The increasing intertwining of the cosmopolitan with local identities, with the local and the bounded increasingly powerful as the narrative develops, is a pattern that can be found elsewhere in Chaucer.

Part of the Virgilian heritage of the first three books of the *Troilus*, however, is that war, as well as love, is a transportable, intercultural system. In the first three books, the Trojans and the Greeks fight much the same way, and the honor they achieve by so fighting depends on a shared aristocratic culture. Indeed, in the first three books, war is depicted as a tournament with some of the rules lifted. If cosmopolitanism as we think of it assumes a commonality of rights and freedoms, including freedom from violence, the culture of the *Troilus* and of medieval romance in general depicts love and war as both part of the same system, as both personally and culturally transformative, and (as both) driven by ideals. By Book IV, this has changed somewhat. Compromised and underhanded tactics now reign, calling into question the place of common values. In Homer, this deflation receives its narrative representation in Achilles's defilement of Hector's body. In Chaucer's *Troilus*, it colors all of Book IV and Book V. There is a difference between the general sense of cosmopolitanism as sophistication, openness to fashionable cultural influences, and urbanity on the one hand, and on the other the ethical sense of cosmopolitanism as an acknowledgement of internationalism and universal human rights. In Chaucer, these two senses are often opposed. The scene most associated with cultural sophistication in *Troilus* is in Book II, when Pandarus invites himself into Criseyde's home, where she is reading with a group of friends (II.78–112). She teases him, saying his mistress is not among them. And she tells him what they have been reading: the legend of Thebes, with its stories of Oedipus and Laius. Here, in besieged Troy, they turn to Greek legend for edification and entertainment. Pandarus shows off his learning by saying that he knows the plot and that it is contained in twelve books, though his dismissal has raised the question for some critics of whether he has actually read it. The conversation quickly turns to other things as Pandarus urges her to dance and to celebrate May. Pandarus attempts to shift the focus to Troilus's deeds of war, and the focus of the conversation moves from Greek literature and its lessons to the virtue of defeating and killing the Greek invaders. At least in these scenes, literature does not help us to appreciate the other, at least not during wartime. Elsewhere, however, Chaucer frequently counterposes apparent sophistication with closedmindedness.

The shift from a cosmopolitan to a nearly xenophobic perspective can be found in some other of Chaucer's works. The Man of Law's Tale is a good example. In other readings, the Man of Law's Tale has been often taken as an unusually open and

cosmopolitan narrative, one of the few that attempts to understand the religious and cultural practices of Islam and the Orient (Bloomfield, 309). As Susan Schibanoff notes, the narrator at first seems to take a relativist and even open attitude towards Islam but eventually renders its practitioners, as well as heretics and disruptive females, as other. Schibanoff argues that the narrative is designed to inculcate a certain male, orthodox, Christian perspective in solidarity against deviance.³ The *Man of Law's Tale* opens with the visit of Syrian merchants to Rome. They behave like merchants in Boccaccio — sophisticated, curious, alert, and concerned with the circulation of goods and information around the Mediterranean. Not only is the narrative cosmopolitan in its attitude towards these visitors, but the visitors themselves exhibit the virtues of cosmopolitanism. As the plot develops, this is less and less clear. The Sultan to whom they report the virtues of the Emperor's daughter might be willing to convert, but his court is full of intrigue. His mother's ill will more than makes up for his virtue. The apparent compatibility of religious and cultural practices, at first emphasized, disappears in a bloodbath rather than a baptism. Later, the Emperor of Rome takes vengeance not only against the court but against its entire land and people, in an escalation modeled on a crusade.

While the Troy story, as Edwards points out, is in many ways the model of cosmopolitan cultural interchange, it is also beset with ironies. Edwards notes the limits of cosmopolitanism and the internationalism of aristocratic culture as expressed in Lydgate's *Troy Book*, especially in terms of its commission by the future Henry V. Recent work on Lydgate has argued for a restricted notion of what it means to be a public and, presumably, cosmopolitan poet, especially the argument of Maura Nolan in *John Lydgate and the Making of Public Culture*. For Nolan, Lydgate's generalizing tendencies complicate the instrumental and occasional contract of his commissions, creating forms which can be appropriated by an audience almost called into being by the distance between the intentions and the effects of these works. One might rewrite Nolan's argument to say that Lydgate is inadvertently cosmopolitan in his foregrounding of the ethics rather than teleology in recounting historical events. Seen from this point of view, Lydgate resembles Gower and Langland rather than Chaucer. In the *Troilus*, Chaucer first broadens and then limits the powers of human sympathy, radically questioning the possibility of a consistent ethical stance. The well-known prologue to Book II of *Troilus and Criseyde* not only acknowledges the changeability of language, but also admits to cultural relativity in an almost anthropological way (I.22–28). Things get done in various societies, especially those in the past, even if the procedures are not those we use today and even though they may seem foreign or silly to us. At the same time, the narrator acknowledges that each nation (we would say peoples) has its own laws. This is sophisticated and cosmopolitan in one way, but not in the more crucial ethical sense, since presumably even bad laws in another society are to be explained by difference. This, of course, is the narrator speaking, and his judgment may not be the final judgment of either the poet or the poem.

Gower also opens the *Confessio Amantis* with an awareness of a historical dimension, but, instead of distance and anthropological difference, Gower emphasizes the relatively constant ideal of wisdom as it was promulgated in the past and continues to do so in the present, even if wisdom requires some leavening to be palatable.⁴ Such wisdom, written in books, is what we can pass on to posterity, says Gower in a protohumanist gesture. As often the case with late medieval literature (this is the case with Lydgate also), the address to the prince as a mirror and record of wise and poor governance is in fact presented generally, so that anyone can use these examples to model his or her (in Gower at least) behavior. Where Chaucer ironizes his moral through radical contextualization at critical junctures, Gower consistently argues away difference. Moreover, Gower's utopian past includes the entire "wide world" governed well. The sincerity and solid hierarchical structure of society that then existed was to the benefit of all. Now, says Gower, the entire system is turned upside down and outside in. Justice and law no longer serve each other. Fortune now governs earthly matters. The poor and disenfranchised are at the mercy of the powerful, and one can only hope that they will be guided by wisdom. God, as the king of the world, might rescue us from the constant warfare between nations that is our present state, but Gower's hope is expressed conditionally, that we might "Afferme pes between the londes / And take her cause into hise hondes/ So that the world may stonde appessed" (Prologue, 189–91).

Gower's discussion of the course of empires, while shaped as a traditional narrative of an almost geologic decline (consistent with his sense of popular revolt as a coursing river), is a sure account of the fall of the Rome, the rise of the Ottonians and Carolingians, the sharing of power with Germanic nations, and so forth. Underlying this pattern, however, is a structural lesson, which is that unity and universal peace represent the ideal intended state of humankind as divinely ordained, and that disunity is responsible for the disruption of that ideal. Finally, however, the innate divisions within each human prevent such unity, which will only be achieved, says the Prologue, at the end of time. There is one hope proffered, however, and that is the example of Orion, who makes a music that heals division. While suggesting a common voice of reason across humankind, in fact Gower's solution is characteristically horizontal rather than vertical, correcting disorder within a hierarchy by bringing nations together, though the latter is implied. The complexity and contradiction of Chaucer's perspective in the *Troilus* have been essential to his prime place in the canon during most of the twentieth century. If the homogeneity (often exaggerated) of Gower's style and works has relegated him to a secondary status, that style and tone also reveal an ethical perspective that allows rather than complicates a sense of sympathy between cultures and perspectives. Interestingly, where that stylistic and tonal consistency and control are lacking, as in the *Vox Clamantis*, so is the sense of sympathy for the other.

The test case for late medieval literary cosmopolitanism is, of course, *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*. Once taken seriously as a travel account, it is now read as a more or less artful compendium of fabulous geographies and ethnographies.⁵

A number of studies have pointed to the relative latitude of the narrator towards the non-European and non-Christian that he purportedly describes:

And ye shall understand, that of all these countries, and of all these isles, and all the diverse folk, that I have spoken of before, and of diverse laws, and of diverse beliefs that they have, yet is there none of them all but that they have some reason within them and understanding, but if it be the fewer, and that have certain articles of our faith and some good points of our belief, and that they believe in God, that formed all things and made the world, and clepe him God of Nature. (Pollard, 206)

For Mandeville, the commonality of all peoples resides in the potential to understand revealed truth, but underlying this commonality is an assumption of universalism that erases the difference that he otherwise indulgently describes.

More recently, Karma Lochrie has placed the work squarely in the context of medieval cosmopolitanism. Lochrie is primarily concerned with arguing for a discourse of premodern utopianism, a discourse which would complicate the idea of More's *Utopia* and early modern utopianism as normative. Revising Dipesh Chakrabarty's well-known *Provincializing Europe*, Lochrie notes that Mandeville provincializes Europe in a somewhat different way, more spatial than temporal. For instance, Mandeville collocates two types of cartographies of the world in the medieval *mappaemundi* tradition, one with Jerusalem at its center, another a more zonal representation. In so doing, Christian Europe loses its centrality. Non-Christian nations can no longer be considered potentially or incompletely Christianized. Lochrie defines Mandeville's cosmopolitanism as a "middleness," a spatial and cultural negotiation of Aristotle's Golden Mean (593). For Lochrie, a key moment in Mandeville's provincialization of Europe is the narrator's awareness of the cosmopolitanism of "Saracen" culture, when the French-speaking Sultan of Egypt lambasts the corruption of the Christian clergy and indicates his own interest in the ways and manners of the Europeans.

Medieval cosmopolitanism, then, was as complex as medieval indigenous identities. Nation, language, and race, in many ways the defining signifiers of modern identity, were as difficult to locate in medieval self-definitions as they are in the post-modern moment. Overlapping feudal associations, multilingualism and dialect patterns, jurisdictional conflicts between competing religious institutions and regional and local customs, none of which ever disappear entirely, nevertheless outweighed monolithic allegiances. Crises, social and individual, could result in binary, apocalyptic scenarios, but these alternated with an ongoing pattern of multiple and layered structures of identity. Not surprisingly, then, except in such crises, Western European writers and thinkers tended to define non-Europeans and non-Christians in many different and sometimes inconsistent ways, at least those separated by distance (Blanks and Frassetto; Frassetto; Tolan). The closer they came, the more others resembled each other and became part of an internal system of definition by difference, as, for instance, Jews and heretics could stand in for each other in literary and polemical representations. This may be why, for instance, Jews are so often excluded from the

generosity, such as it was, of medieval cosmopolitanism, precisely because they often existed in a cosmopolitan condition that threatened such a distant perspective. Indeed, in the history of antisemitism, especially in its nationalist guises, cosmopolitanism is often a sneering euphemism. If modern political thought distinguishes between cosmopolitanism and communitarianism, medieval writers made no such distinction and often synthesized or hybridized these two apparently antithetical perspectives. Thus, individual writers and thinkers in the Middle Ages could be both xenophobic and cosmopolitan, both curious and closeminded, either at particular points in their careers or, more typically, within the same text.

Notes

- ¹ On race in the Middle Ages, see Hahn.
- ² But see, for British exceptionalism at least, Lavezzo and Turville-Petre.
- ³ But see Kathryn L. Lynch, who helpfully distinguishes between Chaucer's and the Man of Law's treatment of Islam, and between religious as opposed to cultural, economic, and legal otherness (Lynch, "Storytelling" and "East Meets West").
- ⁴ For an understanding of Gower's Mediterranean setting as inherently cosmopolitan, see Wetherbee.
- ⁵ The most complete study is Higgins.

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