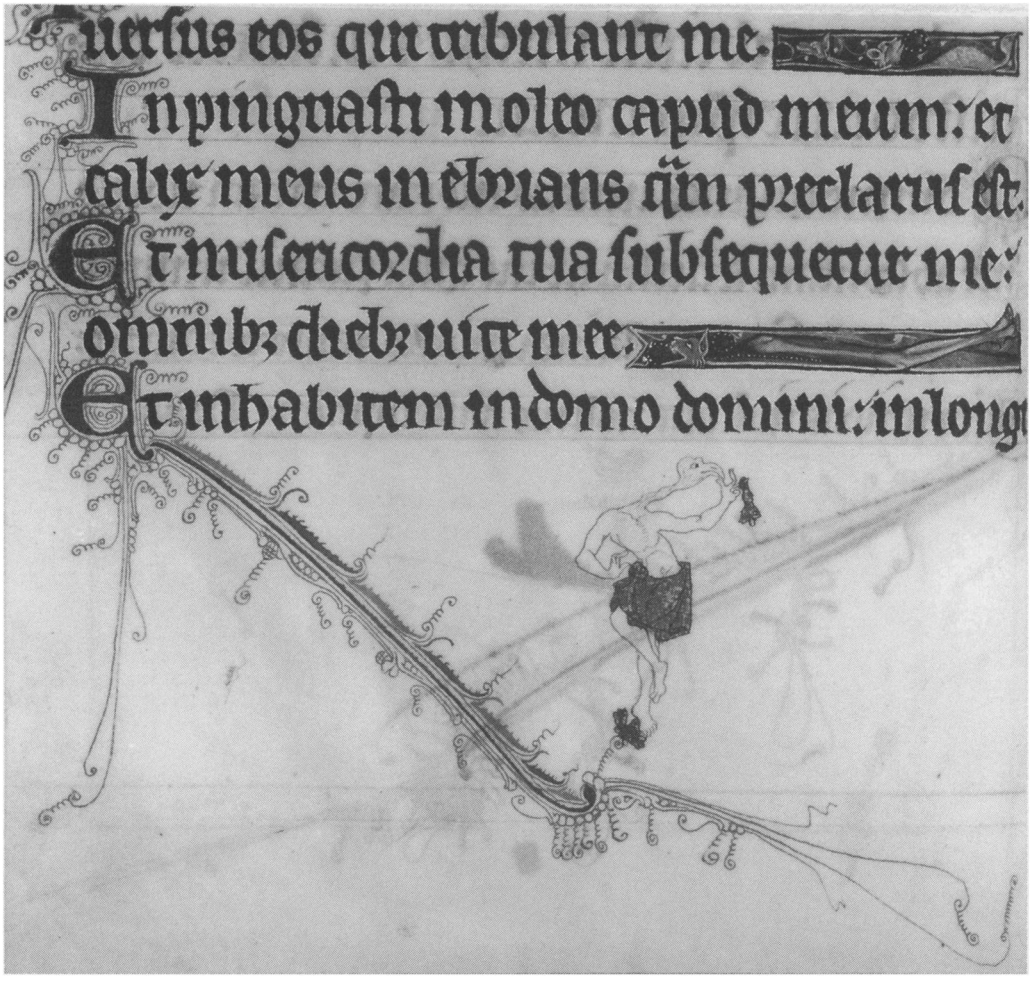

An example of medieval grotesquery, a man with a bird's head. Detail of lower marginal figure, Book of Hours and Psalter, England, *circa* 1300, fol. 56vo. Courtesy of the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, Maryland.

Medievalisms Old and New: The Rediscovery of Alterity in North American Medieval Studies

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THIS ARTICLE WILL EXAMINE American views of the Middle Ages during the twentieth century, in particular the recent revival of interest in strange and extreme forms of belief and behavior now perceived as characteristic of medieval civilization. The rediscovery in medieval historiography of what might, without prejudice, be called the "grotesque" comes after a period, encompassing most of the twentieth century up to the 1970s, during which historians tended to present the medieval as explicable in modern terms—demystifying its romantic, "Gothic" reputation in favor of those aspects that could be considered progressive or rational.[1] Thus we are especially interested in the shift over the last twenty years from a Middle Ages represented as being in tune with modernity—indeed, the very seed-bed and parent civilization of the modern West—to a more vivid and disturbing image of medieval civilization as the West's quintessential "other," in which the salient traits of the Middle Ages derive from its marginal and unsettling character, its "hard-edged alterity" in the words of one scholar, a view radically different from the confident foundationalism in vogue during most of the twentieth century.[2] To be sure, many strands of current scholarly inquiry continue to concern social, institutional, ecclesiastical, legal, and political history. But we believe that new, emerging tendencies throughout the range of medieval studies are changing our view of the civilization of that era in ways quite unforeseen in earlier decades of this century.

To explain this transformation in the historiography of the Middle Ages, we have sought answers in a manner typical of historians—by looking at the past. In doing so, we have been struck by the ways in which the modernizing paradigms that held sway during the decades of our own graduate training (roughly, the late 1960s and early 1970s), which focused on topics such as the medieval origins of the modern

[1] We are using the "grotesque" here in the general sense of the odd, strange, and "Gothic," rather than in the specific meaning Mikhail Bakhtin has given it, since Bakhtin's use refers to a postmedieval epoch. For a Bakhtinian consideration of the grotesque in relation to the study of medieval literature, see John M. Ganim, "Medieval Literature as Monster: The Grotesque before and after Bakhtin," *Exemplaria* 7 (1995): 27–40. On the grotesque understood more broadly as strangeness and the Gothic, see Paul Freedman, "The Return of the Grotesque in Medieval Historiography," in *Historia a Debate: Medieval*, Carlos Barros, ed. (Santiago de Compostela, 1995), 9–19.

[2] Stephen G. Nichols, "Modernism and the Politics of Medieval Studies," in *Medievalism and the Modernist Temper*, R. Howard Bloch and Nichols, eds. (Baltimore, Md., 1996), 49.

state or the "discovery of the individual" in the twelfth century, have waned, even vanished, in favor of a postmodern medievalism, either celebrated or condemned, depending on one's point of view. Moreover, we wish to explore the challenge of postmodernism not merely as a current agenda or future program but as something that has already displaced approaches and assumptions only recently dominant.

We also want to look at the particular practice of medieval studies in the United States, something not usually done, because American medievalists like to think of their discipline in terms of a global interpretive community. Nonetheless, without seeking to deny that all work in medieval history necessarily embraces the widest possible range of national scholarly traditions, we believe that there are distinctive features to the American study of the Middle Ages, just as there are distinctive features to the various European traditions of medieval historiography, despite the international character of modern scholarship. For Americans, this difference is in part generated by the fact that, like all countries formed by Western European settlement since 1492, America lacks a medieval past. Any attempt to argue the importance and relevance of medieval history in the United States, therefore, must first overcome its evident "otherness," its lack of connection to any visible, shared national or cultural "American" past.

The "alterity" of the Middle Ages is, of course, hardly unique to the American consciousness of the era. Indeed, as Lee Patterson has repeatedly insisted, the Middle Ages has from the beginning served postmedieval Western historical consciousness as one of the primary sites of otherness by which it has constituted itself.[3] As constructed by Renaissance humanists, the Middle Ages comprised the West's shadowy "other," against which the Renaissance and modernity itself was defined, a modernity delineated above all by its difference from the pre-modern Middle Ages. As Patterson sums it up:

> humanism, nationalism, the proliferation of competing value systems, the secure grasp of a historical consciousness, the idea of the individual, aesthetic production as an end in itself, the conception of the natural world as a site of colonial exploitation and scientific investigation, the secularization of politics and the idea of the state—all of these characteristics and many others are thought both to set the Renaissance apart from the Middle Ages and to align it definitively with the modern world.[4]

From this perspective, the "Middle" Ages is precisely that, a millennium of middleness, a space of empty waiting and virtual death until the reawakening of the West to its proper nature and purpose in the period of the Renaissance.

For Europeans, the Middle Ages, if not modern, is at least "there," evident in the monuments erected during those years and the traditions that stand presumptively at the origin of modern European nation-states. It is, in fact, one of the peculiarities

[3] Lee Patterson, introduction, "Critical Historicism and Medieval Studies," in *Literary Practice and Social Change in Britain, 1380–1530*, Patterson, ed. (Berkeley, Calif., 1990), 2. See also Patterson, *Negotiating the Past: The Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature* (Madison, Wis., 1987); and "On the Margin: Postmodernism, Ironic History and Medieval Studies," *Speculum* 65 (1990): 87–108.

[4] Patterson, "Critical Historicism and Medieval Studies," 2.

of medieval study everywhere that it constantly hovers between the dual consciousness of the Middle Ages as a place and time of non-origin (that is, the dark period constructed in and by the Renaissance) and that of origin (the origin of the modern state).[5] It is, in part, this alterity of the Middle Ages that has given medievalists their sense of professional legitimacy, since the very strangeness and "difference" signified by the distant past suggests a special virtue required for its study.

The existence of this longstanding sense of medieval history as the locus of Western alterity differentiates it from other historical periods. The strangeness of the Middle Ages imparts a peculiar effect when the destabilizing moves characteristic of postmodern approaches are applied. In some sense, it is *already* destabilized. The medieval period arrives accompanied by at least a background of alterity and marginality. Unlike the Italian Renaissance, Elizabethan England, or France in the postrevolutionary era, the Middle Ages lacks a continuous tradition of representation as rational and progressive, hence inherently modern. Decentering medieval history, reclaiming its margins, therefore, has different repercussions than applying the same procedure to other epochs has, and it evokes overtones of an earlier emphasis on the grotesque.

It was, in fact, to rid the Middle Ages of its romantic overtones and all too colorful grotesqueries that the first generation of professional historians in America insisted on its relevance as the origin of the modern, hence American world. Precisely to the degree that the Middle Ages constituted an "absent other" in America, just so did its first American students insist, in an overdetermined fashion, on its place in a continuous stream of history stretching from the Teutonic past to the American present.[6] To overcome absence and otherness, scholars of the medieval past in America began by construing alterity as origin, that is, as identity. Given this, it is hardly surprising that the study of medieval history in the United States has from the beginning been marked by inherent paradoxes.

[5] As Kathleen Biddick has argued, the Middle Ages, caught in this double bind of non-origin and origin, lack and plenitude, can be "everywhere, both medieval and modern, and nowhere, sublime and redemptive." Biddick, "Bede's Blush: Postcards from Bali, Bombay, Palo Alto," in *The Past and Future of Medieval Studies*, John Van Engen, ed. (Notre Dame, Ind., 1994), 16.

[6] On the "Teutonic germ theory" of institutional history, which claimed that the seed of American democracy had been created in the Black Forest, taken to Anglo-Saxon England, and thence across the ocean to America, see W. Stull Holt, "The Idea of Scientific History in America," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 1 (1940): 352–62; Dorothy Ross, "On the Misunderstanding of Ranke and the Origins of the Historical Profession in America," *Syracuse Scholar* 9 (1988): 31–41; Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (Cambridge, 1992); Ross, "Historical Consciousness in Nineteenth-Century America," *AHR* 89 (October 1984): 909–28. A particularly egregious example of historical work done in this vein is Herbert Baxter Adams, "The Germanic Origins of New England Towns," *Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science* 1 (1883): 5–38, but it was equally prevalent in many writings of medievalists around the turn of the century and is a central premise of the research and writing done in Henry Adams's seminar on Anglo-Saxon legal institutions during his seven years of teaching at Harvard. The work of the seminar was subsequently published as *Essays in Anglo-Saxon Law*, Henry Adams, ed. (Boston, 1876), to which Adams himself contributed an article, "The Anglo-Saxon Courts of Law." Unlike Baxter Adams, however, Henry Adams's espousal of the theory was tepid at best and not of long duration. For a discussion of Adams's essay, see Robin Fleming, "Henry Adams and the Anglo-Saxons," in *The Preservation of Anglo-Saxon Culture*, Paul Szarmach, ed. (forthcoming). The authors would like to thank Professor Fleming for allowing them to read her essay prior to publication.

ALTHOUGH MEDIEVAL CIVILIZATION REPRESENTED THE TRIUMPHAL PAST of Catholicism and Gothic culture, a world organized according to the dictates of a deeply traditionalistic outlook on life and social customs, in North America its first historians tended to be Protestant, enlightened, and revolutionary founders. Thomas Jefferson and other early American revolutionaries were immersed in myths of Anglo-Saxon democracy, whose laws and chronicles, they believed, foreshadowed their ambitions for democracy. So indebted did Jefferson feel to Anglo-Saxon culture and what he took to be its legacy of Germanic liberties that he planned to put the two primordial Anglo-Saxon figures, Hengist and Horsa—invited by Vortigern into Britain, according to Bede's *History of the English Church and People* (731–32) to aid in the defense of the country against enemies to the north—on the great seal of the new republic, whose obverse side would bear an image of the pillar of fire that led the Chosen People into the Promised Land (Exodus 13: 21–22). According to John Adams, to whom he had communicated his wishes, Jefferson saw Hengist and Horsa as representing "the form of government we have assumed,"[7] thereby tracing American democratic institutions to their origins in the social practices of the pre-Christian Germanic peoples.[8] Jefferson cannot have read his Bede very carefully, though, since the latter made it clear that, although Hengist and Horsa had arrived in the guise of England's protectors, "nevertheless, their real intention was to subdue it," which, having done, Hengist become the founder of a *royal* line.[9] Similarly, the Old Testament pillar of fire signified to Jefferson not guidance or protection but an emblem of conquest, a vivid illustration of the young country's territorial ambitions.[10] The underlying contradictions that marked such use of medieval figurations of American destinies would remain a characteristic feature of the American search for identity and origins in an absent and displaced medieval past.

Ultimately, however, American opinion of the Middle Ages was influenced more by nineteenth-century Romanticism and nostalgia for an intense, devout, harmonious world than by the image of the egalitarian forests of Germany, although it remains true that the "Teutonic Germ Theory" loomed large in the thought of the early generation of German-trained historians such as Henry Adams and Herbert Baxter Adams. But, as the example of Henry Adams powerfully illustrates, the

[7] Quoted in Allen J. Frantzen, *Desire for Origins: New Language, Old English and Teaching the Tradition* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1990), 16. Another design formulated by a committee composed of Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson—also rejected—derived from a drawing by Pierre-Eugène du Simitière (a Swiss painter living in Philadelphia) and consisted of a shield divided into six sections, on which the arms of England, Scotland, Ireland, France, Germany, Belgium, and Holland were painted. Above the shield would be the "Eye of Providence in a radiant Triangle," below the motto *E Pluribus Unum*. As Jay Fliegelman indicates, "what is fascinating about the design is that in its first official appearance, the *E Pluribus Unum* motto refers as much to the process whereby America derived from the six 'countries from which these states have been peopled' as it does to America as a union of States." Hence the insistence on continuity with the European past, despite the more radical implications of the revolution itself, was to be inscribed in America's emblematic self-representation. Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language and the Culture of Performance* (Stanford, Calif., 1993), 161.

[8] Peter W. Williams, "The Varieties of American Medievalism," *Studies in Medievalism* 1, no. 2 (1979/1982): 8.

[9] Bede, *A History of the English Church and People*, Leo Sherley-Price, trans., rev. by R. E. Latham (New York, 1977), 55–56.

[10] Frantzen, *Desire for Origins*, 16.

appeal of the Middle Ages in the late Victorian period lay in its difference, in the alternative it offered to the industrializing and commercially competitive world of America's Gilded Age.[11]

This anti-modernist medieval was almost as strong in the United States as in England, where High Tory longing for a society of deference (as in Benjamin Disraeli's novel *Coningsby*, 1844) waned, only to be replaced by the high Victorian aesthetic dreams of John Ruskin and the socialist craft-guild version of the Middle Ages created by William Morris.[12] Like his English counterparts, Henry Adams embraced with emotional intensity what from the perspective of Enlightenment thinking was medieval history's most offensive aspects. Adams saw the Middle Ages as attractive precisely because of its alterity; it was, he observed, "the most foreign of worlds to the American soul."[13] The vital, collective, organic culture that produced the Gothic cathedrals was an exemplary counterpoint to the "anomic, dehumanized industrial world that he himself inhabited."[14] In a famous chapter of *The Education of Henry Adams* (1907), Adams contrasted the spirit of the Virgin Mary to that of the dynamo, an image of the dehumanizing greed and technology of the modern age. The New World, Adams believed, had not inherited medieval institutions, patterns of social organization, or religious beliefs. The study of medieval history therefore offered no great lessons for the guidance of American life. Its utility, by implication, lay in the escape it provided from the increasingly harsh realities of the modern world, a realm in which to locate the anti-modernist self.[15]

The anti-modern Middle Ages could also represent a frightening counter-example to a freer contemporary world. Henry Charles Lea, the most important American medieval historian before Charles Homer Haskins, wrote massive works that are still consulted concerning the Inquisition, witchcraft, and judicial ordeals, all carefully researched descriptions of past superstition and repression.[16] Lea might have had a grimmer and more practical view of the medieval period than Henry Adams, but he too asserted its radical difference from the world of the nineteenth century.

[11] See the works cited in note 6, to which should be added the wonderful essay by Robin Fleming, "Picturesque History and the Medieval in Nineteenth-Century America," *AHR* 100 (October 1995): 1061–94.

[12] Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven, Conn., 1981).

[13] Quoted in William J. Courtenay, "The Virgin and the Dynamo: The Growth of Medieval Studies in North America 1870–1930," in *Medieval Studies in North America: Past, Present, and Future*, Francis G. Gentry and Christopher Kleinhenz, eds. (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1982), 10.

[14] Williams, "Varieties of American Medievalism," 10.

[15] As a teacher of medieval history at Harvard, however, Adams eschewed a sweeping or vivid romantic picture, confining himself to the reading of documents according to the philological manner practiced in Germany, where he had studied for two years. See Courtenay, "Virgin and the Dynamo," 6.

[16] Henry Charles Lea, *Superstition and Force: Essays on the Wager of Law, the Wager of Battle, the Ordeal, Torture*, 4th edn. (Philadelphia, 1892); *A History of the Inquisition of Spain*, 4 vols. (New York, 1906–07); and *Materials toward a History of Witchcraft*, Arthur C. Howland, ed., 3 vols. (Philadelphia, 1939).

The progressive Middle Ages in its American guise is essentially the creation of Haskins, the first true professional medieval historian in this country. If Henry Adams represents medievalism's anti-modernist agenda and Lea the "écrasez l'infâme" school of medieval studies, they agreed on the unfamiliarity of the period, a view Haskins was to reject.

Trained by Herbert Baxter Adams as an American historian at Johns Hopkins, Haskins studied at the Ecole des Chartres and turned himself into a medievalist. His major publications came between 1918 and 1929 after a stint as graduate dean at Harvard that delayed the appearance of his pathbreaking work. In 1928, three years before the stroke that would incapacitate him, Haskins found his successor in Joseph Reese Strayer, who studied at Harvard before returning to his undergraduate alma mater, Princeton, to teach for the remainder of his career. Haskins and Strayer were to guide the practice of medieval history in North America from the 1920s to the 1980s, constituting what Norman Cantor in his *Inventing the Middle Ages* presents as the premier age of American medievalism.[17]

Haskins's formative experiences at Hopkins had an enduring impact on his career and ideas. Its department of history had graduated Woodrow Wilson but a few years earlier, and throughout his life Haskins would prove to be an ardent Wilsonian progressive, sharing with the president a deep faith in progress, rational reform, and the benefits of government, beliefs that significantly shaped his historical practice. Haskins accompanied Wilson to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 and 1920 as one of three principal advisers, helping to carve out Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia from the former Austro-Hungarian Empire. On returning to Cambridge, Haskins assumed the directorship of the American Council of Learned Societies, from which position he helped to found and finance the Medieval Academy of America and its new journal, *Speculum*. Both were intended to signal the coming of age of American medieval studies by rivaling in seriousness, exacting standards of scholarship, and formality the great academies of European learning on which these American institutions were consciously modeled.[18]

The modernist agenda that Haskins sought to implant on American soil took in its broadest sense the form of an alliance between positivism, Idealism, naturalism, and objectivity, many of whose components derived, ultimately, from the German scientific historiography of the late nineteenth century. But Haskins cast them in a distinctly American, early twentieth-century, progressivist mold. To do so, however, Haskins had first to cover the absence of a medieval past in America. Few historians have argued the relevance of medieval history to Americans as eloquently or with as profound conviction as Haskins. While recognizing that "American history is our first business," it was not, he believed, "our sole business," and in any case, the two were ultimately part of the same story. European history, Haskins argued in a 1923 essay on "European History and American Scholarship," published in the *American Historical Review*, is

[17] Norman F. Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages: The Lives, Works, and Ideas of the Great Medievalists of the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1991), 245–86. On Haskins, see also Sally Vaughn in *Medieval Scholarship: Biographical Studies on the Formation of a Discipline*, Vol. 1, *History*, Helen D'amico and Joseph B. Zavadil, eds. (New York, 1995), 168–81.

[18] On Haskins's role, see George R. Coffman, "The Medieval Academy of America: Historical Background and Prospect," *Speculum* 1 (1926): 5–18.

of profound importance to Americans. We may at times appear more mindful of Europe's material indebtedness to us than of our spiritual indebtedness to Europe; we may in our pharisaic moods express our thanks that we are not even as these sinners of another hemisphere; but such moments cannot set us loose from the world's history. Whether we look at Europe genetically as the course of our civilization, or pragmatically as a large part of the world in which we live, we cannot ignore the vital connections between Europe and America, their histories ultimately but one.[19]

Of all the available European pasts, Haskins signaled America's natural affinity with that of England, for, he declared, "English history is in a sense early American history."[20] This annexed an already established tradition of English constitutional history to the project of making the Middle Ages the starting point for modern authority and modern liberty.

Behind the profound passion of Haskins's statement lies, to be sure, an equally profound anxiety over just how marginal and irrelevant medieval history must have seemed to most Americans. As Karl F. Morrison has pointed out, Haskins and his contemporaries "lived in the shadow of two divisive events: the American Revolution and the Civil War. It was natural that their historical inquiries dealt so regularly with formal mechanisms by which society deliberately maintains and reconstructs itself and with those two supreme moments of transformation, the end of the Roman Empire and the Renaissance."[21] Indeed, in 1971, Strayer openly articulated the threat underlying the American practice of medieval history, warning a new generation of students to whom he addressed his remarks that, without concerted effort, they were in danger of being "shoved into the back corner along with Sanskrit, Assyriology and other subjects" (that is, all the *dead* languages, betraying the threat of non-being that always haunts the medievalist's imaginary). "We should never forget our greatest danger," he continued: "we began as antiquarians and we could end as antiquarians."[22]

The insistence on continuity and relevance marked the American appropriation of the medieval past for decades. In the presidential address "Humanistic Studies and Science," on the occasion of the fifth annual meeting of the Medieval Academy, John Matthews Manly sounded its plea once again, imploring that

the infinitely various and fascinating period we roughly call the Middle Ages must not be neglected. It lies close to *us*. In it arose many of *our* most important institutions. *Our* social life, *our* customs—*our* ideals, *our* superstitions and fears and hopes—came to *us directly from this period*; and no present-day analysis can give a complete account of *our* civilization unless it is supplemented by a profound study of the forces and forms of life, good and evil, which we have inherited from it.[23]

[19] Charles H. Haskins, "European History and American Scholarship," *AHR* 28 (January 1923): 215.

[20] Haskins, "European History and American Scholarship," 218. In 1963, S. Harrison Thomson, surveying the field, echoed Haskins's sentiment, stating that "the Middle Ages are early American history and they should be so presented." See Thomson, "The Growth of a Discipline: Medieval Studies in America," in *Perspectives in Medieval History*, Katherine Fischer Drew and Floyd Seyward Lear, eds. (Chicago, 1963), 17.

[21] Karl F. Morrison, "Fragmentation and Unity in American Medievalism," in *The Past before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States*, Michael Kammen, ed. (Ithaca, N.Y., 1980), 52.

[22] Joseph Reese Strayer, "The Future of Medieval History," *Medievalia et Humanistica*, new ser., 2 (1971): 179.

[23] *Speculum* 5 (1930): 250, italics added.

The concern with continuity was institutionalized in the founding of the Medieval Academy and *Speculum* in 1925, whose embracing purpose was to promote American study of the Middle Ages in all its varieties and subdisciplines, in order to help Americans, wrote George R. Coffman in the official report of the foundation, "to comprehend our medieval ancestors" (the operative word here being "ancestors"). Help was needed, he confessed, given the obscure and complex nature of medieval civilization, and it would require the "cooperation and the creative energy of students of art, archeology, folk-lore, government, law, literature, medicine, philosophy, theology and all other branches" of knowledge to elucidate.[24] Thus, from its inception, the professional study of the Middle Ages in America disclosed a durable structure of paradox in American medievalism—the sense of the absolute remove of the medieval past, its strange, difficult, occult nature, combined with an equally absolute sense of filiation with it.

Haskins was not unaware of this paradox and in his books and essays sought to resolve it in directions that would promote his modernist agenda. His enduring tribute to the modernity of the medieval past was *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*, published in 1927, in which he contested the assumption that modern Western civilization began in the Renaissance. Haskins insisted,

> the continuity of history rejects such sharp and violent contrasts between successive periods, and . . . modern research shows us the Middle Ages less dark and less static, the Renaissance less bright and less sudden than was once supposed. The Middle Ages exhibit life and color and change, much eager search after knowledge and beauty, much creative accomplishment in art, in literature, in institutions. The Italian Renaissance was preceded by similar, if less wide-reaching movements; indeed it came out of the Middle Ages so gradually that historians are not agreed when it began, and so would go so far as to abolish the name, and perhaps even the fact, of a renaissance in the Quattrocento.[25]

Thus, instead of viewing the Middle Ages as Western civilization's pre-modernity, Haskins pushed both the revival of antiquity and the beginnings of modernity with which it was traditionally associated in Western historiography back to the twelfth century, thereby strengthening at one and the same time the continuity of the Middle Ages with the present and the centrality of its study as the parent civilization of the modern West.

Even in the seemingly improbable domain of scientific investigation, long believed to be the most backward and superstition-ridden feature of medieval intellectual life, Haskins argued for the essential continuity between the Middle Ages and the modern age. Haskins's appreciation of the importance of science to medievalism's modernist agenda was implemented in his important research on medieval science, published in 1924 as *Studies in the History of Medieval Science*. This aspect of Haskins's influence was continued and amplified by Lynn White's investigations into the history of technology, beginning in the 1950s, the effects of which were, in John Van Engen's helpful phrasing, "to re-write medieval culture to

[24] Coffman, "Medieval Academy of America," 17.

[25] Charles Homer Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (1927; rpt. edn., New York, 1964), vii–viii.

approximate American dynamism."[26] Haskins's argument in *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* for the modernity of the Middle Ages began the "revolt of the medievalists,"[27] which sought a new legitimacy for the medievalist's professional identity against the charges of obscurantism, irrelevance, and technical virtuosity that continually haunted the practice of medievalism in America in the face of its clear lack of connection with national identity.

Making a virtue out of necessity, Haskins argued that America's lack of direct connection with the Middle Ages cultivated detachment on the part of its scholars; it was, he claimed, "one of America's great advantages as regards many aspects of European history . . . enabling the historian to trace [the history of European civilization] without those national prejudices from which his European confreres cannot wholly emancipate themselves."[28] In that sense, the very alterity of the Middle Ages abetted the entrenchment of positivism as *the* scientific form of scholarly method in American medieval historiography.[29]

Translated into the realm of historical practice, Haskins's positivist objectivity took the form of a search for the rational basis of the political and administrative development of monarchical institutions in Europe, especially those of the Anglo-Normans and French. Like Wilson an admirer of the British constitution and political achievement, Haskins focused his attention on the Normans, whose governmental genius he believed had reconstituted the English political system after the Norman conquest of 1066, bringing to the disordered and backward Anglo-Saxon realm the peculiarly systemized and centralized form of feudalism that the Normans had first developed in France. The fruits of this research began to appear in articles after Haskins started teaching at Harvard, but his magisterial *Norman Institutions* was not published until 1918, thus expressing a reorientation in American medievalism away from the study of German/Anglo-Saxon history after World War I.[30] Hence one effect of Haskins's concentration on the Normans was

[26] See John Van Engen, "An Afterword on Medieval Studies, Or the Future of Abelard and Heloise," in Van Engen, *Past and Future of Medieval Studies*, 414.

[27] The term was popularized by Wallace K. Ferguson, *The Renaissance in Historical Thought: Five Centuries of Interpretation* (Boston, 1948).

[28] Haskins, "European History and American Scholarship," 224, 226.

[29] Space does not allow for a full discussion of the impact of positivism and philology on medieval studies in America, but its perduring effects would be difficult to overestimate. For a discussion from various points of view, see, among others, Frantzen, *Desire for Origins*; Patterson, *Negotiating the Past*; Patterson, "Critical Historicism and Medieval Studies"; and especially the wide range of essays in Bloch and Nichols, *Medievalism and the Modernist Temper*. Especially useful in that volume are David Hult, "Gaston Paris and the Invention of Courtly Love," and Stephen G. Nichols, "Modernism and the Politics of Medieval Studies." On the alliance of philology with French and German national movements, see also R. Howard Bloch, "Naturalism, Nationalism, Medievalism," *Romanic Review* 76 (November 1985): 341–60; and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, "Un Souffle d'Allemagne ayant passé: Friedrich Diez, Gaston Paris and the Genesis of National Philologies," *Romance Philology* 40 (October 1986): 1–37.

[30] According to Courtenay, the most striking effect on American scholarship of the war with Germany was to redirect both attention and training away from Germany to France, Belgium, and England ("Virgin and the Dynamo," 14). One lamentable consequence of this shift was the virtual extinction of German medieval history as a field in North America. For an interesting discussion of the impact of World War II on German studies in the United States, see Patrick J. Geary, "Medieval Germany in America," *Annual Lectures 1990* (The German Historical Institute) (Washington, D.C., 1991); and Edward J. Peters, "More Trouble with Henry: The Historiography of Medieval Germany in the Anglo-literate World," *Central European History* 28 (1995): 47–72. Also relevant are aspects of Giles Constable, "The Many Middle Ages: Medieval Studies in Europe as Seen from America," in *Bilan*

to maintain the traditional orientation of American scholars toward British history but at the same time subtly to redefine what was best in Britain as "French" (Anglo-Norman).[31]

It might also be pointed out that Haskins's new focus on feudalism—a focus that was to characterize American scholarship on the Middle Ages until the 1980s—constituted an apparent revision of the Germanist thesis of Teutonism that had been a crucial explanatory principle for the preceding generation of Herbert Baxter Adams, in whose seminar Haskins had been trained. One function of the Teutonic germ theory had been to enable Americans conceptually to by-pass feudal institutions, so hated by revolutionary founders such as John Adams, who had seen the very essence of the American social experiment in its liberation from what Adams called "the feudal and Canon law."[32] This was achieved by attaching America to an Anglo-Saxon, pre-feudal (indeed, anti-feudal) past. For these thinkers, feudalism represented an anti-democratic, aristocratic regime, which submerged (but left unaffected) the original seeds of democratic liberty sown by primitive Germanic customs and institutions. Interestingly, Haskins, while abandoning his mentor's Teutonic germ theory of institutional history, remained committed to its underlying ideology, since he too sought to locate institutions in a progressively evolving, and rationalized, state that would ultimately secure constitutional government and, through it, individual liberties, now seen as embedded in the very principles of feudal organization and law that earlier generations had viewed with suspicion.

The influence of a progressive view of the state on Haskins can be seen in his focus on the inherent rationality of the Norman brand of feudalism, with its tendency to centralize, placing power in the hands of a court elite at the expense of an anarchic baronage, and its establishment of political and judicial order to bring peace and stability to the realms under Norman sway, in Sicily as well as England. The lesson that medieval monarchies thus bequeathed to the American present was the power of government to effect unity and consensus out of fragmentation and discord. And no one was to propound this lesson more clearly than Haskins's premier student, Strayer. He shared with his mentor a dedication to investigate what he explicitly called "the medieval origins of the modern state,"[33] in particular by studying the growth of royal bureaucracies, governmental powers, and the legal principles by which medieval kings were able to secure not only the ability to rule through force but the affection and loyalty of their subjects as well.

If Strayer was heir both to the intellectual agenda and the political traditions of his mentor, there were, nonetheless, significant differences in the ideological tones

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et perspectives des études médiévales en Europe, Jacqueline Hamesse, ed. (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1995), 1–22.

[31] It should be pointed out that similar revisions were taking place in English historiography, beginning with the work of J. H. Round (1854–1928) and continued in a powerful fashion by F. M. Stenton (1888–1967) and others. Haskins was aware of this work, on which he drew and to which he contributed.

[32] John Adams, "On the Feudal and the Canon Law," in *The Rising Glory of America, 1760–1820*, Gordon S. Wood, ed. (New York, 1971).

[33] Notably in the title of his book, Joseph Reese Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State* (Princeton, N.J., 1970).

of their work. After World War I, the American historical profession in general had suffered a severe loss of optimism and witnessed its first questioning of the positivist program of scientific objectivity, notably in the work of Charles Beard and Carl Becker on historical relativism, but American medievalists such as Carl Stephenson and Charles McIlwain—indeed, Haskins himself—had been relatively untouched by and strongly opposed to its ideological currents. Peter Novick has shown that, among American historians, medievalists were most resistant to the currents of relativism that surfaced after World War I. Whereas Becker and Beard used the occasion of their presidential addresses to the American Historical Association in 1931 and 1933 respectively to articulate their relativist doctrines—Becker in "Everyman His Own Historian," Beard in "Written History as an Act of Faith"—McIlwain devoted his presidential address in 1936 to attacking Beard's address of three years earlier, thus upholding the premises of scientific objectivity against the propositions of his colleagues' relativism.[34] Medievalists were not alone in maintaining the "noble dream" of objectivity, but they were universally on its side in the debate that erupted.[35] Such was not to be the case with medievalists after World War II.[36]

By the time Strayer reached the peak of his career, the American state had grown immeasurably in power, from the rather modest federal government of the period before the Great Depression to the postwar colossus that had mobilized a nation, lifted it out of economic stagnation, unleashed atomic energy, and begun a grim struggle against world communism. There was, to be sure, an ideological continuity with the interventionist plans that had followed the previous war, but Woodrow Wilson's internationalism had been defeated; after 1945, with the end of isolation-

[34] Carl Becker, *AHR* 37 (January 1932): 221–36; Charles A. Beard, *AHR* 39 (January 1934): 219–31; C. H. McIlwain, "The Historian's Part in a Changing World," *AHR* 42 (January 1937): 207–24.

[35] See Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, 1988), chap. 9. See also John Higham, *History: Professional Scholarship in America* (1965; rpt. edn., Baltimore, Md., 1989).

[36] Here again, McIlwain provides the most interesting example. In contrast to his firm maintenance of scientific historiography and objectivity in his 1936 presidential attack on Beard's relativism, already before the end of World War II McIlwain found himself responding to political events by a revision of his earlier understanding of Roman law. Thus in "Medieval Institutions in the Modern World," *Speculum* 16 (1941): 275–83, McIlwain allowed present events in Germany to reorient completely his notion of the place of Roman law in Western constitutionalism, arguing, "If we find the outcome of the Germanic origin of our institutions in the barbarous tribal orgy and the fantastic tribal history of the Germany of today, we may well begin to wonder if we have not been overdoing our own notions both of the continuing importance of our Germanic origins and of the accuracy, or at least the adequacy of the von Maurers of yesterday or of the von Gierkes of today." In place of his insistence in his presidential address that objectivity was not only possible but incumbent upon the historian, and that it could be maintained in the face of the sort of presentist concerns that both Beard and Becker stressed, now McIlwain confessed that "for myself it has been the tribal excesses of present-day Germany which, as much as anything else, have led me to question the group theory of von Gierke's *Genossenschaftsrecht* either as an explanation of medieval life or as a principle of practical politics" (pp. 279–80). Moreover, McIlwain opined, the Nazi repudiation of Roman law suggested that medievalists had greatly overemphasized the despotic character of that great legal corpus and had, conversely, greatly under-rated the "importance of Roman constitutionalism in the early development of our own" (p. 278). This domestication and democratization of what had earlier been seen as the absolutist tendencies of Roman law, begun in an American context by McIlwain, was to gain powerful allies from the German émigré community of medievalists, especially Ernst Kantorowicz, whose students included Robert Benson and Ralph Giesey. See also the essays by Gaines Post, in *Studies in Medieval Legal Thought: Public Law and the State, 1100–1322* (Princeton, N.J., 1964). McIlwain's 1941 article is notable for its prescient awareness of the impact the war would have on American scholarship.

ism, the establishment of a standing army, and the organization of industry and the military to confront the Soviet Union, the American state was considerably more impressive and its defense more urgent than had been the case in Haskins's time.

What Strayer did share with Haskins, and what his own work did so much to promote, was the desire to reinterpret medieval governmental history by making it compatible with American democratic principles. This he did mainly by arguing for the innovative, ameliorative impact of the centralizing monarchies in twelfth and thirteenth-century England and France, whose actions brought order and national unity out of feudal fragmentation. For Strayer, government, as such, was a "good" thing, securing for its subjects the necessary peace and stability that enabled them to prosper. But this was not government for the glory of the ruler—certainly not the gaudy Machiavellianism of Ernst Kantorowicz's Frederick II but rather the sensible, careful (if wily) constitutional practice of an Edward I or Philip the Fair, achieved not through violence but through a legal and administrative system able to deliver effective, consistent justice. Royal centralization arose not to oppose feudal institutions but to rationalize and strengthen them, preserving along the way their pluralist character. This form of feudal, administrative kingship[37] was the first step in the implementation of Western constitutionalism, a rational system for the adjudication of national issues and a style of government beneficial to subjects of the king. Strayer devoted a lifetime to demonstrating that this, not absolutism, represented the true achievement of medieval monarchies. A distillation of this thesis appeared in his famous article, "Philip the Fair—a 'Constitutional' King," published in the *American Historical Review* in 1956, in which Strayer argued, against the grain of previous scholarship, that Philip, far from representing a capricious, tyrannical king, who coldly fabricated scurrilous propaganda and placed himself beyond the reach of law, was instead a "constitutional" monarch who used legal principles to ensure the welfare and security of his realm.[38]

After being criticized for this view by scholars, Strayer later, in his monumental work *The Reign of Philip the Fair* (1980), modulated his position to emphasize instead the efficiency and efficacy of Philip's government, in lieu of the somewhat anachronistic claims concerning royal "constitutionalism" in the 1956 article.[39] But his underlying point remained the same: strong and legitimate government was a positive force in society and in the history of Western European state building. So effective were the administrative systems put in place by medieval governments, and so secure the loyalty of their subjects, that the emerging nation-states of Europe, Strayer argued in his 1971 AHA presidential address, were able to withstand the crises of the fourteenth century, in sharp contrast to the Roman Empire, doomed to succumb to the vagaries of the fourth century precisely because it lacked the

[37] The term is that devised by C. Warren Hollister and John W. Baldwin in "The Rise of Administrative Kingship: Henry I and Philip Augustus," *AHR* 83 (October 1978): 867–905.

[38] Joseph R. Strayer, "Philip the Fair—A 'Constitutional' King," *AHR* 62 (October 1956): 18–32.

[39] His critics in particular included Bryce Lyon, "What Made a Medieval King Constitutional?" in *Essays in Medieval History Presented to Bertie Wilkinson* (Toronto, 1969). We are indebted to Professor John W. Baldwin for this reference. Joseph Reese Strayer, *The Reign of Philip the Fair* (Princeton, N.J., 1980).

bureaucratic mechanisms and affective legitimacy that medieval kings had successfully brought into being.[40]

Beginning in the 1930s and continuing on until the 1980s, Strayer's long career of teaching, research, and writing on medieval history characterized a dominant (though by no means exclusive) orientation of American scholars of this era, a group that includes McIlwain and Charles Taylor at Harvard, Sidney Packard at Smith College, Carl Stephenson and Brian Tierney at Cornell, Sidney Painter and John W. Baldwin at Johns Hopkins, Bryce Lyon at Brown University, Elizabeth A. R. Brown at Brooklyn College, Frederick Cheyette at Amherst College, Charles T. Wood at Dartmouth, Ralph Turner at Florida State University, Thomas Bisson at Berkeley and Harvard, as well as C. Warren Hollister at the University of California at Santa Barbara, Gavin Langmuir at Stanford, and Robert Benson at UCLA, to name only a handful, all of whom were centrally concerned with questions of legal/constitutional and institutional history in relation to issues of both feudalism and state formation. Over the course of half a century, these scholars trained generations of students, whom they sent out throughout the country, populating centers of medieval study from the East to the West Coast. In fact, surveying dissertations in medieval history granted between the academic years of 1960–1961 and 1977–1978, Karl Morrison found that the largest segment (seventy-three) still consisted of works on late medieval England, nearly half of which were studies of law and institutions. The next largest group of theses were devoted to France, also in the later period and also institutional in focus.[41] Thus, if one includes Haskins, these concerns span virtually the entire length of professional medievalism in America, shaping it with notions of scientific methodology, rationality, and progressive ideology. In the early 1970s, Sylvia Thrupp, an economic historian at the University of Michigan, could still observe that "so far, knowing more about medieval society has not produced any radically new ways of thinking about it."[42]

Since Strayer began his researches in the late 1930s, the rise of administrative kingship has been traced for England, Capetian France, and Catalonia.[43] In recent years, however, the field has lost some its allure, as Elizabeth A. R. Brown recently noted, because the state appears both less imposing and less benign than it did in

[40] Joseph R. Strayer, "The Fourth and the Fourteenth Centuries," *AHR* 77 (February 1972): 1–14.

[41] In order of size, Morrison shows, these two categories were followed by Italy, ecclesiology, and church order, in which he included the study of canon law. Smaller groups formed around the study of Byzantium, textual studies, the history of Germany (by the late 1970s, still a marginal field in medieval history in the United States), as well as the history of science, philosophy, and hagiography. Morrison, "Fragmentation and Unity in American Medievalism," 57. A further index of continuity, he indicates, is the fact that of the ten historians who received the Haskins Medal of the Medieval Academy (the highest prize it awards) between 1968 and 1978, four were born between 1894 and 1904 and two others in 1914 and 1916, while the rest were born in the 1920s. Thus, as Morrison himself is quick to point out, the topography of American medievalism in 1978 remained continuous with "the personal and disciplinary elements of its past" (p. 55).

[42] Quoted in Morrison, "Fragmentation and Unity in American Medievalism," 14.

[43] Hollister and Baldwin, "Rise of Administrative Kingship"; John W. Baldwin, *The Government of Philip Augustus: Foundations of French Royal Power in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley, Calif., 1986); Thomas N. Bisson, *Fiscal Accounts of Catalonia under the Early Count-Kings (1151–1213)*, 2 vols. (Berkeley, 1984).

1945.[44] In place of the confident identification of kingship, centralization, and progress is an emphasis on power rather than government, on familial aggrandizement over rulership, on military and judicial force as opposed to constitutionalism.[45] The institutions of rulership have been "remedievalized" as their ceremonial, intimidating, and exploitative aspects receive renewed attention. In that sense, the progressive, modernist agenda for which Strayer's investigations of the Middle Ages stand seems extraordinarily distant from the present concerns of medievalists, so great has the disillusion with state power been in the interim and so much more predatory does the medieval and, for that matter, early modern state now appear.

To understand the disillusion with the state, it is not enough to point solely to the eclipse of governmental prestige in the past few decades. To this must be joined specifically the waning of the Cold War; for, as an ideological conflict, the Cold War encouraged not only the rather stark, state-centered historiography of Strayer but also the humanistic assertion of pluralism and human autonomy that characterized the period, following such works as Karl Popper's *Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945) or Lionel Trilling's *Liberal Imagination* (1950). Stimulated by the contrast between the democratic values of the West and the seemingly monolithic destruction of individualism by totalitarianism, the contest between democracy and postwar communism gave rise to a Middle Ages presented not solely as a model of administrative efficiency but also as the point of origin for Western values, especially individualism and confidence in the power of human reason, both found to be prevalent in the twelfth century.

In contrast to the theme of the medieval origins of the modern state, which tended to be a predominantly American concern, the elaboration of a rational and optimistic image of the twelfth century was shared by mid-century England and the United States alike, focusing above all on the period's psychological dimensions and innovations. As with state power, this strand of historiography can be traced back ultimately to the work of Haskins—not the Haskins of Norman expansionism but of *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*. His inquiry into the scholarship of the cathedral schools and the transmission of translated texts freed a little-appreciated intellectual movement from its exclusively theological associations, in particular from Scholasticism. As Haskins presented them, the masters of the School of Chartres were eclectic explorers, not confined to one field of inquiry or methodological template, more Platonist scientists and biblical scholars than Aristotelian abstract systemizers.

Haskins himself was most concerned to show that the attributes usually credited to the Italian Renaissance (classical learning, scientific curiosity, a sense of human power and autonomy) had been anticipated centuries before. However, as this strand of research developed in the immediate post–World War II decades, the

[44] Elizabeth A. R. Brown, introduction to her collection of articles, *Politics and Institutions in Capetian France* (Aldershot, 1991), ix.

[45] For example, Andrew W. Lewis, *Royal Succession in Capetian France: Studies on Familial Order and the State* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981); Eleanor Searle, *Predatory Kinship and the Creation of Norman Power, 840–1066* (Berkeley, Calif., 1988); Thomas N. Bisson, "The Feudal Revolution," *Past and Present* 142 (1994): 6–42. A cautious position is adopted by many of the authors in the recent collection *Cultures of Power: Lordship, Status, and Process in Twelfth-Century Europe*, Thomas N. Bisson, ed. (Philadelphia, 1995), who depict political power neither as especially progressive nor overweening but varied, diffuse.

Renaissance of the twelfth century became important not so much for the revival of ancient learning as for its optimism, for the change it effected in mentality: from epic fatalism to romantic quest, from intellectual reliance on and deference toward authority to dialectical reasoning, from unquestioning adherence to faith to an active quest for understanding. In R. W. Southern's *Making of the Middle Ages* (1953), surely among the most influential books on medieval history, the loving sacrifice of Christ, the logical meditations of Anselm, Abelard's theories of intentionality, and a widespread rehabilitation of nature, seen especially in the writings of the School of Chartres—all figure as accomplishments of what Southern later termed "medieval humanism," a designation intended less to take issue with the prestige of the Italian Renaissance than to describe a massive shift in the psychology of Europe and the West, one that Southern summed up in the covering phrase "From Epic to Romance."[46] The twelfth century was at once rational, inward looking, and optimistic: a world in which the ordeal yielded to evidentiary criteria; the awe-inspiring Christ as Ruler of All (Pantocrator) became the crucified Son of Man; the strict world of duty in the epic became the adventurous quest in the romance.[47]

The new scholarship on the Renaissance of the twelfth century opposed it to both the period that preceded it and that which followed. Viewed in contrast to the immediate medieval past, the twelfth century represented the revival of the classics, the application of logic to theology, an optimism about the human condition, and a revised theology concerning the relation between God and his creation. It was also different from later, disappointingly dogmatic and intolerant, centuries, in particular from what in the Catholic world was still regarded as the "Thirteenth, Greatest of Centuries" (the title of Catholic historian James J. Walsh's once-celebrated book, published in 1912).[48] Whereas the thirteenth century embodied the systematic scholastic theology of a universalizing church, the twelfth century was diverse, speculative, and—compared to what was to come—relatively open and tolerant.

So profound were the changes in the understanding of the twelfth century that historians began to re-periodize the Middle Ages, positing a new, differentiated chronology for what had previously been seen as a unified epoch. In this new schema, the twelfth century was cast as the springtime of the human spirit. Above all, what the twelfth century seemed to represent to historians of the postwar world was the discovery of the individual: the birth of a sense of human possibility and the awareness of the self as complex and unique, a development that could be traced in

[46] Southern took the phrase from the work of literary historian W. P. Ker, whose book *Epic and Romance* was first published in London in 1897 and subsequently reissued in 1908, 1926, and 1957.

[47] R. W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (New Haven, Conn., 1953); and *Medieval Humanism* (New York, 1970), especially part 2, pp. 29–132. See also Alexander Murray, *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1978); and Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton, N.J., 1983); and Stock's essays in *Listening for the Text: On the Uses of the Past* (Baltimore, Md., 1990).

[48] Walsh actually was not a professional historian but a medical doctor who had trained under Rudolph Virchow in Germany. On Walsh, see Philip Gleason, "American Catholics and the Mythic Middle Ages," in *Keeping the Faith: American Catholicism, Past and Present* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1987), 19 and following.

a wide variety of medieval literary, artistic, and spiritual domains, from the romances of Chrétien de Troyes to the mystical theology of Bernard of Clairvaux.[49]

When twentieth-century historians posited for the twelfth century the discovery of an inner and divided mental world, they undertook a psychological normalizing of the medieval in terms of perceived touchstones of modernity. To do this required secularizing what had been originally a language of religious devotion (as with the Cistercians) or theological disputation (as in the case of Abelard), finessing, if not altogether ignoring, the specifically Christian tenets of belief that informed twelfth-century thought.[50] In the work of Southern, this takes the form of a warm but decidedly nondogmatic sense of God's care for humanity and the exaltation of human agency in the embodied image of the specifically *human* Christ, suffering on the cross to redeem mankind.

More psychologically oriented versions of the birth of individual self-examination were offered in the 1970s by American scholars such as John Benton and Charles Radding. On the occasion of a conference to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of Haskins's *Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*, Benton applied the neo-Nietzschean theories of psychologist Julian Jaynes to locate the moment when the external voice of divine command (characteristic of an "epic" or pre-Socratic imagination) was discovered to emanate from within a divided self (usually associated with romance). Individuality was the result of a sense of the vastness and distinctiveness of the internal forum and the erection of boundaries between this individualized self and the divine, now mediated by rationality.[51] The emergence of the divided self created a new "depth psychology," inaccessible to exterior forms of knowledge or social manipulation, a self capable of both delusion and alienation.

While Benton deployed depth psychology to argue for transformations in the nature and meaning of medieval interiority, Radding drew on advances in cognitive psychology, in particular Jean Piaget's theories of childhood development, viewing the twelfth century as Western humanity's coming of age. Before this key turning point, medieval thought, Radding argued, was limited in its perceptual categories and absolute in its values, lacking notions both of human intentionality and ethical ambiguity.[52] It was, in Piaget's terms, "childlike," a judgment strongly reminiscent of the nineteenth-century exaltation of the Middle Ages for its innocence and uncritical habits of belief. But when it came to the twelfth century, Radding and others saw the birth of a rationality that could theorize about nature and that regarded the self as a fit object of analysis, thus linking the discovery of the individual to scientific progress against superstition and authority.[53]

[49] On Chrétien de Troyes, see Robert W. Hanning, *The Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance* (New Haven, Conn., 1977); for Bernard, see Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050–1200* (New York, 1972).

[50] John Van Engen drew attention to this habit of thought, although more in connection with the anthropological Annaliste approaches of the 1970s and 1980s, in "The Christian Middle Ages as an Historiographical Problem," *AHR* 91 (June 1986): 519–52.

[51] John F. Benton, "Consciousness of Self and Perceptions of Individuality," in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable, eds. (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), 263–95.

[52] Charles M. Radding, "The Evolution of Medieval Mentalities: A Cognitive-Structural Approach," *AHR* 83 (June 1978): 577–97. See also Radding, *A World Made by Men: Cognition and Society, 400–1200* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1985).

[53] Lynn White, "Science and the Sense of Self," *Daedalus* 107 (Spring 1978): 47–59; Charles M.

These versions of the "discovery of the individual" were innovative but still modernizing, making an earlier period intelligible in contemporary terms. They share with Haskins the goal of locating the birth of the modern three centuries before the flowering of the Italian Renaissance. Such progressive ideas of medieval psychological development cast the twelfth century in essentially teleological terms, detecting in it the first outline of a design whose completion would unfold with the modern era, an era whose preoccupations were the preservation of human individuality against the seemingly crushing forces of conformity, technology, and totalitarianism.

Unlike the attention devoted to the state or individuality, the distinction between a tolerant and an intolerant Middle Ages has survived and even flourished. Indeed, it has proven central to the deployment of a new notion of medieval "alterity," whose beginnings can be traced to the late 1970s and which has created a new landscape of concerns that could hardly have been anticipated. What has not survived is the optimistic belief in a progressive Middle Ages embodying pluralism, rationality, and self-knowledge. In its place is a renewed emphasis on a reiterated strangeness. This has entailed a restoration of aspects of the period previously neglected by scholars embarrassed by extreme or superstitious practices, encouraging the discovery of the suppressed, the odd, the fragmentary, and the marginal. In this, medieval history scarcely stood alone. The changes it experienced were part of a much broader movement, which, from the perspective of the 1990s, can be seen as the importation and adaptation of postmodernism into the heart of American scholarship in all fields.[54]

However, the resonance of postmodernism in medieval fields differs from its effects on the study of eras that have always been regarded as more unproblematically progressive, such as the Renaissance. Demodernizing the Middle Ages entails stripping off fewer layers of assumptions, to be sure, but at the same time it summons up ghosts of the irrational that undermining the Renaissance does not. For example, the worlds of inquisitorial repression, of violence mixed with ceremony, extremes of fasting or bodily instability, to cite only a few cases, are vividly new postmodern topics in current medieval historiography. Yet, curiously and doubtless unintentionally, they recall the romantic and anti-modern fascination of nineteenth-century medievalisms. Postmodern tendencies may subvert canonical periods of modernity such as the Renaissance, but for the Middle Ages they strangely reassert an older tradition of the grotesque, intolerant character of the epoch, a dark irrationality that popular opinion never quite abandoned but that in scholarship marks a radical turn in contemporary historical approaches.

Radding, "Superstition to Science: Nature, Fortune, and the Passing of the Medieval Ordeal," *AHR* 84 (October 1979): 945–69.

[54] The term postmodernism first gained renown with the publication of Jean-François Lyotard's *La condition postmoderne: Rapport sur le savoir* (Paris, 1979), but probably was not widespread in American historiography until the translation in 1984. See William D. Paden, "Scholars at a Perilous Ford," in *The Future of the Middle Ages: Medieval Literature in the 1990s*, Paden, ed. (Gainesville, Fla., 1994), 8.

GIVEN THE AMOUNT OF MEDIEVAL MATERIAL that probes the boundaries of the magical, that combines rational analysis with strange questions, and that assembles a *bricolage* of ancient authorities, medieval studies might have been thought ideally placed to exploit the historicist strain in postmodern thought, since it had always insisted on difference ("alterity") as the privileged category defining the relationship of the Middle Ages to the modern world of scholarship. Since a dominant impulse in postmodern criticism is precisely the attempt to "think difference,"[55] medievalists were in principle predisposed to the hermeneutic posture that postmodernism demanded of its practitioners. Moreover, the vaunted complexity of medieval documents, the necessity for highly technical approaches to them, implied that meaning in medieval texts was not naturally accessible and that such texts were, by nature, opaque, at least to the modern reader. In that sense, philology—the principal technical apparatus in the medievalist's arsenal of interpretation—might have seemed compatible with the emerging sense of the opacity of all writing (of writing as *différance*, in Jacques Derrida's sense) and with the turn to textuality as the matrix and condition of possibility for all forms of knowledge. Similarly, the sense of marginality, and the quest for it, that haunts the postmodern should be equally congenial to the medievalist, whose object of study lies outside the master narrative of Western modernity and whose own relationship to the profession is often considered to be, if not marginal itself, at least of marginal utility in a national environment committed to innovation and relevance.

And yet American medievalists—historians in particular—were slow to take up the challenge of postmodernism. In part, this was due to the persistence of the discourse of continuity and progress that had marked the American relation to its patently absent past virtually from the time of Jefferson on, and that had subtended the modernist agenda of the profession in its very formation. In part, and somewhat paradoxically, it was also due to the conservatism of some who joined the profession, for whom the Middle Ages retained its appeal as an alternative model of social being, belief, and intellectual elitism. (Medieval history was, after all, hard to do, demanding a mastery of languages that few Americans naturally commanded.) And in part, it may also be due to the feeling that the very disarray of modernism that "post"-modernism by definition portends threatens to deprive the Middle Ages of whatever negative interest it once had as the refuge of the unenlightened, irrational, and "other."[56] In all these ways, the arrival of postmodernism must have seemed to undermine the unstated but nonetheless powerful investments of the self that medievalists brought to their work and that were intertwined with their professional identities. It was, therefore, not until the 1970s at the earliest that there began to appear currents of thought in medieval historical scholarship in America linked to the influence of postmodernism.

In our view, there were three trends in historical work during the late 1970s and 1980s that made themselves felt in the domain of medieval historiography. The first (and chronologically earliest) transformation came about as a result of the

[55] That is, as Eric L. Santner explains it, "to integrate an awareness of multiple forms of otherness, to identify . . . across a wide range of unstable and heterogeneous regionalisms, local knowledges and practices." See Santner, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Germany* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1990), 51.

[56] On the negative appeal of the Middle Ages, see Paden, "Scholars at a Perilous Ford," 21.

emergence of American feminist historiography and, ultimately, gender studies, whose impact was to shift attention away from the public sphere that had engaged the work of American medievalists in the Haskins-Strayer tradition and toward the private, domestic, and, increasingly, carnal (that is, bodily) spheres. Initially, feminist historiography concerned itself with demonstrating the presence of women in the Middle Ages, making them "visible" as actors on the historical (if not public) stage—a strategy of *inclusion*, of reading women into the then-dominant historical discourse. This was a characteristic of what might be called the "Barnard/Columbia School," led by former students of John Mundy of Columbia, whose principal representatives were Suzanne Wemple and Jo Ann McNamara.[57] In their early work, Wemple and McNamara focused on the ways that historical scholarship had occluded women's historical presence and sought to restore them to view.[58] But as Wemple's and McNamara's own developments indicate, an exclusive focus on women soon became normal, in which practice medievalists were following the much broader pattern of women's history in the United States generally.[59] Very quickly, therefore, feminist historiography developed into an interrogation of the basis of a practice that claimed "truth" while omitting from its purview fully half the population, a result of which was to demonstrate how patriarchy itself (especially in its highly misogynist, medieval variant) relied on a gendered view of nature and power for its success.[60] The concern with gender and its misogynistic working has been especially prominent in the fields of literary study and medieval spirituality.[61] For example, Caroline Walker Bynum's brilliant work on late medieval women's spirituality has disclosed the centrality of the body and bodily practices to a form of asceticism that is peculiarly female, both in its recourse to food as a central symbol of transcendence (in particular, through consumption of the Eucharist) and in its

[57] The work of this school of women's history appears collectively in a festschrift prepared for Mundy upon his retirement, *Women of the Medieval World: Essays in Honor of John H. Mundy*, Julius Kirshner and Suzanne F. Wemple, eds. (Oxford, 1985).

[58] Suzanne Fonay Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister, 500 to 900* (Philadelphia, 1981); Barbara J. Harris and Jo Ann McNamara, eds., *Women and the Structure of Society: Selected Research from the Fifth Berkshire Conference on the History of Women* (Durham, N.C., 1982); see also Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz, eds., *Becoming Visible: Women in European History* (Boston, 1977).

[59] See McNamara's more recent work: *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, ed. and trans. with John E. Halborg (Durham, N.C., 1992); *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996); and *A New Song: Celibate Women in the First Three Christian Centuries* (New York, 1983). It should be pointed out that McNamara has insistently eschewed such exclusivity, urging that feminists include the study of men in their research agenda, as in her own recent work on masculinity, *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, Clare A. Lees, ed. (Minneapolis, 1994).

[60] For an overview of these developments in the field of medieval history, see Susan Mosher Stuard, "A New Dimension? North American Scholars Contribute Their Perspective," in *Women in Medieval History and Historiography*, Stuard, ed. (Philadelphia, 1987), 81–99. See also the recent special issue of *Speculum* 68 (1993) dedicated to women's history, now published as *Studying Medieval Women: Sex, Gender, Feminism*, Nancy F. Partner, ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 1993). An example of this work is Penny Schine Gold, *The Lady and the Virgin: Image, Attitude, and Experience in Twelfth-Century France* (Chicago, 1985).

[61] See, for example, in literature, the article by E. Jane Burns, Roberta Krueger, and Helen Solterer, "Feminism and the Discipline of Old French Studies," in Bloch and Nichols, *Medievalism and the Modernist Temper*, 225–66. In spirituality, the work of Caroline Walker Bynum has been decisive, especially *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, Calif., 1987); and *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York, 1991).

highly penitential, self-punishing mode of bodily deprivation (fasting and self-flagellation).[62]

Within women's history, a constructivist approach to history, when applied to issues of sexuality, powerfully abetted the feminist view that sexual categories once thought to be natural, universal, and given—the very bedrock of identity and being—are instead historically produced under determinate, discursive conditions and in the service of specific material (patriarchal) interests and power relations. Thus gender differences have themselves been revealed as part of a master narrative that feminist historiography, in unmasking, seeks to dethrone. While few medievalists have followed feminists like Judith Butler in affirming a wholly performative notion of gender, the very instability and obscurity of medieval notions of sexuality have readily exposed them to this kind of treatment.[63]

The second principal development affecting the American academy constituted a rejection of the positivist certainties and foundationalism of the "old" historicism—together with its implicit, universalizing humanism—in favor of a "new" historicism that took its lead from the creation of "discourse" studies, which would issue, ultimately, in the practice of "cultural history."[64] Within the domain of historicism, Michel Foucault has argued that, in a postmodern age, the problem of history "is no longer one of tradition, of tracing a line, but one of division, of limits; it is no longer one of lasting foundations, but of transformations that serve as new foundations"; which is to say that history is a form of archaeology.[65] To take Foucault's notion of archaeology seriously, therefore, meant abandoning the master narrative of continuity and progress that had informed historical practice at least

[62] See Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*.

[63] Recent examples of work done in this vein are Joan Cadden, *The Meanings of Sex Differences in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1993); John W. Baldwin, *The Language of Sex: Five Voices from Northern France around 1200* (Chicago, 1994); E. Jane Burns, *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia, 1993). There is a huge literature on medieval sexuality, beginning with the work of Vern L. Bullough, *Sexual Practices and the Medieval Church*, with James Brundage (Buffalo, N.Y., 1982); *Sexual Variance in Society and History* (New York, 1978); *The History of Prostitution*, with Bonnie Bullough (New Hyde Park, N.Y., 1964); *Sin, Sickness and Sanity: A History of Sexual Attitudes*, with Bonnie Bullough (New York, 1978); and James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago, 1987). Bullough and Brundage together have edited a *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality* (New York, 1996). See also *Desire and Discipline: Sex and Sexuality in the Premodern West*, Jacqueline Murray and Konrad Eisenbichler, eds. (Toronto, 1996). For the performative notion of gender, see Judith P. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, 1989); and *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York, 1993).

[64] To some extent, this kind of work might be thought to derive from Marc Bloch's emphasis on *mentalité*, an initially neglected aspect of the Annales paradigm, but there has been rather little work in medieval history—in contrast to early modern Europe and modern European history—in America that takes its primary impetus from the Annales school. There is no identifiable American school dedicated to the study of medieval *mentalités*. In a review of the French medieval establishment comparable to the present essay, Jacques Le Goff and Jean-Claude Schmitt note the ease with which the study of *mentalités* was adopted by the Germans, Italians, and Spanish but failed to win favor among "les médiévistes anglo-saxons." They speculate that "perhaps the problem of translating the term helps to explain both the ease and difficulty of its diffusion." See Le Goff and Schmitt, "L'histoire médiévale," *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale X^e–XIIe siècles* 39 (1996): 16, n. 2. Nor can the profound changes represented by the rise of discursively oriented work really be traced back to the Annales, however compatible the Annaliste emphasis on *mentalité* might at first seem to be with it. In truth, they employ quite different views of language, hence of the nature of medieval textuality and the uses to which it can, and should, be put.

[65] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, A. M. Sheridan Smith, trans. (New York, 1972), 5.

since the nineteenth century (indeed, earlier) in favor of a fractured, discontinuous, and ruptured sense of the past. Yet we believe that this sense of discontinuity now apparent in medieval historiography is the result of internal impulses in the field of medieval studies itself. A disenchantment with narratives of foundationalism (with the origin of an unproblematic modern state or individualism, for example) led to the exploration of the marginal and excluded, thus tending to generate sympathetic readings of Foucault.

Third, and closely allied to this shift, was the so-called linguistic turn, or what might, in its most general sense, be termed a transformation in the understanding of documents as texts rather than sources. As a result of this development, the idea of history has been transformed from narration to representation, based on the conviction that the investigation of the past occurs only through the mediatory and mediating texts it bequeaths, and, therefore, what is "recovered" is not so much the truth of the past as the images of itself that the past produces. For medievalists, this transformation, conducted under the impact of both symbolic anthropology of the Geertzian sort and semiotics (and, in part, Derridean deconstruction, though Derrida's influence was felt primarily in the field of criticism, rather than history), contested the positivist and philological center of all medieval studies and is perceived by many medievalists in America as a threat to the very enterprise of learning. In other words, in treating documents as texts rather than sources, the linguistic turn suggests the instability and opacity of all and any knowledge of the past, while at the same time attacking the very foundations on which medievalists had constructed their professional legitimacy, involved as medieval studies had always been with mastery of highly technical fields of manuscript work such as paleography, diplomatics, codicology, and the like. Together, these two movements are creating a "new medievalism" (in the title of a recent collection of essays), one that is, in Eugene Vance's words, "a science not of things and deeds but of discourses; an art not of facts but of encodings of facts."[66]

While these changes have characterized American historiography in general from the 1970s on, in the field of medieval history what might here be called medievalism's postmodernist agenda required a prior, and double, analytical move: a demodernization of the modernist project that had stood at the core of virtually all medieval disciplines since the late nineteenth century and had endowed American medievalists especially with a sense of professional purpose and identity; and a (postmodern) defamiliarization of the resulting—demodernized—cultural artifacts, an analytical gesture that at the moment appears to entail a certain demonizing of the Middle Ages, the corollary of which is precisely the "return of the grotesque in medieval historiography" that we take to be an emerging theme of postmodern medieval historiography in America. What is taking place, therefore, is not so much the product of the unearthing of new texts (although, inevitably, it has led to the discovery of them) as a massive interpretive shift in the meaning of the Middle Ages that has emerged as a consequence of a refocusing from the normal to the contested, from an optimistic and "progressive" decoding of the past to a

[66] Eugene Vance, "Semiotics and Power: Relics, Icons and the *Voyage de Charlemagne à Jérusalem et à Constantinople*," in *The New Medievalism*, Marina S. Brownlee, Kevin Brownlee, and Stephen G. Nichols, eds. (Baltimore, Md., 1991), 227.

reappropriation of its otherness, an alterity now construed not merely as the temporal boundary demarcating the pre-modern from the modern but as a radical form of otherness that almost defies comprehension.

In particular, Foucault's attack on the normalizing mechanisms of modern epistemological regimes has promoted a sensitivity to ways in which knowledge-power systems marginalize and exclude—silence, in effect—some while valorizing others, and has led medieval historians to take a fresh look at the operations of the church and its systematic theology in the high Middle Ages as well as to seek out those elements of medieval society that both contest and thus seem to escape their power. Especially interesting in this use of Foucault is the way it contradicts Foucault's own embedded "chronology" of normalization, if one can call it that, which locates the emergence of a disciplinary society in the mid-seventeenth century, that is, in a postmedieval world. For Foucault, the Middle Ages seems to escape the fate of those knowledge-power systems so characteristic of the "modern" world. Instead, Foucault tends to present the Middle Ages as a free, untrammeled period, a time when reason speaks to unreason, when torture is writ upon the body rather than the soul, when, in effect, the leper colony may be inhabited solely by lepers, but it is routinely visited by holy kings such as St. Louis. In this view of the Middle Ages, Foucault left undisturbed the basic narrative of modernity, which viewed the origin of modern regimes, both epistemic and disciplinary, as the product of a distinctly postmedieval world. The effect was to leave essentially unchanged an organicist conception of the Middle Ages, a shadowy totality against which Foucault's anti-totalizing readings of the past—of history as "dispersion"—could be staged.

One result of the utilization of Foucault's view of the normalizing tendencies of all discursive formations and the desire to undermine their efficacy has been, within medieval history, a complete reinterpretation of the thirteenth century as witness to what has been called "the rise of a persecuting society."[67] Thus the "greatest of centuries" is no longer seen as the center of a modern, rational progressive movement but as a Foucauldian Panopticon of discipline and colonization, seeking out in order to tame and punish all those perceived as dissenting from the church's regime. In applying a Foucauldian perspective of "normalization," American medievalists have exploited such high medieval developments as the persecution of

[67] R. I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950–1250* (Oxford, 1987); *The Origins of European Dissent* (1977; reissued, New York, 1985); *The Birth of Popular Heresy* (London, 1975). See also the series of works by Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Dissent and Order in the Middle Ages: The Search for Legitimate Authority* (New York, 1992); *Lucifer, the Devil in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1984); Russell, ed., *Religious Dissent in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1971). In addition, see Jeffrey Richards, *Sex, Dissidence, and Damnation: Minority Groups in the Middle Ages* (London, 1991); John E. Boswell, "Jews, Bicycle Riders and Gay People: The Determination of Social Consensus and Its Impact on Minorities," *Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities* 1 (1989): 205–28. For a general bibliography, see Carl T. Berkhout and Jeffrey B. Russell, *Medieval Heresies: A Bibliography, 1960–1979* (Toronto, 1981). Also relevant is the work of Richard Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials: Their Foundations in Popular and Learned Culture, 1300–1500* (Berkeley, Calif., 1976); *Repression of Heresy in Medieval Germany* (Philadelphia, 1979); *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989); and that of Edward Peters, ed., *Heresy and Authority in Medieval Europe: Documents in Translation* (Philadelphia, 1980); *Inquisition* (New York, 1988); *Torture* (New York, 1985); *The Magician, the Witch, and the Law* (Philadelphia, 1978); ed. with Alan C. Kors, *Witchcraft in Europe, 1100–1700* (Philadelphia, 1972). For a general view from the perspective of an art historian, see Ruth Mellinkoff, *Outcasts: Signs of Otherness in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages*, 2 vols. (Berkeley, 1993).

heretics, the rise of the Inquisition, the appearance in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries of "blood libels" and narratives of ritual murder as effects of the increasingly tense relations between Christians and Jews, culminating in the expulsion of the Jews,[68] as well as the growing effort on the part of the church generally to define, regulate, and restrict sexuality—all mobilized to present a dark, persecutory vision of medieval society.[69] This has encouraged, as its obverse, new interest in heretical groups,[70] in Jews and in Jewish-Christian relations, in crime, in children, in popular culture, in gays and other marginalized groups.[71] Subjects once marginalized are now reintroduced as centers of concern: incest (and incest as the model of culture, culture itself being seen as the space in which the dangers of identification or indistinction, the very dangers inherent in the situation of incest, are played out), masochism, rape, transvestism, even postcolonialism.[72]

What is particularly striking about medieval work done in this vein, moreover, is the degree to which it focuses not only on the marginal but on the grotesque. The most popular topics in medieval cultural studies in America at the moment—by some reports—are death,[73] pus, contagion, defilement, blood, abjection, disgust and

[68] See Robert Chazan, "The Deteriorating Image of the Jews—Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries," in *Christendom and Its Discontents: Exclusion, Persecution, and Rebellion, 1000–1500*, Scott L. Waugh and Peter D. Diehl, eds. (Cambridge, 1996), 220–33; and Gavin I. Langmuir, "The Tortures of the Body of Christ," in Waugh and Diehl, *Christendom and Its Discontents*, 287–309. See also Gavin I. Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism* (Berkeley, Calif., 1990), especially the essays "Thomas of Monmouth: Detector of Ritual Murder" (209–36) and "Ritual Cannibalism" (263–81). Also relevant is Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1982).

[69] For an extremely nuanced account of medieval persecutory practices, see David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, N.J., 1996).

[70] Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: An Enquiry Inspired by the Great Witch-Hunt* (New York, 1975). See also the works cited in note 69.

[71] See William Chester Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews: From Philip Augustus to the Last Capetians* (Philadelphia, 1989); and *Women and Credit in Pre-industrial and Developing Societies* (Philadelphia, 1993), which in part concerns financial transactions (loans) between women and Jews; the exemplary work of Barbara A. Hanawalt, ed., *Crime in East Anglia in the Fourteenth Century: Norfolk Gaol Delivery Rolls, 1307–1316* (Norwich, 1976); and *Crime and Conflict in English Communities, 1300–1348* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979); and the work of the late John Boswell, especially his two books, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago, 1980); and *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe* (New York, 1994). Also relevant is Vern L. Bullough, *Homosexuality: A History* (New York, 1979); and *Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender*, with Bonnie Bullough (Philadelphia, 1993). See also Anne Gilmour-Bryson, "Sodomy and the Knights Templar," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 7, no. 2 (1996): 151–83.

[72] See the papers by Leslie Dunton-Downer, "The Horror of Culture," and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Masoch/Lancelotism," which were part of the conference "Cultural Frictions: Medieval Cultural Studies in Post-Modern Contexts," Georgetown University, October 27–28, 1995, available on the World Wide Web at www.georgetown.edu/labyrinth/conf/cs95; Kathryn Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* (Philadelphia, 1991); the papers by Robert L. A. Clark and Claire M. Sponsler, "Queer Play: The Cultural Work of Crossdressing in Medieval Drama," and Kathleen Biddick, "English America: Curricular Masks/Imperial Phantasmatics," Cultural Frictions conference.

[73] Recent works on death are Frederick S. Paxton, *Christianizing Death: The Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1990); Christopher Daniell, *Death and Burial in Medieval England, 1066–1550* (London, 1997); Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1996); and Caroline Walker Bynum, *Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York, 1995). To this list might be added Shulamith Shahar's new book *Growing Old in the Middle Ages* (London, 1997), a companion to her study of *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (London, 1990).

humiliation,[74] castration, pain,[75] and autopsy. Those objects of fascination, Michael Uebel suggests, are "what, if anything does, define cultural studies generally, and medieval cultural studies in particular."[76] Thus Bynum trains her eye on extraordinary acts of asceticism among the women she treats, who drank pus seeping from wounds, fasted to the point of starvation, and submitted to horrifying acts of self-deprivation all in the name of spiritual transcendence. Jewish historians have recently returned to the study of the massacres of 1096, with their images of piles of dead and mutilated bodies.[77] Even within the most traditional domain of feudal studies, there is a growing emphasis on violence as the engine that drives the feudal machine. Indeed, recent work on the Normans, notably Eleanor Searle's *Predatory Kinship and the Creation of Norman Power*, stresses the violent, ritualized nature of their exercise of power, in sharp contrast to Haskins's view of the rational, systematic nature of Norman feudalism.[78] Thus violence, conflict, and marginality are producing similar effects in many fields of research: the defamiliarizing of what previously seemed canonical, progressive, and modern in favor of the marginal, ironic, and fantastic.[79]

The distinctive methodological (or, if you will, theoretical) feature of this work, which differentiates it markedly from older styles of cultural history, is that the aberrant, the exotic, the monstrous, the feminine are not seen as the repressed content of the normal and the normalized but are treated as possible, though excluded, surface alternatives brought back into play through scholarly investigation.[80] For example, rather than seeing sexuality and its "non-normal" practices such as homosexuality as repressed by the church, thus still lingering *within* the normal, postmodern scholars tend to see them as ejected or excised. Hence the characteristically postmodern feature of this work is its erasure of depth in favor of surface. The postmodern habit of mind, Paul Strohm explains, "rejects the claim of a repressed alternative—one potentially, therefore, able to be reclaimed through depth psychology—in favor of an excluded or jettisoned alternative, a broader scope of possibilities denied in a founding moment of representation." In treating

[74] See the recently published books of medievalist William Ian Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997); *Humiliation: And Other Essays on Honor, Social Discomfort and Violence* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1993).

[75] For example, Esther Cohen, "Towards a Science of European Physical Sensibility: Pain in the Later Middle Ages," *Science in Context* 8 (1995): 62–66.

[76] See the statement on "The Practice of Medieval Cultural Studies," for the Cultural Frictions conference, by Michael Uebel and D. Vance Smith, at www.georgetown.edu/labyrinth/conf/cs95.

[77] See the work of Robert Chazan, *European Jewry and the First Crusade* (Berkeley, Calif., 1987); *Daggers of Faith: Thirteenth-Century Christian Missionizing and Jewish Response* (Berkeley, 1989); "The Representation of Events in the Middle Ages," *History and Theory* 27 (1988): 40–55; and of Ivan Marcus, "History, Story and Collective Memory: Narrativity in Early Ashkenazic Culture," *Prooftexts* 10 (1990).

[78] See Eleanor Searle, *Predatory Kinship and the Creation of Norman Power* (Berkeley, Calif., 1988); and Thomas N. Bisson, "The 'Feudal Revolution,'" *Past and Present* 142 (1994): 6–42.

[79] Thus Lee Patterson has specifically advocated the adoption of an ironic mode of history as that best adapted to a postmodernist treatment of the medieval past. See "On the Margin: Postmodernism, Ironic History and Medieval Studies."

[80] Paul Strohm, "Cultural Frictions: Conference Commentary," at www.georgetown.edu/labyrinth/conf/cs95/papers/strohm.html.

the thirteenth-century scholastic propensity for definition and categorization, then, postmodern medievalists tend to see in that process not the workings of an explicitly repressive regime so much as one that practices the nullifications involved in total exclusion. In Strohm's words:

> Perceiving that the establishment of the medieval "body political" proceeded by excluding and jettisoning unwanted parts and components in order to create a shapely whole, the postmodernist [scholar] opts for complexity, disorder and contrariety, posits foundational acts of binarism aimed at producing an excluded and disavowed other against which (by a process of "disidentification") western identity is secured. Over against the ordered and orthodox European body are set the heretics, the monstrous others, the Jews and the Muslims. No longer permitted a "dangerous proximity," these excluded groups are decisively othered via the construction of a "sanitized history" of western self-construction. It is sanitized, in part, by the exclusion of the complicated intermediate array by which a heterogenous view of society is maintained. If one is either orthodox or heretical, well or sick, normal or perverse, pure or impure, then altogether lost are the erased possibilities of hybridity, bisexuality, creolization, doctrinal multiplicity.[81]

The goal here is not so much an expansion, enrichment, or even complication of our understanding of medieval culture but rather its "undoing." In focusing on what is excluded from both medieval representations and our representations of the Middle Ages, representation itself is rendered a "phantasm" and is undone. Moreover, since whatever fails to be represented (whether in medieval representations themselves or in our representations of them) is construed as pathological, it becomes difficult to evade the diagnosis of medieval studies as itself implicated in the very pathology that, inescapably, becomes the defining characteristic of the period. A visit to the cultural studies link of the medievalist web site called "the Labyrinth" discloses an emerging view of the Middle Ages as inherently "pathological." Although this site almost by definition presents work not yet completed, it does indicate possible directions that future research will take and that have already provoked debate and discussion. Here, medieval cultural studies, in the words of D. Vance Smith, one of the organizers of that site,

> investigates the pathogenesis of culture. It resists the totalizing tendency in cultures to repress whatever culture renders valueless, and makes visible the means by which that repression occurs. Because it resists appropriation by the objectifying discourses of a culture, it exposes the arbitrary and contingent ways in which cultures create value. It begins with what is already rendered valueless. The study of culture's pathology, then, anatomizes cultural values. It shows what is purged, what exceptions, what counter instances, and what counter-memories, are forgotten in the emergence of a cultural symbolic. Cultural studies offers a way of reading the material while resisting the totalizing inertia of historicizing discourses; it offers us a chance to stir the ashes of the fires in which imagined gold is produced.[82]

To investigate the "pathogenesis of medieval culture" requires, Michael Uebel claims, that a hermeneutic shift occur, whereby "the object qua object of analysis or of history is abandoned—disappeared under the sign of the pathological, the

[81] Strohm, "Cultural Frictions."

[82] D. Vance Smith, "Enjoy Your Phantasm!" Part 1 of "The Practice of Medieval Cultural Studies," in Cultural Frictions conference, at www.georgetown.edu/labyrinth/conf/cs95.

perverse—and that that ghostly space (that is, the 'phantasm' that constitutes representation, which remains) be filled with the conflicted process of reading itself that the trace-object both organizes and pathologizes" (hence scholarship itself is rendered pathological).[83]

Looked at as a whole, there appear to be two postmodernist approaches to the Middle Ages. Both explore the marginal or the voiceless but from different perspectives of destabilization. On the one hand, there is a renewed emphasis on alterity and on the radical disjunction of the Middle Ages from the modern, the canonical, and the progressive. At its best, this presents us with a more intriguing, more colorful, and less familiar Middle Ages, in which the state is more predatory, piety is more intense, and mentalities more foreign than had been portrayed by the quintessentially "American school" of medieval historiography. The other regards the Middle Ages as darkly familiar, the analogue of a negatively construed modern West. In this light, the Middle Ages becomes the point of reference for those persecuting societies that mobilize rationally administered power toward repressive ends. Both tendencies share an aversion to a Middle Ages conceived as progressive, pluralist, rational, and self-aware.

If one inquires into the reasons for these new currents in the practice of medieval history in America, the answer, it seems to us, lies not so much in the impact of postmodernism per se but in the reasons for the receptiveness of American medievalists to postmodernism's agenda. In common with other sectors of the society and economy, medieval studies during the 1960s and 1970s experienced upheaval and change, both in its recruitment of students into the profession and in the attitudes toward the past thereby engendered.

Of obvious relevance was the experience of these new groups during the "sixties," when the combined forces of the civil rights movement, the anti-war movement, the early budding of feminism, and the utopian critique of American culture represented by the growth of the "counter-culture" were all in full swing.[84] This was a generation raised and coming to consciousness of its place in history in an atmosphere of deep ambivalence toward authority and power—both political and cultural. It is easy to see how, when its members came to develop their own, distinctive vision of the past, some would view the Middle Ages with the same profound suspicion of order, hierarchy, authority, and patriarchy that had characterized their earlier involvement in their own contemporary world. Nor were Americans alone in this tendency, although the openness of the American academy

[83] Michael Uebel, "When the Fetish Comes to Life," Part 2 of "The Practice of Medieval Cultural Studies," in Cultural Frictions conference, at www.georgetown.edu/labyrinth/conf/cs95.

[84] It is striking that Caroline Walker Bynum opened her presidential address, "Wonder," to the AHA in 1997 by declaring herself to be "a product of the 60s." She reports that as a graduate student at Harvard, she "kept on [her] bulletin board" a slogan from the 1968 student rebellion in Paris that declared: "'Toute vue des choses qui n'est pas étrange est fausse' ('Every view of things that is not strange [i.e., bizarre or foreign] is false')." Looking back, Bynum believes that the meaning of this practice was that she was "trying, both as a scholar and as a teacher, to jolt my listeners and readers into [an] encounter with a past that is unexpected and strange, a past whose lineaments are not what we at first assume, whose traces in our sources answer questions we haven't asked and deliver only silence to our initial, self-referential queries." The last part of this testimony indicates Bynum's clear desire to preserve the distinctive "pastness" of the past, rather than assimilate it to a modern, "presentist" agenda. But she shares with later developments the turn to an alterity that goes beyond mere temporal distance and difference. Bynum, "Wonder," *AHR* 102 (February 1997): 1.

to new groups and new ideas may have facilitated the pace and prevalence with which they were accepted in comparison to Europe.

That the habit of suspicion toward authority and the practice of cultural criticism would tend to express itself within medieval studies in a "Gothic" idiom of the "grotesque" is perhaps more difficult to understand. Yet Mark Edmundson has recently reminded us that "Gothic shows the dark side, the world of cruelty, lust, perversion and crime that . . . is hidden beneath established conventions. Gothic tears through censorship, explodes hypocrisies to expose the world as the corrupted, reeking place it is . . . Unsentimental, enraged by gentility and high-mindedness, skeptical about progress in any form, the Gothic mind is antithetical to all smiling American faiths." For this very reason, Edmundson asserts, America, a "nation of ideals . . . has also been a nation of hard disillusionment, with a fiercely reactive Gothic imagination."[85] And at the heart of this imagination lies a profound ambivalence about authority in all its guises, not least that of the past. For the essence of the Gothic predicament and plot, as Edmundson explains it, is a sense of bondage to the past: to past deeds or persons that continue to haunt the present. But whereas late eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century Gothic sought to instruct a postrevolutionary readership on the terrors and guilt of the French Revolution, haunted by the paternal past it had destroyed, modern Gothic scenarios seek rather, in Edmundson's terms, "a way to generate a reductive, bitter version of experience over all."[86]

An additional factor seems likely to have predisposed some American medievalists to recover and redeploy this Gothic idiom in the interest of revising our ways of understanding the medieval past: the medievalists' almost necessary engagement with earlier Gothic scenarios, if only as historiographical foils against which to argue a modern understanding and approach to the Middle Ages. The very fact of a preexisting "Gothic" medievalism made the grotesque a discourse already available to medievalists, at hand for the emerging critique of the past that was coming to preoccupy a segment of the profession as a whole.

Given this, it is hardly surprising that the most powerful sense of the Middle Ages current in the academy is what goes under the name of its alterity, for that alterity offers the best means of escaping from the model of total identification that was the chief mode of studying the Middle Ages in the past. What has changed in the postmodern understanding of medieval alterity, and serves sharply to distinguish it from the earlier modern construction of it, is the simultaneity of our desire for history and the recognition of its irreparable loss, a loss we no longer can, or care to, mask beneath the modernist guise of continuity and progress. If postmodernism has seemed to this generation a viable, indeed crucial, theoretical context out of which to work, this is so because postmodernism invites us to contemplate, as Eric Santner has written, "the shattered fantasy of the (always already) lost organic

[85] Mark Edmundson, *Nightmare on Main Street: Angels, Sadomasochism, and the Culture of Gothic* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997), 4–5.

[86] Edmundson, *Nightmare on Main Street*, x, see also 67.

society that has haunted the Western imagination."[87] The alterity of the Middle Ages, it would appear, is our own estrangement from that fantasy writ large.

[87] Santner, *Stranded Objects*, 7.

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