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by Michael Uebel

ECSTATIC TRANSFORMATION

ON THE USES OF ALTERITY IN THE MIDDLE AGES

Michael Uebel

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*For Keith and Cliff
because I'm still here*

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INTRODUCTION: THE USES OF MEDIEVAL ALTERITY

Fantasy. . . is, pre-eminently, the creative activity from which the answers to all answerable questions come; it is the mother of all possibilities, where, like all psychological opposites, the inner and outer world, are joined together in living union. Fantasy it was and ever is which fashions the bridge between the irreconcilable claims of subject and object.

—C. G. Jung*

This book develops a critical language for narrating the ways that Western medieval culture imaginatively transformed itself in and through its relation to otherness. The central contention is that Europe's Eastern others—notably, the Muslims and Prester John—functioned in the Western imaginary as symptoms that turned Europe itself into a problem. It is not merely that medieval Western Europe depended for its self-definition upon the various others against which it both protected and asserted itself; rather, in the very act of representing alterity, benign or threatening, medieval Europeans necessarily confronted the possibility of utopic—or, as I begin to analyze it in chapter 3, "ecstatic"—transformation. Otherness offered the reader or beholder an ambiguous representation, a deeply equivocal image of social meanings contrary to the concept of clear division or firm limit. Precisely because alterity, I argue, was not always reducible to the terms of the self-same, perceptions of the same in the different gave way to perceptions of the different in the same. In the images of alterity I study here, the transformative power of otherness reveals the extent to which social and individual bodies continually interchange with the world across porous boundaries.¹

Yet, within the current practice of critical medievalism and its fascination with otherness, the transformative force of alterity is rarely studied or even remarked. As important as the work, for example, of Norman Daniel, Michael Camille, and Ruth Mellinkoff is for building an understanding of medieval conceptions of alterity, such work seems content, on the one hand, merely to identify, label, and categorize otherness within the construction of

a kind of typology, and, on the other, to read otherness as that which is, uncomplexly, appropriated and domesticated, or exoticized and consigned to a place beyond cultural analysis. These critical approaches amount to the same interpretative tendency: foreclosing analysis of the ideologically transformative effects of alterity, by placing resemblance, rather than difference, at the center of history, ethics, politics, science, and so on. This book is thus an attempt to place difference and becoming at the center of medieval cultural practice, and to look for its mutative effects within specific literary and historical discourses.

Though the vast majority of studies of cultural identity in the Middle Ages tend to overlook the transformative force of the alien, three notable exceptions are the work of Jacques Le Goff, Louise O. Fradenburg, and Jeffrey J. Cohen. These medievalists, more than any others, have articulated the cultural issues raised by the provocative agency of otherness. Fradenburg, for instance, draws attention, using Le Goff for her point of departure, to "the 'surrealistic anthropology' of the medieval literature on India and Africa, [which] exemplifies . . . the doubleness of the ideal of beauty: its 'formative' or productive power—its power to propel the body into a history of formation—and its power to alienate the body, to 'produce' it as grotesque, excessive or insufficient, chaotic. It produces at once aspiration to perfection of form and a distancing from sensuality and materiality."² While accounting for the other's capacity to alienate and distance, this book focuses on its instrumental function as an agent of cultural metamorphosis. Cohen's sustained analysis of the concept of monstrosity,³ like Fradenburg's more recent work on the logic of sacrifice and pleasure,⁴ is acutely sensitive to the cultural functions of alterity and identification. The theoretical emphases of these two medievalists in particular have continually served as springboards for my own ideas.

An explanation may be at hand for why cultural analysis tends to overlook the productive energies of alterity. Georg Simmel pointed out, in his landmark essay on "The Stranger" (1950), that an understanding of morality and liberty is irrevocably linked to fundamental problems in the way we perceive reality itself. Freedom is a function of ontology, Simmel claims, because it depends upon taking up an objective stance with respect to the material conditions in which one is immersed: "the objective individual is bound by no commitments which could prejudice his perception, understanding, and evaluation of the given."⁵ This freedom—that, in some sense, valorized by the desert hermits I discuss in chapter 3—depends for its meaning upon detachment, the making of radical distinctions between individuals and, by extension, societies. A. David Napier summarizes: "The more we deemphasize the symbolic interconnectedness of 'things' (their dependence), the more we glamorize what it means to be 'free,' to be entirely independent; the more we deny that one individual is 'like' another,

the more we sanctify the fact that each of us is, indeed, quite 'different.'"⁶ The dangers inherent in the achievement of such freedom should be clear: "the totally free individual cannot know the world through contrast."⁷ Such an individual is precisely the one too readily assumed in cultural analysis. The distinction-making enterprises of medieval culture are seen as predicated upon an essential freedom, which, in this view, involves repeatedly overcoming, according to the logic of stereotyping,⁸ the alien.

But this ritual subordination of the stranger forecloses the construction of a possible future. Indeed, as I argue pointedly with respect to the function of the Prester John legend in medieval culture, Western documents of alterity were the chief vehicles for transmitting how certain kinds of otherness are to be handled, how difference itself is to be countenanced, "how certain kinds of diversity are [to be] precluded, how what distinguishes 'us' from 'them' is a function of refining what [medieval culture is] over time,"⁹ and what that culture takes itself to be and wishes to become. Chapter 1, then, examines two possibilities for social desire and intellectual transformation in medieval culture. First, it looks at the ways medieval writers took constructive possession of the inveterate ambivalence of the other. Historians, encyclopedists, apologists, and polemicists continually faced the impossibility of assigning the other a place firmly outside. Discursive borderlines mediate, rather than insulate, cultures. Second, it looks at modes of exchange—historical and fictive—between Eastern and Western ways of life, in which the other is continually actualized within the culture of the self-same. Cultural extremes, such as Frederick II's fetishization of Arab culture in Sicily or Richard I's temporary cannibalism in the Holy Land, illustrate most clearly how distant otherness produces social effects at home.

One of this book's chief concerns is to examine ambivalence and exchange in light of their function as components of utopia. Implicit here is a psychoanalytic model of fantasy, the creative activity that animates the world of imagination and its contents. Fantasy, I am suggesting, is never that purely illusory (that is, internal and private) production that cannot be sustained when confronted with the demands of external reality. Instead, I take fantasy to be vital to both individuals and collectivities as the activity by which identity is protected against loss and the threat of dissolution, by which representations of and solutions to enigmas and contradictions are generated, and by which the refusal to accept reality as it is means that the future takes precedence over the past and present. By placing a utopic impulse at the center of my discussion of medieval representations of and responses to otherness, I mean to signal the ways that the other itself comes to function less as an object than as an identification that leads to a state of satisfaction, elation, ecstasy. The discursive modalities for handling otherness, together with the images that most poignantly represent that otherness (the desert,

for example), all reveal a compulsive desire to assert and deny difference alternately.

This double attitude toward the other bears striking affinities with the perverse impulse. Perversion, the psychoanalyst Masud Khan has emphasized, is, in its essential form, akin to dreaming or, better, to the dramatization of dreams. It has, therefore, a collective or social dimension, that is not often underscored: "Perversions are much nearer to cultural artifacts than disease syndromes."¹⁰ This book studies the workings of the utopic impulse in medieval culture not to diagnose that culture—to label it perverse or neurotic—but to understand why some elements of reality in the twelfth century are supercharged with cultural significance while others drop away or seem repressed. My interest in medieval culture's attachment to exotic, or fantastic, objects and places constitutes an attempt, for example, to understand the Western fascination with and fear of the Arab other. Phobias of any kind, it would seem, are less catastrophic—indeed, we might say more successful—the more they are associated with the alien and distant: as Edward Glover summarizes, "it is more advantageous to suffer from tiger-phobia in London than in an Indian jungle."¹¹ But this book puts forward a very specific advantage that medieval culture recognized and seized—the creation of fantasies of alterity that allow for the opportunity of self-critique and reinvention.

By interrogating what I term the material, spaces, and structures of alterity, I aim at defamiliarizing the Middle Ages in order that we might better reacquaint ourselves with it. What appear as the objects of analysis are finally less objects than processes, mechanisms, techniques for disrupting the dispassionate logic of reason—a logic that inevitably finds itself transformed into myth, fantasm, and hallucination by the pulsion of social desire and cultural phobia, imaginative attachment and violent repulsion. To distinguish reality from illusion, reason from play, is to repudiate fantasy itself, and thus to foreclose opportunities for cultural- and self-reformation. My guiding interest is therefore the cultural uses to which alterity was put in the Middle Ages, how otherness functioned as a response to, a mechanism for coping with, and a means for ultimately transforming unacceptable realities. The utopic, the ecstatic, represents a process or agent of change, not an object or mere reflection of the medieval identities more historically familiar to us. Prester John's relocation in the Middle Ages from India to Africa, as the former became better mapped and explored by the fourteenth century, is just one illustration of how crucial it was to keep fantasy alive and mobile even in the face of historical and geographical "reality."

What is most threatening to medieval culture appears to be responsible for the creation of a medieval literary form: the utopia. Medieval utopic texts, such as the fantastic *Letter of Prester John* (ca. 1160) and the immensely

popular literature surrounding Alexander the Great, developed in response to the differences that were perceived to exist between European and non-European cultures. Utopias crucially presuppose otherness—some temporal, cultural, or spatial break with traditional modes of thinking and living that turns alterity itself into an object for analysis. The otherness of the Orient represented for medieval European society difference par excellence. Closing off its frontiers to such difference proved impossible, as demonstrated by the failure of the Second Crusade; it is shortly thereafter that extraordinary utopias began to circulate throughout Europe. Thus, beginning in the middle of the twelfth century, Western Europe embraced, rather than disavowed, the differences confronting it. My reading of medieval utopic literature focuses attention on the boundaries marking difference, which are best understood not as sharp border lines but as ambivalent "contact zones." The imaginary locus of India, for example, becomes a gap wherein lie the possibilities for cultural transformation, self-discovery, and imaginative identification with others.

This book offers an account of the origin and functions of utopic thinking that differs markedly from traditional accounts in literary history. The inception of utopia in the twelfth century is tied to the cultural and psychological work of imagining Western self and Oriental other in dialectical relation. It is no coincidence that the Crusades become the most important context for imagining utopia in the Middle Ages. Cultural fantasy in the Middle Ages always cuts two ways: as a form of wish fulfillment, issuing from profound insecurity in the face of the alien and unpredictable, and as a form of sheer pleasure, delight in the exotic. Utopic fantasy reflects the extent to which medieval society distorts reality in direct relation to its own insecurity, at the same time that it reflects a liberated alternative to a repressed or impoverished Christian society. For the twelfth-century theologian Alan of Lille, Christendom could be summed up as *latinitas penuriosa* [latinity in dire need]. Precisely what did Latin Europe imagine itself as needing so badly? A look at the medieval Marvels of the East tradition, from Pliny through Augustine to the famous *Liber monstrorum* [Book of Monsters], offers an alternative way of conceiving otherness as that which is inherently resistant to fixation under a fetishistic gaze (chapter 1). The fetishistic attachment to monsters in the Middle Ages, as evidenced by the incessant need to allegorize them as fallen ideals, only served to charge them with utopic significance. Monsters became the primary markers of the utopic impulse because, as deviations from the natural order, they require a method of imagining them that itself deviates from natural patterns of thought.

Muslims of course provided Western crusade chroniclers with additional monstrous subject matter (chapter 2). The histories of the First and Second

Crusades are important ciphers of the important imaginative and ideological responses the threat of Islam provoked. Guibert of Nogent's and Fulcher of Chartres's chronicles, for example, reveal how the ground upon which Christendom imagined itself was fully discursive, not only in the limited sense that it was imaginable largely *through* discourses on the other, but in the deeper sense that it formulated an opposition between sacred word, the nonarbitrary word of God, and alien word, founded upon semiotic deviance. This opposition became a pretext for crusade and reconquest, as well as, more crucially, the precondition for utopic discourse. The utopian drive underwriting this way of imagining the *societas Christiana* posits a harmonious and unified social world in which language functions as device for linking the members of that world. The Middle English romance *Richard Coeur de Lyon*, a text to which I briefly turn, demonstrates the cultural imperative informing the construction of a discursive and imaginary community in the face of the Muslim other.

It is impossible to imagine the Orient without imaginatively coming to terms with the desert (chapters 3 and 4). For a number of medieval writers, including Richard of St. Victor and John Mandeville, the desert became charged with religious, even ecstatic, significance. While clearly representing the alternative to civilized, everyday existence, this space of "wild(er)ness" is nevertheless put in the service of transcending everyday life through providing a model of unrest, incessant change, and orientation toward a time to come. The efficacy of the desert in offering a model for transformation is tied to the desert's own metaphoric mobility, to its inimitability. That is, by demanding and exceeding all figuration, by approximating what Slavoj Žižek terms "the sublime object of ideology,"¹² the power of the desert metaphor depends precisely upon the hope of ongoing mobilizations of its social meaning. The desert, as my survey of its ideological uses demonstrates, is a metaphor that inscribes the possibility of thinking—or better, the thinking of possibilities.

Three medieval literary genres structurally supported thinking about the possible: the fictional *epistola*, the list or montage, and the travel narrative (chapter 5). All three are particularly well suited for handling the complexities of relations between self and other that arise when utopic literature attempts to deal with alternative realities. These generic modes deny the satisfaction of final meaning or utopian significance in order to instill in medieval culture pleasure itself in the form of ongoing desire. Utopia can be characterized as a social formation founded on a loss, an absence that instills in the reader the desire to search for something to replace or exceed the original missing object. The loss of the Holy Land in the Second Crusade cut deeply into the social imaginary, such that anxiety would become the primary affect motivating travel narratives in the Middle Ages.

Mandeville's *Travels*, along with the Wonders of the East documents, immensely popular throughout the medieval period, dramatize the ways that anxiety drives utopic discourse.

Utopic writing is deeply implicated in the narrative structure of what I term "the moving image" (chapter 6). The ideological value of the flow of images found in the list structure, a flow with special affinities to filmic montage, resides in the imaginary relations it produces and into which readers are interpellated. The montage, a central feature of Sergei Eisenstein's famous "agit cinema," activates self-analysis leading to self-transformation. In film theory we find the clearest articulation of the forms such self-analysis can take. Just as the film viewer is placed by the film and the act of spectatorship itself into new and multiple relations to the film, the reader of the utopic text is stimulated to leave the close comfort of familiarity for the provocative alien, the ungraspable that leads, even seduces, the reader forward to the discovery of the new and better.

PART ONE

THE MATERIAL OF ALTERITY

CHAPTER 1

EASTERN MARVELS

Imagining Otherness

The Other is not a simple presence of a self to a self; it is not contained in a relation which starts from a distance and ends in a bringing together. The Other is radical only if the desire for it is not the possibility of anticipating it as the desirable or of thinking it out beforehand but if it comes aimlessly as an absolute alterity, like death.

—John Heaton¹

In 1238, England experienced a glut of herring. At coastal cities near Yarmouth, an overabundance of the fish drove prices down to almost nothing; and in areas distant from the sea herring sold at a fraction of the usual price. That year the fish merchants of Gotland and Friesland decided against making the annual trip to Yarmouth, the place from which they always returned, their ships weighed down with herring. For Matthew Paris, whose *Chronica maiora* records this event, the availability and price of herring did not so much illustrate the microeconomics of fish production as lay bare a *mentalité* underlying Western European attitudes toward what is unknown and uncontrollable.

Paris fits his account of the Yarmouth herring fishery and its economic effects under the rubric “De Tartaris prorumpentibus de locis suis terras septentrionales devastantibus” [Concerning the Tartars bursting forth from their own lands in order to devastate the northern regions].² The Gotlanders and Frieslanders, Paris suggests, had good reason to abstain from the fishery—they were compelled by their profound fear of the Mongols [*impetus eorum pertimentes*]. Even at the fringes of Western Europe, removed from the contested areas and from probable danger—indeed, the Mongols were never known for their naval prowess—deep-seated fear and anxiety gripped the folk. The Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century brought before European Christians an image of an immense pagan population more cruel

and aggressive than the Muslims they had been fighting since the eighth century. By 1238, the early hope that the Mongols might form an alliance with Christendom to wipe out the Saracens was all but abandoned.³ John of Plano Carpini, sent out by Pope Innocent IV in 1245 on a diplomatic mission to the Mongols, returned two years later with an alarming message for Christendom—the Mongols have only one purpose: “to overthrow the whole world and reduce it to slavery.”⁴

In later chapters we shall have occasion to examine specific cultural and psychological aspects of Christian optimism concerning deliverance from “pagan” threat. The belief in an Eastern ally like Prester John who might contain the Saracens by helping to surround them held a prominent place in the Western medieval imagination from the middle of the twelfth until the early sixteenth century.⁵ As a form of wish fulfillment, such a fabulous belief stems in great part from profound psychological insecurity in the face of the alien and unpredictable. Fantasy, and its cultural form utopia, the psychoanalysts remind us, reflect the extent to which an individual or society distorts reality in a direct relation to one’s (or its) own insecurity.⁶ Fantasy, then, is a way of mitigating the anxiety imposed by alterity. But the *other* side to fantasy is perhaps the more familiar one: the sheer pleasure of imagining difference and of marveling at the uncommon, the unknown. The alien, as an agent, frightens and, as an object of inquiry and wonder, fascinates.

Taken here as a kind of running theme subject to continual refinement, the concept of vacillation—the flux of attraction/repulsion or fear/enjoyment—will be seen as central to the cultural and psychological work of imagining others. In even so prosaic a history of alterity as Matthew Paris’s account of the “Tartars,” cultural paranoia plays against intellectual curiosity. Paris, describing the Tartars in conventional terms, emphasizes their grotesqueness:

Hi quoque capita habentes, magna nimis et nequaquam corporibus proportionata, carnibus crudis et etiam humanis vescuntur. . . robusti viribus, corporibus propagati, impii, inexorabiles, quorum lingua incognita omnibus quos attingit notitia. . . ducem habentes ferocissimum, nomine Caan. Hi borealem plagam inhabitantes, . . . numerosi nimis, in pestem hominum creduntur ebullire, et hoc anno, licet aliis vicibus exierint, solito immanius debacchari.⁷

[They have heads that are too large, disproportionate to their bodies, and they eat raw meat, and even human flesh. . . they have robust energy, sturdy bodies, are cruel and inexorable; their language is incomprehensible to all who come in contact with them. . . they have the most ferocious ruler, named Caan. They inhabit the northern region, . . . [from which], in excessive number, they are believed to bubble forth as a pest to mankind, and now, although they go forth with other vices, it (i.e., the pest) makes it its constant and monstrous habit to rage without control.]

A set of stock features imputed to non-Western others emerges from this description of the Tartars: violations of proportion and number, godlessness, unintelligibility, and predilection toward and enjoyment of barbaric behavior. The myth of cannibalism among the Mongols or Tartars was universal.⁸ In the thirteenth century, Mongols replaced Saracens as the representative anti-types of humanity. Paris’s characterization of the Mongols displays a marked interest in corporeal features, monstrous anatomical details signifying more monstrous appetites. The historian generates wonder about a race the Saracens themselves see as inordinately barbaric.

In the grip of terror, Western Europe sought an explanation for the devastating waves of Mongols “breaking out” and “rushing forth” (*L. prorumpere; proruere*) from the region of the Caspian Mountains.⁹ In the space between history and literature known as the Alexander Romance, especially in *Pseudo-Methodius*, an explanation was readily found: Mongols were among the unclean tribes of Gog and Magog, broken loose from their imprisonment behind the Caucasus. As minions of Antichrist and as beastly anthropophagi from the North, the Mongols were neatly identified with these pernicious biblical nations.¹⁰ However, by the fourteenth century, as the Ebstorf and Hereford mappaemundi attest, the Turks succeeded the Tartars as *de stirpe Gog et Magog* [from the race of Gog and Magog].¹¹

The imagined origin of Mongol invaders who exceeded all limits disrupted the West’s confidence in its own boundaries, contributing to the production of a “citadel” or “siege mentality,”¹² dependent upon the desperate attempt to demarcate the lines separating what is known and unknown, same and other.¹³ The civilized world—Gr. *oikoumene*, in legend protected from the barbarians by a mountain range extending from the Caucasus to the remote Orient near the coast of India—looked to heroes like Alexander the Great and Prester John to keep the other safely in the margins, remote from the centers of civilization and religion, Rome and Jerusalem.¹⁴ But at the frontier itself, boundaries between what is known and what is unknown began to blur, and barriers started to crumble. The Gotlanders and Frieslanders felt threatened because they were uncertain about both the placement and security of the boundary line between “us and them.” Their own liminal status is in some sense as frightening, certainly as troubling, to them as that of the monstrously marginal Tartars described by Paris. In imagining the terrible other, the fishermen had to imagine themselves and their precarious place in the world. Deciding to stay home was prompted less by fear of a radical other than by an awareness of the ambiguity of the spatial markers that actually serve to delimit self and other.

Imagining others necessarily involves constructing the limits that contain—in the double sense, to enclose and to include—what is antithetical to the self. These limits, as I continue to suggest in more historical detail, are

but this
can be
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done in a
implicit or
unconscious

characterized by two intersecting paradoxes that guide our preliminary inquiry into the ambivalences inherent in imagining otherness: the paradox of the ideological construction¹⁵ of the other and the paradox of occupying the frontier. The first paradox holds that alterity is never radical because "the terms of a binary interrelate, interdepend. But to differing degrees: in one kind of interdependence the one term presupposes the other for its meaning; in another more radical kind of interdependence the absolutely other is somehow integral to the selfsame. In the latter, *absence or exclusion simultaneously becomes a presence*."¹⁶ The second paradox arises from the border's double status as both marker of separation and line of commonality. Because border lines mediate and are "created by contacts, the points of differentiation between two bodies are also their common points. Conjunction and disjunction are inseparable in them."¹⁷ Flickering between contact and avoidance, interaction and interdiction, border lines produce spaces "in-between," gaps or middle places symbolizing exchange and encounter. As such, they are the areas wherein identity and sovereignty are negotiated, imaginatively and discursively, in relation to the necessary other. These spaces of alterity are finally most interesting not for what they reveal about the other per se but for what they disclose about the ways in which the other was produced and constructed.

This book is a meditation on the concept of boundaries or interspaces, their meaning and function, as they touch on the twelfth-century legend of Prester John, and more generally on the production of utopias. I probe the gaps between history and fiction, political reality and myth, in order to understand the ways in which twelfth-century society's belief structures worked to articulate confrontations of self and other. The myth of Prester John marks crucial historical moments when the suspension of disbelief becomes the activation of belief, when the ways in which the other is imaginatively produced take precedence over the ways it is objectively described.¹⁸ Boundaries and interspaces offer opportunities to think about the unfolding of productive relations to alterity. Heidegger's "Building, Dwelling, Thinking" reminds us of this generative force inhering in boundaries:

A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something *begins its essential unfolding*. That is why the concept is that of *horismos*, that is, the horizon, the boundary.¹⁹

As a utopic locus, Prester John's kingdom in India functions, to borrow Louis Marin's description of More's *Utopia*, as a kind of dream "horizon, [where] this edge of the world joins, onto another edge, that of the other world, and on this limit between the two, a space, a gap, is opened up that belongs

neither to the one nor the other, a gap between the interior space that is closed by the routes of travels (the *terrae cognitae*) and the unknown outer space."²⁰ For in this interstice lie the debilitating paranoia of the Gotlanders and Frieslanders and, as we will see, the utopic possibility for cultural transformation, self-discovery, and imaginative identification with others.²¹

Marvels of the East: Monsters and Saracens

Praecipue India Aethiopumque tractus miraculis scatent.

[India and parts of Ethiopia especially teem with marvels.]

—Pliny the Elder²²

The kind of "oneiric horizon" described by Marin as belonging neither to the one nor the other—neither to the self-same nor the alien—precisely fits the terms of Jacques Le Goff's description of medieval conceptions of the Indian Ocean and the land beyond it as a place of wonders and monsters.²³ Onto the world of the Indian Ocean—believed to be a *mare clausum* [enclosed sea] until the late fifteenth century—was projected a whole range of dreams, myths, and marvels. The ocean became the imaginative repository of fantastic men and beasts with bizarre enjoyments such as incest and coprophagy but also the site of the Earthly Paradise and saintly Brahmins. India was thus viewed through binocular lenses, with a stereoscopic vision that looked for *mirabilia*, alien spectacles assigned to a place beyond analysis, and for domesticated images, allegories representing ideal Western forms.

This is the double optics of an inexhaustible history of the marvels of the East, with its Western origins in the religious forms of Greek mythology and, most significantly for medieval Latins, in the secular history of Herodotus.²⁴ Medieval Europe inherited both a secular and religious vision of Eastern marvels, since the heritage of pagan antiquity—in Pliny, Pomponius Mela, and Solinus—was filtered through the lens of biblical authority. St. Augustine, familiar with the descriptions of fabulous races found in Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*, attempted to reconcile those marvels with Christian doctrine. In a famous chapter of the *City of God* (book 16, chapter 8) entitled "Whether certain monstrous races of men are derived from the stock of Adam or Noah's sons," Augustine advances a logical argument aimed at showing that such creatures as the Panotti, or "all-ears," are not *contra naturam* but a part of divine creation immune to human judgment since only God has absolute knowledge of and authority over creation—as author of creation only he sees the similarities and diversities comprising the beauty of the whole. But Augustine also allows for the possibility that the monsters are really animals, lacking both reason and a pedigree traceable

to Adam. He considers the case of the Cynocephali, or Dog-Men:

What am I to say of the *Cynocephali*, whose dog's head and actual barking prove them to be animals rather than men? Now we are not bound to believe in the existence of all the types of men which are described. But no faithful Christian should doubt that anyone who is born anywhere a man—that is, a rational and mortal being—derives from that one first-created human being. And this is true, however extraordinary such a creature may appear to our senses in bodily shape, in color, or motion, or utterance, or in any natural endowment, or part, or quality. However it is clear what constitutes the persistent norm of nature in the majority and what, by its very rarity, constitutes a marvel.²⁵

It is striking that in this individual case Augustine is deliberately ambivalent about the status of the Dog-Men. He suggests, however, that even the extraordinary nature and appearance of the Cynocephali do not exclude them from humanity. This point is necessary to establish the rest of his argument, where, in what has been described as a rhetorical tour de force,²⁶ Augustine suggests that God may have created the monstrous races so that Christians might not think that the spectacular births which appear among them, and which the theologian himself claims to have seen, are failures of divine wisdom.

For Augustine, the monstrous other is much more than a fictive or provisional condensation of the characteristics marking differences among a superficially diverse humanity. The perceived differences between "us and them" are strictly the products of fundamental distinctions along a hierarchy of salvation. These differences, which manifest the limits of the recognizable and unrecognizable, are, in the theological view, subsumable to divine dispensation. Others, as imperfect humanity, represent the potentially salvageable since all races are open to grace. Monsters remain historically, culturally divided from normative humanity, yet potentially unified with it at the moment of the Last Judgment. As incarnations of a fallen ideal, they possess a double status as insiders enjoying the promise of salvation and as outsiders reminding humanity of the consequences of the Fall. As long as the other is imagined to be other, recognized as somehow different from yet integral to the same or normative, the binary us/them loses its meaning as an absolute opposition between two terms. The result is not merely (con)fusion between the terms or empty equivocation, but an important shift in emphasis from the terms themselves to the relation they structure, from the *relata* to the *relatio*. Any binary, according to Jacques Derrida's famous axiom, translates to a violent hierarchy or relation.

In the Middle Ages, difference was always hierarchical—the other was perennially inferior to what passed as normal. Belief in and adherence to

the tenets and strictures of Christianity marked the principal dividing line between the damned and the saved, the wild and the civilized. That Augustine should inherit and make use of the concept of the city as a metaphor for Christian civilization is not surprising given the prominence of the complex theme of wilderness, the city's antithesis, in Hebrew thought.²⁷ Saracens and monsters were relegated either to the wasteland, to the desert, or to a metaphoric city of evildoers, which the Christian tradition consistently associated with the pedigree of Cain.²⁸ The connection between monsters and a biblical outcast as their first parent is a medieval topos. One need look no further than the beginnings of English literature—the monsters of *Beowulf*, Grendel and his mother, are said to be Cain's kin—or the Western origins of anti-Muslim propaganda—Muhammad and Islam are foreshadowed in the fate of Ishmael, who, according to Genesis 16:12, "shall be a wild man [*ferus homo*]. His hand will be against all men, and all men's hands against him: and he shall pitch his tents against all his brethren."²⁹

In the period roughly from Augustine and extending through a tradition of commentary traceable until the sixteenth century, the monstrous other is often a figure of punishment. The Dog-Man, for example, is commonly seen as an image of punishment that submission to desire brings down upon us. Even the debates contending whether Cynocephali were men with the souls of animals or men so degraded that they had forfeited the possibility of grace leave no doubt as to the status of the Dog-Men as images of punished desire.³⁰ In the monster's double status as exteriorized danger or spectacle and interiorized allegory, a tension arose between the notion of a divided humanity, the damned and the saved, and the notion of potentially, that is finally, unified humanity where man, fellowman, and God comprise the ideal Christian community. This tension between exclusion and inclusion had far-reaching implications for the possibility of proselytizing non-Christian others—in order to be proselytized the other must first be undemonized. While the broad history of Dog-Men as favorite targets for conversion in medieval treatments of missionary activity has already been written,³¹ I would like to emphasize one strand of that history, the close link between theological interest in converting Cynocephali and the Pentecostal dissemination of the Word to the East. The gathering of nations in Jerusalem at Pentecost is typically depicted with a representative of the Dog-Men, who often serves as a stand-in for the "Arabians."³² In both Eastern and Western traditions of anti-Muslim polemic, Saracens and Cynocephali were often associated.³³ Christians depicted Muslims as a race of dogs, often confronting the crusaders in innumerable hordes.³⁴ For the propagandist, the symbolism of the dog-headed Saracen conveys the ideas of religious heresy, monstrosity, remoteness, and irrationality—in short, pure

deviance. Saracens and Dog-Men were construed as savage animals whose deviant desires represent willful rejection and perversion of Christian truth.³⁵

As images of disruptive desire, monsters and Saracens connote liberation from the strictures of religion and convention. In the mid-eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon manuscript of the *Marvels of the East* (Cotton Tiberius B. v) several engaging illustrations of fabulous races portray the individual racial exemplar as a dynamic, playfully transgressive figure. One such exemplar of the race of Blemmyae, "the men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders" in Othello's words, serves to illustrate the dynamism of uncontrollable, monstrous desire (fol. 82a). The Blemmyae fills the apparently solid frame from which it steps out, grasping it as though stretching confining bars. The creature, figuring deviation from the physical norms and customs of the medieval community, suggests an energy too great to be contained in isolation. The Blemmyae appears to test the limits of its own marginality, thereby placing in question the self-imagined identity of the community at the center. Raising questions about where inside and outside meet, the monster, construed as culturally peripheral, becomes symbolically central. The Blemmyae, in its double status as icon of inside and outside, thus dramatizes the effects of simultaneous framing and distancing.

Even these few examples from the monster and Eastern *Marvels* traditions allow us to generalize about imaginative constructions of the other in the Middle Ages. We observe, first of all, several interlocked tensions, competing attitudes toward the other that arise from the medieval inheritance and subsequent conflation of two divergent intellectual traditions—the Greco-Roman and the Judeo-Christian. Hayden White neatly summarizes the differences between these two systems of thought: "perceived differences between men had less significance for Greeks and Romans than they had for Hebrews and Christians. For the former, difference was perceived as physical and cultural; for the latter, as moral and metaphysical."³⁶ From the Greco-Roman tradition, the Middle Ages inherited what may be termed a scientific impulse, and from the Judeo-Christian, an allegorical impulse. These two impulses combined to suspend the monster or marvel between defamiliarization (science) and exemplification (allegory), where the former attempted to grasp the marvelous object in its alterity in order to highlight what is different or surprising about it and the latter attempted momentarily to suppress the marvelous object's alterity in order to emphasize what is familiar or exemplary about it. Put another way, science apprehends the normal in its abnormality whereas allegory understands the abnormal in its normality.

Obviously the opposition between science and allegory was never so neat, for each term contains its own set of contradictions. Medieval science is marked (perhaps principally) by an impulse to name, enumerate, or make

an example of, and allegory (in most medieval definitions) by an impulse to conceal or make strange. In our context, this entangled relation between scientific analysis and allegorical interpretation of the other is in part explicable by the long history of etymological ambiguity concerning *monstra* (monsters). While in the Middle Ages there was universal agreement on the lexical meaning of the word *monstrum* as referring to things *contra naturam*, there was, nevertheless, little agreement on the word's ideological overtones.³⁷ Etymologically, *monstrum* was said to combine two Latin verbs, *monere* (to remind someone of something, to make someone remember; to warn, to prompt, to advise) and *monstrare* (to show, to point out, to teach, to inform). Since both verbs encompass the sense of informing or advising someone to do something, most Latins understood *monstrum* in the sense of a divine prescription or indication, a revelation of god's will.³⁸ As something to behold, a monstration,³⁹ the other announces itself as a marvelous, extraordinary thing. And as a warning, the other predicts the arrival of the marvelous, abnormal thing—in moral terms, it represents the condition into which an individual might degenerate. The close relationship here between the spatial object and its temporal re-presentation emphasizes the degree to which the other structures the boundaries of cultural space and psychological motion. That is, the other marks a cultural break at the same time that it reminds one of the limits of desire and of the consequences of moral transgression.

Monsters, then, in many ways epitomize Western medieval conceptions of otherness. A particular rhythm informs their being—an oscillation between domestication (disavowal of difference) and estrangement (recognition of difference). They may be framed by allegory and/or distanced by the obviousness of their differentness. As deviations from the natural order, they require a method of imagining them that itself deviates from natural patterns of thought. Monstrous others disorient normal interpretative strategies and disrupt usual critical paradigms. How is an understanding of alterity anchored in the flux of acceptance and fear, clarity and opacity, certainty and uncertainty? How is the normality of abnormality or its inverse to be understood?⁴⁰

Imagining the Place of Otherness

What is foreign is that which escapes from a place.

—Michel de Certeau⁴¹

My reading of Prester John's place in the medieval imagination will affirm that one fictional solution to the contradictions posed by such dialectical approaches to otherness is to locate the other in a kind of neutral space.

Neutral space is here provisionally understood as space that possesses, in place of geographical fixity, *perceived* ideological fixity. For over a thousand years, India represented for the West such a neutral space.⁴² India—or, more properly, the Indias—was more a floating toponym than a specific, indeed specifiable, region of the world. Almost unanimously subdivided into three parts,⁴³ India circumscribed an area from Egypt and Ethiopia to the Far East—to what Roau d'Arundel's late-twelfth-century translation of the *Letter of Prester John* terms “la fin de l'orient” (the echo of which is heard in Columbus's famous designation of the “Indies” as “the end of the East”). India was virtually coextensive with the best, however little, known parts of Asia and northeast Africa, the two continents (though not understood in those terms) along with Europe making up the *oikoumene*. As a result of its geographical sprawl, “India” represented for medieval Europeans an immense *terra incognita* that became synonymous with the alien, the remote, and, as the epigraph from Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* to the preceding section typifies, the marvelous. The mobility of India's placement on the *mappae mundi* was inversely proportional to its fixed placement in the medieval imagination. Whatever fixity India lacked as a geographical sign, it recovered as a sign of *difference* in the ideological construction of otherness.

Much of India's force as a neutral space derives from its special susceptibility to imaginative appropriation. An “imaginative geography”⁴⁴ endowed India with its mythical status as a place embracing two extremes: Earthly Paradise and a sort of hell on earth. Fully colonized by the imagination, India assumed a fictional reality that had an overall quiescent effect upon the tensions it embraced: heaven and hell could coexist. In at least three critical registers, one narratological and two historical, India can be viewed as a neutral space capable of provisionally resolving the tensions between self and other, science and allegory, attraction and repulsion, ideal and antitype, that emerge in Western medieval constructions of the other.

The first register involves the nature of the aesthetic act itself. Fredric Jameson argues that, rather than see fiction as charged with certain preexisting ideologies, we must recognize that fiction produces ideology and is itself ideological work “with the function of inventing imaginary or formal ‘solutions’ to unresolvable social contradictions.”⁴⁵ Jameson's understanding of fiction's role in the fabrication of specific ideologies recalls the well-known etymology of *fiction*. Fiction, from the Latin for fashioning or making (*fictio*, from *fictus*, past participle of *figere*, to touch, form, mold), foregrounds the active process of forming ideologies and molding social realities. Such processes of construction are perhaps most transparent in the communifying work of myths. In their treatment of “The Nazi Myth,” Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe analyze Plato's condemnation and exclusion of myth in terms that will be especially pertinent for an

understanding of the “Indian myth” that I am describing. “Myth,” they write, “is a fiction in the strong, active sense of ‘fashioning’ or, as Plato says, of ‘plastic art’: it is, therefore, a *fictioning*, whose role is to propose, if not impose, models or types. . . by means of which an individual, or a city, or an entire people, can take possession of itself and identify with itself.”⁴⁶ Accordingly, as Georges Dumézil contends, myth is the ideal site for analyzing disclosures of ideology.⁴⁷

Northrop Frye's taxonomy of myth brings before us the close linkage of myth and utopia. “There are,” Frye observes, “two social conceptions which can be expressed only in terms of myth. One is the social contract. . . the other is utopia, which presents an imaginative vision of the *telos* or end at which social life aims.”⁴⁸ The image of India represents the limits of such a *telos*, the extreme reaches of imaginative projection and human possibility. The myth of India contains—in the double sense of inclusion and enclosure—the ideal of political and social order (Prester John) and the possibility of disorder (races of giants and anthropophagi). In other words, India dramatizes a state *between* what Frye calls the apocalyptic and the demonic, functioning as a neutral space in which the desires of medieval men struggled against forces that prevented their fulfillment.⁴⁹ Thus where ideology, myth, and utopia converge, the image of India as the place of both the other and the ideal of Prester John offers a space for speculating on the possibilities of existing between alternative subject positions.

In great part, the ideological meaning of India in the Middle Ages depended on its location at the margins of the known world. India, the most remote region of the *oikoumene*, often functioned in vernacular literature as a synecdoche for “the whole earth.” This so-called India topos⁵⁰ constitutes, in my terms, the second frame through which India was imagined as a space where alterity was a function of geography and through which India was figured as a neutral space. A subdivision of the poetic topos “the whole earth sings his praises,” the India topos was a shorthand expression for conveying the vast extent of one's notoriety or dominion. Thus, in the *chanson de geste Aymeri de Narbonne*, Aymeri, urging Charlemagne to take vengeance against “Ganelon le felon traïtor. . . si que trestuit, li grant et li major, / L'oient conter jusqu'en Inde major” [Ganelon the evil traitor such that everyone, the great and the important ones, heard tell of it all the way to greater India].⁵¹ India signifies totality, but also the edge; widely disseminated meaning, but also limited representation; distance, but also contiguity. That this liminal locus—neither here nor there—should be the place where the other resides is not surprising since the other has been consigned to a special place, time, or history in an ethnographic tradition extending from the ancients to the moderns, from Herodotus to Malinowski. What I referred to earlier as the simultaneous framing and distancing in which the

monster was suspended is here understood in terms of the mechanism of liminality.

The central role that liminality plays in *rites de passage* that establishes a sense of self and community vis-à-vis others has been well documented in the anthropological literature.⁵² In the liminal phase of the rite of passage, the ritual subject, having left a fixed place in the social structure, becomes a kind of ambiguous traveler passing "through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state."⁵³ In his state of limbo, the subject is made aware of the differences and boundaries that separate cultural spaces. Medieval village rituals, such as one on Rogation Day called Beating the Bounds, dramatized the extent to which imagining the other was preeminently a process of imagining the place of the other. Beating the Bounds involved introducing village children to the boundary streams and trees where they were dunked and bruised. Knowing the spatial limits of one's world often substituted for knowing what was reportedly beyond those limits. Beating the Bounds emphasized that awareness of the other's place in the world, which is founded upon an awareness of one's own place, was more crucially important than any knowledge of the other itself. One was not taught *what* was over the hill, only that one should *not go there*. But such rituals also dramatized the neutrality of the boundary itself, the place where the child was momentarily disoriented by being beaten or dunked. A boundary stream became a synecdoche for "the whole world," the region of the known while remaining itself, at least symbolically, ambiguous. Placing the other just beyond the hill outside the village or in India outside the bounds of Christianity creates the critical distance and liminality necessary for working out—ritually, fictively, imaginatively—relations of self and other.

As should be clear by now, my use of India as a representative of the edge and as a figure for neutral space is meant to draw attention to the ideological work of "imaginative geography" in the Middle Ages. What has always been most striking about *mappae mundi* such as the famous Hereford or Ebstorf maps is their status as works of the imagination, as visual representations of ideas regarding the relation of objects to their proper place. The center of the map of course was symbolically identified with safety, stability, and salvation (Christ, Jerusalem) and the edges with danger, deviance, and damnation (Indian and Ethiopian monsters). But complementing the symbolic, theological interpretation of place and its relation to disposition or to being was a fundamentally scientific vision of the intrinsic relation that objects must bear to their geographic place. Geographic understanding, accordingly, is negotiated in the space between allegory and science. The ideological significance of the location of India at the edge depends, as I have suggested, upon its fictive operations, its distance and liminality effects, and finally, as I now suggest, upon its theological and scientific visualization.

While allegorical and scientific treatments of place, especially in relation to medieval cartography, have received excellent scholarly attention,⁵⁴ I want to emphasize the ways in which the two systems of thought combined to formulate conceptions of otherness. Roger Bacon's statement on the intrinsic relation of geography to natural characteristics summarizes a long tradition of Western and Eastern views on the significance of place: "If [the latitude and longitude of every location] were known, man would be able to know the characteristics of all things in the world and their natures and qualities which they contract from the force of this location."⁵⁵ Circulating in a scientific tradition founded in Aristotle, extending through Pliny and Ptolemy, to Isidore of Seville and the Arabic scientist Mesue, and achieving its most acute articulation in the late-medieval scientists Bacon and Albertus Magnus, the belief that geography was destiny maintained a prominent place in thinking about others. Bacon called place "the beginning of our existence"⁵⁶ because location vigorously determines character and influences appearance. As in Pliny and his Aristotelian sources, the other at the place of extremes—especially extremes of temperature and humidity or of vulnerability to astral influences—was not only markedly different from but was culturally inferior to the medial or temperate. Albertus Magnus, in *De natura loci*, distinguishes among the seven habitable zones in such a way that the middle regions of the world, the fourth and fifth climates, were *naturally* conducive to the benefits of golden moderation: justice, faith, peace, and respect for the society of men.⁵⁷ The others at the edge, strangers to such benefits, became the victims of a science that rooted them in place, thus subject to the influences of climate, and of a morality that fixed their abject relation to the virtuous center.

Medieval *mappae mundi* often combined the scientific view of the Macrobian zone maps with the allegorical view of the Noachid, or tripartite (T-in-O) maps. The Macrobian map typically focuses on the regions of habitability or inhabitability, providing, in place of information about particular races, cities, or monuments, theoretical reasons to account for differences among the regions. The Noachid map, on the other hand, focuses on races and local curiosities with an ethnological purpose, to supply names and to assign places rather than theorize about the effects of location. The Macrobian map in its purest form refuses to name or specify the occupants of each region; instead, it seeks to understand what makes each regional phenomenon unique. The Noachid map operates in an allegorical mode, demystifying regional phenomena in order to discover what is true about them and always has been. Most maps, though, offered a kind of summa of the two visualizations of alterity. They aimed at both a literal and a symbolic representation of geographic, cosmological ideas concerning otherness. India and Ethiopia, so the double argument went, were havens for monsters

because these places were traditional sites for such creatures and because their environment and location on the world map guaranteed their relation to monstrosity.

Efforts to fix the other in the medieval "imaginative geography" yielded mixed results. Despite a certain ideological fixity, the other would defy placement in the taxonomic imagination of the West, betraying what de Certeau would call an inveterate nomadism. Marking the other was a hesitation between two visualizations of alterity, which I have broadly described as the allegorical and the scientific. In the space of this hesitation fantasies about the other's differentness and about the other's relation to the Western self were generated. When Albertus Magnus characterized the inhabitants of the temperate zones as *medii*, or middle people, or people between—anyone, he wrote, "*scit medium constitui ab extremis*" [knows that the median is constituted by the extremes]—he drew attention to the intermediate space where self-identity is formed. Yet the other—imagined or real—also occupies a middle ground, a neutral space open to ideological territorialization.

CHAPTER 2

MUSLIM MONSTROSITY

Corpus Christianus: The Threat of Islam

To the sacrilegious, there is no distinction of place and no respect for persons.

—William of Tyre¹

All the werewolves who exist in the darkness of history. . . keep alive that fear without which there can be no rule.

—Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno²

In 1190, as Roger of Howden recorded in his chronicle, Richard I stopped at Messina on his way to the Holy Land to visit a certain Cistercian abbot named Joachim, who was earning a reputation as a wise prophet, a gifted interpreter of the Book of Revelation.³ Richard and his retinue of churchmen "took great delight" in hearing a detailed, animated description of the seven-headed dragon of Antichrist waiting to devour the faithful, the offspring of the Holy Church. The seven heads, Joachim of Fiore explained, represented the seven persecutors of the Church, five of whom have passed, one of whom is, and one of whom will be. Among those who have passed was Muhammad, and "the one who is" was none other than Richard's nemesis Saladin, over whom the prophet predicted Richard's eventual victory. Though the bishops attending Richard would dispute Joachim's general interpretation of Revelation, and even Roger himself would question it by following it in his chronicle with two different, more standard interpretations, one aspect would remain clear—the prophetic association of Muslims with the monstrous instruments of Antichrist.

Parts of chapter 2 previously appeared as "Unthinking the Monster: Saracen Alterity in the Twelfth Century," *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 264–91.

In the West, Islam, taken to be the culmination of all heresies,⁴ was seen as a sign of apocalypse, a foreshadowing of Antichrist, as early as the polemical writings of the Cordovan martyrs Eulogius and Paul Alvarus (ca. 854).⁵ Joachim only revived the coherent vision of Islam developed by the Cordovan martyrs, who had imaginatively constructed the other in the shape of the known by placing it in the framework of Christian apocalypse. Explaining the threat of Islam in terms of the fulfillment of biblical prophecy epitomized a type of analogical thinking—recognizing oneself in the other, as in a mirror—which dominated Western conceptions of otherness.⁶ Islam, construed as the perverse culmination of Christianity, became Latin Europe's perfect antithesis, and as such an essential part or measure of its identity. While I discuss later the roles that Islam played in the construction of Western identity in the twelfth century, I want to emphasize the importance of these roles as a background against which medieval notions of alterity developed. The terms and gestures by which Muslim otherness was understood form a context for understanding the legend of Prester John as both a reaction to and an extension of that otherness.

Coextensive with the Middle Ages itself was the threat of Islam. From the late seventh until the late seventeenth century, Islam in one of its forms—Arab, Ottoman, or Spanish and North African—seriously challenged the existence of Christianity. According to R. W. Southern, Islam epitomized alterity in the Middle Ages. "The existence of Islam," he argues, "was the most far-reaching problem in medieval Christendom," a danger that was "unpredictable and immeasurable."⁷ This "problem," as I suggested earlier, was essentially one concerning the integrity and preservation of inviolable boundaries. Like the Dog-Men with whom they were often identified, Saracens and their religion symbolized the blurring of ideal boundaries, such as those separating rational man from animal or civilized man from barbarian. Boundaries thus became contested spaces, areas betwixt and between, where relations had to be determined—what was the relation of the historical trajectory of Islam to Christian history? Of Muhammad to Christ? Of the Koran to the Bible? Of the Muslim afterlife to the Christian heaven? It is not surprising then that, as a rhetorical form, dialogue [*disputatio*] was commonly used to structure theological debates between representatives of Islam and Christianity.⁸ Nor is it surprising that the indeterminacy Latins perceived in Islam should be felt to have terrible consequences: the Saracens, "with all the appearance of a swarm of bees, but with a heavy hand, came fast out of Babylon and Africa into Sicily; they devastated everything and all around," wrote Erchimbert, a monk at Monte Cassino in the late eleventh century.⁹ Because the political, military, economic, artistic, and religious responses to Islam have been well documented and analyzed elsewhere,¹⁰ I confine my reading of "the threat of Islam" to some of the important imaginative or ideological responses it provoked.

The reports of Pope Urban II's speech launching the Crusade at the Council of Clermont on November 27, 1095 univocally proclaim and, as we shall see, dramatize the paramount importance of recovering the Holy Lands. Whatever other reasons impelled, ideologically speaking, restoring the Holy Lands to Christian rule—the rescue of the Eastern Church, the alleviation of internal strife, the exercise of a new awareness of Christian Empire and of holy war—the ordering of genealogy and the retrieval of rightful inheritance remained the primary motivations, on the level of the social imaginary, for crusade. Lamentations 5:2 echoed throughout the long history of conflict with Islam: "Hereditas nostra versa est ad alienos, domus nostrae ad extraneos" [Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers, our home to foreigners]. In his account of Urban's speech, Robert the Monk associates the earthly place of Jerusalem with rightful Christian inheritance of the heavenly Jerusalem: "Enter upon the road to the Holy Sepulchre; wrest that land from the wicked race, and subject it to yourselves. That land, which as the Scripture says 'floweth with milk and honey,' was given by God into the possession of the children of Israel. Jerusalem is the navel of the world; the land is fruitful above others, like another paradise of delights [*Iherusalem umbilicus est terrarum. . . quasi alter Paradisus deliciarum*]."¹¹ The universal identification of Jerusalem as *umbilicus terrarum* makes concrete the importance of the place of origin in the rejection of Muslim appropriations. In his description of Jerusalem as paradise and fountain, Guibert of Nogent provides another, more embellished account of Urban's plea to recover the place of Christian inception:

Let us suppose, for the moment, that Christ was not dead and buried, and had never lived any length of time in Jerusalem. Surely, if all this were lacking, this fact alone ought still to arouse you to go to the aid of the land and city—the fact that "Out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem!" If all that there is of Christian preaching has flowed from the fountain of Jerusalem, its streams, whithersoever spread out over the whole world, encircle the hearts of the Catholic multitude, that they may consider wisely what they owe such a well-watered fountain. If rivers return to the place whence they have issued only to flow forth again, according to the saying of Solomon, it ought to seem glorious to you to be able to apply a new cleansing to this place, whence it is certain that you received the cleansing of baptism and the witness of your faith.¹²

Islam, it was maintained, obstructs the flow of Christian doctrine, preventing at the source the dissemination of saving dogma. The crusades represent, then, a series of new beginnings—cleansings—which are simultaneously returns to origin.

Thus at stake in these representative accounts of crusade propaganda is the proper ordering and movement of providential history, the achievement of a Christian telos. Islam threatens the preservation and renewal of sacred history by setting up an alternative, perverse history. For twelfth-century historians like Otto of Freising, the theological interpretation of history rested upon *translatio imperii* [transference of empire], the placement of "the Roman Empire at the end of a succession of ancient empires as a providential preparation for the age of Christ, in the course of history as well as in the geography of salvation."¹³ The predestination of the Roman Empire guaranteed, through the crucial role it played in unifying mankind, that all men would be receptive to the dispensation of grace. The universality of empire figures, then, the universality of the Christian world order. Thus in the vision of Daniel, historians found confirmation of the providential succession of empires. Otto of Freising, as propagandist of the Holy Roman Empire, saw in Daniel the transference of empire from the Romans to the Greeks to the Franks to the Lombards and finally to the Germans.¹⁴

The existence of Islam jeopardized the translation, and hence the universality, of Christian Empire. For another transference became thinkable—the westward movement of civilization might be halted in a return to its oriental source. Holy Empire might be replaced at the end of history by the rising Islamic Empire. The survival of Christian Empire became a matter of preserving its place and time in the composition of history, a matter of maintaining its geographical and historical source, so compactly symbolized in the image of *umbilicus terrae*. This emphasis on the convergence of place and time in the representation of history was reflected in twelfth-century formulations of *mundus* [world] and *saeculum* [century, age].¹⁵ Representing history depended upon considering relations of *mundus* and *saeculum*, for example, the movement of civilization from East to West.¹⁶ In *De arca Noe morali*, Hugh of St. Victor writes that, in order to represent the complexity of history, "loca simul et tempora, ubi et quando gestae sunt, considerare oportet" [one ought to consider time as well as place, where as well as when events happened].¹⁷ Islam, the histories and polemical writings of the twelfth century held, threatened to pervert history, distorting the providential order of place and time upon which, for example, morality was based. Gerald of Wales, writing on "tempestate Saraceni" [the furious rise of the Saracens] in *De principis instructione*, was not alone in linking place and time in an argument regarding Muslim carnality and what he termed the devil's plot [*arte diabolica*] for a hot climate.¹⁸ Geography determined the kind of history that Islam would generate.¹⁹

As a sign of absolute alterity, the threatening place of Islam on the margins of Western history—*mundus* and *saeculum*—upset the imperial ambitions of Christianity. In a letter to Saladin in 1188, Frederick I Barbarosa was

astounded and incensed by the Saracen's ignorance of Roman history securing the rights of Christians to the Holy Lands:

Nunc autem quoniam terram sanctam profanasti, cui [aeterni] regis [imperamus] imperio, in praeside Iudaeae, Samariae et Palestinorum in tanti sceleris praesumptuosam et plectibilem audaciam debita animadversione decernere imperialis sollicitudo nos ammonet. . . Vix enim credimus hoc te latere, quod ex scripturis veterum et ex antiquis historiis nostri temporis et facti novitate redolet. Numquid scire dissimulas ambas Ethiopias, Mauritaniam, Persiam, Syriam, Parthiam, ubi Marci Crassi nostri dictatoris fata sunt praematurata, Iudaeam, Samariam, Maritimam, Arabiam, Chaldaeam, ipsam quoque Aegyptum, ubi, pro pudor, civis Romanus Antonius, vir insigni virtute praeditus, citra nitorem temperantiae, secus quam decebat [militem] a tanto rerum culmine emissum, minus sobriis Cleopatrae inserviebat amoribus?

[However, now since you have profaned the Holy Land, which we rule by the empire of the eternal king, in protection of the inhabitants of Judea, Samaria, and Palestine, our imperial responsibility demands that we combat with due punishment the presumption and culpable audacity of such great wickedness. . . For we scarcely believe that this is unknown to you, these recent events from the writings of the ancients and from the old histories of our own time. Do you pretend not to know both Ethiopias, Mauritania, Persia, Syria, Parthia, where Marcus Crassus our ruler met his premature death, Judea, Samaria, Arabia, Chaldea, and Egypt itself, where, for shame, Antony, a Roman citizen, a man endowed with the marks of virtue, though not extending to the excellence of temperance, which otherwise was proper for a soldier sent out on such high missions, was with little sense a slave for the love of Cleopatra?]²⁰

The letter continues in this vein to enumerate the nations and races subject to the sway of Roman history, forces that could be effectively marshaled against Saladin. Frederick presents a Roman imperial history—including the place of Emperor Marcus Crassus's untimely death and a moral tale censuring Antony's imprudent love of Cleopatra—inescapably bound to the fate of Christian crusade. In emphasizing Saladin's ignorance of Roman history as garnered "ex scripturis veterum et ex antiquis historiis nostri temporis" [from the writings of the ancients and from the old histories of our own time], Frederick dramatizes the Saracens' position outside history, a place that at once guarantees and threatens Roman rule.

Roman history is in an important sense dependent upon or authorized by its marginal alternatives. Islamic history, from the other side of the frontier, calls imperial history into being, and demands that its narrative be retold. Roman history, in turn, demands that Islam remain outside the frontier separating the two histories to ensure that their narratives do not converge.

However, these frontiers, like the narratives they separate, are inherently unstable and never free of competing ideologies. They figure oscillations between acceptance and abomination, simultaneity and separation. Efforts, then, to fix—in both senses, to set in place and to repair—these boundaries are immensely difficult and even likely to fail. Presenting tremendous problems for twelfth-century theologians, the proximity of Islam to the frontier itself was understood chiefly in terms of the ways that Islam violated certain boundaries. Islam, as several modern historians have pointed out, was rarely understood in its own terms, but grasped in its relation to Christianity.²¹ That is to say, Islam “became an image . . . whose function was not so much to represent Islam in itself as to represent it for the medieval Christian.”²² If, as I have suggested, Islam was a threat to the origins and univocality of Christian history, then the image of Islam might be said to have functioned ideologically as a sign of deviation or perversion—in short, as a sign of monstrosity. Monsters, we recall, inhere in the breaking of boundaries and, as hybrids, bear an uneasy relation to what is figured as the rule or norm. In the medieval Christian imagination the monstrosity of Islam was perceived in every aspect of the rival religion—in its theory, in its practices, in its personages, and in its holy books. Virtually no responses, learned or literary, to Muhammad and his religion fail to evoke monstrosity. In fact, the primary Western images that reflect the ways Islam was imaginatively fashioned contribute to this notion of monstrosity. They include attributions to Muslims of limitless enjoyment and unarrestable desire,²³ of sexual deviation,²⁴ of powers of seduction,²⁵ of madness,²⁶ of disorder,²⁷ and of idolatry.²⁸ What ultimately binds together these characteristics is an anxiety over the stability and placement of the actual boundaries marking differences between the two cultures.

Alan of Lille begins the fourth book of *Contra paganos* with a rather grandiloquent overview of his subject matter:

Nunc contra Machometi discipulos stili vertamus vestigium. Cuius Machometi monstrosa vita, monstriosior secta, monstriosissimus finis in gestis eius manifeste reperitur; qui, maligno spiritu inspiratus, sectam abhominabilem inuenit, carnalibus voluptatibus consonam, a carnalium voluptatibus non dissonam; et ideo multi carnales, eius secta illecti, et per errorum varia precipitia deiecti, miserabiliter perierunt et pereunt; quos communi vocabulo vulgus Saracenos vel paganos nuncupat.²⁹

[Now let us turn our writing (the tracks of our pen) against the disciples of Muhammad. Muhammad's monstrous life, more monstrous sect, and most monstrous end (limit) is manifestly found in his deeds. He, inspired by the evil spirit, founded an abominable sect, one suitable for fleshly indulgences, not disagreeable to pleasures of the flesh; and therefore these carnal men, allured

by his sect, and humiliated by the errors of various precepts, have died and continue to die miserably; the people call them with the usual appellation Saracens or pagans.]

In the concatenation “monstrous life, more monstrous sect, most monstrous end”—the last part most certainly a reference to the Western myth of Muhammad having been devoured by pigs (or dogs, according to Alan)³⁰—are condensed the energies of polemical biography and theological controversy. The religion of Muhammad is marked above all by its willful “error” (L. *errare*, to wander from a place, to deviate from a course), by its transgression of the norms and bounds of Christianity. In this connection “monstrosissimus finis” can be understood in its primary meaning as “most monstrous border, boundary, or limit.” The limits of Islam were coextensive with the extremes of everything monstrously liminal according to the Christian system of thought. Islam not only began, but overlapped, where Christianity imagined itself leaving off.

For Peter the Venerable, who commissioned the first translation of the Koran into Latin in 1143 and wrote the first systematic refutation of Islamic doctrine in the Latin language, Islam was a hybrid of everything antithetical to Christian belief. In a letter to Bernard of Clairvaux, Peter justifies his project of translation by following patristic example concerning Islam: “Hoc ego de hoc precipuo errore errorum de hac fece universarum heresum, in quam omnium diabolicarum sectarum quae ab ipso Salvatoris adventu ortae sunt reliquiae confluerunt, facere volui.”³¹ As the depository of all Christian heresies, Islam, through its cultural marginality and deviance, became a measure of Christianity's symbolic centrality and stability.

In the prologue to the *Liber contra sectam sive haeresim Saracenorum*, Peter asks a series of rhetorical questions that more precisely define the nature of Islam's threat: “Et quae unquam o lector heresis adeo aecclesiae Dei nocuit? Quis unquam error adeo rem publicam Christianum vexavit? Quis in tantum terminos eius rescidet? Quis tant massa perditorum numerum infernalem adauxit?”³² The urgent question “What has broken down its boundaries by so much?” points not only to the extent of Muslim irruptions into the Christian republic but to the anxiety attending such violations. If the boundaries and extremities of Christianity are unstable or permeable, how does that affect its foundation and center? Peter, who, like many of the theologians for whom he wrote, could not finally decide whether Muslims were heretics or pagans,³³ perceived in Islam a nefarious mixture of Christian, heretical, and pagan doctrines. Muhammad, he argued, had indiscriminately fashioned a monster out of the religions that preceded him: “et sic undique monstrosus, ut ille ait, ‘humano capiti cervicem equinam, et plumas’ avium [Mahumet] copulat.”³⁴ . . . Dehinc processu temporis et erroris, in regem ab eis quod concupierat, sublimatus est. Sic bona malis permiscens, vera falsis

confundens, erroris semina sevit, et suo partim tempore, partim et maxime post suum tempus segetem nefariam igne aeterno concremandum produxit."³⁵ The image of the "devilish crop" [*nefariam segetem*] growing up from the seeds of error planted in a mixture of good and evil, truth and falsity figured an otherness without and a danger within. Composed of elements of the exterior and interior, the hybrid with its fate "to be consumed by eternal fire" served as a figure for absolute alterity and as a warning to more local forces of impurity and dissidence.³⁶

No other set of images better dramatizes Western anxiety over the convergence of the exterior and interior than the images of bodily dismemberment universally used by propagandists of the First Crusade. Originating in a late-eleventh/early-twelfth-century letter allegedly sent by Alexius I Comnenus to Count Robert of Flanders, these images, deployed to evoke repulsion and desire for vengeance among the Latins, found their way into several accounts of Urban's harangue at Clermont.³⁷ In his appeal for aid against the advancing infidels, Emperor Alexius details some gruesome violations of religious, sexual, and ethnic prohibitions:

Nam pueros et iuvenes Christianorum circumcidunt super baptisteria Christianorum et circumcisionis sanguinem in despectum Christi fundunt in eisdem baptisteriis et desuper eos mingere compellent et deinceps in circuitu ecclesiae eos violenter deducunt et nomen et fidem sanctae Trinitatis blasphemare compellunt. Illos vero nolentes ea diversis poenis affligunt et ad ultimum eos interficiunt. Nobiles vero matronas ac earum filias depraedatas invicem succedendo ut animalia adulterando deludunt. Alii vero corrumpendo turpiter virginies statuunt ante facies earum matres, compellentes eas nefarias et luxuriosas decantare cantilenas.

[For they circumcise Christian boys and youths over the baptismal fonts of Christian (churches) and spill the blood of circumcision right into the baptismal fonts and compel them to urinate over them, afterward leading them violently around the church and forcing them to blaspheme the name of the Holy Trinity. Those who are unwilling they torture in various ways and finally murder. When they capture noble women and their daughters, they abuse them sexually in turns, like animals. Some, while they are wickedly defiling the maidens, place the mothers facing, constraining them to sing evil and lewd songs while they work their evil.]³⁸

Especially repugnant to a society dependent upon taboos and hierarchies, Saracen atrocities in the Holy Land were assaults against the fabric of Western identity. Saracens, "haec impiissima gens," have polluted and destroyed (*contaminant et destruunt*)³⁹ the inviolable lines separating the sacred from the profane. These violations of sacred space, metaphors for infidel intrusion into the Holy Land, are expressed in terms of bodily violations, monstrous

acts opening up a vulnerable Christian body. As anomalous hybrids of anti-Christian vice, who spill the circumcision blood of innocent Christian boys like Jews in the popular anti-Semitic literatures and who copulate *ut animalia*,⁴⁰ Saracens embody a shifting, intrusive menace to the sanctity of the Christian *corpus*. In the polemical and propagandistic literature such threats assume many ideological representations—as the threatening possibility of dismemberment, of rape and sodomization,⁴¹ of invasion by vast numbers,⁴² of unholy profanation⁴³—but these representations function together in a "discursive chain"⁴⁴ to convey the danger posed to the boundaries and limits defining Christianity as a religion apart from and superior to its others.⁴⁵ Indeed representations of intrusion and dismemberment, like the forms of monstrosity discussed earlier, make for such excellent propaganda because they function within a broad field of signification. Such representations work metonymically in association with a related set of images and metaphorically in a system of analogies.

Christian emphasis on corporeal integrity and purity focused attention on the body as a site, a topography of licit and illicit areas.⁴⁶ The renunciation of the natural body in Judeo-Christian thought only served to reaffirm its ideological centrality. Thus an elaborate system of analogies developed between the physical body and the political or collective body.⁴⁷ The body often served as a map onto which were projected political and religious hierarchies. Humbert of Moyenmoutier's *Adversus simoniacos* (1057), for example, conflates the individual and collective body in order to illustrate the famous tripartite scheme of societal organization⁴⁸ and to emphasize the subordination of the masses to ecclesiastical and secular powers. In Humbert's treatise the Church is represented as the eyes, the lay nobility as the chest and arms, and the masses as the lower limbs and extremities.⁴⁹ The body was the paradigm through which the sacral community was imagined. And in the *Policraticus* (1159) John of Salisbury maps the body politic onto the organic body: "The state [*res publica*]," he writes, "is a body [*corpus quoddam*]" and then proceeds, in the manner of Humbert, to detail the correlation of political rank with bodily location.⁵⁰ Given this set of relations figuring the security of hierarchical organizations in medieval culture, it is not surprising then that any anxieties about religious identity and political integrity should be distributed across bodily landscapes.

Robert the Monk and Guibert of Nogent, in their versions of Urban's exhortation at Clermont, are the most graphic about the kind of threat Islam posed to what William of Tyre confidently called "an inviolable faith."⁵¹ The race of Saracens, writes Robert,

ecclesiasque Dei aut funditus everterit aut suorum ritui sacrorum mancipaverit. Altaria suis foeditatibus inquinata subvertunt, Christianos

ci[r]cumcidunt, cruoremque circumcisionis aut super altaria fundunt aut in vasis baptisterii immergunt. Et quos eis placet turpi occubitu multare, umbilicum eis perforant, caput vitaliorum abstrahunt, ad stipitem ligant et sic flagellando circumducunt, quoadusque, extractis visceribus, solo prostrati corruunt. Quosdam stipiti ligatos sagittant; quosdam extento collo et nudato gladio appetunt et utrum uno ictu truncare possint pertentant. Quid dicam de nefanda mulierum constupratione, de qua loqui deterius est quam silere? Regnum Graecorum iam ab eis ita emutilatum est et suis usibus emancipatum quod transmeari non potest itinere duorum mensium.

[has either entirely destroyed the churches of God or appropriated them for the rites of its own religion. They destroy the altars, after having defiled them with their uncleanness. They circumcise the Christians, and the blood of the circumcision they either spread upon the altars or pour into the vases of the baptismal font. When they wish to torture people by a base death, they perforate their navels, and dragging forth the extremity of the intestines, bind it to a stake; then with flogging they lead the victim around until, the viscera having gushed forth, the victim falls prostrate upon the ground. Others they bind to a post and pierce with arrows. Others they compel to extend their necks and then, attacking them with naked swords, attempt to cut through the neck with a single blow. What shall I say of the abominable rape of the women? To speak of it is worse than to be silent. The kingdom of the Greeks is now dismembered by them and deprived of territory so vast in extent that it cannot be traversed in a march of two months.]⁵²

To these bodily violations, Guibert adds a description of Saracen cruelties suffered by pilgrims to the Holy Land:

Quid de his dicturi sumus, qui nihil prorsus habentes, nudae fiducia paupertatis, dum nil praeter corpora videntur habere quod perdant, illud iter arripiunt? Dum ab eis pecunia quae non est supplicii intolerandis exigitur, dum callos talorum, ne forte quicquam ibi insuerint, dissecando ac revellendo rimantur? Crudelitas nefandorum ad hoc usque perducitur, ut aurum vel argentum miseros absorbuisset putantes, aut, data in potum scamonia, usque ad vomitum vel etiam eruptionem eos vitalium urgent; vel ferro, quod dici nefas est, discissis ventribus, intestinorum quorumque involucra distendentes, quicquid habet natura secreti, horribili concisione aperiant.

[What shall we say of those who took up the journey without anything more than trust in their barren poverty, since they seemed to have nothing except their bodies to lose? They not only demanded money of them, which is not an unendurable punishment, but also examined the callouses of their heels, cutting them open and folding the skin back, lest, per chance, they had sewed something there. Their unspeakable cruelty was carried on even to the point of giving them scammony to drink until they vomited, or even burst their bowels, because they thought the wretches had swallowed gold or silver; or,

horrible to say, they cut their bowels open with a sword and, spreading out the folds of the intestines, with frightful mutilation disclosed whatever nature held there in secret.]⁵³

At work in these two passages of anti-Muslim propaganda is a cluster of anxieties, at once imperial, religious, sexual, economic, and epistemological. Robert the Monk is most clear about the analogy he wishes to establish between the limits of imperial geography and the boundaries of the human body. For him the images of cutting and penetration figure Christian territorial losses as the result of Muslim invasion. The Eastern Church and the Holy Land have been cut off from the Christian world by the effects of Saracen "dismemberment." Robert multiplies detailed images of torture to the (male) Christian body not merely for dramatic effect or impression upon the memory of his readers but to convey something of the ways Saracens both imagine and enjoy unmaking the boundaries that define what is holy.⁵⁴ The Saracens reduce the body to its utter materiality, stripping it of any religious signification and opening it up to the flux and chaos of the merely physical. In Guibert's vision of Saracen torture, the body's boundaries are manipulated for the purpose of examination.⁵⁵ Whereas in Robert's account the Saracens' motives—defile and destroy—are radically anti-Christian, in Guibert's they assume an almost scientific tenor—dissect and investigate. Here the Christian body is not only the object of inventive cruelties but that of probing gazes which turn the body into a place where something is hidden. Turned inside out, the body reveals "whatever nature held there in secret," and in the process is demystified.

In both descriptions of tortures in the Holy Land, the Christian body in pain is objectified, turned into a thing whose boundaries preventing undifferentiated contact with the external world are annihilated by the Saracens. These corporeal boundaries, however, may be all that the Saracens can dismantle. Guibert's remark that the pilgrims seem to have *only* their bodies to lose challenges the idea of total appropriation. That is, the Muslims can only penetrate and interrogate the body; they cannot penetrate the transcendental mysteries and meanings of Christian faith. Saracen concern with materiality is set against Christian renunciation of the same, as in the moment when the pilgrims' callouses, the physical signs of their piety, are misrecognized as concealments of their riches.

If there were certain confidences and securities regarding the drawing of boundaries between self and other in the twelfth century, there were more often anxieties and the imagined need for such securities. There was, as we have observed, a profound need to specify the place of non-European others, who were defined, as the epigraph to this section exemplifies, by their disrespect of place and limitations. Canon legislation, for instance, worked

extensively to keep Christians apart from Muslims and Jews. Church authorities in the eleventh and twelfth centuries condemned miscegenation, construed as sexual relations between a Latin Christian and a non-Christian, non-European partner.⁵⁶ The Council of Nablus (1120) enacted harsh penalties against Latin men in the Holy Land who consorted sexually with Muslim women.⁵⁷ In Gratian's *Decretum* (1140), Christians were strictly forbidden to receive service in Muslim households and were excommunicated for living in them. And the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) codified what already been enforced locally, the law forbidding Muslims and Jews to hold any position of public authority and the requirement that they wear distinctive clothing. To draw definite limits around the territory others were imagined to inhabit became a preoccupation of those who thought about their own place in history, for history (time) was precisely a matter of place (space). In this context, then, the ideological function of Prester John—who marks a time and space outside of (beyond) both Christian and Muslim worlds—became crucially important in structuring self-other relations.

The Necessity of Alterity

In the process of reacting against external pressures, the Latin West defined itself internally. Community and solidarity were the essential results of the ideological work of facing hostility from without and shaping discourses to address the challenges of opposition. Norman Daniel, in his study of crusade propaganda, has argued convincingly that the churchmen composing such polemics were consciously writing *for* their coreligionists rather than *against* the Muslims. The ideological significance of anti-Muslim propaganda resided in the fact that it

both sprang out of and served to fortify the sense of Christian solidarity. . . . Western Christendom wanted to establish its sense of identity. The constant preoccupation with orthodoxy, the crusades against heretics, and the development of the Inquisition all bear witness to the extent to which uniformity was desired by the people who made up the society as a whole. This was not affected by division in society, or by anticlericalism within the bounds of orthodoxy. They felt it to be a precondition of their solidarity. To establish that a whole religion, *lex*, was in every respect the reverse or denial of European society was immensely helpful in creating a mental as well as a physical frontier.⁵⁸

If imagining the Muslim other as the inverse, or alter ego, of the Christian self generated necessary mental and physical frontiers, then it remains to specify the nature of those frontiers. Frontiers, as I have suggested, mark less lines of division than interspaces where identities are formed through

negotiation, interaction, and engagement. The cultural formations taking place at the frontier are the results of a doubly specular process rather than of entrenchment, as Daniel seems to imply. That is, while it is certainly true that Latin Christendom constructed Islam as its mirror reflection—reversed as such images are—it is equally true, and culturally significant, that in the process of constituting itself Christendom revealed itself to be “a play of projections, doublings, idealizations, and rejections of a complex, shifting otherness.”⁵⁹ Thus emphasis on Western solidarity and totality is replaced by focused attention on the potentially unstable dialectic and ideological play generating such formative cultural oppositions. Again the shift is from the terms of the binary to the tensions that structure it. As will become apparent, the investigation of Prester John's function in fashioning twelfth-century identity, in terms of both “Christian solidarity” and “a play of projections” or differences, necessarily calls into question the imperviousness of the frontiers delimiting that identity.

It appears that the boundaries separating Latin Europe from its others were always meant to be crossed, reflected across. Christianity's sustained missionary impulse, gaining great momentum in the thirteenth century, led one historian to label that period “the century of reason and hope,”⁶⁰ an era of the philosophical contemplation of cultural otherness and of theological optimism in the unity of differences. Occupying the center stage in this so-called period of “reason and hope” was the cultural culmination of a long literary tradition of Byzantine and Spanish anti-Muslim polemics in dialogue form⁶¹—the famous debate of William of Rubroek with the Buddhists and Muslims at Karakorum, May 30, 1254. Translation across cultural divides, however, was already the optimistic concern of Peter the Venerable, who expressed his wish in the *prologus* to the *Liber contra sectam* that his book be translated into Arabic, “just as the abominable error could come across [*transmigrare*] to the knowledge of the Latins.” “The Latin work,” he continues, “when translated into that strange language, may possibly profit some others whom the Lord will wish to acquire life by the grace of God.”⁶² Naturally the historical forces bringing together and encouraging or requiring exchange between Latins and their others were not limited to the desire for conversion. Other arenas of cultural exchange and translation included commerce; fields of learning such as astronomy, philosophy, and medicine; literature and literary forms; and court culture.⁶³

To this extent, crossing the boundaries between cultures meant necessarily identifying with others, acknowledging, in the very process of cultural growth and community formation, the degree to which the other is constituent of the self-same. Here different psychoanalytically charged accounts of self-other relations might usefully be aligned, distilled to reveal an essential feature of the ideological image of otherness—namely, that, in the creation of

Secularism
Christianity
Muslims

the self, the other is unavoidable.⁶⁴ In the Lacanian view, for example, the subject depends upon identifying itself with some *other* in order to guarantee its place in the symbolic network. This is because, as Slavoj Žižek writes,

Lacan likened the subject of psychoanalysis to [a pure, nonsubstantial subjectivity], to the great surprise of those used to the "psychoanalytic image of man" as a wealth of "irrational drives"; he denotes the subject by a crossed-out S, indicating thereby a constitutive lack of any support that would offer the subject a positive, substantial identity. It is because of this lack of identity, that the concept of *identification* plays such a crucial role in psychoanalytic theory: the subject attempts to fill out its constitutive lack by means of identification.⁶⁵

As Žižek implies, construing meaning and identity in terms of identificatory relations need not depend upon Freudian notions of the centrality of unconscious impulses in the makeup and recognition of the self. Thus the scope of the idea of Latin Europe's identification with and reaction against its others in the Middle Ages enables readings that can focus simultaneously upon imaginary (instinct or drive-related) and symbolic (linguistic) phenomena. Indeed, the most suggestive readings of difference and "positional meanings"⁶⁶ in medieval culture are those that analyze communities of discourse, or *épistèmes*,⁶⁷ which comprise the *history of thought* configuring alterity, in terms that relate individual psychic disposition to cultural attitude.

Or, in the Foucauldian sense, the *history of unthought* configuring alterity. For Foucault, histories of alterity reveal how the other, "at once interior and foreign," has been unthought, "shut away (in order to reduce its otherness)."⁶⁸ In the process of being marginalized and inscribed by ideologically hegemonic discourses, the other relinquishes its *own* voice, its own narrative agency, to become a reflection on structures of power and their formation and, most tellingly, on the subject(s) at the center. Though "shut away," the other is absolutely integral to the self-same, a necessary parable (Gr. *parabole*, juxtaposition, comparison, from *paraballein*, to set beside) of the self:

Man has not been able to describe himself as a configuration of the *épistème* without thought at the same time discovering, both in itself and outside itself, at its borders yet also in its very warp and woof, an element of darkness, an apparently inert density in which it is embedded, an unthought which it contains entirely, yet in which it is also caught. The unthought (whatever name we give it) is not lodged in man like a shrivelled-up nature or a stratified history; it is, in relation to man, the Other: the Other that is not only a brother, but a twin, born, not of man, nor in man, but beside him and at the same time, in an identical newness, in an unavoidable duality.⁶⁹

This proximate duality of other and self underwrites the most basic notions of identification and community in the Middle Ages. In the following two historical and literary examples, processes of identification vis-à-vis the Muslim other, specifically Frederick II's cultivation of Muslim civilization in Sicily and Richard I's fashioning of a national identity as related in the Middle English crusade poem *Richard Coeur de Lyon*, work to reveal the "play of projections, doublings, idealizations, and rejections" informing the "unavoidable duality" of the unthought.

Community and Contact Zone

The history of the idea of Christian Europe in the Middle Ages depends upon specifying the ways that community was then imagined.⁷⁰ For community, as Benedict Anderson puts it, is intrinsically an "imagined" entity: "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion." Communities, he continues, are distinguished above all "by the style in which they are imagined."⁷¹ In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the images of Christian community (*societas Christiana*) most accessible to us resided with the learned clerics who were concerned with theorizing the limits and durability of Christian ideals of reform and crusade. The creation and ascendancy of papal supremacy, fostered by the Gregorian reform under the leadership of Hugh of Cluny (1024–1109) and Pope Leo IX (1049–54), and the investiture conflict (finally resolved in 1122), coincided with the early stages of the *Reconquista* of the Mediterranean world. The notion of Christendom was thus an outgrowth of combined monastic, papal, and canonical movements, all of which were steered by scholastic intellectuals. Humbert of Romans, for instance, felt acutely the threat of Islam to the proper guidance of Christendom in the hands of the clerics: "Although the abandonment of Christendom to the Muslims must greatly touch all Christians, it touches the clerical and priestly estate more, for it is they who see more clearly . . . because of their greater gift of intellect; and it concerns them more, because of the responsibility they have for Christendom."⁷² Thus the style in which Christendom imagined its "anti-Saracen identity"⁷³ was the function of intense intellectualism and scholastic polemic. Christendom was in a sense imagined from the center outward, from its religious and intellectual core out to less sharply defined zones where the crusades actually brought Christians in contact with their cultural others.

The center of Christendom—described by Guibert of Nogent as a central "fountain" from which flows the source of Christian preaching—and the movement of history guaranteeing the steady flow and advance of

sacred word are images in which discourse and power are inextricably linked. The very discourses—preaching, polemic, history, cartography, marvels of the East, and so on—through which Christendom articulated itself tended not only to spatialize the alterities they delimited but to inscribe these alterities within “a model by which monologic discourse or logocentric rhetoric could be transformed into an assertion of political power justified by sacred authority.”⁷⁴ In other words, the style by which Christendom imagined itself was discursive not only in the limited sense that it was imaginable largely through discourses on the other, but in the deeper sense that it formulated an opposition between sacred word, dependent upon “the non-arbitrariness of the sign,”⁷⁵ and alien word, founded upon monstrosity. This opposition, as Stephen Nichols has demonstrated in his reading of Gerald of Wales’s *Itinerarium Kambriae* and Villehardouin’s *La conquête de Costentinoble*, became a pretext for crusade and reconquest, Christian attempts to ensure the inviolability of sacred language and the *societas* such “truth language” supports.⁷⁶

The utopian drive clearly underwriting this “style of imagining” the *societas Christiana* posits a harmonious and monologic social world in which language functions as a device for linking the members of that world. Matters of admission to membership and of converting others for the purpose of admission to membership are grounded within the notion of a privileged, legitimate script and language. In her work on “linguistic utopias,” Mary Louise Pratt has shown how the ways a community like Latin Christendom gets imagined are precisely reflected in modern constructions of linguistics’s object of study, the speech community.⁷⁷ Speech communities, like Anderson’s “imagined communities,” are intensely utopian in the sense that they postulate a unified, authorized discourse that obscures “the extent to which dominant and dominated groups are not comprehensible apart from each other, to which their speech practices are organised to enact their difference and their hierarchy.”⁷⁸ In other words, concepts of nation-community and speech community are always challenged from within by the operation of language across multiple lines of cultural difference. For Pratt a “linguistics of contact” would study “modes and zones of contact between dominant and dominated groups, between persons of different and multiple identities, speakers of different languages” and focus “on how such speakers constitute each other relationally and in difference, how they enact differences in language.”⁷⁹ Pratt’s deconstruction of ideal or utopian speech communities reveals how such communities are imagined from the center outward, how they depend only upon the uniformity of the center for their definition and suppress the role of the frontier, which is often dismissed as devoid of structure, and as monstrous chaotic.

The term *contact zone* suggests, then, the *intrinsic hybridity* of the frontier and foregrounds in any historicized approach to writing on alterity the interactive dimensions of encountering otherness. It focuses attention on the boundary itself as a zone wherein dialectic relations of self and other must be grasped in terms of “copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practises.”⁸⁰ Interaction in the contact zone is thus always charged with ambivalence—oscillation or hesitation between extremes of attraction and repulsion, of mastery and anxiety. Perhaps nowhere is this style of imagining community and its others more clearly manifested than in the Sicilian court of Frederick II Hohenstaufen (1215–50).

After the Norman conquest of Sicily, which had been under Arab cultural domination from 902 to 1091, the rule of Frederick II, the second of the “two baptized Sultans of Sicily,”⁸¹ fostered the interaction of Arab, Greek, Jewish, and Latin culture. After his return to Sicily from Germany in 1220 and following his imperial coronation, Frederick occupied himself with fashioning Sicily as a “mirror,” reflecting the image of the future empire, the “envy of princes and standard of kings”: “Ut sit admirantibus omnibus similitudinis speculum, invidia principum, et norma regnorum.”⁸² Frederick’s court was the focal point of this mirror, the site of renewed intellectual and political activity built upon the cultural foundation of the emperor’s Norman predecessors.⁸³

However, the cultural rehabilitation of Sicily was only a reflection of Frederick’s larger ambitions, goals that ultimately transcended national kingship—reclaiming the rights of the Roman Empire and restoring its absolute temporal authority and majesty. In Frederick’s nostalgic dream his intellectual and political aims often held an antagonistic relation to one another. His special position on the frontier, in the contact zone of Roman, Visigothic, Byzantine, and Arab civilization, afforded him the opportunity to absorb, for example, the fruits of Arab learning and diplomacy or Byzantine aesthetics, but it also demanded from him constant vigilance to preserve the separateness upon which his colonial domination was premised. In the service of the empire, Saracens functioned as government officials, but as heretics, threatening more as disrupters of the state than as offenders of the faith, they were persecuted by Frederick and driven from the mountainous regions of Sicily and transplanted to Lucera on the mainland. Reliance of the Hohenstaufen court on Arab and Jewish scholars in its intellectual pursuits—such as the translation of philosophical works contributing to the extraordinary rise and impact of Averroës’s interpretation of Aristotle⁸⁴ or Frederick’s ongoing correspondence with Arab thinkers in places like Egypt, Iraq, Yemen, and Spain—is perhaps more well known than the limits of the emperor’s tolerance.⁸⁵ As law giver, Frederick displayed certain anxieties over the integrity of Christian Empire and the island that

was proclaimed its "mirror." In his assizes of 1221 at Messina, for instance, he enacted harsh penalties against Jews who failed to distinguish themselves by either wearing a blue-gray linen garment or growing a beard. Violators suffered property confiscation or branding on the forehead.⁸⁶ Frederick maintained, then, a hesitant relation to the cultural others who both fostered and threatened his imperial, intellectual projects. In the contact zone, subjects previously separated by historical and geographical disjunctures are structured along a continuum, a range of responses to otherness revealing the complex yet unavoidable interplay of what Foucault called "unthought."

This hesitance explains in part the divergent opinions held by modern historians toward Frederick and his Sicilian enterprises. For while some extol the "mental catholicity of the Hohenstaufen court" and its "freedom of spirit unfettered by scholastic philosophy and church dogma,"⁸⁷ others, placing the court firmly in its historical context, see it as merely "a pale shadow of the opulent Norman court, and a less grandiose affair than under his Angevin successors," an intellectual center culturally dependent upon and eclipsed by the one at Toledo.⁸⁸ This tension between admiration and harsh realism, between elevation and humiliation, is also reflected in the polarized thirteenth-century responses to Frederick's Sicilian activities.⁸⁹ His long-standing and bitter conflict with the papacy over the sovereign rights of *imperium* versus those of *ecclesia* culminated at the Council of Lyons in 1245 with Frederick forced to defend himself against charges of heresy based largely on his reputed intimacy with Muslim and Jewish scholars.⁹⁰ From the papal point of view, Sicily was nothing less than an infidel colony, a dangerous outpost subject to alien influences. Innocent IV complained that Frederick had led Saracen rebels in a "rape and pillage" spree through southern Italy⁹¹ and that he was building "a large and strongly fortified city in Christendom, peopling it with Saracens, retaining their customs and superstitions, and rejecting all Christian counsel and religion."⁹²

To these charges, not uncommon throughout Frederick's reign, contemporary chroniclers, especially the notoriously irresponsible Salimbene (ca. 1221–89), added tales of atrocity perpetrated in the name of scientific experimentation. Among many such tales is one in which the emperor ordered two men to be disemboweled, after one had slept and the other strenuously exercised, in order to determine how their digestive systems had been affected by the contrasting activities. Salimbene also tells the story of how Frederick, in order to discover what language humans would naturally speak if raised in total isolation and deprived of hearing spoken words, had infants raised by foster mothers who were only to care for them but not to speak to them. Frederick's desire "to know whether or not they would speak Hebrew, which is the original language, or Greek, Latin, or Arabic, or the language of the parents from whom they were born" went unsatisfied

because, as Salimbene relates, the infants "all died."⁹³ Such hostile propaganda distorts Frederick's genuine scientific interests and the intellectual spirit at his court. What are admirable or praiseworthy in general—his yearning for and contributions to knowledge—are turned into an exemplum of overreaching desire and monstrous cruelty. His identification with Arabic scientific impulses becomes an emblem of his otherness. At work here are some of the same anxieties attending Muslim violations of the Christian *corpus* we saw displayed in Guibert of Nogent's crusade propaganda.

In the contact zone, myth and political reality are interwoven.⁹⁴ Frederick, acclaimed both "stupor mundi" and Antichrist by his contemporaries, became a symbol of the transgressions and border crossings that take place at the frontier, thus a threat whose novelty and provocativeness had to be contained, stilled. Frederick's court became therefore a local ideological extension of the Orient, which always "vacillates between the West's contempt for what is familiar and its delight in—or fear of—novelty."⁹⁵ Those delighting in the emperor's originality and efforts to transcend the familiar included one of the most innovative thinkers of the thirteenth century, Michael Scot (d. 1236), who is credited by Roger Bacon with introducing Arabic Aristotelian philosophy to the West. Scot exclaimed, "O fortunate Emperor, truly I believe if ever a man who, by virtue of knowledge, could transcend death itself that you would be that one!"⁹⁶ The itinerant poet Henry of Avranches lavishly praised the emperor's endless pursuit of the secrets of knowledge, comparing him to Greek and Roman luminaries.⁹⁷ And, overcoming their amazement, the Muslim sources consistently praised Frederick's tolerance and understanding of Islamic culture, often defending him against papal accusations and admiring his ability to analyze the faults of his coreligionists.⁹⁸

While political interests clearly underwrite both admiration and condemnation of Frederick, the two views nevertheless dramatize the ideological complexity of the frontier. Frederick's own attitudes toward his precarious position on the border and toward the others he must manage display some of the same tensions as do the conflicting opinions among modern and among thirteenth-century commentators. These tensions amount to an ambivalence that recalls the fundamental self-other relation structuring identification and identity. The other—that irrecusable twin—is absolutely essential to the self, but is finally under neither the self's physical nor mental control. Looking at the other, as in a mirror, brings before us the ambivalence of any relation to alterity: "As a consequence of the irreducible distance which separates the subject from its ideal reflection, it entertains a profoundly ambivalent relation to the reflection. It loves the coherent identity which the mirror provides. However, because the image is external to it, it also hates that image."⁹⁹ In this context, Frederick's designation of

Sicily as a mirror of empire exceeds its political meaning to suggest something of the dialectic mechanics of imaginative geography.

Like neutral space, the contact zone is full of the tensions, interplays, and vacillations inherent in confrontations of self and other. But unlike neutral space, the contact zone offers no temporary fictive solution to the contradictions it contains. Frederick's Sicily can be read, then, as caught within an oscillating rhythm of familiarity and estrangement, of exclusion and fascination—neither one nor the other, neither here nor there. That the oscillations cannot be imaginatively overcome so long as Frederick's "mirror" continues to return the gaze of its onlookers is strikingly dramatized in the many legends circulating after his demise, which connected the emperor with Prester John.¹⁰⁰ Tales of Prester John's emissaries bringing to the Hohenstaufen court rare and magical gifts such as an asbestos garment, a potion of youth, a ring of invisibility, and the philosopher's stone culminated in two separate legends that placed Frederick in Prester John's kingdom after his disappearance from the living world. One explained the absence of the king by claiming that he vanished in the Orient in order to retire to the realm of Prester John. The other, a later legend (ca. 1400), said that Frederick while on a hunting expedition activated Prester John's magical ring and disappeared forever. These are legends whose popularity depended upon the emperor's absence, upon efforts to compensate for the loss or decline that he came to represent. On an ideological level, they reveal, like all myths, the active fashioning of a solution to the social and historical tensions radiating through society. They point to Prester John's place in medieval imaginative geography as a neutral space capable of resolving even the extreme tensions of the contact zone.

Unavoidable Dualities: Appetite and Enjoyment in *Richard Coer de Lyon*

Acre is the chief of the Frank cities of Syria, the great port of the sea, and the great anchorage for their ships, being second only to Constantinople. It is the meeting place of Muslim and Christian merchants of all lands. The place is full of pigs and of crosses.

—from the diary of the Spanish traveler Ibn Jubair, who visited the city of Acre in 1185, two years before it was recaptured by Saladin

At another meeting place, at the intersection of related historical, cultural phenomena—crusade histories, pictorial representations of Western Europe's others, the Middle English metrical romance of the Third Crusade and its hero, Richard Lion-Heart—violent binarisms compete with one another to circumscribe the contact zone: self/other, attraction/repulsion, fetish/phobia, enjoyment/displeasure. For the purpose of focusing a discussion of these

interanimating binarisms, and to speculate about national fantasies and unnatural unions, I take as their center and point of departure the early fourteenth-century *Richard Coer de Lyon*.¹⁰¹

Surviving in eight manuscripts, this intensely nationalistic 7200-line poem traces the exploits of Richard I (1157–99) by playing the interwoven motives for crusading against one another. The obvious materialistic and religious motives for crusading pale in comparison to what we might label the mythic. That is, the popularity of this poem—there are in addition to the manuscripts three sixteenth-century printings (Wynkyn de Worde's [1509 and 1528] and Thomas Purfoot's [1568])—owes to its intractable nationalism, to its understanding of the construction of a definitively English myth, a fiction or fictioning, to cite Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy again, "whose role is to propose, if not impose, models or types. . . by means of which an individual, or a city, or an entire people, can take possession of itself and identify with itself."¹⁰²

The answer to Goethe's famous question "What unites men?" has, I believe, to do with the process of "fictioning," a set of acts, not necessarily discursive, whose purpose is to hold together a community in the face of forces that would disrupt it: nomadism, piracy, polygamy, sodomy, heresy, usury, leprosy, epilepsy, magic, witchcraft, and so on. The central fantasy driving nationalism is, at first look, the one that imputes to the external other all those nasty, unnatural elements possessed at home. The fashionable term for this—othering—describes a not very complex process of projection onto the other of unwanted or unrecognized qualities and attributes, so as to construct the other. The difference of the other is emphasized in order to reinforce an imagined notion of sameness, where identity depends upon a relation to difference. But if we define ourselves against the other, we also define ourselves by internalizing the other. There can be no such thing as radical otherness; however, the fantasy of myth keeps alive the thought that there is such a thing as radical alterity.

Furthermore, what appears as a sign of remote monstrosity—the wildness without—usually functions as a displacement of the wildness within. This blurring of the distinction between internal and external, the division upon which identity is predicated, is manifest at those moments in the crusade histories when Christians are discovered, with shock and revulsion, to share with Saracens many of their most monstrous traits. In their *historiae* of the First Crusade, for example, Fulcher of Chartres and Raymond d'Aguilers describe, in terms as horror-filled as those reserved for Saracen atrocities, the opening up of graves and the burning and disemboweling of Saracens by crusaders greedy for loot.¹⁰³ Fulcher and Raymond, along with other historians, also document the horrors of Christian cannibalism, a sign of beastliness universally imputed to the Saracen other.¹⁰⁴

Images of cannibalism, disinterment, corporal mutilation circulate here as displacements of an interior radical alterity that is consistently disavowed. Moreover, these images function as signs of Christian monstrosity prior to their explanation or justification—that is, to being explicable by greed, hunger, poetic justice, retaliation, or propaganda. The image monstrosity generates is one of the abject having become proximate. The despised monster crosses over the border of subjectivity because discursive practice refuses to name it as utterly different.

Guibert of Nogent, in his history of the First Crusade, describes a group of peasants in the crusading army called Tafurs, who, unarmed, naked, and hungry, stage a bizarre propagandistic event:

When at Ma'arra—and wherever else—scraps of flesh from the pagans' bodies were discovered; when starvation forced our soldiers to the deed of cannibalism (which is known to have been carried out by the Franks only in secret and as rarely as possible), a hideous rumor spread among the infidel: that there were men in the Frankish army who fed very greedily on the bodies of Saracens. When they heard this the Tafurs, in order to impress the enemy, roasted the bruised body of a Turk over a fire as if it were meat for eating, in full view of the Turkish forces.

To this Raymond d'Aguilers adds: "The Saracens and Turks reacted thus: 'This stubborn and merciless race, unmoved by hunger, sword, or other perils for one year at Antioch, now feasts on human flesh; therefore we ask, Who can resist them?'"¹⁰⁵ Cannibalism circulates here as both a real event—the Franks really eat human flesh (though rarely and in secret)—and a staged event, a Western national fantasy projecting onto the other elements of the same. Representing the other is preeminently a process of self-fashioning, or self-representation. This helps explain why Guibert's and Raymond's cannibalism narratives are not isolated ones: the *Gesta Francorum*, the chronicle of Ademar of Chabannes, the *Chanson d'Antioche*, and *Richard Coeur de Lyon* come to mind.

But in order to rethink the most elementary notions about medieval national identification and fantasy, we must push our reading further. Here, Slavoj Žižek's psychoanalytic account of nationalism and racism can be of help. He shows that what is at stake in relations to the other is possession of what he calls, following Lacan, "the national Thing." Structured by means of specific fantasies, this national Thing is made visible by the unique ways we organize our enjoyments. As *cosa nostra*, as "something accessible only to us, as something 'they,' the others, cannot grasp, but which is nonetheless menaced by them,"¹⁰⁶ it underwrites our most basic attitudes toward the unnatural, toward the other. This is because "we always impute to the 'other' an excessive enjoyment; s/he wants to steal our enjoyment (by ruining our

way of life) and/or has access to some secret, perverse enjoyment. In short, what really bothers us about the 'other' is the peculiar way it organizes its enjoyment."¹⁰⁷ An illustration in Paris's *Chronica maiora* of Tartars and their anxiously anticipated meal of roast boy disturbs, with its depiction of excessive enjoyment and rapacity, the very causes of the cannibalism and the vague homosexual threat figured there.¹⁰⁸

If enjoyment is materialized in specific practices and identity is dependent upon organizing that enjoyment, then for the Christians it is the unmo-
lestled pilgrimage to the Holy Land as both place and symbol—Christ's Cross—that represents what has been stolen by the Saracens. Richard's "hongyr hard" (1339) to launch an expedition "to hethynesse, withouten ffayle, ffor goddes love to geve batayle" (1623–24) is contextualized in the poem by a long nostalgic description of the time when pilgrims could travel freely to enjoy the Holy Land. Richard's activities in the Holy Land constitute attempts to define the English Thing. From the moment he cleaves in two the defensive chain stretched across the harbor of Acre, Richard actively fashions a national myth. His actions at Acre stand in contrast to the two encounters of note, both defensive positionalities, on his way to the Holy Land: Richard defended himself against the treacheries of the French at Messina and against the murderous designs of the Greeks on Cyprus. It is significant that prior to his first battle in the Holy Land, Richard stages, or fictions, the English Thing, just as the Tafurs and the Franks had at Ma'arra.

Before the battle at Acre began, recovering from a debilitating fever, Richard develops a violent appetite for pork, a food unavailable because of Muslim religious prohibition. His resourceful cook substitutes for the "other white meat" a "Sarezyn zong and fflat." Richard eats the roast Saracen faster than he can carve, and emerges "out off his maladye." Exhausted after having single-handedly forced the Saracens to retreat, Richard demands the head of the swine he had eaten earlier. The cook then reveals the head of the Saracen to Richard:

"What deuyl is pis?" þe kyng cryde,
And gan to lauge as he were wood.
"What, is Sarezynys flesch þus good?
And neuere erst j nouzt wyste?
By Goddys deþ and hys vpryste,
Schole we neuere dye for defawte,
Whyl we may in any assawte
Slee Sarezynys, þe flesch mowe take,
Seþen, and roste hem, and doo hem bake,
Gnawen here fflesch to þe bones.
Now j haue it prouyd ones,

Ffor hungyr ar j be woo,
J and my ffolk schole eete moo!" (3214–26)

The enjoyment of roast Saracen and the appetite for more of it are not simply reducible to metaphors for Richard's desire to wipe out the Saracen swine in his project to secure English enjoyment of the Holy Land. Nor is enjoying roast Saracen a parodic inversion of the Muslim pork taboo. Rather, there is "something more" (Žižek) here, a meaningful surplus *present* in these desires, that *appears* through them. This "something more" is the foundation of a community and the notion of enjoyment as communifying process.

A subject, it seems, fully exists only through enjoyment. To a group of Saracen ambassadors who are being entertained as parties to a peace negotiation, Richard displays his anthropophagy and enjoins them to dig right in:

þe knyzt þat scholde þe kyng serue
Wiþ a scharp knyff þe hed gan kerue.
Kyng Richard eet wiþ herte good,
þe Sarezynes wenden he hadde be wood.
Euery man sat styll, and pokyd opir,
þey sayden: "þis is þe deuelys broþir,
þat sles oure men and þus hem eetes!"
Kyng Richard þoo nouzt forgetes;
Abouten hym gan loke ful 3erne,
Wiþ wraþ semblaunt, and eyen sterne.
þe messangers þo he bad:
"Ffor my loue bes alle glad,
And lokes 3e nouzt off 3oure mese,
And eetes ffaste as j doo?
Tel me why 3e louren soo?" (3479–94)

Ffrendes, beth nouzt squoumous,
þis is þe maner off myn hous,
To be seruyd ferst, God it woot,
Wiþ Sarezynys hedes al hoot:
But 3oure maner j ne knewe! (3509–13)

The ultimate coincidence of existence and enjoyment depends upon the Saracens believing in the English Thing: that the English exist only to eat Saracens. Before their departure, the ambassadors are instructed by Richard to deliver this message to Saladin:

Say hym, it schal hym nouzt avayle,
þou3 he forbarre our vytayle,

Fflesch and ffysch, samoun and cungir,
We schal neuer dye ffor hungyr,
Whyl that we may wenden to ffyzt,
And slee þe Sarezynes dounryzt,
Wassche þe fflesch, and roste þe hede;
Wiþ oo Sarezyn i may wel ffede
Wel a nyn, or a ten
Off my goode Crystene-men.
Kyng R. sayd, j you waraunt,
þer is no flessch so noryschaunt
Vnto an Ynglyssche Cristen-man.
Partryck, plouer, heroun, ne swan,
Cow ne oxe, scheep ne swyn,
As is þe fflesch of a Sarezyn:
þere he is ffat, and þerto tendre,
And my men are lene and sclendre.
Whyl any Sarezyn quyk bee
Lyuande now in þis cuntree,
Ffor mete wole we noþyng care:
Aboute ffaste we schole ffare
And every day we schole eete
Al so manye as we may gete.
Into Yngelond wol we nouzt gon,
Tyl thay be eeten everylkon. (3537–62)

The horrified ambassadors faithfully report Richard's message to Saladin. The national thing, the enjoyment of anthropophagy, exists as long as the Saracens and Richard believe in it; it is literally the effect of this belief. Here lies the paradox: the normal order of causality is inverted because the unnatural desire for human flesh, the Cause, is itself produced by its effects, the practices it animates: serving the heads of Saracen prisoners with their name on the forehead to the shocked ambassadors, carving into a head and eating "wiþ herte good" (3481).

But of course one of the aspects of Western Christianity considered most distinctive to it as a theological belief and practice is the incorporation of flesh and blood in the form of the Eucharist. Only the word *form* fails to capture the full sense of the dogma of transubstantiation as initiated in 831 by Paschasius Radbertus. His doctrine asserts the real physical presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, claiming that the bread and wine of the sacrament are the actual flesh and blood of the Savior. This anti-Augustinian doctrine was affirmed by the fourth Lateran Council in 1215. Indeed, the belief structure governing the literality of the Eucharist is the same as that governing profane anthropophagy. The Eucharist *is* the community of

believers in which Christ lives after his death; to believe in him is to believe in belief itself, to believe that one is not alone, a member of a fellowship of believers. In other words, no external proof is needed, no confirmation of the truth of one's belief. The mere act of believing in another's belief is enough to affirm the existence and presence of the Savior.¹⁰⁹ Or, borrowing Žižek's formulation, "the whole meaning of the Thing consists in the fact that it 'means something' to people."¹¹⁰

The link between the Eucharist and Saracen flesh is not wholly gratuitous: at the root of such fantasies of incorporation lies the hatred of one's own enjoyment. The other's enjoyment can never really be hated, because the only enjoyment is one's own. Just as the Saracen functions for the Western theologian as both scourge of transgressive desire and figure for the same, as punishment for sin and monstrous incarnation of sin, the Eucharist embodies both enjoyment and nonenjoyment, the recognition of pleasure and its disavowal. Called "the kernel of western civilization" by Franz Borkenau—or in our terms the western Thing—the Eucharist symbolizes "the total acceptance of saving self-punishment."¹¹¹ Against this incorporation of the divine is directed the strictest prohibition: the Eucharist cannot be touched with the teeth. The prohibition would be pointless if it were not directed against an underlying instinct.

So at the root of enjoyment is asceticism, an imperative of renunciation. This tautological notion translates to another paradox: in the repression of enjoyment, the very enjoyment returns in the real figure of the Saracen who enjoys by repressing his appetite. This takes us close to the full meaning of Richard's appetite for and enjoyment of Saracen as pork. The Middle English poem, as do the literatures of anti-Muslim polemic, makes much of the Muslim prohibition against the consumption of pork. That which is taboo must be desired, so the logic goes, and, as figures of desire, swine and the attitudes toward them are symbolic of the way Saracens organize their desire. There is a striking passage in Ambrose's verse chronicle of Richard's Crusade, the *Estoire de la guerre sainte*, in which he describes the city of Jaffa as wall to wall with an infinity of pigs that are slaughtered by the Saracens immediately upon the city's capture.

It is a well known verity
That they eat no the flesh of swine,
And therefore kill them by design
More than aught else on earth they hate
Them, just as they abominate
The Christian faith. They mingled then
The corpses of the swine and men.
But Christian folk, who were devout

To serve God, took the bodies out,
Buried the Christians found among
The heap, and then outside they flung
Saracens killed on Saturday.¹¹²

Christians and Saracens possess different attitudes toward burial practices and toward swine, but both acknowledge the power of swine as symbols of humiliation and the theft of enjoyment. It is as if pigs are symbolically central to Muslim practices of enjoyment: the temptation they represent must be eradicated in their mass slaughter.

We are now finally ready to characterize the logic of the theft of enjoyment, what has always been at stake in the fictioning of a national myth and the organization of natural and unnatural practises. Writes Žižek: "Every nationality has built its own mythology narrating how other nations deprive it of the vital part of enjoyment, the possession of which would allow it to live fully. If we read all these mythologies together, we obtain Escher's well-known visual paradox of a network of basins where, following the principle of *perpetuum mobile*, water pours from one basin into another until the circle is closed, so that by moving the whole way downstream we find ourselves back at our starting point."¹¹³ Of course, one should add to the concatenation of mythologies I have tried to identify, the well-attested story of Mohammed's end and simultaneous return to origin: the story of him eaten by swine.¹¹⁴ A manuscript illustration of Mohammed holding two scrolls while standing on top of a red sow, the emblem of carnality, announces: "Be a polygamist for it is written increase and be multiplied. You should delight in the present, do not hope for the future" (CCC, Cambridge MS 26, fol. 87).

Escher's paradox makes concrete the structure of anthropophagic fantasy as national myth by collapsing the relation to an other into the relation to the same. The demonization of "unnatural" practices—homosexuality, incest, and cannibalism—is undergirded by a general fear of consorting with the same. What gets literalized by Richard is an internalization of the other that was never external in the first place. Anthropophagic fantasies are fundamentally about communifying, forging an unavoidable union with an other, (re)enforcing a relation of duality to the same. While it is clear that Christians belong to a community different from and antagonistic to that of Saracens, the boundaries separating these different communities are anything but clear.

Excursus: History and Anthropology

Historical discourse makes a social identity explicit, not so much in the way it is "given" or held as stable, as in the ways it is differentiated from a former period or another society.

—Michel de Certeau¹¹⁵

The more we come to know of history, the more it reveals itself to be symbolic, as the discrete events, artifacts, and personages tend to lose something of their individualities and to become increasingly representative.

—Frederick Turner¹¹⁶

History, like anthropology, presupposes otherness—a temporal, cultural, or spatial break with some past tradition or *épistème* that turns it into an object for analysis. The objects of historical and anthropological analysis come to signify as do myths, which allow our society to tell its own story vis-à-vis (hi)stories of the other.¹¹⁷ Just as the past forces us to think reflexively about the present, otherness makes us think about selfhood and its possible forms. As the central project of history and anthropology, knowledge of the other, then, depends upon the full recovery of cultural and historical conditions for the production of alterity. This project traces a basic movement, as Johannes Fabian likes to put it, from there to here, from then to now.¹¹⁸ Thus history and anthropology might be said to collapse into heterology, into investigations of the differences, projections, doubleness, and ambivalences attending past and present constructions of otherness. Heterology encompasses, then, an archaeology of historically conditioned “systems of the transgressive,” fields of possible transgression, as Foucault describes them, that “coincide neither with the illegal nor the criminal, neither with the revolutionary, the monstrous nor the abnormal, not even with the sum total of all of these deviant forms; but each of these terms designates at least an angle.”¹¹⁹

More than a few modern historians have been greatly troubled by what they term Western medieval *ignorance* of others, a lack of awareness of cultural differences and the spaces of possible transgression. For these historians, recovering the conditions that allowed documents to be understood, read, or composed is hampered by the wide gulf that separates medievals’ bald indifference or the “backwardness of [their] ethnological thought” from our more enlightened interest in cultural otherness.¹²⁰ Modern historians’ disappointment at finding a twelfth century essentially “ignorant” of its others issues from their desire to recover the real lived experience of twelfth-century theologians and historians, to restore real-world “effects” and facts. Yet, to specify, for example, what Latin churchmen did or did not know about Muslims or Nestorians too often elides the operations and economies of social meaning and production that serve to shape the contexts for the documents we study. Therefore, shifting the emphasis, as Said has, from questioning how specific discourses of alterity have *erased* the real other to how these discourses have *displaced* the other allows us to investigate the ideological workings of any confrontation with what resists or limits the thinkable.¹²¹ In my reading of documents of alterity

and their place in the medieval imaginary my ultimate goal is to historicize the limits of the thinkable, while reconstructing, even resurrecting, the historical experience of limits. For Prester John’s place—the place of the utopic—at the origins *and* boundaries of the thinkable affords us the opportunity to construct a model of how otherness became the crucial myth by which Latin Europe organized and conceived of itself.

PART TWO

THE SPACE OF ALTERITY

CHAPTER 3

MEDIEVAL DESERT UTOPIAS

On the Border with Prester John: Desert Ideas

Compared with even the simplest manifestations of spontaneous life within the teeming environment of nature, every utopia is, almost by definition, a sterile desert, unfit for human occupation.

—Lewis Mumford¹

“Dante Alighieri, it always seemed to me,” wrote Captain John G. Bourke in 1891, “made the mistake of his life in dying when he did in the picturesque capital of the Exarchate five hundred and fifty years ago. Had he held on to his mortal coil until after Uncle Sam had perfected the ‘Gadsden Purchase,’ he would have found full scope for his genius in the description of a region in which not only purgatory and hell, but heaven likewise, had combined to produce the bewildering kaleidoscope of all that was wonderful, weird, terrible, and awe-inspiring, with not a little that was beautiful and romantic.”² Bourke’s brand of frontier medievalism calls our attention to the deep imbrication of the utopian or fantasy impulse with the appreciation and appropriation of desert spaces. For it is within these spaces that the disparate can be held together so that a “bewildering kaleidoscope” of difference (at once temporal, spatial, and affective) has momentary coherence. Indeed, Bourke, serving as aid de camp to General Crook of the Third Cavalry, whose mission it was to secure the newly acquired desert Territories of Arizona and New Mexico, conceived of the wasteland as an ideal place onto which to project the ideology of Manifest Destiny, a crusading impulse that, though it entailed exterminating the Apaches, was

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justifiable in terms of the harmony such a crusade would eventually bring. The elimination of difference, driving and killing off the Amerindians, seemed fully compatible with the creation of a particular, highly aestheticized attitude toward difference, one that converts temporal and moral progression—hell, purgatory, heaven—into an instantaneous “utopic now,” a time when the unfolding struggle of contradictory elements is suspended in favor of indifference.

The following sections on Prester John's desert kingdom and its forehistory aim to trace the kinds of indifference that the medieval desert encourages through its special receptiveness to fantasmatic projections. By *indifference* should be understood cultural tolerance for ambiguity, undecidability, and in some cases, the social threats entailed in unrest. Indifference, then, is conceived in relation to the activities of fantasy production and social desire rather than to intellectual apathy or emotional neutrality. A critical engagement with desires themselves leads us to consider their setting, the space in which fantasies take place and are put into social practice. It will be my working assumption, following Jonathan Z. Smith, that “the fundamental question” we can ask of an alien or past culture concerns “the character of the place on which one stands,”³ or, better, the character of the place on which one imagines standing. Such an inquiry into the spatial component of living will reveal that a crucial strand of medieval cultural self-understanding is tied to an intense experience of the desert in fictional, religious, and historical literature. By placing Prester John's desert in the context of the historical problem of sacred and utopic space, we move well beyond the now-familiar conception of the desert as “the purified form of social desertification. . . or social enucleation,” the aesthetic shape of “the inhumanity of our ulterior, asocial, superficial world.”⁴ To escape the impasse of the logics of both social disaffection and private aesthetic fantasy, I draw attention to the ways the desert actually produces a multiplicity of desires, which, uninterrupted, flows directly into the social body through the channels of collective expression.

It seems impossible to speak critically of the desert outside of a framework of binaries. A conference on “Le désert: image et réalité” was held at Cartigny during the academic year 1982–83, whose program included a colloquium in May 1983, the proceedings of which were subsequently published.⁵ I mention this important gathering of work on the desert as one example of the modern interpretative tendency toward binarization, the bipolar analysis of the desert in terms of reality/image, passive/dynamic aspects, positive/negative features, considerations from nomadic/sedentary points of view, and so on.⁶ Such a tendency, for instance, pervades scholarship on Hebrew conceptions of the desert, especially the long-running debate regarding biblical attitudes toward the exodus and the so-called nomadic

ideal of the Reccabites (Jer. 35:6f.). By resituating Semitic attitudes toward the desert in the context of ancient Sumero-Akkadian and Egyptian attitudes, I test the desert's reputed polarities. The desert is too often approached critically along the decisive fault line of an either/or logic, directed, it would seem, at dissolving the equivocating force and variable ideological function of the desert. My reading of ancient religious and medieval literary constructions of the desert aims, instead, to mobilize an analysis of desert space that takes into account its polyvalent nature as a symbolic, and indeed social, field in which collective desires are both invested and reproduced—beyond all dualities.

A dualistic conceptualization of the desert is perhaps unsurprising, given the strong tendency of historians to mark the epistemic break between medieval and Galilean theories of spatiality as a rupture in which the latter account is said to “dissolve” the former by converting hierarchy and localization into pure extension and movement.⁷ The medieval “space of emplacement” is said to yield entirely to open and centrifugal space (and, in the postmodern period, to heterogeneous or heterotopic space⁸). Behind such an account lies the familiar dichotomy Medieval/Early Modern (or Medieval/Postmedieval), erected to defend against attempts to redialecticize medieval experiences of space themselves. Or again, any contemporary assessment of how a space like the medieval desert was once conceptualized must pass back through a decisive chronological break, a definitive dualism, which conditions, in this case, the object of study as univocal, nontranscendent, locative, centripetal, closed. In order to find anything other than a quiescent Middle Ages, it seems we must begin to suspend or bracket, for the purposes of a kind of dialectically “thick description,” the determinative effects of the historical rupture in question.

In reaching toward a thick description of spatial thinking in the Middle Ages, I wish to signal my distrust of the tendency to think history in terms of progress, the succession of synchronic homologies wherein each one replaces the one preceding it. If, as I suggest, a reality like the medieval desert has been imagined in terms that are strikingly similar to those of both antiquity and postmodernity, even so the category *desert* in all its various fantasmatic habitats is not non- or ahistorical. A critique of the desert will be achieved through polysemous deconstruction, the result of intertextual play and semantic slippage, of a dialogue across multiple writings and signifying practices, insofar as such play and slippage produce history itself—a history that is fully dialogic even though, in an important sense, continuous. Perhaps a metaphoric illustration is in order: in Plato's *Phaedrus* (253c–54e), the myth of the charioteer and his two steeds—the white horse of restraint and modesty in love and the black horse of lawlessness—reveals the necessity of dialectic for continuance insofar as one horse proves

inadequate to move the potential lover toward his goal. With only the chaotic black horse, there would be no movement at all, no boundaries, no limits to the supplicant's aggressive desire.⁹ The way in which dialectic fuels the movement of desire, keeps the engines of history revving, is, I submit, a crucial aspect of myths, which actually do the work of harnessing fluctuating energies in order to convert them into some social productivity.

Desert Contexts: The Shaping of Ancient Ideas

Maybe the desert is the pulverized beyond of the question: at the same time its disproportionate humiliation and triumph.

—Edmond Jabès¹⁰

In order to understand the dialogic relationality to the desert in history, we must look briefly at the conceptions of the wasteland among the ancients, for these conceptions tell an important story about the desert's resistance to permanent totalization. In the ancient Sumero-Akkadian, Assyro-Babylonian, Western-Semitic (Ugaritic and Hebrew), and Egyptian religions, the desert was virtually synonymous with the netherworld.¹¹ The common cultural elements of these desert religions has often been noted, due to what one author has called the "rather homogenous civilization of the whole Near East."¹² A crucial aspect of their homogeneity is tied to the centrality of fertility rites and cults (e.g., the myth of the dying and rising god). Common to the Near East, fertility rites were celebrated as "New Year festivals" connected to natural, agricultural cycles, and were performed four times a year to mark the seasons. From religious compositions and liturgical writings dated before 2000 BCE, we know that the most powerful of all annual rituals was the mid-summer liturgy associated with Tammuz, a deity linked to Marduk the sun-god. Like Marduk, Tammuz was a dying and rising god whose absence was explained by his sojourn to the netherworld. The place where Tammuz has gone was called *edin*, a Sumerian word for the steppe, abode of hostile powers. The ritual cycle runs thus: the temple of greenery (*edin*) is infiltrated by enemies from the netherworld who carry Tammuz off to the desert (*edin*). Tammuz returns from the netherworld, restored, renewed, and the lamentations over the god's death then become celebrations of his return to life. In the cycle, *edin* denotes both the green steppe and its transformed condition in the god's absence, the desert. The performance of this rite guarantees nothing less than the order of the cosmos.

That one word, *edin*, given the mythic uses to which it is put, should signify opposites is perhaps in itself unremarkable, for we recognize that the

socially transformative power of myths depends upon the reactions individuals, as a collectivity, have to ambiguated or shifting signification. Meaning provokes, excites change, precisely at that historical moment when the context in which it is to be comprehended shifts, even slightly. For the ancients, the category of the desert was unassignable to any single or coherent meaning. This is not to say that the desert therefore lacked or refused meaning; it remained, despite its inherent ambiguity, supercharged with cultural significance. Indeed, its primary function seems to be as a kind of register of social affectivity, a gauge to how a particular culture handled the anxiety and provocation of alterity. It is well known that the desert was regarded as a radically negative space, the antithesis of civilization and its symbol, the city. The ancients believed, for example, that the desert, with its adjacent steppe, was the special domain of malevolent beings, a site incessantly haunted by demons that represented everything evil, barbaric, and deadly.¹³ An inscribed prism of Sargon II (founder of the last Assyrian Empire at the end of the eighth century BCE) details how he single-handedly restored the region of Babylon to civilized order by converting a trackless expanse of desert "woven [over with] spiders' webs," choked with jungle plant life, and terrorized by wild beasts, treacherous nomads, and malicious demons into a plain of clear and systematized byways, channels and furrows.¹⁴ Sargon II's desire to reorder society is grounded in the most primordial of all spaces, a site in which fantasies of creativity and re-creation seem rather naturally to unfold: "the precincts of the former wilderness. . . I occupied [anew]."¹⁵

Sargon II's taming of the desert is a fully utopian project, one that, were it not for the blatant anachronism, we might be tempted to call romantic. At any rate, in the effort to transform creatively the unfruitful energies of chaos and the will to nothingness into a reaffirmation of the will to power, such a project bears an interesting resemblance to a more recent utopic enterprise—the Paris student revolution of May 1968. Among the many slogans and graffiti, one stands out in its function as a utopian rallying cry: "BENEATH THE PAVEMENT, THE BEACH." What the students sought was a way of transgressing the bounds of the ordinary, to cross the frontier between reality and utopic futurity, in order to encounter what Deleuze in 1969 calls "pure becoming without measure," or what Foucault, in his tribute to Deleuze's work in 1970, glosses as "monstrous and lawless becoming."¹⁶ At a moment of crisis or revolution, the beach, like the desert, functions in the social imaginary as a symbol of the radical contingency that lies seething just below the surface of social order and hierarchy. Whether what is at stake is the liberating of the lawless desert through the undoing of social order, or the reverse, the disciplining of the desert through the establishment of culture, the earth in its primordality seems to be the

privileged example of a state of becoming, a condition of possibility for cultural renovation.

The desert understood in its primary historical significance—as the negative locus of disruption, terror, and chaos—holds the clue to its more profound, dynamic function in the imaginary of the ancients. Babylonian royal inscriptions reflect the desert as an exotic space outside the law of man, and thus in perpetual need of resuscitation and recuperation. However, because the border between culture and chaos could never be demarcated with certainty,¹⁷ the desert was sometimes figured as a place where disruption is neutralized, through a process of absorption whereby the continual movement of the desert itself effaces the otherwise radical effects of evil.¹⁸ As a force of chaos, the desert by its very nature both fosters and extinguishes social distortion and disruption. Uncertainty thus inheres in the desert such that it seems truly “un terrain de parcours aléatoires, un paysage qui inspire dépaysement ou exotisme” [a terrain of uncertain voyages, a landscape that inspires a change of scenery or exoticism].¹⁹

In the ancient cosmologies the desert is always mobile, resisting fixation either as an idea or as a real thing, and its essentially transitory nature rendered it just as confounding as salvific. The Western-Semitic conception of the world, essentially Babylonian in its division of the universe into three parts (heaven above, earth, waters of netherworld below), is structured according to the contrast between life and death, or more precisely, between the stability of law and the unpredictability of chaos. The nemesis of the world of men is not only the desert territories (*midbar*²⁰), but also the land of death below, *sheol*. The subterranean *sheol* is the deepest place in the universe, just as heaven is the highest (see, e.g., Isa. 7:11; 57:9; Prov. 9:18), and is intimately linked, in its radical negativity, to both the desert and the ocean (*tehom*), which lies curbed under the earth's surface (Gen. 49:25; Ps. 136:6).²¹ In their mythic status as the realms of death and chaos (*tohu*), the ocean, the netherworld, and the desert are indissolubly associated, as in the apocalyptic description of the destruction of Tyre (Ezek. 26:19–21) where the city is liquidated by God into aspects of all three nonworlds. In their illimitability, desert and oceanic spaces epitomize the terror of the unknown and the unforeseeable beyond.²² The struggle against the negative forces must thus be constantly renewed in the form of rituals that recapitulate in miniature the epic battle of Yahweh against the ocean of chaos,²³ a fight sometimes described as having occurred with a dragon (*tannin*) identified as Leviathan, Rahab, or the Sea (*Yam*) (Isa. 51:9; Ps. 89:10–12). The dragon's defeat notwithstanding, the threat of his movement through the waters of chaos is ever present (Ps. 104:26), and only rites like those connected with the rain season, when subterranean springs unite with the water from heaven to form a seamless whole (symbolically to reassemble

Rahab whom Yahweh had cleaved in two²⁴), are thought to bring peace (Ps. 104:10–14; Ps. 74:13–15).²⁵ Even into the modern era, some Palestinians continued to believe that the waters of springs and rivers issue from the tumultuous subterranean *tehom*, the abode of demons and other supernatural beings.²⁶

The set of correspondences in the Semitic tradition among *tehom*, *sheol*, and *tohu* are indeed more complex than I give sense of here, but my objective is to draw out the imaginary relations that exist between the ocean, the desert, and primordial chaos—all three terms at times designated with the technical term *tohu*²⁷—as those relations begin to work on the subject's own conceptions of self and social order. In the chapters of Deutero-Isaiah, for instance, the desert holds the same place as chaos does in the popular conception of Yahweh's powers of rulership and creativity (see Isa. 40:3; 43:19; 41:18). By reigning over the desert, Yahweh assures the continuance of tranquility and prosperity. Thus the story of the deluge, wherein the cosmos is destroyed by the ocean, becomes a powerful reminder of the power of the forces of chaos, of what happens when God unleashes *tohu*. But the story is more crucially a dramatization of the essential and constitutive capacity for founding a new order of things, a utopic covenant, that comes as the result of passing *through*, and emerging on the other side of, an interspace, suspended between two opposed possibilities and animated by absolute tension and dialecticality. The Old Testament is rich in such parables of dialectical liminality: the Jonah story, where incidentally *sheol* and *tehom* appear synonymously, and the narratives of exodus and exile, stories to which I momentarily return, are obvious examples.

For Assyro-Babylonian, Semitic, and Egyptian cultures, the desert was all at once frightening, dangerous, depressing, and overwhelming—in short, “sacred in the wrong way.”²⁸ That is, sacred in a perverse sense; to be “sacred in the wrong way” represents the dynamic incorporation of opposites, by harking back to the original Latin meaning of *sacred* as given by Emile Benveniste: “august and accursed, worthy of veneration and exciting horror.”²⁹ This dialectical combination of affectivities rendered the desert an especially contestable terrain of identity formation. For Assyro-Babylonians, the desert, as we have seen, was the locus of demons and damnation, but it was also, to judge by *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, the very substance of life and creation, the land of darkness that nonetheless contains the fountain and waters of life. And while, for example, the desert signified for Egyptians the domain of death and radical disorder, the space of burial, and therefore a field to be traversed quickly, always in fear of demons, nomads, serpents, and other fantastic and terrifying animals,³⁰ it also represented the land of precious commodities (gold, silver, lapis lazuli), the province of miracles, and therefore a region “plein de secrets,”³¹ where possible destinies play

themselves out.³² The desert, it seems, did not represent an absolute end of, or antithesis to, the normal order of things, so much as a container for (in the sense of standing outside and encompassing) various cultural antagonisms: life/death, fecundity/sterility, renovation/ruin, sedentariness/mobility, wealth/scarcity, and as we see later, group formation/diaspora and covenantal salvation/evil temptation. Popular conceptions of the desert throughout the ancient world reveal these kinds of deep ambivalence about its mythic, and hence cultural, function. After a brief overview of the ideas of the desert, and their relation to the "nomadic ideal," in biblical culture, I go on to suggest why such ambivalence was not only necessary but socially useful in late antiquity and into the Middle Ages.

In Old Testament attitudes toward the desert, especially as they relate to the story of Exodus, we find their clearest articulation as a set of competing visions of man's relation to the "unsown land." Just as the biblical canon seems freighted with tension with respect to the way the desert is to be imagined, so too is the scholarly tradition concerning the biblical "desert motif." Early scholars, such as Karl Budde, who in 1895 coined the term "desert ideal," Paul Humbert (1921), and, most emphatically, John W. Flight (1923), tended to view the Old Testament desert motif in terms of an ideal of nomadic simplicity, a cultural period of special closeness to Yahweh that presaged the golden age to come.³³ More recently, this conversion of a motif or idea into an ideal has been argued strongly against by Shemaryahu Talmon and Paul Riemann, both of whom see the desert in sharply negative terms and nomadism as a form of punishment or cultural regression.³⁴ Other recent studies, notably those by George Williams and George Coats, while noting the inherently ambivalent nature of the scriptural desert, opt nevertheless for a particular view of the desert, in both cases a positive one.³⁵ One of my purposes here in quickly tracing the major critical interpretations of the Old Testament desert motif is to highlight a heuristic tendency that, through its insistent binary logic, systematically elides the possibility that the desert was imagined as at once positive and negative, or, better, as the line of transition between the two poles. The meaning of individual scriptural passages is ultimately of less importance in determining the fantasmatic contours of the desert than the meaning effect the passages create as an amalgam.

Taken together, the Old Testament passages dealing with the desert reflect shifting, competing imagery and religious meanings. The examples proliferate: the desert is the locus of uncreated order, primordial chaos (Gen. 1:2; Job 26:7); of divine salvation and promise (Isa. 41:18; 35:1); of phantoms and demons (Isa. 13:21–22; 34:11–14); of intimacy with Yahweh (Hos. 2:14; Jer. 2:2–3); of abject fear, destruction, and desolation (Isa. 14:17; Zep. 2:13); of refuge and retreat (Jer. 9:1; 48:6; Ps. 55:7–8); of monstrous,

inhuman life (Job 30:3–8); of idyllic and law-abiding life (Jer. 35); of dangerous uprootedness and ruination (Isa. 38:12; Jer. 10:20; Ezek. 19:10–13; Jer. 17:6); of overdetermined itinerary and orderly settlement (Num. 33:1–49). The heterogeneity of imagery and diversity of significance are not only striking; they signify the profound resistance of the desert to univocal and sedentary meaning. The desert disarticulates any final meaning through its inexorable polyvalence, as though meaning were always *on the way toward* perfect articulation. In the desert, we might say, meanings are rarely arrived at; they are passed through.

As the space for the Jewish *transitus* from Egypt to the Promised Land, the desert calls into being possible itineraries of identity formation. While the desert can function, straightforwardly enough, as a stage toward glorious revelation, it does so, however, only as a kind of ambiguous testing ground, a space of temporary indeterminacy at the center of *rites de passage*.³⁶ This is the unavoidable middle space where one either falls into idolatry or discovers the grace of God, but a space one must occupy nevertheless before reaching the New Jerusalem and thus the end of history. Gregory of Nyssa, for example, understood the desert as an intermediate stage to be transformed by means of scriptural learning and virtuous deeds:

The [true husbandman] is he who at the beginning in Paradise cultivated human nature which the Heavenly Father planted. But the wild boar [Ps. 80:13] has ravaged our garden and spoiled the planting of God. That is why he [the husbandman] has descended a second time to transform the desert into a garden, ornamenting it by planting virtues and making it flourish with the pure and divine stream of solicitous instruction by means of the Word.³⁷

The desert was not confinable to its allegorical interpretation as the scene of sin, where only lawless exiles dwell. Indeed, St. Ambrose stressed the self-discipline necessary to overcome mankind's exilic condition, an art of self-rule that must have as its intimate setting the desert, the very space into which Adam was driven. In order to become the second Adam, one must surrender oneself to be taken prisoner "in a new paradise" (Matt. 26), the wilderness regained.³⁸ Before investigating more deeply the desert's place in the Christian ascetic's return to the wilderness, it is worth recalling another radical embrace of the wasteland for the purposes of redemption and the salvation of history—that of the Sectaries of Qumran in the first century CE.

Qumran literature, a diverse body of apocalyptic writings by the Sectaries, who responded to their sinful contemporaries by establishing a separate religious community in the Judean desert, reflects an intense interest in the desert as a liminal, or testing, period. This period represented the hiatus between the historical exodus that comprises the Sectaries' past and the

eschatological conquest of Jerusalem and Israel that lies ahead. For the Sectaries, whose self-proclaimed mission is to prepare for the conquest of Jerusalem, it was an article of faith that "the present age of Israel's history should fittingly end, as it had begun, with a probationary period."³⁹ This probationary period marks a new understanding of the desert, one achieved by refiguring the Old Testament prophets' polysemous wilderness motif as an unavoidable continuum of meaning, that is, a trajectory of thought which "has become a pure and concentrated expression of the 'transition and preparation' idea."⁴⁰ This strategic redeployment of the Pentateuchal traditions meant discovering in central passages, such as Isa. 40:3 or 41:19, the importance of the notion of the desert as a space of becoming, transition, and progression: "A voice cries: In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God" (Isa. 40:3).⁴¹ Nothing less than the procession of history hinges on this road under construction, for the Sectaries believed that their secession from Israel is, as their *Manual of Discipline* states, precisely "the time when the way is being prepared in the desert,"⁴² the time of transition to the New Israel and the "New Covenant" of the last days.⁴³ Only as "exiles of the desert" [*golat ha-midbar*] reenacting the desert trek of the Mosaic period could the Sectaries begin to imagine their utopic project, a march to salvation, a passage to spiritual bliss.

These early Christian configurations of desert ideology illustrate well the desert's inveterate transitionality, making it the perfect emblem of what I have been calling the utopic. Obvious moral bipolarities—such as the desert as space of damnation and space of redemption—are just one facet of its unstillable meaning. Indeed, Edmond Jabès's insight that "wandering creates the desert"⁴⁴ serves as a guide to the way the desert, as a kind of nomadic monad, operates in the social imaginary of ancient and biblical societies: as a space where meaning comes *undone*, before it wanders into the imagination eventually to be put to ideological use.⁴⁵ The ancient texts give us an image of the desert as a space of release and leave-taking, of—literally—desertion. We can understand this desertion rather literally, as exodus, exile, or nomadism, or more metaphorically as the encouragement of unaccustomed relations to truth. In his meditations on "Being Jewish," Maurice Blanchot underscores the centrality of what he terms "the exigency of uprooting" to the formation and affirmation of "nomadic truth,"⁴⁶ a way of reengaging the world as a passageway to other realities more satisfying because of their liberatory power:

Why does errancy substitute for the dominion of the Same an affirmation that the word Being—in its identity—cannot satisfy? . . . To leave the dwelling place, yes; to come and go in such a way as to affirm the world as a passage,

but not because one should flee this world or live as fugitives in eternal misfortune. The words exodus and exile indicate a positive relation with exteriority, whose exigency invites us not to be content with what is proper to us (that is, with our power to assimilate everything, to identify everything, to bring everything back to our I) . . . [I]f to become rooted in a culture and in a regard for things does not suffice, it is because the order of the realities in which we become rooted does not hold the key to all the relations to which we must respond.⁴⁷

Recognizing its fundamental power to deform and reform identificatory relations, the ancients marked the desert as a space of plenitude and potentiality, into and out of which there is incessant movement. Here is a space that, by impelling movement and unrest, calls into existence new relays to whatever exists outside of the self-same, beyond self-identity. The solid comfort of rootedness is blasted apart by an inexhaustible wandering whose ideological value resides in its manner of unbinding subjects from "the determination of place or to settling close to a reality forever and already founded, secure, and permanent."⁴⁸ The desert, I argue, is within the medieval imaginary the preeminent space for rehearsing new modes of moving outside the self, a special site for creating an exteriorizing, ecstatic relation to untried alterities.

Opus transformationis: The Desert Projects of Late Antiquity

There will still be the desert to conjugate the nothing.

—Edmond Jabès⁴⁹

[In the desert] there is just the present, untied by the past, the present that may be lived as the beginning. . . . a beginning that does not threaten to solidify into a consequence, a beginning which can only be followed by other beginnings, and thus may be lived with the benign feeling of impunity. There is no more to the routes than the imprint of steps, and the imprints will not last.

—Zygmunt Bauman⁵⁰

For the desert is simply that: an ecstatic critique of culture, an ecstatic form of disappearance.

—Jean Baudrillard⁵¹

In its primordial elementality, the desert represents the total absorption of subjectivity, or not quite: it represents the abandonment (Latin *deserere*) of comfortable identities in favor of those decoupled from the support systems of the familiar.⁵² Just as the experience of the desert constitutes the central episode in the history of Israel as a national and religious entity, so too it comprises that period in individual life-history when the creation of another identity, an ecstatic alter-ego, is effected. To experience the desert is, therefore, to face the prospect of having one identity supplanted by another

that lies ahead, for nothing impels motion like the desert. Certainly this experience of the desert holds true for the Hebrew nation, whose own name bears the inscription of itinerant movement: "the name Hebrew, being interpreted, means 'one who passes over [migrates],'" according to Philo of Alexandria.⁵³

Among the many ways in which one can construct a new identity by means of passing over into the desert, that of the desert fathers, the monks who inhabited the Egyptian deserts in the fourth and fifth centuries, would exert the greatest pressure on the formation of desert ideas in the Middle Ages. Their very occupation of the desert constituted a radical way of passing over into or through the desert in order to forge a new identity. Having inherited a mixture of the Old Testament tradition and the ancient Egyptian tradition concerning the ambiguity of the desert, the desert fathers harnessed the synergy resulting from such a potent mixture of traditions and meanings, and created a new "rule" for social living and religious conduct. The *Rule of Pachomius*, the founding document of Coptic literature, represents the product of grafting "the branch of Christian asceticism onto the trunk of antique Egyptian wisdom."⁵⁴

The writings of Philo of Alexandria (ca. 20 BCE–50 CE) provide a key to how such a conceptual hybrid of the ancients and the late-antique desert fathers might take shape. The influence of his writing on the later Christian tradition had the effect of refiguring the desert as an agential space with the power to resuscitate and revitalize its inhabitants. Emphasizing the desert's power of conversion and sustenance,⁵⁵ Philo sees the desert as a space of life-affirming abundance, rather than scarcity. For him, the desert represents a utopic region of plenitude and immediacy to the presence of God's new covenantal law.⁵⁶ The desert, the scene of mankind's reception of the Commandments, is further imagined as the mise en scene of therapy, that is, the site par excellence of spiritual, even physical, reparation. Charged with allegorical significance, the way of the desert called forth a path of living where passion and vice give way to the authority of reason and philosophy: "When anyone leading us along the desert road, deserted by passions and by acts of wickedness, the rod, that is, of philosophy, has led right reason to a height, and placed it like a scout upon a watch-tower [Num. 13:18], and has commanded it to look around, and to survey the whole country of virtue."⁵⁷ The intelligence-gathering functions of this watch-tower reveal it to be an important image of surveillant control (an image, incidentally, consonant with desert king Prester John's own utopic watch-tower⁵⁸). For Philo, the tower ensures that the surrounding land remains fruitful (i.e., virtuous) enough for producing and nourishing the wisdom that issues from Christian doctrine.

The more devoid of the confusion of sin, and immune to the psychic dispersion that results from uncontrolled pleasure, a particular space is,

the more receptive it is to Christian teaching and to the cultivation of wisdom.⁵⁹ In book 3 of *Legum allegoriae*, Philo suggests that only throughout vacuous space is the divine Logos effectively disseminated: "And this word is not apparent in every place, but wherever there is a vacant space, void of passions and vice; and it is subtle both to understand and to be understood, and it is exceedingly transparent and clear to be distinguished. . . . Such also is the word of God, being profitable both in its entirety and also in every part, even if it be ever so small."⁶⁰ The awesome emptiness of the desert is thus ideally suited for the dispersion of salvific doctrine. Indeed, for Philo, the desert was chosen by God as the site for the covenant with his people precisely because it is imagined to be the privileged place of purity, clarity, and freedom from the pollution- and corruption-filled cities.⁶¹ Philo's strong antiurban bias is founded primarily upon his belief that the air of the desert is absolutely pure and light, and thus especially healthy: for example, in his description of the Therapeutes and their abandonment of Alexandria for the desert outside the city, Philo stresses the salutary atmospheric conditions that make the desert an ideal location for founding a new community of believers.⁶² Hebrew writings of the same period attest to the close association of desert space with purity and immediacy to the divine (e.g., II Macc. 5:27). In the *Homilies on Luke*, Origen tells us that John the Baptist (a proto-anchorite for both early Christian and medieval writers⁶³), "fleeing the tumult of the cities, came to the desert where the air was purer, the heavens more open, and God nearer [*familior*]."⁶⁴ Eucherius compared the desert to "a limitless temple of our God."⁶⁵

Together with later works such as Jerome's *Vita S. Pauli* and Eucherius's *De laude eremi*, the writings of the early Christians on the desert would indelibly mark the way the desert was imagined, well into the modern period.⁶⁶ The seductiveness of deserts seems to derive from their function in the social imaginary as spaces of unlimited projection. Their topographic openness, atmospheric purity, and luminosity signify their receptivity to projection. These are spaces that are used, yet never used up, as receptacles for both desires and fears, where, for instance, monks encountered equally God and the Devil's demons.

A wonderful medievalist illustration of the desert's double power of seduction, at once dangerous and salvific, is Gustave Flaubert's *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* (1874), a work that renders the dark side of the anchorite mentality by showing how dangerously transparent the desert is to fantasy, hallucination, and what Flaubert famously calls "the cruelty of ideas." Flaubert is calling attention to the imaginative drive subtending every act of cruelty, especially that practiced by the masochistic desert monk, whose self-punishment, if it is to be transformable into sensual art, must always remain fully self-conscious. For Flaubert, then, the desert martyrs were

accomplished artists of "savage sensuality," whose private fantasmagoric visions represented nothing less than "la vraie vérité" [the genuine truth].⁶⁷

For Edward Gibbon, by contrast, the desert denies access to truth, precisely because it encourages an art of masochistic torture that, by being so intensely and self-shatteringly private, rendered both truth and its social use value incommunicable. According to Gibbon, the desert eremites of the fourth and fifth centuries were nothing but an assortment of "hideous, distorted, and emaciated maniacs." They were men, he continued, "without knowledge, without patriotism, without affection, spending their lives in a long routine of useless and atrocious tortures and quailing before the ghastly phantoms of their delirious brains."⁶⁸ In Gibbon's diatribe, the desert fathers' relation to the desert and to their own bodies was evidence not only of their private madness but of their social marginalization and inefficacy. Above all, these were men who just did not care—about others, about the society they left behind, or about the condition of their own minds and bodies.⁶⁹ Gibbon's desert is a kind of theater of cruelty, an arena where pain never fully converts to the pleasures of productivity, leaving behind instead a damning residue of alienation and debilitation. Despite—or perhaps because of—its overblown language, such an account does capture certain crucial elements of early Christianity's masochistic relation to the desert and its inhabitability. The tireless violence of self-abnegation, the severe routinization of self-mutilating behavior, and the hallucinatory engagement with reality resulting from sleep and food deprivation, in the form of visions and dreams, are well attested by the fathers themselves.

Even in their most profound moments of stillness (*hesuchian*), or contemplative withdrawal, these "athletes of Christ" were committed to endless struggle with forces beyond their immediate control—especially, if somewhat ironically, the other athletes with whom they fiercely competed. Rufinus, in the prologue to *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, describes their strenuous competition: .

I also saw another vast company of monks of all ages living in the desert and in the countryside. Their number is past counting. There are so many of them that an earthly emperor could not assemble so large an army. For there is no town or village in Egypt and the Thebiad which is not surrounded by hermitages as if by walls. . . . Some of them live in desert caves, others in more remote places. All of them everywhere by trying to outdo each other demonstrate their wonderful ascetic discipline. Those in the remotest places make strenuous efforts for fear anyone else should surpass them in ascetic practices. Those living in towns or villages make equal efforts, though evil troubles them on every side, in case they should be considered inferior to their remoter brethren.⁷⁰

Such a passage underscores the degree to which spatial practices structure the determining conditions of social life, here via a ready-made narrative of competition. Usually considered the most severe ascetics, those monks in the more remote regions must nevertheless preserve their status over against those hyper-competitive city-dwellers who daily face more obstacles to their asceticism. Competition unites the monks, solidifies them into one "vast company," a numberless multitude, at the same time that it reinforces very clear divisions between groups according to spatial locatedness, such that the different hermitages are like walls sealing off a city from its desert surroundings.

The Holy Man's repudiation of the familial and the social in favor of the desert signifies, as Peter Brown summarizes it, "a long drawn out, solemn ritual of dissociation—of becoming the total stranger."⁷¹ John Moschus, for example, records in the *Pratum spirituale* one of Abbot Olympios's rules: "Wherever you sit, say constantly, 'I am a stranger.'"⁷² The Holy Man's mission to forge a new alienated identity by social death and intense self-absorption necessarily placed him into remarkable relations with the supernatural and utopic. The life of the desert father, as depicted for example by Byzantine painters in the frescoes of Cappadocian and Greek monasteries, became the exemplary index of an existence beyond ordinary humanity, one "half-way to the other world." The life of the ascetic hero was figured as the highest and most revelatory possibility for existence between two states or conditions: "represented. . . as beings half savage and half angel: they were given emaciated faces, tattered clothing, hair hanging down to their feet, but also the look of people lost in contemplation of another reality and flesh which was hardly substantial."⁷³ The abandonment of one reality in pursuit of another, through complete erasure of earthly subjectivity, belongs to a special category of existence we might call *entre-deux*.⁷⁴ In the Cappadocian and Greek frescoes, the utopic dimension of desert holiness is figured in terms of an existence that is neither one nor the other—this over against the insane degradation of body and soul that so transfixed Gibbon. For another illustration of the *entre-deux*, we need only recall one of the tales circulating about Symeon Stylites, the ascetic who famously remained perched atop a pillar for over thirty years: a layman who had ascended his pillar once asked if he were human; Symeon hesitated to answer, tempted to respond in the negative.⁷⁵

Among the monks themselves a discourse of leave-taking circulated, where estrangement and flight were imagined as the only true vocations for a man searching after the liberty of his own soul. The *Apophthegmata patrum*, a collection of sayings by the desert fathers begun in the early fourth century for the purposes of instructing other monks and creating a close-knit community of ascetics, is full of injunctions to flee "the conversation of

men" in order to find a desert place of absolute solitude, free from social entanglements such as women:

Abba Sisoës' disciple said to him, "Father, you are growing old. Let us now go back nearer to inhabited country." The old man said to him, "Let us go where there are no women." His disciple said to him, "Where is there a place where there are no women except the desert?" So the old man said, "Take me to the desert."

Abba Ammoun of Rhaithou came to Clysma one day to meet Abba Sisoës. Seeing that Abba Sisoës was grieved because he had left the desert, Abba Ammoun said to him, "Abba, why grieve about it? What would you do in the desert, now you are so old?" The old man pondered this sorrowfully and said to him, "What are you saying to me, Ammoun? Was not the mere liberty of my soul enough for me in the desert?"

Abba Aïo questioned Abba Macarius, and said: "Give me a word." Abba Macarius said to him: "Flee from men, stay in your cell, weep for your sins, do not take pleasure in the conversation of men, and you will be saved."⁷⁶

Fathers Sisoës and Macarius the Great stress the necessity of mobility with respect to identity formation: in order to achieve salvation, the anchorite must reinscribe his existence as a constant state of becoming. For the anchorite, who must again and again move not so much away from society as toward the presence of God, in its full intensity and immediacy, the work of flight is never done. The lives of the desert fathers are not, however, at a deep structural level, about flight—indeed, as Alison Elliott points out in her structuralist analysis of the *passiones* and *vitae*, the most common form of flight, the "secret flight," functions strictly as a narrative motif—but rather, to use Elliott's own terms, concerned with offering an "account of the process by which a good man becomes better, by which a holy man draws closer to God."⁷⁷

The flight from society, ending in the struggle of the solitary man against demonic temptation in the desert, is undoubtedly the most memorable image of anchorite existence. However, the war between man and demon is only the outward sign of a more profound contest occurring at an elemental level, where the desert itself, the preeminent scene of struggle, symbolizes the heterodox combination of antiworld and metaphor for the world. As I remarked earlier, one aspect of this volatile conjugation surely owes to the alignment of Egyptian monastic tradition with the mythical thinking about the desert reflected in the Old Testament and in earlier thinking by the ancient Semites and Assyro-Babylonians. Another, more crucial, aspect of the antiworld/world conjunction owes to the imaginary relation that is called into being by such a fissiparous symbol in the first place: namely, the necessity of imagining that it is in fact possible to contain

both extremes within a single subject(ivity). This containment is achieved only through a process of radical self-transformation, a conversion of oneself into the total alien, the *xenos monachus* or monk-stranger, such that one is utterly "alone in his confrontation with metaphysical sources."⁷⁸

Only desert existence offered holy men the opportunity to confront their metaphysical origins without the encumbrance of social structures such as the oedipal family. A return to origins in the desert, the mythic domain of death, necessarily involved operating under the pressures of the death instinct, whose "goal is to bring the living back to an inorganic state."⁷⁹ Thus the basic psychosocial tendencies of desert martyrdom centered upon repeated and repeatable renunciations of the life instinct, involving eschewal of social unities like the family or polis. The desert fathers' embrace of the desert was inescapably conditioned by ancient Egyptian myths, which placed the desert under the dominion of Seth, the god of destruction and sterility. For the Egyptians, the desert was thus the proper space for tombs. Indeed, the Coptic word *toou*, which means "desert," also means "cemetery," since the dead, in accordance with ancient tradition, were buried in the desert.⁸⁰ For the holy men of the fourth century as well, the desert became the proper site for burial, a space full of caves and other small, dark spaces in which refuge from the world of human affairs might be sought. Antony's first place of withdrawal, after relinquishing his worldly possessions, was a tomb, in which, according to several versions of his *vita*, he then spent twenty years shut up.⁸¹ Abraham, fleeing marriage, found an abandoned crypt just outside the city, and there "he blocked the door to the cell, and shutting himself within, he left a very tiny hole of a window through which on the appointed day he received food."⁸² He spent twelve years in sepulchral isolation. Macarius the Roman spent three years buried up to his neck as self-punishment for having been seduced by a dream of his deserted bride.⁸³ Symeon Stylites too had a penchant for self-interment: before ascending the pillar, he occupied an abandoned well, lived for three years in a cramped tomb-like enclosure, and, according to the Syriac life, written just fifteen years after the hermit's death, he also passed two years buried up to his chest in the monastery garden.⁸⁴

In these narratives of self-entombment, the connection between the desert and the tomb itself as the place of ascetic practice is often explicit. The *Historia monachum in Aegypto*, for example, contains a story that John of Lycopolis tells of an unnamed young man who, struck with a desire to do penance for his sins, "made straight for the cemetery, where he bitterly lamented his former life, throwing himself down on his face and not daring to make a sound, or to pronounce the name of God, or to entreat him, for he considered himself unworthy even of life itself. While still living he incarcerated himself among the tombs, and renouncing his own life, did

nothing but lie underground and groan from the depths of his heart."⁸⁵ After recounting the young man's several battles with demons, John stresses that the cemetery is synonymous with the desert as the exclusive site for disciplining oneself to attain humility, the foundation of all other virtues.⁸⁶ Becoming the complete stranger is thus a process of self-fashioning that involves symbolic death and rebirth. A state of being that constitutes a return to the inorganic seems to be the prerequisite for spiritual renewal and ecstatic self-abandonment. The desert, with its multitudinous caves and crypts, afforded the fantasmatic setting for holding apart, in productive tension, the opposites of life and death. Indeed, the confining tomb was a kind of life-in-death: that much is clear from Theodoret's life of Marcellianus, who, because he could neither lie down nor stand in his cell, remained curled up in a fetal position.⁸⁷ Such an experience would more often than not have a surprising revitalizing effect upon the ascetic. When his fellow monks, driven by the desire to imitate Antony, tore down the door to his cramped cave where he had spent nearly twenty years, they "saw his body [and] marvelled at his sweetness," and confirmed that "the thought [Gr. *ethos*, state] of his soul was pure."⁸⁸

The example of the anchorites puts before us a rich, complex image: a model of self-creation demanding a masochistic response to reality, where the hermit's very existence paradoxically depends upon being imaginatively and physically receptive to self-destructive experiences.⁸⁹ Experiences of radical receptivity in the desert form the lines of flight along which subjectivity potentially *becomes* something other.⁹⁰ The quest for alterity through the masochistic ideal aims at a condition of absolute simultaneity: to be victim (object) and victor (subject)—the duality that arises when, for instance, the monk, sealed in a tomb, putrefies his flesh in order to emerge as a model of virtue and spiritual ascendancy.⁹¹ The perfect desert hermit is he who discovers himself as an object, by taking the role of the other for a time such that he becomes absolutely objective by viewing himself from the perspective of the other. This, it seems, is the proper way to avoid sin, and accords perfectly with the doctrine of charity. As a recent commentator on the psychological foundations of the passions puts it, "to refuse to be guided in one's treatment of others by one's capacity to imagine *being* them—that is, to identify with their feelings and to care—is the essence of sin."⁹²

Abbot Bessarion symbolizes the necessity of self-observation in the avoidance of sin this way: "The monk," he said just before dying, "ought to be as the Cherubim and the Seraphim: all eye."⁹³ This image of becoming "all eye" recalls Philo's image of the desert watch-tower. The open desert is a model for making oneself visible to, turning oneself into an object for, one's self and others. The work of self-creation is thus a matter of occupying a space of pure externality, a surface of pure visibility upon which one

can disappear as a human being by an ecstatic process of self-distillation, in order to make oneself even more apparent in heaven.⁹⁴ He who is in paradise, Augustine claimed, has access to all thoughts as though they are transparent to him; "he who is in the desert," Abbot Gelasios claimed, "does not lie in a bed, but in the open air. . .for the eye of God always sees the works of a man and nothing escapes him and he knows those who do good."⁹⁵

The desert represented for the ascetics of late antiquity a locus of purification and openness whose utopic symbolism inheres, as it did for the ancients, in both its negativity (the locus of death) and its positivity (the site of potentiality and renewal). The desert ascetics' position at the limits of culture operates precisely as an "ecstatic critique," in that, by being regarded as aliens or outsiders (*askathistoi*, rootless men⁹⁶) they not only directly call into question the society they leave behind or cancel out, but they offer themselves, in their *vitae*, *passiones*, and apothegms, as unfinished models of self-transformation. Through the process of *extasis*—displacement, a driving out of one's senses or one's familiar condition—the lives of the desert saints provoke new ways of seeing and being, ways of stepping outside the familiar conditions of selfhood. The Middle Ages responded to these provocations, as we will see, by putting into circulation stories about fantasmatic worlds and spaces, stories tuned to the formidable challenges to culture, identity, and home that such worlds and spaces unfailingly issue.

Back into the Orient: Utopic Space in the Middle Ages

The Orient is not something to be imitated: it only exists in the construction of a smooth space.

—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari⁹⁷

Only empty space can really hold the future in store.

—Roland Barthes⁹⁸

The Middle Ages would be set to inherit, from the intertwined traditions of ancient myth, the Bible, and late-antique monasticism, the overdetermined symbolism of the desert. Embodying the principal alternative to civilized, everyday existence, this space of "wild(er)ness" is put in the service of transcending everyday life through providing a model of incessant change and orientation toward a time to come. The efficacy of the desert in offering a model for transformation is tied above all to the desert's own metaphoric mobility, to its inimitability. That is, by demanding and exceeding all figuration, by approximating what Slavoj Žižek terms "the sublime object of ideology,"⁹⁹ the desert resists fixed significance, to become a metaphor that inscribes the thinking of possibilities.

In part, then, I mean to test the figural capacity of the desert metaphor: are there times when it seems to bear a greater burden of ideological meaning than others? Obviously, I believe there are, and because postmodernity is one of these times (as my epigraphs suggest),¹⁰⁰ I have been struck by the strong conceptual links between historical understandings of the desert and contemporary ones. Before turning to medieval conceptions of the desert, let me point out that throughout my discussion of the desert there has been, and will persist, a slippage between image (desert as metaphor) and reality (desert as localizable geophysical entity). This slippage, however, is less the product of an ontological confusion, or even of an alarming essentialism, than of the critical impulse such slippage importantly marks: namely, the desire to point out the mechanisms by which material realities are inevitably defended against or are concealed under the language of fantasy. Clearly, different historical periods possess different ways of translating refractory material realities into the instrumental fantasies of everyday life.

We should nevertheless bear in mind how culturally central metaphors, like the desert, call into existence, as Dick Hebdige puts it, a "focus for collective as well as personal identification in an always unfinished narrative of historical loss and redemption. . . a lens through which the past is given shape and direction and hence redeemed as it delivers us here, now, in front of a future which is pulled sharply into focus as a virtual space—blank, colourless, shapeless, a space to be made over, a space where everything is still to be won."¹⁰¹ Unsurprisingly, the "virtual space" of the desert, full of possibility and anticipation, furnishes the key trope by which Helen Waddell succinctly summarizes the desert fathers' legacy to medieval Europe: "eternity. . . they embody it. These men, by the very exaggeration of their lives, stamped infinity on the imagination of the West."¹⁰² This inscription of an unbounded imaginary had the effect of altering forever the West's relation to what is historically possible or spiritually "still to be won."

One striking manifestation of this utopic desert impulse is the Romanesque iconographic tradition concerning the temptations of Christ, and the subtradition of Christ with the beasts in the desert.¹⁰³ The seventh-century Ruthwell Cross represents a neat linkage of these two motifs—temptation and peaceable kingdom—in the sculpture of Christ and the adoring beasts, encapsulated in the inscription that surrounds the carving: IHS XPS: JUDAS AEQUITATIS: BESTIAE ET DRACONES COGNOVERUNT IN DESERTO SALVATOREM MUNDI [Jesus Christ: the judge of righteousness: beasts and dragons recognized in the desert the savior of the world]. The latter half of the inscription is clearly an interpretation of Mark 1:13: "And Christ was in the desert forty days and forty nights and was tempted by Satan; and he was with the beasts, and the angels ministered to him."¹⁰⁴ Together, the Ruthwell inscription and the sculpture

of the animals with Christ (two beasts whose heads and paws are raised to Christ in acknowledgment) signify both victory over the devil¹⁰⁵ and the establishment of a new order of community and peace in the desert/world. A common theme of Romanesque architectural art,¹⁰⁶ the fusion of the two themes of Christ's victory over the recalcitrant desert beasts and of the possibility of future salvation is contained within the general belief that Christ's temptation recapitulates that of Adam and Eve, and thus his victory points toward the redemption of mankind.¹⁰⁷ This popular belief is expressed in the *Biblia Pauperum*, where the desert assumes a double meaning as both the terrible wasteland, repellent to civilization, and the paradisiacal garden where man and beast once lived in perfect harmony.¹⁰⁸ A late-twelfth-century psalter, whose illustrations were completed in the fourteenth century by Catalan artists, renders the scene of the Temptation of Christ to illustrate his victory over the animals as mentioned in Ps. 91, juxtaposing this to another scene, that of the figure of Christ among a group of adoring desert animals, which has been described by one art historian as "a peaceful congregation quite Franciscan in spirit."¹⁰⁹

The Ruthwell inscription alludes, then, simultaneously to the temptation narrative of Mark 1:13 and, when considered together with the sculpture itself, to a Messianic image of the peaceable kingdom, a utopic vision originally expressed in Hebrew apocryphal literature and carried into the Middle Ages by the writings of the early monastics and religious reformers.¹¹⁰ Latin apocryphal Gospels, such as the greatly influential *Liber de Infantia*, or *Historia de Nativitate Mariae et de Infantia Salvatoris*, served as the primary vehicles for popularizing stories of animals adoring the infant Christ.¹¹¹ Their influence on medieval art is so great that indeed "much medieval art is indecipherable without reference to [such] books."¹¹² Medieval commentaries on Mark also emphasized the Messianic concord of the earthly kingdom: "then the beasts will be at peace with us, when in the shrine of our souls, we tame the clean and the unclean animals, and lie down with the lions, like Daniel."¹¹³ Envisioned here is a reorganized, or tamed, desert that serves as the interior space (what the desert ascetics called *mons interior*) for spiritual self-transformation. In the main exegetical tradition from which the iconography of the Ruthwell Cross draws, then, the desert serves as the lens through which it is possible to imagine spiritual and social renovation. The principal utopic signifier seems to be harmony with the beasts. The animal stories of the hagiographic tradition of late antiquity, and especially their medieval elaborations,¹¹⁴ functioned chiefly as an imaginative response to the call of Isaianic prophecy: "The wilderness and the solitary places will be glad for them; and the desert will rejoice, and blossom as the rose" (35:1; cf. 41:18).

Total social renovation seems more a matter of installing the desert into sacred places, such as the monastic establishment (Celtic monasteries were

often called *disert* or *disart*), than of reconstituting the desert space itself as sacred. For the desert is, in a sense, always already sacred, and so, for instance, its centrality to Irish monasticism means that the desert plays a direct role in providing a model for spiritual conduct. Thus Alcuin, in a letter of 798 to Charlemagne, would refer to the Irish clergy as *pueri egyptiaci* out of a desire to recall their precise emulation of the desert fathers, even to the point of unorthodoxy by electing to follow the Egyptian canonical computation of Easter.¹¹⁵ If man is born into the desert of worldliness, then it becomes his mission to discover, in the desert, strategies for harnessing and redirecting the energies of discord there toward the production of future community. Civilization itself is sanctioned and completed by such a re-creation of tension in the desert. Failure to coexist with the animals of the desert or forest, according to Bede, stems from grave spiritual failure: "We lose our empire over the creature because we neglect to serve God."¹¹⁶

The flight of medieval monks into the remote wilderness, like that of the early ascetics into the desert, is not so much an escape or passive withdrawal as an active remodeling of society perceived to be enmeshed in oppressive and harmful relationships. Claims that anchoritic retreat to the desert functions primarily to close "disturbingly open frontiers in the self"¹¹⁷ such that there remain "no reservoirs of the unknown, the unconquered, or the unpredictable"¹¹⁸ seem to me to elide the dynamic force of the desert itself in conditioning the very possibilities for communal- and self-fashioning. Bede, for example, in his commentary on Luke, discusses Christ's overcoming of temptations in the desert within the context of Israel's flight from Egypt to the Promised Land, since both, he indicates, exemplify flight from evil. Flight, however, is not the central concept for Bede; instead, as he stresses, the overcoming of an environmental evil necessarily means reengaging with that same environment on the model of Matt. 10:23: "and when they shall persecute you in this city, flee into another."¹¹⁹ (Interestingly, Byzantine psalters, in order to visualize the new peace brought by victory over the desert animals, tend to employ both the Hebrew *transitus* and the Temptation of Christ to illustrate Ps. 91.¹²⁰) The desert affords, then, an indispensable perspective from which to critique particular social realities and the very ways such realities are put to ideological use.

The dramatic entrance of the desert into poetic narratives as disparate as the Old English *Exodus* (the epic battles between the armies of Moses and the Pharaoh *on westenne*) and Dante's *Commedia* (the pilgrim lost in *gran diserto*) seems to mark a certain concretizing of the desert's deep metaphoricity. In *Exodus* and the *Commedia*, the desert sets the scene for a race or individual seeking salvation and truth. Central to the experience of both poems is sensitivity to the polysemy of the historical Exodus itself,¹²¹ which, as critics of the *Commedia* have convincingly shown, is put in the

service of "an extraordinarily *untimely* sense of hope."¹²² As "a radical emblem of history," the desert, according to Guiseppe Mazzotta, "removes man's utopian visions and pastoral dreams away from the boundaries of romance. . . to the world of the possibilities of history."¹²³ Beyond romance, the desert reveals a historical world that is radically contingent, shifting and open to change. The hope that the desert extends is thus untimely, charged with the desire to uncover truth in its full contingency. The desert in these two poems contains the worlds of history and of allegory, two worlds that, in combination, impel a dismantling of deceptive romantic complacencies and illusions. The world of the desert is never sealed off like a pastoral enclave or romance garden; rather, it is open and turbulent, like the space of history itself, a space in which the nomadic interpreter never ceases to rediscover the alien behind every tamed truth. For Richard of St. Victor, the desert is the privileged signifier of open meaning: "est namque desertum aliud bonum aliud malum."¹²⁴

The work of allegorical interpretation is thus always work in progress, and texts such as *Exodus* and the *Commedia* emphasize the extent to which the act of reading, as the patristic commonplace has it, involves undertaking a journey in a foreign land, in the desert of exile. Scripture's oceanic depths, says Jerome, conceal the mysteries of God just like a labyrinth, like an *infinita sensuum silva*.¹²⁵ Exegetes, such as Honorius of Autun¹²⁶ and Hugh of St. Victor, commonly identify the act of reading as one of exilic wandering. In his treatise on the art of reading, the *Didascalicon*, Hugh, in a paragraph on *De Exsilio*, writes that "a foreign soil is proposed, since it, too, gives a man practice. All the world is a foreign soil to those who philosophize. . . he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign land."¹²⁷

Reading and philosophizing, as forms of critique, thus demand a certain amount of nomadic mobility in order to find one's way to the proper—or alien—perspective. Yet such a perspective is, properly, a self-regarding one. Not surprisingly then, confession combines nomadic practices like reading and thinking whose aim is critical and whose function is transformative. The *regio dissimilitudinis* in which Augustine found himself, "far off" from God,¹²⁸ would become an important trope for medieval writers who perceived in the image certain affinities with the spatial practice of "crossing over." Confession involves the act of *transitus*, in the sense that one crosses over from a land of unlikeness, where, according to Peter Lombard, "memoria dissipatur, intellectus caecatur, voluntas foedatur" [memory is scattered, intellect blinded, will befouled],¹²⁹ to the true image, and hence likeness, of God. That writers would employ images of the desert and desert wandering/crossing to make concrete the Augustinian motif of confession seems, then, absolutely appropriate. Richard of St. Victor, for example, uses a pair of central images from the history of the Jewish *transitus* to illustrate how

one should set about "perfecte deserere regionem dissimilitudinis" [completely to desert the region of unlikeness].¹³⁰

There is yet another point at which the act of reading, the process of spiritual transformation, and the desert converge, a dramatic incident in the life of a certain monk, who was known for his visionary capacity. Othlo of St. Emmeran (d. ca. 1070), we learn from the record of his third *visio*, favored Lucan among the Latin writers, and one day, while engaged in a reading of the *Pharsalia*, he had a vision in the form of a "ventus urens et vehemens" [a terrible and scorching wind] that attacked him three times with such force that he could no longer remain outdoors, and so, "libro assumpto," taking the book with him, he hurried inside and immediately fell into a kind of faint.¹³¹ The Pentecostal wind of Acts 2 ("adventus spiritus vehementis") provides a backdrop for two crucial intertexts—one biblical, one secular—called up for us by the image of the "terrible burning wind." The first is a cluster of biblical imagery concerning the force of the desert wind and its punitive use against a mass of people:

At that time will it be said to this people and to Jerusalem, a dry wind of the high places in the desert toward the daughter of my people, not to fan, nor to cleanse, even a full wind from those places will come unto me; now also will I give sentence against them. (Jer. 4:11)

To make their land into a desert, and a perpetual hissing; everyone that passes thereby will be astonished, and wag his head. I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy; I will show them the back, and not the face, in their day of calamity. (Jer. 18:16–17)

And Moses stretched forth his rod over the land of Egypt, and the Lord brought an east wind upon the land all that day, and all that night; and when it was morning the east wind brought the locusts. (Exod. 10:13)

Othlo's masochistic vision, his torture by a scorching wind, reflects, as he later states, his "own desire to effect an alienation of his mind [*alienatio mentis*]." The wind provided a kind of shock to his system, inducing a contemplative state that had the effect of pulling him in two directions at once—toward self-alienation and toward brute reality. For it seems probable, based upon the cultural and literary importance of the precise passage in the *Pharsalia* we are entitled to speculate he was reading at the time of his *visio*, that Othlo imaginatively encountered a different kind of bodily assault:

Through this land [the Libyan desert] Cato's hardy / valor bids him march. . . / the land is wide open—but, roaming / free, it whips up Aeolian frenzy all over the sand, / blusters, bedevilling the dust, and drives a cloud devoid / of rain up into a spiral. Most of the sand is whirled / aloft and, since

the twister never slackens, hangs there. / The Nasamon pauper sees his realm whip past, wind borne, / his goods and chattels scattered; huts fly by, snatched-up / roof first, leaving the owners exposed. What catches fire rises / no higher but, like billows of smoke swirling upwards / to blot out the light of day, dust clouds claim the air. / Now, even more fierce than usual, the wind attacks / the Roman column: with nothing to stand on, the soldier / staggers, the very sand beneath his heel snatched away.¹³²

For another forty-five lines, Lucan continues to describe the obliterating force of the desert simoom: along desert tracks that become blotted out, men are buried by the sand with dust caked in their throats; the more fortunate are harassed by serpents. This second intertext depicts a radical loss of subjectivity, the erasure of culture by nature. And if a legend on the famous Borgia *mappa mundi* is any indication, the image of the desert's destructive force was well regarded. Next to the Sahara desert, it reads: "mare sive terra arenosa, in qua reperitur via modo maris et gentes equitantur in tentoriis pergamenis, ne nisu ventorum et arena destruantur."¹³³

For a medieval audience, Lucan's description of the desert winds comprises both a lesson in natural history and science and a point of marvelous interest. As Jessie Crosland has argued, it was particularly in Lucan's role as provider of *merveilleux* that the Latin author can be identified as the source or inspiration for medieval writers, especially composers of epic and romance literature. Furthermore, Lucan is rarely excluded from the list of authorities cited by writers on natural history and science. Alexander Neckham and Brunetto Latini, for example, single out Lucan as the source of geographical and natural historical information.¹³⁴ But, for Dante, Lucan had another, though related, meaning. Twice in the *Inferno*, Dante, while describing the tortures of hell, announces his bid to outdo Lucan's portrait of the horrors of the Libyan desert: "Let all the sands of Libya boast no longer"; "Let Lucan from this moment on be silent" (see 24.85–90; 25.94–96). To describe the monstrous marvels of a vision of hell better than Lucan describes the simoom is for Dante a measure not only of poetic accomplishment, but a testament to the control of imagination and power of vision. Here the transformative value of the desert experience as vision exceeds its value as marvel. Indeed, for Dante, transformation is the central issue: witnessing the horrors of hell and the catastrophic changes they bring, which even exceed those of Cato's famous desert trek, sets in motion a journey of self-transformation. Othlo's engagement with Lucan likewise betrays the centrality of transformative possibility that is called up by the image of the desert's transfigurative force. In the case of Othlo's vision, the convergence of desert imagery is far from coincidental, as a more careful study would undoubtedly reveal.

The intertexts of Othlo's *visio* point to the desert as a model or vehicle for change, a model that Richard of St. Victor would allegorize in his reading of the *Song of Songs*, which constitutes the centerpiece of his discussion of the modalities of contemplation. In book five of *Benjamin major*, Richard elaborates his discussion of grace to account for the three modes by which contemplation takes place: by enlarging, by elevating, and by alienating the mind. All three practices of contemplation serve to effect a transgressive relation to one's own mental boundaries, the most dramatic relation occurring as pure ecstasy, when, "by a transfiguration from divine working, the mind goes over to a state of soul both alien and inaccessible to human activity."¹³⁵ This is the condition of *alienatio mentis*, a mode of ecstatic contemplation, which Richard compares to a kind of intoxicated dance of the mind:

the mind of man is alienated from itself when, after drinking of—nay after having become completely inebriated by—that inner abundance of interior sweetness, it completely forgets what it is and what it has been. And it is carried over into an ecstasy of alienation by the excess of its dance and suddenly transformed into a kind of supermundane affection subject to a kind of marvelous happiness.¹³⁶

Richard is precise about the context in which this dance takes place: the "anagogic modes of ecstasy"¹³⁷ are, he claims, perfectly described in the desert imagery of the *Song of Songs*. The "desert dance" of ecstatic contemplation must be understood in relation to the progression of imagery concerning the appearance of the lover, the adorer of the celestial bridegroom: "Who is she who comes up from the desert like a column of smoke from the spices of myrrh, incense, and all the powders of the perfumer?" (*Song of Songs* 3:6); "Who is she who comes forth like the dawn rising?" (6:9); and "Who is she who comes up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning upon her beloved?" (8:5).

The language of ecstatic transformation is striking here. The soul, Richard explains, becomes the column of smoke rising up to encounter the sublimity of God:

in order that the soul herself may become a thin column of smoke, it is necessary that she rise up above the desert itself, although she must begin to become such in the desert. Yet the mind itself is not carried away into ecstasy of mind unless it is elevated above itself, unless it deserts itself in the lowest place, and makes itself a desert by deserting, so that after having deserted it goes upward in the manner of smoke more and more into sublime places.¹³⁸

The soul rises up from the floor of the desert, the necessary ground of ecstatic transformation. The desert becomes the proper space for self-alienation, for

the kind of transcendence enabling the practice of true devotion: "The human soul comes up from the desert, as it were, when it passes over above itself by means of alienation of mind, when deserting itself in the lowest place and passing upward to heaven it is immersed only in divine things by means of contemplation and devotion."¹³⁹ The desert as site of production for the interior *visio* proper to devotional practice is not unique to Richard; indeed, as I have suggested thus far, the desert has been the site for mystical contemplation, conversion, and covenant since its inception in the Western imaginary as a crucial transitional or potential space.

The notion of transitional, or potential, space belongs of course to the psychoanalytic theories of D. W. Winnicott, whose inquiry into the centrality of illusion in the perceptual universe of the infant has far-reaching implications for any study of the social dimensions of utopia. For at stake in utopia is precisely a set of illusions perpetuated by its refusal to declare allegiance either to inner (personal) or to outer (shared) reality. Illusions, above all ways of imaginatively taking possession of the world, are thus suspended between the privacy of interiority and the openness of exteriority. The consequence of this suspension, Winnicott stresses, is profound: "what emerges. . . is the further idea that paradox accepted can have positive value."¹⁴⁰ In other words, it is possible that paradox is best left unresolved, and, to turn this around somewhat, unresolved paradox is the best condition for the possible. As we move now to the Orient as it was imagined in the medieval West, the desert figures prominently as that attribute of imaginative utopia that remains most fully suspended between two (or more) social possibilities. The desert acquires unprecedented ideological force, at the same time it becomes increasingly concretized in oriental legend.

CHAPTER 4

DESERT ECSTASIES

Unbearable Desert Productions: The Medieval Desert as Utopic Space

And in each desert, suddenly animated, a springing forth of self that we did not know about—our women, our monsters, our jackals, our Arabs, our fellow-creatures, our fears.

—Hélène Cixous¹

Travelers, fictional letter writers, and natural historians provide most of the material concerning the desert that was inherited directly by and incorporated into medieval writings. Fragments of the Alexander legend, such as the *Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem*, functioned as a kind of conduit through which ancient and late-antique material was transmitted to the Middle Ages. In the Alexander material, one crucial bit of knowledge passed on to medieval writers concerns the particularity of the natural world in India and in Africa, namely, the ways in which natural environments themselves seem especially productive of marvelous, utterly alien life forms. When Pliny observes that “India and Ethiopia are especially noted for wonders,” he is drawing attention to the extent to which the land itself, in these two regions, forming worlds unto themselves, breaks down the normal order of creation.² Here are regions wherein

la nature paraît . . . jouer avec la distinction des espèces . . . Livrée à une fécondité inépuisable, elle s’amuse à créer de nouvelles formes, à diversifier ses oeuvres, elle s’abandonne à une séduisante et terrible anarchie

[Nature seems to be . . . playing with the classifications of species . . . Dedicated to a boundless fertility, she delights in creating new forms, in diversifying her works; she gives herself over to a seductive and terrible anarchy.]³

The production of hybrid monsters in Africa and India, their depiction on the *mappaemundi* and in texts like the *Liber monstrorum*, make concrete the

determinative effects that geography has on the creation and appearance of life forms.

The desert, the exemplary figure of a moral condition in the scriptural tradition, became concretized as an alien place in the Middle Ages. Wilderness became, in some sense, wildness. What had been primarily a manifestation of a particular relationship with God became, in Oriental literature, the revelation of a specific relation with nature—nature out of control. The marginality of the life found in the desert corresponds with the marginality of the place in which such life dwells. As Ranulph Higden, in John Trevisa's translation of the *Polychronicon*, summarizes it: "Note that at the farthest reaches of the world often occur new marvels or wonders, as though Nature plays with greater freedom secretly at the edges of the world than she does openly and nearer us in the middle of it."⁴ At once a figure for the edge and the play that produces new things, desert lands enter the medieval imaginary as a symbol of diversity and mystery. The landscapes of the East and the South were conflated in the Middle Ages as "free-play" zones in which the generative forces of nature were unbound (*desertum*). In fact behind such conflation, as James Romm points out, lies the Greek proverb "Aei ti pherei Libuë kainon" (Libya always brings forth some strange new thing).⁵ Metonymically, the saying refers to both Africa and the Orient, based as the saying is on Aristotle's scientific explanation of the phrase in *De generatione animalium*: "The proverbial expression. . . has been coined because of the tendency for even heterogeneous creatures to interbreed there [in Libya]. On account of the paucity of water, different species encounter one another at the few places which possess springs, and there interbreed."⁶ The sun's generative force combines with the forced proximity of creatures in the desert to produce monstrous hybrids. The hybrid beasts found in India, insist Mandeville, result from the sun, which "gives heat to nourish all marvels of the earth."⁷

The ancient and medieval tropes of the desert's generative power are well known as scientific explanations, but they are, I submit, no less provocative as ideological explanations. To return, for a moment, to the ancient proverb: the phrase seems, to judge by the comic poet Anaxilas's use of it in the fourth century, to have evolved in meaning to represent a certain acknowledgment of cultural progress, a kind of shrug of the shoulders, according to Romm, as if to say "that's progress for you." Anaxilas wrote: "The arts, like Libya, produce some new beastie [*thérion*] every year."⁸ Indeed, the measurement of cultural progress, even the possibility of any progress at all, seems to be one crucial social register in which the desert, with its sheer power to produce, functioned in the Middle Ages. The desert becomes the space across which differences meet, intermingle, and reproduce themselves, and thus the space from which possible trajectories of becoming issue.

In the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, the desert represents the very site of all becoming, a space that refuses to submit to the taxonomic principles of Aristotelian scientific modalities. Alexander's mission into the Indian desert frontier, one involving field research to be communicated back home to the laboratory scientist, Aristotle, functions as a test of the latter's rational systems of thought.⁹ Alexander articulates his scientific objectives always in reference to Aristotle's system of thought, a taxonomic system in which Alexander places absolute faith, but finally realizes "may be in danger of overload as it tries to absorb all Oriental anomalies."¹⁰ The topography of India, thought to be mainly sandy desert until well into the fourteenth century,¹¹ proves unmanageable, full of anarchic possibility, when Alexander camps his army, after a long journey through the desert, next to a pool of water that harbors deadly scorpions. Once the scorpions are driven away, the army must continue through the night to fend off a legion of monstrous animals drawn to, indeed in some sense generated by, the watering hole, the locus of primal life itself.¹² Alexander loses half his army to the multiplying beasts and is forced to move on, thus failing, as Romm puts it, to "mak[e] the world safe for Hellenic science" (p. 26). Part of Alexander's tragic experience of India derives from the basic incongruity between an Aristotelian system committed to the hierarchical ordering of different realities and the multiplicitous and multiplying realities themselves, which seem to be fully at home in a divergent and heterotopic spatiality like the desert.

This brings us, then, to the more crucial point: the way in which the conflict between Alexander and the Orient is organized according to two opposed, yet mutually animating, ways of thinking about space and the possibility of making distinctions: a royal, scientific model and a nomadic model. On one level, Alexander's mission dramatizes the struggle of systematized knowledge over against irrecusable otherness, and, on another, homogenous spatiality over against disparate spatiality. By focusing on the second level for a moment, I want to demonstrate that the drama of Alexander in the Orient fundamentally involves space. Alexander does not merely travel to, explore, and conquer other spaces; he becomes embroiled in them. The journey that Alexander undertakes is one through what Deleuze and Guattari term the *Dispers*, or *nomos*, a heterogeneous field of forces and flows "wedded to a very particular type of multiplicity: nonmetric, acentered rhizomatic multiplicities that occupy space without 'counting' it and can 'be explored only by legwork.'" ¹³ For Deleuze and Guattari, such a space is smooth and open-ended, as opposed to striated and entrenched; heterogeneous, as opposed to metrically determinate; and laterally organized (like roots, like a rhizome), as opposed to hierarchically (like a tree). Upon this smooth space, different species mingle and produce hybrids that do not correspond to the hylomorphic schemata of science,

which promote, as Deleuze and Guattari put it, "an invariable form for variables, a variable matter of the invariant" (p. 369). The desert is the space par excellence of variable or nomadic thought,¹⁴ a space that courts and embodies a deep refusal to analyze the world into discrete components, thereby distilling continua into the singularity of self-reflection, before arranging them by relative position. Instead the desert affirms, through its inherent changeability and variability, a multiplicity of elements that will somehow be synthesized without the risk of having its heterogeneity effaced or its potential for future rearrangement stifled.

In short, the desert is a qualitatively different space—different from the spaces mapped out by science or the State, or state sciences (law, government, and war). The desert spaces of the Orient are all the more forceful as imaginary objects in the Middle Ages because, to judge by such accounts of them as those found in the *Letter of Prester John* and in the travel literature of Mandeville and Marco Polo, such spaces hold out the seductive possibility of new kinds of movement and thought—namely, arraying oneself in an open space, as opposed to entrenching oneself in a closed space. Imagining the desert—the desert imaginary—was one way of unlocking Europe's deep-seated citadel or "siege mentality" (Jean Delumeau), of overcoming the paralyzing effects of "paranoid phantasy" (Norman Cohn).¹⁵ The therapeutic dimension of the desert is one tied to its function as a space of radical potentiality, a place whose ultimate meaning is unfixable, unstillable. The desert thus encourages the formation of a new set of affects: a sense of surrender and wonder that displaces—momentarily—defense and fear.

Indeed, we might be tempted to see the desert as the site of pure abstraction, wherein freedom from historical contingency reigns in the name of disembodiment. This view of the desert is, however, largely post-Cartesian;¹⁶ in the Middle Ages, the desert was virtually unthinkable apart from its materiality, its physical embodiment—Richard of St. Victor's soul of smoke rising up from the desert floor; Othlo's vision of scorching desert wind; Alexander's battle with the desert come to life, and so on. The desert, given its metaphoric mobility, seems anything but what its etymology suggests. It is more often a metaphor for the world itself, for the plenitude the world contains, than a referent for abandoned, empty space. When medieval writers "discovered" the Orient as suitable narrative subject matter, they did not find the kind of smooth space imagined by Descartes, where the linearity of geometry encounters no obstacles, but the kind of smooth space imagined by Deleuze and Guattari, where lines of flight and becoming offer the potential for taking up alternative subjectivities. There was an urgent need in the twelfth century to posit alternative identities, a need that engendered utopia, an alternative social and political space predicated upon the opportunity for transformation. The desert became,

I would argue, the crucial emblem for change by means of encountering the other.

In the middle of the twelfth century, the news of a fabulously wealthy and immeasurably powerful Eastern potentate, in the form of a curious letter addressed to European leaders, began to reach the ears of a politically troubled Western Europe. Surviving in over 250 Latin and vernacular manuscripts, the *Epistola Presbyteri Johannis* of about 1160 is unanimously construed by its few modern critics as an allegory, an ideal or utopic picture of the Christian State-machine and War-machine.¹⁷ Prester John, the mighty ruler of a perfectly ordered Christian kingdom situated, in Otto of Freising's words, "in extremo Oriente," vows to bring aid to the failing crusaders from behind the Muslim front. From the moment of his first Western appearance before 1158 in the seventh book of Otto's *Historia de Duabus Civitatibus*,¹⁸ Prester John was figured as embodying a much-hoped-for equilibrium between Church and Crown. In him were unified the temporal and spiritual swords, at a historical moment when these swords were clashing violently. At the time the fictive *Epistola* begins to circulate throughout Europe, Pope Alexander III is fighting with Frederick Barbarossa, the Investiture Controversy is still lingering, Becket and Henry II's quarrel is at its height, the Normans are causing trouble in Sicily, Emperor Manuel is at war with Venice, and memories of the fall of Edessa in 1144 and the dismal failure of the Second Crusade in 1149 are fresh.

Reaction to the trauma of loss—the forfeiture of political and religious unity, and of the Holy Land, the center and foundation of spiritual life in the West—took the form of imagining a better, alternative world. The fantasy of Christianity without boundaries, encompassing its religious others—in short, as smooth, continuous space—was the primary impetus for the proliferation of the immensely popular legend of Prester John. From the mid-twelfth to the early seventeenth century, the prospect of finding Prester John coincided with the very structure of fantasy and pleasure itself. Alexander Vasiliev, whose final scholarly project, unfinished at the time of his death, was a study of Prester John, observed, quite judiciously, that "the Prester John legend ha[d] become so deeply rooted in the mediaeval mind that popular fantasy in any country could not live without believing that such a blessed realm. . . must have existed somewhere."¹⁹ Whether or not we posit the existence of a monolithic "medieval mind," it is certainly true that medieval and early-modern European travelers and explorers seemed absolutely mesmerized by the figure of Prester John, and by the possibility of finding him.²⁰

What are the imaginative contours of this belief in the possible existence of Prester John? Are the contours those of the void—the desert—itsself? "By a paradox that is only apparent," de Certeau writes, "the discourse that

makes people believe is the one that takes away what it urges them to believe in, or never delivers what it promises. Far from expressing a void or describing a lack, it *creates* such. It makes room for a void. In that way, it opens up clearings; it 'allows' a certain play within a system of defined places."²¹ This insight into the mechanics of the utopic impulse, that the refusal to satisfy clears a space for the free play of possibility, offers us a new way to understand just how, as Mumford puts it, "every utopia is, almost by definition, a sterile desert." Deserts symbolize the clearing away of univocal and final meaning. Their emptiness is a creative one. In medieval representations of the desert, it is unsurprising therefore that we should find this symbolic dimension expressed as the desert's inherent dynamism, its flux and seductive movement.

Prester John's desert is the one feature of the original *Letter* that is preserved in nearly all vernacular versions, and indeed one of the most striking attributes of his Oriental kingdom:

31. Among the other things which marvelously happen in our kingdom, there is the sandy sea without water. Indeed, the sand moves and swells up in waves just like all other seas, and is never still. This sea can be crossed neither by ship nor by any other means, and for this reason, what type of land may lie beyond is not able to be known. And although it is completely devoid of water, nevertheless diverse kinds of fish are found near the shore on our side which are the most palatable and tasty to eat and which are seen nowhere else. 32. Three day's distance from this sea are some mountains, from which descends a river of stones, in the same condition [as the sea], without water, and it flows through our kingdom all the way to the sea of sand. 33. It flows for three days a week, and small and large stones flow by and carry with them pieces of woods all the way to the sea of sand, and after the river has entered the sea, the stones and wood vanish and do not appear again. As long as it does not flow, anyone is able to cross it. On the other four days, it is accessible to crossing.²²

The topography of Prester John's kingdom is dynamic, and its very refusal to remain still seems a sign of its resistance to knowledge. The incessant movement of the desert and the river of stones²³ functions as an impediment to travel and, by extension, to the knowledge that travel brings: "what type of land may lie beyond is not able to be known." There is a long tradition associating the end of the knowable world with the limits of human knowledge—from Greek mythology to Irish legend, from the columns or pillars of Hercules to the mountain of flames in the voyage of St. Brendan. The point at which one cannot go further is typically connected to elements of chaos like fire, the desert,²⁴ the forces of Gog and Magog,²⁵ or the ocean, the last of which according to the Western Semites encircles the earth, marking the ends of the world. The *Talmud*, for example, states

that "*Tohu* is the green cord that surrounds the whole earth and from which darkness springs."²⁶ This image of the ocean as container for the known world and limit beyond which there is only impenetrable darkness is one concrete marker for the end of civilization.²⁷ Others include mountains,²⁸ rivers, towers, and castles (all of which are mentioned in *The Letter of Prester John*).

Prester John's position at the end of the known world—Mandeville, for example, placed Prester John just before a field of darkness, the entrance to paradise—corresponds to the position of *Sheol*, or *tehom*, at the extremity of the civilized world. The affinities of *Sheol*, chaos, and the desert have already been mentioned; instead, I wish to emphasize the ideological value of Prester John's desert kingdom as incitement to imagination, to wonder, and ultimately to ecstatic identification.²⁹ Spaces of radical mobility and ritualized chaos, Prester John's desert and river of stones are interdictions to further knowledge and incitements to the same. That is, their own status as marvels guarantees that a temporary suspension of the course of normal events will take place, a pause or moment of uncertainty wherein a future can be plotted. The value of the desert as wonder-object in Prester John's kingdom is comparable to the value of the aesthetic object as fantasy described in Todorov's famous account of the literary genre of the fantastic. Todorov emphasizes that the fantastic depends for its aesthetic impact and transformative force upon its ability to occupy what he terms "the duration of [an] uncertainty."³⁰ The fantastic is simply a moment of hesitation in which a decision is refused in the name of contemplating the differences between *what is*—say, the intact laws of nature—and *what could be*—the new laws of nature. Todorov's fantastic shares with the medieval category of the *mirabile* precisely this necessary moment of unsuspected delay, a moment that is the very space for the production of the new and the marvelous.

Medieval accounts of the Oriental desert recognize its dangers, its wildness and unpredictability.³¹ One could be attacked at any moment, from all sides, by blood-thirsty griffins, according to Bishop Haymo of Halberstadt (d. 853).³² The "sandy sea" is where, in Mandeville's narrative, monstrous "men with horns upon their heads" dwell, as well as unusual birds: "And there are fowls also speaking of their own kind, and they will hail men that come through the deserts, speaking as openly as they were men. These fowls have large tongues and on either of their feet five nails. And there are others that have but three nails on either foot, and they speak not so well ne so openly."³³ The Latin text is more explicit concerning the highest rank of these marvelous birds:

Et quaedam ex istis naturaliter loquuntur verba aut proverbia seu salutationes in patriae ydyomate, ut evidenter salutes concedant et reddant viatoribus et nonnunquam debitum iter errantibus per desertum ostendant.³⁴

[And some of these naturally speak, words and proverbs or greetings in the native speech, so that it seems they offer and return hellos to travelers and sometimes show the right way to wanderers in the desert.]

The voices of the desert creatures lead men astray and mock travelers who have lost their way. In the Chinese tradition concerning the Gobi desert, the *Lew-Sha* (Flowing Sands), deluding voices are likewise associated with the desert. Ma Twan-Lin describes the two roads that stretch from China to the west; one is the easy way, the other takes the traveler across

a plain of sand extending for more than one hundred leagues. . . . During the passage of this wilderness you hear sounds, sometimes of singing, sometimes of wailing; and it has often happened that travelers going aside to see what these sounds might be have strayed from their course and been entirely lost; for they are voices of spirits and goblins.³⁵

Hiuen Tsang, the "Indian Pausanias," on his travels across the desert before the eighth century, would confirm the effects of demons. He experienced "visions of troops marching and halting, . . . constantly shifting, vanishing, and reappearing, 'imagery created by demons.'" ³⁶ The hallucinatory terrain of the desert draws our attention to its function as fantasy realm, as space like that described by Freud as "a kind of reservation" free from the dictates of the reality principle.³⁷ This is the realm of play, experimentation, change, and the possibility of replacing one reality with another. It is unmistakably dangerous, but it is first and foremost compelling and seductive. Marco Polo's journey across the desert brought him into contact with the alluring force of the desert:

there is a marvellous [*sic*] thing related of this Desert, which is that when travellers are on the move by night, and one of them chanceth to lag behind or fall asleep or the like, when he tries to gain his company again he will hear spirits talking, and will suppose them to be his comrades. Sometimes the spirits will call him by name; and thus shall a traveller oftentimes be led astray so that he never finds his party. (1: 197)

In a sense, the desert is where you always stand, where you can be led astray—say, into idolatry or death—or where you can discover a new subjectivity. It is the ambivalence itself of the desert that holds out the possibility of utopic, ecstatic transformation. At the limits of the known, representations and voices cannot be trusted, and thus the ambivalence—that mixture of fear and attraction—felt toward the alien, the other, can be momentarily overcome in the act of giving oneself over to the conceptual ambiguity signified by a phenomenon such as the desert. Richard of

St. Victor, we recall, notes that "est namque desertum aliud bonum aliud malum."³⁸ The radical undecidability contained in the desert signifies its resistance to perpetuating the Same, just as it signifies that no resistance to the desert is possible. In the next section, an excursus, I show how this feeling of passivity in the face of the radically possible, the nomadic, was converted into the activity of looking. An attempt is made to regulate the desert's spatial projection of the multiplicity of detours, displacements, and lines of flight along which the subject constitutes itself. This occurs as the utopic project of Prester John becomes increasingly politicized, from the late Middle Ages and into the Renaissance, as a way of legitimizing monarchic power.

Excursus: Mirror and Monarchical Vision in Prester John's Kingdom

*One image crossed the many-headed, sat
Under the tropic shade, grew round and slow
No Hamlet thin from eating flies, a fat
Dreamer of the Middle Ages. Empty eyeballs knew
That knowledge increases unreality, that
Mirror on mirror mirrored is all the show.*

—William Butler Yeats³⁹

If we try to examine the mirror in itself we discover in the end nothing but things upon it. If we want to grasp the things we finally get hold of nothing but the mirror.—This, in the most general terms, is the history of knowledge.

—Friedrich Nietzsche⁴⁰

In her seminal essay "Backgrounds of the Title *Speculum* in Mediaeval Literature" (1954), Sister Ritamary Bradley traced the range of significance of the word *speculum*, revealing it to be the center of a historically consistent set of meanings from Augustine to Alan of Lille to late-medieval writers.⁴¹ Her essay, like the paradoxes of Yeats and Nietzsche, reminds us that the mirror is always both literal and figurative, a material and metaphorical construct whose existence depends upon the objects it reflects. Mirrors never merely show us the world as it is, but indicate, like the mirror of Holy Scripture, the world to come, the world as it could be. In the mirror is everything refracted, reflected, telescoped, perspectivized, fragmented, exposed, revealed. Mirrors, we know, have a lot in common with the doublings and multivocalities inherent in fictionality. "Languages of heteroglossia," Mikhail Bakhtin declares, "like mirrors that face each other, each reflecting in its own way a piece, a tiny corner of the world, force us

to guess at and grasp for a world behind their mutually reflecting aspects that is broader, more multi-leveled, containing more and varied horizons than would be available to a single language or a single mirror."⁴² This ineradicable multiplicity marking fictionality provides what Wolfgang Iser dubbed its "operational power." This operational power of fictionality—in the active sense of the Latin *factio*, a fashioning, a construction or architecture—will be my focus as I try to suggest one of the ways space, seeing, fictioning, and power are bound up with one another. The problem of seeing and power in the medieval Latin and French *Letter of Prester John* is powerfully located in terms of the fantasy structure of the mirror, a device that links processes of identification, representation, and othering to what might be called the making of identities. What becomes visible in the image of the mirror then is the subject's own uncertain relation to the intricately matters of representation and self-representation, of seeing and seeing oneself as another.⁴³

But such a fantasmatics of seeing and power does not necessarily begin with Lacan and his mirror stage or with Bentham and Foucault and their Panopticon; instead, the fantasy of surveillance makes its appearance in the West in an Arabic history written by Ibn Chordadbeh in the last quarter of the ninth century. Ibn Chordadbeh was the first to mention the mirror high atop Pharos, the Alexandrian tower that served both as a beacon for ships in the Mediterranean and as a reconnaissance device, able to survey, the historian tells us, the entire sea to Constantinople, spying ships at three-day's journey.⁴⁴ Made of Chinese iron, the mirror enabled the Egyptian Arabs to keep close watch on their enemies, the Greeks. For several Arab writers, the mirror was one of the four Wonders of the World: its optical technology provided incredible powers of intelligence gathering and, as an incendiary instrument of the kind Roger Bacon was later to recommend for use against the Muslims, it provided the firepower to burn enemy ships as they approached port.⁴⁵ Though they differ in narrative details, the histories and geographies are univocal concerning the incident of the mirror's destruction by the treachery of the Greeks. Benjamin of Tudela, for example, recounts how Theodoros, a Greek captain, brought gifts for the Egyptian king and, having achieved friendly terms with the lighthouse keeper, threw a great banquet where he got the keeper and all his men drunk. Theodoros smashed the mirror and departed, thus restoring Greek sovereignty over the Egyptians.⁴⁶ Stories of the mirror's destruction dramatize the fragility of power tied to an architecture of seeing.⁴⁷ The collapse of the state is imminent when the universal gaze is obscured.

Curiously, medieval historians and geographers were quicker than modern ones to dismiss stories of the mirror and its wondrous powers. While, for instance, Ibn Hauqal and Leo Africanus declare the mirror tower an absurd and foolish tale "likely only to convince children,"⁴⁸ modern scholars like

Hermann Thiersch and A. Hilka suggest that the mirror is not pure fantasy, that it was the product of Hellenistic optical knowledge as employed by the Alexandrian academy.⁴⁹ However, to separate utterly the fictional from the real risks ignoring the degree to which, in the Middle Ages, these two categories of experience and knowledge were deeply imbricated. Indeed, it is precisely the fictional status of the mirror as focus for the exercise of power and simultaneously for the registration of knowledge that accounts for what can only be called a deep fascination with mirrors and optical imagery in the Middle Ages.

Mirrors construct, or "fiction," the universe. They mark a transition from a society of spectacle like that of antiquity to a society of surveillance. If the architecture of antiquity—its temples, theaters, circuses—and its social formations—its public life, festival, and community—both reflect and produce a society organized such that a multitude has the ability to see a small number of objects, then the architecture of the Middle Ages and modernity procures for a small number an instantaneous vision of the multitude. The Gothic Cathedral reverses the spectacle by strictly regulating the relations between worshipper and divine order and between private individual and state. For the religious, the Gothic, as a model of the vast universe, functions anagogically, its geometric proportion, immensity, and abundant light calculated to lead the mind from an immersion in the world of appearances to the contemplation of the divine. We know Suger of St. Denis, the first "architect" of the Gothic, saw his abbey as the embodiment of powerful political and religious visions in the tradition of the *chanson de gestes Pseudo-Turpin* and the *Descriptio qualiter Karolus*, popular poems emphasizing a strong bond between church and state. The abbey of St. Denis, as a center of pilgrimage, embodied a transcendental vision of twelfth-century France's spiritual center, a center ideally immune to feudal breakdown.

Indeed, the mutation of the antique society of the spectacle into the more modern surveillant or "control" society crucially depended upon technologies of the visual and, as I suggest, upon the organization of spatial relations to the nomadic other. At the crossroads of these two societies is the *Letter of Prester John*, a document that contains and works through at many different levels the tension between spectacle and surveillance. To the internecine strife characteristic of the twelfth-century political environment, the figure of Prester John offers an alternative: a society under the control of a Priest-King, who alone, in Georges Dumézil's famous formulation, acts as the mythic guarantor of the order of things. Yet this concentrated projection of the desires and reactions of the social body onto one person obviously must result in an ambiguous situation, a situation analogous to the order of sacred things in general: objects, like the lower jaw of Saint Eobanus, functioning at once as spectacular, mobile fragments manifesting

power and as singular relics that find their proper value and efficacy only on the condition that organic unity and totality retreat. Sacred things, according to Jean-Clet Martin, are not "conceived on the basis of a lost unity or a concealed totality"; they are "perfectly autonomous elements with no link to the whole from which they were removed."⁵⁰ Any reader of the *Letter* will immediately notice that the text is nothing other than a long inventory or catalogue of the individual marvels to be found in Prester John's utopic kingdom (I treat this feature of the *Letter* in chapter 5). The reader is offered a strange world of plenitude and multiplicity to survey, space organized as a realm of objects to be marveled at and wished for. A principle of accumulation thus organizes this open-ended text; indeed, by the time it underwent five major interpolations from about 1190 to the late thirteenth century, and eventually became around 1488 one of the earliest French printed books, the *Letter* was indistinguishable from a kind of nonallegorical bestiary chock-full of marvelous creatures.

Despite the effects of accumulation and translation, with the *Letter* gaining in simplicity and appeal, one element would endure essentially unchanged: the fabulous thirteen-story tower, constructed upon a single column and a series of bases and columns which reach, by a factor of two, sixty-four in number and then are divided by a factor of two until returning to a single column atop of which is a magical mirror, so the tower looks like an inverted pyramid with another pyramid resting on its base. The Latin text continues: "Indeed at the top of the uppermost column there is a mirror, consecrated by such art that all machinations and all things which happen for and against us in the adjacent provinces subject to us are most clearly seen and known by the onlookers. [72.] Moreover it is guarded by twelve thousand soldiers in the daytime just as at night, so that it may not, by some chance or accident, be broken or thrown down." Adjacent to Prester John's palace, the tower becomes a dominating center organizing the space around it through the effect of a gaze. It responds to the nomadic invasion of Islam by being itself a permanent invasion, employing the speed of magnifying vision to cause distances to approach and collapse: "objects in mirror are closer than they appear." In the French verse text we are told that "never was there so far off a country / from where a war was launched / or sneak attack made by any people / that we would not see it immediately."⁵¹ The optical technology mirrors the nomad so effectively as to immobilize, by spatializing and observing, the Muslim invader. Prester John's panoptical gaze masters the forces, such as invading armies and revolutionary movements, that establish horizontal conjunctions. As a disciplinary force, the mirror "oppose[s] to the intrinsic adverse force of multiplicity," or nomadism, "the technique of the continuous, individualizing pyramid."⁵²

The mirror is, then, also a sacred center, an emblem of sacral power and social privilege tied to viewpoint, to the place of the beholder or tower's master who is metonymically the master of the world. The mirror's look masters space, unifies and stabilizes the *imperium* such that, as the *Letter* repeatedly affirms, "there is no division among us." Prester John's existence is founded in God's will as a source of justice, power, and law; the mirror structures monarchical power whose perfect image is the summit of a pyramid with an apex that functions, to borrow Foucault's terms, as "the 'source' or 'principle' from which all power derives as though from a luminous focus."⁵³

Recalling that Prester John functions as the mythic guarantor of the order of things, I now want to suggest that he does so only by remaining at the juncture of the spectacular and the surveillant. The *Letter* describes the Priest-King as a central point surrounded by the splendor of sovereignty. Yet Prester John both merges with the trappings of his pomp to become himself a spectacular manifestation of power, a spectacle among spectacles, and he looms over everything, exercising a single gaze that organizes from above the spatial relations of the social body. While his own spectacular physical and material presence merges with the field of his extraordinary possessions, as the body of the king becomes the body of the marvel, Prester John is at the same time elevated to the lofty position of the imperial eye ordering the space around it. Relations of sovereignty are replaced by relations of discipline as the locus of power shifts from the person of the king to the spatial relations of the social body. This shift, or oscillation, from one position of authority to the other is made possible only by the dialectical structuring of the mirror whose gaze always works two ways: inwardly, to provide a vision of an immediate political or social array and outwardly, to provide the vision of a mediated political space tied to the projection of a fictional or historical other. In the later French versions, the power of Prester John's mirror rests as much upon its ability to see everything as upon its ability to be seen by everybody from everywhere: "li mireur est bien assis mult loinz veü par le pais" [ll. 835-36; the mirror is well situated to be seen from a great distance throughout the country]. Prester John's anti-nomadic physics of power depends upon the arrangement of an alterity that stops, so to speak, to recognize itself in the mirror. This scopical regime, with Prester John at its center, succeeds in making all Christian lands and holy places converge and resonate around the center. At once religious and secular, this despotism is a center of significance whose radiance causes the stratification of all barbaric invasions. Prester John's architecture of power also brings about the reterritorialization of every smooth surface and desert space suited for the wandering gliding of the nomad.

The anatomy of power in the late Middle Ages is, I submit, tied to the creation of a perceptual or optic space intolerant of the nomadic other. The

competing tendencies toward spectacle and surveillance are dramatized in the transition from late-medieval to Renaissance painting. The *Letter* enfolds these tendencies and reveals a dynamic of perspective latent in late-medieval optics and painting. Remarkable in works such as Giotto's "Expulsion of the Demons of Arezzo" and Cimabue's "St. Peter Healing the Lame" of the late thirteenth century are their panoptical Orientations. The buildings recede, not toward the center, but away from it, with the consequence that the eye, instead of being drawn toward the middle of the composition by the orthogonals, or receding lines, is fixed there by the verticals lying parallel to the surface. The tendency is to read these paintings in the opposite way to that of a typical Renaissance painting that draws attention inward from all sides, as in the Montefeltro Altarpiece of Piero della Francesca. In the Giotto and Cimabue paintings I mentioned, the gaze moves from the center outward, much as the real world is scanned by turning the head from side to side away from the norm or central axis represented by a straight ahead look. This is a vision of the world from the center of things, society organized as a spectacle that refuses to conform with vision represented by a single focused glance.⁵⁴ This is the world of the nomad, the mobile and multiple whose gaze travels over the surfaces receding outward from the fixed center. It is, at any rate, a world made available to all observers, to all members—potential and actual—of the community who are offered the possibility of identifying their belonging to this social space, as though they were the central observer.⁵⁵

An orderly universe ultimately under the single eye of the monarch would emerge in pictorial representations of the early fifteenth century. Brunelleschi is most often credited with developing the first complete, focused system of perspective with mathematically regular dimensions toward a fixed vanishing point. This fixed vanishing point, this all-important center of attention, directly controlled the onlooker's position in relation to the pictured scene, both in distance and direction. Paintings would be visualized using a peephole to ensure the monocularly of vision required to produce a surface as seen from a single viewpoint set at a particular distance. These two principles—the coincidence of observer and painted viewpoint and the singleness of the vanishing viewpoint—comprised a metaphysical program for the organization of the visual and the social. Alberti's treatise on the visual arts, *De pictura* (1435), codified the rules for a perspectival construction that placed the viewer and what he termed the *historia*, or emotive action, of the painting in the same spatial continuum. The beholder's eye and the surfaces of the world were to be connected by means of a pyramid of rays, whose apex resided in the eye, whose sides were the visual rays going out to the surface forming the pyramid's base. The image of the pyramid concretizes the power relations underpinning any

system of surveillance. The apex of the pyramid marks the site of the singular observer who takes command of the perceptual field by taking possession of its dimensions, which the observer himself generates.

Alberti's *De pictura* elaborated the new role of the spectator in relation to the picture or *historia* in terms that reflected not just a growing humanism, but an emergent political order based upon the Protogorean notion that man is the measure of this new world. The social and political combined with the aesthetic to emerge as the center of a new architecture of power. "The virtues of painting," writes Alberti, "are that its masters see their works admired and feel themselves to be almost like the prince and Creator [*principe et deo se paene simillimus esse intelligent*]." ⁵⁶ Painter, beholder, prince, and God collapse powerfully into a new figure whose chief task it seems is to regulate the nomadic other. Optical geometries and hierarchical ordering would lend to this new figure, whose gaze is unwavering, the power to see everything and to make the world transparent, that is, clear and distinct, to monocular vision. Alberti will stress in his treatise that the first thing that gives pleasure in a *historia* is plentiful variety. But, he cautions, this perceptual wealth must not be haphazard, unsystematic, unrestrained, or nomadic: "I disapprove of painters who, in their desire to appear rich or to leave no space empty, follow no system of composition, but scatter everything about in random confusion with the result that their *historia* does not appear to be doing anything but merely to be in a wandering turmoil [*sed vagari tumultuare historia videtur*]" (p. 79). The architectural view from the school of Piero della Francesca, with its dramatic orthogonals leading the eye toward a focal point lying in space beyond the buildings, illustrates the kind of painting Alberti would have approved of. Alberti would have found the painting dignified in its establishment of a world of restraint and measure, in its unified, striated organization of space. A paradigm of sociopolitical space, of Alberti's *costruzione legittima*, this painting embodies the fantasy of subjection by striation, of power through fixation and illumination. Along the line of fixative sight, anti-nomadic power is deployed.

The *Letter of Prester John* and Alberti's *De pictura* together figure a new kind of space called into being by the nomadic other. They might be said to orient the Orient. I have stressed the relays between medieval and Renaissance architectures of power in order to begin to map the fantasmatics of space and vision at work in these control structures.⁵⁷ In order to understand the Orient as other, in the mirror of the same, we must broach the problem of seeing and power as it is made visible in architectural and spatial realities, constructs, and metaphors.

PART THREE

THE STRUCTURE OF ALTERITY

CHAPTER 5

THE MARVEL AND THE LIST

This chapter and chapter 6 treat medieval writing, principally the *Letter of Prester John*, in relation to three generic modalities: the fictional *epistola*, the list or montage, and the travel narrative. All three genres are particularly well suited for handling the complexities of relations between self and other that arise when such literature attempts to deal with alternative realities. This chapter aims at explaining the mechanics of these genres, how they do the work of both keeping alive the reader's interest and, more crucially, instilling in the reader the *desire* for an alternative reality.

I begin with a brief discussion of fictional letters, and, by focusing on wonder-letters, lay bare the special way that these documents structure the reader's suspension of disbelief. Wonder-letters provoke the reader to invest in a new kind of reality, one that is future oriented, open, and utopic, rather than static, locative, and closed. The centrifugal force of wonder-letters derives from the way they put forward certain arguments about reality. Here, I borrow from documentary film theory the notion of making an argument about reality, an argument aimed not at faithfully describing reality, as if by holding a mirror up to it, but at persuading someone that the reality being presented is in fact deeply conditioned by ideological effects. Wonder-letters dramatize this gap between realities—the one you know and the one you think you know—in order to set up the contrast between this world now and a possible one to come. Readers get caught in this gap, I suggest, when they necessarily become fascinated with disjunction itself. By suspending the reader between two realities, the letters generate a new level of reality prescribed for cultural and individual transformation.

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I turn then to mirabilia lists as the chief mode by which readers are momentarily captivated in the interspace held open by a dual focus upon local facts or bits of knowledge (*res*) and more general, even allegorical, meanings. I concentrate on the list's didactic function in order to suggest that its cultural value has less to do with preserving knowledge as some recyclable content than with systematizing knowledge as a collection of useless fragments. In their awkward juncture, in the full shock of their incongruity, the fragments acquire utopic value that is not, however, to be derived from any conscious effort on the part of the reader to assimilate them into a coherent, meaningful whole.

Lists deny readers the pleasure of final meaning or utopian significance in order precisely to confer upon them pleasure itself in the form of desire. This chapter hinges on a reading of utopia as a social formation founded on loss, an absence that instills in the reader the desire to search for something to replace or exceed the original missing object. Nowhere is this desire stronger than in the interspace of ritual and pilgrimage. I read the story of the coffin of St. Thomas in terms of its instantiating a desire to reconcile same with other, local with distant, and present with future. From this case, I develop a theory of identity that I term "serial genealogy." The problem before me is how to ground an approach to self-other relations in history at those moments when the other resembles the same so closely that the gap between the two terms appears seamless. I put to use the Derridean concept of originary delay to show how in such moments the self undergoes radical refiguration as a point in a series of proximate identities, a point whose meaning is thrown into question by the other, to the extent that the original self is rendered anxious, on the move toward an alternative reality.

Anxiety propels movement, and so I turn to the genre of the travel narrative in chapter 6 to uncover the way that identity is figured there as an anxious process, an excited trajectory. The work of travel has everything to do with utopic movement—both appear structured by anxious desire and both are deeply implicated in the narrative structure of what I term "the moving image." The very flow of images in the *Letter of Prester John* installs the wish to reconstitute, by moving through them, the ruins of local bits of historical memory (what will be reanimated by the utopic drive). I draw upon psychoanalytic theory from here out because it most powerfully furnishes a way of talking about the core of fantasy involved in myths calculated to direct a reader to another space of thinking and acting.

Chapter 6 builds to a discussion of the ideological value of the flow of images found in the list structure, a flow bearing genetic resemblance to filmic montage. I reframe the list in terms of the imaginary relations it produces and into which readers are interpellated. The montage, the theory of which I borrow from Eisenstein's famous "agit cinema," activates

self-analysis leading to self-transformation. In film theory, I would argue, we find the clearest articulation of the forms such self-analysis can take. Just as the film viewer is placed by the film and the act of spectation itself into new and multiple relations to the film, the reader of the utopic text is stimulated to leave the close comfort of familiarity for the provocative alien, the ungraspable that leads, even seduces, the reader forward to the discovery of the new and better.

Medieval Letters and the Real

Charles-Victor Langlois's pronouncement that "the most precious documents for a history of the Middle Ages are letters"¹ not only draws attention to the neglected study and broad significance of medieval epistolography but, for our purposes, prompts an investigation of the specific ways in which letters, like the *Letter of Prester John*, actually construct and represent history in/of the Middle Ages. Medieval letters, as "self-conscious, quasi-public literary documents, often written with an eye to future collection and publication,"² share with medieval historical writing a concern for conserving the past for the present, or more precisely, for historicizing the past in the present. Letters, like histories, work to bring the past into the present, to collapse the distance between historical alterity and present reality, to ensure continuity between two temporal realities. Furthermore, both the epistolary and historical genres provide discursive frameworks for imaginatively appropriating otherness—such as the "distant" past, Saracen history, or marvels of the East—for the fundamental purposes of self-knowledge and self-creation. Letters, though, are especially revealing of this play of self and other, writer's world and recipient's world, that necessarily inheres in the distances between the two, in what scholars of epistolography call the epistolary situation.³ Accordingly, letters issue from a desire to bridge spatial as well as temporal gaps. They clearly dramatize what I shall call the dialectics of presence and absence underwriting fictional responses to otherness in the Middle Ages.

Throughout the Middle Ages, fictional letters, documents not intended to be sent but nonetheless understood as letters conforming to basic rules of the *artes dictaminis*, enjoyed widespread and steady circulation. These fictional letters often blurred the generic boundary lines between history (an account of the reality of past events) and literature (imaginative re-creations of such events).⁴ So, for example, the immensely popular *Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem*, known in England as early as the eighth or ninth century, describes the natural wonders of the East against the historical and geographical background, however fuzzy, of Alexander's military campaigns in India.⁵ The *Epistola* functions, in Roland Barthes's terms, as "an effect of the real,"

making of history a referential system dependent upon mythic, legendary, and fictional details that combine with and ultimately displace historical reality.⁶ Other popular letters achieve "reality effects" by purporting to be sent by such suprahistorical figures as Christ, the Devil, and the Virgin for the purpose of instructing, warning, or disciplining wayward clergy.⁷ Still others, sometimes despite knowledge of their fictional status, were instrumental in political negotiations and crusading propaganda.⁸ Like the *Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem*, these letters foreground an argument,⁹ usually authorized by an extraordinary figure, about the everyday historical world itself, an argument that depends upon contrasting a world with *the* world, the supramundane with the mundane. Perhaps most striking about such letters, then, are ways they dramatize and attempt to bridge the gap between two disparate realities, the world in which we live and the world in which we may imagine living.

The letter form encourages, therefore, not a resolution of tension or a synthesis of opposites in the gap it opens up between two realities, but rather a fascination with disjunction itself, the oscillation between two worlds, one familiar and one strange. The letter offers knowledge of an other, but does so only within a structure amounting to a paradox. This is the case since, as Bill Nichols puts it, a reader "caught within oscillations of the familiar and the strange. . . acquire[s] a fascination *with* this oscillation per se, which leads to a deferment of the completion of knowledge in favor of the perpetuation of the preconditions for this fascination."¹⁰ Complete knowledge is thus always elusive, illusory because it is intrinsically *allusive*. What a letter withholds, allusively gestures toward, becomes finally as interesting as what it reveals; or, to put it another way, what maintains interest is precisely the play of withholding and revelation. That such play and contradiction, then, should trouble the rationalistic minds of churchmen like Guibert of Nogent is not surprising. In *De virginitate*,¹¹ Guibert implicitly criticizes the confusions and inconsistencies in the alleged correspondence of Jesus and Abgar, an apocryphal epistolary exchange included in Eusebius of Caesara's *Ecclesiastical History*, and which enjoyed immense independent circulation in late-antique and medieval culture, and was even said to have an apotropaic function.¹²

In part, Guibert's discomfort with the contradictions of such epistolary documents is a register of our own uneasiness with the whole tradition of fictional letters in the Middle Ages forming a context for the most popular letter of them all, the *Letter of Prester John*. This tradition includes, in addition to the fictional epistles I have briefly mentioned, wonder-letters such as the letter of Pharasmanes (or Fermes) to Hadrian,¹³ the letter of Premo to Trajan,¹⁴ the *Collatio Alexandri cum Dindimo per litteras facta*,¹⁵ the letters of Alexander to his mother Olympias,¹⁶ and the letter in Sindbad's sixth

voyage.¹⁷ What I have labeled an "uneasiness" with such wonder-documents issues from the interpretative challenges posed by their "grotesque actuality,"¹⁸ that is, as Mary Campbell has characterized them, their images of hybridity, inversion, disorder, and the paratactic organization of these same images—all of which subvert critical taxonomy. But, as Campbell shows, even such grotesque actuality can be tamed by allegorization or organized by science. Wonder-letters, like the monster and Marvels of the East traditions I discussed in chapter 1, structure a rhythm oscillating between the symbolic or allegorical and the actual or phenomenal. Guibert of Nogent, it seems, did not tolerate the simultaneous presence of the symbolic and the historical in the letters of Jesus and Abgar, so he reinterpreted them, confidently dismissing their historical reality and symbolic meaning.

If the central problem—for Guibert, for medieval as well as modern readers—posed by such letters is the relation or comparison between two realities, then does it matter if this dyad is synthesized, this conflict resolved? I would suggest, with Campbell, that it matters little. "The point," as she puts it, "is only that we are here confronted with an ontological order somewhere *between* the symbolic and the actual—a level of reality that resolves the confusion we began with. We might call it 'minimum reality,' an order in which [realities] can be conceived that exist only for the uses—psychological, theological, material—to which others can put them."¹⁹ So, for example, Alexander's epistolary exchanges with Dindimus, king of the Gymnosophistae or Brahmins of India, contrasting the nefarious, materialistic civilization of the Greeks with the simple, ascetic lives of the Indian sages—letters either of Cynic origin or a response to Alexander's Cynic opponents²⁰—served later purposes of extolling Christian asceticism, while always pointing out, as such Renaissance images of the "noble savage" did, the shortcomings of contemporary Western society and belief structures. To put the matter simply, the Brahmins existed only for the ideological uses to which the West put them. They must be actual only as the material or imagistic vehicles for a specific ideology; they have historical reality insofar as they have symbolic or representative value.

Given this double structure of responses to the wonder-letters, as depositories of local wonders and of generalized truths, the uneasiness toward such documents is perhaps only disguised pleasure, a special kind of enjoyment in the ways that reality per se seems to give way to impressions of reality. That is, wonder-letters invoke two kinds of reader expectations: those associated with fiction and those with realism. While, as categories, these genres and the "horizon of expectations" they construct do not inform the medieval reader's understanding and recognition of narrative structures, they nevertheless structure the methods by which a reader processed information conveyed by these documents of alterity. The

conventions of fictional letters, which as I have suggested share the generic trait of positing an alternative, often superior, world or worldview, issue in what I will call "allegorical pleasure":

We settle into a distinct mode of engagement in which the fictional game calling for the suspension of disbelief ("I know this is a fiction, but I will believe it all the same," a continual oscillation between "Yes, this is true," and "No, it is not") transforms into the activation of belief ("This is how the world is, but still, it could be otherwise"). Our oscillation now swings between a recognition of historical reality and the recognition of an argument about it.²¹

In recognizing that what matters is not historical reality but our impression of it, we arrive at the possibility of transforming that historical reality into something else, something *other*. The oscillations underwriting any encounter with otherness become productive only when local acknowledgments of how the world is, or appears to be, become global configurations of a society transformed. Allegorical pleasure is delight in the possibility of a future transformed and in the process of transformation itself (precisely in the process of "speaking in *other* terms" [Gr. *allegorein*]). Nowhere is this pleasure stronger than in utopic documents such as the *Letter of Prester John*.

Fictional letters illustrate perhaps more transparently than other narrative structures the mechanisms by which reality is set against and transformed into its other. "The essence of the epistolary genre," writes Giles Constable, "both in Antiquity and the Middle Ages, was not whether a letter was actually sent but whether it performed a representative function."²² The reality of the letter—its origin, destination, and factual content—was secondary to the performative role it played, to its representational function as process or act. This subordination of the constative to the performative has far-reaching implications for the ways that the Real is configured in such letters. For if, to follow Fredric Jameson,

we try to accustom ourselves to thinking of the narrative text as a process whereby something is done to the Real, whereby operations are performed on it and it is one way or another "managed" (Norman Holland) or indeed "neutralized," or under other circumstances articulated and brought to heightened consciousness, then clearly we will have to begin to think of the Real, not as something outside of the work, of which the latter stands as an image or makes a representation, but rather as something borne within and vehiculated by the text itself, interiorized in its very fabric in order to provide the stuff and the raw material on which the textual operation must work.²³

Letters offer an understanding of reality only as something acted upon by epistolary constraints, as something manipulated by the continual flux of

sameness and otherness, presence and absence, that creates the space for managing or neutralizing the Real. In the gap that the letter opens up between two realities, the letter acquires its force as a mediator and transformer of the Real. Such mediation and transformation take place across a field of dialogue, space linking two interlocutors. Antique and medieval theories of the epistolary genre invariably regarded the letter as one-half of a complete dialogue, enacting an ersatz encounter or speech between sender and addressee. Ambrose, for example, claimed that "the epistolary genre [*genus*] was devised in order that someone may speak to us when we are absent."²⁴ The letter was thought of as a *presence before*—in both the temporal and spatial senses, to proceed and in front of or facing—an absence. Similarly, medieval masters of *ars dictaminis* defined the letter as "sermo absentium quasi inter presentes" and "acsi ore ad os et presens."²⁵ This concept of the letter as "sermo absentium" [absent conversation] affirmed the impossibility of unifying, either temporally or spatially, two disparate world(view)s, but nonetheless suppressed the disruption of distance. The concept guarantees the duality of presence and distance: if the letter is meant to be a presence facing an absence, a deferred presence, then certainly the opposite, too, obtains, where the letter is only an absence (or, more properly, the marker of absence) for a presence (the reader or addressee).

The effect created by this quasi dialogue affirming simultaneous presence and absence is never wholly a source of confusion or of a breakdown in communication. Instead, the irony of coming into the presence of the other in order to certify difference or absence seems, to judge by the centrality of the so-called arrival scene in traditional ethnographic representations, in fact to offer an impression of authenticity and unity.²⁶ Literal arrival scenes—for example, Marco Polo at the court of the great Khan or, for that matter, anthropologist Raymond Firth in Polynesia—establish the trustworthiness or truth-value of the observer's *descriptio* on the premise of "You are there because I was there."²⁷ Proximity to and dialogue with the other, living in the midst of the exotic and participating in alien cultures, make unity imaginable, while, as this passage from the Cotton version of Mandeville's *Travels* underscores, always rendering such engagements deeply problematic.

And all be it þat sum men wil not trow me, but holden it for fable to tellen hem the nobless of his persone & of his estate & of his court & of the gret multytude of folk þat he holt, natheles I schall seye zou A partye of him & his folk, after þat I haue seen the manere & the ordynance full many a tyme. And whoso þat wole may leue me zif he will, And whoso will not may leue also. For I wot wel zif ony man hath ben in tho contrees be zonde, þough he haue not ben in the place where the grete Chane duelleth, he schall here speke of

him so meche merueylouse thing, that he schall not trowe it lightly; And treuly no more did I myself til I saugh it. And þo þat han ben in þo contrees & in the gret Canes houshold knowen wel þat I seye soth. And þerfore I will not spare for hem that knowe not ne beleue not but þat þei seen for to tell you a partie of him & of his estate that he holt whan he goth from contree to contree & whan he maketh solempne festes.²⁸

An anxiety subtends Mandeville's personal report of the Great Khan's court, a sense that the subjectivity demanded of eye-witness reporting impairs the material realities of encounter itself.²⁹ Mandeville's drive to create an impression that he was really there and that his words are to be trusted predictably meets the skepticism of those who were not really there. Mandeville's suspicion that some of his readers will have chosen not to suspend their disbelief issues from his awareness that a fuller, subjective account of the "practices of everyday life" is missing from his narrative. Lost in the gaps between the grand items on lists of subjects to be described ("the nobless of [the gret Canes] persone & of his estate & of his court & of the gret multytude of folk that he holt"; "his estate that he holt whan he goth from contree to contree & whan he maketh solempne festes") is the webbing of subjective experience, "spoken from a moving position already within or down in the middle of things, looking and being looked at, talking and being talked at."³⁰ As participant-observer—as traveler par excellence—Mandeville is ineluctably suspended between two relations toward the otherness he wishes to describe: interactive subjectivity ("this is the way things *were* because I was present") and detached objectivity ("this is the way things *are* regardless of my presence"). The gap between these two speech positions, obviously as much temporal as it is spatial, again brings before us the duality of presence and absence underlying discourse on otherness.

But the more basic point is that Mandeville really does care if he is believed or not, or more precisely, if his readers "holden it for fable" all the wonders he has reported. Mandeville's concern is not whether readers finally believe he is the traveler he claims, but whether they believe that all these points of travel may actually exist, that this itinerary of marvels is a *possible* one. Now subjectivity can give way to objectivity; in fact it must if readers are to transform their suspension of disbelief into active belief, if readers are to grasp "the utopian moment of travel." This moment arises, as Stephen Greenblatt puts it so nicely, "when you realize that what seems most unattainably marvelous, most desirable, is what you almost already have, what you could have—if you could only strip away the banality and corruption of the everyday—at home."³¹ The authorial desire to be believed in this special way seems to lie at the heart of medieval *mirabilia*-texts. For if

critical opinions of Mandeville, past or present, are limited to labeling him a "steady liar" writing in "brazen bad faith,"³² then dialogue with his readers fails: why should the reader continue to absorb the information contained in the lists and series of marvels, contemplate their meaning, believe in their utopic possibilities? After all, a medieval reader with access to Odoric of Pordenone's *Itinerarius*, the Alexander romances, the *Letter of Prester John*, or Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum historiale/naturale* could readily satisfy his thirst for *mirabilia* by turning to these texts, Mandeville's own source material. The existence of codices such as the deluxe late-fourteenth-century *Livre des Merveilles* (Bibliothèque Nationale MS français 2810), containing a vast assortment of *mirabilia*-texts including the *Travels*, the *Livre de l'estat du grant Caan* of Jean de Cori, and half a dozen other sources Mandeville plagiarized,³³ suggests finally that, as Alan Gaylord writes, "the medieval reader entertained a somewhat different opinion on the question of truth-claims."³⁴ A medieval reader expected something different when he encountered the volatile mixture of common and arcane knowledge, traces of half-true and misunderstood phenomena, verifiable facts and pure myth. He expected to have his curiosity held, his fascination suspended in the fluctuating rhythms of familiarity and strangeness, and, through these, his world transformed.

Knowing Strangeness: Marvels and Lists

That such codices and Mandeville's own book conveniently packaged strange marvels for a perennially curious readership does itself little to explain the immense popularity of these texts. Instead, their appeal resides in the way these *mirabilia*-texts structure a captivating oscillation between subjectivity and objectivity, control and estrangement, holding reading interest within a structured paradox:

We want to know and yet not know completely. We seek to make the strange known, or, more precisely, to know strangeness. We want to *know* it but know it *as strangeness* as such, to know that by being beheld as strange, it continues to elude full comprehension. The motivating force of curiosity persists, conserving the strangeness of what we seek to know.³⁵

Mandeville's book thus shares with wonder-letters a tendency to list marvels, to compile or enumerate, through detached objectivity, individual wonders whose aggregate effect is that of a desire for more. For the reader, the enjoyment of imaginatively extending the list, or having it extended for him or her, comes at the expense of relating to the subjective experience that organized those marvels into a list in the first place. Mandeville's appeal

derives, then, more from his self-effacing function as a transmitter of the richness of alien culture than from his role as traveler fashioning a narrative out of his personal experiences. Yet, as we saw, Mandeville's attempt to mitigate some of the anguish of this contradiction surfaces in moments of self-reflexive speculation on the truth-claims of his narrative, when he inserts into the wonder-descriptions his reflections on the authority of subjective experience out of which the wonders are generated.

Such self-reflections on the project of enumerating wonders are not uncommon in the medieval literatures of *mirabilia*, an encyclopedic tradition heavily indebted to Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*, especially to its seventh book containing an account of Eastern marvels, which is in fact the longest of extant wonder-lists.³⁶ In this book, Pliny prefaces his list with an admission that, in treating the world in its parts (e.g., "gentes, maria, flumina insignia, insulae, urbes"), specifying the nature of animals alone is beyond the capacity of the human mind: "Animantium in eodem natura nullius prope partis contemplatione minor est, etsi ne hic quidem omnia exsequi humanus animus queat" (7.1.1). But it is the almost infinite diversity of humanity—its innumerable races and customs—that especially defies specification. So Pliny opts not to describe all races and nations, instead just those marvelous ones far from the Mediterranean basin, in the wondrous East:

Neque enim ritus moresque nunc tractabimus innumeros ac totidem paene quot sunt coetus hominum; quaedam tamen haud omittenda duco, maximeque longius ab mari degentium, in quibus prodigiosa aliqua et incredibilia multis visum iri haud dubito. quis enim Aethiopas antequam cerneret credidit? aut quid non miraculo est cum primum in notitiam venit? quam multa fieri non posse priusquam sunt facta iudicantur? naturae vero rerum vis atque maiestas in omnibus momentis fide caret si quis modo partes eius ac non totam complectatur animo. (7.1.6–7)

[Nor will we now deal with manners and customs which are beyond counting and almost as numerous as the groups of mankind; yet there are some that I think ought not to be omitted, and especially those living more remote from the sea; some things among which I do not doubt will appear too portentous and incredible to many. For whoever believed in the Ethiopians before seeing them? Or what is not deemed miraculous when first it comes into knowledge? How many things are judged impossible before they actually occur? Indeed the power and majesty of all natural things at every turn lack credence if one's mind embraces only parts of it and not the whole.]

Like Mandeville, Pliny asserts that seeing involves knowing, that the shock of the extraordinary can be overcome, at least momentarily, by knowledge. These phenomena, seeming to many "prodigiosa" and "incredibilia," Pliny suggests, are not fully credible in their individuality, but only as parts of a

sublime whole. Only by contemplating nature as a totality can the observer appreciate its awesome variety, its power and majesty. This knowledge of a greater whole overcomes the taxonomic problems posed by encountering and attempting to delimit what is infinitely multiple. It prevents intellectual astonishment by organizing an unusual perceptual wealth into a list that demands a dual focus on the local bits of fact (*res*) and on their general meaning. The single marvel is contemplated for a fleeting moment in a state of detachment and dis-order before it is concatenated and systematized.

But even thus concatenated and systematized, the marvel bears a residue of disorder, excess, and mobility, a resistance to the containing and restraining pressures of the list or the catalogue.³⁷ No list or catalogue can fully contain the multiplicity of what only temporarily appears organized and uniform. And so the *Letter of Prester John*, a text whose structure depends upon the compilation of lists and catalogues, ends, in nearly all versions, with an impossible challenge to the reader: "If you can count the stars in heaven and the sand of the sea, then you can calculate the extent of our kingdom and our power" (§100). The reader, having digested a great deal of information, in discrete sections, about the East and its magnificent ruler, arrives at the text's end liberated, rather than stymied, by lack of closure. Structurally "at once accretive and discontinuous,"³⁸ the flexible forms of the list and of the catalogues themselves gesture metonymically toward plenitude and the impossibility of final enumeration and measure. Thus what appears in reality uniform and continuous—stars in the heaven and sand of the sea—is formally open-ended, discontinuous, infinite. By admitting the incapacity of the informational list (and its human creators) to be comprehensive, the *Letter* ends figuratively where Pliny begins his wonder-list of book 7: "ne . . . quidem omnia exsequi humanus animus queat" [the human mind is not capable of exploring the whole field].

Yet the list's intrinsic failure to be comprehensive, its gesture toward the infinite, accounted, perhaps paradoxically, for its didactic narrative function and its strong appeal to the medieval imagination. Thus, as Nicholas Howe notes, in the Middle Ages "the catalogue could be used for a variety of encyclopedic and poetic purposes because it corresponds to a certain vision of experience, or pattern of thought, which values plenitude and diversity."³⁹ At once poetic and encyclopedic, the *Letter of Prester John* expresses notions of plenitude and diversity in long paratactic lists like this one:

14. In terra nostra oriuntur et nutriuntur elephantes, dromedarii, cameli, ypotami, cocodrilli, methagallinari, cametheternis, thinsiretae, pantherae, onagri, leones albi et rubei, ursi albi, merulae albae, cicades mutae, grifones, tigres, lamiae, hienae, boves agrestes, sagittarii, homines agrestes, homines cornuti, fauni, satiri et mulieres eiusdem generis, pigmei, cenocephali,

gygantes, quorum altitudo est quadraginta cubitorum, monoculi, cyclopes et avis, quae vocatur fenix, et fere omne genus animalium quae sub caelo sunt.

[14. In our country are born and thrive elephants, dromedaries, camels, hippopotami, crocodiles, *methagallinarii*, *cametheternis*, *thinsiretae*, panthers, aurochs, white and red lions, white bears, white merlins, silent cicadas, griffins, tigers, lamias, hyenas, wild oxen, archers, wild men, horned men, fauns, satyrs and women of the same kind, pigmies, dog-headed men, giants whose height is forty cubits, one-eyed men, cyclopes, and a bird, which is called the phoenix, and almost all kinds of animals that are under heaven.]

This list itself figures, on a microsyntagmatic level, the larger structure of parataxis informing the entire *Letter*. That is, just as the individual lists in the *Letter* are composed of fragmentary knowledge, of bits of data lacking causal relations to one another and organized into a series based above all upon a principle of accumulation, the whole work seems to lack organizing principles that logically coordinate and subordinate blocks of meaning and of description. For example, the wonder-list just cited is preceded directly by the declaration that "Seventy-two provinces serve us, of which a few are Christian, and each one of them has its own king, who all are our tributaries" (§13), and followed immediately, in the original version, by a biblical allusion affirming that "Our land flows with honey and abounds with milk" (§21). Taken together, these three blocks of information present the reader with some striking incongruities. The reader might wonder what the mundane political organization of Prester John's realm has to do with fantastic creatures and marvelous beasts, over whom presumably no political control is exercised. Or, in what way satyrs, horned men, cyclopes, and pigmies fit with the notion of biblical paradise. Even the items of the lists themselves seem mysteriously incongruous. What, for instance, is the relation of silent cicadas—probably a churchman's fantasy of a noiseless local environment⁴⁰—to griffins, those disruptive, outré beasts of prey?

Searching for answers to questions such as these may be, finally, a more modern occupation than a medieval one. Medieval readers, faced with such a writerly text, which requires, Martin Gosman argues, "de la part du destinataire un effort d'assimilation considérable" [a considerable effort at assimilation on the part of the addressee],⁴¹ would not have been bothered by the ways in which ideals of organic form are vitiated or by the ways in which common sense is violated. The reception of the *Letter of Prester John* was governed neither by post-romantic assumptions concerning the integrity and unity of the work as a whole nor by expectations of any strict correspondence between what is described or enumerated and the known world.⁴² Instead—and here as elsewhere I part company with those who, like Gosman, read the *Letter* in dogmatically allegorical terms—readers

expected and delighted in shocks of discontinuity and fragmentation, in the clash of form and disorder, in the copresence of the far-fetched and the believable, in the mixture of the exotic and the ordinary.

I am not claiming for the *Letter* postmodern aesthetic sensibilities, but emphasizing here the extent to which the experience of marvels, as mediated especially through lists or catalogues, necessarily oscillates between mystery and knowledge. Lists organize and position the marvel, rendering it a discrete object of knowledge embedded in a series of such objects, while simultaneously defamiliarizing it, placing the marvel in a mysterious relation to (its) others. In the absence of grammatical and logical placement, the marvel floats autonomously, unrestrained by the "open work"⁴³ organizing it. Eco's idea of the open work, an open-ended narrative inviting the interpretation of its reader and thus presupposing cooperation between author and reader, was in fact first applied to Prester John by Gosman, who argued that the *Letter's* organizing principle is above all theological:

Ce qui filtre cependant à travers la succession des anecdotes indépendantes, c'est le profil d'une systématique qui garantit une autre existence, plus autoritaire, plus ecclésiastique, plus conforme à une volonté divine. Du moins, c'est ce que suggère l'information partielle, plus évocatrice que la présentation exhaustive. . . Son écriture évasive et partielle actionne le dispositif d'une fantaisie, celle d'une société à la recherche de ce que l'on pourrait qualifier de "bonheur."⁴⁴

[What filters, however, through the succession of the anecdotes is the profile of a *systématique* guaranteeing another existence, one more authoritative, ecclesiastical, in conformity with a divine will. At least it is what suggests partial information, more evocative than the exhaustive presentation. . . Its evasive and partial writing actuates the device of an imagination, that of a society in search of what one could describe as "happiness."]

Gosman contends that the fragmentary nature of the *Letter* gestures toward its final utopian significance, inviting the reader to recognize, and indeed to coconstruct, a " 'bonheur' terrestre" [earthly happiness].⁴⁵ As propaganda, the *Letter* functions just as an *exemplum* does, prescribing rather than describing an alternative reality. Disorder, incompleteness, and fantasy give way to the coherent hierarchy of divine will. Now the marvelous is reduced to an attractive husk for the kernel of religious meaning: "l'exotisme est. . . la couverture onirique de la *delectatio*: le message doit être présenté dans un emballage attractif" [exoticism is a dreamlike cover for the *delectatio*: the meaning must be presented in an attractive wrapping].⁴⁶ Yet the marvelous husk is more than ornamental packaging, more than a briefly entertaining obstacle to transcendental meaning. It is, as we will see in a later section

on "the moving image," instrumental in the formation of ideological representations of the social world and in the creation of "possible worlds" that offer models for moral and political change.

In Gosman's reading, the incongruities inherent in the marvelous are sealed up and the openness of the text itself closed down by the quiescence of "bonheur terrestre." For Gosman, the letter's fragmented structure, troubling its reader with disorder and metonymy, implies, on an ethico-political level, its opposite—harmony and final meaning. Utopia, in this view, emerges only at a moment of resolution and stability, at a moment when the harmony of the temporal and spiritual erases any residue or reminders of what Otto of Freising, referring to the historical moment of the *Letter*, called *turbulentia malorum*. Since utopia is always external to the lived, this "confusion of bad things" must yield to the assurance of an exterior stability—removed both spatially and temporally. In the outside utopia, the dynamic multiplicity of living becomes an inert singularity. The *Letter* thus leaves its reader in a kind of moribund state, in a "happiness" conditioned by rigid didacticism.

Between Two Worlds: The Pleasures of Utopia

Yet surely this is a singular kind of happiness, a joy which finally may not be all that joyful. In his essay on the oneiric value of India for medieval Latinity, Jacques Le Goff identifies "two opposing mentalities and sensibilities" at the heart of medieval conceptions of the exotic. As a repository for the oneiric projections of the medieval West, India became the site of conflicting desires, a magical space where the domesticating project of allegory confronted the shock or resistance of ambiguously coded marvels. At once attractive and repellent, these marvels play against their allegorical domestication. Though Le Goff seems much more interested in the tension of desire and fear marking marvels themselves than in the actual tension between tendencies to allegorize and tendencies to shock, he does point to the dampening effects of moralization on what might be called "bonheur monstre":

Tailored for instructional use, the India thus moralized might still inspire desire or fear, but it was primarily sad and saddening. The lovely substances are now mere allegorical baubles, and the poor monsters, created for edification, as well as the unfortunate race of wicked men with large lower lips who rank just above the monsters in the scheme of things, all seem to repeat the verse in Psalm 140 that they personify: 'malitia laborum eorum obruat eos.'

Tristes tropiques. . . .⁴⁷

Tristes tropiques: Le Goff's point here, I would emphasize, is too often ignored in approaches—both medieval and modern—to the ideological

value of utopic representations. Totalized and homogenized in the theater of Western projections, multiple wonders are stripped of their temporality, to become timeless signifiers of difference. The transformation of monsters into endlessly repeatable signs of the moral, even physical, degeneration of mankind—one thinks of the tympana of Vézelay and other churches—enforces a kind of forgetfulness, a refusal to acknowledge the very difference that the monster itself marks. In other words, in utopic representation of an allegorical type, the radical differences of wonders are always repressed so that their universal and timeless value can emerge.⁴⁸ If utopia is to be represented, the singularity of creatures with gigantic lower lips must be forgotten, in fact, it must not even be represented except as the insistent marker of a non-memory. Utopic representation thus works negatively to produce a striking sense of loss, a sadness contaminating from within what Louis Marin calls utopia's "permanent instant of happiness." "Now," Marin writes, "we can understand the despair that accompanies all utopic representations: the instant of prediction, the moment of good news and time outside of the time of pure difference is broadcast in the time of mourning. We know ahead of time that we can only forget what we mean when saying it."⁴⁹

Medieval Christianity is in a profound sense predicated upon the mournful loss inherent in utopic representation, the constant reminder of which was of course the drama of the Fall. Lost was Paradise, like Prester John's kingdom "a very sweet place in the East" (Honorius of Autun⁵⁰), and with it harmony (especially living in accordance with nature⁵¹), community, homogeneity. Significantly, after the Fall the supernatural becomes discontinuous with the human; in fact, mankind, Augustine tells us, continues to degenerate from its original marvelous condition of giant stature and super-longevity to one of moribund squatness.⁵² Only after the Fall can what is marvelous be properly distinguished from what is natural since the fluid relation of the sacred and profane has been disrupted by an awareness that wonder events or objects, such as miracles or relics, now stand out arrestingly against the backdrop of ordinary reality.⁵³ That is, no longer are wondrous events, marvels, or miracles part of the order of the phenomenal but have become instead extra-ordinary entities whose significance is always left open to interpretation.⁵⁴ Miracles, for example, are, according to Aquinas, "those things which God does *outside* those causes which we know."⁵⁵ However, because the causes, and thus the final meanings, of miracles or other wonders remain hidden, efforts beginning in the twelfth century strenuously to divide the world into, say, the natural and the supernatural, actually open up spaces for interpretation by reinvesting the wonders with their original ambiguity. Either the wonder is regarded as something radically other, "irrelevant to most occasions of . . . normal

existence[,] or as positively crushing," something onerously proximate. "Hence," argues Peter Brown, "the paradox of the development of Christian society in the West in the eleventh and twelfth centuries."⁵⁶

This paradox, embodying a fundamental contradiction in the way special kinds of otherness were experienced in the Middle Ages, is central to the ideology of genre in Prester John. For if utopia, understood in its allegorical function, works to suspend differences, then the illusion of coherence, offered by the differentness up against which identity is defined and maintained, is lost. That loss must be mourned, either privately or communally, for it implies a forfeit of some essential element of the self.⁵⁷ Such mourning, the psychoanalytic literature insists, crucially builds upon melancholy. That is, melancholic incorporation of the desired object into the self, which occurs, Freud assures us, with loss, is the necessary precondition⁵⁸ for active, outward desire—here, either for a prelapsarian world (Prester John's kingdom as Paradise) or for a monstrous, hybrid world (Prester John's kingdom as marvelous place). To desire—or to live—utopia, that imaginary field of otherness in which are invested both hopes and fears, means to engage in a process of mourning that necessarily begins with an intensely ambivalent identification with the lost or absent object. Indeed, melancholy, as Judith Butler describes it, arises when an individual or society "refuses the loss of the object, and internalization becomes a strategy of magically resuscitating the lost object, not only because the loss is painful, but because the ambivalence felt toward the object requires that the object be retained until differences are settled."⁵⁹ The paradox for the development of twelfth-century Christian society in the West might be said, then, to reside not only in the dilemma between repressing alterity (forgetting) and being impressed by it (remembrance), but precisely in the problems posed by the "settling of differences" internal and external to society. That utopia was the genre used to settle differences provisionally is, as I have suggested thus far, tied to the formal structures of the letter and list and to their capacity to manage worldly chaos by creating and maintaining spaces between sameness and otherness, by positing gaps from which the expression of a possible world can emerge.

Here it is important to remark that utopias often prolong indefinitely any real settling of differences. Performing the cultural work of mourning, utopias seem to be instances of extended melancholia since the dialectical relation to otherness they promote is particularly unstable, always shifting from one pole to another, from self to non-self. The questions posed by the existence of Prester John are thus always versions of the same one: What is the nature of the ambivalent identification with this realm which is at once familiar and strange, a self-projection and an alien site? Despite what appears in the twelfth century as a need to maintain as firm a demarcation

between self and other as possible, the constant oscillation of the familiar and the alien was effected across a field of perpetual desire, the insistent wish to bring the two together. Thus, for example, a pattern appears in the *Letter*: what was lost once gets figured as that which is desired forever. Consider the description of Prester John's fountain of youth:

27. Quod nemus est ad radicem montis Olimpī, unde fons perspicuus oritur, omnium in se specierum saporem retinens. Variatur autem sapor per singulas horas diei et noctis, et progreditur itinere dierum trium non longe a paradiso, unde Adam fuit expulsus. 28. Si quis de fonte illo ter ieiunus gustaverit, nullum ex illa die infirmitatem patietur, semperque erit quasi in aetate XXXX duorum annorum, quamdiu vixerit.

[27. This grove [where, the *Letter* has just informed us, pepper is harvested] is situated at the foot of Mount Olympus, from where a clear spring issues, containing all kinds of pleasant tastes. The taste, however, varies each hour of the day and night, and flows out by a waterway for three days, not far from Paradise, from where Adam was expelled. 28. If someone who has fasted for three days tastes of this spring, he will suffer no infirmity from that day on, and will always be as if he were thirty-two years old, however long he may live.]

Here two desires flow together: the desire for a paradise regained and the desire to experience that paradise permanently. However, as the passage stresses, desire for utopia—literally, the taste for paradise—varies with the shifting elements, and may actually disappear (*progredior*, to go out, go away). Recovering the paradise that has slipped away or been forcibly taken away, as in Adam's case, becomes the melancholy enterprise of the utopian who must continually confront the fragility of his own utopia. Only by acknowledging and working through the intrinsic changeability or motility of utopia can the utopian hope to gain a perennial condition of happiness and well-being. Yet this acknowledgment and working through express themselves paradoxically as sublimated desire, asceticism undertaken as a strategy of gratification.⁶⁰ Having no taste for utopia is the precondition of tasting it forever, just as recognizing one's powerlessness to preserve utopia is the precondition of being empowered by it.

In the *Letter* this tension of desire and its sublimation assumes the shape of a dynamic, often rhythmical oscillation between the poles of conservation and loss, achievement and interdiction. Pleasures and desires fulfilled are lived *through* rather than arrived at. Never entirely achieved or lost, the allegorical pleasures of Prester John's utopia constitute less a final "bonheur terrestre" and more a passageway to composing, and confronting, the problem of their own allegoricity. The utopian is never wholly within or

without (both outside of and lacking) a kind of earthly happiness and satisfaction:

38. Iuxta desertum inter montes inhabitabiles sub terra fluit rivulus quidam, ad quem non patet aditus nisi ex fortuito casu. Aperitur enim aliquando terra et si quis inde transit tunc potest intrare et sub velocitate exire, ne forte terra claudatur. Et quicquid de harena rapit, lapides preciosi sunt et gemmae preciosae, quia harena et sabulum nichil sunt nisi lapides preciosi et gemmae preciosae.

[38. Near the desert between the uninhabited mountains a certain rivulet flows beneath the earth, the entrance to which is not accessible except by chance. Indeed, sometimes the ground opens up, and if someone at that moment crosses over from there, he is able to enter; but he must quickly get out, if by any chance the ground may close up. And whatever he snatches up from the sand is precious stones and gems, for the sand and gravel are nothing but precious stones and gems.]

The pleasures of utopia are risky and fleeting: quickly snatching up jewels, one faces entombment in the utopic space (within a utopic space) he has entered. Access to and attainment of utopic pleasure are not givens, but are determined by chance and even by the extent of one's greed and the ability to curb it. This liminal space tests the limits of the utopian's desire, measuring how much he is willing to risk for a taste of utopia proffered now and again.

Perpetual desire for what is absent or lost propels Prester John's utopia, carrying it along on the rhythms of ritual. The anonymous *De adventu patriarchae Indorum ad Urbem sub Calixto papa secundo* [On the arrival of the Patriarch of the Indians to Rome under Pope Calixtus II] of 1122, containing one of two influential Western versions of the legend of St. Thomas's shrine and the saint's miracle-working hand,⁶¹ records an instance of this ritual dynamism whose basic elements provided source material for the descriptions of the saint's festival in at least two Latin versions of the *Letter* (BN 6244A and the Hildesheim MS), several French versions, and the narrative of Elyseus (1185).⁶² In *De adventu* the ritual festival of St. Thomas is regulated not only by the church calendar, but also by the rhythm of natural events. The saint's feast day (October 6) coincides with the lowering of the waters of a deep lake encircling the *mater ecclesia* (mother church) to allow pilgrims access to the *sancta sanctorum* where they will receive the Eucharist administered by St. Thomas's miraculously revived right hand (the same that had probed Christ's wounds in the famous scene of doubt):

26. Paululum vero extra urbis moenia mons separatus est, profundissimi lacus aquis undique septus, ab aquis autem porrectus in altum, in cuius summitate beatissimi Thomae apostoli mater ecclesia posita constat. [. . .] 28. Praedictus

quidem mons, ubi Thomae apostoli sita est ecclesia, infra annum nulli hominum accessibilis est, neque illum adire aliquis temere audet, sed patriarcha, quicumque fuerit, ad celebranda sacra mysteria locum et ecclesiam istam non nisi semel in anno cum circumquaque venientibus populis ingreditur. 29. Namque apostolicae festivitatis appropinquante die, octo diebus ante illam totidemque post illam, habundantia illa aquarum montem praedictum circumventum ita tota decrescit, quod fere an ibi aqua fuerit non facile discernatur, unde ibi undique concursus fit populorum, fidelium ac infidelium, de longe venientium, atque omnium male habentium, languorum suorum remedia et curaciones beati Thomae apostoli meritis indubitanter expectantium.

[26. A short distance outside the walls of the city [Hulna] is a mountain, surrounded everywhere by the waters of the deepest lake, which extends in height out of the water, at the top of which stands the mother church of St. Thomas the Apostle. 28. During the year, the aforementioned mountain, where the church of St. Thomas is located, is not accessible to anyone, nor would anyone without cause dare to approach, except the patriarch, whoever he may be, in order to celebrate the sacred mysteries, who enters the place and the church with the people who gather from everywhere only once a year. 29. For, eight days before and after the approaching feast day, the level of the water surrounding the mountain so greatly diminishes that it is hard to tell there was any water there at all; at this place there, people from everywhere come together, believers and unbelievers, who have come from far away, all infirm, confidently expecting remedy and cure, by the favor of the blessed Apostle Thomas, for their weaknesses.]

Time and topography work together to restrict access to the *locus sanctus* by ensuring that a rhythm of permission and interdiction controls the great flow of pilgrims [*maximus concursus populorum* (§36)] wishing to visit the saint. The phenomenon of the fluctuating level of water temporarily opening a dry passage functions, structurally, as a ritual element dramatizing the insularity of differentiated spaces, times, and identities and the possibility of movement between them.⁶³ Indeed, a pilgrim's self-identity depends upon the outcome of his encounter with St. Thomas, whose hand closes and withdraws in the presence of an infidel, heretic, or sinner [*infidelis vel erroneus seu alia peccati macula infectus* (§45)]. Since the unbeliever must either repent or die on the spot (§46), a great number, we are told, instantly convert to Christianity and are baptized (§47). In Elyseus's account of the wonders of St. Thomas's feast day, terrible punishments are given out to those to whom the hand has closed, including imprisonment for up to fifty years and dismemberment by wild animals (§§20–21). As a test of identity, the festival of St. Thomas enframes a liminal period where identity in relation to utopia (here, the very specific one of a *communitas* of believers) is provisional, momentarily subject to radical change (conversion, death). This

indeterminacy binds the pilgrim, even though he cannot imagine being inside it, or what is perhaps more tragic, cannot pretend to have it. The truth of the pilgrim's identity is inescapable; there is, in short, no way out and no going back.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, he remains transfixed in the interspace of ritual, between choosing to be transformed and being obligated to do so, between participating in utopia and being cast out of it, between being empowered by it (receiving the Eucharist) and being tragically disempowered by it. Thus suspended, the pilgrim, that figure of transition from one state to another, one land to another, knows only the possibilities of transformation.

Serving as an ideal metaphor for this state of the *entre-deux* is the coffin of St. Thomas itself, simultaneous destination and point of origin of the pilgrim's transformative experience. In the Elyseus narrative, the description of the fluctuating river is immediately followed by the description of the apostle's iron coffin, suspended between the magnetically charged walls of a lodestone chamber:

1[7]. Et cum festivitas apostoli advenerit, unusquisque praelatus cum populo sibi commisso accedit ad supradictum fluvium. Idem fluvius per 8 dies ante festum deficit et 8 post festum. In defectione eiusdem fluvii omnes homines accedunt ad apostolum, apostolus autem est in ecclesia eiusdem montis, et est in tumulo ferreo tumulatus; et tumulus ille manet in aere ex virtute 4 preciosorum lapidum. 1[8]. Adamans vocatur, unus in pavimento positus, in tecto secundus, unus ab uno angulo tumuli, alius ab alio. Isto vero lapides diligunt ferrum: inferior non permittit ascendi, superior nondescendi, angulares non permittunt eum ire huc vel illuc. Apostolus autem est in medio.

[1[7]. And when the feast day of the Apostle arrives, every prelate, with the people entrusted to him, approaches the aforementioned river. The river ebbs for eight days prior to the feast day and for eight days after. When the river ebbs, all of the people approach the apostle, who, residing in his church on the mountain, is entombed in an iron coffin. The coffin hovers in the air by the power of four precious stones. 1[8]. Known as lodestone, one is situated in the floor, a second in the ceiling, another at an angle to the coffin, and another at another angle. The stones attract the iron: the lower prevents it from rising, the one above from descending, and the ones on the sides hold it in place. The apostle is thus in the middle.]

Apostolus autem est in medio: the image of the apostle's final resting place, the center of the pilgrim's desire, is a perfect symbol of the liminality of the pilgrim situation itself. That is, by inhabiting an interval between two states of intense identification—"the dilemma of choice versus obligation," to borrow Victor Turner's formulation—the pilgrim himself and the goal with which he comes to identify himself function as limits for unifying what is, or was previously, disparate or plural.⁶⁵ The in-between offers the possibility

of cultural and personal reassessment through recombining or connecting with what is usually figured as separate, alien, other.

Indeed, in the *Letter*, the function of St. Thomas's tomb as geographical limit of Prester John's kingdom draws our attention to the simultaneity of being in the middle and at the edge, of being in the presence of the same and the other, *huc vel illuc* at once:

12. In tribus Indiis dominatur magnificentia nostra, et transit terra nostra ab ulteriore India, in qua corpus sancti Thomae apostoli requiescit, per desertum et progreditur ad solis ortum, et redit per declivum [per devium⁶⁶] in Babilonem desertam iuxta turrim Babel.

[12. Our magnificence dominates the three Indias, and our land extends from farthest India, where the body of St. Thomas the Apostle rests, across the desert to the place where the sun rises, and returns by slopes [through byways] to the Babylonian desert near the tower of Babel.]

The desert kingdom of Prester John exists as a space between several points, the relationship of one to another initiating a process of self-constitution. Identifying with this realm means neither reducing it to a fiction, a fixed narrative description of travel points inscribed on an imagined map of the Orient, nor domesticating it by converting the far off or strange into the near or recognizable. Instead, this other world confronts the medieval West as a process, displacing, by the practice of the travels it invokes, all inert representations of the alterity with which the West provisionally identifies. For Prester John to have meaning in the medieval cultural imaginary, he must be exploded into his constitutive parts—the tomb of St. Thomas, the tower of Babel, and so on—whose relationship to one another traces the paths along which identification can finally *take place*. Now we reapproach, from an angle that will be pursued more completely in a subsequent discussion of the utopic meaning of Prester John's desert, a theme of this chapter: how cultural identity is found(ed) in the spaces posited between us and them, between a known here and an unknown there, or, more precisely, how the other's identity is generated in the interval itself, never in the lonely places (*L. devia*)—lying outside or beyond—otherwise assiduously assigned to it. Not simply a matter of figuring Prester John in the contours of the known, the utopic representation of the East plays freely on the relationships between its recognizable features in order to create the space for grasping, in a single moment of recognition, what is alien in the alien *and* in the self-same.

On the Threshold: A Serial Genealogy of Identity

That the meaning of the other is to be found in interstitial spaces, allowing for otherwise unlikely encounters and unsuspected sources of interaction

and influence, becomes clearer when we look, for a moment, at another Western medieval legend involving a magnetically suspended tomb. A vital part of the anti-Islamic polemic tradition, this legend maintained that Muslims believed Muhammad's tomb, residing in the Ka'ba, the rectangular building in Mecca that is the center of Islamic devotion, was magnetically supported in the air.⁶⁷ The general belief in the West that Muhammad's tomb in Mecca was scandalously adored with idolatry ("adorare. . . turpiter ydolatrando")⁶⁸ dovetailed with the belief that the Hajj was the Islamic counterpart of Christian pilgrimage to the relics of a saint.⁶⁹ It is rather easy to see how these beliefs evidence both an effort to understand the other in the shape of the known⁷⁰ and a willful distortion of the other in order to demonize him. Even the Black Stone embedded in the wall of the Ka'ba, which Muslim pilgrims pass seven times as they circle the building, each time kissing or touching the stone, was taken by Latin anti-Muslim writers to be the magnetic stone that supported Muhammad's coffin.⁷¹ Moreover, to the Muslims was imputed the belief that this levitation was a sign of the prophet's divine power. The Muslims' failure to recognize the purely natural causes for this suspension was taken to be a sure sign of their credulity and ignorance.⁷² Indeed, a no less authoritative figure than Augustine, in an attempt to distinguish among divine miracles, natural wonders, and human marvels, used the example of a floating pagan idol⁷³ in order to emphasize the error of confusing human artifice with divine miracle:

Thus God's created beings can, by the use of human arts, effect so many marvels, which they call *méchanémata* (contrivances), of a nature so astounding that those unfamiliar with them would suppose them to be the works of God himself. That is how in one of the temples an image of iron hung suspended in mid-air between two lodestones of the required size, fastened one on the floor, the other in the roof, suggesting to those who did not know what was above and beneath the image that it hung there by an exercise of divine power.⁷⁴

The Christian production of a set of beliefs, first imputed to the other and then ridiculed, demonstrates some of the complex disavowals of sameness and evasions of circular logic that must ensue if Muslims are to be symbolically contained, overridden, or erased. Yet similarities between self and other remain as fallout of the symbolic "leveling" or collapsing of alterity. Indeed, the striking overlap of the story of St. Thomas and the legend of Muhammad reminds us not only of the difficulty with which similarities to the Muslim other were strenuously disavowed in the Middle Ages, but, more importantly, if less intuitively, of the fluidity of the boundaries arbitrarily drawn (especially in the sense of *rendering a judgment*) to efface the

intervals, interfaces, and interstices between same and other. The narratives set in place to privilege or guarantee the stability of these borders turn out to be themselves unstable, full of contradiction.

The element of repetition in these tomb stories is not an end in itself, but rather in part a practice of parody, whose force consists precisely in the attempt to avoid flat repetitions which can only bring about a stagnation of identity. This is why, for example, the otherwise-enlightened Ramon Lull appealed to the witness of *converted* Muslims (presumably unconverted Muslims would be unreliable) to deny the legend of the magnetically suspended tomb when that legend was itself a Western construction. Efforts to affirm difference by disavowing similarity, projects marking the whole tradition of anti-Muslim polemic, necessarily end up as parodies engaged in the simultaneous recognition and denial of certain attributes or experiences of the other. If the other ineluctably leads back to the self, then this imbrication of sameness and alterity, when configuring the other in the contours of the known, immediately raises a conceptual problem inherent in mimesis: what kind of relation between self and other, between model and copy, obtains when all adequation between the two is broken down by parodic repetition? To affirm the radical alterity of Muslims, Christians turn them into endlessly repeatable simulacra of themselves, and in the process create themselves retroactively. The relationship between model and copy is thus one where, to borrow Robert Young's terms, "the copy precedes the original in a ghostly originary repetition."⁷⁵

Turning the other into a degraded, ghostly version of the self describes a structure of retroactivity comparable to the Derridean notion of "originary delay": "a first event cannot be a first event if it is the only event; it cannot be said to be a first until it is followed by a second, which then retrospectively constitutes it as the first—which means that its firstness hovers over it as its meaning without being identifiable with it as such" (82).⁷⁶ "Originary delay" provides a crucial insight into self-other relations by radically refiguring the self as a potentiality, an entity ready to be actualized only as a point in a series. Furthermore, selfhood, understandable strictly as an effect of meaning not identifiable with anything in the self as such, cannot exist "by its own properties alone." Instead the other, "with all the force of its delay,"⁷⁷ only comes after, taking priority over the self as it brings the self into being. Christian identity is thus a radically provisional, contingent, and serial construction, whose emergence is based on the negative premise that simulation of the Muslim other actually leads to a degraded version of the Christian subject. There is no originary until the second subject (the other) comes along to make the first subject first, and so in the process turns this first subject into an other. Originary delay and the paradoxes structuring it suggest, then, a previously ignored feature of the complex interplay and

interpenetration of cultures in the Middle Ages: accepting that identities, as points on a continuous relay, are unfinished entails recognizing how deeply such identities are part of the movement they share with the narratives recounting them.

This continual movement is one engendered and propelled by anxiety. Indeed, the writing of identity as a genealogical series bears structural affinities to the psychoanalytic concept of *Nachträglichkeit* (deferred action or retroactivity): both are transferential functions, whereby temporal relations determine and delimit self-identification through an anxious repetition of events.⁷⁸ Selfhood undergoes constant revision and disruption when new relations to some originary event are formed. In serial identities formation, just as in the Freudian analysis of neurosis, the question whether the originary event really "came before" (as, say, part of an infantile past) or is the product of subsequent fantasy is of secondary importance. What matters is the retroactive force that an encounter with otherness exerts on the present subject. Coming after the subject, the other addresses it as its cause, and in so doing throws the subject radically into question:

anxiety manifests itself clearly from the very beginning as relating—in a complex manner—to the desire of the Other. . . . The anxiety-producing function of the desire of the Other [is] tied to the fact that I do not know what object *o* I am for this desire.

The desire of the Other does not recognize me. . . . It challenges me (*me met en cause*), questioning me at the very root of my own desire as *o*, as cause of this desire and not as object. And it is because this entails a relation of antecedence, a temporal relation, that I can do nothing to break this hold other than to enter into it. It is this temporal dimension that is anxiety.⁷⁹

We might extend Lacan's insight, that a temporal disjunction lies at the heart of anxiety, to account for cultural attitudes toward otherness in the medieval documents I have been discussing. That is, we might view the various discourses on alterity—anti-Muslim polemic, allegories and marvels of the East, fantasy letters—together as one dimension of a unified cultural response to the threat posed by an other, who is prevented by those same discourses from performing the one act that would allow for a coming to terms with anxiety. "Anxiety," Lacan assured his audience in 1963, "is only overcome where the Other names itself."⁸⁰ Western documents of alterity preclude the Eastern Other from defining its own desires, and hence, from naming itself. The result is that the very structure of anxiety, that of a "twisted border" or Möbius band,⁸¹ enmeshes the subject to the extent that the threshold between identity and nonidentity dissolves: one tomb resembles the other.

CHAPTER 6

MONSTROUS TOPOI

Identity on the Move: Travel Narratives, Utopic Space

What you chart is already where you've been. But where we are going, there is no chart yet.

—Audre Lorde¹

We get to where we're going, and then there is still the distance to cover.

—Edmond Jabès

The relation of St. Thomas's coffin to Muhammad's is not (only) an issue of historicity—the question of which "came first"—but an issue of temporality—how such a relation was to be grasped as an event possessing immediate analytic attention (in a "here and now"). Or, put another way, the question is: how was this "here and now" defined vis-à-vis its relation not only to the past or to the other, but to another relation per se (that of the two tombs)? Grasping the relation of the two tombs suggests foremost a *process* of identity formation, where at work are acts forming an identity on the move, always implicated in the convergence and relation of the specific cultural histories conditioning those acts. Identity, Stuart Hall points out, thus emerges "at the unstable point where the 'unspeakable' stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of history, of a culture."² This passage from "unspeakable" to "speakable," from silent narratives of the single self to resonant myths of collective history, assumes in medieval culture a form that is necessarily incomplete, open to what might be called the "expression of a possible world."³ In this expression of the possible inheres the utopic; that middle ground between the founding of subjectivity and its displacement, between the establishment of identity and its transgression, and, as I have suggested in the introduction, between the positioning of subjecthood and its perversion through fantasy and play. If, as Michel de Certeau has said, "every story is a travel story. . . a spatial practice,"⁴ then utopic stories trace

special trajectories through space: movement from place to no place, from the world that is to a world that could be.

Travel stories, however, crucially remind us that danger—the threat of misdirection or catastrophic loss—constantly haunts the movement from here to elsewhere: “every voyage is potentially a voyage into exile.”⁵ Indeed, one of the features most characteristic of utopic literature as a genre in the Middle Ages is precisely the way in which it often begins with the act of traveling to another place, specifically a journey set in motion by a moment of crisis and then proceeding at risk. Prester John is just such a narrative: the story of an Eastern potentate conveyed, always at great peril to the messenger, to the West on the occasion of a religio-political crisis. The earliest twelfth-century account of how news of Prester John reached the West illustrates moments of political and religious emergency giving rise to the departure and journey that comprise, as Louis Marin has it, “the utopian moment and space”⁶ of travel. On November 18, 1145, Otto of Freising, who witnessed the meeting of Pope Eugenius III with Bishop Hugh of Jabala, records that the prelate from Syria arrived in Viterbo⁷ with a doubly urgent mission: to seek the authority of the Apostolic See concerning Raymond I of Antioch’s, as well as his mother-in-law’s, refusal to pay a tithe of the spoils seized from the Saracens and, principally, to “mak[e] pitiful lament concerning the peril [*periculum*] of the Church beyond the sea since the capture of Edessa.”⁸ Hugh then relates the brief story of Prester John in order not to emphasize, but rather to *dispel*, reports of the Priest-King’s omnipotence:

dicebat praedictum Iohannem ad auxilium Hierosolimitanae ecclesiae procinctum movisse, sed dum ad Tygrim venisset, ibique nullo vehiculo traducere exercitum potuisset, ad septentrionalem plagam, ubi eundem annum hyemali glacie congelari didicerat, iter flexisse. Ibi dum per aliquot annos moratus gelu expectaret, sed minime hoc impediende aeries temperie obtineret, multos ex insueto coelo de exercitu amittens, ad propria redire compulsus est. [. . .] Patrum itaque suorum, qui in cunabulis Christum adorare venerunt, accensus exemplo Hierosolimam ire proposuerat, sed praetaxata causa impeditum fuisse asserunt. Sed haec hactenus.

[(Hugh) said that after this victory the aforesaid John moved his army to the aid of the Church in Jerusalem, but when he had reached the river Tigris and was unable to transport his army across that river by any device he turned toward the north where, he had learned, the river was frozen over on account of the winter’s cold. When he had tarried there for several years without, however, seeing his heart’s desire realized—the continued mild weather prevented it—and lost many of his soldiers because of the unfamiliar climate, he was forced to return home. (. . .) Incited by the example of his fathers who came to adore Christ in the manger, he had planned to go to Jerusalem, but by the aforesaid reason he was prevented—so men say. But enough of this.]

Undergirding Otto’s skepticism directed at such a fantastic figure is an effort, coinciding with Hugh’s, to humanize Prester John in light of his reputed failure to cross the Tigris with his war machine. Indeed, his inability to move or travel west draws attention to the river’s ideological function as interdiction, a reality check compelling the West to launch a crusade independent of Eastern aid. As boundary or limit, the river functions not as an empty plot device borrowed from the Alexander romances,⁹ but as a signal of Christian potential, of anti-Muslim possibility. Prester John’s travel is interrupted at the place where his identity as rescuer of the besieged Christian Church in the Holy Land begins. Identity, it seems, is inextricable from travel. Yet travel opens up the utopian moment while the limit, or frontier, paradoxically contains (quite literally: holds) the truth of subjectivity. Failing to cross over means that Prester John returns home without having converted the boundary into a marchland, the gap into a crossover space that is the precondition for the production of the utopic. This is an irreparable loss Hugh of Jabala consciously takes pains to avoid repeating: his successful journey was one of crossing over, and he would relay this fact to the pope.¹⁰

When a river fails to become a bridge, the interanimating effects of the frontier are impaired. For it is the bridge, de Certeau stresses, whose story “privileges a ‘logic of ambiguity,’ ” wherein the bridge “alternately welds together and opposes insularities. It distinguishes them and threatens them. It liberates from enclosure and destroys autonomy.”¹¹ In Hugh’s account of Prester John, the bridge functions as an index of the utopic: the river, in refusing to become a bridge, adheres to the law of *topos* by serving as a threshold that denies transgression (*L. transgredi*, to step across). Prester John is forced to return home, to the place of his identity, his consistency as subject intact. The menace of loss, the possibility of there being no return, that inheres in travel is overcome. However, the fiction of the bridge stubbornly remains as a disquieting reminder of the possibility of place being given over to the other. In its function as confine, the missing bridge represents less a failed instance of utopia (Prester John’s liberation of the Holy Land that the bridge would have enabled) than the gap of the border, the neutral space in which the work of travel becomes “the typical form of the utopian process.”¹² The bridge stands *in the place of* a gap, that is, both at the site of the interval and as a substitute for the interval. The fact that it never materializes only dramatizes its function as the figure of the indefinite interval between two historical images: Western Christendom rescued by Prester John and Eastern Christendom organized by Prester John’s sovereignty. The bridge can be said to have simultaneous performative functions: holding open the space between these two images and insisting that the subject of utopia, for which the bridge is a primary index, issues from a neutral location neither in Western nor Eastern Christendom.¹³ The bridge compels us

"to perceive in this interval not a rigid limit but the shadow line of a potential *transit*" between cultures.¹⁴

In the narrative of Elyseus, the story of Prester John is called into being by an opening up of the neutral in the dramatic form of a series of crises. The narrative, as told to an anonymous cleric by a certain Elyseus, begins with an account of religious emergency in India, the site of Elyseus's origin (§1) and the place from which he will journey for Rome. A well-lettered and ordained bishop-elect (*episcopus electus et ordinatus et bene litteratus* [§3]) falls into heresy, declaring that the Holy Spirit does not proceed from the Father and the Son and that the Trinity is not one Deity (*unum Deum* [§4]). Although the unorthodox bishop is put to death as Indian law decrees, a troubling residue of heresy is perceived to remain:

7. Episcopo supra dicto dampnato rex Indiae nomine Iohannes, qui cognominatus est presbyter, non ut ita sit ordinatus, sed propter reverentiam suam presbyter est appellatus. Idem rex, inito consilio, misit legatos suos quosdam monachos ad dominum apostolicum, ut melius certificaretur de catholica fide, non quod inde dubitaret sed ut prohiberetur vulgare scandalum de sententia illata in praedictum haereticum dampnatum.

[7. After the aforementioned bishop was condemned, the king of India John, who is named *presbyter* not because he was ordained, but on account of his reverence he is so called—this same king—after the counsel was begun, sent as his legates certain monks to the pope in order that he should be better informed of the catholic faith, not because he was uncertain about it, but because he wanted to prohibit the scandal among the people caused by the teaching of the aforementioned condemned heretic.]

Prester John, a figure for the strict law and order (detailed at §§5–6¹⁵) that regulates his kingdom, polices the boundary between heresy and orthodoxy. The threat to Christian law and order posed by heretical doctrine must be met by a mechanism of control that reestablishes the coherence of the social system. The monks' travel mission to Rome ensures the integrity of cultural identity by securing the rights to religious representation and authority.

Indeed, representation itself involves an argument about *this world* that takes us into the domain of law and its authorial, moral function. The terms in which Hayden White describes Richerus of Rheims's chronicle, *History of France* (ca. 998), apply just as well to the genre of the travel narrative: "every historical narrative has as its latent or manifest purpose the desire to moralize the events of which it treats. Where there is ambiguity or ambivalence regarding the status of the legal system, . . . the ground on which any closure of a story one might wish to tell about a past, whether it be a public

or a private past, is lacking."¹⁶ The serene closed order of things regulated by laws—those, for example, of a religious or ethical system—is not the proper starting point for travel, which, in a narrative, seeks to repair or relocate a debilitated order of things. Travel opens out from the space between the past and the present, both of which are then subject to reinscription and refashioning. The momentary disruption of Prester John's moral universe by heresy brings about a critical moment of openness, the opportunity through travel to trespass limits on the way to restoring them. Thus the "work" of travel here cuts two ways: proceeding from a space of neutrality or ambivalence, it *demarcates* cultural and geographical limits while it *crosses over* them.

Foundation and trespass are intimately related to the work of travel, especially in those moments when travel becomes the occasion for knowledge gathering. Seeking information as an antidote to crisis, Prester John sends out, along with the monks, two bishops, who, because of their ignorance of the Latin language, are compelled to take along with them an interpreter, Elyseus. Elyseus, like the ideal traveler, can move across linguistic boundaries, beyond the space of sameness where, we are told, "ibi tantum utitur Chaldaica lingua" [there only the Chaldean language¹⁷ is spoken (§9)]. He has learned Latin from travelers to the land of Prester John: "didicerat linguam latinam a quibusdam peregrinis abhinc illuc venientibus et in domo patris eius manentibus" [he learned the Latin language from certain pilgrims after they had arrived there and stayed in his father's house (§90)]. Knowledge of another language is the very sign of mobility. Now a pilgrim himself, Elyseus is subject to the dangers of travel. On his way to collecting the knowledge that will rehabilitate his homeland, he is reminded of the absolute limits of travel, of the extent to which traveling and the movement of death are in accordance:

10. Illis autem episcopis in itinere obdormientibus, uno in periculo maris et alio in Apuleia, iste Elyseus est profectus ad dominum apostolicum. Dominus autem apostolicus, audita legatione regis Indiae, praecepit litteras fieri, scilicet expositionem super spalmum Quicumque vult.

[10. Even with the bishops dying on the journey, one on the perilous sea and the other in Apuleia, this same Elyseus sets out for the pope. The pope, after hearing the legate of the king of India, ordered a letter to be sent, namely a commentary on the psalm *Quicumque vult*.]¹⁸

Now the return home can begin; the reparation of Christian community can take place. Yet travel narratives distinguish themselves above all by a peculiar suitability to the representation of repeated disaster. Travel is significant only in the stations of its disruption. The greater the significance, the

greater the subjection to disaster, and the greater the difficulty of *taking place*, of holding one's course on the journey from one place to another.

The interruption of Elyseus's homeward journey becomes the occasion for the production of a story. Accidents, it seems, engender narrative.

11. Acceptis Elyseus iisdem litteris et muneribus sibi datis iter redeundi arripuit. Volens redire per Ungariam venit ad quandam silvam quae vocatur Canol. Ibidem spoliatus est, scilicet litteris et muneribus et vestibus et omnibus quae habebat, ita quod vix nudus effugit. Sed quia magnum frigus esse coepit, in via destituit et omnino desperavit. Veniens autem Frisacum, in hospitali susceptus est a quodam monacho presbitero ab abbate Admuntensium illic constituto et misericordia motus curam eius egit cum fratribus ibidem manentibus. 12. Illo autem ibi manente per 14 dies et convalescenti, interrogatus ab eodem monacho, quales essent Indiae et qualiter cuncta essent ordinata, Elyseus ita exorsus est.

[11. Elyseus received the letter and the presents given to him and started on his journey back home. Wishing to return through Hungary, he came to a forest which is called Canol. There he was robbed of his letter, his gifts, his clothes, and everything he possessed, such that, with great difficulty, he fled away nude. But when it became very cold, he sat down on the road and lost all hope. Arriving at Friesach though, he was received into the hospital by a certain monk—one established there by the abbot of Admont—who acted out of pity. In need of his care, he remained with the monks. 12. He remained there for 14 days, and while convalescing he was questioned by each monk regarding what the Indias were like and how they were all arranged. Elyseus began (to tell his story) thus.]

What follows, a fantastic description of Prester John's India derived chiefly from the *Letter* and *De adventu*, is made credible only by the series of accidents and surprises Elyseus has had to endure. That is, Elyseus is empowered to speak about (and from) elsewhere because he himself represents and embodies difference, his existence indelibly marked with the risks and consequences of voyaging out. The disasters befalling Elyseus enable a "rhetoric of distance,"¹⁹ a discourse of separateness that the narrator can authoritatively use to establish his own differentness or that of his subject matter.

The travel narrative of Elyseus signifies the work of returning, of redirecting the different or multiple toward the same and single. The incomplete state of the manuscript (which breaks off in the middle of §51) prevents us from ever knowing if Elyseus completed his journey home. But, in a sense he already has returned home: to a stable and uniform Christian community of monks. The fraternity of monks, eager for tales of the strange, questions Elyseus, who is thereby provided with the opportunity to

cross, this time over literary terrain, back into the same. The tale he begins is, in an ideological sense, a familiar one: the other returns to, becomes, the same. This trajectory or operation of returning is, as de Certeau has pointed out, an essential structural element of any travel account.²⁰ Furthermore, it is charged with ideological significance since this movement "inserts itself within the general problem of crusade that still rules over the discovery of the world in the sixteenth [and, especially, the twelfth] century: 'conquest and conversion.'"²¹ Crusade was preeminently a process of spatial expansion, one dependent upon hierarchical orderings of place²² (sacred versus profane, center versus edge) and incorporative or inclusive conceptions of time/space:

The Others, pagans and infidels (rather than savages and primitives), were viewed as candidates for salvation. Even the conquista... needed to be propped up by an ideology of conversion. One of its persistent myths, the search for Prester John, suggests that the explorers were expected to round up, so to speak, the pagan world between the center of Christianity and its lost periphery in order to bring it back into the confines of the flock guarded by the Divine Shepherd.²³

Explorers, like missionaries and crusaders, are charged with the task of ensuring a smooth return to the order of the same. Thus, in travel narratives, fascination or experience of the other usually involves acts of reincorporation and recognition: "A part of the world which appeared to be entirely other is brought back to the same by a displacement that throws alterity out of skew in order to turn it into an exteriority behind which an interiority... can be recognized."²⁴

Repeated many times in medieval travel narratives, the successful journey back home draws its cultural meaning from a relation with its opposite—the loss of return. Indeed, as a twelfth-century papal project to instruct Prester John in the tenets and practices of Christianity suggests, desires to recognize in the exterior other an element of the interior self often went unfulfilled. On September 27, 1177, Pope Alexander III sent with his personal physician Philip a letter addressed "karissimo in Christo filio Iohanni, illustri et magnifico Indorum regi" [to his dearest son in Christ, John, renowned and noble king of India].²⁵ The letter begins with an assertion of Roman curial supremacy, supported by quotation from Matt. 16:19 (*Tu es Petrus*, and so on). The pope then states that rumors of Prester John's Christian faith and eagerness to do good works have reached him from multiple sources: from many persons and from common rumor [*referentibus multis et etiam fama communi* (§6)]. Moreover, the pope's desire to recognize in Prester John elements of his own Christianity is affirmed by *magister* Philip's conversations "cum magnis et honorabilibus viris tui

regni. . . in partibus illis" (with great and honorable men of your [John's] kingdom in that region [§7]). Philip, it seems, has already served as messenger, perhaps as envoy to John's kingdom or traveler to a nearby region such as the Holy Land. Philip had been told by John's men that their king ardently desired to learn the Catholic and apostolic rule [*catholica et apostolica disciplina* (§7)] so that there would be no possibility of dissension or difference in their faith from the teachings of Rome [*quod a doctrina sedis apostolicae dissentiat quomodolibet vel discordet* (§7)].

The pope's desire to fashion Prester John's kingdom into a simulacrum of the Apostolic See depends entirely upon the success of Philip's missionary journey. Pope Alexander makes repeated reference to Philip's excellent character and acute powers of observation and judgment. The adjectives used to describe Philip focus on the messenger's observational skills: *circumspectus* ("viewing or searching around"; repeated twice), *providus* ("looking forward or ahead"; repeated three times), and *prudens* (contr. from *providens*, "foreseeing"). Philip is the perfect messenger (spy²⁶): always on the lookout for dangers and the predicaments of travel in an unknown land. As the pope himself acknowledges, the perilous itinerary "inter tot labores et varia rerum ac locorum discrimina, inter linguas barbaras et ignotas" [among all sorts of difficulties and manifold situations and diverse places, amid foreign and unknown languages] traces a path out from the familiar home [*a nostro latere destinare*], through the unhomely, the strange and the multiple, back to the fixity of the Apostolic See. The mission of Philip, like that of Elyseus, is predicated upon a return to the familiar, a journey that indicates the radical coincidence of point of departure and point of return.

Indeed, not all journeys possess this same "economy of travel," one where, to borrow the terms of Van Den Abbeele, the familiar home operates "as a transcendental point of reference that organizes and domesticates a given area by defining all other points in relation to itself. Such an act of referral makes of all travel a circular voyage insofar as that privileged point or *oikos* [Gr. "home," etymon of "economy"] is posited as the absolute origin and absolute end of any movement."²⁷ Sometimes space gets radically retemporalized—the story of Rip Van Winkle and the ending of *The Planet of the Apes* (Franklin Schaffner, 1968) come to mind—so that the home to which one returns is not the same as that one has left. Or sometimes, as in the case of Philip's journey, the circle of travel is never closed due to a tragic spatialization of time. That is, the articulation of space with time, as a line between points on a map, is disrupted by some accident such that the continuity of the itinerary is broken. The fact that Philip is never heard from again, that news of him is in effect lost, signals travel's status as a formation of economy—a transaction that can be talked about in terms of loss or gain, in relation to something against which one can measure or register loss or gain.²⁸

That fixed point of reference against which one measures loss is home, the *domus* that functions simultaneously as point of departure and destination. If the point of return were identical to the point of departure, there can be said to be no journey—that much seems obvious. However, the home must remain fixed as a place to which one returns with a feeling of security, the familiarity of having once been there, nostalgia (Gr. *nostos*, to return home). Its self-identity is thus crucial, however much the detour engendered by the journey itself demands that points of departure and return do not precisely coincide. As a detour through difference, the journey itself bears immense ideological weight, so that the journey away from home, the familiar, is fundamentally a process of estrangement, a making strange or extraneous. All journeys, we might speculate, are by definition strange in the sense that they posit a home, a nodal point that lends all meaning to the journey, only after they have begun. The meaning of home can therefore only be posited retroactively; and, hence, who one is when one is at home is an identity that must be conferred retroactively as well. If "one has always already left home, since home can only exist as such at the price of its being lost,"²⁹ then it follows that identity is unthinkable outside the positing of an originary subject position. My earlier discussion of identity as serial constructedness, as a metonymical process always already initiated and founded upon originary loss, can thus be brought to bear upon the problem of travel.

The imbrication of identity with travel in the Middle Ages is crucial to underscore because it offers us an alternative way of conceptualizing identity: not as something discoverable or given, inherent in place or lineage, but as something accumulated or nomadic, expressive of a trajectory as unfolded through space and over time. It is the ongoing process of travel that shapes a cultural identity, not only the putative fixity of space.³⁰ So stories of loss and retrieval are especially significant, not only in terms of leaving home and returning, but in the ways that narrative and identity are tightly interwoven. That is, the concern over whether the story of travel will be complete—will it, in the Aristotelian sense, have a beginning, middle, and end—only masks another, more crucial concern: namely, whether the story will reproduce former ways, or practices, of being in the world (decidedly not Heidegger's static *im Welt sein*). "What," de Certeau asks (quoting Lévi-Strauss), "does travel ultimately produce if it is not, by a sort of reversal, an 'exploration of the deserted places of my memory'?"³¹ The work of returning thus assumes a foundational cultural significance, to the extent that culture is predicated upon memorialization, the recollection or restoration of something that is (or is perceived to be) lacking.

In his chronicle (ca. 1231) for the year 1170, Albéric of Trois Fontaines brought closure to Philip's mission to Prester John by creating the story of

the messenger's return:

Inveniuntur quaedam papae Alexandri literae, quas misit presbitero Iohanni superius memorato per quendam episcopum Philippum, ab eodem papa ordinatum et de fide et de moribus sanctae Romae ecclesiae diligenter instructum. Qui Philippus ab eodem presbitero Iohanne transmissus fuerat ad papam Romanum.³²

Philip, in this chroniclers' account, carries a letter to Prester John, and then back to the pope. In other chronicler's reports, such as those of Benedict of Peterborough, Roger of Howden, and Ralph of Diceto, return, and hence home as point of both origin and end, is not posited retroactively. What the difference between the chronicle versions suggests is less that Albéric's is historically inaccurate (he even gets the date wrong), and therefore anomalous, than the fact that within a travel economy of loss, a gain could be utopically manufactured. The creation of the Prester John myth is indelibly marked by this kind of wish, this desire for communication, reciprocity, satisfaction, even surplus. The return of a messenger from Prester John is a sign of hallucinatory satisfaction, a form of desire directed at neither the messenger nor Prester John himself, but at a fantasy—the mnemic traces of a lost satisfaction. While I might wish to forestall the full discussion of Prester John's ideological, or utopic, function as fantasy, I do wish to emphasize here that the origins of fantasy are inextricable from the origins of cultural memory that travel produces.

Monstrous Topoi: The Shock of the Moving Image

Cicero declared in the *Topics* that rhetoric, with its ordering scheme of topoi and its systematized list of tropes, sets up "disciplinam invendiendorum argumentorum, ut sine ullo errore ad ea ratione et via perveniremus" [a system for inventing arguments so that we might make our way to an account of them without any wandering about].³³ Rhetorical knowledge is tied to knowledge of travel, to knowing how to navigate through narrative space. But in order to navigate successfully, one has to remember, and then keep to, the discursive itinerary. Crucial to such knowledge, then, are the methods prescribed to train the memory (*artes memorativa*) to segment the material to be remembered into "bits" small enough to be recalled in single units and then to key those "bits" into some reproducible order. This produces what Mary Carruthers calls a "'random access' memory system" by which one is not compelled to start at the beginning each time one wishes to recall the whole system.³⁴ Disorientation, the problem of losing one's way as if by wandering through a text, is prevented by the two-part memorial

process of breaking the text into manageable pieces and then placing those pieces in designated sites that one then imaginatively tours. For travel to produce memory, nomadism must be contained.

Efforts to contain the nomadic mind evolved from the classical mnemotechnique of tying topoi to an architectural setting (*locus* linked to the space of a three-dimensional room one mentally tours) to the medieval mnemotechnique of locating "places" on a grid, in a two-dimensional cell on a flat surface like that of the page.³⁵ Hugh of St. Victor, for example, treats *memoria* as a line (*linea*) of bins (*conditoria*, "tombs," rectangular boxes having the shape of the Roman tomb) arranged in a numerical grid. Tombs contain what culture represses in order to keep itself alive, mobile, future oriented. The medieval entombment of memory—here, the ending of Marie de France's "Laüstic" comes to mind—implies not only the activation of repression, but the foundation of culture itself. The issue of what gets repressed and what gets remembered is perhaps the central question of cultural formation: whether, and to what extent, historical memory has psychic as well as ideological consequences. To put it another way, can culture be said to have a primal scene? The answer to such a question depends upon grasping the problem of origins and its relation to the function of memorialization in reconstructing, even resurrecting, them. So: can the tomb of memory be opened, and, if so, how?

Freud certainly thought that it could. Indeed, his theory and case studies suggest that the work of analysis is precisely that "of remembering that the relation of the object of interpretation to the real has been forgotten. The primal scene is always a scene that is 'unknown' [*unbekannte*] and 'forgotten' [*vergessene*]."³⁶ The unique way that the primal scene takes up a place outside the known raises obvious problems of interpretation and recuperation. Although the primal scene [*Urszene*] first appeared in Freud's famous 1918 case history of the Wolf-Man (*From the History of an Infantile Neurosis*), it served as a fundamental concept at the foundation of his analytic work. What Freud, however, came to understand in this case study is that origins could not be located in the past, entombed by forgetting, but only in the future, in the repetitions of projections over origins that the process of transference articulated. This means that beginnings are sites toward which one is constantly moving. The work of remembering becomes the work of beginning, of moving and of (re)generating culture.³⁷ Indeed, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930) posits recollection as the genesis of civilization.³⁸ Memory-traces, we are told, endure just like—and the analogy is telling—the classical ruins of the city Rome. The beginning of *Civilization* includes a lengthy meditation, or what Freud himself calls a "phantasy,"³⁹ concerning what an archaeological excavation of Rome would entail and how the unearthed city, once reconstructed, would appear today. Freud in fact

conducts his reader on a mental tour of the remodeled city, stopping at points of interest in the manner of the classical/medieval arts of memory. Freud's point, however, is that "in mental life nothing which has once been formed can perish—that everything is somehow preserved and that in suitable circumstances. . . it can once more be brought to light."⁴⁰ Ruins are originary sites, and culture thus emerges through the process of remembering, of reassembling past fragments into momentary coherence.⁴¹

The work of reconstruction through memorial constitutes the essential work of myths (psychoanalytic or cultural): myths are stories about reconstructed ruins, about what happened in another world in another time (*in illo tempore*, as Eliade has it) and how that other site, though discontinuous with the present one, is related to it for the reason that it helped to bring it about, and persists in bringing it about insofar as the two worlds can be ritually reintegrated. This power of reactivating another world in this one, the power in some sense shared by analyst and analysand, rests upon a pragmatic contradiction: the presence in this world of the other world increases with its theoretical absence. The contradiction here—presence via absence, that world in this one—never finally resolves itself, and so discloses the force of desire, the wish to keep alive the ritual motion of myth. Myths like that of Prester John, we might say, articulate a story of ruins by instilling in the reader the single compulsive desire to conduct a tour through them.

Moving through the ruins of myth constitutes an imaginary experience (like Freud's Roman "phantasy"), an experience whose structure is necessarily that of a "journey," the "end" of which is the phantasmatic (fantasy structure) itself.⁴² In other words, in moving through the space of fantasy, "it is not an *object* that the subject imagines and aims at, so to speak, but rather a *sequence* in which the subject has his own part to play and in which permutations of roles and attributions are possible."⁴³ Desire's complicated relation to fantasy renders the mythic tour irreducible to a sequentially structured *teleological* narrative: the aim of the imagined journey becomes the "scripts (scénarios)" themselves, which organize it into momentous scenes "capable of dramatisation—usually in a visual form."⁴⁴ Fantasy functions not as the end or object of desire, but as its visual setting: "In fantasy the subject does not pursue the object or its sign: he appears caught up himself in the sequence of images."⁴⁵

Travel narratives play out a series of images through which the reader qua traveler moves but never fully masters or possesses. The traveler/reader, condemned to role play or "script" his activities, is prevented from achieving his moment of mastery precisely because there is, to paraphrase an often-repeated expression of L. P. Hartley's from his novel *The Go-Between* (1953), "a sense in which a foreign place is always a past—involving both alienation and an act of recovery."⁴⁶ The logic here is clearly fetishistic: the

traveler enters into a managed relation to loss whereby belief in the existence of the lost object, the foreign place as ruin, is retained at the same time it is given up. Travel and utopic narratives beg a "perverse" reading practice, one that aims at recovering conventional meaning while all the while preparing to turn to *other*, more monstrous regions of the text. Among the best illustrations of this is Mandeville's *Travels*, a book that divides itself right up the center, the first half leading to Jerusalem, the second half leading out to the unstable edges of the world. While reading/traveling along, desire, on the part of the reader, is kept alive through the trope of metonymy, through a series of images whose end is (literally) nowhere in sight:

Beyond these isles that I have told you of and the deserts of the lordship of Prester John, to go even east, is no land inhabited, as I said before, but wastes and wildernesses and great rocks and a murk land, where no man may see, night ne day, as men of those countries told us. And that murk land and those deserts last right to Paradise terrestrial, wherein Adam and Eve were put; but they were there but a little while. And that place is toward the east at the beginning of the earth. But that is not our east, where the sun rises til us. . . .⁴⁷

The inaccessibility of the earthly Paradise renders it phantasmatic, idealizable precisely because, for Mandeville, it exists only as the memory-traces of other travelers, recollections based upon their reports. "Wise men and men of credence,"⁴⁸ the traveler claims, will provide him with what he cannot know firsthand. Indeed, as I suggested earlier in my discussion of the ideological function of the *Letter of Prester John* and its catalogic structure, it is only such a metonymic representation of the world that can be fully utopic, and hence culturally transformative or redemptive.

In psychoanalytic terms we might say that, through fantasy, the *mise en scène* of desire is articulated as a drama of possibility in which defensive operations reveal that "what is *prohibited* (*l'interdit*) is always present in the actual formation of the wish."⁴⁹ These "defensive operations" include the work of metonymy, list-formations whose "drama of possibility" depends upon their stretch toward the impossible or outlandish ("if you can count the stars in heaven and the sand of the sea. . .). I want to begin a turn now to what I call 'the shock of the moving image' in order to specify one crucial way the genre of the list, specifically in a condition of *montage*, produces social effects. It will be my contention that the dialectical openness of the list in the *Letter* produces a constant pressure to generate a new ideology, one resistant to forms of moribund didacticism otherwise foreclosing the "expression of a possible world."

First, a clarification of the concept of ideology, one I offer only as it serves to contextualize my reading of the *Letter's* montage effects. It should

be emphasized that the nucleus of ideology, the center around which cultural and psychic affects orbit, is constituted by trauma, the shock of the real as the everyday confronts, for example, the unexpected, the incongruous, the alien, and the manifold ways these threaten or harm:

Ideology is not a dreamlike illusion that we build to escape insupportable reality; in its basic dimension it is a fantasy-construction which serves as a support for our "reality" itself: an "illusion" which structures our effective, real social relations and thereby masks some insupportable, real, impossible kernel. . . . The function of ideology is not to offer us a point of escape from our reality but to offer us the social reality itself as an escape from some traumatic, real kernel.⁵⁰

It is crucial to keep in mind the extremity of Žižek's argument here: if ideology is illusory, it is so precisely because it is quite real. Its realness inheres in its ability to divert attention away from, by covering over, something traumatic. An orientalist document like the *Letter of Prester John* is less an escape from Western reality than a strong affirmation of the desire to know, and thus take (re)possession of, Western realities, even when those realities are wholly indistinguishable from the illusions that serve to support and preserve them. In response to the insupportable reality or shock of losing the Holy Land, the story of Prester John was mobilized as a way of overcoming and mastering the trauma of loss.

Because loss, as psychoanalytic theory emphasizes, is always a matter of passivity—what is done to or endured by the subject—psychic and social responses to loss often take the shape of an aggressive impulse, as a way of countering or disavowing the reality of traumatic experience. In terms of ideological significance, utopic discourse works just like the play of children: both seek gratification through fantasy play as the primary means for defending the ego against anxiety and resolving the conflicts produced by traumatic experience.⁵¹ Both play and utopia, that is, *do* the work of posing the problem of representation ideologically through their constant desire to leave the illusion of reality intact. It is never a matter of construing illusion *as* reality; rather, the crux is the illusion *of* reality: a matter of ensuring that play and utopic practices, like the activity of fantasy in Freud's account, be "kept free from reality-testing and [remain] subordinated to the pleasure principle alone."⁵²

By using the Freud just cited to supplement the classic definition of ideology offered by Louis Althusser, we introduce into the concept the centrality of play, the ceaseless activity of disavowal and of defense that creates for individuals the imaginary spaces (what D. W. Winnicott called "spaces of play"⁵³) in which they can seek satisfaction. For Althusser, ideology

is predicated upon imaginary representations of reality: "in ideology 'men represent their real conditions of existence to themselves in an imaginary form.'" ⁵⁴ Affirming that ideologies do not correspond to reality, "that they constitute an illusion," amounts nevertheless to "admit[ting] that they do make allusion to reality, and that they need only be 'interpreted' to discover the reality of the world behind their imaginary representation of that world (ideology = illusion/allusion)."⁵⁵ While, in Althusser's account, material alienation in modern capitalist society militates strongly against utopic exploitation of that space between allusion (based on recognition) and illusion (based on misrecognition), nonetheless the effect of *reconnaissance* and *méconnaissance* in dynamic tension is always to produce desire for reshaping or transforming lived reality. Stephen Heath conveys the dialectical nature of ideology, its resistance to taking up a final position wholly within the system of binary oppositions that confine it to descriptions of present reality:

recognition because ideology is anchored in reality, embraces the conditions of existence, furnishes a practical guide for intervention on reality (is not a pure realm of the imagination); miscognition because it seizes reality in order to represent it according to its own purposes: "In ideology the real relation is inevitably invested in the imaginary relation, a relation that *expresses a will* (conservative, conformist, reformist or revolutionary), a hope or a nostalgia rather than describing a reality."⁵⁶

To continue with Althusser: "It is in this overdetermination of the real by the imaginary and of the imaginary by the real that ideology is *active* in principle, that it reinforces or modifies the relation between men and their real conditions of existence, in the imaginary relation itself."⁵⁷ The force of ideology as intervention on reality, its "revolutionary use value,"⁵⁸ is realized only as it actively places individuals into new imaginary relations.

In the *Letter of Prester John* the list-structure plays a crucial role in the production of imaginary relations into which the document's readers are interpellated. By offering the illusion of reality in a state of absolute plenitude, the *Letter* works both to compensate for what was lost and to preserve what is possessed. Of course, the point is: what was *imagined* to be lost and to be possessed. The classical and medieval encyclopedia, genres to which we might usefully compare the *Letter* in terms of ideological utility, compiled and systematized *facta* as a response to the urgency of cultural disruptions.⁵⁹ Whereas letters conserve a past for the present, in order to redeem the former for the latter, encyclopedic narratives taxonomize the current world, provisionally sheltering it against the clear and present danger of chaotic dissolution. The absorption of the list form by that of the letter

renders the *Letter* a rather special document, one that spatializes its *facta* into a containing coherence and temporalizes them as part of a dynamic process wherein devolution to disorder is inescapable, and potentially transformative. Or to put it otherwise, in terms of its generic form, the *Letter* guarantees its own longevity and integrity through a kind of chaos management while inexorably moving toward novelty and disorder. The *Letter* functions as both *thesaurus* [treasury, treasure trove], conserving a rich knowledge about the East, and *bricolage*, consistently attracted to the paratactic, the fragmentary, the unfinished.

Collections and inventories fashion a consumer fascinated by his identification with alterity. In his famous essay "Towards a New Middle Ages," Umberto Eco identifies in the conception of art as *bricolage* one of the most salient points of contact between medieval culture and our own: "the mad taste for collecting, listing, assembling and amassing different things. . . due to the need to take to pieces and reconsider what is left of a previous, perhaps harmonious, but now absolute world."⁶⁰ The kind of indiscriminate collections possessed by rulers such as Charles IV of Bohemia or the Duc de Berry⁶¹ have as their discursive analog documents that amass, in a non-systematic manner, information about things, events, and places so remote in space or time that, if never collected, would either remain unknown or else be forgotten. However, in the *Letter*, the impulse to collect is not reducible to the need to bring into alignment two different realities—say, a mundane present and a sacred past—but rather signals a more profound need to designate the seam itself between realities as the site for understanding cultural difference.

Assessing the significance of the space between cultures opened up by the differentness of objects collected and catalogued is a powerful form of cultural (self-)analysis: "By its very nature, the list provides a cultural perspective that is at once grand and microscopic, since it implies everything while mentioning only selected items. . . essentially, the list exhibits the cultural episteme writ small."⁶² Such a dialogic perspective thus possesses "a peculiar intensity," what Gaston Bachelard has called "intimate immensity."⁶³ Indeed, grasping the *relatio* of one culture to another is possible only under conditions that foster the production, in the imaginary, of a Gestalt constituted by smaller relational intensities. These conditions include the rapid-fire additive style of the *Letter*, the movement of one image quickly followed by another such that a disjunctive shock is produced that impels further movement. Despite the chaotic potential of the list formation, its violence to the notion of how things may be coordinated and subordinated, a sense of the way things of varying intensity fit together within an analytic field does in fact emerge.

A fine example of this occurs in the *Letter's* obsessive accumulation of imagery concerning precious gemstones. Enumerated are gemstones

possessing magical powers (§§29–30; 66; E 8–20); precious stones gathered from flowing rivers (§§22; 32–33; 39–40); used in the construction of palaces or other monuments such as the magical mirror tower or marvelous mill house (§§68; B 87–93; D w–y; E 29); used for architectural purposes, but primarily ornamental (§§47; 57–60; 62–63); and whose value is particularly high because of the difficulty of their attainment (§38). The *Letter's* multiple interpolations⁶⁴ suggest that such a catalogue of fantastic riches can be extended ad infinitum, such that the following claim in the earliest version seems fully credible: "Omnibus divitiis, quae sunt in mundo, superhabundat et praececlit magnificentia nostra" [Of all the riches that are in the world, our magnificence exceeds in abundance and surpasses (§50)]. The pile up of gemstones of varying utility and intrinsic value draws attention to the desire for or fantasy of accumulation itself as the real subject of the images. Precious stones do not represent the otherness of vast wealth or marvelous virtue associated throughout the Middle Ages with India,⁶⁵ so much as the force of fantasy itself that creates the possibility for a meeting of self and other across the space opened up by their putative differences.

One form that the fantasy takes, one field in which it might be analyzed, involves the contrasting of Eastern with Western ways of assessing an object's true value. Because precious stones, given their relative rarity and manifest aesthetic properties, have immediately recognizable and exoteric value, their absolute or hidden worth may never be known. Two documents from the later Middle Ages, a fourteenth-century Icelandic tale of India and a fifteenth-century Italian Prester John *nouvelle*,⁶⁶ center on a gift of three precious gems from Prester John to a Western potentate who fails to discover their esoteric powers.

In the Icelandic version, the king of Denmark is given three stones by one of his own subjects, a man who has just returned from India where he himself was given the stones by a local ruler. Though the Danish king admits he does not know at all the stones' value, he keeps them in case the giver should ask one day for reciprocation. As it turns out, a messenger from India does arrive at the king's court with a request for something in return, to which the king replies: "I don't know how they merit any recompense, for I do not see what can be done with them."⁶⁷ The Indian then demonstrates their virtues: one multiplies gold, the second protects against wounds in battle, and the third transports the user to India—thereupon the Indian vanishes. In the Italian story, the plot trajectory is similar: an emissary from Prester John arrives at the court of a Western potentate to explain the significance of precious stones already possessed, only to vanish with the stones after elucidating their virtues. But the Italian story is from its outset a moral tale: "La forma e la intenzione di quella ambasceria fu solo in due cose, per volere al postutto provare se lo 'mperadore fosse savio in parlare et in opere"

[the form and intent of the mission was double: a desire to put to the test whether the emperor was learned in speech and in deeds]. Having received the three stones, the emperor is supposed to indicate "quale è la migliore cosa del mondo" [what is the best thing in the world]. The emperor, however, fails to enquire about the stones' virtues, choosing to praise their beauty instead. The emperor concludes, somewhat ironically given the great opulence of his own court, that the best thing in the world is *misura* [moderation; the golden mean]. After hearing report of the emperor's words, Presto Giovanni judges the emperor "molto savio in parola, ma non in fatto, acciocchè non avea domandato della virtù di così care pietre" [very wise in word, but not in deed, in as much as he had not asked about the virtue of such precious stones]. Prester John then dispatches his jeweler [*lapidaro*] to retrieve the stones. Once the jeweler holds all the stones, he becomes invisible, returns to India, and presents the stones to Prester John "con grande allegrezza" [with great happiness].⁶⁸

Both tales clearly illustrate the failure to understand an object's intrinsic significance, a failure that has ultimately less to do with the mysterious nature of the objects themselves than with the social field in which they exchanged.⁶⁹ The gift of three stones binds giver and receiver together, such that the gift is to be properly experienced as a kind of test regarding how it will eventually be consumed. Prester John issues a challenge to his Western counterparts: whether or not in accepting the gift they will also accept the alternative, magical world of which it is symbolic. By failing to discover or even investigate the stones' esoteric powers, the Western rulers display their fascination with the outward signs of material wealth, and with the sheer act of accumulation itself. As aesthetic objects and things to be traded in the future, the stones become substitutes for a lost faith in the mysteries mediating between this world and another possible one. We might even say that the stones, as the West experiences them, are nothing other than symptoms of a kind of "petrification of the faith," the deadening of popular mythology that characterizes cultures no longer animated by their interaction with "an infinitely larger and more beautiful design."⁷⁰ An example of utopia as self-critique: or, we need not give the story of the magical stones such a sharply didactic or moral edge. Rather, we might see the tale of Prester John's gift not in terms of an education in what this world is or should be like, but a gesture toward the possibility of what *another* world might be like. In other words, the didacticism, if we choose to call it that, is not necessarily so moribund, confined to characterizing only the status quo, but aims more openly to place readers in a new imaginary relation with what is other.

It is very difficult to disengage the meaning of the superabundance of precious stones, packed for the reader in the *Letter's* list-structure, from the particular ideological perspective with which Western medieval culture

shaped and interpreted its own knowledge of self-other relations. The gemstones are less objects to be admired, marveled at or even fetishized, than identifications, bridges to another "reality." The *Letter* has the peculiar function of presenting its reader with an unorganized perceptual wealth, wherein the immediate reality of *things* is eclipsed by the active relations into which a reader is placed. If things, as they are given meaning in language, imprison subjects through their circumscription of cultural space,⁷¹ they may also serve as the very vehicles for transforming or transcending one's own delimited social reality. Von Humboldt was one of the first to suggest how things furnish a sense of bounded reality: "Man lives with his objects chiefly—in fact, since his feeling and acting depend upon his perceptions, one may say exclusively—as language presents them to him. By the same process whereby he spins language out of his own being, he ensnares himself in it; and each language draws a magic circle round the people to which it belongs, a circle from which there is no escape *save by stepping out of it into another*."⁷² It is the fetishization, in language, of objects like gemstones that transforms them into "magical" things, more *real*, we might say, than reality itself. That is, objects condition a way of looking at and living in reality that has finally little to do with their specific materiality or utility. Not merely the inert "stuff" of reality, things bear directly on, and thus can come to dominate, as if by magic, perceptions of lived reality.

If indeed things possess the magical power to take over the space of their production and consumption, by anchoring ideology, then they also possess the power to circumscribe entirely new fantasmatic spaces into which subjects might step—or, as I suggest, leap. This leap into a new identificatory relation is encouraged by none other than the *Letter's* own artificial list-structure, a formal arrangement that, because of rather than in spite of its artificiality, provides the truest index of the real, the surest, and most assuring, shape of reality, especially reality to come. Utopic discourse, we will recall, is by its nature deeply processural, supercharged with productivity. Neither in its elements nor as a totality does the utopic text come to rest in the form of a " 'realized' vision of this or that ideal society or social ideal,"⁷³ but rather it moves continuously forward by means of "logically unmotivated associative transition[s] from one theme to another."⁷⁴ Only in its cognitively abrupt transitions can the text's fully "ideological aspect" be revealed. I will propose here, apropos of the theories of Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, that the *discursive* relations found in the *Letter's* list-structure cannot be construed independently of the *existential* relations such a generic structure urges.

The force of cinema's intervention into reality depends, for Eisenstein, not on the fetishization of reality that the montage seems to promote, but on its mode of "cutting the spectator into and beyond the film in a

(multi-) position of reading"⁷⁵ and living. Montage film is a manifestly material-based and, as Eisenstein would have it, "agitational" or "aggressive" medium—aimed at "moulding the audience in a desired direction"⁷⁶—and in this it has structural, if not political, affinities with literature that privileges linguistic effect over plot motivation.⁷⁷ In order to concentrate one's emotion in a desired direction, montage art creates cognitive dissonances in the *subject* (in both senses of the term), shocks or collisions between two or more disparate units of meaning that, despite obvious incongruity, constitute a whole, an impression in the mind. This impression is the seed of a transformation, the conflict inherent in the art having been transferred to the onlooker. "Agit cinema" compels a special kind of fictive collaboration, one centered on

an "effective construction". . . according to which it is not the facts being demonstrated that are important but the combinations of the emotional reactions of the audience. It is then possible to envisage in both theory and practice a construction, with no linking plot logic, which provokes a chain of the necessary unconditioned reflexes that are . . . associated with (compared with) predetermined phenomena and by this means to create the chain of new conditioned reflexes that these phenomena constitute. This signifies a realisation of the orientation towards thematic effect, i.e. a fulfillment of the agitational purpose.⁷⁸

The alterity of the "agitational spectacle" is itself unimportant; its figurative tendencies ("what does it mean?") are secondary to its productive qualities, that is, to its ideological effects upon a subject who has internalized a series of dynamic relations, what Eisenstein refers to as the "shocks" between spectacles. The dialectical instabilities of montage guarantee its provocative-ness, its constant, often overwhelming, challenge to seek out and inhabit another—always better—state of existence.

This distillation of Eisensteinian film theory provides a backdrop for the present investigation of the utopic dimensions of the montage mechanism. With respect to the utopic impulse, montage does double duty: it conserves a past, by indulging cultural nostalgia for lost unity with the others it portrays, and it maps out possible futures for subjects in whom it installs the desire for alternative worlds. I elaborate the mechanics of montage's utopic drive in greater detail in a moment, but before doing so, I want to illustrate the discursive and thematic features of the *Letter's* moving montage style. To arrest, for a moment, the flow of marvelous images:

42. In certain other provinces near the torrid zone there are serpents who in our language are called salamanders. Those serpents are only able to live in fire, and they produce a certain little membrane around them, just as other

worms do, which makes silk. 43. This little membrane is carefully fashioned by the ladies of our palace, and from this we have garments and cloths for the full use of our excellency. Those cloths are washed only in a strong fire. 44. Our Serenity abounds in gold and silver and precious stones, elephants, dromedaries, camels, and dogs. 45. Our gentle hospitality receives all travelers from abroad and pilgrims. There are no poor among us. 46. Neither thief nor plunderer is found among us, nor does a flatterer have a place there, nor does avarice. There is no division among us. Our people abound in all kinds of wealth. We have few horses and wretched ones. We believe that no people is equal to us in riches or in number of men. 47. When we proceed to war against our enemies, we have carried before our front line, in separate wagons, thirteen great and very tall crosses made of gold and precious stones in place of banners, and each one of these is followed by ten thousand mounted soldiers and 100 thousand foot soldiers, besides those who are assigned to the packs and the cart-loads and the bringing in of the army's food. 48. Indeed when we ride out unarmed, a wooden cross, ornamented with neither paint, gold, nor gems, proceeds before our majesty, so that we may always be mindful of the passion of our lord Jesus Christ, and [so does] a golden vase, full of earth, in order that we may know that our body will return to its proper origin, the earth. 49. And another silver vase, full of gold, is carried before us in order that all may understand that we are lord of lords. 50. In all the riches which are in the world, our magnificence exceeds in abundance and surpasses.

This list description comprises, I would suggest, much more than a catalogue of conspicuous wealth and abundance, more than a display of Christian force or a show of regal pageantry. It is the key or guide to a process of radical self-estrangement that originates in idealization. Clearly the list encourages, indeed dramatizes, the capacity of its Western European reader to confer upon his Eastern "better half" the things and attributes he does not possess at home. The montage-like structure works, through refusing logical motivation, to accumulate—or, better, pile up—images of the marvelous and extravagant, upon which are instantly conferred an ideality. In this manner, the montage functions as a way of making sense beyond its status as a collection of images, each moving abruptly, as in a filmic "cut," from one to the next.

Film montage offers this consonance with the apparently unsystematic list: both of these methods of giving shape to refractory reality rely upon the apriori assumption that the world being described or portrayed is in fact a comprehensible whole. Montage, in order to have any social effect, must be a meaningful, that is, meaning-producing, operation. Individual images, whose relation to one another the montage manages, should "add up" to a greater organic and expressive whole. This was true, I demonstrated, for Pliny's encyclopedic project and, in a general way, for its progeny, the medieval wonder-list as well. In the *Letter*, however, the montage arrangement

of individual images works slightly differently. The symbolic whole, to which all the parts supposedly "add up," is nothing other than a surplus, whose excessive meaning exceeds the total of its combined parts. In other words, the anatomizing of Prester John's kingdom into parts is an operation that cannot be undone, or as it were reversed, by reassembling the parts into the whole. New sets of relations—among parts and between reader and text—intervene, ones that produce irreparable changes in the whole. Innocent reflection on the utopic text/event is never (again) possible.⁷⁹

Such new relations, though in a sense supplemental, are not, however, the by-products of some useless expenditure;⁸⁰ instead, they are meant to be recycled as stimuli for the abandonment of one's familiar social relations. Within the network of montage relations, abandoning the familiar necessarily entails discovering the alien. That seems obvious enough, except that the alien here is that which has been *made alien*, or defamiliarized in particular ways. Consider the passage cited: its thematic rhythm might be described as the shock of the foreign confronting the homely, the distant colliding with the local, the lavish and ostentatious clashing with the plain and humble. In each instance, the latter terms are transformed into something outlandish. Dogs, alongside elephants and camels, appear almost exotic;⁸¹ the salamander, an animal making cameo appearances in encyclopedic, travel, and crusade literature and whose meaning itself oscillates between the sacred and the merely material, is flagged as an anomaly in another language (Greek);⁸² a few miserable horses, sandwiched between affirmations of unparalleled wealth, while common enough at home, are actually signs of foreignness—a well-known fact about distant India, which must import horses from Persia or Arabia.⁸³

Beyond the menagerie, the text points to what readers would immediately recognize as equally strange, a social state where there is no poverty, no crime, no vice, no dissension. Such an ideal social condition, having been broken down into its constitutive elements and conveyed as a list of local attributes,⁸⁴ functions more as a prescription than a description. That is, while each element signifies something desirable in and of itself, each element "is also *at one and the same time* taken as the *figure* for Utopia in general, and for the systemic revolutionary transformation of society as a whole."⁸⁵ Each detail in the list focuses, for a moment, the reader's desire for a new social existence. The utopic list guides the reader through the text, directing him to the fulfillment of social aspirations. Never is the reader's desire arrested, for the force of fantasy alone keeps in motion the very sequence of images in which the reader is caught up.⁸⁶ In the descriptions of Prester John at war and at peace, the mundane and the ideal coexist, are ritually integrated, such that the reader is presented with the recognizable or quotidian (such as banner wagons, an eleventh-century Italian invention;⁸⁷

the usual numbers—10,000 and 100,000—for describing war machinery; and military ordnance) alongside mixed signals of magnificent power and humble faith. The images of jewel-encrusted gold crosses, next to the unadorned wooden ones, idealize war against the enemies of Christianity, but do so in a peculiar way. The scene of peace, which encourages lowly meditation upon suffering and the return to earthly origins, suggests that war is not intrinsically ideal, but is here exalted only by context.

The *Letter's* list-structure places the reader right in the midst of a relay of displacements, tensions, and contradictions, a circuit that provides the dialectical energy for redirecting and streamlining identificatory relations. In utopic lists like this, the logic of the self-same has little transformative force. The fetishistic insistence that the other is only some ideal version of the same collapses the space of difference, whereas immersion in the utopic process makes sure that there is always something "ungraspable" out ahead of the place where one has momentarily settled. Georges Bataille, however, sees in Christianity the antithesis of utopic process, a system of thought that freezes all dynamism because it ceaselessly corporealizes or "substantializes" the sacred. And as Steven Shaviro has noted, the corporealization of the sacred results from the belief that "there are no limits to idealization," in that "the self-reflecting spirit has the power of transforming everything into itself, but at the price of never being able to encounter anything other than itself." An event, or object, he continues "can always be . . . idealized, but once we have done so, what we have taken hold of is no longer an event. Everything can be explained, but what is explained is no longer what happened."⁸⁸ So, for Bataille, a fetish object like the Grail⁸⁹ represents a failed instance of perceiving the relationship between God and the "true" object of religion, the sacred: "Christianity has made the sacred *substantial*, but the nature of the sacred. . . is perhaps the most ungraspable thing that has been produced between men: the sacred is only a privileged moment of communal unity."⁹⁰

In my view, Bataille is both right and wrong. There can be no doubt that Christianity has strenuously substantialized the sacred, and that what is ungraspable about the sacred is precisely its "privileged moment of communal unity." Corporealizing the sacred need not, however, be incommensurable with the production of sacral community. Prester John, who himself became keeper of the Grail for a troubled West in Albrecht von Scharfenberg's *Titarel* romance, presents us, in what I have been calling a montage mode, with things that are just alien or ideal enough to severely limit the kind of self-reflexivity and immobility that Shaviro explained was inextricable from the idealizing impulse. Bataille has a point about the *content* of certain utopic projects, but in failing to account for their *form* he ignores the essential dimension of their political force.

Eisenstein, as I have indicated, was acutely attentive to the formal possibilities of social transformation. His montage compositional method aimed above all at effecting an ecstatic relation to otherness, what he called a "maximum 'departure from oneself.'" In his essay "The Structure of the Film" (1939), Eisenstein notes two crucial facts about montage: it is "an arrangement of phenomena, which themselves flow ecstatically"; it is "the representation of phenomena as distributed in such a way among themselves, that each of them in relation to each other seems a transition from one intensity to another."⁹¹ The moving image is designed to provoke or "shock" the subject into moving "from quality to quality" on the way to "a new condition" of existence.⁹² Eisenstein's, and indeed Prester John's, answer to Bataille's rendering of the sacred within Christianity is to stress the "fundamental ecstatic formula" of the utopic impulse:

the leap "out of oneself" invariably becomes a leap into a new quality, and most often of all achieves the diapason of a leap into opposition.

Here is another organic secret: a leaping imagist movement from quality to quality is *not a mere formula of growth*, but is more, *a formula of development*—a development that involves us in its canon, not only as a single "vegetative" unit. . . but makes us, instead, *a collective and social unit, consciously participating in its development*. For we know that this very leap, in the interpretation of social phenomena, is present in those revolutions to which social development and the movement of society are directed.⁹³

The "organic secret" of the *Letter* is the way that it carries, via the list, "the montage principle over into history" by discovering "in the analysis of the small individual moment the crystal of the total event."⁹⁴ The inherent instability of the paratactic list, its violation of logical order and diegetic expectation, even its internal ambiguities,⁹⁵ spark an abandonment of singular and familiar self-sameness in search of ecstasy, collectivity, utopia. The analogy between montage and the list-structure is, I think, most useful as an analogy—one that allows us to formulate the revolutionary nature of identification as an ecstatic transition to something else.⁹⁶ I offer my reading of Prester John as an intervention into the notion of utopia, by marking affinities with what we in fact have come to think of dystopia: the combination of what does not quite cohere or appear seamless, the uneasy *bricolage*-effect distinguishing such films as *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982) and *Brazil* (Terry Gilliam, 1985). Not without its own catastrophes, clashes, and flights, dystopic film, like Prester John's *Letter*, locates for us the source of the culturally redemptive in the interstices, in the seams between sites of collision. From these we emerge, frenzied by the fantasm of something new. . . .

POSTSCRIPT: UTOPIC ENDINGS

Melius est ad summum quam in summa.

—Otto of Freising*

A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of utopias.

—Oscar Wilde†

The world is now too dangerous for anything less than Utopia.

—John Rader Platt‡

Others have made this remarkable observation: the great utopian works of the twentieth century have all been anti-utopias or kakotopias, "visions of a world," as Leszek Kolakowski has put it, "in which all the values the authors identified themselves with have been mercilessly crushed."¹ The authors are now part of a canon of dystopian writing: Huxley, Orwell, Kubrick, Zamyatin, Capek, Saramago, Bradbury, Gibson, Atwood, and so on. And, arguably, more than the timely poignancy of the novels, it was the passionate affectivity of films that dismantled utopia, denying its practicality and its value as a viable mentality, at the same time that they pointed to perfect satisfactions (somewhere) and ultimate solutions to predicaments (somehow). Among my own movie experiences, this set of anti-utopian films constitutes some of the most memorable: *Blade Runner* (1982), *Brazil* (1985), *The City of Lost Children* (1995), *Strange Days* (1995), *Twelve Monkeys* (1995), *Dark City* (1998), *Pi* (1998), *The Matrix* (1999), *Donnie Darko* (2001), *28 Days Later* (2002) and, anti-utopia as comedy, *Shaun of the Dead* (2004). What makes these films so powerfully anti-utopian and simultaneously utopian is their insistence that the hope for some *ultimum*, whether social or epistemological, inevitably involves pain and forfeiture. With sacrifice and loss at their core, utopias are always structured according to a contradiction: if the utopia satisfies all desires, extinguishes all pains,

then it grinds to a halt, and stagnation replaces creativity. So, to remain vital, there must always exist within utopia a surplus of unrest, of need, of desire. It is this surplus that is reflected back to us in so many anti-utopian films, reminding us, for example, that a technological utopia is inconceivable without a highly despotic social order managing to simulate the impossible total perfection. To smash the totalitarian order and its fundamental lie is to destroy utopia and at the same time resurrect it, reclaiming it for freedom and inventiveness. The gamble is always whether or not having introduced resistance in the name of freedom or conflict in the name of innovation already contaminates utopia to the extent that it must give way to something more human, thus fallible.

Its sacrificial logic renders utopia an impossibility, though not therefore unthinkable. Kolakowski reminds us that the perfectly consistent egalitarian utopia is self-defeating, reflecting what he terms a "secular caricature of Buddhist metaphysics":

It may be seen perhaps as a peculiar expression of the suicidal impulse of human society. . . Ultimately it amounts to this: life necessarily involves tension and suffering; consequently if we wish to abolish tension and suffering, life is to be extinguished. And there is nothing illogical in this last reasoning.²

Whereas I would prefer to characterize the impulse here as masochistic rather than suicidal, if only to preserve something of the defiance inherent in enduring suffering to gain a pleasure or satisfaction of some kind, even if that pleasure is the zero point of tension, death, the key point here is the way utopia tolerates logical contradiction.³ These contradictions have long been part of the very fabric of both religious utopianism and its paradoxical fulfillment in Christian Apocalypse.

The political caricature of Christian theology that currently passes as an innocuous faith-based governance has more in common with suicidal affectivity than with defiant self-harm. The theological basis for anti-environmentalism in the United States is one striking example of how it is possible to set a nation upon a path of self-destruction in the name of utopian "rapture." The anti-environment ethos of the Christian Right is perhaps less well known than its stances against abortion or same-sex marriage. Yet in 2004, the 43 percent of the U.S. Senate (45 members) and House of Representatives (186 members) who earned the highest approval ratings from the nation's three leading Christian Right advocacy groups (the Christian Coalition, Eagle Forum, and Family Resource Council) also garnered flunking grades from the League of Conservation Voters. While, as many have feared, George W. Bush's reelection gives him a mandate for

"unburdening" industry of what remains of the regulatory controls clamped on it in the last century, it is perhaps too easy to view such policy in terms of capitalistic motive when there is a clearly utopian impulse at work. Intertwined with earthly gains is earthly loss—the literal loss of the planet. Here the Christian fundamentalist notion that any concern for the future of the earth is irrelevant because it has no future is expressed as a belief in End Time, that final stage of history that itself ends with Christ's return in order to sort out the righteous from the sinners. Environmental destruction, as a sign of the Apocalypse, is thus something to be welcomed, even courted, rather than feared.

How mainstream is this vision of planetary consumption, which is at once utopian and anti-utopian? According to a 2002 *Time/CNN* poll, 59 percent of Americans believe that the prophecies found in the Book of Revelation are going to come true, and now, four years after the event, nearly one-quarter think the Bible predicted the 9/11 attacks.⁴ The broad appeal of evangelical End Time musings is reflected in the phenomenal success of the Lohmeier and Jenkins *Left Behind* series of apocalyptic potboilers, whose perennially popular novels have sold more than seventy million copies. Among those in power, the lineage of such beliefs can be traced back to a statement of James G. Watt, a born-again evangelical whose tenure on the board of directors of the scandalous PTL Club ministry coincided with service as Reagan's first secretary of interior, who declared that protecting natural resources was unimportant in light of the imminent return of the son of God: "God gave us these things to use. After the last tree is felled, Christ will come back."⁵

So bizarre have attempts to bring about the End Time become that, since the mid-1990s, a group of fundamentalist Christian Texas ranchers has been helping messianists of the Israeli Right breed a pure red heifer, a genetically rare animal that must be sacrificed to fulfill an apocalyptic prophecy found in the Book of Numbers. The latest crimson beast will be ready for sacrifice in 2005. How serious is this really? Well, when the first red heifer appeared in 1996 (before it reached the ritually mandated age of sacrifice, the bovine sprouted white hair and was disqualified), David Landau, columnist for the Israeli daily *Haaretz*, called the cow "a four-legged bomb" with the potential to "set the entire region on fire." Muslim leaders fretted over the red heifer too, as they would see an attempt by Jews to take over the Temple Mount (in preparation for the Messiah, a Third Temple must be built, and only the ashes from the heifer can purify Jews so they can set foot on the Temple Mount⁶) as a sign of the Islamic apocalypse.⁷ Hastening the Apocalypse, running down the road to Armageddon, is only a paradox if not viewed through a fundamentalist lens, whether it be Christian, Jewish, or Islamic, or, as we see in the miraculous red heifer, a conflation of all three.

Marcuse has remarked that our present "capacity to turn the world into hell" and our power to turn the world into the opposite both spell the end of utopic thinking.⁸ In either direction, the voice of utopia as social critique is squelched, with utopia's function as a condemnation of where we are heading silenced. Utopias and anti-utopias trip cultural alarms, broadcasting warning signals announcing that culture is degrading—or about to be rescued, redeemed. It is arguable, indeed demonstrable, that our world is fast becoming a hell (it is, scientists tell us, getting warmer), and what utopias then signify is nothing more than what Toynbee once called a "pegging" of the social order, an artificial arresting of its downward movement: "To arrest a downward movement is the utmost to which Utopias can aspire, since Utopias seldom begin to be written in any society until after its members have lost the expectation of further progress."⁹ While utopias tend to recycle the past, anti-utopias recycle the future, and in some sense they both temporarily arrest social movement. This is not to say that we could survive without them or the rest they provide. When I read that veteran British code-breakers are attempting to determine if the ten-letter inscription—DOUOSVAVVM—carved into a garden monument of the Shugborough Estate in Staffordshire reveals, as legend has it, the location of the Holy Grail, I am reminded of how important utopia is as a stay against cynicism and a register of inexhaustible human will.¹⁰ Around another holy relic, the Turin Shroud, circulates a utopian vision familiar to the readers of this book: Pierre Krijbolder's recent revelation that the cloth image is not Christ but Prester John.¹¹

In this book, I have wanted to suggest that somehow our most hopeful impulses fuel beliefs such as these. As absolutely unhistorical as it may be that Prester John's visage marks the Turin Shroud, the shaping of history, and our ability to understand it, depend upon our never relinquishing such a way of thinking. To jettison even politically retrograde utopias is to risk suffocating our ideals, while criticizing them most assuredly does not.

APPENDIX: TRANSLATION OF THE ORIGINAL LATIN LETTER OF PRESTER JOHN¹

1. Prester John, by the power and virtue of God and our lord Jesus Christ, lord of lords, to Emmanuel, governor of the Romans, wishing him health and the extended enjoyment of divine favor. 2. It has been reported to our majesty that you esteem our excellency and that mention [knowledge] of our High One has reached you. And we have learned through our delegate that you should wish to send us some entertainments and trifles [*ludicra et iocunda*], which would satisfy our righteousness. 3. Of course we are only human and take it in good faith, and through our delegate we transmit to you some things, for we wish and long to know if, as with us, you hold the true faith and if you, through all things, believe our lord Jesus Christ. 4. While we know ourselves to be mortal, the little Greeks regard you as a god, while we know that you are mortal and subject to human infirmities. 5. Because of the usual munificence of our liberality, if there is anything you should desire for your pleasure, make it known to us through our delegate through a small note of your esteem, and you shall have it for the asking. 6. Receive the hawkweed in our own name and use it for your own sake, because we gladly use your jar of unguent in order that we mutually strengthen and corroborate our bodily strength. And, on account of (our) art, respect and consider our gift. 7. If you should desire to come to our kingdom, we will place you in the greatest and most dignified place in our house, and you will be able to enjoy our abundance, from that which overflows with us, and if you should wish to return, you will return possessing riches. 8. Remember your end and you will not sin forever. 9. If you truly wish to know the magnitude and excellence of our Highness and over what lands our power dominates, then know and believe without hesitation that I, Prester John, am lord of lords and surpass, in all riches which are under the heaven, in virtue and in power, all the kings of the wide world. Seventy-two kings are tributaries to us. 10. I am a devout Christian, and everywhere do we defend poor Christians, whom the empire of our clemency rules, and we sustain them with alms. 11. We have vowed to visit the Sepulcher of the Lord with the greatest army, just as it is befitting the glory of our majesty, in order to humble and defeat the enemies of the cross of Christ and to exalt his blessed name. 12. Our magnificence dominates the three Indias, and our land extends from farthest India, where the body of St. Thomas the Apostle rests, to the place where the sun rises, and returns by slopes to the Babylonian desert near the tower of Babel. 13. Seventy-two provinces serve us, of which a few are

Christian, and each one of them has its own king, who all are our tributaries. 14. In our country are born and raised elephants, dromedaries, camels, hippopotami, crocodiles, *methagallinarii*, *cametheternis*, *thinsiretae*, panthers, aurochs, white and red lions, white bears, white merlins, silent cicadas, griffins, tigers, lamias, hyenas, wild oxen, archers, wild men, horned men, fauns, satyrs and women of the same kind, pigmies, dog-headed men, giants whose height is forty cubits, one-eyed men, cyclopes, and a bird, which is called the phoenix, and almost all kinds of animals that are under heaven. 21. Our land flows with honey and abounds with milk. In a particular part of our country no poisons harm nor noisy frog croaks, there is no scorpion there, nor serpent creeping in the grass. Venomous animals are not able to live in that place nor harm anyone. 22. Amid the pagans and through one of our provinces flows a river which is called Ydonus. This river, flowing out of Paradise, extends its windings by various courses throughout the entire province, and in it are found natural gems, emeralds, sapphires, carbuncles, topazes, chrysolites, onyx, beryls, amethysts, sardonyxes, and many other precious gems. 23. In the same place a plant grows which is called *assidios*, the root of which, if someone carries it upon his person, he puts to flight the unclean spirit and causes it to announce who and from where it may be, and its name. And so unclean spirits never dare to invade anyone in that land. 24. In another province of ours whole pepper—which is exchanged for wheat, grain, leather, and bread—grows and is gathered. 25. That land is also woody, like a forest of willows fully permeated with serpents. But when the pepper ripens, the forest is set on fire, and the fleeing serpents enter their holes, and then the pepper from the shrubbery is dried and cooked, but how it is cooked, no stranger is permitted to know. 27. This grove is situated at the foot of Mount Olympus, from where a clear spring issues, containing all kinds of pleasant tastes. The taste however varies each hour of the day and night, and flows out by a waterway for three days, not far from Paradise, from where Adam was expelled. 28. If someone who has fasted for three days tastes of this spring, he will suffer no infirmity from that day on, and will always be as if he were thirty-two years old, however long he may live. 29. There are small gems there, which are called *midriosi*, and which eagles are often accustomed to bring to our country, by which they rejuvenate and restore their sight. 30. If someone should wear one on his finger, his sight would not fail, and if his sight diminishes, it is restored, and the more he uses his eyes, the sharper his sight becomes. Blessed by the proper charm, it renders a man invisible, banishes hatred, forges friendship, and drives away envy. 31. Among the other things which marvelously happen in our kingdom, there is the sandy sea without water. Indeed the sand moves and swells up in waves just like all other seas, and is never still. This sea can be crossed neither by ship or by any other means, and for this reason, what type of land may lie beyond is not able to be known. And although it is completely devoid of water, nevertheless diverse kinds of fish are found near the shore on our side which are the most palatable and tasty to eat and which are seen nowhere else. 32. Three day's distance from this sea are some mountains, from which descends a river of stones, in the same condition (as the sea), without water, and it flows through our kingdom all the way to the sea of sand. 33. It flows for three days a week, and small and large stones flow by and carry with them pieces of woods all the way to the sea of sand, and after the river has entered the sea, the stones and

wood vanish and do not appear again. As long as it does not flow, anyone is able to cross it. On the other four days, it is accessible to crossing. 38. Near the desert between the uninhabited mountains a certain rivulet flows beneath the earth, the entrance to which is not accessible except by chance. Indeed sometimes the ground opens up, and if someone at that moment crosses over from there, he is able to enter; but he must quickly get out, if by any chance the ground may close up. And whatever he snatches up from the sand is precious stones and gems, for the sand and gravel are nothing but precious stones and gems. 39. And that rivulet flows into another river of greater size, which the men of our kingdom enter and carry from there the greatest abundance of precious stones; nor do they dare to sell them unless they first show them to our excellency. And if we wish to keep them in our treasury or for the payment of our force (army), we receive them given to us at half price; otherwise they are able to sell them freely. 40. The children in that land are raised in water, so that, in order to find stones, they may live sometimes for three or four months entirely under water. 41. Beyond the stone river are the ten tribes of the Jews, who though they imagine they have kings of their own, are nevertheless our servants and tributaries to our excellency. 42. In certain other provinces near the torrid zone there are serpents who in our language are called salamanders. Those serpents are only able to live in fire, and they produce a certain little membrane around them, just as other worms do, which makes silk. 43. This little membrane is carefully fashioned by the ladies of our palace, and from this we have garments and cloths for the full use of our excellency. Those cloths are washed only in a strong fire. 44. Our Serenity abounds in gold and silver and precious stones, elephants, dromedaries, camels, and dogs. 45. Our gentle hospitality receives all travelers from abroad and pilgrims. There are no poor among us. 46. Neither thief nor plunderer is found among us, nor does a flatterer have a place there, nor does avarice. There is no division among us. Our people abound in all kinds of wealth. We have few horses and wretched ones. We believe that no people is equal to us in riches or in number of men. 47. When we proceed to war against our enemies, we have carried before our front line, in separate wagons, thirteen great and very tall crosses made of gold and precious stones in place of banners, and each one of these is followed by ten thousand mounted soldiers and 100 thousand foot soldiers, besides those who are assigned to the packs and the cart-loads and the bringing in of the food of the army. 48. Indeed when we ride out unarmed, a wooden cross, ornamented with neither paint, gold, nor gems, proceeds before our majesty, so that we may always be mindful of the passion of our lord Jesus Christ, and [so does] a golden vase, full of earth, in order that we may know that our body will return to its proper origin, the earth. 49. And another silver vase, full of gold, is carried before us in order that all may understand that we are lord of lords. 50. In all the riches which are in the world, our magnificence exceeds in abundance and surpasses. 51. There is not a liar among us, nor is anyone able to lie. And if someone there should begin to lie, he immediately dies, that is, he would be considered just as dead man among us, nor would any mention of him be made among us, that is, he would receive no further honor among us. 52. We all follow truth and we love one another. There is no adulterer among us. No vice rules among us. 53. Every year we visit the body of the holy prophet Daniel with a large army in the Babylonian desert, and we are all armed on

account of the wild beasts and other serpents, which are called frightful. **54.** Among us fish are caught, by whose blood purple things are dyed. **55.** We have many fortifications, and the strongest men and men of various form. We rule over the Amazons and even the Bragmani. **56.** Indeed the palace in which our Sublimity dwells, is in the image and likeness of the palace which the apostle Thomas planned for Gondoforus, king of the Indians, and the out buildings and other buildings are similar in all ways to that palace. **57.** The paneled ceilings, beams, and *epistilia* are made of acacia. The roof of the same palace is of ebony, so that by any circumstance it is not able to be burned. Indeed at either end of the palace, above the roof-ridge, are two golden apples, and in each of these are two carbuncles, so that the gold shines in the day and the carbuncles sparkle at night. **58.** The larger gates of the palace are of sardonyx inlaid with serpent's horn, so that no one is able to enter secretly with poison; the others are of ebony, and the windows are of crystal. **59.** Some of the tables, on which our court eats, are of gold and others are of amethyst, and the columns which support the tables are of ebony. **60.** Before our palace is a certain street in which our Justice is accustomed to watch those triumphant in battle. The pavement is of onyx and the walls inlaid with onyx, so that by the power of the stone the courage of the warriors grows. **61.** In our aforementioned palace no torch burns at night except that which is fed by balsam. **62.** The chamber, in which our Sublimity sleeps, is marvelously gilded and ornamented with all kinds of stones. If indeed wherever onyx should be used for adornment, then around it would be four cornelians of the same size, in order that by their virtue, the irregularity of the onyx may be regulated. **63.** In the same chamber balsam always burns. Our bed is of sapphire, on account of the stone's virtue in chastity. **64.** We have the most beautiful women, but they do not come to us except four times a year for the purpose of procreating children, and thus sanctified by us, as Bethsheba by David, each one returns to her place. **65.** Once a day our court dines. At our table every day, thirty thousand eat besides those who enter and leave. And all these receive provisions each day from our treasury, such as horses and other expenses. **66.** This table is of precious emerald, and two columns of amethyst support it. The power of this stone allows no one sitting at the table to become inebriated. **67.** Before the doors of our palace, near the place where the fighters struggle in battle, is a mirror of very great size, to which one climbs by one hundred twenty five steps. **68.** Indeed the steps of the lower one-third are of porphyry, and partly of serpentine and alabaster. From this point to the upper one-third the steps are of crystal stone and sardonyx. Indeed the upper one-third are of amethyst, amber, jasper, and sapphire. **69.** Indeed the mirror is supported by a single column. Above this column is set a base, upon the base are two columns, above which is another base, upon which are four columns, above which is another base and upon which are eight columns, above which is another base and upon which are sixteen columns, above which is another base, upon which are thirty-two columns, above which is another base and upon which are sixty-four columns, above which is another base, upon which are also sixty-four columns, above which is another base and upon which are thirty-two columns. And so in descending the columns diminish in number, just as ascending they increase in number, to one. **70.** Moreover, the columns and the bases are of the same kinds of stones as the steps by which one

ascends to them. **71.** Indeed at the top of the uppermost column there is a mirror, consecrated by such art that all machinations and all things which happen for and against us in the adjacent provinces subject to us are most clearly seen and known by the onlookers. **72.** Moreover it is guarded by twelve thousand soldiers in the daytime just as at night, so that it may not be by some chance or accident broken or thrown down. **73.** Every month seven kings serve us, with each one of them in order, as well as sixty-two dukes, three hundred sixty-five counts at our table, in addition to those who are charged with various duties at our court. **74.** At our table every day twelve archbishops eat close by our side on the right, on the left eat twenty bishops, in addition to the Patriarch of St. Thomas and the Bishop [*Protopapaten*] of Samarkind, and the Archbishop [*Archiprotopapaten*] of Susa, where the throne and the dominion of our glory reside, and the imperial palace. Every month each one of them returns, in turn, to his own home. The others never depart from our side. **75.** Indeed abbots serve us in our chapel according to the number of days in the year and every month they return to their own homes, and the same number of others return to the same service in our chapel every calends. **76B.** We have another palace, not of greater length but of greater height and beauty, which was built according to a vision that, before we were born, appeared to our father, who, on account of the holiness and justice which marvelously flourished in him, was called Quasideus [God-like]. **77B.** For it was said to him in a dream: "Build a palace for your son, who is to born of you, and who will be king of the worldly kings and lord of the lords of the entire earth. **78B.** And that palace will have such a grace conferred to it by God that there no one will ever be hungry, no one will be sick, nor will anyone, being inside, die on that on which he has entered. And if anyone has the strongest hunger and is sick to the point of death, if he enters the palace and stays there for some time, he will leave satisfied, as if he might have eaten one hundred courses of food, and as healthy as if he might have suffered no infirmities in his lifetime. **85B.** On the next morning Quasideus, my father, terrified by the entire vision, got up and [C] after he had thought and was greatly disturbed, he heard a sublime voice, and which all who were with him heard pronounced: **[86C.]** "O Quasideus, do what you have been ordered to, do not hesitate by any means, for all will be just as it has been predicted to you." **87C.** By this voice, certainly, my father was completely comforted and immediately [B] he ordered the palace to be built, in the construction of which only precious stones and the best melted gold was used for cement. **88B.** Its heaven, that is its roof, is of the clearest sapphire, and the brightest topazes were set here and there in between them, so that the sapphires, like the purest heaven, and topazes, in the manner of stars, illuminate the palace. **89B.** Indeed the floor is of large crystal flagstones. There is no chamber or other kind of division in the palace. Fifty columns of the purest gold, formed like needles, are set in the palace near the walls. **90B.** In each corner is one column, the rest are set between them. The height of one column is sixty cubits, its circumference is such that two men are able to encompass it with their arms, and each one has at its top a carbuncle of such size as a large amphora, by which the palace is illuminated as the world is illuminated by the sun. **91.** [C] If you ask [B] Why are the columns sharpened to a point just as needles? The cause is evidently this: because, if they were as wide at the top as at the bottom, the floor and the whole palace would not be so

greatly illuminated by the brightness of the carbuncles. **92.** [C] And likewise if you ask whether either of the two are bright there, [B] So great is the brightness there that nothing can be imagined so small or so fine, if it is on the floor, that it is not able to be seen by anyone. **93B.** There is no window or other opening there, so that the brightness of the carbuncles and other stones cannot be eclipsed by the brightness of the most serene heaven and sun. **96.** On the day of our birth and whenever we are coronated, we enter that palace and remain inside as long as we might have stayed there to have eaten, and we leave there satisfied, as if we were filled with all kinds of food. **97C.** If again you ask why, since the creator of all will have made us the most powerful and the most glorious over all mortals, [O] (why) our sublimity does not permit itself to be called by a more noble name than presbyter, your prudence ought not to be surprised. **98.** For we have in our court many officials, who are more deserving of title and office, as far as ecclesiastical honor is concerned, and they are provided with divine service even greater than ours. In fact our steward is a primate and king, our cup-bearer an archbishop and king, our marshal a king and archimandrite, and our chief cook a king and abbot. And on that account our Highness has not allowed himself to be called by the same names or distinguished by the same ranks, of which our court seems to be full, and therefore he chooses preferably to be called by a lesser name or inferior rank on account of his humility. **99C.** We cannot at present tell you enough about our glory and power. But when you come to us, you will say, that we are truly the lord of lords of the whole earth. In the meantime you should know this trifling fact, that [B] our country extends in breadth for four months in one direction, indeed in the other direction no one knows how far our kingdom extends. **100.** If you can count the stars in heaven and the sand of the sea, then you can calculate the extent of our kingdom and our power.

NOTES

Introduction

- * C. G. Jung, *Psychological Types*, vol. 6 of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 52.
- 1. The psychoanalytic dimension of this interchange is discussed in Paul Schilder, "The Libidinous Structure of the Body-Image," in his *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body* (New York: International Universities Press, 1950), pp. 119–212.
- 2. Louise O. Fradenburg, *City, Marriage, Tournament: Arts of Rule in Late Medieval Scotland* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), p. 249.
- 3. See Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," in his *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 3–25, and *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
- 4. L. O. Aranye Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism, Chaucer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).
- 5. Georg Simmel, "The Stranger," *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans. and ed. Kurt H. Wolff (New York: Free Press, 1950), p. 405 [402–408].
- 6. A. David Napier, *Foreign Bodies: Performance, Art, and Symbolic Anthropology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 139–40.
- 7. Napier, *Foreign Bodies*, p. 156.
- 8. On this issue, see Homi K. Bhabha, "The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination, and the Discourse of Colonialism," in his *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 66–84. Bhabha shows how stereotyping is based at once upon "daemonic repetition" and absolute rigidity, such that stereotyping's apparent fixity, as sign of difference, is paradoxical. Stereotyping thus carries within it the force of ambivalence, a force that is, e.g., largely ignored, as Bhabha points out, by critics and readers of orientalism, Said included. What is called for is interrogation of the political effects of discourse, produced by representation, which reflect both history and fantasy (as the scene of desire). For an approach to this last point, see my "Re-Orienting Desire: Writing on Gender Trouble in Fourteenth-Century Egypt," *Gender and Difference in the Middle Ages*, ed. Sharon Farmer and Carol Braun Pasternack (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 230–57.

9. Napier, *Foreign Bodies*, p. 153.
10. M. Masud R. Khan, *Alienation in Perversions* (London: Hogarth, 1979), p. 121. Perversions should be placed in more general contexts: "that of man's attempts to escape from his condition," as Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel puts it (p. 299). See her essay "Perversion and the Universal Law," *International Review of Psycho-Analysis* 10 (1983): 293–301.
11. Edward Glover, "The Relation of Perversion-Formation to the Development of Reality-Sense," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 14 (1933): 489 [486–504].
12. See Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1989).

Chapter 1 Eastern Marvels

1. John Heaton, "The Other and Psychotherapy," *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 5–6. The other, as a central critical term in my analysis and one inherited by cultural studies from the hermeneutic philosophy of Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger, too often loses its historical and cultural specificity in contemporary discussions of difference. For a provocative philosophical account of alterity, see Mark C. Taylor, *Alterity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). While I would want to begin with an abstract, unlocalized definition of the other, such as the one I cite here from Tzvetan Todorov, my guiding concern is to show how medieval culture tells its own story through a history of the other:

We can discover the other in ourselves, realize we are not a homogeneous substance, radically alien to whatever is not us: as Rimbaud said, *Je est un autre*. But others are also "I"s: subjects just as I am, whom only my point of view—according to which all of them are *out there* and I alone am *in here*—separates and authentically distinguishes from myself. I can conceive of these others as an abstraction, as an instance of any individual's psychic configuration, as the Other—other in relation to myself, to me; or else as a specific social group to which *we* do not belong. This group in turn can be interior to society: women for men, the rich for the poor, the mad for the "normal"; or it can be exterior to society, i.e., another society. . . unknown quantities, outsiders whose language and customs I do not understand, so foreign that in extreme instances I am reluctant to admit they belong to the same species as my own. (*The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, trans. Richard Howard [New York: Harper, 1984], p. 3)

2. Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora*, ed. Henry Richards Luard, 6 vols. (London, 1876) 3: 488. All translations, unless otherwise cited in text, are my own.
3. In fact Paris's account of the Tartars begins with a potential, unexpected alliance: Saracen emissaries arrive at the court of the king of France seeking Christian aid against "quoddam genus hominum monstruosum et inhumanum ex

- montibus borealibus prorupisse" [a certain race of monstrous and savage beings who have rushed down from the northern mountains]. In England, the Muslim ambassadors are turned away in reproach by the bishop of Winchester: "Sinamus canes hos illos devorare ad invicem, ut consumpti pereant" [Let us leave those dogs to devour these, in order that they may perish by consuming one another (Paris, *Chronica majora*, p. 489)].
4. John of Plano Carpini, *History of the Mongols*, ch. 8 in *The Mongol Mission: Narratives and Letters of the Franciscan Missionaries in Mongolia and China in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, ed. and trans. Christopher Dawson (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955), p. 45.
5. The legend of Prester John as a Western fantasy of power dominated the imagination of crusaders from the Second to the Fifth Crusade (ca. 1150–1240). An interesting, yet as we shall see typical, conflation occurred at the time of the Fifth Crusade, as the crusaders approach Damietta. In a letter, dated April 18, 1221, sent to a number of important personages, including Pope Honorius III, Jacques de Vitry expected relief from a certain oriental prince named David, whom he identified with Prester John. David (also taken to be Prester John's son) turned out to be none other than Genghis Khan. The letter is edited by R. B. C. Huygens, *Lettres de Jacques de Vitry, 1160/70–1240, évêque de S. Jean-d'Acre* (Leiden: Brill, 1960), pp. 134–53. On the identification of Prester John with David and its role in the propaganda of the Fifth Crusade, see Friedrich Zarncke, "Der Priester Johannes als Vorfahr des sogenannten König David, des Mongolen Dschingiskhan," *Abhandlungen der philologisch-historischen Classe der königlichen sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften* 8 (1883): 5–59; Martin Gosman, "La légende du Prêtre Jean et la propagande auprès des Croisés devant Damiette (1218–1221)," *La croisade: réalités et fictions. Actes du Colloque d'Amiens 18–22 Mars 1987* (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1989), pp. 133–42; and R. W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), pp. 45–47.
6. See, e.g., *The World of Henri Wallon*, ed. Gilbert Voyat (New York: Aronson, 1984), p. 46.
7. Paris, *Chronica majora*, p. 488.
8. See, e.g., "The Tartar Relation" (*Historia Tartarorum*), a largely ethnographic description of the Mongols written down in 1247 by a certain C. de Bridia upon the occasion of Plano Carpini's return to Europe, in R. A. Skelton, Thomas E. Marston, and George D. Painter, *The Vinland Map and the Tartar Relation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), p. 97. Or this concerning the taste of Mongols for pickled human flesh in the Egerton MS version of Mandeville: "When thai ensege a castell or a walled toun, thai behete thaim that er enseged so faire proffers that it is wonder; for thai will graunt tham what-sum-ever thai asch. Bot, als sone as thai hafe yolden tham, thai slae tham and cuttez off thaire eres and layes tham in vynegre for to sowce and makez of thaim a dayntee meet for grete lordes" (*The Buke of John Maundeuill. being the Travels of John Mandeville, Knight 1322–56. A Hitherto Unpublished English*

Version from the Unique Copy (Egerton Ms. 1982) in the British Museum. . . together with the French Text, Notes, and an Introduction, ed. George F. Warner [London: Roxburghe Club, 1889], p. 123). For a recent overview of Western myths of Mongol cannibalism, see Gregory G. Guzman, "Reports of Mongol Cannibalism in the Thirteenth-Century Latin Sources: Oriental Fact or Western Fiction?" *Discovering New Worlds: Essays on Medieval Exploration and Imagination* ed. Scott D. Westrem, (New York: Garland, 1991), pp. 31–68. The figure of the cannibal, as I suggest later, is an important image in the construction of specific kinds of fantasies. The widespread figure was central to the formation of national consciousness and identity.

9. Paris describes the Mongols erupting "ex Caspiis montibus vel ex vicinis" [out of the Caspian mountains or from that region] and "ex montibus borealibus prorupisse" [rushed down from the northern mountains] (*Chronica majora*, p. 488).
10. The existence of Gog and Magog was established on the basis of Gen. 10:1–5, Ezek. 38:1–23 and 39:1–6, and Rev. 20:7–10. On his map of Palestine, Matthew Paris depicts in the north Alexander's walls and the *inclusi*, and states in a rubric that from this same direction came the Tartars. See Konrad Miller, *Mappae Mundi: Die ältesten Weltkarten*, 6 vols. (Stuttgart, 1895–98) 3: 93. The fourteenth-century Hereford *mappa mundi* shows a northern European peninsula surrounded by walls and towers. The rubric occupying the area refers to the medieval legend of Gog and Magog: see Vicomte de Santarém, *Essai sur l'histoire de la cosmographie et de la cartographie pendant le Moyen-Age*, ed. Martim de Albuquerque, 3 vols. [Lisbon: Administração do Porto de Lisboa, 1989] 2: 338. On the equation of the *Tartari inclusi* with Gog and Magog, see Andrew Runni Anderson, *Alexander's Gate, Gog and Magog, and the Enclosed Nations* (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy, 1932), pp. 14, 98–103.
11. See Anderson, *Alexander's Gate*, p. 88.
12. On the development of the "siege mentality" in late-medieval and early-modern Europe see Jean Delumeau, *La peur en Occident (XIV^e-XVIII^e siècles): Une cité assiégée* (Paris: Fayard, 1978).
13. Margaret T. Hodgen characterizes the first 1,300 years of Christianity as "a prolonged interlude of continual anxiety" (*Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964], p. 73). Jacques Le Goff frames the Middle Ages in the same general terms: "the mentalities and sensibilities of medieval men were dominated by [a] sense of insecurity which determined the basis of their attitudes" (*Medieval Civilization* [New York: Blackwell, 1988], p. 325). A classic statement on Western medieval "paranoid phantasy" (p. 71), here in the context of popular eschatology, is Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1957), pp. 69–74.
14. While the popularity of Prester John as guardian of civilization is discussed later, I want to emphasize the cultural influence of the Alexander legend in *Pseudo-Methodius*, the version which is interpolated in the Letter of Prester John. Anderson writes: "during the Middle Ages the influence of

Pseudo-Methodius was second only to that of the Canon and church fathers. The reason for this is not far to seek: as Christendom was threatened by each new peril in the later centuries of the middle ages [*sic*]—the Mongol invasions and the westward advance of the Turks even to the walls of Vienna—Christendom in its direst need and darkest hour found in *Pseudo-Methodius* not only hope but even assurance of final victory over Gog and Magog and the might of Antichrist" (*Alexander's Gate*, p. 49).

15. By "ideological construction," I refer to the "representational structures" of "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster [New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971], p. 162).
16. Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde/Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), p. 229; emphasis added. Or, as Dollimore puts it in a trenchant aphorism, "to be against (opposed to) is also to be against (close up, in proximity to) or, in other words, up against" (p. 229).
17. Michel de Certeau, "Spatial Stories," *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 127.
18. As I suggest in chapter 6, many of the conventions associated with realism that inform documentary texts and films also inform the legend of Prester John. Bill Nichols has analyzed the principal "expectations and procedural operations that documentary invokes," one of which is an oscillation between the recognition of historical reality (the basis for any suspension of disbelief) and the recognition of an argument about that reality (actively believing that the world could be different) (see his *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991], p. 28). In my terms, recognizing an argument about the world is part of the ideological work of imagining utopia.
19. Martin Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," *Basic Writings*, ed. David Ferrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 332.
20. Louis Marin, "Frontiers of Utopia: Past and Present," *Critical Inquiry* 19 (1993): 416 [397–420].
21. Identifying with others can generate what Dollimore calls "a politics of proximity." Dollimore quotes a crucial passage in Homi Bhabha, "The Commitment to Theory," *New Formations* 5 (1988): 10–11 [5–23]: "The language of critique is effective not because it keeps for ever separate the terms of the master and the slave. . . but to the extent to which it overcomes the given grounds of opposition and opens up a space of 'translation': a place of hybridity, figuratively speaking, where the construction of a political object that is new, *neither the one nor the Other*, properly alienates our political expectations, and changes, as it must, the very forms of our recognition of the 'moment' of politics. . . This must be a sign that history is *happening*—within the windless pages of theory."
22. Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia* 7.2.21, in *Natural History*, trans. H. Rackham, 10 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949) 2: 518.

23. See Jacques Le Goff, "The Medieval West and the Indian Ocean: An Oneiric Horizon," *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 189–200.
24. Three excellent encyclopedic treatments of medieval conceptions of Eastern wonders, especially monster traditions, are Rudolf Wittkower, "Marvels of the East: A Study in the History of Monsters," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 5 (1942): 159–97; John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); and Claude Lecouteux, *Les monstres dans la littérature allemande du Moyen Age: Contribution à l'étude du merveilleux médiéval*, 3 vols. (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1982).
25. Saint Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin, 2003), p. 662.
26. Wittkower, "Marvels," p. 168.
27. On the theme of wilderness in Hebrew thought see George H. Williams, *Wilderness and Paradise in Christian Thought: The Biblical Experience of the Desert in the History of Christianity and the Paradise Theme in the Theological Idea of the University* (New York: Harper, 1962), pp. 10–64; and Hayden White, "The Forms of Wildness: Archaeology of an Idea," *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 157–62. The prominence of the city/wilderness opposition in Greek thought should also be mentioned. The opposition between civilized and barbarian translates to one of inside/outside: in the city-state a man could achieve full humanity as a "political animal" (Aristotle); outside the city lawlessness precluded the possibility of a man ever realizing his full humanity. Inside he could be a political subject, outside only a curious object (see White, "The Forms Of Wildness," p. 169).
28. In *City of God*, Augustine recalls of Cain that after his malediction "he built a city" (Gen. 4:17). The sort of city he had in mind is dramatized by the contrast between the two brothers: "I classify the human race into two branches: the one consists of those who live by human standards, the other of those who live according to God's will. I will also call these two classes the two cities, speaking allegorically. By two cities I mean two societies of human beings, one of which is predestined to reign with God for all eternity, the other doomed to undergo eternal punishment with the Devil. . . . Cain. . . the first son born. . . belonged to the city of men; the later son Abel belonged to the City of God. . . . Scripture tells us Cain founded a city, whereas Abel, as a pilgrim, did not found one. For the City of the saints is up above" (Saint Augustine, *City of God*, pp. 595–96).
29. See, e.g., the account of Muhammad's origins and rise to power in cap. 2 of William of Tripoli's *Tractatus de statu Saracenorum et de Mahomete pseudo-propheta et eorum lege et fide* in Hans Prutz, *Kulturgeschichte der Kreuzzüge* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1964), pp. 575–98, esp. 576.
30. The Bodleian Library's Douce bestiary (MS Douce 88 II, fol. 69v) moralizes the Dog-Men thus: "Cenocephali qui canina capita habent, detractores et discordes designant. . . qui labeo subteriore se contegunt eos figurant de

- quibus dicitur labor laborum operiet eos" [The cenocephali, having dogs' heads, signify detractors and sowers of discord]. The bestiary at Westminster Abbey (MS 22, fol. 1v) likewise figures the Dog-Men as dissenting persons. The immensely popular *Gesta Romanorum* (ed. Hermann Oesterley [Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1980]), under chapter 175 entitled "De diversitate et mirabilibus mundi cum expositione inclusa" [Concerning the diverse and miraculous things of the world with an explanation], discusses the Dog-Men first among the Plinian races as a figure for preachers who should wear animal skins as a sign of penance and as a proper example to the laity (see p. 574).
31. Friedman, *Monstrous Races*, pp. 67–75.
32. The exegetical foundation for this is traced by Friedman (*Monstrous Races*, p. 61) to Ps. 21:17 where David cries out in despair that "Dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me: they pierced my hands and feet." Glossed as an unreasonable act, refusal of the word became an image of Jews barking or heretics rejecting the truth. The presence of Dog-Men for the dissemination of the Word, then, attests to the Word's power of conversion since the most intractable of subjects could be evangelized. In the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, e.g., there is the conversion of a cynocephalus.
33. The identification of cynocephalics with Muslim "Turks" extends of course beyond the Latin polemical tradition. In fact the polemical tradition gained its force from popular folktales and the romances. David Gordon White, in his outstanding book on the mythology of the Dog-Man, mentions the Slavic folk identification of Turks with dog-headed man-eaters (see *The Myths of the Dog-Man* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991], pp. 61–62).
34. The conflation of Saracens and dogs occurs in the French *chansons de geste*, where the Muslims are frequently portrayed as barking like dogs when they rush into battle. See C. Meredith Jones, "The Conventional Saracen of the Songs of Geste," *Speculum* 17 (1942): 205 [201–225].
35. The famous Borgia *mappa mundi* pictures in northern Africa a cynocephalic king of the Saracens seated on a throne and holding court for two subjects as monstrous in appearance as himself. The rubric reads: "Abichinibel rex est Sarracenus Ethipicus; cum populo suo habens faciem caninam, et in cedent omnes nudi propter solis calorem" [Abichinibel is king of Saracen Ethiopia; with a populace having dogs' faces and they all go about nude on account of the sun's heat] (Santarém, *Essai*, p. 294).
36. White, "The Forms of Wildness," p. 156.
37. The best discussions of medieval etymology for *monstrum* are Friedman, *Monstrous Races*, pp. 108–130, and Lecouteux, *Les monstres*, 1: 2–3.
38. Augustine, e.g., derives "monster" from *monstrare*: monsters demonstrate God's absolute power over physical nature. See Augustine, *City of God*, 21.8.983.
39. This sense of *monstrum* as something to behold is conveyed in the primary meanings of the word and its cognates. In addition to ModE "monster," these include a visit or view, a sample (s.v. "monstrum" in R. E. Latham, *Revised Medieval Latin Word-List from British and Irish Sources* [London: Oxford

- University Press, 1965)); a celestial phenomenon (s.v. "monstrum" in *Novum Glossarium latinitatis* [Hafni: Munksgaard, 1900-]); pieces of evidence (s.v. "monstra" in Jan Frederik Niermeyer, *Mediae latinitatis lexicon minus: A Medieval Latin-French/English Dictionary* [Leiden: Brill, 1976]); ecclesiastical monstration (s.v. "monstrum (2)" in *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis*, ed. Charles du Cange et al. [Paris: Firmin Didot, 1840-50]).
40. Anthropologist Michael Taussig (*The Nervous System* [New York: Routledge, 1992]) uses the term "nervous system" as a figure for the historical condition of terror, which he asserts is the other in the postmodern age. Such a nervous system is structured upon a dialectic of disorder and order, hysteria and numbing acceptance, centered reason and "decentered randomness." He refers to "a state of doubleness of social being in which one moves in bursts between somehow accepting the situation as normal, only to be thrown into a panic or shocked into disorientation by an event, a rumor, a sight, something said, or not said—something that even while it requires the normal in order to make its impact, destroys it" (p. 18). Taussig's "optics of the nervous system" provides a postmodern analog to medieval forms of imagining the other. See esp. pp. 11-22.
 41. Michel de Certeau, "Montaigne's 'Of Cannibals': The Savage 'I,'" *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 70.
 42. India, though the most important for the construction of the Prester John myth, is hardly the only neutral space in the Middle Ages; others include St. Brendan's island, the Purgatory of St. Patrick, the Land of Cocaigine, the Fortunate Isles, Ireland, and Columbus's West Indies. A good, if outdated, survey of these spaces is George Boas, *Essays on Primitivism and Related Ideas in the Middle Ages* (New York: Octagon, 1948).
 43. See John Kirtland Wright, *The Geographical Lore of the Time of the Crusades: A Study in the History of Medieval Science and Tradition in Western Europe* (New York: American Geographical Society, 1925), p. 272. Wright's citation of an exception to the threefold division of India is mistaken. The Elysaeus account of Prester John's kingdom, cited as evidence of a twofold division, in fact maintains the traditional threefold one: "Indiae tres sunt." For a sense of the shifting geographical limits defining the three Indias, see Jean Richard, "L'extrême-orient légendaire au moyen âge: Roi David et Prêtre Jean," *Annales d'Ethiopie* 2 (1957): 226-27 [225-42].
 44. Edward Said coined the term to refer to the ways that objective, "natural" reality gets re-presented in the guise of the fictive or constructed. The term draws attention to the merging of geographic boundaries with social, cultural, mythical, and poetical ones (see his *Orientalism* [New York: Vintage, 1978], pp. 54-55).
 45. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 79.
 46. Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "The Nazi Myth," *Critical Inquiry* 16 (1990): 297 [291-312].

47. Georges Dumézil (*The Destiny of the Warrior*, trans. Alf Hiltebeitel [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970]) writes that "the function of . . . myths is to express dramatically the ideology under which a society lives; not only to hold out to its conscience the values it recognizes and the ideals it pursues from generation to generation, but above all to express its very being and structure, the elements, the connections, the balances, the tensions that constitute it; to justify the rules and traditional practices without which everything within a society would disintegrate" (p. 3).
48. Northrop Frye, "Varieties of Literary Utopias," *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, ed. Frank E. Manuel (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966), p. 25. See also the third essay, "Archetypal Criticism: Theory of Myths," in his *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 131-58.
49. See Frye, *Anatomy*, pp. 141-50. Compare Hayden White's conception of myth as speculation and desire containing its own mechanism of resistance: "Myths provide imaginative justifications of our desires and at the same time hold up before us images of the cosmic forces that preclude the possibility of any perfect gratification of them" ("Forms of Wildness," p. 175).
50. See the brief discussion of this topos in Hans Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Pantheon, 1953), pp. 160-61.
51. *Aymeri de Narbonne*, ed. Louis Demaison, 2 vols. (Paris, 1887) 1: 55; ll. 1277, 1283-84, cf. l. 2426. For other examples of the India topos and the extent of its use, see André Moisan, *Repertoire des noms propres de personnes et de lieux cités dans les chansons de geste françaises et les oeuvres étrangères dérivées*, 5 vols. (Genève: Droz, 1986) 2: 1199, s.v. "Inde, Ynde"; and Ernest Langlois, *Table des noms propres de toute nature compris dans les chansons de geste imprimées* (1904; Genève: Slatkine, 1974), p. 359, s.v. "Inde, Ynde."
52. See, e.g., two of the earliest and clearest statements on the subject in Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (1908; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960) and Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969), pp. 94-130.
53. Turner, *Ritual Process*, p. 94.
54. See Friedman, *Monstrous Races*, pp. 37-58. For good discussions of the significance of medieval cartography, see Anna-Dorothee von den Brincken, "Mappamundi und Chronographia," *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 24 (1968): 118-86; and her "'...ut describeretur universus orbis': Zur Universalkartographie des Mittelalters," *Miscellanea Mediaevalia* 7 (1970): 249-78.
55. Roger Bacon, *The Opus Majus of Roger Bacon*, trans. Robert Belle Burke, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1928) 1: 320. Compare statements in Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia* 2.80.189-91, in *Natural History*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949) 1: 321-23; and Albertus Magnus, *De natura loci*, tract. 1 cap. 2, in *De natura loci/De causis proprietatum elementorum/De generatione et corruptione*,

ed. Paul Hossfeld, vol. 5, pt. 2 of *Opera Omnia* (Aschendorff: Monasterii Westfalorum, 1980), pp. 3–4.

56. Bacon, *Opus Majus*, p. 159.
57. Albertus Magnus, tract. 2 cap. 3, p. 27. The same kind of cultural superiority is expressed in Aristotle's *Politics* 7.6. See *Politics*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 567.

Chapter 2 Muslim Monstrosity

1. William of Tyre, *Historia rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum*, 1.15 in *Recueil des historiens des croisades*, 16 vols. (Paris: Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres, 1841–1906), vol. 1, pt. 1 of *Historiens Occidentaux*, p. 41; my translation of “Non est sacrilegis locorum differentia; non est personarum respectus.”
2. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, “The Importance of the Body,” *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), p. 234.
3. Roger of Hoveden, *The Annals of Roger of Hoveden*, trans. Henry T. Riley, 2 vols. (London: Bohn, 1853) 2: 177–87.
4. The idea that Islam was a kind of false Christianity, a deviation from orthodoxy rather than a separate religion in its own right dominated Western thinking, which was comfortable with seeing in the other the shape of itself. Among those subscribing to such analogical thinking were the most informed churchmen and historians: Peter the Venerable, William of Malmesbury, Thomas Aquinas, and Ricoldo of Montecroce.
5. The date cited is that of Alvarus's *Indiculus Luminosus*. The works of the Cordovan martyrs are collected in PL 115: 705–870. The *Indiculus Luminosus*, containing Alvarus's interpretation of the Book of Daniel in terms of the rise of Islam as the fourth and final kingdom, is in PL 121: 397–566.
6. One of the major themes of Norman Daniel's seminal study *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1960) is the way that Islam as an autonomous religion was displaced by its representation within a limited range of vocabulary and imagery. Islam was domesticated by strictly analogical understanding—Muslims, it was maintained, worship a false trinity of idols, and Muhammad was an apostate Roman cardinal.
7. R. W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), pp. 3–4. Relevant here also is Said's discussion of Islam as “a lasting trauma” (p. 59) for medieval Europe; see his *Orientalism*, pp. 58–72.
8. The work of Adèle-Théodore Khoury is indispensable: *Les théologiens byzantins et l'Islam: textes et auteurs (VIIIe–XIIIe s.)*; *Apologétique byzantine contre l'Islam (8–13 s.)*; *Polemique byzantine contre l'Islam (8–13 s.)*. See also Paul Khoury, *Matériaux pour servir à l'étude de la controverse théologique Islamo-chrétienne de langue arabe du VIIIe au XIIe siècle*, who argues that “l'activité théologique est, par structure, une activité de dialogue” (p. 4). Also Jean-Marie Gaudeul,

- Encounters and Clashes: Islam and Christianity in History*, 2 vols. (Rome: Pontificio Instituto di Studi Arabi e Islamici, 1984), who argues that the history of Islamo-Christian relations is one of failed dialogue.
9. Heremberti *Epitome Chronologica*, ed. Lodovico Antonio Muratori, 5: 18–21; trans. in Norman Daniel, *The Arabs and Mediaeval Europe* (London: Longman, 1975), p. 56.
 10. Recent studies informing my reading of Saracen alterity, and medieval monstrosity in general, include Jeffrey J. Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) and his splendid chapter “On Saracen Enjoyment,” in his *Medieval Identity Machines* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 188–221; Robert Mills and Bettina Bildhauer, *The Monstrous Middle Ages* (University of Wales Press, 2004).
 11. Robert the Monk, *Historia Hierosolymitana*, cap. 2 in *Recueil des historiens des croisades*, 16 vols. (Paris: Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres, 1841–1906), vol. 3 of *Historiens Occidentaux*, p. 729; English translation in Dana C. Munro, *Urban and the Crusaders* (Philadelphia, 1895), pp. 6–7.
 12. Guibert of Nogent, *Historia quae dicitur Gesta Dei per Francos*, lib. 2 in *Recueil des historiens des croisades*, 16 vols., vol. 4 of *Historiens Occidentaux*, p. 138; English translation in August C. Krey, *The First Crusade: The Accounts of Eye-Witnesses and Participants* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1958), p. 38.
 13. M.-D. Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West*, ed. and trans. Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Little (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 185.
 14. Otto of Freising, *Chronica sive historia de duabus civitatibus*, ed. Roger Wilmans (Leipzig: Hiersemann, 1925) in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, ed. Georg Heinrich Pertz (Hannover: Hiersemann, 1868) 20: 116–301. In English, *The Two Cities: A Chronicle of Universal History to the Year 1146 A. D.*, trans. Charles Christopher Mierow, ed. Austin P. Evans and Charles Knapp (New York: Octagon, 1966), p. 94.
 15. See Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society*, pp. 170; 186–87.
 16. Hugh of St. Victor, *De vanitate mundi*, iv in PL 176: 720.
 17. Hugh of St. Victor, *De arca Noe morali*, iv.9 in PL 176: 667.
 18. See Gerald of Wales, *De principis instructione*, dist. 1, in *Geraldus Cambrensis de principis instructione liber*, Rolls Series 21 (London, 1891), p. 70.
 19. The implications of place in determining the nature of the other, as I suggested earlier, were immense. William of Malmesbury attributes to Urban the theory that climate determines physique which determines national character. Climate theory, e.g., explains why Turks refuse to close with their enemies, preferring to fire their arrows from a distance. See William of Malmesbury, *De gestis regum Anglorum*, ed. William Stubbs (Wiesbaden: Kraus Reprint, 1964) 2: 393ff. More commonly, climate theory was used to explain the bestiality of Orientals living in the hot regions. Jacques de Vitry, e.g., held that “in partibus Orientis, et maxime in calidis regionibus bruti et luxuriosi homines, quibus austeritas Christiane religionis intolerabilis et importabilis videbatur, . . . viam que ducit ad mortem, facile sunt ingressi”

(*Libri duo, quorum prior orientalis, sive Hierosolymitanae; alter, occidentalis historiae nomine inscribitur* [Douay, 1597], vol. 1, cap. 6: 25–26).

20. Gerald of Wales, *De principis instructione*, dist. 3, in *Geraldus Cambrensis de principis instructione liber*, Rolls Series 21 (London, 1891), p. 268. The letter is also included in the histories of Benedict of Peterborough, Roger of Howden, Ralph of Diceto, and Ralph of Coggeshale, as well as in the *Itinerarium regis Ricardi*.
21. This is the thesis of Norman Daniel, W. Montgomery Watt, and Edward Said. See also Rana Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient: Devise and Rule* (London: Macmillan, 1986) and Maxime Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam*, trans. Roger Veinus (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1987).
22. Said, *Orientalism*, p. 60.
23. Saracens were defined in terms of desire and enjoyment. What frustrated Western writers most was the ease with which their desires were satisfied: The Saracens, writes Guibert of Nogent, "have ruled over the Christians at their pleasure, and have gladly frequented the sloughs of all baseness for the satisfaction of their lusts, and in all this have had no obstacle" (*Historia quae dicitur Gesta Dei per Francos*, in Krey, *The First Crusade*, p. 38). Casting Muslims in terms of their limitless desire must have had some value as an explanation for their successes. Theirs was a desire that knew no psychological or spatial limits. Humbert of Romans, e.g., claims to have seen with his own eyes "the holy chapel, in which the Muslims who were on their way to the Lord Frederick [II] quartered themselves; and it was said as certain [pro certo] that they lay there at night with women before the crucifix" (*Opusculum tripartitum*, 1.7, in *Appendix ad fasciculum rerum expetendarum et fugiendarum sive tomus secundus*, ed. Edward Brown [London, 1690], trans. in Daniel, *Islam and the West*, p. 110). As I demonstrate later, the image of the Muslim afterlife, to which I claim Prester John's kingdom is an ideological response, spatializes notions of limitless Saracen desire.
24. Manifestations of boundless desires included adultery, polygamy, concubinage, and sodomy (in the full range of practises covered by this term—in short, sexual acts *contra naturam*). These were said to be openly practiced and encouraged under Muslim law. Ramón Martí, e.g., described Muhammad's law as "immunda, nociva, et mala" and focused his treatise "De seta Machometi" on Muslim sexual practises defined repeatedly in these terms: "contra legem naturalem," "contra preceptum Dei," "contra bonum prolis," and "contra rei publice utilitatem" (Josep Hernando I Delgado, "Le 'De Seta Machometi' du Cod. 46 d'Osma, œuvre de Raymond Martin (Ramón Martí)," *Islam et chrétiens du Midi (XIIe–XIVe s.)*, ed. Edouard Privat [Toulouse: Cahiers de Fanjeaux, 1983], pp. 353–54). Rather than multiply references to Muslim sexual deviation and excess here, I refer the reader to Norman Daniel's excellent overview of the subject in *Islam and the West*, esp. his chapter on "The Place of Self-Indulgence in the Attack on Islam," pp. 135–61.
25. Desire, enjoyment, and deviation powerfully combined in the image of Islam as the religion of seduction. The crusades were in many senses projects to recover land that had been seduced away from Christian

- holds. Thus William of Tyre begins his *Historia* with an account of how Muhammad, with his "doctrina pestilens" [pestilent doctrine], "Orientalium regiones et maxime Arabiam seduxerat" [seduced the eastern regions and greater Arabia] (*Historia rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum*, 1.1, in *Recueil des historiens des croisades*, 16 vols., vol. 1 of *Historiens Occidentaux*, p. 9). Or Cardinal Rodrigo Ximénez (1170–1247), archbishop of Toledo, who described Muhammad as the seducer of Spain (see his *Historia Arabum*, 1.1, in *Historia Saracenicæ qua res gestae Muslimorum inde a Muhammede Arabe. . . Arabice olim exarata a Georgio Elmacino, etc.*, ed. Thomas Erpenius [van Erpe] [Leiden, 1625]). Jacques de Vitry also figures Muhammad as the aggressor in the *Historia Hierosolimitana abbreviata* (ca. 1221) where the rubric to his biography of Muhammad reads "Vita Machometi, qualiter seduxit terram sanctam, sive ecclesiam orientalem" (Paris, B. nat., lat. 6244A; cited in Daniel, *Islam and the West*, p. 348 n. 2). St. Thomas Aquinas lays bare the role that desire and the attractiveness of enjoyment played in Muhammad's victories: "He seduced the people by promises of carnal pleasure to which the concupiscence of the flesh goads us. His teaching also contained precepts that were in conformity with his promises, and he gave free rein to carnal pleasure. In all this, as is not unexpected, he was obeyed by carnal men" (*Summa contra Gentiles*, 1.6; trans. in James Waltz, "Muhammad and the Muslims in St. Thomas Aquinas," *The Muslim World* 66 [1976]: 83 [81–95]).
26. Images of madness pervade anti-Muslim polemical writing. The antithesis of Western medieval ideologies that endorse rationality and order, madness, from the first moments of crusade, was adduced as an explanation of the Saracen threat—paradoxically, the religion and its practises could only be explained in terms of the unexplainable. The annotator of the autograph manuscript of Peter the Venerable's corpus of translations and treatises (the Toletano-Cluniac corpus, MS Arsenal 1162) applies the epithet *insanus* (madman) to Muhammad; the annotator's view is consistent with both Jewish attitudes toward Muhammad (as *m'shugga* [mad], based on Hosea 9:7, "the prophet [man of the spirit] is mad") and a long Western tradition that conflated Muhammad's epilepsy with madness and demonic possession (on this, see Daniel, *Islam and the West*, pp. 27–32).
 27. Images of Muslim disorder center on the confused form of the Koran; there was an obvious relation, so the argument went, between Muhammad's madness and the self-contradictory, repetitive, and irrational nature of the Koran. Western readers, fortunate to have access to Robert of Ketton's 1143 translation, found the text wholly inconsistent with reason and repellent to logic. In discussions of the Koran, we come very close to the kinds of ideological constructions of the other that impute to it notions of flux, ambivalence, and mixture. To Daniel's thorough discussion of the image of the Koran (*Islam and the West*, pp. 57–67), I would add two interesting sources: a treatise on Saracens, entitled "Mores Sarracenorum et leges quas Mahumeth observare constitute prophetando sarracenis" (London, British Library, Cotton Faustina, A. 7, ff. 150v–56v), which takes up the "problem"

- of the Koran and its form at 155v; and Thomas Aquinas's comments on the monstrous construction of the Koran (*Summa contra Gentiles*, 1.6).
28. On the ideology of idolatry and its central role in the imagination and fabrication of the other in the Middle Ages, see Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
 29. *Liber quartus contra paganos*, *Opinio paganorum qui dicunt Christum conceptum fuisse de flatu Dei*, ed. M.-Th. d'Alverny in "Alain de Lille et l'Islam. Le 'Contra Paganos,'" *Islam et chrétiens du Midi (XIIe-XIVe s.)*, ed. Edouard Privat (Toulouse: Cahiers de Fanjeaux, 1983), pp. 331-32. For the full text of Alan's tract, see *De fide catholica contra hæreticos sui temporis*, PL 210: 305-430.
 30. References to the prophet's scandalous death are common in the polemical writings. Most often Muhammad was believed to have been devoured by pigs rather than dogs. Gerald of Wales writes "de Machumeto quoque, per quem multa nimis mala contigerunt et adhuc hodie contingunt, digna divinitus ultio data fuit, quod in platea noctu corruens vinolentus, quoniam, a porcis, quae immunda animalia reputantur, est devoratus" (*De principis instructione*, p. 68). Gerald's view represents those of Guibert of Nogent, Ranulph Higden, and Matthew Paris. Alan appears to have inherited the view of a ninth-century Spanish legend of Muhammad; see M.-Th. d'Alverny, "Alain de Lille et l'Islam," pp. 320-21.
 31. Peter the Venerable, *Epistola ad Bernardum Claraevallis*, A 4rs, ed. James Kritzeck in his *Peter the Venerable and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 213.
 32. Peter the Venerable, *Liber contra sectam sive haeresim Saracenorum*, D 179vs, in Kritzeck, *Peter the Venerable and Islam*, p. 225.
 33. See Peter's argument, which ends with an invitation to his readers to decide the question for themselves, in *Liber contram sectam*, D 179vd-180rs, in Kritzeck, *Peter the Venerable*, pp. 226-27.
 34. Citation of Horace, *Ars poetica* 1.1-2.
 35. Peter the Venerable, *Summa totius haeresis Saracenorum*, A 2vs, in Kritzeck, *Peter the Venerable*, p. 208.
 36. The argument is made later that crusade propaganda and anti-Muslim polemic functioned primarily, if not exclusively, ideologically to unify Christian Europe, to create, in Benedict Anderson's formula, "a religious community" free from disrupting internal forces such as heretics and unbelievers. On community and nation as ideological structures, the products of imagination, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).
 37. The letter, almost unanimously taken by modern historians to be a Western forgery circulated before the First Crusade, survives in at least three manuscripts of the early twelfth century. Incorporated into the histories of Robert the Monk, Guibert of Nogent, and William of Tyre, the letter was an important document in determining the trajectory of thought regarding Muslim alterity and violation of Christian sanctity. For the discussion of the letter's authenticity and origin, see Einar Joranson, "The Problem of the Spurious

- Letter of Emperor Alexius to the Count of Flanders," *American Historical Review* 55 (1950): 811-32. The Latin text is in Heinrich Hagenmeyer, ed., *Die Kreuzzugbriefe aus den Jahren 1088-1100: Eine Quellensammlung zur Geschichte des Ersten Kreuzzugs* (Innsbruck: Wagner, 1901), pp. 130-36; and a decent English translation by John Boswell in the appendix to his *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 367-69.
38. Hagenmeyer, *Die Kreuzzugbriefe*, p. 131; "Spurious Letter of Alexius Comnenus to Count Robert of Flanders Imploring His Aid against the Turks," Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, p. 367.
 39. Hagenmeyer, *Die Kreuzzugbriefe*, pp. 133, 132.
 40. Hagenmeyer, *Die Kreuzzugbriefe*, p. 131.
 41. Representations of Saracen sexual violence are stock features of crusade literature. The "Spurious Letter of Alexius Comnenus to Count Robert of Flanders" accuses the Saracens of sodomizing their victims and having already killed "sub hoc nefario peccato" [by this nefarious sin] a Christian bishop (Hagenmeyer, *Die Kreuzzugbriefe*, p. 132). Albert of Aachen describes the Saracens as ravishing nuns and other women during the First Crusade and raping Armenian women at 'Arqa (see his *Historia Hierosolymitana*, in *Recueil des historiens des croisades*, vol. 4 of *Historiens Occidentaux*, pp. 288, 358). Raymond d'Aguilers charges that the Muslims hold out the incentive of easy opportunities for rape in order to incite their troops (see *Le "Liber" de Raymond d'Aguilers*, ed. John Hugh Hill and Laurita L. Hill [Paris: P. Geuthner, 1969], p. 155). See also Robert the Monk, qtd. later, p. 57.
 42. The vast number of Muslims and their victories over Christians were to twelfth-century historians both puzzling and threatening. William of Malmesbury, e.g., attributes to Urban the lamentation that the enemies of Christendom inhabit two-thirds of the world, Asia and Africa, and have been oppressing the Christians in the remaining one-third for 300 years in Spain and the Balears (see his *De gestis regum*, II, pp. 393-98). William, in his *Commentary on Lamentations*, sees the expansion of Islam as a result of God's judgment on impious Christians (see Oxford, Bodleian 868, f. 34v). As another link in the "discursive chain," polygamy among the Muslims was often adduced as the source of their vast numbers. In a manuscript of Matthew Paris's *Chronica maiora* (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 26, fol. 87) there is an illustration of Muhammad holding two scrolls in the center margin. One of them reads "Poligamus este. Scriptum est enim crescite et multiplicamini" [Be polygamous for it is written increase and be multiplied].
 43. Images of profanation such as the ones I have cited were perhaps the most dominant group of images in anti-Muslim polemic. Like images of monstrosity and boundary breaking, such images were applicable to a wide range of Muslim beliefs and practises. The images conveyed notions of pollution, disorder, and fluidity. The crusades became a cleansing of the Holy Land; see Fidenzio of Padua, *Fidentii. . . liber de recuperatione Terrae Sanctae*, xvi, in vol. 2 of *Biblioteca Bio-bibliografica della Terra Santa e dell'oriente Franceseano*, ed. P. Girolamo Golubovich, 5 vols. (Quaracchi, 1905).

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44. According to Stuart Hall, ideologies operate in "discursive chains" wherein "ideological representations connote—summon—one another"; see his "Signification, Representation, Ideology: Althusser and the Post-Structuralist Debates," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 2 (1985): 104–105 [91–114].
45. An excellent example of this emphasis on the blurring and breaking of the limits that define Christianity is William of Tyre's account of Urban's crusade speech where he catalogues Saracen violations in the Holy Land. See *A History of Deeds Done beyond the Sea*, 1: 88–91.
46. For the sources of medieval ideas on the body and its structure as a system of boundaries, see Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).
47. On the place of the body and the body as place in the symbolic representation of social experience, see Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (New York: Pantheon, 1970).
48. On the tripartite functional organization of medieval society—the holy, the warring, and the working—which Georges Dumézil traced to its origins in Indo-European culture, see Georges Duby, *Les trois ordres ou l'imaginaire du féodalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978) and Jacques Le Goff, "Les trois fonctions indo-européennes, l'historien et l'Europe féodale," *Annales E.S.C.* 34 (1979): 1187–1215.
49. Humbert of Moyenmoutier, *Adversus simoniacos*, PL 143: 1005 ff. There is a discussion and translation in André Vauchez, "Les laïcs dans l'Eglise à l'époque féodale," *Notre Histoire* 32 (1987): 35.
50. John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, 5.2, ed. C. C. J. Webb (Oxford, 1909); in English by John Dickinson, *The Statesman's Book of John of Salisbury: Being the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Books, and Selections from the Seventh and Eighth Books, of the Policraticus* (New York: Knopf, 1927).
51. William of Tyre, *Historia rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum*, 1.15 in *Recueil des historiens des croisades*, 16 vols., vol. 1, pt. 1 of *Historiens Occidentaux*, p. 41; English trans. in *A History of Deeds Done beyond the Sea*, 1: 90.
52. Robert the Monk, *Historia Hierosolymitana*, cap. 1 in *Recueil des historiens des croisades*, 16 vols., vol. 3 of *Historiens Occidentaux*, pp. 727–28; English translation in Dana C. Munro, *Urban and the Crusaders* (Philadelphia, 1895), pp. 5–6.
53. Guibert of Nogent, *Historia quae dicitur Gesta Dei per Francos*, lib. 2 in *Recueil des historiens des croisades*, 16 vols., vol. 4 of *Historiens Occidentaux*, p. 140; English translation in Krey, *The First Crusade*, p. 40.
54. It should be clear that my account of alterity in the twelfth century aims at complicating the prevalent idea that such terrifying descriptions of the Saracens were strictly (and merely) emotional *excitatoria*. Thus statements like this one in a recent essay by James Muldoon have a very limited place in a history of the ideology of difference in the Middle Ages: "The purpose of describing the non-European in terrifying or grotesque terms was to appeal to the emotions—not the minds—of readers or hearers" ("The Nature of the Infidel: The Anthropology of the Canon Lawyers," *Discovering*

- New Worlds: Essays on Medieval Exploration and Imagination*, ed. Scott D. Westrem [New York: Garland, 1991], p. 116).
55. This process of pain followed by interrogation corresponds to the structure of torture which, as Elaine Scarry has theorized, consists of a physical act, the infliction of pain, and "an element of interrogation" (p. 28). See Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 27–59.
56. See Burchard of Worms, *Decretum* 9.30, in PL 140: 830, and Ivo of Chartres, *Decretum* 8.204, in PL 161: 626.
57. The Council of Nablus—not a church council in the ordinary sense but rather a *parlement* (see Prawer)—decreed that a Christian man guilty of miscegenation with a Saracen woman was to be castrated and the woman's nose was to be cut off. See *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, ed. Giovanni Domenico Mansi, 60 vols. (Paris: Hubert Welter, 1901–27) 21: 264. On the Council of Nablus see Joshua Prawer, *Crusader Institutions* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980), pp. 15–17, and Hans Eberhard Mayer, "The Concordat of Nablus," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 33 (1982): 531–43.
58. Daniel, "Crusade Propaganda," in *The Impact of the crusades on Europe*, ed. Harry W. Hazard and Norman P. Zacour (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), p. 77. W. Montgomery Watt subscribes to the same view of Islam's effect on Latin Europe. Islam, writes Watt, "provoked Europe into forming a new image of itself" (*The Influence of Islam on Medieval Europe* [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1972], p. 84). For a good discussion of the historical formation of Europe, see Denys Hay, *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1968).
59. James Clifford, "On Orientalism," *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 272.
60. See the second chapter, "The Century of Reason and Hope," in Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages*, pp. 34–66.
61. On the centrality of the dialogue form in Western polemics against Islam, see M.-Th. d'Alverny, "La connaissance de l'Islam en Occident du IXe au milieu du XIIe siècle"; see also n. 8 above.
62. Peter the Venerable, *Liber contra sectam sive haeresim Saracenorum*, D 180vs, in Kritzeck, *Peter the Venerable*, p. 229.
63. Interestingly, the *Letter of Prester John* manifests all of these cultural borrowings and exchanges (see the description of the *Letter* later). Three good discussions of the specifically cultural effects of contact with the Muslim other are *The Meeting of Two Worlds: Cultural Exchange between East and West during the Period of the Crusades*, ed. Vladimir P. Goss (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute, 1986); María Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987); and Dorothee Metlitzki, *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).
64. It is nearly obligatory to invoke here the important work of Jacques Lacan and his disseminators. That said, I cannot underline enough the significance of that work as a foundation for thinking about alterity in any historical

- period. Its most basic premises—e.g., the idea of the force of ambivalence in attitudes toward the other and in discourses on the other as modes of knowledge and power—inform medieval texts in ways that need to be historicized. Once historicized, the claims of psychoanalysis on medieval culture are immune to charges of anachronism. Work contributing at all levels to my readings of otherness includes Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question," *Screen* 24.6 (1983): 18–36; Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), esp. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," pp. 1–7; Max Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*, trans. Peter Heath (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954); Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Daniel N. Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant: A View from Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology* (New York: Basic Books, 1985); *The World of Henri Wallon*, ed. Gilbert Voyat; and Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (New York: Verso, 1991); *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1991).
65. Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry*, p. 166.
 66. Michèle Barrett sees in the concept of difference the idea that meanings are understood positionally, always in relation to one another; see her "The Concept of 'Difference,'" *Feminist Review* 26 (1987): 29–41. See also Jonathan Dollimore, who calls this sort of relational thinking "semiotic difference" (*Sexual Dissidence*, p. 249).
 67. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), Michel Foucault defines the *épistème* as "the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practises that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems" (p. 191).
 68. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1970), p. xxiv.
 69. Foucault, *Order of Things*, p. 326. This "unthought has accompanied man, mutely and uninterruptedly" (pp. 326–27), not since the nineteenth century as Foucault asserted, but, as I hope to show, since the high Middle Ages.
 70. Most histories of Europe in the Middle Ages fail to articulate the ideological underpinnings of identity and community formation. Two exceptions are Denys Hays, *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1968) and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.
 71. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 15.
 72. Humbert of Romans, *Opusculum tripartitum* 189; trans. in Daniel, "Crusade Propaganda," p. 63.
 73. Watt, *The Influence of Islam*, p. 49.
 74. Stephen G. Nichols, "Fission and Fusion: Mediations of Power in Medieval History and Literature," *Yale French Studies* 70 (1986): 35 [21–42].
 75. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 21; see pp. 20–25 for a discussion of the medieval "religious community," "imaginable largely through the medium of a sacred language and written script" (p. 20).

76. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 22; see Nichols, "Fission and Fusion" for a discussion of the literatures of crusade preaching mentioned.
77. See Mary Louise Pratt, "Linguistic Utopias," *The Linguistics of Writing: Arguments between Writing and Literature*, ed. Nigel Fabb, Derek Attridge, Alan Durant, and Colin MacCabe (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), pp. 48–66.
78. Pratt, "Linguistic Utopias," p. 59.
79. Pratt "Linguistic Utopias," p. 60.
80. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 7. See her introduction, "Criticism in the Contact Zone" (pp. 1–11), for a fuller development of dialectic and historicized approaches to "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other" (p. 4).
81. Michele Amari, *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia*, 3 vols. (Florence, 1854–72) 3: 372. The first "baptized Sultan" was Frederick's maternal grandfather Roger II (1130–54). For the significance and history of Islamo-Sicilian culture, in addition to Amari's study, see Umberto Rizzitano, *Storia e cultura nella Sicilia Saracena* (Palermo: Flaccovio, 1975).
82. Frederick II, *Novae constitutiones regni Sicilie*, vol. 4, pt. 1 of *Historia diplomatica Frederici II*, ed. Jean Louis Huillard-Bréholles, 6 vols. in 12 (Paris, 1852–61), p. 186.
83. Frederick's court and the intellectual projects pursued there are discussed in most favorable terms by Ernst Kantorowicz, *Frederick the Second, 1194–1250*, trans. E. O. Lorimer (London: Constable, 1931), pp. 293–365; Dorothee Metlitzki, *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England*, pp. 7–10; and Thomas Curtis van Cleve, *The Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, Immutator Mundi* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), pp. 283–346. For the countervailing view of Frederick's court as manifesting a very limited revival or enlargement of cultural interests, see David Abulafia, *Frederick II: A Medieval Emperor* (New York: Allen Lane, 1988), pp. 251–89.
84. On the influence of Averroës's philosophy in the period, see Martin Grabmann, *Der lateinische Averroismus des 13. Jahrhunderts und seine Stellung zur christlichen Weltanschauung: Mitteilungen aus ungedruckten Ethikkommentaren* (Munich: Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1931).
85. See, e.g., Kantorowicz, *Frederick the Second, 1194–1250*, pp. 267–71.
86. See Julius Ficker and Eduard Winkelmann, ed., vol. 5 of *Gesta imperii, Die Regesten des Kaiserreichs unter Philipp, Otto IV, Friedrich II, Heinrich (VII), Konrad VI, Heinrich Raspe, Wilhelm und Richard, 1198–1272*, 5 pts. (Innsbruck, 1881–1901) 1: no. 1325a; for the Messinese legislation, see Richard of San Germano, *Chronica*, vol. 7, pt. 2 of Ludovico Antonio Muratori, ed., *Rerum Italicarum scriptores*, 25 vols. in 28 (Milan, 1723–51), pp. 94–98.
87. Kantorowicz, *Frederick the Second, 1194–1250*, pp. 322, 197. Cf. also van Cleve *The Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen*, pp. 304, 332.
88. Abulafia, *Frederick II*, p. 266; see also p. 255.
89. After citing examples of contemporary historical accounts irresponsibly imputing to Frederick all sorts of fantastic crimes in collusion with the

- Muslims, Kantorowicz is struck by the ambivalence underwriting such accounts: "it is interesting to note how tales of horror and wonder tend to focus round one great name, partly in order to gain greater credence from its authority and partly out of a strange desire to see two incongruous elements brought together in one person's story—the real and the fantastic; Muhammad and Christ; Kaiser and Khalif" (p. 194). Cf. also van Cleve, *The Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen*, p. 531.
90. The Staufen family would have to defend itself against charges that its intellectual interests were tantamount to heresy. The ambassador of the sultan of Egypt and Syria, Jamal-ed-Din, visited Sicily under the rule of Manfred, Frederick's son, and was impressed with his learning, dismayed that "his brother Conrad and his father Frederick had also incurred excommunication because of their penchant for Islam" (qtd. in Abu'l-Fida', *Kitab al-mukhtasar fi akhbar al-bashar*, *Recueil des historiens des croisades*, vol. 1 of *Historiens orientaux*, p. 170).
 91. See Eduard Winkelmann, ed., *Acta imperii inedita saeculi XIII*, 2 vols. (Innsbruck, 1880; 1885) 2: 714, no. 1037.
 92. van Cleve, *The Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen*, pp. 154–55; see Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora* 4: 435.
 93. Salimbene, *Cronica in Monumenta Germaniae Historica* 32: 350–53. Especially interesting is the tale of "Nicholas the Fish," which is also recounted by Franciscus Pipinus in his *Chronica*, in Muratori, *Rerum Italicarum scriptores* 9: 669.
 94. Henri Baudet, in his pioneering analysis (*Paradise on Earth: Some Thoughts on European Images of Non-European Man*, trans. Elizabeth Wentholt [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965]) of the "fundamental inner split" (p. 8) in Western medieval perceptions of alterity, argued that these two relations—myth and political reality—"are always apparent in the European consciousness" (p. 6). This split Baudet called a "psychological urge" that "creates its own realities" (p. 6). This "urge" translates to what others, like Said and Daniel, have called "paranoia" or "hysteria."
 95. Said, *Orientalism*, p. 59.
 96. Latin text in Charles H. Haskins, *Studies in the History of Mediaeval Science* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1924), p. 294.
 97. See Eduard Winkelmann, "Drei Gedichte Heinrichs von Avranches an Kaiser Friedrich II," *Forschungen zur deutschen Geschichte* 18 (1878): 482–88.
 98. See Michele Amari, ed., *Bibliotheca arabo-sicula*, 2 vols. (Turin and Rome, 1880–89) 2: 245; Moritz Steinschneider, *Die hebräischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher* (Graz: Akademische Druck und Verlagsanstalt, 1956), pp. 3–9; and Raphael Straus, *Die Juden im Königreich Sizilien unter Normannen und Staufer* (Heidelberg: Winters, 1910), pp. 81–83.
 99. Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, p. 158.
 100. On the little-explored connection between Frederick and Prester John see the brief allusions and discussions in Kantorowicz, *Frederick the Second*, 1194–1250, pp. 197, 323, 354, and 683; Alexander A. Vasiliev, *Prester John: Legend and History*, ts. Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection,

- Washington, D.C., n.d. (ca. 1950), pp. 229–30; and Franz Kampers, *Vom Werdegange der abendländischen Kaisermystik* (Berlin: B. G. Teubner, 1924), pp. 125–26.
101. *Der mittellenglische Versroman über Richard Lowenherz: kritisch Ausgabe nach allen Handschriften mit Einleitung, Anmerkungen und deutscher Übersetzung*, ed. Karl Brunner (Wien: W. Braumüller, 1913); hereafter cited in text by line number.
 102. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Nazi Myth," *Critical Inquiry* 16.2 (1989): 297 [291–312].
 103. See Fulcher of Chartres, *Historia Hierosolymitana*, lib. 1, cap. 28 and lib. 2, cap. in *RHC*, vol. 3 of *Historiens Occidentaux*, pp. 359 and 390; and Raymond d'Aguilers, *Historia Francorum qui ceperunt Iherusalem*, cap. 8, vol. 3 of *Historiens Occidentaux*, p. 249.
 104. See Fulcher, *Historia*, cap. 24, p. 352; Raymond, *Historia*, cap. 14, p. 271; also, the *Gesta Francorum Iherusalem expugnantium*, *RHC*, vol. 3 of *Historiens Occidentaux*, p. 498.
 105. Raymond d'Aguilers, *Historia Francorum qui ceperunt Iherusalem*, trans. John Hugh Hill and Laurita L. Hill (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1968), p. 81.
 106. Žižek, "Eastern Europe's Republics of Gilead," *New Left Review* 183 (1990): 50–62.
 107. Žižek, "Eastern Europe's Republics," p. 54.
 108. Corpus Christi College, Cambridge MS 16, fol. 166r.
 109. This is the logic that Žižek describes (see p. 53), which, I take it, is a reformulation of the Freudian notions regarding group formation and the cathexis on a leader. See Freud's *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), in *SE* 18: 69–143.
 110. Žižek, "Eastern Europe's Republics," p. 53.
 111. Borkenau, "The Road to Western Civilization," *End and Beginning: On the Generations of Cultures and the Origins of the West*, ed. Richard Lowenthal (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), p. 416 [392–416]. Two recent treatments of the Eucharist include Caroline Walker Bynum, "The Blood of Christ in the Later Middle Ages," *Church History* 71. 4 (2002): 685–714; and Georgia Frank, "'Taste and see': The Eucharist and the Eyes of Faith in the Fourth Century," *Church History* 70.4 (2001): 619–43.
 112. Ambrose, *The Crusade of Richard Lion-Heart*, trans. Merton Jerome Hubert (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), pp. 413–14.
 113. Žižek, "Eastern Europe's Republics," p. 54.
 114. See n. 30 earlier.
 115. Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 45.
 116. Frederick Turner, *Beyond Geography: The Western Spirit against the Wilderness* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983), p. 118.
 117. On the emerging and vital rapprochement between history and anthropology, see *Culture through Time: Anthropological Approaches*, ed. Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

118. See Johannes Fabian, "Presence and Representation: The Other and Anthropological Writing," *Critical Inquiry* 16 (1990): 753–72.
119. Michel Foucault, "Les déviations religieuses et le savoir médical," Jacques Le Goff, ed., *Hérésies et sociétés dans l'Europe pré-industrielle, 11e–18e siècles* (Paris: Mouton, 1968), p. 19.
120. Margaret T. Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964), p. 80. Hodgen allows what she sees as the "mental torpor" (p. 51) cloaking the Western mind fully to account for medieval constructions of otherness (see esp. p. 68). In other words, because medievals lacked the tools and enthusiasms of modern ethnology, nothing of real ideological interest took place. The same basic opinions toward medieval constructions of alterity, especially early medieval constructions, are held by R. W. Southern who labels the twelfth century "the age of ignorance" and Benjamin Z. Kedar who substitutes for Southern's or Hodgen's "ignorance" a notion of "Catholic disinterest," a lack of intellectual interest in the other (see *Crusade and Mission: European Approaches toward the Muslims* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984], pp. 18–41).
121. De Certeau's discussion of investigations of the real within historical discourse—the origins of "the thinkable," the possibility and limitations of meaning—has helped me to articulate the kinds of questions addressing models of (historical) knowledge, models of knowing the other; see his *Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 35–44.

Chapter 3 Medieval Desert Utopias

1. Lewis Mumford, "Utopia, the City, and the Machine," *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, ed. Frank E. Manuel (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), p. 10.
2. Captain John G. Bourke, *On the Border with Crook* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), p. 1. For further accounts of the American desert, as myth, aesthetic object, and fantasy space, see the collection *The Desert Reader: Descriptions of America's Arid Regions*, ed. Peter Wild (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1991). Particularly interesting is William Gilpin's (1860; 1873) mythologizing of the desert as a land of plenty, a Promised Land of resources and wealth that is supposed to entice settlers to the Western wastelands (see pp. 49–60).
3. Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Wobbling Pivot," *Map is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 103.
4. Jean Baudrillard, *America*, trans. Chris Turner (New York: Verso, 1988), p. 5.
5. *Le désert: image et réalité (Actes du Colloque de Cartigny 1983)*, ed. Yves Christe, Maurice Sartre, Bruno Urio, and Ivanka Urio (Leuven: Éditions Peeters, 1989).
6. See *Le désert*, esp., pp. 10–11, where the themes of the conference are schematized.

7. Such a historical account of the history of space is exemplified by Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," trans. Jay Miskowicz, *Diacritics* 16 (Spring 1986): 22–23 [22–27].
8. See Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (New York: Verso, 1989).
9. Jonathan Z. Smith uses the metaphor of Plato's myth of the two steeds in order to make a point about the way in which chaos is never contained, but is an active presence in myths as a source of possibility, creativity, and change that is nevertheless always tied to order and sacredness. I shall be making similar claims about the desert's generative and utopic potentialities, in its role as chaotic force. See Smith, "The Wobbling Pivot," p. 97.
10. Edmond Jabès, *From the Desert to the Book: Dialogues with Marcel Cohen*, trans. Pierre Joris (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill Press, 1990), p. xiv.
11. The following account of desert ideas in the ancient religions and cosmologies is an amalgam drawn mainly, not exclusively, from the following (cited by individual source when quoted directly or when the reader can be usefully directed to a specific source): Knut Tallqvist, "Sumerisch-Akkadische Namen der Totenwelt" *Studia Orientalia* 5(1934): 1–47. Alfred Haldar, *The Notion of the Desert in Sumero-Accadian and West-Semitic Religions* (Uppsala: A.-B. Lundequistska, 1950); A. J. Wensinck, *The Ocean in the Literature of the Western Semites* (1918; Wiesbaden: Martin Sändig, 1968); and Johannes Pedersen, "The World of Life and Death," in his *Israel: Its Life and Culture* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), pp. 453–96.
12. Haldar, *The Notion of the Desert*, p. 5.
13. Haldar writes: "the idea of the desert as the dwelling-place of demons and monsters—hence equivalent to the dwelling-place of the dead, or the Nether World—may easily be assumed to be a feature inherent in all of the various Near Eastern civilizations" (p. 66). See also Sylvie Lackenbacher, "L'image du désert d'après les textes littéraires Assyro-Babyloniens," *Le désert: image et réalité*, pp. 67–79.
14. Prism D, col. 7, ll. 45–76, in C. J. Gadd, "Inscribed Prisms of Sargon II from Nimrud," *Iraq* 16 (1954): 193 [175–200].
15. Prism D, col. 7, ll. 73–74.
16. Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester, ed. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 1; Michel Foucault, "Theatrum Philosophicum," *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 193.
17. See, e.g., Pedersen, "The World of Life and Death," pp. 456, 460.
18. See Lackenbacher, "L'image du désert," pp. 72–73.
19. Chantal Dagon and Mohamed Kacimi, *Naissance du désert* (Paris: Editions Balland, 1992), p. 61.
20. "Desert," as it appears in the Old Testament, translates four Hebrew words, the most common of which is *midbar*. The others—*arabah*, *yeshimon*, *chorbah*—denote varying degrees of desolateness, and often correspond to

- specific geographical regions of the Middle East. See the entry "Desert" in John McClintock and James Strong, *Cyclopædia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (New York: Harper, 1894) 2: 756–58.
21. See Pedersen, "The World of Life and Death," pp. 460–70; and Wensinck, *The Ocean in the Literature of Western Semites*, pp. 15–19. A description of the desert such as Jer. 2:5–7 marks it as a dark, desolate land of no return, in terms that strikingly recall the description of the underworld found at the beginning of the Akkadian myth of Ishtar's Descent to the Nether World. For the text, see *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 106–109.
 22. Jonathan Z. Smith underscores the point: "That which is open, that which is boundless is seen as the chaotic, the demonic, the threatening. The desert and the sea are all but interchangeable concrete symbols of the terrible, chaotic openness. They are the enemy *par excellence*" ("The Influence of Symbols on Social Change: A Place on Which to Stand," *Map is Not Territory*, p. 134).
 23. Job 38:8–11. The "divine warrior" typically battles the chaotic force of the water: in Hebrew myth, Baal combats Prince Sea (*Zabul Yam*) or the seven-headed water dragon *Lotan*; in Babylonian, Marduk against Apsu and Tiamat; and in Sumerian, Ninurta versus Kur. To produce order, the waters must be walled, channeled, or otherwise contained. On this general mythic pattern, see Hermann Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit: eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1895); O. Kaiser, *Die mythische Bedeutung des Meeres in Ägypten, Ugarit und Israel* (2nd ed.; Berlin: A. Töpelmann, 1962); and L. R. Fisher, "Creation at Ugarit and in the Old Testament," *Vetus Testamentum* 15 (1965): 313–24. On the biblical pattern, see Frank Moore Cross, Jr., "The Divine Warrior in Israel's Early Cult," *Biblical Motifs: Origins and Transformations*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), pp. 11–30; and Otto Eissfeldt, "Gott und das Meer in der Bibel," *Studia Orientalia Ioanni Pedersen* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1953), pp. 76–84. As we might expect, the same mythic pattern manifests itself in the battle against the desert. For example, both the opening and ending of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* praise the work of the king in building walls and boundaries against the desert. See *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, trans. Maureen Gallery Kovacs (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989) 1.9–20; 11.314–20.
 24. Recalling Babylonian cosmography: Marduk's famous splitting of Tiamut in the *Enuma elish*, 4.135–40.
 25. In Syriac cosmogony, the subterranean ocean plays an even greater role. The earth itself is said to drink subterranean waters. See Wensinck, *The Ocean in the Literature of Western Semites*, pp. 16–17. Traces of this idea is found in Arabic literature as well, though less prominently. In Masudi, e.g., we find mention of springs and rivers issuing from the subterranean *tehom* (Masudi, *Les prairies d'or*, ed. and trans. Barbier de Meynard and Pavet de Courteille [Paris, 1861–77] 1: 203).
 26. See Taufik Canaan, *Aberglaube und Volksmedizin im Lande der Bibel* (Hamburg: L. Friederichsen, 1914); *Haunted Springs and Water Demons in Palestine*

- (Jerusalem: Palestine Oriental Society, 1922); and *Damonenglaube im Lande der Bibel* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1929).
27. For the desert figured as chaos (*tohu*), see, e.g., Ps. 107:40 and Job 6:18.
 28. Smith, "Earth and Gods," *Map is Not Territory*, p. 109.
 29. Emile Benvéniste, *Pouvoir, droit, religion*, vol. 2 of *Le vocabulaire des institutions européennes* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1969), p. 188.
 30. See L. Keimer, "L'horreur des Egyptiens pour les démons du désert," *Bulletin de l'Institut d'Égypte* 26 (1944): 135–47; Serge Sauneron, "Les animaux fantastiques du désert," sect. 26 of "Remarques de philologie et d'étymologie," *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 62 (1964): 15–18; and Alessandro Roccati, "La conception rituelle du désert chez les anciens Egyptiens," *Le désert: image et réalité*, pp. 127–29. The hieroglyphic sign for the desert was the same as that designating the necropolis.
 31. Roccati, "La conception rituelle," p. 129.
 32. See, e.g., the story of the "Fated Prince" in Lange and Schäfer, "(Z)mt 'Begräbnisplatz' auf Grabstein des Mittleren Reichs aus Abydos," *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 38 (1900): 109–112. Roccati compares the image of the desert as fairyland to the function of the forest in European fairy tales (p. 129), and directs the reader to Mario Liverani, "Partire sul carro, per il deserto," *Annali dell'Istituto Orientale di Napoli* 32 (n. s. 22) (1972): 403–415.
 33. See Karl Budde, "The Nomadic Ideal in the Old Testament," *New World* 4 (1895): 726–45; Paul Humbert, "Osée, le prophète bedouin," *Revue de l'histoire et philosophie de la religion* 1 (1921): 97–118; "La logique de la perspective nomade chez Osée et l'unité d'Osée 2: 4–22," *Festschrift für Karl Marti*, ed. Karl Budde, supp. to *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 41 (1925): 158–66; John W. Flight, "The Nomadic Idea and Ideal," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 42 (1923): 158–226; also, Samuel Nystrom, *Beduinitum und Jahwismus* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1946).
 34. See Shemaryahu Talmon, "The 'Desert Motif' in the Bible and in Qumran Literature," *Biblical Motifs: Origins and Transformations*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), pp. 31–63; Paul Riemann, "Desert and Return to Desert in Pre-Exilic Prophets," diss., Harvard University, 1964; Albert de Pury, "L'Image du désert dans l'Ancien Testament," *Le désert: image et réalité*, pp. 115–26; also, Robert R. Wilson, "The City in the Old Testament," *Civitas: Religious Interpretations of the City*, ed. Peter S. Hawkins (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), pp. 3–13. Wilson reframes the debate a bit, arguing that the prophets' hope, in Jeremiah and Hosea, for a return to Israel's nomadic origins is not evidence of antiurban bias. For the opposing view, see Michel Ragon, "L'exode," in his *L'homme et les villes* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1975), pp. 15–30.
 35. See George H. Williams, *Wilderness and Paradise in Christian Thought: The Biblical Experience of the Desert in the History of Christianity and the Paradise Theme in the Theological Idea of the University* (New York: Harper, 1962), pp. 10–137; and George W. Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness: The Murmuring Motif in the Wilderness Traditions of the Old Testament* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1968).

- Williams emphasizes the desert as paradisiacal force, while Coats dismisses the question of the "desert ideal" altogether, in order to focus on the relationship between Yahweh and Israel during the period of journey through the desert, a relationship that he characterizes as "basically positive" (p. 15).
36. Edmund Leach's anthropological reading of the Old Testament wilderness motif discusses the desert as a "marginal state" (van Gennepe). Leach, however, insistently reads the desert as "Other World," a timeless place constituting the goal of movement (exodus) rather than constituting the process of movement itself, as I am inclined to argue. See his "Fishing for Men on the Edge of the Wilderness," *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 579–99. See also Edmund Leach and D. Alan Aycok, *Structuralist Interpretations of Biblical Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
 37. Gregory of Nyssa, *In Canticum canticorum*, PG 44: 1092D; cited from *In Canticum canticorum*, ed. Hermann Langerbeck, in *Opera*, ed. Werner Jaeger (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960) 6: 436–37.
 38. Ambrose, *Epistola 71 ad Horontianum*, PL 16: 1295.
 39. F. F. Bruce, *Biblical Exegesis in the Qumran Texts* (London: Tyndale, 1960), p. 26; qtd. in Talmon, "The 'Desert Ideal,'" p. 57.
 40. Talmon, "The 'Desert Ideal,'" p. 60.
 41. Qumranic scripture reflects the messianic importance of desert ideology: see, e.g., 1QH 8: 4–5 (from *The Thanksgiving Psalms*) and 1QS 8: 13–14 (from *The Manual of Discipline*), in *The Dead Sea Scriptures in English Translation*, trans. Theodor Herzog Gaster (Garden City: Doubleday, 1956), p. 56.
 42. 1QS 9: 19–20, in *The Dead Sea Scriptures*, p. 59.
 43. A covenant born not from the quiescent flow of history, but from upheaval, *tohu* itself. See 1QH 8: 4–5 (cf. Isa. 41: 18).
 44. Jabès, *From the Desert to the Book*, p. 68.
 45. To draw on an etymological pun: *de* + *sertus*; L. *de*, in the negative sense, plus the past participle of *serere*, to bind, join.
 46. Maurice Blanchot, "The Limit-Experience," *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 125.
 47. Blanchot, "The Limit-Experience," p. 127.
 48. Blanchot, "The Limit-Experience," p. 127.
 49. Edmond Jabès, *The Book of Questions*, vol. 1, trans. Rosemarie Waldrop (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1976), p. 55.
 50. Zygmunt Bauman, "Desert Spectacular," *The Flaneur*, ed. Keith Tester (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 140.
 51. Jean Baudrillard, *America*, trans. Chris Turner (New York: Verso, 1988), p. 5.
 52. There is perhaps no better graphic example of the sublime and humiliating power of the desert in shaping new subjectivities than John Ford's western *Three Godfathers* (1948). Indeed, anything that can be said about the desert's elemental power to uproot entrenched identities is a footnote to the magnificent desert scene twenty-four minutes into the film.
 53. Philo of Alexandria, *De migratione Abrahami* 20, in *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. C. D. Yonge (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993),

- pp. 253–54. All references to Philo are cited by title, section, followed by the page number, in Yonge's translation; square brackets indicate my additions.
54. L. Th. Lefort, "S. Pachôme et Amen-em-Ope," *Le Muséon* 40 (1927): 74.
 55. See Philo of Alexandria, *De vita Mosis* 266–67, 515; *De Decalogo* 16, p. 519; and *De specialibus legibus* II 199, p. 587.
 56. See *De Decalogo* 16–17, p. 519.
 57. *De Somniis* II 170, p. 400.
 58. "Der Priester Johannes," ed. Friedrich Zarncke, *Abhandlungen der philologisch-historischen Classe der königlich sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften* 7 (1879): 919–20.
 59. Philo, in his discussion of the possibility of sin in the wilderness, notes that the name *scorpion* suggests the psychic dispersion of the passions. Only solitude in the desert affords immunity to the scorpion's sting on the path to salvation (see *Legum allegoriae* II 86, p. 47).
 60. *Legum allegoriae* III 170, p. 69.
 61. See *De Decalogo* 2, p. 518.
 62. *De vita contemplativa* 22–23, p. 700.
 63. See, e.g., Jerome's famous *Epistola* 125, where he traces the lineage of Christian monasticism to John the Baptist, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (New York, 1890) 6: 246 ff. Also: John Cassian, *Collationes*, 18.6 (PL 49: 1100–1) and *De coenobiorum institutis* 1 (PL 49: 61 ff.). Tracing the origins of the monastic tradition back to John the Baptist—and, unsurprisingly, the Egyptian monks—was very common in the Middle Ages, especially in the Anglo-Irish tradition. See Meyer Schapiro, "The Religious Meaning of the Ruthwell Cross," *The Art Bulletin* 26 (1944): 236 [232–45].
 64. Origen, *Homilies on Luke*, PG 13: 1827D. The same sentiments are found in Clement of Alexandria (*Pedagogus* 2.10.112, for which see *Pédagogue*, ed. Claude Mondésert and Henri Irenée Marrou (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1965), pp. 212–13; and Methodius of Olympus (*The Banquet* 8.11.197–98 and 8.12.203, for which see *Le Banquet*, ed. Herbert Musurillo, trans. Victor-Henry Debidour (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1963), pp. 226–27, 232–33). It is clear that by the end of the fourth century the theme of the desert as space of quietude and purity pervades Christian writing. In the correspondence of Basil of Caesara and Gregory of Nazianzus, e.g., the desert functions as a literary trope for meditation far from the foulness, corruption, and noise of the city. See Basil of Caesara, *Epistola* 14, in *Lettres*, ed. Yves Courtonne (Paris: Les Belles lettres, 1957) 1: 42–45; and Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epistolae* 4–6, in *Lettres*, ed. Paul Gallay (Paris: Les Belles lettres, 1964) 1: 3–8. Saint Jerome, in a letter to his friend Heliodorus, celebrates the desert's purity and luminosity over against the "stinking prison" of the city in language that recalls Philo's. See *Epistola* 14, in *Lettres*, ed. Jerome Labourt (Paris: Les Belles lettres, 1949) 1: 44.
 65. Eucherius, *Epistola de laude eremi*, PL 50: 701–702.
 66. On the influence of these writings, see Antoine Guillaumont, "La conception du désert chez les moines d'Egypte," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 188 (1975): 3–21.

67. See Gustave Flaubert, *Notes de voyage*, in *Oeuvres complètes de Gustave Flaubert* (Paris: Louis Conard, 1910) 2: 356, 367; and *Correspondance* (Paris: Louis Conard, 1926–33) 1: 429.
68. Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York: Modern Library, 1932) 2: 15–16.
69. Gibbon continues: “This voluntary martyrdom must have gradually destroyed the sensibility both of the mind and of the body; nor can it be presumed that the fanatics who torment themselves are susceptible of any lively affection for the rest of mankind. A cruel, unfeeling temper has distinguished the monks of every age and country: their stern indifference, which is seldom mollified by personal friendship, is inflamed by religious hatred” (*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 2: 16–17). Gibbon’s perspective on asceticism is consistent with a utilitarian one; see Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (London: W. Pickering, 1823).
70. Rufinus, *The Lives of the Desert Fathers: The Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, trans. Norman Russell (Oxford: A. R. Mowbray, 1981), p. 50.
71. Peter Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Antiquity,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971): 91 [80–101].
72. John Moschus, *Pratum spirituale*, PG 87: 2861B. On “becoming the stranger,” see the discussion of *xeneteia* in Antoine Guillaumont, “Le dépaysement comme forme d’ascèse dans le monachisme ancien,” *Annuaire de l’Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes*, Cinquième Section, Sciences religieuses (1968–69): 31–58.
73. Jacques Lacarrière, *The God Possessed*, trans. Roy Monkcom (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1963), p. 57.
74. As Peter Brown has pointed out, the moment of the Holy Man’s death marks the clearest manifestation of his role as intermediary between the human and the divine. At this moment the link is broken (see Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978], p. 13). Brown cites Bishop Serapion of Thmuis, writing in 356 to the disciples of Anthony: “Consider now: the very moment when the Great Man of our land, the blessed Anthony who prayed for the whole world, passed from us, the wrath of God is come upon Egypt and all things are overturned and become calamitous” (“Une lettre de Serapion de Thmuis aux disciples d’Antoine,” ed. R. Draguet, *Le Muséon* 64 [1951]: 13).
75. Theodoret, *Historia religiosa*, PG 82: 1481B. We note here the image of the “hairy hermit,” the ascetic who resembles more animal than man and who consorts with animals, on the model of a kind of “peaceable kingdom.” Perhaps the most striking example of the ascetic’s liminal status, these beast-men, and beast-women, have elected to rehearse, in a way as radical as self-inhumation, the preconditions for the life to come. See Charles Allyn Williams, *The Oriental Affinities of the Legend of the Hairy Anchorite*, 2 vols. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1925; 1927); Paul Peeters, “Review of Williams, *The Oriental Affinities*,” *Analecta Bollandiana* 47 (1929): 138–41; and Alison Goddard Elliott, *Roads to Paradise: Reading the Lives of the Early Saints* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1987), pp. 144–70. Some stories

- of holy men and their animals have been collected in *Beasts and Saints*, trans. Helen Waddell (New York: Henry Holt, 1934).
76. *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, trans. Benedicta Ward (London: A. R. Mowbray, 1975), pp. 178, 182, 116.
77. Elliott, *Roads to Paradise*, p. 85; see pp. 85–102 for her analysis of the “secret flight” motif (when the saint’s flight from society remains a secret, necessary to escape, to take a typical example, an unwelcome marriage).
78. Robert Browning, “The ‘Low Level’ Saint’s Life in the Early Byzantine World,” *The Byzantine Saint*, ed. Sergei Hackel (Oxford: University of Birmingham Fourteenth Spring Symposium on Byzantine Studies, 1980), p. 121.
79. J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Norton, 1973), p. 97; see also “Death Instincts,” pp. 97–103; “Life Instincts,” pp. 241–42.
80. See the Bohairic life of Pachomius, in *Pachomian Koinonia*, trans. Armand Veilleux (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1980) 1: 269 n.3.
81. See Athanasius, *Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, trans. Robert C. Gregg (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), pp. 37–39; *The Coptic Life of Antony*, trans. and ed. Tim Vivian (San Francisco: International Scholars, 1995), pp. 40–43.
82. *Vitae patrum* PL 73: 283D. See also Symeon Metaphrastes’s more detailed account in PG 115: 49.
83. For the story of his demonic vision and his burial by his pet lions, see the *Vitae patrum* PL 73: 423D–425A.
84. See Theodoret, *Historia religiosa*, PG 82: 1468. For the Syriac vita, and other details, see A. J. Fustagière, *Antioche païenne et chrétienne: Libanius, Chrysostomes, et les moines de Syrie* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1959), pp. 313, 358. Other examples of vivisepture abound: the fourth-century anchorites Paul of Thebes, Zeno, Marcianus, and the seventh-century St. Theodore of Sykeon were tomb-dwellers; in the next century, Alypius, and, in the tenth century, the Bulgarian Saint John of Rila both lived in hollow trees that resembled coffins.
85. Rufinus, *The Lives of the Desert Fathers*, pp. 57–58.
86. Rufinus, *The Lives of the Desert Fathers*, p. 59.
87. Theodoret, *Historia religiosa*, PG 82: 1326–27.
88. Athanasius, *The Coptic Life of Antony*, p. 47; cf. ch. 14 of Athanasius, *Life of Antony*, pp. 42–43.
89. The logic here is that of disavowal, a strategy that aims precisely at the creation of the utopic. Gilles Deleuze would importantly link this to the practice of masochism: “Disavowal should perhaps be understood as the point of departure of an operation that consists neither in negating nor even destroying, but rather in radically contesting the validity of that which is: it suspends belief in and neutralizes the given in such a way that a new horizon opens up beyond the given and in place of it” (“Coldness and Cruelty,” trans. Jean McNeil, in Gilles Deleuze and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Masochism* [New York: Zone, 1991], p. 31).
90. We should preserve an important psychoanalytic distinction here: receptivity, not passivity, characterizes a masochistic response to the stimuli of the outside world. Masochism is an active pursuit of stimuli with the goal of

- self-transformation. See Jack Novick and Kerry Kelly Novick, *Fearful Symmetry: The Development and Treatment of Sadomasochism* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1996), p. 31. According to a Lacanian insight, masochism can thus be understood as the process of becoming the object through self-negation. See, e.g., Marcelle Marini, *Jacques Lacan: The French Context*, trans. Anne Tomiche (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), p. 187.
91. There is the lovely story of Theodore of Sykeon who, desiring to imitate John the Baptist, crawled into a cave where he stayed for two years. When he was found, his body had become a barely animate corpse: his body was full of worms, his bones showed through his skin, and he smelled powerfully of the grave. His brothers immediately hailed him as a second Job, ordaining him as subdeacon and then a priest by the time he was only eighteen years old. See chs. 20–21 of A. J. Festugière, *Vie de Théodore de Sykéon*, 2 vols. (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1970).
 92. Donald L. Carveth, "Psychoanalytic Conceptions of the Passions," *Freud and the Passions*, ed. John O'Neill (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), p. 45.
 93. *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, p. 35.
 94. Meister Eckhart is perhaps most famous for promoting the opposite kind of self-creation, the mystical achievement of what he called "the darkness of unself-consciousness." For Eckhart, the desert is still the desired state, the divine *Wüste*, the barren Godhead: "the more he makes himself like a desert, unconscious of everything," the closer he comes to such a state. Citing Hos. 2: 12, Eckhart ties the desert to revelation: "The genuine word of eternity is spoken only in the spirit of that man who is himself a wilderness alienated from [denuded of] self and all multiplicity" (Sermon *Et cum factus esset Jesus*, in *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation*, ed. Raymond B. Blakney [New York, 1941], p. 120; cf. *Beati pauperes*, pp. 227ff.).
 95. *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, p. 42.
 96. See Philip Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority, and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 43.
 97. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 379.
 98. Roland Barthes, "Le Prince de Hambourg au TNP" (1953), *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Eric Marty (Paris: Seuil, 1993) 1: 205.
 99. See Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1989).
 100. Take, e.g., Rosi Braidotti's assessment of postmodern artists Martha Rosler, Barbara Krueger, and Jenny Holzer: "In their hands, areas of transit and passage become contemporary equivalents of the desert, not only because of the enormous, alienating solitude that characterizes them but also because they are heavily marked by signs and boards indicating a multitude of possible directions, to which the artist adds her own, unexpected and disruptive one" (Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1994], p. 20).

101. Dick Hebdige, "Training Some Thoughts on the Future," *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*, ed. Jon Bird, Barry Curtis, Tim Putnam, George Robertson, and Lisa Tickner (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 278.
102. Helen Waddell, *The Desert Fathers [Vitae Patrum]*, trans. Helen Waddell (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1957), p. 23.
103. Both traditions, especially the latter, are thoroughly treated in Schapiro, "The Religious Meaning," from which I draw examples.
104. "Et erat in deserto quadraginta diebus et quadraginta noctibus, et tentatus a Satana; eratque cum bestiis, et angeli ministrabant illi."
105. The scriptural precedent is Ps. 91:13 (Vulgate 90): "You will walk upon the asp and the basilisk: and you shall trample under foot the lion and the dragon." This passage is treated by early Christian and Greek commentators as an allegory of Christ's victory over Satan's temptations. See Jerome's *Tractatus in Marcum 1: 13*, in vol. 3, pt. 2 of *Sancti Hieronymi presbyteri tractatus sive homiliae in psalmos*, in *Marci evangelium aliaque varia argumenta*, ed. Germanus Morin (Maredsol: J. Parker, 1897), pp. 328ff.; Bede, *Expositio in Lucae evangelium*, PL 92: 369. Commentaries on Ps. 91: 13 include: Jerome, *De psalmo XC*, in vol. 3, pt. 2 of *Sancti Hieronymi*, p. 118; and vol. 3, pt. 3 of *Sancti Hieronymi* (1903), p. 71. Greek commentators include Eusebius, *Commentaria in psalmos*, PG 23: 1153–56; and bk. 9 of his *Demonstratio Evangelica*, PG 22: 674ff. See also excerpts from later Greek commentators in Balthasar Corderius, *Expositio patrum Graecorum in psalmos* (Antwerp, 1642) 2: 886–87. A number of medieval psalters illustrate Ps. 91 with a scene of the temptation: for example, the Stuttgart psalter of the Carolingian period depicts on the same page (fol. 107v) the figure of Christ triumphant over the animals and the temptation (see Ernest T. Dewald, *The Stuttgart Psalter, Biblia, folio 23, Wuerttembergische Landesbibliothek, Stuttgart* [Princeton: Publication for the Department of Art and Archaeology of Princeton University, 1930], pp. 79–80). Schapiro lists four other psalters (see his "The Religious Meaning," p. 233).
106. Schapiro points to a twelfth-century relief in New York in which Christ stands upon a lion in each of the three temptation scenes (see p. 234), as well as another tympanum (the Portal of the Goldsmiths in Santiago), where the beasts are represented by a coiled serpent. On the latter, see A. Kingsley Porter, *Romanesque Sculpture of the Pilgrimage Roads* (Boston: Marshall Jones, 1923), vol. 6., ills. 678–79; Georges Gaillard, *Les debuts de la sculpture romane espagnole: Leon, Jaca, Compostelle* (Paris: P. Hartmann, 1938).
107. It is thus no surprise that this idea should be materialized as a scene of Baptism, as on the wooden door of S. Maria im Kapitol in Cologne. See Richard Hamann, *Die Holztur der Pfarrkirche zu St. Maria im Kapitol* (Berlin: Marburg: Verlag des Kunstgeschichtlichen Seminars der Universität Marburg a. L., 1926).
108. See Gustav Heider, *Beiträge zur christlichen Typologie aus Bilderhandschriften des Mittelalters* (Vienna: Kais-Staatsdruckerei, 1861), p. 57. See George Williams, *Wilderness and Paradise in Christian Thought*, pp. 10–64, for a good

- discussion of this bipolarity as it unfolds up to the Middle Ages as "the never-ending to-and-fro of Christian history" (p. 7).
109. Schapiro, "The Religious Meaning," p. 234.
 110. See, e.g., *The Apocalypse of Baruch* 73: 6, in Robert H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913) 2: 518.
 111. This is now called the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, of which see chs. 14, 18–19, 35–36, in J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 94–95, 97–98.
 112. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 84.
 113. Jerome, *Commentarius in Evangelium secundum Marcum* PL 30: 595. Glorieux lists the commentary as anonymous and of the late fifth century. The comparison to Daniel also appears in the *Biblia Pauperum* (see Heider, *Beiträge zur christlichen Typologie*, p. 115).
 114. The late-antique stories are collected under "Bestiae," in the index of PL 74: 23. An important early transmission to the West is Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi*, cap. 13–15, where Postumianus recounts many incidents of holy men and tamed beasts, and emphasizes that animals are in fact a model of obedience and reverence to God (see cap. 14). Numerous examples of Western saints at peace with the animals are mentioned in Charles Plummer, *Vitae sanctorum Hiberniae* (Oxford, 1910) 1: cxliii–cxlvii. A central text is Jonas, *Vita S. Columbani*, PL 87: 1020–1028.
 115. Alcuin, Epistola 82, in PL 100: 266–67.
 116. Qtd. in Williams, *Wilderness and Paradise in Christian Thought*, p. 46.
 117. Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity*, p. 90.
 118. Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 25. Otherwise, I find Harpham's reading very sensitive to the ambivalence of the desert (see, e.g., p. 69).
 119. Bede, *Commentarius in Lucem*, PL 92: 369.
 120. The Psalter of 1066 (British Library, Add. MS 19352), the Chludoff Psalter, and Barberini Gr. 372 are examples.
 121. *Exodus*—and the *Commedia*—work by "treating history as veiled revelation full of intimations, mutually confirmative, of an ever-present divine plan" (S. A. J. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* [London: J. M. Dent, 1982], p. 49). For the allegorical interpretations of Exodus, see James E. Cross and S. I. Tucker, "Allegorical Tradition and the Old English *Exodus*," *Neophilologus* 44 (1960): 122–27; and B. F. Huppé, *Doctrine and Poetry* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1959), pp. 217–23.
 122. Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert: History and Allegory in the Divine Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 13. See also Singleton's reading of the *Commedia* in terms of the Exodus, which he argues is the crucial and explicit structure animating the poem. Dante's journey is structured on the stages of the desert *transitus* from Egypt to the Promised Land. See Charles S. Singleton, "In Exitu Israel de Aegypto," *Dante: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. John Freccero (Englewood Cliffs,

- NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), pp. 102–121; and his *Dante Studies I: Commedia: Elements of Structure* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), pp. 1–17.
123. Mazzotta, *Dante*, p. 12.
 124. Richard of St. Victor, *Mysticae adnotationes in psalmos*, PL 196: 302.
 125. Jerome, Epistola 64, in PL 25: 448D.
 126. See Honorius of Autun, *De anime exsilio et patria*, PL 172: 1241–46.
 127. Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon: A Medieval Guide to the Arts*, trans. Jerome Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), p. 101. Cf. Hugh's *In Ecclesiasten Homiliae*, PL 175: 221C ("All the world is a foreign soil to those whose native land should be heaven. . . Therefore comes a 'time for scattering' [Eccles. 3: 5], so that man may see he has no stable dwelling here and may get used to withdrawing his mind"). The world as a desolate place, human life as a pilgrimage, *homo viator in bivio*, are of course topoi in the Middle Ages, and at this time I suspend a discussion of them in favor of focusing on the desert. See, instead, F. C. Gardiner, *The Pilgrimage of Desire* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971).
 128. Augustine, *Confessiones* 7.10.16. Pierre Courcelle provides almost one hundred direct reflections of *regio dissimilitudinis*, most of them from the twelfth century; see his *Les Confessions de Saint Augustin dans le tradition littéraire: antécédents et postérité* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1963), pp. 623–40. The *regio dissimilitudinis* is the locus of radical ambiguity, encounter, and thus potentiality. See, particularly, John Freccero's reading of the first canto of the *Commedia*, in "Dante's Prologue Scene," *Dante Studies* 84 (1966): 12 [1–25]. Also: F. Chatillon, "Regio Dissimilitudinis," *Mélanges E. Pöschard* (Lyon: Facultés Catholiques, 1903), pp. 85–102.
 129. Peter Lombard, *Sermo* 26, PL 171: 436.
 130. Richard of St. Victor, *De exterminatione mali et promotione boni*, PL 196: 1073ff. Richard uses the images of the flight from Egypt into the desert and the journey into the Promised Land, from the desert, and over the Jordan. See Gervais Dumeige, *Richard de Saint-Victor et l'idée chrétienne de l'amour* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1952), pp. 51–68.
 131. Odo von St. Emmeran, *Liber visionem*, ed. Paul Gerhard Schmidt (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1989), pp. 42–54. The "venus urens" is at p. 45.
 132. Lucan, *Pharsalia*, 9.444–445, 453–65, trans. Jane Wilson Joyce (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 245.
 133. Vicomte de Santarém, *Essai sur l'histoire de la cosmographie et de la cartographie pendant le Moyen-Age*, ed. Martim de Albuquerque (Lisbon: Administração do Porto de Lisboa, 1989), p. 212.
 134. Jessie Crosland, "Lucan in the Middle Ages, with Special Reference to the Old French Epic," *Modern Language Review* 25 (1930): 32–51. See, esp., pp. 38, 47–51.
 135. The *Benjamin major* is in PL 196: 63–192. I quote the fine translation in *Richard of St. Victor: The Twelve Patriarchs, The Mystical Ark, Book Three of the Trinity*, trans. Grover A. Zinn (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), p. 310.
 136. *Richard of St. Victor*, pp. 316–17.
 137. *Richard of St. Victor*, p. 317.

138. *Richard of St. Victor*, p. 318.
139. *Richard of St. Victor*, p. 332.
140. D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (New York: Routledge, 1971), p. 14.

Chapter 4 Desert Ecstasies

1. Hélène Cixous, *Sorties*, qtd. in David Lodge, *Modern Criticism and Theory* (New York: Longman, 1988), p. 292.
2. Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia* 7.2.21; cf. Herodotus, *Histories* 4.191.
3. Jean Céard, *La nature et les prodiges* (Geneva: Droz, 1977), p. 14, trans. mine; qtd. in James Romm, "Alexander, Biologist: Oriental Monstrosities and the Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem," *Discovering New Worlds: Essays on Medieval Exploration and Imagination*, ed. Scott D. Westrem (New York: Garland, 1991), pp. 16–30. I am indebted to Romm's masterly reading of the Letter.
4. *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden*, ed. Churchill Babington, Rolls Series 41 (London, 1865; rpt. 1964), p. 361.
5. Romm, "Alexander, Biologist," p. 18. I follow Romm's discussion of the proverb here.
6. Aristotle, *De generatione animalium* 746 b7–13; Aristotle cites the phrases two other times in ways that suggest its popular currency.
7. *Mandeville's Travels: Texts and Translations*, ed. Malcolm Letts (London: Hakluyt Society, 1953; 2nd ser., no. 101) 1: 118. Cf. Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* (6.35.187): "There is nothing surprising in the fact that monstrous forms of animals and men arise in the extreme reaches of [Africa], because of the molding power of fiery motility in shaping their bodies and carving their forms."
8. Anaxilas, *Hyakinthos Pornoboskos*, in *Comicorum Graecorum fragmenta*, ed. August Meineke (1840; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1970) 3: fr. 27.
9. See *Alexander's Letter to Aristotle about India*, trans. Lloyd L. Gunderson (Meisenham am Glan: Hain, 1980), pp. 1–2.
10. Romm, "Alexander, Biologist," p. 25.
11. The Royal Library of Turin mappa mundi (12th c.), e.g., has a rubric placed to the east of the Persian Gulf that reads: "India deserta et arenosa" [Indian desert and sand]. On the Turin mappa mundi, see de Santarém, *Essai sur l'histoire de la cosmographie*, pp. 127–53.
12. See *Alexander's Letter*, pp. 17–20. In addition to Romm's reading of this episode, see A. Cizek, "Ungeheuer und magische Lebewesen in der Epistola Alexandri ad Magistrum Suum Aristotelem de Situ Indiae," *Third International Beast Epic, Fable and Fabliau Colloquium, Münster 1979: Proceedings*, ed. Jan Goossens and Timothy Sodman (Cologne: Bohlau, 1981), pp. 78–94.
13. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, "1227: Treatise on Nomadology—The War Machine," *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 371.
14. See, esp., "1227: Treatise on Nomadology," pp. 379–87.
15. On the development of the "siege mentality" in late-medieval European culture, see Jean Delumeau, *La peur en Occident (XIV^e–XVIII^e siècles): Une cité assiégée* (Paris: Fayard, 1978); Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1957), p. 71.
16. Descartes's project in *Discourse on Method* is a quest for the solitude and freedom of philosophical abstraction afforded by the space of the desert, the "vacant plain" of the engineer's mind (see René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald A. Cress [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980], p. 6). An insightful commentator on this aspect of Descartes's project stresses how the desert "means the mind's abstraction from history—its material and cultural disembodiment." The *Discourse*, in this reading, recounts the philosopher-saint's efforts to abstract himself: "Descartes composed the *Discourse on Method* . . . as a hagiographical tale that ends with the saint's solitary retirement into the desert" (Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992], p. 112). The temptation here is, then, double: to see the desert as the radical space of abstraction, and to see this abstraction as having affinities with late-antique, even medieval, projects.
17. See, e.g., Karl Helleiner, "Prester John's Letter: A Mediaeval Utopia," *The Phoenix* 13 (1959): 47–57; Leonardo Olschki, "Der Brief des Presbyters Johannes," *Historische Zeitschrift* 144 (1931): 1–14; and Martin Gosman, "La royaume du Prêtre Jean: l'interprétation d'un bonheur," *L'idée de bonheur au moyen âge: actes du Colloque d'Amiens de mars 1984* (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1990), pp. 213–23.
18. See Otto, Bishop of Freising, *The Two Cities: A Chronicle of Universal History to the Year 1146 A.D.*, trans. Charles Christopher Mierow, ed. Austin P. Evans and Charles Knapp (New York: Octagon, 1966), pp. 443–44.
19. Alexander A. Vasiliev, *Prester John: Legend and History*, ts. Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Washington, D. C., n. d. (ca. 1950), p. ii.
20. One quite incredible text is the late-fourteenth/early-fifteenth-century *Libro del Infante don Pedro*, which recounts the adventurous travels of the Infante Dom Pedro on his way to and meeting with Prester John. For the text and commentary, see Francis M. Rogers, *The Travels of the Infante Dom Pedro of Portugal* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961). Nearly every traveler and missionary to the East mentions evidence of Prester John's realm in India: Oderic of Pordenone, John of Monte Corvino, Ricoldo de Monte Croce, Ramon Lull, John of Plano Carpini, Ascelinus (in Beauvais's *Speculum Historiale*), Smbat, Joinville, William Rubruck, Marco Polo. Even after Jordanus de Séverac places Prester John in Ethiopia (ca. 1321–30), writers like Philippe de Mézières and the Marquis of Salviés Thomas III (1356–1416), in his novel *Chevalier errant* (1395), continued to locate Prester John in Asia. Indeed, the great explorers of the late fifteenth century knew about and were concerned to find Prester John. Columbus owned a Latin Marco Polo, which he copiously annotated: his jottings include two references to Prester John (see Cesare de Lollis, *Scritti di Cristoforo Colombo*, 2 vols. [Rome: Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, 1892; 1894] 2: 452, 454).

- Vasca da Gama, on the first voyage to India (1497–99) carried with him letters of introduction from King Manuel to Prester John.
21. Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City," *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 105–106; emphasis added.
 22. "Der Priester Johannes," ed. Friedrich Zarncke, *Abhandlungen der philologisch-historischen Classe der königlich sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften* 7 (1879): 914 [831–1028].
 23. The river described here is of course the River Sambation, or Sabbaticus, the legendary stony river that flows for six days but rests on Saturday. The Christian author of the *Letter* altered this detail, changing it to four days of rest, corresponding to the four days of the Truce of God. This river was believed to contain the ten lost Hebrew tribes. The river has both fantastic value (it was singled out as a marvel, e.g., by Fulcher of Chartres in *A History of the Expedition to Jerusalem 1095–1127*, ed. Harold S. Fink, trans. Frances Rita Ryan [Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1969], pp. 292–93; and by Jacques de Vitry in his *Historia abbreviata* in *Extracts from Aristeas, Hecataeus, Origin, and Other Early Writers*, trans. Aubrey Stewart [London: Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society, 1895], pp. 92–93) and utopic value. Toward the end of the ninth century speculation concerning the whereabouts of the lost tribes was confirmed by the traveler Eldad, who claimed to have communicated with four of the tribes. His account of the tribes was widely read, and contains astonishing parallels to the Prester John letter: details of the armies when they go into battle, geographic features, and a list of virtues all seem to provide evidence that the author of the Latin *Letter* was familiar with the Hebrew story. On this last point, see Vsevolod Slessarev, *Prester John: The Letter and the Legend* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1959), p. 52. Eldad's account is described and translated in A. Niebauer, "Where are the Ten Tribes?" *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 1 (1889): 98–114.
 24. The Latin Mandeville and *Der jüngere Titurel*, e.g., stress the desert's function as boundary. See John Livingston Lowes, "The Dry Sea and the Carrenare," *Modern Philology* 3 (1905): 14 [1–46].
 25. "The legend of Alexander's Gate and of the enclosed nations is in reality the story of the frontier in sublimated mythologized form," writes Andrew Runni Anderson (*Alexander's Gate, Gog and Magog, and the Inclosed Nations* [Cambridge: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1932], p. 8).
 26. Hagiga 12a, cited in Wensinck, *The Ocean in the Literature of the Western Semites*, p. 41. On markers of the known world, see pp. 26–28.
 27. *The Book of Enoch* describes Sheol as the end of the earth; see chs. 17–22 of *The Book of Enoch*, trans. R. H. Charles [1917; London: S. P. C. K., 1974], pp. 44–49. As a boundary phenomenon, the conflation of desert, sea, and chaos is particularly common, as we might expect. The Gobi desert, e.g., came to be seen as marking the boundary limit of the known world. To quote John of Marignola: "Cylloskagen [Gobi], id est ad montes arene, quos faciunt venti, ultra quos ante Thartaros nullos putavit terram habitabilem, nec putabatur ultra aliquam terram esse" (*Cronica Boemorum*, ed. Joseph Emler, in

- vol. 3 of *Fontes Rerum Bohemicarum* [Prague, 1882], p. 495b). The Gobi was throughout the Middle Ages considered a sea; on "Boden der Gobi," see Alexander von Humboldt, *Central-Asien: Untersuchungen über die Gebirgsketten und die vergleichende Klimatologie* (Berlin: C. J. Klemann, 1844), pp. 442ff.
28. This well-known marker of civilization pervades myth. The famous "twin mountains" (Akkadian *Masu*), which found their way into the Alexander stories as the "ubera aquilonis" [breasts of the north], are almost always associated with a gloomy desert, beyond which is paradise. The Book of Enoch, the Book of Giants, and, in the Christian tradition, the Book of Parables all make use of the "twin breasts" of the mountains as geographic boundaries. See *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumran Cave 4*, ed. J. T. Milik (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 30. On the legendary Breasts of the North in the Alexander tradition, see Andrew Runni Anderson, *Alexander's Gate*, pp. 25, 43, 51.
 29. The search for Prester John is of course an act of pure imagination, yet without imagination geographic exploration is impossible. On the role of imagination in travel and exploration, see John L. Allen, "Lands of Myth, Waters of Wonder: The Place of Imagination in the History of Geographical Exploration," *Geographies of the Mind: Essays in Historical Geosophy in Honor of John Kirtland Wright* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 41–61. Allen shows how exploration persists despite empirical knowledge that otherwise contradicts exploratory goals. Prester John's kingdom is one of his examples of a goal that persisted for centuries (see pp. 53–54).
 30. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), p. 25.
 31. William of Tyre dilates on the terrors of the desert; for a discussion, see Emil Dreesbach, "Der Orient in der altfranzösischen Kreuzzugliteratur," diss., University of Breslau, 1901.
 32. Haymo, Bishop of Halberstadt, in *Sophoniam prophetam*, PL 117: 205. Compare Ambrose's description of the desert in *Historia de excidio urbis Hierosolymitanae*, PL 15: 2075.
 33. *Mandeville's Travels: Texts and Translations* 1: 191.
 34. Cited in Friedrich Zarncke, "Der Priester Johannes," *Abhandlungen der philologisch-historischen Classe der königlich sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften* 8 (1883): 146 [1–184].
 35. Cited in *The Book of Ser Marco Polo, the Venetian: Concerning the Kingdoms and Marvels of the East*, trans. and ed. Henry Yule (New York: Scribner, 1903) 1: 201.
 36. Cited in *The Book of Ser Marco Polo* 1: 202. See also Sir Aurel Stein, *Sand-Buried Ruins of Khotan: Personal Narrative of a Journey of Archaeological and Geographical Exploration in Chinese Turkestan* (London: T. F. Unwin, 1903), p. xiv.
 37. Sigmund Freud, "The Loss of Reality in Neurosis and Psychosis," *SE* 19: 187; see also "The Paths to the Formation of Symptoms," *SE* 16: 372.
 38. Richard of St. Victor, *Mysticae adnotationes in psalmos*, PL 196: 302.
 39. William Butler Yeats, "The Statues" (1936), *The Poems of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Richard J. Finneran (New York: Macmillan, 1983), p. 337.

40. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 141.
41. Sister Ritamary Bradley, "Backgrounds of the Title *Speculum* in Mediaeval Literature," *Speculum* 29 (1954): 100–115.
42. M. M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 414–15. Cf. Wolfgang Iser: "The mirror cannot be grasped in transcendental terms any more than it can be pinned to a dialectic that would eliminate interplay. The structural formula of fictionality entails not a synthesis of, but an endless unfolding of, interwoven and interacting positions. The lack of any transcendental reference and the impossibility of any overarching third dimension show literary fictionality to be marked by an ineradicable duality, and indeed this is the source of its operational power" ("Staging as an Anthropological Category," *New Literary History* 23 [1992]: 878 [877–88]).
43. See Edmund Bergler, "The Mirror of Self-Knowledge," *Psychoanalysis and Culture: Essays in Honor of Géza Róheim*, ed. George B. Wilbur and Warner Muensterberger (New York: International Universities Press, 1951), pp. 319–26; and Géza Róheim, *Spiegelzauber* (Vienna: Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1919).
44. See M. J. de Goeje, *Bibliotheca geographorum Arabicorum* (Lugduni Batavorum: E. J. Brill, 1967) 6: 115.
45. On the use of spy mirrors set up high above the enemy, see Roger Bacon, *The Opus Majus of Roger Bacon*, trans. Robert Belle Burke (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1928), pp. 578–82. Here he also proposes installing mirrors so that one army would appear as many in order to terrify the enemy. On the use of incendiary mirrors in the crusade against the Muslims, see Roger Bacon, *Opus tertium*, in *Fr. Rogeri Bacon Opera hactenus inedita*, ed. J. S. Brewer, Rolls series 15 (London, 1859) 1: 116–17.
46. Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, trans. Marcus Nathan Adler (New York: Joseph Simon, 1983), p. 133.
47. See the narratives of Masudi and Ibn Hauqal, for instance: in Hermann Thiersch, *Pharos: Antike, Islam und Occident. Ein Beitrag zur Architekturgegeschichte* (Leipzig and Berlin: Teubner, 1909), pp. 40ff.
48. "Ridicula profecto narratio et quae infanibus persuaderi debeat" (*Ioannis Leonis Africani de totius Africae descriptione libri XI in Latinam linguam conversi Ioannis Floriano* [Antwerp, 1666], p. 262). For Ibn Hauqal, see M. J. de Goeje, *Bibliotheca geographorum* 2: 99.
49. See A. Hilka, "Studien zur Alexandersage," *Romanische Forschungen* 29 (1911): 8 [1–71]; and Thiersch, *Pharos: Antike, Islam und Occident*, p. 68.
50. Jean-Clet Martin, "Cartography of the Year 1000: Variations on *A Thousand Plateaus*," *Gilles Deleuze and the Theater of Philosophy*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas and Dorothea Olkowski (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 279.
51. The French reads: "Ne ja n'iert si loigteine la terre / Ou l'em nus voile muver la guerre / Ne traïson de nule gent / Ke nel veïum errantment" (Yale MS, ll. 843–46, in *La lettre du Prêtre Jean: Les versions en ancien français et en*

- ancien occitan/Textes et commentaires*, ed. Martin Gosman [Groningen: Bouma's Boekhuis, 1982], p. 136).
52. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1977), p. 220.
53. Michel Foucault, "The Eye of Power," *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper (New York: Pantheon, 1980), p. 159.
54. I am here indebted to the very succinct discussion of painting perspective in John White, *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).
55. See Jean-François Lyotard, "Representation, Presentation, Unpresentable," *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 120.
56. Alberti, *On Painting and on Sculpture*, ed. Cecil Grayson (London: Phaidon, 1972), p. 61.
57. Both *De pictura* and, in particular, another treatise, Lorenzo Ghiberti's *Third Commentary*, articulated the previously acknowledged relationship between medieval optics and the new perspective science. Summarizing for their contemporaries the conception of visual reality that was the basis and justification for this new system, Alberti and Ghiberti emphasized the dominant medieval notions that seeing involves knowing and that vision is a bodily act. The definitive edition of the *Third Commentary* is Julius Ritter von Schlosser, *Lorenzo Ghiberti's Denkwürdigkeiten* (Berlin: J. Bard, 1912). For an extremely helpful concordance and discussion of Ghiberti's medieval sources, see G. ten Doesschate, *De Derde Commentaar van Lorenzo Ghiberti in verband met de Mildeleeuwsche Optiek* (Utrecht: Hoonse, 1940).

Chapter 5 The Marvel and the List

1. Charles-Victor Langlois, "Formulaires de lettres du XIIe, du XIIIe et du XIVe siècles [1]," *Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque nationale et autres bibliothèques* 34.1 (1891), p. 1.
2. Giles Constable, *Letters and Letter-Collections* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1976), p. 11.
3. See Heikki Koskeniemi, *Studien zur Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes bis 400 n. Christus* (Helsinki, 1956), pp. 53, 155–200; and W. G. Doty, "Classification of Epistolary Literature," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 31 (1969): 183–99.
4. Constable (*Letters and Letter-Collections*, pp. 11–12) makes this point, buttressed by Carl Erdmann (*Studien zur Briefliteratur Deutschlands im elfen Jahrhundert* [Leipzig: K. W. Hiersemann, 1938], pp. 1–2) and by Jean Leclercq ("Lettres de S. Bernard: Histoire ou littérature?" *Studi Medievali* 12 [1971]: 1–74).
5. For a satisfactory discussion of the *Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem* and its relation to historical narrative, see Lloyd L. Gunderson, *Alexander's Letter to Aristotle about India* (Meisenheim am Glan: Anton Hain, 1980), pp. 91–122. The Latin text of the *Epistola* is edited by W. Walther Boer, *Epistola Alexandri*

- ad Aristotelem ad Codicum Fidem et Commentario Critico Instruxit (Meisenheim am Glan: Anton Hain, 1973); the English text in Gunderson, *Alexander's Letter to Aristotle*, pp. 140–56. The Anglo-Saxon version, bound into the Beowulf Manuscript (10/11th ca.; Cotton Vitellius A.xv), is edited by Stanley Rypins, *Three Old English Prose Texts in MS Cotton Vitellius A xv*, EETS, o.s. 161 (London: Oxford University Press, 1924). There is a Middle English prose translation of the *Epistola* (Worcester Cathedral Library MS 172, fols. 136–46v), edited by Thomas Hahn, “The Middle English Letter of Alexander to Aristotle: Introduction, Text, Sources, and Commentary,” *Mediaeval Studies* 41 [1979]: 106–60.
6. See Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), p. 139. Barthes does not suggest merely that historical reference is always illusory. He instead points “to the way a desire for ‘history’ . . . may express itself in conflation of the referent and the signifier” (Humphrey Morris, “Translating Transmission: Representation and Enactment in Freud’s Construction of History,” *Telling Facts: History and Narration in Psychoanalysis*, ed. Joseph H. Smith and Humphrey Morris [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992], p. 76). In the case of the medieval genre of letters, referent (the reality of the past and the way it conditions the reality of the present) and signifier (mythic topoi, cosmic elements) become provisionally imbricated. A strange kind of disbelief suspension is involved: readers invest in a new kind of reality, one that is future oriented, whose utopic “effects” have been conferred upon the concrete details of historical knowledge and belief.
 7. For the texts and some discussion of these letters, see Robert Priebisch, *Letter from Heaven on the Observance of the Lord’s Day* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936); Clovis Brunel, “Versions espagnole, provençale et française de la lettre du Christ tombée au ciel,” *Analecta Bollandiana* 68 (1950): 383–96; W. R. Jones, “The Heavenly Letter in Medieval England,” *Medievalia et Humanistica* 6 (1975): 163–78; Wilhelm Wattenbach, “Über erfundene Briefe in Handschriften des Mittelalters, besonders Teufelbriefe,” *Sitzungsberichte der königlich preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin. Philosophisch-historischen Classe* (1892): 91–123; Ludwig Bieler, “Lettres envoyées par le Diable aux XIIIe et XIVe siècles pleines d’invectives contre les pretres et les moines,” *Scriptorium* 4 (1950): 335–36; Konrad Burdach, *Schlesisch-böhmische Briefmuster aus der Wende des vierzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1926), pp. 22–23; and C. M. D. Crowder, *Unity, Heresy and Reform, 1378–1460: The Conciliar Response to the Great Schism* (London: Arnold, 1977), pp. 41–45.
 8. For example, *The Letter of Prester John* addressed to Emperor Charles IV is clearly intended as crusade propaganda. Aziz S. Atiya notes other fictional letters of propagandistic value in his *The Crusade in the Later Middle Ages* (2nd ed.; New York: Kraus, 1970), p. 309 n.2. Joseph Gill recounts an event at the Council of Ferrara in which the Duke of Burgundy’s envoys presented letters to Pope Eugenius IV, ignoring the Byzantine emperor, who was noticeably affronted. Only after letters were prepared on the spot in the duke’s name and

- presented to the emperor was he appeased (*The Council of Florence* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959], pp. 157–58).
9. I use the term “argument”—as Bill Nichols has, in his excellent book on documentary film to which my thinking here about the dialectical impulses of fiction and documentary, same and other, is indebted—to suggest something of the persuasive, instrumental, hence ideological, meanings of such documents of alterity (see *Representing Reality*, esp. pp. 3–31). For a compelling reading of how such an argument works, see James Romm, “Alexander, Biologist,” pp. 16–30. Romm shows how the *Letter* manifests the failures of Western political aggression and scientific taxonomy in the face of the East’s natural plenitude. It is worth pointing out that the term *argumenta* was used by Isidore of Seville to describe a genre of writing—intermediating between fable and history—that involves reporting things which are possible even if they did not actually happen. If history relates real events, and fables events that never happened and could not have because they are *contra naturam*, then the argumentum marks the space of the possible. See Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), pp. 452–53.
 10. Nichols, *Representing Reality*, p. 225.
 11. Guibert of Nogent, *De virginitate*, in PL 156: 579–608; see col. 587.
 12. Eusebius Pamphili, *Ecclesiastical History, Books 1–5*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1953), pp. 76–82. On the correspondence, see Richard A. Lipsius, *Die Edenessische Abgar-sage: kritisch Untersucht* (Braunschweig: C. A. Schwetschke und Sohn, 1880); Ernst von Dobschütz, “Der Briefwechsel zwischen Abgar und Jesus,” *Zeitschrift für Wissenschaftliche Theologie* 43 (1900): 422–86; and Eduard Schwartz, “Zur Abgarlegende,” *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* (1903): 61–66. Egeria mentions in her *Itinerarium* (17.1, 19.6) that a letter in Christ’s hand which had been preserved and reproduced, possessed miraculous powers (*Itinerarium Egeriae*, ed. E. Franceschini and R. Weber, *Corpus Christianorum*, series latina, 175 [Turnhout: Brepols, 1953]). Indeed, this letter “enjoyed wide circulation as an amulet affixed to doorposts and walls” (see J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993], p. 538; text of letter on pp. 541–42).
 13. About the *Letter*, Ann Knock writes, “The account of monsters and other phenomena now known as the *Letter of Pharasmanes to Hadrian on the Wonders of the East* enjoyed the same kind of popularity in the Middle Ages as the Alexander legends, with whose development it was closely linked. Drawing on a wide range of sources, the *Letter* itself was used extensively by Gervais of Tilbury and the anonymous compiler of the *Liber monstrorum*, and its influence is seen in other accounts of this type” (P. McGurk and Ann Knock, “The Marvels of the East,” *An Eleventh-Century Anglo-Saxon Illustrated Miscellany*, ed. P. McGurk et al. [Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1983], p. 88). For the transmission, see D. J. A. Ross, *Alexander Historiatus: A Guide to Medieval Illustrated Alexander Literature* (London: Warburg Institute, 1963), pp. 32–33.

- For the text (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale nouv. acq. lat. 1065, fols. 92v–95r), see Henri Omont, "Lettre à l'Empereur Adrien sur les merveilles de l'Asie," *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartres* 74 (1913): 507–515. For five additional unpublished mss., see Knock, "The Marvels of the East," p. 88.
14. With the Anglo-Saxon Beowulf ms., the famous Latin Mirabilia texts of Cotton Tiberius B. v. and the early twelfth-century Oxford, Bodley 614 trace their sources to the *Epistola Premonis ad Trajanum Imperatorem*. For a text of the letter, see Edmond Faral, "Une source latine de l'Histoire d'Alexandre: La Lettre sur les Merveilles de l'Inde," *Romania* 43 (1914): 199–215; 353–70. See also M. R. James, *Marvels of the East (De Rebus in Oriente Mirabilibus): A Full Reproduction of the Three Known Copies* (Oxford: Roxburghe Club, 1929), pp. 33–40.
 15. On the three versions of the *Collatio*, see D. J. A. Ross, *Alexander Historiatus*, pp. 31–32; and George Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, ed. D. J. A. Ross (1956; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp. 13–14; and Edmond Liénard, "Collatio Alexandri et Dindimi," *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 15 (1936): 819–38.
 16. See Jules Berger de Xivrey, *Traditions téatologiques ou récits de l'Antiquité et du Moyen Age en Occident sur quelques points de la fable du merveilleux et de l'histoire naturelle publiés d'après plusieurs manuscrits inédits grecs, latins et en vieux français* (Paris, 1836).
 17. On the Letter included in Sindbad's sixth voyage as a probable influence on the "whole concept and content" (p. 50) of the *Letter of Prester John*, see Vsevolod Slessarev, *Prester John: The Letter and the Legend* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1959), pp. 50–51.
 18. Mary B. Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World: Exotic European Travel Writing, 400–1600* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 75.
 19. Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World*, p. 79; emphasis in original.
 20. As Cary points out, "this work, in its original form, was supposed to have been directed against Alexander by his Cynic opponents; but Liénard reached a conclusion which will be accepted by most readers of the *Collatio*, that the author's sympathies were with Alexander, and that the work was intended as an attack, either upon the ascetic philosophy preached by the Cynics or, possibly, upon the early Christian accusers of Alexander. By degrees, however, Dindimus came to be accepted as an admirable ascetic, and the work was used against Alexander, whose replies were often mutilated so as to give Dindimus the best of the argument" (pp. 13–14). See Edmond Liénard, "Collatio Alexandri et Dindimi," *Revue Belge de philologie et d'histoire* 15 (1936): 819–38.
 21. Nichols, *Representing Reality*, p. 28.
 22. Constable, *Letters and Letter-Collections*, p. 13.
 23. Fredric Jameson, "Of Islands and Trenches: Neutralization and the Production of Utopian Discourse," *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971–1986*, vol. 2 *Syntax of History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 81.
 24. Ambrose, Ep. 66, in PL 16: 1225A.

25. See Klaus Thraede, *Grundzüge griechisch-römischer Briefftopik* (Munich: Beck, 1970), pp. 183–84; and Adolf Bütow, *Die Entwicklung der mittelalterlichen Briefsteller bis zur Mitte des 12. Jahrhunderts, mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Theorien der ars dictandi* (Greifswald: Buchdruckerei H. Adler, 1908), pp. 53–56. This relation of a presence to an absence is in fact central to medieval tropes of writing. Cf. John of Salisbury: "Littere. . . absentium dicta sine voce loquuntur" (*Metalogicon*, 1.13, ed. C. Webb [Oxford: Clarendon, 1929], p. 32).
26. Bill Nichols's discussion of the function of the arrival scene in ethnographic film to invoke presence and distance at once has been helpful for thinking about literal and metaphoric arrival scenes in the context of medieval wonder-letters (see his *Representing Reality*, pp. 221–23). On arrival scenes, see also Mary Louise Pratt, "Fieldwork in Common Places," pp. 27–50; and James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Allegory," *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 98–121.
27. James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Authority," *Representations* 1 (1983): 118 [118–46].
28. *Mandeville's Travels, Edited from MS. Cotton Titus C.XVI*, ed. Paul Hamelius, EETS 153 (London: Oxford University Press, 1919), pp. 144–45.
29. Cf. John of Plano Carpini's sense of an essential incongruity between the strangeness he has seen and the Christian mission that brought him into such encounters: "But if for the attention of our readers we write anything which is not known in your parts, you ought not on that account to call us liars, for we are reporting for you things we ourselves have seen or have heard from others whom we believe to be worthy of credence. Indeed it is a very cruel thing that a man should be brought into ill-repute by others on account of the good that he has done" (Prologue, *History of the Mongols*, in Christopher Henry Dawson ed., *The Mongol Mission: Narratives and Letters of the Franciscan Missionaries in Mongolia and China in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955), p. 4).
30. Pratt, "Fieldwork in Common Places," p. 32.
31. Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 25.
32. Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, p. 7.
33. For a brief discussion and description of the *Livre des Merveilles*, see Jean Richard, "La vogue de l'Orient dans la littérature occidentale du Moyen Age," in his *Les relations entre l'Orient et l'Occident au Moyen Age: Etudes et documents* (London: Variorum, 1977), pp. xxi, 560.
34. The example and quote are from Alan T. Gaylord's unpublished paper "Jews and Women in Mandeville: Beneath or Beyond 'Tolerance,'" which he read at the Binghamton conference in October 1993.
35. Nichols, *Representing Reality*, p. 225.
36. Cf. Romm, "Alexander Biologist," p. 19.
37. While the generic distinctions between a list and a catalogue appear to be formal and quantitative (a catalogue has longer entries than a list), for the purposes of my reading of their ideological functions in medieval culture,

- I shall treat both, following Nicholas Howe, as "didactic strategies for ordering large quantities of material" (*The Old English Catalogue Poems* [Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1985], p. 20). See pp. 21–28 for a discussion of the differences between the two, where the list is described as a "naming form" and the catalogue as a "describing form" (p. 22).
38. Howe, *The Old English Catalogue Poems*, p. 27.
 39. Howe, *The Old English Catalogue Poems*, p. 17.
 40. The desire for quiet is not to be underestimated for medievals who had neither windows to block nor air conditioners to drown out the sounds of nature. At §21, a phrase in the Latin hexameter there affirms that in Prester John's land "nulla venena nocent nec garrula rana coaxat" [no poisons harm or noisy frog croaks]. I have written about sound as a form of otherness in "Acoustical Alterity," *Exemplaria* 16.2 (2004): 349–65.
 41. Martin Gosman, "La royaume du Prêtre Jean: l'interprétation d'un bonheur," *L'idée de bonheur au moyen âge: actes du Colloque d'Amiens de mars 1984* (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1990), p. 220.
 42. Reception of wonder-documents like the *Letter*, as Mary Campbell has suggested of the *Wonders of the East*, is not to be understood finally in terms of belief—whether or not early readers "believed" the fantastically distorted world they encountered in fiction. Rather, they are to be understood in rhetorical terms—how the rhetoric presents actuality, how "[i]t constitutes a set of credible schemata" (p. 74). See *The Witness and the Other World*, pp. 74–5.
 43. See Umberto Eco, *The Open Work* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).
 44. Gosman, "Le royaume," p. 221.
 45. Gosman, "Le royaume," p. 216.
 46. Gosman, "Le royaume," p. 220.
 47. Jacques Le Goff, "The Medieval West and the Indian Ocean: An Oneiric Horizon," in his *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 199.
 48. The moralization of monsters recalls an observation about the freezing of utopic space that de Certeau makes in his reading of the Christian Morgenstern poem "Der Lattenzaun" [The picket fence]: in this poem the "Zwischenraum," or in-between space, of the fence is transformed at the hands of an architect into a house; the state intervenes; and the architect flees. De Certeau remarks that the appropriation of the between spaces, their "political freezing," must necessarily result in a fleeing "far away from the blocs of the law" (p. 128). Once frozen, utopic space must be abandoned: forgotten only to be recalled in sadness. See Michel de Certeau, "Spatial Stories," in his *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 127–28.
 49. Louis Marin, *Utopias: The Semiological Play of Textual Spaces*, trans. Robert A. Vollrath (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1984), p. xxvi.
 50. Honorius of Autun, *Elucidarium* 1.13 in PL 172: 1117.
 51. George Boas, in his survey of the patristic and medieval sources on the original condition of man, emphasizes this aspect of prelapsarian existence.

- See his *Essays on Primitivism and Related Ideas in the Middle Ages* (New York: Octagon, 1948).
52. Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 15.9. For evidence of giants, the saint relied on, in addition to scripture and Pliny, the archaeological evidence of outsize bones, which he himself claimed to have seen at Utica.
 53. See, for e.g., the discussion of St. Ambrose's treatment of Adam before and after the Fall in Boas, *Essays on Primitivism*, pp. 42–43.
 54. I do not wish to suggest that medieval views on the supernatural and natural (and preternatural, a category introduced by Aquinas) are monolithic. The tensions, inconsistencies, and variations inhering in such notions, as elaborated over a millennium, certainly militate against generalizing them. My point is more basic: that at the moment the supernatural becomes disengaged from the social, that is, after the Fall, utopia becomes a rhetorical figure of loss, of mourning for some missing unity or copresence. On the complex relations of natural, supernatural, and preternatural, and the effects of these categories on the status of evidence in medieval and renaissance culture, see Lorraine Daston, "Marvelous Facts and Miraculous Evidence in Early Modern Europe," *Critical Inquiry* 18 (1991): 93–124. On the cultural ramifications of the shift from a notion of the supernatural as the objectified values of the social group to subjective, personal ones, see the argument of Peter Brown, "Society and the Supernatural: A Medieval Change," *Daedalus* 104 (Spring 1975): 133–51.
 55. Emphasis mine; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 3 vols. (New York, 1947) 1: 520.
 56. Brown, "Society and the Supernatural," p. 144.
 57. Now we can postulate a utopic dimension to the Wife of Bath's lamenting, in the opening of her tale, the ecclesiastical sanitization of the countryside, the dispelling of the otherworldly creatures who provide in no small measure her own subjectivity (as transformer of a world).
 58. Freud initially defined melancholy oppositionally, that is, he set up a binary relation of melancholy to mourning where the former was the pathological side of the latter, a kind of ceaseless mourning (see Freud's 1917 essay, "Mourning and Melancholia," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey [London: Hogarth, 1953–74] 14: 243–58). However, in his later *The Ego and the Id* (1923), Freud deconstructed the binary he had set up earlier, in the belief that the two could not be so clearly separated in the actual process of grieving. Melancholia came to be seen then as crucial to the work of mourning. See Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, in SE 19: 12–66.
 59. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 61–62.
 60. My description of asceticism as an act of self-discipline, the outcome of which is empowerment or satisfaction, is informed by Geoffrey Galt Harpham's brilliant treatment of the subject in his *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).
 61. The other version of the St. Thomas legend is Odo of Rheim's letter of 1126–35.

62. The Hildesheim MS of the *Letter*, a translation into Latin of the French version of the *Letter*, and hence of late date and heavily interpolated, contains the scene of St. Thomas dispensing the Eucharist at a ritual event held once a year. See "Über eine neue, bisher nicht bekannt gewesene lateinische Redaction des Briefes des Priester Johannes," ed. Friedrich Zarncke, *Berichte über die Verhandlungen der königlich sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig. Philologische-historische Classe* 29 (1877), p. 128, §§47–48. St. Thomas figures more prominently in the French versions than in others, especially the earlier Latin ones. On the French versions and the larger question of the connection of the *Letter* to St. Thomas, see Vsevolod Slessarev, *Prester John: The Letter and the Legend* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1959), esp. pp. 9–31, 60–61. The narrative of Elyseus contains a fuller version of St. Thomas's ritual act. See "Der Priester Johannes," ed. Friedrich Zarncke, *Abhandlungen der philologisch-historischen Classe der königlich sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften* 8 (1883): 123–24, §§15–20.
63. This is an element conserved in several accounts of St. Thomas's miracle-working in India. In Odo of Rheims's letter (§17), as in the Elyseus narrative (§15), instead of a lake a deep river flows around the mountain, access to which was open on the saint's feast day. In addition, there is compelling evidence, consisting of an Ethiopian collection of saints' lives and two other early Eastern accounts, to suggest that this was one of the features of a simple prototype of *De adventu*. See Enrico Cerulli, *Etiopi in Palestina. Storia della comunità etiopica di Gerusalemme*, 2 vols. (Rome: Libreria dello Stato, 1943–47) 1: 177–79. Furthermore, the image of the fluctuating lake may be based on a natural occurrence, the rising and falling of lake Urmia in north-west Iran, where it is said that an island becomes a peninsula. Ugo Monneret de Villard, who first made this connection, also argues, suggestively, that the name Hulna, the site of St. Thomas's shrine (though not the only place claimed as such in the Middle Ages), derives from Urmiyah (Urmī). See Monneret de Villard, *Le leggende orientali sui magi evangelici* (Vatican: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 1952), pp. 153–55.
64. Thus the insistence in these utopic texts that "there is no liar among us." Deception is not compatible with institutionalized indeterminacy. Cf. *Letter*, §§51–52, and Elyseus, §§6, 16 and 22.
65. Victor Turner, "The Center Out There: Pilgrim's Goal," *History of Religions* 12 (1973): 200 [191–230]. See also David Napier's definition of ritual as "the stage for the unification of the plural" (p. 174) in his *Foreign Bodies: Essays in Performance, Art, and Symbolic Anthropology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).
66. Not attested in Zarncke's list of textual variants, "per devium" occurs in Oppert's Latin text (Gustav Oppert, *Der Presbyter Johannes in Sage und Geschichte*. 2nd ed. Berlin, 1870), p. 169. It is tempting to see here, despite the awkwardness of the Latin, the measurement—a kind of imaginary journey across Prester John's lands—back to the tower of Babel tracing a route of trespass, through byways or off the beaten track (de/via). The very narrative that authorizes frontiers to be demarcated also displaces or trespasses over

- them. The founding of an identity must occur somewhere along the path between fixed sites, on the way from one to another. Travel is the work of utopia.
67. Walter of Compiègne, e.g., placed Muhammad's tomb in *Mecha*, while asserting that other writers place it, equally appropriately, in Babel. See his *Otia de Machomete*, ed. R. B. C. Huygens, *Sacris Erudiri* 8 (1956), p. 327. Historical discussions of the legend include Alexandre Eckhardt, "Le cercheil flottant de Mahomet," *Mélanges de philologie romane et de littérature médiévale offerts à Ernest Hoepffner* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1949), pp. 77–88; and John Tolan, "Un cadavre mutilé: le déchirement polémique de Mahomet," *Le Moyen Âge* 104 (1998): 53–72. I am indebted to both essays.
68. This quote from Guido Terrena's *Errores Sarracenorum*, part of the "sextus decimus error," is representative of the widespread Western belief that Islam was a religion of idolatry and that Muslims traveled to Mecca to worship Muhammad's burial place. Even the otherwise sober Ramon Lull insisted that Muslims believed Muhammad to be buried in Mecca. This confusion of Mecca with Madina and of the Hajj with Christian pilgrimage practice was widespread: see, for e.g., the fourteenth-century *Liber Nicolay*, which, like the anonymous *Iniquus Mahometus*, tells the widely known story of Muhammad's seduction of a woman that leads to his murder, dismemberment, his body fed to pigs, except for the foot, which then becomes the sacred object of pilgrimage in Mecca. But there's an interesting twist on this story in the *Liber Nicolay*—the foot is placed in a magnetically suspended iron coffin:

Omnes Sarraceni peregrinationem faciunt ad Mecham et adorabant ibi pedem in archa, pedem Machumeti. Archa vero in aëre detinetur suspense et trahitur a tribus magnis lapidibus calamitis in cathenis pedentibus super eam. Non est enim ex illa parte deaurata archa quem superius calamite tangunt. Credunt multi simplices Sarraceni quod non artificiose sed potius virtuose illud sit factum. (fol. 353v, Bibliothèque Nationale f. lat. 14503)
- Errores Sarracenorum* is in Enrico Cerulli, *Il "Libro della Scala" e la questione delle fonti arabo-spagnole della Divina Commedia* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica, 1949), pp. 491–502 (quote on p. 500). *Iniquus Mahometus*, ed. A. Mancini, is in "Per lo studio della leggenda di Maomette in Occidente," *Rendiconti della R. Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei* 10 (1934): 325–49 (for description of Muhammad's death, see pp. 345–49).
69. Confusion about the Hajj was endemic; see Norman A. Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1960), pp. 217–20.
70. Representing Muhammad as divine or saintly—if antidivine or antisaintly—involved drawing upon a topos in saint's lives: the levitating saint. Examples are plentiful: praying Mary levitates in Hildebert of Lavardin's (ca. 1056–1133) *Vita Beatae Mariae Aegyptiacae* (PL 171: 1327D); Mary of Loreto, who levitates a whole house; St. Francis; and Joseph of Cupertino.

71. For example, Cardinal Rodrigo Ximénez (1170?–1247), archbishop of Toledo, described the Black Stone as magnetic (see his *Historia Arabum*, 3, in *Historia Saracenica qua res gestae Muslimorum inde a Muhammede Arabe. . . Arabice olim exarata a Georgio Elmacino, etc.*, ed. Thomas Erpenius (van Erpe) [Leiden, 1625]).
72. See, e.g., Embrico of Mainz's *Vita Mahumeti*, ed. Fritz Hübner, *Historische Vierteljahrschrift* 29 (1935): 487–88 [441–90]; Walter of Compiègne's *Otia de Machomete*, ed. R. B. C. Huygens, *Sacris Erudiri* 8 (1956): 327 [287–328]; and Andrea da Barberino's *Guerrino il meschino*, ed. and trans. Gloria Allaire, in her essay "Portrayal of Muslims in Andrea da Barberino's *Guerrino il Meschino*," *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam: A Book of Essays* ed. John Victor Tolan (New York: Garland, 1995), pp. 252–53.
73. It should not be surprising that, in the anti-Muslim polemical literature, there is in fact a floating Saracen idol. In the twelfth-century *Chanson d'Antioche*, 20,000 Turks gather around the tent of the "Soudan de Sarmasane" to witness the floating idol of Muhammad held in the air by virtue of four magnets. See *Chanson d'Antioche*, ed. Suzanne Duparc-Quioç (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1976), ll. 4891ff. See n. 74 for references to other floating idols.
74. Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson (Baltimore: Penguin, 1972) 21.7.977–78. Augustine's example should be placed in the context of two early stories of Alexandrian temples: the first in Pliny, who in his *Naturalis Historia* (34.42.148) illustrates the magnetic power of lodestone with the story of a certain architect Timochares who "had begun to use lodestone for constructing the vaulting in the Temple of Arsinoe [wife of Ptolemy II, Philadelphus King of Egypt, 286–247 B.C.] at Alexandria, so that the iron statue contained in it might have the appearance of being suspended in midair; but the project was interrupted by his own death and that of King Ptolemy who had ordered the work to be done in honour of his sister." The second, according to Eckhardt, is found in Rufinus of Aquileia (*Ecclesiastical History* 2.23), where the legend of the floating idol in the Alexandrian Temple of Serapis is told. Eckhardt finds the origin of the floating Muhammad here. This seems reasonable given, as Eckhardt documents, the medieval transmission of similar stories of floating idols: the anonymous *De promissionibus et praedictionibus Dei*, Bede's fourth wonder of the world, the magnetically suspended statue of Bellerophon at Smyrna. For Bede's text, *De septem miraculis mundi ab hominibus factis*, see H. Omont, "Les sept merveilles du monde au Moyen Age," *Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des Chartes* 43 (1882): 40–59. Also, see Eckhardt "Le Cercueil flottant de Mahomet," pp. 79–82, for the story of the floating idol of Serapis as told by the lexicographer Suidras (tenth ca.) and his compiler Cedrenus (eleventh ca.); the poets Claudius and Cassiodorus; and Isidore of Seville (*Etymologiae* 16.1).
75. Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 82.
76. Here Young provides a neat summary of Derrida's concept, originally expounded by Vincent Descombes.

77. Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, trans. L. Scott-Fox and J. M. Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 145.
78. See J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Norton, 1973), pp. 111–14. Defining attributes of the self such as "experiences, impressions, and memory traces may be revised at a later date to fit in with fresh experiences or with the attainment of a new stage of development. They may in that event be endowed not only with a new meaning but also with psychical effectiveness" (p. 111).
79. Jacques Lacan, from his lectures on anxiety, March 7, 1963 and February 27, 1963; qtd. in Samuel Weber, *Return to Freud: Jacques Lacan's Dislocation of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Michael Levine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 161, 160.
80. Qtd. in Weber, *Return to Freud*, p. 164.
81. As Weber writes: "The object *o* is. . . not accessible to symbolization, it is what falls out of the signifying chain, or what it leaves behind. Nor can this strange object be reflected in a mirror, since, like the Möbius strip with which Lacan at times compares it, it has no definable, fixed border; indeed, its structure seems to be that of such a twisted border" (p. 158).

Chapter 6 Monstrous Topoi

1. Audre Lorde, Interview with Pratibha Parmar and Jackie Kay, in *Charting the Journey: Writings by Black and Third World Women*, ed. Shabnam Grewal, Jackie Kay, Liliane Landor, Gail Lewis, and Pratibha Parmar (London: Sheba Feminist Publishers, 1988), p. 130.
2. Stuart Hall, "Minimal Selves," *Identity/The Real Me: Post-Modernism and the Question of Identity*, ed. L. Appignanesi, ICA Documents 6 (London: ICA, 1987), p. 44.
3. I borrow the words from Gilles Deleuze, "Michel Tournier and the World without Others," *The Logic of Sense* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 301–321. Deleuze uses the phrase to indicate the function of the other in its capacity to fill the world with possibilities: "The Other, as structure, is the expression of a possible world" (p. 308). However, near the end of "Michel Tournier," the phrase comes to denote that which is antithetical to a perverse world, in that the pervert, living in a world without others, lives without the possible. I would stress quite the opposite: utopia's intrinsic relation to perversion renders it entirely open to the other, to the possible.
4. Michel de Certeau, "Spatial Stories," p. 115.
5. Georges Van Den Abbeele, *Travel as Metaphor: From Montaigne to Rousseau* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), p. xvii.
6. Louis Marin, "Frontiers of Utopia: Past and Present," *Critical Inquiry* 19 (1993): 415 [397–420].
7. A difficult journey perhaps of a year and a half, the time, Otto reports, that it took prelates from Armenia, who were meeting with the Pontiff at the same time as Hugh, to make "the wearisome journey." See Otto of Freising,

- The Two Cities: A Chronicle of Universal History to the Year 1146 A.D.*, trans. Charles Christopher Mierow, ed. Austin P. Evans and Charles Knapp (New York: Octagon, 1966), p. 441.
8. Ottonis episcopi Frisingensis, *Chronica sive historia de duabus civitatibus*, ed. Roger Wilmans (Leipzig: Hiersemann, 1925), in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, ed. Georg Heinrich Pertz (Hannover: Hiersemann, 1868) 20: 266. In English, see *The Two Cities*, p. 443.
 9. The idea of a frozen river as an aid for crossing is an obvious borrowing from the legendary Stragan of the Alexandrian romances. See, e.g., Friedrich Pfister, ed., *Der Alexanderroman des Archipresbyters Leo* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1913), p. 90. Previous readers have seen the unfrozen river only as a device "picked arbitrarily and without any natural justification to stand in the way of the advancing king" (Vsevolod Slessarev, *Prester John: The Letter and the Legend* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1959], p. 29).
 10. As Otto reports: "Audivimus eum periculum transmarinae ecclesiae post captam Edissam lacrimabiliter conquerentem et ab hoc Alpes transcendere ad regem Romanorum et Francorum pro flagitando auxilio volentem" [we heard him making pitiful lament concerning the peril of the church beyond the sea since the capture of Edessa, and saying that he was minded on this account to cross the Alps to the king of the Romans and the Franks to ask for aid].
 11. Michel de Certeau, "Spatial Stories," p. 128.
 12. Marin, "Frontiers of Utopia," p. 414.
 13. The image of the bridge often performs, while maintaining a space between two states, a spiritual function. In John Gobi's *Scala coeli* (Strasbourg, 1483), e.g., a knight works through his doubts regarding taking up the cross when he dreams of himself on a bridge suspended high above a deep canyon (no. 401). As a space of hesitation, bridges are especially perilous. In a Franciscan exemplum, a Norman canon lawyer's lack of spiritual commitments cost him his life. As the lawyer was crossing a bridge over the Seine at Rouen, he was levitated in the air and carried all the way to the church of St. Marie de Près where he was dropped to his death. See *Liber exemplorum ad usum praedicatorum*, ed. A. G. Little (Aberdeen, 1908), pp. 41–42 n. 67.
 14. Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 26; emphasis added.
 15. "5. Talis est consuetudo terrae illius, quia non sunt ibi nisi tria iudicia dampnationis, ut dampnati conburantur aut in aquis demergantur vel fers ad devorandum tradantur, hoc est ursis, leonibus, leopardis. Ibi etiam non effunditur sanguis humanus alienis christianis. 6. Quia terra veratatis est, ideo nemo mentitur nec iurat, nisi prout decet. Quod si quis fecerit aut fornicatur aut adulteratur, secundum praedictam legem dampnatur. Etiam talis est consuetudo terrae illius, ut nemo ducat uxorem ante 30 annos; et nemo accedit ad uxorem propriam nisi ter in anno pro sobole creando" [5. It is customary in those lands that are only three sentences: the condemned are burned, or drowned, or given over to wild animals—bears, lions, leopards—to be devoured. Thus no blood is spilt of these wayward Christians. 6. Because this

- is a land of truth, no one lies or takes an oath unless it is proper. Because if anyone should do that, or fornicate, or commit adultery, the aforementioned second punishment applies. And it is customary that no one marries a wife before the age of thirty, and no one approached his own wife but three times a year for the purpose of creating offspring].
16. Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," in his *The Content and the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 14.
 17. Chaldean is the language of Nestorian Christians living in and beyond the Islamic Empire.
 18. Tracking *Quicumque vult* poses some difficulties, given the date of the Elyseus narrative. Not found in the Vulgate, the *initia* of the psalm, according to the *Repertorium hymnologicum*, ed. Ulysse Chevalier (Louvain: 1892–1912; Bruxelles, 1920–21), and *Initia carminum*, ed. Hans Walther (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959–), are attested only as early as the fourteenth century: *Quicumque vult animam firmiter salvare, / tres personas* (and variants); *Quicumque vult salvus esse, / ipsum fidem est necesse* (sixteenth ca.); and *Quicumque vult sortem uranicam, / corde credat fidem cat* (fourteenth ca. MS). Mandeville, however, may hold the key: in the Egerton MS, a story of Athanasius's quarrel with the pope centers on the story of the psalm:

In this city [Trebizond] lies Saint Athanasius, that was bishop of Alexandria and he made the psalm *Quicumque vult* [*Quicumque vult saluus esse etc.* in the Paris MS (f. 44v, Bibliothèque Nationale Nouv. Acq. Franç. 4515)]. This Athanasius was a great doctor of divinity, and for he preached more profoundly of holy writ than other did, therefore he was accused to the Pope of heresy; and the Pope sent for him and gert [put] him in prison. And whilst he was in prison, he made the psalm before-said and sent it to the Pope and said, "If I be an heretic," quoth he, "then is all heresy that here is written, for this is my trowth." And when the Pope saw that, he said it was all wholly our belief and gert deliver him out of prison and commanded that the psalm be said ilk a day at prime; and he held Athanasius for a good man and a holy. (*Mandeville's Travels: Texts and Translations*, ed. Malcolm Letts [London: Hakluyt Society, 1953; 2nd ser., no. 101] 1: 103–104)

Another candidate, at least chronologically, is a quite popular twelfth-century drinking poem, *Quicumque vult esse bonus frater, / bibat semel bis ter quater!* See *Poésies populaires latines du Moyen Age*, ed. Edélestand du Mériel (Paris: F. Didot, 1847), p. 202 n. 2.

19. The term is de Certeau's; see his "Montaigne's 'Of Cannibals': The Savage 'I,'" *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 69.
20. See de Certeau's discussion of travel narrative in "Ethno-Graphy: Speech, or the Space of the Other: Jean de Léry," *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 209–243.

21. Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, p. 219. On the ideology of crusade, de Certeau cites Alphonse Dupront, "Espace et humanisme," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 8 (1946): 19 [7–104].
22. See Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16 (1986): 22–23 [22–27].
23. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 26.
24. De Certeau, *The Writing of History*, p. 219.
25. Text in Friedrich Zarncke, "Der Priester Johannes," *Abhandlungen der philologisch-historischen Classe der königlich sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften* 7 (1879): 941–44 [831–1028]. There is considerable disagreement on the identity of the recipient of this papal letter: see Richard Hennig, "Neue Forschungen zur Sage des Priesterkönigs," *Universitas* 4 (1949): 1261–65; Constantine Marinescu, "Le Prêtre Jean, son pays. Explication de son nom," *Académie Roumaine, Bulletin de la Section Historique* 10 (1923): 77–78; *The book of Ser Marco Polo, the Venetian: concerning the kingdoms and marvels of the East*, trans. and ed. Henry Yule (3rd ed. rev. by Henri Cordier; New York: Scribner, 1903) 1: 231; C. F. Beckingham, *The Achievements of Prester John* (Oxford: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1966), pp. 11–13; and Zarncke, "Der Priester Johannes," pp. 945–46.
26. In an interview with Michel Foucault, the editors of *Hérodote* provocatively claim that geographers and travelers, in their use of the inventory or catalogue, are charged with the strategic function of collecting information, "which in its raw state does not have much interest and is not in fact usable except by power. What power needs is not science but a mass of information which its strategic position can enable it to exploit." Travelers are intelligence-gatherers, and their work involves in part collecting and mapping information that is exploitable by powers such as the papacy, merchant clans, and military strategists. To the editors' comment, Foucault responds with an "anecdote": "A specialist in documents of the reign of Louis XIV discovered while looking at seventeenth-century diplomatic correspondence that many narratives that were subsequently repeated as travelers' tales of all sorts of marvels, incredible plants and monstrous animals, were actually coded reports. They were precise accounts of the military state of the countries traversed, their economic resources, markets, wealth and possible diplomatic relations. So that what many people ascribe to the persistent naiveté of certain eighteenth-century naturalists and geographers were in reality extraordinarily precise reports whose key has apparently now been deciphered" ("Questions on Geography," *Power/Knowledge* [New York: Pantheon, 1980], p. 75). The identity of the scholar to whom Foucault refers remains, to the best of my knowledge, unknown. The notion, however, that traveler's tales derive their ideological value from turning marvels into coded figures in the service of political and economic power accords well with the more general claim advanced here that any translation of otherness into the terms of the same necessarily involves a bringing back or return of knowledge, which can then be put to cultural use. To what extent do such codes operate in the

- Letter of Prester John?* Though well beyond the bounds of this study, the question has prompted me to consider otherness as born of political expedience. Considering the cultural valuation of alterity would lead, e.g., to further research on the production of medieval maps. Did merchants intentionally disseminate maps depicting sea-serpents and other beasts at the borders of their trade routes in order to simultaneously discourage exploration and establish mercantile monopolies?
27. Georges Van Den Abbeele, *Travel as Metaphor*, p. xviii.
 28. Van Den Abbeele, *Travel as Metaphor*, p. xvii.
 29. Van Den Abbeele, *Travel as Metaphor*, pp. xviii–xix.
 30. See James Clifford, "Travelling Cultures," *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 96–112.
 31. Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City," *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 107.
 32. Albéric of Trois Fontaines, *Chronica*, MGH 23: 853–54.
 33. Cicero, *Tópica*, trans. H. M. Hubbell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 382; qtd. and trans. in Van Den Abbeele, *Travel as Metaphor*, p. xxi. Translation is modified from both.
 34. Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 7.
 35. See Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, p. 129.
 36. Ned Lukacher, *Primal Scenes: Literature, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 27.
 37. On the linkage of cultural foundation to the failure of repression and the work of memory in epic narratives, see Elizabeth J. Bellamy, *Translations of Power: Narcissism and the Unconscious in Epic History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992). For a brilliant account of the work of beginning in medieval English culture, see D. Vance Smith, *The Book of the Incipit: Beginnings in the Fourteenth Century* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).
 38. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, in SE 21: 64–145.
 39. Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, p. 70.
 40. Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, p. 69. Even in the act of recuperation and in the work of reconstruction (as in reconstituting the ego), there remains an element of disaster. That is, in Freud's own myth about psychoanalysis, the analyst qua archaeologist may not so much be discovering a primordial condition of existence as discovering what W. R. Bion has called "a primitive catastrophe" (see W. R. Bion, "On Arrogance," in his *Second Thoughts: Selected Papers on Psycho-Analysis* [London: Jason Aronson, 1967], p. 88). As I suggested in the preceding section, the transformational energy vital to utopia is inextricable from the violence of catastrophe.
 41. The trope of the analyst as archaeologist is recurrent in Freud. It appears in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess (December 21, 1899), *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, 1887–1904*, ed. and trans. Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1985), pp. 391–92; in *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (1905), SE 7: 12; and in "Constructions in

- Analysis" (1937), *SE* 23: 259–60. Indeed, as Henry Sussman notes, "it was not by accident that Freud maintained a collection of ancient figurines in the apartment at Berggasse 19 where he also kept his office" (Henry Sussman, *Psyche and Text: The Sublime and the Grandiose in Literature, Psychopathology, and Culture* [Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993], p. 47). On the linkage of the psychoanalytic process and Freud's antiquities collection as modalities of recuperating the material of the past on the way to constructing a functional subjectivity, see John Forrester, "Mille e tre: Freud and Collecting," *The Cultures of Collecting*, ed. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 224–51.
42. See Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), *SE* 5: 574.
43. J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, p. 318. Laplanche and Pontalis here direct the reader to Freud's emphasis on the shifting natures of fantasy in "A Child is Being Beaten" (1919) and the Schreber case (1911).
44. Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, p. 318.
45. Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality," *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan (New York: Methuen, 1986), p. 26.
46. Barry Curtis and Claire Pajackowska, "'Getting There': Travel, Time and Narrative," *Travellers' Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement*, ed. George Robertson, Melinda Mash, Lisa Tickner, Jon Bird, Barry Curtis, and Tim Putnam (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 199.
47. *Mandeville's Travels: Texts and Translations*, ed. Malcolm Letts (London: Hakluyt Society, 1953; 2nd ser., no. 101) 1: 214.
48. *Mandeville's Travels*, p. 215.
49. Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, p. 318.
50. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1989), p. 45.
51. On play as response to trauma, see Jacob A. Arlow, "Trauma, Play, Perversion," *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* 42 (1987): 31–44; and Otto Fenichel, "On Acting," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 15 (1946): 144–60.
52. Sigmund Freud, "Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning" (1911), in *SE* 12: 222.
53. See D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (New York: Routledge, 1971). The connection of Althusser's imaginary to Winnicott's "spaces of play" is, especially as far as ideological practice is concerned, much stronger than any association of the perhaps more obvious linkage of Althusser with Lacan's imaginary. On the comparison of Althusser's and Lacan's conception of subjectivity and the imaginary, see Grahame Lock, "Subject, Interpellation, and Ideology," *Postmodern Materialism and the Future of Marxist Theory: Essays in the Althusserian Tradition*, ed. Antonio Callari and David F. Ruccio (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), pp. 78–80.
54. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes toward an Investigation)," *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), p. 163.

55. Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," p. 162.
56. Stephen Heath, "Lessons from Brecht," *Screen* 15 (1974): 114 [103–128]; the quote from Althusser is from his "Marxism and Humanism," *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1977), p. 234.
57. Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," p. 234.
58. I borrow the terms that Benjamin uses to describe photography, and later montage, in its ideological formulation. See Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: New Left Books, 1973), p. 7.
59. See Nicholas Howe, *The Old English Catalogue Poems* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1985), pp. 30–32; Fritz Saxl, "Illustrated Medieval Encyclopedias," in his *Lectures* (London: Warburg Institute, 1957) 1: 228–54; and Simone Viarre, "Le commentaire ordonné du monde dans quelques sommes scientifiques des XIIe et XIIIe siècles," *Classical Influences on European Culture, A.D. 500–1500*, ed. R. R. Bolgar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 203–215.
60. Umberto Eco, "The New Middle Ages," *On Signs*, ed. Marshall Blonsky (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. 502.
61. Eco lists the "Objects contained in the treasure of Charles IV of Bohemia: the skull of St Adalbert, the sword of St Stephen, a thorn from the crown of Jesus, pieces of the cross, tablecloth from the Last Supper, one of St Margaret's teeth, a piece of bone from St Vitalis, one of St Sophia's ribs, the chin of St Eobanus, a whale rib, an elephant tusk, Moses' rod, clothing of the Virgin. Objects from the treasure of the Duc de Berry: a stuffed elephant, a basilisk, manna found in the desert, a unicorn horn, a coconut, St Joseph's engagement ring" ("Towards a New Middle Ages," p. 502 n. 3).
62. Patti White, *Gatsby's Party: The System and the List in Contemporary Narrative* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1992), pp. 108–109.
63. White, *Gatsby's Party*, p. 165 n. 20; Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 193.
64. I account here only for the interpolations in the Latin text. Interpolations to the vernacular MSS, especially the late ones, are needless to say extensive. Common to these later interpolations is the kind of information found in lapidaries. See, e.g., the interpolation in BM Egerton 1781 (152r), an Irish text of the fifteenth century, which introduces a list of gems and their properties. For the Irish text, see David Greene, "The Irish Versions of the Letter of Prester John," *Celtica* 2 (1952): 125 [117–45].
65. The twelfth-century MS Berlin 956 (fols. 24–25), a lapidary ascribed to St. Jerome, opens with the description of a journey to India, the land of the carbuncle, emerald, and other gemstones, a place so remote that navigating the Red Sea alone takes six months, while crossing the ocean to India requires another year. For William of Auvergne and Albertus Magnus, India was the proper site of the fantastic precisely because gems of marvelous virtue were easily found there. See Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1923) 2: 236–37.
66. A transcription of the fourteenth-century MS appears in *Fire og fyrretve for en stor Deel forhen utrykte Præver af oldnordisk Sprog og Literatur*, ed. Konrad Gislason

- (Copenhagen, 1860), pp. 416–18; the Italian tale appears in an edition of Carlo Gualteruzzi, *Il Novellino. Le cento Novelle antike* (Bologna, 1525). A French translation of the Icelandic text, along with the Italian version, appears in Reinhold Koehler, "La nouvelle italienne du Pretre Jean et de l'Empereur Frédéric et un récit islandais," *Romania* 5 (1879): 76–79.
67. Koehler, "La nouvelle italienne," p. 77; translation mine.
 68. Koehler, "La nouvelle italienne," pp. 76–78; translations mine (with the assistance of Professor M. Roy Harris).
 69. The ideological significance of gift exchange is most famously discussed by Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W. D. Halls (New York: Norton, 1990). See also Jacques Derrida's reading of Mauss and the problem of exchange in *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 34–70.
 70. Frederick Turner, *Beyond Geography: The Western Spirit against the Wilderness* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983), p. 89. In his polemical book, Turner here suggests that attitudes toward gems and metals mark important differences between cultures. The crusaders, Marco Polo, and Columbus were united, he suggests, in their quest for things: "gold, silver, and stones, [which] like technology, are pathetic substitutes for a lost world, a lost spirit life" (p. 90).
 71. Or to follow the Marxist perspective: things imprison subjects through their embodiment and dissimulation of social relations and the forms such relations take.
 72. Wilhelm von Humboldt, "Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluss auf die geistige Entwicklung des Menschengeschlechts (1830–1835)," in *Einleitung zum Kawiwerk*, vol. 7 of *Wilhelm von Humboldts Werke*, ed. Albert Leitzmann (Berlin: B. Behr, 1907), p. 60; Emphasis added.
 73. Fredric Jameson, "Of Islands and Trenches: Neutralization and the Production of Utopian Discourse," *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971–1986*, vol. 2 *Syntax of History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), pp. 80–81.
 74. Sergei M. Eisenstein, "Literature and Cinema: Reply to a Questionnaire" (1928), *Writings, 1922–34*, vol. 1 of *Selected Works*, ed. and trans. Richard Taylor (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 96.
 75. Stephen Heath, "Lessons from Brecht," *Screen* 15 (1974): 112 [103–128].
 76. Eisenstein, "The Montage of Attractions" (1923), *Writings, 1922–34*, p. 34.
 77. See Eisenstein, "The Montage of Film Attractions" (1924), p. 40; and "Literature and Cinema: Reply to a Questionnaire," *Writings, 1922–34*, pp. 95–99.
 78. Eisenstein, "The Montage of Film Attractions," p. 49.
 79. I am reminded here of Brecht's treatment of Chinese painting, a fragment of which Stephen Heath quotes and discusses: "Chinese painting leaves room, the eye can wander, dispersed: 'the things represented play the role of elements which could exist separately and independently, yet they form a

- whole through the relations they sustain among themselves on the paper without, however, this whole being indivisible.' Not an organic unity—a meaning—but a series of meanings and remeanings. . . a multi-perspective without the fixity of depth. Instead of representations, displacements—of eye, of subject (in both senses of the term)[—]a materiality of texture which baffles the 'innocence' of reflection" (Heath, "Lessons from Brecht," 105).
80. In Georges Bataille's notion of *dépense* (unproductive expenditure), his theory of the need for absolute loss, is implicit a critique of any materialist enterprise (like montage) that seeks some order of reality beyond the phenomenal. While, in a moment, I draw upon Bataille's notion of Christianity's "substantializing" of the sacred through limitless idealization, I would emphasize precisely what Bataille leaves out of his account: the harnessing, to human and social ends, of the agitational energy of ideality. See Bataille, "The Notion of Expenditure," *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. and trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), pp. 116–29.
 81. Isidore of Seville (*Etymologiae* 12.2.25–28) idealized the dog. No doubt his source was Solinus (*Collectanea rerum memorabilium*, ed. Theodor Mommsen [Berlin, 1895] 14.11).
 82. In the Middle Ages, the meaning of the salamander was intensely ambivalent. From Pliny (*Naturalis Historia* 29.76), the medieval bestiary and *Physiologus* received the idea that the salamander lives in fire, and poisons everything with which it comes into contact. See the bestiaries published in *Mélanges d'archéologie, d'histoire et de littérature*, ed. Charles Cahier and Arthur Martin (Paris: Mme Ve Poussielgue-Rusand, 1847–56) 3: 271–74. See also *Le Bestiaire: Das Thierbuch des normannischen Dichters Guillaume le Clerc*, ed. Robert D. Reinsch (Leipzig: O. R. Reisland, 1892), pp. 33ff. Against this tradition, Isidore of Seville (*Etymologiae* 12.4.36) and others took the salamander for a symbol of Christ or another eminent martyr: the fire has the power of purification, of resurrection (as the phoenix rises from the ashes). Konrad of Megenberg bound the two traditions together (see Konrad von Megenberg, *Das Buch der Natur*, ed. Hugo Schulz [Griefswald: J. Abel, 1897], pp. 234–44). He reports that Pope Alexander III was obsessed with obtaining the wondrous fireproof garments made from the salamander, at the same time that he was emphasizing the purifying capacity of the fire, in which the soul would be cleansed just like the salamander. The pope seems attracted to both its marvelous and its allegorical dimensions. In any case, salamanders (asbestos) proved a stock feature of Eastern wonders. See, e.g., Fulcher of Chartres, *Historia Hierosolymitana* 3.13, where the animal is listed among "The Different Kinds of Beasts and Serpents in the Land of the Saracens," and where there is an echo of the Holy Trinity in the discussion of the salamander who "has three names but in body is one and the same"; see also, Marco Polo, *The Travels*, trans. Ronald Latham (New York: Penguin, 1958), pp. 89–90. *Salamander* is one of several Greek loanwords in the *Letter*, and should not be taken as evidence of a Greek original. Alexander A. Vasiliev (*Prester John: Legend and History*, ts. Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and

Collection, Washington, DC, undated, p. 90) argued against the Latin origin of the document based on the presence of Graecisms, and added, for good measure, that references to the salamander and its *pellicula* (fleece) suggest knowledge of and intimacy with the Byzantine silk industry. Vsevolod Slessarev rightly called the references "too tenuous to be of much importance" (*Prester John: The Letter and the Legend* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1959], p. 47).

83. Modern explanations of this decidedly incongruous line are unsatisfactory. Zarncke tried to explain it as yet another device highlighting the prosperity of India. It works, he suggested, by downplaying the value of horses, animals considered quite precious in the West (Zarncke, "Der Priester Johannes," p. 928). But, even as Zarncke himself notes, later versions of the *Letter* ignored such subtlety, changing the line to: "equous habemus multos et velocissimos." Slessarev (p. 49) chooses the *lectio simplicior*, reading the line as the author's sudden awareness that, amidst all the marvelous possessions, the fact remained that India imported its horses, a fact that travelers (such as Marco Polo, Jordanus de Séverac, John of Montecorvino) and merchants alike could take for granted. The earliest mention of India's importation of horses seems to be Cosmas Indicopleustes (see *The Christian Topography of Cosmas, an Egyptian Monk*, trans. and ed. J. W. McCrindle [London: Hakluyt Society, 1897], p. 372). Surely Slessarev's account seems satisfactory as an explanation for the appearance of such a line, but what is overlooked is the way the text turns an ordinary animal into a rare commodity.
84. The dual focus in utopic discourse on the local and the global is perfectly compatible with a method of hypercitation. The *Letter*, as assemblage of citation, shares an epistemophilic overdrive with montage composition. Indeed, Eisenstein himself insists that a "glut of citations is just one more manifestation of the principle of montage" (see Jacques Aumont, *Montage Eisenstein*, trans. Lee Hildreth, Constance Penley, and Andrew Ross [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987], p. 11). Compare also Walter Benjamin's self-description of his *Arcades Project* as that which "has to develop to the highest degree the art of citing without quotation marks. Its theory is intimately related to that of montage"; see "N (On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress)," *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 458.
85. Fredric Jameson, "Pleasure: A Political Issue," *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986*, vol. 2 *Syntax of History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 73.
86. A provocative psychoanalytic reading of the prescriptive power of narrative to override the trauma of disempowerment is offered by Duncan Barfield, "Reading Perversion," *British Journal of Psychotherapy* 9 (1993): 336-45. If I read him correctly, Barfield is suggesting that, in general, perverse narrative structures—such as utopia—work, through exercising rigorous control over descriptive detail, to overcome and reverse traumatic experience. I am tempted then to make this argument: Prester John's total domination over

the world, continually stressed in copious narrative detail where his wealth and power are described as unequaled, is in effect reversed to fulfill a Western European desire. The *Letter* serves as the vehicle to move the locus of power from Prester John to the West: a *translatio imperii* of sorts. The trauma of disempowerment, inflicted by the Saracens and by Prester John (both placing the West in a position of inferiority) is transmuted into triumph, into control. Such is the trajectory and aim of perversion. The perverse, indeed utopic, answer to the challenge of counting the stars and the sands is to insist that it can be done.

87. See Percy Ernst Schramm, *Herrschaftszeichen und Staatssymbolik* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1955) 2: 663.
88. Steven Shavero, *Passion and Excess: Blanchot, Bataille, and Literary Theory* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1990), p. 20.
89. Bataille refers to the Grail: is there a hint of the Grail in the image of the golden and silver vases? Ulrich Kniefelkamp raises this possibility; see *Die Suche nach dem Reich des Priestkönigs Johannes* (Gelsenkirchen, Germany: Müller, 1986), p. 158 n.125.
90. Georges Bataille, "The Sacred," *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, ed. and trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), p. 242.
91. Sergei Eisenstein, "The Structure of the Film," *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harvest, 1949), p. 170 [150-178].
92. Eisenstein, "Structure of the Film," pp. 173, 167.
93. Eisenstein, "Structure of the Film," p. 172.
94. Walter Benjamin, "N (On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress)," p. 461.
95. Considering the ambiguity and instability here in psychoanalytic terms, I would suggest that they correspond to the latent ambiguity of objects that are, in Klein's sense, not yet fully mastered. In other words, facing a world of good objects and bad objects means that, as Foucault puts it, "ambivalence is established as a natural dimension of affectivity" (Michel Foucault, *Mental Illness and Psychology*, trans. Alan Sheridan [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987], p. 20). The potential here for anxiety is great; loss of an object (Holy Land) necessitates the search for a substitute (Prester John's kingdom); the successful search is ecstatic: "In considering the dynamics of the process, the concept of anxiety is clearly needed. Melanie Klein has laid great stress on the fact that it is dread of the original object itself, as well as the loss of it, that leads to the search for a substitute. But there is also a word needed for the emotional experience of finding the substitute, and it is here that the word *ecstasy* may be useful" (Marion Milner, "The Role of Illusion in Symbol Formation," *Transitional Objects and Potential Spaces: Literary Uses of D. W. Winnicott*, ed. Peter L. Rudnytsky [New York: Columbia University Press, 1993], p. 17).
96. Kaja Silverman's deconstruction of the dominant psychoanalytic paradigm of cinematic identification (the experience of the film as introjective, ideopathic) was the impetus for my reading of the ecstatic dynamics of the

montage-list and its centrality to the utopic project. Silverman was the first to connect Eisenstein to the production of what she calls "political ecstasy"; see *The Threshold of the Visible World* (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 83–121. She extends her earlier work on heteropathic identification in the dynamic of sympathy; see *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 205–207, 264–70.

Postscript

- * It is better to approach the best than to arrive there (trans. mine). Otto von Freising, *Gesta Fredrici* 1.4.
- † Oscar Wilde, "The Soul of Man under Socialism," *The Soul of Man under Socialism and Selected Critical Prose*, ed. Linda Dowling (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 141 [127–60].
- †† J. R. Platt, *The Step to Man* (New York: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 1966), p. 196. This sentence, famous because of Buckminster Fuller's citation of it in his *Utopia or Oblivion: The Prospects for Mankind* (New York: Overlook Press, 1969), is often wrongly attributed to Fuller.
- 1. Leszek Kolakowski, "The Death of Utopia Reconsidered," *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, vol. 4, ed. Sterling M. McMurrin (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1983), p. 237 [229–47].
- 2. Kolakowski, "Death of Utopia," pp. 241–42.
- 3. On masochism as a political strategy, see Theodor Reik, *Masochism and Modern Man* (New York: Rinehart, 1942). I have argued for a political reading of masochism, specifically its centrality as an index of the postwar American cultural and critical agenda; see my "Masochism in America," *American Literary History* 14.2 (2002): 389–411.
- 4. See Nancy Gibbs, "Apocalypse Now," *Time Magazine* (July 1, 2002).
- 5. Qtd. in Austin Miles, *Setting the Captives Free: Victims of the Church Tell Their Stories* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1990). Watt has denied ever saying this.
- 6. Current rabbinical law forbids Jews from setting foot on the Temple Mount unless they are ritually purified; the ashes of the red heifer had been required by ancient Hebrews to purify worshippers who went into the Temple for prayer.
- 7. Rod Dreher, "Red-Heifer Days," *National Review Online*, April 11, 2002, <<http://www.nationalreview.com/dreher/dreher041102.asp>>.
- 8. Herbert Marcuse, "The End of Utopia," *Five Lectures: Psychoanalysis, Politics, and Utopia* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), p. 62 [62–82].
- 9. Albert Toynbee, *A Study of History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), qtd. in Robert Lindner, *Prescription for Rebellion* (New York: Rinehart, 1952), p. 213.
- 10. See Brendan O'Neill, "The Never-Ending Search," *BBC News Magazine*, November 26, 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/4044765.stm>. Karl Mannheim has emphasized that the disappearance of utopic thinking "ultimately would mean the decay of human will" and that

it "would lead us to a 'matter-of-factness' . . . a static state of affairs in which man himself becomes no more than a thing," having been reduced to "a mere creature of impulses" (Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, trans. Louis Wirth and Edward Shils [New York: Harcourt Brace, 1985], pp. 262, 262–63).

- 11. See Pierre Krijbolder, *Crucifixion and Turin Shroud Mysteries Solved*, trans. John Hagen (Rotterdam: FirstQ Press, 1999).

Appendix

- 1. Translators of the *Letter* include Sir E. Denison Ross ("Prester John and the Empire of Ethiopia," in *Travel and Travellers of the Middle Ages*, ed. Arthur Percival Newton [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1926]), who translates only 35 of the 100 paragraphs into which Friedrich Zarncke ("Der Priester Johannes," *Abhandlungen der philologisch-historischen Classe der königlich sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften* 7 [1879]: 831–1028) divided the text; Robert Silverberg (*The Realm of Prester John* [New York: Doubleday, 1972]), who follows Ross's text very closely and adds nothing to it; George Boas (*Essays on Primitivism and Related Ideas in the Middle Ages* [New York: Octagon, 1948]), who made a partial translation of twenty-four paragraphs; and Alexander A. Vasiliev (*Prester John: Legend and History*, ts. Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Washington, D. C. [ca. 1950]), whose unpublished fuller translation unfortunately does not discriminate interpolations (marked here B or C) from original text (marked O). I have used the best of the translations—Boas's and Vasiliev's—as guides, carefully following, when at times they did not, Zarncke's Latin text. There are also translations into German by Ulrich Knefelkamp (*Die Suche nach dem Reich des Priesterkönigs Johannes* [Gelsenkirchen: Müller, 1986]) and by A.-D. von den Brincken ("Prester Johannes, Dominus Domantium—ein Wunsch-Weltbild des 12. Jahrhunderts," *Ornamenta Ecclesiae: Kunst und Künstler der Romanik*, ed. Anton Legner [Köln: Böhlau, 1985], pp. 83–97); one into Italian by Gioia Zaganelli (*La Lettera del Prete Gianni* [Parma: Pratiche, 1990]); and one into Danish by Allan Karker (*Jon Præst: Presbyter Johannes' brev til Emanuel Komnenos, synoptisk udgivet på latin, dansk og svensk* [Copenhagen: Tutein & Koch, 1978]).

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