

# Constructing Prejudice in the Middle Ages and the Repercussions of Racism Today

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AS MEDIEVALISTS WHO are Puerto Rican and Jewish Italian American respectively, we have experienced and witnessed sexism, prejudice, and racism in the classroom, conferences, academic institutions, and society in general.<sup>1</sup> These experiences have pushed us to study the Middle Ages with a critical eye towards injustice.<sup>2</sup> Beginning with the premise that Christian European literature constructs a dichotomy between Christianity and paganism shows that many medieval texts justify Christian aggression against Saracens, Muslims, Jews, and even other Christians (they were not Christians in the right way).<sup>3</sup> A Christian, European culture was constructed by an ideology that paganism is bad and must be subjugated by good Christian men, and in the late Middle Ages, this developed into an apparatus that diminished human value through the construction of racial, religious, and migrant differences. The development of the transatlantic slave trade is key to understanding the construction of prejudice in the late Middle Ages and its role as a progenitor of modern racism.

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1. Daniel and Nahir have very different experiences on prejudice and racism. Although Daniel is a white man, he has experienced antisemitism, but these instances have been much less frequent and pervasive than Nahir's experiences with racism. More to the point, Daniel has been witness to racist interactions against Nahir from other academics who treat her differently than him.

2. Because the majority of the essays in this issue deal with gender inequality, we will concentrate our efforts on examining racial inequality.

3. We specify Christian European texts so as not to lose sight that many non-Christian communities, including Muslims and Jews, lived in Europe throughout the Middle Ages and their literary production is also European.

Let us begin with the renewed practice of slavery in the fifteenth century. Although slavery was common in ancient times, the institution was almost extinct by the late medieval period. This would be the case until 1441, when Antam Gonçalves captured ten Africans and brought them to Prince Henry of Portugal. To the Portuguese, the Africans' blackness signaled their non-Christian status, which justified enslaving the men and dividing them among themselves. By 1455, ten percent of Lisbon's population was African. Heather Andrea Williams writes that

[The Portuguese] employed Christianity as a justification for capturing people and taking them to Europe. . . . Prince Henry asserted that the captives in Portugal would be better off because their souls would be saved through Christianity, and he thought it his duty as a Christian to evangelize and take the message of Christ to the so-called infidels and pagans. Early on, those who participated in the Atlantic slave trade employed Christianity, a religion that arguably promoted a gospel of liberation, to justify enslaving others. This Christian justification of the enslavement of Africans continued as long as slavery lasted in the Americas.<sup>4</sup>

The Portuguese used the color of the skin of Africans as proof that they were not Christian and used their pagan status to justify their dehumanization and enslavement. Approximately twelve million Africans were kidnapped, over two million died in the middle passage, and the rest were divided among the different colonial powers of the Americas.

In this essay, we survey Christian medieval texts that demonstrate the arguments used to justify slavery. The medieval texts include several twelfth- and thirteenth-century *chansons de geste* and romances, including the *Chanson de Roland* (Old French, ca. 1100), Chrétien de Troyes's *Yvain ou le Chevalier au Lion* (ca. 1170), and the *Roman de Silence* (after 1250); we also consider the *Historia regum Britanniae* by Geoffrey of Monmouth (ca. 1100-1155), *Topographia Hibernica* by Gerald of Wales (ca. 1146-1223), the *Anticlaudianus* of Alain de Lille (ca. 1182-1184), and

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4. Heather Andrea Williams, *American Slavery: A Very Short Introduction* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 7.

the *Man of Law's Tale* by Geoffrey Chaucer (ca. 1342-1400).<sup>5</sup> The Third Branch of the *Mabinogi* (*Manawydan fab Llŷr*, ca. 1100-1300), however, draws attention to violence against migrants.<sup>6</sup>

At present, racial, religious, and migrant statuses contribute to the dehumanization of people of color in contemporary Western societies. Moreover, white supremacists have and are appropriating the Middle Ages to justify the belief that medieval Europe was white and that Europeans came together to defend themselves against the East.<sup>7</sup> Their aim is to suppress the multicultural realities of the Middle Ages and to contest gender, racial, and religious equality. This essay is divided into two parts in order to contest the current tactic of denying the existence of racism in Western society and asserting that Europe was a victim of Eastern forces. The first section presents examples of modern racism, introducing terminology to discuss dehumanization and inequality. The second section analyzes the medieval texts mentioned above and gives examples of the ways the texts dehumanize others.

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5. *The Song of Roland*, ed. and trans. Glyn Burgess (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990); Chrétien de Troyes, *Yvain: The Knight of the Lion*, trans. Burton Raffel (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987); *Silence: A Thirteenth Century French Romance*, ed. and trans. Sarah Roche-Mahdi (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2007); Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Geoffrey of Monmouth: The History of the Kings of Britain: An Edition and Translation of De gestis Britonum (Historia regum Britanniae)*, ed. Michael D. Reeve, trans. Neil Wright (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007); Gerald of Wales, *The Itinerary Through Wales and The Description of Wales*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978); Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, trans. James J. Sheridan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1973).

6. *The Mabinogion*, trans. Sioned Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

7. Examples of discussions on this topic include S. N., "The Far Right's New Fascination with the Middle Ages," *The Economist*, 2 January 2017, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/democracyinamerica/2017/01/medieval-memes>; and Sierra Lomuto, "White Nationalism and the Ethics of Medieval Studies," 5 December 2016, <http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2016/12/white-nationalism-and-ethics-of.html>.

## Racism and Dehumanization Today

An alarming number of published studies demonstrate the ways in which minorities are treated less favorably than white people in our mainstream Western society. Medievalists are in a unique position to demonstrate that the apparatus that promotes racial inequality is a long and complex one that took hundreds of years to become what it is today and that this process is closely linked to religious and nationalist ideologies. In order to engage critically with some of the dehumanizing practices in the Middle Ages, we must acknowledge and understand the ways that racism affects people in our present day.

Nick Haslam defines dehumanization as “the denial of full humanness to others.”<sup>8</sup> Phillip Atiba Goff and his co-authors differentiate between dehumanization and prejudice. These concepts are distinct because “prejudice is a broad intergroup attitude whereas dehumanization is the route to moral exclusion,” which leads to “the denial of basic human protections to a group or group member.”<sup>9</sup> While prejudice would lead to devaluing a person from a disliked group, dehumanization can lead to the “endorsement of genocide or extreme violence.”<sup>10</sup> Our current political climate demonstrates that the lives of people of color, as well as

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8. Nick Haslam, “Dehumanization: An Integrative Review,” *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 10, no. 3 (2006): 252–64, 252.

9. Phillip Atiba Goff, Matthew Christian Jackson, Brooke Allison Lewis Di Leone, Carmen Marie Culotta, and Natalie Ann Di Tomasso, “The Essence of Innocence: Consequences of Dehumanizing Black Children,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 106, no. 4 (2014): 526–45, 527, doi:10.1037/a0035663. See also Susan Opatow, “Moral Exclusion and Injustice: An Introduction,” *Journal of Social Issues* 46, no. 1 (1990): 1–20; and Ervin Staub, *The Roots of Evil: The Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

10. Goff, et al., “The Essence of Innocence,” 527; see John. F. Dovidio and Samuel L. Gaertner, “Aversive Racism and Selection Decisions: 1989 and 1999,” *Psychological Science* 11, no. 4 (2000): 315–19, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40063839>; and Staub, *The Roots of Evil*, and “Moral Exclusion, Personal Goal Theory, and Extreme Destructiveness.” *Journal of Social Issues* 46, no. 1 (1990): 47–64.

of Muslims and Jews, among others, are the victims of both prejudice and dehumanization.

We will begin by discussing the biases of our own communities, remembering that academia is not immune to racism. For example, Katherine L. Milkman and her co-authors sent 6,500 identical emails to professors at top US universities; the only difference was the names of the students. The names signaled gender (male and female) and race (Caucasian, Black, Hispanic, Indian, Chinese). They found that “faculty were significantly more responsive to white males than to all other categories of students, collectively, particularly in higher-paying disciplines and private institutions.”<sup>11</sup> Discrimination against people of color happens in the very institutions that purport to fight for equality and accessibility.

People of color experience bias from their infancy. A 2013 study led by Dr. Tiffani J. Johnson found that white children are given pain medication more often and have a shorter stay at the Emergency Room (ER) than children of color with the same amount of pain and with the same tests ordered by doctors at the ER.<sup>12</sup> Another study (2016), also led by Dr. Johnson, found that resident physicians in the pediatric emergency department (ED) displayed moderate bias before their ED shift and that their bias increased when the ED was overcrowded and the physician took care of more than ten patients.<sup>13</sup> When overburdened, pediatric doctors give priority to white children over children of color.

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11. Katherine L. Milkman, Modupe Akinola, and Dolly Chugh. “What Happens Before? A Field Experiment Exploring How Pay and Representation Differentially Shape Bias on the Pathway into Organizations,” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 100, no. 6 (2015): 1678–712, 1678.

12. Tiffani J. Johnson, Matthew D. Weaver, Sonya Borrero, Esa M. Davis, Larissa Myaskovsky, Noel S. Zuckerbraun, and Kevin L. Kraemer, “Association of Race and Ethnicity with Management of Abdominal Pain in the Emergency Department,” *Pediatrics* 132, no. 4 (2013): e851–58, 851, doi:10.1542/peds.2012-3127.

13. Tiffani J. Johnson, Robert W. Hickey, Galen E. Switzer, Elizabeth Miller, Daniel G. Winger, Margaret Nguyen, Richard A. Saladino, Leslie R. M. Hausmann, “The Impact of Cognitive Stressors in the Emergency Department on Physician Implicit Racial Bias,” *Academic Emergency Medicine* 23, no. 3 (2016): 297–305, 297, 303, doi:10.1111/acem.12901.

The inability of medical institutions and doctors to register the pain of children of color relates to the inability to process children of color as actual children. The 2014 study “The Essence of Innocence: Consequences of Dehumanizing Black Children” found that after the age of nine “blacks were seen as less innocent than whites,” and black children’s perceived innocence was equal to the innocence of older non-black children.<sup>14</sup> Black children were not only seen as older and less innocent, they were also deemed “more culpable for their actions than white or Latino targets.”<sup>15</sup> Perhaps more troubling is that “because black felony suspects were seen as 4.53 years older than they actually were, this would mean that boys would be misperceived as legal adults at roughly the age of 13 and a half.”<sup>16</sup> This is not inconsequential to black children, who disproportionately experience police violence in comparison to any other group. The inability to see children of color as children relates to the inability to empathize with people of color.

A 2014 study led by Rebecca Dore investigated the development of bias in children. Although by the age of seven children begin to show signs of bias, by the age of ten white children believed that black children felt less pain than themselves for the same injuries.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, the article “Racism and the Empathy for Pain on Our Skin” investigates the “existence of a racial bias in the emotional reaction to other people’s pain and its link with implicit racist biases.” The scientists found that “Caucasian observers reacted to pain suffered by African people significantly less than to pain of Caucasian people. The reduced reaction to the pain of African individuals was also correlated with the observers’ individual implicit race bias.”<sup>18</sup> White people feel less empathy when they witness the pain of blacks than they do with the pain of whites.

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14. Goff, “The Essence of Innocence,” 529.

15. *Ibid.*, 535.

16. *Ibid.*

17. Rebecca Dore, Kelly M. Hoffman, Angeline S. Lillard, and Sophie Trawalter, “Children’s Racial Bias in Perceptions of Other’s Pain,” *British Journal of Developmental Psychology* 32 (2014): 218–31, 218, doi:10.1111/bjdp.12038.

18. Matteo Forgiarini, Marcello Gallucci, and Angelo Maravita, “Racism and the Empathy for Pain on Our Skin,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 2 (2011): 1–7, 1, open access, <http://journal.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fpsyg.2011.00108>.

Minorities are also more likely to be arrested and incarcerated than white people for committing the same crimes. In 2009, Human Rights Watch published the study “Decades of Disparity: Drug Arrests and Race in the United States” using national drug arrest data and determined that black and brown people were 2.8 to 5.5 times more likely to be arrested for drugs than white people, despite the fact that whites use and sell drugs in comparable rates.<sup>19</sup> In 2014, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) submitted the report *Racial Disparities in Sentencing* for the Hearing on Racism in the Justice System of the United States. They found that

there are significant racial disparities in sentencing decisions in the United States. Sentences imposed on black males in the federal system are nearly 20 percent longer than those imposed on white males convicted of similar crimes. Black and Latino offenders sentenced in state and federal courts face significantly greater odds of incarceration than similarly situated white offenders and receive longer sentences than their white counterparts in some jurisdictions. Black male federal defendants receive longer sentences than whites arrested for the same offenses and with comparable criminal histories.<sup>20</sup>

The result of racism in the justice system is that people of color are disproportionately targeted. They are arrested more often and punished more harshly than whites for committing the same crimes.<sup>21</sup>

Data provided by the United States Sentencing Commission (2009) finds that Hispanics are the largest group to have federal offense cases with 45.4 percent of all cases. Also, “non-citizens made up 44.7 percent

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19. Human Rights Watch, *Decades of Disparity: Drug Arrests and Race in the United States* (March, 2009), 1.

20. American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), *Written submission of the American Civil Liberties Union on Racial Disparities in Sentencing: Hearing on Racism in the Justice System of the United States*, 27 October 2014, 1.

21. See Jennifer L. Eberhardt, Paul G. Davies, Valerie J. Purdie-Vaughns, and SheriLynn Johnson, “Looking Deathworthy: Perceived Stereotypicality of Black Defendants Predicts Capital-Sentencing Outcomes,” *Psychological Science* 17, no. 5 (2006): 383-86, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40064553>.

of all offenders,” and the category with the largest percentage of non-citizens was cases dealing with immigration with 93.2 percent of the offenses.<sup>22</sup> Finally, “immigration offenses replaced drug offenses as the largest single category of federal convictions, making 32.2 percent of all offenders sentenced in 2009.”<sup>23</sup> These statistics lead to the conclusion that Hispanics were targeted on the basis of their immigration status. Racism exists against Hispanics, and subsequently drug offenses and immigration problems become convenient platforms through which to exercise that racism.

We would like to conclude these examples with the repercussions of Donald Trump’s electoral college victory for the presidency of the United States. The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) published “Ten Days After: Harassment and Intimidation in the Aftermath of the Elections” (2016), which collected data on hate incidents after the 2016 election. SPLC found that of the 867 incidents, 280 were anti-immigrant, 187 were anti-black, 100 anti-Semitic, 95 anti-LGBT, and 49 anti-Muslim, among others. The report also noted that because approximately two-third of hate crimes are not reported, the true numbers are more staggering.<sup>24</sup> The proliferation of hate incidents after the election demonstrates that bias based on religious, racial, and migrant identities is alive and well and currently resulting in violence.

The above studies demonstrate a twofold system that deemphasizes the pain of minorities, which can be used to justify harsher living conditions and violence. It severely and disproportionately punishes minorities for crimes against whites and for the living conditions imposed on them by the status quo. These are some of the ways in which bodies of color are dehumanized in our society, and they affect minorities at all levels of the economic and social scale. Lance Hannon, for example, found that

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22. United States Sentencing Commission, “Research,” *U. S. Sentencing Commission’s 2009 Sourcebook of Federal Sentencing Statistics*, accessed 28 November 2016, 35, [http://www.ussc.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/research-and-publications/annual-reports-and-sourcebooks/2009/Chap5\\_09.pdf](http://www.ussc.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/research-and-publications/annual-reports-and-sourcebooks/2009/Chap5_09.pdf).

23. *Ibid.*, 39.

24. Southern Poverty Law Center, “Ten Days After: Harassment and Intimidation in the Aftermath of the Election,” November 2016, 5-6, <http://www.splcenter.org>.

“African Americans and Latinos deemed to have lighter skin tones are significantly more likely to be seen as intelligent by white interviewers.”<sup>25</sup> Perhaps even more alarming, Avi Ben-Zeev and his writing group found that an educated black man tends to be remembered as lighter skinned by both whites and people of color.<sup>26</sup> Thus, “black individuals who defy social stereotypes might not challenge social norms sufficiently but rather may be remembered as lighter, perpetuating status quo beliefs.”<sup>27</sup> Those that challenge social stereotypes are remembered as whiter than their actual skin color, leading to the attribution of their intelligence to their whiteness. The studies that demonstrate the dehumanization of minorities in our current society are overwhelming, and the above cases are but a few examples.

Systemic racism is the product of a long process of dehumanization that goes beyond colonialism, taking hundreds of years to become what it is today. Although encompassing the entire history of Western racism is beyond the scope of this paper, we would like to give several examples of the ways in which Christian European texts enhance our understanding of the roots of systematic oppression. In some ways, systemic racism can be traced to the medieval period.

### Constructing Prejudice in the Middle Ages

Several Christian medieval texts demonstrate a pattern of creating dichotomies—Christian versus pagan, Christian versus Saracen, and nature versus nurture—to justify aggression.<sup>28</sup> The representations of Saracen bodies in the French *chansons de geste* and romances reveal a

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25. Lance Hannon, “White Colorism,” *Social Currents*, *SAGE* 2, no. 1 (2015): 13–21, 18.

26. Avi Ben-Zeev, Tara C. Dennehy, Robin I. Goodrich, Branden S. Kolarik, and Mark W. Geisler, “When an ‘Educated’ Black Man Becomes Lighter in the Mind’s Eye: Evidence for a Skin Tone Memory Bias,” *SAGE* 4, no. 1 (2014): 1–9, 7.

27. *Ibid.*, 1.

28. Frequently these categories were not differentiated, and it is common to see Muslims referred to as “pagans” (*paiens*) in Old French texts such as the *Chanson de Roland*.

steady development of bias towards black and brown bodies.<sup>29</sup> While depictions of non-European bodies exerted a kind of fascination in earlier versions of these genres, as theories on nature and physiognomy became popular in European academic communities, a moral-historical component made its way into these depictions. As we consider the changes in representations of non-Europeans, particularly Saracens, we see that physiognomy came to be read as an indicator of character, and cultural otherness might be attributed to natural disposition. The thirteenth century stands out as a period of academic concentration on the nature of bodies and individual characteristics as determined in the negotiation between often allegorized Nature and Nurture—for example, in the romance *Silence* and Alain de Lille’s didactic poem *Anticlaudianus*.

The fascination with the Saracen body in the *Chanson de Roland* and other *chansons de geste* was constructed in the context of Crusades. Most likely composed between the First and Second Crusades, the *Chanson* responds to European conflict with Muslim peoples by drawing a link to the wars fought by Charlemagne several centuries earlier in Spain.<sup>30</sup> Sharon Kinoshita remarks that the *Chanson* is a rewriting of a historical event in which Ibn al-<sup>c</sup>Arabī seeks Charlemagne’s aid against the Emir of Cordoba, <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Rahmān I, in the year 778.<sup>31</sup> On their way back to

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29. There is an acknowledged diversity among the population referred to as Saracens or Moors by European writers. See Frederick A. De Armas, *Don Quixote Among the Saracens: A Clash of Civilizations and Literary Genres* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011).

Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100–1450* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), is particularly useful as a source for the role of othered bodies in medieval European literature and scholarship, especially chapter four, “The Place of the Jews,” and chapter five, “The Saracen Body.”

30. The date of composition for the *Chanson de Roland* is uncertain, and the work underwent a number of editions between the 1060s and 1160s. See Burgess’s Introduction, 8–9.

31. Sharon Kinoshita, *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

France from this expedition “high in the Pyrenees, [Charlemagne’s] army was attacked—its baggage train looted and its rearguard massacred—not by ‘Saracens’ but by a contingent of Basques.”<sup>32</sup> The *Chanson* turns this event into “an apocalyptic crusade between the Muslims and Christians,” creating a binary between Europeans and Saracens.<sup>33</sup>

The conflict is presented in a far wider geographic frame than the actual historical event. After the death of Roland and his companions, the armies of Baligant, emir of the Islamic world, and Charlemagne fight a battle, before which there is a kind of roll call of nations that have been martialled to fight in the Muslim army (lines 3201–64): men from Persia, Lycia, Syria, and Outremer among others. Tellingly, there are physical descriptions of those assembled into divisions:

The first is made up of men from Butentrot  
And the next of large headed Milceni;  
On their spines, along the middle of their backs,  
They are as bristly as pigs. [236]<sup>34</sup>  
(lines 3220–23)

This list continues, with characterizations such as “ugly Canaanites” (line 3238); “Their skins are as hard as iron” (line 3249); “The giants of Maprose” (line 3253). Insofar as the Muslim armies are set up as the antagonists of the epic, it is not entirely surprising that they are portrayed in unflattering, or even monstrous, terms. However, the fascination with their bodies displays a diversity in regards to virtue as well. The description of Baligant conforms to an aesthetic of European beauty:

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32. *Ibid.*, 17.

33. *Ibid.*, 16.

34. The number in brackets indicates the *laisse* in Burgess’s translation. The poem continues: “The third is made up of Nubles and Blos, / The fourth of Bruns and Slavs, / The fifth of Sorbres and Sors, / The Sixth of Armenians and Moors / The seventh of men from Jericho, / The eighth of Nigres and the ninth of Gros / And the tenth of men from Balide the Strong, / They are a people to whom good deeds are unknown” [237] (lines 3224–31).

Baligant mounted his war-horse,  
 His stirrup was held by Marcule from Outremer;  
 His crotch is very large  
 And he has slender hips and broad ribs;  
 His chest is large and handsomely formed,  
 His shoulders are broad and his face is very fair,  
 His look is fierce and his hair curly.  
 It was as white as a flower in summer;  
 His courage has often been tested in battle.  
 O God, what a noble baron, if only he were a Christian! [231]  
 (lines 3155–64)

This description mirrors an earlier one of Marsile's men, concluding that "had he been a Christian, he would have been a worthy baron" [72] (line 899).<sup>35</sup>

The presence of diversity depicted among the geographically broad Islamic peoples indicates a knowledge that individual nature can express itself despite geographic origin. But this presence of European characteristics—countenances that are "fair" (*cler*); attributions of courage and chivalry; an association, even obliquely, to Christianity (it is all that is lacking)—creates a kind of exceptionalism amongst the otherwise animalistic or monstrous host. Suzanne Conklin Akbari describes this exceptionalism in terms of potential for conversion, in which "there is . . . a secondary dichotomy that informs the depiction of Saracens in the literary and cultural production of the Middle Ages: that is, the division of Saracens into those who are white, well proportioned, and assimilable, and those who are dark-skinned, deformed or of grotesque stature, and doomed to destruction."<sup>36</sup> And while the criteria for the construction of these categories is of great interest, what is of primary importance for this study is that the existence of these categories, and the

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35. Marsile's man is described as "an emir is there from Balaguer. / His body is very handsome and his face fierce and fair. / When he is mounted on his horse, / He bears his arms with great ferocity. / He is well known for his courage" [72] (lines 894–98).

36. Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 156.

belief in them, creates a foundation for an ideology of racism between a “European” nature and an “Other” nature: the former is superior to the latter in the hierarchy of virtues.

In contrast to this fascination with Saracen bodies, there is a lack of similar descriptive focus on European ones. While descriptions of European bodies exist, especially in the description of King Charles, or of particular heroes such as Roland, it is clear that these are descriptions of exceptionalism—this is to say they stand above the masses of European characters. This is most likely a function of normalized depictions: an acceptance of general whiteness among the Franks, amplified at times in the whiteness of Charlemagne’s hair and beard, or the clarity of a European face or limbs.

Appearance as an indicator of social or moral worth gets greater attention in the romances of the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries as the genre features a more diverse cast along social class and gender lines. The association of darkened skin, hairiness, or animalistic traits with lower social classes is well established in the genre, particularly for male figures. For example, the wild herdsman whom Calgrentant encounters near the beginning of *Yvain*: “And I saw / Sitting on a tree stump, a lowborn / Creature black as a Moor, / Huge, and hideously ugly” (lines 287–90). In subsequent lines, the herdsman’s features are compared to those of animals (lines 300–4), and Calgrentant expresses an initial apprehension that he might be attacked by the man (in fact, the herdsman remains calm and obliging to Calgrentant throughout the encounter). The presence of these dark, bestial, and threatening lowborn characters allows particular tropes in romance narratives to conform to an ideologically broader construction of blackness in confrontation with a heroic European whiteness, such as the presentation of a “monstrous” antagonist against whom the hero may prove himself, and, in some cases the physical blackening and then re-whitening of the protagonist.

The negative traits of the lowborn, a savage lack of *courtoisie*, and a lack of emotional restraint that leads to aggression and violence are also present in the character of stereotyped Saracen figures, particularly those that are portrayed as beyond the hope of conversion. In this regard, it seems to be the civilizing effect of Christianity that negates the savagery inherent in the Saracen’s nature—we should be reminded of the *Chanson*

*de Roland* author's apostrophes desiring the conversion of several of the Franks' opponents. Akbari likewise highlights this effect in two of the characters in the twelfth-century *chanson de geste*, *Fierabras et Floripas*: "The violent, impulsive behavior shown by Floripas throughout the poem is a manifestation of her Saracen identity, the irascibility natural to Saracen bodies. The warlike nature of Fierabras is similarly founded on that Saracen identity; consequently, after conversion, he does not appear as a warrior on the Christian side of the conflict."<sup>37</sup> The Saracens of *Fierabras* are constructed to hierarchically distinguish the virtuous pagans (and consequently those more likely to be converted to Christianity) from those who are unable to be assimilated.<sup>38</sup> These characters, Floripas and Fierabras, are fairer and more beautiful than many of their comrades, although still characterized by their unruly dispositions and, in the case of Fierabras, by his giant size. However, contrasting with Floripas is the giantess Barac (or Barrok), who is black and monstrous in a way that narratively will not allow her to convert and conform to a European social paradigm—Akbari writes, "from her first appearance in the text, it is clear that Barac's fate can only be a violent death in battle."<sup>39</sup>

The figure of the desirable, white female, either Christian or Saracen, juxtaposed with a dark-skinned, frequently monstrous, male figure is another established, associated trope. The *Historia regum Britanniae* by Geoffrey of Monmouth (ca. 1100–1155) provides several examples of this

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37. *Ibid.*, 168.

38. Akbari writes at length about the difficulty of the assimilation of Saracen characters in *Idols in the East*. Gigantism in particular is a signal of Saracen nature, and while it is presented as a positive trait in some characters, Fierabras for instance, its monstrousness signifies an unapproachability in the other characters. Akbari, *Idols of the East*, 171–73.

39. *Ibid.*, 166. For examples on the position of the giant as Other, see Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2003); and Nahir Otaño Gracia's manuscript (currently under review), "The Other Faces of Arthur: Translating Arthurian Texts from the Peripheries of Europe."

trope.<sup>40</sup> The rewriting of the Ursula legend within the *Historia* demonstrates how the defense of Christian women was used to justify violence. The Ursula legend was codified between the ninth and the eleventh centuries:<sup>41</sup> Ursula, a Christian princess of Britannia, was promised to the pagan prince Aetherius.<sup>42</sup> She goes on pilgrimage to Rome before her marriage, and on her return trip, a storm takes her and her 11,000 virgin companions to Cologne, where they are threatened with rape and then killed by the Huns besieging the city.

In 1106, the legend gained support from evidence that authenticated the tale for a Christian medieval audience. Thousands of remains found outside of Cologne were attributed to the 11,000 virgins, and the remains began to be exported throughout Europe as early as 1113.<sup>43</sup> Given that the finding of the remains happened about thirty years before Geoffrey wrote the *Historia* and that the remains were circulating throughout Europe, it is very likely that Geoffrey and his contemporaries knew the legend. The codification of the legend, the remains of the bodies, and the Church named after St. Ursula authenticated the legend within the medieval imaginary. The legend became evidence of the perils that women face from pagans.

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40. See Heng for a discussion of the ways that the *Historia* relates to the Crusades and the character of Helena as the catalyst for the topic of “the rescu[ing] of aristocratic maidens” made so popular in medieval romance. Heng, *Empire of Magic*, 44.

41. The religious cult of Saint Ursula begins with the Clematius Inscription, attributed to the fifth century, housed at the Saint Ursula church in Cologne. According to Pamela Sheingorn, “the inscription tells us that certain holy virgins shed their blood in Christ’s name. It also attests to the rebuilding of a church in their honour by one Clematius, who came to Cologne from the East after experiencing visions. But the legend remains undocumented for several hundred years thereafter.” Pamela Sheingorn and Marcelle Thiébaux, trans., “The Passion of Saint Ursula and the Eleven Thousand Virgins (Regnante Domino),” *Vox Benedictina* 6, no. 3 (1989): 257–92, 257.

42. Scott B. Montgomery, “Ursula and Her Companions,” in *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Margaret Schaus (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 809–10, 809.

43. *Ibid.*, 809.

Geoffrey rewrites the Ursula legend and incorporates it into the *Historia* when Conanus, who rules Brittany, asks Dionotus, who was left in charge of Britain, for women to be sent to Brittany. Dionotus gathers 11,000 noblewomen and 60,000 “girls of common birth,” sends them to London, and ships them to Brittany. The women die before arriving to Brittany:

The few women who escaped the danger [of shipwreck] were driven to foreign islands, where they were butchered or enslaved by an unknown people; they had chanced upon the evil army of Wanius and Melga, who had been ordered by Gratianus to subject the nations who lived by the ocean and the Germans to terrible slaughter. Wanius was king of the Huns, and Melga of the Picts. Gratianus had made them his allies and sent them to Germany to attack Maximianus’ supporters. While ravaging the shore-line, they came upon the girls who had been driven there and, when they saw how beautiful they were, they wanted sex with them. When the girls refused, the villains fell on them and most of the Britons were quickly killed.<sup>44</sup>

The scene invites the reader to sympathize with the women, especially those who successfully defend their virginity from the “evil army of Wanius and Melga” (*nefandum exercitum Wanii et Melgae*), a non-Christian Hun and a non-Christian Pict. Their deaths are a reminder that women must be protected by a Christian patriarchal society against an “evil” non-Christian threat. This threat is both Eastern and pagan.

In other examples, it is the hero’s undertaking of a task, such as the “rescue” of a woman, that drives the narrative. In doing so, he achieves a double victory: proving his own military prowess in the destruction of a “monster” as well as his courtliness in aiding a lady in distress. This is in addition to the sexual prize read into the body of the woman—the nature of this prize is erotic, but politically patriarchal as well when the female object is figured as Saracen.<sup>45</sup> This becomes a persistent trope in

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44. Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, 88.

45. Nadia Altschul cites Louise Mirrer when she writes about this in her article: “As Mirrer analyzes, sexual access to Muslim and Jewish women, who

Western literature, as we see variations on these characters (even with a twist in the power relationships) in the colonialist works of H. Rider Haggard (the character of Ayesha in *She*) and the notoriously racist stories of Robert E. Howard (especially the tales of Solomon Kane).

The construction of a socio-moral connection to the color of the body also allows characters to have moments in which they might transform or have transformed their white bodies as a signal to the reader that the natural order has been disrupted. Inevitably, in these cases, there is a reassertion of natural coloring and “right” behavior for the hero, and while one effect is certainly to complicate the character as he inevitably must move from upper class to lower class, or from civilization to the wild, it also comments on the idea of nature as it pertains to the individual in society. We can see this in *Yvain*, when the knight loses his mind when he is rebuked and dismissed by the lady Laudine (line 2774ff). He goes through the choreography of madness, tearing at his skin and clothes, acting like a wild animal or “a savage,” eating meat raw, and wandering naked through the woods. It is not until he is cured of this madness (through the intercession of a magical balm and an over-attentive maid-servant) that he is brought back to himself, “And seeing himself naked / As ivory, he was terribly ashamed” (lines 3020–21). This moment of biblical self-recognition triggers the recollection of his mental and moral faculties, bound up in the recognition of his own whiteness (*yvoire*). This recognition is also a crucial component in the assurances of virtuous quality in Saracen knights when they are encountered, so that although

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bear Christian children to their fathers, was a way of establishing the superiority of Christian men over their Muslim and Jewish opponents. These studies show that the disparity in the portrayal of hideous, dark, exotic men vis-à-vis beautiful, fair, exotic women is not an anomaly, nor does it prove a lack of medieval racial thinking, but has instead an ideological tint. ‘Foreign’ women legitimate the expansionist desires of ‘non-foreign’ men.” Nadia Altschul, “Saracens and Race in *Roman de la Rose* Iconography: The Case of Dangier in MS Douce 195,” *Digital Philologies: A Journal of Medieval Cultures* 2, no. 1 (2013): 1–15, 7. See also, Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 173ff; and the first chapter of Jacqueline De Weever, “Whitening the Saracen: The Erasure of Alterity,” in *Sheba’s Daughters: Whitening and Demonizing the Saracen Woman in Medieval French Epic* (New York, NY: Garland, 1998).

they may be black on the exterior, they contain an interior whiteness or “fairness” that clarifies European acceptance of them as morally good characters.<sup>46</sup> This emphasis on the interior whiteness of black, male characters is the gendered equivalent of the physical whitening that occurs in the representation of Saracen women’s bodies.<sup>47</sup>

These narrative examples of whitening and negative associations with blackness in Saracen characters, reflect wider discussions in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Europe about nature’s and nurture’s effects on geographically and culturally diverse peoples. This theme is demonstrated repeatedly in French and English romance epics and finds a more academic voice in the thirteenth-century writings of Vincent of Beauvais, who proposes a connection between climate and humoral physiology, and of Alain de Lille.<sup>48</sup> The latter was especially influential in establishing Nature as an allegorical character with an agenda to create the perfect man (the New Man), as Alain de Lille portrays in the *Anticlaudianus*, and allies Nature with all the virtues, then ultimately with Faith and God.

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46. See Maghan Keita’s discussion of *Morien*, a fourteenth-century Dutch tale in the Arthurian canon. “Saracens and Black Knights,” *Arthuriana* 16, no. 4 (2006): 65-77, 70-72. In the article as a whole, Keita asks us to confront our assumptions about the presence of “Saracens” or “Moors” or generally black bodies in European societies that they would be a rarity rather than a normal component of European communities.

47. Akbari notes that the system of alterity in Saracen bodies splits along gender lines, “mainly because the qualities of aggression and even violence are valued highly within the chivalric system where warfare is the natural state of affairs,” meaning that when a black, male character is assimilable, those qualities of aggression and violence that are tied to blackness are acceptable, if not desirable. Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 167. However, she also notes that these are precisely the qualities that are often stripped from the Saracen character when he converts to Christianity, so perhaps it is more correct to highlight the “positive” and “civilizing” effect that a “whitening” of the black character has, and that these qualities are only acceptable in that their disappearance proves the character’s moral growth. Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 168-69.

48. See Akbari, who also draws connections to the writings of Bartholomeus Anglicus to describe the wide-ranging associations that were made between geography and physiology, and the impact on the cultural and natural characters of diverse peoples. Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 141ff.

Although the New Man's body (book 7) is never shown to be white, the implied whiteness of the perfect human is blatantly stated by the author of the *Roman de Silence*, in which Nature frequently laments the disruption of her perfect work in the heroine/hero of the romance. Indeed, in *Silence* much is made of Nature's role in the formation of the protagonist's physical characteristics as the character shifts from female to male and ultimately back to female, or from noble to commoner back to noble. Early in the text, Nature complains to Nurture that she had taken great pains to place the correct proportions of white and red into the female Silence's complexion "to excite the envy of everyone" (line 2285); but, "now they have made a male heir of her, / who will go out in the wind and scorching sun, / as if he were of crude workmanship" (lines 2289–91). Later, Silence stains his/her skin to fit into a group of minstrels:

first he stained and disguised his face  
a [sic] herb he found in the woods.  
Whoever looked at his complexion  
would certainly think him of low station .  
(lines 2909–12)

This staining of his/her features does not last long:

Thus the rose wins over the nettle  
and Nature's color becomes apparent.  
White and red are mingled:  
if anyone dares to believe it,  
he outdoes both rose and lily.  
(lines 2974–78)

The argument between Nature and Nurture over Silence's body concludes ultimately with Nature's victory and our understanding that, while Nurture may momentarily "dis-nature," the underlying traits will inevitably find a way to resurface.<sup>49</sup> When applied to the bodies of Silence, or Alain de Lille's new man, or the "ivory" skin of Yvain, there is an assurance of perfection that brooks no diversity—deviation from

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49. *Silence*, Introduction, xvii–xix.

this perfect model requires explanation and ultimately tends towards a hierarchy that classifies some humans as “less-than.”

A similar tactic of dividing nature and nurture is apparent in the works of Giraldus Cambrensis, or Gerald of Wales (1146–1223). The Anglo-Normans employed the same ideologies used against Saracens to encroach on the territories in the west of Britain and in Ireland.<sup>50</sup> Because the men being conquered were Christian men, the ideologies of expansion evolved to distinguish those with the wrong kind of Christianity, in part, by drawing on the dichotomy of nature and nurture.<sup>51</sup> *Topographia Hibernica* (The Topography of Ireland), *Itinerarium Cambriae* (The Journey through Wales), and *Descriptio Cambriae* (The Description of Wales) by Gerald of Wales helped in this expansion.<sup>52</sup>

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50. The system of dehumanization that supported medieval European expansion to the East was also in effect on the peripheries of Europe. It led the medieval European “centers” to use Christianity to justify encroaching into other European societies: “these societies included the Al-Andalus in the Iberian Peninsula, the islands of Sicily or Sardinia in the Mediterranean, Scotland or Wales in Great Britain, or the great German expansion into the Slavic world.” Enric Guinot, “The Expansion of a European Feudal Monarchy during the 13th Century: the Catalan-Aragonese Crown and the Consequences of the Conquest of the Kingdoms of Majorca and Valencia,” *Catalan Historical Review* (2009): 33–47, 33, <http://revistes.iec.cat/chr/>.

51. Simon Meecham-Jones aptly enumerates the reasons used to justify the conquest of Wales and Ireland: “The discourse of peripherality drew attention to Wales’s perceived status at the geographical margins of European civilization. The discourse of Britishness proclaimed the “natural” unity of the island(s) of Britain, inferring from physical continuity an inevitable political unity. The discourse of authority asserted the right of England to rule Wales, by virtue of tradition, God’s favor, and England’s greater civilization. Allied to this was the myth of the racial inferiority of the Welsh (and Irish).” Meecham-Jones, “Introduction,” in *Authority and Subjugation in Writing of Medieval Wales*, ed. Ruth Kennedy and Simon Meecham-Jones, 1–12 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 2.

52. David N. Dumville writes that “it may be argued that Giraldus provided the Francophone and Anglophone worlds (overlapping as they did) with the very prism through which they looked at the Gaels for the rest of the Middle Ages.” Dumville, “‘Celtic’ Visions of England,” in *The Cambridge*

“The Topography of Ireland” described the Irish using terms such as lazy, leisurely, and barbarous:

They do not devote their lives to the processing of flax or wool, or to any kind of merchandise or mechanical art. For given only to leisure, and devoted only to laziness, they think that the greatest pleasure is not to work, and the greatest wealth is to enjoy liberty.

This people is, then, a barbarous people, literally barbarous. Judged according to modern ideas, they are uncultivated, not only in the external appearance of their dress, but also in their flowing hair and beards. All their habits are the habits of barbarians. Since conventions are formed from living together in society, and since they are so removed in these distant parts from the ordinary world of men, as if they were in another world altogether and consequently cut off from well-behaved and law-abiding people, they know only of the barbarous habits in which they were born and brought up, and embrace them as another nature. Their natural qualities are excellent. But almost everything acquired is deplorable.<sup>53</sup>

The description of the Irish draws a distinction between their nature (which Gerald implies is British and therefore excellent) and their Irish culture (their nurture), which is barbarous. Gerald continues to describe the Celts in dehumanizing terms in “The Description of Wales,” where he uses the sexual depravities of the Welsh as reasons to support the Anglo-Norman conquest.<sup>54</sup> The description of the Celts as less than human was a way of drawing attention to Celtic territories. David Dumville succinctly explains that “[Gerald] sought to sell ‘the west’ as an exotic and interesting Other, much preferable to the fascination with ‘the east’ (whose characteristics he portrayed as deeply unattractive) so

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*Companion to Medieval English Culture*, ed. Andrew Galloway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 107–28, 118.

53. Gerald of Wales, *The History and Topography of Ireland*, trans. John O’Meara (London: Penguin Books, 1982), 102–3.

54. Gerald of Wales, *Description of Wales*, Bk. 2, ch. 6–9; see also Katherine Millersdaughter, “The Geopolitics of Incest in the Age of Conquest: Gerald of Wales through Geoffrey Chaucer” (PhD diss., University of Colorado, 2003), 276.

widespread in an age of crusading.”<sup>55</sup> Gerald’s discourse that the Celts’ culture is what makes them subhuman and that “we” must focus on incorporating the west into Britain, supports Anglo-Norman expansion.

Gerald’s descriptions of the Welsh—the Anglo-Normans’ neighbors—as well as our previous examples are not so distant that we cannot draw parallels to Donald Trump’s calling Mexicans rapists and describing Islam as terrorism.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, the Welsh and Irish experienced similar treatment in the Middle Ages as migrants do today. The Third Branch of the *Mabinogi* (*Manawydan, Son of Llŷr*) provides a glimpse of the violence the Welsh might have endured in England.

In what seems like an off-the-mark section of the Third Branch, a mist surrounds Dyfed, and the men and women of the community disappear except for the titular characters—Manwydan, Pryderi, Cigfa, and Rhiannon. Although they survive off the land for two years, they decide to move: “‘God knows,’ said Manawydan, ‘we cannot live like this. Let us go to England, and seek a craft by which we may make our living.’”<sup>57</sup> They move to Hereford, sixteen miles east from Wales. The men take up different crafts in different towns—saddlemaking, shieldmaking, and shoemaking. Because their goods become the best in each city, the craftsmen want to kill them, forcing them to move to another town: “All the saddlers realized that they were losing their

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55. Dumville, “‘Celtic’ Visions of England,” 117.

56. Trump said: “when Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best. They’re not sending you. They’re not sending you. They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with us. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people. But I speak to border guards and they tell us what we’re getting. And it only makes common sense. It only makes common sense. They’re sending us not the right people. It’s coming from more than Mexico. It’s coming from all over South and Latin America, and it’s coming probably—probably—from the Middle East. But we don’t know. Because we have no protection and we have no competence, we don’t know what’s happening. And it’s got to stop and it’s got to stop fast.” TIME Staff, “Here’s Donald Trump’s Presidential Announcement Speech,” *Time*, 16 June 2015, <http://time.com/3923128/donald-trump-announcement-speech/>.

57. *Mabinogion*, 37.

profits, and that nothing was being bought from them unless it could not be supplied by Manawydan. So they got together and agreed to kill him and his companion.”<sup>58</sup> While making shields “their fellow townsmen became angry with them and agreed to try and kill them.”<sup>59</sup> After this, they decided to make shoes because “shoemakers will not have the heart to fight us or forbid us.”<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, “the shoemakers realized that they were losing their profits, for as Manawydan cut out the leather, Pryderi stitched it. The shoemakers came and took counsel; they agreed to kill them.”<sup>61</sup> Each time Manawydan and Pryderi leave the town instead of fighting against the craftsmen. Finally they decide to go back to Dyfed.

The scene has some striking resemblances to modern migration patterns. Just as Manawydan and Pryderi take jobs associated with a lower social class (they go from lords owning land to craftsmen), many Latin Americans who migrate to the United States also tend to take jobs associated with a lower social status. Moreover, their work ethics can create a hostile environment because of their positions as migrants. While Manawydan and Pryderi faced the threat of murder, many Latin Americans face the risks of wage theft, incarceration, and deportation. From the perspective of the migrant—medieval or modern—their dehumanization leads to the threat of physical violence. Moreover, the tactics used to bring up the issues of those affected by violence are also similar. In both instances the use of art and the reappropriation of literary systems help create resistance.<sup>62</sup>

The connections between modern racism and medieval prejudice and their common tropes of dehumanization take on new nuance in the late Middle Ages. Although as already noted Christian Europe tends

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58. Ibid.

59. Ibid., 38.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid.

62. For an interesting essay on labor and migration and the ways that US Latino Sci-Fi gives agency to migrants, see Matthew Goodwin, “The Technology of Labor, Migration, and Protest,” in *The Routledge Companion to Latina/o Popular Culture*, ed. Frederick Luis Aldama, 120–28 (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016). For more information on Welsh reappropriation as a form of resistance see chapter two of Otaño Gracia, “The Other Faces of Arthur.”

not to differentiate between non-Christian religious groups, they do begin to make a distinction between Christians who were descendants with the right kind of heritage (such as the Visigoths in Spain and the Saxons or Vikings in Britain) and those who were descendants of Jews or Muslims.<sup>63</sup> An example of these distinctions is apparent in the *Man of Law's Tale* by Geoffrey Chaucer (1343-1400). The tale demonstrates the belief that not everyone can become a true Christian and that true Christianity can only be acquired by the right kind of pagans, such as the Anglo-Saxons and the Vikings.

Custance, so named because of her constancy in her Christian faith, travels from Rome into “hethenesse” through her story. In Syria, her husband converts to Christianity but is eventually killed by his Muslim mother who does not want to become a Christian. In that episode, all Christians are slaughtered, except for Custance who is put on a boat and sails away. Then, Custance travels to Northumberland, in England, where she slowly converts the population to Christianity. She also marries the king of the province, Alla. In both voyages, Custance marries the kings of the land and both times is threatened by the mother of the king. Once again, Custance is put to sea, and she ends up in Rome as a servant. There, she reunites with her second husband Alla who is on pilgrimage. She also meets her father in public and says to him:

I am youre doghter Custance,” quod she,  
“That whilom ye han sent unto Surrye.  
It am I, fader, that in the salte see  
Was put allone and dampned for to dye.  
Now, goode fader, mercy I yow crye!  
Sende me namoore unto noon hethenesse,  
But thonketh my lord heere of his kyndenesse.  
( 2., lines 1107-13)

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63. See David Nirenberg, “Race and the Middle Ages: The Case of Spain and Its Jews,” in *Rereading the Black Legend: The Discourses of Religious and Racial Difference in the Renaissance Empires* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 71-87, for the earliest uses of the word race, its relationship to conversos, and the distinction between true Christians, descendants of Visigoths, versus Christians, descendants of Jews or Muslims.

Custance's words to her father serve to make a distinction between the territories of her first husband, "hethenesse," and the character of her second husband, "kyndenesse;" the men are extensions of their territories and their character.

The *Man of Law's Tale* is presented in the context of a religious alignment with Christianity in contrast to paganism and Islam through political and cultural means.<sup>64</sup> In Syria all Christians are slaughtered, and Islam continues to be the official religion. In "Engelond," however, Custance becomes the new matriarch, turning England Christian. While the first trip marks her first venture into "heathen" territory, the second brings her to kindness and ultimately to Christianity. The mimicry between her voyages is significant; it serves to destabilize any imagined

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64. Scholarship on Custance as a Christian model include works by David C. Benson, "Varieties of Religious Poetry in *The Canterbury Tales: The Man of Law's Tale* and *The Clerk's Tale*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer: Proceedings* 2 (1986): 159–67; David Raybin, "Custance and History: Woman as Outsider in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 12 (1990): 65–84; Roger E. Moore, "Nominalistic Perspectives on Chaucer's 'The Man of Law's Tale,'" *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 23, no. 1 (1993): 80–100; Helen Cooney, "Wonder and Immanent Justice in the *Man of Law's Tale*," *Chaucer Review* 33, no. 3 (1999), 264–87, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25096056>; Elizabeth Robertson, "The 'Elyvssh' Power of Custance: Christian Feminism in Geoffrey Chaucer's the *Man of Law's Tale*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 23 (2001): 143–80, doi:10.1353/sac.2001.0048; A. C. Spearing, "Narrative Voice: The Case of Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*," *New Literary History* 32, no. 3 (2001): 715–46, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20057689>; and Joseph E. Grennan, "Chaucer's Man of Law and the Constancy of Justice," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 84, no. 4 (1985): 498–514, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27709558>. On representations of East and West cultural contact in the *Man of Law's Tale*, see Glory Dharmaraj, "Multicultural Subjectivity in Reading Chaucer's Man of Law's Tale," *Medieval Feminist Newsletter* 16 (1993): 4–8; Susan Schibanoff, "Worlds Apart: Orientalism, Antifeminism, and Heresy in Chaucer's Man of Law's Tale," *Exemplaria* 8 (1996): 9–96, doi:10.1179/exm.1996.8.1.59; and Kathryn L. Lynch, "Storytelling, Exchange, and Constancy: East and West in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*," *Chaucer Review* 33, no. 4 (1999): 409–422, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25096065>.

relationship between Syria and England, allowing England to enter a Christian space and signaling that Syria could never do so. At the end of the tale, she returns to “Engelond” where she lives with her husband until his death a year later, after which she returns to Rome. The *Man of Law’s Tale* imagines the moment, then, at which England moves from the outer edge of “hethenesse” and paganism into the realm of a larger Christendom.<sup>65</sup> England is marked as a European country that can become Christian. The tale hints that England’s identity is rooted in pagan ideologies that are congruent with Christianity and can connect England to the rest of Europe.

This broad foundation of prejudice from the Middle Ages can provide a great understanding of the racism we encounter today. It provides examples of how Europeans of the Middle Ages justified conquest by dehumanizing those that they wanted to conquer and convert. It shows that by the late Middle Ages Christian Europe used racial markers and ancestry to justify a new form of dehumanization that led to the annihilation of natives and to the Atlantic slave trade. We are able to look back on the mechanisms of European thought, on its communities’ literature, cultural aesthetics, and theories of natural science, and draw direct lines to the racist ideologies and institutions of our modern societies. Such a view should allow us to approach the results of those studies cited in the first part of this article and recognize the cultural foundations for these prejudices in ourselves, and with that recognition, we may begin the process of dismantling them, as individuals within ourselves, and as academics within our communities.

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65. James Simpson, “Chaucer as a European Writer,” *The Yale Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Seth Lerer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 55–86.