Decolonizing the Middle Ages Introduction


"Here in the Africa Petrarch establishes most of the language which will be key to the European colonization of The Middle Ages: the idea that there is a middle time, a squalid time of shadows which follows Roman Antiquity and which will in turn be followed by a second coming of light, of radiance" 434

*idea of unilinear progress and development begins as early as the late Middle Ages themselves*

"Temporal colonization is already inherent in the colonialist project, then: the colonized other is "primitive," exists in a past state opposed to the European present. Although we may inhabit different spaces, newly colonized lands and The Middle Ages inhabit the same time." 435

"There can be no continuity, no impinging of time (and of peoples) which might threaten to link The Middle Ages in a natural way with present history. The chronological rupture cleaving The Middle Ages from history must absolute so that any genealogies ... can be constructed under present control, any miscegenation carefully regulated, even if it cannot entirely be suppressed." 435

"It is the peculiar emptiness of The Middle Ages, as Petrarch and others simultaneously invented it and evacuated it of historical agency, which creates the opportunity for Europe's colonial exploitation of The Middle Ages over the next six or seven centuries. Its meaning, its very being can only derive from that gaze which is fixed on it by Modernity." 436