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1. The Goliard Poets

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1. The Goliard Poets

Abstract

One aspect of medieval variety was a love of this world and of nature. This naturalism had many bases in addition to the fact that man has always found nature unavoidable. It was due also, in part, to the pronounced emphasis on the other world, and arose as an understandable reaction to the prevailing concern for things spiritual. It was also due in part to the fact that, according to Christian teachings, this world of nature was in and of itself good because it had been created by a good God. Therefore it was not to be despised. Naturalism was further strengthened by the appearance of Aristotle's thought. A mixture of such motives as these produced two very different results, both of which we can illustrate by poems, one of them by a Goliard poet and the other by St. Francis. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Contemporary Civilization, Medieval Era, Christianity, naturalism, Goliards

Disciplines

Cultural History | European History | European Languages and Societies | History | Intellectual History

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This is a part of [Section IV: The Medieval Ferment](#). The [Contemporary Civilization](#) page lists all additional sections of *Ideas and Institutions of Western Man*, as well as the [Table of Contents](#) for both volumes.

More About Contemporary Civilization:

From 1947 through 1969, all first-year Gettysburg College students took a two-semester course called Contemporary Civilization. The course was developed at President Henry W.A. Hanson's request with the goal of "introducing the student to the backgrounds of contemporary social problems through the major concepts, ideals, hopes and motivations of western culture since the Middle Ages."

Gettysburg College professors from the history, philosophy, and religion departments developed a textbook for the course. The first edition, published in 1955, was called *An Introduction to Contemporary Civilization and Its Problems*. A second edition, retitled *Ideas and Institutions of Western Man*, was published in 1958 and 1960. It is this second edition that we include here. The copy we digitized is from the Gary T. Hawbaker '66 Collection and the marginalia are his.

Authors

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Concerned with this world as gratification. Religion pushed to the background.

The Goliards were an unorganized group of poets, like the troubadours, from among the wandering medieval students whom we have already met. These students moving from university to university banded themselves together against the predatory feudal lords, the greed of lodging-house keepers, and the rapacity of both tradesmen and tavernkeepers. Never overly reverent in the face of established authority, they found the Church and its creeds suitable objects of ridicule, despite the fact that the Church had tried to take them under its wing by calling them clerics and by allowing them to be tried in its courts. But the students were not this easily pacified. They had problems which appeared to be too immediate and pressing to be dealt with in this fashion. They took the name of Goliard from the Latin word for Goliath, perhaps because he was said to foreshadow the devil as David was said to foreshadow Christ. Wandering from town to town, sometimes in search of knowledge that was proscribed, never sure of a position commensurate with their abilities and training, these students appeared as a menace to peace and order, and were often dealt with as such. Their love of this world and the present, without any concern for the next world or the future, found expression in songs and poems, many of which have been preserved. Some of the attitudes of the Goliards were expressed in the following poem, written about 1200. It is a rewriting of the Apostles' Creed by one of them -- or was it a group of them gathered about some tavern table? The scene is the arrival of a priest to give a dying Goliard extreme unction.

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