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Bonnie Honig: Democracy and the Foreigner

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Would it still make sense to speak of democracy when it
would no longer be a question . . . of country,
nation, even of state or citizen?

—*Jacques Derrida*

What is a foreigner? A [wo]man who makes
you think you are at home.

—*Edmond Jabes*

1 NATIVES AND FOREIGNERS: Switching the Question

“How should we solve the problem of foreignness?” The question underlies contemporary discussions of democracy and citizenship. Proposed solutions vary. Political theorists deliberate about whether or to what extent social unity is necessary to sustain social democracy. Courts rule on the extent of government’s obligations to its noncitizen residents. Economists debate the costs and benefits of immigration. Sociologists argue about the (in)effectiveness of multilingual education. But, notwithstanding their differences, participants in contemporary debates about foreignness all reinscribe foreignness as a “problem” that needs to be solved by way of new knowledge, facts, or politics. In so doing, they reiterate the question that has dominated political theory for centuries.

In classical political thought, foreignness is generally taken to signify a threat of corruption that must be kept out or contained for the sake

of the stability and identity of the regime.¹ This somewhat xenophobic way of thinking about foreignness endures in the contemporary world, though other options—from assimilation to the many varieties of multiculturalism—are now also considered viable.² All of these options persist in treating foreignness as a problem in need of solution, however. Even many of the most multiculturally minded contributors to diversity debates treat foreignness as a necessary evil and assume that we would be better off if only there were enough land for every group to have its own nation-state.³

There are some who take a more positive view of foreignness. In *Nations Unbound*, Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc endorse a new transmigrant politics that is, in their view, bringing to an end the nation-state's privileged position as the central organizing institution of modern cultural, political, juridical, and administrative life. In the same spirit, James Holston and Arjun Appadurai claim that in many places "the project of a national society of citizens . . . appears increasingly exhausted and discredited."⁴ Analogously, for Iain Chambers, increased encounters with transnational others have the following, desirable consequence: "The earlier European intertwining of national language, literature and identity is unpicked, and the epic of modern nationalism is forced open to meet the exigencies that emerge from more complex patterns."⁵

For celebrants of postnational politics, foreignness does not seem to be a problem in need of solution. It is a welcome agent of welcome changes. But these thinkers, wittingly or unwittingly, rearticulate the classical position on foreignness noted above. That is, on the postnationalist account, too, foreignness is a threat to the stability and identity of established regimes. Postnationalists differ from their predecessors only in their valuation of that threat. They celebrate it and valorize the very fragmentation that earlier political theorists took to be a problem.

Motivated by these ongoing debates, I take foreignness as a topic, a question, rather than a problem. What does it mean? What sort of work does it do in cultural politics? In the chapters that follow, I read texts of democratic theory looking at the roles (often heretofore unnoticed) played in those texts by strangers or foreigners, and I read popular and high cultural stories about strangers or foreigners, looking for the lessons they might have for democratic theory. Again and again, I find

foreignness used in familiar ways, as a device that gives shape to or threatens existing political communities by marking negatively what “we” are not.⁶ But I also find foreignness operating in a less conventionally familiar way, with a seldom-noted positive content and effect.

Sometimes, the figure of the foreigner serves as a device that allows regimes to import from outside (and then, often, to export back to outside) some specific and much-needed but also potentially dangerous virtue, talent, perspective, practice, gift, or quality that they cannot provide for themselves (or that they cannot admit they have). This supplement of foreignness gives receiving regimes something different from the novelty, cultural breadth, and depth identified by theorists of immigration and multiculturalism such as Bhikhu Parekh.⁷ Indeed, it is often their foreignness itself—not, as Parekh suggests, the culturally inflected talents, skills, or perspective that individual foreigners happen to have—that makes outsiders necessary even if also dangerous to the regimes that receive them. Indeed, sometimes foreignness operates as an agent of (re)founding.

In the classic texts of Western political culture (both high and low), the curious figure of the foreign-founder recurs with some frequency: established regimes, peoples, or towns that fall prey to corruption are restored or refounded (not corrupted or transcended) by the agency of a foreigner or a stranger. Moses appears as an Egyptian prince to lead the Israelites out of Egypt and bring to them the law from the mountain. The biblical Ruth’s migration from Moab to Bethlehem reanimates the alienated Israelites’ affective identification with their god while also beginning the line that will lead to King David. Oedipus arrives from elsewhere to solve the riddle of the Sphinx and save Thebes (temporarily) with his wise leadership. In *The Statesman*, it is the Eleatic Stranger who teaches us how to know the true statesman. In *The Republic*, the founding dialogue of political theory’s interminable debate about justice takes place in the house of a foreign merchant, Cephalus, who is originally from Syracuse. Why is this the setting? Does Plato mean to imply that justice, or perhaps philosophical dialogue itself, is occasioned by engagement with foreignness?⁸ Later in *The Republic*, Plato has Socrates say casually that the myth of the metals, the Republic’s founding myth, is a “Phoenician thing,” not unfamiliar and yet of foreign origin. In the *Social Contract*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s lawgiver comes

from elsewhere to found an ideal democracy. And in the contemporary United States, a variety of American institutions and values, from capitalism to community to family to the consenting liberal individual, are seen to be periodically reinvigorated by that country's newest comers, its idealized citizens: naturalizing immigrants. Again and again, the cure for corruption, withdrawal, and alienation is . . . aliens.

This finding invites us to switch the question that has long dominated our thinking about foreignness. Rather than "*How should we solve the problem of foreignness?*" and "What should 'we' do about 'them?'" (questions that never put the "we" into question and this, surely, is part of their point and attraction), the question that animates this book is: *What problems does foreignness solve for us?* Why do nations or democracies rely on the agency of foreignness at their vulnerable moments of (re)founding, at what cost, and for what purpose?

As we will see in the chapters that follow, foreign-founder scripts use foreignness in a dazzling variety of ways: the foreign-founder may be a way of marking the novelty that is necessarily a feature of any (re)-founding. The same mythic figure may be a way of illustrating a psychological insight that stale or corrupt patterns cannot be broken without the injection of something new. The novelties of foreignness, the mysteries of strangeness, the perspective of an outsider may represent the departure or disruption that is necessary for change.⁹ The foreignness of the founder might also be a way of marking and solving a perennial problem of democratic founding in which the people must be equal under the law and cannot therefore receive it from any one of their own number. Some theorists, such as Julia Kristeva, speculate that stories of foreign-founders are a culture's way of marking its inextricable relation to otherness, its strangeness to itself. Finally, the foreignness of the foreign-founder might be a way of modeling the impartiality, breadth of vision, objectivity, and insight that a founder must have. Who but an outsider could be trusted to see beyond the established lines of conflict and division that make shared governance difficult?¹⁰

Some might argue that none of these hypotheses is really needed because the reason we tell stories of foreign-founding is quite simply that they are true. For example, in answer to the question: "Isn't it curious that some stories of founding feature a foreign-founder?" they might say: "Not really. Or at least not necessarily. After all, some origin stories

feature foreign-founders because some peoples really were founded by a foreigner. Take Russia, for example.”¹¹ They might then go on to detail the events that led up to the A.D. 862 invitation by quarreling Slavic tribes to the Varangian Rus’: “Our whole land is great and rich, but there is no order in it. Come to rule and reign over us!”¹²

But can the facts of a foreign-founding story decide the question of its meaning and power? The facts do not explain why the story is retold and recirculated, nor to what effect. The truth and meaning of Russia’s origin story have, for example, been heatedly debated for centuries. Historiographers date the inauguration of the debate to September 6, 1749, the day Gerhard Friedrich Müller gave a lecture on the origins of Russia to members of the Imperial Academy. Omeljan Pritsak captures what must have been a dramatic scene: “Müller never finished his lecture. As he spoke, tumult arose among the Russian members and ‘adjuncts’ of the Imperial Academy in protest against the ‘infamous’ words they were hearing.” Müller was charged with dishonoring the nation, and a special committee was appointed “to investigate whether Müller’s writings were harmful to the interests and glory of the Russian Empire.” The result? “Müller was forbidden to continue his research in Old Rus’ history, and his publications were confiscated and destroyed. The intimidated scholar eventually redirected his scholarly work to a less incendiary subject: the history of Siberia.”¹³

This academic exile to Siberia did not put the matter to rest, however. Following these events, eighteenth and nineteenth-century anti-Normanists denied the foreignness of the Rus’, claiming they were really Slavs, not Swedes. One Slavophile even rewrote the founding story: in Khomiakov’s long poem, *Vadim*, the foreign Rus’ leader, Riurik, is driven out of Novgorod by a good Slav, Vadim. In *The Chronicles*, Vadim is mentioned only in passing, as having led a *failed* resistance to Riurik. But Khomiakov was “one of the leading spokesmen for the Slavophile view of history.” For him, Andrew Wachtel explains, “the undesirability of a foreign-born ruler and the need for a native Slavic element to triumph over him becomes clear.”¹⁴

Unsurprisingly, a century earlier, Catherine the Great, herself a foreign ruler of Russia, gave the story a rather different spin, in which the foreign Riurik is an enlightened ruler and in which (in Wachtel’s words) “Russian patriotism and national pride are not incompatible with bor-

rowing from the outside.”¹⁵ Others insisted on the incompatibility that Catherine tried to minimize, but their agenda was neither nationalist nor xenophobic. Nineteenth-century Normanists such as Vladimir Solovyev affirmed and valorized Russia’s foreign-founding because, they argued, it meant that Russia was particularly well positioned for a cosmopolitan or universalist mission.¹⁶

Pritsak suggests that these debates are ongoing because each side of the argument has its weaknesses. The problem, he says, is a problem of knowledge: “[H]istorians have too often substituted political (or patriotic) issues for improved techniques of historical methodology in their discussions; they have had a limited knowledge of world history; and they have been biased in their use of source materials.”¹⁷ It is not clear, however, whether the objective and thorough history that Pritsak calls for could put a quick end to the centuries of to-ing and fro-ing on the question of the Rus’. Do historical facts have that kind of power? Even if the empirical question regarding Riurik’s foreignness could be put to rest, the question of his expressive significance as a foreign-founder would still be an open question whose debate would arouse passions and land some unfortunate souls in a Siberia of one kind or another.

Confronted with the fact of Riurik’s foreignness, nationalists would undoubtedly engage in a symbolic politics of foreignness: How foreign was he? What does his foreignness mean for Russia? In all likelihood, the fact of Riurik’s foreignness would drive some to argue that Riurik, though really a Scandinavian, was possessed of Slavic features and temperament. Alternatively, scholars might redate what they take to be the beginning of a Slavic people, so that Riurik would be removed from his position of central importance in the Slavs’ origin story. In short, the questions raised by the foreignness of the founder are not, *pace* Pritsak, empirically soluble; they are symbolic questions. Similarly, in contemporary debates about immigration, the facts can inform but they cannot resolve the question of whether immigrants are good or bad for the nation because the question is not, at bottom, an empirical question. The question of why the founder (or the refounder) is a foreigner points not to the origins of the origin story in question, but rather to the daily workings of that story in the life of a regime.¹⁸

Similarly, when I ask why a (re)founder is a foreigner, I am asking not “Where does he or she come from and why?” but rather “What

symbolic work is the story of foreign-(re)founding doing for the regime in question?"¹⁹ Of what practices and programs of renationalization and legitimation are the symbolic politics of foreignness a part? And, in the cases of *democracy's* foreign-(re)founders in particular: Is foreignness a site at which certain anxieties of *democratic* self-rule are managed? At bottom, these questions are not about foreignness per se, but about the work that foreignness does, the many ways in which it operates as a way to frame other issues of democratic theory and citizenship.²⁰ The answers to these questions vary in relation to different texts and contexts.

In Chapter Two, where I read Rousseau's *Social Contract* together with Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* and Girard's *Violence and the Sacred*, I find that the figure of the foreign-founder may be a way of managing some paradoxes of democratic founding, such as the alienness of the law, an especially charged problem in democratic regimes. In Chapter Three, the foreignness of Ruth is what enables her to supply the Israelites with a refurbishment they periodically need: she chooses them in a way that only a foreigner can (and the more foreign the better) and thereby re-marks them as the Chosen People. She also domesticates by way of her apparently freely felt love for the law the alien and violently imposed law that Moses brought to the Israelites from the mountain. In Chapter Four, I trace how foreignness works, in the American exceptionalist literature, contradictorily and simultaneously to reestablish popular but always shaky beliefs in a meritocratic economy, heartfelt community, patriarchal family structures, and a consent-producing liberal individualism, all of which undergird the sense of choice-worthiness that immigrants are positioned and required to enact for the United States. Immigrants' new membership in the United States is not only celebrated, it is also endorsed as iconic of good citizenship, with problematic consequences for the native born and for all would-be democratic citizens.

All of these uses of foreignness are double edged, however. Foreignness operates in each instance as both support of and threat to the regime in question. Moses' foreignness and that of Rousseau's lawgiver, the biblical Ruth, and America's immigrants do not only solve certain problems. In each case, their foreignness is itself a problem for the regimes that seek to benefit from its supplement. What I find, therefore,

and what I call attention to in each of the chapters below, is what we just saw at work in the case of Russia's origin story: a *politics* of foreignness in which different parties to the debate try to mobilize a founder's foreignness on behalf of their ideal, while also striving somehow to solve or manage the problem of the founder's foreignness.

The cultural organization of foreignness as threat and/or supplement is not exhausted by the types of foreignness examined here. To the foreigner as founder, immigrant, and citizen, one could add other categories—the foreigner as refugee, boundary crosser, terrorist, outlaw, repository of irrationality, erotic excess, madness, anarchy, and so on. But my goal is not to offer a complete catalog of the symbolic figurations of foreignness. Instead, my goal is to study in depth some of the uses to which foreignness is daily put on behalf of democracy. Since democracy is still thought of in predominantly national terms, this means we must look not only at texts of democratic theory in which foreignness figures, but also (as in Chapter Three on the Book of Ruth) at texts in which foreignness is put to work on behalf of national or subnational communities. Since much of the contemporary democratic theory literature theorizes democracy as a form of liberalism, we must look also at texts in liberal theory that use foreignness to shore up specifically liberal institutions and values such as consent (as in Chapter Four, when I discuss Peter Schuck's and Rogers Smith's part in American immigration debates).

It is worth mentioning here, however, that one counterimage of foreignness does keep surfacing in each of the chapters: that of the *taking* foreigner. This taking is not the criminal activity of an outsider (though it is not immune to such depictions) but an honorific democratic practice—that of demanding or, better yet, simply enacting the redistribution of those powers, rights, and privileges that define a community and order it hierarchically. Here the iconic taking foreigner puts foreignness to work on behalf of democracy by modeling forms of agency that are transgressive, but (or therefore) possessed of potentially inaugural powers. Carried by the agencies of foreignness, this revalued “taking” stretches the boundaries of citizenship and seems to imply or call for a rethinking of democracy as also a cosmopolitan and not just a nation-centered set of solidarities, practices, and institutions. One might object that such a move to locate democracy also on cosmopolitan registers

itself amounts to a “use” of foreignness on behalf of a political aspiration. The point cannot be denied. But the hope is that this particular use might better serve the needs of democracy than the mostly nation-centered alternatives whose promises and insufficiencies I track in the chapters that follow.

In Chapter Five, I raise the issue of genre, which provides one way of understanding why political theorists have not heretofore attended to the politics of foreignness as I cast them here. Most readers of democratic theory tend to bring certain romantic genre expectations to texts, often treating the narrative as a series of arguments intended to bring about a reconciliation, a happy (or at least resigned) marriage between a people and their law or institutions. In Chapter Five, I ask: What if we read democratic theory gothically instead of romantically? Gothic novels depend on the reader’s uncertainty as to whether the heroine’s would-be lover is really a hero or a villain. Similarly, a gothic approach to democratic theory presses us to attend to the people’s perpetual uncertainty about the law and their relation to it: Is it really part of us or an alien thing, an expression of our intimate will or a violent imposition? That gothics tend to represent and deepen our uncertainty about the hero by making him a foreigner, and the setting a foreign (often a Catholic) place only adds to the appositeness of this genre to democratic theory, in which anxieties about empirical foreigners and (in more abstract terms) the alienness of the law are always at work, even if seldom in a way that is noted by many scholars.

Another genre choice also shapes this book. What unites texts as disparate as Rousseau’s *Social Contract*, Freud’s *Moses and Monotheism*, the biblical Book of Ruth, Michael Walzer’s *What It Means to Be an American*, and Schuck and Smith’s *Citizenship without Consent: Illegal Aliens in the Polity* with one another and with the various films I discuss as well, including *The Wizard of Oz*, *Strictly Ballroom*, and *Shane*, is that all are—whatever else they may be—*myths of foreign-(re)founding*.²¹ Reading them as such makes certain salient but heretofore relatively unnoticed characteristics of the texts rise to the surface, while others, though perhaps more often noted, recede into the background.

For example, the Book of Ruth is usually read as a conversion story, so Ruth is often compared to Abraham, the first convert to Judaism.

Reading Ruth as a myth of foreign-founding invites a comparison instead to Moses, the possibly foreign lawgiver who formed the tribes of Israel into a people of the law. That new comparison calls attention to the fact that Moses died in the land where Ruth was born: Moab. Suddenly, it seems possible that one of the many effects of this great short story is its implication that the law may be reborn as a woman, that one of Ruth's many functions may be to rescript our affective relation to the law from a relation of violent imposition or awe to one of loving devotion, from the sublime to the beautiful.²² The justification for reading Ruth as a myth of foreign-founding is that she is, indeed, the agent of a (re)founding. Her virtuous example returns the Israelites from a period of corruption to devotion to the one true God. Through her son, Obed, she inaugurates the monarchic line of David.

My analysis of foreign-founder scripts is motivated by several goals. It is not my intention to make a general claim about the necessity of stories of foreign-founding to successful refoundings, nor, indeed, to recommend the telling of such stories. Not all regimes tell such stories, and those that do retell them with varying frequencies and intensities. I aim merely to ask what sort of work is done by such stories where they do exist. The genre is a curious one and seems to beg for some sort of explanation. Why do regimes tell stories of themselves in which they are depicted as dependent upon the kindness of strangers? What effect might such stories have on the democratic aspirations of a regime? Aren't democracies particularly threatened by such accounts, given the still widely held belief that democracy presupposes and requires social unity?

Second, entering into the interpretative fray over the significance of myths of foreign-founding is a way to vie for the political-cultural capital that such stories offer the interpreters that claim them. One of the most interesting things to come out of this study is the fact that foreignness in and of itself is neither a cosmopolitan nor a nationalist resource. A foreign-founder is not, as such, an obstacle to a national project. Nationalists find in the figure a vehicle of renationalization. Cosmopolitans find in it a resource for denationalization. Since the symbolic powers of foreignness are capacious enough to be mobilized by both sides, those who would like to expand the reach of democracy beyond the nation's borders must enter the interpretive fray and not just count on the facts of foreignness to do the world-building work of politics.²³

Third, this genre, in which foreignness does positive work (even if not *only* positive work) for a regime, might be a useful resource for those who would like to address tendencies to xenophobia that are part and parcel of modern democratic life. But how? Will attending to the iconic foreign founder open up democracies to the foreignness we now encounter, not for the first time, as part of the processes of globalization and migration? Maybe, but as I argue in Chapter Three contra Julia Kristeva, such an awareness all by itself is not a sufficient condition of generating a more open and magnanimous democratic politics. In truth, it may not even be a necessary condition. There is no logic that requires that relatively homogeneous societies are less tolerant than relatively heterogeneous ones, and there is no empirical evidence to support such a claim, either. If the foreign-founder helps us to combat xenophobia, it is by inviting us to see how a fraught relationship to foreignness may be generated or fed by certain needs and demands of democracy itself (in different ways in its various settings, theorizations, and practices) rather than, say, stemming exclusively from deep psychological needs or from separate, independent tendencies to nativism or xenophobia.

With this last phrase, I take issue with Rogers Smith's argument in *Civic Ideals*. In that book, Smith advances what he calls a "multiple traditions thesis" according to which the United States is not—contra Alexis de Tocqueville, Louis Hartz, and other American exceptionalists—a purely or essentially liberal democratic regime. Instead (as evidenced by its citizenship laws, whose history Smith traces in detail), the United States is a regime constituted by many competing, incompatible, sometimes cooperating ideologies such as liberalism, republicanism, racism, patriarchalism, and nativism. Liberalism and republicanism are, according to Smith, egalitarian, while the other traditions are ascriptive. This pluralization of America's ideological base allows Smith to argue against critics of American liberalism, and also against critics of liberal theory more generally, that the shortcomings of liberal theory and practice do not stem from liberalism per se. The admirable moments of progress, liberation, and justice that punctuate American history are attributable to its liberal or republican commitments, on Smith's account, and America's less fine moments can be traced to its ascriptive traditions.²⁴

What is striking about Smith's reading of American liberalism is that its structure replicates the very mode of thinking that the author seeks to criticize. Out to discredit "ascriptive mythologies that can easily become demonologies," Smith produces an argument that is itself demonological in structure. The many violent crimes and injustices that mark American national history are not essential to its character as a partly liberal democratic regime. Those violences come from elsewhere, from other parts of the American polity. Ascriptive ideologies distinct from liberalism are responsible for the nativist, sexist, and racist citizenship laws and arguments catalogued by Smith. Thus, liberalism is insulated from implication in the unsavory elements of American political history. The real culprits, those other "traditions," are set up as Girardian scapegoats. Made into the bearers of all that liberalism seeks to disavow, they can now be cast out of the polity, which is then (re-)unified around this purging of its pollutants.²⁵ That is to say, they are rendered foreign to the would-be, still-hoped-for, liberal democratic body politic.²⁶

My point is not that, contra Smith, liberalism is in fact the real culprit, after all. What evidence could decide *that*? On the contrary, my point is that setting the problem up as a search for the single, causal culprit is misguided.²⁷ Rather than join this argument, pro or contra, I want to point out how Smith's multiple-traditions thesis works to direct our critical scrutiny away from the object being defended (in this case, liberal values and institutions), while encouraging a demonizing attitude toward the objects of critique (in this case, more explicitly ascriptive forms of life).²⁸ The foreign-founder invites us to set the problem up differently. Because the figure puts foreignness at the center of some democracies' daily (re)foundings, the foreign-founder presses us to look beyond xenophobic beliefs to explain xenophobic politics. What if such politics are *also* driven by pressures that come from within democracy itself, as it is variously practiced and theorized?

By inviting us to switch the question—from "How should we solve the problem of foreignness?" to "What problems does foreignness solve for us?"—the foreign-founder gives us a more promising way to proceed in our efforts to study the diverse, intimate relations between liberal democracy and its would-be others. Such an alternative analysis shows how certain anxieties endemic to liberal democracy—the paradox of democratic power (given up just as it might have been gained),

the alienness of the law, the lack of a sense of choiceworthiness or the periodic need to have that sense refurbished, the distance or inaccessibility of consent—themselves generate or feed an ambivalence that is then projected onto the screen of foreignness. This ambivalence is testified to by Rousseau's curiously foreign lawgiver who is both loved and feared by the people he founds.

The iconic foreign-founder also presses us to ask whether democracy, in its origins and daily refoundings, may presuppose not only the reconstruction of the national (as theorists such as Smith, Beiner, Miller, and others assume) but also the violation of the national.²⁹ To counteract the still deep-going assumption that democracy is necessarily a national form, I refer occasionally in the pages that follow to an alternative conception of democracy: democratic cosmopolitanism. Nationalists often resort to the specter of an international government in order to discount cosmopolitanism and reprivilege the state as the center of any future democratic politics.³⁰ But democracy is not just a set of governing institutions.³¹ It is also a commitment to generate actions in concert that exceed the institutional conditions that both enable and limit popular agencies.

At their most successful (as with some international human rights, labor, and environmental organizations), such actions in concert open up and even institutionalize spaces of public power, action, and discourse that did not exist before. In short, democratic cosmopolitanism is a name for forms of internationalism that seek not to govern, *per se*, but rather to widen the resources, energies, and accountability of an emerging international civil society that contests or supports state actions in matters of transnational and local interest such as environmental, economic, military, cultural, and social policies.³² This is a democratic cosmopolitanism because democracy, in the sense of a commitment to local and popular empowerment, effective representation, accountability, and the generation of actions in concert across lines of difference, is its goal. In that sense it is also a rooted cosmopolitanism, rooted not (contra a range of cosmopolitans from Julia Kristeva to David Hollinger) in a national ideal but rather in a democratic ideal, one that seeks out friends and partners even (or especially) among strangers and foreigners.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, himself the great theorist of democracy as a national form, makes a surprising gesture in this direction when he

refers in passing to the apparent doubles of his domestic foreign-founder, the “few great cosmopolitan souls” who are the last remaining persons in the modern world to be moved by the pity and the natural goodness characteristic of the Rousseauvian state of nature:

The law of nature no longer operated except between the various societies, where under the name of the law of nations, it was tempered by some tacit conventions in order to make intercourse possible and to take the place of natural commiseration which, losing between one society and another nearly all the force it had between one man and another, no longer dwells in any but *a few great cosmopolitan souls*, who surmount the imaginary barriers that separate peoples and who, following the example of the sovereign Being who created them, include the whole human race in their benevolence.³³

The analysis developed here of the intricate relations between democracy and foreignness just might open up more room for the admirable impulses personified by Rousseau’s few great cosmopolitan souls and today enacted by such admirable groups as Médecins du Monde. But I am motivated most centrally by a more humble and academic desire. How shall we understand the following puzzles? The texts that I read, from the *Wizard of Oz* to *Shane*, from Rousseau’s *Social Contract* to the Hebrew Bible and American liberal and democratic theory all suggest in one way or another, that democratic citizens (not the Bible’s original audience, but definitely Moses’ and Ruth’s contemporary readers), are often threatened and supported by dreams of a foreigner who might one day come to save us and enable us finally to abdicate or perhaps reassume the abundant responsibilities of democracy. Why? Why do these fears and hopes take shape through the figure of a foreigner? And what can that foreigner, the iconic foreign-founder, teach us about the insufficiencies, challenges, dramas, and dreams of democracy?