Human persons are at the center of law. Nevertheless, legal personhood, or the status of being a person at law, does not always center on human beings; body parts, embryos, animals and even plants have been considered for legal personhood in recent years. This assortment of legal persons goes back to the ways in which law imagines personhood—as “a legal construct,” a “pure abstraction” and a “rights and duty bearer” that should not be mistaken for a real, natural being. The paradox of humans as the benchmark for granting legal personhood to artificial, nonhuman entities owes its existence to law being a domain of culture, which can be understood as a “capacity for creating the categories of our experience” from “disparate ideas and actions, and in the process fabricate a world of meaning that appears to us as real.”

The legal personhood of corporations is one such fabrication that has become hotly contested in recent years. Jonathan Frieman of San Rafael, California, has made it his mission to prove that corporations are not persons. Pulled over for driving without a passenger in the carpool lane in October 2012, Frieman “waved his corporation papers at the officers, saying that corporations are people under California law.” Apparently Frieman had been looking for years for an opportunity to get fined, appear in court and get a judge to challenge the personhood status of corporations. As Russ Baker from The Huffington Post reports, however, the judge ruled that Frieman had strayed too far from the intent of the law regarding driving in the carpool lane, “which is to get people out of their cars and into one car in that lane,” and therefore could not

argue that corporation papers constitute a person.\textsuperscript{5} Frieman is not the first to challenge the artificial personhood of corporations. These kinds of challenges go back to the thirteenth century, and were possible in part because the definition of corporation, and implicitly of its legal personhood, was fluid in the understanding of civil and canon lawyers.\textsuperscript{6} A medieval corporation was paradoxically conceived not only as “an abstract unitary entity perceptible only by the intellect” but also, and at the same time, as “a body composed of a plurality of human beings.”\textsuperscript{7} The permeable boundary between natural and artificial personhood puts pressure on the relationship between law and justice, a relationship essential to many arguments in this volume.

It is tempting to trace some of the current debates about personhood in Anglo-American law back to the Middle Ages, but this is not the purpose of this book. Rather, the focus is on some of the compelling, age-specific questions that inform medieval legal personhood as a result of the jurisdictional pluralism of medieval law—for instance, how might the common law jurisdiction over lands and goods impact the canon law jurisdiction over the soul? The primary goal of this volume, therefore, is to explore what might be distinctly medieval and particularly English about legal personhood vis-à-vis jurisdictional conflicts by analyzing a range of examples from literature and art, historical and legal documents, theology and philosophy. A secondary goal is to furnish a timely reassessment of the English ‘law and literature’ field, best collected in the pioneering volume of Emily Steiner and Candace Barrington, \textit{The Letter of the Law}, by addressing the question: What place might there be for legal personhood at the intersection of the legal and the literary imaginations?\textsuperscript{8}

It is only since the individualistic turn in law, which took place at the beginning of the early modern period, that individuals become models for legal personhood. Alexander Nékám reminds us that, in terms of legal evolution, the legal (artificial) person precedes the natural person and that the social person


\textsuperscript{8} Emily Steiner and Candace Barrington, eds., \textit{The Letter of the Law: Legal Practice and Literary Production in Medieval England} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).