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Response to Anne E. Duggan, review of Alicia C. Montoya, *Medievalist Enlightenment: From Charles Perrault to Jean-Jacques Rousseau.* Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2013. viii + 248 pp. Bibliography and index. $85.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1-84384-342-9.

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I am grateful to the editors of H-France for their invitation to prepare a response to Anne Duggan's review of my book *Medievalist Enlightenment*—a response that, for various reasons, and as the editors correctly surmised, is very much called for. Indeed, as I read the review, I found myself wondering whether it was really my book it was describing, given the absence in the review of any extended discussion of the book's central thesis, which deals with the role of the medieval in constructions of the concept of "the Enlightenment." While it is unquestionably the reviewer's role to foreground aspects of a book's argument or details that might require rethinking, this review's almost exclusive focus on topics tangential to the main argument risks seriously misrepresenting the book's overall thesis and intent.

In her review, Duggan assembles a dizzying number of criticisms and objections to the book, raising further points as the review moves along, sometimes as part of the general argument, sometimes as asides that are not further followed up. The cumulative effect is overwhelming, and it would be difficult, given the format of this response, to address all of her points in a single response. I will focus here on what I think are her four major issues with the book, as outlined in the third paragraph of the review. These are (1) that it supposedly makes overgeneralizations about medievalist tendencies, especially relating to opera and the novel, (2) that it "reduces the complexity of [specific] genre's or author's relation to the medieval," (3) that it "does not adequately take into account how things medieval get channeled through Renaissance humanism," and finally, (4), that "the concept of medievalism is sometimes used in ways that efface distinctions between medieval and Renaissance periods."

These are serious and potentially damning criticisms. When one turns from these claims to the examples used to substantiate them, however, it is somewhat puzzling to discover not a detailed discussion of the texts I most fully discuss in the book—Charles Perrault's *Parallèle des Anciens et Modernes*, Madame de Sévigné's letters, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Nouvelle Héloïse*, the comte de Caylus' contributions to the *Mémoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, the comte de Boulainvilliers's works on feudalism, and Montesquieu's *Esprit des Lois*—but instead, discussions centered on other genres and authors. By far the largest part of the review is dedicated to a discussion of the fairy tale, specifically Charles Perrault's *Contes du temps passé*—on which Duggan has published extensively—and, to a lesser extent, opera and the seventeenth-century novel. These are genres and texts that are certainly an important part of the argument made in *Medievalist Enlightenment*, but I treat them in a relatively cursory manner, as compared to the more lengthy discussion of other texts. Nowhere does the book offer a thorough interpretation of Perrault's *Contes*, and not a single seventeenth-century novel is analyzed. In fact, my discussion of fairy tales and opera is confined to a single chapter, chapter four, while novels are mentioned in another chapter, chapter three, that explicitly adopts the viewpoint of readers and their reception of novels, i.e. concerned not with what the novels do, but with what readers did with them. So let me first address the reviewer's comments on these two chapters, and then come back to the book as a whole and the argument that it makes.

In her discussion of chapter four, "Continuities: The Medieval as Performance," Duggan writes that my treatment of Perrault "simplif[ies] what is going on in his fairy tales." This would be a fair criticism, if not for the fact that Perrault's tales appear only in a few scattered references in my book. When I speak of Perrault's medievalism, I refer more to his *Parallèle des anciens et des modernes*—the main text discussed in chapter one—than to his fairy tales. But putting aside these caveats, my treatment of the fairy tales is criticized because it supposedly fails to show how Perrault medievalizes his text. Yet I think my book does precisely that, in pointing out how Perrault's publishing strategies conferred a medieval patina to his *Contes*. His choice to "publish" the volume initially not as a printed book, but as a luxurious illustrated manuscript visually reminiscent of medieval illuminated books, was an important step in medievalizing the nascent genre of the fairy tale. Visually, the contrast between Perrault's medievalizing *Contes* that claimed to draw on French sources, with his rival La Fontaine's classicist *Fables* that instead drew on classical models, was meant to make a polemic point, within the context of Perrault's allegiance to Louis XIV's proto-nationalist agenda.

Similarly, I nowhere claim that the sources of his tales were authentically medieval as Duggan implies I do. Rather, I write that the insistence one finds in the writings of authors such as Marie-Jeanne L'Héritier on the supposedly medieval origin of fairy tales merits examination as an example of the way some eighteenth-century authors invoked a medieval ancestry for specific rhetorical purposes—in her case, to suggest a lineage of female authors, and to inscribe herself within a specific nationalist, monarchical tradition. Duggan's choice of fairy tales as an example supporting her contentions (1) and (2) (that my book overgeneralizes and reduces the complexity of specific genres' relation to the medieval) both overlooks the relatively minor role Perrault's *Contes*—as opposed to his *Parallèle*—play in the argument, and suggests I am generalizing about the entire genre, as opposed to offering a new interpretation of a few authors and texts I consider significant within a broader consideration of Enlightenment medievalisms.

A third claim Duggan makes is that I pay too little attention to early seventeenth-century and Renaissance sources for eighteenth-century medievalism. She mentions, specifically, the influence of Renaissance models on fairy tales, and early seventeenth-century writings on *galanterie*, which I largely pass over in silence. This is a fair objection, and perhaps I could have spent more time dwelling on antecedents, although, as I mention in my book, excellent work has already been produced on the topic of seventeenth-century *galanterie*, for example, by scholars like Emmanuel Bury, Alain Viala, and most recently Marine Roussillon. (Let me note my surprise, *en passant*, that the review refers exclusively to English-language publications, ignoring the excellent scholarship produced by French colleagues on this and other topics.) This seems to me to be the classic situation of a monograph on Topic A being reviewed by a specialist on Topic B, who objects that there is too little of Topic B in the book. If I have not discussed Renaissance mediations of medieval material at great length, I do acknowledge their existence and briefly explore them at various moments, especially in chapters three and four. A discussion of Castiglione's *Courtier*, Scudéry's *Conversations*, and Faret and Méré's works would surely have further enriched my treatment of *galanterie*, but would also have moved the book well beyond its original topic as would have any attempt to discuss the (English-language) studies of Elias, Stanton, and Seifert on this subject. Since the subject of *my* book is eighteenth-century literature and political thought, specifically the construction of notions of "the Enlightenment," I judged it best not to dwell too long, despite their evident interest, on Renaissance and seventeenth-century texts.

If *Medievalist Enlightenment* is not a book about Renaissance and seventeenth-century texts, nor about Perrault's fairy tales, then what *is* it about? Quite simply, as the title indicates, it is concerned with medievalist elements in the Enlightenment's narrative of itself. It seeks to tease out the ways in which the very notion of "the Enlightenment" was necessarily predicated on the notion of a corresponding Dark Age—the Middle Ages—that the Enlightenment then sought imaginatively to recreate. This discursive creation of "the medieval" was highly complex, for it functioned both as a foil to the *philosophes* and as an idealized, alternative space from which to rethink modernity itself, most notably in Rousseau's contradictory use of medievalist elements in his writings. In its most

polemical context, the Middle Ages functioned for some authors as a rhetorical, imagined site that allowed them to rethink the ideology and poetics inherited from classicist absolutism.

So it appears that Duggan misreads the book's basic intent in her review. The argument it seeks to make is not a naively positivistic argument demonstrating the mere presence of medievalist elements in Enlightenment culture, nor quantifying this presence. (This work has already been done, for the beginning of the period I study, in Nathan Edelman's classic *Attitudes of Seventeenth-Century France toward the Middle Ages.*[1]) Admittedly, if judged by such criteria, the book is sorely lacking. Eighteenth-century culture, taken as a whole, was not exceptionally medievalist in outlook. It is quite true, as Duggan points out, that medievalist references were not widespread in opera, and that only three of Quinault and Lully's *tragédies lyriques* were based on medievalist (Renaissance) sources. Likewise, it is undeniable that fairy tales drew much more on Renaissance models—Basile, Straparola, etc.—than on medieval ones. (In this instance, I plead guilty to having assumed readers' knowledge of this fact: as Duggan rightly points out, such information "needs to be said, not assumed.") But demonstrating or quantifying the existence of medievalist elements in these works is not the point the book seeks to make. Rather, I set out to explore *how* and *why* the medieval was invoked by a number of specific authors and thinkers, in a number of specific texts and theatrical works, at a specific moment in history. In other words, if it is quite true that only three of Quinault and Lully's operas were based on medievalist sources, the fact that these were their *last* three operas, and that after 1684, the composer-librettist duo turned their back on classicist models seems to me highly significant, all the more so given the fact that a number of other authors also decisively turned to medieval models around this same date.

Another source of misunderstanding in the review stems from the fact that my book explores not the "historical" Middle Ages and the historical processes by which medieval material was transmitted to the eighteenth century (hence my relative silence about Renaissance middlemen) but concerns itself primarily with medievalism, that is, cultural perceptions rather than historical authenticity. Whether or not Perrault's fairy tales or Boulainvilliers's views of feudalism were faithful to their "real" medieval models is mostly irrelevant. What interests me is the way they functioned within the cultural field of their own period. In other words, I see the Middle Ages as a historical construct that needs to be understood with reference to the culturally and historically determined interests of those engaged in imaginatively recreating them. The phenomenon of eighteenth-century antiquarianism is interesting not for what it tells us about the Middle Ages, but about modernity. This explicit focus on medievalism underlines the irrelevance of Duggan's criticism (4), that my book elides medieval and Renaissance phenomena. This elision is precisely the point it makes, that in eighteenth-century views, the medieval was constructed in other chronological and historical terms than our present-day ones, and telescoped historical periods that in our view are distinct. I am not, as the review implies, "suggesting that what scholars tend to consider Renaissance courts are in fact medieval." Rather, I am suggesting that the very categories of "medieval" and "Renaissance" need to be critically interrogated, and that studying eighteenth-century medievalisms helps us do so in some significant ways.

Let me then briefly set out the book's argument as I see it. Because the "medieval" that medievalism refers to is as much a rhetorical construct as an objective historical reality, the book's opening chapter, "A Sense of the Past: Ancients, Moderns, and the Medieval," starts out by asking some fundamental questions on the history of ideas during the early Enlightenment. Was the medieval perceived as distinct from modernity during the period 1680-1720, and how was this historical otherness conceptualized or not? Intellectuals' increasing questioning of accepted historical narratives led some of them to adopt a stance that could be termed proto-historicist. At the same time, prevailing definitions of the medieval as essentially a literary or rhetorical category, or a floating signifier, meant that considerations of historicity and philology remained intertwined. The Middle Ages, as a separate historical period, were both defined and refracted through its literary productions.

Chapter two, "The Medievalist Rhetorics of Enlightenment," then addresses the teleological view of the Enlightenment that was first propounded by the Parisian *philosophes* whose reformist agenda

dominated public discourse. Within their self-view as secular, progressive intellectuals, essentially forward rather than backward-looking, there was little place for the medieval. The Middle Ages functioned as a foil obscuring other, contemporary, often aristocratic traditions that on the contrary looked backward towards the medieval past for political regeneration. The foundational rhetorics of the Enlightenment thus drew on an opposition between medieval darkness and modern light that is embodied in the period's own self-designation. I explore here both this defining opposition as well as its contestation in an overview extending from Jean Chapelain's *Lecture des vieux romans* in the 1640s to Rousseau's *First Discourse* in the 1750s.

Chapter three, "Survivals: Reading the Medieval *Roman* at the Dawn of the Enlightenment," studies the reception of chivalric romance, in various more or less bastardized forms, throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The *roman de chevalerie* provided the matrix for much critical engagement with the medieval in early Enlightenment France. Significantly, this genre was frequently associated with a female readership, gendering the Middle Ages themselves female. I explore the role of chivalric romance as a defining mode in Enlightenment medievalism, and the ways in which chivalric fiction was read during the opening years of the period, through an analysis of Madame de Sévigné's readings and engagement with the genre. Chivalric fiction's link with an idealized past, I argue, played a central role in the self-fashioning of aristocrats such as Sévigné, so that aesthetic appreciations of the genre were inflected by strong political and class interests.

In chapter four, I examine the genres of the fairy tale and opera. These genres had in common both their reference to (fictional) medieval sources and narrative *topoi*, and the key role they gave to performance. These genres, in other words, invite us to think of the medieval not so much as text, but as performance, not primarily as content, but as a kind of oral or musical mode. I close this section with chapter five, "Reconfigurations: Medievalism and Desire, Between *Eros* and *Agape*," on two textual traditions that emphasized erotic love, understood as a medieval quality *par excellence*. These are the Ovidian heroide, which was increasingly medievalized in the eighteenth century, and the twelfth-century letters of Héloïse. Through an interpretation of Sévigné's letters and Rousseau's rewriting of the Abélard and Héloïse myth, I argue that these authors deployed medieval references in an attempt to secularize older notions of Christian *agape*, seeking to attain a new, distinctly modern and bourgeois (in the case of Rousseau) reconciliation between secular and divine varieties of love, *eros* and *agape*.

The book concludes with a discussion of the professionalization of medieval studies, spearheaded by the Académie des Inscriptions in the 1720s through 1750s, as a reaction to older, more literary engagements with the medieval. Chapter six, "The Invention of Medieval Studies," focuses on the ideological contest between academic medievalists and aristocratic scholar-amateurs. Studying key texts by Boulainvilliers, La Curne de Sainte-Palaye, comte de Caylus, and Montesquieu, this chapter teases out the specificity of personalized, aristocratic approaches to the medieval as a movement that can be contrasted to the nascent "scientific," supposedly more objective method associated with the Enlightenment *philosophes*. The book's argument culminates with Montesquieu and his elaboration of a distinctly modern political theory that drew on medievalist themes, whose inherent nostalgia he imbued with powerful political undertones. Thus, literary medievalism both helped co-opt new groups into the absolutist state by creating for it a new collective memory, and became a site of contestation from which the disenfranchised aristocracy, such as Boulainvilliers and Montesquieu, could formulate new societal models.

As this brief summary indicates, *Medievalist Enlightenment* seeks to say something about the movement that we know as "the Enlightenment." Yet curiously, Duggan's review mentions the Enlightenment only in passing: twice when directly referring to the book's title, and once quoting my statement that "early Enlightenment readers tended to elide the medieval period and what we know today as the Renaissance." A key figure in my argument such as the comte de Boulainvilliers is mentioned not a single time. More importantly, nowhere does the review discuss the notion of the Enlightenment itself, as a movement that supposedly laid the conceptual groundwork for (political) modernity, and its possible relation to the medievalist artifacts I describe in my book. In other words, Duggan's review fails to reflect *Medievalist Enlightenment*'s argument in a number of critical

ways. In addition, and more problematically, the review attributes to the book aims it does not have—supposedly, to demonstrate or quantify the presence of medieval elements in genres such as the fairy tale and opera—and then condemns it for failing to meet them. Thus, ironically, the first criticism it makes, that my book overgeneralizes on the basis of just a few examples, could be made, too, of the review, which is largely based on a reading of chapter four, focusing on one specific genre and work (fairy tales, represented by Perrault's *Contes*) to the exclusion of the other, weightier works that the book discusses. By so often targeting details, the review ultimately ignores the book's central argument, and surprisingly passes over in silence two of the major issues it raises: that of the rhetorical construction of the concept of "the Enlightenment" itself, and the relation between eighteenth-century medievalisms and specific political and class interests. In short, while Duggan's review makes some valid points on specific aspects of my argument, I cannot help but remain disappointed that it fails to engage with the book's main ideas.

NOTE

[1] Nathan Edelman's classic *Attitudes of Seventeenth-Century France toward the Middle Ages* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1946).

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