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PROLEPTIC SUBVERSION: LONGING FOR THE MIDDLE AGES IN THE LATE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY FRENCH FAIRY TALE

In his important analysis of the first French fairy tale vogue, *Fairy Tales, Sexuality and Gender in France (1690–1715): Nostalgic Utopias*, Lewis C. Seifert contends that the rise of the literary fairy tale in the early 1690s can be indirectly connected to a widespread phenomenon of medieval nostalgia, particularly affecting the salon aristocracy. Dismayed by the waning cultural influence of the worldly nobility, and apprehensive of the noble identity's increasing instability, late seventeenth-century salon authors used fairy tales to sublimate the present, refashioning in its place an idealized, medieval past, traditionally associated with oral genres and folklore. As such, while the formulaic opening of the archetypal fairy tale ("once upon a time") may give the impression that the tale is situated in a mythical or non-existent temporal space, the majority of these tales in fact refer to a chronologically and geographically specific context: that of the indigenous, French Middle Ages.[1]

Medieval nostalgia, as it operates in the late seventeenth-century French fairy tale, does not involve an exclusively present-past dynamic, however. Rather, it is proleptic.[2] In looking to the past as an idealized alternative to contemporary reality, late seventeenth-century fairy tale authors inadvertently constructed the Middle Ages as a kind of utopia, a concept that, according to Ernest Bloch, is fundamentally future oriented (Seifert 16).[3] Passing over

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1. In paying homage to the Middle Ages, fairy tales published during the final decades of Louis XIV's reign evoked, both formally and stylistically, the heroic, pastoral novels of the early salon (1610–1645)—a novelistic context in which the medieval codes of chivalry and feudalism were likewise revered and idealized (Seifert 15).
2. I am grateful to my colleague John Westbrook for the term "proleptic nostalgia." As Seifert points out, Susan Stewart offers a similar conceptualization of nostalgia in the introduction to her book *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. However Stewart refers to this type of longing as "future-past" (Stewart x).
3. Seifert references the introduction to Bloch's *The Utopian Function in Art and Literature: Selected Essays*, page xxxiii.

the present, nostalgic authors probed a real or imagined remote history for a reason to believe that the future might hold new and better possibilities.

Seifert advances several theories as to why the Middle Ages, as opposed to another era, might have been particularly inspirational to so many late seventeenth-century fairy tale authors. While women writers appear to have imagined medieval culture as legitimizing feminine desire to a greater degree than at present, male writers seem to have associated the period with "normative masculinity," a view of manhood exemplified by the heroic knights of courtly, chivalric romances (Seifert 129,149).[4] Authors of both genders viewed the Middle Ages as representing an idealized form of "social cohesion and interaction," which was believed to be lacking in contemporary society (Seifert 22).[5] Above all, however, the Middle Ages appear to have represented a more stable era for the aristocratic identity, whose innateness was confirmed by the presence of the marvelous and the prevalence of exceptional, physical heroism. This was a curious tendency, especially when one considers that nearly a third of the authors who developed the vogue were not themselves aristocrats (Seifert 112, 151).[6]

Here, I would like to propose a new dimension to studies on the complex and dynamic relationship between the late seventeenth-century fairy tale and the French Middle Ages: that medieval nostalgia embodies more than simply a longing for a better time, or for a specific set of salon values perceived to have been normative in medieval culture. Specifically, this type of nostalgia comprises one of several authorial strategies developed by worldly authors toward the end of Louis XIV's reign, in their efforts to articulate a direct and calculated political response to the absolutist propaganda of Louis XIV. This was a propaganda that sought, in similarly nostalgic fashion, to extol the monarchy's glorious present and to project that present onto an even more glorious future through proleptic association with the grandeur of Greco-Roman Antiquity. In creating an alternative medieval origin for the worldly

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4. In his discussion of why male writers may have idealized medieval heroism, Seifert draws from Michael Nerlich's observations about the late seventeenth-century identity crisis of the *noblesse d'épée* who, by the end of that period, were no longer called upon to embark on military missions, but rather were sequestered at court (Nerlich cited by Seifert 152).

5. Seifert cites the contractual "give and take" that occurs between the storytellers in the frame narratives of the *Decameron* or the *Heptaméron* as examples of the social cohesion in question.

6. It would appear that aristocratic writers felt threatened by the rising political and economic power of the bourgeoisie, a phenomenon due both to Louis XIV's appointment of bourgeois ministers and intendants, and to the new possibility of purchasing aristocratic titles, a practice extremely unpopular with the low-level nobility.

literary fairy tale, and for the diasporic salon community that produced and consumed such stories, late seventeenth-century salon authors distinguished themselves and their works both from the classical literary canon and from the absolutist social and political orientation of Louis XIV's court.[7]

Proleptic Nostalgia at Court

In the decades before the fairy-tale vogue took shape, Louis XIV's court at Versailles had become fraught with nostalgic obsession for a time when France had been part of a powerful Roman Empire, and the emperor had represented a kind of deified political authority, believed to be in direct communication with the gods of Olympus.[8] In an effort to associate a similar brand of authority with his emerging personal reign, the young monarch took pains to construct an embellished (baroque) vision of France's former classical glory, projecting the aura of this heroic past onto the monarchy's future through various forms of aesthetic mediation. Charles Le Brun frescoed the King's apartments and the "Salon de Guerre" with deified classical rulers such as Augustus and Alexander, associating highlights from the lives of these emperors with more recent French military victories against Spain and Holland (see Appendix I). Jean Cotelle paid tribute to the palace's recently renovated gardens by representing them as a nostalgic classical paradise, with mythological scenes in the foreground and divinities seated in the heavens (see Appendix II). Jean-Baptiste Lully composed court music that extolled the classical values of symmetry and precision. Playwrights were not only encouraged to resurrect classical tragedies for the purpose of court entertainment, but also to justify their choice of subject matter by proleptically linking Louis XIV's ambitious future to the heroism of the glorious, classical past. In the second preface to *Andromaque* (1676), for example, Jean Racine explains that he has allowed Astyanax to survive the Trojan war, even though he is killed off according to ancient Greek sources, by stating that:

> Qui ne sait que l'on fait descendre nos anciens rois de ce fils d'Hector, et que nos vieilles Chroniques sauvent la vie à ce jeune prince,

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7. Several of Lully and Quinault's operas, for example, will attest to the fact that Louis XIV's court was not completely devoid of medieval influences, particularly during the 1680s. However, I would argue that in these cases, the foregrounding of medieval heroes such as Amadis (1684) and Roland (1685) constitutes an eclectic presence and does not contribute to Louis XIV's overall project of nostalgic propaganda.
8. For more on the concept of the divine monarchy in Greco-Roman Antiquity, see Tarn.

> après la désolation de son pays, pour en faire le fondateur de notre monarchie. (Racine 40)
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> [Who is not aware that our ancient kings are believed to have descended from this son of Hector, and that our old chronicles save the life of this young prince, following the destruction of his homeland, in order to make him the founder of our monarchy.][9]

Louis XIV's nostalgia for classical Antiquity exerted such a powerful influence on the French Academy that, when defending his three recently published short tales in verse in the preface to the third edition of *Griseldis, nouvelle, avec le conte de Peau d'Ane et celui des Souhaits ridicules* (1694) [*Griselda, novel, with the Tale of Donkey Skin and that of the Ridiculous Wishes*], a preface that is reprinted in the *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes* (1688–1697) [*Parallel of the Ancients and the Moderns*], Charles Perrault felt compelled to defend the fairy tale by capitalizing on the Academy's nostalgia for the literary aesthetics of the classical past (Zarucchi 293).[10] Arguing that, since modern fairy tales sought the same moral continuity as the myths and fables of Antiquity, and perhaps even did a superior job of achieving it, Perrault insisted that the fairy tale was a genre worthy of France's future literary greatness (Zarucchi 293). In claiming, however, that fairy tales were fundamentally nostalgic for the classical fables of the past, Perrault reveals yet another way in which his emerging philosophy of fairy tale production would differ radically from that of his salon contemporaries. While Perrault's vision for the future development of the literary fairy tale appears to have resonated with the French Academy, given the lack of critical reaction against the genre, the worldly public was clearly not seduced, as we shall see.[11]

Family Feud: Perrault, Lhéritier and the New French Fairy Tale

Following the publication of his new vision for the literary fairy tale in the preface to *Griseldis*, Perrault sought to model how salon fairy tales could be

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9. All translations are my own.

10. Perrault wrote "Griseldis" in 1691 and presented it to the French Academy, where it was well received. He wrote "Les Souhaits Ridicules" [The Ridiculous Wishes] in 1693, based on a classical tale but substituting French peasants for the foolish protagonists. He wrote "Peau d'Ane" [Donkey Skin], a short, verse fairy tale, that same year. In 1694, he published all three together with a preface that engages the fairy tale in the quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns.

11. As Seifert points out, the Academy's reluctance to censor or critique fairy tales can also be attributed to the fact that the genre's traditional association with old women and peasants made academicians reluctant to dignify the genre by attacking it (Seifert 64).

made to conform to classical tastes with the circulation of his famous *Contes de ma mere l'oye* [*Mother Goose Tales*], a manuscript that was eventually published in 1697 under the title *Histoires ou contes du temps passé, avec des moralités* [*Stories or Tales of Times Past, with Morals*]. These short tales, each organized around a moral lesson and with the stated goal of providing behavioral instruction to children, conformed to the classical literary aesthetic in several respects. First, the organization of each short narrative around a particular moral principle or *moralité* gave the fairy tale the illusion of unity and centralization. Second, the conciseness and uniformity of the style and of the moral messages reiterated from tale to tale offered the collection an aura of symmetry, harmony and homogeneity. Third, the fact that the short tales were gathered together and presented in the form of a collection, placed an unprecedented emphasis on generic purity; prior to the *Contes de ma mère l'oye*, fairy tales had never appeared in print without being accompanied, in some form, by a novel.[12] Yet, a final way in which Perrault's "classical" fairy tales made a definitive break with the salon tradition was on the level of plot. Although medieval nostalgia had been present in the fairy tale since its inception, Perrault's simultaneous refusal to feature chivalric heroes (Seifert 150) or eloquent, active, salon heroines, demonstrated a strictly classical interpretation of similar oral material.[13] In so doing, Perrault proffered a new direction for the nascent salon tradition of publishing literary fairy tales even before the tradition had fully articulated itself.

During the early years of the *fin-de-siècle* fairy tale vogue, medieval nostalgia was generally relegated to formal considerations evocative of medieval romances, or implicit references to medieval cultural paradigms. In 1690, for example, when Marie-Catherine le Jumel de Barneville, comtesse d'Aulnoy inserted "L'île de la félicité" [The Island of Happiness], the first fairy tale of the French tradition, into her novel *Histoire d'Hypolite, comte de Duglas* [*Hypolitus, Earl of Douglas*], the hero of this tale, Adolphe, is murdered by Father Time at the tale's conclusion precisely because he abandons his lady and thereby violates the medieval chivalric code. Similarly, the fairy tale d'Aulnoy published the following year, interpolated into her travel narrative the *Relation du Voyage d'Espagne* [*Account of a Trip to Spain*] and generally referred to as "L'Histoire de Mira" ["The Story of Mira"], capitalized indirectly on the

12. D'Aulnoy's "Ile de la félicité" (1690) [The Island of Happiness] (1690) and "Histoire de Mira" (1691) [The Story of Mira] were both interpolated into novels, while Perrault's "Peau d'âne" (1694) [Donkey Skin] was juxtaposed with two short novellas. These texts will be discussed in more detail in the following paragraph.

13. See Patricia Hannon for more on how Perrault's interpretation of the same oral tale types differs from that of his salon contemporaries.

plots of medieval romances, exploiting the discrepancy in legends surrounding the fairy Mélusine.

Although medieval nostalgia is clearly an important undercurrent in both of these initial fairy tales, the degree to which the Middle Ages might become a generic mandate for the vogue to follow was not explicitly theorized until Marie-Jeanne Lhéritier de Villandon decided to accompany the two literary fairy tales she inserted into her *Oeuvres meslées* (1696) [*Mixed Works*] with a tripartite manifesto for future fairy-tale publication. Circulated in 1695, one year after Perrault had published his defense of the classical fairy tale in the preface to the third edition of *Griseldis* (1694), Lhéritier's *Oeuvres meslées* provided a strident salon response to Perrault's classical vision. In an effort to separate the worldly literary fairy tale from the classical tradition, and to preserve it from being corrupted by Louis XIV's nostalgia for the myths and fables of Antiquity, Lhéritier argued that the salon community, like the literary fairy tales that had been part of its culture for the past two decades, was inextricably grounded in the indigenous French Middle Ages. In this way, Lhéritier argued, medieval nostalgia must continue to play a central role in the literary fairy tale's future development, not only because of its innate compatibility with salon values, but also because it provided a unique and effective way to exert a counter-discourse to Louis XIV's classicism.

Of Gods and Fairies

Lhéritier's *Oeuvres méslées* comprises a collection of letters written to various members of the author's real-life literary entourage. Two of these letters, addressed to Mademoiselle de Perrault and Madame Le Camus, contain short stories. Two more, addressed to Lhéritier's patron the duchesse d'Epérnon and to her fellow salon author the comtesse de Murat, contain fairy tales. Several others, such as those addressed to Madame de M*** and Mademoiselle de B. C.***, contain odes, sonnets and eclogues. An additional two letters, addressed to Mademoiselle de Razilly and to an anonymous reader, referred to as Madame D.G.***, philosophize on the process of literary creation but do not contain interpolated narratives. Finally, towards the end of the work, Lhéritier includes a tribute to the late poet Antoinette Deshoulières. Although the epistolary component of Lhéritier's work is often ignored, these letters are in fact essential for an accurate reading of the work's interpolated tales, and for an understanding of the role that the Middle Ages would continue to play in the development and theorization of the nascent fairy-tale vogue. As shall become apparent, Lhéritier's letters, in addition to situating her fairy tales in specific narrative contexts, also appear to respond directly to her uncle Charles Perrault's previous assertion that literary fairy tales, as classical genres, should strive to imitate the myths and fables of Antiquity, thereby encouraging her

salon contemporaries to capitalize instead on the indigenous, French Middle Ages as providing genealogical legitimacy for the worldly literary enterprise.

Lhéritier introduces the work's first fairy tale with a letter to her patron, the duchesse d'Epérnon, stating that the fairy tale she is about to read does not find its origin in Antiquity, but rather that it is "une de ces Fables gauloises, qui viennent apparemment en droite ligne des Conteurs ou Troubadours de Provence si célèbres autrefois" (Lhéritier 163–4)[14] [One of these Gallic fables that apparently comes in direct line from the Storytellers or Troubadours of Province, who were so famous in the past]. Lhéritier learned the story, she continues, from "une Dame très instruite des antiquités Grecques & Romaines mais encore plus savante dans les Antiquités Gauloises" (Lhéritier 164–5) [a woman who was very learned in Greco-Roman Antiquity but who was even more knowledgeable about Gallic Antiquity]. In this way, Lhéritier emphasizes to her patron that those who write fairy tales of medieval origin do so, not because they know nothing about the genres of classical Antiquity, but rather *despite* such knowledge.

Lhéritier continues to justify her break with the classical tradition by emphasizing to d'Epernon that, even though her tale will not seek to prove the veracity of a classical moral, it will nonetheless defend a medieval proverb whose values epitomize those of the salon tradition. In this case, her tale will prove "une maxime très sensée quoique Gothique" [a maxim that is very reasonable even though it dates from the high Middle Ages] (Lhéritier 165), a proverb which maintains that "Doux & courtois langage vaux mieux que riche héritage" (Lhéritier 165) [Sweet and courteous language is worth more than a rich inheritance].[15] In choosing to exalt a maxim that extols the worldly female virtues of wit and eloquence over the classical female virtues of duty and submission, Lhéritier simultaneously foregrounds the Middle Ages as the locus both of original fairy-tale production and of worldly moral values, hoping that her patron will agree, and thereby compensate her innovative project financially.

Lhéritier concludes her fairy tale with a final invocation to her patron, this time exhorting that salon authors working in the tradition of the Middle Ages should not be judged against the values of the classical aesthetic, but rather be recognized as belonging to a distinct ideological system—a system that is

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14. I have modernized the spelling of all French quotes where appropriate. Original capitalization and punctuation have been retained.

15. It is possible that this was the moral of the original tale type, but as Perrault points out in "Les Fées," his version of the same tale, adhering to this moral is not obligatory. Perrault's replacement moral authorizes the importance of *honnêteté* and submission.

equal if not superior to the classical aesthetic espoused by the French Academy. As Lhéritier states:

> Je ne sais pas, Madame, ce que vous pensez de ce Conte: mais il ne me paraît pas plus incroyable que beaucoup d'Histoires que nous a fait [sic] l'ancienne Grèce; & j'aime autant dire qu'il sortit des perles et des rubis de la bouche de Blanche, pour designer les effets de l'Eloquence, que de dire qu'il sortait des éclairs de celle de Périclès. Contes pour Contes, il me paraît que ceux de l'antiquité Gauloise valent bien à peu près ceux de l'antiquité Grecque: & les Fées ne sont pas moins en droit de faire des prodiges, que les Dieux de la Fable. (Lhéritier 227)
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> [I am not sure, Madame, what you think of this story: but it does not seem to me to be any more incredible than many stories that have been passed down to us from Ancient Greece; and I like just as much to say that pearls and rubies fell from the mouth of Blanche, to denote the effects of eloquence, than to say that lightning came from that of Pericles. Story for story, it seems to me that those originating in Gallic Antiquity are just as worthy as those from Greek Antiquity: and fairies have as much right to create magic as do the Gods of the Fable.]

In stating that the eloquence of her fairy tale's medieval heroine is more pleasant to behold than the eloquence of Pericles, a classical orator, Lhéritier makes a plea for the superiority, not only of the literary fairy tale, but also of the worldly salon culture that enables its production and reception. In insinuating that fairy tales derived from the medieval tradition contain a kind of eloquence that is distinct, and perhaps even superior to that of Greco-Roman Antiquity, Lhéritier's appeal to her patron simultaneously urges her literary public to recognize the value of her story, not only in monetary terms, but more importantly with respect to the inherent appeal of worldly culture, a culture that equals, if not surpasses, that of the court.

The second letter of Lhéritier's *Oeuvres mêlées*, which directly follows the letter to the duchesse d'Epérnon, implies that just as medieval literary values have been passed down from the Troubadours to the present, so also should such values continue to provide a legacy for the future. In this letter, which contains the fairy tale "L'adroite Princesse ou les aventures de Finette" [The Clever Princess or the Adventures of Finette], Lhéritier takes pains to ensure that fellow members of her salon community are informed of the literary fairy tale's rich medieval heritage, dedicating the letter to contemporary novelist and *conteuse* Henriette-Julie de Castelnau, comtesse de Murat, with the following preamble:

Je ne doute pas que vous ne sachiez que ce Conte est très-fameux: mais je ne sais si vous êtes informée de ce que la tradition nous dit de son antiquité. Elle nous assure que les Troubadours, ou Conteurs de Provence, ont inventé Finette bien longtemps [avant] qu'Abbellard [sic], [et que] le célèbre Comte Thibaud de Champagne [n'] eussent produit des Romans. (Lhéritier 296)

[You are no doubt aware that this story is very famous: but I am not sure if you are informed of what tradition tells us about its antiquity. It assures us that the Troubadours or Provencal storytellers invented Finette well before they created Abailard and before the famous comte Thibaut de Champagne wrote novels.]

Lhéritier's insistence that the comtesse de Murat be acquainted with the medieval origins of the French literary fairy tale she is about to read, goes beyond a mere concern for literary historical accuracy, however. In informing Murat of the tale's trajectory, Lhéritier simultaneously urges Murat, and the entire salon community, by extension, to recognize the Middle Ages as providing a set of literary aesthetics distinct from, if not superior to, those of the classical animal-fable tradition. In this way, Lhéritier hopes to convince Murat to try the genre out for herself, as we see in the following verse poem, which concludes the letter:

Oui, ces Contes frappent beaucoup;
Plus que ne font les faits & du Singe & du Loup.
J'y prenais un plaisir extrême,
Tous les enfants en font de même:
Mais ces Fables plairont jusqu'aux plus grands esprits,
Si vous voulez belle Comtesse,
Par vos heureux talents orner de tels récits.
L'antiquité Gaule vous en presse:
Daignez donc mettre dans leurs jours
Les Contes ingénus, quoique remplis d'adresse,
Qu'ont inventé les Troubadours.
Le sens mystérieux que leur tour enveloppe
Égale bien celui d'Esope. (Lhéritier 297–8)

[Yes, these tales are quite striking;
Even more so than the deeds of the monkey or the wolf.
I took extreme pleasure in them,
All the children do likewise:
But these Fables would be pleasing to the greatest minds,
If you would, beautiful Countess,

Also ornament such narratives with your happy talents.
Gallic Antiquity urges you to do so.
Deign, then, to give light to
Ingenious stories, however fraught with innovation,
Like those invented by the Troubadours.
The mysterious meaning that their plots envelop
Is more than equal to that of Aesop.]

In the letter to Madame D.G. that follows the letter to the comtesse de Murat, Lhéritier moves on to convince an anonymous worldly reader of the importance of retaining the literary fairy tale's medieval origins, outlining the specific kinds of values associated with the troubadours and assuring her reader that the works to be published will continue to ally themselves with refined, worldly literary tastes—provided that they continue to draw from the medieval, as opposed to the classical, tradition. As Lhéritier states to Madame D.G., the medieval-style fairy tales that she has just written, although dedicated to the duchesse d'Epérnon and to the comtesse de Murat, are in fact composed in response to the desires of readers such as Madame D.G. herself—desires of which Lhéritier became aware after speaking to this reader at a friend's salon:

> Je me fais un plaisir de vous annoncer aujourd'hui, qu'on est devenu depuis quelque temps du goût dont vous êtes. On voit de petites Histoires répandues dans le monde, dont tout le dessein est de prouver agréablement la solidité des Proverbes. . . . J'ai été charmé que la mode entrât si bien dans votre goût: car je n'ai pas oublié la conversation que nous eûmes dans l'Hôtel de S.C. (Lhéritier 300–1)
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> [I give myself the pleasure of announcing to you today that society has recently begun to adopt your tastes. We see small stories becoming widespread in the world, the goals of which are to prove the agreeable solidity of proverbs. . . . I was charmed that this fashion accorded so well with your own tastes, as I have not forgotten the conversation that we had at the home of S.C.]

After giving Madame D.G. a two-page lesson on the Troubadours (a lesson which includes who they were, the significance of their name, the kinds of stories they wrote, where they lived, and how their works were received), Lhéritier traces the evolution of the novel from its medieval inception to the present. This genealogy, Lhéritier explains, reached "le comble de perfection" [the height of perfection] with the works of "l'illustre Mademoiselle de Scudéry" [the illustrious Mademoiselle de Scudéry], not surprisingly among the

last to participate in the medieval revival of the early seventeenth century (Seifert 15). By refusing to pay homage to the Middle Ages in Scudéry's wake, worldly authors, with the noted exceptions of Lafayette and "one or two others," have allowed the novel to fall into a state of stagnation so abject, such works can now be generalized as "un nombre infini de petits Romans sans goût, sans règle & sans politesse" (Lhéritier 306) [an infinite number of small, tasteless novels, devoid of rules and politeness]. A return to the genre's medieval origins, as is done with the fairy tale and with the narratives that frame them, is the only way that worldly prose can recover the "simplicité, verité, délicatesse et tendresse naturelle" (Lhéritier 308) [simplicity, truth, delicacy and natural tenderness] characteristic of its earlier triumph, as Lhéritier attests:

> Il me paraît qu'on fait de mieux de retourner au style des Troubadours, que de s'en tenir à de telles insipidités. Ce qui serait à souhaiter, est qu'en nous ramenant le goût de l'antiquité Gauloise, on nous ramenât aussi cette belle simplicité de moeurs . . . ou tout s'y passe dans l'ordre naturel . . . [et ou toutes les aventures] sont bien inventées. (Lhéritier 310–3)
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> [It seems to me that one does better to return to the style of the Troubadours than to hold oneself to such insipid standards. What should be hoped for, is that in bringing us back to the tastes of Gallic Antiquity, one will also bring us back to that beautiful moral simplicity . . . where everything followed the natural order . . . and all exploits were well invented.]

In using the letters that frame her fairy tales to construct a synchronized address to all participants of salon literary creation (patrons, authors and readers alike), Lhéritier's manifesto for a return to medieval values resounds on both literary and cultural levels. While on a literary level, her framing letters bolster the legitimacy of newly invented salon genres such as the fairy tale, the novel of the 1690s and the novel/fairy-tale hybrid, on a cultural level, the invocation of the medieval literary tradition provides a historical precedent for the worldly values associated with this type of literary creation. These include: innovation, spontaneity, tender love, artistic collaboration and chivalric virtue—all of which are evident on the level of plot, as Seifert has shown. Lhéritier's framing letters, however, do not stop there. Instead, they go one step further, setting the Middle Ages and the worldly literary tradition it authorizes as being in direct opposition to the fables, orators and classical authors esteemed by the king and the French Academy. In this way, Lhéritier's *Oeuvres mêlées* address both the highly politicized role of medieval nostalgia in the late seventeenth-century French fairy tale and the importance of reading

these tales in their original novelistic contexts. When "Les enchantements de l'éloquence" and "L'adroite princesse" are returned to the epistolary correspondence that originally framed them, the medieval nostalgia apparent on the level of their plots becomes more than a mere symptom of late seventeenth-century aristocratic despair: it evolves into a political manifesto for rebellion against Louis XIV's cultural hegemony.

Lhéritier's Legacy

The plethora of fairy tales that continued to situate themselves in medieval settings during the decade that followed can be taken as proof that Lhéritier's medieval manifesto won out over that of her uncle Charles Perrault, whose classical, children's tales would remain an anomaly until they were reprised by moralists and pedagogues during the second half of the eighteenth-century. Detailed below are a few of the more obvious examples of authors who continued to cultivate a rapport between the late seventeenth-century literary fairy tale and the indigenous French Middle Ages. In the *Histoire de Mélusine. Tirée des Chroniques de Poitou, et qui sert d'Origine à l'ancienne Maison de Lusignan* [*The Story of Melusine Taken from the Chronicles of Poitou and which Provides an Origin for the Antiquated House of Lusignan*] (1698), and in the *Histoire de Geoffrey, Surnommé à la Grand'Dent. Sixième Fils de Mélusine. Prince de Lusignan* [*The Story of Geoffrey, Nicknamed Big Tooth. Sixth Son of Melusine. Prince of Lusignan*] (1699), Paul-François Nodot used fairy tales to prove that the genealogy of the Lusignan family had originated with the medieval fairy Mélusine. Louise de Bossigny, comtesse d'Auneuil drew from the plots of chivalric romances and *lais*, such as Marie de France's "Lanval" and Chrétien de Troyes *Le Chevalier de la charette* [*The Knight of the Cart*] when she created frame narratives for the fairy tales contained in *La Tirranie des fées détruite* (1702) [*The Fairies' Tyranny Destroyed*] and *Les Chevaliers errans et le Génie familier* (1709) [*The Wandering Knights and the Familiar Genie*]. Lhéritier herself continued to insist upon the fairy tale's medieval origins in her *La Tour ténébreuse et les jours lumineux* (1705) [*The Shadowy Tower and the Radiant Days*], by having King Richard the Lionhearted tell fairy tales while in captivity during the crusades. Thomas-Simon Gueullette argued that his novel/fairy-tale hybrid, *Les Soirées bretonnes, dédiées à Monseigneur le Dauphin* (1712) [*The Breton Evenings, Dedicated to Monsieur the Dauphin*], was in fact translated from "un Manuscrit très-ancien" [a very old manuscript], dating from medieval Brittany during the reigns of the Celtic kings Conam Meriadec and Daniel Dremruz, between 680 and 720 AD.

But did the evocation of the Middle Ages continue to imply an act of political subversion in these texts? Or was it merely invoked as part of a salon game in which members of the worldly diaspora competed with one another to see

who could devise the most innovative integration of the latest, popular theme? A reading of the tale "L'origine des fées" [The Origin of Fairies] contained in Catherine Bédacier Durand's *Les Petits soupers de l'été 1699* (1702) [*The Light Suppers of the Summer of 1699*], would make it appear that worldly authors, at least to some degree, remained aware of medieval nostalgia's subversive implications, even at the dawn of the eighteenth century.

"L'origine des fees" begins with the description of a young woman writer who wonders obsessively whether the same fairy tales which "passent pour chimères" (Durand II: 134) [pass for chimaeras], might at one time have been considered true. To satisfy her curiosity, the god Apollo sends her a dream which allows her to see how fairies came into existence—an origin that began when the powerful god Jupiter fell in love with a beautiful nymph named Ogilire, the description of whom unsurprisingly resembles that of the ideal salon woman:

> [Cette] Nymphe [était] la plus belle qui ait jamais été, rien ne manquait à la régularité de ses traits, sa taille était divine, son air galant & majestueux, son teint surpassait les plus belles fleurs, son rire était gracieux, & son esprit avait une sublimité & un charme à quoi il n'était pas possible de résister. La nature . . . fit ses derniers efforts pour accomplir un chef-d'oeuvre en la personne d'Ogilire. (Durand II: 138–9)
>
> [This nymph was the most beautiful ever to have existed. Nothing detracted from the regularity of her features, her figure was divine, her presence was gallant and majestic, her coloring surpassed that of the most beautiful flowers, her laugh was gracious, and her mind had a sublimity and a charm that was impossible to resist. Nature . . . spent its final efforts to accomplish a masterpiece in the person of Ogilire.]

Following a passion "si longue, si heureuse, & si fidèle, qu'on n'a presque pas la force de la blâmer" (Durand II: 154–5)[so long, so happy and so faithful that one can hardly find fault with it], Ogilire becomes pregnant. Jupiter prophesies that the child will be a girl whose great beauty and vast knowledge will be so exceptional that "on la nommera Fée" (Durand II: 158) [she will be called Fairy]. Although Jupiter predicts that the fairy descendents of this exceptional young woman will become less revered as the decadence of "les plus puissants Empires" [the most powerful empires] evolves, the god also foresees a time in which:

> Des femmes illustres célébreront les Fées, & renouvelleront leurs faits avec beaucoup d'esprit & d'art . . . [et que] les hommes mêmes

> de cette lignée [seront] favorisés de ces précieux dons du Ciel [et auront aussi] l'art de Féerie. (Durand II: 158–9)
>
> [Illustrious women will celebrate fairies and will reproduce their acts with much wit and art. And even the men of this lineage will be favored with precious gifts from heaven and will also be endowed with fairy magic.]

Although the tale claims that fairies originated from the progeny of both a classical god and an exceptional woman, the tale also makes it clear that, as time goes on, fairies cease to bestow their gifts upon those who fail to have reverence for them. In this way, salon authors who venerate fairy magic by documenting it in witty and artful stories are once again placed in direct contrast to the "powerful empires" that no longer acknowledge such fairies and are instead committed only to Roman gods. Although the first fairy may have been a direct descendent of Jupiter, at the moment, these beings have broken their ties to classical Antiquity, retaining sole allegiance to salon intellectuals.

In nostalgically allying the worldly men and women of the present with the fairies of medieval Antiquity, Durand evokes the gallant parties and royal propaganda characteristic of Versailles during its heyday, a heyday that was presided over by what Louis Marin has called a *roi magicien* [magician king], endowed with all the supernatural powers previously attributed to classical gods (Marin 236–50). In emphasizing that late seventeenth-century salon authors are not simply *like* fairies in their possession of unique talents and creative powers—rather, they *are* fairies—Durand employs a similar strategy of elision, supplanting the influence of Roman deities at the court of Louis XIV with the authority of fairies in the salon community.

The relationship between the salon author's assumption of supernatural capabilities, and Louis XIV's efforts to represent himself as a god of Antiquity, is further emphasized by the fact that directly before the "Origine des fées" is told, the salon authors featured in the fairy tale's frame narrative arrive at the chateau of one of their friends, only to find its immense garden "éclairé par quatre grandes figures fort bien peintes & illuminées, comme on en a vu autrefois aux illuminations de Versailles" (Durand II: 127) [lit up by four tall statues very well painted and illuminated, as one used to see in the past in the illuminations at Versailles]. These statues, which represent medieval fairies rather than classical gods, promptly become the center of a fireworks display so captivating that the entire troupe is stunned into silence (Durand II: 128). The fact that this Versaillesque spectacle is organized by a salon author instead of by a powerful monarch, and has the purpose of foregrounding the glory and authority of the Middle Ages rather than that of classical Antiquity, illustrates to an even more radical degree an attempt on the part of the worldly community to

invoke and exalt medieval nostalgia as a means of distinguishing themselves and their literary enterprise from Louis XIV's classical propaganda. In creating an alternative locus of nostalgia in which classical origins are no longer important, salon authors not only refuse to take part in perpetuating the spectacle of Louis XIV's absolute power, but also they secure the continuation of a new, worldly, independent authority, thereby endowing the disenfranchised lower nobility with a revised supernatural status, equivalent, if not superior to, that of the king. As such, Lhéritier's *Oeuvres meslées* did more than provide the literary fairy tale with a powerful, medieval origin designed to protect it from being appropriated for classical ends; it offered the salon community a point of departure from which to articulate a new set of social and political priorities for the century to come.

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Appendix I:

View of the Salon of Venus in the King's State apartment (Constans 33)

Charles Le Brun's "Bellona Enraged" in the Salon of War (Constans 104)

Charles Le Brun's "Holland Defeated with Her Lion" in the Salon of War (Constans 105)

Appendix II:

Jean Cotelle "The Lake of the Swiss Guards and the Orangerie" in the Gallery Of the Grand Trianon (Constans 88)

Jean Cotelle, "The Fountain of Neptune" in the Gallery of the Grand Trianon (Constans 89)