INTRODUCTION:
QUESTIONING EARLY MODERN MEDIEVALISMS

Alicia C. Montoya, Sophie van Romburgh and Wim van Anrooij

When we encounter the medieval in early modern culture, what do we see? Do we find a more or less deliberate use of and reflection upon the Middle Ages along the lines of what, over the past decades, we have come to call 'medievalism'? Do we find a re-creation of past times nostalgically praised as a native antiquity or, instead, denounced as the embodiment of ignorance for a renaissance to distinguish itself from? Or do we find a continuation of processes and practices that we today are used to identifying as medieval, but that may or may not have been perceived as such during the early modern period? What uses of the medieval and whose medievalism do we see in our early modern studies?

The concept of medievalism has, during the past few decades, given rise to a new subfield within literary and cultural studies. Leslie Workman, whose creation in 1979 of the journal *Studies in Medievalism* played a central role in the institutionalization of the field, was also one of the first to attempt to define the concept. On the most basic level, medievalism, he maintained, is 'the *study* of the Middle Ages on the one hand, and the *use* of the Middle Ages in everything from fantasy to social reform on the other'.[1] Medievalism might accordingly be said to be restricted to the explicit negotiation with a shared construct called 'the Middle Ages'. Crucially, such study and use of the Middle Ages also defines what the Middle Ages actually are: 'medieval historiography, the study of the successive recreations of the Middle Ages by different generations, *is* the Middle Ages. And this of course is medievalism'.[2] Workman's explanation thus emphasizes the field's generative characteristic: by seeking to re-create, studies and artistic productions actually create the Middle Ages in the process.

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[1] Workman L.J., "The Future of Medievalism", in Gallant J. (ed.), *Medievalism: The Year's Work for 1995* (Holland, MI: 1999) 12.
[2] Ibid.

Other, later uses of the term medievalism focus more specifically on the historiography of scholarship dealing with the Middle Ages, and the ways in which this historiography may invite present-day scholars to re-evaluate accepted interpretations of specific medieval texts or traditions. Thus, the studies produced by the 'New Medievalists' of the 1990s typically dealt with the careers of the first nineteenth- and early twentieth-century academics who studied the Middle Ages and their literature. While the medievalism that originated around Workman in the 1970s paid particular attention to texts and traditions originating in the English-speaking world, the New Medievalism of the 1990s focused more frequently on continental Europe and France. And whereas the first school generated – and indeed continues to generate – case studies with a largely empirical focus, the latter sought also to relate the historiography of medieval studies to present-day theoretical debates. Yet despite these differences, both schools share a number of basic traits. Both share a concern with textuality and an interest in literary texts that surely help to explain why medievalism succeeded in gaining institutional respectability in the 1980s and 1990s, decades also marked by the combined influence of cultural studies and the new historicism. Both schools also share as their starting-point the idea that the Middle Ages – or the medieval, as we would prefer to term them here – are themselves a historical construct, and need always to be understood with reference to the culturally and historically determined interests of those engaged in studying them.

'Old' and 'new' medievalists, finally, share also a similar chronological framework, and it is this that the present volume would like to question. Indeed, a quick glance at some representative publications shows that medievalist studies are overwhelmingly focused on the modern period. The landmark volume produced by the New Medievalists in 1996, *Medievalism and the Modernist Temper*, contains seventeen essays, of which eleven focus exclusively on the nineteenth or twentieth century. This, of course, is because the authors estimate that serious academic study of the Middle Ages started only in the second half of the nineteenth century, when Germanic philology took root. Recent volumes of *Studies in Medievalism* display a similar slant.[3] Leslie Work-

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[3] For instance, of the seven case studies published in the *Studies in Medievalism* 2009 volume, one deals with the period before 1800, while in the 2008 volume, two of the ten articles deal with the early modern period.

man himself drew a strong link between medievalism and Romanticism, even going so far as to suggest that, in the earliest usages of the term 'Romantic', the two terms were in fact seen as interchangeable.[4] Thus, in the narrowest reading of the historical archive, medievalism would be a phenomenon that only arose with Romanticism – and in the English language, in fact, the term is first recorded in the 1850s – making it appear less relevant to search for forms of medievalism in the period before.[5]

While there is a case to be made for restricting the field of medievalism to the period after 1800, the present volume has arisen out of a desire to question whether the early modern culture of, roughly, 1500–1800 did have its own variety of medievalism(s). We wondered how, closer to the medieval period, what we today identify as the medieval may have continued unobserved and uninterrupted in certain fields, while being considered a thing of the (imagined) past, for good or for ill, in others. Moreover, we believed that a conscious negotiation with the Middle Ages is only one in a range of attitudes toward the medieval. Therefore, rather than trying to seek a set of early modern examples or cases that fit a clearcut definition of medievalism, we thought it would be more productive to explore a very large range of early modern attitudes, conscious as well as unconscious, toward what *we today* would term the medieval, but what was not necessarily perceived as such by men and women living during the early modern period. The medievalism this volume addresses, in other words, is as much our own, twenty-first-century medievalism, as it is that of the early modern men and women who are its subject. Hence our choice in our volume title for early modern medievalisms, in the plural.

Our starting point, then, was that – whether one terms them 'medievalist' or not – the early modern period was marked by plural, diffuse discourses on the Middle Ages. Both scholarly work and artistic production created images of the philological Middle Ages, the imagined Middle Ages, the utopian Middle Ages, and even the anti-Middle Ages. Indeed, the last category is one that appeared particularly relevant to

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[4] See especially his long article "Medievalism and Romanticism", *Poetica* 39–40 (1994) 1–44.

[5] On the first uses of the term 'medievalism' in English, see Simmons C.A., "Medievalism: Its Linguistic History in Nineteenth-Century Britain", *Studies in Medievalism* 17 (2009) 28–35.

any discussion of early modern medievalisms, given that modernity itself was often explicitly predicated on an opposition between a past 'Dark Age' and a contemporary age of light. Contrary to studies of modern medievalism that tend to pay attention to more or less celebratory or approving views and uses of the medieval, we felt that discourses that implicitly or explicitly rejected the medieval should also be included within the panoply of early modern medievalisms, to the extent that these discourses, too, contributed to the construction of specific images of the Middle Ages. Emphasizing this diversity, the present volume therefore focuses on the interplay and tensions between discourses, continuities and discontinuities, and competing images of the medieval during the early modern period. A particular focus, as the subtitle suggests, is the interplay between scholarly erudition and artistic production. In other words, how did scholarly reflections on the medieval influence subsequent literary and artistic medievalisms, and how did artistic images, conversely, influence the development of a scholarly discourse?

Continuities and Discontinuities

The first section of the volume is devoted to several contributions that reflect on the notions of continuity and discontinuity between the medieval and the early modern. This is in keeping with our original idea that, in seeking to describe early modern medievalisms, we did not want to restrict ourselves only to cases in which artists and thinkers posited an explicit relation to the medieval. Un(der)stated or even unconscious relations, after all, can also be reflective of specific valorizations and attitudes toward the medieval. And more importantly, signalling continuity or, on the contrary, discontinuity represents the most basic way of establishing the existence of a 'Middle Age' in opposition to a contemporary, (early) modern one. Thus, this first section of the volume focuses largely on the Italian Renaissance and its European reception. The first two essays are on Petrarch, the author most commonly perceived as the herald of the new humanism of the Renaissance, and on his followers. In the first of these, "'I Desire Therefore I am': Petrarch's *Canzoniere* Between the Medieval and Modern Notion of Desire", Elena Lombardi considers Petrarch not only as an early humanist but, equally importantly, as a late medieval author. Her

essay argues that it is, indeed, by ironically rewriting Dante's medieval notion of desire as a form of connection with God that Petrarch gives a new, characteristically 'modern' meaning to the concept. In the following essay, "Medievalisms in Latin Love Poetry of the Early Italian Quattrocento", Christoph Pieper again demonstrates how texts that have until recently been considered as typically classicist can also be regarded as medievalist. Focusing on Latin-language humanist poetry, Pieper reveals that, in seeking a form of *aemulatio* with the classical tradition, fifteenth-century humanist poets consciously incorporated medieval elements into their poetry. Thus, what is absent in their theorizing – reference to the medieval – reappears in their poetic practice, giving a distinctly 'alternative' flavour to these works that have, most often, only been considered in relation to classical Antiquity.

The following two essays focus on examples of continuity that betray a less self-conscious positioning of early modern authors against the medieval. Anne-Marie De Gendt's essay, "On Pleasure: Conceptions in Badius Ascensius' *Stultiferae Naves* (1501)", shows how the Flemish humanist Jodocus Badius Ascensius can, in more than one way, be described as 'a man in between': both humanist scholar and continuator of medieval traditions. Thus, in her study of the role Epicurus plays in Badius' *Stultiferae Naves*, she argues that its reference to classical literature, rather than making it a distinctly humanist text, actually reinforces the authority of medieval religious values perceived to correspond with classical thought. Rather than rupture, then, Badius' humanist medievalism betrays a sense of profound continuity. A similar sense of historical distance abolished, or simply not perceived as such, emerges from Tiphaine Karsenti's essay "From Historical Invention to Literary Myth: Ambivalences and Contradictions in the Early Modern Reception of the Franco-Trojan Genealogy". In it, Karsenti shows that when early modern French authors made use of the medieval myth telling of the Trojan ancestry of the French nation, they did so in an ambiguous manner. Increasingly rejecting the historical truth-value of the myth, they still granted it authority as a point of origin for distinctly French forms of national and royal representation. The medieval, in this case, was valued not in its own right – in fact, the historical inaccuracy of the myth was much commented on – but, rather, as the repository of images allowing humanist authors to link themselves to classical antiquity, as Vergil-like poets singing the praises of their king. Medievalism and humanism, once again, fuse.

The last essay of this first section presents a particularly striking example of an early modern attempt to adapt medieval concepts to a new setting. In "Early Modern Angelic Song in Francesco Patrizi's *L'Amorosa Filosofia* (1577)", Jacomien Prins demonstrates that, countering natural science's deconstruction of the medieval notion of the music of the spheres, Francesco Patrizi nonetheless succeeded in reintroducing the notion of celestial harmony, as expressed now through the musical sublime. In other words, the disenchantment of the world produced by the abandonment of key aspects of the medieval worldview did not, unexpectedly, lead to a new world-view, but rather led to a 're-enchantment' of the world, in which the function previously fulfilled by the physical universe was now fulfilled by the aesthetic notion of the sublime. The sense of loss, a loss equated with the passing away of the medieval, thereby becomes crucial in defining a new, modern aesthetic.

The Interplay between Scholarship and Artistic Production

From the discussion of continuities and discontinuities between the medieval and early modern, the second section of the volume moves on to a discussion of the manifold ways in which artists in the early modern period made use in their works of elements identifiable as 'medieval'. These are more conscious and explicit appropriations of the medieval, which authors and artists invoked for purposes of (political) legitimation or, in another vein, for satirical or more playful purposes. In the first article in the section, "Rabelaisian Medievalisms: *Pantagruel* and *Amadis*", Paul J. Smith shows how the development of François Rabelais' career as an author was substantially conditioned by the fluctuating fashion in his time for various forms of medieval(ist) fiction. While, in his early works, Rabelais responded to the chivalric prose novels that were popular in the 1530s, in his following works he reacted to the popularity of the *Amadis* genre and, later, to its increasing contestation in literary circles. The medieval here, rather than being a phenomenon belonging to the past, was perceived by Rabelais as a central element in the contemporary, sixteenth-century literary field.

The following three articles discuss ways in which the medieval was invoked by the early moderns, in different national and historical contexts, as an instrument of political and religious legitimation. In "The Portrait of Lady Katherine Grey and her Son: Iconographic

Medievalism as a Legitimation Strategy", Martin Spies examines an intentionally archaic, medievalist portrait of Lady Katherine Grey, arguing that its medievalism served as an argument for the legitimation of her marriage and the recognition of her son as the lawful heir of the House of Suffolk. By evoking medieval ruler portraits on one hand and the pre-Reformation iconography of Virgin and Child on the other, the medieval was valued not on historical terms, but as the repository of an iconographic vocabulary still readily understood by the painter's contemporaries. A second iconographic case study is provided by Waldemar Kowalski in his "Medieval Tradition Presented in Early Modern Paintings and Inscriptions in Little Poland". In this essay, Kowalski shows how epigraphs and murals in monastery and parish churches, especially after the mid-century wars, evoked the medieval past in order to link it to the present: just as the contemporary Polish nation and Catholic Church felt besieged by enemies (invasions of Protestant and Orthodox neighbours), so too had it in the past been perceived to face threats from without (Mongol and Tatar invasions) and from within (Jewish population). Medievalism thus participated in the early modern creation of national identities, including, in their more extreme forms, distinct anti-Semitic elements. Finally, in "'O Fundatrix Begginarum': St Begga and her Office in Early Modern Beguine Scholarship and Musical Sources", Pieter Mannaerts discusses the uses that the medieval traditions surrounding the Merovingian saint Begga were put to in seventeenth-century scholarship and music. In what was essentially a foundation polemic, scholars legitimated newly established early modern traditions by means of a medieval one. Interestingly, however, actual liturgical practice differed somewhat from the findings of scholars. The office performed in early modern beguinages, in fact, was the one scholars regarded as less authentic, thereby showing that while the office was perceived to go back to medieval antecedents, its medievalism was in the final count more important than its historically medieval character.

Moving from public discourse and legitimation strategies to private entertainment, the element of play comes to the fore in the last three essays of this section. These essays focus on texts produced during the same time and historical context, namely eighteenth-century France. In the first of these, "Medievalism and Magic: Illustrating Classical French Fairy Tales", Daphne Hoogenboezem describes how the earliest illustrators of French fairy tales consciously used archaic or naïve elements to give a pseudo-medieval patina to the fairy tale texts. In

doing so, illustrators were responding to elements already present in the fairy tales themselves, which emphasized popular and medievalist aspects to create a contrast with classicist aesthetic ideals. However, just as importantly, by mixing medievalist and classicist styles, they were creating a new aesthetic in which the medieval was an important element within a magical setting, a fantasy period rather than a strictly historical one. A similar vision of the imaginary medieval past emerges from Aurélie Zygel-Basso's essay "A Fairy Troubadour? Medieval Matter and the 'Bon Vieux Temps' in Women's Fairy Tales (1730–1750)". In mid-century women's fairy tales, what was valued in the medieval past was not the specifics of a precise historical period but, rather, a sense of otherness that fulfilled, in the first place, an ornamental role within an overall syncretist aesthetic. A second, equally important aspect, however, were the possibilities the medieval was felt to offer in defining a new ideal of courtly politeness (*politesse*) and frankness: in this sense, medievalism also had a distinctly moral function. In the last essay of this section, "Old French in the Eighteenth Century: *Aucassin et Nicolette*", by Peter Damian-Grint, these same elements of ornamental medievalism and moral value reappear. Like fairy tale illustrators, eighteenth-century adapters of the medieval tale *Aucassin et Nicolette* consciously introduced archaic elements to heighten the text's ornamental medievalism. At the same time, however, by also adding to it elements of eighteenth-century *sensibilité*, these authors sought to give the text a place within the contemporary literary landscape. Paradoxically, the resulting medievalism is thus at the same time both a distance and a closeness, as the medieval text is perceived both to be radically other and basically the same as early modern aesthetic ideals.

Conceptualizing the Medieval

In the third and final section of the volume, the essays turn to the question, raised by the preceding two sections, of how the medieval was explicitly conceptualized in the early modern period. Views and value judgements that sometimes remained implicit in artistic uses of the medieval were formulated more directly by a number of scholars and artists. The section opens with two essays describing valuations of the medieval that could be described as 'traditional', to the extent that they reflect the mixture of contempt and interest already found in some early renaissance reflections on the medieval. The first of these,

Coen Maas' "'Covered in the Thickest Darkness of Forgetfulness': Humanist Commonplaces and the Defence of Medievalism in Janus Dousa's Metrical History (1599)" explores an example of humanist medievalist historiography. It shows how the Dutch historian Janus Dousa's use of humanist commonplaces – including that of the Dark Age – was motivated by his desire to foreground his own originality, and does not preclude a real admiration for medieval martial virtue, which he connected to the present-day Dutch Republic. In the second essay, "Reproducing the Middle Ages: Abbé Jean-Joseph Rive (1730–1791) and the Study of Manuscript Illumination at the Turn of the Early Modern Period", Andrea Worm discusses Jean Joseph Rive's ambivalent stance on medieval manuscript illumination. While he was one of the first to devote serious attention to medieval miniatures, as evidenced by his superb reproductions, Rive continued to decry the barbarity of the High Middle Ages, and presented his work as primarily of antiquarian interest. His failure to resolve this contradiction, argues Worm, appears to underlie later, post-Romantic criticisms of his work.

The next three essays describe more complex early modern reflections on the medieval. Joost Keizer's "Michelangelo out of Focus: Medievalism as Absent Life in Italian Renaissance Art" returns again to the Italian Renaissance as a formative period for the early modern positioning in relation to the medieval. In an exploration of authorial presence in painting, in particular in Michelangelo's work, Keizer argues that, in contrast to the anonymity of the medieval, lifelikeness and the foregrounding of the author were intertwined for modernity. In response to growing criticism of his overpowering presence at the expense of religious subject-matter, Michelangelo therefore sought to absent himself from his later work by turning to an unnaturalistic, medievalist stance, whereby, crucially, 'medievalism was not so much understood as the *retrieval* of a historical past but as an *imagination* of an alternative to modern painting'. In the second essay in the series, "Jean Mabillon's Middle Ages: On Medievalism, Textual Criticism, and Monastic Ideals", Mette Bruun provocatively asks whether Jean Mabillon can actually be considered a medievalist in the modern sense of the term. While his scholarly work in diplomatics focused largely on the period we now consider medieval, she argues, he himself hardly used the term 'medieval' – a stance he shared with other scholars examined in our volume, including Janus Dousa. His work, furthermore, was organized not according to historical chronology,

but according to a scale of moral virtue which implied that medieval texts were capable of speaking directly to modern readers. Yet at the same time, the very act of scholarship created a distance between the early modern reader and these same medieval texts. Ultimately, this is therefore a paradoxical medievalism, predicated both on a distance and closeness of the two eras not unlike the one described in Damian-Grint's essay. This same questioning of early modern medievalism is again taken up in the final contribution of this series and volume, Adam Shear's "The Early Modern Construction of Medieval Jewish Thought". Examining the Jewish *Haskalah* or modernizing movement of the late eighteenth century, Shear argues that, rather than representing a radical break with tradition, the *Haskalah* can be viewed as a continuation of trends already visible in the (earlier) early modern period. These trends looked back to medieval religious philosophy as an attempt to reconcile reason and revelation, and saw the period as a kind of classical 'golden age'. Because, however, this view did not depend on a sense of rupture, Shear proposes to consider it as a form of 'continuous medievalism', that may or may not be characteristic of the Jewish religious-philosophical tradition and/or early modern period in general.

The Specificity of Early Modern Medievalisms

In concluding our volume with Bruun's and Shear's thought-provoking contributions, we wished to underline once again the way in which the early modern cases presented here ultimately problematize the notion of medievalism itself, at least as understood in its post-Romantic sense. From these collected articles emerge at least three strands in early modern relations to the medieval that appear specific to this period. These could be described, respectively, as a sense of the continuity or even *coincidence* of the medieval and early modern; medievalism as a specific position in the debate on *classicism*; and the medieval as a *moral* stance or point of reference.

Several of the volume's essays discuss forms of engagement with the medieval in which the early moderns, rather than perceiving a clear break between their own era and the medieval past, instead operated on the implicit assumption of a basic continuity between these two periods. Thus, for the scholars writing the history of the beguinage

tradition, as demonstrated by Mannaerts, early modern practices were regarded as more or less unproblematic continuations of medieval ones – even when this was, demonstrably, not the case. Likewise, in the paintings and inscriptions discussed by Kowalski, medieval historical events were seen to presage later developments, as the Polish nation perceived itself to be threatened time and again by various forces and ethnic groups. But as this latter case shows, the sense of continuity could easily veer into a telescoping of the medieval and the early modern, whereby the two were felt not only to be contiguous, but actually to coincide. In addition, there is an important sense in which the medieval and early modern coincide simply by virtue of the survival of medieval or medievalist artefacts into the early modern period: thus, when Rabelais positions himself against the medieval in *Pantagruel* and its sequels, he is fully aware of the medieval as a distinct historical period, yet still feels the need to react to the contemporary popularity of medievalist literary texts. In yet another variety, finally, this sense of the coincidence of the early modern and medieval can also assume the form of more or less conscious syncretism, such as can be found in the French fairy tales examined by Hoogenboezem and Zygel-Basso.

Significantly, as shown by Damian-Grint and Bruun, early moderns' awareness of the Middle Ages as a distinct historical period did not preclude their *simultaneously* construing their own works as a link in a larger, continuous tradition. There is, as noted by Bruun, a monastic tendency to regard medieval predecessors as 'contemporaries in the spirit'. And thus, as she goes on to argue, what may appear to us moderns as a Janus-faced medievalism, appealing at the same time to a sense of distance and of contiguity, is in fact a coherent stance to the early moderns. It is in our opinion, also, a defining characteristic of early modern medievalisms, as distinct from their Romantic varieties. If the French revolution marked the end of the early modern period, in the most fundamental sense, by giving a new meaning to the term 'revolution' itself – no longer an event within a cyclical series, but a singular break with the past – this was because conceptions of time were also changing, moving from models based on notions of synchronicity and cyclic return to conceptions based on linearity and diachronic development. Within the former conception, there was nothing odd about the medieval being synchronous with the early modern, or with medievals conversing with their early modern counterparts (as they actually did

in a popular literary subgenre of this period, the so-called dialogues of the dead). The early modern cases examined in this volume lead us to agree, finally, with Nils Holger Petersen's assessment that 'medievalism should not be restricted to features in which a historical consciousness is explicitly at work' because, in a sense, the Middle Ages never ended, but – as our cases demonstrate – are recreated over and over again.[6] Or, put another way, perhaps it would be productive to consider not the Middle Ages as an inconvenient disruption in a progressive historical narrative running from classical antiquity to the Renaissance but, rather, to consider the Renaissance as a temporary wrinkle in a period that began with the transition from Antiquity to the Middle Ages, and in which we find ourselves living still today.

A second theme that thus emerges from these essays is that of medievalism's complex relationship to the Renaissance classicist ideal. In a number of the cases presented, medievalism can actually be reinterpreted as a form of classicism. Petrarch as described by Lombardi, the medieval *topos* of the Trojan genealogy of the Franks, and Cimabue as perceived by the Italian Renaissance, all offer examples of reappropriations of medieval elements within a classicist framework. Thus, Petrarch's rewriting of medieval conceptions of divine desire was instrumental in the creation of a new, distinctly modern notion that could be legitimized by reference to the Ovidian model. For early modern adapters of the commonplace of the Franco-Trojan genealogy, what was crucial was not its medieval origin but, rather, the link it made possible to Vergilian epic. The medieval painter Cimabue was reclaimed and integrated into the Renaissance canon by rebranding him not as a medieval but as a modern, by virtue of his life-giving authorship. In all of these cases, the medieval was stripped of its very medievalness in order to make it contemporary – a stance not completely unlike the medievals' previous treatment of classical antiquity. In other cases, the medieval was used more self-consciously and more strategically, as an element serving in the literary demarcation of authors seeking to position themselves in relation to – or even against – the prevailing classicist aesthetic. These authors resorted to the medieval as a source of formal or thematic innovation: Janus

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[6] Petersen N.H., "Medievalism and Medieval Reception: A Terminological Question", *Studies in Medievalism* 17 (2009) 42.

Dousa did so to underscore his own originality, as did Latin humanist poets seeking to distinguish themselves from the Petrarchan model. But just as often, just as the early modern and the medieval were telescoped into one another, so were the classical and the medieval merged, sometimes to such an extent that determining what element belongs to which source becomes something of an academic exercise. Does Marrasio follow more closely the model of Geoffrey of Vinsauf in describing his beloved, or that of Ovid – and is such a quantitative/qualitative parcelling out of influence finally really relevant to a poetics conceived not only in terms of competitive *aemulatio* but, perhaps just as importantly, in terms of *copia* – understood both as imitation and as copiousness? What is clear, in any case, is that the plurality of early modern medievalist discourses was fundamentally conditioned by the period's relation to Antiquity – that previous age of light – even when it also reflected a real interest in the Middle Ages as such. Paradoxically, therefore, early modern medievalisms can be conceived as a form of classicism as well as anti-classicism, a reflection on the modern self as much as on the medieval other.

Finally, a third strand that can be teased out from the various contributions to this volume is that of the medieval as moral reference point. There emerges, in quite a number of the cases examined, a sense of loss and, in some instances, of almost Romantic nostalgia associated with the medieval. The lost harmonic world of the Middle Ages was perceived by Francesco Patrizi as something to be recreated anew, just as the classical topos of the Golden Age was applied by the Jewish philosophical tradition to the medieval past. This was strongly linked to a conception of the medieval as a moral grounding-point. The Middle Ages were conceived not as a chronological category but, rather, as a moral one; hence, in calling a phenomenon 'medieval', early moderns were not attempting to situate it within a closed-off historical period, but were ascribing to it specific moral virtues. In the world of eighteenth-century fairy-tale authors, the Middle Ages were an imaginary site, the original 'bon vieux temps' and the source of modern ideals of politeness and frankness. For Jean Mabillon a century earlier, the most important hierarchies were not those imposed by chronological divisions, but those that resulted from degrees of saintliness, making the medieval in some aspects superior to the early modern. And even earlier, already during the Italian Renaissance, critics of 'the charms of art' held up the Middle Ages as an alternative source of religious and artistic integrity. The medieval, in these cases and in others, was

construed as an anchoring-point for a set of values that remained relevant still to the early moderns. At the very least, the Middle Ages were the source of a common language still spoken by them: this could be the iconographic, religious language used in the portrait of Lady Katherine Grey, or it could be the literary language of commonplaces used by authors invoking the Trojan origins of the French monarchy. In its richest form, this appeal to a medieval past was an appeal to a world perceived as more unified and more coherent than the contemporary, *critique*-riven, war-torn and diasporic reality early moderns perceived around themselves. Thus, from the valiant ancestors of the early modern Dutch nation, too busy practising martial virtue to engage in mere book-writing, to the memory of the founding fathers of Christianity, what the Middle Ages offered was also the retrospective reflection of contemporary (ecclesiastical, national) communities, and – thereby – an idealized image of the origins of modernity itself.

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