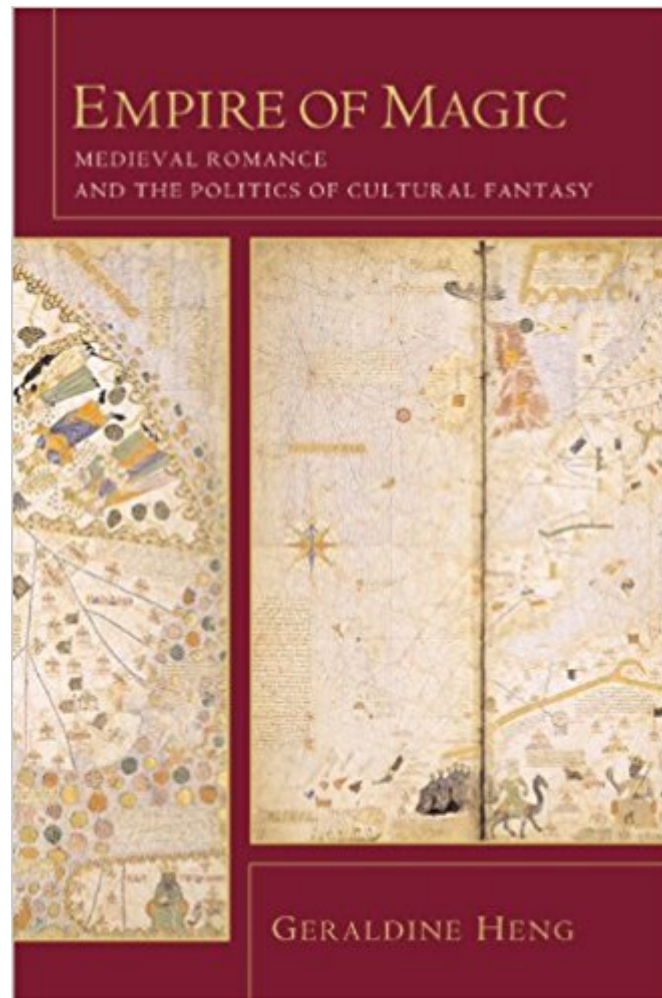


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# Empire Of Magic: Medieval Romance And The Politics Of Cultural Fantasy



## Synopsis

Empire of Magic offers a genesis and genealogy for medieval romance and the King Arthur legend through the history of Europe's encounters with the East in crusades, travel, missionizing, and empire formation. It also produces definitions of "race" and "nation" for the medieval period and posits that the Middle Ages and medieval fantasies of race and religion have recently returned. Drawing on feminist and gender theory, as well as cultural analyses of race, class, and colonialism, this provocative book revises our understanding of the beginnings of the nine hundred-year-old cultural genre we call romance, as well as the King Arthur legend. Geraldine Heng argues that romance arose in the twelfth century as a cultural response to the trauma and horror of taboo acts—*in particular the cannibalism committed by crusaders on the bodies of Muslim enemies in Syria during the First Crusade*. From such encounters with the East, Heng suggests, sprang the fantastical episodes featuring King Arthur in Geoffrey of Monmouth's chronicle *The History of the Kings of England*, a work where history and fantasy collide and merge, each into the other, inventing crucial new examples and models for romances to come. After locating the rise of romance and Arthurian legend in the contact zones of East and West, Heng demonstrates the adaptability of romance and its key role in the genesis of an English national identity. Discussing Jews, women, children, and sexuality in works like the romance of Richard Lionheart, stories of the saintly Constance, Arthurian chivalric literature, the legend of Prester John, and travel narratives, Heng shows how fantasy enabled audiences to work through issues of communal identity, race, color, class and alternative sexualities in socially sanctioned and safe modes of cultural discussion in which pleasure, not anxiety, was paramount. Romance also engaged with the threat of modernity in the late medieval period, as economic, social, and technological transformations occurred and awareness grew of a vastly enlarged world beyond Europe, one encompassing India, China, and Africa. Finally, Heng posits, romance locates England and Europe within an empire of magic and knowledge that surveys the world and makes it intelligible—*usable*—for the future. Empire of Magic is expansive in scope, spanning the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries, and detailed in coverage, examining various types of romance—*historical, national, popular, chivalric, family, and travel romances*, among others—to see how cultural fantasy responds to changing crises, pressures, and demands in a number of different ways. Boldly controversial, theoretically sophisticated, and historically rooted, Empire of Magic is a dramatic restaging of the role romance played in the culture of a period and world in ways that suggest how cultural fantasy still functions for us today.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Heng offers a broad-reaching study of the intellectual and cultural origins of medieval romance... She is especially good at isolating and explaining the historical points of contact between West and East. (Choice) Her observations about literature, which are everywhere cogent and show the presence of a subtle and wide-ranging sensibility (John Block Friedman, Kent State University Speculum) Empire of Magic is a book that will set the terms of debate on medieval postcolonialism for some time to come. It is a must read. (Laurie A. Finke Arthuriana) Empire of Magic is one of the most thorough - and thoroughly engaging - examples to date in the emerging theoretical field of "postcolonial medievalism."... Heng's Empire of Magic is a "must read." (e 3w Review of Books) Empire of Magic is a... fascinating study of medieval romance. (Forum for Modern Language Studies) Fearless and provocative... Heng's scholarship and sweep are admirable. This is a must-read. (Christine Chism Studies in the Age of Chaucer)

Empire of Magic is expansive in scope, spanning the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries, and detailed in coverage, examining various types of romance—historical, national, popular, chivalric, family, and travel romances, among others—to see how cultural fantasy responds to changing crises, pressures, and demands in a number of different ways. Boldly controversial, theoretically sophisticated, and historically rooted, Empire of Magic is a dramatic restaging of the role romance played in the culture of a period and world in ways that suggest how cultural fantasy still functions for us today.

If you have any interest whatsoever in Medieval Romance then this is a book for you. Whether your interests are historical, cultural, or structural this book has a theory to match. I will caution this book has little to do with Chaucer or other prototypical Medieval standards, but that is precisely why I found the read so refreshing. In this book you will find a stunning and coherent analysis of five different Romances teachers too often place on the additional course reading lists, if at all, and it is exactly this newness of study that I must encourage you to delve into. *Empire of Magic* explores these texts with the passion of a true enthusiast, and it works through the pieces with the thoroughness of a learned, careful mind. The analysis builds a multitude of spiraling theories and possibilities ranging from mental warfare cannibalism to the impact cannibalism could've made on race relations to how race relations might have influenced the writer to dream up acts of cannibalism to write about. BUT hey! If cannibalism doesn't do it for you then you might enjoy a different analysis of King Richard the Lion Heart (and cannibal in some romances...read the book to find out!) such as why he was such a popular King despite being away from England for almost the entirety of his rule? And why did his contemporaries like him so much despite the almost ruin of the country because of his constant warring? My favorite section takes a careful look at *Mandeville Travels*, and the question is raised as to whether Sir John actually ever traveled any further than his local library. Again, I encourage you to read the book to find out. Overall, what makes this book brilliant, other than the nice size and weight which could work well on a bookshelf, nightstand, backpack, or coffee table, or the print size which is also nice because it's the kind where it isn't too small that your eyes hurt or too large where your friends make fun of you because it looks like a 2nd grade reader, and other than the fact that it's a steal as a genius theoretical book divided into five sections for your convenience for only \$25, is that the book contains valuable currency. Not just the mental currency that colleges everywhere are getting by on by charging high prices, but the currency of being current despite the book being about Medieval texts. The issues addressed in this book are issues that we face today in society all around us, and the theories this book offers about Medieval societies and their symbiotic relationships to their texts of information and entertainment line up to our society with chilling resonances. This book, with careful research, inspiration, and study, makes these Medieval romances as relevant and debatable as the movie coming out this Friday, and you, with an easy click of a button, can bring it all to your place of residence, which I highly recommend.

Have you ever wondered where the legend of King Arthur originally came from? Why, after a thousand years, is this romance so popular? With insights on subjects as diverse as King Arthur,

Chaucer, and 9/11; Geraldine Heng's book "Empire of Magic" is an absolute tour de force that illuminates the secret history of medieval romance. Indeed, "Empire of Magic" is so shocking and engaging that it almost reads like a detective novel of sorts. Heng shows us the hidden (and sometimes horrifying) connections between medieval literature and medieval history in a way that is both unsettling and unforgettable. After all, who but a great detective could have uncovered links between the legend of King Arthur and acts of cannibalism committed by Christians during the first Crusade? This book is essential reading for anyone interested in literature, history, or the Middle Ages, and is an incredible treat for anyone who likes intellectually stimulating reading of any variety. You will be amazed that reading about literature can be this mind-bending and fun. Pick up this book. You won't regret it.

After years of reading books about political theory and racial conflict, I have finally found a book that helps to make sense of racial identity and conflict in the post-modern 21st century. Ironically enough, the best book on the subject of post-modern race is a book about race in the Middle Ages. But don't be fooled - "Empire of Magic" has more intelligent things to say about race, nation, culture, class, terrorism, and Holy War than any other book I have ever encountered. In a way, this makes perfect sense. With America's War on Terror, still being fought against Islamist enemies in Afghanistan and Iraq, who better to ask about issues of racial and cultural identity than an expert on the history of cultural conflict between the Islamic East and the Christian West? Groundbreaking in its scope and impact, Geraldine Heng's book helps to show how the lessons of the Middle Ages can provide us with an incredible understanding of the conflicts and identity crises we're seeing today. With this book, Heng has singlehandedly revolutionized the way that I think about race and identity. Heed my words: read this book immediately. You'll never see literature or history in the same way again.

Geraldine Heng has written an excellent resources that examines such topics as race, class, and gender in some of the lesser known texts of the Middle Ages (ie. not Chaucer). A wonderful resource for anyone wondering what good it would do to study anything medieval.

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