

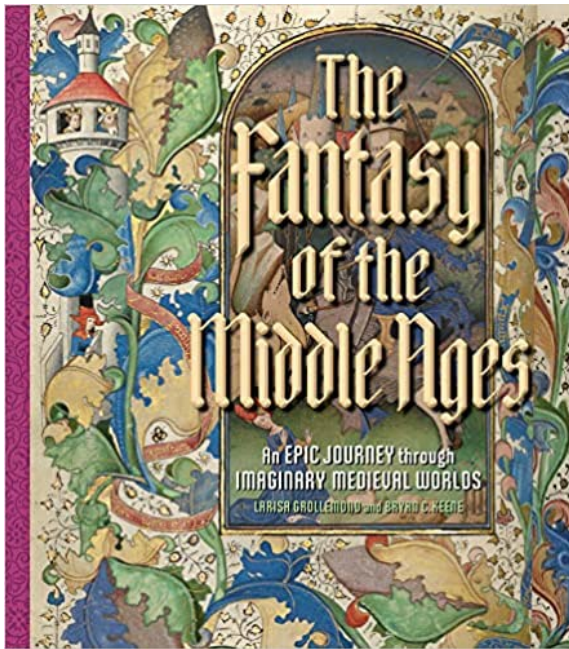
Review: The Fantasy of the Middle Ages: An Epic Journey through Imaginary Medieval Worlds

by Larisa Grollemond and Bryan C. Keene. J. Paul Getty Museum, June 2022. 144 p. ill. ISBN 978-1-60606-758-1 (h/c), \$29.95.

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This enchanting publication, published to accompany an exhibition of the same name at the J. Paul Getty Museum, explores the notions of medievalism, the global Middle Ages, and fantasy in literature and visual culture. Authors Grollemond and Keene, who curated the exhibition, approach the subjects thematically to show that medievalisms, which feature visual representations of fantastic creatures, costumes, architecture, people, relationships, and (hi)stories, have developed across time and media to create the “fantasy construct” that modern movie-goers and Netflix-bingers know today.

Through hundreds of cinematic and literary examples – including Arthurian parody *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* and spinoff musical *Spamalot*, the magical world of Harry Potter, animated films *Robin Hood* and *Sleeping Beauty* from Walt Disney Productions, television phenomenon *Game of Thrones*, J.R.R. Tolkien’s expansive Middle-Earth, and many others – the authors demonstrate that representations of the Middle Ages in popular culture do not accurately portray the historical Middle Ages. They explain that the stereotypical “medieval” worlds that we experience in modern media meld archetypes, legends, fantasies, myths, and fairy tales in an anachronistic way that create entirely new settings, stories, and characters that belong in our imaginations and not our history books.

The authors use examples from medieval books of hours, chronicles, maps, paintings, and woodcuts from the J. Paul Getty Museum, Library Special Collections at UCLA, the Stanford University Libraries, and other institutions to show the visual origins for medieval fantasies. However, they do not discuss the patrons, creators, places, and methods of creation, or socio-political contexts of these medieval objects. Short essays on the processes of creating parchment and pigments in the Middle Ages, paired with information about the objects' provenances, would have enriched the reader's understanding of their creation and use, while reinforcing the argument that pop culture fantasies differ from actual medieval realities.

This richly illustrated book is intended for general audiences. The authors provide a selected bibliography in the back matter, but the text itself does not include scholarly citations. The ubiquitous color illustrations, numbering over 130, include short captions and bibliographic data, where applicable. However, the captions are in separate boxes, set apart from the images themselves, creating some confusion about which caption refers to which illustration. Illustration credits, acknowledgements, author biographies, and an index enhance the publication. The book includes necessary discussions about race, sexuality, gender, social construct, marginalization, and inclusivity, referencing both medieval and modern examples.