

ROMANCE AND HISTORY

To what extent can imaginative events be situated in time and history? From the medieval to the early modern period, this question is intriguingly explored in the expansive literary genre of romance. This collective study, edited by Jon Whitman, is the first systematic investigation of that formative process during more than four hundred years. While concentrating on changing configurations of romance itself, the volume examines a number of important related reference points, from epic to chronicle to critical theory. Recalling but qualifying conventional approaches to the three “matters” of Rome, Britain, and France, the far-reaching inquiry engages major works in a variety of idioms, including Latin, French, English, German, Italian, and Spanish. With contributions from a range of internationally distinguished scholars, this unique volume offers a carefully coordinated framework for enriching not only the reading of romance, but also the understanding of changing attitudes toward the temporal process at large.

JON WHITMAN teaches in the Department of English of The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where for many years he also directed the Center for Literary Studies. He has published a range of essays on approaches to romance and history, and he is the author of *Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique* (1987) and the editor of *Interpretation and Allegory: Antiquity to the Modern Period* (2000).

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ROMANCE AND HISTORY

*Imagining Time from the Medieval
to the Early Modern Period*

EDITED BY
JON WHITMAN



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*To my wife, Ahuva,
and
to my daughter, Naomi Eliora*

Contents

<i>List of contributors</i>	page xii
<i>Preface</i>	xiii
I OPENING PERSPECTIVES	
1 Romance and history: designing the times <i>Jon Whitman</i>	3
II THE MATTER OF ROME (AND REALMS TO THE EAST): APPROACHES TO ANTIQUITY	
2 Fearful histories: the past contained in the romances of antiquity <i>Christopher Baswell</i>	23
3 Troy and Rome, two narrative presentations of history in the thirteenth century: the <i>Roman de Troie en prose</i> and the <i>Faits des Romains</i> <i>Catherine Croizy-Naquet</i>	40
III THE MATTER OF BRITAIN: SOCIAL AND SPIRITUAL DRIVES	
4 Inescapable history: Geoffrey of Monmouth's <i>History of the Kings of Britain</i> and Arthurian romances of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries <i>Robert W. Hanning</i>	55
5 Gottfried, Wolfram, and the Angevins: history, genealogy, and fiction in the <i>Tristan</i> and <i>Parzival</i> romances <i>Adrian Stevens</i>	74

x	<i>Contents</i>	
6	Fictional history as ideology: functions of the Grail legend from Robert de Boron to the <i>Roman de Perceforest</i> <i>Friedrich Wolfzettel</i>	90
7	The Prose <i>Brut</i> , Hardyng's <i>Chronicle</i> , and the Alliterative <i>Morte Arthure</i> : the end of the story <i>Edward Donald Kennedy</i>	105
8	Arthur in transition: Malory's <i>Morte Darthur</i> <i>Helen Cooper</i>	120
IV	THE MATTERS OF FRANCE AND ITALY: ACTS OF RECOLLECTION AND INVENTION	
9	The <i>chanson de geste</i> as a construction of memory <i>Jean-Pierre Martin</i>	137
10	Ruggiero's story: the making of a dynastic hero <i>Riccardo Bruscagli</i>	151
11	Temporality and narrative structure in European romance from the late fifteenth century to the early sixteenth century <i>Marco Praloran</i>	168
V	MATTERS OF FABULATION AND FACT: SHIFTING REGISTERS	
12	The disparagement of chivalric romance for its lack of historicity in sixteenth-century Italian poetics <i>Daniel Javitch</i>	187
13	Romance and history in Tasso's <i>Gerusalemme Liberata</i> <i>David Quint</i>	200
14	The thinking of history in Spenserian romance <i>Gordon Teskey</i>	214
15	La Cava: romance and history in Corral and Cervantes <i>Marina S. Brownlee</i>	228

	<i>Contents</i>	xi
VI	CLOSING REFERENCE POINTS	
16	Afterword and afterward: romance, history, time <i>Jon Whitman</i>	245
	<i>Notes</i>	254
	<i>Select bibliography</i>	305
	<i>Index</i>	310

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Preface

In the coordination of a study about the interplay of texts and time, even the conventional turnabouts in the time shortly before publication – when what is nearly a postscript becomes finally a “preface” – may have a special point. For me, in any case, the time of completing this preface is an opportunity to express my appreciation to those who helped to turn the work that is about to be past into the book that is about to come.

The preparation of this study is the culmination of a collective research project extending over many years and including scholars from a range of countries. I began coordinating the project for the Center for Literary Studies of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem when I was the director of the Center. The initial stages of the project included the shaping and organizing of a broad international conference in Jerusalem on “Romance: Dimensions of Time and Designs of History.” Much of the work for this volume appeared in an early form in selected material at that conference; other work was provided at later stages. Close and detailed consultation with each of the contributors facilitated extensive cross-references between parts of the study and the gradual adaptation of essays for the cooperative volume as a whole.

To the Center for Literary Studies I am deeply grateful for its indispensable support – institutional, financial, and practical – for this wide-ranging international project. Supplementary assistance was provided by the Authority for Research and Development and the Faculty of Humanities of the Hebrew University.

For the valuable contributions made to the collective project by all the participants in the formative conference in Jerusalem I wish to express my sincere appreciation. In addition to almost all the individuals contributing to this specific volume, those who gave presentations or chaired conference sessions included Cyril Aslanov, Haggai Ben-Shammai, Lawrence Besserman, Sanford Budick, Carol J. Chase, Luisa Ferretti Cuomo, Jeannine Horowitz, Joshua Levinson, Sylvie Meyer, Lee Patterson, Claudia Rosenzweig, David Wallace, and Eli Yassif. Both before and after the conference,

Ruben Borg, Jennie Feldman, and Jonathan Stavsky offered careful translations into English for three non-English contributions to the collective project. Student assistants of the Center for Literary Studies provided practical help with various aspects of the conference.

For his encouragement for this conference and, more broadly, for his far-reaching vision of international dialogue in Israel at the highest levels of contemporary literary scholarship, I am especially grateful to the founding director of the Center, Sanford Budick.

The transformation of individual essays into the components of a collective study was made possible by the sustained commitment of the contributors to this volume. I am indebted to them for their rich scholarship, their exemplary patience, and their gracious cooperation in the complex and intricate process of preparing this book. The texture of the study is a testimony to their cooperative spirit.

As the text approaches publication, it is especially saddening for me to record the loss of one of the contributors to the volume, Marco Praloran, who passed away at the age of fifty-six. Both at the conference in Jerusalem and in his essay for the collaborative study he made distinguished contributions to the research project as a whole. I remain grateful for his sincere dedication and his intellectual enrichment of our shared activity.

In arrangements for the publication of this work I am particularly indebted to Alastair Minnis for his attentive care and encouraging support. I would like to express my appreciation to Linda Bree at Cambridge University Press for her thoughtfulness and expert assistance, and to the readers for the Press for their comments on a preliminary form of the study. The talent and craftsmanship of Nahman L'hrar made possible the artwork for the book jacket.

Beyond my gratitude for assistance with this particular project is an abiding personal indebtedness for support of a deeper kind. Though the lives of my parents did not extend to the time of my present writing, my very sense of how a past can inform a future remains indebted to their enduring guidance and continuing inspiration. To my wife, Ahuva, and to my daughter, Naomi Eliora, I am indebted anew with every new moment. In a fundamental sense, their sustained and loving support during the years in which this work was in the making is the real preface to this book. I cannot adequately express how grateful I am to them for their keen understanding, their special generosity, and their steadfast care over those years. But in dedicating this book with love to Ahuva and Naomi Eliora, I hope at least to be able to suggest from the beginning that without them I could scarcely have imagined that time.

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