

Textiles, Gender, and Materiality: A Response

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Materiality and Textiles in Gender Studies and Medieval Studies

Gender studies and specifically feminist theory have been pioneering the current wave of interest in materiality that spans much of the humanities and social sciences. The long-standing feminist interest in the material world stems primarily from the observation that women in patriarchal societies are more closely associated with the body, with matter, and domestic concerns, while only men are assumed to have access to the highest domains of reason, spirit, and mind. Judith Butler made it a priority for the entire field of gender and queer studies to deconstruct not just the binaries of male/female and heterosexual/homosexual, but also the underlying assumed difference between sex and gender, between body and mind, between biology and culture.¹ This is one of her most misunderstood and at the same time most fundamental contributions to thought. Butler emphasizes that there is no clear dividing line between sex and gender, that is, between a biological sex and a socially constructed gender identity. According to her argument, it is not the case that the hormones, chromosomes, neuronal pathways, or genitalia with which we are born make us biologically male or female, or that such an alleged biologically given sex is then simply associated with further roles such as female domesticity and male aggression. This does not mean that Butler denies that we have hormones, chromosomes, and neuronal patterns. It means instead that there is no clear demarcation between our

1. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1999 [1990]); Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London: Routledge, 1993).

material embodiedness and its culturally specific interpretation. What we perceive as biologically given—be it hormones, be it humors, be it phrenological skull shapes—varies from culture to culture. This applies not just to what we consider the biological reality of gender, but to any so-called biological facts. The very idea of matter itself is culturally specific; the distinction between material and immaterial does not exist in the same way in all societies and is not a universal truth.

Karen Barad has extended this beyond the human body to rehabilitate matter in general and to show that from the point of view of theoretical physics, matter is agential, not a passive object.² Butler dismantles the division between sex and gender, between body and spirit, from the point of view of language and culture, showing that the demarcation between material sex and cultural gender is itself culturally specific. Barad dismantles it from the point of view of matter, showing that what we think of as matter is not just a passive substance onto which we project our meanings, but in itself generates meanings in interaction with humans. Not only is matter not clearly distinguishable from the immaterial, but it also shapes what we think of as immaterial. While mainstream western philosophy since Descartes has traditionally postulated an opposition between language, on the one hand, and a reality one can never quite reach on the other, feminist thinkers such as Butler, Barad, Rosi Braidotti, and Elizabeth Grosz argue that there is a spectrum between matter and non-matter, and that matter is a process rather than a preexisting entity.³ We moreover perceive certain (visible, tangible) things to be more material than invisible and intangible things, though from the point of view of physics, a transparent gas or a soundwave is composed of material elements with immaterial spaces in between, just like a rock or table.

Within medieval studies, Caroline Walker Bynum's influential work has made it very well known that medieval theology, philosophy, and

2. Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

3. Other than the texts by Butler and Barad already mentioned, a good starting point with chapters by Braidotti and Grosz is Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, eds., *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

culture associated femininity with matter and masculinity with spirit and other nonmaterial phenomena.⁴ At the same time, Bynum has amassed abundant evidence for the fact that in medieval thought and everyday practice, the material and the transcendent were not perceived as polar opposites but as points on a spectrum. Much medieval theology was concerned precisely with how material substances and the transcendental could merge: how the word could become flesh (incarnation); how matter could come into being out of nothingness (creation); how the material eucharist could become Christ (transubstantiation); and how bodies could become eternal (resurrection of the body). The material body and transcendental soul were usually perceived as intimately linked rather than as ontological opposites.

While observing for medieval culture what many theorists have diagnosed for modern culture, Bynum often carefully distances herself from theoretical approaches, claiming an inductive method of working from medieval sources to arrive at her conclusions. This distancing from theoretical approaches is characteristic of most work on medieval materiality. The recent “new materialism” or “material turn” has also encompassed medieval studies, but so far most scholars have taken pragmatic rather than theoretically informed approaches and studied material objects rather than materiality as such. Hundreds of publications showcase investigations of manuscripts, clothes, archaeological remains, and representations of material items with renewed force, yielding a fascinating array of insights. Less common is a critical engagement with the question of what materiality means, how medieval thinkers defined it, and what we can glean from extant sources about everyday medieval experiences of materiality.

Independently of the recent theoretical interest in materiality, textiles themselves have long been a much-researched topic within feminist scholarship, which has reclaimed an interest in clothes and in hand-crafting textiles that is conventionally associated with femininity and

4. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone, 1991); Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York: Zone, 2011); Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christendom, 200–1336*, Lectures on the history of religions, n.s. 15 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

devalued. This interest has also included medieval studies, since elite textile producers in the Middle Ages were often women. The focus in both feminist and other scholarship on medieval textiles has been on empirical studies of the production, provenance, uses, and iconography of clothes and tapestries, though excellent work has been done in many fields from a variety of approaches.⁵

In the following, I am taking my cue from the discussions of textile items in the two articles in this section. Morgan Boharski's contribution "Like Looking in A Mirror" analyzes Jean Renaut's thirteenth-century French romance *Galeran de Bretagne* alongside Marie de France's version of the same tale from the point of view of three significant textiles: a cloth, a sleeve, and a veil. These textiles in Boharski's interpretation connect the protagonist Fresne to her twin sister, from whom she is separated at birth and whose thriving depends on Fresne's failure and vice-versa. Boharski compellingly demonstrates how the cloth objects and the women stand in for each other: Fresne does not have an identity without the cloth; the sleeve is fetishized by her lover as a substitute for her; and the veil allows one twin to substitute for the other. While Boharski draws out primarily what this means for the interpretation of *Galeran de Bretagne*, her method of focusing on the connections between material objects and female characters could fruitfully be used much more widely, and some of her observations are valid for a wide range of medieval texts.

Amy Burge and Lydia Yaitsky Kertz in "Fabricated Muslim Identity, Female Agency, and Cultural Complicity" engage with an important current issue, that of the complicity of white women in empire-building projects. Their fresh and insightful reading of the fifteenth-century English romance *Emaré* in this light shows how the female protagonist, the Christian emperor Artyus's daughter Emaré, is here complicit in reappropriating a luxury cloth a "Saracen" emir's daughter made for her Babylonian lover. By using the non-Christian cloth to augment her appearance and identity as a racially white and Christian woman, Emaré repurposes it, or in Burge's and Kertz' terminology inspired by

5. A good starting point to gain an overview of the work done in this field is the pioneering journal *Medieval Clothing and Textiles* (2005-).

Deleuze and Guattari, deterritorializes and then reterritorializes it. Burge and Kertz highlight the potential of reading other objects and territorial entities in medieval texts as assemblages in Deleuze's and Guattari's sense to better understand the medieval roots of imperialism. As regards material things, their approach of paying attention to the intersectional power structures in which objects partake is also fruitful in this respect.

In the following, I would like to draw out four particular aspects of Boharski's and Burge and Kertz's interpretations that are relevant for a wide range of medieval narratives beyond *Galeran* and *Emaré*: the idea that textiles have their own itineraries; that textiles are connected threads; the ways in which textiles can be compared to texts; and how textiles can exude shine. These four aspects also tie in with my own work on material objects as represented in medieval literature, especially in German-language narratives. In my monograph *Medieval Things*, I discuss how many medieval narratives report the past histories, present powers, and future trajectories of objects, including textiles, in thing biographies similar to the ones of the cloths traced by Boharski and Burge, and Kertz.⁶ The ideas that textiles are connective and that they can be used as metaphors for texts are discussed in my book in the context of nets and networks. Finally, I suggest in this monograph that shine is one of the major ways in which things exert a nonhuman form of agency in medieval literature. In the following sections, I shall sketch Morgan Boharski's, and Amy Burge and Lydia Kertz's observations on each particular aspect (object itineraries, connectivity, text/textile, and shine), and then set their arguments in the broader context of medieval narratives in several languages, especially German. In this way I aim to give some pointers as to how their skillful analyses could be used to discover wider patterns in the gendered depiction of textiles in medieval literature.

6. Bettina Bildhauer, *Medieval Things: Agency, Materiality and Narratives of Objects in Medieval German Literature and Beyond* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2020).

Textiles with Biographies

Marie de France's lai *Le Fraisne* and *Galeran de Bretagne*, as discussed by Boharski in her contribution to this volume, can be read as a biography not only of the human protagonist Fresne but also of a significant cloth. We hear about important stations of the cloth's itinerary and are in each case given a brief prehistory of how it got to be there. In *Le Fraisne*, first, as Fresne's mother uses the cloth to wrap the newborn that she is about to abandon, we hear that it had been acquired by Fresne's father in Constantinople and then given to Fresne's mother. The cloth is mentioned again when the adult Fresne goes to live with a knight, and we are told that Fresne's foster mother had passed it on to her. Fresne then repurposes the cloth to decorate the bed when her beloved knight marries her twin sister, and the twins' mother recognizes it, prompting Fresne to recount its history once more. It here develops a pivotal agency, serving as a sign of identification that turns Fresne's life around when she essentially supplants her twin sister in the affections of both the knight and her birth mother. Though the cloth has no pseudohuman or supernatural powers, it nevertheless shapes the plot. Renaut provides a similar biography for this cloth, with some changes, such as that Fresne's mother makes the cloth herself during her pregnancy, and that Fresne refashions it not as a decoration for the wedding bed, but as a dress for herself to attend the knight's wedding.

The fifteenth-century Middle English short romance *Emaré*, as observed by Burge and Kertz, likewise follows the trajectory of a cloth as a particularly significant object. The text summarizes this object's history in a concise embedded narrative told by King Tergaunte of Sicily: it was made by the "Saracen" Emir's daughter for her lover, the Sultan of Babylon's son. From there, it is passed among several men: from the son to his father the Sultan; from the Sultan to King Tergaunte of Sicily's father; and from King Tergaunte's father to his son. King Tergaunte now gives it to the emperor Sir Artyus, and Sir Artyus then has it made into a wedding gown in which he wants to marry his own daughter Emaré. When she refuses, he sends her away in a rudderless boat while she is still wearing the gown, which, as Burge and Kertz put it, "reappears at key moments in the text."

These biographies can be set in the context of other textiles and other things being given their own stories in medieval literature. When stories stay focused on a material thing, this gives the impression that the thing “wanders”: that it has its own path or trajectory, even though it cannot move in a self-propelled fashion. This is important in the context of current debates about the potential of things to exert agency. In the traditional philosophical view, still indebted to Descartes, agency is something that only humans can have as the only ones that transcend the world of matter, which is composed of inert substances that can only move due to an external agency in a cause-and-effect relation. Medieval literature, along with many other creative fields, has developed more nuanced concepts of how things might not have a quasi-human ability to move, speak, or think, but nonetheless are not passive objects either.⁷ The impression of agency can be created narratively through the fact that a thing figures as the “subject” of its own story alone.

The seamless tunic that allegedly clothed Christ during the passion is one further example of a textile item which is given its own biography in several narratives of the “translation” or history of the relic. Much like Emaré’s cloth, the Grey Robe is claimed to have been artfully handmade in the Middle East: it is spun and woven by the Virgin Mary in one seamless piece. It is then worn by Christ during his fasting in the desert and also on the cross. The German epic *Orendel or the Grey Robe* (dating from the late twelfth or potentially late fifteenth century) now deviates from the standard report that it was acquired by Saint Helena together with the cross and instead adds a different and highly eventful history: after the crucifixion, an old Jewish man is given the robe by Herod in return for his services.⁸ When the bloodstains do not wash out, the man hides it in a stone sarcophagus and throws it into the sea. But the sarcophagus is opened—in one version by the waters; in another by a merman—and the robe washes up on a distant beach, where it remains for eight years. In the ninth year, a pilgrim finds the robe. When the

7. Bildhauer, *Medieval Things*. On “wandering” things in particular, see Michael Niehaus, *Das Buch der wandernden Dinge: Vom Ring des Polykrates bis zum entwendeten Brief* (Munich: Hanser, 2009).

8. There is no critical edition or English translation, but a workable version of the text is published in *Orendel*, ed. Hans Steinger (Halle: Niemeyer, 1935).

rose-colored blood stains again do not wash out, he throws it back into the sea. Here a whale swallows it and keeps it in its stomach for another eight years, until King Orendel of Trier finds it there. The fact that *Orendel or the Grey Robe* reports this eventful history gives the impression that the robe has its own path that is as worthy of recounting as that of a human character. This becomes even more pronounced when King Orendel starts wearing the robe and then becomes also known simply as The Grey Robe. The further adventures of what the text calls The Grey Robe are now that of the human king referred to by that name rather than of the garment on its own.

Such an overlap between textiles and their wearers is relatively common in medieval literature. Burge and Kertz also claim of the cloth and Emaré that “her identity is mediated through it” and that we can read the “cloth *as* the Emir’s daughter.” Boharski nuancedly speaks of “clothbodies” and “sartorial bodies”; items of clothing that stand in for the person who made or wore them, or who is currently wearing them, which include the sleeve in the version of Fresne’s tale in *Galeran de Bretagne*. A similar sleeve is given by a very young girl as a love token to Gawain in Wolfram of Eschenbach’s *Parzival*.⁹ This blurring of the distinction between clothes and wearer is significant insofar as ontological differences between humans and textiles are not always as clearly pronounced in medieval narratives as we usually assume.

Other texts that relate the itinerary of a thing, which in this way appears to have its own path, are Hans Sachs’s *Of the Lost Talking Gulden* (1553) and *The Poor Complaining Horsebide* (1557), which are also narrated by the thing at their center.¹⁰ Many other texts follow a thing as a minor character, weaving its trajectory into a longer narrative that also details the progress of human characters. Examples include the many stories of

9. Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival: Studienausgabe, mittelhochdeutscher Text*, ed. Karl Lachmann, trans. Peter Knecht (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998). A readable English translation is Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, trans. A.T. Hatto (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980).

10. Hans Sachs, “Von dem verlornen redenten gulden,” in Sachs, *Werke*, ed. by Adalbert von Keller and Edmund Goetze, 26 vols (Stuttgart: Bibliothek des Litterarischen Vereins, 1870–1908), vol. 4 (1870), 216–27; Sachs, “Die ellend klagent roßhaut,” in Sachs, *Werke*, vol. 5 (1870), 146–53.

the grail, of Turnus's ring in the Trojan War narratives, or of treasures in *Beowulf*, the *Völsungasaga*, and other epics. Such thing biographies assume a gendered dimension when the agency given to special things can exceed that of female human characters who are traded as objects between men without being able to exert any free will. This is arguably the case for Fresne, who cannot choose her husband until her cloth is recognized. Rings are particularly often associated with a woman's lack of consent to marriage or sexual intercourse: Siegfried in the *Song of the Nibelungs*, for instance, takes Brunhild's ring and girdle when he overpowers her so that she can be "deflowered" and loses her strength; in the German epic *Solomon and Morolf*, a pair of magic rings makes Salomé fall in love with her partners; and in Wolfram's *Parzival*, Parzival forces himself sexually on Jeschute against her will and takes her ring.¹¹

Textiles as Connective

In Burge and Kertz's analysis in this collection, the most important phenomenological aspect of the cloth in *Emaré* and other textiles is their connectivity. Building on an established interpretation of *Emaré*, Burge and Kertz see the text as "invested in ideas of connection and assemblage" and "the cloth itself as already an assemblage" of "interweaving networks."

This understanding of textiles as connective is typical of much current research not only on *Emaré* or indeed medieval literature, but across the arts and humanities. Of the phenomenological features of textiles, what seems most evocative to contemporary scholars is the idea of textiles as weaving together or in other ways connecting different threads (as well as of clothes' proximity to the bodies of their wearers, which I will discuss in more detail below), rather than, for instance, as warming, as large flat surface, as pliable, or as encompassing small holes. I have investigated this for one particular form of textile, the net, whose

11. *Das Nibelungenlied: Mittelhochdeutsch – Neuhochdeutsch*, ed. Ursula Schulze, trans. Siegfried Grosse (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2010); a good English translation is *The Nibelungenlied: The Lay of the Nibelungs*, trans. Cyril Edwards (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); *Salman und Morolf*, ed. Alfred Karnein, Altdeutsche Textbibliothek, 85 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1979).

defining characteristic is that it is knotted together (rather than woven or knitted) from threads.¹² Modern scholarship as well as everyday usage imagines nets and networks primarily as composed of connectors and nodes. Medieval fictional and historical narratives, however, associate nets *not* so much with connectivity as instead with trapping and with a combination of material and immaterial elements.

What many medieval writers mention about nets is the contrast between the material strings and the gaps between the strings. This goes both for decorative nets, such as hairnets or nets of pearls or gold incorporated into luxury clothing, and for nets used for trapping animals or other prey. Decorative nets are often described as both intensely material, with skilfully crafted precious metals, gemstones, or pearls making the wearer's wealth and social standing visible, and as containing immaterial holes through which one can see the hair or clothing underneath. A particularly lavish net made "von berlîn kleine / mit hôhem flîze" (carefully from little pearls)¹³ through which one can see precious fabric is described, for instance, in Konrad of Würzburg's thirteenth-century version of the *Trojan War*:

durch daz rîliche netze breit,
daz löcherehte dûhte,
des phellers varwe lûhte,
diu sam ein gloie was getân.¹⁴

Through the precious wide net, which seemed to be full of holes,
shone the silk fabric's iris-like color.

As well as the sumptuous material and the well-craftedness of the net, the text mentions that one can see the fabric through its holes. The nets' combination of (material) tangibility and (seemingly immaterial) transparency is characteristic also of nets used as traps, which can

12. Bildhauer, *Medieval Things*.

13. Konrad von Würzburg, *Trojanerkrieg*, ed. Heinz Thoelen and Bianca Häberlein, *Wissensliteratur im Mittelalter*, 51 (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2015), lines 35258–59. Translations from Middle High German are mine throughout.

14. Konrad, *Trojanerkrieg*, lines 32560–63.

only function if they remain unseen by their prey, but then physically hold the captured prey so that it cannot escape. The fowler's net in the ring-dove's story from the *Kalila and Dimna* tradition that spread from Arabic into many European languages, for example, is in many medieval versions described as invisible from the outside, but inescapably strong from the inside.¹⁵ The connotations of textiles and other material objects have clearly changed over time, and it is important to remain alert to our own contemporary biases.

Textiles as Texts and Texts as Textiles

In *Galeran*, as analyzed by Boharski, Fresne's cloth is not only a textile but also a text made by a woman insofar as it tells the story of creation through embroidered images: "le ciel, le feu luytant com or, l'eau et la terre avec partie, de ce dont Dieu avoit garnie" (the sky, fire as brilliant as gold, the water and the earth with a part that full of the creatures God had made and placed there). The cloth in *Emaré*, as Burge and Kertz argue, also tells a story by depicting famous heterosexual lovers, which reminds the viewers of these well-known love stories and creates a narrative context into which the Emir's daughter has inserted an image of herself and her beloved.

There are many similar textile objects in ancient and medieval literature, often made by women, whose woven or embroidered images have such narrative functions. Medieval literary texts featuring such textiles are often adapted from ancient Greek and Roman myths, where textile production by women was seen as equivalent to poetry.¹⁶ Boharski mentions the story of Philomena, who communicates the narrative of her rape through woven images after her tongue is mutilated. Arachne similarly weaves tales of the misdeeds of the gods, again told through

15. Abdallah Ibn al-Muqaffa, *Le livre de Kalila et Dimna*, trans. André Miquel (Paris: Klincksieck, 1957), 133–34.

16. Beate Wagner-Hasel, "Textus und textere, hyphos und hyphaëin: Zur metaphorischen Bedeutung des Webens in der griechisch-römischen Antike," in "Textus" im Mittelalter: Komponenten und Situationen des Wortgebrauchs im schriftsemantischen Feld, ed. Ludger Kuchenbuch and Uta Kleine, Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte, 216 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 15–42.

pictures in her tapestries, in her competition with the goddess Pallas Athena. A cloth that depicts the cosmos with its four elements, like Fresne's, is also already found in ancient literature, with Claudian's epic *De raptu Proserpinae* (written around 395–400 CE in Italy) likely influencing later medieval versions, as Ulrich Ernst has traced.¹⁷ Here Proserpina weaves a cloth embroidered with the four elements, as well as a map of the world with its five climate zones.

If textiles described within the plot can tell stories, several medieval texts also compare themselves to textiles, as *Orendel or the Grey Robe* does by calling itself *The Grey Robe*. This again goes back to Latin and Greek literature and culture, where terms for texts and books were derived from terms for woven fabrics.¹⁸ The narrator of Hartmann's *Erec*, for instance, uses a saddle blanket that depicts the cosmos, similar to Fresne's, as an opportunity to showcase the "narratedness" of this item and to explain his poetics.¹⁹ Further exploration of the overlaps between texts and textiles could surely provide new insights into medieval literature, as in the case of Emaré's and Fresne's cloths.

Shiny Textiles

The cloth in *Emaré* dazzles onlookers such as Emaré's father through its shine; as Burge and Kertz quote: the "glysteryng" (100) cloth "shone so bright" (439). Burge and Kertz rightly and perceptively point out that this is a racialized shine, set in parallel with Emaré's "white skin." The gown in *Emaré* can be seen in the context of the many things in medieval literature that exert agency through their shine, which is often racialized and gendered. Shine is a major way in which things are

17. Claudian, *De raptu Proserpinae*, ed. and trans. Claire Gruzelier (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), bk. 1, lines 246–75; Ulrich Ernst, "Nouveau Roman' im Mittelalter? Generistische Betrachtungen zum 'ekphrastischen Roman,'" *Das Mittelalter* 13, no. 1 (2008): 125.

18. See the chapters collected in Kuchenbuch and Kleine, "*Textus*" im Mittelalter.

19. Hartmann von Aue, *Erec*, ed. Manfred Günther Scholz, trans. Susanne Held (Frankfurt a. M.: Deutscher Klassiker-Verlag, 2007); for an English translation, see Hartmann von Aue, *German Romance V: Erec*, ed. and trans. Cyril Edwards (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2014).

reported as having powerful effects on human onlookers in medieval literature by attracting them or stunning them without any quasi-human or supernatural agency.

Many shiny objects are worn by white women, who themselves also appear as shiny objects of attraction. This is the case, for example, for Florie, Gawain's love interest, in Wirnt of Grafenberg's thirteenth-century German Arthurian romance *Wigalois*. When Gawain first sees Florie, her glamorous clothing is described in detail, including a "masterfully tied" silk chemise "so truly bright (*lüter*)" and "like a light (*liehtez*) mirror glass"; a belt made from gold and jewels containing a ruby with the power to ease pain and bad moods "with sweet shine (*mit süezem schîne*)"; a clasp in the shape of Amor carved from a carbuncle that "shone (*schein*) ahead of the maiden wherever she went by night; it did not allow any darkness when the lady was inside; by day it gleamed (*glaster*) like a glass."²⁰ The text then seamlessly moves from a description of her hairbands to her hair and physical features, depicting Florie's body as a similarly shining and specifically white object: her hair is "golden"; her parting "white (*wîz*)," her skin "bright" and "pink and white," her eyes "light," her ears "of luminous whiteness (*von liehtvarwer wîze*)" and her whole body "of light color."²¹ In the same way as her chemise and belt, she is also reported to remove any suffering with her friendly gaze and to be as "clear as a mirror vis-à-vis all treachery."²² Florie thus appears as a shiny object that attracts Gawain's attention, much like her clothes do, and she does so due to her light skin, eyes and hair color.

The expertise and labor of the elite "Saracen" woman who made Emaré's cloth is culturally appropriated for the imperial project when the piously Christian and explicitly white emperor's daughter wears it, as Burge and Kertz convincingly demonstrate. A similar argument could potentially be made for Florie, though she lives in an unspecified fairy realm rather than the Roman Empire. Her cloak nevertheless incorporates a fish skin from Ireland and tassels that were cut with "with 'heathen' craft" into a racially white ensemble ("heathen" being a

20. Wirnt von Grafenberg, *Wigalois*, ed. J. M. N. Kapteyn, trans. Sabine Seelbach and Ulrich Seelbach (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), lines 721–867.

21. Wirnt, lines 868–952.

22. Wirnt, lines 948–49: "si vor allem valsche waz / liuter als ein spiegelglas."

derogatory Middle High German term often used for non-Christians of any religion or none, but specifically for Muslims).²³ In many medieval texts shiny luxury goods are, as in *Emaré* and *Wigalois*, associated with “heathen” lands or the “Orient” rather than with white Europeans because actual luxury textiles and the literary texts that describe them were often imported from the Middle East. Arabic and Persian narratives such as Fakhraddin Gorgani’s *Vis and Ramin* or the *Arabian Nights* promote an aesthetics of shine in which fabrics, humans, castles, and horses are often characterized as shining like the sun and the moon and sparkling like jewels. Literature in “European” languages often borrowed or culturally appropriated such attractive descriptions of shiny textiles and other glittering objects. Attention to shiny things can illuminate patterns of cultural appropriation not only in *Emaré*, as Burge and Kertz evidence, but also in medieval literature more generally.

Boharski’s as well as Burge and Kertz’s articles thus contribute to materialist research into medieval literature not only two fine case studies of how a focus on material objects can bring new perspectives on canonical texts. Taken together and in the context of other textile and material studies, they also show the significance of the broader issues of thing biographies, of textiles as connective, of the use of textiles as metaphors for texts, and of shine. They demonstrate the fruitfulness of an approach that does not automatically privilege the human over the rest of the material world, but pauses to consider textiles in their own right.

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23. Wirnt, lines 803–25, line 823: “mit heidenischem liste.”