E. Jane Burns, ed. *Medieval Fabrications: Dress, Textiles, Cloth Work, and other Cultural Imaginings.* (The New Middle Ages.) Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. pp. 279.

"Textiles stand at the nexus of the personal and the cultural, often linking specific, individual expressions to institutionalized and hierarchical social structures" (1). This statement from E. Jane Burns' introduction provides an excellent summary of the focus and the scope of this collection of essays. Topics range from late medieval Germanic slippers with embossed images of scenes from *Tristan* to clerical garb, stained glass patterns, Griselda's *chemise*, and Almerian silk testifying to the fruitful ways in which the study of medieval textiles and textile-working, taken in their largest senses, can inform our understanding of not only medieval material culture, but also of literature, art, philosophy, and religion.

Burns surveys the critical and theoretical positions of the previous literature on feminism and material culture related to the study of clothing and textiles. Her examination of the uses of the term *chemise* in Old French literature and history offers a cogent illustration of the theoretical possibilities to be found in the study of clothing and of the ways in which clothing can signify materially and symbolically.

Claire Sponsler examines the interplay between poetry and pictorial display in the poems John Lydgate intended to accompany hangings of woven or painted images. Her speculative analysis productively complicates the boundaries between texts and pictorial representations. However the actual poems, and indeed the larger category of "tapestry poems," are lost amidst a host of conditional phrases, such as "these images might well have amplified [. . .]" and "Lydgate was producing what may have been tapestry poems" (32). (It does not help that we have no images of the hangings to accompany the text, for none have apparently survived.) This deliberately speculative article raises some interesting questions, but leaves one wishing for fewer conditional subtleties. In contrast, in "Tristan Slippers: An Image of Adultery or a Symbol of Marriage?" Kathryn Starkey offers both an overview of the association of shoes with marriage and sexuality in the Germanic tradition and a specific reading of the iconography of the Tristan scenes embossed on low-country leather slippers. Starkey shows how these slippers, and their possible meanings, take form within the context of late-medieval urban culture. Clearly and cogently argued, the article offers a fascinating glimpse of one very unexpected intersection between literary and material culture.

Dyan Elliott and Roberta Krueger both discuss dressing and undressing, but in two very different contexts. Elliott examines "how clerical identity is constructed through the superimposition of layers of symbolically laden fabric even as it is

deconstructed through the inverted ritual of divestment" (55-6). Elliott's generally fine look at the symbolic power of clerical garb to literally "make" and "unmake" a priest suffers somewhat from the use of examples from the Carolingian period to establish the norms against which she then compares the rituals of the late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-centuries. That caveat aside, the majority of Elliott's analysis focuses on Durandis' *Rationale for the Divine Offices*, and demonstrates both the changes in church thinking about priestly degradation and the ways in which the priest's symbolic clothing both set him apart and protected him from secular justice, such that the removal of that clothing signified not only his loss of priesthood but also his exposure to possible execution. Krueger offers an excellent reading of late medieval Griselda tales from Boccaccio to the Menagier de Paris, focusing on Christine de Pizan's transformation of the story from an exemplary tale of extraordinary female virtue into an all-too-true example of female suffering. However, despite Kreuger's discussion of the husband clothing, and un-clothing Griselda, it is not really central to her argument.

Ruth Mazzo Karras' contribution ("'This Skill in a Woman is By No Means to Be Despised': Weaving and the Gender Division of Labor in the Middle Ages") surveys gender division in textile production, particularly weaving, in the Middle Ages, using guild and tax records alongside cultural representations of textile work. She highlights the importance of considering marital status "as a category of difference among women" (104) as she demonstrates the ideological strength of the image of the married woman providing clothing for her household. From literal clothing production to stained glass production, the distance is shorter that one might imagine as Madeline Caviness shows in her essay, "Tucks and Darts: Adjusting Patterns to Fit Figures for Stained Glass Windows Around 1200." Her discussion of stained glass patterns or cartoons is illuminating, and her suggestion that the cartoons were adapted to the constraints of various windows using techniques similar to those used for dressmaking patterns is fascinating.

Sarah Grace Heller and Kathleen Ashley focus on clothing in legal documents. In "Limiting Yardage and Changes of Clothes: Sumptuary Legislation in Thirteenth-Century France, Languedoc, and Italy," Heller offers an interesting *tour d'horizon* of sumptuary legislation that corrects a number of oft-repeated generalities about the development of these laws in medieval Europe. In addition, the article discusses the sumptuous descriptions of clothing in the *Roman de la Rose* and its adaptations and imitators in Occitan and Italian. Where Heller looks mainly at legislation and its literary reflections, Ashley examines gifts of clothing in testaments of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. She notes, "I had expected to use gender as a major analytical tool in this essay but found that the more provocative differences between wills in this sample, clearly

reflected in clothing gifts, arose because of class location" (139). She goes on to analyze in extremely interesting and fruitful ways how class and, in particular, affluence associated with class could affect the meaning of gifts of clothing in these late-medieval and early-modern wills.

Janet Snyder's contribution provides a welcome second article on the architectural-visual arts, complementing Caviness' consideration of stained glass cartoons. Unfortunately, her discussion of Islamic influence on twelfth-century French sculptural depictions of cloth and clothing is hampered by much infelicitous grammar, which is very unexpected given the overall extremely high quality of the discourse, and the editing, demonstrated in this volume. In addition, I repeatedly found myself needing an image that was not there in order to visualize what was being discussed. As a result, the argument did not convince me. Andrea Denny-Brown's article on Boethius also forced this literary scholar out of her professional comfort zone. However, in "How Philosophy Matters: Death, Sex, Clothes, and Boethius," the author's lucid prose makes her thought-provoking examination of Lady Philosophy's garments extremely readable. Her argument is wide-ranging (encompassing William of Conches, sumptuary laws of Greece and Rome, late medieval iconographic portrayals of Lady Philosophy, *et al*) without becoming vague or ahistorical.

The volume ends with Sarah Kay's discussion of skin in the *Pèlerinage de vie humaine*. As her title "Flayed skin as *objet a*: Representation and Materiality in Guillaume de Deguileville's *Pèlerinage de vie humaine*" suggests, Kay uses Lacan and Žižek as her critical lens, providing in fact a mutually illuminating discussion of both the medieval religious and post-modern critical texts. Her conclusion brings us full-circle, to Burns' introduction (and earlier work on clothing) providing a fitting end to the volume.[1] Indeed Kay's final sentence offers not only a summary of her argument, it simultaneously suggests broader implications of the volume's insights, "Less tilted than the imagery of clothing toward imaginary seductions, more able to expose the material limits of ideology, flayed skin in the *Pèlerinage de vie humaine* suggests ways of giving a more material hold on the concept of representation, and greater materiality to manuscript studies, than hitherto" (205).

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End Note

1. See *Courtly Love Undressed: Reading Through Clothes in Medieval French Culture* (Philadelphia: U Pennsylvania P, 2002).