READING THE CLOTH IN *EMARÉ*

THE FABRIC OF THE STORY: READING THE CLOTH IN *EMARÉ*

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A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree
Master of Arts

McMaster University

MASTER OF ARTS (1995) McMASTER UNIVERSITY
(English) Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: The Fabric of the Story: Reading the Cloth in *Emaré*

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SUPERVISOR: Dr. Anne Savage

NUMBER OF PAGES: v, 82

ABSTRACT

At the beginning of the Middle English romance *Emaré*, there is a description of a "cloth þat was wordylye wroghte" (l. 38) by the "amerayle dowgter of heþennes" (l.109). This cloth is present throughout the whole story in the form of a robe that is worn by the central character in the romance, Emaré. This thesis examines the presence of the cloth in *Emaré* by exploring the origin of the cloth both as a product of the Oriental world and as a textile created by a woman. A discussion of the perceived threat that the Orient posed to the stability of life in Europe during the Middle Ages and the way this threat is represented in romance provides a framework for looking at the cloth as a representation of the Orient in *Emaré*. The cloth is also a representation of the feminine in the romance because it was embroidered by a woman. An exploration of the idea that this cloth and the images depicted on it may be read as the text of the daughter of the Emir which she has written with a needle and thread, suggests that the Emperor's shaping of the cloth into a robe serves the purpose of "translating" this feminine -- and Oriental -- text. Since both the Orient and the feminine were considered Other in the Medieval period, this act of "translation" seems to be an attempt to control the Other. However, the idea that the cloth retains some of its Otherness even after it has been reshaped is a point of departure for questioning the nature of romance, specifically the way in which it allows for varied interpretations of the representation of the Other.

My sincere thanks to . . .

Dr. Anne Savage for her interest and confidence in my ideas and for providing the type of guidance that allowed me to investigate and develop this thesis in the way that seemed most natural to me.

My parents, Ron and Bev Struch, for teaching me how to read and instilling in me a love of literature. Through their constant affirmation of my abilities I gained the confidence necessary to meet the challenges that were presented to me this year.

My sister, Leanne, for helping me to keep a light heart, a composed mind and a rational perspective on life with her unconditional approval, calm attitude and keen sense of humor.

Dr. Murray Evans whose enthusiasm for Medieval Literature has inspired me to embark on studies in this area and all of the professors at the University of Winnipeg who provided me with a forum, during my undergraduate years, in which I was able to explore my writing process.

Diane for being both a "wise, wise woman" and a "giggling girl" with me during our adventures in Hamilton this year and for being my most enthusiastic (and vocal) advocate.

Jason, for never once saying "maybe you can't" when I said I didn't think I would be able to write this.

Willow, Charlotte, Pauline, Chris, Ras, Michelle, Anne Zak and her family, the Orobko Family, Grandma and Grandpa Struch and the many other friends and family members who have continued to support and encourage me, even from a distance.

Tom, Erica, Vicky, Cynthea, Gordon and all those whose friendship made me feel comfortable in Hamilton and provided me with a community in which I could discuss my ideas and voice my anxieties.

The Ancient Mariners baseball team and the Hamiltonian Operators soccer team for having nothing at all to do with my thesis during the (seemingly) long summer months when writing it was a constant preoccupation for me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In one of the few critical essays written solely on the Middle English romance *Emaré* Mortimer J. Donovan asks: "what should be done with a description extending for 98 lines in a narrative itself lasting just over a thousand lines?" (338). The description which Donovan and other scholars interested in the romance question is of the "cloth þat was wordylye wroghte" (*Emaré*, l. 83) by "the amerayle dowgter of heþennes" (l.109) and which is finally worn as a cloak by Emaré, the daughter of an Emperor. The cloth remains an important part of the romance even after the lengthy description because Emaré wears the "robe swyþe" (l.242) for the rest of the story. Donovan notes that in a number of Middle English romances there is a "specific, concrete object" at the centre which develops "new varieties of symbolic content" (338) throughout and, more importantly, within the poem. The elaborately embroidered cloth "wrowȝte . . . wyth pryde" (l.111) is such an object in *Emaré*. When Emaré puts on the cloak, she is suddenly transformed into someone not of this world. When she is given the cloak by her father, she is described as "non erþely wommon,/ That marked was of molde" (l. 245-246) and a similar formulation of this description is repeated a number of times throughout the romance.[1] What is this cloth and why does it excite such a reaction to Emaré when she is wearing it?

[1] The image is repeated in lines 394-396 when she is serving before the king in Galys and again in lines 697-702 when the merchant finds her after her exile from Galys.

The greatest tendency in much of the criticism on *Emaré* is to associate the cloth directly with Emaré so that, just as during the course of the romance she does not remove the robe, no meaning can be read into the cloak without including Emaré -- her physical and moral attributes -- as part of that meaning. Therefore, in the quest to determine what the cloak symbolizes in the romance, Donovan concludes that "perhaps the most important part assigned to the robe . . . is to reflect beauty" (340), that is, the beauty of Emaré. Similarly, Dieter Mehl argues that "the moral and spiritual perfections of the lady are also effectively mirrored in the extensive descriptions of the cloth" (139). For these scholars who write of the romance as a "moral narrative," Emaré and the cloak which she wears are a unit, functioning together to provide beauty and Christian instruction to a community (the other characters in the story) which has been morally and spiritually remiss. Ross G. Arthur criticizes these readings of the poem which focus on "what the robe itself 'is'" (89). He chooses instead to explore "how it [the robe] is interpreted" (90) by the other characters in the poem, noting that "the good and evil characters in the story reveal their natures . . . by their responses to Emaré's beauty" (84) which includes the cloak. Like Donovan and Mehl, Arthur also adds a moral and spiritual dimension to his reading of the romance. He uses Augustine's definition of "sign"[2] to determine that the cloak "is . . . a sign" which "serves as a touchstone for

[2] Arthur quotes the definition as: "a thing which *causes us to think* of something beyond the impression the thing itself makes upon the senses" (80).

determining the spiritual state and charting the spiritual progress of those who behold and respond to it" (91).

I agree with Arthur's statement that "the cloak is everywhere we look in the story" and concur that "by determining its function we move a long way to understanding the poem" (86). However, the approaches outlined above omit any discussion of a character who plays an equally important part in the description of the cloth: the "amerayle dowȝter" who "made þys cloth wyth-outen lees" (ll.109-110). Explorations have been made of "the relationship of" the central object in *Emaré*, the cloth, "to Emaré, the leading character" in the romance (Donovan, 337) without a consideration of the relationship of the central object in *Emaré* to the Emir's daughter, the creator of the cloth. The scholars that I have discussed above consider the cloth mainly in terms of its role specifically as a cloak and as an element important to the action *within* the romance. Their arguments begin when Emaré assumes the cloth as a cloak and end when both her husband and her father have repented their mistreatment of her. It is problematic, also, to read the cloth in the romance as a symbol of Christian virtue since the cloth is in fact not Christian but "of heþennes" (l. 109).

How can one read the transition of the textile from a cloth made by the (Oriental) hands of the Emir's daughter to a cloak which covers the (Christian) body of Emaré? There are a number of issues at play in this question. The first is the differentiation between "Oriental" and "Christian". The cloth goes through many

hands before Emaré receives it: it is given by the Emir's daughter to the Sultan's son (l. 170) from whom it is taken by force by the King of Cesyle (ll.173-174) who then gives it to the Emperor (l. 178) who gives it to his daughter Emaré (l. 244). The cloth is transported from the Orient to Europe where it is proclaimed to be an anomaly: "so ryche a jwelle ys þer non/ In alle crystyante" (ll. 107-108). What happens to the cloth in this transportation?

A second important issue is the transformation of the textile from a "cloth þat was wordylye wroght" (l. 83) into a "robe swyþe" (l. 242). The function of a cloth is different from that of a robe. A cloth can be used for many different purposes -- as the covering on a bed, a table, or simply as a wall-hanging -- however a robe, as a piece of clothing, has the specific purpose of covering a body. Why does Emaré's father, the Emperor, "lette shape a robe swyþe" (l. 242) from that cloth when he might just as well have given the cloth to Emaré in its original form?

My concern here is to discuss the presence of the "cloth þat was wordylye wroghte" in the romance by looking specifically at its role as a textile which moves from the Oriental world to the Christian world -- and from the hands of one woman to the body of another -- through the hands of men. I will first explore the cloth as a representation of the Orient in the romance. Edward Said's study on the ways in which the Orient is represented in Western literature serves as a theoretical context for this exploration. His theory that the Orient must be viewed as a representation in Western literature and that this representation is an attempt to "dominate",

"restructurè" and "have authority over" the Orient reveals the cloth's presence in the romance as such an image. It represents the Orient which has been restructured to fit into Medieval European society. In the first chapter, I will discuss the role of the Orient in the society of the Middle Ages in conjunction with Middle English romance as a genre. This discussion provides an interesting point of departure for my study of the Oriental cloth in *Emaré* which forms the basis of the second chapter.

As much as it is emphasized in the romance that the cloth is a product of the Orient, it is also emphasized that the cloth was made by a woman. The process through which the Emir's daughter went to prepare to make the cloth is described (ll. 109-120) before the cloth itself is described. We are told that she "wrowȝte hyt alle wyth pride" (l. 111) and that "seuen wynter hyt was yn makynge" (l. 118). Its stones were "sowȝte . . . fulle wyde" (l. 117) as if to attest to the fact that the making of the cloth was no small undertaking.

In the third and fourth chapters, I will explore the idea that the cloth as a textile is a representation of the feminine in the romance. Textile production has traditionally been a female activity - for centuries women were responsible for the making and upkeep of clothing in the family unit as well as making tablecloths, samplers and quilts which adorned their homes. Some feminist scholarship has studied and contextualized the presence of the textile arts in literature. Scholars such as Nancy K. Miller, Carolyn Heilbrun, Rozsika Parker and Radka Donnell[3] present

[3] Their studies are "Arachnologies: The Woman, the Text and the Critic." The Poetics of Gender. Ed. Nancy K. Miller. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986; "What was Penelope

arguments which consider the textile made by a woman to be an alternative form of self-expression, the text of the woman who, in a patriarchal society, could not write. The textile, through use of colour, pattern and stitching, contains meaning in different ways than the written text does. Can the cloth in *Emaré* be read as a text written by the daughter of the Emir? If it can be, does the text change when it is passed from the daughter of the Emir to Emaré? What are the implications of the cloth being an Oriental textile and a feminine text -- a text/ile[4]?

The presence and importance of textiles and the textile arts in the Middle Ages is evidenced by the number of recent publications on the actual physical production of textiles in that period.[5] An indication also of the growing interest in textiles and clothing in the Middle Ages is the number of sessions at this year's congress on Medieval Studies at Kalamazoo devoted to topics such as "Cloth, Clothing and Class in Medieval Culture" and "Costume as Iconography." However, many of the papers delivered concentrated on the society of Medieval France and its literature. There is a disparity of literature on the role of textiles in Middle English literature. For example, no book-length study (whether it be by one author or a collection of essays from a number of authors) has been published that centres on the presence and use of textiles in the literature of the Middle Ages. This is surprising

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Unweaving?" Hamlet's Mother and Other Women. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990; The Subversive Stitch.London: The Women's Press, 1984 ; Quilt as Women's Art: A Quilt Poetics Canada: Gallerie Publications, 1990.

[4] I use this term at certain points throughout my discussion to designate the dual nature of the cloth both as textile and as text.

[5] The following scholars have recently published studies on the production of textiles in the Middle Ages: Harte and Ponting, 1983; Herlihy, 1990; Staniland, 1991; Martin, 1985.

for two reasons. First, there has been an increasing interest in the area of gender studies in the role of dress and costume in the construction of gender; the question "does clothing define gender roles?" is increasingly important. In Renaissance drama particularly, dress and costume is being studied.[6] The Medieval period is not without texts which explore the issue of clothing and its relation to gender - especially the recognition of gender through clothing. For example, *Le Roman de Silence* involves a female child who is raised by her parents as a male. At a young age, she is dressed in masculine clothing. Her adventures during the romance include being mistaken for a man by a queen who attempts to seduce her.[7] The long debate between "Nature" and "Nurture" in the romance highlights the question of how gender roles are defined.

Secondly, in many Medieval romances the whole of the action hinges on the textile: it may be the magical presence which tests those involved in the romance (as in *Le Mantel Mautaillé*); or it may be a clue to the hero's or heroine's identity, central to the recognition scene of the romance (as in *Lai le Freine*); it may also be an integral part of the arming scene before the hero embarks upon the journey which is to be the story of the romance (as in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*). In many of these romances, the presence of the textile is apparent not only in the one instance

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[6] For example the following are recent studies in Renaissance drama: Peter Stallybrass, "Transvestism and the 'Body Beneath': Speculating on the Boy Actor"; Marjorie Garber "The Logic of the Transvestite: The Roaring Girl (1608)" ; Winfried Schleiner, "Male Cross-Dressing and Transvestism in Renaissance Romances"; Elizabeth D. Harvey, Ventriloquized Voices: Feminist Theory and English Renaissance Texts.

[7] Peter L. Allen discusses the romance in "The Ambiguity of Silence; Gender, Writing, and *Le Roman de Silence*."

(or instances) in which it actually "appears" but images of textiles permeate the whole romance. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* for example, there are elaborate descriptions not only of Gawain's clothing (ll. 568-589) but also of the clothing of the Green Knight (ll. 152-167 and 267-271) and of course the magical girdle (ll. 1846-1854). The whole romance itself takes place with the backdrop of Arthur's court and Bertilak's castle which are adorned with rich tapestries, silks and carpets.[8] Through studying the importance of the textile in *Emaré*, I hope to highlight the importance of investigating the presence of textiles in Middle English literature and engage in a discussion of textiles which includes, but does not end with, *Emaré*.

By way of introduction to *Emaré*, I would like to give a brief account of the roots of the story. This is not intended as a source study; I mean merely to point out some of the places where *Emaré* is consistent with other "Constance" stories and where the poem deviates from these other stories. This is particularly important because I will be making reference to the stories of the "Constance cycle" throughout this paper in conjunction with certain patterns within the romance. Constance is a "persecuted heroine who is forced to leave her home and is reunited with her family only after many adventures and ordeals" (Archibald, 259). Her story is most familiar to modern readers in the form of Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale* but it is also recounted in Trivet's *Life of Constance* and Gower's *Confessio*

[8]For example, descriptions of tapestries in lines 74-84; the description of Gawain's chamber in Bertilak's castle, lines 853-870; description of lady Bertilak's clothing, lines 950-967.

Amantis.[9] According to Margaret Schlauch the story also exists in folk-tale form in numerous cultures throughout the world. The basic plot of the story is as follows: a young woman flees her homeland in order to be married in another country (or she flees because of her father's incestuous proposal of marriage and happens to marry the king or price of the country to which she fled). While in the other country, she experiences "brief happiness in marriage" (Archibald, 259) and then is falsely accused, which causes another flight and separation from her family. The accusation is often made through a letter in what is called by Schlauch the "exchanged letter" story. That is, a letter bearing pleasant news is switched by the villain and a letter is delivered which contains the accusation. There are a few more details which are particular to the Constance stories: the heroine enters into a marriage with a Saracen who has been converted to Christianity by her beauty (or, in the case of the *Man of Law's Tale*, stories of her beauty) and the false accusation which is brought against her is usually that she has borne a child which is demonic in some way.

Emaré follows the basic story quite closely: Emaré is exiled by her father when she refuses his incestuous proposal of marriage, she then marries the King of "Galys", the country where she lands after her ordeal at sea. Her marriage is happy for a time but her husband's absence from home to help the King of France who was "be-sette wyth many a Sarezyne" (l. 482) allows for the introduction of the

[9] Neil Isaacs notes that "the story of Constance was one of the most popular plots treated in Medieval literature" (260) and traces its development in the fourteenth century by comparing the way in which it is recounted by these three writers.

"exchanged letter story" which consists of Emaré's mother-in-law's switching the letter which announces the birth of his child to the king with a letter which declares the child to be "a deuylle" (l. 536). Emaré is again exiled with her child and a number of situations ensue before her she is reunited with both husband and father. Clearly *Emaré* deviates from the Constance stories by the fact that she does not have a hand in converting a saracen, nor does she marry one. However, the romance is not without a Christian-Saracen connection (apart from the King of France's troubles), because the beautiful robe which Emaré is given by her father is created by the "amerayle dowȝter of heþennes" (l. 109). The presence of such a garment in the romance is another way in which *Emaré* demonstrates itself to be part of the Constance cycle. Schlauch traces the presence of "supernatural robes obtained by the heroines of folk-tales by their fathers" (74) through the "accused queen" stories which she examines. The cloth in *Emaré* is one of many in the stories of the Constance cycle which possess some type of magical powers. It is to that cloth that I now turn.

CHAPTER ONE: ORIENTALISM AND MEDIEVAL ROMANCE

Orientalism is a western style for dominating,
restructuring and having authority over the Orient.
-Edward Said

In his book Orientalism Edward Said is concerned with "the phenomenon of Orientalism." That is, he is occupied with writings about and portrayals of the Orient and its peoples in Western (or 'Occidental') literature. The umbrella term "Oriental" designates "Asia or the East" (Said, 31) while "Occidental" refers to Europe (particularly Great Britain and France) in early history and America in later centuries. Said maintains that "the Orient was almost a European invention"(1) and on this statement builds a discussion of why and how the Orient has been "since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences" and one of Europe's "most recurring images of the Other" (1). Said argues that Orientalism, although seemingly a way of illuminating the Orient for Western readers, is ultimately a "Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient" (3).

The phenomenon of which Said writes is a lack of "correspondence between Orientalism and Orient." Instead, "the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient" exist "despite or beyond any correspondence . . . with a 'real' Orient" (5). Because of this discrepancy between the actual and the imagined Orient, Said continually makes use of the term "representation" to describe the

phenomenon. Said argues, using textual evidence from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, that representations of the Orient in literature must be regarded "*as representations*, not as 'natural' depictions of the Orient" (21). In essence, Orientalist texts are re-presentations which alter the original in some way, shape or form. Some schools of literary criticism might ask: "When is a work of art not a representation? When does it not alter the original?" Said does not take this into consideration because his concern is with *how* the original is altered: what set or sets of images do Occidental writers use when describing the Orient and its people? How have these images been perpetrated and how do they build on each other to create a system of images and texts which "acquire mass, density and referential power among themselves" (20)? How do the images have power and meaning to the "culture at large"(20) in which they are produced?

How and why are these sets of ideas and images through which the Orient is present in Western literature constructed? The word "construction" and Said's word "invention" suggest something that is made -- perhaps as a reaction against, or a solution to, a problem. It may be assumed that historically the Orient has been a threat to Europe both physically, because of its proximity and size (it appeared, to the European mind, to be larger and more populous), and ideologically. A physical threat was, at times in European history, the fear of invasion by Islamic armies. From as early as the death of Mohammed in 632 to the seventeenth century the "Ottoman peril" represented "for the whole of Christian civilization a constant danger" (Said,

59). The religion, physical appearance and philosophy of the peoples of the Orient also presented a threat to the European sensibility. In as many ways as possible, the Orient has been (and as Said argues, still is) the place of the "deepest and most recurring images of the Other" (1) for Europeans. As with any unknown entity the Orient as the Other fascinates and frustrates Europeans. They have explored and colonized the Orient. They have also created stories and written literature about the Orient; they have incorporated the "peril and its lore, its great events, figures, virtues and vices, as something woven into the fabric of life" (59).

Although he does not deal with the Middle Ages in detail, Said's observations about Orientalism may serve as a context for studying the use of "the matter of the Orient" in texts from that period. If the Orient is "an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West" (5), it should be assumed that part of this imagery and vocabulary developed in and through the literature of the Middle Ages. Due to the extensive contact between Europe and the Orient in this period, and the considerable representation of the Orient in European art, history, literature and science, a tradition of "vocabulary, imagery, rhetoric" (Said, 41) developed. This tradition is what has lead up to Said's analysis of Orientalism. What is this tradition? Where did it come from? How is the Orient represented in the literature of the Middle Ages? Are the images and issues that Said explores in the texts of later centuries relevant to the Middle Ages?

In the Middle Ages, the Orient was more than anything a religious "Other." Since the Orient was the site of the root of Christianity yet the Islamic people themselves did not adhere to the same beliefs as the Christians, the Middle Ages judged Islam to be a "fraudulent new version" (Said, 59) of Christianity. How was the Medieval Christian to understand this religious Other? The Other's lack of Christian belief was seen as an example of an "irrational" or "fallen" state. Attempts to control or contain this difference may be seen in the pilgrimages and crusades to the Orient. With the purpose of converting the Other to Christianity, Crusades are an actual representation of the kind of control which Said describes. The crusades are an example of how "the Orient . . . [was] corrected, even penalized" (Said, 67) for lying physically and religiously outside of the society of Medieval Europe.[1]

Yet with all of the physical contact that Medieval Europe had with the Orient and the factual knowledge which might have arisen from that contact, it is evident, in the writings which come from that period, that representations of the Orient are *representations* and not "'natural' depictions of the Orient" (Said, 21). Dorothee Metlitzki argues that in Medieval England "the factual knowledge of countries and cultures did not . . . supplant traditions and conventions associated with them in literary treatment" (136). Just as much as it was necessary for the Middle Ages to create an image of the Orient which they could "handle", it was also necessary to

[1] In her book, The Matter of Araby in Medieval England, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977) Dorothee Metlitzki gives a historical account of actual contact (including battles) between Christians and Saracens. See her chapter "History and Romance."

write (rewrite) the stories which came from the Orient from a Christian perspective. In essence, the image of Islam in the Middle Ages did not "represent Islam in itself" as much as it "represent[ed] it for the Medieval Christian" (Said, 60).

If "the making of Medieval romance falls into a period when there was not only the most intimate personal contact with Islam that Europe has ever experienced but when there was considerable knowledge about Islam in spite of the propaganda of literary stereotypes" (Metlitzki, 247), then the substantial representation of the Orient in Middle English romance is not surprising. What is engaging is how that experience is represented. Metlitzki suggests that fascination with the Orient and the making of romance grew up together in the Middle Ages. In a theory which is quite different from Said's, Metlitzki describes the use of "the matter of Araby" in romance as a "harmonic union of two cultures" (249). Where Said finds the Western relationship to the Oriental Other in literature to be one of power and domination, Metlitzki speaks of the marriage of the Christian and Saracen in romance as one which "ennobles and harmonizes the two different cultures" (250). Because the union of Christian and Saracen in romance can only take place after the Saracen has been converted to Christianity, Metlitzki's reading of this union seems to admit the Christian "domination" and "restructuring" (in Said's words) of the Oriental as an acceptable course of action.

Metlitzki confirms Said's assertion that the impetus for the depiction of the Orient in Western literature was the presence of the Orient in very real, physical

ways in Europe. She notes that "in its preoccupation with the matter of Araby the romantic imagination throughout the Middle Ages invaded the realm of contemporary reality on its most solid ground - that of physical and cultural survival" (248). Metlitzki talks about four main themes or story lines which are present in romance in which the Orient plays a large role: the marriage theme, the converted Saracen, the defeated Sultan and the Saracen giant. She explains each theme in terms of the root story from which it derives and how it serves to create that "harmony" between cultures of which she writes. For example, the theme of marriage between a Christian and a Saracen who is then converted to Christianity is discussed in terms of how the story has developed and how it exemplifies Christian-Muslim relations. Not taken into consideration however is the issue of representation and the way in which the representation of this relationship is one of power and control. Metlitzki places the stories of *The King of Tars and the Soudan of Damas*, Chaucer's *Squire's Tale* and the tale of Constance on the same continuum because they have the same theme and because "the marriage between Christian and Saracen had the approval of the Pope and is in the hope of peace between two opposing creeds and cultures" (137). This marriage could only take place however, after the Other had been converted to Christianity through a miracle and was brought under control through the adoption of the faith. The caricature of the Saracen in this and the other themes which Metlitzki describes is a way in which the Middle Ages could

cope with what was perceived as a real threat in the "concrete reality of Medieval existence" (248).

An understanding of how "the matter of Araby" is incorporated into Middle English romance assumes a definition of romance itself. This is a less straightforward task than it seems because, as John Finlayson notes, "one of the greatest difficulties facing the student of Middle English Narrative poetry lies in the ambiguity, or even vagueness, of this designation" (429). How are the concerns of the people of the period, such as the threat of the Oriental "other", reflected or represented in romance? What are the elements which constitute romance and how do these elements allow the Other to be present but controlled in the text?

Susan Crane argues that any attempt to define romance must be fluid because "romances do not claim to be co-extensive with the contemporary world . . . but to reshape and meditate on the world" (2). Since the same might be said of any work of fiction, how is romance different from other forms of literature of the period like drama or religious writings? John Finlayson differentiates between the romance's ability to "contemporize" and its inability to "actualize." That is, he suggests that the romance may be "contemporaneous in manner, dress and architecture", while at the same time "outside of time and place in actions" (444). Clothing and architecture are concrete items which are often physically present in romances as an integral part of the story while places are not. For example, the cloth in Emaré, which (as will be discussed in the second chapter) represents quite accurately the type of needlework

done in the Orient in the Middle Ages, is described in great detail in the romance. However, no details are given as to *which* "amerayle dowȝtyr . . ./ Made þys cloth wyth-outen lees" (ll. 109-110); it seems enough to know that she is "of heþennes" (l. 109). Details of how the "King of Cesyle" "wan" the cloth from "þe sowdan sone" (l. 170) are also omitted from the text. Was the cloth part of the spoils from a crusade or holy war? Specifics such as these which would "actualize" the romance are clearly kept out of it so that the world in the romance *resembles* the real world but is not that world.

A differentiation between the real world and the world of the romance allows for the occurrence of events and situations in the world of the romance which are not common in the real world. In romance there is an "acknowledged draw of self-evidently implausible, not to say improbable, sequences of events" (Brewer, 4). It is most often these "implausible" events which set the romance in motion and sustain the narrative. Often these events take the form of "marvels or the supernatural" (Finlayson, 442). John Finlayson argues that this is the "essence" of romance because it "either initiates the action or defines the nature of the action" (442). It also creates the "special atmosphere of the romance world where elements of social reality and the unnatural commingle" (442). Often the marvel or the supernatural is present in the form of an object which exhibits magical properties. This object is usually one which "contemporizes" the romance: a cup (*King Horn*), a ring (*Floris and Blanchflour*), a cloth (*Emaré*). Yet the object also contains properties which are

unexplainable. By encompassing these properties, Medieval romances are almost like a contemporary style of writing popular among Latin American writers called "magic realism." In a typical "magic realist" scene, the supernatural combines with the everyday so that the reader's near-belief in the magical is suspended temporarily by an image of the everyday world.[2] Keeping in mind the notion that for Western Europeans, the Orient was "a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences" (Said, 1), while it was also a real presence for Medieval Europe, it is not difficult to understand how the Orient came to be integral to romance as the marvelous or supernatural. Clearly the Orient as Other in the Medieval period seems particularly suited to representation in Middle English romance because of its presence as the marvelous or supernatural.

Just as the practice of Orientalism portrays a constructed image of the Oriental, so romance portrays an image of the world which is not a "natural depiction" (Said, 21). Finlayson outlines this the best when he differentiates between romance and *chanson de geste*. He says that while the chanson de geste is "no more than a heightening of reality," the romance is "largely an idealization which bears little relation to social reality" (239). The characters in the romance conform to "a code of behavior which was largely a literary creation and convention" (Finlayson, 239) thus they must be viewed "*as representations*" (Said, 21) not as 'real' people.

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[2] One of the trade-mark scenes of "magic realism" is found in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude; a Buddhist monk levitates while drinking a cup of hot chocolate. Another example, from Medieval romance, is in lines 444-465 of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* where the Green Knight his "hede in his honde he haldes up even" (l. 444) and repeats his challenge to Arthur's court.

In a sense, what romance does is restructure the Medieval world to conform to certain conventions and codes which exist only in the world of the romance. This process of restructuring is analogous to the process that the Orient goes through (according to Said) in Western literature.

Derek Pearsall claims that there is a deliberate illusion of historicity present in the body of literature that we call Medieval romance. He asserts that the early form of intertextuality (that is, references to characters and events from one romance in other romances[3]) in romances is not present by chance. Instead, these references show the "astuteness of the fabrications of these romances" (98) which then create the "illusion of historicity" (98). This historicity gives the romances a "referential power among themselves" (Said, 20). Pearsall's approach to analyzing the relationship between romances is much the same as Said's approach to analyzing the relationship between Orientalist texts. Said terms his method "strategic formation," which is "a way of analyzing the relationship between texts and the way in which groups of texts, types of texts, even textual genres acquire mass, density and referential power among themselves and thereafter in the culture at large" (20).

Derek Brewer notes that one factor in romance which soon becomes apparent to the reader of romance is "the importance of pattern as opposed to the arbitrariness or the determinism of a chain of cause and effect" (5). As these patterns

[3] For example the references in *Emaré*, through the descriptions on the cloth, to other romance stories: "Ydoyne and Amadas" (l. 122), "Trystram and Isowde" (l. 134) and "Florys and Dam Blawncheflour" (l. 148).

become familiar to the audiences of the romances through repetition and the intertextuality of which Pearsall writes, it becomes difficult to speak of one text without referring to a group of others. For example, when writing about *Emaré*, it is almost inevitable that one will refer a number of times to the Constance cycle of stories. These texts have garnered "referential power among themselves" due to certain patterns that occur in all of the stories and would be particularly suited to Said's method of "strategic formation" in analyzing texts. One of the patterns that recurs in this particular cycle is, as Metlitzki has shown, the converted Saracen. Medieval romance may be approached through Said's theories of Orientalism not only because many romances contain an element of the Oriental but also because, by nature, the romance represents the world in much the same way that Western literature represents the Oriental.

I will now focus my attention on *Emaré* to discuss how this particular romance deals with the Orient: how is the Orient represented in the romance? How do Said's theories of Orientalism shed light on this representation?

CHAPTER TWO: THE ORIENT AS TEXTILE

Þen was þe emperour gladde and blyþe,
And lette shape a robe swyþe
Of þat cloth of golde
- *Emaré*, ll.241-243

It is clear from examples in the previous chapter that "the Orient is an integral part of European *material* civilization and culture" (Said, 2) in terms of its presence in the stories which form Middle English romance. Yet the Orient is "something woven in the fabric of life" (Said, 59) in the Middle Ages in another important and concrete way. Objects brought back from pilgrimages and crusades and items obtained through trade with the Orient became increasingly present in daily life -- perhaps not for every single person, but certainly for certain groups of people within the society. Items such as spices and steel were imported from the Orient.[1] These items gave the society of Medieval England a sense of some contact with a real Other. One such item is very aptly described by Said's use of the figurative language "fabric of life": textiles.[2] Certain textiles and patterns in the Middle Ages, particularly those with "solid-gold grounds" (the "ground" is the fabric

[1] Western Europeans acquired "timber and mineral products . . . salted fish, wine, nuts, metals and minerals (silver, copper, lead, red and yellow arsenic, mercury, copper sulfate), vegetable and mineral dyes, salt" through trade with the Orient as well as luxury products such as "precious metals, both as coin and plate; fine textiles; fierce hunting dogs and spirited horse; falcons; strong, sharp swords; earthenware pots . . . ; glassware and window panes; wines and spices" (The Dictionary of the Middle Ages, volume 11, under "Trade, Western European").

[2] The entry "Trade, Armenian" in The Dictionary of the Middle Ages, volume 11, notes that in trade between Western Europe and the Orient, "the greatest demand, according to Arab sources, was for choice textiles: cushions, covers, curtains, rugs, multicolored flowered silks."

on which the embroidery is worked) were "inspired by near-eastern fabrics" (Parker, 51). Textiles and patterns for woven and embroidered fabric were imported from the Orient as a result of the crusades which "plundered rich textiles and brought them to Europe" (Parker, 51). Once in Europe, "embroiderers adopted not only the use of gold but also certain motifs" (Parker, 51) until at a certain point in the Middle Ages the weavers and embroiderers themselves were brought from the Orient to create the fabric which was highly valued in the society.[3]

In *Emaré*, the Orient figures prominently as one such textile. The description of the cloth as being made "wyth ryche golde and asowr,/ And stones on ylk a syde" (ll. 113-114) is reminiscent of Rozsika Parker's statement that actual embroidered textiles in the Middle Ages with "solid-gold grounds" (51) originated in the Orient. It is also clear from the description in the romance that the cloth was imported from the Orient as a result of something *like* a crusade: the cloth is described as being "wan,/ Wyth maystrye and wyth myȝth" (ll. 173-174) from "þe sowdan" of Babylon (l. 173). The cloth "contemporizes" (to use Finlayson's term) the romance. It is not difficult to imagine that a cloth *like* this might have existed in the Middle Ages. However, the cloth is not a real cloth, it is a literary representation of the Orient and as such, it takes on certain dimensions and plays a specific role within the romance.

[3] Aileen Ribeiro notes that "by the 10th century silk weaving was established in Sicily under Arab rule" (36). Rebecca Martin cites "financial records and inventories" as indicating that " 'saracenic' (Muslim) weavers were living and working in and around Paris and in Flanders in the 13th century" (27).

The cloth represents the Orient in the romance in two ways. First, it is a physical presence of the Orient: it is an Oriental textile. That is, the narrator of the text does not hide the fact that it is made in the Orient ("heþennes") by the "amerayle dowȝter" (l. 109). Secondly, the cloth re-presents the Orient through the descriptions of the images which are depicted on it. The "amerayles dowȝtyr" (l. 159) is portrayed with "þe sowdan sonne" (l. 158) in one of the corners of the cloth. According to Said's theories about the ways in which the Orient is dealt with in Western literature, these two ways in which the Orient is present in *Emaré* must be regarded "*as representations*, not as 'natural' depictions of the Orient" (Said, 21). Since it is difficult to know what a 'natural' depiction of the Orient might be, it is necessary to look at the representations, acknowledge them as such, and explore how those representations operate within the context of the story. What can be said about the way in which the cloth is present in the romance and the role that it plays? Is there any evidence that the cloth has been subjected to the "domination" and "restructuring" that Said argues the Orient undergoes at the hands of Western literature?

I would like to look first at the cloth itself as an Oriental presence in the romance and leave the descriptions of the images on it aside for the moment. In the text, the cloth serves as a concrete presence of the idea of the Orient and of the Otherness of the Orient. It is introduced into the romance as a gift to Sir Artyus, the Emperor. His immediate reaction to the cloth is to call it "a fayry" (l. 104) because

the "glysteryng of þe ryche ston" (l.100) makes it difficult for him to see the cloth. The giver of the gift, the King of Cysyle, responds to the Emperor's reaction by saying "so ryche a jwelle ys þer non/ In alle Crystyante" (ll. 107-108). This response is important because, when coupled with the Emperor's reaction, it confirms the fact that the cloth is Other precisely because it is not Christian. The cloth is described as "fayry" not because of the images on it (at least it is not identified to be the images) but specifically because it has never been seen in "Crystyante" before. The Emperor's questioning of the cloth -- "how may þys be?" (l. 102) -- also proves telling in identifying the cloth as Other. He does not understand how he cannot have "redy syghte" (l. 101) of the cloth. Because he cannot see it clearly, he deduces that it must not be real. Also, the cloth is not anything that he has ever seen before and so, to him, it is a "fayry."

Other is defined "according to the particular manner in which the *One* chooses to set himself up" (De Beauvoir, 248). The Emperor in the romance is the One. In the passages leading up to the description of the cloth, his position is clearly defined. He is first described in a role which places him at the head of a domain. He is

> an Emperor,
> Of castelle and of ryche towre,
> . . .
> He hadde boþe hallys and bowrys,
> Frythes fayr, forestes wyth flowrys,
> So gret a lord was none.
> (ll. 25-30)

Only after this clear definition of his role as the centre of his own small world is he defined as a person. We are told that he was

> þe best manne
> In þe world þat lyuede þanne,
> Both hardy and þer-to wyght;
> He was curtays in alle þyng,
> both to olde and to ȝynge,
> And welle kowth dele and dyght.
> (ll. 37-42)

Since he is "þe best manne" in the world (if only in the world defined by this romance), then the behavior he exhibits must be a model for other men. "Best" is defined specifically by his demeanor as a man who is "hardy", "wyght" and "curtays." The cloth is Other because the Emperor has never seen anything like it before. It is something foreign that has been brought into his world unexpectedly. Since it is not within his experience, as the One he defines it as Other.

"Fayry" is defined as "a supernatural contrivance, enchantment, magic, illusion."[4] Coupling this definition of the cloth with the fact that it is "of heþennes" aligns the Other, the Oriental, and the supernatural or magical. Because the cloth serves to contemporize the romance and is also the source of enchantment in *Emaré* it has a hand in the creation of the "special atmosphere of the romance world where elements of social reality and the unnatural commingle" (Finlayson, 442). It should then be the cloth, as the marvelous or supernatural, which "initiates or defines the

[4] This definition is taken from the Middle English Dictionary, Part F (ed. Hans Kurath & Sherman Kuhn. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1952) under "ferly."

nature of the action" (Finlayson, 442). As a reader who has learned to recognize the magical or supernatural in stories as the motivation for the action in the plot, I am tempted to read the cloth as something which initiates the action in *Emaré*. However, this is not the case. The cloth is neither the cause of Emaré's exile(s) nor is it the means through which she is reunited with her husband and her father. The cloth is not coveted by other characters in the romance and therefore the cause of her suffering and no one tries to take it away from her. She is allowed to take the cloth with her when she is exiled and there is no indication that she gives up the cloth when the romance has ended. The cloth is simply 'there' all of the time.

The next logical questions are what, then, is the cloth doing in the romance? What is the role of the cloth in *Emaré*? These are the question with which scholars like Arthur, Mehl and Donovan begin their investigations. Whatever route these investigations take, there is a point at which it is determined that the cloak "reflect[s] beauty" (Donovan, 340), mirrors the "moral and spiritual perfections of the lady" (Mehl, 139) or "serves as a touchstone for determining the spiritual state of those who . . . respond to it" (Arthur, 91). While these interpretations do respond to the questions at hand, I think it is first important to ask: what happens to the cloth during the course of the romance? *How* is the cloth represented throughout the romance? These questions, rather than challenging the existing investigations, open up another point of entry into understanding the "relationship of the central object"

in the romance "to Emaré" (Donovan, 337) and to viewing how the Other is dealt with in the romance.

It has already been established that the cloth is both Oriental and Other. In his reactions to the cloth, the Emperor expresses his inability to understand the cloth because it lies outside of his experience. As Other, the cloth poses a threat to the Emperor's stability. The cloth, then, must be brought into the realm of his experience if he is to be able to understand or accept it. In order to do this he "lette shape a robe swyþe,/ Of þat cloth of golde" (ll. 242-243). In doing so, he lends some structure to what he believes to be an unstructured and incomprehensible cloth. A robe has a function: it covers the body for the purpose of clothing. A cloth does not have the same evident structure, it can serve any number of purposes. Said's argument that "Orientalism is a western style for "dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient" (3) can be seen in action in *Emaré*. The cloth, representing the Orient, is dominated by the king of Cesyle who "wan" it "wyth maystrye and wyth myȝth" (ll. 173-174). The Emperor then restructures the cloth through shaping it into a robe.

After the Emperor has the cloth fashioned into a robe, he gives it to Emaré who wears the robe throughout the rest of the romance. There is a change in the diction that is used to describe the robe. It is not described as "fayry" again in the romance; the words used to describe it are "glysteryng" (ll. 350, 699) and "wordy" (l. 447). It is also called a "robe of nobulle ble" (l. 270) and "ryche ble" (ll. 590,

644). Howèver, the robe does seem to retain some if the qualities of the Other that it had as a cloth; as soon as it was "don. . . vpon" Emaré, "she semed non erþely wommon" (ll. 244-245). This same phrase is repeated again a number of times by the narrator just before another character is about to see Emaré.[5] As well, upon their first sight of Emaré two of the characters react as if the robe is somehow magical. Sir Kadore "hadde ferly" of the "glysteryng þyng" (ll. 350-351) -- Emaré in her robe -- that he finds by the sea-side. Similarly Iurdan, the merchant who finds Emaré after her second exile, "was a-ferde of þat syght,/ For glysteryng of þat wede" (ll. 698-699). He thinks that she is "non erdyly wyght" (l. 701) because he "sawe neuur non such yn leede" (l. 702). These passages suggest that the cloth, even after being restructured, is still Other. Did the Emperor not rid the cloth of all of its Oriental associations in his fashioning of it into a robe?

There are a number of things that must be noted with regard to that question. Primarily, the robe does not change Emaré in any other way besides making her "seme" not of this world. She is not *actually* "non erdely", she only *appears* that way at first. Once the same characters who wonder at the robe observe Emaré in her interaction with others and in her "werk", they become enamored with her because of her demeanor rather than her appearance. Before Emaré puts on the robe, she is "curtays in alle thynge,/ Bothe to olde and to ȝynge" (ll. 64-65) and regardless of how she appears in the robe, she remains this way throughout the romance.[6] Any

[5] Lines 394-396 and lines 697-702.

[6] Lines 379-380 and 724-725 also describe her this way.

supernatural associations that the robe might have for the characters in the romance and any fears that it might conjure up are soon dispelled by Emaré's actions. By remaining constant throughout the romance both in action and faith[7], Emaré herself participates in the restructuring of the robe into something that is no longer Oriental. The final description of the cloth is as something that is "bryght and shene" (l. 933). It no longer carries with it the formulaic "she semed non erdly þyng" because, by the end of the romance, the characters in the story and the readers of the text have come to associate the robe with Emaré rather than the Orient.

One of the ways in which *Emaré* differs from its counterparts in the Constance cycle is by the fact that the marriage which takes place is not between a Christian and a Saracen who has been converted to Christianity by the beauty of the heroine. This is puzzling because the romance has other incidents in common with the Constance stories. Such incidents are explained in the Constance stories as a result of the combining of the Oriental and Christian in marriage. For example, in other stories where the queen is accused of bearing a child that is devil-like (or deformed in some way) either the baptism of the child or the conversion of the father of the child (or both) is enough to set things right again (Metlitzki, 155). In *Emaré*, the accusation that the child is a "deuylle" with "thre heddes" (ll. 536-538) is unfounded and it is not necessary for a conversion to take place in order to set it right. Emaré also differs from her counterparts in the Constance stories in that she

[7] She prays to "God of heuen . . . /And to hys modyr also" (l. 314-315) and to "Ihesu and hys modur dere" (l. 671) for safe deliverance each time she is exiled.

does not convert the people who rescue her once she is cast adrift in exile from her home. Each time she arrives in a new place, Emaré teaches the people there how to do "sylky werke" (l. 376, 730), but does not instruct them in religion of any sort. Given the similarities between *Emaré* and her sister stories, it seems odd that the element of the conversion seems to have been eliminated from the romance. The only "conversion" which Emaré has a hand in is the reshaping of the robe. In a strange way, the restructuring of the cloth represents the conversion of the Saracen in *Emaré*.

I would now like to focus my attention on the images which are depicted on the cloth. There we find the Oriental again has been "dominated" and "restructured" in order to make sense to the Medieval Christian. However, the process of this restructuring is not shown in the text as is the restructuring of the cloth itself. Instead the romance itself, if approached through Said's theories, is an Orientalist text. The romance is a Western European text written during the Middle Ages, a time when the Oriental Other posed a physical and ideological threat to the society because of its difference. The cloth is a representation, a fabrication within the romance. Just as, according to Said, the Orient as represented in Western European literature is a set of images fabricated to represent the Orient for the Medieval Christian, the sets of images on the cloth are fabricated to represent love for the Medieval Christian. Neither is a "natural depiction" (Said, 21).

The images "purtrayed" (l. 112) on the cloth by the daughter of the Emir are re-presented in the text by the narrator who describes the cloth. These images consist of four sets of lovers, one for each corner of the cloth. Three of these pairs are part of Western European stories and have "a common reputation in Medieval fiction" (Donovan, 340). The fourth is the daughter of the Emir and the Sultan's son - an Oriental couple.[8] The first three pairs are described with words that identify for the reader the *type* of love that these couples represent. They "loued hem ryght" (l.136), "wyth honour" (l. 124, 148) and "wyth loue þat was so true" (l. 123). "Ryght" and "honour" in this world view are constructed codes which have "social value" (Wasserman, 78) and which denote "the highest praise that society can afford an individual as measured by his equals" (78). The lovers depicted on the cloth are meant to exemplify the ideal of love in Medieval society. The idea that these couples are to represent a certain type of love is stressed by the fact that "none of the most strikingly individual features of these lovers is allowed to come through" (Mills, 198). Instead, even the symbols used to represent these unions are the same: both "Ydoyne and Amadas" and "Florys and Blawncheflour" are "purtrayed . . . wyth trewe-loue-flour" (ll. 125, 149).

It is the similarities in these descriptions and their presence as the Medieval chivalric ideal of love that causes discussions of the romance like Dieter Mehl's to

[8] Edith Rickert notes that "the "sowdan" of Babylon was a familiar figure in English romances of the 14th century" (37). This highlights the idea that the Orient was continually being restructured by the Europeans in the Middle Ages, so that it became a familiar part of Medieval culture.

culminate with the assertion that the cloak is something which mirrors "the moral and spiritual perfections of the lady" (139). The "moral" and "spiritual" perfections of Emaré are her resistance to her father's incestuous proposal of marriage and her silent suffering throughout the times that she is scorned and exiled during the romance. Like the words "ryght" and "honour" used in the romance, "moral" and "spiritual" are terms which have connotations beyond their use as descriptive words. They contain meaning in a specifically Judeo-Christian context. The way in which Mehl reads the descriptions on the cloth implies that they are not only "ryght" in Medieval chivalric terms, but they are also "right" in Christian spiritual terms.

Where does that leave the couple depicted in the "fowrthe korner" of the cloth -- the daughter of the Emir and the son of the Sultan? They share with the three other couples the fact that they are in love. What they do not share with these same couples is the Medieval chivalric love based on Judeo-Christian constructs because they are not Christian nor are they Western Medieval. However, by being depicted with those other stories, it is assumed that they do share in that *type* of love. Mehl for example, does not differentiate between the sets of lovers in his interpretation of the cloth; for him, the whole cloth and therefore all of the stories on the cloth represent the "moral and spiritual perfections of the lady." In choosing to set up the description of the Oriental lovers on the cloth in a Western Medieval context, the narrator of the story has created a situation where the image of the Orient does not represent the Orient itself as much as it "represents it for the

Medieval Christian" (Said, 60). It is not clear what a 'natural' depiction of the Oriental lovers might be, but it is clear that the narrator chooses to represent them in a way that makes sense to his audience, as chivalric lovers.

The cloth as literally restructured Oriental fabric serves as a concrete image for the way in which *Emaré* itself is restructured Arabic material. The romance can be traced, through the Constance stories, to Arabic roots. Dorothee Metlitzki has argued that despite the differences in treatment, "the core of the Christian-Muslim . . theme in . . . the story of Constance is the same as in the . . . Arabian story of Omar an-Nu 'man" (140). The story itself has been restructured by the Western author for the Medieval audience. Both the story and the cloth, then, are transplanted products of another culture. If, as I will discuss in the following chapter, the textile can be read as a feminine and an Oriental text then the translation of this text by the Emperor (the restructuring of the cloth) demonstrates how Medieval authors reworked Arabic stories.

CHAPTER THREE: TEXTILE AS TEXT

Procne unrolled the tapestry and read
the unhappy saga of her own misfortunes.
- Ovid, *Metamorphosis*

Throughout western literature, most specifically in classical Greek texts, there are a number of descriptions which depict a woman involved in the creation of a textile of some sort. More often than not the creation of the textile forms a type of subtext to the main story line. In Homer's *Odyssey* Penelope wove a shroud for her father-in-law Laertes by day and unwove it by night (*Odyssey* 2.94-109). The action served to postpone her decision to re-marry when her husband had not yet returned from the Trojan war. Similarly, in the *Iliad* Helen wove the story of the Trojan war, as it was taking place, into a tapestry (*Iliad* 3.121). One of Ovid's famous metamorphoses is Arachne's transformation from a women weaving a tapestry into a spider, forever weaving webs. Her metamorphosis takes place after she has dared to challenge Athena to a weaving contest (*Metamorphosis* 6.4-145). Comparable subtexts occur in more recent literature, most notably Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* where the women knit stories of the French revolution as it is taking place. The Lady of Shallot "weaves by night and day, a magic web with colours gay" in Tennyson's poem which bears her name. Virginia Woolf repeats the image of Mrs. Ramsay knitting many times in *To The Lighthouse*. Whether it be weaving, embroidering,

knitting or spinning, these women are engaged in a type of creation -- the creation of textiles -- that has a long history of being a women's activity.[1]

The root of both "textile" and "text" is the Latin "tegere," "to weave." This suggests a connection between the creation of a textile and the creation of a text. While this is evident in the linguistic root of the two, it is also present in the metaphoric language which we use to describe the creation of a story. There is a tradition in the English language of associating the telling of stories with the textile arts: we talk of "spinning a yarn" and "weaving a tale"; the main idea of a story is the "thread" and images throughout the story are "fabricated"; stories are "embroidered" with details. The metaphor is so frequently used and has become such a constant in our language that its association with the creation of textiles as an actual activity is, if not forgotten, a secondary consideration. If the original image used in the metaphor -- spinning, weaving, sewing -- is remembered, the metaphor expands to encompass new levels of meaning. Because the creation of textiles was traditionally associated with women, the metaphor suggests, on one level, that the creation of stories is also the domain of women. Does coupling the notion of textiles as being traditionally women's work with the idea that story-telling is also an activity which creates a text shed any light on the question of the textile being a woman's text?

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[1] For a discussion of evidence of the history of textile production as a female activity from the Upper Palaeolithic period (20,000 B.C.E.) to the same evidence in Classical Greece, see Elizabeth Wayland Barber, Women's Work: The First 20,000 Years (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994).

Whèn described in literature the creation of textiles often serves metaphorical purposes. The "iconography of women's work", to use Rozsika Parker's term, invites varied scholarly reactions. Among many classical scholars, the stories of Penelope, Arachne and Helen are a metaphor for poetic creation: for the craft of the, usually male, poet. Scholars such as George A. Kennedy and J. Hillis Miller acknowledge the "semantic connection between weaving and literary composition" (Kennedy, 8). That is, the connection between "text" and "tegere". The importance as they see it, however, is the achievement of the male poet who is able to "weave words" to create the text that they are reading. The device of the ecphrasis in epic poetry is "the description in verse of an object of art" (Kurman, 1). An example of ecphrasis is Achilles' shield in the *Iliad* (18.478-607) the description of which is so intricate that it could stand on its own as a poem. The shield contains all of "the elements of life" (Kurman, 2) and is almost an allegory of creation. The ecphrasis provides a "break in the narrative by evoking a figure beyond it" (Kurman, 5). This deviation from the poem "allows the long poem virtually to contain a world" (Kurman, 7) creating a natural "comparison between God, man and nature as artificers" (Kurman, 10). The ecphrasis, originating with Homer, became a device which was a constant in epic poetry. It is understood to be correlated with the creative process of the poet who recreates in words what has already been created by God -- the world. The description of Helen's tapestry in the *Iliad* and Arachne's and Athena's weaving in the *Metamorphosis* are also ecphrases. As such the

craftswomen in the poems (Helen, Arachne and Athena) are read by these same scholars (Kurman and Kennedy)[2] as examples of poets; not as women creating textiles, simply as creators. Arachne's story serves as a warning to artists who demonstrate too much *hubris* and dare challenge the Gods in their own craft -- creation.

Recent feminist scholarship, however, has re-thought these stories which contain the "iconography of women's work" as parables for a purely female poetic process. For Carolyn Heilbrun, who is concerned with how women describe their experiences and write their stories, "weaving was women's speech, women's language, women's story" (103). She discusses the textiles in some of the myths that I have outlined above as representing the narratives of the women who create the textiles. She sees them as examples of the ways in which women tell their stories in literature. Heilbrun provides two models for reading the "iconography of women's work." The first model is comprised of Helen and Penelope, who represent "what might be called legitimate weavers, those who weave while men make war and stop when the violence ends" (104). Heilbrun reads Penelope's weaving and unweaving not as a measure of procrastination, but as a way of telling her story. Because she did not know how the narrative would end, she could not complete the cloth until

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[2] Geoffrey Hartman, in his essay "The Voice of the Shuttle: Language from the Point of View of Literature" takes a similar approach to the use of textile metaphors in literature. He says that the metaphor means "that truth will out, that human consciousness will triumph" (337). Patricia Klindienst Joplin response to Hartman's arguments in her article "The Voice of the Shuttle is Ours." She, with Carolyn Heilbrun and Nancy Miller, argues that the representations of textile arts in literature must be viewed not as Hartman views it as "Language . . . and the male poet's trope" (Joplin, 26) but as "the violated woman's emergence from silence" (Joplin, 26).

Odysseus returned to Ithaca (Heilbrun, 108). Evidence which Elizabeth Wayland Barber discusses regarding the nature of the cloth that Penelope was weaving enhances Heilbrun's suggestion that the cloth is narrative. Barber suggests that Penelope's cloth was a "story cloth" rather than the type of shroud a modern reader might picture it to be. Apparently it was common in ancient Greece for women to make these "storytelling cloths": large tapestry-like textiles which represented a story and were hung in temples. Penelope could not have fooled the suitors for as much time as she did simply by weaving a shroud, because it would not have been as intricate and detailed to weave as a story cloth would have been (Barber, 153-154). Helen's depictions of the Trojan war must also have been a storytelling cloth. The connection between story (or text) and textiles was certainly present in actual life in Ancient Greece and this connection extends into the literature of the period.

Heilbrun's second category is the "defiant woman weaver, the one who will not be silenced in her only art though it costs her life" (104). Included in this grouping is Arachne who dies as a result of her challenge of the Gods, and Philomela whose story demonstrates, perhaps the most effectively, Heilbrun's assertion that weaving is "women's story." Philomela's story, as found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (6.572-674) is as follows: after raping Philomela, her brother-in-law, Tereus, cut out her tongue so that she could not tell who had violated her. Because her "mouth, dumb, could not tell of the crime" (6.577-578), she skillfully "hung the threads from the barbarian loom and interwove purple scenes with the white threads, telling of the

crime" (6.580-583). She sent this tapestry to her sister Procne who "unrolled the tapestry and read the unhappy saga of her own misfortunes" (6.588-589).[3] The communication between the sisters, rather than taking place through language or writing, has taken place through the tapestry, the textile. In a most concrete way, Philomela's textile is her text; her weaving is her language.

Nancy Miller looks to the story of Arachne as the basis for her theories regarding the "iconography of women's work." She sees Arachne as a "figuration of woman's relation of production to the dominant culture" and as a "critical modeling" for a "feminist poetics" (272). Arachne's challenge of Athena, the goddess of spinning, is a defiance of the "dominant culture" which is also represented by Athena who "identifies not only with the gods, but also the godhead, the cerebral male identity that bypasses the female" (Miller, 273). Miller terms her theory "arachnologies" and defines it as involving the "reappropration of a story . . . that deploys the interwoven structures of power, gender and identity inherent in the production of mimetic art" (272). That is to say, the stories are re-read not as examples of the poetic process of the dominant group, the male poetic process, but as the "woman's elevation of her . . . domestic craft - weaving - into a new means of resistance" (282). These alternative readings of the myths which are an integral part

[3] I use Mark Morford and Robert Leonardon's translation of this section of the myth in their study Classical Mythology because I like the wording more than other translations that I have found. Other translations say that her mouth was "speechless", but I find the use of the word "dumb" more compelling in its emphasis on silence.

of western literature are a model for reading the representations of textiles in other literature.

Theories such as Heilbrun's and Miller's are based primarily on textual evidence. They use stories about textiles to discuss the connection between textile and text. However, the premise that textile is women's text has a concrete basis in clothwork that is done by women. Rozsika Parker, in her book-length study of representations of embroidery in literature called The Subversive Stitch, looks to actual techniques of embroidery practiced by real (not literary) women to see how textiles can be read as women's texts. Her work encompasses many centuries of needlework and literature with the purpose of examining how the two have evolved. Since her examination is centered on embroidery, Parker looks to things like colour, pattern and type of stitching as revealing information about the woman who crafted the textile. Essentially, these elements of the textile -- thread and pattern -- form the narrative of the textile which has been written with the needle. The pattern on the textile is especially telling because if it is not a pattern created by the maker of the textile herself, it might be a pattern which she has learned from the work of another woman. She has "read" another woman's text and found something that holds some meaning for herself within that text. When women share patterns, they are essentially sharing stories and creating a community of authors who are familiar which each other's texts. Parker notes that "needlewomen chose particular patterns, selecting those images which had meaning for them" (12). For example in Chile mothers,

wives, and sisters of the "disappeared" -- the men taken captive and killed by the military dictatorship of Pinochet -- began to make *apilleras* to sell to earn money after the breadwinner of the family was taken from them. *Apilleras* are textile pieces embroidered in the traditional Chilean fashion. However, the patterns which the women embroider are not traditional. The images depicted on the textile show the political situation in their country and often recreates the situation under which their loved one "disappeared." Their patterns consist of guns and blood, faces in anguish and hands joined in hope. The "apilleras" serve as "patchwork postcards to the world" which tell of the situation of the people in Chile.[4]

Patterns on textiles in the Medieval period served an equally important purpose. Since "a largely non-reading European populace was particularly susceptible to the visual language of art" (Martin, 9), the scenes on tapestries and embroidered textiles could be "read" and understood through the patterns that were used and the situations they depicted. Religious textiles in particular were used as an "aid in teaching Christian lessons to the illiterate" (Cavallo, 31). Heraldic textiles served as texts which announced, through the symbols used, the presence of royalty. Diane Owen Hughes notes that "cloth, along with the costumes produced from it" was in the Middle Ages a "mark of social status and a signal of social mobility, as well as a means of fashioning social and political distinction" (139). Certain types of cloth were more valuable than others. Silks and fabrics embroidered in the Orient as

[4] This information is taken from a film called Threads of Hope: The Daughters Of Ixchel. Dir. Katherine Lipke and John MacKay. Narrated by Donald Sutherland. Vekota Productions, 1993.

well as textiles which incorporated "pearls, cameos, enamels, semi-precious and precious stones" served as "symbols of wealth, status and power" (Staniland, 4). The presence of precious stones on the textile adds another 'text' which must be read in order to understand the story depicted on the textile. Belief in the magical powers of gems was another aspect of the Medieval Period. The virtues of these rare stones were outlined in Medieval lapidaries. Stones could be worn for, among other reasons, medicinal purposes or to protect the wearer from harm. Another connection between textiles and text in the Middle Ages is that the "designs for the embroideries reflect a great deal of the drawing style, arrangement and iconography found in contemporary manuscript illuminations" (Staniland, 20). Since illuminations themselves represent scenes from the text which they adorn, the embroideries are, if indirectly, representations of text.

Elizabeth Wayland Barber studies the importance of textiles in society from an archaeological and anthropological perspective. She notes that in pre-print cultures, both cloth and clothing "provided a fine place for social messages. Patterned cloth in particular is infinitely variable and, like language, can encode arbitrarily any message whatever" (149). It is not hard to see how cloth can embody meaning for a society. Countries or groups of people within countries often have a certain type of clothing that they wear, or traditional types of textile creation that they participate in which has meaning, whether it be practical or decorative, to those around them. These have been passed onto us as "folk" customs and costumes.

Those who know what certain colours or patterns signify to the culture in question can "read" the meaning of those textiles. Barber looks at folk customs in order to understand what ancient peoples tried to accomplish by encoding meaning into their textiles. She notes:

> for one thing it can be used to mark or announce information. It can also be used as a mnemonic device to record events and other data. Third, it can be used to invoke "magic" - to protect, to secure fertility and riches, to divine the future, perhaps even to curse. (149).

The final purpose -- the ability of the textile to invoke "magic" -- seems particularly popular in the representations of textiles in Medieval romance. Certain Medieval French romances, like the *Lai du Mantel* and *Le Mantel Mautaillé* have at their centre a magical cloth. In these romances the garment serves as a test of the fidelity of a woman. It will "fit perfectly a chaste maiden or faithful wife, but will reveal whether, and in what way, a woman has been unfaithful to her husband or beloved" (Driscoll, 109). Magic is also evoked by the girdle in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* because the "costes that knit ar therinne" (l. 1849) are that anyone who wears the girdle "myght not be slayn for slyght upon erthe" (l. 1854). Even the cloth which is at the centre of the recognition scene in *Lai le Freine* may be read as magical because it protected Freine throughout the romance, and her mother's recognition of the cloth restores Freine to her family and husband.

As noted in previous chapters, the stories of the Constance cycle also have at their centre a magical and mysterious textile. On a number of occasions in *Emaré* the

cloth is described in terms of enchantment. The Emperor is the first to identify the cloth as "fayry" (l. 104)[5]. But he is not the only character in the romance to have that reaction to the cloth. After her first exile and upon her arrival at "Galys," Emaré is found by Sir Kadore. He saw the "glysteryng þyng" (l. 350) which is the cloth and "hadde ferly" of it. That is, he was filled with "astonishment, surprise, or wonder"[6] at the sight. This in itself does not indicate that the cloth is magical in any way. However, when "ferly" is used as an adjective, it means "terrifying, strange or marvelous" which does carry with it a sense of magic or enchantment. I would assume that one would "have ferly" at something that is itself "ferly". In the romance this would be the cloth. The effect that the textile has on Emaré is also magical. The first time it was "don her upon,/ She semed non erþely wommon" (11. 244-245). Each time another person witnesses Emaré wearing the cloth, the narrator reminds the reader of the other-worldly quality of her appearance with almost the same formulaic description:

> þe cloth upon her shone so bryȝth,
> When she was þer-yn y-dyȝth,
> She semed non erdly þyng.
> (ll. 394-396)[7]

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[5] The definition of "fayry," already quoted on page 26 of this study, has definite connotations of magic and enchantment.

[6] This definition and the next (the use of "ferly" as an adjective) are from the entry under "ferly" in the Middle English Dictionary.

[7] The description is repeated in a similar narrative context in lines 244-246. Also, lines 439-441 read: "The cloth on her shon so bryght,/ When she was þer-yn dyght, / And her-self a gentelle may." I tend to agree with Maldwyn Mills who, in notes to the text, reads this line as a "clumsy and conventional substitute for an original" (199) in which the last line read "she semed non erthely may." This formulation makes sense when compared with the other two passages cited.

The two mèn who express their wishes to marry Emaré propose marriage almost simultaneously with seeing Emaré in the cloak. Certainly the Emperor gains permission from the Pope to marry Emaré *before* she has put on the cloak, but only *after* he has seen her in the "cloth of golde" (l.243) as "non erþely wommon" (l. 245) does he declare: "dowȝtyr, y wolle wedde þe,/ Thow art so fresh to be-holde" (ll. 248-249). Similarly, when Emaré is serving before the King of "Galys", she is wearing the cloth which "shone so bryȝth" (l. 394) that when she was wearing it "she semed non erdly þyng" (l. 396). At this point,

> The kyng loked her up-on,
> So fayr a lady he sygh neuuer non,
> Hys herte she hadde yn wolde.
> (ll. 397-399)

Just after this, he sets the plans in motion to marry her. He consults Sir Kadore, "oþur knyȝtes" and "Dukes and erles, wyse of lore" (ll. 409-412) as to the identity of Emaré and announces his intentions: "I wylle haue þat fayr may,/ And wedde her to my quene!" (ll. 431-432). It is not clear whether it is because of the attributes of Emaré herself that these men wish to marry her or if it is because of the way she is transformed when she is wearing the cloth. It seems that she is admired due to a combination of her appearance when she is wearing the cloak and her demeanor as a "mayden." We are told that "she was curtays in alle thynge,/ Both to oldes and to ȝynge" (ll. 64-65) and she demonstrates this quality when she is serving the King of

"Galys". Sir Kadore calls her the "konnyngest wommon . . . of werk" (ll. 427-429) that he has ever seen.

A possible explanation for the wonder experienced at the sight of the cloth has already been discussed in the previous chapter: as an object from the Orient, it would hold mystery for the Medieval Christian. Another possible explanation may be its creation. If, as Elizabeth Wayland Barber has shown, cloth is used to "invoke magic," it is possible that the daughter of the Emir might have made the textile as a love charm which was meant to secure and protect the love of the son of the Sultan.[8] The cloth was made "for hys sake" (l. 160) because "she loved hym in hert and thowght" (l. 161). Perhaps she made the cloth "stuffed wyth ymagerye" (l. 168) which would ensure that a relationship would ensue. Or, she might have made the cloth as an adornment for their wedding chamber [9] embroidering her story among the stories of other couples whose love was "so trewe" (l. 123) in the hopes that these would bring luck to her own relationship. On the cloth also are included stones "bryght of hewe" (l.126) which "wer sowghte wyde" (l.167) for the sole purpose of being included on the cloth. Knowing the belief in the magical power of these gems

[8] Alternately, in their edition of the poem French and Hale note that the cloth though "rationalized" in the poem "is a love charm - originally given to the fairy Emaré by supernatural well-wishers" (428). They do not, however, expand on this explanation.

[9] Wayland Barber notes the importance of textiles, in many cultures, as a "backdrop to the key participants in the most important rites of passage, such as marriage, birth, death" (151). The images portrayed on the textile would be appropriate to the sentiments of the occasion. For example, images of unity and fertility would be used for the textile which adorned a wedding chamber.

prevalent in the Medieval period in Europe and the Near East, it is possible that they were included on the cloth by the daughter of the Emir as magical charms. [10]

Whether or not the cloth was meant to "invoke magic" in its creation, it certainly is part of the continuum of textiles represented in literature which tell stories. Like the "storytelling cloths" of the women of ancient Greece, the cloth *is* story. Because the story of the Emir's daughter and the son of the Sultan is depicted in the "fowrthe korner" (l.157) of the cloth along with the stories of lovers of the past, the cloth is similar to Helen's tapestry in the *Iliad:* the creator of the textile is also one of the subjects portrayed on the cloth. The cloth is the daughter of the Emir's text which is written for the son of the Sultan. The poem itself calls attention to the idea that the textile is story:

> In the fowrthe korner was oon,
> Of babylone þe sowdan sonne,
> The amerayles dowȝtyr hym by.
> For hys sake þe cloth was wrowght;
> She loued him in hert and thowght,
> As testymoyeth *þys storye*.
> (ll. 157-162, my emphasis)

What "storye" is being referred to here? It must be the story on the cloth which is probably more complete than the description which is given in the text. Just as Procne read Philomela's tapestry, the son of the Sultan can read in the daughter of

[10] The chapter "Lapidaries of Spain and the Nearer East" in Joan Evans' Magical Jewels discusses Spanish lapidaries that were "translated from Arabic or written under Arabic influence" (38).

the Emir's textile the testimony of her love. The cloth is her love letter to the son of the Sultan which she has written in thread.

The narrator's use of the words "wordylye" and "wordy" to describe the cloth also draws attention to the connection between textile and narrative. "The ryche kynge of Cesyle" (l. 80) brought "a cloth þat was wordylye wroght" (l. 83) to the Emperor as a gift. "Wordylye" is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary (hereafter OED) as "with due dignity, pomp, or splendor." This meaning of the word certainly makes sense in the text since the cloth took "seuen wynter . . . yn makynge" (l. 118) and is adorned so splendidly "wyth ryche golde and asowr,/ And stones on ylke a syde" (113-114). However, it is interesting to read the cloth as being "*word*ylye wroght" or, being "made with words." Similarly, Emaré's future mother-in-law reacts to her by saying: "Sone, þys ys a fende,/ In þys wordy wede" (ll. 446-447). She means, of course, that the cloth (the "wede") is "deserving of something by merit or excellence."[11] Yet the definition of "wordy" is also "full of or abounding in words" (OED) and the pun may be intended. It is interesting to contemplate whether the irony of the descriptions was apparent to the Medieval audience of the text. Citations in the OED note that as early as 1100 "wordy" was used to mean "full of words." The connection, by invoking written romances, adds new meaning to the theory that the cloth is a woman's text: her narrative is full of

[11] This is the OED entry under "worthy".

words. It is almost as if the poem is calling attention to the fact that the cloth must be "read."

Each character in the romance who has occasion to see the cloth "reads" it and reacts to it. Even the narrator, in describing the cloth in the poem, provides a reading of the cloth. The narrator uses value-laden phrases like "þey loueden hem wyth honour" (l. 124) and "for þey loued hem ryght" (l. 136) to describe the stories portrayed on the cloth. These phrases betray the fact that the narrator reads the stories as representative of a "proper" kind of love, Medieval chivalric love. A narrator interprets by stressing or emphasizing elements of a story which he finds important. As such, the descriptions are centered around the type of love that the couple shares rather than *how* that love is represented in the textile.[12] The narrator does not even find it necessary to tell us how the story on the "fowrthe korner" ends. It is interesting that the only character who "reads" the cloth negatively is Emaré's mother-in-law. What does she see in the cloth that causes her to call Emaré a "fende"(l. 446)? As a woman who is also probably involved in the creation of textiles and familiar with certain patterns in embroidery, does she recognize in the pattern something that the male characters -- not being familiar with needlework patterns -- could not? Or does it represent the motherly jealousy and hatred of a woman who takes her son? In the latter case, why would she mention the robe in her disapproval of Emaré and why would she call it "wordy"? These questions can only

[12] For example, are the couples in an Oriental or Western European setting? What kinds of colors are used in the portrayal?

lead to more speculation, since no details are given about the Queen's disapproval of Emaré.

Since Rozsika Parker believes that an important question to ask of any textile is "why they [the woman who created it] selected such subjects" (13), I ask, "Why would the daughter of the Emir choose to embroider the pattern that she does on her textile?"[13] The pattern, as it is described in the romance, seems to exemplify Medieval chivalric notions. Why does she include herself as contained within that world view? This act may be viewed from an Orientalist perspective, as was done in the previous chapter. The daughter of the Emir and her love affair, as part of the Oriental world, are Other and would both fascinate and frighten Medieval society. Therefore their story is written into the body of stories of the society and assimilated into its values. This view explains why the textile is represented in the romance the way that it is, but it does not explain why the original textile is patterned in that way. If "needlewomen chose particular patterns, selecting those images which had meaning for them" (Parker, 12), how would the pattern have meaning for the daughter of the Emir? Is it simply that she identifies her love for the son of the Sultan with the loves of the other women represented on the cloth? Clues to these queries are not apparent in the text mainly because the description of the Emir's daughter's purposes for creating the textile are limited. As Maldwyn Mills observes,

[13] The dicsussion here regarding the daughter of the Emir's creation of the cloth is not meant to assume that she is a real person. I am speculating as to what a Medieval audience might infer about the daughter of the Emir given the clues in the text about the pattern which she has created.

"none of the most strikingly individual features of these lovers is allowed to come through; they are essentially decorative motifs, multiplied so that the power of love among men may be more heavily stressed" (198). Any clues that are given are interpreted by the narrator who, as has already been demonstrated, views the patterns from a Medieval chivalric ideology of love. Further investigations into the stories reveals that at least one of them, that of Floris and Blancheflour, is also centered on the Orient. Blancheflour is sold to "marchaundes of Babyloin full riche" (l.145) and the majority of the romance takes place in the Orient. Perhaps the daughter of the Emir identifies with the places and events in this story and therefore decides to use it as part of her pattern.

It has thus been established that, at a certain level in the romance, the cloth may be read as a text written by the daughter of the Emir. What role does this text/ile play in the romance beyond its obvious transformation of Emaré into "non erdly thyng"? What happens to the textile as it is transferred from creator to wearer, from cloth to garment? How is the cloth used in the romance? These questions will be addressed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE TRANSLATED TEXT/ILE

Christine understood that most women wrapped themselves in robes tailored by others.
-Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, "Including Women"

Women and the Orient have a similar role in romance. Women were also Other in the Medieval period. As such, representations of women in Middle English literature, like representations of the Orient, are fabrications. Much of what Said describes as the West's view of Oriental as Other bears an interesting resemblance to the Western patriarchal view of women as Other. This is not surprising since, as Simone de Beauvoir notes, "the *Other* is particularly defined according to the particular manner in which the *One* chooses to set himself up" (248). In the case of British explorers and colonists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the One chose to set himself up (in a literally elevated position to the Oriental) as "rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal'." Conversely, the Oriental was described as "irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, 'different'" (Said, 40). These descriptions are similar to the ways in which women have been viewed in Western culture and Judeo-Christian ideology.

The connection between Oriental and female sheds some interesting perspectives on both the Orient and women because of the images of both which are present in Western literature. I find the connection specifically powerful in two ways. The idea that, because of his "rational" and "mature" ways, the European

holds some power over the Other is evident in both Orientalism and the view of women. Said notes that "the Orient . . . is corrected, even penalized, for lying outside the boundaries of European society" (67). For how many women has the fact that they do not follow societal conventions, whether it be in choosing their profession, their marital state, or their status as a mother, caused them to be penalized? Due to this hierarchy in the mind of the One there is a necessity to take steps towards controlling the Other. In Said's discussion of Orientalism, the words "constrain" and "contain" surface on numerous occasions when he is discussing how the Orient is "handled" in Europe. A way of doing this was to show the Orient as "outsiders having a special role to play *inside* Europe" (71), so that the exotic, the "irrational" is on European ground (so to speak) where it may be controlled by the society. In similar ways, women have socially constructed roles within Western society which are *inside* of the patriarchal structures. These roles are propagated through their reproduction in literature because one way of constraining and containing the Other, as has been seen through the previous discussion of the Oriental in Middle English romance, is through representation in art.

The terms which Said uses to describe the way in which the Orient is represented in Western literature serve as a starting point for discussing the ways in which women are represented in Medieval literature. Said claims that the Orient is "dominated" and "restructured" in Western literature so that it resembles the One. Is the feminine dominated and restructured in Medieval literature? An understanding of

that issue will most likely lead to an illumination of the ways in which the patriarchy "has authority over" (Said, 3) the feminine in the literature of the Medieval period. Since my concern here is with romance it is that genre I address with this question in mind. Women are often cast into roles which are similar from romance to romance. An example of this is the "archetypically passive" (Hansen, 238) heroine of the Constance stories. John Leyerle explains her silent suffering as a function of the type of society in which the woman lives:

> for women in an honour/shame culture, honour depends on public recognition in a markedly different fashion than for men. Honour for women is a function of sexual chastity; shame comes from any public evidence of unchastity or sexual aggression. Honour in this sense is not easily translated into heroic action; consequently, chivalric literature is full of heroines who preserve their honour passively by resisting sexual advances. (140)

Leyerle's comments bring up some very important issues. The first is that chivalric literature is one of the places where there is an attempt to control the feminine. Secondly, this control is exerted on a physical level -- it is an attempt to control the female as a sexual being by affording her value based on her resistance to sexual aggression. Control of the female body also means control of the one type of creation of which only the female is capable: the creation of life. Since control of feminine creativity is a control of the Other, then one site of the Other in romance is the female body. "Honour" is the guise under which the Other is dominated in this case, and is seemingly something that the woman would want to strive to obtain.

The silent, suffering heroine represents more than the attempt to control the female body. Her silence is also important. In the model of the romance society that Leyerle presents, sexuality, the female body, and language are interconnected. The "fear of female language was linked to the fear of female flesh and desire" (Régnir-Bohler, 429) so the silent and passive woman is seen to pose no threat to the patriarchy. Any form of self-expression in language by the female, then, is a public act which is "evidence of unchastity or sexual aggression" (Leyerle, 140). The fear that "female discourse, like female sexuality, could be a genuine threat to established order" (Benkov, 245) is important to note. Acknowledging this discourse meant acknowledging the Other as having an existence *outside* of the representations which have been so carefully constructed by the One. In her study entitled "Language and Women: From Silence to Speech," Edith Benkov discusses the connection in Medieval literature between feminine sexuality and language. She notes that for the most part, "so genuine is the fear of language as a weapon in women's arsenal in regard to the battle of the sexes, that much of Medieval literature seems to have as its subtext that women's speech must either be carefully controlled or in some cases violently suppressed" (245).

The Oriental Other in the Medieval period was "violently suppressed" through crusades and holy wars. The threat that the Orient posed to the security of the society during the Middle Ages was represented in the literature in a "carefully controlled" fashion, as seen through the restructuring of the cloth in *Emaré*. The

image of the Emperor who "lette shape a robe swyþe/ Of þat cloth of golde" (ll. 242-243), as well as being an example of the way in which the Orient is Westernized in Medieval romance, is central to an investigation of the way in which the female is restructured in the poem. If the cloth represents not only the Orient, but also a woman's text, the act of shaping by the Emperor is also an act which "carefully controls" women's discourse. At the same time the structure given to the cloth -- it is turned into a robe -- serves to cover over the female body of Emaré. By shaping the text/ile, the Emperor silences the language of women on two counts. He takes "authority over" the text of the daughter of the Emir and he veils the body of his suffering heroine.

The "robe swyþe" that appears in the romance originally as a cloth "wrowghte . . . wyth pride" (l. 111) by the daughter of the Emir is "don . . . vpon" (l. 244) Emaré after the Emperor "þowȝth to worche hys wylle" with her and "wedde her to hys wyfe" (ll. 227-228) and just before he declares his intentions to her. That the Emperor would give his intended wife a gift of clothing at this point is not unusual. Diane Owen Hughes remarks that "gifts of clothes and jewels that husbands gave their wives at marriage should be seen . . . as the means by which a husband might pretend to clothe the naked Griselda, placing on her an unmistakable sign of his claims" (140). What is unusual is that the woman he intends to marry is his daughter and that the "unmistakable sign of his claims" is a textile which represents both the Orient and female discourse, it is Other. However, by shaping

the cloth into a garment the Emperor puts his trademark on it. He reshapes the story that the cloth *is*, giving it his own form. He appropriates the feminine discourse and makes it his.

The text/ile, created as a love letter for the son of the Sultan, was diverted from its original destination before the Emperor received it. Much like the way in which the "olde qwene" intercepts the letter meant to announce the birth of Segramore to his father and changes the story, the textile is intercepted. If the cloth was originally a love letter expressing the daughter of the Emir's true love for the son of the Sultan, into what kind of text is it shaped? The pattern represented for the daughter of the Emir lovers whose love was "trewe" and whose relationships succeeded so that she could place herself among them for luck. She fashioned the cloth to "invoke magic." When made into a garment by the Emperor, the pattern on the cloth represents idealized love -- chivalric love which is based on honour and which embodies certain codes of behavior. The "magic" of the cloth is brought under control through the cloth's being shaped into a garment.

Once he has restructured the female text, the Emperor uses the new story to cover the female body of his daughter. Because of her "semblant swete" (l.220), the Emperor "was an- amored hys þowȝtur" (l.226) and he decided to marry her. However, incest is not sanctioned by the church[1] or by the patriarchy so "tales of

[1] In the romance the church represented by the Pope does consent to the incestuous marriage. This certainly must be an anomaly and would not have actually occurred in the Middle Ages. Edith Rickert notes that "here the Pope's assent is taken for granted; elsewhere [in other "Constance" stories] he is bribed to help against the Saracens and then consents only because it is revealed to him in a vision that no harm shall come" (38).

incest must be suppressed" in order to "advance [patriarchy's] own structures of power" (Dinshaw, 95). The Emperor uses the garment which, when shaped by him represents chivalric love based in both Christian and patriarchal ideas, in order to cover over the source of his incestuous desire: Emaré. Blame for the 'unnatural' desire of the Emperor is placed on the female Other rather than on the Emperor (who represents patriarchy as father and ruler) himself. The text which at one time was to serve to reveal the love of the daughter of the Emir when shaped by the hand of patriarchy serves to hide the female body. In putting on the robe, Emaré has *literally* done something that Christiane Klapisch-Zuber (in the epigraph that I have chosen for this section) suggests Christine de Pisan realized women in the Middle Ages did *metaphorically*. She has "wrapped [herself] in a [robe] tailored by others."

The Emperor's act of restructuring the female and Oriental text/ile brings to the fore a familiar treatment of the Other in the Medieval period which is based on St. Jerome's characterization of pagan classical texts as alien women. Jerome reads in Deuteronomy (21:10-14)[2] "the command given by the voice of the Lord that when a captive woman had had her head shaved, her eyebrows and all her hair cut off, and her nails pared, she might then be taken to wife" (letter 70, to Magnus) as a metaphor for transforming the pagan classical text into a Christian one. He uses this metaphor when explaining his use and translation of secular writings. He says:

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[2] Although Jerome does not include it as one of the ways in which to Christianize the alien woman, the passage in Deuteronomy orders the man to "discard her captive's garbs" (21:13). This is especially important to my discussion, which follows, of the Emperor clothing Emaré in the robe that he has tailored.

> Is it surprising that I too, admiring the fairness of her form and the grace of her eloquence, desire to make that secular wisdom which is my captive and my handmaid, a matron of the true Israel? Or that shaving off and cutting away all in her that is dead whether this be idolatry, pleasure, error, or lust, I take her to myself and beget by her servants for the Lord of Saboath? (Letter 70, to Magnus)

The direct association here with the feminine as an Other which must be somehow controlled must be what made the image of the female as a text a popular one for Medieval writers.

Carolyn Dinshaw explores how Jerome's metaphor is present in the Medieval period by using Chaucer's texts as a basis for her discussions. In Chaucer's writings, like Jerome's, there is a "repeated, subtle, exploratory use of the figurative identification of the text with woman" (17). Dinshaw explores, in detail, literary acts -- "reading, translating, glossing, creating literary tradition" (17) -- as acts performed on this female body by men. Two of Chaucer's tales discussed by Dinshaw are *The Man of Law's Tale* of Constance and *The Clerk's Tale* of Griselda. Both stories form part of the Constance cycle and both women are suffering (and silent) heroines. As the connection to *Emaré* is obvious, Dinshaw's theories illuminate how the Oriental text/ile is dealt with in the romance.

The image of the "clothed body" represents "the text translated from one language to another" (Dinshaw, 137). If this body is specifically female, as in

Jerome's metaphor, it is possible to describe the (masculine) act of translation as follows:

> the warrior takes the alien from her people, has her clothed and reclothed in a ritual preparation for the nuptials, and transforms her from the alien seductress to fecund wife.
> (Dinshaw, 23)

This description is analogous to what happens to Griselda in *The Clerk's Tale*. Dinshaw argues that, in essence, Griselda herself is translated just as the text in which she figures prominently has been translated. A similar situation takes place in *Emaré*. Emaré is "reclothed in ritual preparation for the nuptials" when the "robe swyþe" is "don her upon" (ll. 242-244). However, Emaré is not a "pagan seductress" before she put on the cloak; nor are her "essential beauties . . . nurtured by washing, shaving and clothing . . . put to Christian use" (Dinshaw, 23). Throughout the romance Emaré is consistently described in Christian terms. She is "curtays in alle thynge" (l. 62) and "alle her loued þat her sye,/ wyth menske and mychyl honour" (ll. 68-69). She is, however, alien to her father because she is female and because she is sexually forbidden to him. The Emperor, following Jerome, clothes Emaré in order to hide these alien aspects. As has already been discussed, by covering Emaré with the robe, the Emperor removes from his sight the female body which is the source of his incestuous desire.

While Emaré is literally the alien woman of Jerome's metaphor, the Oriental textile is the figurative one. By reading the cloth as a feminine text, we can see how, through the course of the romance, it is treated in the same way that Jerome treats his pagan text. The Oriental text/ile which both represents (through its presence in the romance) and re-presents (through the depictions on the cloth) the "alien" in the romance is removed of its "pagan seductions" through the "commercial transactions which constitute patriarchal culture" (Dinshaw, 26). The feminine text passes through many male hands before Emaré receives it and as it does so, it is reshaped so that it is no longer Other. The male characters in the story gain authority over the feminine text by first making it a captive which was acquired by force:

> My fadyr was a nobylle man,
> Of þe sowdan he hyt wan,
> Wyth maystrye and wyth myȝth.
> (ll. 172-174)

It is then passed from father to son as a gift of love: "for gret loue he gaf hyt me" (l. 175) just to be given to the Emperor as a token of friendship between the two countries: "I brynge hyt þe in specyalte" (l. 176). Finally, the Emperor, "lette shape a robe swyþe,/ Of þat cloth of golde" (ll. 242-243). Like Jerome, he transforms his pagan (feminine) text into a Christian one by "shaving off and cutting away all in her that is dead" -- that is, by giving it a new shape.

The cloth also encourages the relationships between men in the romance. As a gift from the King of Cesyle to the Emperor upon his arrival, the cloth assures that the King is "wellecomed . . . as þe hende" (l. 84) and that he can stay with the

Emperor "às long as hys wylle wer" (l. 180). The feminine text/ile becomes the "currency exchanged between men" which is the center of the "ritual that establishes the bond between" them (Schweickart, 539).[3]

Levi-Strauss has theorized this type of exchange as "the traffic of women" because it is women that are traded "between groups of men" (Dinshaw, 16). The trade is usually "motivated by the prohibition of incest" (Dinshaw, 16) and women "function [in the patriarchal society], as do empty linguistic signs, in forming bonds between men" (Dinshaw, 16). In *Emaré* it is the text/ile, the feminine discourse, which forms the bonds but, as I have argued, the textile functions as anything *but* an "empty linguistic sign". Instead, it is a feminine text which must be controlled and restructured before it can be put to use in the patriarchal society.

In Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*, Constance is "traded between pagan shores just as the tale itself (along with other merchandise) has been traded across the seas" (Dinshaw, 16) and as such, argues Dinshaw, is currency in "the traffic of women" that takes place in the story. Similarly, Emaré moves from one country to another -- her home, Galys and then Rome -- and from one man to another -- her father, the king of Galys and Iurdan -- throughout the course of the romance. It might even be argued that the initial time she is "traded" is "motivated by the prohibition of incest." Her father becomes "ryght wrothe" (l. 265) when she refuses his proposal of

[3] In the Dictionary of the Middle Ages the entry under "Textiles, Islamic" notes that "textiles played an important political role" in the Orient as "lavish diplomatic gifts." The gift of the cloth from the King of Cysyle to the Emperor might be a Western Medieval version of the same.

marriage and then he "shate her yn-to þe se" (l. 273). Although the text seems to suggest that her exile is caused by her refusal, I think that it is more a function of her father's realization, after she reminds him that "God of heuen hyt for-bede" (l. 251), that he can not marry her and he therefore chooses to remove the "temptation" from his immediate presence. In any case, Emaré's role as the currency in these exchanges becomes very concrete when the diction associated with her in the romance is considered closely; at certain points in the story Emaré literally becomes "merchandise" through being described as a textile.

Emaré not only wears the robe throughout the romance, at times she *is* the robe. The words that are used to designate "robe" throughout the romance are interesting. The "robe swyþe" (l.242) is also referred to as a "wordy wede" (l. 447) by the "olde qwene", Emaré's future mother-in-law. Edith Rickert and Maldwyn Mills gloss this word respectively as "dress" and "robe" in that context. However, the word "wede" is used a number of other times in contexts which suggest that it refers to Emaré herself. For example, when her father expresses his wish to marry her, Emaré's reply is prefaced with: "Then sayde þat wordy vnþur wede" (l. 250).[4] Rickert still glosses this occurrence of the word as "dress" whereas Mills designates it "honourable lady." The double meaning of the word adds an additional aspect to the way in which Emaré is connected to the robe. If "wede" is synonymous for both "robe" and "lady" then Emaré, in some sense, is not "Emaré" at all, she is merely

[4] Other places in the text where Emaré is designated as "wede" are in lines 366 and 612. In line 699 - "For glysteryng of þat wede" - it is unclear whether it refers to Emaré or her robe.

identified as "robe." A similar multiple meaning is embodied by the phrases "comely vnþur kelle" (l. 303) and "goodly vnþur gore" (l. 938). The former, Mills notes, "is a phrase conventionally applied to women in romances" (199). "Kelle" is "usually glossed as 'headdress', but it could also stand for 'cloak', 'garment' or 'shroud'" (199). "Gore" or "gare" is glossed by Rickert as "robe". Mills suggests that these phrases are "given more meaning than would normally be the case" (199) because of the importance of the robe in the romance.

Emaré's value as merchandise is also specified in the poem. The "cloth þat was wordylye wroght" (l. 83) is described in terms of its worth. Because "so ryche a jwelle ys þer non/ In alle Crystyante" (ll. 107-108), it is a rare and precious acquisition. The same is said of Emaré twice in the romance. When she is wrongly accused of bearing a devil as a child and therefore exiled from Galys, her final words to the steward who is in charge of carrying through with her exile are:

> Grete welle my lord fro me,
> So gentylle of blode yn cristyante,
> Grete he neuur more!
> (ll. 634-636)

Similarly Sir Kadore, who finds her when she arrives in Galys after her first exile, tells the king:

> She ys þe konnyngest wommon,
> I trowe, þat be yn Crystendom,
> Of werk þat y haue sene.
> (ll. 427-429)

This line, as well as designating Emaré's "worth" can also be read to designate her as "merchandise." "Werke" has multiple meanings which make the use of it in this phrase ambiguous. It can mean the *process* of "making a textile or fabric, as weaving or (usually) sewing, knitting or the like" (OED). It can also designate the *product* of the same: "the fabric or the thing made of it" (OED). The latter is the meaning assigned to the word in an earlier scene: "She tawȝte hem to sewe and marke/ Alle maner of sylky werke" (l. 376-377). The "of werke" is ambiguously placed in the phrase because it is broken from the "konnyngest wommon" by the qualifying phrase "þat be yn Crystendom." Sir Kadore probably means to designate Emaré, as Edith Rickert glosses the phrase, as "the cunningest woman in her work" (Rickert, 14). However, it is also possible to read the phrase to mean that she is the "konnyngest wommon" of any that he has ever seen. "Werke" in this case would be the product; she is a piece "of werke." The dual nature of this phrase works with the other examples where Emaré *is* the cloth to designate her not only as a woman who is "exchanged" in the romance, but also as merchandise which has a specific value.

By reading both the feminine discourse and the female body in the romance as the Other which is controlled and restructured by the patriarchy, it is evident that the Orient and the feminine are dealt with in the same way. It has been shown that the restructuring of the Orient in the literature of the Middle Ages is based on the need for the actual perceived threat of the Other to be dissipated. If "romances do not claim to be co-extensive with the contemporary world . . . but to reshape and meditate on the world" (Crane, 2), how can one read the restructuring of the female

in romance? Dieter Mehl has argued that romances were often "the illustration of moral truths by way of exemplary story" (5). These stories which exemplify what women are "supposed to be" and plant that as an ideal in the mind of 'real' men are detrimental to 'real' women who cannot live up to those expectations. If, as Carolyn Dinshaw argues, "tale-telling is to serve patriarchy" (95), then the story that dominates and restructures the female Other is ideal. The challenge, in engaging with these texts in scholarship, is how to "confront the vexed relationship between the lives and subjectivities of 'real' women and the ideological re-presentation of them in . . . the textual tradition" (Fisher and Halley, 1).

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

The clothes make the man.
But the woman makes the clothes;
So what does that make the woman?
- Meryn Cadell

Christ in His great virtue is pliant as a windblown sleeve. He falls into place and clings, whichever way you try Him, closely and smoothly, as He is bound to do.
- Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*

I would like to consider for a moment the notion that "feminist literary criticism of male-authored texts need not rest with alerting us to the mythologizing of women in patriarchy" but "can also explore the implications about women's power, perceived or actual, that these writings attempt to submerge." (Fisher and Halley, 5). My discussion has centred onthe "mythologizing" of the Other -- whether it be the Orient or the female -- in Middle English romance. An investigation of the transition of a textile (the cloth in *Emaré*) from one country to another and from one woman to another has raised a number of questions regarding the nature of that "mythologizing"; specifically, how and under what circumstances the Other is written into the stories which are told by the One. Something I have not touched on and intend to do so here is the "implications about women's power" that surface from such a discussion. I have used a considerable amount of evidence based on the actual creation of textiles in the Middle Ages (and other ages) to inform my discussion of the presence of textiles in the literature of the Middle Ages. However I

realize with Fisher and Halley that to ask in which ways "textual constructions of women influence[d] women's conceptions of themselves" (7) is to pose an unanswerable question. As a result, I mean to discuss the "implications about women's power" in Medieval romance not in the daily life of the Medieval period.

The image of the Emperor's "shaping" the cloth with the hand of patriarchy seems to typify how, in *Emaré* (and I would venture to say in other romances as well), that which does not "naturally" conform to the masculine power structures -- the Orient and the female, especially the feminine body and therefore feminine creativity and language -- is altered in order to support these structures. By using the cloth for his own purposes, to cover incest, the Emperor also conceals the female in the text. It seems then, that feminine possession of honour and right, which are a "function of sexual chastity" (Leyerle, 140) in the romance world, are under the control of the masculine power structures. For Emaré, covered by her "robe swyþe", this is literally the case. Similarly, the feminine body *as* text/ile is under the power of the masculine hand which translates, trades, owns, writes and silences it. These actions both literally and figuratively "mythologize" the feminine.

Now I would like to consider Meryn Cadell's contemporary statement at the head of this section in conjunction with the previous discussions of *Emaré*. It relates to the topic at hand not only in its reference to the creation of textiles, but also because of how the statement itself silently but assuredly alters the meaning of the power structure that it asserts. In *Emaré*, the "cloth makes the man" not because he

wears it, but because he *uses* it -- and reshapes it -- for his own ends. The Emperor gives a robe to Emaré as an "unmistakable sign of his claims" (Hughes, 140) in an attempt to marry her. However what might be to the Emperor an unmistakable way by which to claim the merchandise, the woman which he will acquire in marriage, is open to question in a number of ways. These questions, with which I began my exploration, constantly return to the Otherness of the cloth -- its Oriental and feminine origins and nature -- in spite of its being remade, reinterpreted and misused by some of the men in the romance. Although it has been restructured, the cloth is constantly given high visibility as both a feminine and an Oriental text/ile. It has been taken (literally and figuratively) out of context by the Emperor, but it was originally "wrowȝte . . . alle with pride" (l. 111) by the "amerayle dowȝter of heþennes" (l. 109) for the Sultan's son.

So what *does* that make the woman? This question hints at a discussion of the role of women in romance -- a discussion which I do not have the space to enter into at the moment. However, the fact that the question may be posed in relation to *Emaré* intimates the idea that all is not as it may seem when it comes to the way in which women, the Other, are represented in *Emaré* specifically and possibly other romances in which textiles play a large role. The creation of textiles is an area of female control both inside and outside of masculine power structures. As women's work, textile making may be dictated by a larger power structure which divides women's work from men's. In this large power structure, women may seem to have

little control over their own lives in terms of what they can do and what they can say. On the other hand, the representation of women at this work does not always show this limited control, especially in romance, which specializes in making the impossible happen. I will discuss this more closely below.

Obvious familiar reworkings of the making of textiles and the telling of stories as both inside and outside masculine control are the stories of Philomela and Penelope.[1] Philomela wove her story of the violence she suffered at the hands of Tereus when he attempted to silence her ability to recount the story verbally. Penelope also worked outside of these structures, which dictate marriage for a woman, through her weaving.

In *Emaré* the creation of the cloth and therefore the meaning which it holds (as a love letter to the Sultan's son), originated with the daughter of the Emir. As such, it also originated (literally) outside the masculine reach of western European power as perceived by the writer and the audience. The cloth retains traces of the Orient and therefore traces of its original meaning even after it has been "translated" by the Emperor. This fact is highlighted when Emaré's wearing of the cloth causes her to be seen as "non erdely þyng" (l. 396) to those people -- her father, the king of Galys, Iurdan and her stereotypically possessive mother-in-law -- who represent the norms of power that might be called the masculine interpretation of meaning.

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[1] Another example of textile creation as control both inside and outside the masculine power structures are, again, the women of Chile who bypass the governmental and military structures which demand silence about the situation surrounding the "disappeared" in that country by telling their stories to the world through their *apilleras*.

Emaré herself also creates textiles and, in doing so, garners some control inside of the structures of power in which she finds herself in the romance. After each of the times she is exiled she ends up in a new land and, as such, is at the mercy of a different man. She might have been rejected by the men who found her because she "semed non erdly þyng"; yet she is accepted by Sir Kadore, the King of Galys and Iurdan because she demonstrates her ability to do "Alle manner of sylky werke" (l.377, 730). Each time she is described in the process of doing needlework, the description is coupled with a statement of her demeanor: "she was curteys yn alle þyng,/Bothe to olde and to ȝynge" (ll. 379-380).[2] A function of her being accepted as honourable is the fact that she creates textiles -- specifically textiles which reflect her gentility. Aristocratic women (of which Emaré is one as the daughter of an Emperor) had the materials, like silk, to do fine embroidery work. This needlework earns her some employment, Sir Kadore engages her "To teche [his] chylderen curtesye" (l. 425), and it also causes her to be identified as someone of high social stature: "an erles þowȝtur of ferre londe" (l.422). Her ability to do "sylky werke" is as a result of the large power structure which seems to dictate how women live their lives. That is, it is a result of the hierarchy which allows aristocratic women to do fine needlework while lower class women do not have the time or money to do the same. Yet at the same time, through her use of this specifically feminine craft, Emaré

[2] The same phrase is repeated in lines 64-65 just after Emaré has been taught "golde and sylke for to sewe" (l. 59). Also when she ends up in Rome at the end of the romance, the lines are repeated (ll. 724-725) and then it is said that she "sewed sylke werk yn bour" (l. 730).

seems, somehow, to work outside of this larger power structure to gain recognition in the romance.

How can it be that the cloth -- and textile work -- can seem to be subjected to the control of patriarchy yet still afford some amount of power to the female within the romance? This question opens up issues of representation and interpretation. As a genre, romance allows the impossible to happen because it moves into the romance world which "reshape[s] and meditate[s] on the world" (Crane, 2). By describing the impossible in one scene, romance opens up possibilities for what might happen in the next. Derek Brewer notes that "in many romances what happens, though it may be surprising or improbable, not to say impossible, . . . 'feels right'" (5). Situations that might remain open-ended in the real world are resolved in romance, without the reader or the characters in the romance thinking twice about the impossibility of the resolution. Reconciliations that seem almost impossible take place in the world of the romance. For example, Emaré despairs over her separation from her husband (l.732) and he thinks her dead (l. 892). But he decides to go to Rome for repentance where she (what a coincidence!) has ended up and they are reconciled.

It is also sometimes difficult to know where the romance falls on certain moral issues. For example, there has been much critical debate over Gawain's guilt in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.[3] Gawain does not seem to doubt that he is

[3] Clare Kinney, R.A. Shoaf and Sheila Fisher are a few of the scholars who engage in this debate. The titles of their works can be found in my bibliography.

guilty. But of what is he is guilty is not clearly explained in the text. The varied reactions to the girdle is an example of this uncertainty. Gawain takes the girdle as a "syngne of . . . surfet" (l. 2433) which he wears to remind himself of "the faut and the fayntyse of the flesche crabbed,/ How tender hit is to entyse teches of fylth" (ll. 2435-2436). Yet the court at Camelot adopts the girdle as a "bauderyk" of the "brotherhede" (l. 2516). Why would they adopt a badge of his dishonor? The court does not seem to find Gawain's actions as morally grave as he does, they "laghen loude" (l. 2514) at his description of his "untrawthe" (l. 2509). Similarly, in versions of the stories of *Tristan and Isolde* or *Lancelot and Guinevere* the reader's sympathies lie with the lovers even when they are shown to be at fault when it comes to adhering to principles of honesty. The romance seems to set up, purposely, different systems of morals which conflict with each other. These elements of romance allow for and even encourage many possible interpretations and representations of Otherness. The romance itself seems "pliant" like the "windblown sleeve" in the second epigraph at the head of this section.

Because it is something which invites questions from both the characters -- the Emperor asks "how myght thys be?" (l. 102) -- and modern scholars the "cloth þat was wordylye wroght" is one of the highlighted objects in romance which invites varied interpretations. Just as the stories depicted on the cloth are read and interpreted differently by modern readers, the cloth itself can be interpreted in a number of ways. The characters in the romance react to the cloth as if they were

reading a romance. As Derek Brewer finds that an incident in romance "may be surprising or improbable, not to say impossible" yet still "feel right", the Emperor, Sir Kadore and Iurdan react to the cloth as if it were something surprising, but soon accept it as a possibility in the world of the romance.

When looking at texts like *Emaré* it is difficult to decide how to read the presence of the feminine. Is she "the mark of female absence, because the male author is speaking not through, but across the female in order to address other men" (Fisher and Halley, 5)?[4] Considering the way in which women are represented in textiles, as textiles, and creating textiles in romance might be a way to establish the presence of the feminine outside of the structures which cause women to function in patriarchal society as "empty linguistic signs, in forming bonds between men" (Dinshaw, 16). When explored as a textile made by an Oriental woman, the "cloth þat was wordylye wroght" is more than just a piece of cloth in the romance; it is a text, it is Oriental and it is feminine. And in all three dimensions, it is instrumental in the meaning of the romance, even when that meaning is complicated, obscure, or open to interpretation.

[4] Fisher and Halley assume the masculinity of the author; I am not concerned here with the gender of the writer nor is it relevant to my discussion at this point. I am mainly interested in the idea that the even the presence of the feminine might be an absence because she is represented within masculine power structures.

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