The luxurious episcopal capa (cape or cope) that emerged at the center of Church ceremony in the thirteenth century came under the scrutiny of two very different texts, Bishop William Durand’s monumental liturgical treatise, the *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum* (*Rationale for the Divine Offices*), and a little-known macaronic satirical poem, “Song Upon the Tailors,” found in an important English miscellany, British Library, MS Harley 978. Each of these texts addresses a paradox at the heart of contemporary ecclesiastical dress, which is the way new garments worn by the clergy no longer explicitly corresponded with the traditional, often biblical prescriptions that guaranteed the authority of those very garments. As I will discuss, in their scrutiny of the inherent contradictions of fashionable religious clothing, each writer explicitly confronts the problematic existence of fashion’s systemic changeability in relationship to the ideal of divine stasis. While Durand struggles to fit contemporary changes of clerical dress into the categories outlined by Old Testament law, the anonymous satirical poet parodies both new eccle-
siastical fashions and the old allegorical methods of interpretation that try to justify them. Each text reacts in its own way to contemporary legislative energies, which strove to differentiate clerical attire from that of secular fashions largely by presenting it as stable and biblical. But each text also uses the cultural trope of sartorial changeability to examine the changing methods of literary analysis itself in this period, demonstrating that trope’s broad appeal to thirteenth-century writers as well as its myriad claims on thirteenth-century experience.

VESTIMENTARY CHANGE IN WILLIAM DURAND’S RATIONALE DIVINORUM OFFICIORUM

Canonist and liturgical writer William Durand (1230–96), the bishop of Mende from 1285 to the end of his life, wrote his monumental Rationale Divinorum Officiorum shortly after 1286 and it quickly became what one of its modern editors calls “the definitive medieval liturgical treatise.” A work composed of eight books that synthesizes, interprets, and allegorizes most Church laws, customs, and rituals, the Rationale spends an entire book on the symbolism of ecclesiastical vestments (Book III), by far the longest sustained discussion of vestments in medieval theological writings. While Durand was not the dominant force behind the substantial changes in the symbolic use of religious vestments in this period, nor behind many of the interpretations of specific vestments in his text—most of this can be attributed to Pope Innocent III—it is precisely for this reason that Durand provides, in the places where he does deviate from his sources, a telling glimpse into how an encyclopedic mind recognized and attempted to reconcile the subtle disparities between traditional Church narrative about ecclesiastical vestments and actual contemporary practices.

Moreover, while Durand’s opus was not the first to provide a hermeneutics for religious ritual, the thoroughness of his organizational program meant that the work surpassed its forebears in popularity and influence. Each book deals sequentially and in depth with a different aspect of church symbolism, from the ornaments and furnishings of churches, to Church ministers, vestments, the Mass, feast days, divine offices, Sunday practices, and the liturgical calendar. The Rationale’s appeal persisted despite cultural pressure from new theological methods of biblical interpretation, despite what Joseph A. Jungmann called the “crisis” of liturgical allegory in the thirteenth century caused by the achievements of scholastic theology. Even more surprisingly, the Rationale’s impressive publication history lasts well into the
sixteenth century and past the eve of the Reformation, at which time Martin Luther denounced it by name as a work and a genre for “idle” men. Yet judging from over three hundred surviving complete medieval manuscripts and at least fifty-nine printed editions before 1614, the readership for this popular text was anything but idle. Not only was the *Rationale* one of the first books ever printed—the 1459 edition from Gutenberg’s press is the fourth book and the second nonbiblical work printed in Europe—but also its early printing history suggests a particular type of reading practice. It was the first printed book composed in a smaller “book” typeface (now termed the Durandus type) that came to be associated with private reading of classical works in contrast to the large “missal” type used for liturgical works.

Dyan Elliott’s recent work on Durand’s *Rationale* in her article on vestmentary ordination and degradation in Church ritual suggests that interpretation of ecclesiastical dress, like the clothes themselves, had become “more or less stabilized” by the thirteenth century. Yet Durand’s *Rationale* depicts anything but a stable image of vestimentary symbolism. His attempt to assimilate previous interpretations of ecclesiastical dress in fact reveals significant gaps and discrepancies in the standard hermeneutics. Likewise, his attention to the traditional exegesis of individual garments replaces supposedly incontrovertible meanings with multiplicities and inconsistencies. Elliott’s study of the ecclesiastical employment of sartorial rites and symbolism to systematically construct—and deconstruct—clerical identity illustrates the profound importance of the meaning of clothing in this period; as she succinctly declares, in the medieval period “clothing was meant to mean.” Precisely because clothing was so culturally significant, however, the inherently slippery and pluralized nature of its symbolism was even more potentially problematic. Durand’s text explicitly confronts the process by which the meaning of clothing escapes the control of the institutions and individuals who attempt to regulate it. As the historical starting point for most ecclesiastical and secular sumptuary legislation, the thirteenth century carries the burden of this problem perhaps more than the overtly volatile sartorial discourses of later centuries.

Durand’s text exhibits the strain of trying to ensure that cultural perceptions about ecclesiastical attire remain distinct from contemporary ideas about secular clothing. A glimpse at one beautifully illuminated manuscript of the *Rationale* made within decades of Durand’s death, for example, shows, at the top of the page, an accurate depiction of the vesting of a bishop, laid out sequentially in fourteen of the fifteen steps as outlined in the text by Durand, while the grotesques in the bottom margin include an ape—well
known in this period for its mimicry of humans—cavorting in its own version of religious dress (see plate 2 and figure 3.1). The juxtaposition of these images on the same page generates surprisingly substantive questions about the susceptibility of ecclesiastical dress to the crude imitative impulses of fashion, including the possibility that bishops, like monkeys, might merely perform their ceremonies without fully understanding them. These types of questions occasionally surface in the body of the text as well as the marginalia of Durand’s work. While this kind of marginal imagery and commentary is still a long way from the dramatic appropriation of ecclesiastical dress that Stephen Greenblatt discusses, in which Renaissance players acquired and wore actual bishop’s vestments on stage, the space for interpretive play evident in this illuminated manuscript of the Rationale, and in the liturgical text itself, suggests that the meaning of attire, especially the highly regulated attire of the Church, could be fluid and evocative.

How ecclesiastical vestments make meaning was a topic undertaken by exegetes and theologians throughout Judeo-Christian history, from Josephus and Jerome forward. At the center of these writings was the allegorical (and in Christian texts, typological) understanding of the description and explanation of the Jewish high priest’s attire in Exodus 28, in which God teaches Moses the craftsmanship and symbolism of Aaron’s intricate garments. Yet despite the allegorical interpretation of vestments through the ages, theologians could never entirely separate for the skeptic the beauty or style of religious garments from their cultural status as commercial or luxury items. As I discuss in my introduction, Tertullian, the early Church father most famously critical of others’ attachment to their clothing, was so castigated for his own change from wearing the traditional Roman toga to the more contemporary pallium that he gave a public speech defending the garment. Jerome’s letter against the Pelagians also takes time to defend ecclesiastical dress more broadly against an accusation that will reappear throughout Church history, that “gorgeousness of apparel or ornament is offensive to God.”

Pope Innocent’s De Missarum Mysteriis discusses priestly vestments as part of the preparation for the Mass, classifying liturgical garments according to their descriptions in Exodus and with the general typological understanding (usually called “rememorative allegory”) that the vesting of the priest and his procession to the altar represents Christ entering the world (and that the rest of the Mass represents the sequential events of Christ’s life from birth to ascension). Innocent’s text thus provides the classic, twofold understanding of ecclesiastical clothing in the Middle Ages: that it follows divine law as commanded in the Old Testament and also symbolizes Christ’s literal
entrance into the material (and sinful) world. According to the symbolic system of the thirteenth-century Church, therefore, vestments represented both divine order and mortal disorder.

Durand relies heavily on Innocent’s earlier work but also expands his own interpretations in ways that are especially helpful for understanding perceptions of religious attire in the latter half of the thirteenth century. Like many medieval theologians, he develops the link between allegorical interpretation and ornamentation. For example, he opens the *Rationale* by explaining, as Innocent does in *De Missarum Mysteriis*, that religious ornaments contain within them an invisible sacred order revealed only through a combination of industrious exposition and divine gift, and by describing the value of the study of symbolism for both learned and unlearned priests.\(^\text{16}\) He opens Book III of the *Rationale*, the book devoted to ecclesiastical vestments, by rearticulating the key cultural distinction between religious and secular dress: we do not wear the sacred vestments for everyday use, he says, so that we can emphasize the immaterial aspects of their material transformation: “to note,” he says, “that just as we change garments according to the letter, so too should we do this according to the spirit” [ad notandum quod sicut mutationem habitus secundum litteram facimus, ita et secundum spiritum agamus].\(^\text{17}\)
The synthesis of matter and spirit is an important subject throughout the *Rationale*, and vestments are given primary place in the discussion of that synthesis. This guiding principle is made most evident in the very title and central conceit of Durand’s entire opus, which expands Innocent’s brief mention of the episcopal pectoral ornament called the *rationale*, taken from the primary element of the high priest’s attire in Exodus 28. Durand explains the rich symbolism of the title in the Proem to the treatise:

Sane liber iste Rationalis uocabulo descriptur. Nam quemadmodum in rationali iudicii quod legalis pontifex ferebat in pectore scriptum erat manifestatio et veritas sic et hic rationes uarietatum in diuinis officiis et earum ueritas describuntur et manifestantur quas in scrinio pectoris sui ecclesiarium prelati et sacerdotes debent fideliter conseruare. Et sicut in illo erat lapis in cuius splendore filii Israel Deum sibi fore propitium agnoscebant, sic et deutus lector ex huius lectionis splendore in diuinorum officiorum mysteris eruditus agnoscit Deum fore nobis propitium, nisi forte eius indignationem culpe offendiculo improuide incurramus.

[The word *Rationale* is appropriately used as the title of this book, because just as “revelation and truth” were written on the pectoral of judgment that the High Priest bore on his vestments, so too the *Rationale* contains the reasons for the variations of the Divine Offices, and their inner meaning is described and made manifest. The prelates and priests of the Church should faithfully keep these truths in the chamber of their heart. In the pectoral of judgment, moreover, there was a stone by whose splendor the sons of Israel could know that God’s favor was with them. In the same way, the devout reader, instructed in the mysteries of the divine offices by the splendor of this book, will be able to know that God’s favor will be with us, unless we incur his indignation through the commission of some sin.]

In so closely aligning his learned text with a material liturgical ornament, Durand dismisses up front any notion that the ornamental inherently breeds frivolity and excess. The *rationale*, moreover, is not just any ornament: as a contemporary decoration, it was worn in the center of the bishop’s chest and represented some of the most lavish and detailed decoration of the liturgical vestments. Durand goes on to describe the four colors of gold in the *rationale* in terms of the principles (*rationes*) that are founded, again, in the “variety of ecclesiastical [things and] offices” [*varietaetum in ecclesiasticis rebus atque officiis*], variations that are manifested in terms of the fourfold allegorical interpretation: “the historical, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical,
with faith [gold] at the center of all colors” [istorico, allegorico, tropologico et anagogico, fide media colorantur]. In this way he makes doubly clear that the two *rationales*—both ornament and text—are meant to clarify and unify any differences or disparities in ecclesiastical appearances or manner.

Durand’s text illuminates the slipperiness of clothing as a symbol, and especially as a symbol of spiritual purity. He teases out again and again the tension between outside and inside, material and immaterial; just as in the above passage the “truth” of the *rationale* manifests itself both externally and internally, so in the Proem to Book III each priest is told to take heed once again that he “not bear a sign without embodying what it signifies; that is, wearing a vestment without its virtue” [ut signum sine significato non ferat; ut uestem sine uirtute non portet]. In explaining more fully the relationship between person and vestments, he quotes an illuminating passage from the liturgical ceremony for the consecration of a bishop (a ceremony that he himself wrote in his popular pontifical):

> Pontificalem itaque gloriam non iam honor commendat uestium, sed splendor animarum, quoniam et illa que quondam carnalibus blandiebantur obtutibus, ea potius que in ipsis erant intelligenda poscebant; ut quicquid illa uelamina in fulgore auri, in nitore gemmarum, et in multimodi operis uarietate signabant, hoc iam in moribus actibusque clarescat. Cum et apud ueteres reuerentiam ipsa significationum species optineret, et apud nos certiora sunt experimenta rerum quam enigmata figurarum.

[Now the honor of the vestments does not confer pontifical glory, but rather the splendor of souls, since those things which flatter the carnal gazes more properly summon us to the things that ought to be understood by these vestments, so that whatever these clothes signified with glittering gold, in splendid gems, and with a wide variety of workmanship, can now shine forth in good morals and deeds. Among the ancients, the visual appearance of something acquired as much reverence as what it signified, but for us, the experience of things is more certain than the enigma of figures.]

An ecclesiastical figure with noticeably luxurious attire, the bishop is thus held up by Durand (who wrote this text shortly after his own appointment as bishop of Mende) as a potential example for all religious regarding the ideal relationship to one’s ornaments. Even as the bishop is vested with material symbols of his episcopal power in the above passage, he is reminded of the inherent capacity of such garments to seduce the viewer with their surface beauty and of the responsibility he has to outshine glorious appearance with
glorious conduct—to bring a new meaning and implication, *significatio*, to the outward form, *species*, of the vestments. In the last line of this passage we might even glimpse a possible reason for Durand’s dogmatic insistence throughout his treatise on the fundamental power of sartorial symbols and allegorical interpretation, that is, the hint at a contemporary shift in interest away from such obscure figures, or *enigmata figurae*. Similar allegorical interpretations of the Mass were disparaged by Albertus Magnus, for example, who died shortly before Durand started writing his *Rationale*.\(^{23}\)

The thirteenth century marked a period of emergence for the figure of the bishop in the medieval Church, and Durand’s corresponding emphasis on episcopal ornaments is obvious in his text, the Proem of which expressly outlines the sequential donning of fifteen episcopal vestments from step one, putting on the sandals, “that he will be mindful of the Lord’s Incarnation”; to step four, donning the belt, “so that he can curb the impulse towards illicit behavior”; to step eight, donning the gloves, “so that he will avoid vainglory”; to the fifteenth object, treading on carpets, “so that he might show that he despises this world and loves the celestial realm.”\(^{24}\) Each of these garments receives another full chapter of exposition in the body of the book, most of which, like the introductory descriptions, address both the temporal aspect of the vestment and its transcendent possibilities, each garment working to remind the wearer of the moral weight and spiritual vulnerabilities associated with his worldly attachments as well as the possibility of surpassing the mortal, material realm through the divine elements those same garments represent. In the bishop’s garments, we learn that it is not only the pectoral ornament, or *rationale*, that Durand uses as a unifying symbol for the diverse orders of the Church. As Elliott notes, the bishop’s crucial role at the top of the Church hierarchy is also symbolized by the fact that his numerous garments literally encompass those designated to the orders beneath him: in Durand’s words, the bishop “wears all the ornaments, to show that he possesses all the orders perfectly.”\(^{25}\)

There is one problem, however, with the “perfection” of the bishop’s multitidinous sartorial representation. That is, as Durand himself points out, the thirteenth-century bishop wears fifteen vestments, whereas God only stipulates eight for Aaron in Exodus 28.\(^{26}\) Durand explains this disparity first by equating sartorial excess with excessive devotion; he quotes Matthew 5:20, stating that “our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, if we would enter into the kingdom of heaven.” He then offers another solution, which is to count the bishop’s garments in a different way: “On the other hand,” he says, “it may also be said that our bishop has eight from head to feet, if we except the ornaments of his feet and hands.”
Subtracting the footwear from the bishop’s vestimentary numerology makes sense, Durand further states, because it is the pope, rather than the bishop, who is told to “go ye and teach all nations.” Apparently not being able to find a justification for excluding the bishop’s handwear—that is, the gloves that had become one of the most recognizable aspects of episcopal attire—Durand leaves that part of his new argument out altogether.

This less-than-successful attempt to reconcile such a noticeable disparity in his exegetical explanation of contemporary bishops’ vestments helps to illuminate an underdiscussed element of Durand’s text and its context. Durand’s use of a well-known and somewhat old-fashioned genre, his reliance on earlier, authoritative liturgical writers, his repeated citations of biblical, especially Old Testament sources for his allegory, and, I would argue, the perceived stability of ecclesiastical dress since the Middle Ages, all give the critical impression that the ordered symbolism and use of vestments described in the Rationale mirror an ordered use and symbolism in contemporary practice and perception. As Elliott puts it, ecclesiastical vestments seem “frozen in time,” trapped in an aesthetic rooted in early Roman ecclesiastical attire.27 A closer look at the subtler tensions in Durand’s treatise and its larger circumstances, however, offers a different impression. As I will discuss in the next section, the heavy-handed regulating and ritualizing in the thirteenth century from Lateran IV onward makes it clear that at least in this period, mutability in religious dress as well as inappropriate clerical use of both religious and secular attire were seen as problems that needed to be rationalized and homogenized—that is, they existed to the extent that they needed to be controlled. Durand’s elaborate interpretations of the vestments seem to tap into this impulse, often working so hard to tie each piece of attire to an authoritative biblical passage—preferably from Exodus 28—that the meanings of individual garments often contain obvious gaps or duplications.

Directly after explaining away the issue of the fifteen ecclesiastical garments, for example, Durand addresses yet another discrepancy: in fact the vestments include more than the already problematic fifteen garments listed. Durand proceeds to discuss the existence of two important contemporary garments not included in Innocent’s earlier text and that he cannot seem to easily categorize. The first of these garments is put on before all other sacred vestments: the linen surplice (superpellicium). The surplice was a modified version of the white linen alb, and its ritual use was promoted in the thirteenth century from being worn solely as a choir vestment to being worn for the administration of the sacrament and other priestly services; it had not yet in this period become the distinctive garment of the lower orders.28 Durand seems to have no problem creating a consistent interpretation of this vest-
ment: the garment, he says, is to be worn over common dress because it is a figure for the mortification of the flesh: literally worn over, *super*, the tunics of skin, *pellicias tunicas*, in which Adam was clad after the Fall. Its whiteness represents the cleanness and purity of chastity; its role as the first sacred garment represents the primary virtue of innocence; its ampleness represents ample charity; and its crosslike shape represents Christ's passion, as those who wear it should experience crucifixion for their vices and concupiscence [quodque illud gerentes crucifigi debent uitiis et concupiscentiis]. In his final point about this garment, he ties it to Exodus 28, stating that, like Moses, who used the clothing offered by the people of the Tabernacle to make Aaron's first garments, so the surplice is sometimes made of the white linen cloths put on babies during the baptism ceremony.

Durand has a more difficult time explaining the second “extra” garment, which is put on after all the other sacred attire. The cope or long cloak (*pluviale* or *capa*) also came into its liturgical importance in the thirteenth century. Early-thirteenth-century ecumenical and provincial regulations deemed the *cappa clausa* or closed cope a universal and properly modest garment for the clergy (as opposed to the open cloak, or *capa scissa*); as one bishop states, the cope is a piece of attire “which adapts itself . . . to every order.” Yet as the century wore on, the cope also became a privileged garment of paramount value and importance, usually made of silk, and highly ornamented—often more so than the chasuble—for its use in processions. By the second half of the century it had become, according to historian Janet Mayo, “the principal vestment of the Church,” worn by priests and upper clergy for all ceremonial occasions not connected with the Mass itself; its shape had also become more fitted and its hood had become a decorative appendage. The cope’s aesthetic purpose was so ritualized that its color began to change for the feast occasion. In Lincoln in 1260, the ceremonies for martyrs required red copes, for confessors green or brown, and for matrons or betrothed a saffron color. The back of the cope—the part most often on view to the congregation—became the most highly ornamented area, eventually changing its shape to facilitate the Eucharistic canon when the host had to be raised into the air. Episcopal and papal copes were of course the most highly decorated, often with Opus Anglicanum, the world-renowned English embroidery that reached its peak in the thirteenth century (see plate 3). Such rich copes became important symbolic gifts within the Church, a type of ecclesiastical currency. Besides the copes and other vestments required by the thirteenth-century constitutions to be provided to Churches by their parishioners, exchequer records document Henry III’s various purchases of expensive copes for chapels and bishops; in addition, “profession” copes were required to be given to the
Church of Canterbury by each subordinate bishop in the diocese as a symbol of the bishop's canonical compliance. As my discussion of “Song Upon the Tailors” will further demonstrate, by the end of the thirteenth century when Durand was writing, the cope was clearly an object of beauty, luxury, ritual—and derision. Matthew Paris, for example, describes Innocent IV in 1246 as greedily demanding Opus Anglicanum from the English to wear on the orphreys (or decorative bands) of his processional copes as well as his chasubles. Paris, admittedly a biased observer, depicts the pope as attempting to get the embroidery pro nihilo, for nothing, a display of open avarice which he claims offended even the scruples of the London merchants. Most likely because they were not strictly liturgical garments, copes were also one of the few priestly vestments that were decorated with personal identification markers, often embroidered with initials, names, and heraldic devices of the wearer or donor rather than with divine or biblical figures or conventional designs. Such expensive and vain personal touches risked undermining the tenets of Christian stoicism as well as (at least in terms of the wearer's devices) the constitutional idea that priestly vestments were owned by the parishioners and not by the Church or priests. Such extravagant decoration might well have helped fuel the cope's associations with clerical avarice and abuse.

It is in this context that we must understand both Durand's inclusion of the cope and its allegorical interpretation. As if to counter such accusations, for example, Durand immediately connects the cope with the “tunic of the law” from Exodus 28, even before giving the physical details of the garment and their basic allegorical interpretations:

Est etiam et alia uestis que pluuiale uel capa uocatur, que creditur a legali tunica mutuata; unde sicut illa tintinabulis, sic ista fimbriis insignitur, que sunt labores et huuius mundi sollicitudines. Habet etiam capucium, quod est supernum gaudium. Prolixa est, usque ad pedes, per quod perseverantia usque in finem significatur. In anteriori parte aperta est, ad notandum quod sancte conuersantibus uita patet eterna, seu quod eorum uita patere debet aliis in exemplum.

[There is also another vestment that is called the pluvial or cope, which is believed to have been borrowed from the tunic of the Old Law; and so where there were bells, now it is marked with fringes, which are the labors and worries of this world. It also has a hood, which is supernatural joy. It is long, going down to the feet, which signifies perseverance right to the end. In the front it is open, to note that eternal life is open to those who]
live in holiness, or whose life ought to be made well known as an example to others.]\(^{37}\)

To this description of the cope Durand then adds an anagogic interpretation, linking it to the resurrection of the dead:

Rursus, per capam gloriosa corporum immortalitas intelligitur; unde illam nonnisi in maioribus festiuitatibus induimus, aspicentes in futuram resurrectionem, quando electi, deposita carne, binas stolas accipient, uidelicet requiem animarum et gloriam corporum. Que capa recte interius patula est, et, nisi sola necessaria fibula, inconsuta; quia corpora iam spiritualia facta nullis animam obturabunt angustiis. Fimbriis etiam subornatur; quia tunc nostre nichil deerit perfectioni, sed quod nunc ex parte cognoscimus, tunc cognoscemus sicut et cogniti sumus.

[To continue, the cope is understood to be the glorious immortality of the body; and for this reason, we only wear it on major feast days, looking toward the future resurrection when the elect, having set aside the flesh, will receive two stoles, namely, the eternal rest of their souls and a glorified body. This cope is appropriately wide-open on the inside and is not sewn together, but only held together out of necessity by a clasp; and this is because when bodies become glorified, they will no longer impede the needs of the soul. The cope is also decorated with fringes, since in the future, there will be nothing lacking for our perfection, but now, we only have a partial understanding, but then, we will understand all things just as we ourselves are understood.]\(^{38}\)

Durand depicts the cope as representing material and immaterial, present and future, mortal and immortal: it is both the world inherited through Adam, with its “labors and cares,” and the “glorious immortality” that those who resist such sins will acquire at Judgment. The inherent contradiction in such symbolism is uniquely documented in the manuscript discrepancies involving this passage. While some versions of the *Rationale* state, as above, that the fringe illuminates our own perfection, others state just the opposite, that it represents the completeness of our imperfection (*imperfectioni*).\(^ {39}\)

The cope stands out more overtly in Durand’s text because it once again leads to his defensive avowal of the appropriateness of vestments not explicitly listed in the Bible. Furthermore, it marks the one place in this book where he explicitly addresses contemporary concerns about the growing richness of ecclesiastical attire. He states, “But certain heretics do vainly talk,
affirming that it can nowhere be found in the New Testament that Christ or his disciples did put on the previous vestments, rashly censuring us that we adorn ourselves with such things” [Quidam autem heretici garriunt nusquam reperiri in nouo testamento quod Christus, uel discipuli eius, premissis uestibus induerentur, reprehendentes nos temere, quia talibus ornamur]. Durand gives a surprising amount of attention to the arguments of these “heretics,” diligently citing their biblical precedents for complaint. Their accusations, he says, rely on the fact that Christ is said to have used none but his own ordinary garments (John 13:12) and that he warned against those who love to walk in long garments (Luke 20:46). Furthermore, the detractors claim, those who wear such attire wish to appear more righteous and better than the people, and are more concerned with the superficies that the public sees than the underlying truth that God sees (Luke 16:15). Curiously, after delineating the precise arguments against these particular garments, Durand’s own generalized counterarguments seem evasive and inadequate. While he says righteously that the Old Testament will prove them wrong—“their error is most plainly confounded by that which goes before”—the actual examples he uses by no means dispel the allegations. He defends the lack of biblical precedent for these garments, for example, by quoting Ezekiel 42 and 44, in which God stipulates that those who enter his sanctuary to minister shall wear special garments (linen rather than wool) and shall take off those garments when they leave to join the people—passages that discuss material, not style, and make no mention of the “extra” vestments that he has just described in detail and about which he claims his detractors explicitly complain. Durand’s next strategy is to side-step the issue of biblical precedent altogether in favor of Church custom: he lists and interprets the many white linen garments already worn successfully by various orders. He then moves on to list the vestments decreed by the “new” canons put into effect by ecclesiastical councils. Nowhere does he attempt to defend the issue of biblical or cultural precedent for the much larger question of the luxurious cope.

As we can see in these passages, even while Durand’s interpretations attempt to side-step their own gaps and inadequacies, they do not avoid the provocative questions about changes in ecclesiastical dress overall. His citation of “that which goes before” as the preferred exemplar for understanding contemporary usage of Church vestments correlates with his overall reliance on the Old Testament, and specifically the “clothing of the law” (the *legalia indumenta*), throughout this work, beginning with the *rationale judicii*, or the Jewish priestly ornament from Exodus 28 that is the namesake of his opus. Yet at the same time, his treatise also takes pains to include the most current ecclesiastical ornament, to the point of discussing garments not found in his
immediate sources and for which there is no room in traditional numerological and hermeneutic structures. In addition, he almost always offers an example of the transcendent possibilities of ornaments to go along with the Old Testament precedence, addressing the twofold nature of the vestment as on the one hand a symbol for divine order and perfection and on the other a symbol for the material, worldly imperfection that must be transcended.

Going back to the Proem of the treatise, we can see that Durand has in fact carved out a specific space for this type of interpretation, laying the groundwork for his extended attempts to reconcile contemporary changes—yes, even fashions—in ecclesiastical ornament and ritual with seemingly implacable Old Testament law. Here Durand suggests explicitly that continuity can be found only through metaphorical or allegorical interpretation. He categorizes types of change to make them seem ordered and stable: of the things commanded by the law, he says, some are meant to be understood morally or literally (for example, “you shall not kill,” and “honor thy father”), while others are meant to be understood mystically or metaphorically (the sacraments, for instance, and “you shall not wear a garment made of wool and cloth”). According to Durand, while the former type of law never changes, the latter type changes in its outward, surface form, but the mystical or metaphorical signification (and hence the law) remains the same.41 This discussion makes way for Durand’s explanation of the fourfold allegorical interpretation, and it encapsulates the usefulness of allegory as a hermeneutic that absorbs various kinds of change.

Thus, in linking ecclesiastical ornamentation to biblical directives in general and to Christ’s life in particular, Durand once again strives to give the impression of age-old stability. Like the changes in secular attire that I describe in my previous chapter, the appearance, style, and value of religious vestments were rapidly changing in the thirteenth century, a phenomenon that must have been as readily apparent to Durand and his episcopal contemporaries as it was to poets and satirists. Durand’s text not only underscores the necessity of clerical meditation on the use and understanding of vestments in general and of each garment in particular, but also reminds us that such meditation often dealt with the fundamental conflict surrounding ecclesiastical ornament: the problematic materiality and commerciality of the objects used to represent the sublime. Durand’s process of finding biblical meaning if not precedent in each garment and ornament worn in Mass or other clerkly ceremonies in effect works to distinguish the changes in Church attire from similar changes in the secular world. If the aesthetic and use of vestments are guided by Old Testament law and by Christ’s experience dressed in mortal skin, then they cannot also be guided by the fluctuations of
fashion that govern secular clothing and goods. In fact one of the burdens of Book III of the *Rationale* as a whole might be said to be its attempt to give Church vestments unquestionable biblical and cultural authority and thus to keep their changes from being recognized as such.

**LEX METAMORPHOSEOS AND “SONG UPON THE TAILORS”**

Bishop Durand’s largely futile efforts to recast vestimentary change as a form of stasis in his *Rationale* might be said to have a foil in a satirical poem apparently written over twenty years earlier, called “Song Upon the Tailors,” which casts both episcopal attire and allegorical readings such as those in the *Rationale* as irresponsibly and irretrievably changeable. The “law of metamorphosis” that governs clerical conduct in this poem helps to establish its satirical features as a goliardic poem, a popular genre of ecclesiastical parody in thirteenth-century England that imagined an upside-down religious order made up of vagabonds who vow to live according to personal pleasures and who follow one gluttonous Bishop Goliard.42

“Song Upon the Tailors” is written in Latin and Anglo-Norman and found in British Library, MS Harley 978, an important thirteenth-century English miscellany that gives us what is thought to be the earliest English lyric, “Sumer is icumin in,” as well as the only complete collection of both the *Fables* and the *Lais* of Marie de France.43 This manuscript provides an important context for the anonymous poem by suggesting a probable date for its copying, 1261–65, as well as by providing a group of companion poems from which one can gather a more complete picture of the poem’s ideological grounds. While Harley 978 begins with a selection of mainly Latin hymns and prayers, for example, the portion of the manuscript that contains “Song Upon the Tailors” contains in its forty-two folios a much more partial, subjective picture of contemporary culture and events: goliardic poems on ecclesiastical corruption, short poems on clerkly and lay avarice, songs on the times, two poems on the martyrdom of Thomas Becket, the French satire *La Besturné* about corruption regarding the bishopric of Winchester in 1262, and the *Song of Lewes*, which celebrates Simon de Montfort’s moral and military victory over Henry III in 1264. Harley 978 has long been linked to the Benedictine Abbey of Reading, an important monastery founded by Henry I, who was buried there, and consecrated by Thomas Becket. Recently Andrew Taylor has convincingly argued that the owner of Harley 978 was a particular monk at Reading named William of Winchester, and that this section of the miscellany was most likely copied by a monk at Reading.44
As the poems accompanying “Song Upon the Tailors” reveal, the short period from 1261–65 to which the copying of the manuscript has been dated was especially volatile in English political leadership. Baronial reform and rebellion against Henry III dominated the political landscape, the highlights of which were the creation of the Provisions of Oxford, a baronial constitution forcing Henry to recognize the Parliament, in 1258–59; Simon de Montfort’s capture and imprisonment of Henry at the Battles of Lewes when the king refused to honor the terms of the Provisions, in 1264; and de Montfort’s eventual defeat and death at the Battle of Evesham, in 1265. This was also a period when long-held clerical grievances came to a head, culminating in 1261 when Archbishop Boniface of Canterbury legislated, with ecclesiastical sanctions, a series of provincial constitutions formally claiming clerical rights and liberties and requiring the king to remedy their complaints about his privileging of royal law over divine law. The monastery at Reading seems to have had a certain number of ties to the secular and ecclesiastical reforms of the time, as Simon de Montfort passed through Reading in June 1263 on his campaign to restore the Oxford Provisions, and in October 1264 the Abbey hosted an ecclesiastical council that generated the support of the barons who were now in control of the government. While “Song Upon the Tailors” appears more concerned with ecclesiastical corruption than royal corruption, however, its interests are far from explicit. As I will discuss, at times its theme of misrule in general and its focus on distortions of divine law in particular also seem to speak to the political and ideological struggles against Henry, who was not only known by contemporaries as a “Proteus” but who actually courted an association with Fortune’s wheel, having it painted on his palace chambers at Clarendon. The poet’s fascination with changeability means that his objects of satire also sometimes shift depending on the stanza one reads.

The poem makes its theme of changeability clear in an epigraph quoting the famous opening lines of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*: “In nova fert animus mutatas dicere formas / Corpora; Dii, coeptis nam vos mutastis et illas / Aspirate meis” [Of bodies changed to other forms I tell; You gods, who have yourselves wrought every change, Inspire my enterprise]. Its subsequent ninety lines present a dizzying array of social, sexual, economic, religious, and political metamorphoses through the overarching metaphor of a garment tailored according to one owner’s ever-changing needs and desires. The narrative arc follows the progress of a single piece of cloth through its brief but volatile lifespan: what begins as a *capa* (cape or cope) develops quickly (through sewing, collaring, decollaring, squaring, rounding, defurring, and refurring) into other vestimentary forms, such as a mantle (with and with-
out fur lining), a *capuce* or hood, a clerkly *aumuce* or almuce (hooded cape), and gloves. While the poet offers few specifics regarding the status of the garments or the tailoring practices themselves—he shows little professional knowledge about garment-making—he lavishly dramatizes the transformations the cloth undergoes. It is said to “change bodies” like Proteus and experiences “the fortune of Tiresias” by changing its sex; the defurred garment becomes a circumcised Jew, who is later “cleansed by baptism” when the garment is dyed; the sewn and resewn garment is likened to a divorced, remarried, and widowed bride; and finally, the “hypocritical mantle” changes owners as well as social status when it is given to a servant for his wages. The poet infuses his verses with a staggering nomenclature of transformation; words such as *mutare, transmutare, formare, declinare,* and *metamorphoses* saturate the short poem. Within this discourse of change, the dominant categories entail some form of division and/or separation (suggested by words such as *rumpere, separare, divorium, dividere, caedere,* and *violare*) or their opposite, mixing and/or merging (such as *copulare, matrimonium, reparare, consortium, conjugare,* and the Anglo-Norman *espuser*). In addition, shifts in voice, perspective, and language—especially the seemingly random shifts from Latin to Anglo-Norman throughout—structurally reproduce the poem’s central focus on change. Sustaining the poem’s chaotic subject matter is its recurring, hymnlike verse structure: a six-line stanza of two sets of two octosyllabic lines followed by a heptasyllabic one (887887), with the rhyme pattern *aabccb.*

As its modern title suggests, the poem initially presents its hymn to sartorial changeability as a parody of the figure of the tailor. Because of the growing importance of tailored fashions in this period, the tailor achieved visibility as a figure of emerging power and prominence in thirteenth-century Europe. In England, where this poem’s manuscript was copied and owned, the word *taillour* (from the Old French *tailleor,* cutter) emerged in this period in the specific sense of a fashioner of clothes, and the London tailors’ guild was established at the century’s end. As its Ovidian invocation to the “Gods who have wrought every change” suggests, however, the poem’s primary interest is the literary *trope* of the tailor and his craft, rather than the practical aspects of tailoring as a profession. Along with the theme of sartorial shape-shifting and metamorphosis, therefore, the poem offers as a guiding theme the proud tailor who thinks he is a god. In this way the poem engages the trope of the *Deus artifex,* in which the notion of God as a tailor figured prominently due to his creation of Adam’s and Eve’s first garments in Genesis 3:21 and to his extended instructions to Moses about the construction of Aaron’s garments in Exodus 28, upon which Durand so explicitly relied.
The first lines of “Song Upon the Tailors” address these tailor-gods directly, in the form of a mock-service in honor of their feast day:

Ego dixi, dii estis;
Quae dicenda sunt in festis
Quare praetermitterem?
Dii, revera, qui potestis
In figuram novae vestis
Transmutare veterem.

(1–6)

[I have said, you are gods; why should I omit the service that should be said on festival days? Gods certainly you are, who can transform an old garment into the shape of a new one.]

On their surface these lines introduce one of the most foundational complaints in medieval discourses about secular fashion, which is the change from old-fashioned, traditional attire to new shapes and styles, a phenomenon that makes up Sarah-Grace Heller’s criterion number one of the thirteenth-century fashion system. On their surface these lines introduce one of the most foundational complaints in medieval discourses about secular fashion, which is the change from old-fashioned, traditional attire to new shapes and styles, a phenomenon that makes up Sarah-Grace Heller’s criterion number one of the thirteenth-century fashion system.53

Several aspects of this stanza, however, suggest an additional meaning. To describe the newly tailored form as a figura, for example, seems implicitly to invoke the allegorical process of figural interpretation by which New Testament meaning can come from the Old Testament text, the sense of figura described by Erich Auerbach and used, somewhat after its heyday, in Durand’s Rationale.54 The mention of the “old” garment that is transformed into the “new” thus appears to include an inside clerical joke not only about the allegorical process itself, but also possibly about its current unfashionability and declining favor among theologians. Likewise, the word for change used here, transmutare, also had specialized usages in ecclesiastical contexts, being a term employed at various times to depict the change that happens at the consecration of the Mass and also a term for the translation of a bishop.55 Last, the opening phrase Ego dixi, dii estis repeats a verse from the Vulgate’s Psalm 81, a passage in which God judges the appointed gods of the world, condemning their neglect of the poor and needy and their acceptance of wickedness, darkness, and disorder.56 In the New Testament Christ repeats the same phrase in order to defend himself from accusations of blasphemy for calling himself the son of God: he asks his accusers, “nonne scriptum est in lege vestra quia ego dixi dii estis” [“Is it not written in your law, I said you are gods?” (John 10:34)]. Together these passages reveal a clear
ecclesiastical subtext of this poem, exposing the work as a type of double 
contrafactum: a poem that uses the lyric form of a hymn to describe secular 
sartorial disorder, but then adds another layer of parodic inversion in which 
the true target is not tailors in themselves, but Church leaders who act like 
tailors. Such figures, the passage dramatically suggests, have come to their 
moment of judgment.57

The demand for judgment over clerical conduct in this poem and in 
other poems in Harley 978 reflects the growing scrutiny of clerkly behavior 
in this period of the thirteenth century, an outcome of the increased articu-
lation of the rights and responsibilities of the clergy following the canons of 
the Fourth Lateran Council. While the Lateran IV canons detailed precise 
requirements of clerical restraint from various temporal pleasures, including 
incontinence, drunkenness, laziness, and gambling, the most visible reforms 
were sartorial, an apparent consequence of Innocent III’s particular inter-
est in clothing symbolism and regulation throughout his papacy.58 Cordelia 
Warr has argued that Innocent’s regulation of dress marked a shift away from 
earlier decrees stressing basic sartorial humility and toward an emphasis on 
ecclesiastical expression through specific visual symbols.59 Canon 16 of Lat-
eran IV seems to signal this change, outlining a uniform style for all orders— 
a full-length garment not too short or too long, which is closed in front—as 
well as outlawing certain fashions deemed too ‘secular’: long sleeves, embroi-
dered or pointed shoes, red or green colors, gold or silver buckles, rings, and 
ornamental accoutrement for horses. Part of a larger attempt to systematize 
ecclesiastical practices in the thirteenth century, these sumptuary regulations 
reveal the extent to which change and difference were suppressed in the fur-
therance of the appearance of a unified, unchanging Church. Even as the 
doctrine of transubstantiation made transmutation of matter itself the center 
of Church ceremony in this period, the bodies that performed that ceremony 
were expected to appear more regularized and fixed, less capable of material 
change.60

Importantly, the canons also outlined a structure for the institutional 
observation and correction of that conduct. According to the sixth canon, 
each archbishop, upon pain of suspension from office and benefits, was to 
hold an annual provincial council with the purpose of rectifying abuses, 
reforming clerical morals, and revisiting the canonical rules, after which they 
were to publish the findings and appoint personnel to “investigate what needs 
correction or reform.”61 While it appears that few English bishops in the thir-
teenth century actually held the prescribed councils regularly, the years lead-
ing up to the creation of Harley 978 saw their rapid increase. The councils of 
1257, 1258, and 1261 reformulated earlier decrees on clerical conduct, and
several bishops in this period followed the earlier example of Robert Gros-sesteste, Bishop of Lincoln and steadfast reformer, who, despite royal inter-
ference, had conducted a personal visitation of his diocese in the 1240s to
inquire into the intimate details of cleric and lay lives. When the poet of
“Song Upon the Tailors” presents Church leaders as tailors who shape and
reshape their subjects on a whim, he could perhaps be reacting to the new
zeal with which some English bishops embraced these regulations on clerical
attire. And when he asks for judgment on these tailor-gods by echoing Psalm
81, he signals a turning of the tables in which the unjust judges on earth find
that they themselves must also be judged.

The remainder of “Song Upon the Tailors” seems to reflect this power
inversion. In a stanza rich with allusion, the specific mention of gloves and
their liturgical function indicates that the poem will address bishops’ attire in
particular:

Si quid restat de morsellis
Caesi panni sive pellis,
Non vacat officio:
Ex hiis fiunt manuthecae,
Manutheca quidem Graecè
Manuum positio.
(31–36)

[If there remain any morsels of the cloth or skin which is cut, it does not
want a use: of these are made gloves; a glove is called in Greek “the plac-
ing of the hands.”]

Bishops’ gloves were highly powerful garments in the symbolic system of
the medieval Church. Along with the ring, staff, and mitre, or two-pointed
hat, they designated the bishop’s symbolic domain and were explicitly asso-
ciated with the ritual “laying on of hands”—cheirontonein, or cheirotonia—
alluded to here in the last line. A rite stemming from various biblical passages
(for example, Acts 6:6, 1 Timothy 4:4, and 2 Timothy 1:6), the laying on
or ‘imposition’ of hands represents the special power of a bishop to impart
the grace of the Holy Spirit ex opera operato in various ecclesiastical ceremo-
nies. The gloved placing of the hands implicitly marked the transformative
moment of these ceremonies. In the ordination of other bishops or priests,
for example, the bishop’s placing of the hands symbolized the conferral of
the spiritual power of the priesthood and was immediately followed by the
investiture of the garments that symbolized that power. The primary con-
notation of the gloves and the laying on of hands, however, was the bishop’s
capacity to preside over the Eucharistic liturgy, and thus to consecrate and
officiate the ultimate act of transmutation, transubstantiation. The period to
which Harley 978 has been dated coincides with the Church’s codification
of Eucharistic importance in ecclesiastical ritual; the feast of Corpus Christi
was first implemented in Urban IV’s papal bull of 1264, exactly the period in
which the manuscript seems to have been copied. In describing the scraps
of leftover material that mark the mundane beginnings of a bishop’s ceremo-
nial gloves, the sacrilegious poet of “Song Upon the Tailors” undermines the
symbolic transformative power of the garments themselves.

Durand’s discussion of the symbolism of the episcopal gloves explains
the allegory behind the ritual: a bishop’s gloves are made from goat skin, like
those garments worn by Jacob, because the skin represents the “image of sin”
with which his mother Rebecca (who represents the grace of the Holy Spirit)
dressed the “true Jacob” (that is, the works of Christ). The skins, and the
gloves made from them, thus represent the material challenges of the sin-
ful human body itself, which Christ puts on to avoid detection, and whose
bodily appetites and toils he experiences firsthand. As Durand continues:

Christus enim similitudinem peccati sine peccato suscepit, ut incarnationis
misterium dyabolo celaretur. Nam ad similitudinem peccatorum esurit et
sitiuit, doluit et expauit, dormiuit et laborauit.

[Christ took on the appearance of sin, though He was without sin, so that
the mystery of the Incarnation would be hidden from the devil. For being
in the image of sinners, He hungered and thirsted, mourned, became fear-
ful, slept and toiled.] In Durand’s explanation the episcopal gloves become a larger metaphor for
the beleaguered ecclesiastical relationship to clothing in this period. Those
bishops appearing in lavish garments, he suggests, are to be perceived as
Christ in human weeds or as Jacob in Esau’s garments and skins; though
they take on the likeness—the similitude—of sin, they do not indulge in the
sin itself.

“Song Upon the Tailors” takes pains to show the failure of this ideal.
At a time when clerical bodies were being regulated in a way that tried to
restrict change and diversity, this poem insists not merely on the somatic
changeability of those bodies but on their diverse and vacillating apparel. In
the second stanza the poem settles on the bishop’s capa or cope as the best
metaphor for this changeability, a garment whose potential vacillations of
style, form, and function the poet describes for fourteen stanzas. Stanza 2 begins:

Pannus recens et novellus  
Fit vel capa vel mantellus,  
Sed secundum tempora  
Primum capa, post pusillum  
Transmutatur haec in illum;  
Sic mutatis corpora.  
(7–12)

[The cloth, while fresh and new, is made either cape/cope or mantle; but in order of time, first it is a cape/cope, after a little space it is transformed into the other; thus you change bodies.]

As the punning reference to changing bodies at the end of this passage suggests, the poet’s fascination with corporeal metamorphosis means he often conflates the artisan and consumer, the shaper and the shape-shifter. Yet as this passage also shows, the clothes hold as much interest to this poem as the tailors. To the stylistic transformations that the capa underwent in the thirteenth century, the poet adds the practical and inevitable process of recycling clothing. Because of their large size and valuable material and decoration—essentially an entire semicircle of precious silk and embroidery—copes likely were made into and out of other garments over time. One of the earliest extant copes—the famous Syon cope from the early 1300s (see plate 3)—shows signs of this kind of alteration and may have been a chasuble at one point.

What the poet focuses on, however, is less the fact of recycling ecclesiastical clothing than the magnitude, speed, and motivation behind the garments’ transformations. In the passage I have also used as an epigraph to this chapter, what could be regarded as a prudent and charitable undertaking is instead portrayed as a protean ethos of change:

Antiquata decollatur,  
Decollata mantellatur,  
Sic in modum Proteos  
Demutantur vestimenta;  
Nec recente est inventa  
Lex metamorphoseos.  
(13–18)
[When it becomes old, the collar is cut off; when deprived of the collar, it is made a mantle, thus in the manner of Proteus, are garments changed; nor is the law of metamorphosis a new discovery.]

Here the owner’s underlying attention to the condition of aging garments as they are recycled and handed down is offset by the poet’s presentation of the changes these garments undergo, their “law of metamorphosis,” which, as the poem progresses, conveys such frequent and rapid movement that the effect is often not of old, overused attire but of newly and continuously revised garments, always novel or different because of what one can add (a hood, gloves, fur on the outside) or subtract (a collar, fur lining). The following stanza represents this effect well, suggesting as it does four successive sartorial changes in one short season. The seemingly arbitrary shift into Anglo-Norman in line 26 heightens the effect of indiscriminate variability:

Bruma tandem revertente  
*Tost unt sur la chape enté  
  Plerique capucium;  
Alioquin dequadratur  
De quadrato retundatur,  
  Transit in almucium.  
(25–30)

[When, at length, winter returns, many engraft immediately upon the cape a capuce; then it is squared; after being squared it is rounded; and so it becomes an aumuce.]

In such passages even the necessary winterizing of old clothing takes on a decidedly trendy and fashion-forward slant; in this case the *aumuce*—a fur-hooded cape especially popular in the cold cathedrals of England—is positioned as the *au courant* favorite. The *aumuce*, along with other pieces of religious attire, did have the potential for this kind of signification, since which kind of fur lined the hood, squirrel or ermine, carried obvious cultural and hierarchical resonance; some bishops of royal blood, for example, were allowed *aumuces* of spotted ermine with hanging tails.68 The shift to Anglo-Norman here and throughout the poem may also suggest particular practices of the Church leaders; a poem that was copied a few pages after “Song Upon the Tailors” in Harley 978 speaks about a Church dean whose delight in exploring “subaltern things” [*res subalternas* (95)] includes “changing the
tune of his tongue and yesterday’s garments” [Mutans linguae modulum et vestes hesternas (96)] as he heads on his way to taverns.\(^{69}\)

The description of a square garment being “rounded” also has analogues in other poems of Harley 978, which present the metaphor of changing square things for round as a specific type of metamorphosis generated by ecclesiastical corruption—that is, the process of changing honest things for coins. In this way ecclesiastical avarice takes on a Fortune-like cycle of transience, as in the following passage from the same poem a few pages after “Song Upon the Tailors”:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Roma, turpitudinis jacens in profundis,} \\
\text{Virtutes praeposterat opibus inmunis,} \\
\text{Vacillantis animi fluctuans sub undis,} \\
\text{Diruit, aedificat, mutat quadrata rotundis.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(50–53)

[Rome, lying in the depths of turpitude, ranks virtues beneath filthy lucre; fluctuating under the waves of a vacillating mind, she overthrows, builds, and changes square things for round.\(^{70}\)]

In this poem greed causes things physically to change shape by subjecting them to this “round form” [formae . . . rotundae (72)]. The canons, the biblical patriarchs, and even the (square) Book itself succumb to this corruptive process of rounding, as we see in the following playful lines:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Coram cardinalibus, coram patriarcha,} \\
\text{Libra libros, reos res, Marcum vincit marca,} \\
\text{Tantumque dat gratiae lex non parco parca,} \\
\text{Quantum quisque sua nummorum servat in arca.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(61–65)

[Before the cardinals and before the patriarch, a pound overcomes the Bible, money the accused, and a marc Mark, the law sparing to him who is not sparing, gives only as much grace as each has money in his purse.\(^{71}\)]

By connecting episcopal clothing to this more widespread metaphor of shape-shifting corruption, the poet of “Song Upon the Tailors” taps suggestively into another, larger lex metamorphoseos: the ability of avarice to literally and figuratively re-form—to ‘tailor’—the world to suit its desires. Corruption
thus carries an aesthetic effect not just through the appearance of the luxury garment but also in the changed and changing form of that object, a rounding effect embodied by the semicircular capa and arguably underscored by the circular aabccb rhyme pattern of the poem itself.

Another particular complaint that the poet voices in “Song Upon the Tailors” is the bishop’s concealment of the age of his garment coupled with his reluctance to donate it to others. This kind of complaint had precedent among goliardic poems. Hugo of Orleans, also known as Primas, a poet popular in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and the attributed author of at least one other goliardic poem in Harley 978, speaks contemptuously in his poem “Pontificum Spuma” (“Pontifical scum”) about an old unlined cloak, a mantellum sine pluma, given to him by a proud bishop who selfishly tore out the fur lining first. Commenting on clergymen’s avarice as well as, perhaps, on a lack of papal or episcopal protection more generally, the poet compares this flimsy garment to a shroud, and in the final stanza he has the mantle itself speak to confirm its uselessness against the chill and against the speaker’s wheezing cold.72 “Song Upon the Tailors” carries some resemblances to this poem in its extensive complaints about similar sartorial tampering and in its nearly eight stanzas on the removal and replacement of this garment’s lining and fur. After several references to its donation (for example, lines 22 and 88), the last stanza of “Song Upon the Tailors” describes the owner finally giving away his “hypocritical mantle” (90) with a new-looking fur on the outside only after it has become completely devoid of warmth on the inside. This passage also shifts into Anglo-Norman at key moments, this time seeming perhaps to mark the direct speech of the garment’s owner:

Pars pilosa foris paret  
Sed introrsus pilis caret  
Vetustas abscendita;  
Datur tamen, k’il n’i eit perte,  
Servienti, pur deserte,  
Mantellus hypocrita.  
(85–90)

[The hairy part is turned out, but the old part, concealed inwardly, is bare of hairs. Now the hypocritical mantle, in order that there may be nothing lost, is given to the servant for his wages.]

The garment, like its episcopal owner, is hypocritical because it began as one thing and ended as another; in this case, it began as a luxurious processional
cope and ended as a gutted and debased mantle. More than that, however, the false giving in this final passage contradicts one of the most basic tenets of Christian charity, that of giving your goods or clothing to a needier person.

The symbolic act of giving one’s cloak to another was epitomized of course by Saint Martin of Tours, one of the most popular saints of the Middle Ages—and incidentally, the patron saint of tailors—about whose cloak two different charitable stories circulated in this period. The first story takes place when Martin is a soldier in the Roman army and cuts his cloak in half to give to a shivering pauper; he later sees a vision of Christ wearing the half of the cloak he had given to the beggar, who thanks him personally for his charity (after which Martin converts). The later story or “Second Charity” of Saint Martin is even more appropriate in the context of this study. Durand tells a version of the story in Book VII of the *Rationale*: when Martin is bishop of Tours he meets another pauper begging for a warm coat. Martin sends his steward to buy one for him, but when the steward comes back with a cheap cloak (so cheap it should be called a mantle) Martin gives his episcopal vestments to the pauper instead, and takes the skimpy cloak for himself. When Martin celebrates Mass dressed in this decrepit attire that does not properly cover his arms or legs, angels appear and cover his bare arms with bracelets of gold and a ball of fire appears over his head. With such a prevalent cultural understanding of the *capa* as a symbol of charity, the hypocritical garment of “Song Upon the Tailors,” donated only when it has lost its value and functionality, cannot help representing the opposite of proper episcopal behavior in general and of Saint Martin in particular.

While the hypocrisy of the garment in this poem resides most overtly in its sartorial trendiness and in the prelate’s stinginess and lack of true *caritas*, there are also suggestions of other, more serious instances of pretense and impropriety. In the particularly imaginative stanza that directly follows the reference to the *lex metamorphoseos*, for example, the poet presents the sewing up of a torn cloth as a type of sex change that each garment must undergo before the ecclesiastical primates—that is, the archbishops and bishops—will deign to give them to their subordinates:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Cum figura sexum mutant;} \\
\text{Prius ruptam clam reclutant} \\
\text{Primates ecclesiae;} \\
\text{Nec donatur, res est certa,} \\
\text{Nisi prius sit experta} \\
\text{Fortunam Tiresiae.}
\end{align*}
\]

(19–24)
[With their shape they change their sex; the primates of the Church privately close up again what was before torn; nor is it given, assuredly, till it has first undergone the fortune of Tiresias.]

While this passage is clearly meant to shock and ridicule, it is hard to locate unequivocally the transgression to which it alludes. At its most innocuous the secret resewing of the torn garment here suggests an excessive attention to one’s own appearance and a desire to conceal the flaws or tears of the donated garment; perhaps the owner of the garment is turning it from a showy, open episcopal cope to the more modest cappa clausa of the lower orders. At its most provocative the references to a concealed sex change or possible revirginization, the process of literally recluding the torn garment (or body) to make it whole again, suggest lechery and/or sodomy (possibly involving cross-dressing) that has been covered up by the Church, perhaps in the form of the literal seclusion or closing up of the monastic recluse. In either case, the reference to Tiresias, who, like Proteus, is not merely a shape-shifter but also a prophet, makes it apparent that garments and their “fortunes” carry secret knowledge, and that the poet has decided to illuminate for his readers what exactly these particular garments can be made to tell.

THE CIRCUMCISED CLOTH

The implicit comparison between unchanging divine law and the lex metamorphoseos practiced by corrupt ecclesiastics that informs the first half of “Song Upon the Tailors” takes a different form in the second half of the poem, where the dominant subject changes from the shape-shifting sartorial bodies of bishops to one particular type of body refashioned by episcopal ritual. The Jewish body is the explicit object of the sartorial manipulations in this section of the poem, which turns from exploring the changes in the shape and terminology of the cope’s many manifestations and accoutrements to exploring the garment’s second life as a mantle [mantellus] with equally numerous changes in thickness and lining. The poet begins by presenting the garment’s first separation of cloth and fur as a type of circumcision and orientation into Judaism:

Adhuc primo recens anno,
Nova pelle, novo panno,
   In arca reconditur;
Recedente tandem pilo,
Juncturarum rupto filo,
    Pellis circumciditur.
(43–48)

[In the first year, while it is still fresh, the skin and cloth both being new, is laid up in a box; when, however, the fur begins to be worn off, and the thread of the seams broken, the skin is circumcised.]

The next stanza likens this process of circumcision to a “divorce” [divortium (51)] of skin and cloth, after which the circumcised skin attempts the “crime” [delictum (55)] of a second marriage and new conjugal relations with another cloth against the objections of its former partner. Such relations, the poet says, in a stanza that shifts into Latin midstream, are against canon law:

\[
\begin{align*}
    N'est & \text{ de concille, ne de sene,} \\
    Deus & \text{ dras espuser à une pene,} \\
    E si nus le juggium; & \\
    Permittunt hoc decreta? non: & \\
    Sed reclamat omnis canon & \\
    Non esse conjugium. \\
\end{align*}
\]

(61–66)

[It is neither of council nor of wisdom to marry two cloths to one fur, and so we judge it. Do the decretals permit this? No: on the contrary, every canon declares that it is no marriage.]

The cloth eventually marries another skin, but only after it has undergone the cleansing ritual of baptism; that is, after it is dyed:

\[
\begin{align*}
Pannus primum circumcisus & \\
    Viduatus et divisus & \\
    A sua pellicula, & \\
    Jam expertus Judaismus, & \\
    Emundatur per baptismum & \\
    A quacumque macula. \\
    Circumcisus mundatusque & \\
    Est adeptus utriusque & \\
    Legis testimonium; & \\
    Quem baptismus emundavit, & \\
\end{align*}
\]
Cum secunda secundavit
  Pelle matrimonium.

(67–78)

[The cloth having been first circumcised, then widowed and separated from its skin, now having experienced Judaism, is cleansed by baptism from every stain. Being circumcised and cleaned, and having obtained the testimony of both laws, he whom baptism has cleaned contracts a new marriage with a second skin.]

Finally, when this second skin starts to age, it is inverted and a new fur is added, a transformation that the poet describes in terms of those famous Old Testament twins, Jacob and Esau:

Pilis expers, usu fractus,
Ex Esāü Jacob factus,
  Quaunt li peil en est chaü,
Inversatur vice versa,
Rursus idem ex conversa
  Ex Jacob fit Esāü.

(70–84)

[Being devoid of hair and worn by use, from Esau having become Jacob, when the hair is fallen from it, the process is inverted, and again conversely from Jacob it becomes Esau.]

Like the earlier stanzas of the poem, these passages offer few specifics in terms of actual tailoring processes; rather, their sole purpose seems to be to connect the tailor’s transformative art—and thus that of the religious leaders associated with the tailors—to contemporary attitudes toward and regulation of Jews. The poet’s dual focus on the rituals of circumcision and baptism—and on the “two laws” they symbolize—are prime examples. In this poem the aging, deteriorating garment becomes the circumcised Jewish body, which can, through dyeing and tailoring, become a new Christianized one. However, like the sentiment in the rest of the poem, this tailoring process is neither wholly ethical nor wholly controllable; it effects other legally and morally questionable mixings between cloths and is ultimately and problematically reversible. In the end, the addition of new fur means Jacob turns back into Esau.

The convoluted, often inscrutably covert, meanings hidden behind a the-
matics and aesthetics of changeability make “Song Upon the Tailors” a difficult poem to unravel and elucidate, and the question of why the poet chooses to draw his focus so minutely on the legislative fashioning of the converted Jewish body is one of the more curious elements of the poem. In a general sense the poem’s fascination with the somatic metamorphoses from Jewish to Christian and back again reflects a morbid fascination with somatic transformation itself that also permeates the famously anti-Semitic legends about forced Christian conversions in the thirteenth century, which often conflate fears about the circumcision of young Christian children with fears about the mutilation of the Eucharistic Host. The historical context makes clear, however, how appropriate the subject of Jewish conversion to Christianity is to the dating of Harley 978, as the decades leading up to the manuscript’s production were peak years for Jewish conversions to Christianity in England. Social eruptions against Jews also dramatically increased; the years of 1263–65 in particular, which coincide with the dating of this poem, saw the sacking of Jewish neighborhoods in London, Canterbury, Northampton, and Winchester (where the probable owner of Harley 978 was from) and the forced baptism, on pain of death, of many of their occupants. Ecclesiastical discourses describe a persistent threat that Christian converts would revert to their Jewish origins; in the words of the Fourth Lateran Council, some of these converts “do not wholly cast off the old person in order to put on the new more perfectly” [veterem hominem omnino non exuunt, ut novum perfectius induant]. Moreover, this threat was explicitly understood in sartorial terms: the same canon likens these uncertain converts to the mixed garment of Deuteronomy 22:11, a garment of wool and linen together that should not be put on: “indui vestis non debeat lino lanaque contexta.”

Exploiting the metaphorical possibilities of this trope of the hybrid conversi seems to fit into the sacrilegious aesthetic program of “Song Upon the Tailors.” Through closely examining the lifecycle of a bishop’s attire from its initial existence as a fresh, uncut skin to its unfortunate conclusion as a decrepit, worn-out, “hypocritical mantle,” we see revealed a figure whose corruption has transformed him from an example of promising raw material into a prideful, avaricious, uncharitable being whose hypocritical changeability is thrown into relief by the inherently unstable Jewish convert whom he baptizes. Like Durand’s text, however, at the heart of this analogy and at the heart of the poem itself is a focus on how changeable appearance and material circumstances interact with divine, Old Testament law. The “law of metamorphosis” demonstrated by the vacillating bishop and the “two laws”
enacted by the convert are implicitly compared with the ideal stability of divine law. As Jeremy Cohen has pointed out, medieval Christian theology conceived the Jews as the embodiment of biblical law, in Bernard of Clairvaux’s words, the “living letters” of Scripture: a group whose position in the history of the Old Testament and in the life of Jesus, and especially whose future role as witness to Christian redemption (as its future conversion would mark the second coming of Christ) ostensibly gave it a singular and protected purpose in Christian society. In England this symbolism was aesthetically legislated as part of the Jewish badge mandated by Lateran IV: whereas the most usual form of this badge on the continent was a wheel or rouelle, in England it usually consisted of two white or yellow tablets [tabulæ], to symbolize the two tablets of the Old Testament law bestowed by God on Moses.

By bringing the aesthetically inscribed Jewish body into his poem, therefore, the poet plays in a sophisticated way with the symbolic treatment of divine law itself in clerical culture. The sartorial conversion described here appears to work as an elaborate metaphor, once again, for the allegorical hermeneutic method or figura alluded to in the opening stanza of the poem: that is, to convert the Jewish body sartorially marked by the two tablets of the law is to practice typological reading, to literally transmute the Old Testament letter of the law into the New Testament meaning. From its inception this mode of biblical interpretation had been associated with vestimentary metaphor, as a process by which the vesture of the text could be unveiled to reveal its hidden meanings. Durand capitalizes on this association in his Rationale, structuring his concept of the text itself as a version of the sartorial ornament worn on the chest of the pope. The poet of “Song Upon the Tailors” keeps the medium of this metaphor but utterly changes the terms, and in the process illustrates his clear disdain for the practice Durand would use to great effect a little over twenty years later. A bishop who practices such a style of biblical reading, suggests this poet, undertakes a systemic abuse of his material; by cutting, separating, defurring, refurring, dyeing, and stripping all protective lining of the text, he ultimately destroys its value before ever offering it to the masses for their own use.

CONCLUSION

The texts that I have examined in this chapter are deeply rooted in the problematic materialism of representation itself, that paradoxical fact, to borrow Daniel Miller’s words, “that immateriality can only be expressed through
materiality.” As both Durand’s *Rationale* and “Song Upon the Tailors” demonstrate, this paradox is especially evident when the material object involved is clothing, an object indispensable to the seemingly contradictory processes of allegorical exposition and material self-fashioning. This chapter illustrates the multiple uses for this trope in clerical culture, showing on the one hand how changeable secular fashions were used as a negative marker against which theologians strove, often unsuccessfully, to construct the appearance of a stable and unified clerical aesthetic distinct from worldly fluctuations, and on the other hand, how the emerging art of tailoring could be used to reexamine the ethics of aesthetic transformation itself in Church culture, whether that transformation involved the style of bishops’ copes or the style of their biblical interpretations. In the next chapter I will discuss Chaucer’s fourteenth-century *Clerk’s Tale* and *Envoy*, texts whose narrator also uses the trope of vestimentary change to capture the paradoxical connection between allegorical exposition and secular fashions, while at the same time speaking to particular material concerns in his culture regarding the consumption, possession, and ownership by English women of their attire.