Cologne, the abrupt and lasting shift from Low to Upper German is reflected in writing by members of all layers of society. In Augsburg, changes are temporary, with accommodation to perceived prestige varieties seen in the writing of the highest social groups, but not spread down through the general population.

The main strength of this volume lies in it allowing multiple lines of access to a remarkably disparate and interesting range of little-known texts. The title cannot do full justice to its heterogeneity, while the generality of its terms may also seem to overpromise. The focus is on variety of voices, texts and regions, and readers who embrace the turn away from a linear narrative of standardization will find much here that is new and illuminating.

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Medieval Things: Agency, Materiality, and Narratives of Objects in Medieval German Literature and Beyond. Bettina Bildhauer.
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The image of the Round Table in Wirnt of Grafenberg's *Wigalois* from 1372 presents a bright white table with shining golden horns and goblets. The figures wear glittering golden crowns and drink from golden vessels, surrounded by a patterned golden border. This beautiful image, which appears on the cover of Bettina Bildhauer's *Medieval Things*, is shown by Bildhauer to demonstrate a contemporary "aesthetics of maximum shine" (20). Shine is the first means used by Bildhauer to examine how things could acquire a kind of nonhuman agency in medieval narratives. Shiny surfaces were understood, she argues, to interact intensely with their viewers, exerting power through their visual attractiveness and emphasizing the skill with which they were made.

Bildhauer's book brilliantly explores the material power of things in medieval narratives, as she brings a new materialist, pragmacentric (that is, thing-centered) perspective to medieval German literature. As she writes, this approach differs from the majority of new materialist work, which tends to focus on the present, anglophone world. Furthermore, by focusing her analysis on the agency of inanimate objects Bildhauer brings fresh interpretations to the texts she examines which, she claims, is the book's "major research contribution" (4). The ten texts under scrutiny date from the twelfth to the sixteenth century and include both well-known works (such as *Wigalois*) and less-studied texts, including, for instance, Hans Sachs's *Of the Lost Talking Gulden* (1553). Bildhauer also reaches beyond German literature to show how stories written in German were a "melting pot of global traditions" (15), underscoring their influences from Latin, Arabic, French, and Norse sources.

The five chapters explore, in addition to shine, nets and the relationship between materiality and immateriality; thing biographies; rings and the spectrum of human and nonhuman agency; and an in-depth study of treasure and the grail in the canonical works of *Parzival* and *Song of the Nibelungs.* Across these chapters Bildhauer persuasively builds up a rich understanding of the varied ways in which things exerted agency, always being careful to specify that this was not fetishistic, quasi-human agency, but rather thing-specific forms of agency. In so doing, Bildhauer's analysis varies in scale from broader statements on the nature of materiality in medieval texts, to closer readings of particular things and their specific agency within a narrative.

Perhaps unsurprisingly for a literary study, throughout the book Bildhauer's analysis focuses on the linguistic, grammatical, and semantic means through which things are shown to exert power. While she is quick to note in her introduction that this is not a study of "medieval objects or even representations of medieval objects in themselves" (4), the book's focus on language and narrative does seem somewhat at odds with its interest in materiality. Indeed, the discussion of the Round Table mentioned above, as well as Bildhauer's analysis of nets, which utilizes visual sources from the period, is particularly persuasive precisely because it incorporates a consideration of objects and representations of objects. Though Bildhauer seemingly dismisses studies of actual medieval objects as "rarely ask[ing] wider philosophical questions about medieval concepts of materiality, of agency, and of the differences between things and humans" (4), an examination of the scholarship on early modern German things and materiality (such as that of Ulinka Rublack and Stefan Hanß, among others) would surely have been illuminating in this regard.

Also requiring greater consideration are the makers of things, their practices of making, and the materials from which a thing is made. While Bildhauer remarks that the artisanal labor involved in creating an object "is not usually focused upon" (52) in medieval texts, that the prologues of both the twelfth-century *Wedding* and Johann of Würzburg's *William of Austria* compare the art of reading to the practices of a goldsmith (as mentioned by Bildhauer on page 56) suggests that these practices are more important to the interpretation of such texts than Bildhauer indicates. Her discussion of nets as metaphors for narrative might thus have been developed through an examination of contemporary methods and materials used in constructing nets and how these could relate to the weaving together of a story.

If one comes to *Medieval Things* expecting a discussion of actual medieval objects and their materiality, they will be disappointed. Nevertheless, Bildhauer's book leaves the reader with a profound appreciation for the spectrum of agency held by things in medieval German literature and a new understanding of these famous and forgotten narratives. Moreover, it masterfully demonstrates how engaging with the premodern period can enrich current new materialist theories by historicizing ways of understanding the material world.

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