

‘Various Pleasant Fiction’: Embroidering Textiles  
and Texts in Early Modern England

Two Volumes

Volume One

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## Abstract

This thesis considers the role of the needle in early modern English culture and thought, with particular attention to its relationship with textual media and practices. Drawing together textual and material evidence, it overturns assumptions that needles were subordinate to pens and argues instead that needlework was a significant and mainstream cultural practice and form. Contrary to the critical tendency to regard needlework as a feminizing activity or women's interest, sewing engaged both men and women, in ways which were practical, connoisseurial and conceptual. Stitchcraft was recognized as a psychophysiological, spiritually and socially productive practice which was capable of crafting complex ideas. It equally provided an illuminating model for practices of textual composition, exegesis and book use. In material and metaphorical encounters, needles shaped pens, as much as the converse.

Chapter one explores the intersection of men's and women's textile handiwork. Examining hitherto neglected male needle skills, it reveals how men, women, boys and girls collaborated in domestic and commercial environments, and how needles constructed as well as challenged discourses of masculinity. Chapter two considers how practices of sewing were combined with devotional and aural reading practices. Drawing upon theories of skill and embodiment, this chapter refutes notions of sewing as mindless, revealing how stitchery produced desirable psychophysiological effects and heightened makers' dexterity in companionate activities. Chapter three examines embroidered bookbindings. Alongside a handlist of extant examples, it surveys trends in design and readership, before presenting two case-studies which analyse how these covers intervened in textual hermeneutics and book use. Chapter four scrutinizes needlework narratives, examining how the fabric medium created generic and rhetorical features, and provided a model for textual storytelling. An epilogue offers an alternative critical history, imagining a pedagogical space in which needles, rather than pens, take pride of place as tools of creative and aesthetic expression.

## List of Contents

### Volume One

Abstract .....	2
List of Contents .....	3
List of Illustrations .....	5
Acknowledgments .....	11
Author's Declaration .....	13
Introduction .....	14
A Material Approach .....	19
Needlework as a Perceptual Model .....	22
Gender .....	26
Sources and Terms .....	30
Chapter Summaries .....	33
Chapter One: Men's and Women's Textile Work in Early Modern England .....	36
Household Sewing.....	38
The Textile Economy .....	48
Virtue or Vice? Textile Work and Early Modern Manhoods .....	68
Chapter Two: On Making: Textile and Textual Handiwork .....	88
'Book and Needle shar'd the Day': Stitchcraft and Scripture Work .....	93
Grasping Scripture: Needles and Fingers as Instruments of Understanding.....	108
Elizabeth Isham: A Case Study in Devotional Embroidery .....	120
Chapter Three: The Textile Technologies of Early Modern Books .....	139
Embroidered Bindings: Readers, Makers and Texts .....	143
Common Designs .....	152
Embroidered Bindings as Frames .....	158
<i>Parergons</i> and Paratexts: Embroidered Frontispieces .....	160

The Flowers of Scripture .....	171
Conclusion .....	188
Chapter Four: Embroidered Narratives in Textiles and Texts .....	191
Storified Objects .....	197
Following the Thread .....	209
The Flowers of the Needle: Embroidering <i>Copia</i> .....	215
Between <i>Copia</i> and Control .....	227
‘A written Gospell in each little Twist’: Elizabeth Powlet’s Embroidery .....	235
Conclusion .....	250
Conclusion .....	253

## Volume Two

List of Contents.....	260
Figures .....	261
Appendix 1: Hand-List of Books with Embroidered Bindings, Made or Used in England or Scotland, during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, Which Are Now in Known Public or Private Collections .....	315
Appendix 2: Embroidered Bindings Offered for Sale by Sale Houses and Auctioneers .....	429
Appendix 3: Texts with Woven Bindings whose Designs Engage Similar Themes to Those on Contemporaneous Embroidered Bindings.....	465
Abbreviations .....	467
Bibliography (List of Works Cited) .....	468

## List of Illustrations

- Figure 1. Details of accounts in various hands, from Sarah Ballard's Debt Book, The National Archives, Kew, E 101/699/21, 21v–22r. Reproduced by permission of The National Archives. ....261
- Figure 2. 'Sarah Ballard hir Debt Booke', The National Archives, Kew, E 101/699/21, 1r. Reproduced by permission of The National Archives. ....262
- Figure 3. Embroidered knotwork on a sampler, made 1600–1625, 61.6 x 21.6 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 9047-1863. ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London. ....263
- Figure 4. Wall hanging showing Temperance with Sardanapalus, 2.78 x 3.38 m, Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire, NT 1129594.2. ©National Trust/Robert Thrift. ....264
- Figure 5. Wall hanging showing Penelope flanked by Perseverance and Paciens, 2.77 x 3.50 m, Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire, NT 1129593.1. ©National Trust Images/Brenda Norrish. ....265
- Figure 6. Detail of Sardanapalus with a spindle and niddy-noddy, from the hanging of Temperance and Sardanapalus, Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire, NT 1129594.2. ©National Trust. ....266
- Figure 7. 'David and Abigail', British, c. 1650–1675, 37 x 44.7 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 64.101.1310. Gift of Irwin Untermyer, 1964. Used under the OASC license, [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org). ....267
- Figure 8. Front cover of Susanna Hidson's Bible, New York Public Library, New York, \*KC 1657 (Bible. Holy Bible contayning the Old, and New Testaments). Reproduced by permission of the New York Public Library. ....268
- Figure 9. Back cover of Susanna Hidson's Bible, New York Public Library, New York, \*KC 1657 (Bible. Holy Bible contayning the Old, and New Testaments). Reproduced by permission of the New York Public Library. ....269

- Figure 10. Georg Pencz, ‘Touch’, from *The Five Senses*, c. 1539–44, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 57.658.56. Gift of Harry G. Friedman, 1957. Used under the OASC license, [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org). .....270
- Figure 11. Front cover of embroidered binding, made c. 1649, containing Bible and Book of Psalms, 22.3 x 18.4 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 64.101.1293. Gift of Irwin Untermyer, 1964. Used under the OASC license, [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org). .....271
- Figure 12. Back cover of embroidered binding, made c. 1649, containing a Bible and Book of Psalms, 22.3 x 18.4 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 64.101.1293. Gift of Irwin Untermyer, 1964. Used under the OASC licence, [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org). .....272
- Figure 13. Embroidered book cover, c. 1652, 15 x 9 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, T.44 to B-1954. ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London. ....273
- Figure 14. Front cover of embroidered binding showing Moses and Aaron, The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Oxford, Bib. Eng. 1617 e.1. Reproduced by permission of The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford. ....274
- Figure 15. Embroidered binding showing David and Goliath, on a 1639 copy of *The Whole Booke of Psalmes*, Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, D.C., STC 2689 copy 1. Image used by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>. ....275
- Figure 16. Embroidered binding showing David with his harp, 18 x 12.1 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 64.101.1294. Gift of Irwin Untermyer, 1964, used under the OASC license, [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org). ....276
- Figure 17. Back cover of embroidered binding, The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Oxford, Bib. Eng. 1617 e.1. Reproduced by permission of The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford. ....277
- Figure 18. Title-page to the King James Bible, *The Holy Bible* (London, 1611), title-page, Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, D.C., STC 2216. Image used by permission of

- the Folger Shakespeare Library under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>. . . . .278
- Figure 19. Embroidered bookbinding, made c. 1634, containing the Book of Common Prayer, the Authorized Version of the Bible, and the Book of Psalms, 17.8 x 12.1 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, T.6-1988. ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London. . . . .279
- Figure 20. Title-page to *The Holy Bible*, as used in V&A T.6-1988. Huntington Library, San Marino, California, Rare Books 46785. Reproduced by permission of the Huntington Library. . . . .280
- Figure 21. Front cover of Henry Valentine's *Private Devotions* (London, 1636), The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Oxford, Vet A2 g.28. Reproduced by permission of The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford. . . . .281
- Figure 22. Frontispiece to Henry Valentine's *Private Devotions* (London, 1636), British Library, London, Ames II.1303. Reproduced by permission of the British Library. . . . .282
- Figure 23. Back cover of Henry Valentine's *Private Devotions* (London, 1636), The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Oxford, Vet A2 g.28. Reproduced by permission of The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford. . . . .283
- Figure 24. Front cover of Henrietta Heath's embroidered binding, The Morgan Library, New York, PML 2091. Image used by permission of The Morgan Library, New York. . . . .284
- Figure 25. Frontispiece woodcut to Thomas Rogers, trans., *Of the Imitation of Christ* (London, 1584), Huntington Library, San Marino, California, Rare Books 30049. Reproduced by permission of the Huntington Library. . . . .285
- Figure 26. *The Whole Booke of Psalmes* (London, 1635), Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, D.C., STC 2662 copy 1. Image used by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>. . . . .286
- Figure 27. Covers embroidered with a tulip design, binding a 1633 copy of *The New Testament* and a 1635 copy of *The Whole Booke of Psalmes*, Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, D.C., STC 2661.2 Bd. w. STC 2943. Image used by permission of the

- Folger Shakespeare Library under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>. . . . .287
- Figure 28. Front cover of Elizabeth I's copy of the Epistles of St. Paul, The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Oxford, Arch. G e.48 [previously MS e Mus 242]. Reproduced by permission of The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford. . . . .288
- Figure 29. Back cover of Elizabeth I's copy of the Epistles of St. Paul, The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Oxford, Arch. G e.48 [previously MS e Mus 242]. Reproduced by permission of The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford. . . . .289
- Figure 30. Floral embroidered binding on a 1628 copy of *The Holy Bible* and 1628 copy of *The Whole Booke of Psalmes*, Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, D.C., STC 2283.5. Image used by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>. . . . .290
- Figure 31. Placemaker with floral anchor design, accompanying Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, D.C., STC 2283.5. Image used by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>. . . . .291
- Figure 32. Embroidered binding on *The Godlie Garden* (London, 1619), Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, D.C., STC 11560. Reproduced by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library. . . . .292
- Figure 33. Embroidered binding on *The Godlie Garden* (London, 1621), Huntington Library, San Marino, California, Rare Books 62041. Reproduced by permission of the Huntington Library. . . . .293
- Figure 34. *The Godlie Garden* (London, 1619), D4v, Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, D.C., STC 11560. Reproduced by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library. . . . .294
- Figure 35. Floral embroidered binding, Huntington Library, San Marino, California, Rare Books 438000:830. Reproduced by permission of the Huntington Library. . . . .295
- Figure 36. Embroidered cover, containing Lewis Bayly, *The Practise of Pietie* (London, 1620), New York Public Library, New York, \*KC 1620 (Bayly, L. Practise Of Pietie



- Directing a Christian how to walke). Reproduced by permission of the New York Public Library. ....296
- Figure 37. Back cover of Dorothy Feilding’s Manuscript Miscellany, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, Osborn MS b226. Reproduced by permission of the Beinecke Library, Yale University. ....297
- Figure 38. Embroidered coif, early seventeenth century, 22.9 x 43.2 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 64.101.1258. Gift of Irwin Untermyer, 1964. Used under the OASC license, [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org). ....298
- Figure 39. Embroidered purse, made c. 1600–1650, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, T.53-1954. ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London. ....299
- Figure 40. Pomander, made c. 1600–1620, 9.84 x 6.67 x 3.18 cm, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, Costume Council Fund, M.72.46.1. Public domain image, courtesy of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. ....300
- Figure 41. Embroidered psalm book and bag, held by the British Library, London, C.194.c.27. ©British Library Board, C.194.c.27. ....301
- Figure 42. Seventeenth-century embroidered binding on Thomas Becon’s *The Pomaunder of Prayer* (London, 1563), The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Oxford, Arch. A f.100. Reproduced by permission of The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford. ....302
- Figure 43. Cabinet with scenes from the life of Joseph, c. 1650–1675, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 39.13.3a–k. Purchase, Anonymous Gift, 1939. Used under the OASC license, [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org). ....303
- Figure 44. *Erastus* (London, 1684), B5v, Huntington Library, San Marino, California, Rare Books 123727. Reproduced by permission of the Huntington Library. ....304
- Figure 45. Embroidered linen jacket, 1590–1630, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 919-1873. ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London. ....305
- Figure 46. Embroidered Mirror Frame, 1660–1680, 70.5 x 56.2 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 247-1896. ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London. ....306
- Figure 47. Anonymous, Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, embroidered picture, mid- to late-seventeenth century, 31.2 x 46.8 cm, Ashmolean Museum of Art and

- Archaeology, University of Oxford, Oxford, WA 1994.142. Image ©Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, Accession Number WA 1994.142. ....307
- Figure 48. Detail of exposed stuffing in caterpillar in panel depicting Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, mid- to late-seventeenth century, Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Oxford, Oxford, WA 1994.142. Image ©Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, Accession Number WA 1994.142. ....308
- Figure 49. Margaret Mason, sampler, 1660, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, T.182-1987. ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London. ....309
- Figure 50. Sampler, c. 1625–1650, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, CIRC.279-1923. ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London. ....310
- Figure 51. Detail of an embroidered mirror frame showing pearls, shells and coral, third quarter of seventeenth century, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 64.101.1332. Gift of Irwin Untermyer, 1964. Used under the OASC license, [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org). ....311
- Figure 52. Detail of an embroidered mirror frame showing the use of detached needlepoint to create free-standing petals, leaves and wings, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 64.101.1332. Gift of Irwin Untermyer, 1964. Used under the OASC license, [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org). ....312
- Figure 53. Detail of the neck of a woman's smock, 1600–1618, Museum of London, London, A21968. Image reproduced by permission of the Museum of London. ....313
- Figure 54. Detail of the sleeve of a woman's smock, 1600–1618, Museum of London, London, A21968. Image reproduced by permission of the Museum of London. ....314

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## Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as references.

A few paragraphs from chapter four have previously been published in a different form in Claire Canavan and Helen Smith, “‘The needle may convert more than the pen’: Women and the Work of Conversion in Early Modern England”, in *Conversions: Gender and Religious Change in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Simon Ditchfield and Helen Smith (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 105–26.

Some of the ideas and materials considered in this thesis are examined further in the following articles, which are referenced as appropriate in the notes:

Claire Canavan, “[A]ll Sorts of Stiches”: Looking at Detail in a Proclamation of Solomon Embroidery’, *Textile History* 47, no. 1 (2016): 43–48.

Claire Canavan, ‘Object Study 13: An Embroidered Mirror’, in *The Routledge Handbook of Material Culture in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Catherine Richardson, Tara Hamling and David Gaimster (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 242–43.

Claire Canavan, ‘Reading Materials: Textile Surfaces and Early Modern Books’, *Journal of the Northern Renaissance*, forthcoming 2017.

Claire Canavan, ‘Textual and Textile Literacies in Early Modern Braids’, *Renaissance Studies* 30, no. 5 (2016): 684–707.

## Introduction

In a prefatory poem to the embroidery pattern book, *The Needles Excellency* (1631), water-poet John Taylor made a bold claim for the comprehensive scope of the needle in early modern life, declaring: ‘There’s nothing neere at hand, or farthest sought,/ But with the Needle, may be shap’d and wrought’. Coming immediately after his typically copious record of stitched ‘Flowers, Plants, and Fishes, Beasts, Birds, Flyes, & Bees,/ Hills, Dales, Plaines, Pastures, Skies, Seas, Riuers, Trees’, Taylor’s comment echoes the fecundity of contemporary embroideries and underscores the needle’s ability to fashion images of the flora and fauna of both familiar and remote lands.<sup>1</sup> But Taylor’s comment seems equally germane to his ensuing praise of needlework’s

...Poesies rare, and Annagrams,  
Signifique searching sentences from Names,  
True Historie, or various pleasant fiction ....<sup>2</sup>

Taylor’s reflections on needlework’s generic variety and intellectual subtlety suggest that the needle’s capacity to shape and work upon things is as much conceptual as iconographic and material. Giving form to the physically, intellectually and imaginatively unfamiliar, as well as to the quotidian, the needle represents and enters into all aspects of culture.

This thesis argues that needlework constituted a pervasive and mainstream cultural form in early modern England, and that it played a prominent role in structuring ways of thinking and being in the world. Its significance and thought-provoking complexity, both as an expressive medium and as a skilled practice, were widely recognised by men and women. Both sexes were literate in textile meaning, and a significant number of men as well as virtually all women had practical needle skills. Stitchery and stitched objects were valued as persuasive participants in contemporary social, theological and cultural discourses. Rather than being opposed to the pen or offering an inferior alternative, the needle commanded a place alongside and sometimes even before it. The needle was valued as an expressive, imaginative and creative technology, and was engaged in a mutually enriching relationship with graphic and

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<sup>1</sup> ‘shape, v.’, *OED Online*, June 2016, def. 5a.

<sup>2</sup> John Taylor, *The Needles Excellency* ([London], 1631), A3r–v.

verbal media. As Taylor's observations suggest, early moderns understood textiles and texts as congruous and complementary; they considered the needle not only as apt to respond to the pen and the press but as actively shaping texts, in ways which were both concrete and conceptual. As a dominant analogical and metaphorical domain in early modern thought, sewing offered a compelling model which people used to conceptualise and comprehend issues including techniques of literary composition, and devotional and theological practices.

Early modern needlework has long attracted the attention of textile historians and antiquarians, who have undertaken essential work in cataloguing extant examples and reconstructing techniques.<sup>3</sup> In recent years, the idea that needlework deserves serious critical engagement has gained traction in historical and literary criticism, particularly amongst scholars of women's writing and work. Sewing was initially seen as a barrier to women's writing, designed to keep female hands and minds away from the supposedly male pen.<sup>4</sup> More recently, scholars have begun to challenge the gendered binary of the female needle and male pen, considering how women used both tools in complementary ways. Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass were early leaders, exploring how 'the needle could *be* a pen' with which '[w]omen stitched themselves into public visibility'.<sup>5</sup> Susan Frye's monograph *Pens and Needles: Women's Textualities in Early Modern England* offers the most extensive contribution to recent scholarship. Frye argues for a more inclusive conception of women's textualities which incorporates written and wrought work, as well as painting and drawing, and which recognises the

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Xanthe Brooke, *The Lady Lever Art Gallery: Catalogue of Embroideries* (Stroud: Alan Sutton in association with Trustees of the National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, 1992); Mary M. Brooks, *English Embroideries of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: In the Collection of the Ashmolean Museum* (London: Ashmolean Museum in association with Jonathan Horne Publications, 2004); Santina M. Levey, *The Embroideries at Hardwick Hall: A Catalogue* (London: National Trust, 2007); Andrew Morrall and Melinda Watt, eds., *English Embroidery from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1580–1700: Twixt Art and Nature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> See for example, Suzanne Trill, Kate Chedgzoy and Melanie Osborne, eds., *Lay by your Needles Ladies, Take the Pen: Writing Women in England, 1500–1700* (London: Arnold, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 134–172, esp. 134, 144.

interconnecting ways in which women used these media to construct, examine and communicate religious, political and social identities.<sup>6</sup>

These studies have made important progress in exploring how needlework functioned as a site for cultural production and socio-political commentary. However, the entrenched nature of modern attitudes to needlework and the decorative arts more generally has meant that the assumption that the needle is ultimately subordinate to the pen and the press tends to persist, implicitly and explicitly. This includes Jones and Stallybrass's attempt to extol embroidery by arguing that 'the needle could *be* a pen', a valuable intervention which nonetheless considers only one side of the equation. Several seventeenth-century texts do figure women's needles as pens: the epitaph of Puritan Dame Dorothy Selby, for example, describes how her 'Pen of Steele and silken inck enroll'd/ The Acts of Jonah in Records of Gold'.<sup>7</sup> Such tropes fit within a culture in which, as scholars have argued, the pen was conceived as a 'generic tool' that incorporated paintbrushes, quills and styluses as well as needles.<sup>8</sup> Yet the subtle persistence of the bias against the decorative arts is revealed in Jones and Stallybrass's claim that this provided a means of '*elevating* fine stitchery into a kind of textuality with analogies to epic and religious verse' (my emphasis).<sup>9</sup> This thesis argues that the needle possessed cultural value and authority in and of itself; the pen was as much a kind of needle, as the needle was a pen.

Bianca Calabresi's study of early modern needlework samplers begins to consider how pens and needles might exist in a more equal relationship. Tracing similarities between alphabets stitched in samplers and printed in hornbooks, Calabresi suggests that 'because these pieces [sewn samplers] are frequently lettered ... we need to consider them as alternative sites where literacies might originate, be registered, or be contested'. Positioning the needle on a 'continuum' with the pen, Calabresi's stimulating argument allows for a reciprocally informative dialogue in which samplers' distinctive

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<sup>6</sup> Susan Frye, *Pens and Needles: Women's Textualities in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Inscribed on the monument to Dorothy Selby, Ightham Church, Kent, cited in Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 165.

<sup>8</sup> Wendy Wall, *Recipes for Thought: Knowledge and Taste in the Early Modern English Kitchen* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 119.

<sup>9</sup> Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 142.



‘literacies ... might then be replicated or alluded to in other media and other hands’.<sup>10</sup> Calabresi’s proposal of a dialogic understanding of needlework’s relationship to writing and typography, however, has yet to be embraced fully. For example, whilst Frye has examined how women’s wrought adaptations of printed biblical images enabled women’s ‘engagement with print culture’, scholars have not yet considered what response this elicited from ‘print culture’.<sup>11</sup>

The tendency to underestimate needlework’s impact on graphic and verbal culture parallels what Joan Scott terms ‘the logic of the supplement’, which characterized early attitudes to women’s history. Within this logic, canonical history allowed work on women’s history in so far as it remained confined to a separate sphere, making no impact on the dominant order.<sup>12</sup> An approach which straightforwardly translates the needle into a pen or which overlooks needlework’s ability to effect change in graphic culture risks following a similar logic. This thesis argues that sewing must be recognised as an established and esteemed mode of cultural and aesthetic production, and that a reconsideration of textiles demands a reassessment of textual culture. The needle informed and participated in graphic culture, and offered an aesthetic and expressive model which other textual and visual media not only praised but imitated.

Reassessing the cultural position of the needle demands that we do not just consider the elementary pedagogies examined by Calabresi but recognise the advanced forms of learning, embodied skill, cognition and understanding involved in sewing. As Wendy Wall observes in relation to kitchen crafts such as ‘carving and confectionary’, domestic literacies should not be regarded simply ‘as preparatory or initial stages in a progression that culminated with etching words on paper’.<sup>13</sup> Whilst Calabresi positions needlework as a ‘writing technology in its own right’, others imply its preliminary or juvenile status.<sup>14</sup> Frye, for example, concludes her consideration of Elizabeth Tudor’s embroidery by observing that she ‘would go on to translate Petrarch, Horace, Seneca ...

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<sup>10</sup> Bianca F.-C. Calabresi, “‘You sow, Ile read’: Letters and Literacies in Early Modern Samplers”, in *Reading Women: Literacy, Authorship, and Culture in the Atlantic World, 1500–1800*, ed. Heidi Brayman Hackel and Catherine E. Kelly (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2008), 79–104, esp. 80–81, 87.

<sup>11</sup> Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 159.

<sup>12</sup> Joan Scott, ‘Women’s History’, in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke (London: Polity Press, 1991), 49–55.

<sup>13</sup> Wall, *Recipes for Thought*, 157.

<sup>14</sup> Calabresi, “‘You sow’”, 81.

and Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, write significant prayers, poetry, and even more renowned speeches, while leaving her needlework behind with her disempowered youth';<sup>15</sup> embroidery appears an immature stepping stone to penmanship. Following Wall's reassessment of kitchen literacies, I argue that needlework 'was a desired "literate" endpoint' and produced advanced literacies, which involved complex forms of mental and manual craftsmanship, and challenged the interpretive faculties.<sup>16</sup>

The assumed inferiority of the needle to the pen stems from a cultural aesthetic which is more modern than early modern. As Dympna Callaghan observes, our tendency to oppose writing's cultural capital to the cultural invisibility of sewing is based on 'the creation of an absolute distinction between aesthetic and productive labor ... [which] postdates the Renaissance'.<sup>17</sup> This distinction is exacerbated by the modern tendency to regard literature as an abstractly cerebral art, above manual and material crafts. Recent scholarship on early modern literature has highlighted the opposite, drawing our attention to not only penmanship but *poesis* as a skilled handicraft.<sup>18</sup> Rayna Kalas reveals how poetry and 'the shaping of language' was considered a '*techné*', combining 'manual skill and creative invention'.<sup>19</sup> Wall highlights the non-alphabetic and manual aspects of literacy, as well as noting that '[d]evices and poems were "made" rather than thought' in Renaissance poetics. Wall argues that the 'governing assumption' which applied to these devices was also applied to culinary 'conceits', although she stops short of suggesting that recipe users considered themselves 'as makers in the sense embraced by humanist poets and thinkers of the day'.<sup>20</sup>

This thesis highlights that theologians, poets and other intellectuals understood written and wrought making as cross-fertilising, and considered needlework an important contributor to contemporary thought and discourse. Whilst the sparsity of

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<sup>15</sup> Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 41.

<sup>16</sup> Wall, *Recipes for Thought*, 158.

<sup>17</sup> Dympna Callaghan, 'Looking Well to Linens: Women and Cultural Production in *Othello*', in *Marxist Shakespeares*, ed. Jean E. Howard and Scott Cutler Shershow (London: Routledge, 2000), 78.

<sup>18</sup> On early modern handwriting, see, for example, Jonathan Goldberg, *Writing Matter: From the Hands of the English Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

<sup>19</sup> Rayna Kalas, *Frame, Glass, Verse: The Technology of Poetic Invention in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 64, 1.

<sup>20</sup> Wall, *Recipes for Thought*, 165. See also Wendy Wall, 'Literacy and the Domestic Arts', *HLQ* 73, no. 3 (2010): 383–412.

autobiographical reflections on making challenges attempts to determine precisely how practitioners positioned their work, it is evident that at least some elite women understood their making in humanist terms.<sup>21</sup> I remain alert to how makers understood themselves as participants in a literate and intellectual culture which was substantial and palpable; conceived of as forms of material making, the crafting of language, ideas and thought informed and was informed by textile paradigms.

## A Material Approach

Throughout this thesis I emphasise that early moderns attended as much to the significance of materials, techniques and processes as to the words and images that they formed. Equally, rather than seeing meaning as fixed in a finished artefact, early moderns understood the activity of sewing itself as significant, and considered meaning-making as an ongoing process, generated between human and material participants. In exploring the relationship between pens and needles, studies of early modern sewing have tended to rely on existing disciplinary approaches, whether textual (deciphering sewn letters) or art historical (considering the arrangement of images in largely two-dimensional terms). This thesis draws upon both these approaches but emphasises the need to consider the material and technical particularities of three-dimensional stitched objects, and to reflect upon how a textile methodology informs understandings of other media. Needleworks operate as sites of literacies not only, as Calabresi observes, ‘because .... [they] are frequently lettered’; both textiles and texts demand diverse and complex non-alphabetic competencies, and invoke wide-ranging, materially-rooted expressive and interpretative systems and practices.<sup>22</sup>

An extract from Richard Brathwaite’s prose romance, *The Two Lancashire Lovers* (1640), underscores the need to consider stitched letters within a more extensive expressive and affective system. Doriclea is separated from her sweetheart, Philocles, and has ‘*neither the benefit of Inke nor Paper, to discover her loyall intimate thoughts to her faithfull Lover*’. She thus:

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<sup>21</sup> As Calabresi observes, for example, Elizabeth Tudor received her ‘humanist education in multiple hands, writing and sewing’, “‘You sow’”, 93. See also Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 33–41.

<sup>22</sup> Calabresi, “‘You sow’”, 80.

supplie[s] that want with her Needle, sowing her minde in Letters of gold and returning them in a curious border of needle work, so neatly and artificially shadowed, as it was not in the power of art nor strength of fancie to discover it.<sup>23</sup>

Doriclea's needlework initially seems a second-choice solution, enforced by her inability to access the pen. Yet her sewing generates significance beyond alphabetic semiotics in its 'curious border', subsequently described as filled with 'curious devices'.<sup>24</sup> Its meaning seems generated not only in emblematic figures but in the silks' hues; artfully 'shadowed', the work's chromatic gradations seem to participate in the work's abstruse meaning.<sup>25</sup>

These suggestions are extended in the stitched letters which declare:

*MY Pen a Needle now must be  
To manifest my love to thee;  
While every stitch shall sting my heart  
Till it take harbour where thou art;  
Where landing, may it dye a shore  
If e're we live divided more.*<sup>26</sup>

Doriclea's needle is not to become a pen. Rather, her pen is to become a needle. The verse's words continually foreground their own materiality, explicating the significant effects of the stitches themselves. Her pricking needle 'sting[s]' her heart, emphasising sewing's emotional and psychophysiological effects. Eliding love and stitch, the declaration 'may it dye' echoes the border's colourful 'shadowing', and positions the handiwork's pigments as actively involved in constructing meaning.

Doriclea's stitches resonate with Juliet Fleming's study of early modern 'writing arts'. Examining inscriptions from wall-writing to earthenware, Fleming asks us not only to attend to a wider range of media and spaces in which writing was produced, but to consider how objects were understood to 'express [themselves], through a variety of

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<sup>23</sup> Richard Brathwaite, *The Two Lancashire Lovers* (London, 1640), G3r, G4v.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, G4v.

<sup>25</sup> 'shadow, v.', *OED Online*, June 2016, defs. 6a, 7a, 10.

<sup>26</sup> Brathwaite, *The Two Lancashire Lovers*, G4v. For 'sowing' as connoting stitchcraft and publication, see Calabresi, "You sow", 80.

material effects'. Fleming focuses on alphabetic inscriptions, but her suggestion that 'a pot need not be decorated with writing in order for it to be understood to be entertaining thought' points, like Doriclea's stitched poem, to how unlettered objects were considered as cognitively complex and meaningful.<sup>27</sup> Whilst Fleming's model tends to locate the material as a host or recipient of thought, I suggest that the material object participates in cognitive, imaginative and skilled work.

Fleming claims that 'the material properties of the graphic trace' tend to remain 'unobserved' when produced using paper and ink.<sup>28</sup> As Joshua Calhoun has demonstrated, this was not true for early modern readers and writers who were highly conscious of how the literal materiality of paper (and sometimes ink) could contribute to or contest an inscription's meaning. As Calhoun notes, early moderns were acutely aware of the 'rhetorical effects' of paper's material content and how it could 'inflect the acts of reading and interpretation'.<sup>29</sup> Paper was fashioned from pulped linen rags, swatches of which sometimes remained visible. Ink could also have a fabric history, pigmented with paper rags or burnt wool.<sup>30</sup> These written sheets might then be stitched together into a book. John Taylor's *The Praise of Hemp-Seed* (1620) contains a particularly extensive example of how writers and readers engaged with paper's recycled materials, conjecturing, amongst other things, what it might mean when 'a *Brownists* zealous ruffe in print/ Be turn'd to paper, and a Play writ in't'.<sup>31</sup> Taylor's ruff puns on 'print' as both typography and pressed fabric pleats. Emphasising that the needle exists on a continuum with the press as well as the pen, Taylor suggests the legibility of linen folds (the *Brownist's* ruff), and questions how they prefigure or oppose the letters impressed in folded quires of paper.<sup>32</sup> This thesis attends both to the materiality of sewing, and to

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<sup>27</sup> Juliet Fleming, *Graffiti and the Writing Arts of Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 153.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>29</sup> Joshua Calhoun, 'The Word Made Flax: Cheap Bibles, Textual Corruption, and the Poetics of Paper', *PMLA* 126, no. 2 (2011): 327–44, esp. 328, 338.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 333–44, 337. For a woollen ink recipe, see Jean de Beaucesne, *A Booke containing Divers Sortes of Hands* (London, 1571), ¶2r.

<sup>31</sup> John Taylor, *The Praise of Hemp-Seed* (London, 1620), D4v.

<sup>32</sup> For further discussion of puns engaging the shared language of textile and typographic trades, see Natasha Korda, *Labors Lost: Women's Work and the Early Modern English Stage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 142–43.

how ink and paper, thread and canvas, interacted with one another, extending our understanding of the material as well as alphabetic effects of graphic media.

## Needlework as a Perceptual Model

Taylor's reflections highlight the extensive fabric vocabulary available to those who wrote and imaginatively engaged with texts. The language of needle, thread, and fabric seems poised between the literal and figurative.<sup>33</sup> Textual culture's use of material metaphors implies that if we think about the needle as a writing technology, then we must equally consider the other half of the equation, implicit in the etymology of text in *textus*, that which is woven: the pen could be a needle, and printed or handwritten texts could provide alternative grounds for textile forms and practices.<sup>34</sup> Embroidery not only offered an attractive subject on which authors might exercise their creative dexterity, but provided a respected and deeply considered model for the work of writing and reading.<sup>35</sup> Scholars' frequent but brief references to the shared etymology of text and textile rarely explore the material roots of such understandings or acknowledge just how developed and complex fabric ways of thinking about texts were.<sup>36</sup> The language of fabric was engrained in every level of textual composition, fundamentally shaping how the structures of written and printed texts were conceptualised graphically, bibliographically, physically and rhetorically.

Penmanship and basic word formation were essentially fibrous crafts. As writing masters explained, the lines 'which do begin and end all letters, joyning each to other in every word', were termed 'threads';<sup>37</sup> these fibres materialized in scripts like the 'Lettre

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<sup>33</sup> My thinking here has been influenced by Joseph Moshenska's examination of the 'borderland between figurative and literal, metaphor and simile' in Reformation invocations of touch, *Feeling Pleasures: The Sense of Touch in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 39.

<sup>34</sup> 'text, n.1', *OED Online*, June 2016.

<sup>35</sup> Linda Woodbridge briefly explores one example of this, examining how patchwork provided 'a common figure for literary borrowing', 'Patchwork: Piecing the Early Modern Mind in England's First Century of Print Culture', *English Literary Renaissance* 23, no. 1 (1993): 5–45, esp. 24.

<sup>36</sup> For an important exception, discussed further below, see Rebecca Olson, *Arras Hanging: The Textile that Determined Early Modern Literature and Drama* (Newark, Del.: University of Delaware, 2013), esp. chapter one.

<sup>37</sup> Richard Lloyd, *The Schoole-Masters Auxiliaries* (London, 1654), D4v.

Entrlacee' script in which a thread weaves through the letters, linking them together.<sup>38</sup> Although primarily chirographic features, such threads continued to manifest themselves in print, materialized in ligatured letters as well as printed calligraphic manuals.<sup>39</sup>

Textual threads were products of intellectual and rhetorical as well as graphic work. Thomas Coryate's prefatory address to King James in *Coryates Crambe* (1611) offers a modest material appraisal of his work which attends to its discursive textures, paratextual layout and physical production. Coryate describes it as:

*a home spunne present, made indeede of course Wooll ... spunne into a threed by the wheele of my braine, the spindle of my Penne, and the Oyle of my industrie ... and now woven into a piece of Rawe cloth in the Printers Presse .... The lists [borders] of this Cloth are the Verses at both the ends of my Booke.*<sup>40</sup>

Other writers similarly conceived of books in terms of the qualities and shape of cloth. William Dillingham's prefatory address to the reader in Nathaniel Culverwell's *An Elegant and Learned Discourse of the Light of Nature* (1652) uses comparable terms to Coryate, as he contrasts the texture and quality of his fibres with Culverwell's illustrious style and material: '*I intend not here ... with my Canvase to preface this cloth of gold. The work is weaved of Sunne-beams, to hang any thing before it, were but to obscure it*'. Highlighting a particularly brilliant section of Culverwell's text, Dillingham exclaims: '*never was light so bespangled; never did it triumph in greater bravery of expression*'.<sup>41</sup> 'Spangles' describe the glittering sequins embroidered on fine textiles. Culverwell's 'bravery of expression' too is materially grounded; connoting 'fine clothes' as well as more generally 'splendour' and 'adornment', 'bravery' points to Ciceronian notions of words as the clothing of meaning, a concept I discuss further in chapter four.<sup>42</sup> Like Coryate, Dillingham regards the structures of cloth as an apt model for the book's shape and the relationship

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<sup>38</sup> De Beauchesne, *A Booke Containing Divers Sortes of Hands*, E1r.

<sup>39</sup> Compare Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History* (London: Routledge, 2007), 68–70. I discuss this further in Claire Canavan, 'Textual and Textile Literacies in Early Modern Braids', *Renaissance Studies* 30, no. 5 (2016): 687–89. See also Mary E. Hazard, *Elizabethan Silent Language* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 39.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Coryate, *Coryates Crambe* (London, 1611), B1r.

<sup>41</sup> Nathaniel Culverwell, *An Elegant and Learned Discourse of the Light of Nature* (London, 1652), A4r, a1v.

<sup>42</sup> 'bravery, n.', *OED Online*, June 2016, 3a, 3b, 3c.

between its parts. Offering his preface as ‘*as a course List to a finer Webb; or as waste paper to defend this Book from the injury of its covers*’, Dillingham emphasises that the book is a material object, subject to wear and tear, and with its own literally ragged life-cycle.<sup>43</sup>

The examples offered here could be expanded considerably. Quotations, for example, were considered ‘shreds’, a description which evokes the practice of physically cutting commonplaces from books.<sup>44</sup> Interpretive cruxes were ‘knots’ which ‘dextrous’ readers might ‘untie’.<sup>45</sup> Marginal annotations were envisaged as ‘lace’ trimmings and ‘points’ (another term for lace as well as an element of text or argument) which fringed the edge of the text with visually similar jags.<sup>46</sup> Further examples are highlighted throughout this thesis. These extended and pervasive material metaphors were characterized by a detailed and intimate consideration of fabric objects and practices. Far from hasty or perfunctory comparisons, they suggest that textile approaches to text were deeply engrained and continually interrogated for the light they might shed on forms of textual and bookish engagement.

Metaphors of textile texts suggest that fabrics actively structured the ways in which texts were understood. As cognitive linguists and scientists have stressed, metaphors do not just reflect but create systems of thought.<sup>47</sup> For early modern readers, needlework was a dominant conceptual and perceptual structure which allowed them to make sense of texts, ideas and concepts. Metaphors operate in objects as well as words, as Christopher Tilley has highlighted in his work on how ‘solid metaphors’ actively shape ‘perceptual processes’.<sup>48</sup> This thesis is alert to how textual and textile things and

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<sup>43</sup> Culverwell, *An Elegant and Learned Discourse*, a1v.

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Thomas Gataker, *Saint Stevens Last Will and Testament* (London, 1638), A4r. For commonplacing as a technique of cutting and pasting, see Adam Smyth, “‘Shreds of holiness’: George Herbert, Little Gidding, and Cutting Up Texts in Early Modern England [with illustrations]”, *English Literary Renaissance* 42, no. 3 (2013): 452–81. I discuss these metaphors further in Claire Canavan, ‘Reading Materials: Textile Surfaces and Early Modern Books’, *Journal of the Northern Renaissance* (forthcoming 2017).

<sup>45</sup> See for example Joseph Hall, *Resolutions and Decisions of Divers Practicall Cases of Conscience* (London, 1649), R6r–v; Richard Allestree, *Forty Sermons* (Oxford; London, 1684), E1v; Giles Firmin, *A Serious Question Stated* (London, 1651), G4v.

<sup>46</sup> Stephen Jerome, *Englands Iubilee* (Dublin, 1625), A2r; William Annand, *Mysterium Pietatis* (London, 1671), \*4v; Gataker, *Saint Stevens Last Will and Testament*, A4r.

<sup>47</sup> George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980).

<sup>48</sup> Tilley suggests that solid metaphors differ from linguistic metaphors in that the latter are simply ‘communicating meaning’, whereas ‘material forms’ are ‘actively doing something in the world’. I diverge



practices operate as solid metaphors, constructing an analogical domain which exists in a dialogical relationship with linguistic metaphors. Attending to these metaphors enriches our understanding of early modern approaches to literary composition and style, and hermeneutic skills. Equally, fabric figures invite us to attend to a more multitudinous variety of ways of engaging with books and words, as physical, visual and aesthetic as well as verbal objects. They can thus contribute to recent scholarship which has highlighted how books were used as well as read.<sup>49</sup>

At the same time, this thesis understands material approaches as complementing rather than necessarily competing with textual methodologies. Material studies have come under scrutiny from formalists. Even scholars who engage material considerations can be wary of them as critical dead-ends which ‘distract’ from what they suggest ought to be our priority: ‘the writing itself’.<sup>50</sup> Liable to eclipse the text, materiality is seen as having a supportive rather than equal role in literary studies. Others argue that formalism, textuality and materialism are complementary rather than antagonistic concerns.<sup>51</sup> Even here, though, some scholars regard attention to ‘extra-textual’ things suspiciously, suggesting their capacity to ‘supplant traditional literary categories’.<sup>52</sup> Throughout this thesis, I attend closely to the material and literary forms of both texts and textiles, demonstrating that these concerns can and indeed should be understood as reciprocally illuminating and mutually constitutive. Books articulate ideas and literary forms through physical and material as well as verbal structures. Equally, as will be explored further in chapter four, early moderns considered the detailed examination and

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from his approach here, since words do actively do things in the world. Christopher Tilley, *Metaphor and Material Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 269, 265.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, William H. Sherman, *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), xiii; Bradin Cormack and Carla Mazzio, *Book Use, Book Theory: 1500–1700* (Chicago: University of Chicago Library, 2005); Jeffrey Todd Knight, “‘Furnished for Action’: Renaissance Books as Furniture”, *Book History* 12 (2009): 37–73.

<sup>50</sup> Gillian Wright, *Producing Women’s Poetry, 1600–1730: Text and Paratext, Manuscript and Print* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 10.

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, Jennifer Richards and Fred Schurink, eds., ‘The Textuality and Materiality of Reading in Early Modern England’, special issue, *HLQ* 73, no. 3 (2010): 345–552; Elizabeth Scott-Baumann and Ben Burton, eds., *The Work of Form: Poetics and Materiality in Early Modern Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>52</sup> Douglas Bruster, ‘The Materiality of Shakespearean Form’, in *Shakespeare and Historical Formalism*, ed. Stephen Cohen (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 32.

interpretation of textiles as continuous with practices of close reading and critical scrutiny. For modern, as for early modern, scholars, literary and material hermeneutics should be considered as overlapping *praxes*.<sup>53</sup>

## Gender

The tendency of scholars to underestimate the cultural value of sewing is both exacerbated by and reflected in the impetus to see needlework as a women's interest: a female 'subculture'.<sup>54</sup> Scholarship has examined how needlework was used 'to express female emotions, words, and actions' and illuminated its role in forging connections between women, both in the act of making and in the giving or bequeathing of wrought objects.<sup>55</sup> These studies have made important contributions to scholarship seeking to recover early modern women's cultural production, and particularly their "writings", in all their material richness. However, they have tended to situate needlework within a closed feminine sphere in which it is taken for granted that stitchery is not only women's work but predominantly a female concern.<sup>56</sup> This risks limiting our understanding of how gender intersected with the broader spectrum of identities available to needlewomen, as well as neglecting men's involvement in cultures of the needle and overlooking the needle's role in constructing forms of manhood.

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<sup>53</sup> For a cognate defence of material studies, see Lucy Razzall, 'Containers and Containment in Early Modern Literature' (PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2013), 38–40.

<sup>54</sup> Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 156.

<sup>55</sup> Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 159. See also Anna Riehl Bertolet, "'Like two artificial gods': Needlework and Female Bonding in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*", in *Medieval Clothing and Textiles 11*, ed. Robin Netherton and Gale R. Owen-Crocker (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2015), 159–78; Sophie Holroyd, 'Embroidered Rhetoric: The Social, Religious and Political Functions of Elite Women's Needlework, c. 1560–1630' (PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 2002), 72–75, and chapter 3. Sarah Randles seeks to complicate the gendering of needlework in her discussion of men's involvement in authoring and reading printed pattern books, but she ultimately focuses on needlework as a feminine pursuit, used to generate female bonds, "'The Pattern of All Patience": Gender, Agency, and Emotions in Embroidery and Pattern Books in Early Modern England', in *Authority, Gender and Emotions in Late Medieval and Early Modern England*, ed. Susan Broomhall (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 150–67.

<sup>56</sup> On women's work, see Michelle M. Dowd, *Women's Work in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

Studies of stitched stories from the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and David have focused on female characters including Sarah, Hagar, Rebecca, Bathsheba and Abigail,<sup>57</sup> embroideries depicting David and Goliath, Abraham sacrificing Isaac, or scenes from the Life of Joseph have, in contrast, elicited little attention.<sup>58</sup> The use of material metaphors by women such as Margaret Cavendish has been understood as a straightforwardly gendered means of negotiating and legitimating female authorship, overlooking how material metaphors were adopted (and used as modesty tropes) by male writers.<sup>59</sup> Rebecca Olson's monograph on woven tapestries (typically made by men) and Jeffrey Todd Knight's recent article on functional sewing in books have begun to highlight men's textile literacies.<sup>60</sup> However, men's interest and involvement in the sphere of needlework has yet to be fully acknowledged.

Women occupied a central position in textile culture, often understood as commanding particularly high levels of expertise in making and understanding embroidery. As such, sewing has much to tell us about women's roles in cultural

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<sup>57</sup> Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 135–59; Ruth Geuter, 'Embroidered Biblical Narratives and Their Social Context', in Morrall and Watt, *English Embroidery*, 57–77; Andrew Morrall, 'Domestic Decoration and the Bible in the Early Modern Home', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in Early Modern England, c. 1530–1700*, ed. Kevin Killeen, Helen Smith and Rachel Willie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 590–91; Amanda Pullan, 'Needlework and Moral Instruction in English Seventeenth-Century Households: The Case of Rebecca', *Studies in Church History* 50 (2014): 254–68; Pullan, "'Informed Seeing": Reading the Seventeenth-Century Embroidered Cabinet at Milton Manor House through its Historical and Social Contexts', *Textile History* 47, no. 1 (2016): 49–59.

<sup>58</sup> See, for example, 'Cabinet with scenes from the Life of Joseph', c. 1650–75, MMA 39.13.3a–k; Morrall and Watt, *English Embroidery*, 244–45; 'An English Finely Embroidered Needlework Picture [depicting David and Goliath]', in Christie's, London, 'The Mayorcas Collection of Tapestries and Textiles' (February 12, 1999), lot 216 [online auction catalogue], accessed January 30, 2017, <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/lot/an-english-finely-embroidered-needlework-picture-1442053-details.aspx?from=searchresults&intObjectID=1442053&sid=51745426-8f38-4957-9297-1653050404c8>; I.E. [or I.Y.], 'The Sacrifice of Isaac', Embroidered Picture, Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, Oxford, WA. OA.414. Tara Hamling comments that feminine subjects and experiences dominate embroidery but that 'the theme of parenthood' is evident in 'images from the story of Abraham and Isaac', *Decorating the 'Godly' Household: Religious Art in Post-Reformation Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 215.

<sup>59</sup> Emma Lees, *Margaret Cavendish: Gender, Genre, Exile* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 107–11; Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 23–25.

<sup>60</sup> Olson, *Arras Hanging, passim*; Jeffrey Todd Knight, 'Needles and Pens: Sewing in Early English Books', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 45, no. 3 (2015): 523–42.

production, and their agency in textual as well as textile culture. This agency extended well beyond exclusively or stereotypically “feminine” interests; stitchery was a mainstream medium and engaged with topical issues of central concern to both sexes. At the same time, this thesis underscores the importance of recovering the practical and connoisseurial skills of men as well as women. To do so is not only to restore needlework to its place at the cultural centre but to recover the stitchcraft of men whose work has been occluded from the historical record. Attending to interactions between needlewomen and needlemen will allow us to recover the experiences and cultural activities of men in this field, adding to recent scholarship which has sought to recover a more diverse range of early modern manhoods.<sup>61</sup>

This thesis is attentive to the men and boys who had first-hand experience with the needle, and considers how their skills intersected with those of women. As will be discussed in chapter one, professional embroidery and tailoring were guild-regulated crafts, in which men predominated. Other men and boys had informal skills in needle and thread: some made, others mended and many more helped women associates and companions with preliminary work. Men, women, boys and girls collaborated in both commercial and domestic settings, categories which were often not discrete. Attending to men’s experience with and interest in the needle will contribute to a framework within which women’s needlework can be seen in less restrictive terms, demonstrating how a sexed identity could intersect with forms of identity based on networks of hetero- as well as homosociality, confessional orientation and artisanal skill.

To assume that sewing constitutes a female subculture is to overlook sewing’s omnipresence in early modern lives, as a practice and as both decorative and functional products. As Sophie Holroyd briefly notes, ‘needlework is so visible in this society that men too are conversant with embroidery’.<sup>62</sup> Social and bodily spaces were swathed in materials. As Taylor enthusiastically proclaims in *The Needles Excellency*, the needle is a ‘maker and a mender’; without it there would be ‘No Sheets, Towels, Napkins, Pillow-beares,/ Nor any Garment man or woman weares’.<sup>63</sup> Contemporary responses highlight that both fancy and plain stitchery elicited considerably more than a cursory glance

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<sup>61</sup> See, particularly, Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>62</sup> Holroyd, ‘Embroidered Rhetoric’, 35.

<sup>63</sup> Taylor, *The Needles Excellency*, A2r.

from men; an ‘old decay’d patch’d Bed’ as well as fine embroidery could provoke comment and creative analogy.<sup>64</sup> As will be shown throughout this thesis, male writers’ meticulous descriptions of actual and fictionalised needlework indicate that men regarded stitchery with skilled scrutiny, taking a knowledgeable interest in materials and techniques, and their resulting effects.

Scholarship which has focused on how sewing was used to confine women physically, or helped to create homosocial communities, risks creating the impression that women stitched in cloistered and all-female spaces.<sup>65</sup> Although women did sometimes sew in female groups or use their handiwork as a means of retreat, at other times, they discussed sewing projects with male companions or worked on them in their presence. The diary of Puritan gentlewoman Margaret Hoby, discussed further in chapter two, is particularly illuminating. As well as sewing with her maids, Hoby records working in the company of numerous male relatives, neighbours and Puritan associates, stitching as she talks to them, listens to them read and conducts business with them.<sup>66</sup> Such examples remind us that it is important not to relegate domestic stitchery to a supposedly invisible “private” sphere. Particularly in elite households, the home was an important centre for theological, political, cultural and artistic discussion, community and exchange; needlework, both as product and process, participated in this.<sup>67</sup> Sewn objects were displayed, exhibited to visitors and even, as Robert Burton observes, ‘shew[n] to strangers’.<sup>68</sup> Stitching seems to have been a pervasive activity, interjected into an extensive range of settings. Consequently, even men who did not handle the needle themselves must have developed a close familiarity with fabric skills and

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<sup>64</sup> *Musarum Deliciae* (London, 1655), E6r–E8r.

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, Roszika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: The Women’s Press, 1984; repr. New York: Routledge, 1989), 62–64.

<sup>66</sup> Margaret Hoby, *The Private Life of an Elizabethan Lady: The Diary of Lady Margaret Hoby, 1599–1605*, ed. Joanna Moody (Stroud: Sutton, 1998), 24, 39, 43, 54, 56, 61, 70, 83–85, 89, 95–96, 100, 102, 115, 119, 123, 125, 130, 135–36, 140–41, 145–47, 158–59.

<sup>67</sup> For discussion of concepts of privacy and resistance to it within domestic space, see Lena Cowen Orlin, *Locating Privacy in Tudor London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). See also Wendy Wall, *Staging Domesticity: Household Work and English Identity in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 5–9.

<sup>68</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, vol. 2, ed. Nicolas K. Kiessling, Thomas C. Faulkner, and Rhonda L. Blair (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 95.

materials. Throughout this thesis I emphasise that men as well as women experienced texts and textiles in physically and conceptually proximate ways.

The tendency to see needlework as conditioning virtuous femininity remains most manifest in relation to needlework-as-practice, an area largely neglected by recent revisionist approaches.<sup>69</sup> Embroidered objects which demonstrate the maker's agency or subjectivity are seen as subverting the restrictive intentions behind women's needlework education; the needle continues to be regarded as an instrument of patriarchal control, designed to instil a limiting femininity under which women were chaste, silent, obedient and, in the terms of Lena Cowen Orlin's critique, 'invisible'.<sup>70</sup> By contrast, I argue that creating both basic and fancy stitches is mindful, skilled work and was frequently perceived as an imaginative, creative, devotional, recreational and sociable experience. Whilst needlework-as-practice comes most to the fore in my first two chapters, my consideration of wrought objects in chapters three and four equally emphasises the need to bear practice in mind when looking at stitched artefacts. Sewn materials bore traces of skilled and meaningful gestures, and the maker(s) as well as other knowledgeable viewers experienced a stitched object as a record of its production.

## Sources and Terms

In order to illustrate just how wide an array of discursive and practical domains was permeated by needlework and textile ways of thinking, this thesis draws upon a broad range of printed and manuscript sources, including but not limited to pattern books, autobiographical writings, letters, company records, account books, poetry, drama, devotional guides, scriptural texts and glosses, and sermons. I position these texts in conversation with extant stitched artefacts. In drawing together these sources, I seek to examine both how sewing and sewn objects were experienced in practice (as well as represented prescriptively), and how material forms of perception and

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<sup>69</sup> I borrow the term 'needlework-as-practice' from Holroyd, who distinguishes it from 'needlework-as-object', 'Embroidered Rhetoric', 35.

<sup>70</sup> Lena Cowen Orlin, 'Three Ways to Be Invisible in the Renaissance: Sex, Reputation, and Stitchery', in *Renaissance Culture and the Everyday*, ed. Patricia Fumerton and Simon Hunt (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999): 183–203. See also Morrall, 'Domestic Decoration and the Bible', 590–91; Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 118.

understanding circulated in wider culture. Each chapter features at least one case study of a particular text or object, designed to provide further insight into the topic under discussion.

Many of my sources are religious, reflecting the central place of Christianity in early modern texts and textiles, and indeed in early modern life and thought. In Ruth Geuter's survey of seventeenth-century figurative embroideries, biblical stories appear on 43 percent of the examples.<sup>71</sup> In print, it is estimated that religious works account for just over 40 percent of texts published between 1559 and 1602; religious titles continued to predominate throughout the seventeenth century.<sup>72</sup> I focus on Protestant sources, adding to recent work by scholars such as Tara Hamling, Matthew Milner and Andrew Morrall which has highlighted that early modern reformed religion had a rich visual, material and sensory culture.<sup>73</sup>

This thesis equally contributes to recent studies which have begun to redress the longstanding critical neglect of religious reading and writing by literary scholars, and remains alert to how religion operated as what Debora Shuger calls 'the cultural matrix for explorations of virtually every topic'.<sup>74</sup> Women's religious activity has been particularly neglected; as Erica Longfellow observes, texts which are understood according to anachronistic categories as works of "'personal" devotion' are considered to operate 'in a less transgressive and therefore less interesting aesthetic'.<sup>75</sup> As already indicated, similar assumptions are evident in studies of women's needlework, which

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<sup>71</sup> Geuter, 'Embroidered Biblical Narratives', 57.

<sup>72</sup> Alan B. Farmer and Zachary Lesser, 'What is Print Popularity? A Map of the Elizabethan Book Trade', in *The Elizabethan Top Ten: Defining Print Popularity in Early Modern England*, ed. Andy Kesson and Emma Smith (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), 31.

<sup>73</sup> Hamling, *Decorating the 'Godly' Household*; Matthew Milner, *The Senses and the English Reformation* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011); Andrew Morrall, 'The Reformation of the Virtues in Protestant Art and Decoration in Sixteenth-Century Northern Europe', in *Art Reformed? Reassessing the Impact of the Reformation on the Visual Arts*, ed. Tara Hamling and Richard Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2007), 105–26. On Catholic women's textiles, see Sophie Holroyd, "'Rich Embroidered Churchstufte": The Vestments of Helena Wintour', in *Catholic Culture in Early Modern England*, ed. Ronald Corthell et al. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 73–116.

<sup>74</sup> Debora Shuger, *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance: Religion, Politics, and the Dominant Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 6.

<sup>75</sup> Erica Longfellow, *Women and Religious Writing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 11.

tend to emphasise that needlework was essentially restrictive: an ‘appropriate’ and ‘sanctioned form of activity and personal expression’.<sup>76</sup> As noted above, women’s needlework not only participated in spaces typically thought of as male, “public” areas, but occupied a lively and influential place within the household and was viewed by diverse as well as privileged audiences.

This thesis’s consideration of ‘needlework’ focuses predominantly on fabric sewing, including decorative embroidery, tailoring and sempstry, acts of plain-seam work and mending. Like other recent considerations of the needle, my attention also extends when appropriate to other forms of textile labour which, as Frye observes, existed on a ‘continuum’ with sewing and have typically been considered the province of women, including lace-making, knitting, spinning and thread-winding.<sup>77</sup> Scholars often approach decorative and plain stitches with different assumptions; while the former is beginning to be acknowledged as posing complex and stimulating work for both the maker and the viewer or user, the idea that more utilitarian work was mindless and culturally invisible has yet to be challenged.<sup>78</sup> As Callaghan observes, the false ‘distinction between esthetic [*sic*] and productive labor’ is as evident in considerations of sewing which prioritise embroidery above seaming, as it is in the hierarchy of pen over needle.<sup>79</sup> While this thesis draws extensively on elaborate embroidery (particularly in chapters three and four), it is alert to the skilfulness, and the significance, of non-figurative and plain stitches. Responses to sewing and textile metaphors which focus on the significance of the basic stitch, and on textures and materials, emphasise that non-pictorial work could equally be understood as significant and “legible”.

Considering this continuum of needlework allows this thesis to explore how the intersection of texts and textiles cut across a spectrum of social orders, at the same time

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<sup>76</sup> Nely Keinanen, ‘Elizabeth Tudor, Embroidered Cover of “The glasse of the synnefull soule”’, in *Reading Early Modern Women: An Anthology of Texts in Manuscript and Print, 1550–1700*, ed. Helen Ostovich and Elizabeth Sauer (New York: Routledge, 2004), 411–13. PDF e-book. See also Randles’ claim that needlework ‘inculcated a feminine sociability and friendship within the boundaries of an activity seen as appropriate for women’, “The Pattern of All Patience”, 161.

<sup>77</sup> Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 13.

<sup>78</sup> Orlin, ‘Three Ways’, 188–89.

<sup>79</sup> Callaghan, ‘Looking Well to Linens’, 56.



as remaining sensitive to the particular experiences of different parts of society.<sup>80</sup> The basic act of sewing and associated crafts such as spinning spread across all social levels; all women from the wealthiest to the poorest were expected to be able to handle needles and spindles. Those from lower social orders come to the fore in chapter one, where I highlight that men from poorer sections of society might have more practical needle skills, as financial necessity prompted them to mend their own clothes, earn a wage in the textile trade, serve in elite households or assist female relatives. Studying the handiwork of such men and women opens up a space in which to begin to consider how a still neglected social demographic experienced diverse ‘textualities’ and both responded to and helped to construct literate culture.<sup>81</sup>

## Chapter Summaries

Chapter one focuses on how gender identity and relations were experienced in relation to sewing. Considering the intersection of a range of female and male skills with needle and thread, I examine how men, women, boys and girls worked co-operatively in domestic and commercial settings. I emphasise how sewing creates patterns of practice, sociability and shared experience which complicate discourses of the needle as a feminizing instrument. The needle was used to construct and negotiate male identities, and offered female stitchers identities which were rooted in commonalities of skill, creativity, confessional orientation and economic situation as much as notions of girl- and womanhood.

I begin by considering how women engaged with men and boys in the domestic stitchery of the elite and upwardly mobile middling sorts. I then consider commercial sewing, complicating scholarly distinctions between men’s participation in the formal

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<sup>80</sup> Frye takes a similar approach, arguing that ‘[r]egardless of [a woman’s] class or the choices made from the range available to her, she was located in and contributing to a world composed of texts—to stories, songs, conversation, and argument; to cheap printed pictures pinned to the walls of the local inn and dwellings; to opulent tapestries or to the more intimate, domestically produced needlework pictures wrought in bright silks’, *Needles and Pens*, 10. See also Kathleen Staples, ‘Embroidered Furnishings: Questions of Production and Usage’, in Morrall and Watt, *English Embroidery*, 28–29.

<sup>81</sup> Susan Wiseman’s work-in-progress on the literary experiences of servants promises to contribute to this field, ‘Renaissance Ideas and Local Contexts?’ (conference paper, Reading Conference in Early Modern Studies, University of Reading, July 11, 2013).

economy and women's relegation to the 'shadow' economy.<sup>82</sup> I emphasise how women's stitchery was accommodated alongside men's in formal economies, using a case study of the "graffiti" in three mid-seventeenth-century account books relating to the Ballard family drapery business to illuminate the business identity and commercial relations of the wife, widow and mistress, Sarah Ballard. I then recover male handiwork, undertaken by men and boys, which was culturally and economically marginalised. Finally, I consider the modes of male identity which sewing and spinning constituted. Turning the notion of needlemen's effeminacy on its head, I bring together a hanging at Hardwick Hall 'of temperance and the contrary Sardanapales' with contemporaneous textual invocations of Sardanapalus's and Hercules' spinning to reveal how these supposedly effeminate figures could be reclaimed as masculine ideals, or used to contest patriarchal norms.<sup>83</sup>

Chapter two extends the focus on practice by considering how sewing was understood and experienced as a skilled handicraft which was cognitively productive in its own right, and enabled stitchers to get to grips with accompanying textual and devotional labours. In both domestic and professional settings, religious reading and meditation often accompanied sewing as consonant and companionate practices which were integrated with and enriched by the material handiwork; rather than stifling the intellect, reading and working combined to stimulate and develop forms of acuity which were both mental and manual. Whether working plain seam or elaborate embroidery, sewing created a space in which readers could engage with and respond to texts, creatively, critically, meditatively and often communally. Drawing on theories of enskilment and embodiment, I emphasise that sewing involved manual and instrumental as well as cerebral ways of knowing, feeling and thinking; its cognitive and emotional value was generated not in spite of but out of physical labour. The chapter concludes with a case study of Elizabeth Isham, a Northamptonshire Puritan gentlewoman whose autobiographical writings illuminate the intersections of handiwork, reading and devotion.

Turning from needlework-as-practice to needlework-as-product, chapter three examines how embroidered bookbindings operated as sites of complex and elaborate

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<sup>82</sup> See Korda, *Labors Lost*, 3, 20–22.

<sup>83</sup> Santina M. Levey and Peter K. Thornton, eds., *Of Household Stuff: The 1601 Inventories of Bess of Hardwick* (London: National Trust, 2001), 45.

meaning, and situated the bound text within a richly significant contexture of reading materials, within, upon and beyond the book. Typically applied to scriptural and devotional texts, embroidered bindings became highly popular during the late-sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Drawing upon Derrida's theory of the *parergon* and Renaissance theories of framing, I argue that these embroidered bindings functioned as creative frameworks which shaped and extended the textual and paratextual structures of books. I begin with an overview of dominant trends in cover design, before offering more detailed considerations of two different genres. Firstly, I consider embroidered bindings which respond to printed frontispieces, focusing particularly on a 1636 copy of Henry Valentine's *Private Devotions*. Secondly, I consider how floral covers, the most popular variety of design, structured and produced interpretative and devotional responses to the bound text. Considering forms of book use as well as direct textual responses, I argue that these covers situated reading within an holistic network of floral conceits and practices. The chapter is supplemented by a hand-list of extant embroidered bindings (Appendices 1 and 2) and cognate woven bindings (Appendix 3); these are designed as resources to enable further research into this wealth of materials.

My final chapter considers how narrative and rhetoric operate in needlework, and how the embroidered 'stories' often identified in early modern textiles intersected with and shaped how textual stories were theorized, structured and perceived. Emphasising the need to understand stitched stories in distinctively fabric terms, I reveal how narrative's spatial and temporal structures were created, tested and managed in needlework's materials and structures, including threads, colours and lists (selvages), as well as images. In sewing and sewn objects, and in material metaphors, needlework tends towards dilatory and digressive narrative structures, at the same time as producing a dynamic and coherent story. I reveal that embroidery participated in rhetorical and literary discourses and debates, generating forms of verisimilitude, *copia* and epitome, and offering a language in which to understand these features in texts. Responses to a piece of needlework, made by Lady Elizabeth Powlet and given to the University of Oxford, provide a striking case study. Presenting the story of Christ's birth, death and resurrection, the embroidery was celebrated in a manuscript of poems which reveal the complexity of stitched stories and shed new light on the textile metaphors which pervaded early modern thought.

## Chapter One: Men's and Women's Textile Work in Early Modern England

On 4th August 1586, Elizabeth Shrewsbury<sup>1</sup> replied to allegations made by her estranged husband, George Talbot, that she had taken ‘certain utensills of howsehold’ belonging to him. Amongst these objects were ‘Rich hanginges made by Thomas Lane Ambrose William Barlowe and Henrye Mr. Henrye Cavendishes man’, all ‘Imbroderers’ whose ‘meate drinke and wages’ the Earl claimed to have paid ‘duringe the workinge of them’. According to Shrewsbury, however, ‘most of the hanginges [were] made at Chattesworth and some of the Countesse Gromes women and some boyes she kepte wroughte the moste part of them. [She n]ever hadd but one Imbroderer at one tyme that wroughte on them’.<sup>2</sup>

The range of handiworkers named in this exchange complicates modern scholarly commonplaces which regard needlework as a ‘specifically female knowledge and practice’, performed according to clearly delineated gender boundaries.<sup>3</sup> Modern critical accounts seeking to disrupt the binary between the female needle and the male pen have rarely considered male stitchery.<sup>4</sup> Although needlework featured heavily in prescriptive texts on femininity, in practice, it was performed by men and boys, as well as women and girls. As Maureen Daly Goggin observes, ‘the cordoning off of embroidery as “women’s work”’ has contributed to a ‘paucity of information’ about men’s needlework.<sup>5</sup> Textile historians have studied a small number of professional male embroiderers, but this work has remained isolated from accounts of the sewing which

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<sup>1</sup> Although Elizabeth Shrewsbury is often known as Bess of Hardwick, this thesis follows the precedent set by her practice of signing herself ‘EShrouesbury’ (and orthographic variants thereon).

<sup>2</sup> ‘Answer to the Demand of Plate by the Earl of Shrewsbury’, August 4, 1586, Hatfield House Archives, Hatfield, Cecil Papers 164/91.

<sup>3</sup> Wall, *Staging Domesticity*, 65.

<sup>4</sup> Frye cites Shrewsbury’s letter, and makes passing mention of other male embroiderers, but she largely effaces their work by concentrating on Shrewsbury as the ‘producer of her own woven text’, *Pens and Needles*, 61–63.

<sup>5</sup> Maureen Daly Goggin, ‘An Essamplaire Essai on the Rhetoricity of Needlework Sampler-Making: A Contribution to Theorizing and Historicizing Rhetorical Praxis’, *Rhetoric Review* 21, no. 4 (2002): 331.

women undertook for commercial profit as well as within the home economy.<sup>6</sup> Shrewsbury's account of the collaborative production of these hangings reveals that, particularly in elite households like Chatsworth and Hardwick, male textile artisans lived and worked collaboratively alongside male and female servants for whom stitchery formed part of a wider range of domestic work. Apparently not textile workers by trade, the juveniles and man-servants cited by Shrewsbury suggest that a more socially diverse range of early modern males was competent with a needle and thread than has hitherto been acknowledged.

In this chapter, I examine collaborative cultures of needle and thread in relation to both home and commercial economies, exploring how the social, economic and cultural narratives constructed by and about different forms of stitchery prompt us to rethink the identities and privileges which textile work afforded male and female handiworkers. The first section reflects on the "home economy" of the elite and middling sorts, examining the various male handiworkers working within and for the household, and considering how their involvement challenges us to reassess the feminized meanings of "domestic needlework".<sup>7</sup> I begin by considering the professional needlemen and male domestic servants who worked for and with needlewomen, before looking at how women's use of pattern drawers and books connected women with male practitioners beyond the home. Positioning the household as a space in which discourses of skilled productivity might be shared by workers of different genders, and occupational and social statuses, textile work in and for the home reveals the porous complex of identities that "domestic" stitchery afforded to women, men and boys.

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Patricia Wardle, 'The King's Embroiderer: Edmund Harrison (1590–1667) I. The Man and His Milieu', *Textile History* 25, no. 1 (1994): 29–59; Wardle, 'The King's Embroiderer: Edmund Harrison (1590–1667) II. His Work', *Textile History* 26, no. 2 (1995): 139–84; Wardle, 'John Shepley (1575–1631), Embroiderer to the High and Mighty Prince Charles, Prince of Wales', *Textile History* 32, no. 2 (2001): 133–155.

<sup>7</sup> My use of 'domestic needlework' follows Frye's definition of it as work 'produced by women for gifts and the "household store"'. Frye defines this against 'professional needlework': work 'produced for wages'. Frye acknowledges that this distinction is problematic not only in relation to labouring and middling households, where women could be involved in both, but in relation to elite households, like Chatsworth, which constituted 'small home industr[ies]' where professional needlemen, male and female servants and elite women might all be employed in contributing to the "household store", *Needles and Pens*, 245n.1.

The second section of this chapter examines gender relations in commercial textile economies, highlighting how men and women, boys and girls worked alongside each other in guild-regulated professions and in informal, often impoverished, sectors, which existed beyond corporate protection. Finally, I return to Hardwick Hall, to consider a hanging depicting Sardanapalus handling a distaff and thread-winder. I read this material narrative alongside early modern texts which use the textile labours of Sardanapalus and Hercules to explore the social and moral status of male handiwork, revealing how stitchcraft and threadwork could be used to articulate both normative and heterodox male identities.

## Household Sewing

Shrewsbury employed numerous professional needlemen during her lifetime. Some delivered work completed in their own workshops; many worked within her residences at Northaw, London, Sheffield, Chatsworth and Hardwick, becoming temporarily assimilated into her household. For example, in a 1577 letter to Shrewsbury, Gilbert Talbot (George's son) discussed her claim that George Talbot had refused her 'imbroduers' entry to Sheffield Lodge and thus 'kepte [them] from theyr beddes there yesternyghte'.<sup>8</sup> More usually, Shrewsbury seems to have patronised one embroiderer at a time, as her letter to George Talbot claimed. Santina Levey highlights that Shrewsbury's accounts record numerous occasional payments to 'my' and 'the embroiderer', as well as identifying individual embroiderers by name, sometimes employed on a temporary, piecework basis and sometimes as salaried household members.<sup>9</sup> Payments to Angell and Barnett are recorded in 1550 and 1552 respectively. '[O]ne Amyas a brod'r' received wages in November 1595. 'Webb the imbroduer' received a half-year's salary in Midsummer 1598, before departing in February 1599. Thomas Lane, an embroiderer whom the Earl claimed had worked on the disputed hangings, received money for a livery coat in 1590, a fabric item which materially incorporated him into the household. In 1601 Lane was in receipt of a half-yearly wage, although in the intervening period he

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<sup>8</sup> Gilbert Talbot, 'To Elizabeth, Countess of Shrewsbury', July 1577, Folger MS X.d.428 (111), 1r. For discussion of this letter, see Mary S. Lovell, *Bess of Hardwick: First Lady of Chatsworth 1527–1608* (London: Little, Brown, 2005), 268–71.

<sup>9</sup> Levey, *Embroideries at Hardwick Hall*, 23.

was also commissioned to produce individual items, suggesting a liminal position which was both part of and separate from the household.<sup>10</sup> Lane also held leases on the Hardwick estate, a privilege which, as Levey notes, Shrewsbury awarded to other esteemed servants, such as John Balechouse, a painter and another of Shrewsbury's permanent craftsmen. Balechouse worked on Shrewsbury's painted friezes and cloths, and probably designed and drew some of Hardwick's embroideries, pointing to a wider range of male handiwork visible in "homemade" embroideries.<sup>11</sup>

The embroiderers' place within the household was marked spatially at Hardwick Hall, where they had a dedicated room: accounts for 1591 mention an 'imbroderes chamber' in the Old Hall, whilst the 1601 inventory of the New Hall records 'nyne payre of beames for imbroderers' in a 'roome at the wardrop dore'.<sup>12</sup> Many elite households seem to have possessed equipment marked for professional use, materially embedding artisanal infrastructures and personnel within the home. For example, a 1603 inventory of Hengrave Hall, home to the Kitson family, notes 'divers tents to serve for the embroyderers' in the Wardrobe.<sup>13</sup> Such tools could move with the family, working to constitute the household anew in a different location.<sup>14</sup> Gilbert and Mary Talbot's 1607 accounts, for example, record moving the 'imbroyderers loome' from their house in Broad Street to temporary lodgings in Whitehall.<sup>15</sup> These frames emphasise how elite domestic space encompassed professional identities and modes of

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<sup>10</sup> Cited in Santina M. Levey, *An Elizabethan Inheritance: The Hardwick Hall Textiles* (London: National Trust, 1998), 42–43, 106n.7; Levey, *Embroideries at Hardwick Hall*, 23–24. For livery as a 'form of incorporation', see Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 19–20.

<sup>11</sup> See Anthony Wells-Cole, *Art and Decoration in Elizabethan and Jacobean England: The Influence of Continental Prints, 1558–1625* (New Haven: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre, 1997), 286–89; Levey, *Embroideries at Hardwick Hall*, 24–25, 175, 309.

<sup>12</sup> Cited in Levey, *Embroideries at Hardwick Hall*, 24. The 1601 Chatsworth inventory similarly noted 'a short tent' in the Middle Wardrobe and a 'frame to weyve Carpetes' in a 'litle vawte' at the Wardrobe door, Levey and Thornton, *Of Household Stuff*, 45, 23.

<sup>13</sup> John Gage, *The History and Antiquities of Hengrave, in Suffolk* (London: James Carpenter, 1822), 35. See also Holroyd, 'Embroidered Rhetoric', 52.

<sup>14</sup> On the household as 'constituted' by objects as well as subjects, see Natasha Korda, *Shakespeare's Domestic Economies: Gender and Property in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 1.

<sup>15</sup> 'Account of Domestic Expenditure at Broad Street, and also Travelling Expenses', 1607, Lambeth Palace Library, London, Shrewsbury Papers MS 706, 38r.

production, presenting professional embroidery as a facet of domestic stitchery rather than its opposite.

For members of the household retinue, distinctions between professional artisans and domestic servants could be fluid, as craftsmen undertook other domestic duties. According to Fabian Philipps, writing in 1663, ‘now many Gentlemen can ... supply the places of a Servingman, Butler, and Taylor, by one man fitted for all those employments’;<sup>16</sup> such practices were sufficiently common to make butlers-cum-tailors stock characters in contemporary literature.<sup>17</sup> While scholars have tended to focus on the place of needlework in women’s preparation for domestic service, for men too sewing could be part of a spectrum of household duties.<sup>18</sup> Needlework completed by maids, grooms (household stewards, sometimes particularly male youths) and boys thus exists on a continuum and even overlaps with that of professionals.

The range of male handiworkers employed by Shrewsbury accords with other elite households. At Hengrave Hall, in 1572, the Kitsons engaged handiworkers on a piecework basis, reimbursing ‘the embroyderers for viiij weeks and iiij days work in embroydering work at viij*d.* the daye’; the accounts for May 1574 record paying ‘Porring of Fornham for vij days work in the wardrope in making the children’s gowns at v*d.* the day’, followed immediately by a payment which equated to 4*d.* per day to ‘young John Dawson for xvij days work sewing in the wardrope’.<sup>19</sup> Combined with the less precise description of Dawson’s work as ‘sewing’ and his identification by age rather than vocation, these wages suggest that he had not yet achieved professional status and indicate male workers’ participation in an informal economy, discussed in the following section.

The juvenile males employed at the Bacon household in Stiffkey, Norfolk, appear to have had more secure corporate identities. Accounts from 1591 relating to the

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<sup>16</sup> Fabian Philipps, *The Antiquity, Legality, Reason, Duty and Necessity of Præ-emption and Pourveyance, for the King* (London, 1663), Ss3v.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, George Fidge, *The Great Eater of Grayes-Inne* (London, 1652), C4v; William Cavendish, *The Triumphant Widow* (London, 1677), F4r.

<sup>18</sup> See Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, ‘Women Apprentices in the Trades and Crafts of Early Modern Bristol’, *Continuity and Change* 6, no. 2 (1991): 233–34.

<sup>19</sup> Gage, *History and Antiquities*, 35, 191, 202. See also, Levy, *Embroideries at Hardwick Hall*, 25.



making of a bed record paying ‘the embroidererers sonne for 24 weeks 3 days at 3s the weeke’. The boy’s father, John Roofe, was also working in the house on another project at this time, receiving 5s a week for 34 weeks.<sup>20</sup> While the son’s lower wages, combined with his lack of a given name, indicate his lower professional standing, the relational moniker anticipates the son’s assumption of his father’s status and business. This emphasises needlework’s role in crafting patrilineal identities, offering a paternal and professional parallel to the matrilineal transferral of textile skills traditionally stressed by scholars.<sup>21</sup> Taylor’s prefatory poem to the pattern book, *The Needles Excellency*, echoes these parallels, observing that ‘The Mothers taught their Daughters, Sires their Sons,/ Thus in a line successively it runs’.<sup>22</sup> This genealogy complicates Jones and Stallybrass’s suggestion that stitchery constituted a distinct, female memorial culture, which counteracted women’s exclusion from inheritance systems that ‘privileged fathers and sons’.<sup>23</sup> Taylor’s use of zeugma suggests a material culture which prioritised women, rather than excluding men, setting a maternal precedent which paternal modes of succession followed.

Although Taylor bifurcates matrilineal and patrilineal genealogies, the Hengrave and Hardwick accounts suggest that sons’ work may have registered connections that took in the whole family. For example, three months after the disbursement to ‘young dawson’ for ‘sewing’, Kytson paid ‘Dawson his wife for making six payer of yeomen’s sheets’.<sup>24</sup> Shrewsbury paid ‘ned franke for hys boy to work at Imbradrey’ in 1599, recompensing Franke’s wife in 1600 ‘for starching some peces of wrought hanging’.<sup>25</sup> In each case, the work of mother and son is recorded by describing actions rather than invoking occupational titles. This suggests parallels between how the work of women and boys was conceptualised, evoking Alexandra Shepard’s argument

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<sup>20</sup> Cited in Pamela Clabburn, *The National Trust Book of Furnishing Textiles* (London: Viking, 1988), 102.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 158.

<sup>22</sup> Taylor, *The Needles Excellency*, A2v.

<sup>23</sup> Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 156.

<sup>24</sup> Gage, *History and Antiquities of Hengrave*, 202.

<sup>25</sup> Cited in Levey, *An Elizabethan Inheritance*, 43.

that women tend to describe their work in ‘verb-oriented’ rather than ‘noun-oriented’ ways.<sup>26</sup>

The distinctly gendered genealogies of needlework are further challenged by practical collaborations between women and the craftsmen they employed, as is revealed by a 1656 letter from Heneage Finch to his brother-in-law, Edward Dering. Illustrating the knowledgeable interest which men took in domestic needlework, Heneage recounts how his wife, Elizabeth, is progressing in her embroidery project:

shee hath bought the Cloth for her Bedd, and cutt it out,  
and means to Lay the Flowers so thick that there want 6  
Flowers to the finishing of the Bedd, which she is going  
about, But as for the Carpet and Chayr and stoole, I should  
despayre of seeing an end of them, if John Best had not  
found out a way to ease her. But now John takes those  
borders which my mother wrought, and cutts out every  
single Flower and Leafe, and when these are so voyded, He  
draws some Turning Stalks for my Wife to work, upon  
which he will so place the Flowers and the Leaves, that it  
shall seem as if all had been wrought together, and be  
perfectly sutable to the Pattern on the Bedd. So in Time wee  
hope to Erect an Handsome Furniture to the Honor of my  
mother.<sup>27</sup>

This final line positions the embroidery as an act of maternal memorialization. Yet the fact that it is Heneage’s mother (rather than Elizabeth’s), combined with his concluding use of ‘wee’, suggests a more complexly gendered model of commemorative needlework than that postulated by Jones and Stallybrass. This ‘wee’ emphasises the collaborative nature of the material memorialisation, produced between Heneage,

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<sup>26</sup> Alexandra Shepard, ‘Crediting Women in the Early Modern English Economy’, *History Workshop Journal* 79, no. 1 (2015): 10–12.

<sup>27</sup> Sarah Hutton, ed., *The Conway Letters: The Correspondence of Anne, Viscountess Conway, Henry More, and Their Friends, 1642–1684*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 133–34. Ruth Geuter discusses this letter in ‘Women and Embroidery in Seventeenth-Century Britain: The Social, Religious and Political Meanings of Domestic Needlework’ (PhD thesis, University of Wales, 1996), 151, 251–52.

Elizabeth and John Best—perhaps the broderer and citizen of London who died in 1676.<sup>28</sup>

Best mediates the matrilineal stitchery materially and narratively, heralding the introduction of Heneage's mother to the letter. Heneage passes from describing his wife's ambitious artistic vision and accomplished work to highlighting John's initiative in 'f[inding] out a way to ease her', and moves back and forth between the handicrafting of Elizabeth, John and his mother. Making emerges as a dynamic interchange between skilled female and male needleworkers, past and present. The resulting objects, which seem 'wrought together', indicate that embroideries might occlude rather than articulate gendered and occupational distinctions, complicating scholars' tendency to assume that the maker's gender can readily be discerned from an artefact and that stitched pieces presented straightforward displays of femininity. This chimes with the controversy over the production of the Hardwick hangings. Shrewsbury and Talbot evidently each felt confident that their opposing claims about the hangings' makers would appear valid. This suggests that professional and non-professional, as well as male and female, handiwork might be indistinguishable in terms of their visual and material idiom, and their execution; this challenges Levey's claim that pieces made by master craftsmen can be differentiated from those produced by more casual workers.<sup>29</sup>

The communities of practice at work in the Finch household resonate with exchanges between other elite women, male artisans and household members. Scholars have amply demonstrated how collaborative sewing between women created homosocial bonds;<sup>30</sup> collaborations between women and men, by contrast, remain critically overlooked. In a letter written in 1571, when Mary Stuart was under house arrest with the Shrewsburys, Mary commented that Bastien Pagez 'me soulasge par ses inventions d'ouvrages, qui m'est, après mes livres, le seul exercisse qui m'est layssay' (comforts me by his designs for needle work which is, after my books, the only exercise

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<sup>28</sup> 'Best, John, Citizen and Broderer of London', July 4, 1676, TNA PROB 4/18498. See also, Patricia Wardle, 'A Rare Survival: The Barge Cloth of the Worshipful Company of Pewterers and the Embroiderer John Best', *Textile History* 37, no. 1 (2006): 1–16, esp. 9–11.

<sup>29</sup> Levey, *Embroideries at Hardwick Hall*, 270–71. Randles also questions how easy it is to differentiate professional and non-professional work, "'The Pattern of All Patience'", 152.

<sup>30</sup> Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 145; Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 58–65; Randles, "'The Pattern of All Patience'", 160–61.

which is left to me).<sup>31</sup> The work of Pagez, a *valet de chambre*, further suggests male grooms' contributions to domestically wrought textiles. The comfort his work provides parallels Mary's reported 'delight' in contriving needleworks with her ladies-in-waiting, and emphasises that women's interactions with male employees were not solely mercantile or perfunctory but forged affective bonds and ties of reciprocal obligation.<sup>32</sup>

Although most non-elite households could not afford to retain resident embroiderers, the homes of the upwardly mobile middling sorts could still provide sites for women to forge creative relationships with professional needlemen, as is revealed by Samuel Pepys' diary for January 1666. Having agreed that Elizabeth's closet should have new hangings, and gone with her to choose material, Samuel returned home on the 10th to find her 'busy about making her hangings for her chamber with the Upholster', an artisan whose tasks included making, hanging and mending household furnishings.<sup>33</sup> In this case, the upholsterer was perhaps a preliminary advisor: Samuel does not mention him again in subsequent references to these hangings. This suggests a more complex theory of seventeenth-century women's consumption than is allowed by Natasha Korda's attempt to chart a growing 'division between male activity and female inactivity', as women's role within the household became that of consumer rather than producer.<sup>34</sup> Working collaboratively 'with' the upholsterer and later independently, Elizabeth's handiwork indicates that women possessed authority and autonomy in their exchanges with male craftsmen, and that the consumption of male services and expertise could facilitate and further women's skilled productivity.

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<sup>31</sup> Mary, Queen of Scots, *Lettres, instructions et mémoires de Marie Stuart, Reine d'Écosse*, vol. 3, ed. Alexandre Labanoff (London: C. Dolman, 1844), 373. Translation from Mary, Queen of Scots, *Letters of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scotland: Selected from the 'Recueil des lettres de Marie Stuart'*, trans. William Turnbull (London: C. Dolman, 1845), xxiii.

<sup>32</sup> George Talbot, 'Earl of Shrewsbury to Sir William Cecil', March 13, 1569, TNA SP 53/3/62. This letter is discussed by Randles who also briefly mentions Mary's letter concerning Pagez in relation to needlework's emotionally restorative capacity. Randles, however, does not discuss Pagez, remaining focused on female sociability, "'The Pattern of All Patience'", 160–61.

<sup>33</sup> Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, vol. 7, 1666, ed. Robert Latham and William Matthews (London: Harper Collins, 1995), 7, 10. On upholsterers' work, see Clabburn, *The National Trust Book of Furnishing Textiles*, 69–79.

<sup>34</sup> Korda, *Shakespeare's Domestic Economies*, 29, 33.

Women also engaged craftsmen's services remotely, forging connections with a wider community of needlework practitioners. Lady Brilliana Harley's letters to her son, Ned, twice refer to pieces drawn by Roger Nelham, an embroiderer and citizen of London.<sup>35</sup> In March 1639 Brilliana directed Ned, a student at the University of Oxford: 'Tell Gorg Griffets ... I haue sent him the mony for Mr Neelham, the drawer, and I would haue him hasten the sending of the peace of cloth, which he had to drawe'. Another letter instructs Ned: 'tell George Griffithes that I have received the petticoates wch Mr Nelham did drawe, and the silke and wyre'. She adds that 'Mr Nelham shall haue money, when I receiue the piece of greene cloth from him'. Brilliana's assertive dealings with Nelham indicate a steady flow of designs, materials and perhaps ideas between them, in which Brilliana commanded authority. These letters also highlight the mediation of Ned and George Griffiths, Ned's servitor. Although perhaps indicative of limits on her movement, Brilliana's engagement of Ned and George highlights how men's involvement in purchasing materials and liaising with pattern drawers made them intimately familiar with needlework. On occasion, Ned was perhaps more than a messenger. In 1641, Brilliana thanked him 'for the patterne of worke you sent me', informing him: 'I like it very well, and ... if pleas God, I purpose to woorke a shute of chars of it, and I hope you shall inioy them'.<sup>36</sup> Brilliana's approving comments suggest that Ned may have chosen this pattern himself, collaborating in her creative exercises. Revealing her intentions for its application and her hopes for his satisfaction, she assumes his continuing interest in the project.

Scenes in Thomas Heywood's *The Fair Maid of the Exchange* (1607) indicate that interactions with pattern drawers also offered women of the middling sorts opportunities for creative collaboration with male craftsmen. Mall Berry and Phyllis Flower, gentrywomen seamstresses, take handkerchiefs to Cripple the drawer. Both seamstresses have carefully conceived needlework designs, possessing emblematic (and erotic) significance, intended to reveal their affections to their loves; in Phyllis's case,

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<sup>35</sup> For the use of pattern drawers by women including Brilliana Harley see Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 136; Staples, 'Embroidered Furnishings', 28–31. On Roger Nelham, see John Nevinson, 'John Nelham, Embroiderer', *The Bulletin of the Needle and Bobbin Club* 65 (1982): 17–19; 'Will of Roger Nelham, Embroiderer of London of Mortlake, Surrey', February 16, 1654, TNA PROB 11/236/246.

<sup>36</sup> Brilliana Harley, *Letters of the Lady Brilliana Harley*, ed. Thomas Taylor Lewis (London: Camden Society, 1854), 35–36, 86, 137.

Cripple is the intended recipient, again suggesting the emotional content of collaboration between men and women, here filtered through male fantasy.<sup>37</sup> Mall and Phyllis each seek Cripple's artistic input. Requesting his 'counsell' and 'direction' in finalising their highly-developed designs, they present consultation with pattern drawers as a sought-after opportunity for creative and critical development and collaboration.<sup>38</sup>

Both 'counsell' and 'direction' signal the instruction and guidance involved in this interchange. Whilst in the sexualised context of *The Fair Maid* this suggests pattern drawers' involvement in regulating social and emotional discourses, it also registers how the production and supply of patterns allowed for the exchange of expertise. According to Hannah Woolley's *A Supplement to The Queen-Like Closet* (1674), pattern drawers could provide technical as well as aesthetic and compositional advice. Instructing readers how 'to make a suit of Chairs', she adds: 'if you want skill to shadow, desire the Drawer to direct you in the drawing of it; but then you must get an Embroiderer to draw it, for no other can direct you right'.<sup>39</sup> Alongside her subsequent offer 'to teach any Ingenious Person to Embroider any of these things' in person, Woolley's advice not only highlights that skilled practice needs embodied as well as textual instruction, but emphasises that early modern needlewomen were to assimilate both male and female instruction, conjoining written guidance with the direction of an experienced needleperson.<sup>40</sup>

Some embroiderers appear to have offered elementary instruction, highlighting that girls did not always learn from their mothers or schoolmistresses. Kathleen Staples posits that girls from upper and elite social orders may have received instruction from professionals. Noting that unemployed court musicians taught at Robert Perwich's Hackney girls' school, she conjectures that court embroiderers, out of work during the Interregnum years, may similarly have been employed to teach

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<sup>37</sup> Thomas Heywood, *The Fayre Mayde of the Exchange* (London, 1607), B3r, D4v.

<sup>38</sup> Heywood, *The Fayre Mayde of the Exchange*, B3r, D4v. Compare Juana Green's suggestion that the handkerchiefs constitute 'a form of female authorship' whose publication Cripple facilitates, 'The Sempster's Wares: Merchandising and Marrying in *The Fair Maid of the Exchange* (1607)', *Renaissance Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (2000): 1084–1118, esp. 1103.

<sup>39</sup> Hannah Woolley, *A Supplement to The Queen-Like Closet* (London, 1674), E3r.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, E5v.

needlework in girls' schools.<sup>41</sup> Further down the social order, some embroiderers certainly did instruct girls. The 1609 Chester court deposition of Griffith Johnis, a sheerman by trade (responsible for the finishing of woven cloth), declared that John Dakin, an embroiderer, 'did teach and instruct ... [Johnis'] daughter and other children ... to some needle worke', as well as 'offer[ing] to take ... [his] sonne apprentice'.<sup>42</sup>

According to Taylor's preface to *The Needles Excellency*, male-authored, -designed and -printed pattern books could enable women ostensibly operating in gynocentric communities to imagine themselves in a creative community involving men as well as women. Declaring that his 'Book, some cunning works doth teach', Taylor presents his text as co-operating in maternal instruction:

So Maids may (from their Mistresse, or their Mother)  
Learn to leaue one worke, and to learne another.  
For here they may make choyce of which is which,  
And skip from worke to worke, from stitch to stitch ....<sup>43</sup>

In his final prefatory poem, Taylor erases gender, class and occupational distinctions altogether, addressing himself '*To all degrees of both sexes, that loue or line by the laudable employment of the Needle*'.<sup>44</sup> This contrasts with the book's frontispiece image of three women and Taylor's sonnets celebrating famous needlewomen, which suggest a primarily female imagined readership.<sup>45</sup> His expansive dedication was probably motivated partly by the desire to reach as wide a readership as possible. Combined with his reference to sires teaching their sons, though, it suggests that even books which foregrounded needlework as a feminine activity, acknowledged and appealed to needlemen, and encouraged users to envisage their works within iconographic, affective and occupational discourses which were shared between the sexes and between professionals and non-professionals. Taylor's appeal echoes other Renaissance embroidery books printed and circulated across Europe which, as Randles notes, used

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<sup>41</sup> Staples, 'Embroidered Furnishings', 32–33.

<sup>42</sup> 'Examination concerning John Dakin, embroiderer', February 22, 1609, Cheshire Archives and Local Studies Service, Chester, ZQSE/8/10.

<sup>43</sup> Taylor, *The Needles Excellency*, A4v. Compare Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 129–30.

<sup>44</sup> Taylor, *The Needles Excellency*, B4r. See also Goggin, 'An Essamplaire Essai', 333–34.n8.

<sup>45</sup> Taylor, *The Needles Excellency*, t.p., B1r–B3v.

their paratexts to target both men and women, working in commercial and household economies.<sup>46</sup>

It is difficult to determine to what extent needlemen used such books, but at least one pattern book did find its way into male hands. Federico de Vinciolo's *Les secondes oeuvres, et subtiles inventions de lingerie* (printed in Paris but also circulated in England) addressed itself to a female readership but one 1599 copy bears the contemporaneous inscription: 'William Corinlilie the same'.<sup>47</sup> It is unclear who William was, or how the book came into his hands; perhaps he was an embroiderer or perhaps he did not perform needlework himself but, like Ned Harley, was involved in acquiring patterns. Whatever his relation to this book, his signature on the verso of a pattern suggests the ways in which men freely and willingly entered into the supposedly "feminine" space of domestic needlework, and, as we will see below, constructed their identities in relation to it. Needlework might, in patriarchal theory, be an 'active sign of female virtue',<sup>48</sup> but its practice involved both sexes.

## The Textile Economy

Having looked at the home economies of the elite and upwardly mobile middling sorts, I want now to consider the collaboration of male and female handiworkers in the commercial economy. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have typically been understood as a period during which increasing restrictions gradually excluded women from the workplace.<sup>49</sup> In recent years, this view has been complicated by scholars who have sought to recover how women *were* economically productive, in

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<sup>46</sup> Randles, "The Pattern of All Patience", 155.

<sup>47</sup> Federico de Vinciolo, *Les secondes oeuvres, et subtiles inventions de lingerie* (Paris, 1599), CUL Bb\*.2.49(D), Q4v.

<sup>48</sup> Andrew Morrall, 'Representations of Adam and Eve in Late Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century English Embroidery', in *The Authority of the Word: Reflecting on Image and Text in Northern Europe, 1400–1700*, ed. Celeste Brusati, Karl A. E. Enekel, and Walter S. Melion (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 314.

<sup>49</sup> Alice Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, 1st ed., new impression (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1968), 145–49; see also Steve Lee Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds: Structures of Life in Sixteenth-Century London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 38–40.



spite of these restrictions.<sup>50</sup> Tim Reinke-Williams and David Pennington have each shown that women were active in early modern marketplaces and used their trading to develop positive occupational identities and social relations.<sup>51</sup> Laura Gowing has examined the participation of girls and singlewomen as apprentices and mistresses in late-seventeenth-century London Companies.<sup>52</sup> Alexandra Shepard has focused on married women's wage-labour, emphasising that the '[e]xtensive evidence of wives' independent enterprise as well as their "assisting work" suggests the need for fuller incorporation of married women's productive skills within broader accounts of commercial growth'.<sup>53</sup>

Natasha Korda has focused on women's work in relation to London's theatres, arguing that whilst women were excluded from the socially and economically prestigious 'formal economy' of guilds and companies, many women worked in 'a hidden, yet nonetheless crucial, "shadow" economy': textile trades featured prominently, with many women performing wage-labour in sempstry, tiremaking and spinning. Korda argues that such work was characteristically 'unacknowledged, undervalued, stigmatized, or otherwise placed under cultural erasure' by guilds and companies anxious to protect male privilege. This led, Korda argues, to a 'gendered division of labor' whereby the '*form*' of women's economic activity, fundamentally 'differed from that of men', in terms of both social status and the tasks involved.<sup>54</sup> This binary, however, does not account for the full complexity or variety of economic participation for either men or women.

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<sup>50</sup> For a useful historiographical survey of women's work in the formal sphere, see Clare Crowston, 'Women, Gender, and Guilds in Early Modern Europe: An Overview of Recent Research', *International Review of Social History* 53, no. S16 (2008): 19–44.

<sup>51</sup> Tim Reinke-Williams, *Women, Work and Sociability in Early Modern London* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); David Pennington, *Going to Market: Women, Trade and Social Relations in Early Modern English Towns, c. 1550–1650* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).

<sup>52</sup> Laura Gowing, 'Girls on Forms: Apprenticing Young Women in Seventeenth-Century London', *Journal of British Studies* 55, no. 3 (2016): 447–73; Gowing, "'The Manner of Submission": Gender and Demeanour in Seventeenth-Century London', *Cultural and Social History* 10, no. 1 (2013): 25–45.

<sup>53</sup> Shepard, 'Crediting Women', 1–24, esp. 10.

<sup>54</sup> Korda, *Labor Lost*, 19–21.

This section examines the interplay between men's and women's work in both the "formal" and "informal" economic spheres (as defined by Korda), considering the forms their work took and the attitudes it provoked. I begin by considering how women's textile skills could allow them access to high status occupational positions and identities. Uncovering evidence of women's collaboration with male colleagues as well as independent female activity, I highlight that some women, especially but not exclusively the wives, widows and daughters of Company freemen, participated in the "formal economy" in ways which were appreciated and acknowledged by male colleagues.<sup>55</sup> The second part of this section considers male handiwork in the informal sphere, heeding Shepard's observation that 'patriarchal dividends were by no means evenly available to all men'.<sup>56</sup> As the exchange between Elizabeth Shrewsbury and George Talbot reveals, men and boys, as well as women, possessed informal handicraft skills which they employed at or beyond the margins of the regulated economy. As is highlighted by Cavendish's attempt to obfuscate this labour, the work of these subordinate men and boys was also at risk of 'cultural erasure' by the patriarchal system: an erasure reproduced in modern, critical accounts.

Korda highlights that many women worked informally by fiscally and materially contributing to their husbands' businesses.<sup>57</sup> The extent to which commerce depended on and appreciated women's skilled fabric work is evident in the ballad *The More Haste, the Worst Speed* ([1672–1696?]).<sup>58</sup> Here, a maid suggests her eligibility for marriage by detailing numerous 'Trades:/ Who through employment may have need/ more of a Womans Wit'. The ballad highlights how women's expertise made them attractive

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<sup>55</sup> Korda suggests that pageants staged by alien craftspersons granted alien women's work a prominent and privileged place. However, she places this in 'striking contrast' to English attitudes, 'Staging Alien Women's Work in Civic Pageants', in *Working Subjects in Early Modern English Drama*, ed. Michelle M. Dowd and Natasha Korda (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 53–68.

<sup>56</sup> Alexandra Shepard, 'From Anxious Patriarchs to Refined Gentlemen? Manhood in Britain, Circa 1500–1700', *Journal of British Studies* 44, no. 2 (2005): 290.

<sup>57</sup> Korda, *Labors Lost*, 25–30.

<sup>58</sup> *The More Haste, the Worst Speed* ([London, 1672–1696?]) The exact date of publication is unknown for this ballad. The estimated date is provided by the English Broadside Ballad Archive. See 'EBBA ID: 31361', accessed May 13, 2013, <http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/31361/citation>. Mark Hailwood discusses this ballad in "'The Honest Tradesman's Honour': Occupational and Social Identity in Seventeenth-Century England", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 24 (2014): 99.

economic as well as marital partners and evokes Pennington's suggestion that '[s]ome husbands evidently prized the commercial canniness of their wives more than the tenets of patriarchal convention'.<sup>59</sup> The ballad equally illustrates how, as Shepard notes, 'marriage enabled women's productive work'.<sup>60</sup> Textile skills repeatedly prove crucial to the maid's proposed work: she notes that the Shoemaker's 'Shop-Thread I can spin' and that 'The Taylors Needle I can thred,/ if haste should so require'. For the weaver she can 'Either wind Silk, or fill his quills' and thus 'Money save,/ which is a good beginning', a shrewd insight which indicates that she expects to be involved financially, as well as practically, in her future husband's business.

Alongside her expedient needle-threading, the elementary and assistive nature of this work appears to confirm Korda's suggestion that women's work was marginalised and subordinated to men's.<sup>61</sup> At other moments, however, the maid uses her expertise to claim a share in the formal economy: 'part of his [the glover's] trade I know,/ Whither it plain or prick-seam be'. Even her work's ad hoc qualities might disturb apparent gender distinctions. Whilst raising fears about the cuckolded profligate husband, the maid's confident assertion that she could 'Make answer to a man, while he [the tailor]/ doth at the Ale-house sit' acknowledges how discrepancies between patriarchal ideals and lived practice led women to expect that they would share or take over their husbands' work.

The works imagined by this fictional maid echo those undertaken by actual sixteenth- and seventeenth-century wives whose work was conceptualised, either by themselves or the authorities who recorded them, as co-operative as well as assistive. Joan Foster's 1611 deposition notes that 'her husband is an imbroderer and she helpeth him to winde his silk & to further his worke', a description which at once situates her work as preliminary and advanced ('further').<sup>62</sup> The 1570 Norwich Poor Census

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<sup>59</sup> Pennington, *Going to Market*, 49.

<sup>60</sup> Shepard, 'Crediting Women', 12.

<sup>61</sup> See, for example, Korda's discussion of restrictions imposed by the Weavers' Company on women working openly, *Labors Lost*, 19–25.

<sup>62</sup> London Metropolitan Archives, London, DL/C/219/350r.

registered an ‘enbroyderer [*sic*] and ... his wyfe, that enbroyder’.<sup>63</sup> The repeated lexeme indicates that this couple’s skills were perceived in essentially identical terms, although the wife lacks her husband’s title, again supporting Shepard’s finding that women predominantly described their work in verb- rather than noun-form.

The 1597 Ipswich poor census recorded a household in which husband and wife alike were identified as ‘Tayler[s]’, as well as a tailor’s wife who ‘[h]elpeth’ her husband.<sup>64</sup> The co-operation of these spousal ‘Taylers’ challenges assumptions that this higher status work was reserved for men, with women restricted to the subservient occupation of seamstress.<sup>65</sup> The 1570 Norwich poor census similarly identifies a sole resident, ‘Katherin Bedfor [*sic*]’ as ‘a taylor’ and Jone Browne, a vagrant’s wife, as a ‘womans taylor’.<sup>66</sup> A 1603 edict from Parish Overseers in Essex not only indicates that female tailors were common enough to warrant a mention, but suggests that the prohibitions encountered by some women working in higher status roles were more complex than can be explained according to simple gender binaries. This decree mandated that ‘none shall set any man tailor or woman tailor (being single persons) to work ... so long as there is any tailor a married man in the parish that can and will do’.<sup>67</sup> Probably motivated by the higher cost of providing poor relief to an unemployed married man’s family, the decree indicates how patriarchal privileges could prioritize

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<sup>63</sup> Paul Welbank, ed., ‘Norwich Census of the Poor’, August 10, 1999, entry 117, accessed August 9, 2016, <http://www.welbank.net/norwich/1570/1570data.html>. Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent references to this database are to entry reference numbers.

<sup>64</sup> John Webb, ed., *Poor Relief in Elizabethan Ipswich* (Ipswich: Suffolk Records Society, 1966), 137, 131.

<sup>65</sup> Although Marjorie McIntosh notes that in more isolated areas women would undertake similar processes to those executed by male tailors, she classes these women as dressmakers. Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *Working Women in English Society, 1300–1620* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 229–30. See also Korda, *Labors Lost*, 45, 230n.153.

<sup>66</sup> Welbank, ‘Norwich Census of the Poor’, 392. Eventually the gender of the customer would determine that of the maker, with men and women each fashioning clothes for their own sex. However, this was not the norm until the end of the seventeenth century; see Janet Arnold, *Patterns of Fashion*, vol. 3, *The Cut and Construction of Clothes for Men and Women, c. 1560–1620* (London: Macmillan, 1985), 3.

<sup>67</sup> Cited in Arnold, *Patterns of Fashion*, 3:3.

marital identities in ways which marginalised single men as well as single women.<sup>68</sup> As Pennington observes, ‘women aligned by marriage to a respectable craft or trade or who operated as widow-masters enjoyed considerably more commercial opportunities than young, un-apprenticed male interlopers’.<sup>69</sup> For Essex tailors, the opportunities open to both widows and married women, who were increasingly expected to contribute to the wages of impoverished families, remain ambiguous.

Writing in the mid-seventeenth century, physician Dr William Denton portrayed a tailoring trade open to female participation at the same time as raising questions about the profession’s socio-economic and artisanal pre-eminence relative to sempstry. Discussing his daughter’s education, he claimed that ‘for her needle my highest ambition was never above a plain stitch, but to learn to cut out as much as you will that she may be either seamstress or taylor, anything to get a living by’; Denton reiterated the interchangeability of these occupations in a subsequent letter.<sup>70</sup> Denton’s disregard seems to be for ornamental female accomplishment rather than textile expertise: cutting out is usually understood as an advanced tailoring skill since mistakes require the costly purchase of new cloth.<sup>71</sup>

Overlaps between sempstry and tailoring are also evident in Randle Holme’s *The Academy of Armory* (1688), which acknowledges that the author’s best efforts to distinguish between them are thwarted by the fluidity of practice. Separating the terminology belonging to each, Holme alleges that the tailor’s work is to ‘adorn the Head and Hands and Feet, as the other [the seamster’s] is for the covering of the Body’. But he immediately contradicting himself: ‘nay, very often the Seamster occupieth the room and place of a Taylor in furnishing the Nobility and Gentry with such

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<sup>68</sup> Most German guilds required master craftsmen to marry; see Merry E. Wiesner, “Wandervogels” Women: Journeymen’s Concepts of Masculinity in Early Modern Germany?, *Journal of Social History* 24, no. 4 (1991): 768.

<sup>69</sup> Pennington, *Going to Market*, 87.

<sup>70</sup> Cited in Miriam Slater, *Family Life in the Seventeenth Century: The Verneys of Claydon House: A Case Study* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 135.

<sup>71</sup> McIntosh, *Working Women in English Society*, 229.

conveniencies as serve the whole body, especially in the Summer season'.<sup>72</sup> Formal occupational divisions did not necessarily correlate with the flux of lived experience, and distinctions could be further obscured by seasonal fluctuations in social milieu and fashions.

A letter from the Lord Carew to the Earl of Salisbury, written on behalf of Henry Brookebanke, offers insight into spousal co-operation and suggests how sempstry might gain cultural and commercial recognition alongside men's work. Writing in July 1608, Carew describes Brookebanke as 'an Imbrotherer ... who is an excellent workeman, and his wife a maker of ruffes and wastcoates to[o]' and requests that 'he [Brookebanke] may be come tennant' of one of Salisbury's shops in Durham House, the site of the New Exchange.<sup>73</sup> The role of Brookebanke's wife is unclear. Perhaps, like the proverbial Exchange women, she was to work and sell her wares in the shop, either independently or alongside her husband's. Alternatively, perhaps their stitches mingled to produce the embroidered waistcoats and ruffs which were fashionable at this time. Korda pinpoints the work of alien women ruff-makers as particularly liable to occlusion and delegitimization by anxiously protective guildsmen.<sup>74</sup> Carew's letter, sent from one enterprising nobleman to another, on behalf of a Broderers' company member, tells a different story of the formal economy's attitudes to one woman's work, emphasising how marital status and nationality intersect with gender in determining patterns of inclusion and exclusion. Carew's discussion of the wife's work 'too' might be read as presenting her labour as an extension or asset of her husband's work, subordinating or subsuming her occupational subjectivity within his. At the same time, it positions her stitching on a continuum with her husband's expertise, indicating the collective nature of their business and mercantile reputation, and rendering this woman's work socially and commercially visible.

Wills written by seventeenth-century husbands demonstrate that workmen gratefully remembered women's contributions in material ways which suggest that wives

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<sup>72</sup> Randle Holme, *The Academy of Armory* (Chester, 1688), N1r. Laura Gowing notes that by the 1680s there were increasing opportunities for seamstresses, due, in part, to women's mantua-making, 'Girls on Forms', 452.

<sup>73</sup> 'Lord Carew to the Earl of Salisbury', July 2, 1608, Hatfield House Archives, Cecil Papers 295/26.

<sup>74</sup> Korda, *Labors Lost*, 114–15.

were co-operative business partners.<sup>75</sup> In 1618, for example, embroiderer Nicholas Atkinson bequeathed his tools ultimately to his son, but willed that ‘my wife shall keepe and use [them] as long as she doth use my trade’.<sup>76</sup> Atkinson’s implements prioritise spousal relations before male succession and emphasise that men’s provisions for their widows’ handiwork could be motivated by an active desire to enable women’s work rather than being necessitated by the lack of a male heir.

Other embroiderers indicated their intent that their spouses should continue their trade through provisions for apprentices. In 1591 John Raphe gave his apprentice, Richard, ‘Two yeares service conditionally that he doe serve the rest of his tyme truly and iustely with my wyffe Margarett Rauphe’.<sup>77</sup> Simon Younge’s 1631 will similarly stated: ‘if George Read my Apprentice prove a dutyfull and faithfull servant unto her and demeane himself well then my wief at the expiracon of his apprentishippe shall give him Tenn poundes’.<sup>78</sup> Widowhood afforded women greater independence and freedom, as well as making them more visible in historical records, but women were evidently co-operating in the businesses beforehand.

Widow proprietors have typically been regarded as provoking anxiety and anger from male apprentices and journeymen, who regarded the woman’s management as a threat to gendered power relations and saw her work as obstructing their own labour and professional progression by taking a position which a man might otherwise occupy.<sup>79</sup> As Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos indicates, however, a contemporary indenture

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<sup>75</sup> Helen Smith discusses this phenomenon in relation to bequests made to stationers’ wives in *Grossly Material Things: Women and Book Production in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 90.

<sup>76</sup> Cited in Sue Wright, “Churmaids, Huswyfes and Hucksters”: The Employment of Women in Tudor and Stuart Salisbury’, in *Women and Work in Pre-Industrial England*, ed. Lindsey Charles and Lorna Duffin (London: Croom Helm, 1985), 113.

<sup>77</sup> ‘Will of John Raphe alias Rolte, Embroiderer of London’, November 29, 1591, TNA PROB 11/78/366.

<sup>78</sup> ‘Will of Simon Younge, Broderer of Saint Bride, City of London’, June 17, 1631, TNA PROB 11/160/69.

<sup>79</sup> See, for example, Mihoko Suzuki, ‘The London Apprentice Riots of the 1590s and the Fiction of Thomas Deloney’, *Criticism* 38, no. 2 (1996): 190–91; Wiesner, “Wandervogels”, 767–82; Janine M. Lanza, *From Wives to Widows in Early Modern Paris: Gender, Economy, and Law* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 97–98.

suggests that widow proprietors could assuage, rather than provoke, male apprentices' anxieties: Francis Reade demanded repayment of his bond if his unmarried master haberdasher died during the apprenticeship, since he would 'not leav[e] a wife that shall keep on his trade'.<sup>80</sup> Guildsmen could also be anxious to protect widows' continuing trade: the Drapers' and the Clothworkers' Companies both enshrined widows' rights to retain loans granted to their husbands, the Clothworkers noting that this was 'provided ... [they] occupy the same trade'.<sup>81</sup> Guild decrees that seem to delegitimize female labour should thus be balanced against the actions of men and youths who authorized, facilitated and appreciated the formal participation of their kinswomen, during and after their husbands' lives.

Three debt books and an accompanying contemporaneous index offer a suggestive insight into the activity of one wife and later widow of a draper citizen and skinner, and indicate how male colleagues positioned themselves in relation to their mistress.<sup>82</sup> John Ballard's will, proven on 11<sup>th</sup> January 1645, appointed his wife Sarah sole executrix. As well as two unmarried daughters, Ann and Sarah, Ballard left behind two apprentices, John Lambert (his 'Cosen') and Daniel Major. Lambert was to have 'Twenty Pounds in money to be paid within Three monethes next after the expiration of his Apprenticeship in case hee shall justly and trulie serve the nowe remainder of his Terme', indicating that Ballard expected the business to continue after his death.<sup>83</sup> Lambert clearly did serve his time for his hand features heavily in the debt books. By September 1653, Sarah junior and Sarah senior had died. In the intervening period, Sarah senior had wed Lambert, seemingly fulfilling the cliché of the remarrying widow who offered journeymen a route to becoming a master.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Cited in Ben-Amos, 'Women Apprentices', 240.

<sup>81</sup> Cited in Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds*, 39–40.

<sup>82</sup> 'Notebook of Sarah Ballard: Rents Paid and Miscellaneous Accounts, including Sale of "bills of publike faith"', 1636–48, TNA E 101/699/20; 'Sarah Ballard's Debt Book: Sales of Cloth in London, and Miscellaneous Purchases', 1646–57, TNA E 101/699/21; 'Sarah Ballard's Account Book: Sales of Cloth and Summary Accounts', 1636–57, TNA E 101/699/22.

<sup>83</sup> 'Will of John Ballerd, Linen Draper and Skinner of Christ Church within Newgate London', January 11, 1645, TNA PROB 11/192/222.

<sup>84</sup> 'Certificate by Gervase Blackwell and John Lambert', July 30, 1653, TNA SP 63/295/1492; 'Certificate by John Pargiter, goldsmith, and John Lambert, skinner, citizens of London', September 28, 1653, TNA



The debt books, which cover transactions conducted between 1636 and 1657, reveal that as well as selling cloth, the business made up and laundered linen items, including handkerchiefs, napkins, and shirts.<sup>85</sup> Sometimes the sewing was subcontracted to local needlewomen who paid for their debts with their handiwork, but the volume of items produced, together with numerous accounts which refer to ‘makeinge’ the object, suggests that some sewing was probably done in-house.<sup>86</sup> One debt book contains Sarah’s accounts as her late husband’s executrix, highlighting her numerical as well as alphabetic competency.<sup>87</sup> The drapery accounts present a complex interweaving of hands, in which the scribe is typically not explicitly identified. Most pages feature multiple entries, often inscribed by different people; in some cases, two or more hands have contributed to a single entry, highlighting the highly collaborative nature of the business (Figure 1). The accounts seem to be written largely in the hands of John Ballard, Lambert and Major, as well as another belonging to Henry Nailour, a contributor discussed further below. Sarah’s hand features far less, but she was evidently involved in commerce and accounting, apparently recording a debt which ‘my mother ow<sup>th</sup>’ on 18<sup>th</sup> July 1647 and noting payment received from Goody Barton against a debt incurred on 29<sup>th</sup> July 1647.<sup>88</sup>

Sarah’s status as proprietor of the business is marked most clearly at the start of the book which contains these two accounts, and details debts from 1646 to 1657. ‘Sarah Ballard hir Debt Booke September 5<sup>th</sup> 1646’ is inscribed in large letters on the front page.<sup>89</sup> The ownership mark is repeated further down in now faded ink and her knotted initials appear at the bottom of the page. As Figure 2 illustrates, these inscriptions are located amid a mass of inscriptions and graffiti. Sarah’s name is written upside down underneath one ownership mark. The names of ‘Badgnall’ and ‘Alyes

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SP 63/295/1497. On remarrying widows, see Lanza, *From Wives to Widows*, 93–95; Jennifer Panek, *Widows and Suitors in Early Modern English Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 16–18.

<sup>85</sup> See for example, TNA E 101/699/21, 2r, 5r, 8r, 22r, 23v, 26r, 31r, 37v, 50v, 55v, 58r; TNA E 101/699/22, 2r, 3v, 4r, 7v, 8v, 14v, 16v. TNA E 101/699/21 has contemporary folio numbers marked on each recto. However, these start on the third actual folio of the manuscript (i.e. fol. 3 is ‘1’). My numbering begins with the manuscript’s first actual folio.

<sup>86</sup> See payments received against a debt from Ann Roger for ‘doing’ shirts, TNA E 101/699/21, 61r, 68v.

<sup>87</sup> TNA E 101/699/20, 2r–v, 4r, 5r, 25v–26v.

<sup>88</sup> TNA E 101/699/21, 10v.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 1r.

Lambert', perhaps John Lambert's relative, are inscribed around Sarah's faded ownership mark. Apprentice Daniel Major's hand is particularly profuse.

These inscriptions might be dismissed as meaningless scribbles, indicative of an unskilled hand or superficial involvement with the business and its working texts. Jason Scott-Warren offers an alternative perspective, arguing that signatures in books should be understood like modern graffiti "tags": they are social rituals used to make a name for oneself within a community, enabling the graffitist to learn and demonstrate mastery of the scripts of social and, in this case, economic engagement.<sup>90</sup> As is highlighted by the debts inscribed at the top, this page is not peripheral to the business's dealings, but a site of financial and social transaction.

With Sarah's name writ large, the *mise-en-page* presents a business with a woman at its head and centre. Signing his name beneath this and echoing his mistress's ownership mark in his own (now faded) dated signature, Daniel seems an apprentice who, rather than being anxious about operating under a woman's supervision, is actively crafting his social, artisanal and commercial identity in relation to his mistress. Recent scholarship has stressed that early moderns understood the self in relational and social terms: as Debora Shuger argues, Renaissance mirrors do not show the beholder but some other figure, indicating that the self is conceived in relation to those whom 'one will or can or does resemble'.<sup>91</sup> Mirroring his mistress's ownership mark, Daniel articulates an identity which subordinates gender difference to corporate and artisanal imitation and anticipates his own ascent to master craftsman.

Daniel and Sarah's relationship is also marked in the various knots inscribed on this page. A prominent part of early modern culture, knots 'variously figure the complexity of human relationship to self, other, and the physical world'.<sup>92</sup> Like the iterations of 'and' which surround them, these knots act as connectives which figure Sarah and Daniel's relationship to themselves, to one another and to the fabric with which they worked. The knots in Sarah's ciphered initials suggest her matrimonial ties

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<sup>90</sup> Jason Scott-Warren, 'Reading Graffiti in the Early Modern Book', *HLQ* 73, no. 3 (2010): 363–81.

<sup>91</sup> Debora Shuger, 'The "I" of the Beholder: Renaissance Mirrors and the Reflexive Mind', in Fumerton and Hunt, *Renaissance Culture and the Everyday*, 21–41, esp. 37. See also Adam Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 10–12, 156–57.

<sup>92</sup> Hazard, *Elizabethan Silent Language*, 36.

to the business. Various woven double knots fill the space between Sarah and Daniel's signatures, articulating the twofold bonds that tied the apprentice to his mistress, as well as evoking the interlacing of hands here and within the accounts. These knots also echo material interlacings and recall paper's material content, calling to mind the warp and weft of cloth, and the knots wrought in linen samplers and garments (see, for example, Figure 3).<sup>93</sup> These interlacings suggest a common idiom between the social, verbal and graphic literacies which were being practised within the book and the material literacies indexed by the accounts.

Connections between Sarah and Daniel also appear to be manifested in graffiti in another account book, covering the years 1638–57, although these inscriptions may belong to Sarah junior. On fol. 7r, the space surrounding an account which covers October and November 1639 is filled with scrolling pen trials, Sarah's knotted initials and variations on them, 'Sarah Ballard' and 'Daniell Maior', as well as 'Henry Nailour'. Beneath Nailour's signature, a note declares 'not his book', emphasising that knots excluded as well as connected and that these books delineated privileged communities.<sup>94</sup> 'Sarah and' and her knotted initials are inscribed on fol. 11v–12r, including alongside a summing of payments received.<sup>95</sup> As well as suggesting parallels between financial and social forms of addition, this placement blurs distinctions between doodles and nominal inscriptions, echoing the signatures witnessing particular debts.<sup>96</sup> This suggests graffiti's role in practising the graphic and rhetorical scripts of the trade, as on fol. 7r where, amidst the graffiti, a neat hand has copied the phrase 'Lent in money to' from the main entry.

These inscriptions cannot be dated straightforwardly. The dates 1640 and 1642 accompany graffiti on an earlier page of this manuscript which details accounts from 1638 and 1639. Whilst recording the receipt of payments could require a return to earlier accounts, these dates suggest a need for caution when making judgements about

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<sup>93</sup> For a cognate discussion of connections between Elizabeth I's embroidered and written knots, see Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 37–39.

<sup>94</sup> TNA E 101/699/22, 7r. Hazard, *Elizabethan Silent Language*, 40.

<sup>95</sup> TNA E 101/699/22, 11v–12r.

<sup>96</sup> See, for example, *ibid.*, 18v.

what kinds of involvement these inscriptions index.<sup>97</sup> Nevertheless, they indicate that Sarah's participation within the business community was marked before her death and that, even before she was sole mistress, apprentices sought to register their connections with her.

The inscription of Sarah's and Daniel's names is part of a wider impulse to manifest relations between her and her male colleagues. 'Ms Sarah' is written beside 'John' on fol. 6r. The accounts of the preceding pages are suffused with signatures by John Ballard, John Lambert and Daniel.<sup>98</sup> Made by the master of the business, John Ballard's marks underscore that signing practices formed significant marks of ownership and community, produced by those at the centre of the business. Mingling male and female marks of ownership, involvement and commercial as well as textual literacy, the Ballard account books offer a provocative insight into the heterosocial communities which were forged in one early modern workplace.

The Drapers' Company, to which the Ballards belonged, seems to have been particularly open to the participation of women, not only as widows, but as single women, both as mistresses and as apprentices. Between 1580 and 1680 ten women were admitted to the Drapers' Company by patrimony and one by redemption, having purchased her freedom.<sup>99</sup> In a recent article on women's apprenticeship in late-seventeenth-century London, Laura Gowing highlights that the Drapers' Company, along with the Mercers' Company, 'had a surprisingly high proportion of female apprentices taking the freedom, around one in three', although she notes that this proportion still translates into relatively low numbers: 'eighteen apprentices and five mistresses'. Gowing's article makes an important contribution to scholarship on women's relationship to formal trade, highlighting that the period following the Civil War yielded increasing, albeit still limited, opportunities for women's participation in guilds and companies. Although girls remained 'a tiny minority of London apprentices',

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 2r.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 6r, 5r, 3r.

<sup>99</sup> These numbers were generated using 'Records of London's Livery Companies Online', accessed May 5, 2013, <http://www.londonroll.org>.

their numbers grew markedly from the 1640s into the eighteenth century, with most engaged in forms of stitchery across a variety of companies.<sup>100</sup>

The Drapers' Company discussed female apprenticeship in 1570, when a freeman wishing to apprentice a young woman sought assurance that she would 'enjoye also the freedom of the Cytie' after serving her time. Previously rejected because 'they had not seen the like before', the warden asserted that there was precedent and noted that 'the self same othe wch ys mynistered to all other apprentices that are made free ys also ministered to them', adding that 'the indentures ought also to be made in suche manner and forme as they are for other apprentices in this Cytie'.<sup>101</sup> Although Gowing notes that the company did not admit its first female apprentice until 1632, the Company was evidently prepared for girls to participate and sought to place them on an equal footing with male colleagues.<sup>102</sup> Gowing also highlights that the Drapers' Company, alongside the Merchant Tailors', had company-specific forms printed especially for mistresses and female apprentices. Emphasising the importance of paperwork, Gowing identifies these legislative and administrative accommodations as potentially 'amongst the conditions that encouraged, within firm limits, the apprenticeship of girls and their access to the freedom of the City'.<sup>103</sup> Contrary to assumptions that the period was characterized by men anxious to delegitimize women's textile work, this suggests that at least some guildsmen provided new opportunities for women to participate in the formal economy.

At the same time as girls and women had opportunities to situate their stitchery within formalized contexts, male textile work participated in the informal economy. I want now to consider how, especially among poorer social strata, small but nonetheless significant numbers of men and particularly boys were engaged in wage-labour in textile handicrafts which scholars have conventionally considered 'women's work'. The participation of these male handiworkers in the 'shadow' economy suggests that informal skills in handicrafts like sewing, spinning or lace-making were more prevalent

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<sup>100</sup> Gowing, 'Girls on Forms', 454, 457, 450–51.

<sup>101</sup> Cited in Gowing, 'Girls on Forms', 466. See also Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds*, 36.

<sup>102</sup> Gowing, 'Girls on Forms', 466.

<sup>103</sup> Gowing notes that the Fruiterers and Leathersellers used female-specific forms, but that these featured only 'a generic city coat of arms', 'Girls on Forms', 458–60.

amongst men and boys than has hitherto been recognised and that, particularly amongst poorer demographics, male productive labour was also subject to stigma and erasure.

Textile work appears to have been widely adopted as a poor relief mechanism, following edicts that parishes should provide ‘Flaxe Hempe Wooll Threed Iron and other necessarie Ware and Stuffe to sett the Poore on worke’; it was probably particularly prevalent in established centres of textile production such as Norwich.<sup>104</sup> Not only women but children were to be employed in spinning, sewing and other common textile handicrafts. Salisbury’s 1626 ‘Orders for the Poor’, for example, decrees:

all the children of the poor that are not able to relieve them [shall] be set to sewing, knitting, bonelace-making, spinning of woollen or linen yarn, pin-making, card-making, spooling, button-making, or some other handiwork as soon as ever they be capable of instruction to learn the same ....<sup>105</sup>

Similarly, in his proposal for a London workhouse, Samuel Hartlib indicates that ‘Children shall be employed to spinning, knitting, and sowing, and such other employment as consists to the making of their owne Cloathes’. Indicating that this ‘may be very assistfull to Handycraft-Tradesmen, and ... the Marchant’, Hartlib evidently envisaged that pauper children could be exploited for commercial production.<sup>106</sup>

The 1626 and 1635 Salisbury poor censuses, and the 1570 Norwich census show numerous boys and girls engaged in similar textile tasks. Sometimes the family instigated the boys’ handiwork as in the Norwich household of Alice Reade, a wool spinner abandoned by her husband. Reade’s household was a community of skilled workers, comprising ‘2 sons, the eldest 9 yeris olde, which she set to spynnyng’ and a daughter, ‘Jone Rede of 14 yeris that spyn mydle worp’.<sup>107</sup> Boys worked alongside their mothers and female peers in numerous other Norwich families; in several households the father

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<sup>104</sup> John Raithby, ed., *The Statutes of the Realm*, vol. 4, part 2 (s.l., 1819), 962; John Layer’s directions for overseers of the poor notes that the stipulated ‘commodities are not to be had’ in all counties and that discretion should be exercised, *The Office and Dutie of Constables* (Cambridge, 1641), H5r.

<sup>105</sup> Paul Slack, ed., *Poverty in Early-Stuart Salisbury* (Devizes: Wiltshire Record Society, 1975), 89.

<sup>106</sup> Samuel Hartlib, *Londons Charity Inlarged* (London, 1650), B3v.

<sup>107</sup> Welbank, ‘Norwich Census of the Poor’, 19.

was absent, jobless or had been forced to abandon his formal trade.<sup>108</sup> George Garland and Will Cocker were both worsted weavers by trade, but the former was unemployed whilst the latter worked as an itinerant chapman: both had sons as well as wives who spun.<sup>109</sup> Perhaps if the cloth trade had been more buoyant these sons would have pursued their fathers', rather than their mothers', work. This suggests how pressures within the formal textile economy might drive boys and girls alike into informal textile work, prompting families to adopt what Shepard terms 'alternative household strategies' which prioritised 'the maintenance and survival of their household' over 'adherence to a patriarchal blueprint'.<sup>110</sup>

Other examples of boys' spinning and stitchery are less clearly attributable to paternal unemployment. For example, the deposition of ten-year-old Edmund Robinson, the son of a Lancaster mason, recorded that 'his mother ha[d] brought him up to spynne wooll and also used him to fetch home her kyne [cows]', a setup which demonstrates that spinning could contribute to an education in a range of household duties for boys, as well as girls.<sup>111</sup> In his memoirs, Thomas Tryon (born in 1634) recalls:

The first Work my Father put me to, was Spinning and Carding, wherein I was so Industrious, and grew so expert, that at Eight Years of Age I could Spin Four Pound a day, which came to Two Shilling a Week.<sup>112</sup>

While Tryon frames his labour in relation to the financial pressures created by their large family, Tryon's father, a tiler and plasterer, evidently did not struggle for work since he later entreats his son to learn his trade.<sup>113</sup> Tryon's clear pride in his skill,

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<sup>108</sup> See, for example, *ibid.*, 45.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 152, 80.

<sup>110</sup> Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*, 187, 202.

<sup>111</sup> 'Examination of Edmund Robinson the younger, of Newchurch, co. Lancaster, aged ten years or thereabouts, taken by George Long, Justice of Peace for Middlesex, by command of Sec. Windebank', July 10, 1634, TNA SP 16/271/57.

<sup>112</sup> Thomas Tryon, *Some Memoirs of the Life of Mr. Tho. Tryon* (London, 1705), 10–11. See also Margaret Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and its Readership in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Methuen, 1981), 28.

<sup>113</sup> Tryon, *Some Memoirs*, 7–8, 12.

industry and economic productivity reminds us that men and boys could derive positive identities from textile handiwork, as will be discussed further in the next section.

As the above examples suggest, many of the males engaged in textile work were young, often aged between six and ten years; Tryon, for example, notes that he spun ‘close till I was Ten or Eleven Years Old’ when he ‘began to be weary of the Wheel’ and took to tending sheep.<sup>114</sup> Some boy spinners may not have been ‘breeched’, an event occurring around the age of seven or eight in which boys swapped the long gown of infancy for a doublet and hose.<sup>115</sup> Scholars have argued that breeching enacted a ‘formal move out of the common gender of childhood, which was both female in appearance and largely controlled by women, and into the world of men’.<sup>116</sup> Within this interpretative framework, a mother teaching her unbreeched son to spin might have been considered minimally disruptive to patriarchal discourses which viewed the needle and spindle as feminizing instruments. Will Fisher, however, has contested this framework, suggesting that boyhood rather constituted a ‘distinct gender’ in relation to early modern understandings of the one-sex model.<sup>117</sup> According to this model, gender is constructed along a continuum ‘where the boundaries between male and female are of degree and not of kind’.<sup>118</sup> Consequently, Fisher argues, ‘the distinction between men and boys would have been much more similar to that between men and women’.<sup>119</sup> Fisher gives no specific age for the end of boyhood, instead arguing that masculinity

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>115</sup> In Hertfordshire in 1631, it was noted that pauper children ‘not yet of fitt years to be putt forth ... [were] sett to spinning or such small worke’, suggesting that thread-making might be a temporary occupation before apprenticeship. Cited in Hindle, “‘Waste’ Children? Pauper Apprenticeship Under the Elizabethan Poor Laws, c. 1598–1697”, in *Women, Work, and Wages in England, 1600–1850*, ed. Penelope Lane, Neil Raven and K. D. M. Snell (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004), 36.

<sup>116</sup> Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare’s England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 15; see also Diane Purkiss, ‘Marvell, Boys, Girls, and Men: Should We Worry?’, in *Gender and Early Modern Constructions of Childhood*, ed. Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 188.

<sup>117</sup> Will Fisher, *Materializing Gender in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 87.

<sup>118</sup> Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 25.

<sup>119</sup> Fisher, *Materializing Gender*, 87.



was ‘materialized through a range of attributes or parts’, both ‘natural’ and ‘artificial’, all of which acted as prostheses.<sup>120</sup> Early moderns usually understood boyhood as ending in the fourteenth year according to contemporary accounts of the different ‘ages of man’. Youth followed, lasting until twenty-one; ‘manhood’ itself was relatively brief, occurring between thirty-five and fifty years of age.<sup>121</sup> As will be discussed further below, such a schema reminds us of the plurality of male identities, as well as indicating that boys’ textile skills should not be equated either with men’s textile skills or with a distinctly feminized sphere.

Boys’ textile aptitude may, to some extent, have been considered physiologically age-specific. Advocating the establishment of spinning workhouses, Thomas Firmin remarked in 1681: ‘for young Children, there is nothing they can more easily learn, than to spin Linnen, their Fingers being never so small, being big enough to pull out the Flax, and to make a fine Thread’.<sup>122</sup> As boys grew, their perceived dexterity might dwindle, making it tempting to suppose that fine thread-work represented a transient stage in the male life-cycle, whereas women’s supposedly ever-slender fingers made it their lifetime’s work. Yet Firmin equally observed that ‘there are very many antient People ... which yet can Spin indifferent well’, a comment that resonates with contemporary Dutch paintings by Quiringh van Brekelenkam which depict elderly men engaged in spinning, sometimes alongside women also engaged in textile work.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 88. For a cognate discussion of girls as differently gendered from women, see Jennifer Higginbotham, *The Girlhood of Shakespeare’s Sisters: Gender, Transgression, Adolescence* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 9, 64–103.

<sup>121</sup> For examples of the ages of man, see Holme, *The Academy of Armory*, Eee2r. See also Bruce R. Smith, *Shakespeare and Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 71–82; for alternative schema, see Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*, 54–56.

<sup>122</sup> Thomas Firmin, *Some Proposals for the Employment of the Poor* (London, 1681), B4r.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., B3v. Quiringh van Brekelenkam, ‘Interior with a Fisherman and a Man at a Spinning-Wheel’, 1663, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv./cat.nr. SK-A-60; van Brekelenkam, ‘Interior with a Man at a Spinning-Wheel and a Woman Reading’, c. 1655–1660, Private Collection, accessed August 10, 2016, via <https://rkd.nl/explore/images/252419>; van Brekelenkam, ‘Interior with a Spinner and a Woman Scraping Carrots’, c. 1655–1660, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, inv./cat.nr 535; van Brekelenkam, ‘Interior with a Spinner Eating Herring’, 1661, Private Collection, accessed August 10, 2016, via <https://rkd.nl/en/explore/images/252445>; van Brekelenkam, ‘Interior with a Spinning Man

The elderly were proverbially ‘twice child’, emphasising the life-cycle’s circularity and suggesting a level of latent male textile skills.<sup>124</sup> For some men, threadwork extended throughout the life-cycle. The Norwich and Salisbury censuses record numerous male youths aged up to nineteen years engaged in spinning and making bonelace; these teenagers would have been old enough to be apprenticed to other crafts, suggesting that their work may have been more than an interim measure, performed until they were old enough for formal training.<sup>125</sup> According to a 1678 treatise, purportedly written by a country tradesman, even fully matured ‘men may learn to spin, as well as Women’.<sup>126</sup> Finding evidence of such male threadwork is complicated by scholars’ tendency to assume that payments made to men for spinning, lace-making and stitchery were economic transactions which concealed a woman’s labour.<sup>127</sup> Although this is undoubtedly true sometimes, we need equally to be wary of obscuring low status male handiwork. For example, Sarah Fell’s 1677 accounts note paying ‘a man of peasholms’ ‘for spinninge 31 leas of teare of linn yarne’, as well as giving money to ‘Edw Brittain for his wife spinninge’. Fell’s careful recording of the proxy payment suggests the former may have been for the man’s own work.<sup>128</sup>

Male householders trained in textile trades were perhaps particularly likely to turn to informal threadwork when unable to find work, something which was increasingly common as the woollen trade declined.<sup>129</sup> More generally, as Shepard notes,

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and a Woman Sewing’, 1650–1659, Private Collection, accessed August 10, 2016, via <https://rkd.nl/explore/images/70007>.

<sup>124</sup> John Weever, *The Mirror of Martyrs* ([London], 1601), C3r; Smith, *Shakespeare and Masculinity*, 74–75.

<sup>125</sup> For example, in Salisbury, in 1635, Israel Bernester, aged sixteen, was employed in ‘bonelace’ and William Yorke, aged fifteen, ‘sp[u]n’, Slack, *Poverty in Early-Stuart Salisbury*, 77; in Norwich in 1570, William Cocker’s son, aged fourteen, and George Garland’s son, aged nineteen, ‘spyn webynge’, whilst Benedict de Vale’s son, aged fifteen, ‘weve[s] lace’, Welbank, ‘Norwich Census of the Poor’, 80, 152, 162; Shepard also highlights a deposition in which a fifteen year old youth, living with his mother, describes his labour as spinning, ‘Crediting Women’, 9.

<sup>126</sup> *The Ancient Trades Decayed* (London, 1678), C1v.

<sup>127</sup> See, for example, Korda, *Labors Lost*, 29.

<sup>128</sup> Sarah Fell, *The Household Account Book of Sarah Fell of Swarthmoor Hall*, ed. Norman Penney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920), 389, 375.

<sup>129</sup> For a history of the cloth trade and literary engagements with its decline, see Roze Hentschell, *The Culture of Cloth in Early Modern England: Textual Constructions of a National Identity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

significant numbers of men were forced into makeshift work outside of their designated trade, disturbing the scholarly tendency to gender piecemeal labour as female.<sup>130</sup> Among Shepard's examples is the 1667 deposition of a sixty-seven year old Yorkshire linen weaver who 'lives by his owne & wifes labor by knittinge', offering further evidence of aged men's handiwork and of spousal co-operation in the informal as well as formal sphere.<sup>131</sup> The Norwich poor census identifies five men between the ages of twenty-nine and fifty-three who are 'worsted weavers' but 'use' or 'work lace', as well as a thirty-year-old 'wollen wever', Thomas Saye, who 'is in no worke but help his wyf [who spins white warp] in hir wolle'.<sup>132</sup>

Whilst Saye's work was prompted by necessity, the ballad *The Knitters Jobb* ([1672–1696]) suggests that other men might actively choose to assist their spouse's handiwork. Courting a maid whose 'only care' is 'to Card to Knit and Spin', the ballad's male speaker promises her that:

When that thou dost a Spinning sit  
thy servant I will be  
To bring thy Cards and Wooll to thee  
And a kiss shall be my Fee ....<sup>133</sup>

The final line situates this young man's promised assistance within sexualized discourses of male desire. Nevertheless, in offering a contemporary counterpoint to *The More Haste, the Worst Speed* (printed for the same stationer), the ballad gestures towards a culture in which men as well as women could provide spousal assistance and in which payments to women might conceal evidence of men's informal contributions as well as vice versa. For many of the men and boys discussed in this section, spinning, sewing and lace-making seem to have been driven primarily by financial necessity. *The Knitters Jobb* invites us to consider forms of help and ad hoc involvement which might be less visible to the historical record. Like Brilliana Harley's letters to her son, it indicates how

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<sup>130</sup> Shepard, 'Crediting Women', 12.

<sup>131</sup> Cited in Shepard, 'Crediting Women', 10; Alexandra Shepard, *Accounting for Oneself: Worth, Status, and the Social Order in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 175.

<sup>132</sup> Welbank, 'Norwich Census of the Poor', 284, 352, 588, 639, 376, 119. See also Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*, 202.

<sup>133</sup> *The Knitters Jobb* ([London, 1672–96]). Both this and *The More Haste, The Worst Speed* were printed for P. Brooksby.

women's handiwork drew on men's practical assistance and suggests that some men wanted rather than were forced to handle the needle and thread.

### Virtue or Vice? Textile Work and Early Modern Manhoods

The occlusion of early modern male stitchers and spinners from the historical record has been exacerbated by the tendency, both now and then, to regard these craftsmen as emasculated by their work. Stereotypes of effeminate tailors and embroiderers clearly possessed cultural force, and were common in early modern drama and ballads. John Fletcher and Philip Massinger's *Love's Cure, or The Martial Maid* (composed 1615) offers a striking example in which the youth Lucio's 'starching of Ruffs, and sowing of black-work' forms part of an extensive 'womanish disguise' which he proves reluctant to put off.<sup>134</sup>

Such fictional representations, however, were not uncontested and did not necessarily correlate with the self-image of needlemen or with others' perceptions of them. The ballad, *The Taylors Vindication* ([1670–1696]), openly refutes effeminate stereotypes, providing 'An Answer to the War-like TAYLOR', a contemporaneous ballad which 'says that Taylors were no men'.<sup>135</sup> Promising to 'prove' that 'A Taylor is a man', *The Taylors Vindication* notes how Adam and Eve 'sew'd Figg-leaves and Breeches made/.../And so began the Taylors Trade,/ at the worlds first beginning'; King Solomon's 'Royal Robes and rich array' are also highlighted as being 'of the Taylors making'.<sup>136</sup> Both the first couple and King Solomon were commonly depicted in seventeenth-century needlework, perhaps offering comparable material explorations of

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<sup>134</sup> Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *Comedies and Tragedies* (London, 1647), Rrrrr1v, Qqqqq4r. See also the titular knight and embroiderer of George Chapman's *Sir Gyles Goosecappe Knight*, described as 'the best Sempster of any woman in England' (London, 1606), D3v.

<sup>135</sup> *The Taylors Vindication; Or An Answer to The War-Like Taylor* ([London, 1670–1696]), Bodleian Douce Ballads 2(215b), *Broadside Ballads Online from the Bodleian Library*, accessed January 31, 2017, <http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/static/images/sheets/20000/15437.gif>. Another variation of this ballad exists, under the same title, suggesting that its opinions were popular, *The Taylor's Vindication* ([London, 1650–1750]). These ballads replied to *The War-Like Taylor* ([London, 1670–1695]).

<sup>136</sup> Compare Taylor's observation that 'in the sacred Text it [sewing] is enrold:/Our Parents first in Paradiſe began,/ Which hath descended since from man to man', *The Needles Excellency*, A2v.

needlemen's masculinity.<sup>137</sup> Positioning tailors in relation to these biblical forefathers, the ballad's speaker emphasises how needlemen could assume patriarchal masculinities, ennobled by stitchery's Christian heritage and aristocratic patronage.

Many boys and men clearly enjoyed engaging with textile handiwork both practically and as connoisseurs, and experienced stitchery free from the anxiety of emasculation. Thomas Tryon's memories of his boyhood spinning suggest that textile skills could engender a sense of economic and social worth. Writing to his brother, Heneage Finch's discussion of the embroidery undertaken by his wife and John Best indicates that needlework could be an interesting and enjoyable topic of conversation between men, and highlights that needlemen such as Best were esteemed for their inventiveness. Lord Carew's letter of recommendation for the embroiderer Henry Brookebanke similarly commends his industry and expertise, professing him an 'excellent workeman'.<sup>138</sup>

In the late seventeenth century, Samuel Wesley, a poor scholar at Oxford, used his handiwork to lay claim to heroic masculinity. Synthesising textual and textile handiwork, Wesley's 'An Anacreontique on a pair of BREECHES' ponders where he should apply his 'artful Hand' and 'stick the *Muse's Needle* in'. So ragged are Wesley's clothes that his labour seems Herculean:

I eternally must mend;  
For one hole starts out two more,  
*Hydra*-like, or three, or four;  
Patch on patch are new lay'd on ....<sup>139</sup>

Although evidently tongue-in-cheek, Wesley's poem expresses little fear that his sewing is effeminate. Indeed, his use of the Anacreontic, a playful form often involved in articulating refined male conviviality, rather suggests the place of mending in male

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<sup>137</sup> On embroideries of Adam and Eve, see Morrall, 'Representations of Adam and Eve', 313–53. For examples of Solomon embroideries, see Brooks, *English Embroideries*, 48–51.

<sup>138</sup> Hatfield House Archives, Cecil Papers 295/26.

<sup>139</sup> Samuel Wesley, *Maggots* (London, 1685), C2v.

homosociability.<sup>140</sup> Read alongside a lively tradition of university poetry about threadbare clothes, and letters written by students bemoaning their endless patching, Wesley's verse indicates that, for cash-strapped scholars, sewing could constitute a form of male bonding.<sup>141</sup>

Wesley's invocation of Hercules' labours seems to turn the dominant gender discourse about textile work on its head. Moralists often registered textile work's enervating effects in reference to Hercules being so overpowered by his love for Omphale that he dressed in women's clothing and spun for her. Sardanapalus, the semi-mythologized last King of Assyria, offered a comparable example who was lambasted for keeping 'companie of his concubines, spinning of Purple, in womans apparell'.<sup>142</sup> In this final section I want to explore how stitchery's feminizing effects could be contested, problematized or questioned from within the very stereotypes that seemed to confirm needlemen's emasculation. In contravention of orthodox opinion, the handiwork of Hercules and Sardanapalus was celebrated by early modern male textile workers. Even texts which purported to denounce the work of these mythic figures as effeminate had a more ambivalent sense of how material handiwork could produce and support a range of normative, alternative and subversive male identities.

As indicated above, recent scholarship, most notably by Shepard, has emphasised the need to take account of a broader and more heterodox range of male identities: patriarchy and manhood were not synonymous and 'men as well as women

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<sup>140</sup> Stella Achilleos, 'The *Anacreontea* and a Tradition of Refined Male Sociability', in *A Pleasing Sinne: Drink and Conviviality in Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. Adam Smyth (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 21–35; Achilleos, 'The Anacreontic and the Growth of Sociability in Early Modern England', *Appositions: Studies in Renaissance/ Early Modern Literature and Culture* 1 (2008), accessed August 16, 2016, <http://appositions.blogspot.co.uk/2008/05/stella-achilleos-anacreontic.html>.

<sup>141</sup> For poetry on threadbare clothing, see Thomas Jordan, *Wit in a Wildernesse of Promiscuous Poesie* (London, [1665]), †1r–†2; *A Poor Scholar's Thred-bare Suit* (London, 1668). On students' mending, see Abigail Shinn, 'Cultures of Mending', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Popular Culture in Early Modern England*, ed. Andrew Hadfield, Matthew Dimmock and Abigail Shinn (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 239–40; Ulinka Rublack, *Dressing Up: Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 217.

<sup>142</sup> Loys Le Roy, *Aristotles Politiques* (London, 1598), Gg1r. For an example discussing Sardanapalus's and Hercules' spinning as effeminate, see Alexander Ross, *Som Animadversions and Observations upon Sr. Walter Raleigh's Historie of the World* (London, [1648]), B12r.

actively resisted patriarchal norms and also pursued alternative codes of manhood'.<sup>143</sup> Rather than a static monolith, early modern manhood had diverse, competing and volatile 'meanings' which varied further according to a range of factors including age, social status and economic situation.<sup>144</sup> Textile work exposed instabilities in masculine codes and offered craftsmen a range of positive male identities, characteristics and experiences.

The readiness of textile craftsmen to defy conventional didacticism and regard the textile skills of mythic heroes as positive types is highlighted by the opening verse of a ballad in *Jack of Newbery* (1597). Written by yeoman-weaver and balladeer Thomas Deloney, this fictionalized biography of a weaver was set during the reign of Henry VIII but concerned with contemporary difficulties in the broadcloth industry.<sup>145</sup> Jack's weavers sing as they work, reminiscing:

WHen *Hercules* did vse to spin,  
and *Pallas* wrought vpon the Looome,  
Our trade to flourish did begin,  
while Conscience went not selling Broomes.  
Then loue and friendship did agree,  
To keep the band of vnitie.<sup>146</sup>

Redirecting moralising discourses which saw Hercules' spinning as symptomatic of degrading lust, the Greek's handiwork is presented as an exemplary act of platonic love, which accords with the themes of 'amity' and 'friendship' developed through the ballad, and recalls the social bonds forged by collective handiwork.<sup>147</sup> Placed in a golden era before the sexual corruption of Conscience ('selling Broomes' is a reference to her

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<sup>143</sup> Shepard, 'From Anxious Patriarchs', 290.

<sup>144</sup> Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*, *passim*.

<sup>145</sup> Hentschell, *The Culture of Cloth*, 51–71.

<sup>146</sup> Thomas Deloney, *The Pleasant Historie of Iohn VVinchcomb in His Yonguer [sic] Yeares Called Iacke of Newbery* (London, 1626), F1v. Unless otherwise indicated, all further references are to this edition.

<sup>147</sup> Joan Pong Linton alleges that Hercules' spinning 'is obviously not to the men's liking' and carries the threat of 'female tyranny in the figure of Omphale', but she offers no textual evidence for this interpretation, 'Jack of Newbery and Drake in California: Domestic and Colonial Narratives of English Cloth and Manhood', *ELH* 59, no. 1 (1992): 31.

being forced to act as a bawd),<sup>148</sup> Hercules' spinning is opposed to contemporary moral depravity and suggests how heterodox readings of stigmatised characters enabled Deloney to contest society's disregard for his fellow craftsmen.

Hercules was still current for early modern textile workers nearly a century later. R.C.'s *Minerva* (1677), a book-length poem on '[t]he art of weaving', celebrates him alongside Sardanapalus, highlighting how:

... personages of worth, known frequent were,  
To Spin and Weave: as *Hercules* for one  
Whose like, (if true) no time hath ever known;  
His Twelve great Labours makes the World admire  
That he such difficulties could acquire;  
Yet he laid by his Club, and Lyons skin,  
And for a Ladies love sate down to Spin.  
So likewise, *Sardanapalus*, although he,  
Did sway th'Assirian first great Monarchy,  
Took much more pleasure with Women to Spin,  
And use the Weaving Trade, then he took in  
Such great Magnificence.<sup>149</sup>

Aligning with concerns that the masculine ideal of martial vigour needed moderating in order not to overflow into brutality, R.C. positions Hercules' fingerwork as demonstrative of his humility and obedience to the codes of service demanded by courtly love. Spinning operates as the civilizing complement to Hercules' martial exploits and aligns him with the chivalrous knight.<sup>150</sup> R.C.'s reading of Sardanapalus similarly inverts moralizing discourses which considered Sardanapalus's spinning as

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<sup>148</sup> Thomas Deloney, *Jack of Newbury*, ed. Peter C. Herman (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2015), 71n.1.

<sup>149</sup> R.C., *Minerva, or, The Art of Weaving* (London, 1677) C3r.

<sup>150</sup> For discussion of these and other masculine ideals, see Smith, *Shakespeare and Masculinity*, esp. 44–49. Jennifer C. Vaught discusses Philip Sidney's use of Hercules' spinning in relation to effeminacy, courtiers and the desirable softening of military aggression, in *Masculinity and Emotion in Early Modern English Literature* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 127–29.



symptomatic of his perverse self-indulgence, instead presenting his textile work as a temperate renunciation of luxurious ‘Magnificence’ for simpler pleasures.

Textile workers engaged with Hercules and Sardanapalus in material as well as textual forms. Hercules’ labours are depicted in several early modern tapestries and embroideries.<sup>151</sup> Sardanapalus’s handiwork was respun in a hanging worked for Elizabeth Shrewsbury (Figure 4). Ostensibly, the hanging concurs with the moralists who denounced Sardanapalus’s effeminacy. One of three hangings adapted from engravings showing ‘Virtues and their Contrary Vices’, the piece presents Sardanapalus’s spinning and silk-winding as ‘Temperance’s opposite.’<sup>152</sup> An inset scene underscores his intemperate behaviour and consequent downfall. Sardanapalus’s neglect of his royal duties supposedly provoked a rebellion that he only briefly tried to quell before retreating to his palace and setting it alight; as the hanging shows, he and his women enjoyed a final feast as the palace burned around them. I want to suggest that this hanging was, however, open to heterogeneous interpretations and offered a visual reminder of the male labour ‘congealed’ within Shrewsbury’s household textiles.<sup>153</sup> Susan Frye has recently highlighted the materially autobiographical possibilities of Hardwick’s hangings, postulating that Shrewsbury attempted ‘to figure herself as a chaste, textile-producing wife’ through the stitched depiction of Penelope holding a roll of cloth in a series now termed the ‘Noble Women of the Ancient World’ (Figure 5).<sup>154</sup> The depiction of Sardanapalus, hitherto overlooked in considerations of the gendering of textile work, offers a parallel autobiography of the hangings’ male makers.

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<sup>151</sup> See for example: ‘Embroidered Panel’, early seventeenth century, Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum, New York, 1981-28-124; Guy Delmarcel, *Flemish Tapestry from the 15th to the 18th Century* (Tiel: Lannoo Uitgeverij, 1999), 203–7. A 1584 inventory of Kenilworth records hangings depicting the ‘storie’ and ‘historie of Hercules’, J. O. Halliwell-Phillipps, ed., *Ancient Inventories of Furniture, Pictures, Tapestry, Plate &c.: Illustrative of the Domestic Manners of the English in the Sixteenth Centuries* (London: J. E. Adlard for private circulation, 1854), 143–45. Margaret H. Swain notes an embroidered bed owned by Mary Stuart, and recorded at Hampton Court in 1659, which showed ‘the history of the works of Hercules’, *The Needlework of Mary, Queen of Scots* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1973), 46.

<sup>152</sup> For description of this embroidery and its sources, see Levey, *Embroideries at Hardwick Hall*, 91–99.

<sup>153</sup> I borrow the term from Natasha Korda, who uses it in relation to the overlooked work of early modern needlewomen, *Labors Lost*, 95–99.

<sup>154</sup> Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 62–63.

Holding a distaff and winding silk on a niddy-noddy (Figure 6), Sardanapalus's labour not only resonates with the impoverished male workers discussed in the previous section but evokes the manipulation of silks by Shrewsbury's embroiderers, grooms and boys, recalling items recorded in the household accounts such as 'thynges that the yembrother wyndes hys golde on' and 'cards to wind silk'.<sup>155</sup> Connections and continuities between this hanging and its male fabricators may have been drawn out further in the navigation of space. The 1601 inventory of Hardwick's New Hall locates the cloth in the Best Bed Chamber. This room's contents are listed immediately after the room holding the embroiderers' beams, situated in the same space on the floor above; for the inventory taker, at least, the space of making led to a depiction of male handiwork.<sup>156</sup> The series of hangings to which this panel belongs may have been stitched within the Hardwick workspace; whilst their production began sometime after 1576, Levey indicates that they were probably not finished until after Shrewsbury moved to Hardwick in 1584.<sup>157</sup>

Relative to the engraved figure, the embroidered Sardanapalus manifests a more complex range of attitudes towards the male identities crafted by textile work. Fisher identifies the beard as 'a central component of manhood', which materially constituted a person's masculinity: it 'made the man'.<sup>158</sup> In the source engravings, Sardanapalus is the only smooth-chinned vice, a bare-faced sign of his degenerately effeminate behaviour. The hanging overturns this signal, endowing Sardanapalus with a short, pointed beard, popular with Elizabethan courtiers like Walter Raleigh. Known as a "bodkin" or "needle" beard, this stitched facial hair suggests that textile tools might constitute masculinizing rather than emasculating prostheses. This beard occupied an ambivalent position in early modern gender discourses, as Mark Albert Johnston highlights. Time-consuming and costly to maintain, the needle beard indexed a leisured lifestyle, embodying the wealth and social status of elite masculinity. But it could also slide into excessive luxury, 'undoing the ideal manhood it was supposed to materialize',

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<sup>155</sup> Cited in Levey, *Embroideries at Hardwick Hall*, 51; 'Receipt of Charles Mather, [tailor]', August 1606, Lambeth Palace Library, Shrewsbury Papers 706, 49r.

<sup>156</sup> Levey and Thornton, *Of Household Stuff*, 45, 66.

<sup>157</sup> Levey, *Embroideries at Hardwick Hall*, 86.

<sup>158</sup> Fisher, *Materializing Gender*, 83–128, esp. 93, 128.

particularly if worn by those of lower ranks.<sup>159</sup> Sardanapalus's beard thus epitomises the plural, contingent and contested nature of contemporary discourses of masculinity. Destabilising gender norms, it suggests that Sardanapalus's manhood might materialize in spite of—and perhaps even as a result of—his subversion of temperate masculinity.

Shrewsbury's households were no strangers to morally heterodox material readings of classical history. Records reveal that the 'Noble Women' series, to which Penelope belongs, also featured Cleopatra; the hanging itself is no longer extant. Typically reviled and cited alongside Sardanapalus as a figure of 'unmeasurable excess',<sup>160</sup> Cleopatra was portrayed in Shrewsbury's hanging as a virtuous heroine, flanked by 'fortitudo and Justitia'.<sup>161</sup> Gillian White suggests that Cleopatra was probably chosen because of 'her great capacity for love' and 'nobility in ... [choosing] death over ignominy';<sup>162</sup> this offers suggestive parallels with the appreciation of male spinners' loving labours in *Jack of Newbury* and *Minerva*, and indicates how even Sardanapalus's self-immolation might attract approbation. The 1601 Hardwick inventory locates Cleopatra and the other 'Noble Women' hangings in the New Hall's Withdrawing Chamber, adjacent to the Best Bed Chamber where Temperance and Sardanapalus hung.<sup>163</sup> Inviting viewers to plot conceptual connections between these rooms, Sardanapalus's location at Hardwick may have prompted viewers to consider a similarly atypical interpretation, as well as to register connections between his work-in-progress and the finished product held by Penelope.

A counter-cultural approach to Sardanapalus may have been further encouraged by the limited relevance that his contrary virtue, Temperance, held to its makers. Whilst gendered female in the hanging, temperance assumed a principle position among patriarchal masculine ideals, as highlighted in Edmund Spenser's prefatory letter to Sir

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<sup>159</sup> Mark Albert Johnston, *Beard Fetish in Early Modern England: Sex, Gender, and Registers of Value* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011), 55, 62–64, esp. 63.

<sup>160</sup> Bernard Gilpin, *A Godly Sermon* (London, 1581), D6v.

<sup>161</sup> Levey and Thornton, *Of Household Stuff*, 47.

<sup>162</sup> Gillian White, "'Pictures of the Vertues": A Set of Wall-Hangings at Hardwick Hall', *Renaissance Journal* 2, no. 3 (2005): 6–7, accessed January 25, 2017, [www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/ren/projects/journal/eleven/white.doc](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/ren/projects/journal/eleven/white.doc).

<sup>163</sup> Levey and Thornton, *Of Household Stuff*, 47.

Walter Raleigh in *The Faerie Queene* (1590).<sup>164</sup> As suggested above, significant numbers of men were marginalised or excluded by patriarchal masculinity. Shepard notes that men who fell outside this demographic did not necessarily feel themselves to be emasculated, but rather asserted ‘alternative or resistant codes of manhood’.<sup>165</sup> Not only the pauper workers discussed in the previous section but the more financially comfortable male textile workers employed at Chatsworth, Hardwick and other elite households are likely to have experienced limits on their access to patriarchal masculinity. Some of Shrewsbury’s professional embroiderers may have headed their own households, but when they lived under her roof and worked under her direction, they participated in ‘alternative household strategies’ which inverted patriarchal dictates.<sup>166</sup> Headed by a woman, Hardwick provides a striking example of such alternatives but even craftsmen employed in male-headed households, such as Chatsworth, would have occupied a ‘subordinate’ rather than ‘patriarchal’ position, owing deference to and being dependent upon the husband and housewife.<sup>167</sup>

Shrewsbury’s grooms and boys would have been more firmly entrenched in this subordinate position. Patriarchal manhood’s narrow age limits immediately excluded the young fabric-workers engaged by Shrewsbury and other elite families, as well as the boys and elderly men working in pauper households. Neither of these age groups was understood to be physiologically disposed to temperance.<sup>168</sup> Particularly in youth, forms of male identity proliferated which celebrated intemperate behaviours, often involving cultures of excess and illicit sex that resonate with Sardanapalus’s actions, as well as chiming with commonplace sexual innuendoes about needlemen’s phallic tools and pricking stitches.<sup>169</sup> For example, one tailor made his apprentice sign a contract that he

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<sup>164</sup> Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (London: Longman, 1980), 716, l. 43. See also Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*, 30–34, 40–46; Anthony Ellis, *Old Age, Masculinity, and Early Modern Drama: Comic Elders on the Italian and Shakespearean Stage* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 32–33. On disregard for temperate masculinity, see also Ronda Arab, *Manly Mechanicals on the Early Modern Stage* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2011), 149–61.

<sup>165</sup> Shepard, ‘From Anxious Patriarchs’, 295.

<sup>166</sup> Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*, 187.

<sup>167</sup> Shepard, ‘From Anxious Patriarchs’, 291.

<sup>168</sup> Ellis, *Old Age*, 15–17, 32–33.

<sup>169</sup> Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*, 93–126. For a typical example of sexual innuendoes about needlemen’s work, see ‘Of A *Taylor* and his Sweetheart’, in *Ex Ungue Leonem* (London, 1654), D8r.

would ‘reject the illicit lure of ... alehouses and taverns’, a variation on a common stipulation in Merchant Tailors’ Company apprenticeships which suggests that such behaviour was common enough to need guarding against.<sup>170</sup> Whilst ‘condemned by moralists as unmanly, effeminate, and beast-like’, the youths involved considered their licentious activities as assertions of male fraternity and ‘potent’ manhood.<sup>171</sup> Sardanapalus’s subversive and intemperate handling of thread may thus have been more appealing to Shrewsbury’s boys than moralists intended. The hanging might usefully be placed alongside the ballad, *The Knitters Jobb*, discussed above, which invites readers to inhabit the position of the young male speaker offering material assistance in exchange for a kiss. Sardanapalus’s spinning and pursuit of concubines could offer a similarly appealing fantasy which allowed young workers to explore how their work intersected with heterodox manhoods.

Sardanapalus’s tools also bring his supposed intemperance into dialogue with another of Shrewsbury’s textile furnishings: the Tobit table carpet. Dated 1579, this needlework carpet bears the arms of Talbot impaling Hardwick at its centre and tells the biblical story of Tobit around its edges. The central section of one border depicts a set of balances holding two trophies: on the right, the struts of an embroiderer’s frame, broaches (spools for winding thread), scissors and weavers’ shears, as well as a pair of spectacles and a mahlstick, and on the left, painters’ implements, accompanied by two embroiderers’ broaches.<sup>172</sup> Locating these balances—closely associated with temperate equilibrium<sup>173</sup>—at the centre of grotesque *copia*, the carpet’s composition refuses an easy opposition between excess and restraint.

These tools of the trade seem to function like those drawn by contemporary French artisans, as ‘signatures’ intended to identify the carpet’s makers, suggesting how Shrewsbury’s handiworkers manifested their work in the textiles they produced.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Cited in A. Lynn Martin, *Alcohol, Sex and Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 77.

<sup>171</sup> Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*, 94.

<sup>172</sup> Levey, *Embroideries at Hardwick Hall*, 276–78; ‘Tobit Table Carpet’, 1579, Hardwick NT 1129489.

<sup>173</sup> See Jessica Wolfe, *Humanism, Machinery, and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 84.

<sup>174</sup> James Richard Farr, *Hands of Honor: Artisans and Their World in Dijon, 1550–1650* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 154.

Foregrounding the carpet's materiality, these stitched tools invite reflection on the various skilled artistic processes underlying its creation. The broaches and the frame's struts recall those borne on the Broderers' Company arms, gesturing towards a semiotic system in which textile tools constituted signs of occupational and civic eminence. Suggesting the presence of professional handiwork within the household, the carpet locates these tools within the sphere of domestic production and alongside the family heraldry, evoking the shears, broaches and frames recorded in Shrewsbury's accounts and inventories, and further suggesting the imbrication of market and home economies.<sup>175</sup> Displayed to distinguished guests in the State Apartments, this carpet suggests that the textile skills of the men, boys and women employed by Shrewsbury were celebrated rather than stigmatized within the household.<sup>176</sup>

Levey notes that Temperance's facial features resemble contemporary pictures of Shrewsbury.<sup>177</sup> Shrewsbury may have intended this Virtue as a self-portrait, creating further connections between this hanging and Penelope (another "autobiographical" piece). This further destabilises the work's moral binaries, in light of Shrewsbury's commissioning of the hangings. It situates Shrewsbury/Temperance as the originator of their luxuriance and, positioning her in conference with textile craftsmen, suggests that Temperance and Sardanapalus might be considered less as contraries than collaborators. If this risks compromising the Virtue, the positioning of the piece as a display of Shrewsbury's household *oeconomia* allows a more virtuous reading of male textile labour which emphasises that the subordination of some males was a necessary condition of patriarchal manhood. Rather than symbolising anarchic lust, the male threadworker's spinning indexes his accordance with social order, enabling domestic self-sufficiency and observing the housewife's socially legitimate control over subordinate male servants and craftsmen—albeit, at Hardwick, within an unorthodox female-headed household.

Similarly complex statements of gender and identity inform the representation of male threadwork in William Painter's prose fiction 'A Lady of Boeme'. Ostensibly, Painter presents male spinning and reeling as humiliating and effeminizing. However,

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<sup>175</sup> In addition to the looms and broaches already cited, Shrewsbury's accounts record the purchase of 'thymbylles and sheres' for the embroiderer, cited in Levey, *An Elizabethan Inheritance*, 42.

<sup>176</sup> Levey, *Embroideries at Hardwick Hall*, 278.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

closer analysis reveals more ambivalent attitudes which suggest that spinning might have a role in producing as well as interrogating normative masculinities. Freely translated from Matteo Bandello's *Novelle*, Painter's text was printed in *The Second Tome of the Palace of Pleasure* in 1567, reprinted in 1580. The story begins with Sir Ulrico leaving his household to serve at King Mathie's court. Here, Sir Ulrico makes a bet upon the faithfulness of his wife, Lady Barbara, agreeing to send two young barons to try to seduce her. Lady Barbara tricks these barons into believing that they have succeeded, only to imprison them within their rooms, forcing one to spin thread and the other to reel it. In a suggestive, though subtly different, parallel to Hardwick, Painter's introduction likens the steadfast Lady Barbara to Penelope and describes the barons as 'more shamefull than shamelesse Sardanapalus'.<sup>178</sup>

Describing the barons' 'fall to womans toyle', Painter's introduction appears to uphold a straightforwardly moralistic interpretation.<sup>179</sup> Yet the validity of the binaries and normative gender roles which underpin this interpretation are destabilised by the narrative's subversion of feminine stereotypes; by challenging constructions of femininity the narrative also brings masculinity into question. Lady Barbara asserts her womanhood by disavowing normative femininity, declaring: 'I confess my self to be a woman, and you men do say that womens hearts be faint & feeble: but ... the contrary is in me'. She is commended for acting 'like a couragious and politike captaine' in defending her 'pudicitie', conforming to normative chaste femininity by departing from it.<sup>180</sup> As Queen Beatrice (King Mathie's wife) underscores, gender identity is various for men and women: it is 'extreme follie, to iudge all women to be of one disposition, in like sort as it were a great error to say that al men be of one qualitie and condition'.<sup>181</sup> Throughout the ensuing events, the barons' threadwork epitomises tensions between normative and alternative masculinities. At the same time as being satirized as demeaning and effeminate, the barons' handiwork operates as a disciplined behaviour, productive of normative masculine virtues and conducive to social order, and creates communities of practice that resonate with those articulated by contemporary craftsmen.

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<sup>178</sup> William Painter, *The Second Tome of the Palace of Pleasure* (London, 1567), DDDd4r–v.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., EEEe3r, DDDd4r–DDDD4v.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., FFFf3v.

In contrast to Sardanapalus's elective spinning, the barons are forced to handle thread, an activity presented as curative rather than symptomatic of their 'foolish and youthly conceits'. Lord Alberto's initial aversion to spinning represents an overflow of immature intemperance: noticing the distaff and spindle, he is 'overcome with choler and rage', overwhelmed by the humour believed to dominate youths' bodies.<sup>182</sup> Choler was both good and bad, according to discourses of manhood: the heat it produced was a defining characteristic of men's bodies and the courage it inspired was necessary for martial success, but it could induce disobedience and social discord.<sup>183</sup> Such ambivalence is evident here. Whilst Painter tacitly commends these 'braue and lustie souldiers', choler causes Alberto to behave 'like a beast', inducing a level of 'unmanly degeneration', which as Shepard notes, was worse than effeminacy.<sup>184</sup>

Serving 'to coole the heate of your lustie youth', spinning and reeling thus engender an ascent to patriarchal virtues, including temperance and wisdom, rather than a fall to vice. Painter observes that Alberto:

was aboute to spoyle and breake the same [spindle and distaff] in pieces: but remembring what a harde weapon Necessitie is, hee stayed hys wysdom, and albeit hee hadde rather to haue contriued hys leysure in noble and Gentlemanlyke passetyme, yet rather than he woulde be idle, hee thoughte to reserue that Instrument to auoyde the tedious lacke of honest and familiar companie.<sup>185</sup>

Scholars have often highlighted needlework's role in averting female idleness, regarding it as a mechanism of patriarchal control,<sup>186</sup> but male idleness also concerned moralists; it symptomatized young men's incontinence and 'deface[d] utterly the life of

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., FFFf4v, GGGg4r; on choleric youth, see Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 16–17.

<sup>183</sup> See, for example, Katharine A. Craik, *Reading Sensations in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 52–72; Arab, *Manly Mechanicals*, 17–18.

<sup>184</sup> Painter, *Second Tome*, DDDd4v, GGGg4r; Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*, 29.

<sup>185</sup> Painter, *Second Tome*, GGGg3v, GGGg4r.

<sup>186</sup> See, for example, Randles, "'The Pattern of All Patience'", 158; Holroyd, 'Embroidered Rhetoric', 98–101.



gentlemen'.<sup>187</sup> Alberto's textile work speaks to the way that, amongst upper sections of society, forms of recreation could cut across gender divisions. George Puttenham, for example, suggests that 'Ladies and young Gentlewomen, or idle Courtiers' were apt to occupy themselves with poetic making, itself analogous with embroidery, as will be discussed in chapter four.<sup>188</sup> As Ronda Arab highlights, directions against idleness gained force during the early modern period, as economic pressures combined with the Protestant work ethic. Exactly what this meant for the upper social orders was open to contestation; although, in practice, elite 'work' was usually understood as any form of service to the commonwealth, manual labour could be privileged as a contrast to the apparent idleness of the aristocracy, whose place had shifted from the battlefield to the court.<sup>189</sup> The baron's spinning seems to speak to these tensions. On the one hand, Alberto's desire for 'leisure' and 'noble and Gentlemanlyke passetyme[s]' seems in keeping with courtly codes of masculinity. Yet it is his spinning which prevents ungentlemanly idleness, signalling its equivocal relationship to normative constructs of masculinity.

These gentlemanly virtues may have resonated with the position of some household servants and corporate craftsmen. Towards the end of the sixteenth century increasing numbers of gentlemen entered apprenticeship, a trend which gathered pace in the seventeenth century; second-born sons were particularly likely to enter apprenticeship due to a need for financial independence.<sup>190</sup> This change seems to have

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<sup>187</sup> *The Institution of a Gentleman* (London, 1555), H5r.

<sup>188</sup> George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (London, 1589), S4v. On Puttenham's analogies between poetry and embroidery, see Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 206. For other recreations engaging men and women, see Jeanice Brooks, 'All You Need Is Love: Music, Romance, and Adolescent Recreation in Sixteenth-Century France', in *Masculinities, Violence, Childhood: Attending to Early Modern Women—and Men: Proceedings of the 2006 Symposium*, ed. Amy E. Leonard and Karen L. Nelson (Newark, Del.: University of Delaware Press, 2011), 169–94.

<sup>189</sup> Arab, *Manly Mechanicals*, 21–27, 46–47.

<sup>190</sup> Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middling Classes: Business, Society, and Family Life in London, 1660–1730* (London: Methuen, 1989), 6–7; Christopher Brooks, 'Apprenticeships, Social Mobility and the Middling Sort, 1550–1800', in *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550–1800*, ed. John Barry and Christopher Brooks (London: Macmillan, 1994), 52–83, esp. 61; Patrick Wallis and Cliff Webb, 'The Education and Training of Gentry Sons in Early Modern England', *Social History* 36, no. 1 (2011): 36–53. On dramatic representation of anxieties about gentry apprenticeships, see Ronda Arab, 'Transforming the Younger Son: The Disruptive Affect of the Gentleman-Apprentice in *Eastward Ho!*', in

informed subsequent re-interpretations of Painter's tale. In Philip Massinger's tragicomedy, *The Picture* (1629), the two 'wild courtiers' are similarly set to spinning and reeling by Lady Sophia and the play concludes with them thus 'hau[ing] learnd/ Their seuerall trades to liue by'.<sup>191</sup> The threat of emasculation in this context may reflect fears that such work demeaned men's gentle status and made them subordinate to men of lower ranks. Other writers, however, emphasised the compatibility of gentility and mechanical industry, particularly when the alternative was poverty.<sup>192</sup> Meaning that they need 'neuer charge the hospitall', the courtiers' handiwork is presented as a means of avoiding financial dependence on the state, evoking the economic conditions experienced by the male handiworkers which I discussed in the previous section.<sup>193</sup>

In 'The Lady of Boeme', Painter observes how Alberto 'made of necessitie a vertue, and applied himselfe to learne to Spynne by force, whiche freedome and honour coulede neuer haue made hym to doe'.<sup>194</sup> At the same time as acknowledging that spinning is below the baron's station, Painter's suggestion that the spinner may transform his work into a 'vertue' highlights that masculine virtues are not governed by a monolithic moral code but subject to personal circumstance and motivation. This evokes how poor or elderly males adopted informal textile labours out of financial necessity, in order to support themselves and their families and thus practise the honest industry and financial sufficiency expected by patriarchal masculinity.<sup>195</sup> The component ideals of gender norms could, in reality, produce competing demands; Alberto's handiwork suggests how men who were employed in crafts which were normatively considered 'women's work' could nevertheless find a sense of virtuous masculinity in their labour.

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*Historical Affects and the Early Modern Theater*, ed. Ronda Arab, Michelle M. Dowd, and Andrew Zucker (London: Routledge, 2015), 198–210.

<sup>191</sup> Philip Massinger, *The Picture*, in *The Plays and Poems of Philip Massinger*, vol. 3, ed. Philip Edwards and Colin Gibson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 5.3.151–52.

<sup>192</sup> James Maxwell, *The Golden Art* (London, 1611), F4r–v.

<sup>193</sup> Massinger, *The Picture*, 5.1.122.

<sup>194</sup> Painter, *Second Tome*, HHHh1v, see also GGGg4r.

<sup>195</sup> Shepard posits that, for men on the breadline, honest hardship may have been experienced as emasculating rather than empowering, since their lack of monetary worth prevented them from accessing the social capital of credit, *Meanings of Manhood*, 187–88.

The moral ambivalence of textile craftsmanship is reflected in the text's heteroglossic laughter, which undercuts attempts to stigmatise the handiwork outright and suggests how male fabric workers' voices might be heard within apparently moralising discourses.<sup>196</sup> Alberto's first thread is:

all cut of fourme and fashion, that sundrie times very heartyly he laughed to him selfe, to see his cunning, but woulde haue made a cunningg woman spinner burst into ten thousande laughters, if shee hadde bene there.<sup>197</sup>

This imagined woman's reaction aligns with theories of laughter as expressing scornful superiority over something ridiculous, and often morally and physically deformed.<sup>198</sup> Such laughter, however, remains hypothetical. Instead Alberto chuckles to himself, evoking theories of laughter as expressing '*joie de vivre*'.<sup>199</sup> Alberto finds spinning 'ioyfull' and appreciates the 'solace' it provides as a 'comfortable sport for his captiue tyme'. Although Painter calls him 'deceiued' for thinking so, Alberto's attitude accords with that of actual captives, such as poet George Wither, imprisoned for libel in 1661.<sup>200</sup> Like Alberto, who had 'neuer spoonne in all hys lyfe before', Wither proudly and punningly describes how he can 'make a mends for what is defective *without me*, and can do many things for my self which I never did heretofore; mend my Cloaths, make my Bed ... and make the doing of these things a pleasing recreation', an observation that again suggests how men might appropriate unorthodox textile work as a form of resistance to social injustices.<sup>201</sup>

The restorative effects described by Alberto and Wither resonate with those recorded by early modern needlewomen, discussed further in my next chapter,

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<sup>196</sup> On heteroglossia, see M. M. Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 259–300.

<sup>197</sup> Painter, *Second Tome*, HHHh1v.

<sup>198</sup> Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, vol. 3, *Hobbes and Civil Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 145. For other early modern theories of laughter, see Indira Ghose, *Shakespeare and Laughter: A Cultural History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 52–70; Matthew Steggle, *Laughing and Weeping in Early Modern Theatres* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 11–21.

<sup>199</sup> Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, 3:161.

<sup>200</sup> Painter, *Second Tome*, HHHh2v.

<sup>201</sup> George Wither, *The Prisoners Plea* (London, 1661), E3r.

suggesting the common emotional and psychophysiological landscape of male and female textile work. Initially, as indicated above, Alberto sees spinning as a means of ‘auoyd[ing] the tedious lacke of honest and familiar companie’, an approach that parallels Lady Anne Clifford’s days spent ‘in working, the time being very tedious unto me as having neither comfort nor company’.<sup>202</sup> Later, the barons’ handiwork serves to create homosocial emotional structures, as they are ‘put together, y<sup>t</sup> by spinning & reeling they might comfort one an other’. These affective bonds not only mirror those created between needlewomen but recall the fraternal ‘bands of amitie’ celebrated by the pairs of weavers in Jack of Newbury’s workshop.<sup>203</sup>

In ‘The Lady of Boeme’, the imagined workwoman’s laughter is replaced by Lady Barbara’s maid ‘smylyng’, an expression understood by contemporaries as ‘a natural sign of pleasure, and especially of affection and encouragement’.<sup>204</sup> Calling the work ‘well done’, this maid contradicts Painter’s moral and material judgement, and indicates how positive interpretations of male textile work might be bolstered within communities of makers. Proceeding to observe that Alberto will soon ‘proue suche a woorkeman, as my mistresse shall not neede to put out hir flax to spinne ... but that the same maye well bee done wythin hir owne house’, the maid’s comments frame the baron’s work in relation to domestic craftsmen and highlight that, for elite households, ideals of self-sufficient *oeconomia* relied upon some degree of male subordination.<sup>205</sup>

I want to conclude this chapter by considering how early modern craftsmen identified with female, as well as male, exemplars. As noted above, the weavers’ ballad in *Jack of Newbury* praises Pallas’s weaving alongside Hercules’ spinning; a later verse rejoices that ‘*Penelope* apace did spin,/ And Weauers wrought with mickle Ioy’.<sup>206</sup> In *Minerva*, the ‘Worthy Personages’ celebrated for weaving include Omphale, Iole, Penelope, Lucrece, Livia (Augustus Caesar’s wife) and Charlemagne’s daughters. Many of these women are discussed in relation to monarchical or martial husbands and fathers, suggesting how they might enable craftsmen to access patriarchal and heroic

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<sup>202</sup> Anne Clifford, *The Diaries of Lady Anne Clifford*, ed. D. J. H. Clifford (Stroud: Sutton, 1990; repr. with corrections, 1992), 55.

<sup>203</sup> Painter, *Second Tome*, IIIi1r; Deloney, *Jack of Newbury*, F2r.

<sup>204</sup> Painter, *Second Tome*, HHHh1v; Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, 3:150.

<sup>205</sup> Painter, *Second Tome*, HHHh2r.

<sup>206</sup> Deloney, *Jack of Newbury*, F1v–F2r.

masculinities. But R.C. also celebrates these women as worthy exemplars in their own right. Observing that Livia was ‘frequent about Weaving’ and did ‘Not on her husbands Stately titles stand’, he finds comparable humility in this woman to that celebrated in Sardanapalus.<sup>207</sup> Humility was a tenet of male social and religious obedience: men were to be humble beneath their rulers and before God. At the same time, humility was a cornerstone of feminine virtue and, as Jennifer Clement observes, ‘[t]he humble body [was] often ... female or feminized’.<sup>208</sup> Both Protestantism and Catholicism had traditions of men identifying with female exemplars in order to access Christian virtues to which women were believed to be more predisposed.<sup>209</sup> Relating to women like Livia and participating in female handicrafts may thus have enabled men better access to desirable religious and social identities.

R.C. appears anxious that that his craft will be trivialised as effeminate, but insists ‘tis no disparagement,/ That worthy Women did it first Invent/ For they in other things have famous been’. R.C.’s examples of such women include Semiramis who possessed ‘manly courage’ and Sappho who ‘In mans apparel read Divinity’, suggesting how women might embody and enable access to masculine characteristics and again indicating interconnections between the subversion of male and female gender norms.<sup>210</sup> Rather than seeking to displace women from the material world, R.C. celebrates the equal worthiness of the sexes, evoking the ways in which some craftsmen celebrated women as colleagues and partners:

Thus a few worthy Women I have shown  
 But many, many more are likewise known.  
 Many several wayes as excellent  
 As Men ....<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> R.C., *Minerva*, C3v.

<sup>208</sup> Jennifer Clement, *Reading Humility in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 5, 81.

<sup>209</sup> See, for example, Ulrike Strasser, “‘The First Form and Grace’: Ignatius of Loyola and the Reformation of Masculinity”, in *Masculinity in the Reformation Era*, ed. Scott H. Hendrix and Susan C. Karant-Nunn (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2008), 54–59; Kathleen M. Crowther, *Adam and Eve in the Protestant Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 130–36.

<sup>210</sup> R.C., *Minerva*, C1v–C2r.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, C2v.

The phonological slippage between ‘Women’, ‘many’ and ‘Men’ presses at the porosity of gender boundaries, and suggests how personal virtues and social worth produced through textile work might be shared by men and women.

R.C.’s suggestion that craftsmen might find exemplars in women was perhaps less remarkable than we might assume. Using scripture as a guide to material enrichment, James Maxwell’s *The Golden Art* (1611) lauds the industry of the ideal wife of Proverbs 31, commending her spinning and other textile work at length. Early modern moralists often present the Proverbial wife’s works as virtuous types for women’s needlework;<sup>212</sup> for Maxwell her handiwork equally provides a mirror for male labour: ‘all that haue betaken themselues to a gainefull calling ought to imitate the diligence of *Salomons* vertuous woman, bee they women, or bee they men’.<sup>213</sup> Here, diligence, a chief housewifely virtue, intersects with what Arab calls a ‘work-orientated masculine identity’ which prizes commercial productivity and considers ‘diligent labor in one’s calling’ a devotional act.<sup>214</sup> Maxwell’s ensuing comments on the gentility of ‘mechanicall industry’, including tailoring, point towards textile parallels between the virtuous woman’s labours and men’s handiworks.<sup>215</sup>

The instability of gender in relation to virtue resonates with the Hardwick hangings. Although the *Virtues and their Contrary Vices* series depicts all Virtues as women, the inventory begins by recording ‘one peece of the picture of fayth and *his* contrarie Mahomet’ (emphasis added); the subsequent hangings take the ungendered ascription ‘the contrary’.<sup>216</sup> This suggests that female (and perhaps effeminized) figures might have been viewed in terms of male or gender-neutral virtues and identities. Perhaps at Hardwick, Penelope too might have offered a mirror for textile craftsmen.

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<sup>212</sup> Proverbs 31:10–31. See for example, Samuel Clarke, *A Collection of the Lives of Ten Eminent Divines* (London, 1662), L13v; Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 18–19, 180.

<sup>213</sup> Maxwell, *The Golden Art*, F2v–F4r.

<sup>214</sup> Arab, *Manly Mechanicals*, 21–23.

<sup>215</sup> Maxwell, *The Golden Art*, F4v–G1r. See also Danielle Clarke’s observation that Robert Cleaver’s commentary on this chapter presents the woman as ‘a model for emulation within the household, and is aimed at husbands and wives alike’, in ‘Gender and the Inculcation of Virtue: The Book of Proverbs in Action’, in *Biblical Women in Early Modern Literary Culture, 1550–1700*, ed. Victoria Brownlee and Laura Gallagher (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 111.

<sup>216</sup> Levey and Thornton, *Of Household Stuff*, 45.

Whilst the group of hangings to which she belongs is now commonly referred to as the ‘Noble Women of the Ancient World’ series, early modern appraisers applied the gender-neutral denomination ‘the virtues’. Several of the accompanying virtues including Paciens and Perseverans, who flank Penelope, were considered desirable male attributes.<sup>217</sup> Penelope herself resembles contemporary depictions of Fortitudo, a chief virtue of heroic masculinity.<sup>218</sup> At the same time as suggesting Shrewsbury’s appropriation of conventionally male forms of authority, the hanging also asks us to consider whether Penelope might have offered an attractive model for the material identities of the craftsmen involved in its making.<sup>219</sup>

Like the heterosocial connections forged between workers in the home, and in both formal and informal economies, the narratives constructed through and around Hercules and Sardanapalus confirm that the relationship between fabric skills and gendered identity was far more complex than scholars often acknowledge. Needle- and thread-work were practised by men alongside women in a variety of social and economic contexts, and might be used to construct both normative and alternative male identities as well as fashioning and subverting models of femininity. At the same time, however, both historical and fictional accounts question the extent to which gender was necessarily experienced as an overriding category of identity. Emphasising skills which were shared between workers and celebrating virtues which were prized in men and women alike, archival records, advice manuals and literary works challenge us to consider the complexities of textile-based identities which were as much about craft and community as gender.

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<sup>217</sup> See, for example, Anthony Munday, *The Third and Last Part of Palmerin of England* (London, 1602), Ddd4r; David Chytraeus, *A Postil*, trans. Arthur Golding (London, 1570), Aa8v; Gillian White discusses how the women represented in this set of hangings transgress normative gender roles, White, “‘Pictures of the Vertues’”, 4–8, 11. NT 1129593.1. The inventory differs from the hanging itself, recording Sapientia and Prudentia; these, too, were celebrated patriarchal characteristics. Levey and Thornton, *Of Household Stuff*, 47.

<sup>218</sup> Levey, *Embroideries at Hardwick Hall*, 80–81.

<sup>219</sup> On Shrewsbury’s appropriation of conventionally male forms of authority, see Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 62.

## Chapter Two: On Making: Textile and Textual Handiwork

While some have argued that the finished artefact is what stirs reflection, and on the part of the consumer, here the argument is that making things can sharpen the craftsman's awareness and understanding of those things. Making is a form of knowing.<sup>1</sup>

Daniel Wakelin's comments on the handicraft of scribal correction bear witness to a growing interest in making and artisanal skill as forms of epistemology. Pamela Smith's work on craftsmen, together with edited collections such as *Making Knowledge in Early Modern Europe: Practices, Objects and Texts, 1400–1800* (2007) and *Ways of Making and Knowing: The Material Culture of Empirical Knowledge* (2014), have emphasised that 'knowing' is not a theoretical or abstractly intellectual process, and have urged us to take seriously the forms of tacit knowledge, physical technique and embodied understanding which were developed through artisanal practice.<sup>2</sup> This chapter explores the kinds of habituated and embodied knowledge developed in the practice of needlework.

Most recent studies of early modern craft have focused on craftsmen, implicitly or explicitly gendered male.<sup>3</sup> In relation to varieties of skilled work seen as feminised or belonging to women's domain, discourses of 'craft' (as opposed to art) still tend to carry diminutive, dismissive connotations.<sup>4</sup> As suggested earlier, the embodied work of sewing has been regarded as a means of physically enforcing women's subjection, engendering submissive virtuous femininity, constraining women's movements and

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Wakelin, *Scribal Correction and Literary Craft: English Manuscripts 1375–1510* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 101.

<sup>2</sup> Pamela H. Smith and Benjamin Schmidt, eds., *Making Knowledge in Early Modern Europe: Practices, Objects, and Texts, 1400–1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Pamela H. Smith, Amy R. W. Meyers, and Harold J. Cook, eds., *Ways of Making and Knowing: The Material Culture of Empirical Knowledge* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2014); Pamela H. Smith, *The Body of the Artisan: Art and Experience in the Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Ursula Klein and E. C. Spary, eds., *Materials and Expertise in Early Modern Europe: Between Market and Laboratory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Parker, *Subversive Stitch*, 5.



rendering them invisible, or conversely opening them up to sexual voyeurism.<sup>5</sup> Stitchers' own bodily experiences have been neglected. Some studies briefly highlight the potential for cerebral stimulation in inventing or adapting patterns,<sup>6</sup> but little has been done to challenge the assumption that the handiwork itself is 'essentially tedious'.<sup>7</sup> Only fancy stitches and elaborate designs are acknowledged as intellectually challenging; the basic act of stitching continues to be figured as mindless drudgery.

These assumptions colour critical suppositions about why sewing was frequently combined with reading and being read to: 'insufficiently occupying', sewing allegedly needed the accompaniment of a more cognitively engaging activity, designed to keep 'thoughts from wandering or tongues from wagging on inappropriate lines'.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, needlework is presumed to have limited women's concentration on the accompanying exercise. Heidi Brayman Hackel regards the conjunction of sewing and aural reading as designed to obstruct women's critical responses to texts: practices which kept women's hands busy with needlework contributed to the 'trivialization of women's reading' and prevented direct annotation of the page. According to this logic, only textual handiwork is critically significant. Yet Hackel herself emphasises the need for the history of reading to 'shift the fields of evidence', observing that a focus on scribal marginalia has excluded from our view the experiences of readers—particularly women—who could not or were not allowed to write in their books.<sup>9</sup> In this and the following chapter, I argue that these fields of evidence must be expanded to include sewing, and that marks made with the needle should not be understood as necessarily

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<sup>5</sup> Orlin, 'Three Ways', 183–203; Morrall, 'Domestic Decoration and the Bible', 592; Frye, *Needles and Pens*, chapter 4.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 129–31.

<sup>7</sup> Orlin, 'Three Ways', 189.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Heidi Brayman Hackel, "'Boasting of Silence": Women Readers in a Patriarchal State', in *Reading, Society and Politics in Early Modern England*, ed. Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 108–10, 101. See also Hackel, *Reading Material in Early Modern England: Print, Gender, and Literacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 206–7.

driven by restricted access to the pen or scribal illiteracy; sewing might be the reader's medium of choice.

A small number of scholars have begun to gesture towards a more complementary relationship between textual and textile practices. Bianca Calabresi indicates that sewing offered a site where basic literacy skills might emerge, examining alphabets stitched into samplers and highlighting that textile craftsmen and craftswomen were well-known for providing literacy instruction.<sup>10</sup> Fiona McNeill highlights how songs which women sang whilst working not only gave voice to their experiences but supported their work, helping them to count stitches and maintain a regular rhythm.<sup>11</sup> Considering a moment of homosocial sewing and aural reading in Mary Wroth's *Urania* (1621), Helen Smith suggests that the needleworkers could 'appropriate the literary text and rework it' in embroideries which were known for their narrative content, as I explore further in chapter four.<sup>12</sup> In this chapter, I argue that early modern men and women understood textile making as highly skilled work which produced a range of embodied, mindful and devotional effects. Sewing was valued in and of itself, and enabled stitchers to think through other issues: it sharpened the maker's understanding of and engagement with not just the fabric-in-hand, but concomitant matters. Other exercises accompanied sewing not because stitching was mindless, but because needleworkers and commentators valued the processes and results of co-ordinating sewing with textual and discursive work. Makers experienced activities such as communal reading and singing not as extraneous additions to their handiwork but as complementary and cohesive practices.

Early modern women complemented their sewing with a variety of verbal material. Margaret Hoby considered contemporary politics as she stitched, having 'Mr Rhodes read the booke of my lord Esixe treason'.<sup>13</sup> Anne Clifford records hearing

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<sup>10</sup> Calabresi, "You sow", 79–87.

<sup>11</sup> Fiona McNeill, 'Free and Bound Maids: Women's Work Songs and Industrial Change in the Age of Shakespeare', in *Oral Traditions and Gender in Early Modern Literary Texts*, ed. Mary Ellen Lamb and Karen Bamford (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 101–6.

<sup>12</sup> Helen Smith, 'Grossly Material Things', 200.

<sup>13</sup> Hoby, *Private Life*, 147.

‘Montaigne’s *Essays*’ and ‘Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*’ while working; Elizabeth Isham also enjoyed listening to the latter whilst sewing.<sup>14</sup> Katherine Montague read ‘histories’ whilst her sister Nelly worked, describing this combination of textual and textile practices as ‘much more diverting then if we both work at a time’.<sup>15</sup> A city gallant in Thomas Nabbes’ comedy *Totenham Court* (performed 1633, printed 1638) declares that he will ‘spin or threed their [women’s] needles,/ Read *Spenser* and th’*Arcadia* for their company.’<sup>16</sup> Despite the bawdy subtext, this indicates that pastorals and romances were also popular genres, as well as suggesting that the common practice of men reading to women while they sewed might coincide with or prompt the varieties of informal assistance discussed in the previous chapter.

This chapter focuses on the combination of sewing with biblical and devotional subjects. Contemporary diaries, paintings, elegies and poetry indicate that godly practices were popular accompaniments to textile handiwork, complementing the predominance of biblical subjects in contemporaneous figurative embroideries. As Matthew Brown highlights, popular religious reading has historically ‘been overlooked by cultural critics and wholly neglected by literary scholars’.<sup>17</sup> Recent studies by scholars including Andrew Cambers, Femke Molekamp and Kate Narveson have begun to address this neglect, with Molekamp and Narveson in particular highlighting how women found religious reading a rich source for literary activity, self-expression and community.<sup>18</sup> Such studies offer useful correctives to a prevailing critical dynamic which regards religious exercises, like sewing, as inherently safe or restrictive. Focusing upon

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<sup>14</sup> Clifford, *Diaries*, 41, 76; Elizabeth Isham, ‘Booke of Rememberance’, c. 1639, ed. Elizabeth Clarke and Erica Longfellow, dirs., 20v, accessed July 30, 2015, [http://web.warwick.ac.uk/english/perdita/Isham/index\\_bor.htm](http://web.warwick.ac.uk/english/perdita/Isham/index_bor.htm).

<sup>15</sup> ‘Letter to Lady Hatton, Kerby’, November 6th, 1682, Northamptonshire Archives, Northampton, FH/F/A/B/4444.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Nabbes, *Totenham Court* (London, 1638), E4v.

<sup>17</sup> Matthew Brown, *The Pilgrim and the Bee* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 9.

<sup>18</sup> Andrew Cambers, *Godly Reading: Print, Manuscript and Puritanism in England, 1580–1720* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Femke Molekamp, *Women and the Bible in Early Modern England: Religious Reading and Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Kate Narveson, *Bible Readers and Lay Writers in Early Modern England: Gender and Self-Definition in an Emergent Writing Culture* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

the experiences of Protestant, often Puritan, craftspeople, I highlight that for both women and men the combination of textile handiwork with scriptural and devotional activities could not only be enjoyable but engender highly desirable social, spiritual and cognitive effects.

I begin this chapter by considering the extensive evidence that needlework was accompanied by oral and literate activities. Counterbalancing the tendency of scholars to focus exclusively on the conjunction of textual and textile work in women's household sewing, I first highlight the association of fabric work, sociability, and scriptural edification in commercial environments, before examining domestic sewing communities. Highlighting continuities between the stories told whilst working and the work being stitched, I argue that fabric practices fostered a deep and attentive engagement with the stories told, not only prompting critical and phenomenological responses but offering a space in which to record and work through them. I then draw upon theories of craft and skilled practice in order to consider how fingers and needles were understood as sites of embodied skill which allowed makers to get to grips with both texts and textiles. Relating this to conceptions of Protestantism as a practical knowledge, I reveal how fabric handiwork informed, and was in turn guided by, devotional literacy.

Finally, I present a detailed case study of the synthesis of textile, textual and devotional work using the writings of the Northamptonshire Puritan gentlewoman Elizabeth Isham. As well as an almanac-style 'Diary' (a 'vademecum', composed retrospectively and covering her first thirty-six years), Isham produced an autobiographical 'Booke of Rememberance', written c. 1639 when she was aged around thirty years. Addressed to God and modelled in part on Augustine's *Confessions*, Isham's life-writings constitute some of the most substantial extant records of early modern textile making and illuminate how fabric handiwork formed an important component in a complex of devotional activities.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> For an overview of Isham's work, see Alice Eardley, 'like hewen stone': Augustine, Audience and Revision in Elizabeth Isham's "Booke of Rememberance" (c. 1639)', in *Women and Writing c. 1340–c. 1650: The Domestication of Print Culture*, ed. Anne Lawrence-Mathers and Phillipa Hardman (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press in association with Boydell Press, 2010), 177–95. See also, Isaac Stephens, *The*

## **‘Book and Needle shar’d the Day’: Stitchcraft and Scripture Work**

Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century preachers repeatedly echoed Erasmus’s desire that ‘ye plowman wold singe a texte of the scripture at his plowbeme And that the wever at his lowme with this wold drive away the tediousnes of tyme’.<sup>20</sup> Writing in 1674, the nonconformist minister Thomas Hardcastle presents such practices less as a means of avoiding tedium, than as a way of workers positively furthering their labours by working with God in ways which engender both pleasure and spiritual and occupational profit. Advising readers to be ‘Heavenly minded in Earthly employments’, he counsels:

get as much of Heaven as ever thou canst to attend thee in thy worldly matters, it will wonderfully facilitate and prosper thy work, it will make it go on with ease and pleasure; a Bible upon a loom or shop-board never hinders work ....<sup>21</sup>

Accommodating the Bible on the loom or the shop-board (a term describing the table where tailors sat) becomes a means of ensuring divine attendance in the workshop and upon the workers.<sup>22</sup> God becomes a driving force in their work as handiwork and heaven-work fortify and advance one another. Hardcastle’s advice echoes Psalm 90:17: ‘prospere thou the worcke of oure handes vpon vs, O prospere thou oure handy worcke’.<sup>23</sup> The verse was widely invoked as a call for God’s blessing, grace and guidance of earthly labours, as in the ‘Morning Prayer for a Family’, printed in Lewis Bayly’s ever-popular *The Practise of Pietie*.<sup>24</sup>

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*Gentlewoman’s Remembrance: Patriarchy, Piety, and Singlehood in Early Stuart England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).

<sup>20</sup> Erasmus, *An Exhortation to the Diligent Studye of Scripture* (Antwerp, 1529), no signature numbers.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Hardcastle, *Christian Geography and Arithmetick* (London, 1674), H6r–v.

<sup>22</sup> ‘shop board, n.’, *OED Online*, December 2016, def. 2.

<sup>23</sup> 1540 Great Bible translation. This translation was used with and eventually incorporated into *The Book of Common Prayer*. See Brian Cummings, ed., *The Book of Common Prayer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 555–56, 784–85.

<sup>24</sup> Lewis Bayly, *The Practise of Pietie* (London, 1613), V7r. The verse also features in Robert Aylett’s versified retelling of the biblical story of Susanna (discussed further below) where it forms part of the prayer which Susanna and her maids utter before work, *Susanna* (London, 1622), A8v.

The Bible was a familiar part of the furniture for the textile workers whom Richard Baxter encountered while ministering in Kidderminster. Baxter remarks:

it was a great Advantage to me, that my Neighbours were of such a Trade as allowed them time enough to read or talk of holy Things. For the Town liveth upon the Weaving of *Kidderminster* Stuffs; and as they stand in their Loom they can set a Book before them, or edifie one another ....<sup>25</sup>

Baxter's observations highlight the congeniality of the material and social environment of textile work to a range of literate and oral activities, and emphasise that handiwork's association with 'edification' was not necessarily concerned with the inculcation of exclusively feminine virtues, but contributed to less prominently gendered schemes for moral instruction.

If Baxter considered textile work opportune for edifying discussion, moreover, it was not because the physical labour was insufficiently occupying, as is highlighted by his 'Directions to furnish the Mind with good Thoughts' in *A Christian Directory* (1673). Advising readers to '[b]e diligent in your callings, ... and perform your labours with holy minds', Baxter explains:

Employments of the *body* will employ the *Thoughts*: They that have *much to do* have much to *think on*: For they must do it prudently and skillfully and carfully, that they may do it *successfully*: and therefore must *think* how to do it ....

Baxter's polysyndeton ('prudently and skillfully and carfully') mimics the deliberative nature of the work, underscoring that skilled physical labour demands concentration and circumspection. Emphasising that 'thoughts about your *labours* may be good', Baxter indicates that this attentiveness is not just conducive to meditational focus but a form of meditation, providing '*Matter* for holy and profitable *thoughts*'.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Richard Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (London, 1696), N1r.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory* (London, 1673), Rr1r, Qq2v.

The Ballard debt books, discussed in the previous chapter, point to an environment where religious edification was part of the workshop's social life. As well as inscribing their names in these books, the participants in the Ballard's drapery business also populated the pages with iterated scriptural quotations, religious maxims and supplications, marking their identities within a religious community. Many inscriptions are laced between the lines of accounts, suggesting the productive interweaving of drapery and devotion, and demonstrating the combination of spiritual and financial reckonings, as explored in Adam Smyth's study of early modern account books.<sup>27</sup>

The Ballards appear to have been aligned with Presbyterianism and Royalism, during the Civil War and Interregnum period.<sup>28</sup> At other times, textile work proved central to non-conformist and independent religious communities, suggesting that the forms of sociability it produced may have had a particular role in sustaining dissident groups, forced to operate covertly. While Baxter's approval of the Kidderminster weavers' reading may simply refer to communal devotion, some interpreted his comments as condoning lay preaching and associated religious radicalism and sectarianism.<sup>29</sup> Men and women employed in textile work frequently feature in seventeenth-century reports of artisans reading the Bible in church, teaching theology, and establishing conventicles.<sup>30</sup> According to Peter Pett's *A Discourse Concerning Liberty of*

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<sup>27</sup> See, for example, TNA E 101/699/22, 2r, 3r, 5r, 8r, 12r, 13v. Smyth, *Autobiography*, chapter 2.

<sup>28</sup> John Ballard's will expressed his desire to be buried in Christchurch, a hotbed for Presbyterianism, and requested that his 'good freind [*sic*] Mr William Jenkyns vicar of the said parish ... preache at my Buriall', TNA PROB 11/192/222. Jenkyn was a controversialist who would later promote the Royalist cause. See E. C. Vernon, 'Jenkyn, William (*bap.* 1613, *d.* 1685)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online ed., January 2008, accessed March 14, 2016, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/14743>. The Ballard account books also contain inscriptions made during the 1640s and 1650s asserting divine support for Charles; see, for example, TNA E 101/699/22, 5r, 15r.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Long, *A Review of Mr. Richard Baxter's Life* (London, 1697), P7r.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, 'Mistress Attaway the Lace-woman', in Thomas Edwards, *The First and Second Part of Gangraena* (London, 1646), C1r. Quaker Solomon Eccles made sewing a non-conformist act, stitching in the pulpit during the service at Aldermanbury Church, Solomon Eccles, *In the Yeare 59* (London, 1659). On associations between the textile trades and nonconformity, see David Underdown, *Revel, Riot, and*

*Conscience* (1661), this was partly because textile work enabled religious sociability. Pett emphasised that many victims of religious persecution had been employed in ‘our Old and New Draperies’ and the woollen industries:

to which Trades the ordinary sort of Puritan Non-Conformists were rather inclined then to ploughing and digging, because in these Trades of theirs; as namely Weaving, Spinning, Dressing, &c. Their Children might read Chapters to them as they were at work, and they might think or speak of Religious things, or sing Psalmes, and yet pursue their Trades.<sup>31</sup>

A letter sent to Archbishop Laud in 1632 confirms that sectarians’ handiwork was regarded as central both to their forms of religious community, and to their efforts in scriptural interpretation. Discussing a tailor’s apprentice held in New Prison for his ‘familism’, the letter relates that ‘he sites workinge and Indeed for him to be then nowe to worke, then to reade then to confer with his associates it is a waye to make him a most perfet scoller in his way as one greene a taylor’.<sup>32</sup> Apparently following the scholarly pattern of another tailor, this apprentice’s textile practice is presented as part of a regime which hones his scriptural and discursive skills and suggests how forms of material ‘enskilment’ might go hand-in-hand with textual and sectarian apprenticeship.

Alternating between cloth, book and conversation, the course of this apprentice’s day resonates with the routines of women’s domestic handiwork, to which I now turn. Women who sewed for household profit frequently combined textile and textual work, as is illustrated by the abundant paintings which show women spinning, stitching or lace-making alongside books.<sup>33</sup> In many cases, a woman works beside an

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*Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England 1603–1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 77–79; J. F. Davis, ‘Lollard Survival and the Textile Industry in the South-East of England’, *Studies in Church History* 3 (1966): 191–201.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Pett, *A Discourse Concerning Liberty of Conscience* (London, 1661), E1v.

<sup>32</sup> [signature defaced] to the Bishopo Laud’, October 12, 1632, TNA SP 16/224/26.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Nicolas Maes, ‘The Virtuous Woman’, Netherlands, c. 1655, The Wallace Collection, London, P239; Quiringh Van Brekelenkam, ‘A Woman Making Lace With A Small Child Beside’, in Sotheby’s, New York, *Important Old Master Paintings including European Works of Art*, (January 23, 2003), lot 12 [online auction catalogue], accessed 26 January, 2017,



open volume, indicating reading as well as stitching in progress. As Edward Sparke remarked of his late wife, Martha: ‘*Book and Needle shar’d the Day*’.<sup>34</sup>

Early modern English women’s diaries are richly informative about practices of reading whilst working. They highlight that whilst some needleworkers read alone, and perhaps silently, many enjoyed communal aural reading. On 27<sup>th</sup> February 1617, for example, Anne Clifford ‘spent my time in working & hearing Mr Rose read the Bible’.<sup>35</sup> References to combining sewing with hearing religious texts proliferate in the diary of the Puritan Lady Margaret Hoby. Sometimes Hoby ‘read of the bible and wrought’. On other occasions, Hoby complemented her sewing with a wide range of devotional and didactic works, including ‘the Bushoppe [*sic*] of Canterberies booke’, ‘Mr perkins new booke’ and texts by Church of England clergyman Richard Greenham and religious controversialist Thomas Cartwright. These and ‘other good books’ were usually read aloud to her, either by her personal chaplain Mr Rhodes, or by Puritan associates, including Mr Maud, Henry Arthington and ‘young Corow’.<sup>36</sup> The evidence provided by these diary entries parallels images which show women spinning or stitching whilst a man reads.<sup>37</sup> Rather than straightforwardly indicating a restrictive gender division between the needle and the pen, these images highlight that even non-stitching men were co-opted into sewing communities. Spending long periods of time in intimate proximity to Hoby’s sewing, her male readers expand our sense of how a range of men as well as women experienced and understood texts and textile in proximate ways.

Hoby’s waiting women sometimes joined her on such occasions. On 12<sup>th</sup> August 1601, for example, Hoby records: ‘After prairs, I wrought, as I was accustomed, with my maides, and hard Mr Ardington read’. At times, the maids themselves read, as when Hoby ‘wrought amonge my Maides, and hard one read of the Booke of Marters’.

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<http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/lot.12.html/2003/important-old-master-paintings-including-european-works-of-art-n07871>; Joachim Wtewael, ‘Portrait of Eva Wtewael (1607–1635)’, 1628, Central Museum of Utrecht, Utrecht, 18022.

<sup>34</sup> Edward Sparke, *Scintillula Altaris* (London, 1652), D1v.

<sup>35</sup> Clifford, *Diaries*, 50.

<sup>36</sup> Hoby, *Private Life*, 7, 12, 96, 89, 85, 56, 140, 145, 43, 147, 159.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, [*English Customs. 12 Engravings of English Couples with Verses*] ([London], 1628), image 13.

On other occasions roles were reversed as Hoby ‘read a while to my workwemen’.<sup>38</sup> Such entries underline that Hoby’s engagement of male readers did not necessarily reflect women’s exclusion from the literate world, and highlight Hoby’s direction of the spiritual as well as literate and material education of her maids.

As in professional workshops, the combination of aural reading and working would have developed and sustained the household devotional community. Scholars have widely noted that reading books aloud remained common throughout all social levels during the early modern period. For some, the practice was necessitated by their inability to decipher the written word; for many more it was a choice, designed to ‘foster convivial social bonds’ or enable discussion of a shared text.<sup>39</sup> Molekamp has highlighted that ‘sociable reading’ practices played an important role in creating and sustaining female religious communities.<sup>40</sup> As we have seen in relation to the reading practices which accompanied commercial stitchery, material religious communities could be heterosocial as well as homosocial. Particularly when makers were working collaboratively on similar projects, or even on the same piece of fabric, the social bonds of the shared text could be promoted and maintained by communal textile handiwork, as will be discussed further in relation to Isham below.

Both for those embroidering images and for those involved in varieties of sempstry, responses to a text could be generated and expressed in the work itself. As noted above, biblical subjects predominate in extant pictorial needleworks, accounting for 43 percent of the examples surveyed by Ruth Geuter.<sup>41</sup> In his versified retelling of the story of the biblical heroine, *Susanna* (1622), Robert Aylett indicates that making such embroideries offered opportunities to record, remember and retell encounters with their textual counterparts:

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<sup>38</sup> Hoby, *Private Life*, 159, 70, 34. See also Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 123–25. On women’s employment of their maids in pious needlework, see Geuter, ‘Women and Embroidery’, 146–49.

<sup>39</sup> Roger Chartier. ‘Leisure and Sociability: Reading Aloud in Early Modern Europe’, trans. Carol Mossman, in *Urban Life in the Renaissance*, ed. Susan Zimmerman and Ronald F. E. Weissman (London: Associated University Presses, 1989), 104.

<sup>40</sup> Molekamp, *Women and the Bible*, 84–89.

<sup>41</sup> Geuter, ‘Embroidered Biblical Narratives’, 57.

At vacant houres it was her chiefe delight,  
 To reade the stories of Gods glorious might,  
 Where all the choisest precepts she could find,  
 She stor'd as heau'nly *Manna* for her mind:  
 The Liues of choisest *Dames* of *Iewish* nation,  
 To her as patternes are for imitation,  
 Which oft with needle, lest she should forget,  
 She in most curious Colours neatly set.<sup>42</sup>

Making moral 'patterns' material, Susanna judges, extracts and stores these 'precepts' as *Manna* for her mind'.<sup>43</sup> This evokes commonplace books where industrious, bee-like readers stored the sweet and nourishing honey they had selected from choice flowers of texts. Susanna's stitchery emphasises that needles as well as pens, and colourful pictures as well as words, could register the 'active' reading habits which have elicited much recent scholarly attention.<sup>44</sup> Susanna's sewing also accords with the mnemonic applications of commonplace books as prompts which enabled the recollection of material stored within human memory.<sup>45</sup> For Susanna, practice as well as product seems to stimulate the memory; working these patterns 'oft', the frequency and regularity of her work makes scriptural understanding a habitual and unforgettable practice.

When needlework accompanied aural reading, the visual practices engendered by sewing co-operated with the aural material to sharpen and sustain the stitcher's

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<sup>42</sup> Aylett, *Susanna*, B8r–v. This and other passages from the poem are also discussed in Geuter, 'Embroidered Biblical Narratives', 60–62.

<sup>43</sup> On the shared vocabulary of moral and textile patterns and exemplars, see Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 120.

<sup>44</sup> See, most influentially, Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, "'Studied for Action": How Gabriel Harvey Read His Livy', *Past and Present* 129 (1990): 30–78. On needlework and textual *exempla*, see Holroyd, 'Embroidered Rhetoric', 109–10.

<sup>45</sup> Richard Yeo, *Notebooks, English Virtuosi, and Early Modern Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 37–68. On the mnemonic functions of textiles, see Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing, passim*. Amanda Pullan is working on the relationship between needlework, focus, memory and reading, discussed briefly in 'Knowing a Book by its Cover: The Embroidered Binding as a Marker of Female Readership' (conference paper, annual conference for the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing, Longueuil, July 9, 2015).

devotional focus. Explaining how to '[f]ix and fasten our minds to holy and profitable meditations', clergyman John Bisco highlights the risks of audio-visual distractions: 'We must carefully guard our outward senses . . . : our eyes and eares are often the occasions of our thought-wandrings'.<sup>46</sup> Needlework pattern books also registered the role of eyes in determining the direction of thoughts, reminding users: 'Sitting at work cast not aside your look/ They profit small that have a gazing minde'.<sup>47</sup> Whilst such comments are liable to be interpreted within narrowly gendered concerns about women's flighty minds, they might rather be situated in the context of the notorious difficulty of achieving meditational focus; with many struggling to achieve more than 'transient thoughts', both sexes needed any help they could get.<sup>48</sup> Intensely detailed embroideries which required needleworkers to train their eyes upon a biblical story for long periods of time could develop their meditative capacity to 'stay, and sit sometime upon it', encouraging mindful as well as minutely attentive habits of thought.<sup>49</sup>

This raises questions about the extent to which the embroidered image might itself be the meditative object.<sup>50</sup> Recent scholarship has highlighted that reformed religion had a far richer material and sensory culture than has been assumed and, whilst images could provoke anxiety, early modern Protestants continued to enjoy and respond to visual arts.<sup>51</sup> Context was key. Even as iconoclasts targeted churches, domestic decoration continued to be encouraged.<sup>52</sup> Narrative images such as those wrought in early modern embroideries were generally allowed.<sup>53</sup> Intriguingly,

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<sup>46</sup> John Bisco, *The Grand Triall of True Conversion* (London, 1655), Bb8v.

<sup>47</sup> Giovanni Battista Ciotti, *A Booke of Curious and Strange Inuentions* ([London], 1596), A3r.

<sup>48</sup> Henry Scudder, *The Christians Daily Walke* (London, 1631), K10r; Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 117–18.

<sup>49</sup> Scudder, *The Christians Daily Walke*, K10r.

<sup>50</sup> For meditations on needleworks, see Holroyd, 'Embroidered Rhetoric', 107–9.

<sup>51</sup> See Milner, *The Senses*; Hamling and Williams, *Art Re-formed*; David J. Davis, *Seeing Faith, Printing Pictures: Religious Identity During the English Reformation* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

<sup>52</sup> Hamling, *Decorating the 'Godly' Household*, esp. 47–49.

<sup>53</sup> Alexandra Walsham, 'Idols in the Frontispiece? Illustrating Religious Books in the Age of Iconoclasm', in *Illustrated Religious Texts in the North of Europe, 1500–1800*, ed. Feike Dietz et al. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 27–28; Morrall, 'Domestic Decoration and the Bible', 578–83.

needlework may have been more permissible than other media. The 1601 Hardwick Hall inventory records a ‘Crucefixe of imbrodered worke’ in the Upper Chapel, raising questions about the role of wrought iconography within this reformed household.<sup>54</sup>

Non-pictorial needlework could also participate in and extend the meanings of biblical texts, as another passage from Aylett’s *Susanna* highlights. Like Hoby, Susanna provides oral instruction to accompany her maids’ handiwork:

... either she to them the Scripture reades,  
Or learns them some choise precepts she collected,  
Or hystories which most her soule affected,  
With piety their minds to exercise  
Whilst each her taske with nimble ioints applies:  
Their chiefest workes were roabes; to keepe from cold  
The orphans poore, and widowes that were old ....<sup>55</sup>

The maids’ sewing evokes the ‘good works’ of Dorcas who made ‘coats and garments’ for widows and was often invoked as a ‘pattern’ for early modern needlewomen.<sup>56</sup> Modelling their stitching on this ‘Jewish Dame’, the women combine Susanna’s oral histories with an embodied, kinaesthetic reworking of another biblical story. In this context, ‘appl[y]ng’ themselves to their textile task, practising their sewing intently, seems to facilitate practices of biblical application which are central to religious reading. As will be discussed further below, application required the godly to fit themselves to the scriptures, aligning their own lives with scriptural models and translating words into good works as well as earnest feelings; book-learning alone was insufficient.<sup>57</sup> According to Narveson, practices of application which stirred profound feelings and prompted personal transformation ‘opened space for independence and creativity in lay writing’;<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Levey and Thornton, *Of Household Stuff*, 51.

<sup>55</sup> Aylett, *Susanna*, B1r.

<sup>56</sup> Acts 9:36–39, KJV. See for example, Richard Brathwaite, *Anniversaries upon his Panarete* (London, 1634), B5r; Brathwaite, *The Two Lancashire Lovers*, B5r–v; the epitaph on Dorothy Selby’s funeral monument, quoted in Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 165.

<sup>57</sup> On practices of application, see Narveson, *Bible Readers*, 79–99.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

lay stitching offered a similar opportunity. Sewing allowed needleworkers to move beyond an abstract, book-bound appreciation of scripture, enabling them to interpret biblical models in relation to their own lives and learning to embody them. Allowing stitchers to put biblical text into practice, sewing whilst reading made women active rather than passive readers, their manual distance from the book enabling rather hindering a more thorough, personal and dynamic engagement with the text.

Embodied and material renditions of pious work might themselves be understood as texts, according to Norwich prebendary and Laudian Edmund Porter's dedicatory epistle to Lady Margaret Paston in *Trin-Unus-Deus* (1657). Defending the publication of his text at a time when Laudians were being driven underground, Porter begins by invoking Augustine: 'as a learned man once said, *The Preacher is a Book to them that cannot read*; So a good Book is a silent Preacher to them that cannot otherwise hear necessary truths'. This emphasis on the multiformity of books, the porosity of literacy and orality, and the fluidity of didactic media continues as he proceeds immediately to praise women's charitable handiworks:

There were in old time, books called *Libri Lintei*, i.e. linnen books written by men: and there have been linnen books written by holy Women, but with the pens of Needles, such as the Charitable *Dorcas* wrote, *Act. 9. 39.* for vesting of poor Widows: Such kind of writings have been much practised in that worthy, and most charitable familie, wherein God hath planted you ....<sup>59</sup>

Printed on paper made from linen rags, Porter's comments have immediate relevance to his own material text.<sup>60</sup> Describing the women's garments in emphatically bibliographical and scribal terms, Porter's associative logic propounds a capacious and flexible understanding of what constitutes a material text and emphasises that it was not just stitched letters which provided alternative forms of writing.

Porter's suggestions can help us to re-evaluate the nature of relationships such as that between Margaret Hoby and her chaplain Mr Rhodes. Julie Crawford has

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<sup>59</sup> Edmund Porter, *Trin-Unus-Deus* (London, 1657), A2v–A3r.

<sup>60</sup> Calhoun, 'The Word Made Flax', 327–44.

recently highlighted how Margaret Hoby's engagement of reading partners constituted a form of political and religious 'activism' which allowed her to direct male as well as female associates.<sup>61</sup> Intimating parallels between the preacher's verbal instruction and the stitcher's material evangelism, Porter's comments suggest that a circuit of reciprocal pious didacticism might exist between needlewomen and the men who read to them. Although Porter's precise relationship to Paston remains ambiguous, he appears to have been closely involved in Paston's household in Oxnead, Norfolk: as well as being 'employed ... as a dispenser' of Paston's charity, Porter notes that 'Some Portions' of his book had been 'prepared for, and also presented to, [Paston's] Ear', suggesting that he may have occupied a similar role to Rhodes.<sup>62</sup> Porter's comments suggest how male reading partners might equally have read the 'linnen books' being sewed by their interlocutors as forms of religious direction which corresponded to their own verbal instruction, especially when considered in relation to networks of patronage and household employment.

In the final part of this section I want to consider some of the less explicitly gendered possibilities for scriptural engagement which needlework offered. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed a growing market for texts and maps charting the Holy Land; combining scriptural history with contemporary exploration and travel, these were works of biblical exegesis, and interpreted recent geographic discoveries in theological and spiritual terms.<sup>63</sup> Accounts of reading whilst working and extant embroidered artefacts both indicate a distinctive interest in biblical places, which merges with this contemporary concern for sacred geography, religious geopolitics and increased global navigation. Attending to this evidence will expand our sense of the scope of needleworkers' engagement with scripture, embracing not just devotional or meditative approaches, but an active interest in religious geopolitics and the vogue for sacred geography.

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<sup>61</sup> Julie Crawford, *Mediatix: Women, Politics, and Literary Production in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 86–101.

<sup>62</sup> Porter, *Trin-Unus-Deus*, A2r, A3v.

<sup>63</sup> Zur Shalev, *Sacred Words and Worlds: Geography, Religion, and Scholarship, 1550–1700* (Brill: Leiden, 2012).

Robert Roche's versified retelling of Susanna, *Eustathia* (1599), highlights how the exercises which accompanied embroidery could engage makers' thoughts about sacred space and place. Having noted how Susanna's mother 'Would teach her childe, the precepts of the law', Roche relates that, 'When booke had rest, and needle leaue to play', her father, Hilkiah:

Doth entertaine her thoughtes, with some discourse,  
From *Adams* age; vntill that present day,  
And oft recountes, *Ierusalems* decay.  
Whilst eke by cunning art, *chorographie*,  
He doth present, the citie to her eie.<sup>64</sup>

Hilkiah frustrates a straightforward distinction between the written, spoken and wrought as he extends Susanna's biblical instruction with oral stories of her forefathers, interwoven with '*chorographie*', a term connoting verbal descriptions as well as a pictorial maps of regions.<sup>65</sup> '[P]resent[ing] the citie to her eie', Hilkiah's efforts resonate with Zur Shalev's observation that, when composing early modern sacred travel narratives, pilgrims not only engaged their 'on-site' experiences but 'used their sight and their mind's eye to remember and re-enact, as it were, the heightened scenes of sacred history'.<sup>66</sup> For Hilkiah, the navigation of Jerusalem and its history becomes a literacy exercise as he proceeds from '*Aleph*' to '*Beth*' and so on, 'And so by letters, of her *Alphabet*,/ He pointeth out, where every place was set'.<sup>67</sup> This reference to 'her *Alphabet*' evokes the letters stitched in samplers, suggesting how Susanna's stitchery might structure and participate in a multimedia experience which integrates grapheme, word and image, cloth, paper and voice.

Susanna's combination of stitchery with works of sacred geography accords with contemporary needlework practices. Isham, for example, recalls 'working and

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<sup>64</sup> Robert Roche, *Eustathia* (Oxford, 1599), B3r.

<sup>65</sup> 'chorography, n.1', *OED Online*, December 2016, def. 1a.

<sup>66</sup> Zur Shalev, 'Early Modern *Geographica Sacra* in the Context of Early Modern Scholarship', in Killeen, Smith and Willie, *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible*, 201.

<sup>67</sup> Roche, *Eustathia*, B3r.



hearing' her cousin Anne read George Sandys's 'travels of the holy land'.<sup>68</sup> Anne Clifford also apparently interspersed Sandys and sewing, although she identifies the work by another name. On 26<sup>th</sup> April 1617, Clifford 'spent the evening in working and going down to my Lord's Closet where I sat and read much in the 'Turkish History and Chaucer'; whilst the latter may gesture towards another variety of religious travel literature—*The Canterbury Tales*—the former apparently continued a course of reading started earlier that year when she 'began to have Mr Sandy's Book read to me about the Government of the Turks'.<sup>69</sup> Julie Crawford notes that Clifford's reading of Sandys is indicative of Clifford's 'consistent interest in the Holy Land', pointing to other occasions when she acquires information about and from Jerusalem.<sup>70</sup>

Until very recently, scholars have overlooked the considerable evidence of early modern embroidery's engagement with space and place. Heather Hughes has made some preliminary steps in this field, exploring how seventeenth-century women used embroidered personifications of the four continents to engage with a 'global context'; her work offers a suggestive precursor to forms of geographic and world interest considered by Judith Tyner's study of eighteenth-century map samplers.<sup>71</sup> One embroidery, considered by Hughes, sets the Four Continents around 'The Sacrifice of Isaac'. Europe is depicted with an open *Biblia Sacra*, opposite Asia, whose turban and

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<sup>68</sup> Isham, 'Rememberance', 20v.

<sup>69</sup> Clifford, *Diaries*, 54, 45. Clifford's interest in chorography extended beyond sacred landscapes and encompassed her own land claims. In September 1616, for example, Clifford records: 'This Month I spent in working & reading. Mr Dumbell read a great part of the History of the Netherlands', Clifford, *Diaries*, 41. See Susan Wiseman, 'Knowing Her Place: Anne Clifford and the Politics of Retreat', in *Textures of Renaissance Knowledge*, ed. Philippa Berry and Margaret Tudeau-Clayton (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 199–222.

<sup>70</sup> Julie Crawford, 'Lady Anne Clifford and the Uses of Christian Warfare', in *English Women, Religion, and Textual Production, 1500–1625*, ed. Micheline White (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 108n.25.

<sup>71</sup> Heather Hughes, 'The Four Continents in Seventeenth-Century Embroidery and the Making of English Femininity', in *Personification: Embodying Meaning and Emotion*, ed. Walter S. Melion and Bart Ramakers (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 716–49; Judith A. Tyner, *Stitching the World: Embroidered Maps and Women's Geographical Education* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).

incense were intended to invoke an Islamic context, setting the biblical story in relation to contemporary religious politics.<sup>72</sup>

Geographic interest is also evident in early modern pattern books which emphasise the global reach of their designs, ‘brought out of forreine countries’.<sup>73</sup> Taylor’s prefatory poem to *The Needles Excellency* invites readers to plot their work in relation to contemporary religious geography, employing patterns brought ‘From the remotest part of Christendom’ and ‘Beyond the bounds of faithlesse *Mahome*’. Taylor concludes: ‘Thus are these works, *farre fetcht, and deere bought,* / And consequently, *good for Ladies thought*’.<sup>74</sup> This not only invokes the common idea that expensive and exotic commodities are appropriate for women but suggests that they make a fitting subject for the thoughts of Ladies, encouraging makers to ruminate upon their needlework’s global reach.

While Taylor’s predominantly abstract patterns indicate that non-iconographic designs could call to mind particular places, marked by their association with religious difference, extant pictorial embroideries highlight more explicitly the time and skill which early modern needleworkers invested in imagining and representing biblical terrain. Embroiderers frequently set their biblical stories within landscapes dense with pictorial and material detail, adding architectural and natural features which often far surpass the scenery suggested in print sources (see, for example, Figure 7).<sup>75</sup> This scenery rarely elicits more than passing attention from modern scholars who tend to regard background features as essentially irrelevant to a work’s scriptural content, as will be discussed further in chapter four.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> ‘The Four Continents and the Sacrifice of Isaac’, c. 1649, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 47.1032.

Hughes notes that the open bible ‘confirm[s] the superiority of that continent [Europe] as the adopter of the first true religion’, ‘The Four Continents’, 727–28.

<sup>73</sup> Federico de Vinciolo, *New and Singular Patternes & Workes of Linnen* (London, 1591), A3r.

<sup>74</sup> Taylor, *The Needles Excellency*, A4r.

<sup>75</sup> See also, for example, ‘Book Cover’, c. 1636, MMA 64.101.1294; ‘David and Abigail’, mid-seventeenth century, MMA 64.101.1325, discussed in Morrall and Watt, eds., *English Embroidery*, 130–32, 238–42.

<sup>76</sup> Andrew Morrall’s work on the embroidered flowers which populate the landscapes of embroideries of Adam and Eve is a notable exception. See Andrew Morrall, ‘Representations of Adam and Eve’, 313–53;

An embroidered binding applied to a 1657 King James Bible belonging to Susanna Hidson indicates that needleworkers conceived of these backgrounds more precisely.<sup>77</sup> As will be discussed more fully in chapter three, embroidered book covers functioned as sites of textual and textile interpretation, responding to and extending the stories they contained. The binding of Hidson's Bible responds imaginatively to the sacred lands in which the book's scriptural stories are plotted. The front cover shows a woman in seventeenth-century dress beside a fountain; in the background, on a small hill, stands a domed and turreted edifice, labelled 'SION' in silver stitching (Figure 8). Such buildings often appear in the backgrounds of biblical embroideries where they may similarly have represented the Holy Land's domed temples.<sup>78</sup> The back of this Bible shows King David, designed, as in many embroideries from the Interregnum years, to look like Charles I (Figure 9);<sup>79</sup> he too stands in front of a building, amidst a detailed, verdant landscape. Given that Sion was called the 'city of David', after his conquest of the fortress, the back cover too seems to represent the Holy Land, situated here in relation to contemporary questions about 'true faith' and rulership. Engaging their imagination as well as scriptural knowledge and political awareness, needleworkers who produced such images brought the stories they saw and read to life before their eyes, allowing a more immediate and participatory experience of sacred scenes than critics have imagined, and contributing to the creative and immersive experience of sacred geography.

Whether in the workshop or at home, sewing and reading were complementary practices, which co-operated to create and sustain devotional communities and to enable the interpretation and application of Holy Writ. Men and women, professional and non-professional stitchers, had a shared understanding of how material handiwork

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Morrall, 'Regaining Eden: Representations of Nature in Seventeenth-Century English Embroidery', in Morrall and Watt, *English Embroidery*, 79–97.

<sup>77</sup> NYPL \*KC 1657 (Bible. Holy Bible containing the Old, and New Testaments).

<sup>78</sup> Compare Claire Robinson's suggestion that the blue-domed temples embroidered on Henry Wardlaw's gloves 'reflect the influence of Eastern design', "'An old and faithful servand": A Pair of Early Seventeenth-Century Gauntlet Gloves given by King Charles I to Sir Henry Wardlaw', *Costume* 49, no. 1 (2015): 26–27.

<sup>79</sup> On embroideries depicting King David in the likeness of Charles I, see Geuter, 'Embroidered Biblical Narratives', 71–72.

could not only accommodate scripture, but produce and participate in devotional as well as politically charged responses to it. Far from hindering readers, needlework made them ‘perfect scholars’.

## **Grasping Scripture: Needles and Fingers as Instruments of Understanding**

It was not just the image or object being sewn which honed stitchers’ scriptural understanding but the work itself. William Sherman’s influential study of early modern manicules highlights how early modern ‘readers ... [had] an acute awareness of the symbolic and instrumental power of the hand’ as a tool which enabled them to get to grips simultaneously with the physical and conceptual matter of the book.<sup>80</sup> In this section I argue that the material handiwork of sewing was understood as hermeneutically productive and instrumental to scriptural literacy. I begin by examining forms of ‘cunning’ produced in the responsive interface of hand, tool and material, and argue that the deft movements of finger, needle and thread were represented and experienced as forms of agile thought and understanding. In the second part of this section I consider how skilled needlework interfaced with religious reading practices, arguing that cunning with the needle both constituted and was directed by forms of devotional literacy.

Throughout this and the following section I am beholden to recent theoretical work on skilled making and embodiment. Tim Ingold has repeatedly challenged the idea that the physical act of making is essentially mindless. He argues that this misconception arises from the belief that making is merely the fulfilment and imposition of a preconceived ‘blueprint’ upon passive material: ‘the actualisation of the form is reduced to a simple matter of mechanical transcription: all the *creative* work has already been done in advance’.<sup>81</sup> By contrast, Ingold argues that both the form of the object and the creative process itself unfold through the engagement of a perceptive and attentive

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<sup>80</sup> Sherman, *Used Books*, 48.

<sup>81</sup> Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London: Routledge, 2000), 343.

body with a ‘richly structured environment’: a process whereby the body becomes ‘enskilld’.<sup>82</sup>

According to Ingold, all forms of making require a continuous and dynamic dialogue between human and material participants in which we ‘bring the movements of our own being into close and affective correspondence with those of its [a thing’s] constituent materials’.<sup>83</sup> The artisan thus ‘thinks *from* materials’ rather than ‘*about*’ them.<sup>84</sup> Bringing the needleworker into correspondence with the needle, thread and cloth, sewing generates a fabric phenomenology which structures the practitioner’s perception of his or her environment. As such it can fundamentally affect accompanying acts of literacy and orality. Early modern stitchers who engaged with stories and songs whilst working would have experienced the words and sounds from a distinctively textile perspective, reading, thinking and speaking from and with their materials.

Early modern descriptions of needleworkers often draw attention to the hand as a locus of skill in ways which gesture towards the synthesis of imagination and hermeneutic insight with physical aptitude, as in Aylett’s *Susanna*. Describing the ‘cap or band’ which Susanna is working for her husband, Aylett discusses her portrayal of the Temptation of Adam and Eve, before commenting: ‘But not farre off, her cunning hand contriues/ An *Antidote* which out this poison driues’.<sup>85</sup> This antidote is the sacrifice of Isaac, an Old Testament antitype for Christian redemption and a common subject in contemporary embroideries. Susanna’s manual labour confirms Ingold’s assertion that the materialisation of form is no simple matter of ‘mechanical transcription’; rather, the form of the embroidery and its scriptural exposition emerge within the handiwork. Meaning ‘to invent, devise, excogitate with ingenuity and cleverness’ as well as to ‘make’, Susanna’s ‘contriving’ hand thinks in sewing.<sup>86</sup> thought

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<sup>82</sup> Ingold, *Perception of the Environment*, 353, 36–37, 357, 413; Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 26.

<sup>83</sup> Ingold, *Making*, 85.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>85</sup> Aylett, *Susanna*, B1r.

<sup>86</sup> ‘contrive, v.1,’ *OED Online*, December 2016, def. 1a; Robert Cawdry, *A Table Alphabeticall* (London, 1604), C6v.

and material creativity cohere in and are generated by the handiwork. ‘To contrive’ also signifies to ‘find out or discover (as the solution of a problem or riddle); to come to understand’.<sup>87</sup> Rather than reproducing or recording pre-existing knowledge, Susanna’s handiwork seems to bring her—as well as the poem’s readers—to understand the ‘*Antidote*’ to original sin. Forming typological connections as it forms stitches, Susanna’s hand works exegetically to grasp interpretive problems.

The cognitive connotations of ‘contrive’ are augmented by Aylett’s identification of Susanna’s hand as ‘cunning’. An adjective commonly used in discussions of needlework, the term has specific artisanal connotations, signifying a ‘branch of knowledge or of skilled work; a science or art, a craft’; it also invokes senses of intellectual acuity, connoting ‘[t]he capacity or faculty of knowing; wit, wisdom, intelligence’.<sup>88</sup> Aylett reiterates the epithet later in the poem, highlighting how ‘Her hands with vse were so cunning become,/ That though her eyes lookd off, her worke was done’.<sup>89</sup> Positioning Susanna’s kinaesthetic and haptic perspicacity as intellectually as well as physically adroit, Aylett indicates that repeated actions sharpen rather than dull the wits. This resonates with Ingold’s criticism of the prevailing assumption that ‘the training of the body through repetitive exercise ... leads to a progressive loss of conscious awareness or concentration in the task’ as the actions become ‘automatic and involuntary’; Ingold argues instead that rhythmic, repeated movements intensify concentration and perception.<sup>90</sup> As Susanna’s heightened powers of manual apprehension and dexterity emphasise, regularly practised handiwork was far from unconscious.

Susanna’s cunning hand finds its complement in her tools. Describing Susanna’s embroidering of the Temptation, intended to ‘shew her skill’, Aylett comments that ‘thou might see, with cunning needle told,/ The subtile serpent simple *Eue* infold’.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> ‘contrive, v.1’, *OED Online*, December 2016, def. 4.

<sup>88</sup> cunning, n.1, *OED Online*, December 2016, defs. 2, 4.

<sup>89</sup> Aylett, *Susanna*, B1v.

<sup>90</sup> Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 60–61. Compare Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (London: Penguin, 2009), 160, 175–78.

<sup>91</sup> Aylett, *Susanna*, B2r.

Presenting the creation and relation of the biblical narrative as a co-operative process, Aylett positions the needle as a skilled and scripturally adept partner. This co-operation and agreement between tools and human practitioners speaks to Ingold's work on the correspondence between makers and materials, as well as to recent work on early modern subject-object relations.<sup>92</sup> According to Ingold, '[s]kill ... is a property not of the individual human body ... but of the total field of relations constituted by the presence of the organism-person, indissolubly body and mind, in a richly structured environment'.<sup>93</sup>

However, Ingold continues to see such skill as predominantly person-centred, arguing that inorganic objects like the needle 'do not grow or develop', and 'consequently embody no skill' and exercise no agency.<sup>94</sup> This model cannot accommodate lively early modern understandings of craft instruments. Descriptions of nimble needles emphasise that we need to temper a focus on physical perception with a corresponding focus on the role of imaginative, as well as spiritual, experiences which seem to exceed the immediate taskscape; verbal and conceptual playfulness, as well as belief in divine involvement, opened early moderns to different understandings of correspondence and alternative perceptions of tools and texts.

Early modern needles are commonly described as curious as well as cunning. For example, Francis Quarles' poetic romance, *Argalus and Parthenia* (1629), describes how 'the curious Art/Of the laborious needle did impart/ So great a glorie' to the bridegroom's wedding garments; another attendant is 'arai'd in greene,/ On which the curious *needle* vndertooke/ To make a *forest*'.<sup>95</sup> '[L]aborious' and 'curious', the needle is skilful, clever and careful, an active and even purposeful participant in the creation of the embroidered garments. Unlike Aylett, Quarles does not mention the needle's

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<sup>92</sup> See, for example, Margreta de Grazia, Maureen Quilligan, and Peter Stallybrass, eds., *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>93</sup> Ingold, *Perception of the Environment*, 353.

<sup>94</sup> Ingold, *Being Alive*, 94. For criticism of Ingold's SPIDER theory, see Chris Fowler, *The Emergent Past: A Relational Realist Archaeology of Early Bronze Age Mortuary Practices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 34–39.

<sup>95</sup> Francis Quarles, *Argalus and Parthenia* (London, 1629), O4r, P2r.

handler, suggesting that anthropomorphised tools might operate metonymically or serve to obfuscate the needleworker's skill.<sup>96</sup>

Alternatively, and particularly in texts which describe both human and material participants as skilled, anthropomorphised needles may reflect how tool-use blurs distinctions between human workers and their materials, something widely explored by modern phenomenologists. Discussing tool-use, Maurice Merleau-Ponty observes: 'To get used to a hat, a car or a stick is to be transplanted into them, or conversely, to incorporate them into the bulk of our own body'.<sup>97</sup> The ambivalent nature of this human-tool relationship is further illuminated by theories of prosthetics. As Will Fisher observes of the early modern prosthesis, 'it is neither clearly ... body or artefact, self or other, inside or outside'; at the same time as it appears a detachable object, it plays a fundamental role in constituting the subject, 'bring[ing] it into being'. Fisher's comments not only should caution us against seeing needles as 'unproblematically assimilated into the body and self' but underscore that the craftsperson is crucially altered by tools which play a fundamental role in constituting the skilled handler.<sup>98</sup>

The interaction of needleworker and needle is illuminated by a collection of poems written in response to an embroidery made by Lady Elizabeth Powlet, mentioned briefly in the introduction to this thesis and discussed further in chapter four. Given to the University of Oxford by Powlet in 1636, the embroidery depicted Christ's 'Birth, Death, Resurrection and Ascension' and was celebrated in a manuscript of verses written by seven Oxford scholars; the embroidery's current whereabouts are

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<sup>96</sup> On the obfuscation of women's textile labour, see Ann Rosalind Jones, 'Dematerializations: Textile and Textual Properties in Ovid, Sandys, and Spenser', in de Grazia, Quilligan, and Stallybrass, *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*, 189–212. On discourses of curiosity, see Mary M. Brooks, 'Performing Curiosity: Re-Viewing Women's Domestic Embroidery in Seventeenth-Century England', *The Seventeenth Century* (2017), accessed February 10, 2017, doi:10.1080/0268117X.2016.124448.

<sup>97</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), 166. Compare David Owen, 'The Mindful Hand', in *Hand Stitch, Perspectives*, ed. Alice Kettle and Jane McKeating (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 17.

<sup>98</sup> Fisher, *Materializing Gender*, 26–27, 32.



unknown.<sup>99</sup> The poets appreciated stitcher and tool in similarly skilled terms, praising Powlet's 'Curious hand' and 'the Curious Needle'.<sup>100</sup> The penultimate stanza of Edward Marrow's poem attends simultaneously to maker, tool and material. Wondering if Powlet might be entreated to turn the poets' panegyrics into embroidery, he fancies

... That the Hand, which did  
 Make vs thus Thankfull, would be pleas'd to Thred  
 Her Cunning Needle once more, with like Skill  
 Deciphring out our Thanks as Living=Still, ....<sup>101</sup>

Meaning not only to depict and to translate, but to discover and to interpret, Powlet's manual 'deciphering' evokes Susanna's 'contriving' hand.<sup>102</sup> In this case, the placement of 'with like Skill' at some distance from the hand, and in line with 'Her Cunning Needle', suggests the expertise of material participants in making sense. For Edward Dalby, the silks were skilful too. As will be discussed further in chapter four, Dalby highlights how her 'skillfull Clue/ Hath made a Rode to Bethlem',<sup>103</sup> emphasising the role of Powlet's thread in helping both stitcher and viewer to decipher the scriptures and navigate biblical space.

Dalby later marvels at Powlet's vivid depiction of the 'Pensive Handmaydes' who take Christ down from the cross, 'Enbalming him with teares'. Dalby declares: 'Noe hand but yours, could teach a Needles eye/ To drop true Teares, vnfaynedly to Cry'.<sup>104</sup> Punningly anthropomorphising the needle, Dalby effaces distinctions between human participants and what Ingold would consider 'inert matter', and points to stitchery's role in scriptural application. Powlet's needle becomes a lachrymal prosthesis through which her handiwork is manually and passionately aligned with the meditative

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<sup>99</sup> Bodleian Bodl. MS 22, 1r. For further details of the gift, see William Dunn Macray, *Annals of the Bodleian Library Oxford: With a Notice of the Earlier Library of the University*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1890), 65.

<sup>100</sup> Bodleian Bodl. 22, 9v, 7r.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 6v.

<sup>102</sup> 'decipher, v.', *OED Online*, December 2016, defs. 1, 3, 4.

<sup>103</sup> Bodleian Bodl. 22, 7r.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 7v.

and sorrowful handiwork of Christ's maidens. As Powlet attunes herself to the tenor of the biblical material, the needle is brought into a 'close and affective correspondence' with her hand, developing an emotional and embodied responsiveness in conjunction with its human collaborator.<sup>105</sup>

If tools could resemble their makers, makers could equally resemble their materials. George Chapman's continuation of Christopher Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* (1598) postulates that needlewomen's 'plied wits in numbred silk might sing'.<sup>106</sup> These women's wits—faculties of bodily perception and 'of thinking and reasoning'—present an embodied and material understanding of thought.<sup>107</sup> Describing them as 'plied', Chapman compounds the term for strands of thread with connotations of careful and industrious application, meaning to practise one's trade and more specifically '[t]o use, handle, or wield vigorously or diligently (an instrument, tool, weapon, etc.)'.<sup>108</sup> Recalling Merleau-Ponty's comments on tool-use, the intent application of these women to their stitchcraft seems to transplant their wits into their silks; they seem not just, as Ingold suggests, to think '*from* rather than *about*' their materials, but to think as, in and through their materials.<sup>109</sup>

Chapman's image is symptomatic of more broadly fibrous conceptions of the human body and perceptive faculties, in both religious and scientific thought. The description of humankind as 'curiously wrought' in Psalm 139:15 was typically glossed as figuring the body as divine needlework.<sup>110</sup> Anatomical investigations figured the nervous system as a network of threads, as is highlighted by the reference in John

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<sup>105</sup> Ingold, *Making*, 85.

<sup>106</sup> George Chapman, *Hero and Leander* (London, 1598), H4r.

<sup>107</sup> 'wit, n.', *OED Online*, December 2016, defs. 2a, 3a, 3b.

<sup>108</sup> 'ply, n.', *OED Online*, December 2016, def. 2a; 'ply, v.2', *OED Online*, December 2016, defs. 2a, 2b.

<sup>109</sup> Ingold, *Making*, 94.

<sup>110</sup> KJV. See, for example, John Tombes, *Emmanuel* (London, 1669), H6r; Culverwell, *An Elegant and Learned Discourse*, Cc2r. For further discussion of this trope, see Michele Osherow, 'Mary Sidney's Embroidered Psalms', *Renaissance Studies* 29, no. 4 (2015): 650–52.

Donne's 'The Funeral' to the 'sinewie thread my braine lets fall'.<sup>111</sup> Drawing out connections between these threads and his beloved's 'hairs which upward grew', and which are now woven into a bracelet, Donne suggests a culture apt to imagine how systems of thought might be materialized externally. This intersects with the scholarship of Mary Carruthers and with recent studies of extended and distributed cognition in the early modern world, which have explored in different ways how memory and thought were understood as embodied processes which were constructed in combination with external stimuli and material artefacts.<sup>112</sup> Read alongside Chapman's verse, Donne's 'sinewie thread' and bracelet invite us to consider how systems of thought might be extended further using prosthetic needlework tools which elide boundaries between human and material fibres.

I want now to consider the relation between skilled needlework practices and devotion. As I noted in the previous section of this chapter, Aylett's Susanna cultivates a dextrous approach to scripture in her workwomen. Allying mental and physical agility, Aylett describes how Susanna reads scripture to her sewing maids, providing them 'With piety their minds to exercise/Whilst each her taske with nimble ioints applies'.<sup>113</sup> As *A Christian Dictionarie* (1612) explains, 'exercise' combines corporeal and devotional connotations, signifying 'Bodily recreation or mouing the partes of the body, for the preseruation of health' and 'The practise of godlinesse, and studying the Scriptures'.<sup>114</sup> The needleworkers' 'nimble' knuckles, spatially aligned with 'exercise' on the page, seem

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<sup>111</sup> John Donne, 'The Funeral', in John Donne, *The Elegies and Songs and Sonnets*, ed. Helen Gardner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 90–91, l. 9.

<sup>112</sup> Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400–1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), esp. 10–59; Miranda Anderson, *The Renaissance Extended Mind* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Evelyn B. Tribble and Nicholas Keene, *Cognitive Ecologies and the History of Remembering: Religion, Education and Memory in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

<sup>113</sup> Aylett, *Susanna*, B2r. Spiritual and physical exercise also come together in an anonymous elegy for Cicely Ridgeway who, whilst 'work[ing] or weav[ing] with her owne hands', would 'us[e] her eares ... in heareing her owne reed/ Some choyce good bookes (by which her mynd and body both together,/Shee exercisd and edify'd ...)', cited in Andrea Brady, "'Without welt, gard, or embrodery": A Funeral Elegy for Cicely Ridgeway, Countess of Londonderry (1628)', *HLQ* 72, no. 3 (2009): 387, 12.5–9.

<sup>114</sup> Thomas Wilson, *A Christian Dictionarie* (London, 1612), K2r.

to articulate forms of cognitive as well as digital alacrity which ‘apply’ to the scriptural as well as material ‘task’.

The suggestion that needlework engenders a manual grasp of scripture is also evident in Samuel Evans’ response to Powlet’s embroidery which concludes: ‘Let others talke of Scripture, and pretend/ Knowledge, you haue it at your Fingers End.’<sup>115</sup> Evans’ reference to ‘Fingers End’ compounds connotations of ‘living by one’s finger’s ends’—‘by industry or manual labour’—with idioms about having something at one’s fingertips—having thorough familiarity with a subject as well as having something physically ready at hand.<sup>116</sup> The phrase was also deployed by John Batchiler in relation to the embroidery of his late sister-in-law, Susanna Perwich. His elegy highlights: ‘every work/ In which a *cunning skill* did lurk,/ She had it at her *fingers end*’.<sup>117</sup> Batchiler’s comment plays upon the fact that it is literally the fingertips which manipulate needle and thread. This not only positions stitchcraft as a form of digital sensitivity requiring nimble movements, as the italics emphasise. It situates skill in the zone where hand and instrument meet, recalling Ingold’s assertion that skill does not belong to the ‘individual human body’ but is created by the ‘the total field of relations’ of ‘organism-person ... in a richly structured environment’.<sup>118</sup> Located ‘at her *fingers end*’, skill is neither simply *in* the finger ends nor simply *in* the material which touches them, but is produced at the interface between them. Such an adept, perceptive grasp of needle and thread begets a deft and incisive handling of scripture. Particularly in cases like that of Powlet, where the embroidery being worked tells scriptural stories, cunning with the needle constitutes a form of biblical cunning, produced between maker, tools and materials.

Evans questions whether such manual experience might be superior to verbal discourse. Contrasting Powlet’s digital familiarity with the potential hypocrisy of those who only ‘talk of Scripture’, Evans refers to contemporary concerns about the false faith of abstract knowledge and empty words.<sup>119</sup> As Bishop John Hooper expounds,

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<sup>115</sup> Bodleian Bodl. 22, 2v.

<sup>116</sup> ‘finger-end | finger’s end, n.’, *OED Online*, December 2016, defs. P5, P1a.

<sup>117</sup> John Batchiler, *The Virgins Pattern* (London, 1661), E1v.

<sup>118</sup> Ingold, *Perception of the Environment*, 353.

<sup>119</sup> See Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, 266–71.

‘knowledge and talke of vertue and vice, of Gods fauour and of Gods punishment, is not sufficient’; we must be brought to ‘feeling, consenting, and a full surrendring of our selues’.<sup>120</sup> As with discourses of application, believers are exhorted to move beyond a brain-bound to a felt and embodied faith. William Perkins, for example, declares that ‘knowledge in the braine will not saue the soule: but he that is truly founded on Christ, feeles the benefits of his death and resurrection in some measure in himselfe’.<sup>121</sup> Puritan divine, John Preston, directs readers: ‘doe not make a profession, get not knowledge in the braine onely but act it too’. Comparing Divinity to ‘lessons of Musicke’ and ‘a Copy or Writing’, Preston insists that it ‘is not enough to know them, but you must practise them’.<sup>122</sup> Preston’s advice accords with Lori Anne Ferrell’s observation that early modern ‘Protestantism, especially Calvinist Protestantism, was most often taught as a skill or “art”’ and that consequently ‘the teaching of sacred skills was closely allied to the teaching of secular ones’.<sup>123</sup> The sensate practice of needlework skills provided stitchers with an analogical vocabulary by which to understand Calvinist pedagogy, as Ferrell indicates in relation to shorthand techniques. Moreover, when the handiwork itself was devotionally orientated, the processes of textile enskilment constituted lessons in Divinity, enabling workers to move towards a more sensible faith.

In *Military and Spirituall Motions for Foot Companies* (1645), Captain Lazarus Haward similarly casts faith as a skilled bodily *praxis*, declaring: ‘Religion is more practicall then theoreticall [*sic*]; rather an occupation then a meer profession, dwelling like an Artizan, wit at fingers end’.<sup>124</sup> This digital situation of wit—a term which, as noted above, signifies both sensory and intellectual faculties—not only points towards how the senses channelled matter with which the intellect might work, but suggests that

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<sup>120</sup> John Hooper, *Certeine Comfortable Expositions* (London, 1580), D4v–D5r.

<sup>121</sup> William Perkins, *A Godly and Learned Exposition of Christs Sermon in the Mount* ([Cambridge], 1608), Ll8v.

<sup>122</sup> John Preston, *Foure Godly and Learned Treatises* (London, 1633), R2v. For further discussion of the insufficiency of ‘knowledge in the brain’, see, for example, William Guild, *Loves Entercours Between the Lamb & his Bride* (London, [1657]), B8v; Thomas Taylor, *The Parable of the Sover and of the Seed* (London, 1621), Gg2r.

<sup>123</sup> Lori Anne Ferrell, ‘Method as Knowledge: Scribal Theology, Protestantism, and the Reinvention of Shorthand in Sixteenth-Century England’, in Smith and Schmidt, *Making Knowledge*, 163–77, esp. 176.

<sup>124</sup> Lazarus Haward, *Military and Spirituall Motions for Foot Companies* (London, 1645), F1v.

there is a kind of intellect in the responsive haptics of the fingers themselves.<sup>125</sup> Punning upon ‘profession’ as a verbal declaration (particularly of one’s faith) and as a career, Haward figures religion instead as an ‘occupation’. Applied particularly to mechanical trades and ‘skilled handicraft[s]’, the term figures religion as a skill acquired and maintained through diligent and sensitive manual labour and as an activity which occupies one’s time and attention.<sup>126</sup> Haward’s text itself marries religious practice with skilled gesture, the initial letter of each spiritual axiom contributing to an acrostic which spells out drills to be executed by military companies. Evincing a devotional mode rooted in the active rather than contemplative life, Haward suggests that occupational skills are forms of religious practice.

Directions to be handy with religion find scriptural support in Proverbs 7:3. Frequently invoked by divines seeking to draw readers to a more practical faith, this verse instructs: ‘Bind them [God’s Commandments] upon thy fingers, and write them upon the table of thine heart’. The verse was often glossed in terms of ‘finger ends’.<sup>127</sup> Peter Moffett’s 1592 *Commentary* on the Proverbs, for example, explains the verse as an injunction to ‘haue them ... at our fingers ends, neuer suffering them to vanish or to perish’.<sup>128</sup> Both the bound fingers and the tables of the heart articulate an embodied and material model of faith. Whilst the latter incorporates inscriptive systems, the former invokes long-established digital-textile mnemonic practices.<sup>129</sup> As William Basse explains, ‘the tying of the finger with a thread’ was believed to operate ‘as an adiunct to

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<sup>125</sup> Thomas Aquinas’s axiom, ‘[n]othing is in the intellect that was not previously in sense’ was a commonplace in the period, *The Disputed Questions on Truth*, vol. 1, trans. Robert W. Mulligan (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952) 69, 2.3.19. For the artisan’s senses as a form of cognition, see Smith, *The Body of the Artisan*, 95–129.

<sup>126</sup> ‘profession, n.’, *OED Online*, December 2016, defs. 1a, 4a, 7a; ‘occupation, n.’, *OED Online*, December 2016, defs. 4a, 4b, 4c.

<sup>127</sup> KJV.

<sup>128</sup> Peter Moffett, *A Commentarie vpon the Booke of the Proverbes* (London, 1592), E8v.

<sup>129</sup> For discussion of this verse in relation to heart-based memory, see Lianne Habinek, ‘Altered States: *Hamlet* and Early Modern Head Trauma’, in *Embodied Cognition and Shakespeare’s Theatre*, ed. Laurie Johnson, John Sutton and Evelyn Tribble (New York: Routledge, 2014), 204–5.

our memory'.<sup>130</sup> Further signalling how systems of thought might be extended in silken fibres, this mnemonic 'adjunct' suggests how the handling of threads in embroidery may have tied into such prosthetic practices.

Sabbatarian Baptist Francis Bampfield invokes this verse in *All in One* (1677), where he argues that scripture contains the grounds of all arts and sciences and should guide the study of them. Discussing 'Scripture-Wisdom', Bampfield echoes prayers for God to 'prosper our handiworks', discussed at the beginning of this chapter, as he declares that 'This Word ... will lead along in proficiency, when we are in our particular Callings'. He advises:

We should bind them over our Fingers (to work by them, and to wise us in and about our work) .... This Word it [*sic*] greatly useful for an Active, as well as for a Contemplative Life. Here is work for Fingers, as well as thinkingness for Hearts.<sup>131</sup>

Bampfield's advice reorientates the directions offered by writers like Preston and Haward. Rather than appropriating handiwork as a guide to scriptural practice, Bampfield invites readers to consider how scripture should guide and participate in artisanal practice.

Providing 'work for fingers', scripture seems to supply the materials for this handiwork, as well as cognitive substance for the thinking heart. The Christian handiworker is encouraged not only to treat biblical words as a manual kept close at hand, but to work by means of them: scripture becomes instrumental. Getting handy with these words enskills the worker. Whilst 'bound over' evokes apprenticeship indentures as well as structures of physical control or support, the suggestion that Christ's words will 'wise us in and about our work' indicates not only that scripture wisdom will engender both practical and theoretical knowledge but that it will 'guide'

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<sup>130</sup> William Basse, *A Helpe to Memory* (London, 1630), A7r–v. For more on this see Quintilian, *Institutionis oratoriae libri duodecim*, vol. 2, ed. Michael Winterbottom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 11.2.30; Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 314, 450.

<sup>131</sup> Francis Bampfield, *All in One* ([London], 1677), M3r.

and ‘govern’ our fingers, ‘direct[ing] the[ir] course or movement’.<sup>132</sup> The Word of God thus structures, orchestrates and even produces the worker’s gestures from within the process. For divinely moved artisans, skilled practice involves not just ‘developmentally embodied responsiveness’, but divine direction.<sup>133</sup>

The skilled movements of hand, needle and thread thus operated in synergy with devotional labours. Early modern needleworkers thought about and responded to scripture and stitchery with and from their bodies, materials and tools. They found themselves moved by the spiritual and doctrinal content of what they read and stitched, and understood their manual skills as forms of practical faith. The scriptural contents and contexts of stitchery were far from extraneous additions to skilled handiwork; religious practice and sewing were not simply co-incidental but co-efficient.

### **Elizabeth Isham: A Case Study in Devotional Embroidery**

Elizabeth Isham’s autobiographical writings offer some of the most expansive evidence for Protestant experiences of needlework as an embodied spiritual activity which both responded to and shaped scriptural understanding. Isham’s stitchcraft is a dominant theme throughout her ‘Booke of Remembrance’ and occupied a central role in her religious life.<sup>134</sup> Her life writings present sewing as bringing her to a deeper and more personal understanding of scripture, and enabling communion with God as well as self-examination. A source of solace, it sustains and strengthens her faith, as well as testing it at times. This section uses Isham’s ‘Diary’ and ‘Book of Remembrance’ to examine psychophysiological and spiritual experiences of textile handiwork in more detail. I begin by considering Isham’s understanding of material skill as a divine gift which brings her into correspondence with God, and which engages body and mind as interconnected and interdependent aspects of an holistic self. I close by addressing

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<sup>132</sup> ‘wise, v1.’, *OED Online*, December 2016, def. 1, 2a.

<sup>133</sup> Ingold, *Being Alive*, 65.

<sup>134</sup> For a brief discussion of Isham’s needlework, see Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 126–27.



needlework as a communal activity, which structured and participated in forms of conversation, collective understanding and memory.

Isham's sense of her stitchery as spiritually motivated emerges as she recalls her fourteenth year:

I thought my selfe happie in being sometimes pri-vat that I might powre foorth my selfe in praies to\* my father in secret. or else I did ofton (after this) invent or doe some kind of worke. which they thought unposible for me to doe (and not learn) I bringing it foorth afterwards.<sup>135</sup>

Isham's sequence of activities is typical of Puritan women such as Margaret Hoby, who frequently worked before and/or after praying.<sup>136</sup> In Isham's record, 'after' seems not only to operate as a temporal marker but to carry connotations of imitation, suggesting that her work emulates prayer. Describing how she prayed 'or else' worked, Isham presents these occupations as interchangeable and suggests that both inventing and doing her handiwork constitute passionate and fluent supplicatory outpourings. As true prayer was understood to proceed not from the believer but from God, so her unlearned work, which others 'thought unposible for me to doe', seems to register the operations of the Holy Spirit within her.<sup>137</sup>

Later in the 'Rememberance', Isham explicitly identifies her work as a divine gift. Again she presents her handiwork as companionate to a range of more typically verbal spiritual practices, here suggesting a productive combination of psychophysical effects. She observes that she thought the day 'wellspent' when she had 'read some part of what I might enrich my mind. having a desire to doe like the Bee thinking it time to furnish my selfe with that which I might afterwards feed upon'. She continues in the margin: '[as well as] profit my body or selfe by worke which thou hast continually for

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<sup>135</sup> Isham, 'Rememberance', 17v. Unless otherwise specified all punctuation included in quotations from Isham's 'Rememberance' and 'Diary' is original to the online edition.

<sup>136</sup> Hoby, *Private Life*, 6, 12, 36, 39, 42, 70, 105, 108, 116, 136, 147, 159.

<sup>137</sup> Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, 101.

the most part blessed me with [hetherto?].<sup>138</sup> While this observation might seem to counterpoint her handiwork's corporeal benefits with the psychic benefits of her reading, the profits of each activity to Isham's 'selfe' suggest a more holistic understanding which recalls the pouring forth of her 'selfe' in prayer.

The interdependence of text and textile is enriched by the apian simile that Isham applies to her reading. Recalling the '*Manna*' of Susanna's reading, it figures texts as flowers from which readers extract the sweet nectar of good sense, storing it for future nourishment. Anticipating herself 'feed[ing]' upon this, Isham presents a psychophysiological understanding of textual engagement, in which a sustained and spiritually sincere application of the text affects body, mind and soul not as distinct but as interconnected and interdependent entities.<sup>139</sup> As will be discussed further below, embroidery's bodily benefits similarly produced psychophysiological effects. Reading and working are thus experienced as syncretic spiritual practices, which bring reciprocal and interconnected benefits to the self.

For Isham, the apian simile's implicit botanical context may have created further resonances between her reading and handiwork, evoking one of her most ambitious devotional embroidery projects. As I discuss further in chapters three and four, flowers were highly popular in early modern needlework, both as discrete designs and as features in the landscapes of 'stories'; Isham participated in this trend, working the 'garden flowers' and, later, the 'field flowers'.<sup>140</sup> Describing how she began the former in her twentieth year, she notes: 'the spring came on and the beauty of the flowers agreeing with my fancy invited me to worke them which I never learnt to doe'.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Isham, 'Rememberance', 25v. On Isham's marginal notes, see Eardley, "like hewen stone", 185. On connections between prayer, embroidery and religious ecstasy in an Italian Counter-Reformation context, see Patricia Rocco, 'Maniera Devota, Mano Donnesca: Women's Work and Stitching for Virtue in the Visual Culture of the Conservatori in Early Modern Bologna', *Italian Studies* 70, no. 1 (2015): 89–90.

<sup>139</sup> On gustatory metaphors in women's reading, see Helen Smith, "More Swete Vnto the Eare / than Holsome for Ye Mynde": Embodying Early Modern Women's Reading', *HLQ* 73, no. 3 (2010): 423–26; see also Craik, *Reading Sensations*, 93–114.

<sup>140</sup> Isham, 'Rememberance', 25v–26r. Andrew Morrall explores the significance of embroidered flowers in 'Representations of Adam and Eve', esp. 315–19; see also Morrall and Watt, *English Embroidery*, 257.

<sup>141</sup> Isham, 'Rememberance', 21r.

Isham's aesthetic experience is inherently spiritual. As William Brissett notes, 'beauty was for many Puritans the mainspring of conversion, which was often figured as the moment of transformed perception, when the sinner first saw the true beauty of Christ and the true ugliness of sin': the beauty of the earthly environment was understood as demonstrating God's wondrous handiwork and as imitating heavenly beauty.<sup>142</sup> Presenting her unlearned work as externally instigated—invited by the flowers—Isham positions the creative process as a conversionary experience prompted by divine stimuli; as is consistent with Protestant understandings of conversion, this process proceeds not from human will but unfolds within the field of forces created by divine grace.<sup>143</sup>

'Agreeing' with this aesthetic stimulus, Isham's handiwork prompts us to reorientate Ingold's comments on the 'close and affective correspondence' produced between makers and materials. Moved by and with these flowers, as well as other products of God's handiwork, Isham's handiwork becomes a means of corresponding with the divine Creator, as she reveals a few pages later when her work is again figured as a form of worship and prompt to it. Her marginal note observes: 'I made an end of my Garden flowers and rose betimes in mor[n]ings to behold the skie for beholding thy work I have often [said] this p[iec]e espeially at rising'. The adjoining text records:

I busied and pleased my selfe with those workes of my fancy for  
 immetaing [imitating] the life of nature. as somtimes the earth and  
 flowers, and other whiles the clouds and skie I learned in them all to  
 Glorifie thee my God. and maker. whose workes all praise and thy  
 Saints shall blesse thee. \psal 145.10/ ....<sup>144</sup>

Imitating natural specimens, Isham's embroidery demands a sustained scrutiny of God's works, recalling embroidery's capacity to promote visual and cognitive concentration. As she later reflects: 'I might long looke and still entertaine my eyes with new objects

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<sup>142</sup> William Bassett, 'Edward Taylor's Public Devotions', *Early American Literature* 44, no. 3 (2009): 460.

<sup>143</sup> I borrow this phrase from Ingold, who observes that an artefact's form 'comes into being through the gradual unfolding of that field of forces set up through the active and sensuous engagement of practitioner and material', *Perception of the Environment*, 342.

<sup>144</sup> Isham, 'Rememberance', 24r. Insertion in square brackets ('[imitating]') mine.

which I did neere to the life'.<sup>145</sup> Stitchcraft also affords experiential insight into the wisdom and skill required to invent and make such beautiful forms, and prompts further acts of contemplation. Learning to recreate 'them according to the life as much as I could', Isham brings her self, body and soul, into as close a correspondence as she can with God's work as Creator.<sup>146</sup>

Isham's concluding invocation of Psalm 145:10 highlights how her work brings her into agreement with scriptural material and establishes suggestive parallels between theories of correspondence in making and directions for applying scripture to oneself. Materially attentive handiwork may have not only prompted and facilitated emotionally transformative responses to scripture, but itself been experienced as a form of meditational application. As Narveson highlights, Clergyman John Downame describes scriptural application as 'framing and fashioning our hearts vnto it [the subject matter of the verse], and changing and varying our affections, as the matter is changed and varied'. This resonates strongly with Ingold's description of making as 'bring[ing] the movements of our own being into close and affective correspondence with those of its [the object's] constituent materials'.<sup>147</sup> Like makers who thought and felt with their materials, believers were to feel with the affective matter of the text; as Downame continues, referencing Augustine: '*If ... the Psalme prayeth, doe yee also pray; ... if it congratulateth and reioyceth, reioyce ye likewise*'.<sup>148</sup> Learning to 'Glorify God' from flowers which 'praise' their Creator, Isham's making frames her affections to the laudatory matter of Psalm 145.

A more ambivalent understanding of the relationship between human and divine handiwork emerges in Isham's application of Ecclesiastes. Isham observes that 'as Salomon made for his delight gardens and orchards. \Ecc1 2.5/ so in my worke I made the shadow of these things', a comment that draws together the careful chromatic shading exhibited in early modern needlework with the idea that the divine was 'shadowed' or imperfectly imitated in earthly things, which were, in turn, mimicked in

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 32v.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 26r.

<sup>147</sup> Ingold, *Making*, 85.

<sup>148</sup> John Downame, *A Guide to Godlynesse* (London, 1622), lii6r. For discussion of this passage and the transformative effects of scriptural application, see Narveson, *Bible Readers*, 82.

art.<sup>149</sup> Solomon initially ‘rejoiced in all my labor’ but found that ‘all was vanity and vexation of spirit’.<sup>150</sup> Applying the language of the biblical verse, Isham similarly ‘thought to make my hart rejoyce in the things which I had made. which delighted me so well when I did them’. Instead, like Solomon:

I apprehended [it] to be better then I found it to be when I (again) looked on it: which caused some discontent in me because it pleased me not againe. other whiles looking on it when it happened to please me I thought there was a kind of temptation in it when I looked on it too \much/ (or I found my selfe tempted to displeas thee in beholding too much such vanities) Therefore I considered the vanity of these things and thought of this saying Let not that which thou hast made possesse thee lest thou forget him. by whom thy selfe was made and I thought to set my mind upon better especially when these pleased me not. (for I divers times found by the comendations of some Temporall things more\* ravish in the expectation than in fruishtion: but things eternall \are/ more in the fruition than expectation. S Austen) ....<sup>151</sup>

Isham’s discontent offers an important reminder of the priority of process over product.<sup>152</sup> While delight in making glorifies God, delight in the finished work risks esteeming what is, in the divine scheme of things, worthlessly transient.<sup>153</sup>

Rebecca Laroche reads this passage as articulating a move away from the earlier meditative focus of Isham’s sewing towards a self-censure of her pleasure and pride in needlework; she argues that it prompts Isham to leave her needlework in favour of

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<sup>149</sup> Isham, ‘Rememberance’, 32v.

<sup>150</sup> Ecclesiastes 2:10–11, Geneva version.

<sup>151</sup> Isham, ‘Rememberance’, 32v. Insertion of ‘[it]’ mine.

<sup>152</sup> Orlin considers the valuation of process over product from the perspective of patriarchal control, ‘Three Ways’, 191.

<sup>153</sup> On anxieties about ‘finished’ artefacts in relation to God as creator, see Chloe Porter, *Making and Unmaking in Early Modern English Drama: Spectators, Aesthetics and Incompletion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 103–7.

herbalism as a pursuit which is more pleasing to God.<sup>154</sup> This interpretation, however, risks not only collapsing practice and product but also overlooking stitchery's role in Isham's spiritual development. Her temptation serves a greater good, instigating a deeper, affective understanding of scripture and praise of God. As Alec Ryrie highlights, Protestants perceived a little temptation positively, as a test of resistance which allowed believers to prove their strength of faith.<sup>155</sup> Text and textile again function reciprocally, as Isham uses Augustine's axioms to understand her material experiences and her material experiences to understand Augustine. Considering her vain embroidery reminds Isham of her place in the divine order, and directs her mind towards 'better' subjects whilst her disappointed expectations testify to the difference between the temporal and the eternal, the earthly and the divine. Admitting that she eventually 'found that the too much love or abuse of those things was from my own naturall corruption', Isham ultimately reveals that the sin does not originate in the embroidery; rather, needlework initiates self-examination which enables her to recognise, confess and correct her innate sinfulness.<sup>156</sup>

Rather than abandoning her handiwork, Isham reconciles her sewing and her faith through further application of Solomon. Again Isham is conscious of God's will in her work:

Yet thou sufferest me to delight in these things ... that I might be the better stilled or passified whereby time was the lesse tegious [*sic*] to me till I was able to apprehend better: yet to naturall reason as Salomon saith there is nothing better /good\ in things of this life then to /doe good\ rejoyce in ones labour for it is the gifte of God \E 3. 12.13.22/  
 ....<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Rebecca Laroche, *Medical Authority and Englishwomen's Herbal Texts, 1550–1650* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 131–32.

<sup>155</sup> Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, 242.

<sup>156</sup> Isham, 'Rememberance', 32v.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.* Ellipsis and '[*sic*]' mine.

Evoking Protestantism's work ethic and the belief that one's vocation was God-given, Isham emphasises the importance of 'doe[ing] good' and returns to rejoicing in labour rather than finished works.<sup>158</sup>

Isham's reference to being 'stilled or passified' by her work emphasises that sewing could provide solace as well as spur self-scrutiny, and positions embroidery as a source of spiritual peace, an elusive state, much prayed for but rarely enduring.<sup>159</sup> It emphasises that needlework continues to provide a 'calming medicine' and 'preventative cure', as Laroche identifies earlier in the 'Rememberance'.<sup>160</sup> Isham notes needlework's pacifying effects on several occasions. The positive emotional effects of handiwork are often allied with those of reading, indicating further reasons for the combination of text and textile work. Noting that she found herself missing London company, she relates:

I passified my selfe finding this place fitter to inrich my soule then adorne my body. for my God through the joy which thou gavest me I had true content. and I had a busiy head inventing for the most part something to imploy my selfe with ether working or reading.<sup>161</sup>

Co-ordinated with God-given joy, working and reading present interchangeable forms of self-quieting which operate, paradoxically, by "busying" her head. Describing both her embroidery and reading in terms of 'inventing', Isham positions reading and working as parallel forms of devising and making. Contrary to scholarship which has understood the conjunction of sewing and reading as intended to render women passive consumers of texts, this suggests that the affiliation rather proceeds from their correspondent qualities as generative and mentally invigorating forms of creativity and ingenuity.<sup>162</sup>

Recalling how she 'busied and pleased' herself with working the field flowers, Isham's 'busiy head' equally confutes Peter Lake and Isaac Stephens' claim that Isham

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<sup>158</sup> Rosemary O'Day, *The Professions in Early Modern England, 1450–1800: Servants of the Commonweal* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2000), 34–37.

<sup>159</sup> Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, 80–83.

<sup>160</sup> Laroche, *Medical Authority*, 130

<sup>161</sup> Isham, 'Rememberance', 21r.

<sup>162</sup> Hackel, *Reading Material*, 207.

turned to needlework to achieve ‘mental blankness, the absence of conscious distraction or intention’.<sup>163</sup> Intent upon and fully occupied by her inventions, Isham’s experiences instead parallel those of fellow Puritan Lady Grace Mildmay whose autobiography recalls: ‘every day I spent some time in works of mine own invention’, including ‘carpet or cushion work’ and ‘draw[ing]... with my plumett upon paper’. Like Isham, Mildmay recognises God’s hand in her work, noting that her labours ‘did me good in as much as I found in myself that God wrought with me in all’, an observation that both suggests divine co-operation in her ‘inventions’ and intimates that God acted upon her in her work. Like Isham, she appreciates her work’s occupying effects, noting that ‘this variety of exercises did greatly recreate my mind, for I thought of nothing else but that I was a doing’.<sup>164</sup> Absorbing the practitioner, making engenders not mindlessness but mindfulness.<sup>165</sup>

Isham’s experiences exemplify early modern understandings of stitchery’s emotional effects; as Randles notes, sewing was widely appreciated as ‘producing or regulating’ the maker’s ‘emotional state’, generating feelings of contentment and combatting melancholy.<sup>166</sup> Isham found ‘hard’ work particularly effective. Commenting on her ‘field flowers’, she notes:

I was somthing curious to please my selfe in doing them according to the life as much as I could. whereby it was hard. yet the more pleasant. and I found the more the labour was the more it kept me from those thoughts which was hurtfull to mee according to the use many times of surgions and phisitions. which divert the humers some other way that the [*sic*] may not as themselves at one accostamed place to endanger the health or soundnesse of the body. but my sister delighted not to imploy

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<sup>163</sup> Peter Lake and Isaac Stephens, *Scandal and Religious Identity in Early Stuart England: A Northamptonshire Maid’s Tragedy* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2015), 352.

<sup>164</sup> Linda Pollock, *With Faith and Physic: The Life of a Tudor Gentlewoman, Lady Grace Mildmay, 1552–1620* (London: Collins & Brown, 1993), 35; ‘work, v.’, *OED Online*, December 2016, branch VI.

<sup>165</sup> See also Federico de Vinciolo’s intention that his pattern book would be used ‘Pour tromper vos ennuis, et l’esprit employer’ (to overcome your anxieties and occupy the mind), *Les Singuliers et Nonneaux Pourtraicts* (Paris, 1587), A4r, translated and discussed in Randles, “‘The Pattern of All Patience’”, 159.

<sup>166</sup> Randles, “‘The Pattern of All Patience’”, 159–60.



her selfe this way. but many times sat musing whereby I suppose she suffered the more both in mind and body.<sup>167</sup>

Isham's sense of busy-ness here seems to extend beyond a narrowly cerebral understanding, to encompass a more extensively embodied sense of activity as she moves from her 'thoughts' through 'the humers' to 'the body', and emphasises her sister's affliction 'both in mind and body'. This psychophysiological conception of needlework's medicinal effect is grounded in Galenic theory, according to which the mind follows the body's temperature. In this context, Isham's understanding of 'hard' work perhaps involves senses of physical as well as intellectual exertion, a suggestion extended in her description of sewing as 'labour', a term combining mental and bodily industry. Physical exercise was often advocated as a cure for melancholy, a recurrent complaint for the Isham women; sewing and other forms of textile work were understood as forms of physical as well as mental exercise, which would 'consume' 'evill humours'.<sup>168</sup> As Gail Kern Paster explains, 'the heat produced by the laboring body and its consumption of the extra blood would work to warm and thin the ... otherwise congested blood and humors'.<sup>169</sup> Extending our understanding of needlework's 'diverting' properties, Isham's cognitive re-routing thus proceeds from the humoural diversions created by her bodily movements.

Isham elaborates on the restorative effects of handicrafts further down the page where she intimates how textile work might both complement and counterbalance reading's emotional effects. Isham notes: 'my friends thinking that the Booke of Marters made me mallancoly ... my brother lent me Sir phillips sidnes Booke (and after

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<sup>167</sup> Isham, 'Rememberance', 26r. Insertion of '[sic]' mine. Laroche suggests that the mention of 'surgions and phisitions' should make us wary of the ideas espoused here, given Isham's attitude towards them elsewhere in the 'Rememberance', *Medical Authority*, 130. However, there seems little sense that Isham is seeking to discredit needlework's medicinal applications here.

<sup>168</sup> A.M., *Queen Elizabeths Closset of Physical Secrets* (London, 1656), D2r. In a section on 'Exercise rectified of Body and Mind', Robert Burton notes that 'women ... have curious Needle-workes, Cut-workes, spinning, bone-lace, and many pretty devises of their owne making', *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 95. Randles also discusses this passage, "'The Pattern of All Patience'", 160.

<sup>169</sup> Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004), 96.

Spencer)’. While not wholly convinced of *The Book of Martyrs*’ harmful effects, Isham seems to have admitted the need for variety, reading Foxe ‘in the mornings. and sir phillips sidny for the most part on evenings’. These principles of variety are paralleled in her handiwork, where they were apparently more therapeutically effective: ‘I found it a recreation to \[soe]/ change my worke somtimes to make lace and espetically to spin, whereby my mind was the more eased’.<sup>170</sup>

As indicated in the previous chapter with regards to George Wither’s mending, stitchery was often understood as ‘recreation’.<sup>171</sup> This complex term denoted more than an amusement or pastime; as Elaine McKay highlights, it often described senses of mental, physical and/or spiritual refreshment and restoration.<sup>172</sup> Writing in 1582, Puritan Christopher Fetherston explains recreation as a ‘seconde making, or a making agayne’; it could be applied to the body ‘wearied with much labour’, or describe the ‘renewing of the minde beeyng worne with much labour & studie, greate cares, and vnmeasurable sorrowe’, a definition which resonates strongly with Isham’s melancholy.<sup>173</sup>

Physical activity was often advocated as a source of mental refreshment. This thinking informed the guidance offered in devotional manuals like Joseph Hall’s *The Art of Divine Meditation* (1606). Hall observes: ‘the minde ... is sooner dulled with continuall meditation’; it ‘growe[s] weary, the thoughts remisse and languishing, the obiects tedious’. Hall encourages readers to emulate monks who ‘intermeddled bodily labor with their contemplations’, ‘refresh[ing] themselues with this wise varietie, imploying the hands, while they called of the mind’ and thus ‘gain[ing] both enough to the body, & to the soule more’.<sup>174</sup> Hall’s advice aligns with Isham’s use of needlework ‘now and then

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<sup>170</sup> Isham, ‘Rememberance’, 26r.

<sup>171</sup> For further examples see Nehemiah Wallington, *The Notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington, 1618–1654: A Selection*, ed. David Booy (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 88; Taylor, *The Needles Excellency*, B3v.

<sup>172</sup> Elaine McKay, “‘For refreshment and preserving health’: The Definition and Function of Recreation in Early Modern England”, *Historical Research* 81, no. 211 (2008): 52–74. See also Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, 444–45.

<sup>173</sup> Christopher Fetherston, *A Dialogue agaynst Light, Lende, and Lasciuious Dauncing* (London, 1582), A8v, discussed in McKay, “‘For refreshment and preserving health’”, 61–62.

<sup>174</sup> Joseph Hall, *The Arte of Divine Meditation* (London, 1606), C6r–C7r.

... to avoid [weri]nes’, as well as to make ‘time ... lesse tegious [*sic*] to me’.<sup>175</sup> Hall’s emphasis on ‘variety’ equally resonates with the handiworks of Isham and other pious needleworkers like Mildmay, in terms of both the practice of various skills and the ‘delight[ful]’ ‘veriaty’ evident in the works themselves.<sup>176</sup> This suggests how mingling reading, praying and meditating with handicrafts enabled a more sustained and focused engagement with the devotional objective.

In medicinal terms, recreation is particularly associated with the ‘[p]hysical refreshment or comfort produced by something affecting the senses or body’.<sup>177</sup> This offers a striking juxtaposition to the reflections which follow Isham’s remarks on her work’s recreational effects. Indicating that her work enables her to recognise the symptoms of spiritual ills as well as working both curatively and prophylactically against them, she continues:

yet when I was about my worke I could perceive when Satan began to tempt me which I thought first was a kinde of numnes in my soule \or sences/ then a temtation which if I through my own slouthfulnes did not resist quickly. I thought I yeilded then (many times) he would tempte me with desparation.<sup>178</sup>

Isham’s ‘numnes’ and ‘slouthfulnes’ are symptomatic of spiritual inertia, humourally associated with melancholy.<sup>179</sup> Identifying this numbness ‘in my soule’, before inserting ‘or sences’, Isham reflects an ambivalence about the relationship between the bodily and spiritual senses in reformed thinking. Whilst some reformers sought to distinguish and even oppose the spiritual and external senses, others, like Anglican Joseph Hall,

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<sup>175</sup> Isham, ‘Rememberance’, 34v, 32v.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 32v. See also Isham’s remarks on ‘delighting much in [the flowers] severall shaps and coullers’, *ibid.*, 26r (insertion mine).

<sup>177</sup> ‘recreation, n.1’, *OED Online*, December 2016, def. 2a. See also McKay, “‘For refreshment and preserveringe health’”, 57, 59–60.

<sup>178</sup> Isham, ‘Rememberance’, 26r.

<sup>179</sup> Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, 20–21.

indicated that they ‘do in a sort partake of each other’.<sup>180</sup> Positioning her ‘sences’ as interchangeable with, yet alternative to, her soul, Isham’s attitude seems aligned with Hall’s position and invites us to consider how ‘numnes’ is registered and responded to in the sensory experiences of her work. Using a sensorial term, Isham’s observation that her work enables her to ‘perceive’ Satan’s temptation underscores that her handiwork is not the source of the numbness but rather facilitates sensory recognition and processing. Given that women’s textile work emblematised tactility (Figure 10),<sup>181</sup> perhaps Isham’s handiwork constituted a measure of haptic sensitivity, with disruptions in dexterity being perceived as signs of numbness and symptoms of temptation; needlework, commonly advocated as a means of avoiding slothfulness, was ideally placed to help Isham resist being tempted.<sup>182</sup>

Isham’s work not only enables her to perceive this temptation, but works with her reading to help her avoid future temptations by facilitating and even producing devotional contemplations. Pondering her reading of the Bible, Augustine’s *Confessions* and Baxter’s works, Isham reflects on her ‘fuller knowledge’:

I ... thought my faith like a goodly tree spreding it selfe into goodly branches. for since these [me]ditations left me I had many good thoughts when I was at worke and I thought I was fortified against troubles that should [ensue] and as I thought never likly to fall into that like temtation.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Joseph Hall, *The Contemplations upon the History of the New Testament* (London, 1634), N4r. On the relationship between spiritual and physical senses, see Milner, *The Senses*, esp. 67–78, 221–39; Moshenska, *Feeling Pleasures*, esp. 42–43, 77–78, 214–15; Elizabeth Swann, “‘The Apish Art’: Taste in Early Modern England” (PhD thesis, University of York, 2013), 121–37.

<sup>181</sup> For discussion of Pencz’s print, see Elizabeth D. Harvey, ‘Introduction: The Sense of All Senses’, in *Sensible Flesh: On Touch in Early Modern Culture*, ed. Elizabeth D. Harvey (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 13–14; Olson, *Arras Hanging*, 21.

<sup>182</sup> See Richard Shorelekyer, *A Schole-House for the Needle: Produced from the Original Book Printed in 1632 and Now in the Private Collection of John and Elizabeth Mason*, ed. A. E. Smith (Much Wenlock: RJL Smith, 1998), A2v–A4v; Taylor, *The Needles Excellency*, t.p., A2v, B3v.

<sup>183</sup> Isham, ‘Rememberance’, 28v.

Isham's 'good thoughts'—commonly synonymous with meditations and other devotional considerations—extend the 'goodly tree' of her faith with its 'goodly branches'.<sup>184</sup> The arboreal simile offers suggestive confluences with her botanical sewing, especially in light of the preposition 'for', which suggests a causal link between her burgeoning knowledge and her work. Underscoring how sewing stimulated rather than stymied makers' thoughts and feelings, these 'good thoughts' position Isham's handiwork as a particularly fertile ground for theological and spiritual growth. Consolidating her reading and generating feelings of assurance, Isham's handiworks may not only have fostered these contemplations but provided the matter for them, evoking Baxter's suggestion that work could be the subject of 'good Thoughts'.

In the final section of this chapter I want to turn from Isham's use of sewing as a 'pri-va't' activity, which provided individual communion with God, to consider her appreciation of the rich cognitive, emotional and spiritual profits that communal making yielded. The Isham household often combined working with communal reading or the discussion of texts, in ways which suggest that collective textual and textile work were mutually supportive, structuring practices of responsiveness and thinking-in-common.<sup>185</sup> For example, Elizabeth records that in her eighteenth year:

wee had good company of my cosen Anne my uncle pagitts daughter we spent our time for the most part working and hearing one read my cosen being a good reader I loved to hear: the Bookes wherein she read were, Ovids Metamorfeces. in Sandyes travels of the holy land. and Gods [revenge] against Murther, so wee profited together working and reading and somtimes goeing abroad.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> See, for example, Thomas Fuller, *Good Thoughts in Bad Times Consisting of Personall Meditations, Scripture Observations, Historically Applications, Mixt Contemplations* (Exeter, 1645).

<sup>185</sup> My thinking on practices of communal thinking has been informed by recent work on early modern cognitive ecologies, particularly Tribble and Keene, *Cognitive Ecologies*.

<sup>186</sup> Isham, 'Rememberance', 20v.

Elizabeth's observation that 'wee profited together working and reading' suggests the co-operative and reciprocal communion both of the activities and of the participants, and suggests that profit proceeds from the synthesis of parties as well as practices.<sup>187</sup>

Isham was far from unique in appreciating the pleasures as well as profits of hearing a book read aloud. As Helen Smith reveals in her analysis of Helkiah Crooke's *Mikrokosmographia* (1615), aural reading could be preferable to visual reading; many of the reasons for this align closely with the benefits and practices of needlework. Crooke observes that 'wee are more recreated with Hearing then with Reading', suggesting how the restorative effects of aural reading and needlework may have co-operated. Crooke's explanation that this is, in part, 'because there is a kinde of society in narration' resonates with Isham's appreciation of the 'good company' she has in working and reading with her cousin. As Smith highlights, this sociability enables a more probing examination of the text: Crooke notes that it lets hearers 'demaund a reason of some doubts from him which speaketh to vs' and allows narrators to 'digresse from their discourse for the better explication of a thing', generating a 'changing of words or mutuall conference, [in which] many pleasant passages are brought in by accident'.<sup>188</sup> Crooke's explanation aligns with theories of skilled making, suggesting how communal reading and working may have been reciprocally supportive. As making is not simply the actualisation of a preconceived 'blueprint', so reading aloud is not just a rehearsal of the written word. Rather, it is a responsive dialogue which, like skilled making, 'unfolds' within the process.<sup>189</sup>

Such mutual conference characterized communal reading in Isham's household where those maids who were literate would read to the family 'for the most part every evening'. Elizabeth especially appreciated the 'freenesse of conversation wee had together with' one 'Mrs Alce' [*sic*], an observation that recalls the spontaneity and fluency of Crooke's digressive narration. Isham notes:

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<sup>187</sup> 'together, adv., prep., n., and adj.', *OED Online*, December 2016, defs. 1b, 6, 7.

<sup>188</sup> Smith, "'More Swete Vnto the Eare'", 421; Helkiah Crooke, *Mikrokosmographia* (London, 1615), Ooo1v.

<sup>189</sup> Ingold, *Perception of the Environment*, 342–43.

as I read the Booke of Marters so Mrs Alce began the Chronicles of our kings ... and if /[when]\ wee read privately to our sel[ves] wee used to repete one to another as wee sat at worke, those things which wee could remember. that was remarkable or might edifie.<sup>190</sup>

Recalling the Kidderminster weavers' who 'edifie[d] one another' while they worked, the sharing of these instructive readings suggests further continuities between professional and non-professional handiworkers. Isham and Mrs. Alce's verbal reiterations evoke Crooke's comment that things heard make 'a deeper impression in our minds' than things seen.<sup>191</sup> By reciting instructive reading, the women may not just have demonstrated their individual ability to recall information but enabled each other to memorize it. As the repeated first person plural pronouns highlight, this process is insistently communal and collective, transforming textual extracts into shared memories. Elizabeth and Mrs Alce's sewing may have participated in making these communal memories. Isham's 'Diary' offers an instructive point of comparison. She records that 'Mrs Alce wrot cutworke for my f[ather's] cap\_ {and I?} began the first book of marters'; Isham's coupling of these two memories suggests mnemonic connections between her companion's work and her recollected reading.<sup>192</sup>

Collaborative handiwork was particularly likely to enhance the mnemonic and interpretative conference of aural reading, as the sharing of textile expertise paralleled shared textual extracts. Isham's writings record numerous items made collectively. For example, in 1631, 'I gave my f[ather] a cape which Mrs Alce[?] wrot the pelfe and my B[rother] one which I steched and my S[ister] and I made the purls'. In an entry for 1640 which highlights early modern orthography's propensity to compound the needle and pen (wrought/wrote), Isham notes that she made 'lace for my fathers cap betty wrote the cap I did a litle lace'.<sup>193</sup> Producing these items would have created material and haptic conversations in which participants responded to and elaborated one

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<sup>190</sup> Isham, 'Rememberance', 25v.

<sup>191</sup> Crooke, *Mikrokosmographia*, Ooo1v.

<sup>192</sup> Isham, 'Diary', ed. Elizabeth Clarke and Erica Longfellow, dirs., 1631, accessed July 30, 2015, [http://web.warwick.ac.uk/english/perdita/Isham/index\\_yr.htm](http://web.warwick.ac.uk/english/perdita/Isham/index_yr.htm).

<sup>193</sup> Isham, 'Diary', 1631, 1640.

another's handiwork, kinaesthetically as well as vocally. Even when the Isham women were not directly working on the same item, Elizabeth situated their work communally, noting, for example, 'I wrot breadstich after my sister mended I and she wrot boothose for my Brother'.<sup>194</sup> While Isham's lack of punctuation makes the precise order of events ambiguous, her use of 'after' nevertheless situates her breadstitch and her sister's mending as contingent upon and responsive to one another.

This dialogue between makers recalls Ingold's theory of making, with its patterns of 'close and affective correspondence' between makers and materials. Collaborative working also produced such correspondences between makers, and asked them to think with one another, as well as with their materials. This is aptly illustrated by a passage from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (first performed c. 1595–96), which suggests that collaborative making engendered collective thinking. Describing her childhood sewing with Hermia, Helena declares:

We...  
 Have with our needles created both one flower,  
 Both on one sampler, sitting on one cushion,  
 Both warbling of one song, both in one key,  
 As if our hands, our sides, voices and minds,  
 Had been incorporate.<sup>195</sup>

As Anna Riehl Bertolet notes in her reading of this passage, needlework plays an important role in creating and articulating female friendship, and in structuring the 'synchronicity of ... thoughts and feelings'.<sup>196</sup> Paralleling their unified singing and sewing, and alliteratively aligning their sampler and song, Helena highlights how co-ordinated practices of manual, vocal and material communion co-operate to not only reflect but produce, as it were, a social model of embodied thinking: progressing from 'hands' to 'minds', the mental becomes 'incorporate' (united in one body) through their communal handiwork. Describing them as 'two seeming bodies, but one heart', Helena

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<sup>194</sup> Isham, 'Rememberance', 20r.

<sup>195</sup> William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Harold F. Brooks (London: Methuen, 2007), 3.2.203–8.

<sup>196</sup> Bertolet, "Like two artificial gods", 159–77, esp. 162.



evokes not only the language of the marriage ceremony,<sup>197</sup> but Aristotelian theories of friendship as ‘one Soul in two Bodies’ or the ‘meeting’ of ‘two severall bodies ... in one minde’.<sup>198</sup> Offering an intriguing analogue to modern theories of distributed cognition, which suggest that thought processes are distributed across the minds and bodies of social units as well as material environments, the metaphysics of friendship further suggest that embodied feeling and thinking were shared between and across companions.<sup>199</sup>

Helena’s suggestion that sewing elides distinctions between the self and others resonates with Elizabeth’s uncertainty about who had performed what work. In a marginal note to her twelfth year, Elizabeth notes that ‘in this time I or my mother ??? wrot. [ ]ace for an apron for my selfe’; in a context where making was often shared, she and her mother, Judith, become indistinguishable and even interchangeable.<sup>200</sup>

Elizabeth continued to collaborate with her mother after Judith’s death, recording that in 1631 she had ‘wrot a Queen stich purs which my mother began’. Elizabeth’s continuation of her late mother’s textile handiwork sits suggestively alongside her subsequent application of her mother’s legacy of textual handiwork. Towards the end of her ‘Rememberance’, she records how she:

thought to make use of my mothers writtings wherein I might find many  
good instructions for the bettering of my owne life (for me thinkes I  
enter in \to/ her very soule which tho her body be dead yet speaketh)  
....<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, 3.2.212; Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 153.

<sup>198</sup> Thomas Churchyard, *A Sparke of Friendship* (London, 1588), C1r. Although such conceptions of friendship were more typically gendered male, women appropriated this language of soul-mingling to describe female friendships, see Allison Johnson, “‘Virtue’s Friends’: The Politics of Friendship in Early Modern Women’s Writing” (PhD thesis, University of Miami, 2010), esp. 184–214.

<sup>199</sup> For an overview of distributed cognition in relation to early modern England, see Tribble and Keene, *Cognitive Ecologies*, 2–4.

<sup>200</sup> Isham, ‘Rememberance’, 17r.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 34r.

The soul-mingling effects of reading an absent loved one's writings were commonplace; as John Donne remarked, 'more than kisses, letters mingle souls,/ For thus, friends absent speak'.<sup>202</sup> Such declarations participated more broadly in ideas about the letter's ability to make the absent writer present through not only its verbal content, but its handwritten materiality, as is highlighted by puns on character which compound chirographic style with a person's moral and mental qualities.<sup>203</sup> This suggests how Judith's handwritten notes may have contributed to Elizabeth's sense of entering into her mother's 'very soul', and invites consideration of how her material handiwork may have been experienced similarly. As thoughts and feelings might speak in ragged or steady handwritten characters so they might be communicated in the tension and evenness of the handwrought stitch, as we have seen in relation to Powlet's lachrymal needlework. Finishing her mother's purse, Elizabeth added her stitches to her mother's and produced a material commixture of their collective outpourings which may have enabled a similar soul-mingling to her use of her mother's written expressions.

Isham's writings highlight that making was a transformative, and spiritually and psychophysiological productive, practice. Affecting bodies and minds, needlework directed and constructed embodied patterns of thinking, feeling and communicating with God which both complemented and facilitated companionate textual and verbal activities. For the Isham household, as for the other pious handiworkers discussed in this chapter, the practices and effects of skilled making fundamentally shaped the ways that they experienced, exercised and understood their faith. Appreciated both as a devotional activity in its own right and as a means of structuring ways of knowing, responding to and practising God's Word, sewing was a meaningful and important process which went hand-in-hand with scripture.

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<sup>202</sup> John Donne, 'To Sir Henry Wotton', in *The Complete English Poems*, ed. A. J. Smith (London: Penguin, 1996), 214–16, ll. 1–2.

<sup>203</sup> See Goldberg, *Writing Matter*, 78–80, 111–69; Lisa Jardine, *Reading Shakespeare Historically* (London: Routledge, 1990), 78–97.

## Chapter Three: The Textile Technologies of Early Modern Books

If sewing-as-practice could shape reading experiences, so could its products. This is nowhere more apparent than in the creation and use of embroidered books. Popular during the late-sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, embroidered bookbindings provide one of the most direct examples of the interface between texts and textiles in early modern England. These wrought covers have much to contribute to the recent ‘material turn’ in book history. Attention to social and commercial networks, the *mise-en-page*, features of physical format and traces of reading has expanded conceptions of how, where and by whom meaning was made and understood, and has richly demonstrated the rewards of studying a book’s physical make-up in relation to its textuality.<sup>1</sup> Among such far-ranging concerns, however, the literal materiality of early modern books has received surprisingly little attention. As noted previously, this contrasts with the concerns of early modern readers and writers, who were alert to what Joshua Calhoun calls the ‘sartorial associations of paper’; formed from linen rags (swatches of which sometimes remain visible in the page), paper’s material content was considered capable of ‘inflect[ing] the acts of reading and interpretation’.<sup>2</sup> More recently, Jeffrey Todd Knight has suggested how forms of functional sewing inside books, including those involved in binding a text, could have ‘migrated out of the structures of books ... to form a tool for bookish engagement’; ‘needle and thread’

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret J. M. Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Ann Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information Before the Modern Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Juliet Fleming, ‘Changed Opinion as to Flowers’, in *Renaissance Paratexts*, ed. Helen Smith and Louise Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 48–64; Margaret Aston, ‘Lap Books and Lectern Books: The Revelatory Book in the Reformation’, in *The Church and The Book: Papers Read at the 2000 Summer Meeting and the 2001 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. R. N. Swanson (Woodbridge: Published for the Ecclesiastical History Society by Boydell & Brewer, 2004), 163–89; Margreta de Grazia and Peter Sallibrass, ‘The Materiality of the Shakespearean Text’, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (1993): 255–83; Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe Between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994); David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Book* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Richards and Schurink, ‘The Textuality and Materiality of Reading’.

<sup>2</sup> Calhoun, ‘The Word Made Flax’, 333, 338.

offered ‘tools for reading, annotating, organizing knowledge, and even collaborative scholarship’.<sup>3</sup> These studies lay the foundations for a more extensive consideration of how the textile surfaces and contents of early modern books were understood as meaningful structures which shaped how a book was understood and offer insightful traces of reading.

In this chapter, I examine the forms of engagement prompted by the stitches on the outsides of books, using embroidered bindings to consider the intricate connections between needlework, the printed or handwritten page, and book use. Wrought covers formed part of a book’s hermeneutic, affective and devotional structures, and enfolded the text within significant and extensive networks of material practice and meaning. As reading and the process of sewing operated as integrated practices, so fabric bindings and the material appurtenances of book use were understood not as extraneous attachments but as coherent and continuous with their written and printed contents; the material make-up of a book is co-constitutive of its meaning.

The lack of attention paid to embroidered covers is symptomatic of the critical neglect of book covers more generally. Beyond the important empirical and technical bibliography undertaken by Mirjam Foot, bookbindings have received little attention.<sup>4</sup> Literary critics frequently make bold but bare claims about the binding’s involvement in the ‘work of signification’.<sup>5</sup> A few scholars have acknowledged the opportunities that bindings afforded readers to personalize, assert ownership or declare the ideological orientation of their reading material.<sup>6</sup> Stuart Bennett’s monograph on trade bookbindings in the long eighteenth-century contests the notion that bindings were primarily produced on a bespoke basis for private customers, arguing that most books

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<sup>3</sup> Knight, ‘Needles and Pens’, 523–54, esp. 538, 523.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Mirjam M. Foot, *Studies in the History of Bookbinding* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1993). See also, David Pearson, ed., *For the Love of the Binding: Studies in Bookbinding History Presented to Mirjam Foot* (London: British Library, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker, ‘Introduction’, in Sharpe and Zwicker, *Reading, Society and Politics*, 5.

<sup>6</sup> Kathleen Lynch, ‘Devotion Bound: A Social History of *The Temple*’, in *Books and Readers in Early Modern England: Material Studies*, ed. Jennifer Andersen and Elizabeth Sauer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 177–97.

were sold bound rather than in sheets.<sup>7</sup> For scholars studying the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, the ways in which the people involved in producing bookbindings contributed to the book's meaning remains untheorized, especially in light of the recent attention paid to the agency of other workers in the early modern book trades.<sup>8</sup> In *Bound to Read: Compilations, Collections, and the Making of Renaissance Literature*, Jeffrey Todd Knight offers an intriguing glimpse of how binding practices might impact on the history of reading, arguing that the physical gathering of texts into a book was a creative act, cognate with techniques of commonplacing. Yet Knight does not address the role played by the covers themselves in creating the forms of 'material intertextuality' that he outlines.<sup>9</sup> In an unpublished doctoral thesis, Lucy Razzall argues persuasively for the need for scholars to consider 'what and how early moderns thought about their bookbindings', highlighting Protestants' varying attitudes towards books' outsides and what this reveals about the 'book as a material container for intellectual or spiritual content'.<sup>10</sup> With detailed and sometimes idiosyncratic designs, embroidered bindings demonstrate the complex intertextual and intertextile connections which needlework could produce, as well as illuminating forms of conceptual, creative and interpretative work generated in bindings more generally.

The interpretive decisions evident in embroidered bindings highlight the important contribution which they stand to make to the history of reading. These covers are both products of and prompts to particular types of reading and book use. As in the previous chapter, I focus on varieties of religious reading since most embroidered covers were applied to scriptural and devotional texts, as will be discussed below. Embroidered bindings register and shape forms of engagement with books which demonstrate an interest in textual hermeneutics and material textuality as well as in the interpretive, devotional, and affective structures of the book as a material object.

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<sup>7</sup> Stuart Bennett, *Trade Bookbinding in the British Isles, 1660–1800* (London: Oak Knoll, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Zachary Lesser, *Renaissance Drama and the Politics of Publication: Readings in the English Book Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Sonia Massai, *Shakespeare and the Rise of the Editor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare and the Book Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Smith, 'Grossly Material Things', 87–173.

<sup>9</sup> Jeffrey Todd Knight, *Bound to Read: Compilations, Collections, and the Making of Renaissance Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), *passim*, 82.

<sup>10</sup> Razzall, 'Containers and Containment', 95–136, esp. 102.

Covers respond to, intervene in and co-operate with a book's contents. At the same time, bindings extend attention outside the book, offering themselves as readable surfaces and presenting literate activities as practically and perceptually continuous with a range of devotional, domestic, medicinal and fabric practices.

In considering the devotional and embodied effects produced by and marked on needlework covers, this chapter aims to contribute to recent scholarship which has begun to recover a more plural understanding of the varieties of reading and book use practised by early moderns. Scholars including Lisa Jardine, Anthony Grafton and William Sherman have recovered much information about techniques of goal-orientated 'reading for action', practised by humanist men.<sup>11</sup> Yet this has thrown into sharp relief our relative neglect of other types of reading and readers. Embroidered bindings are revelatory not only of how those who could not write engaged with books but of how even scribally proficient readers used their pens alongside a much richer range of literacy technologies than has hitherto been acknowledged.<sup>12</sup> Material covers, as well as bookmarks and other "reading materials", offer valuable traces of the tactile, visual and plastic ways in which early moderns made, discovered and managed meaning in, between and beyond early modern books.<sup>13</sup> Equally, they point towards a more extensive range of book uses. Tying the book (sometimes literally) to the clothed body and the material environment, they not only mark the book as a fashionable, aesthetic and treasured object, but suggest how reading materials might be applied in embodied as well as intellectual ways.

This chapter begins with an overview of trends in the production, designs and uses of embroidered bindings. I then apply concepts of the *paregon* and the frame to theorize the relationship between the binding, the text and its context, and to trace the

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<sup>11</sup> Jardine and Grafton, "Studied for Action", 30–78. William H. Sherman, *John Dee: The Politics of Reading and Writing in the English Renaissance* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997). For discussion of alternative reading practices, see Jennifer Richards and Fred Schurink, 'Introduction: The Textuality and Materiality of Reading in Early Modern England', *HLQ* 73, no. 3 (2010): 345–61.

<sup>12</sup> For cognate discussion of the multiplicity of literacies in other 'domestic arts', see Wall, 'Literacy and the Domestic Arts', 383–412; Wall, *Recipes for Thought*, 157–60.

<sup>13</sup> I discuss other textile book technologies, including bookmarks, book-ribbons and book-bags further in Canavan, 'Reading Materials'.

movements in and out of a book produced by its covers. These movements are explored in more detailed studies of two genres of cover design: those which resonate strategically and pictorially with printed frontispieces, and those wrought with floral figures. In the final section I broaden my purview to consider how embroidered books were enmeshed in more extensive material environments, drawing upon Bruce Smith's influential theory of ambient reading. Smith proposes that early modern readers regarded the fabric furnishings that surrounded them as continuous with the verbal content of their books, and that these materials 'informed texts in hand'.<sup>14</sup> The material accoutrements of reading invite us to consider in more tangible terms the continuities between texts and the textiles which physically and conceptually envelop, intersect and overlap with them. Offering cognate and complementary technologies, these objects extend our sense of the material book and indicate that responses to and uses of a text created a richly significant contexture of reading materials within, upon and beyond a book.

### **Embroidered Bindings: Readers, Makers and Texts**

English embroidered bookbindings are a distinctly early modern phenomenon.<sup>15</sup> A very small number of examples survive from the medieval period.<sup>16</sup> Their production began to increase during the final quarter of the sixteenth century and accelerated

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<sup>14</sup> Bruce Smith, *The Key of Green: Passion and Perception in Renaissance Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 128.

<sup>15</sup> Books printed, sold or used in England and Scotland seem to predominate in the extant corpus. Embroidered bindings survive from other northern European countries (particularly French and Dutch examples), but preliminary research by scholars including Marike van Roon has revealed far fewer examples than for England. Further research is needed to determine whether this is because fewer embroidered bindings were made and used outside of England, or because fewer survive. This issue was discussed at 'Seminar on Embroidered Bindings', University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, August 19–21, 2015.

<sup>16</sup> The earliest known English example is the Felbrigge Psalter, made in the early fourteenth century, BL Sloane MS 2400. For further discussion of the history of embroidered and textile bindings, see Giles Barber, *Textile and Embroidered Bindings* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 1971), 3–5; Mirjam M. Foot, *The History of Bookbinding as a Mirror of Society* (London: British Library, 1998), 61–65.

rapidly in the first half of the seventeenth century, with ownership expanding and becoming more socially diverse; after the 1690s far fewer new embroidered bindings were produced, although inscriptions reveal that many earlier examples continued to be treasured and used throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In an article on fine bindings, including embroidered ones, Walsham comments that wrought covers survive ‘in relatively large numbers’.<sup>17</sup> Yet, the extent of their popularity has still to be recognized. As yet, no systematic or comprehensive cross-institutional survey has been undertaken.<sup>18</sup> Instead, scholars have tended to consider isolated examples, or to examine one institution’s collection.<sup>19</sup> This is perhaps understandable given the difficulty of locating and viewing these books. Some institutions, such as the British Library, the Folger Shakespeare Library and the Bodleian Library, have sizeable collections which have been made more accessible by digitization projects.<sup>20</sup> Other collections are less well known and sometimes difficult to locate: details about bindings and book accessories are often catalogued in idiosyncratic ways or simply not recorded.<sup>21</sup> Considerable numbers are scattered internationally across archives, museums and libraries; auction and sale catalogues point to still more preserved in private collections (see Appendix 2).

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<sup>17</sup> Alexandra Walsham, ‘Jewels for Gentlewomen: Religious Books as Artefacts in Late Medieval and Early Modern England’, in Swanson, *The Church and The Book*, 132.

<sup>18</sup> The most extensive survey of embroidered bindings remains Cyril Davenport’s *English Embroidered Bookbindings* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Company, Ltd., 1899).

<sup>19</sup> See for example Barber, *Textile and Embroidered Bindings*; Cyril Davenport, ‘Embroidered Bindings of Bibles in the Possession of the British and Foreign Bible Society’, *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 4, no. 12 (1904): 267–80; Femke Molekamp, *Women and the Bible*, 43–48; Andrew Morrall, ‘Representations of Adam and Eve’, 324–30; Mirjam M. Foot, ‘An Embroidered Binding for Charles I’, *The Book Collector* 60, no. 4 (2011): 572–74.

<sup>20</sup> Bodleian Library, ‘LUNA’, accessed January 27, 2017, <http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet>; British Library, ‘Database of Bookbindings’, accessed January 27, 2017, <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/bookbindings/>; Folger Shakespeare Library, ‘Folger Bindings Collection’, accessed January 27, 2017, <http://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/BINDINGS~1~1>.

<sup>21</sup> For example, Appendix 1 lists twenty-two early modern English embroidered bindings at the Huntington Library, of which only three were recorded as such in the catalogue before I contacted the library.



I have uncovered 415 embroidered bindings which were applied to texts printed and/or used in England or Scotland during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and which are now held in permanent collections, as detailed in Appendix 1.<sup>22</sup> These range in size from folios as large as 47cm by 33cm to a volume measuring just 4.7cm by 3.1cm; the majority are octavo format or smaller. A few are wrought on detachable slip-covers, but most are pasted onto boards.<sup>23</sup> The overwhelming majority of extant examples contain printed religious texts, most commonly Bibles, Psalters or Books of Common Prayer, as well as popular small prayer books and devotional works such as Lewis Bayly's *The Practise of Pietie*. A small number contain religious texts which are now commonly considered as "literary" works but which would have had a devotional charge for early modern readers. These include a 1641 duodecimo imprint of George Herbert's *The Temple*, bound with Christopher Harvey's *The Synagogue* (1647); a 1611 quarto of Joshua Sylvester's translation of *Du Bartas His Devine Weekes*; and part of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*.<sup>24</sup>

The audience for embroidered books spanned confessional divisions. Some enclose explicitly Catholic texts.<sup>25</sup> Others were applied to fifteenth-century texts, suggesting their involvement in preserving earlier religious practices.<sup>26</sup> Considerable numbers were produced during the 1620s and 1630s at the height of Laudianism. Laud himself possessed a quarto Bible in 'a rich embroydered Cover' which depicted a 'goodly embroydered Crucifixe' and which he claimed had been 'sent unto me by a Lady'; Puritans viewed the book as evidence of his popish inclinations.<sup>27</sup> Yet, as Razzall observes, it would be misguided to attribute the appeal of embroidered books purely to

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<sup>22</sup> Although this thesis focuses on England, I have included books printed or made in Scotland, since these show similar designs and could easily have passed into English hands.

<sup>23</sup> For examples of slip-covers, see Morgan PML 2096; NYPL KC 1661.

<sup>24</sup> BL Davis 100; Folger STC 21651 copy 5; Folger STC 23082 copy 6 fragment—this copy lacks all before C3 and all after <sup>2</sup>2I8; H1 has been replaced by manuscript text.

<sup>25</sup> Folger STC 5645.5.

<sup>26</sup> For example, the Morgan Library holds a *Biblia Latina*, printed in Venice in 1483, bound in seventeenth-century English embroidery (PML ChL 787).

<sup>27</sup> William Prynne, *Canterburies Doome* (London, 1646), I1v, Ppp1v. Another book containing a Greek copy of The New Testament (1633), bound with a Book of Common Prayer and the Psalms, contains an old but non-contemporary (and unverifiable) inscription which declares: "This Book formerly belonged to Archbishop Laud", MMA 64.101.1294. See Morrall and Watt, *English Embroidery*, 130–32.

counter-reformation impulses or Laudian schemes for the beautification of worship; the concern about Laud's bible most likely related more to the crucifix than the medium.<sup>28</sup> The flyleaves of an embroidered Book of Common Prayer (1678) and Psalter (1680) contain inscriptions copied from William Assheton's *The Child's Monitor Against Popery* (1687), intended for a child of 'Popish Parents' who was determined to remain true to the Church of England.<sup>29</sup> Other embroidered books were owned by Puritans, including Elizabeth Isham, whose father gave her an embroidered bible in 1634.<sup>30</sup>

A small number of bindings contain a more idiosyncratic range of printed and manuscript texts, emphasising that whilst embroidered literacies were applied with particular enthusiasm to popular theological and devotional works, they inflected a wider range of reading and writing practices. These include Dorothy Feilding's manuscript miscellany, discussed further below; a family memorandum book belonging to the Haulseys of London; a set of writing tables bound with a calendar; and a manuscript memoir by Mary Whitelock.<sup>31</sup> Embroidery was also applied to elite presentation manuscripts. Elizabeth Tudor, for example, apparently produced four manuscript translations with needleworked covers which she gave to Henry VIII and Katherine Parr.<sup>32</sup> Esther Inglis created (usually devotional) calligraphic manuscripts

<sup>28</sup> Razzall, 'Containers and Containment', 126–27; see also Walsham, 'Jewels for Gentlewomen', 134–41.

<sup>29</sup> Beinecke 2011 762, front flyleaves; William Assheton, *The Childs Monitor Against Popery* (London, 1687).

<sup>30</sup> Isham, 'Diary', 1634.

<sup>31</sup> Dorothy Feilding, '[Commonplace Book]', [c. 1684], Beinecke, Osborn MS b226; 'Haulsey family memorandum book', 1646–1846, Rubenstein Library, Duke University, Durham N.C., Baskin Collection Box 1; Sotheby's, London, 'Books and Manuscripts from the English Library of Archibald, 5th Earl of Rosebery and Midlothian, K.G., K.T.' (October 29, 2009), lot 132 [online auction catalogue], accessed January 13, 2017, <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2009/books-and-manuscripts-from-the-english-library-of-archibald-5th-earl-of-rosebery-and-midlothian-kg-kt-l09794/lot.132.html>; Sotheby's, New York, 'Property From The Collection of Robert S Pirie Volumes I & II: Books and Manuscripts' (December 2, 2015–December 4, 2015), lot 848 [online auction catalogue], accessed January 13, 2017, <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2015/property-collection-robert-s-pirie-books-manuscripts-n09391/lot.848.html>.

<sup>32</sup> Elizabeth I, 'Translation of Margeruite de Navarre's *Le Miroir de l'âme pécheresse*', 1544, Bodleian Cherry MS 36; Elizabeth I, 'Translation of John Calvin's *Institution Chrétienne*', 1545, National Records of Scotland, Edinburgh, MS R.H. 13/78; Elizabeth I, 'Precationes sev meditationes', 1545, BL Royal MS 7.D.X. The Fourth manuscript is now missing but Frye identifies a 1619 letter discussing it. For this and discussion of the other covers see Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 31–41.

which she gave to elite patrons; fourteen extant examples are bound in embroidery.<sup>33</sup> These emphasise how finely wrought books participated in networks of elite gift-exchange, performing systems of reward, supplication and duty. As Lisa Klein has highlighted, the care, cost and time indexed by needlework made such handwrought gifts highly effective, particularly if the giver had produced the embroidery.<sup>34</sup>

Embroidery was also applied to large printed presentation volumes given to elite patrons by a text's author or stationers. William Camden, for example, presented Princess Henrietta Maria with a 1610 copy of *Britain* in a satin binding wrought with personifications of Peace and Plenty, popular figures on embroidered bindings of this period; Henrietta Maria is also addressed in two handwritten poems on the front flyleaves, suggesting how the embroidery participated in a multimedia framework of handwrought paratextual embellishments.<sup>35</sup> Francis Bacon seems to have been particularly enamoured of embroidered bindings as instruments of patronage; several of his texts survive in embroidered covers.<sup>36</sup> These include a 1625 copy of his *Essaies* which was presented to its dedicatee, George Villiers; embroidered with portraits of Villiers based on an engraving by Simon de Passe, the covers crafted a plea for patronage which complemented the printed dedication.<sup>37</sup> Such covers likely engaged the services of

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<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Esther Inglis, 'Le livre de l'Ecclesiaste, ensemble le Cantique de Salomon', BL Add. MS 27927; Inglis, 'Livre contenant cinquante emblemes chrestiens', 1624, BL Royal MS 17 D. XVI; Inglis, 'Les CL pseumes de David', 1599, Folger MS V.a.93.

<sup>34</sup> Lisa M. Klein, 'Your Humble Handmaid: Elizabethan Gifts of Needlework', *Renaissance Quarterly* 50, no. 2 (1997): 459–93. See also Jane Donawerth, 'Women's Poetry and the Tudor-Stuart System of Gift Exchange', in *Women, Writing, and the Reproduction of Culture in Tudor and Stuart Britain*, ed. Mary E. Burke et al. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 3–18, esp. 7–9; Georgianna Ziegler, "'More than Feminine Boldness': The Gift Books of Esther Inglis", in Burke et al., *Women, Writing, and the Reproduction of Culture*, 19–37. On the giving of books, see Jason Scott-Warren, *Sir John Harington and the Book as Gift* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>35</sup> BL Davis 182.

<sup>36</sup> For example, Francis Bacon presented a 1623 copy of *Opera Francisci baronis de Verulamio ... tomus primus* to the Bodleian library: Bodleian Arch. A c.6. See Barber, *Textile and Embroidered Bindings*, 5.

<sup>37</sup> Bodleian Arch. G e.36. Compare Durham University Library, Durham, SB 2396, another copy of Bacon's *Essaies*, bound in a very similar embroidered binding. See, Sheila Hingley, 'An Embroidered Presentation Binding', in *Treasures of Durham University Library*, ed. Richard Gameson (London: Third Millennium Publishing Limited, 2007), 106–7.

professional needleworkers and indicate that embroidered bindings were not necessarily made by women, as will be discussed further below.

Very well preserved and often unmarked, some of these presentation books, particularly the larger volumes, raise questions about the extent to which such books were intended to be read and to what extent they were objects of display which signalled wealth, power, status and favour.<sup>38</sup> Such questions, however, risk creating a false binary between the book's textual content and its symbolic power. As we will see below, the latter could itself rely upon the interpretation of scriptural content. Questions of reading and textual engagement are particularly complex with regards to biblical works whose words were so familiar that the text did not necessarily need to be scanned to be called to mind. Moreover, in line with Zachary Lesser's argument that the stationers involved in producing a book made decisions about its presentation which positioned them as amongst its first readers, we might remember that the recipients of embroidered books were not their only readers: the binding represented a response to the book's contents by those who commissioned, designed and/or made the cover.<sup>39</sup>

Embroidered books have often been considered 'feminized object[s]' representative of peculiarly feminine textualities.<sup>40</sup> Yet, as already indicated, men as well as women gave, received, and appreciated embroidered books. This is particularly true of folio-sized embroidered books, commissioned by or given to royalty, courtiers or bishops.<sup>41</sup> An intriguing glimpse into the complex readerships and audiences such books might attract is offered by a folio volume comprising a Book of Common Prayer, Bible and Book of Psalms, dating from 1611–12. The book is bound in embroidered covers with the arms of James Montagu, Bishop of Winchester, in raised work at their centre; the four winds blow from the corners, all set within a frame of vines, symbolising Christ. These covers perhaps marked Montagu's involvement in the making of the book's contents; he was reportedly part of the Second Oxford Company, charged with

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<sup>38</sup> On the different uses, symbolic meanings and perceptions of large tomes and small, hand-held books, see Aston, 'Lap Books and Lectern Books', 163–189.

<sup>39</sup> Lesser, *Renaissance Drama*, 18.

<sup>40</sup> Molekamp, *Women and the Bible*, 43–49, esp. 48.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, University of St. Andrews Library, St. Andrews, Bib BS170.C40.

translating the Gospels, Acts and Book of Revelation.<sup>42</sup> At some point, the book apparently passed through the hands of Anne North, Montagu's niece and the wife of Dudley North, who wrote her name on the title-page.<sup>43</sup> At the bottom of the title-page, another seventeenth-century hand made the now crossed-out inscription, 'Kirtling Chappell Bible', indicating that someone, perhaps Anne, placed the volume in the Church of the North family seat where she and her husband lived.<sup>44</sup>

The location of this bible within the parish church raises questions about exactly where and how the book was used. Was it on display, available, like the lectern books discussed by Margaret Aston, as an icon of God's word and a sign of the biblical authority invested in the family lineage?<sup>45</sup> Did the preacher read from the book, allowing the congregation to synthesise the material and oral manifestations of Holy Writ it projected? If so, it suggests that whilst the ownership of large and lavishly adorned books remained restricted to the wealthy, the circumstances of their display or use may have exposed them to a congregation which incorporated household servants and tenants on the estate. While this audience would have had a less physically intimate, more mediated relationship to embroidered books compared with those who literally got to grips with them, it nevertheless indicates that at least some less affluent sections of the population might have experienced and engaged with embroidered bindings.

Scholars have been particularly prone to gender smaller books as feminine, considering them as 'Jewels for Gentlewomen'.<sup>46</sup> Women's ownership marks do predominate in these volumes, indicating that they have much to contribute to the

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<sup>42</sup> David Norton, *The King James Bible: A Short History from Tyndale to Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 61.

<sup>43</sup> 'A Genealogical Account of Montagu, Duke of Manchester', *The British Magazine*, November 1761, 579; Charles Mosley, ed., *Burke's Peerage, Baronetage and Knightage: Clan Chiefs, Scottish Feudal Barons*, 3 vols., 107th ed. (Stokesley: Burke's Peerage & Gentry, 2003), 2:1691.

<sup>44</sup> BL Davis 96; Dale B. J. Randall, 'North, Dudley, fourth Baron North (1602–1677)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online ed., January 2008, accessed January 27, 2017, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/20296>.

<sup>45</sup> Aston, 'Lap Books and Lectern Books', 164–68.

<sup>46</sup> Walsham, 'Jewels for Gentlewomen', 123–42.

recovery of women's reading habits.<sup>47</sup> However, even small embroidered covers did not necessarily demarcate such strict gender lines as scholars have typically assumed. Anne Whitelock's duodecimo memoirs, for example, are addressed to her eldest son, Samuel, highlighting that women conveyed their material memorials to sons as well as daughters.<sup>48</sup> Several other books contain later inscriptions which indicate that embroidered books passed to male heirs.<sup>49</sup> Bennet Sherard's embroidered book was evidently considered a sufficiently significant possession to be included in a 1629 portrait of him at age eight; he holds a miniature volume wrought with a popular floral design.<sup>50</sup> Men as well as boys possessed small embroidered books. In 1688, Katherine Dixon gave her father, William Dixon, an octavo Bible, bound with a Book of Common Prayer and Book of Psalms in embroidered covers. In a dedicatory poem inscribed in the front, Dixon declares that 'This Jewell richer sure will prove/ Then Earth can give', emphasising that finely bound books constituted precious reading material for gentlemen too.<sup>51</sup>

Some embroidered bindings are marked as the products of female handiwork. A 1639 Geneva Bible bound with a Book of Psalms in an embroidered cover contains an inscription declaring that 'Anne Cornwaleys Wrought me'.<sup>52</sup> Several embroidered Bibles and psalters printed during the 1630s and 1640s contain later inscriptions declaring the covers to have been worked by the writer's grandmother or great-grandmother.<sup>53</sup> Most bindings, however, offer little evidence of who made them. Embroidered bindings were

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<sup>47</sup> For recent studies of women's reading, see, for example, Hackel and Kelly, eds., *Reading Women*; Julie Crawford, 'Reconsidering Early Modern Women's Reading, or, How Margaret Hoby Read Her de Mornay', *HLQ* 73, no. 2 (2010): 193–223; Leah Knight, 'Reading Across Borders: The Case of Anne Clifford's 'Popish' Books', *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 25, no. 2 (2015): 27–56.

<sup>48</sup> Sotheby's, New York, 'Property From The Collection of Robert S Pirie', lot 848.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, CUL BSS 201.C40.5; BL C.108.a.29.; BL C.18.a.10.

<sup>50</sup> Gilbert Jackson, 'Portrait Of Bennet Sherard, 2nd Baron Sherard Of Leitrim (1621–1700), Aged 8, Standing Full-Length, Wearing Embroidered Costume And Holding A Book', in Sotheby's, London, 'The Duchess: Property & Precious Objects from the Estate of Mary, Duchess of Roxburghe' (May 27, 2015–May 28, 2015), lot 171 [online auction catalogue], accessed January 13, 2017, <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2015/duchess-roxburghe-l15317/lot.171.html>.

<sup>51</sup> BL Davis 77, first front flyleaf, recto.

<sup>52</sup> Morgan PML 17197.

<sup>53</sup> CUL BSS 201.C40.5; Morgan PML 151785; Colonial Williamsburg Museum, Williamsburg, 1971–1472.

certainly made by professional craftsmen, although, in general, it is difficult to tie extant objects to particular individuals. Accounts for the Royal Household, for example, indicate that Edmund Harrison produced several Bible covers while engaged as the King's Embroiderer.<sup>54</sup>

A 1638 petition to Archbishop Laud by milliners from the Royal Exchange indicates that professionally made embroidered books were perhaps more 'mass-produced' than is typically assumed.<sup>55</sup> Asking to be exempted from legislation that allowed only stationers to sell books, the milliners declared that they:

doe set on work Imbroderers and other poore freemen of London, who  
... bring to the petitioners shopps rare and curious covers of  
Imbrothery and needlework, wherein the petitioners have used to cause  
Bibles, Testaments and Psalm Bookes of the best sort and neatest print  
to be richly bound up for ye Nobility and gentry ....

Adding that 'many poore ... doe get a good part of their Living by makeing the sayd covers', the petition offers further evidence of how poverty drove men in both needle and non-needle trades to undertake piecework sewing that placed them in a subordinate position and forced them into shadow economies which, as the petition highlights, were liable to occlusion.<sup>56</sup> The petition distinguishes the making of these covers from the binding, indicating that the production of the books probably involved participants in the textile trade collaborating with bookbinders who stitched the cover and contents together. While it is typically assumed that needlework bindings were individually commissioned, the milliners' account of their business suggests that some embroidered

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<sup>54</sup> Mirjam M. Foot and Howard M. Nixon, *The History of Decorated Bookbinding in England*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 56; Foot, *The History of Bookbinding as a Mirror of Society*, 63–64; Mirjam M. Foot, 'The Embroidered Prayer Book of Charles I at Ham House', in *Ham House: Four Hundred Years of Collecting and Patronage*, ed. Christopher Rowell (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 33–35. Compare Walsham, 'Jewels for Gentlewomen', 132–33.

<sup>55</sup> Molekamp asserts that 'embroidered bindings were never mass-produced but always made by special commission for individuals', *Women and the Bible*, 43.

<sup>56</sup> 'Petition of milliners to archbishop Laud', 1638, Bodleian Tanner MS 67, 33r. See also Foot and Nixon, *History of Decorated Bookbinding*, 54–55.

books may have been available off-the-shelf, a suggestion supported by extant bindings with identical or very similar designs.<sup>57</sup>

The milliners' observation that the contained texts were 'of the best sort and neatest print' underscores that it was not only stationers and publishers who might, in Lesser's terms, be considered amongst a book's first readers.<sup>58</sup> Producing and marketing the material book, these textile traders made judgments about the aesthetics of the printed page which could both reflect and shape the concerns of a book's future owners. Selling these books alongside 'other workes and wares' made by the embroiderers and poor freemen, the milliners emphasised that embroidered books were as much a part of textile culture as of print culture and, as I explore later, directed buyers to consider their reading materials in relation to a wide range of fabrics.<sup>59</sup>

## Common Designs

As will be discussed further below, flowers constitute the most common subject on embroidered covers, participating in what we have already seen was a widespread taste for needlework flora. Pictorial versions of scriptural 'stories' were also popular choices, usually wrought on Bibles or Psalm books. These covers highlight particularly clearly that bindings were produced through acts of reading and interpretation, were used to direct the responses of subsequent readers, and asked to be read themselves. As Andrew Morrall has highlighted, the temptation of Adam and Eve is a popular subject.<sup>60</sup> It is paired in two examples with an image of Christ risen from the dead, or in majesty;

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<sup>57</sup> See the 'Further Information' column of Appendices 1 and 2 for notes on comparable designs. A striking example of the same design being reused is offered by four books all wrought with an identical iris design and all containing New Testaments and Psalm books printed c. 1627–30: Huntington 82524; Huntington 438000:373; BL C.65.i.2.; National Library of New Zealand, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, N.Z., REng BIBLE 1628. All except Huntington 438000:373 are bound dos-a-dos. Several other dos-a-dos books are bound in embroidered covers which use the same frame but depict a different flower. See for example, University of Amsterdam Library, Amsterdam, OK 06-1659.

<sup>58</sup> Lesser, *Renaissance Drama*, 18.

<sup>59</sup> Bodleian Tanner 67, 33r.

<sup>60</sup> Morrall, 'Representations of Adam and Eve', 321–30.



like the Bibles that they contain, these covers tell the story of man's fall and ultimate redemption in Christ.<sup>61</sup> Others follow the narrative of a particular figure. A 1646 Bible, for example, portrays scenes from the life of Isaac, showing Rebecca at the well on the front (the precursor to her meeting Isaac) and Isaac's sacrifice on the back.<sup>62</sup> The binding of a 1649 Bible bound with the Psalms takes Elijah as its subject, depicting his encounter with the widow on the front and his feeding by the ravens on the back (Figures 11 and 12).<sup>63</sup>

Walsham briefly notes that Protestant concerns about idolatry meant that bindings wrought with such biblical scenes were likely to be considered as didactic 'narrative pictures' rather than 'static icons', an observation that draws implicitly on reformers' distinctions between 'a proces of story, paynted with the gestures and actions of many persones' and 'one dumbe idoll or image standyng by it selfe'.<sup>64</sup> I consider textile stories more fully in my next chapter, examining how and what kind of narratives are created in needlework. Bindings which use the two covers to set two scenes side-by-side offer one means of portraying the 'processe of a story'. Another binding, wrought with Elijah and the widow and applied to a Bible and Book of Psalms, takes a different narrative strategy which suggests how the spatial dynamics of the book could be used to re-enact events (Figure 13). Drawing their meeting out across the two covers, the binding articulates the story physically, as the opening of the book brings Elijah face-to-face with the widow, dramatizing the moment of God's grace. Written and wrought stories unfold concurrently, emphasizing the synthesis of text and textile and highlighting to the reader how opening the Bible provides its own source of grace.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Morgan PML 127590; Morgan PML 17197. See also Morrall, 'Representations of Adam and Eve', 321–24.

<sup>62</sup> Morgan PML 129517.

<sup>63</sup> MMA 64.101.1293.

<sup>64</sup> Walsham, 'Jewels for Gentlewomen', 140; *The Second Tome of Homilees* (London, 1570), D6v; see also Walsham, 'Idols in the Frontispiece?', 28.

<sup>65</sup> V&A T.44 to B-1954. This book was previously believed to portray Abraham banishing Hagar and Ishmael. I am grateful to Amanda Pullan for pointing out that the woman depicted is more likely the widow, given her carrying of a basket. Frye discusses this binding in relation to Hagar, see *Pens and Needles*, 142–44.

The narrative and biblical-historical contents of embroidered bindings are also highlighted in Dixon's dedicatory poem. Describing the binding as a 'Frontispice [*sic*]', Dixon notes that it 'contains the Story/ Of Jacobs Dream, of Jacobs Glory': the front cover shows Jacob wrestling with the angel, while the back depicts his dream of the ladder to heaven.<sup>66</sup> Dixon explains that 'This Ladder's Christ, in mercy given/ Lost man to guid [*sic*] from Earth to Heaven'; this builds upon Calvin's commentary on the verse, which declares that Christ 'is the mediator which reacheth from heaven unto the earth'.<sup>67</sup> As well as positioning the Bible itself as a means of guiding readers to Heaven, Dixon's interpretation highlights how embroidered bindings participated in what Tara Hamling terms a taste for 'surrogate images', which represented stories of Christ by using Old Testament figures as typological precursors.<sup>68</sup>

Several other bindings offer typological readings. The sacrifice of Isaac, a type for Christ's crucifixion, appears on several bindings, including the front cover of a bible owned by Elizabeth Illingworth. As is consistent with the redemptive drive of many bindings, the back cover portrays Jonah escaping from the Whale's mouth, a type for Christ's resurrection; each scene is set within green borders wrought with flowers.<sup>69</sup> Drawing out narrative connections between different figures and events from scripture, Illingworth's Bible both reflects and constructs non-linear reading practices, which trace providential and typological connections between different events; making sense of biblical history rather than straightforwardly reproducing it, embroidered bindings could participate in more advanced forms of exegesis than a basic comprehension of and familiarity with a story's events.

Several covers portray Moses holding the tablets of the Law, presenting a metonym for the Old Testament which gestures towards Moses's inscription of the Pentateuch and foregrounds the materiality of the Word.<sup>70</sup> As on Bible frontispieces,

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<sup>66</sup> This pair of images also appears on BL C.17.a.24.

<sup>67</sup> John Calvin, *A Commentarie ... upon the First Booke of Moses called Genesis*, trans. Thomas Tymme (London, 1578), Pp2v. See also David L. Jeffrey, *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 1992), 388–90.

<sup>68</sup> Hamling, *Decorating the 'Godly' Household*, 233–53.

<sup>69</sup> V&A T.134-1929. Hamling discusses the cover's typology in *Decorating the 'Godly' Household*, 245.

<sup>70</sup> See, for example, Huntington 438000:070; NYPL Spencer Coll. Eng. 1632; Bodleian Vet. A2 e.517.

Moses is sometimes presented alongside Aaron (see Figure 14). As well as signifying the Church, Aaron and his carefully depicted clothing may also have offered a means of marking the scriptural and ecclesiastical importance of embroiderers. Exodus 28 and 31:10 describe the making of Aaron's garments by Bezalel and Aholiab. James Maxwell's *A Golden Art*, discussed in chapter one, linked these passages to contemporary needlemen, using them to assert the gentility and religio-social worthiness of mechanical trades. This highlights how religious needlework could offer men as well as women opportunities to express esteemed pious identities.<sup>71</sup>

David was another popular choice, especially on volumes containing the psalms; in examples entitled *The Whole Booke of Davids Psalmes*, such covers co-operate with the book's printed paratexts to foreground David's composition of the contents.<sup>72</sup> While two extant bindings portray David's triumph over Goliath (Figure 15),<sup>73</sup> he is more usually depicted with his harp (Figure 16). Echoing the enjoinder in Psalm 33 to 'Praise the LORD with harp: sing unto him with the psaltery', such covers materially translate the book's contents and act as directives to participate in musical devotion, particularly in editions which supply the musical notation.<sup>74</sup> Psalm-singing was widely appreciated as a source of spiritual comfort. This keyed into David's use of his harp to refresh Saul by driving away the evil spirits troubling his mind, a story which was worked on the back cover of a 1640 Bible and Book of Psalms.<sup>75</sup>

Several bindings adopt symbolic Christian iconography. The 'pelican in her piety', widely recognized as an emblem of Christ's self-sacrificing crucifixion, was popular and further reveals how these covers seek to portray redemption and provide

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<sup>71</sup> Maxwell, *The Golden Art*, D3v, G1r. See also James Maxwell, *The Mirrour of Religious Men, and of Godly Matrones* (London, 1611), L6v–L7r.

<sup>72</sup> See, for example, NYPL Spencer Collection English 1633; Huntington 438000:200; BL C.183.c.3. Margaret P. Hannay makes a similar point in "'So May I with the *Psalmist* Truly Say": Early Modern Englishwomen's Psalm Discourse', in *Write or Be Written: Early Modern Women Poets and Cultural Constraints*, ed. Barbara Smith and Ursula Appelt (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 107.

<sup>73</sup> See also BL C.143.a.10.

<sup>74</sup> KJV Psalm 33:2.

<sup>75</sup> BL C.65.g.22. On psalms as comforting, and David's soothing of Saul, see Jonathan Willis, *Church Music and Protestantism in Post-Reformation England: Discourses, Sites and Identities* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 191–96; Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, 88.

‘surrogate imagery’ of Christ’s sacrifice.<sup>76</sup> Personifications of the Cardinal and Theological virtues are also common. Bindings depicting the pairing of Hope and Faith are particularly prevalent; several examples, including covers reportedly made by ‘Mrs Chillcott’ and the mother of ‘Mary Arbutot’, are executed in tent-stitch according to similar designs, suggesting that patterns may have been available.<sup>77</sup> Often depicted in contemporary dress, these virtues may have encouraged female makers and readers in particular to identify with them.<sup>78</sup> Holding an open book with her name stitched across it, Faith signals especially clearly that the binding was both a product of and a prompt to virtuous reading, and invites viewers to consider how covers might turn textual contents inside-out.<sup>79</sup>

A small number of bindings portray contemporary figures; these predominantly cover texts printed between the 1640s and 1660s with images of Charles I, and, less often, Charles II. Such bindings participate in the use of a wide variety of embroidered materials to articulate views on the Civil Wars and Restoration.<sup>80</sup> Carolean images adorn the covers of two 1649 copies of *Eikōn basilikē*, a text which purportedly collected Charles I’s writings, combining his account of recent events with pious meditations. One 24mo copy shows Charles I with one hand on his heart, the other holding his book, in a posture of private, heartfelt devotion which complements the text’s fold-out engraving.<sup>81</sup> The other octavo volume is signed ‘Anne Morley 1660’ and is bound in

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<sup>76</sup> See, for example, Lambeth Palace Library, E185 1629 [\*\*]; Bodleian Bib Eng 1634 e.2; CUL BSS.201.C32.15.

<sup>77</sup> CUL BSS 201.C40.5; Morgan PML 151785. On Arbutot’s binding, see Molekamp, *Women and the Bible*, 48.

<sup>78</sup> Amanda Pullan is working on the appeal of bindings depicting these virtues to a female readership. Pullan, ‘Knowing a Book by its Cover’.

<sup>79</sup> See, for example, BL C.46.a.19.; Folger STC 2661.

<sup>80</sup> See Geuter, ‘Embroidered Biblical Narratives’, 68–73, Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 165–70. As Jones and Stallybrass note, embroidery was used to express both Parliamentary and Royalist sentiments.

<sup>81</sup> John Gauden and Charles I, *Eikōn basilikē* (London, 1649), frontispiece; State Library of Victoria, Melbourne, John Emerson Collection 9649. Numerous other textile responses to *Eikōn basilikē* and *Reliquiae Sacrae Carolinae* remain extant, including embroideries adapting the accompanying illustrations, ‘Miniature Portrait of Charles I’, c. 1650–70, MMA 39.13.7, discussed in Morrall and Watt, *English*

covers apparently worked at a similar time; celebrating the Restoration, they pair an image of Charles I with Charles II, both surmounted by crowns.<sup>82</sup>

Images of Charles I and II are also wrought on several bibles or psalters. Like the 'Prayer for the King' (William of Orange), which Dixon inscribed at the front of her bible, such images both display and seek divine support for political and confessional alliances.<sup>83</sup> A few bindings make King David in Charles I's image, as on Hidson's bible, discussed in the previous chapter. These includes two examples from the mid-1620s, highlighting that the use of embroidered bindings to express royalist sentiments was not necessarily confined to the period of the Civil Wars.<sup>84</sup> Throughout the seventeenth century other embroidered objects figured biblical monarchs such as Solomon as contemporary royals, using the conflation to illustrate the divine right of kings and suggest the monarch's virtuous rule.<sup>85</sup> Wrought on bibles and psalters, such images encourage and reflect providential and typological interpretations of the bound text, applying the biblical types to contemporary events and figures.

Many more bindings signalled less contentious forms of authority. As with tooled leather bindings, several are wrought with their owners' coats of arms, ciphers or emblems.<sup>86</sup> Such designs operated as external ownership inscriptions, which would have been consistent with surrounding objects. Embedding the book within the household, these bindings augment Jason Scott-Warren's suggestion that covers did not just enclose texts but directed them 'outwards to objects, ... [and] to people'.<sup>87</sup> Particularly when such covers encased large bibles, perhaps given by the monarch to favoured courtiers, the book would have functioned as a performance of power: it grounded the

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*Embroidery*, 116–19; 'Embroidered Picture', c. 1650–60, V&A T.117-1936, discussed in Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 165–67.

<sup>82</sup> National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, F.6.d.16.

<sup>83</sup> BL Davis 77, 2<sup>nd</sup> front flyleaf.

<sup>84</sup> Bodleian Arch. A f.136; Brian D. Maggs, comp., *Bookbinding in Great Britain: Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century. Catalogue 966* (London: Maggs Bros., 1975), item 21.

<sup>85</sup> See, for example, 'The Judgement of Solomon', 1686, V&A T.17-1946, discussed in Geuter, 'Embroidered Biblical Narratives', 72. For Solomon as a type for contemporary monarchs and patriarchs, see Hamling, *Decorating the 'Godly' Household*, 99–103.

<sup>86</sup> See, for example, MMA 64.101.1265; BL Davis 31; BL Davis 96; BL C.18.e.11.

<sup>87</sup> Jason Scott-Warren, 'Ligatures of the Early Modern Book', *Book 2.0*, forthcoming 2017.

householders' governance in scripture, with textual authority and jurisdiction over household worship reinforcing and being reinforced by social authority.<sup>88</sup> Other bindings apparently celebrated or commemorated marriages; portraying the wife's arms on one side and the husband's on the other, such covers not only resonate with the use of Bibles to record family histories but again indicate an appreciation for the articulate structures of the book, expressing the union of two families in the joining of the covers.<sup>89</sup>

### Embroidered Bindings as Frames

In 1625 Robert Hegge wrote to thank Katherine Oxinden, the mother of his pupil, for 'the Testament of IHS ... arrayd, in a vesture of golde and needleworke'. It was, he declared, 'the best commentaire that I ever saw writ with a womans needle, upon the text'.<sup>90</sup> As Razzall indicates in her reading of this letter, Hegge's description of the binding as a 'commentaire' figures the embroidery as manifesting and prompting a 'close personal engagement with vernacular scripture'.<sup>91</sup> Highlighting that embroidered covers were studied as products of and aids to textual scrutiny, Hegge positions the cover as a detailed exposition designed to guide the reader's understanding of the scriptures, often on a word-by-word basis. Hegge's response is suggestive as to how the structures of the book, combined with their embroidered composition, may have caused early moderns to see conceptual and spiritual, as well as physical, connections between needlework covers and their contents. Describing it as 'upon the text', Hegge conflates the embroidery's interpretive subject with its surface location; especially in the context of his silence on the binding's design, the covering's physical position seems to play a significant part in situating the embroidery as part of the reader's critical apparatus. The medium also assumes an important role. Playing upon the interchangeability of needles

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<sup>88</sup> See, for example, University of St. Andrews Library, Bib BS170.C40. On this book's provenance, see Robinson, "'An old and faithful servand'", 8–10.

<sup>89</sup> See, for example, BL Davis 31.

<sup>90</sup> Dorothy Gardiner, ed., *The Oxinden Letters: Being the Correspondence of Henry Oxinden of Barham and his Circle* (London: Constable & Co., 1933), 23.

<sup>91</sup> Razzall, 'Containers and Containment', 126.

and pens, Hegge reminds us of the material diversity of early modern ‘writ[ing]’, as well as evoking how early modern readers annotated the pages of texts by marking pertinent passages with stitches and other textile implements such as pins.<sup>92</sup> Wrought on the external margins of a text, the stitches of an embroidered binding were as legible to early modern readers as the words it enfolded.

Hegge’s ‘upon’ indicates that it is precisely the external contact of the cover which allows it to intervene in the text, a suggestion which resonates with Jacques Derrida’s conception of the *parergon*. This inclusive term describes ‘something which comes as an extra, *exterior* to the proper field’ and incorporates a range of forms of perceived ‘ornamentation’, from picture frames to clothing on statues; as a materially additive form of decoration, embroidery seems essentially *parergonal*.<sup>93</sup> Repudiating Kant’s claim that the *parergon* is ‘only an adjunct, and not an intrinsic constituent in the complete representation of an object’, Derrida confutes a simplistic opposition between the work and that which frames it, and argues that once the *parergon* has supplemented the *ergon* (the work proper), then the *ergon* cannot be considered complete unto itself. The *parergon* has a synergistic rather than subordinate relationship with the *ergon*; it ‘touches and cooperates within the operation, from a certain outside’. This ‘certain outside’ is essentially liminal: it is ‘[n]either simply outside nor simply inside. Like an accessory that one is obliged to welcome on the border, on board [au bord, à bord]. It is first of all on (the) bo(a)rd(er) [Il est d’abord l’à-bord]’.<sup>94</sup> Like Hegge’s wordplay, Derrida’s punning suggests that it is precisely the *parergon*’s peripheral contact which obliges us to welcome it ‘on board’.

Derrida’s theory of the *parergon* simultaneously departs from and resonates with Renaissance theories of frames and framing. As Rayna Kalas outlines, the concept of the frame as a supplement to the work does not hold true in relation to sixteenth-century frames. What Kalas terms the ‘alienable frame’—the quadrilateral border added to the outside of a picture—did not begin to emerge until around 1600. Before then, the

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<sup>92</sup> Knight, ‘Needles and Pens’, 537; Smith, ‘*Grossly Material Things*’, 185. Razzall also notes the ‘conflation’ of needle and pen, ‘Containers and Containment’, 126.

<sup>93</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 56.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 53–54. Square brackets original.

frame was materially and structurally continuous with the work; as such the frame was responsible for the work's 'internal orchestration rather than its external demarcation' and sought not to 'enclose it, but to make, sustain, or advance it'.<sup>95</sup> Starting from a different set of assumptions, such conceptions produce suggestive confluences with the Derridean *parergon* which, whilst initially separate, is ultimately inseparable; which, whilst coming outside and after the work, exerts internal, constitutive effects on it; and which, in creating a bridge between the work and the milieu, similarly advances or extends the work rather than enclosing it.<sup>96</sup> These correspondences are particularly suggestive in relation to the seventeenth century; as Kalas emphasises, earlier concepts of framing were not overturned by the introduction of the quadrilateral frame but rather 'conveyed some of [their] far-ranging significance to this object'.<sup>97</sup> Embroidered bookbindings were thus popularized during a period when concepts of framing were in transition and in which technically distinct frames continued to be regarded as devising, producing, and participating in the significance of the work. At the same time as the tendency to buy texts unbound may have foregrounded the supplementary status of embroidered covers, the material continuities between the cloth cover and the book's flaxen pages make it possible to consider these bindings in terms of inalienable frames.

### ***Parergons and Paratexts: Embroidered Frontispieces***

Dixon's prefatory poem to her father's Bible, discussed above, further elucidates the *parergonal* status of embroidered bindings and positions her cover in relation to other liminal supplements to the text. Highlighting that 'The Frontispice contains the Story/ Of Jacobs Dream, of Jacobs Glory', Dixon situates her embroidered binding within the framework of pictorial paratexts fashioned on the edges of the printed text. Often produced after the text was printed and even added after publication, printed frontispieces offer intriguing structural and functional analogues to embroidered

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<sup>95</sup> Kalas, *Frame, Glass, Verse*, chapters 1 and 2, esp. pp. 8, 27, 30.

<sup>96</sup> Kalas briefly considers Derrida's *parergon*, *ibid.*, 47–48.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.



bindings.<sup>98</sup> Seventeenth-century attempts to locate the frontispiece indicate that this paratext was, like the *parergon*, considered '[n]either simply outside nor simply inside'. Whilst Thomas Blount's *Glossographia* (1656) defines a 'frontispiece' as the 'Title or first page of a book done in picture', Edward Phillips' *The New World of English Words* (1658) describes it as 'a picture placet [*sic*] before any book'.<sup>99</sup> Shifting the image from within to without the book, these contemporaneous definitions emphasise the frontispiece's equivocal situation, as well as expressing indeterminacy about what constitutes a book. Exploiting this indeterminacy, Dixon's explanation pushes the borders of the book further outward still. Her reference to the stories 'contained' inside compounds the pictorial 'content' of this wrought frontispiece with the printed story, held between the covers, and highlights how the binding physically and conceptually comprehends and works together with what is Writ. The binding operates as a paratextile which constitutes an interpretative framework and participates in the meaning of the text.

In identifying her embroidered binding as a 'frontispiece', Dixon expresses verbally what other covers articulate graphically. Like printed frontispieces, embroidered bindings frequently set their designs in elaborate borders, cartouches and strapwork, foregrounding their status as frames. As with printed frontispieces, several covers employ architectural frames such as doorways or columns, alluding to the term's original meaning as the forefront of a building.<sup>100</sup> Many reflect a shared Christian iconography. The vines bordering James Montagu's embroidered binding, for example, accord with those which frame the title-page of the Book of Common Prayer it encloses.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> On early modern frontispiece designs and meanings, see Margery Corbett and R. W. Lightbown, *The Comely Frontispiece: The Emblematic Title-Page in England, 1550–1660* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1979); Alastair Fowler, *The Mind of the Book: Pictorial Title-Pages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>99</sup> Thomas Blount, *Glossographia* (London, 1656), R6r; Edward Phillips, *The New World of English Words* (London, 1658), Q1r.

<sup>100</sup> See, for example, BL C.65.k.3., BL C.25.m.17. On frontispieces and the architecture of books, see William H. Sherman, 'On the Threshold: Architecture, Paratext, and Early Print Culture', in *Agent of Change: Print Culture Studies After Elizabeth L. Eisenstein*, ed. Sabrina Alcorn Baron, Eric N. Lindquist and Eleanor F. Shevlin (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 67–81.

<sup>101</sup> BL Davis 96.

Several book covers engage more directly and precisely with printed frontispieces, adapting, extending and recomposing their central design. For example, as Andrew Morrall has highlighted, the front cover of Cornwaleys's embroidered Geneva Bible reworks the frontispiece engraving of Adam and Eve which prefaces many copies of the text printed by Christopher and Robert Barker.<sup>102</sup> The front and back covers of a book containing a Greek New Testament printed in 1633, and a 1636 Book of Common Prayer and Book of Psalms, adapt and reframe images of King David from the frontispieces to a King James Bible printed in Cambridge (1629) and the third volume of Gerard de Jode's *Thesaurus Novi Testamenti* (1585).<sup>103</sup> Figures from the title-page to folio editions of the King James Bible were reworked across the covers of a 1617 octavo version, bound with the Psalms, Book of Common Prayer and *The Way to True Happiness*; attending closely to details such as clothing, this binding splits the Old Testament figures from the New, placing Moses and Aaron on the front and the Evangelists on the back, each arranged around a coat of arms (Figures 14, 17 and 18). The front and back covers of another book depict the evangelists set within medallions, translated from the title-page of the enclosed 1634 Bible (Figures 19 and 20). The embroidered design replaces the title at the centre of the printed frontispiece with an image of the Fountain of Life, alluded to throughout the Bible and seen at the end of the Book of Revelation. The text block of this Bible has numerous manuscript annotations, many of them focused on the Book of Revelation or concerned with the final Judgement, suggesting how this cover may have reflected and/or focused its reader's interest in the text.<sup>104</sup>

Since there is not space here to discuss all embroidered bindings which engage with frontispieces, I propose to focus on a copy of Henry Valentine's *Private Devotions* whose embroidered binding is indicative of more widespread practices.<sup>105</sup> Written by a

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<sup>102</sup> Morrall, 'Representations of Adam and Eve', 324–27.

<sup>103</sup> Gerard de Jode, *Thesaurus Novi Testamenti* (Antwerp, 1585), t.p.; *The Holy Bible* (Cambridge, 1629), t.p. See Yvonne Hackenbroch, *English and Other Needlework, Tapestries and Textiles in the Irwin Untermyer Collection* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1960), 22–23; Morrall and Watt, *English Embroidery*, 130–32. Morrall and Watt also note that the same image from de Jode's *Thesaurus Novi Testamenti* was adapted on the binding of a 1635 imprint of *The Whole Booke of Davids Psalmes*, BL Davis 44.

<sup>104</sup> V&A T.6-1988.

<sup>105</sup> Henry Valentine, *Private Devotions* (London, 1636), Bodleian Vet A2 g.28.

relatively tolerant Anglican clergyman, *Private Devotions* was a perennially popular manual, which went through at least twenty-five editions during the seventeenth century as well as being translated into Welsh. The Bodleian Library holds an embroidered 24mo copy of the eighth edition (printed in 1636). Its front cover reworks the text's frontispiece of the Publican in the Temple (Figures 21 and 22).<sup>106</sup>

The engraved frontispiece is not bound in this embroidered copy, although the explanatory poem is included. Copies of other editions similarly include the poem without the accompanying image (the two would have been printed separately). Another copy of the frontispiece appears pasted onto the inner front cover of a 1631 Book of Common Prayer, alongside the frontispiece from Francis Quarles's *Divine Poems* (1633) and manuscript extracts from Quarles' text, a collage which suggests how readers responded creatively to frontispieces and used them to craft intertextual connections.<sup>107</sup> The seeming independence and mobility of this frontispiece relative to the book's verbal content emphasises the liminality of the engraving in relation to the printed text. Its absence from the embroidered copy also raises questions about the relationship between the print, the book and the front cover. Could the print not be acquired? If so, the designer(s) must have had other means of accessing it in order to adapt the image for the cover, indicating their familiarity with material variants of the text and sensitivity to how a complete text should or could look. Or perhaps the print was mutilated in the process of adaptation, rendering it unusable. Alternatively, perhaps those involved in commissioning or producing the book excluded the print, preferring the needle to the press and opting instead for an embroidered translation. Whether through necessity or choice, the wrought cover thus replaced rather than duplicated the engraving, solely assuming the status of frontispiece.

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<sup>106</sup> Two other embroidered copies survive: Folger STC 24576.2; BL C.109.1.28. For biographical information about Valentine and details of the publication of *Private Devotions*, see Jonquil Bevan, 'Henry Valentine, John Donne and Izaak Walton', *The Review of English Studies* 40, no. 158 (1989): 179–201, esp. 189–90. The 1694 imprint identifies itself as the twenty-fifth edition, Valentine, *Private Devotions* (London, 1694).

<sup>107</sup> Folger STC 24576.5; Bodleian C.P. 1631 d.2. The Ames collection of title-pages also preserves an unattached copy of the engraved frontispiece and letterpress title-page, BL Ames II.1303 (Figure 22).

This replacement rewrites the referential frame of the explanatory poem (quoted here in full), relocating the ‘front’ from the front page to the front cover:

*Behold this Publican,  
i'th Temple praying;  
Plac'd in the front,  
as of our book beginner:  
The form of whose devotion  
was this saying,  
O Lord be mercifull  
to me a sinner.  
God heard his suit,  
though short, 'tis not deni'd  
He came a sinner  
but went justify'd.*<sup>108</sup>

Like Dixon's handwritten address to her Father and ensuing prayer, this poem draws the reader's attention to how the binding, in Derrida's terms, 'cooperates within the operation'. Integrating the cover into a cohesive series of interdependent paratexts, the poem is itself a *parergon* which touches upon and mediates between image and word, cover and contents, reader and text, outside and inside. In so doing, it brings this outside in, locating the Publican not only 'in the front' but 'i'th Temple'—the building proper. The poem's deictic reference to 'this Publican' also provides what Derrida calls 'the internal structural link which rivets them [the *parerga*] to the lack in the interior of the *ergon*',<sup>109</sup> this deictic marker establishes the meaning of the printed contents as contingent upon something outside of itself—the cover—and directs attention outward even as it draws it inward. Although the poem antedates the embroidery, the past tense of the verb 'Plac'd', combined with the cover's spatial precedence, makes the verse read as if it were written in response to the binding. The embroidery might be sewn after the text was printed but it appears originative of the poem's meaning. Indicating that what is chronologically subsequent is not necessarily creatively or semantically secondary, the

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<sup>108</sup> Valentine, *Private Devotions*, A1v.

<sup>109</sup> Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 59

textile cover seems to ‘give rise’ to the book’s textual contents, as the *parergon* ‘gives rise’ to the *ergon*.<sup>110</sup>

If the front cover gives rise to the work, the back cover, which depicts Mary Magdalene reading, sustains and advances it, spatially and conceptually (Figure 23). We might read this back cover as ‘feminiz[ing] the Christian typology’ for a female reader, as Molekamp suggests of the image of Mary Magdalene attending Christ in the Garden which Cornwaleys embroidered on the back of her bible.<sup>111</sup> At the same time, the choice of Mary should be understood in the context of long-established parallels between her and the Publican as comparable examples of ‘penitent’ sinners who were granted God’s mercy and thus ‘justified’.<sup>112</sup> The binding articulates these parallels and connections through visual correspondences as well as physical structures of alignment and gathering; Mary is framed within an identical arch and, like him, she holds her right hand to her breast in heartfelt supplication.

These connections are not made in Valentine’s text. Instead they indicate the knowledgeable, creative and expansive ways in which those involved in producing the cover read the printed text and image within its textual and devotional context. The supplementary cover becomes a site for doctrinal as well as material embellishment. The cover’s *parergonal* characteristics—at once part of the work and part of the milieu—make it ideally suited to draw out connections between the book’s content and its context, physically and conceptually. Elaborating the book’s salvational aims, the cover offers an additional illustration of God’s grace which brings a wider corpus of devotional reading and practice to bear upon Valentine’s text. In so doing, the cover co-operates with Valentine’s discursive as well as devotional structures. Valentine advances his explanation of each of the Litanies with quotations collected from diverse scriptural locations, set alongside one another without further exegesis. As will be discussed further in the next section, such techniques were themselves forms of gathering and

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>111</sup> Molekamp, *Women and the Bible*, 45.

<sup>112</sup> See ‘O Maker of heauen and earth’, a prayer included in both Catholic and reformed primers: *Here After Foloweth the Prymer in Englysshe Sette out Longe, After the Use of Sarum* (Rouen, 1538), S6v; *The Manuall of Prayers* (London, 1539), Q4v. See also Bayly, *The Practise of Pietie*, T6v; Samson Lennard, *An Exhortatory Instruction* (London, 1609), X7v–X8r; Thomas Bentley, *The Monument of Matrons* (London, 1582), li8v.

framing, terms habitually used to describe practices of textual collection and application.<sup>113</sup> Extending our sense of how such practices were physically performed in the binding of texts, the cover of *Private Devotions* offers a pictorial and material counterpart to Valentine's textual strategies.

Mary is not just the Publican's complement but the consummation of the narrative that his image sets up. Pictured with a halo and her left hand pointing to the lines of her open book, Mary represents the later stages of salvation and offers an alternative to the prefatory poem's conclusion: '*He came a sinner/ but went justify'd*'. Other embroidered frontispieces similarly present paired images which trace coherent narratives from the front cover to the back. These arrangements foreground a concern with the interrelation between textual form and the physical format of the codex, and offer further evidence of the co-operation of a book's written and wrought discursive structures. As Morrall observes, Anne Cornwaleys's pairing of Adam and Eve with Christ appearing to Mary Magdalene in the Garden uses a 'New Testament antitype of the Fall' to create a 'coherent typological theme' which gestures towards humankind's ultimate redemption.<sup>114</sup> Working its way from Genesis to John, the trajectory of Cornwaleys's binding from front to back accords with that of the printed text. The cover seems to participate in and be continuous with the spatial organisation of the text, evoking Helen Smith and Louise Wilson's observation that paratexts are the 'visible ends of constitutive structures that run throughout the length of the work'.<sup>115</sup> Other bindings display similarly spatialized understandings of textual order, placing figures such as Adam and Eve or Moses on the front, and New Testament figures or surrogate images on the back.<sup>116</sup> We might equally refer to such examples as the binding discussed at the beginning of this section which divides Moses and Aaron from the Evangelists, placing the Old Testament figures on the front cover and the New Testament figures on the back.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> See Kalas, *Frame, Glass, Verse*, 55–56. Compare Mary Thomas Crane, *Framing Authority: Sayings, Self, and Society in Sixteenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

<sup>114</sup> Andrew Morrall, 'Representations of Adam and Eve', 324–27.

<sup>115</sup> Helen Smith and Louise Wilson, 'Introduction', in Smith and Wilson, *Renaissance Paratexts*, 6.

<sup>116</sup> See, for example, Morgan PML 127590; Bodleian Vet. A2 e.517; Huntington 438000:070.

<sup>117</sup> Bodleian Bib. Eng. 1617 e.1.

These covers frame what we might call a spatial metaphysics of reading,<sup>118</sup> which directs the reader to understand the book as a solid object and to experience its discursive structures in three dimensions. This ‘spatial metaphysics’ resonates with Johanna Drucker’s consideration of ‘the *phenomenal* book—the complex production of meaning and effect that arises from dynamic interaction with the literal work’. In an essay on e-book technologies, Drucker argues that ‘the basic spatio-temporal structure of the codex undergirds the conceptual organization of reading spaces’ and that a book’s ‘argument is made in material structure and graphical form as well as through textual or visual matter’.<sup>119</sup> As we saw in the *Elijah and the Widow* binding, discussed above, embroidered book covers suggest an alertness to the dynamic articulacy of the binding. Bindings which draw out the beginnings and ends of books contribute further to what Drucker calls ‘the book as a performative space for the production of reading’ in which meaning-making becomes a ‘dynamic’ process.<sup>120</sup>

The spatialization of textual structures is articulated more fully in relation to the binding of *Private Devotions*. Here the narrative traced in the space between its covers is the projected trajectory of its reader, evoking Drucker’s emphasis on the active role that readers play in meaning-making in this ‘performative space’.<sup>121</sup> As the poem notes, the Publican ‘*Plac’d in the front*’ is ‘*as of our book beginner*’; placed in the back, then, Mary models the book’s finisher. Combining the book’s didactic and physical ends, Mary materializes the aim which determines and orientates the book’s contents: to enable readers to go ‘*justify’d*’. Valentine’s work thus serves and fulfills its covers, evoking Sherman’s description of texts which are subordinate to their paratexts, ‘simply spelling or spinning out the primary message conveyed by a title, frontispiece, or preface’.<sup>122</sup>

As the book is put to use, these covers spatially and spiritually orientate the reader, foregrounding the role of the book in navigating towards salvation. Turning the pages, working from the front cover to the back, the reader works his or her way

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<sup>118</sup> I thank Brian Cummings for suggesting this phrase.

<sup>119</sup> Johanna Drucker, ‘The Virtual Codex from Page Space to E-Space’, in *A Companion to Digital Literary Studies*, ed. Ray Siemens and Susan Schreibman (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 216–32, esp. 221, 216, 226.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>122</sup> Sherman, ‘On the Threshold’, 70.

towards justification; progress through the book offers a means of measuring and even enacting the progress of the soul towards God. The vectors of the material narrative thus correspond with the reader's spiritual and physical trajectories through the book. This offers an intriguing analogue to the 'Protestant kinetics' examined by Lori Anne Ferrell in her discussion of William Perkins' *A Golden Chaine* (1591, first printed as *Armillæ Aureæ* in 1590). Ferrell suggests that the fold-out catechistical diagram included in Perkins' text functions similarly to secular "how-to" books whose moving and three-dimensional parts compound a physical command of the page with command of its conceptual content: 'by unfolding and manipulating a page insert and tracing or counting with the fingers', Perkins' readers can 'master the subtleties of a rigorous theology of grace'.<sup>123</sup> The embroidered covers of *Private Devotions* and other bindings which materialize redemptive trajectories encourage a similarly embodied grasp of religious practice, doctrine and faith which indicates that, by working their way to the end of the book, readers can move towards salvation.

Both the design and textures of the *Private Devotions* binding promote haptic and manual engagement, enabling readers to get to grips with devotional structures outside as well as inside the book. Mary Magdalene's finger traces the lines of her text, suggesting the hand's role in following the thread of the book, as well as pointing to the tactile appeal of the printed page. Again, paratextile co-operates with paratext, paralleling Valentine's prefatory epistle which describes the work as a '*Manuall, and Enchiridion*'.<sup>124</sup> Derived from the Greek, *χρησ*, hand, this latter term was glossed literally by contemporary lexicographers as 'a little booke, which one may stil carrie in his hand'; printed in miniature format, Valentine's text is aptly sized to be thus grasped.<sup>125</sup>

At the same time, the highly-textured surfaces of embroidered bindings possess their own tactile appeal. The columns flanking Mary and the Publican are done in raised metal work. The figures are worked in smooth silks, while Mary's halo, ointment jar

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<sup>123</sup> Lori Anne Ferrell, 'How-To Books, Protestant Kinetics, and the Art of Theology', *HLQ* 71, no. 4 (2008): 591–606, esp. 592, 604.

<sup>124</sup> Valentine, *Private Devotions*, A4r.

<sup>125</sup> 'enchiridion, n.', *OED Online*, December 2016; John Bullokar, *An English Expositor* (London, 1616), F8v.



and, notably, the outer edges of her book are raised in more substantial metallic thread wrapped around a silk core. Materially building up connections between justification, the book and other devotional materials, these raised threads make the important elements stand out to the finger. This touch might be devotional, indicating embroidery's role in prompting or sustaining sensory forms of piety which have tended to be associated with Catholicism.<sup>126</sup> Protestant ambivalence towards such forms of touch was perhaps acknowledged in the depiction of Mary Magdalene's encounter with the resurrected Christ on the back of Cornwall's highly textured, raised work binding. Representing the moment at which Christ declares '*noli me tangere*', the binding simultaneously acknowledges the desire for reverential touch and forbids it.<sup>127</sup> Alternatively, these embroidered bindings might form another means of getting to grips with the book's conceptual content. Like the needleworkers discussed in my previous chapter, the book's users could get knowledge at their 'finger's end' by reading the covers haptically while their eyes scanned the page.

Holding the contents in tension with the cover, embroidered bookbindings complicate Gérard Genette's suggestion of the paratext as a "“vestibule” that offers ... the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back"; rather the reader holds and is held at once inside and outside.<sup>128</sup> As Smith and Wilson highlight, paratexts 'operate in multiple directions, structuring the reader's approach not only to the text in question but to the experience of reading, and of interpreting the world beyond the book'.<sup>129</sup> I want to conclude this section by examining an embroidered frontispiece that looks particularly directly outward. A 1625 King James Bible, signed by Henrietta Heath, is bound with a 1616 Geneva version of the New Testament and a 1625 metrical psalter in covers which depict David kneeling in prayer. Adapted from the frontispiece to Thomas Rogers' much-reprinted Protestant translation of *Of the Imitation of Christ*, the

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<sup>126</sup> Discussing Hegge's reaction to the embroidered New Testament sent to him by Oxinden, Razzall notes that 'to "touch" this beautifully bound copy of the New Testament is [presented as] an act of "devotion", like stroking a relic', 'Containers and Containment', 125. For reformed attitudes towards the sense of touch, see Moshenska, *Feeling Pleasures*, esp. chapters one and two.

<sup>127</sup> On reformed interpretations of '*noli me tangere*', see Moshenska, *Feeling Pleasures*, 69–80.

<sup>128</sup> Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 2.

<sup>129</sup> Smith and Wilson, 'Introduction', 6–7.

design reflects a programme of further reading (Figures 24 and 25).<sup>130</sup> The embroidery, like the print, frames the image with a quotation from Psalm 119:115: ‘AWAY FROM ME, YE WICKED’. But where the woodcut continues ‘FOR I WILL KEPE THE COMMANDEMENTS OF MY GOD’, the binding offers the alternative conclusion ‘FOR I WILL SEARVE THE LORD’, a phrasing which echoes alternative translations of this verse, as well as the authorized translation of Joshua 24:15.<sup>131</sup> Perhaps prompted by the need to make the text fit the embroidery’s tighter spatial constrictions, this reformulation suggests how the material medium could drive makers to intervene in scriptural translation and interpretation, in ways which could simultaneously multiply meaning and intensify it through condensation.

Heath’s bible thus reflects and prompts critical recourse not only to its scriptural contents but to reading material which was intended to be used alongside the scriptures. In bringing these texts together, it develops our sense of how bookbinding produced forms of “material intertextuality” while also complicating notions of the material and ‘physical ... proximity’ by which Jeffrey Todd Knight argues such intertextuality was defined.<sup>132</sup> Locating the frame of another work on the borders of this book, these covers bind the book simultaneously inward and outward into its devotional and iconographic contexts, and materialize how outlying texts touched upon and were touched by their contents.

Outlining, translating, extending and reorientating textual as well as paratextual structures, embroidered frontispieces offer a telling portrait of the elaborate networks of meaning that needlework covers could constitute. Revealing a critical and creative involvement in print culture and the architecture of reading, they indicate that those involved in producing a book’s cover responded thoughtfully to the text and its contexts, and were involved in orchestrating structures of the book and of reading which were at once conceptual, devotional and physical. Producing a creative and

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<sup>130</sup> Morgan PML 2091. Thomas Rogers, trans., *Of the Imitation of Christ* (London, 1584). Hamling identifies a similar image on the overmantel at Montacute House, Somerset, *Decorating the ‘Godly’ Household*, 227–29.

<sup>131</sup> See, for example, Henry Lok’s translation: ‘Away from me ye wicked men, my God alone I serue’, *Ecclesiastes* (London, 1597), I3v. The KJV translation of Joshua 24:15 reads: ‘for me and my house, we will serve the Lord’. The engraving uses the Geneva translation.

<sup>132</sup> Knight, *Bound to Read*, 16.

responsive framework in which to consider the text and its context, embroidered frontispieces oblige us to take seriously the formative work of needles in shaping early modern books.

## The Flowers of Scripture

I turn now to a genre of binding design whose conceptual relation to the text is less apparent to modern eyes but which for early modern readers was intimately involved in the book's devotional applications. As Appendix 1 highlights, flowers are by far the most common subject for embroidered book covers, participating in the popular floral scheme which, as noted earlier, characterizes early modern needlework in general (see, for example, Figure 26). Even bindings which do not use flowers in their central design often incorporate floral motifs in borders or along the spine, leaving very few books which are not marked by botanical features in some way. These designs could function as objects of fashionable aesthetic display and indexes of extravagant consumption; this seems particularly true of covers wrought during "tulipmania" with images of this expensive and exotic flower (Figure 27).<sup>133</sup> Recent scholarship by Andrew Morrall and Sophie Holroyd has drawn attention to the religious significance and devotional charge of embroidered flowers in both Catholic and reformed contexts, highlighting that particular flowers had specific symbolic resonances and that, more generally, flowers possessed 'religious affect' and were powerful 'vehicle[s] for ... spiritual ideality'.<sup>134</sup> In this section, I examine how floral embroidery resonated with the contents of devotional books, constructing and marking appropriate devotional and interpretive practices.

A book said to belong to Queen Elizabeth reveals the complex network of textual practices which flowers could construct. Containing the Epistles of St. Paul, the

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<sup>133</sup> On tulips as luxury goods, see Anne Goldgar, 'Nature as Art: The Case of the Tulip', in *Merchants and Marvels: Commerce, Science, and Art in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Pamela H. Smith and Paula Findlen (London: Routledge, 2002), 324–46.

<sup>134</sup> Morrall, 'Representations of Adam and Eve', 316; Holroyd, "'Rich Embrodered Churchstuffe'", 73–116.

book is bound in black velvet, embroidered perhaps by Elizabeth herself.<sup>135</sup> Each cover presents a floral motif encircled with Latin inscriptions stitched in banderoles; further text is wrought around the edges of each cover (Figures 28 and 29). These flowers manifest and participate in the structures of textual collection which determine the production and reception of the entire book, inside and out. A handwritten inscription on the book's first page reads:

I walke many times into the pleasant fieldes of the holye Scriptures,  
where I plucke vp the goodlie greene herbes of sentences by pruning:  
Eate them by reading: chawe them by musing: And Laie them up at  
Length in the hie seate of memorie by gathering them together, that so  
hauing tasted thy sweetenes I may the Lesse perceau the bitternes of  
this miserable Life.<sup>136</sup>

Keying into commonplacing practices, this book evokes the creation of *florilegia*, where the 'flowers' or choicest passages of various texts were selected and compiled. These flowers sometimes assumed their botanical form in marginal annotations where readers inked flowers next to noteworthy passages.<sup>137</sup> This book's cover may have offered a further margin upon which these flowers were drawn out. In an article on Isabella Whitney's verse collection, *A Sweet Nosgay* (1573), Whitney Trettien demonstrates that the plucking of textual flowers existed in a fluid relationship with the gathering of needlework patterns and the embroidering of 'slips' (appliqued floral motifs); Trettien suggests that Whitney's verse collection mobilises this slippage to legitimize a woman's participation in humanist miscellany practices, an argument which points to a culture possessing a broader understanding of the media and forms in which literate collection and composition were undertaken.<sup>138</sup>

Elizabeth's embroidered book similarly plays upon the imbrication of textual and textile herbs, conjoining written, wrought and bibliographic forms of handiwork.

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<sup>135</sup> Bodleian Arch. G e.48 [previously MS e Mus 242].

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., recto of front flyleaf.

<sup>137</sup> See Sherman, *Used Books*, 27–30.

<sup>138</sup> Whitney Trettien, 'Isabella Whitney's Slips: Textile Labor, Gendered Authorship, and the Early Modern Miscellany', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 35, no. 3 (2015): 505–21.

Elizabeth's inscription is itself a herb, plucked from Thomas Rogers' translation of *A Right Christian Treatise, entitled S. Augustines Praiers* (1581); Elizabeth's text differs only in substituting Rogers' 'using' for 'musing', an alteration which shifts the focus from immediate action to meditation.<sup>139</sup> The printed text within the covers has been physically pruned from a 1578 imprint of *The New Testament*; further 'herbs' have been picked out with an "m", perhaps a reminder to 'muse' upon these verses and commit them to 'memorie'.

The memorial practice of 'gathering' these clippings is performed in the binding of the book which collects the book's contents together with further sprays of text and image. On the front cover, a jack-in-the-pulpit-like flower with heart-shaped leaves at its centre is swathed in banderoles which exhort: 'ELEVA SVRSVM COR IBI VBI EC' (Lift the heart upwards there where Christ is).<sup>140</sup> Situating 'cor' immediately above the 'heart' of the flower, the design puts the plant at the centre of its devotional message and foregrounds the co-operation of the floral and the verbal, as well as of cover, contents and context. In an act of textual synthesis reminiscent of Heath's embroidered bible, the inscription blends Colossians 3:1-2 from the Vulgate with the first words of the priest in the Eucharistic liturgy. Situating the book's Pauline contents in the context of Church worship, the covers join these textual flowers together like grafted slips of a plant.<sup>141</sup>

The edges of the cover provide a further intertextual graft. Declaring '[CO]JELUM PATRIA SCOPVS VITAE CHRISTVS CHRISTO VIVE' (Heaven is our home. The goal of life is Christ. Live in Christ), the first two sentences of this frame are respectively plucked from Ambrose and Vives whilst the final words evoke Paul's

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<sup>139</sup> Augustine, *A Right Christian Treatise, entitled S. Augustines Praiers*, trans. Thomas Rogers (London, 1581), C1v. For further discussion of this passage see Helen Smith, "'More Swete Vnto the Eare'", 423–24.

<sup>140</sup> The sources for all of this binding's quotations and the translations given are taken from Elizabeth I, *Translations, 1544–1589*, ed. Janel Mueller and Joshua Scodel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 403–5.

<sup>141</sup> On the imbrication of textual and botanical gathering, and the slippage between textual and horticultural grafting, see Leah Knight, *Of Books and Botany in Early Modern England: Sixteenth-Century Plants and Print Culture* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 10, 47–48; Knight, *Reading Green in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 89–93.

epistles, echoing Romans 6:11. A similar design scheme governs the back cover, although here the forms of gathering are less complexly multiple: a daisy-like flower is enfolded in banderoles containing an extract from Livy, christianised by the addition of EC, perhaps ‘Et Christo’: ‘VICIT OMNIA PERTINAX VIRTUS E C’ (Steadfast virtue has conquered all things). Around the outside is a quotation from *Tractus de ordine vitae et morum institutione*: ‘BEATVS QVI DIVITIAS SCRIPTURAE LEGENS VERRA VERTIT IN OPERA’ (Blessed is he who, reading the words, turns the riches of scripture into works). This maxim resonates not only with the Augustinian inscription but with the widespread shortening of needlework to ‘work’, pointing towards the devotional charge invested in this text by the embroidery.

Although Elizabeth’s book’s covers are distinctive in the texts stitched upon them, the forms of reading and use upon which they play resonate with the applications of floral bookbindings throughout the late-sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. One 1628 Bible augments its floral covers with a multi-stranded bookmark, whose anchor is also encircled with blossoms, offering a material, repositionable version of marginal flowers (Figures 30 and 31).<sup>142</sup> Floral designs proliferate on miniature psalm books and prayer collections, both of which are commonly appraised in florid terms. For example, in considering the ‘Contents and the benefit of the Psalmes’, preacher Robert Bolton describes how ‘the choice and flower of all things profitable and comfortable for the right course of a Christian life, is therein briefly contained’,<sup>143</sup> an observation which suggests how the physical brevity of many embroidered volumes may have coordinated with the cover design to materialize a similar judgement about their profitable contents.

Many small prayerbooks have herbaceous titles; sometimes imposed by authors, sometimes by the stationers responsible for their publication, these titles invite us to position floral bindings in the context of interpretive decisions made by other members of the book trade.<sup>144</sup> Titles such as *The Saints Nose-gay, or, A Posie of 741 Spirituall Flowers ... Collected and Composed by Samuel Clark* (1642) and *The Posie of Godly Praiers... Made and*

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<sup>142</sup> Folger STC 2283.5.

<sup>143</sup> Robert Bolton, *The Saints Sure and Perpetual Guide* (London, 1634), B1r–v. See also, for example, Robert Watkyns, *Flamma Sine Fumo* (London, 1662), F2r.

<sup>144</sup> On botanical titles, see Randall L. Anderson, ‘Metaphors of the Book as Garden in the English Renaissance’, *The Yearbook of English Studies* 33 (2003): 248–61; Knight, *Of Books and Botany*, 1–4, 47–48.

collected by Nicholas Themylthorpe, emphasise the compiler's work of plucking and gathering; they underscore that practices of collection were creative, even when, as Clarke 'confesse[s]' of his flowers, '*few of them grew upon mine owne soyle*'. Clarke's preface discusses the labours he undertook so that '*I could bind them [the flowers] together in this handfull*'; this compounds the work of textual composition with the physical composition and form of both book and nosegay.<sup>145</sup> Grounding his work in the language of material making, Clark invites us to explore cognitive and practical overlaps between the making and use of books and floral posies, and to consider how authors' and compilers' nosegays might be sustained and extended by those who stitched the 'handfull' together.

Some titles place the onus of selection on the reader as with the anonymous *A Godlie Garden out of the which most cōfortable bearbs may be gathered* (first printed in 1569). Three copies of this text survive in embroidered covers, all bearing designs which echo and fulfil the title's herbaceous prompt. The British Library's 1604 copy is wrought with a repeating floral pattern.<sup>146</sup> The front and back covers of the Folger Shakespeare Library's 1619 copy each depict a building, perhaps a temple, set within a garden, with rose and hearts-ease at alternate corners (Figure 32). The Huntington Library's 1621 copy is embroidered in silver with a large stylized flower at the centre of each cover and smaller flowers at each corner (Figure 33).<sup>147</sup> These covers harmonize with the frame of the text block. Both the title-page and the pages of the work itself set the text within blossoming borders, incorporating flowers similar to those wrought on the Folger and the Huntington bindings (Figure 34). This again highlights how the frames created by binders and embroiderers intersect with those produced by other artisans involved in making the book and suggests how the *mise-en-page* could co-operate with the book's covering to construct and sustain particular reading practices.

The flourished covers of a 1633 octavo Bible prompted one user to collage her or his own floral *mise-en-page*, providing a particularly direct example of how floral covers

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<sup>145</sup> Samuel Clarke, *The Saints Nose-gay* (London, 1642), A5r; Nicholas Themylthorpe, *The Posie of Godly Prayers* (London, 1618).

<sup>146</sup> BL C.18.a.10.

<sup>147</sup> Folger STC 11560; Huntington 62041.

could co-operate with and intervene in texts.<sup>148</sup> Bound alongside a Book of Common Prayer, the Genealogies, and a Book of Psalms, the Bible is embroidered with tulips, daffodils and other blossoms on its front and back covers and spine (Figure 35). Flowers cover the Bible internally as well as externally; numerous petals and flower heads have been pressed, preserved and collected between its pages. These flowers indicate an appreciation of the book's physical heft and an alternative understanding of its spatial capacities, echoing Jeffrey Todd Knight's observation that early moderns valued books 'not just for reading or ... for their ideational content alone', but as 'useful ... material objects or artifacts', particularly 'storage device[s]'.<sup>149</sup> At the same time, this use could add to the book's ideational as well as botanical content. The flowers pressed within this Bible and fused to its pages thicken what Calhoun calls a richly significant 'textual ecology' of plant matter in paper, and are similarly capable of 'inflect[ing] the acts of reading and interpretation'.<sup>150</sup> Highlighting particular pages, adhering to or leaving oily traces upon specific passages, these flowers take practices of gathering the 'goodlie green herbes' of scripture to their horticultural conclusion, marking up the book botanically and preserving its flowers for future consideration. As the flowers have dried, many have become translucent, creating a botanical filter which colours responses to the text, in ways which, as will be explored later, are simultaneously visual, cognitive and emotional. The scripture becomes physically and conceptually imprinted with and within the book's artistic and natural flowers, allowing the reader to look into the floral coverings and read the word of God.

These pressed flowers are consonant with the ways that early modern readers considered and used the Bible and the book of nature in spatially and conceptually proximate ways. We have already seen how Elizabeth Isham viewed the natural environment with scripture in mind. As Andrew Cambers and Leah Knight both note, many readers perambulated outdoors with prayer books and bibles.<sup>151</sup> Knight highlights

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<sup>148</sup> Huntington 438000:830.

<sup>149</sup> Knight, "'Furnished" for Action', 38–39. Leah Knight observes that 'one of the readiest ways to preserve the sprigs of herbs which could combat diseased air was to press them tightly between the pages of a bound book, in the anaerobic environment of which plants might retain not only their fragrance but its associated potency', *Reading Green*, 46.

<sup>150</sup> Calhoun, 'The Word Made Flax', 331–33, 338.

<sup>151</sup> Cambers, *Godly Readers*, 110–16; Knight, *Reading Green*, 19–24.



an example in Amelia Lanyer's 'The Description of Cooke-ham' which indicates that the leaves of nature might physically and conceptually be brought to bear on the leaves of the book. Detailing a meditative practice which evokes and inverts that suggested by the pressed flowers, Lanyer recalls how Margaret Clifford would walk in the woods, 'With Christ and his Apostles there to talke;/ Placing his holy Writ in some faire tree,/ To meditate what you therein did see'.<sup>152</sup> As Randall Martin notes, Lanyer's deictic 'therein' compounds the text placed in the tree and the tree itself, which contains an allusion to the wooden cross.<sup>153</sup> Regarding the 'Writ' and the tree in which it rests as continuous, complementary and commutable, Clifford's meditation indicates that early modern readers appreciated the complex networks of meaning which might be discovered by looking into rather than through botanical book frames and invites us to consider how embroidered covers might operate analogously.

Clifford's botanical musings accord with contemporary directions which exhort readers to meditate upon the natural environment. Isham's piously reverential contemplation of nature, discussed in the previous chapter, complies with instructions offered in manuals such as Bayly's *The Practise of Pietie*: 'Walke into the *fields*, and meditate vpon the *Workes* of God: for in euery *creature* thou maist read, as in an *open Booke*, the *Wisedome, Power, Prouidence, and Goodnesse* of Almightye God'. A marginal note highlights the significance of plant matter: '*Præsentem narrat quaelibet Herba Deum*' (Every blade of grass tells of God's presence).<sup>154</sup> Bayly's instructions acquire a material resonance in a 1620 copy and two 1649 copies of the text, each bound in herbaceous embroidery (see, for example, Figure 36);<sup>155</sup> the text of the 1620 copy is also marked with numerous underlinings, gatherings and manicules, suggesting resonances between the covers and the flowers picked from the text. Binding the text outwards into the natural

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<sup>152</sup> Amelia Lanyer, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (London, 1611), H3r.

<sup>153</sup> Amelia Lanyer, 'The Description of Cookham', in *Women Writers in Renaissance England: An Annotated Anthology*, ed. Randall Martin (Harlow: Longman, 1997), 393, ll. 84–3n; Christine Coch, 'An Arbor of One's Own? Aemilia Lanyer and the Early Modern Garden', *Renaissance and Reformation* 28, no. 2 (2004): 105.

<sup>154</sup> Bayly, *The Practise of Pietie*, Dd4v. Translation mine.

<sup>155</sup> Princeton University Library, Princeton, Scheide 11.2.21; William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, Los Angeles, B359p 1649; NYPL \*KC 1620 (Bayly, L. Practise Of Pietie Directing a Christian how to walke).

environment, these covers extend Bayly's directions to meditate upon God's works. Encouraging readers to 'read, as in an *open Booke*', Bayly's simile frustrates a simplistic opposition of inside and outside the book, and suggests that a text's contents might be interpreted in ways which were epistemologically continuous with meaningful surroundings.

The skilled embroidery of these covers would have provided an apt prompt to and subject for the meditation of God's creation. As stitching flowers deepened Isham's understanding of the Psalms and the wonders of God's handiwork, so embroidered artefacts could spur needleworkers and non-needleworkers alike to divine awe. Viewers widely admired the skilfulness of lifelike embroideries of nature, paying close attention to composition, stitches and materials, as I discuss further in relation to the Elizabeth Powlet's embroidery in my next chapter. As the non-conformist clergyman Anthony Burgess suggests, this scrutiny and the feelings it stirred might serve devotional ends: 'Do ye look on ... some curious needle work, and admire the workmanship; and shall ye not much more the world, as Gods work?'<sup>156</sup> The pleasure, wonder and appreciation provoked by 'curious' flowers—'minutely accurate' and 'skilfully, elaborately or beautifully wrought'—should turn viewers' attention to real flowers and guide their understanding of them.<sup>157</sup>

Burgess intimates some competition between art and nature here, recalling Isham's anxiety about delighting too much in her handiwork. Elsewhere, though, he figures divine and human handiwork as complementary. Invoking the common conception of humankind as divinely embroidered, Burgess explains that in Psalm 139 '*David* acknowledgeth the wonderfull wisdom and power of God, in *making his body, Thou hast curiously wrought me; As the curious needle-woman doth some choice piece*'.<sup>158</sup> Other preachers applied such comparisons to the Creation more broadly. Highlighting how God had 'deck'd [the Earth] as a Bride with Flowers', Thomas Watson, for example, stresses: 'God hath wrought the Creation as with curious Needle-work, that

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<sup>156</sup> Anthony Burgess, *The Scripture Directory* (London, 1659), Nn2r.

<sup>157</sup> 'admire, v.', *OED Online*, December 2016, defs. 1, 2; 'curious, adj.', *OED Online*, December 2016, defs. 7a, 11.

<sup>158</sup> Anthony Burgess, *A Treatise of Original Sin* (London, 1658), Bb4v. For further discussion of this verse, see Osherow, 'Mary Sidney's Embroidered Psalms', 650–52.

we may observe his Wisdom and Goodness, and give him the Praise due to him, *Psal.* 104.24'.<sup>159</sup> Psalm-book covers wrought with natural imagery could provide comparable commentaries, guiding readers' approach to both the text and the natural environment.

Isham's sewn flowers also directed her attention to Psalm 104:24, her stitchery pointing her to other forms of botanical handiwork with religio-medicinal effects. Struggling to progress in learning Latin, she explains:

I rather tooke holde of S pauls words \I cor. 8./1 Knowledge puffeth up. but love edifieth. I therefore purposed to read of the vertue of those hearbs and flowres which I had wrought which as they are different in there shapes and coullers so are there vertues: which made me often call to mind the 24 verse of the 104 psalme. O Lord how manifold are thy workes in wisdome hast thou made them all: I found this way might be very beneficiall both to my Sister and others. and that I might make the best use of those things which our garden afforded. which abounded in those things which was cordiall for her ....<sup>160</sup>

A marginal note adds 'as are rosmary, roses and borage which I made conserves of etc'.<sup>161</sup> Moving fluidly back and forth between substantially graspable textual extracts—earlier described as 'spirituall flowers'—and wrought and botanical flowers, Isham suggests the complementary, intertwined physic of reading, sewing and cookery.<sup>162</sup> As Rebecca Laroche suggests in her reading of this passage, the 'symbiotic relationship' of stitchery and herbalism is likely to have been further cemented by Isham's recourse to

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<sup>159</sup> Thomas Watson, *A Body of Practical Divinity* (London, 1692), I2v. See also Claire Canavan, "[A]ll Sorts of Stiches": Looking at Detail in a Proclamation of Solomon Embroidery', *Textile History* 47, no. 1 (2016): 46–47.

<sup>160</sup> Isham, 'Rememberance', 28r

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 28r.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 5r. On Isham's engagement with textual, botanical and medicinal flowers, and her relationship to the family landscape, see Hilary M. Nunn, "Goeing a broad to gather and worke the flowers": The Domestic Geography of Elizabeth Isham's *My Booke of Rememberance*, in *Ecofeminist Approaches to Early Modernity*, ed. Jennifer Munroe and Rebecca Laroche (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 152–74.

herbal books, which commonly served as needlework patterns, as well as medicinal manuals.<sup>163</sup>

Flowers were commonly used in kitchen physic, a realm in which the housewife possessed particular authority and which meant that women's engagement with gardens was frequently medicinal.<sup>164</sup> Other women similarly register continuities between spiritual, medicinal and artistically creative practices, offering an intriguing suggestion of further uses to which the preserved flowers discussed above might have been put. Grace Mildmay, for example, recalls: 'every day I spent some time in the herbal and books of physic, and in ministering to one or other ... and ever God gave a blessing thereunto'. She proceeds immediately to recall those creative exercises which I mentioned in the previous chapter: 'Also every day I spent some time in works of mine own invention without sample of drawing or pattern before me, for carpet or cushion work and to draw flowers and fruits to their life with my plumett upon paper.'<sup>165</sup> Mildmay's flowers, drawn to 'their life', invoke connotations not just of being drawn in a lifelike manner, but of being drawn or brought (back) towards life. They recall Isham's flowers, wrought 'according to the life as much as I could', and speak more generally to widespread comments about embroidered flora, worked 'to the Life', discussed further in my next chapter.<sup>166</sup> These examples highlight the extent to which wrought flowers not only imitated botanical examples but were seen to reproduce or preserve their vitality. Embroidery's blurring of distinctions between art and nature echoes the properties of kitchen conserves and concoctions. As Wendy Wall observes, women often sought to make kitchen conceits such as candied flowers look as if they were still alive, 'fabricat[ing] artistic products with natural appearances' which 'playfully pressed the boundary between organic and artificial material'.<sup>167</sup>

Isham's physically, spiritually and emotionally salutary cordials not only extend the forms of psychophysiological benefit discussed in the previous chapter but resonate

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<sup>163</sup> Laroche, *Medical Authority*, 122–23, 128–29.

<sup>164</sup> Jennifer Munroe, *Gender and the Garden in Early Modern English Literature* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 40–43. Munroe also discusses connections between needlework and gardens, *Gender and the Garden*, 97–128.

<sup>165</sup> Pollock, *With Faith and Physic*, 35.

<sup>166</sup> Isham, 'Rememberance', 26r. See also Morrall, 'Representations of Adam and Eve', 315.

<sup>167</sup> Wall, *Recipes for Thought*, 85.

strongly with the theo-medicinal designs of many of the texts bound in floral embroidery, inviting us to consider how floral covers co-operated with a book's textual physic. The language of comfort pervades prayer books and psalms. The title-page of *The Godlie Garden*, for example, promises 'most cōfortable hearbs [that] may be gathered for the health of the wounded conscience of all penitent sinners'. As noted above, Bolton describes the Psalms as the 'flower of all things profitable and comfortable for the right course of a Christian life', whilst cleric Edward Waterhouse finds 'flowers of comfort ... disperced thoroughout this Psalm [37]; yea, thoroughout the Scripture'.<sup>168</sup>

As Helen Smith has demonstrated, the widespread use of medical terminology to discuss divine matters registered 'structural and experiential parallels' between bodily and spiritual health in a period when the two were intimately involved.<sup>169</sup> These continuities are evident in a late-seventeenth-century manuscript miscellany by Dorothy Feilding, widow of Basil Feilding, Earl of Denbigh. Alongside culinary and medical receipts, and poems mourning her husband, Feilding inscribed prayers which present the trials and comforts of faith as bodily experiences, and the pains of sickness as spiritual ailments. In the prayer which opens the volume, for example, she describes herself as 'thy afflicted servant' who is 'for my sins now p[?] with sicknes' and begs: 'Lord Remove thy Rod from mee thow good phisishon'. This prayer initially seems to dismiss manmade physic, declaring that 'all medicens signify nothing'. However, Feilding later entreats God to 'give a Blessing to all that I take for the Garding of my health', suggesting rather that prayer co-operated with the household physic recorded in this book. Several of Feilding's receipts involve flowers including sage, borage, betony, lillies and roses.<sup>170</sup> Flowers also extend to the book's outside, which is embroidered with gillyflowers, roses and heartsease; these were all common cordial ingredients, suggesting the overlapping concerns of covers and contents (Figure 37).

Embroidered flowers might not just advertise the effects of the remedies within but impart physic of their own. Syntactically, Isham's description of reading of 'the vertue of those hearbs and flowres which I had wrought' indicates that the 'vertue'

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<sup>168</sup> Edward Waterhouse, *The Gentlemans Monitor* (London, 1665), E2v.

<sup>169</sup> Helen Smith, 'Metaphor, Conversion and Cure in Early Modern England', *Renaissance Quarterly* 67, no. 2 (2014): 477, 491.

<sup>170</sup> Beinecke Osborn b226, 1, 5, 25, 15–16, 20–1, 57.

might be considered as much a property of her wrought flowers as the natural specimens, a suggestion extended in her observation that ‘as they are different in there shapes and coullers so are there vertues’. Isham’s comparison reminds us that colour had medicinal effects, prompting us to consider the effects of needlework’s lively hues; at a time when many pigments were plant-based, the dyes would have contained rather than simply mimicked botanical matter. Leah Knight has recently highlighted the restorative effects of greenery on readers’ wearied eyes and minds; this might be achieved by taking a break from reading and spending time in the garden or by reading amongst nature, highlighting another reason for readers’ outdoor perambulations.<sup>171</sup> Knight indicates that greenery’s therapeutic effects informed the herbaceous titles of early modern books as well the textile furnishings of studies, prompting readers to cover their desks with green cloth, a practice illustrated in the image of Mary Magdalene reading, wrought on the back cover of *Private Devotions* (Figure 23).<sup>172</sup> Verdant bookbindings such as those which border Elizabeth Illingworth’s book, discussed above, sit between fabric and foliage, and may have been appreciated as sights for sore eyes which allowed more sustained textual engagement.<sup>173</sup>

Knight’s focus is greenery, but writers were also alert to the restorative effects of flora. Philemon Holland’s translation of Plutarch’s *Morals* (1603), for example, notes: ‘we refresh & comfort our sight againe with looking upon pleasant colours of flowers, and greene grass’.<sup>174</sup> Blue and violet flowers were particularly salutary.<sup>175</sup> Considering borage, a flower embroidered on numerous bindings, including Illingworth’s Bible, Nicaise Le Fevre gestures to the colourful and visual aspects of its ‘cordial’ properties, observing that its ‘blew flowers recreate the sight and the Heart’. Here, the flower’s chromatic effects seem to extend beyond combatting the kinds of eyestrain and mental weariness identified in Knight’s study of greenery, and to shade into the common use of borage to ‘wip[e] out the melancholy and black Ideas’.<sup>176</sup> Le Fevre’s comments look

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<sup>171</sup> Knight, *Reading Green*, 24–36.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 17, 27.

<sup>173</sup> V&A T.134-1929.

<sup>174</sup> Plutarch, *The Philosophie, Commonlie called, The Morals*, trans. Philemon Holland (London, 1603), N3v.

<sup>175</sup> André Du Laurens, *A Discourse of the Preservation of the Sight*, trans. Richard Surfleet (London, 1599), K2v–K3r.

<sup>176</sup> Nicaise Le Fevre, *A Discourse upon Sr Walter Rawleigh’s Great Cordial* (London, 1664), C8v.

towards the commonly understood affective properties of colours, registered in the conventional identification of dark colours as ‘sad’; this adjective was commonly invoked in descriptions of the visual pleasures of embroidery as ‘light’ or ‘lively’ work on a ‘sad ground’.<sup>177</sup> Looking upon bindings wrought with lively borage flowers suggests that needlework’s ability to alleviate melancholy may have extended beyond the practice of sewing, discussed in the previous chapter, to its product, creating colourful flowers whose comforts could complement or counterbalance the effects of the bound text.

The fabric of these covers may have enhanced the therapeutic valences of these books. Cloth and sewing were essential to the preparation and application of botanical medicines. Floral waters were strained through linen before being applied to the body in myriad material objects, including pomanders, sweet bags, gloves, smocks, handkerchiefs and coifs.<sup>178</sup> Especially with regards to objects like coifs, worn next to or applied to the skin, the cloth itself could be medicinal, protecting the body from environmental disturbances and regulating its humours.<sup>179</sup> Some herbal powders were placed in bags which were quilted to ensure the preparation was evenly dispersed, a process which could elide distinctions between functional and fancy stitches. One recipe directs readers to ‘quilt it [the clout] in manner of a course imbroderie’; another receipt provides a pattern for a bag, wrought with a striped design.<sup>180</sup> Many items bear botanical designs similar to those wrought on embroidered bindings (see, for example, Figures 38, 39 and 40). This botanical stitchery might seem to be the source of the scent: wrought flowers were praised for being so lifelike as to make viewers think they could smell them.<sup>181</sup> Like candied flowers, these medicinal cloths press at distinctions between art

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<sup>177</sup> See, for example, John Ward, *The Good-Will of Him that Dwelt in the Bush* (London, 1645), C1r; Francis Bacon, *The Essays or Counsels, Civil and Moral*, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 12.

<sup>178</sup> On early modern perfume, see Holly Dugan, *The Ephemeral History of Perfume: Scent and Sense in Early Modern England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).

<sup>179</sup> On handkerchiefs as bodily prostheses ‘involved in regulating the body and keeping it “pure”’, see Fisher, *Materializing Gender*, 36–58.

<sup>180</sup> Gervase Markham, *The English House-wife* (London, 1631), B8r; Katherine Packer, ‘A boocke of very good medicines for seuerall diseases, wounds, and sores both new and olde’, 1639, Folger MS V.a.387, verso of fold-out after p. 63.

<sup>181</sup> See Christopher Marlowe, *Hero and Leander*, in *The Collected Poems of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Patrick Cheney and Brian Striar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1.19–22.

and nature, and highlight how needle- as well as kitchen-work is involved in preserving, extracting and applying floral physic.

Pomanders and sweet bags could have a still closer relationship with embroidered books, particularly if the latter had themselves been perfumed, as some precious books were.<sup>182</sup> A number of embroidered books survive alongside bags embroidered or woven with floral designs, in which they are designed to be carried, tied to the girdle; these bags bear a strong resemblance to contemporary sweet bags (see, for example, Figure 41).<sup>183</sup> At least two different devotional texts explicitly registered conceptual and practical correspondences with pomanders, identifying themselves as *The Pomander of Prayer*.<sup>184</sup> Leah Knight suggests that these titles may have directed readers to use the book like a pomander, ‘carr[ying it] about ... on the person, as well as rais[ing it] toward the face (as one does, when reading) in order [for it] to be inhaled in the same way as were the pomander’s healthful vapours when such defenses were required’. Knight comments that these books’ titles may have been prompted by material consonances between books and pomanders, both of which were ‘hinged and clasped containers’.<sup>185</sup>

Miniature embroidered books and pomanders were even more alike, having similar dimensions and being embroidered with comparable patterns. At least one copy of Thomas Becon’s *The Pomander of Prayer* survives in an embroidered binding. Bound with *The Treasure of Gladness* (1563), this 1563 imprint was given to Mary Baynard by her uncle Benjamin Baynard in 1627. The red velvet covers are wrought with Mary’s initials, knotwork and assorted flowers (Figure 42); intriguingly, Becon’s text is missing its title-page, suggesting that the material prompt provided by these covers replaced and

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<sup>182</sup> In 1578 Elizabeth I received a New Testament bound in red velvet from the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge, who had been warned to ensure that it had ‘no savor of spyke [lavendar] which Coeunty book bynders do seke to add to make ther books savor swet’, Elizabeth Goldring et al., eds., *John Nichols’s The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth I: A New Edition of the Early Modern Sources*, vol. 2, 1572–1578 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 568.

<sup>183</sup> See also BL C.17.a.21.; Liverpool University Library, Liverpool, SPEC H85.7; Peter Hewitt, ‘The Material Culture of Shakespeare’s England: A Study of the Early Modern Objects in the Museum Collection of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust’ (PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 2014), 215–20.

<sup>184</sup> Thomas Becon, *The Po[m]ander of Prayer* ([London], 1558); *The Pomander of Prayer* (London, 1528).

<sup>185</sup> Knight, *Reading Green*, 46.



extended the functions of the book's frontispiece, and perhaps provided a preservative covering to a text that was already over sixty years old.

Texts like Becon's played into the enmeshment of medicinal and scriptural application. As discussed in the previous chapter, this was a process by which Christians 'framed' their emotional and spiritual selves to the subject matter, not just reading, but practising and feeling the Word, making it 'wholy our owne'.<sup>186</sup> Christians were exhorted to reread passages, meditating continually upon them until they became so intimately familiar with the words that they entered their hearts and became part of them.<sup>187</sup> Several religious writers used bio-medicinal analogies and metaphors to explain the process.<sup>188</sup> For example, the title-page of Protestant minister Christopher Jelinger's *The Excellency of Christ* (1641) presents itself as '*The rose of Sharon: shewing the art of taking Christ as the onely soveraign medicine of a sin-sick soue*' and demonstrating how believers '*must be fitted to apply Christ unto themselves*'.<sup>189</sup> Intersecting with contemporaneous texts such as biblical herbals, which discussed the virtues of flowers mentioned in the scriptures, Jelinger's text is based on Canticles 2:1, 'I am the Rose of Sharon', and offers a series of analogies between the virtues of botanical roses and of Christ.<sup>190</sup> In a section entitled 'For application', Jelinger observes:

as Roses and flowers are good for the head, for the braine, for the heart, and for many things: so is the Rose-like Doctrine or flower which this next affords good and usefull

1. For the understanding of man to informe it.
2. For the conscience to satisfie and to convince it.
3. For the affection or heart to moove it.
4. For the will to incline it.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Downname, *A Guide to Godlynesse*, Iii6r.

<sup>187</sup> See Narveson, *Bible Readers*, 81–84.

<sup>188</sup> See also Daniel Featley, *Threñoikos* (London, 1660), Sss4r; William Slatyer, *The Compleat Christian* ([London], 1643), Bbb3r; Francis Taylor, *Selfe-Satisfaction* (London, 1633), H2v–H3r.

<sup>189</sup> Christopher Jelinger, *The Excellency of Christ* (London, 1641), t.p.

<sup>190</sup> On biblical herbals, see Knight, *Of Books and Botany*, 42.

<sup>191</sup> Jelinger, *The Excellency of Christ*, B7r.

Jelinger's concentration on the head and the heart underscores the parallels between the applications of Christian doctrine and the Rose. Observing that 'you must ... apply or take him inwardly, as men take Roses conserved or distilled into their bodies', Jelinger likens the incorporation of Christian doctrine to the ingestion of medicinal remedies.<sup>192</sup>

Other medicines which penetrated the body by respiration or through the skin were similarly appreciated as a means of understanding the internalisation of scripture. William Nicholson, Bishop of Gloucester, for example, insists that faith is 'an affective, not a speculative knowledge', declaring:

For as the knowledge of some excellent dose or drugg will not help a disease till it be applyed; or a perfume wrapt up in a Pomander sends forth no sweet savour till it be chafed: So neither will this nor any other Article of our faith cure the diseases of our souls, or sweeten our lives, so long as they swimme only in the braine, and are looked upon for content, and not for use.<sup>193</sup>

Instead, Nicholson commands readers: 'Into the heart then by a sad and serious meditation let them sink'.<sup>194</sup> Nicholson's fluid conception of these articles of faith and their embodied effects, swimming in the brain and sinking into the heart, moves beyond the language of comparison and elides the literal and the figurative. These distinctions could be blurred further, as Leah Knight has highlighted, by the 'conventional association between spiritual words and sweet botanical scents', considered therapeutic for both body and soul. Knight notes that this association informed botanical titles which stressed the 'olfactory fitness' of their textual posies and could become particularly substantial when the words were vocalised: lyric poems were understood as 'artificial ayre[s]' that could be aspirated by oration.<sup>195</sup> Particularly for those who vocalized the psalms contained in embroidered books, the flowers of scripture might enter into and transform the body.

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid., Q8v.

<sup>193</sup> William Nicholson, *Ektthesis Pisteōs* (London, 1661), M3r.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Knight, *Reading Green*, 51–60, esp. 51–53.

Florally embroidered books, borne on the body in quasi-medicinal bags, further conflate the physical and spiritual incorporation of text as they insist upon the need to use and not just comprehend the text. Razzall suggests that ‘the carrying or wearing of books could be employed as a gesture of emphatically reformed piety, implying intellectual and spiritual intimacy with scripture through physical intimacy’.<sup>196</sup> More than this, a book bag could enable such intimacy; keeping the book close at hand and in view, the arrangement prompts frequent recourse to the physical text and stirs the reader-wearer’s memories of it, allowing scripture to permeate daily life.

As Helen Smith notes, books borne on the body also had a prosthetic quality, at once detachable and constitutive of the subject. Miniature texts, in particular, create ‘a fable of interiority, of meaning encapsulated within physical bounds’ which ‘reproduces and reinforces the boundedness of the human body’.<sup>197</sup> Embroidered bindings could foreground affinities between the bounded bodies of readers and books: the materials which clothed the text could bear a striking resemblance to those which covered the reader’s body, as is highlighted by a portrait of Lady Hunsdon, painted around 1620. Hunsdon holds a miniature book bound in ivory satin, embroidered with a framed floral design and strung with carnation ties; it is echoed in her ivory gown which is laced with similarly coloured ribbons and which frames a partlet (covering her chest) and sleeves, both embroidered with flora.<sup>198</sup> Such coordinated materials are visually suggestive of the ways in which, as Leah Knight highlights of Thomas Becon’s *A Pleasaunt Newe Nosegay*, religio-botanical books were not only carried in readers’ bosoms but ‘printed and fast rooted in theyr hertes’.<sup>199</sup>

As this section has revealed, floral bookbindings opened up the book to an extensive spectrum of botanical contexts. Prompting and supporting a fluid interchange between the comforting flowers of scripture, the wonders of the Book of Nature and the herbal cordials of kitchen physic, they positioned reading in an holistic relationship with an interlocking range of botanical and spiritual practices. Practically and

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<sup>196</sup> Razzall, ‘Containers and Containment’, 129. See also Smith, *Grossly Material Things*, 215.

<sup>197</sup> Smith, ‘*Grossly Material Things*’, 215–16.

<sup>198</sup> ‘Lady Hunsdon’, English School, c. 1620, reproduced in Susan North and Jenny Tiramani, *Seventeenth Century Women’s Dress Patterns: Book One* (London: V&A Publishing, 2011).

<sup>199</sup> Thomas Becon, *A Pleasaunt Newe Nosegay* (London, 1542), B3r, cited in Knight, *Reading Green*, 46.

conceptually, books were handled as components within an extensive botanical network, which was rich in spiritual meaning and which produced an interconnected range of embodied effects.

## Conclusion

I want to conclude this chapter by turning from the botanical contexts of embroidered books to their material contexts. Portraits like that of Lady Hunsdon are indicative of how embroidered books were handled alongside other fabric objects. Leaning against a plush green chair and framed by drapery, the finely-dressed Hunsdon holds her book in one hand and a pair of gloves in the other. A contemporaneous portrait similarly depicts Lady Anne Lawley attired in an elaborately embroidered gown, her hand resting on an embroidered book beside a pair of embroidered gloves. As in Hunsdon's portrait, a tablecloth and drapery point to a still more extensive material environment.<sup>200</sup> These portraits evoke extant assemblages of stitched objects. The book bags discussed above constitute just one variety of the material objects which were commonly assembled with embroidered books. The embroidered book and bag set shown in Figure 41 is also accompanied by a pair of gloves bearing floral embroidery.<sup>201</sup> Another embroidered book, containing German devotional texts, is accompanied by a pair of gloves and a pincushion wrought in matching purple silk and embroidered with floral designs.<sup>202</sup> Such gatherings are richly suggestive of the kinds of collections which might be produced in milliners' shops, where (as the milliners' petition cited at the beginning of this chapter highlighted) embroidered books were sold alongside other accessories of dress.

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<sup>200</sup> John Souch (c. 1593–1645), 'Portrait of Lady Lawley', in Christie's, London, 'British Pictures 1500–1850' (26 November 2002), lot 6 [online auction catalogue], accessed January 28, 2017, <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/lot/attributed-to-john-souch-portrait-of-lady-4020446-details.aspx?from=searchresults&intObjectID=4020446&sid=0dca502a-8089-4d95-ba89-6f580d28940c>.

<sup>201</sup> BL C.194.c.27.

<sup>202</sup> 'Embroidered book, gloves and pincushion', c. 1629–30, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich, Inventory Number: 62/21.1–3; Birgitt Borkopp-Restle, *Mit grossen Freuden, Triumph und Köstlichkeit: Textile Schätze aus Renaissance und Barock aus den Sammlungen des Bayerischen Nationalmuseums* (München: Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, 2002), 148–50.

We might dismiss these artefacts as indicative of owners who were more interested in ‘appearing well-dressed’ than in their books’ contents.<sup>203</sup> As we have already seen in relation to book-bags, however, these materials reflected and shaped understandings and uses of the texts with which they were used. Other items might also intervene in acts of reading and book use. Gloves invite us to consider how the hand’s role in getting to grips with texts might be extended or perhaps obstructed by these manual prostheses. We might equally remember that pins were not just used in dressing but constituted tools of textual engagement, used to mark significant passages and affix further sheets of paper to the page. Being well-dressed and well-read could be complementary rather than mutually exclusive.

These materials invite us to extend and modify Bruce Smith’s influential theory of ambient reading. Countering the tendency of book historians to see the reader as ‘totally absorbed by the printed text he holds in his hands’, Smith proposes that early moderns regarded the fabric furnishings that surrounded them as continuous with the verbal content of their books and allowed the cloth—often of a green shade—to colour their perceptions of texts. Indicating that ‘images in the room informed texts in hand’, Smith draws upon traditions of *ut pictura poesis* and ekphrastic poetry to argue that readers experienced ‘a constant—and constantly varying—interplay between the verbal and the visual’. Smith highlights the role that fabric book covers might play in shaping such practices, briefly postulating that cloth bindings may have eased the transition between books and the hangings which swathed reading environments.<sup>204</sup>

Smith frames the materials which surrounded readers as ‘distract[ions]’, however welcome or informative.<sup>205</sup> The assemblages highlighted here, however, suggest that readers thought about their books more consciously and more directly in relation to a contexture of materials. Fabric covers bind a text not just to other texts but to other textiles. As we have seen, this could embed reading within an holistic range of pious, medicinal, botanical and creative practices, and prompt ways of engaging with texts which incorporated not just hermeneutic approaches but embodied and affective

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<sup>203</sup> Foot, *The History Bookbinding as a Mirror of Society*, 62. Compare Walsham, ‘Jewels for Gentlewomen’, 134.

<sup>204</sup> Smith, *The Key of Green*, 127–28, 152.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

responses and effects. These intertextile connections also demand that we expand our understanding of what constituted “reading materials” for early moderns. As we shall see in relation to the stitched ‘stories’ discussed in the next chapter, the textiles which enveloped early modern bodies and spaces provided richly complex grounds for reading. Not just the images but the materials themselves were appreciated as sites for interpretation, pleasurable diversion and aesthetic appreciation, as well as generating material and mechanical structures which underpinned how textual narratives were constructed, perceived and understood. For early moderns, reading was something practised not just within but upon and beyond their books.

## Chapter Four: Embroidered Narratives in Textiles and Texts

In William Cartwright's comedy, *The Ordinary* (1635), the disguised gentleman, Meanwell, is welcomed to his sweetheart's house by her maid, Priscilla. Departing to find her mistress, Priscilla directs Meanwell to 'entertain your selfe a while', remarking:

I'd leave a book with you, but that *I* see  
 You are a Gentleman: perhaps you'l find  
 Some pretty stories in the hangings there.<sup>1</sup>

Priscilla's comment might be read as a joke about gallants' trivial concerns, but it also suggests that cloth furnishings possess as much narrative potential as books. Highlighting the hangings' 'pretty stories', Priscilla employs a generic term that writers and readers used to identify tales which were not only 'fine, pleasing, commendable' but 'proper, appropriate, or polite'.<sup>2</sup> 'Pretty' also describes something 'cleverly or elegantly made' and suggests that textual and textile readers appreciated a story's skilful contrivance.<sup>3</sup> For modern audiences, Priscilla's suggestion that books and wall hangings are literary equivalents is striking. Early modern audiences, however, would have been intimately familiar with the idea that story was as much a textile as a textual concern. In the previous chapter, I briefly noted the narrative content of embroidered book covers. In this chapter I reveal that 'stories' and 'histories'—terms often used interchangeably in this period—were stitched across a wide variety of objects. References to wrought narratives pervade early modern writing, and shaped how textual narratives were composed, understood and received.

Although recent studies of embroidery have often registered its narrative functions, they have tended to take the characteristics of narrative for granted; there has been little conceptual engagement with the particularities of genre, and minimal

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<sup>1</sup> William Cartwright, *The Ordinary* (London, 1651), C7r–v.

<sup>2</sup> 'pretty, adj., n., and int.', *OED Online*, December 2016, def. 3b.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, def. 1b.

reflection on how or what types of narrative are generated within textile media.<sup>4</sup> As noted in the previous chapter, Alexandra Walsham indicates that the religious embroideries wrought on bible covers would have been interpreted as ‘narrative pictures’ rather than ‘static icons’. Walsham’s comment suggestively counterpoints narrative’s implied movement with iconic stasis, but she does not elaborate on how this dynamism is achieved.<sup>5</sup> Rebecca Olson’s monograph, *Arras Hanging: The Textile that Determined Early Modern Literature and Drama*, lays the foundations for a more considered reflection of textile narratology and its relationship to textual storytelling. Focusing on fictional depictions of arras—expensive, woven hangings—Olson argues that tapestries supplied a long-established and ‘aesthetically pleasing narrative model that was complex, multidimensional, and nonlinear’ and which writers such as Spenser and Shakespeare used as patterns for their work.<sup>6</sup>

The scarcity of theoretical work on stitched narratives is symptomatic of a wider neglect of early modern narratology. Whilst the recent return to formalism in early modern studies has prompted new work in this field, narratology remains understudied.<sup>7</sup> Even in literary monographs whose titles announce a focus on early modern narrative, its generic characteristics and structures often remain largely untheorized. Questions of narrative intersect with the concerns of historians, who, in recent years, have examined the relationship between ‘story’ and ‘history’ in the early modern period. Studies have focused predominantly on the extent to which early moderns demarcated historical

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<sup>4</sup> See for example Frye, *Pens and Needles*, chapter 3; Geuter, ‘Embroidered Biblical Narratives’, 57–77; Molekamp, *Women and the Bible*, 45.

<sup>5</sup> Walsham, ‘Jewels for Gentlewomen’, 140.

<sup>6</sup> Olson, *Arras Hanging*, 2.

<sup>7</sup> For some notable exceptions, in addition to those discussed below, see Alastair Fowler, *Renaissance Realism: Narrative Images in Literature and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Howard Marchitello, *Narrative and Meaning in Early Modern England: Browne’s Skull and other Histories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Steve Mentz, *Romance for Sale in Early Modern England: The Rise of Prose Fiction* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006); Rahel Orgis, *Narrative Structure and Reader Formation in Lady Mary Wroth’s Urania* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017); David Houston Wood, *Time, Narrative, and Emotion in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).



“fact” from poetic fiction.<sup>8</sup> Yet, as Blair Worden observes, the impetus to mark this separation at least partially reflects modern disciplinary distinctions between historical and literary studies; ‘story’ and ‘history’ continued to be interchangeable during the seventeenth century.<sup>9</sup> Daniel Woolf’s work on early modern histories (in their narrower modern sense) offers some reflections on generic characteristics; he notes that the period increasingly turned away from chronicle accounts towards narrative histories in which ‘unified authorial voices’ related a past which was conceived of as a ‘continuous process’ of connected events.<sup>10</sup> As F. J. Levy observes, though, Woolf’s work is predominantly concerned ‘with the climate of historical thought rather more than with historical writing’.<sup>11</sup>

Levy makes a compelling call for scholars to fill this interdisciplinary lacuna, arguing that ‘[a]n analysis of narrative structures ... would help enormously in understanding the changing intentions of the authors of histories’ and emphasising that ‘history writing was considered a subset of rhetoric’.<sup>12</sup> Levi’s attention to rhetoric here is illuminating. Much work has been done on early modern rhetoric and, as Katrin Ettenhuber notes, the most fruitful ‘has moved toward a mode of analysis that is at once more contextually embedded and discursively specific ... in recognizing how particular elements of the rhetorical system may acquire significance in a particular genre or mode’.<sup>13</sup> Few scholars, however, have examined rhetoric in relation to

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, William Nelson, *Fact or Fiction: The Dilemma of the Renaissance Storyteller* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 11–55; Daniel Woolf, *The Idea of History in Early Stuart England: Erudition, Ideology, and “The light of truth” from the Accession of James I to the Civil War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 15–17.

<sup>9</sup> Blair Worden, ‘Historians and Poets’, in *The Uses of History in Early Modern England*, ed. Paula Kewes (San Marino, California: Huntington Library, 2006), 72–73.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Woolf, ‘From Hystories to the Historical: Five Transitions in Thinking about the Past, 1500–1700’, in Kewes, *The Uses of History*, 41–47.

<sup>11</sup> F. J. Levy, ‘Afterword’, in Kewes, *The Uses of History*, 418.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Katrin Ettenhuber, ‘How to Do Things with Rhetoric’, in *Oxford Handbooks Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), accessed January 30, 2017, doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935338.013.13. For important work on rhetoric see Brian Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Peter Mack, *Elizabethan Rhetoric: Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Jennifer Richards, *Rhetoric and Courtliness in Early Modern Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University

questions of narrative and plot structure; Patricia Parker's work, discussed further below, is an illuminating exception.

I seek both to illustrate early modern embroidery's narratological riches and to go some way towards responding to Levy's call, examining how different narrative structures were created in needlework, with particular attention to their connection to rhetoric. Understanding these textile modes can inform our understanding of early modern narrative techniques and trends more generally. Writers were alert to fabric's participation in literary taste, genre and form, as Priscilla's 'pretty stories' highlight. Other texts similarly suggest that early moderns considered embroidery as contributing to literary fashions, and regarded it with a keen eye for generic features and how they were constructed. John Taylor, for example, observes that needlework contains 'True Historie, or various pleasant fiction/ In sundry colours mixt, with Arts comixion'.<sup>14</sup> Both 'true history and 'pleasant fiction' were popular generic terms, often applied to texts, which highlight that needlework engaged with questions about the distinction between factual and imaginative works. At the same time, Taylor's reference to 'Arts comixion' suggests that textile narratives, like textual ones, often blurred these distinctions; signifying '[t]he mixing, intermarrying, or interbreeding of one group or population with another', this comixion indicates needlework's blending of generic categories.<sup>15</sup>

Taylor's attention to embroidery's 'sundry colours mixt' also provides a clue as to how to approach analysing needlework's narrative structures, echoing the fiction's 'various[ness]' and evoking commonplace references to embroidery's 'diverse', 'sundry' and 'various' colours. As Susan Frye has highlighted and as will be discussed further below, textile colours possessed affective content and had well-established connections with rhetorical colours.<sup>16</sup> Alongside the predominantly abstract, floral and geometrical designs contained in the body of his pattern book, Taylor's consideration of colours

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Press, 2003); Sylvia Adamson, Gavin Alexander, and Katrin Ettenhuber, eds., *Renaissance Figures of Speech* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> Taylor, *The Needles Excellency*, A3v.

<sup>15</sup> 'commixtion, n.', *OED Online*, December 2016, def. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 205–18.

encourages us to shift our attention from pictorial content to the rhetorical materials and structures of needlework itself.

This chapter resists an approach which straightforwardly applies existing pictorial narrative theories to textiles, attending to the visual syntax and semiotics created in a sewn image.<sup>17</sup> Relying upon established modes of art criticism risks neglecting how the material particularities of textiles produced meaning. In her study of literary representations of tapestries, Olson observes that ‘when we treat [them] ... as “pictures,” we overlook ... the fact that these textiles were large-scale, two-sided objects with which people physically interacted’.<sup>18</sup> Although Olson, in turn, risks overlooking the interactive, three-dimensionality of pictorial forms such as paintings, she rightly notes that scholars often attend to images in textiles at the expense of material form.

This chapter begins by highlighting the range of objects which were stitched with stories, from hangings to cabinets to gloves. Physically and cognitively multi-faceted, these three-dimensional artefacts ask us to consider their stories in the round, thinking about the narrative spaces they constructed within and outwith them, and attending to the dynamic forms of interactive storytelling they prompted. Next, I examine how stitched threads created varieties of narrative temporality. Exploring the connection between rhetoric and embroidery, I reveal how needlework generates techniques of *copia*, verisimilitude, listing and epitome to produce and manage dilatory structures. In a case study of Elizabeth Powlet’s embroidery of Christ’s life-story (introduced in chapter two), I draw out the connections between threads, colour, spatiality and coherence in both Powlet’s work and contemporary textual metaphors. Throughout this chapter I remain attentive to how processes of making, as well as made objects, produced opportunities for storytelling.

It is worth pausing to discuss briefly distinctions between tapestry, arras and needlework. Whereas embroidery is a form of sewing and embellishment, both tapestry

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<sup>17</sup> On pictorial narrative, see Wendy Steiner, ‘Pictorial Narrativity’, in *Narrative Across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*, ed. Marie-Laure Ryan (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 145–77; Werner Wolf, ‘Narrative and Narrativity: A Narratological Reconceptualization and its Applicability to the Visual Arts’, *Word and Image* 19, no. 3 (2003): 180–97.

<sup>18</sup> Olson, *Arras Hanging*, 13.

and arras are woven; the latter was particularly expensive, technically produced in the town from which it took its name, although the moniker was increasingly applied to high-quality hangings made elsewhere. Noting these distinctions, Olson alleges that ‘early modern people ... would not ... confuse tapestries with embroidery, as many modern readers do’.<sup>19</sup> The case, however, is not necessarily so clear-cut. Early modern writers repeatedly refer to tapestries and arras wrought with needles. For example, Thomas Fuller invokes a well-worn pun on wrought/wrote in his meditation on ‘a piece of *Arras*’ which shows ‘an History not wrot with a *pen*, but wrought with a *needle*’.<sup>20</sup> Jean Gailhard describes a room in the Duke of Modena’s Palace as ‘*full of Figures in Tapistry, all excellent Needlework*’.<sup>21</sup> Bringing drawing as well as sewing to bear, Richard Bellings’s *A Sixth Booke to the Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia* (1624) describes a piece of ‘farr-fetcht Arras, in which the ingenious workeman, with the curious pensill of his little Needle, had limm’d the dumme records of reviv’d Antiquitie’.<sup>22</sup> John Bulwer describes a deaf-mute girl who ‘work[s] with her needle all kinde of Sempstry, Tapestry, Embroderie’.<sup>23</sup>

Olson herself puzzles over a passage from John Lyly’s *Gallathea* (1592) in which Cupid is instructed: ‘All the stories that are in Dianaes Arras, which are of loue, you must picke out with your needle, & in that place sowe Vesta with her Nuns, and Diana with her Nimphes’.<sup>24</sup> Observing that unpicking tapestry proper would be difficult, Olson questions whether this arras might be sewn rather than woven, as well as noting that tapestries could be ‘embellished’ with embroidery.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps these authors could not or did not differentiate between woven and stitched work; popular techniques such as tent stitch sought to obfuscate the difference, mimicking weaving. Alternatively, perhaps these writers and their readers understood arras and tapestry more broadly than

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<sup>19</sup> Olson, *Arras Hanging*, 23–25, esp. 25.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Fuller, *Mixt Contemplations* (London, 1660), E2v.

<sup>21</sup> Jean Gailhard, *The Compleat Gentleman* ([London], 1678), A7r.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Bellings, *A Sixth Booke to the Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia* (Dublin, 1624), B2v.

<sup>23</sup> John Bulwer, *Philocophus* (London, 1648), I3r–v.

<sup>24</sup> John Lyly, *Gallathea* (London, 1592), F2r.

<sup>25</sup> Olson, *Arras Hanging*, 150.

their narrow technical definitions, applying them to sewn as well as woven textiles, particularly those employed as wall hangings.<sup>26</sup>

## Storified objects

In his epic poem  *Davideis*  (1656), Abraham Cowley appends a footnote to his description of the wall hangings adorning Saul's Palace. He explains: 'The custom of having Stories wrought in  *Hangings, Coverlits,*  nay even wearing garments, is made to be very ancient by the Poets'.<sup>27</sup> In this section, I bring together material, archival and literary evidence to illustrate that Cowley's contemporaries were familiar with a pervasive array of "storified" textiles, both as literary tropes and as material objects. Like Cowley, I begin with stories wrought in wall hangings, before progressing to smaller household objects and, finally, clothing.

Needlework hangings feature plentifully in early modern literature, portraying a variety of subjects. Mary Wroth's  *Urania* , for example, describes a room in Dalinea's household 'with hangings of Needle-worke, all in Silke and Gold, the Story being of Paris his Love, and rape of Helen'.<sup>28</sup> In Richard Johnson's Arthurian romance,  *Tom a Lincoln*  (1631), the hero's mother, Angelica, takes an autobiographical approach and spends two years working the story of her courtship, marriage and the birth of her son 'with a Néedle ... in silke vpon the Hangings of her Chamber ... as an Arras worke'.<sup>29</sup> Richard Kittowe's prose romance,  *Loues Load-Starre*  (1600), features a fulsome description of hangings where 'Art with néedle-worke portraied the Histories of the

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<sup>26</sup> See Nicholas Mander's reflections on the use of 'tapestry' and 'tapit' to describe painted, woven and embroidered materials, particularly wall hangings, 'Painted Cloths: History, Craftsmen and Techniques',  *Textile History*  28, no. 2 (1997): 129.

<sup>27</sup> Abraham Cowley,  *Poems*  (London, 1656), Iiii2r.

<sup>28</sup> Mary Wroth,  *The First Part of The Countess of Montgomery's Urania* , ed. Josephine A. Roberts (Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 2005), 124.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Johnson,  *Tom a Lincoln*  (London, 1631), I3v–I4r.

Gods', including Diana and Acteon, Echo and Narcissus, and Pluto and Proserpina, as well as 'an infinit number of amorous counterfeits of loue-sicke men'.<sup>30</sup>

Such cloths were not only significant plot devices, used to set the scene and comment upon events and characters; they also responded to the ubiquity, abundance and variety of narrative hangings in the material environment. When John Taylor visited Wilton House, home to the Earl of Pembroke, he was struck by 'The Hangings there, with Histories replete/ Diuine, profane, and Morrall pleasures giuing'; his pun on 'pleat' compounds narrative plenitude and material fullness.<sup>31</sup> An inventory of Kenilworth Castle taken after the Earl of Leicester's death in 1588 contains a section dedicated to hangings which gives a detailed account of the stories wrought therein. The plethora of biblical, mythical and historical subjects include: 'Ffower peeces of the historie of Sawle', 'Six peeces of the historie of Hercules', 'Seaven peeces of the storie of Jezabell', 'Eight peeces of the historie of Judith and Holofernes', 'Fyve peeces of the storie of David', 'Six peeces of the storie of Abraham', 'Fyve peeces of the storie of Sampson', 'Nyne fayre peeces of the storie of Hercules', 'Six peeces of the storie Hippolitus [*sic*]', 'Eight peeces of the storie of Alexander the Great', 'Six peeces of the storie of Naaman the Assyrian' and 'Eight peeces of the storie of Jacob'.<sup>32</sup>

As well as these named examples, the inventory itemizes two sets of hangings recorded as eight and twelve 'peeces of historie'.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps the person taking the inventory could identify the genre but not the subject, suggesting that people knew how to read a hanging for story, even if its particular subject was unfamiliar. Or perhaps these hangings' stories were too various, compiling too many subjects to record individually. Alternatively, perhaps the genre was deemed more important than the subject. In any case, these entries indicate that textiles foregrounded and privileged narrative as a genre, and invite us to consider 'story' as an overarching category, abstracted from the particularities of individual plots.

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<sup>30</sup> Richard Kittowe, *Loues Load-Starre* (London, 1600), F4v–G1r.

<sup>31</sup> John Taylor, *A New Discouery by Sea* (London, 1623), C2r.

<sup>32</sup> Halliwell-Phillipps, *Ancient Inventories*, 142–46.

<sup>33</sup> Halliwell-Phillipps, *Ancient Inventories*, 143.

The 1601 inventory of Hardwick's New Hall indicates that generic descriptions of narrative hangings were not unique to Kenilworth: the Little Chamber within the Best Bed Chamber contained 'fyve peeces of hanginges of grene velvet and Cloth of golde and silver set with trees and slips and Ciphers with long borders of stories in nedlework and borders about all those hangings of Cloth of tyssue silver and grene silk'.<sup>34</sup> Occupying the borders rather than central ground of these hangings, these wrought stories recall the arrangement of the Tobit table carpet, discussed in chapter one, which portrays episodes from Tobit's life along its long edges, filling the central field with the arms of Talbot impaling Hardwick and various flora and fauna. Although the different uses of these materials would have prompted different modes of interaction, they invite us to think about the relationship between story and compositional space, and to explore the relationship between narrative and other needlework designs, both of which are discussed further below.

The Hardwick inventory also indicates that early modern viewers noted distinctions between pictures and narratives. Modern scholars tend to view both the 'Noble Women of the Ancient World' hangings and the 'Virtues and Vices' hangings (discussed in chapter one) in narrative terms, perhaps because they feature figures from well-known stories including Lucretia, Cleopatra, Zenobia, Penelope and Sardanapalus.<sup>35</sup> Noting that the 'Noble Women' series depicts isolated figures, Gillian White observes that 'there is no attempt to depict a continuous narrative'; ultimately though, White reverts to a narrative hermeneutics, conjecturing that viewers were expected to use 'existing knowledge ... to complete the narratives for themselves'.<sup>36</sup> The inventory, however, identifies both sets of hangings as 'pictures', in contrast to other narrative hangings, such as the tapestries 'of the storie of Abraham'; these tapestries portray several different episodes from Abraham's life and are set within elaborately

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<sup>34</sup> Levey and Thornton, *Of Household Stuff*, 46.

<sup>35</sup> Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 50; Olson, *Arras Hanging*, 150.

<sup>36</sup> Gillian White, "'that whyche ys nedefouille and nesenary": The Nature and Purpose of the Original Furnishings and Decoration of Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire' (PhD thesis: University of Warwick, 2005), 207.

developed landscapes, recalling the ‘processe’ of a story and suggesting the importance of temporality and space to narrative.<sup>37</sup>

Whereas the Kenilworth inventory details hangings in a separate section, the narrative textiles at Hardwick are recorded *in situ*. This invites us to consider the interaction between different narrative objects in space, while remaining mindful of the ‘fictions’ of stability and completeness that inventories can create.<sup>38</sup> The Gallery in Hardwick’s New Hall provides a germane example. Hung round with ‘deep Tapestrie hanginges of the storie of Gedion’, the room contained ‘nyntene long quitions’, all but one of which were ‘for the windowes’. These include: a ‘quition of nedlework of the storie of Acteon and Diana’; a ‘quition of petepoynt wrought with silk of the storie of Atalanta’; a ‘quition of nedlework, silke & Cruell of the storie of the sacryfice of Isack’; and a ‘quition of nedleworke, silke & Cruell of the storie of the Judgment of Saloman betwene the too women for the Childe’.<sup>39</sup> These two biblical needleworks, both extant, are wrought with matching borders, creating threads of continuity between the cushions (echoed in the inventory’s repeated taxonomy) and prompting viewers to read their stories in dialogue.<sup>40</sup>

In his theory of ‘ambient reading’, discussed briefly in my previous chapter, Bruce Smith emphasises the need to think about the interplay between wrought stories and less explicitly narrative objects. Smith considers Hardwick Hall’s adoption of the common practice of layering portraits and mirrors on top of hangings, arguing that these objects and the contemporary personages they portrayed became ‘physically’ and

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<sup>37</sup> Levey and Thornton, *Of Household Stuff*, 47, 45. The four Abraham hangings remain at Hardwick, NT 1129441.1–4.

<sup>38</sup> Lena Cowen Orlin, ‘Fictions of the Early Modern English Probate Inventory’, in *The Culture of Capital: Property, Cities, and Knowledge in Early Modern England*, ed. Henry S. Turner (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), 51–83; Giorgio Riello, ‘Things Seen and Unseen: The Material Culture of Early Modern Inventories and Their Representation of Domestic Interiors’, in *Early Modern Things: Objects and their Histories, 1500–1800*, ed. Paula Findlen (Basingstoke: Routledge, 2013), 125–50. See also Antony Buxton on studying ‘objects in association’, *Domestic Culture in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2015), 208.

<sup>39</sup> Levey and Thornton, *Of Household Stuff*, 48–49.

<sup>40</sup> Levey, *Embroideries at Hardwick Hall*, 312–15; ‘Sacrifice of Isaac’, Hardwick NT 1129589; ‘Judgement of Solomon’, Hardwick NT 1129590.



'*thematically* insinuated' into the narratives of the hangings upon which they were placed, creating an interplay between historical and contemporary stories.<sup>41</sup> Agnès Lafont similarly takes an environmentally holistic approach to the presentation of the myth of Diana at Hardwick. Lafont argues that Diana's mythology is writ large across the household not only through explicit representations of her story (such as the needlework cushion displayed in the Gallery and the plaster frieze in the High Great Chamber) but through the Hardwick/Cavendish stags which are '[o]mnipresent in the decoration' of the household, and which 'seem to surround the Goddess of the Hunt'. Echoing the Diana cult surrounding Elizabeth I, Shrewsbury sought to 'conflate the tribute paid to the virgin sovereign with the glorification of the builder of the house'.<sup>42</sup>

Lafont's approach suggests how seemingly non-narrative materials could be co-opted into telling a story and invites consideration of the relationship between the Diana cushion and other long cushions in the gallery. Several are wrought with flora ('a pear tree and slips') and two feature popular images of hunting ('the fancie of a fowler' and the 'hunting the hare'); these seem to extend the scenery and action of the Diana myth. Another cushion 'of the platt of Chatesworth house' provides a prompt to plot the Diana story in relation to Shrewsbury's households.<sup>43</sup> Spatial and literary plots (and the orthographic variant 'platts') were conceptually allied during this period, perhaps making viewers alert to this cushion's narrative potential.<sup>44</sup> The position of the cushions would also have encouraged viewers to inflect these wrought stories with the plot of Hardwick; placed in the gallery's windows, which afforded panoramic views of the grounds and perhaps the residents hunting, the cushions were ideally situated to plot connections with the space of the estate.

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<sup>41</sup> Smith, *Key of Green*, 138–41.

<sup>42</sup> Agnès Lafont, 'Political Uses of Erotic Power in an Elizabethan Mythological Programme: Dangerous Interactions with Diana in Hardwick Hall', in *Shakespeare's Erotic Mythology and Ovidian Renaissance Culture*, ed. Agnès Lafont (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 48–49.

<sup>43</sup> Levey and Thornton, *Of Household Stuff*, 48–49.

<sup>44</sup> Lorna Hutson, 'Fortunate Travelers: Reading for the Plot in Sixteenth-Century England', *Representations* 41 (1993): 83–103; Martin Bruckner and Kristen Poole, 'The Plot Thickens: Surveying Manuals, Drama, and the Materiality of Narrative Form in Early Modern England', *ELH* 69, no. 3 (2002): 617–48.

The shared grounds of literary and topographic plots underscore that whilst temporality has typically occupied a privileged place in narratology, narrative is equally a spatial art. Recent theorists have challenged the assumption that space is static, instead drawing upon geographic theories of space as a social construction in order to emphasise the inherent temporality of space as ‘active, mobile, and “full”’.<sup>45</sup> As Susan Stanford Friedman argues in her call for a ‘topochrone’ of narrative, time and space are co-operative and co-constitutive.<sup>46</sup> Michel de Certeau regards every story as a ‘travel story—a spatial practice’. Reminding us that places become spaces when we invoke ‘vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables’, de Certeau explains that narratives ‘traverse and organize places ... select and link them together’, constructing ‘trajectories’ and ‘itineraries’ which guide readers through a story’s landscape.<sup>47</sup> De Certeau’s theory fits well with embroideries and helps to elide a binary that posits their images as scenic rather than diachronic, and thus non-narrative. As I noted in chapter two, and will discuss further below, embroideries often set their stories within detailed landscapes. Travel features prominently in popular embroidered bible stories such as the banishing of Hagar and Ishmael, the Prodigal son and the procession of Mordecai in the story of Esther;<sup>48</sup> as we will see in relation to Powlet’s embroidery, viewers heeded these journeys and considered their own routes through the story. Even stories which are not explicitly about travel often employ spatial means to guide readers through their narratives and connect different episodes. For example, the sacrifice of Isaac cushion at Hardwick depicts Abraham and Isaac walking along a path from Abraham’s castle in the background towards the foreground where Isaac awaits execution.<sup>49</sup> As Hardwick

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<sup>45</sup> Susan Stanford Friedman, ‘Spatial Poetics and Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*’, in *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, ed. James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 192–205, particularly 195. See also Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: SAGE Publications, 2005); M. M. Bakhtin, ‘Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel’, in *The Dialogic Imagination*, 84–248; Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

<sup>46</sup> Friedman, ‘Spatial Poetics’, 195.

<sup>47</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 115–30, esp. 115, 117.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, ‘Scenes from the Story of Abraham’, mid-seventeenth century, MMA 64.101.1306; ‘Embroidery: The Prodigal Son’, seventeenth century, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 52.112; ‘Cabinet with Scenes from the Story of Esther’, after 1665, MMA 64.101.1335.

<sup>49</sup> Hardwick NT 1129589.

demonstrates, such trajectories extended into the household, telling stories in, with and about the spaces in which they were displayed.

Although the examples discussed thus far have focused on elite houses, it is important to note that people from lower social orders were also familiar with material stories. Smaller stitched objects, such as cushions or counterpaynes could be particularly accessible, particularly when wrought with cheaper materials. William Harrison's *The Description of England* (1587) notes that fabric furnishings descended through the social ranks; even 'inferior artificers and farmers' had 'learned also to garnish their joint beds with tapestry and silk hangings, and their tables with carpets and fine napery'. Typically, he observes, houses were 'hanged with tapestry, arras work, or painted cloths, wherein either divers histories, or herbs, beasts, knots and suchlike are stained'.<sup>50</sup> As Tessa Watt highlights, such narrative hangings also furnished communal spaces like alehouses.<sup>51</sup>

Painted cloths were typically cheaper alternatives to woven or stitched examples and were thus common in less affluent households, such as those of agricultural labourers, although they also contributed to the narrative furnishings at elite houses like Hardwick.<sup>52</sup> While painted cloths differ in technique from the stitched stories under consideration here, Harrison's description of these hangings as all having stories 'stained' in them suggests continuities between painted and dyed fibres. Combined with the aspirational nature of these images, it indicates that embroidery was considered in relation to a more extensive fabric narratology.

As well as shaping the spaces around them, some needlework objects create spaces for storytelling *within* them, drawing viewers and users into intimate, complex

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<sup>50</sup> William Harrison, *The Description of England*, ed. Georges Edelen (Ithaca: Cornell University Press; Folger Shakespeare Library, 1968), 200, 197. See also, Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 5–6; Olson, *Arras Hanging*, 6–7.

<sup>51</sup> Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), chapter 5, esp. pp. 196–99.

<sup>52</sup> Buxton, *Domestic Culture*, 227, online appendix 6.19a. Hardwick's painted cloths include: 'The Conversion of Saul', 'The Sacrifice of Lystra', 'Paul before Agrippa' and 'Paul before the Viper', c. 1600–1601, Hardwick NT 1129558.1–4. On painted cloths, see Susan E. James, 'Painted Cloths in England', in *Medieval Clothing and Textiles 9*, ed. Robin Netherton and Gale R. Owen-Crocker (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2013), 138–60; Mander, 'Painted Cloths', 119–48.

and active relationships with the stitched narrative. Embroidered cabinets were popular during the second half of the seventeenth century; surviving examples indicate that they formed a common part of a girl's needlework education, made around the age of eleven.<sup>53</sup> Wrought on the outside (and sometimes on the inside) with biblical stories as well as tales from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, these boxes have doors and lids to open and drawers to fill (see, for example, Figure 43).<sup>54</sup> Their physically multi-faceted and multi-layered narratives underscore how embroidery could demand highly tactile and dynamic ways of interacting with stories. Like the Elijah and the Widow bookbinding discussed in the previous chapter, these moving parts could enlist users in enacting their stories. For example, the double doors of a late-seventeenth-century cabinet portray Abraham banishing Hagar and Ishmael, positioning the patriarch on the left door, and the maid with her son on the right; as the right door opens, Hagar is parted from Abraham and turned towards the right side-panel which depicts the next stage in the story—Hagar encountering the angel in the wilderness.<sup>55</sup>

As well storing bottoms of silk, cabinets often contained letters, poems and reading and writing materials such as ink bottles.<sup>56</sup> One striking example makes the interaction of needle and pen within the cabinet particularly clear, containing a quill with

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<sup>53</sup> Staples, 'Embroidered Furnishings', 25–27.

<sup>54</sup> Mary M. Brooks, Elizabeth Feller and Jacqueline Holdsworth, eds., *The Micheál and Elizabeth Feller Needlework Collection: 1* ([Hascombe]: Needleprint, 2011), 68–71; Morrall and Watt, *English Embroidery*, 245–48, 251–53. For a casket with stories embroidered on the inside, see 'Casket with scenes from the Story of Rebecca', 1650–75, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 59.1033.

<sup>55</sup> Christie's, London, 'Three Woods: A Passion for Walnut, Oak & Yew The John Parry Collection' (March 25, 2010), lot 100 [online auction catalogue], accessed February 19, 2016, <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/lot/a-late-17th-century-charles-ii-silkwork-5296430-details.aspx?intObjectID=5296430>. For another example which engages the user in performing the story, see Hannah Smith's Casket, 1654–56, The Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester, Manchester, T.8237.1. Jones and Stallybrass refer to an unpublished paper by Lisa Klein, in which Klein notes that Smith's casket positions Jael's stabbing of Sisera with a tent peg immediately beside the keyhole where the user would similarly have inserted a metal instrument, echoing Jael's 'gesture'; cited in Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 159.

<sup>56</sup> Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 133.

needlelace grip.<sup>57</sup> As the prose romance *Erastus* (1684) highlights, writers were alert to how embroidered cabinets could set narrative in motion and be adopted as literary devices. The recently married Aphrodisia falls in love with the eponymous hero, her new son-in-law. She declares her ‘real Affection’ in a letter which, ‘being sealed, she placed, with many Jewels of richest value, in a Cabinet, whereon, in most curious Work, she had taught her Needle to express the Story of *Penelope* and *Uliesses*’.<sup>58</sup>

Aphrodisia’s cabinet recalls Wroth’s *Urania*, in which, as Bernadette Andrea demonstrates, Pamphilia’s cabinet contains her writings and operates as an emblem for women’s authorship, and the agency as well as limitations that it afforded.<sup>59</sup>

Aphrodisia’s cabinet extends the grounds of authorship to include the box itself.

Enclosing the letter and the sexually euphemistic ‘jewels’, the cabinet sets the story of Penelope’s—and, by extension, Aphrodisia’s—handiwork as the narrative frame within which a multimedia declaration of love is constructed. The printed text echoes this frame, boxing the epistle, printed in roman type, within the black letter text (Figure 44).

This typographic mimicry recalls Lucy Razzall’s observation that early modern readers were attentive to material and conceptual continuities between books and boxes; often made from similar materials (wood and leather), both operated as containers which could be ‘opened’ to reveal spaces of discovery and delight.<sup>60</sup> For embroidered cabinets, these imaginative connections were also materially grounded; recent analysis of the glues, papers and embossing used on these cabinets indicates that the boxes may have been put together by bookbinders.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Bonhams, ‘Embroideries, Costumes, Lace, and Fans’ (August 1, 2006), lot 447 [online auction catalogue], accessed January 29, 2017, <http://www.bonhams.com/auctions/14186/lot/447/>.

<sup>58</sup> *Erastus* (London, 1684), B5v.

<sup>59</sup> Bernadette Andrea, ‘Pamphilia’s Cabinet: Gendered Authorship and Empire in Lady Mary Wroth’s “Urania”’, *ELH* 68, no. 2 (2001): 335–58. Wroth, *Urania*, 62–63. See also Julie Crawford, ‘Wroth’s Cabinets’, in *Feminisms and Early Modern Texts: Essays for Phyllis Rackin*, ed. Rebecca Ann Bach and Gwynne Kennedy (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2010), 138–51.

<sup>60</sup> Razzall, ‘Containers and Containment’, *passim*, esp. 28, 43, 87–89, 93; Razzall, ‘Containing the Word: Books and Boxes in Early Modern England’ (research paper, Things that Matter, 1400–1900 Research Group seminar series, University of Cambridge, May 6, 2015).

<sup>61</sup> Patricia Nguyen states in her correspondence to me that ‘The caskets use paper (usually sugar paper, laid) as a structural component wrapping all the drawers and surfaces of the cabinet which is not built the

Of all the narrative objects identified by Cowley, clothing seems to prompt the greatest sense of wonder. The imaginative literature of the period abounds with references to narrative garments. We might recall, for example, the ‘cap or band’ made by Aylett’s Susanna, ‘Where thou might see, with cunning needle told,/ The subtle serpent simple *Ene* infold’.<sup>62</sup> Scriptural clothing also features in Jasper Mayne’s comedy *The Citye Match* (1639), in which Aurelia complains that her seemingly Puritanical maidservant, Dorcas, ‘works religious petticoats; for flowers/ She’l make Church histories’. Aurelia continues:

My smock-sleeves have such holy imbroderies,  
And are so learned, that I fear in time  
All my apparel will be quoted by  
Some pure Instructor.<sup>63</sup>

Turning the biblical Dorcas’s coats into quotes (homophones at this time),<sup>64</sup> Dorcas’s ‘Church histories’ literalise conceptions of scripture as a garment.<sup>65</sup> Although Mayne’s portrait of Dorcas is evidently satirical (and her puritanism is later revealed as a ruse), her work nevertheless reflects early modern fashions. For example, a 1574 inventory of widow Marion Chapman’s goods records ‘One border of a story of Herod persecutinge

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same as other cabinets of the period’ and ‘the way[s] in which the parts [are] cut, joined and are wrapped are consistent with box making techniques used by bookbinders’. She adds that the ‘glues used to adhere the embroidery and paper to the surfaces is [sic] consistent with [what] binders used in bookbinding and not in marquetry. They are primarily starch based’. She also notes: ‘[t]he edges of the cabinet where covered by paper have been decorated in-situ with silver using bookbinding stamps and rolls. I have seen only one case where evidence shows that the paper was stamped beforehand before application. All the rest are done in-situ’. Patricia Nguyen, email to the author, May 13, 2014. Razzall also discusses parallels between embroidered books and boxes, ‘Containers and Containment’, 127–28.

<sup>62</sup> Aylett, *Susanna*, B1r.

<sup>63</sup> Jasper Mayne, *The Citye Match* (Oxford, 1639), E1r.

<sup>64</sup> See Richard Hodges, *A Special Help to Orthographie* (London, 1644), A4r.

<sup>65</sup> Alison Knight, “‘This Verse Marks That’: George Herbert’s *The Temple* and Scripture in Context”, in Killeen, Smith and Willie, *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible*, 518–19.

Christe and the children in the Jury' amongst her 'wollinge', a list apparently detailing clothing and accessories of dress.<sup>66</sup>

There was also a strong literary tradition of clothing wrought with Greek myths. Marlowe's Hero, for example, wears:

... sleeves green, and bordered with a grove,  
Where Venus in her naked glory strove  
To please the carelesse and disdainfull eyes  
Of proud Adonis that before her lies.<sup>67</sup>

Alastair Fowler indicates that Hero here 'wears literature on her sleeve', observing that 'Thomas Lodge's Venus had recently worn a "stately roab ... wherein with cullored silke,/ Her Nimphes had blaz'd the yong Adonis wrack"''.<sup>68</sup> Fowler's suggestion indicates that authors might be attentive to how needles could be used to record and reappropriate one's reading; in their ekphrastic deployment of fabric, the pen imitates the needle as much as the converse. Percy Herbert's prose romance, *Cloria and Narcissus* (1653), highlights that such invocations engaged with clothing's distinctive narrative structures. Cassianus glimpses the eponymous princess wearing 'sleeves [which] were open, and lined with needlework of the story of *Diana* and *Acteon*, wherein the Nymphs with a confused bashfulness, seemed to hide themselves amongst the rushes'.<sup>69</sup> These open sleeves would have simultaneously disclosed and screened the lining, re-enacting the myth's tale of concealment and revelation.

Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher's tragicomedy, *The Custom of the Country* (1647), offers further evidence that narrative garments were more than fictional tropes. The gentleman Rutilio declares to his brother: 'Having a Mistris, sure you should not

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<sup>66</sup> William Greenwell, ed., *Durham Wills and Inventories from the Registry at Durham Part 2* (London: Surtees Society, 1860), 74.

<sup>67</sup> Marlowe, *Hero and Leander*, 1.11–14.

<sup>68</sup> Fowler, *Renaissance Realism*, 31, citing Thomas Lodge, *Scillaes metamorphosis* (London, 1589), C1r. Ellipsis original to Fowler.

<sup>69</sup> Percy Herbert, *Cloria and Narcissus* (London, 1653), B8r.

be/ Without a neate historicall shirt'.<sup>70</sup> Offering no further explanation, the play assumes the audience's familiarity with such apparently ubiquitous clothing. The extant corpus, however, provides more equivocal evidence. The Glove Collection Trust holds a pair of men's gloves, made c. 1620–35, whose gauntlets are embroidered with roundels containing mythological tales; each side of the gauntlet tells a different story, drawn out across three roundels.<sup>71</sup> These gloves suggest that the Ovidian examples discussed above may have prompted and responded to material examples. Such artefacts, however, are scarce. Perhaps they have not survived, or perhaps they were curiosities which many people knew about but few owned.

Alternatively, perhaps we have yet to appreciate the range of designs which might be read narratively. In William Davenant's epic poem, *Gondibert* (1651), the Baconian philosopher Lord Astragon wears a 'Purple Mantle.../ Where Nature's storie was in Colours wrought'; Davenant observes approvingly that 'though her ancient Text seem'd dark before,/ 'Tis in this pleasant Comment clearly taught'. Davenant's 'ancient Text' evokes the Book of Nature and emphasises that it was not only book covers like Hegge's that were understood as providing commentaries; here, the embroidery's bright colours seem to create an expository as well as aesthetic gloss.<sup>72</sup> Manifesting Astragon's natural historical interests, the mantle's 'storie' with its 'ancient Text' challenges the rigid distinction drawn by Daniel Woolf between natural history and history as "story". Woolf argues that the former constitutes an inventory which is synchronic rather than diachronic and thus lacks the temporality necessary for narrative, an observation which neglects the non-temporal dimensions of narrative as well as effacing how inventories participate in narrative, discussed further below.<sup>73</sup>

Astragon's mantle evokes the seventeenth-century fashion for men's and women's jackets, doublets and waistcoats embroidered with flora and fauna.<sup>74</sup> With their

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<sup>70</sup> Beaumont and Fletcher, *Comedies and Tragedies*, Aa4r.

<sup>71</sup> 'Men's Embroidered Gauntlet Gloves', c. 1620–35, The Glove Collection Trust, on loan to the Fashion Museum, Bath, 23344+A.

<sup>72</sup> William Davenant, *Gondibert* (London, 1651), N7v, 6.76.

<sup>73</sup> Woolf, *The Idea of History*, 16–17.

<sup>74</sup> For examples, see Susan North and Jenny Tiramani, *Seventeenth-Century Women's Dress Patterns: Book Two* (London: V&A Publishing, 2012), 48–49.



repeating scrolling designs, these garments may appear purely as aesthetically pleasing patterns, but Astragon's mantle invites us to read more into them. Examining the embroidered linen jacket shown in Figure 45 reveals that its pattern is in fact invested in concepts of temporality, telling the life-story of the flora it contains. As Susan North and Jenny Tiramani observe, '[e]ach scroll depicts the life cycle of the plant featured within it, illustrating the different stages from blossom, ripening of fruit or budding flower through to its fully mature state'.<sup>75</sup>

This jacket emphasises a need to think more expansively about the forms which stitched narrative could take. The variety of objects explored in this section has highlighted that early modern people and spaces were enveloped by diverse material narratives, which were also represented and imitated in textual culture. While some of these draw on familiar pictorial forms of representation, others push at the limits of modern definitions of the genre, and almost all employ material and tactile strategies which require us to develop new ways of reading textiles and texts. In the next section, I look more closely at how materials, rhythms of making and elements of composition can be read for story, creating forms of temporality and rhetoric which shape written narrative.

## Following the Thread

Fabric's fundamental role in constructing narrative is evident in references to the 'thread' of a story. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines this thread as what 'connects the successive points in ... a narrative' and 'the sequence of events or ideas continuing through the whole course of anything'.<sup>76</sup> According to this definition, thread figures key narrative characteristics, particularly coherence, continuity and sequential progression. Narrative threads were widely deployed by early modern writers. Some engaged with the figure obliquely in textile ekphrases. In her reading of the Hall of Busirane in Spenser's

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<sup>75</sup> North and Tiramani, *Seventeenth-Century Women's Dress Patterns: Book Two*, 48. Wall discusses 'strange sallats' in which flora were shaped to look like flowers in different stages of development, suggesting that other handicrafts perhaps participated in such natural histories, *Recipes for Thought*, 95.

<sup>76</sup> 'thread, n.', *OED Online*, December 2016, def. 8.

*The Faerie Queene*, for example, Olson posits that Spenser's description of the arras' threads hints at 'his own weaving of narrative threads'.<sup>77</sup> Other writers invoke the term explicitly: the figure gained traction during the seventeenth century, with writers increasingly referring to the 'thread' of their discourse or story.<sup>78</sup> In this section I examine how narrative threads operate in textual and material stories.

A sermon by Presbyterian pastor Samuel Rutherford, printed in 1647, offers a characteristic example, highlighting 'the threed and tract of the Scriptures coherence, one Verse following on another, as the *Spirit of God* hath ordered them'.<sup>79</sup> Metaphors of God's curious handiwork and the idea of Christ's seamless garment as a figure for the indivisibility of scripture make thread particularly pertinent to biblical narratives. Rutherford's understanding of scripture is doubly material. Thomas Blount's dictionary, *Glossographia* (1656), defines 'tract' as firstly 'a line or thred' and secondarily as 'a discourse drawn out in length'.<sup>80</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* also highlights the term's literary as well as temporal meanings: it signifies the 'drawing out, duration, continuance, process, passing, or lapse of time' as well as the 'course or continuity of a narrative'.<sup>81</sup> Taking the skilled making discernible in this tract as evidence of God's hand in ordering, Rutherford finds the thread apt to express narrative design. This recalls Hayden White's theory of emplotment, which emphasises that senses of continuity and logical sequencing in narrative do not exist in the events themselves but rather are *made* by the teller who combines and orders them.<sup>82</sup>

For historian and political writer James Howell, the thread of a story ought to be straightforward and should be followed by readers as well as authors. Writing in 1642, he declares:

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<sup>77</sup> Olson, *Arras Hanging*, 26–30.

<sup>78</sup> See, for example, Edward Leigh, *Annotations upon All the New Testament* (London, 1650), ¶3r; Richard Whitlock, *Zootomia* (London, 1654), a1r.

<sup>79</sup> Samuel Rutherford, *Christ Dying and Drawing Sinners to Himself* (London, 1647), G2v.

<sup>80</sup> Blount, *Glossographia*, Rr3v.

<sup>81</sup> 'tract, n.3', *OED Online*, December 2016, defs. 1a, 2.

<sup>82</sup> Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 81–100.

The manner & method in reading of *Annalists* is infinitely advantagious, if one take his rise handsomely from the beginning, and follow the series of the matter, . . . otherwise if one read skippingly and by snatches, and not take the *thread* of the story along, it must needs puzzle and distract the memory, wherein *his observations will lye confusedly budded up, like a skeine of intangle silk.*<sup>83</sup>

Like Rutherford, Howell regards the ‘thread of the story’ as a figure for sequentiality. Here it articulates a linear chronology which starts ‘from the beginning’ and proceeds according to a continuous series of events. At the same time, Howell’s admission that some read ‘skippingly’, muddling their thoughts ‘*like a skeine of intangle silk*’, emphasises that thread’s seemingly straightforward temporality could become perplexed and perplexing. Although for Howell this was undesirable, such temporal complications can be crucial for narrative, as will be discussed further below. The popularity of annals had declined during the sixteenth century, overtaken by other genres such as “politic” histories which, in seeking to trace patterns of cause and effect, were less concerned with a rigidly linear chronology.<sup>84</sup> Nor, as Howell intimates, did readers necessarily follow a straightforward path. In a translated preface to a 1606 edition of *The Historie of Justine*, ‘concerning the Profit of reading Histories’, Simon Grynaeus laments those who, ‘with vaine imaginations, . . . tosse from one place to another, to read as birds skip from bow to bough’.<sup>85</sup> Discontinuous reading was evidently common, if often treated as wayward.

Readers of biblical histories were particularly wont to move in non-linear ways, tracking ‘back and forth’ between different chapters and verses, following thematic, typological and eschatological links, and using one verse to unravel another’s meaning.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> James Howell, *Instructions for Forreine Travell* (London, 1642), C8r–v.

<sup>84</sup> Daniel Woolf, ‘Genre into Artifact: The Decline of the English Chronicle in the Sixteenth Century’, *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 19, no. 3 (1988): 321–54; Woolf, ‘From Hystories to the Historical’, 37–39.

<sup>85</sup> Marcus Junianus Justinus, *The Historie of Iustine*, trans. George Wilkins (London, 1606), A4r.

<sup>86</sup> Peter Stallybrass, ‘Books and Scrolls: Navigating the Bible’, in Andersen and Sauer, *Books and Readers*, 42–79, esp. 46; Katrin Ettenhuber, “‘A Comely Gate to So Rich and Glorious a Citie’”: The Paratextual Architecture of the Rheims New Testament and the King James Bible’, in Killeen, Smith and Willie, *The*

For such readers, scriptural threads were not necessarily straightforward but interlaced with multi-directional cross-references. In an exposition of 1 Timothy 4:1–2, for example, John Mede recalls how the third verse had ‘as a thread led me the way to the end of the eleventh chapter of *Daniel*’.<sup>87</sup> As will be discussed further in relation to Powlet’s embroidery, these typological and eschatological understandings of biblical history produced polychronic understandings of narrative.

The use of the line of thread to mark narrative time is entangled with the idea of human life being measured by a length of thread. In Greek mythology of the three Fates, *Clotho* spun the thread of a person’s life, *Lachesis* measured it and *Atropos* cut it, marking the person’s death.<sup>88</sup> The tendency to see needlework as ‘time well spent’ further prompted makers and viewers to regard embroidered stories with an awareness of the time of making and to see stitches as indexical of hours of work.<sup>89</sup> Needleworkers were conscious of how they and others would consider a product in terms of the timeframe of its creation, often working the date of making into their embroideries<sup>90</sup> or providing an accompanying scribal record.<sup>91</sup> This is evident not only in girls’ samplers, but in the work of some professional embroiderers. For example, the backs of three embroideries are inscribed: ‘Edmund Harrison, Imbroderer to King Charles made this Anno Doni. 1637’.<sup>92</sup>

The chronology of making could structure the temporality of the story that was being embroidered, as is suggested by a fictionalised embroidery in Joseph Beaumont’s

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*Oxford Handbook of the Bible*, 69n.29; Kevin Killeen, ‘Chastising with Scorpions: Reading the Old Testament in Early Modern England’, *HLQ* 73, no. 3 (2010): 491–506.

<sup>87</sup> John Mede, *The Apostasy of the Latter Times* (London, 1641), N3r.

<sup>88</sup> For discussion of this in relation to spinning, see Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 117–33. For an embroidery depicting the Fates, see ‘The Three Fates’, mid-seventeenth century, private collection, Bridgeman Images NUL115936, accessed February, 24, 2014, <http://www.bridgemanart.com/en-GB/asset/115936>.

<sup>89</sup> Taylor, *The Needles Excellency*, B1r.

<sup>90</sup> See for example, Anne Lane, ‘Band Sampler’, 1673, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, T.54-1928.

<sup>91</sup> See, for example, the letter accompanying Hannah Smith’s casket, The Whitworth Art Gallery, T.8237.1–2, discussed in Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 133.

<sup>92</sup> The inscriptions have minor orthographic variants. See Wardle, ‘The King’s Embroiderer: Edmund Harrison (1590–1667) II. His Work’, 158–60.

religious epic *Psyche* (1648). Canto 3 relates the Virgin Mary's embroidery of a girdle which is subsequently presented to the poem's titular heroine. Containing 'accurate workes Historik', this girdle tells the life-story of John the Baptist 'who, as the *Work* doth rise, / *Lives, preaches, washes, suffers prison, dies*'.<sup>93</sup> Occupying a liminal position, 'rise' passes over from the creation of the embroidery to John's birth. Indicating that the plot unfolds 'as the *Work* doth', Beaumont suggests that making is a form of storytelling and that the sequence of working could determine the sequence of narrative time.

Whilst this fictive embroidery preserves chronological order, extant artefacts suggest that stitching could re-structure the *fabula*. Figure 46 shows a partially completed mirror frame narrating the banishment of Hagar and Ishmael. Progressing perhaps according to skill, available materials or interest, the embroiderer has sewn Hagar's prayer to the angel and Ishmael in the wilderness before beginning work on the figure of Hagar being banished. She or he has also moved around the cloth to work the flora and fauna, suggesting how these motifs might dilate the time of working between different narrative episodes; as will be discussed further below, dilation characterizes embroidered narratives and such motifs were crucial to its production. This worker's progress evokes Taylor's suggestion that users of his needlework pattern book should 'skip from worke to worke, from stitch to stitch'. Likening the maker to the '*Squirrel* [who] skips from tree to tree', Taylor's comparison recalls Grynaeus's description of those who 'read as birds skip from bow to bough'. For Taylor, this seems a 'delightfull practise'; in embroidery, as in reading, it could be pleasurable and creative to move (in Howell's terms) 'skippingly ... not tak[ing] the threed of the story along'.<sup>94</sup>

Re-ordering the biblical chronology, this mirror frame suggests that, at least in the time of making, needleworkers were not necessarily concerned with reading or creating a straightforward chronicle. The anachronisms created in making offer parallels with the use of analepsis and prolepsis in verbal narrative and might be seen as a form of emplotment by which chronicle is shaped into a meaningful discourse. According to White, the transformation of story elements into narrative requires the linear series of events to be restructured according to culturally significant patterns; these patterns

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<sup>93</sup> Joseph Beaumont, *Psyche* (London, 1648), 3.Argument, 3.55.5–6.

<sup>94</sup> Taylor, *The Needles Excellency*, A4v.

order and emphasise particular elements to construct symbolically meaningful relationships between them, producing a sense of causality.<sup>95</sup>

The rhythms of making could also affect the tempo of the wrought piece, as Leonard Digges' translation of *The Rape of Proserpine* (1617) highlights. Digges describes Proserpine making a needlework garment which depicts her father's kingdom enframed by the four elements. She proceeds from the air to:

... the water, where she often makes  
 A period to her handy-worke; and takes  
 Fresh silke to thred her needle, for she here  
 Had much adoe to make the Sea appeare  
 In all his forms; the waues she to the life  
 Describes, and set out their tumultuous strife ...<sup>96</sup>

Initially, Proserpine's change of thread seems to mark an end and suggests connections between textile and textual punctuation, evoking the 'full prick' of the period. Yet Digges' text is punctuated not with a full-stop but a semi-colon, a dilatory punctuation mark used in 'long winded sentences, and reduplications'.<sup>97</sup> Similarly Proserpine's period, 'often' made, produces repeated pauses rather than an end. Engaging connotations of 'period' as an iterative pattern, Proserpine's false endings prompt new beginnings with 'Fresh silke'. The pattern recurs seven lines later when she moves to the sands: observing that 'forth a different skeine/ Of silke she sorts, and fresh to worke againe/ Begins', Digges invites further comparisons between textual and textile structures as the delayed verbs ('sorts' and 'Begins') and run-on lines register patterns of deferral and distension.<sup>98</sup>

The lines of Proserpine's needlework and Digges' poetic account thus mark another departure from the single, straightforward and measured progression of Howell's chronicle thread. Proserpine's work is multi-threaded and characterized by a

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<sup>95</sup> White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 83–93. See also Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 2, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 78–86.

<sup>96</sup> Leonard Digges, trans., *The Rape of Proserpine* (London, 1617), D4v.

<sup>97</sup> Simon Daines, *Orthoepia Anglicana* (London, 1640), L3v.

<sup>98</sup> Digges, *Rape of Proserpine*, D4v.

recursive and protracted temporality; noting her ‘adoe to make the Sea appeare/ In all his formes’, Digges suggests the prolonged time that both she and he spend in dilatory description. Such patterns might seem opposed to narrative, impeding the spatial and temporal trajectories of plot progression. Yet, as Roland Barthes and Peter Brooks have demonstrated, narrative is essentially an ‘*espace dilatoire*’ in which the delayed ending creates structures of ‘enigma and solution’ that enable the problem(s) posed by a story to be worked through and meaning revealed.<sup>99</sup> Below, I consider how dilation operated in early modern needlework narratives and how both texts and textiles employed the embroidered idiom.

### The Flowers of the Needle: Embroidering *Copia*

As Patricia Parker’s seminal work has demonstrated, dilation and digression were common features of early modern narrative, viewed as simultaneously desirable and dangerous to social as well as rhetorical order. Parker notes that dilatory space is particularly expansive in early modern romance and biblical narratives, two of the genres most frequently depicted in embroidery and, as I highlighted in chapter two, popular textual accompaniments to textile handiwork.<sup>100</sup> We might recall the Montague sisters who found the combination of working while reading ‘histories’ particularly ‘deverting’, suggesting how the pleurably digressive tracks of needle and aural narrative might augment one another.

Dilation was conceptualised materially. Exploring connections between dilation, women’s garrulity and the swelling associated with female reproduction, Parker notes:

the supposed copiousness of the female tongue ... has its textual counterpart in the danger of losing the thread of a discourse and never being able to finish what was begun, the specter of endlessness ... which

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<sup>99</sup> Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), esp. 75–76; Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 287.

<sup>100</sup> Patricia Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property* (London: Methuen, 1987), 8–14, 97–125.

hovers around the edges of all these characterizations of a female speech as “penelopes webb ... [that] never makes an end.”<sup>101</sup>

Recently, Susan Frye has built upon Parker’s work to demonstrate how dilatory threads materialize in the fabrics represented in Wroth’s *Urania*. As Frye notes, early moderns embraced Ciceronian metaphors which characterized the ornaments of eloquence as fine clothing and saw rhetorical and material colours as analogous. Frye argues that Wroth produces romance’s characteristic dilation by dwelling upon the colours of characters’ clothing, ‘playfully literaliz[ing] the rhetorical language of amplification’.<sup>102</sup>

The early modern period enthusiastically embraced rhetoric’s material dimensions, plentifully adapting textile terms to describe the dilation created by textual ornament. Sophie Holroyd notes that ‘embroider’ began to be applied to rhetorical additions in the early seventeenth century, meaning ‘to embellish with rhetorical ornament or with fictitious additions or exaggerations’.<sup>103</sup> As Linda Woodbridge highlights, during the late sixteenth century, ‘bombast’, a material which was primarily used for padding clothes, started being used to describe ‘inflated or turgid language’; fustian, taffeta and silken were similarly adopted.<sup>104</sup> As the definition of bombast highlights, applications were often derogatory and suggest the perils of rhetorical and material ornament:<sup>105</sup> Erasmus’s *De Copia* (1512, enlarged and revised in 1514, 1526, 1534) opened with a chapter on ‘Dangers inherent in its pursuit’, emphasising the need for forms of control and order which were as much social as rhetorical.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies*, 26, quoting *Fifty-Five Enigmatical Characters, All Very Exactly Drawn to the Life* (London, 1665), 33. Final ellipsis and square brackets original to Parker.

<sup>102</sup> Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 191–211, esp. 209.

<sup>103</sup> ‘embroider, v.’, *OED Online*, December 2016, def. 2c. For discussion of this and other comparisons between needlework and literary artistry, see Holroyd, ‘Embroidered Rhetoric’, 102–4.

<sup>104</sup> Woodbridge, ‘Patchwork’, 37. See, for examples, Ben Jonson, *Every Man out of His Humour*, ed. Helen Ostovich (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 3.1.169; William Shakespeare, *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, ed. G. R. Hibbard (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 5.2.406.

<sup>105</sup> On concerns about rhetorical and embroidered dissimulation, see Helen Lynch, *Milton and the Politics of Public Speech* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 128–35.

<sup>106</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, *Copia: Foundations of the Abundant Style*, trans. Betty I. Knott, in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 24, ed. Craig R. Thompson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 295. Unless



Other writers, including John Taylor, however, embraced the language of expansive rhetorical fabrication to champion their rhetorical deviancy, suggesting that material dilation offered an attractively subversive loquacious position for male as well as female authors. Punning upon his surname, Taylor effusively claims of *The World Rvns on Wheeles* (1623) that he has ‘*Imbroadered it with mirth, Quilted it with materiall stuffe, Lac’d it with similitudes; Sowed it with comparisons*’. Concluding that he has ‘*so playd the Taylor with it, that I thinke it will fitte the wearing of any honest mans Reading*’, Taylor reformulates charges against this potentially wearisome style, and embraces a suggestive interplay between fit reading and storified garments.<sup>107</sup> The compounding of fabric and verbal substances emphasises the convertibility of textual and textile rhetoric: ‘stuff’ connotes ‘literary or artistic’ as well as fabric matter, whilst a ‘comparison’ was not only a rhetorical technique, but a variant spelling of ‘caparison’, denoting (often heavily ornamented) clothing.<sup>108</sup> Taylor’s fulsome inventory suggests that dilatory textualities inhere in sewing’s techniques of material insertion, addition and embellishment, prompting us to consider how wrought as well as written narratives might be thus swollen.

The materiality of amplification was not just a trope invoked in textual narratives. Rather than being a series of cursory analogies, the shared language of rhetorical and material ‘embroidery’ was deeply considered and reflected the shared narratological discourse to which texts and textiles belonged. Dilation and digression were seen in the materials, motifs, structures and threads of embroidered stories themselves.

Erasmus’s *De Copia* extensively outlines techniques for achieving, as well as controlling, dilation and rhetorical amplification. *Copia* is ‘twofold’, ‘manifested both in subject-matter and expression’; the latter is closely aligned with fabric, understood as

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otherwise specified, references to Erasmus’s *Copia* are quoted from this translation. See also, Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies*, 13–14.

<sup>107</sup> John Taylor, *The World Rvns on Wheeles* (London, 1623), A4r. On ambivalent or positive responses to ‘bombast’ style, see Goran Stanivukovic, ‘Shakespeare’s Style in the 1590s’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare’s Poetry*, ed. Jonathan F. S. Post (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 26–42, esp. 28.

<sup>108</sup> ‘stuff, n.1’, *OED Online*, December 2016, def. 7a; ‘comparison, n.’, *OED Online*, December 2016, def. 9.

the garments which clothed thought.<sup>109</sup> In both, diversity and variation are key. ‘Richness of Expression’, for example, ‘involves synonyms, ... variation in word form, equivalence, and other similar methods of diversifying diction’.<sup>110</sup> According to one 1668 dictionary, embroidery was by definition various, meaning to ‘[v]ariegate by sowing’.<sup>111</sup> Textual responses to real and imaginary embroideries commonly praised their ‘diverse’, ‘various’ and ‘sundry’ colours. For example, in Giles Fletcher’s allegorical religious poem, *Christs Victorie* (1610), the personification of Mercy is portrayed wearing an embroidered garment ‘Which she her selfe with her owne hand had drawne,/ And all the world therein had pourtrayed’; the element of Earth ‘was of so various hewe;/ For to it selfe it oft so diuerse grewe,/ That still it seem’d the same, and still it seem’d a newe’.<sup>112</sup> Mercy’s handiwork is mirrored in Fletcher’s anaphoric structure, which is similarly the same and new, aligning wrought and written devices for copious expression.

Profusion and diversity also characterize descriptions of embroidery’s stitches and materials. In *The Needles Excellency*, for example, Taylor displays his own copiousness in a six-line list of twenty-one different stitches.<sup>113</sup> William Pearse effusively stresses the skill of his late daughter, Damaris, in the ‘choicest sort of needleworks ... wether with silk, thread, or other materials, so great variety, and plenty’. Similarly, praising his late sister-in-law’s needlework, John Batchiler notes Susanna Perwich’s application of ‘Wax, Straws and Gum,/ Silks, Gems, and Gold, the total sum/ Of rich materials’.<sup>114</sup> Both Pearse and Batchiler find a material plenitude in the women’s handiworks which they reproduce in their additive syntax.

Batchiler proceeds to commend Perwich’s ‘Pictures of *men, birds, beasts, and flow’rs*’. Finding ample opportunity for *copia* in the final category, he spends fourteen

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<sup>109</sup> Erasmus, *Copia*, 24:301. For an overview of analogies between dress and expression from antiquity to the eighteenth century, see Chloe Wigston Smith, *Women, Work, and Clothes in the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 23–36.

<sup>110</sup> Erasmus, *Copia*, 24:301.

<sup>111</sup> John Wilkins, *An Essay Towards a Real Character, and a Philosophical Language* (London, 1668), Fff1r.

<sup>112</sup> Giles Fletcher, *Christs Victorie* (Cambridge, 1610), 54.6–8.

<sup>113</sup> Taylor, *The Needles Excellency*, A4r–v.

<sup>114</sup> William Pearse, *A Present for Youth, and Example for the Aged* (London, 1683), E5r–v; Batchiler, *The Virgins Pattern*, E1v–E2r.

lines describing her wrought plants, listing blooms which include ‘The *Rose*, The *Violet*, The *Lilly*’ and concluding with a gesture to ‘many more varieties’.<sup>115</sup> Batchiler’s profuse description accords with extant embroidered narratives, where flowers, as well as birds, insects and beasts, loom large. They are often disproportionately bigger than the human figures; many motifs are swelled further with bombast padding or other materials, offering a provocative spatial perspective on amplification (see, for example, Figures 47 and 48).<sup>116</sup>

The “problems” of scale that these motifs seem to pose have often troubled modern critics. Considering them alongside other stock motifs such as the castles and rockpools which populate embroidered backgrounds and foregrounds, nineteenth- and twentieth-century art historians dismissed them as irrelevant to and inconsistent with the central story. These commonplace images signalled embroidery’s ‘primitive’ and slavish qualities; needleworkers were believed to have been unable to adjust scale, an assumption that is belied by pattern books which include instructions and squared paper precisely for this purpose.<sup>117</sup>

More recently, scholars have begun to explore alternative approaches to these and other common motifs. Jones and Stallybrass declare that ‘[e]ach detail is interesting on its own, rather than subordinated to a central narrative or consistent perspective’, concluding that ‘[c]opia, symmetry, and variety are the principles of composition, rather than narrative detail’.<sup>118</sup> Opposing *copia* to ‘narrative detail’, however, overlooks the former’s rhetorical applications and effaces how *copia* functions *as* narrative detail; Jones and Stallybrass’s alternative to a unified central narrative seems not to be a heterogeneous and multi-stranded narrative, but narrative’s absence.

Commenting on a mid-seventeenth-century embroidery of Diana and Acteon, Jones and Stallybrass highlight the ‘non-narrative details’ of a castle, bird and butterfly and note how ‘the picture freely adapts the narrative to a flat surface and fills its empty

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<sup>115</sup> Batchiler, *The Virgins Pattern*, E2r.

<sup>116</sup> See also Canavan, “[A]ll Sorts of Stiches”, 43–46.

<sup>117</sup> For an overview of this criticism, see Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, 93. For pattern books with squared paper and/or instructions, see Richard Shorleyker, *A Schole-House, for the Needle* (London, 1632), Q2r; de Vinciolo, *New and Singular Patternes*, A4r–v.

<sup>118</sup> Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 149. Compare Holroyd, ‘Embroidered Rhetoric’, 109.

spaces with the flora and fauna that printed pattern books made available to embroiderers'.<sup>119</sup> Treating the motifs as incidental, the assumption that they are space-fillers overlooks the possibility that the dimensions of the embroidery were chosen in order to *create* space so that these motifs could be included. As well as interspersing flora and fauna between the story's characters, many embroideries set these motifs out in expansive foregrounds and backgrounds which might have been curtailed had their inclusion simply been about not wanting to waste space (see Figure 47).

Jones and Stallybrass's confident separation of narrative and non-narrative detail is equally challenged by Digges' account of Proserpine's embroidered 'fields and flowr's'. Digges adds:

And (for variety) amongst the rest,  
That of *Narcissus* story she exprest;  
Where (opposite) the new transformed Rose,  
The thorne-prick't goddesse loue to *Adon* showes.<sup>120</sup>

Proserpine thus intermingles her botanical imagery with flowers which 'express' the myths whereby Narcissus was turned into a daffodil and Adonis into a rose.<sup>121</sup> This arrangement creates intriguing parallels with printed herbals which, as Leah Knight notes, embedded poetic fictions of flowers, including Ovidian tales of floral metamorphoses, within their botanical descriptions; as noted above, such herbals often provided needlework patterns.<sup>122</sup> Produced '(for variety)', Proserpine's embroidered floral stories figure narrative as a form of *copia*, rather than its opposite, and further indicate floral embroidery's narrative function. Like Digges' swelling parentheses, these stories diversify pictorial content to produce a digressive and dilatory discourse which encapsulates multiple, interrelated narratives and meanings. Located amongst 'the rest' of Proserpine's flowers, these blooms nevertheless suggest a consistency of perspective

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<sup>119</sup> Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 149.

<sup>120</sup> Digges, *Rape of Proserpine*, E1r.

<sup>121</sup> Some versions of the myth have the rose formed from drops of Adonis's blood, and others from Adonis himself. Whitney Trettien discusses a tapestry in Castle Joyeous which depicts Adonis transformed into a rose, in Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 3.1.38; discussed in Trettien, 'Isabella Whitney's Slips', 512.

<sup>122</sup> Knight, *Of Books and Botany*, xiv–xvi, 99–109.

which challenges us to rethink the location of narrative within an embroidery as well as raising questions about how readily floral myths can be distinguished from botanical specimens.

Andrew Morrall's interpretation of embroidered flowers, discussed in previous chapters, offers an alternative perspective on how the copiousness of natural imagery might contribute to narrative content. Focusing on depictions of the Creation and Fall, Morrall reveals how the idealized abundance of flora realizes Edenic perfection and argues that this mode of reading may be applied to other embroideries where 'irrespective of subject matter, they [flowers] lend a kind of pristine, idealizing quality'.<sup>123</sup> Morrall's argument offers a way to understand the symbiotic relationship between biblical narratives and natural motifs, in which the latter expresses and comments on the richness of divine Creation.

The motifs populating the landscapes of early modern embroideries return us to the *parergon*, discussed in the previous chapter. Thomas Elyot defines a *parergon* as 'some thinge added to, beinge no part of the matter, as whan a payntour doeth make an ymage, he doeth adde to trees, or townes'.<sup>124</sup> Samuel Quiccheberg offers more expansive examples, which resonate strongly with embroidered motifs and suggest their participation in an aesthetic of pleasure: 'trees, small birds, florets, scenic views, turrets and the like' are added 'because of charm'.<sup>125</sup> The term, '*parergon*', was adopted widely in early modern writing to describe digressions and dilations, indicating parallels between visual and verbal embellishments. For example, Famianus Strada's address to the reader of *De Bello Belgico: The History of the Low-Country Warres* (englished by Robert Stapylton in 1650), likened his work to that of Tacitus's *Histories* which 'so freely digresses, and hath so many Out-lets, and Parergons, that the additionall Matter is much more then the

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<sup>123</sup> Andrew Morrall, 'Representations of Adam and Eve', 316; Morrall and Watt, *English Embroidery*, 257. Morrall also comments on stock motifs in relation to the 'ideology of place and Nature' in embroideries of companionate couples, 'Regaining Eden', 90–91.

<sup>124</sup> Thomas Elyot, *Bibliotheca Eliotae Eliotis Librarie* (London, 1542), Aa7v.

<sup>125</sup> Cited, translated and discussed in Anna Grasskamp, 'Frames of Appropriation: Foreign Artifacts on Display in Early Modern Europe and China', in *Qing Encounters: Artistic Exchanges between China and the West*, ed. Petra ten-Doesschate Chu and Ning Ding (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2015), 31, 40n.13–14.

fourth part of the Historie'.<sup>126</sup> Although some disregarded digressions, 'judg[ing] it unnecessary, ... to follow the Author through his Mazes, and long wandering parergons',<sup>127</sup> others considered them as participating in the work. John Sergeant's *Sure-Footing in Christianity* (1665), for example, concludes one digression by explaining '[t]he usefulness of this Parergon'.<sup>128</sup> In *A Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*, John Lightfoot observes of his 'account' of the period preceding Christ's passion: 'though it may bee a little *Parergon*, or besides this purpose, yet may it not be uselesse or unprofitable: nay, in some respect it is almost necessary'.<sup>129</sup> Lightfoot's observations accord with Derrida's definition of the *parergon* as exposing and supplying a 'lack in the interior of the *ergon*'. 'Neither simply outside nor simply inside', these liminal embellishments become a necessary part of the work and exert a formative force upon it.

Flowers are particularly pertinent to discourses of *copia*, often featuring alongside colours as terms for rhetorical ornament.<sup>130</sup> Their equivalence with wrought, as well as chirographic, flowers is highlighted by a (probably fictional) letter printed in Hannah Woolley's *The Gentlewomans Companion* (1673). A London gentlewoman, S.L., writes to her former schoolfellow, M.G., declaring:

I am ravisht with content, to see how your curious art ... can so happily translate your hand and fancy from one flower to another, the one as the draught of your Needle, the other of your Pen; were I to be judg, I knew [*sic*] not to which to give the greatest praise or encomium, The Flourishes of the Pen, or the Flowers of the Needle ....<sup>131</sup>

Inviting the reader to imagine the material form of a handwritten letter, S.L.'s reference to M.G.'s 'Flourishes of the Pen' evokes calligraphic flourishes as well as varieties of

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<sup>126</sup> Famianus Strada, *De Bello Belgico: The History of the Low-Country Warres*, trans. Robert Stapylton (London, 1650), A4r.

<sup>127</sup> Edward Worsley, *Protestancy without Principles* (Antwerp, 1668), A1r.

<sup>128</sup> John Sergeant, *Sure-Footing in Christianity* (London, 1665), F5r.

<sup>129</sup> John Lightfoot, *A Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles* (London, 1645), F1r.

<sup>130</sup> See, 'flower, n.', *OED Online*, December 2016, def. 6d.

<sup>131</sup> Hannah Woolley, *The Gentlewomans Companion* (London, 1673), Q5r. Robert Codrington's *The Second Part of Youths Behaviour* contains a similar letter (London, 1664), R8v (signature sequence inconsistent).

‘Literary or rhetorical embellishment; ambitious copiousness or amplification’.<sup>132</sup> This latter connotation is drawn out in S.L.’s ensuing suggestion that ‘a Secretary to a Queen may gather eloquence and fancy’ from them; as noted in chapter three, ‘gathering’ was a key term in *florilegia* practices.<sup>133</sup>

The commonplace qualities of embroidered motifs further recall the rules of *copia*. As Erasmus emphasises, stock epithets, similes and phrases are commonly used to generate *copia*; as noted above, these are collected from texts like nectar from flowers, copied into one’s commonplace book or florilegium and inserted into one’s writing.<sup>134</sup> Practices of textual collection, reproduction and imitation found textile parallels in the sampler which, as Maureen Daly Goggin notes, provided an ‘invention tool similar to the commonplace notebook in rhetoric’.<sup>135</sup> Early modern writers registered such connections. Clergyman Stephen Jerome invokes a common parallel as he remarks on people’s use of notes in ‘their booke-formes which they follow, as Boyes their written Coppies, and Girles their Samplers’.<sup>136</sup> Rather than establishing a binary which debar girls from literate culture, Jerome suggests the equivalence of the two objects and highlights the material variety of ‘book-formes’. Spot and band samplers often represent flora and fauna, as well as castles, houses and mermaids, suggesting that we might see the depiction of these figures in embroidered stories as representing similar kinds of imitation and adaptation to those advocated by Erasmus (Figures 3, 49 and 50).

Setting the narrative scene, embroidery’s crowded motifs can be understood as forms of copious dilation whereby, according to Erasmus, the circumstances of a case

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<sup>132</sup> ‘flourish, n.’, *OED Online*, December 2016, def. 5a.

<sup>133</sup> Woolley, *The Gentlewomans Companion*, Q5r

<sup>134</sup> Erasmus, *Copia*, 24:635–39.

<sup>135</sup> Goggin, ‘An Essamplaire Essai’, 316. On eighteenth-century samplers and commonplace books, see Catherine E. Kelly, ‘Reading and the Problem of Accomplishment’, in Hackel and Kelly, *Reading Women*, 130–35.

<sup>136</sup> Stephen Jerome, *A Ministers Mite* (London, 1650), C6r–C7v. See also Theophilus Brabourne, *An Answer to M. Candry’s Two Books of the Sabbath* (London, 1654), F3r; Thomas Pestell, *Sermons and Devotions* (London, 1659), K2v; John Donne, *John Donne’s Sermons on the Psalms and the Gospels*, vol. 4, ed. George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), 100. See also Calabresi, “‘You sow’”, 87–89. For a miscellany which incorporates needlework patterns alongside textual commonplaces, see Thomas Trevelyon, ‘Trevelyon Miscellany, 1608’, Folger MS V.b.232.

are ‘fill[ed] out’ and ‘reinforce[d] ... with close-packed convincing details’. Such details might appear tangential to the main discourse but Erasmus insists: ‘even if you do not deploy them and lead them out to battle, so to speak, they fight on their own and contribute not a little to the winning of the case’.<sup>137</sup> Erasmus’s comments evoke and qualify Jones and Stallybrass’s claim that ‘[e]ach detail is interesting on its own, rather than subordinated to a central narrative or consistent perspective’. These details operate as potentially autonomous units, fighting individual battles, unbidden by their author. Nevertheless, they are coherent with the case in hand, operating in tandem with, rather than in opposition to, the narrative.

One important function of these ‘close-packed and convincing details’ is to produce *enargeia*: immersive, vivid description which enlivens one’s subject and prompts an audience to respond to it as a dramatically and dynamically immediate spectacle. According to Erasmus, the rhetorician ‘bring[s] it before the eyes with all the colours filled in, so that our hearer or reader is carried away and seems to be in the audience at a theatre’.<sup>138</sup> The visual arts offer an important model, with Erasmus noting that *enargeia* seems to ‘display it [a thing] to be looked at as if it were expressed in colour in a picture, so that it may seem that we have painted, not narrated, and that the reader has seen, not read’. Richard Meek comments that Erasmus here indicates ‘that narration should aspire to the qualities of visual art’, an observation which challenges the modern tendency to see images as static and lacking the progression required of narrative.<sup>139</sup>

According to Erasmus, *enargeia* ‘consist[s] mainly in the exposition of circumstantial details’; these include clothes and tapestries, underscoring fabric’s role in generating *copia* and *enargeia* in verbal narrative.<sup>140</sup> Such detail ‘sometimes seems

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<sup>137</sup> Erasmus, *Copia*, 24:592.

<sup>138</sup> Erasmus, *Copia*, 24:577.

<sup>139</sup> The translation is quoted from Terence Cave, ‘*Enargeia*: Erasmus and the Rhetoric of Presence in the Sixteenth Century’, *L’Esprit Créateur* 16, no. 4 (1976): 7. I follow Richard Meek in using Cave’s translation here, as Cave’s version better preserves the original’s use of ‘narro’ than Knott’s ‘describe’. See Erasmus, *De Duplici Copia Rerum ac Verborum Commentarii II* (Deventer, 1513), H3r. Compare Erasmus, *Copia*, 24:577. Richard Meek, *Narrating the Visual in Shakespeare* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 13. For more on *enargeia* as a narrative device, see Anke Bernau, ‘Enlisting Truth’, *Style* 50, no. 3 (2016): 266.

<sup>140</sup> Erasmus, *Copia*, 24:577–81, esp. 579.



insignificant, yet somehow or other it presents the thing marvellously to our eyes'.<sup>141</sup> This apparent insignificance suggests that modern confusion around seemingly trivial motifs in embroidered stories might be redirected to consider their role in creating an immersive and dynamic narrative. As indicated in previous chapters, natural imagery, in particular, was commonly praised for its verisimilitude. For example, Batchiler observes that Perwich's work was wrought 'so rarely to the Life,/ As if there were a kind of *strife*,/ 'Twixt *Art* and *Nature*'. Artistic creation becomes organic: '*leaves, boughs, branches, body, root*,/ She made to grow in *Winter* time'.<sup>142</sup>

Proserpine's depiction of the water, discussed earlier, appears similarly fertile and produces auditory as well as visual hallucinations: Digges sees the 'sedge and greenish weed/ Flote from the Rockes (as if they there did breed ...)' and considers the 'sands, so like; that lookers on would thinke/ They heard the Seas hoarse murmure'.<sup>143</sup> Digges' description evokes the rockpools often stitched at the bottom of embroidered stories, as in Figures 47 and 51.<sup>144</sup> The verisimilitude of these motifs could be accentuated by the materials used. During the vogue for raised work, commonplace motifs were often selected for three-dimensional treatment and embellishment: for example, shells, pearls and coral often feature in rockpools (see, for example, Figure 51). This material variety recalls Perwich's use of '*Wax, Straws* and *Gum*,/ *Silks, Gems*, and *Gold*, the *total* sum/ Of *rich* materials' and further signals the copious principles governing these motifs as well as their constituent materials.<sup>145</sup> In the context of the rockpool, the marine embellishments seem not just to simulate but to incorporate the physical reality of water, employing organic matter like shells which flourish therein. Other components of raised work similarly blur distinctions between art and nature, life and lifelessness: peacock feathers commonly embellish wings whilst one embroidery of

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 24:580.

<sup>142</sup> Batchiler, *The Virgins Pattern*, E2r. Morrall also reads this passage in relation to the verisimilitude of embroidered flowers, 'Representations of Adam and Eve', 315.

<sup>143</sup> Digges, *Rape of Proserpine*, D4v.

<sup>144</sup> On rockpool motifs in relation to concepts of order and imagination, see Lisa M. Klein, 'The "Fantastical Motion" of Female Imagination: The Rocky Pool Motif in Seventeenth-Century Raised-Work Embroideries', *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 75, no. 2 (2001): 42–56.

<sup>145</sup> Batchiler, *The Virgins Pattern*, E1v–E2r.

Abraham sacrificing Isaac features birds with real beaks.<sup>146</sup> Like the kitchen conceits discussed by Wendy Wall, these embroideries seem to ‘[p]urposefully confus[e] the category of animation’.<sup>147</sup> Their organic details challenge the notion that the motifs they create are absurd, and suggest an approach to realism governed as much by attention to matter and texture, as by a concern for scale or environmental consistency.

Other writers indicate that an embroidery’s material form might generate animacy and plot movement, highlighting how embroideries behaved and were perceived in dynamic ways. Olson notes that tapestries’ ‘wool and silk threads constantly mutated in response to wind, gravity, moisture, and light’, concluding that ‘tapestry threads are living, moving entities’.<sup>148</sup> Other embroidered objects could be even more emphatically animated. In *Christs Victorie*, for example, Fletcher describes the animals in Mercy’s garment as wrought in ‘threads, so fresh, and liuely coloured’ that ‘the mistaken eye would rashly swear/ ... the beasts [did] liuing wear’.<sup>149</sup> Fletcher’s pun suggests how the illusion of temporal and spatial progression is generated in clothing’s use, as well as signalling material and chromatic changes produced through ‘wear and tear’.<sup>150</sup> Dynamic embroidered attire was apparently culturally familiar, particularly in masques. An interlude in J.S.’s romance, *Clidamas* (1639), features masquers in costumes embroidered ‘in the fashion of a net, ... intermixed with little fishes, in which the workman had shewed such skill, that as the garment moved, the fishes seemed to dance and leap in the net’.<sup>151</sup> In Thomas Dekker’s *The Seuen Deadly Sinnes of London* (1606), pages in the ‘Interlude of Apishness’ wear ‘suites, embrodered full of Butterflies, with

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<sup>146</sup> Mary M. Brooks and Sonia O’Connor, “‘In needle works there doth great knowledge rest’: The Contribution of X-Radiography to the Understanding of Seventeenth Century English Embroideries from the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, Oxford”, in Brooks and O’Connor, *X-Radiography of Textiles, Dress and Related Objects* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2007), 240. Brooks considers realistic details, and embroidered motifs more generally, in relation to curiosity, in Brooks, ‘Performing Curiosity’, 15–19. See also Claire Canavan, ‘Object Study 13: An Embroidered Mirror’, in *The Routledge Handbook of Material Culture in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Catherine Richardson, Tara Hamling and David Gaimster (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 242–43; Canavan, “‘[A]ll Sorts of Stiches’”, 45–46.

<sup>147</sup> Wall, *Recipes for Thought*, 89.

<sup>148</sup> Olson, *Arras Hanging*, 30.

<sup>149</sup> Fletcher, *Christs Victorie*, 53.5, 53.7–8.

<sup>150</sup> ‘wear, v.1’, *OED Online*, December 2016, defs.1, 14, 18, 21.

<sup>151</sup> J.S., *Clidamas* (London, 1639), L2r.

wings that flutter vp with the winde'.<sup>152</sup> These fluttering butterflies evoke the detached needlepoint wings and petals of other embroidered pictures and objects (see, for example, Figure 52), suggesting how needleworks may have been enlivened through motions within the environment.

## Between *Copia* and Control

As in verbal rhetoric, embroidery's pictorial and material *copia* is not abundance without limit. As Parker observes, Renaissance rhetorical treatises emphasise that dilation and expansion must 'be kept within the horizon of ending, mastery, and control'.<sup>153</sup> This mastery is articulated through *dispositio*. Concerned with organising matter into an 'orderly sequence leading to an end', *dispositio* produces narrative coherence, linearity and closure. Parker characterizes this discursive control as a form of male social mastery over female prolixity, aligning it with 'the reigning gynecological conception of the male as "disposing" the female in generation'.<sup>154</sup> Yet it is precisely this language in which Batchiler praises Perwich's governance of her 'rich materials [which] she dispos'd/In *dainty* order'.<sup>155</sup> Intimating that Perwich subjects her abundant materials to a kind of discursive sequencing through which she can achieve an ending, Batchiler indicates that rhetorical mastery might be a female as well as a male virtue. Other commentators similarly praise order amongst *copia*, suggesting that it was a recognised trait of accomplished embroidery. James Mabbe's englishing of Mateo Aléman's *The Rogue* (1623), for example, describes a woman with 'a curious hand in all kinde of workes, white or blacke, in silke or gold, and in ordering her colours'; this needlewoman's technical and chromatic versatility generates appreciation of her methodical and proper arrangement.<sup>156</sup>

Copious content could also be circumscribed physically and spatially, especially in small-scale embroideries. In *Christs Victorie*, Fletcher describes how, on Mercy's

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<sup>152</sup> Thomas Dekker, *The Seuen Deadly Sinnes of London* (London, 1606), E4v.

<sup>153</sup> Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies*, 14.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 13–14, 113.

<sup>155</sup> Batchiler, *The Virgins Pattern*, E1v–E2r.

<sup>156</sup> James Mabbe, trans., *The Rogue* (London, 1623), Rr2r.

garment, 'here, and there few men she scattered,/ ... but she with one fine thread/ So short, and small, and slender wove them all.'<sup>157</sup> Fletcher suggests that the dispersed nature of Mercy's subject matter is brought under control by the unity and material brevity of her single thread, recalling the role of the narrative thread in imposing coherence.<sup>158</sup>

Skills of humanist breviloquence were honed and expressed in the epitome. As Chloe Wheatley has demonstrated, this form became increasingly popular during the early modern period; in its attempt to represent a whole through 'principles of selection and exclusion', the epitome offered a 'crystallized sense of the challenges involved in the very act of creating historical narrative'. Wheatley highlights that such self-control could be generated physically in the production of miniature books.<sup>159</sup> In the description of Mary's embroidered girdle in Beaumont's *Psyche*, women's needlework is seen to participate in this narrative trend as material brevity affords similar opportunities for concision: the figures depicted are 'Justled and throng'd, and nipp'd into a small/ (Yet a well ordered) Epitomie'. The point is underscored in a later reference to the jewel which Christ has affixed to the girdle to 'tie up all the story/ In one divine *Epitomie of glory*'. Read alongside Beaumont's earlier observation that the '*Girdle* proves a *Multitude/ Of sundry things made friends and tied in one*', this suggests how the object's purpose might complement its size as a means of restraining dilation and unifying diversification. Tied 'close and straight', and designed to keep the body within bounds, the girdle's purpose recalls *copia*'s association with the swelling female body and suggests that its use can ultimately constrain and unite its varied subject matter.<sup>160</sup> Material function becomes narrative form.

At the same time, Beaumont's admission that this epitome is 'small/ (*Yet ... well ordered*)' [my emphasis] intimates that the story's ordered disposition arises despite, rather than because of, its material brevity. The potentially converse effects of physical diminution crystallize in the stanza's description of the girdle as 'that little

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<sup>157</sup> Fletcher, *Christs Victorie*, 55.1–4.

<sup>158</sup> 'weave, v.1', *OED Online*, December 2016, def. 4c.

<sup>159</sup> Chloe Wheatley, *Epic, Epitome, and the Early Modern Historical Imagination* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 26, 77–81, 84.

<sup>160</sup> Beaumont, *Psyche*, 3.54.1–4, 3.170.5–6, 3.62.5.

Dwelling .../ Where sweet *Contraction* would make them [the figures] *more great*. As the italics emphasise, compression produces distortions of scale which intensify the impression of copious amplification; this tension between compression and expansion is registered in the printed text, where spatial constraints have forced '*great*' to be placed on the line above.<sup>161</sup> *Contraction*'s amplificatory effects evoke Susan Stewart's theory of the miniature as a form in which 'signification ... is increased rather than diminished by its minuteness' since, as an artefact's size reduces, 'the labor involved multiplies'. According to Stewart, this inverse relationship between size and significance 'threatens the infinity of description without hierarchization'.<sup>162</sup> This is discernible in Beaumont's ekphrasis and emphasises the potential of minute embroidery to produce rather than restrain *copia*. Beaumont's lingering description of the crowd as 'Justled and throng'd, and nipp'd' amasses verbs in much the same way as the embroidered '*Figures* [are] crowded close', and suggests parallels between rhetorical and social disorder.<sup>163</sup>

Swelled with synonyms, the text's amplification responds to the embroidery's increased significance by suggesting its ineffability: each verb thickens meaning while also revealing the previous word as incapable of accurately representing the embroidery. The sense of endless, non-hierarchical dilation is augmented by the polysyndetic structure, designed 'to cause deliberation, and to magnifie'.<sup>164</sup> As already highlighted in Fletcher's description of Mercy's 'short, and small, and slender' thread, polysyndeton appealed to other commentators on embroidery, the seemingly endless expansiveness of this additive style aptly capturing the potentially multiplying effects of miniaturization. These verbal structures suggest how small pieces of needlework evade closure and refuse temporal and causal subordination.

Such structures seem to support Stewart's claim that the miniature creates 'a world of arrested time'. Observing that the miniature privileges 'spatial closure ... over temporal closure', Stewart alleges that it 'tends towards tableau rather than towards

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<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.54.5–6.

<sup>162</sup> Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), 38, 44.

<sup>163</sup> Beaumont, *Psyche*, 3.54.1,3.

<sup>164</sup> Christopher Wase, *Methodi Practicae Specimen* (London, 1667), E7r.

narrative'.<sup>165</sup> Yet this both erases the spatiality of narrative and is at odds with early modern understandings of how the interrelation of spatial and temporal brevity could accelerate narrative time, ideas which will be discussed further below, in relation to Powlet's embroidery. Syntactically, Beaumont's polysyndetic deliberation is counterbalanced by his use of asyndeton, a 'swift and speedy' figure which is employed 'when we will seeme to make hast'.<sup>166</sup> In his observation that '*John, ... as the Work doth rise, / Lives, preaches, washes, suffers prison, dies*', this swiftness seems to derive from poetic spatial constrictions which mimic those of the 'one Cell' afforded to Mary's embroidery.<sup>167</sup> As it concludes the stanza, this last line must make an ending; in order to make the subject fit this room, all conjunctions are squeezed out.

At the same time as accelerating storytelling, asyndeton could threaten narrative coherence and organisation. As early modern rhetoricians observe, the term's etymology signals disjunction or disconnection, and the figure produces a seemingly disordered, massy, 'heap or pile of words'.<sup>168</sup> This corresponds with modern reflections on the list, a genre which, as we have seen throughout this section, was commonly employed in early modern responses to embroidery. Janette Dillon alleges that lists engender an 'emphasis on disconnectedness, on the independent life of objects'. Her claim that their contents are 'juxtaposed for no good reason other than their physical contiguity' resonates with critics' reactions to the apparent discontinuity of embroidered motifs and the 'seemingly random' ways in which contents are arranged, suggesting how list-like structures might be discovered within embroidered compositions.<sup>169</sup>

Yet if asyndetic lists indicate disconnectness, polysyndetic ones suggest hyperconnectivity: Puttenham observes that in polysyndeton 'euery clause is knit and coupled together', invoking another textile term ('knit') which is habitually used to

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<sup>165</sup> Stewart, *On Longing*, 48, 66–67.

<sup>166</sup> Puttenham, *Arte of English Poesie*, V3r–v.

<sup>167</sup> Beaumont, *Psyche*, 3.55.5–6, 3.52.5.

<sup>168</sup> John Smith, *The Myserie of Rhetorique Unveil'd* (London, 1665), M2r.

<sup>169</sup> Janette Dillon, *Theatre, Court and City, 1595–1610: Drama and Social Space in London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 13; Morrall and Watt, *English Embroidery*, 159.

describe the ‘proper joining’ of *dispositio*.<sup>170</sup> The antagonism of asyndetic and polysyndetic structures reflects the ambivalent status of the list more generally. As Bob Perelman observes, ‘what from one perspective may look like a sign of radical disconnection may from another be a gesture of continuity’.<sup>171</sup> For Robert Belknap these effects are concomitant with, and discernible within, the verbal syntax of the list: ‘[l]ike the conjunction *and*, the list joins and separates at the same time’.<sup>172</sup> The desire for connection, moreover, tends to be stimulated rather than subdued by apparent randomness or disconnection. Lists prompt us to look for a theme, ‘spark[ing] endless connections’,<sup>173</sup> and demanding ‘strategies of familiarization and narrativization in order to make sense of their meaning’.<sup>174</sup>

What readers take away from the list is thus not an incoherent mass but rather a copiousness of coherence and a multiplicity of ways of navigating which places the onus for fashioning narrative at least partly on the reader; as Eva Van Contzen notes, lists ‘involv[e] readers in the processes of sense-making’.<sup>175</sup> This repays comparison with Olson’s comments on poets’ use of what she calls “‘blank” arras’: tapestries whose surface is not described in the poem. Likening them to “‘choose your own adventure” moment[s]’, she suggests that these tapestries are designed to ‘increase our awareness of our own role [as readers] in the collective labor of fiction making’.<sup>176</sup> The use of the list in descriptions of embroideries suggests that this function might not be confined to imaginary materials but that such “‘blank” arras might take their cue from encounters with actual textiles. Biblical narratives especially could demand readers’ co-operation; as

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<sup>170</sup> Puttenham, *Arte of English Poesie*, V3v; Patricia Parker, *Shakespeare from the Margins: Language, Culture, Context* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 90.

<sup>171</sup> Bob Perelman, ‘Parataxis and Narrative: The New Sentence in Theory and Practice’, *American Literature* 65, no. 2 (1993): 314; see also, Bruce Smith, ‘Reading Lists of Plays, Early Modern, Modernist, Postmodern’, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (1992): 127–44.

<sup>172</sup> Robert E. Belknap, *The List: The Uses and Pleasures of Cataloguing* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 15.

<sup>173</sup> Belknap, *The List*, 2.

<sup>174</sup> Eva Van Contzen, ‘The Limits of Narration: Lists and Literary History’, *Style* 50, no. 3 (2016): 246.

<sup>175</sup> Van Contzen, ‘Limits of Narration’, 257.

<sup>176</sup> Olson, *Arras Hanging*, 3, 84.

we have seen, familiarity with discontinuous scriptural reading practices made readers open to the multiple connections in and routes through biblical history.

The inherence of the list within needlework is explored from a material as well as visual perspective in Beaumont's commentary on Mary's making of the girdle:

As active *Fancy* in a Midnights Dream  
 With strange extemporal dexterity  
 What Sceens, what Thronges, what Worlds she lists, doth frame, ....<sup>177</sup>

Recalling needlework's devotional charge, as discussed in chapter two, Beaumont roots Mary's handiwork in ideas of midnight as a fertile time for dreaming and 'periods of midnight wakefulness ... [as] times when the soul could draw especially close to God'.<sup>178</sup> Mary's teeming work originates from a period of devotional and imaginative fecundity.

Mary's listing has copious connotations. 'List' seems to be used primarily to mean desire or choice, but its situation immediately after the anaphoric inventory suggests that Mary also lists these scenes, throngs and worlds in the sense of serially cataloguing them. This conjunction of female desire with the catalogue's abundance evokes *copia's* potential wantonness. At the same time, Beaumont's ensuing reference to framing invokes connotations of the 'list' as a border, particularly the selvage of a piece of cloth, indicating that the list might be fabricated by the material itself.<sup>179</sup> This suggestion is extended in the use of the verb 'frame'. As Rayna Kalas observes, framing is central to Renaissance conceptions of 'rhetorical invention as both a material craft and a creative and intellectual process' and 'denotes actions that are not confined to the subject or agent but pass over onto the object or, even more frequently, take their cue

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<sup>177</sup> Beaumont, *Psyche*, 3.52.1–3.

<sup>178</sup> Alec Ryrie, 'Sleeping, Waking and Dreaming in Protestant Piety', in *Private and Domestic Devotion in Early Modern Britain*, ed. Jessica Martin and Alec Ryrie (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 83–87, esp. 84.

<sup>179</sup> 'list, n.3', *OED Online*, December 2016, def. 2a. On associations between material and enumerative lists, see David Matthews, 'Enlisting the Poet: The List and the Late Medieval Dream Vision', *Style* 50, no. 3 (2016): 285.



from the object'.<sup>180</sup> Poised at the nexus of literary and material creativity, Mary's (and Beaumont's) acts of listing may thus originate from the fabric itself.

Material lists offered compelling ways of framing *copia* which engaged the changing status of the frame during the seventeenth century. The list provided a common figure for discursive restraint, evoking the emerging functions of the alienable quadrilateral frame in delimiting space,<sup>181</sup> and underscoring how rhetorical disposition was conceptualised in spatial and material terms. For example, in Shakespeare's *All's Well that Ends Well* (first performed c. 1603), Parolles instructs Bertram:

Use a more spacious ceremony to the noble lords; you have restrained yourself within the list of too cold an adieu. Be more expressive to them, for they wear themselves in the cap of the time .... After them, and take a more dilated farewell.<sup>182</sup>

As well as recalling military 'lists' (catalogues of soldiers), Parolles' comment evokes the boundaries of the fabric list as a figure of restraint, underscored in his reference to 'the cap of the time'.<sup>183</sup>

At the same time, those material lists which are alienable—added borders rather than selvages intrinsic to the weave—expand rather than curtail space and recall the frame's propensity to 'sustain, or advance' the work rather than 'enclose it'.<sup>184</sup> The additive list is invoked in a figurative context in Henry Wotton's 1642 biography of George Villiers. Wotton recounts how Villiers was made 'Marquis of *Buckingham*, ... Lord Admirall of *England*, Chiefe Iustice in Eyre of all the Parkes and Forrests in the South-side of *Trent*, Master of the Kings-Bench office ... Head Steward of *Westminster*, and Constable of *Windsor-Castle*.' Some people, Wotton suggests, might

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<sup>180</sup> Kalas, *Frame, Glass, Verse*, 35, 77.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 27, 33.

<sup>182</sup> William Shakespeare, *All's Well that Ends Well*, updated ed., ed. Russell Fraser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 2.1.48–50.

<sup>183</sup> Fraser makes this connection in his editorial gloss, Shakespeare, *All's Well that Ends Well*, 2.1.48–50.n. For discussion of this passage in relation to dilation and increase throughout the play, see Parker, *Shakespeare from the Margins*, 186–220.

<sup>184</sup> Kalas, *Frame, Glass, Verse*, 27.

‘wonder at such an Accumulation of benefits, like a kinde of Embroidering or listing of one favour upon another’.<sup>185</sup> Cited by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as an example of ‘put[ting] as a list or border *upon*’,<sup>186</sup> Wotton’s ‘list’ offers a synonym for the embellishment of embroidery which becomes conflated with his catalogue of positions. This resonates with the application of needlework to the borders of clothes as well as furnishings. Embroidery accumulates on cuffs, collars and other hems and seams, overlaying edging stitches (see for example, Figures 53 and 54). In both textual and textile senses, ‘listing’ represents a process of continuous addition; the burgeoning border of the list becomes a boundless boundary.

This amplification returns us to the borders of evidently narrative embroideries. We might recall Hero’s sleeves, ‘bordered’ with Venus and Adonis, Marion Chapman’s ‘border of a story of Herod’, or the hangings at Hardwick Hall with ‘long borders of stories in needlework’. Recalling Proserpine’s floral myths, added ‘for variety’, this structure positions the tales themselves as forms of copious embellishment.

The ambivalent effects of lists seem to concentrate the tensions at the heart of sewn stories more generally; material structures produce and control narratives characterized by dilation, digression and circumlocution. Operating as structures of containment and expansion, connection and fragmentation, progression and deliberation, lists speak to the challenges of reading embroideries whose copious material, pictorial and verbal textures test the limits of narrative as an ‘*espace dilatoire*’. Questions of scale, the accumulation of detail and the imposition of order were as evident in early modern embroidery as they were in verbal rhetoric, and could direct written style. The copious material and aesthetic structures of needlework stories not only inspired rhetorically flourished responses from contemporary writers’ pens but provided a capacious frame for thinking through the essential challenges of rhetorical style and narrative form.

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<sup>185</sup> Henry Wotton, *A Short View of the Life and Death of George Villiers [sic]* (London, 1642), B2v–B3r.

<sup>186</sup> ‘list, v.3’, *OED Online*, December 2016, def. 1a.

## 'A written Gospell in each little Twist': Elizabeth Powlet's Embroidery

I want now to use the poems written in response to Elizabeth Powlet's embroidery as a case study of the responses prompted by needlework narratives. These poems, previously discussed in chapter two, offer a suggestive insight into how early moderns understood the structure, shape and experience of narrative in terms of temporality, verisimilitude, spatiality, and the tension between coherence and variety.

The narrative content of Powlet's embroidery was noted in the University of Oxford's official record of the gift, which described it as an '*Historia*'.<sup>187</sup> Printed versions of the poems also foreground narrative, addressing themselves '*To a Lady that wrought a story of the Bible in needle-work*' and describing Powlet's gift as '*presenting the whole story of the Incarnation, Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension of our Saviour*'.<sup>188</sup> Although the manuscript title does not explicitly invoke 'story', the verses do. Thomas Gawen, for example, marvels at how Powlet manages 'in Two Tables [to] drawe/ The Gospell All', commenting that 'The Storie/ Doth some thing loose in Bulke, Nothing in Glorie'.<sup>189</sup>

The poets repeatedly highlight the fluid interchange between textual and textile stories, emphasising the embroidery's value in enabling us to understand written as well as wrought narratives. As noted in chapter two, Edward Marrow suggests that Powlet might materialize the scholars' poetry with her 'Cunning Needle', 'Deciphring out our Thanks' and 'ioyn[ing] them to her Guift; that so the Storie/ Of Guift, and Thankes, may tend vnto her Glorie'.<sup>190</sup> For Cartwright, the embroidery provides a generic model for textual composition: signalling the prestige of stories, he declares that 'I should rehearse/ Its Glories in a Storie, not a Verse'.<sup>191</sup> The embroidery itself seems simultaneously text and textile. Observing the crucifixion, Cartwright notes:

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<sup>187</sup> Bodleian NEP/supra/Reg R, 1628–40, 129v. See also, Macray, *Annals of the Bodleian Library*, 65.

<sup>188</sup> John Cleveland, *J. Cleveland Revived* (London, 1659), E7v; *Parnassus Biceps* (London, 1656), L1v.

<sup>189</sup> Bodleian Bodl. 22, 4v.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 6v.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 1r.

... on the Crosse such Loue, such Griefe wee finde,  
 As 'twere a Transcript of our Saviours minde.  
 Each Parcell so Expressiue, each so fitt,  
 That the Whole seems not so much wrought, as Writt;  
 Tis Sacred Text all; wee may quote, and thence  
 Extract what may be press'd in our defence.<sup>192</sup>

Rather than asserting the pen's superiority over the needle, Cartwright's suggestion that the 'Whole seems not so much wrought, as Writt' positions the embroidery as scriptural, invoking Holy Writ, which describes '[s]acred writings collectively'.<sup>193</sup> This is distinguished from the individual 'Parcell[s]', connoting 'short passage[s] of a book, especially of a sacred book, as the Bible'.<sup>194</sup> Evoking bundles of silk, these parcels equally suggest a material appreciation of the embroidery and scripture more generally. Cartwright's suggestion that the work may be 'quote[d]' and 'press'd' extends the material wordplay, punning on quotes/ coats and combining the work's importunate potential with connotations of both the clothes iron and the printing press, a pun with added force in printed versions of this poem. Pointing to the wider circulation of Powlet's story, Cartwright indicates that print, devotional and literary culture respond to models set by embroidery as much as the converse.

The University's Register describes the embroidered story as '*ad Vivum expressa*' (vividly expressed),<sup>195</sup> engaging the lively language of verisimilitude, discussed above. In the previous section I demonstrated how flora and fauna could be used to animate the embroidery; the poems on Powlet's embroidery highlight how the human as well as animal figures in a story were perceived as dynamic and animate, seeming to re-enact, rather than present static snapshots, of the biblical story. Cartwright observes 'Faces so Quick and Liuelie, that wee may/ Feare, if wee turne our backs, they'll steale away'

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 1v.

<sup>193</sup> 'writ, n.', *OED Online*, December 2016, def. 1c.

<sup>194</sup> 'parcel, n., adv., and adj.', *OED Online*, December 2016, def. 3a.

<sup>195</sup> Bodleian NEP/supra/Reg R, 1628–40, 129v. Translation mine.

whilst Ralph Brideoake, studying the Nativity, remarks: ‘The hungry grining Asses  
.../... if not bridled [would] sure eat vp the Hay/ Whereon y<sup>e</sup> Babe is lodg’d’.<sup>196</sup>

For Brideoake even the embroidery’s manifest inanimacy is lively and expressive of plot. With a wordplay on the eagerness of the feigned figures, Brideoake indicates that the handmaidens taking Christ down from the cross ‘fayne would tell/ Their strangling woes, and greifes to all that come;/ Had not too great a sorrowe made ’um dumbe.’ The crowd watching Christ’s ascension is similarly moved to immobility: ‘Their hands are palsie struck, their eyestrings breake,/ One gust of breath would make the mirrour speake’.<sup>197</sup> While the latter line suggests the viewer’s participation in re-enacting the narrative and underscores how environmental disturbances could enliven embroideries, the reference to eyestrings recalls scriptural descriptions of the curiously wrought body. These breaking eyestrings suggest the expressivity of the stitches themselves, the tensioned thread registering strains felt in the fibres of the human body.

For Gawen the vividness of the crucifixion possesses a more particular narrative function, its lively depiction drawing out the life in death of Christ’s story. Declaring that Powlet’s embroidered story surpasses attempts made in ‘Other Arts’, Gawen observes:

Yours fresh and fullie Ideates, and’s One  
That holds out at a Resurrection.  
Heere ’tis, that it to Christ ioyntlie procures  
A Rising from Both Bottoms Hell’s and yours:  
His Countenance refin’d seem’d not more Newe  
Issuing out from the Graue, then from your Clue ....<sup>198</sup>

Like Brideoake, Gawen suggests the particular aptitude of the material medium to tell the story, paralleling Christ’s harrowing of the bottom of Hell with Powlet’s ‘bottoms’: skeins of thread, as well as the silkworm’s cocoon.<sup>199</sup> The latter is particularly pertinent

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<sup>196</sup> Bodleian Bodl. 22, 1r, 10r.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 11v.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 4r.

<sup>199</sup> ‘bottom n., and adj.’, *OED Online*, December 2016, defs. 24a, 24b.

to the embroidered story since the silk-moth's emergence from this 'bottom' was understood as an emblem of resurrection.<sup>200</sup>

Gawen also explores silk's lively properties in relation to Christ's birth:

Here Liues my Sauour, and though He 'tis  
Lends Life to All, yet borrowes he from This.  
And doth to th'Worlde by Two Nativ'ties come,  
Both from your Fancie & from Maries Wombe:  
For, who obserues the Arte, will moue a strife  
Whether the Threds be more of Silke or Life ....<sup>201</sup>

As well as registering the embroidery's verisimilitude and invoking analogies between the creative powers of 'Fancie' and the female reproductive body,<sup>202</sup> Gawen's question 'Whether the Threds be more of Silke or Life' develops ideas of human life as a length of thread, discussed above. As Jones and Stallybrass note, the Virgin Mary 'was sometimes depicted as spinning out the thread of life in her womb'.<sup>203</sup> The thread of life materialized in the creation of silk, often believed to be spun from the silkworm's womb.<sup>204</sup>

Edward Dalby's poem applies a more technically minded form of fibrous temporality which stresses that embroideries were not only perceived but behaved in lively and responsive ways. Observing the Passion, he directs readers to envision Christ's face growing pallid in the fading of the dyed threads: 'See howe hee faints, y<sup>e</sup> Crimson silke turnes Pale,/ Changing its Graine'.<sup>205</sup> Whereas fabric's acute vulnerability to fading now presents a conservation problem, Dalby indicates that early moderns

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<sup>200</sup> Zacharie Boyd, *The Last Battell of the Soule in Death* (Edinburgh, 1629), Cccc2r; George Havers, trans., *A General Collection of Discourses of the Virtuosi of France* (London, 1664), N2v.

<sup>201</sup> Bodleian Bodl. 22, 3v.

<sup>202</sup> Katharine Eisaman Maus, 'A Womb of his Own: Male Renaissance Poets in the Female Body', in *Printing and Parenting in Early Modern England*, ed. Douglas A. Brooks (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 89–108.

<sup>203</sup> Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 117.

<sup>204</sup> See for example, George Sandys, *A Paraphrase upon the Divine Poems* (London, 1638), Bbb4v.

<sup>205</sup> Bodleian Bodl. 22, 7v.

embraced silks' changeable properties, enlisting inevitable changes in the embroidery's materials to construct narrative time and perform actions.

Whilst these elements of lifelike figuration served important narrative functions, they also appear to have prompted Reformation anxieties about the risks of idolatry. Reformation iconoclasm granted a new force to the belief that verisimilitude was a demonic temptation, although, as recent scholarship has amply illustrated, Protestants continued to enjoy a rich visual and material culture.<sup>206</sup> Powlet's scholarly audience registers such anxieties: Brideoake avers that the 'holy thing so farr my zeale misled/ Had no man seene, I had kisser and worshipped', whilst Beesley remarks: 'Could the proud Pontifeye but once commande/ Such a liue sacrifice, wee all should stand/ His pliant Convertites'.<sup>207</sup> Ultimately, however, the threat is contained. Brideoake concludes, 'The Jesuits only hope is by some tricke/ To make this Protestant turne Catholicke' whilst Cartwright claims the work as an instrument of Protestant conversion, asserting that 'The Needle may convert more then the Pen,/ When Faith may come by Seeing, & each Leafe/ Rightly pervs'd proue Gospell to the Deafe'.<sup>208</sup>

Cartwright's comments underscore embroidery's participation in crucial theological controversies, positioning Powlet's work in relation to debates about the relative merits of hearing or visually reading the Word, as well as questions about the uses of imagery; the latter was particularly contentious in the 1630s when Powlet's embroidery was presented and when Laudian programmes for the beautification of worship were in full swing.<sup>209</sup> At the same time, Cartwright's conflation of Powlet's sewn leaves with the biblical pages suggests non-iconographic ways of reading the wrought image and further indicates that early modern viewers were alert to a more complex range of ways of reading stitched flora than we have yet recognised. Stressing

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<sup>206</sup> Milner, *Senses*, 171–73.

<sup>207</sup> Bodleian Bodl. 22, 10v, 8v–9r.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 12r, 1v. For more on needlework's conversionary potential, see Claire Canavan and Helen Smith, "'The needle may convert more than the pen': Women and the Work of Conversion in Early Modern England", in *Conversions: Gender and Religious Change in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Simon Ditchfield and Helen Smith (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 105–26.

<sup>209</sup> Arnold Hunt, *The Art of Hearing: English Preachers and their Audiences, 1590–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 22–59. Kenneth Fincham and Nicholas Tyacke, *Altars Restored: The Changing Face of English Religious Worship, 1547–c. 1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 227–73.

that ‘each Leafe’ needs to be ‘Rightly pervs’d’, Cartwright invokes connotations of ‘read[ing] (a text) critically’, suggesting that embroidery’s meaning was not self-evident but demanded advanced interpretive literacies that aligned with intensive reading practices.<sup>210</sup>

Powlet’s needle prompts not only conversional ‘turns’, but narrative ones too, which emphasise the spatial practices of embroidered stories and expand our understanding of how needleworkers navigated sacred geography. Several scholars exploit the use of needles in wayfaring, as they foreground the various travel stories of Powlet’s Nativity. Brideoake highlights the shepherds who ‘Runne from y<sup>e</sup> sheepe to seeke the Lambe of God./ A little needle points ’vm out the way’.<sup>211</sup> John Beesley extrapolates from the journey of the Magi to the scholars flocking to see Powlet’s embroidery, observing that ‘More wisemen then to that same star did steere/ Their course, shall doe so to the needle here.’<sup>212</sup> Samuel Evans develops the orientational function of the needle for Powlet as maker-reader, observing that she has ‘fetcht a Compasse rounde, and gonne/ Through all our Saviours Passages best knowne,/By vertue of your Needle Misticall’.<sup>213</sup> Compounding the sewing needle with the magnetic needle, Evans positions stitchery as a navigational act in which the passage of the needle through the cloth guides the maker and reader through scriptural as well as spatial passages. These textual ‘passages’ materialize in the sewn lines: the term connotes an ‘extension of a line, string, etc., from one point to another’.<sup>214</sup>

The lines of thread and of the scriptural story are drawn together even more forcefully in Dalby’s observation that Powlet’s

... skillfull Clue

Hath made a Rode to Bethlem; Now wee may

With out a Starrs Direction, finde the way,

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<sup>210</sup> ‘peruse, v.’, *OED Online*, December 2016, def. 4a.

<sup>211</sup> Bodleian Bodl. 22, 9v–10r.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 8v.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 2v.

<sup>214</sup> ‘passage, n.’, *OED Online*, December 2016, def. 1c.



To th'Crotch our Sauious Cradle ....<sup>215</sup>

Evoking paths shown in embroideries like the Hardwick 'Sacrifice of Isaac' cushion, Powlet's 'Rode to Bethlem' foregrounds the travel story inherent in the Nativity and emphasises the participatory nature of reading: 'we', as well as the biblical characters, must find the way to our Saviour. Powlet's clue evokes that given by Ariadne to Theseus to enable him to wind his way through the labyrinth, highlighting thread's long-established orientational function.<sup>216</sup> Conflating this clue with Powlet's stitched depiction of the road, Dalby reveals how Powlet's silken plotting orientates the reader within biblical space. This recalls de Certeau's observation that storytelling is a spatial practice which 'traverse[s] and organize[s] places'. To borrow de Certeau's terms, Powlet's silks link places together, constructing connections between different elements of the story, and providing clues which direct and guide the reader through this itinerary.

In the presentation manuscript, Dalby's lines are accompanied by the marginal annotation, '*Nativity*'.<sup>217</sup> Enabling readers to navigate both the physical space of the page and the imaginative space of the ekphrastic verse, this marginal directive suggests intersections between needlework's signposting structures, and textual and paratextual directives. As I discuss further below, considering responses to Powlet's embroidery in the context of contemporary texts' fibrous metaphors both illuminates the narrative structures of Powlet's needlework and highlights how the textile vocabulary of textual stories was informed by the scrutiny of material artefacts. Threads and clues feature prominently in the vocabulary used to describe how readers and writers steer their way through verbal stories. For example, the frontispiece to the 1643 translation of Giovanni Diodati's *Pious Annotations, upon the Holy Bible* promises that the text will provide 'A Clue ... through each mysterious storie' for readers liable to become 'Lost in the Scriptures Labyrinth'.<sup>218</sup> Powlet's embroidery might be considered similarly. Whilst Diodati's annotations provide an external guidebook, Powlet's clue embeds exegesis

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<sup>215</sup> Bodleian Bodl. 22, 7r.

<sup>216</sup> Plutarch, *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romanes*, trans. Thomas North (London, 1579), A5r.

<sup>217</sup> Bodleian Bodl. 22, 7r.

<sup>218</sup> Giovanni Diodati, *Pious Annotations, upon the Holy Bible*, trans. anon. (London, 1643), frontispiece.

within its narrative, and evokes Protestant beliefs that the scriptures needed no external interpreter, since they ‘contained their own mechanism for right interpretation’.<sup>219</sup>

Claire Bourne has recently explored how ‘bottoms’—skeins of thread—were used to describe the process of navigating twists and turn in early modern drama, focusing primarily on Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher’s play, *The Maid’s Tragedy* (1619). Here, the heroine Aspatia discusses an embroidery of the ‘storie’ of Ariadne, finding parallels between the mythic heroine’s subsequent abandonment by Theseus and her own abandonment by her fiancé. Bourne uses this connection to argue that the image of Aspatia on the printed playtext’s title-page ‘is the keeper of the reader’s thread ... in the disorientating architecture of the play’; it directs the reader to focus on her plot line and reveals her end.<sup>220</sup> Early moderns were evidently alert to how the threads of embroidered stories could be used as directional devices within verbal plots and, more extensively, to the models they offered for the orientational work done by the various agents involved in producing a text.

Writers as well as readers relied upon guiding threads. In *Chorea Gigantum* (1663), for example, Walter Charleton refrains from discussing a particular subject, noting that his points will ‘appear, when the thread of my discourse hath brought me to mention them more opportunely’.<sup>221</sup> Not all threads, though, kept their authors on the straight and narrow. In *The Historie of the Holy Warre* (1639), Thomas Fuller seeks to trace the line of the Kings of Jerusalem but laments: ‘My clew of thread is not strong enough, on the guidance thereof for me to venture into this labyrinth of Pedegrees’.<sup>222</sup> Kenelm Digby’s clue invites rather than avoids digression: ‘the thread of the discourse inviteth mee to say a great deale of the production or creation of Mans Soule’. Concluding that ‘it is too tedious and too knotty a piece’ to enter into, Digby reminds us that even a single thread is not straightforward and can entangle the author and the reader in complicated digressions.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Killeen, ‘Chastising with Scorpions’, 496.

<sup>220</sup> Claire M. L. Bourne, “‘High Designe’’: Beaumont and Fletcher Illustrated’, *English Literary Renaissance* 44, no. 2 (2014): 275–327, esp. 294–96.

<sup>221</sup> Walter Charleton, *Chorea Gigantum* (London, 1663), D2r.

<sup>222</sup> Thomas Fuller, *The Historie of the Holy Warre* ([Cambridge], 1639), Nn2r.

<sup>223</sup> Kenelm Digby, *Observations Vpon Religio Medici* (London, 1643), C8r.

The non-linear and diversionary nature of thread is implicit in Dalby's reference to Powlet's clue: even as it emphasises the silk's role in wayfaring, his verse acknowledges that the embroidery is labyrinthine and thus recreates as well as explicates the scriptural maze. This corresponds with what narrative theorist J. Hillis Miller calls 'the paradox of Ariadne's thread' which 'maps the whole labyrinth, rather than providing a single track to its center and back out': it repeats rather than unravels the maze's convolutions. Like the space of dilation, such convolutions are both intrinsic to narrative and a risk to it. At the same time as the meandering line threatens narrative coherence, '[a] straight line conveys no information beyond the fact that the line is there'; according to Miller, '[o]nly the curved, crossed, or knotted line can be a sign making the line simultaneously something intelligible, conveying meaning ... and something repeatable'.<sup>224</sup>

These convolutions are discernible within embroideries, which, as Margaret Cavendish observes, are 'bossy, full of intermixing stiches, and crosse threds, knotted and purled', a description that captures the entangled, multidirectional structures evident in contemporaneous extant needlework (see, for example, Figure 51).<sup>225</sup> The poets find Powlet's threads similarly perplexed and perplexing. Confusing rather than clarifying, their subtle blending of colours combines with their sinuous and convoluted form to puzzle and deceive the viewer. Noting that the task of paying thanks 'Confounds our gratefull Thoughts', Brideoake continues:

... wee gaze, & see,  
 And in each thread admire a misterie.  
 Obserue y<sup>e</sup> Circumplexed twists, your straunge  
 Delusion of your Colours, how y<sup>ey</sup> chaunge  
 And vary in each stitch; y<sup>t</sup> purple thread  
 Now seemed white, and nowe againe 'tis Red;  
 Heere all insinuate ....<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> J. Hillis Miller, *Ariadne's Thread: Story Lines* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 19, 8.

<sup>225</sup> Margaret Cavendish, *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (London, 1655), M3r.

<sup>226</sup> Bodleian Bodl. 22, 9v.

Brideoake's attention to these 'twists' invokes the technical term used to describe threads 'composed of two or more fibres' as well as connoting the thread of life and the clue.<sup>227</sup> 'Circumplexed' and 'insinuate', Powlet's colourful 'twists' are emphatically circuitous, winding and indirect—like the path of the labyrinth.

'Insinuate' also suggests that Powlet's 'straunge' threads might embody a mysterious and indirect form of signification, a suggestion evident too in Brideoake's discovery of 'a misterie' in each thread. This combines craft's discourse of 'art and mystery' with the meanings hidden in the fibres. Evoking the parallels between mortal handiwork and the wonders of divine craft discussed in chapters two and three, skill itself seems significant and capable of presenting theological mysteries. The disorientating effects of Powlet's embroidery thus replicate the intractability of scriptural truth, something which contemporary theologians often figured in relation to needlework. For example, Presbyterian preacher William Bates notes that '*The great Mystery of Godliness, the Incarnation of the Eternal Son, and his according Justice with Mercy*' will be 'apparent' at the Resurrection, but that '[w]e now see as it were the rough part, and Knots of that curious Embroidery'; upon the resurrection, 'the sweetness of the Colours ... [shall] appear' and we will 'be able to expound the perplexing Riddle'.<sup>228</sup> Drawing parallels between embroidery's entangled threads and the entangled sense of scripture's 'perplexing Riddle[s]', Bates highlights that, particularly in biblical narrative, the drive towards clarification exists alongside structures of complication and delayed divulgence.<sup>229</sup>

Brideoake's attention to 'each thread' and 'each stitch' highlights the minute scrutiny with which embroideries were regarded. This continues as he remarks that Powlet's 'Curious hand/ Has taught th'vnletter'd Reader t'vnderstand/ A written Gospell in each little 'Twist'.<sup>230</sup> Here the thread is not just the guiding principle, but the story itself. Focusing on the individual fibres, Brideoake advocates a non-pictorial mode of understanding embroidered stories. This not only circumvents the risk of idolatry; it

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<sup>227</sup> 'twist, n.1', *OED Online*, December 2016, defs. 4a, 6, 7.

<sup>228</sup> William Bates, *A Funeral Sermon Preached upon the Death of the Reverend and Excellent Divine Dr. Thomas Manton* (London, 1678), B7v.

<sup>229</sup> Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies*, 14.

<sup>230</sup> Bodleian Bodl. 22, 9v.

emphasises that early moderns understood needlework stories in ways which were simultaneously more abstract and more material than can be accommodated by the current scholarly emphasis on iconographic approaches. Discerning a ‘written Gospel’ in these twists, Brideoake’s observation speaks to calls made by Juliet Fleming and Wendy Wall to consider a wider range of ‘writing arts’, and asks us to take further the suggestion that these included non-alphabetic forms.<sup>231</sup> Brideoake’s assertion that ‘th’vnletter’d Reader’ must be ‘taught ... t’vnderstand’ underscores that such meaning was not self-evident and that, like the non-alphabetic kitchen literacies examined by Wall, material literacies were acquired competencies which could demand complex critical and hermeneutic skills.<sup>232</sup>

Brideoake is not the only poet to ponder how Powlet’s skilfully blended colours mystify the narrative they create and seem to elucidate. The guiding agency of Powlet’s clue is both acknowledged and reformulated in Cartwright’s remark that the ‘Colours are mixt so subt’ly that thereby/ The stealth of Art both takes, and cheates the Eye’.<sup>233</sup> Evoking the physical transfer of the object in Aristotelian models of sensation,<sup>234</sup> the directive connotations of ‘take’ turn into a sense of captivating delusion; the viewer becomes ensnared in the labyrinthine threads. In the manuscript version of the poem, Cartwright continues:

At once a Thousand wee can gaze vpon,  
But are deceau’d by their Transition:  
What toucheth is the same, Beame takes from Beame,  
The Next still like, yet differing in th’extreame;  
Here runnes This Track wee see, thither That tends,  
But cann’t say here This rose, or there that ends ....<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Fleming, *Graffiti*, 133; Wall, *Recipes for Thought*, chapter 3.

<sup>232</sup> Wall, ‘Literacy and the Domestic Arts’, 383–412.

<sup>233</sup> Bodleian Bodl. 22, 1r

<sup>234</sup> See Thijs Westeijn, “‘Painting’s Enchanting Posion’: Artistic Efficacy and the Transfer of Spirits”, in *Spirits Unseen: The Representation of Subtle Bodies in Early Modern European Culture*, ed. Christine Göttler and Wolfgang Neuber (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 141–78; Milner, *Senses*, 16.

<sup>235</sup> Bodleian Bodl. 22, 1r.

Considered in spatialized terms, Powlet's work does not offer one, straightforward and clearly marked way through the story, but rather multiple 'tracks' tending in divergent directions from a point of apparent unity. Situating Powlet's stitches as material traces of the line along which her needle has travelled, Cartwright seeks to follow Powlet's trail and points towards making itself as a form of narrative.<sup>236</sup>

Powlet's skilful ordering of polychromic threads creates the illusion of coherence, continuity and succession; her silks appear to follow on seamlessly from one another even as they tend in divergent directions. Such structural artifice is fundamental to narrative meaning; as Paul Veyne observes, the emplotment of history relies upon a 'deceptive continuity' which writes over gaps in sources and synthesises disparate fields of knowledge to create a comprehensible and causal narrative.<sup>237</sup> Whilst the single thread embodies an ideal, unified continuity, embroideries like Powlet's, in which 'Beame takes from Beame', might be considered as chromatically fabricating the illusion of structural significance and integrity in sewn stories. The skilled blending of colours in embroidery provided a common analogue for the creation of textual coherence, thanks to a comparison made by Justus Lipsius in *Politicorum sive civilis doctrinae libri sex* (1589). Lipsius observes: '*ut Phrygiones è varij coloris filo vnum aliquod aulæum formant: sic nos è mille aliquot particulis vniforme hoc & cohærens corpus*'.<sup>238</sup> The analogy was widely referenced and redeployed in translation. Hugh Davis, for example, observed: '*As Broiderers do form some one piece of Tapestry out of a thread of divers colours; so Writers do form also one cohering work out of some thousand particles, and small portions of things*'.<sup>239</sup> Samuel Purchas similarly noted: 'Embroiderers, of threds of divers colours (in the new world of various feathers) make a costly and delightful Hanging: So writers out of a thousand parcels, an uniform, and agreeing body'.<sup>240</sup> Powlet's 'Thousand' colours (with their expressive 'Parcells', discussed above) speak to these 'thousand parcels' and suggest a fluid interchange between metaphor and material.

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<sup>236</sup> 'tract, n.', *OED Online*, December 2016, defs. II.

<sup>237</sup> Paul Veyne, *Writing History: Essay on Epistemology* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1984), 17–18.

<sup>238</sup> Justus Lipsius, *Politicorum sive civilis doctrinae libri sex* ([Leiden, 1589]), \*\*2r.

<sup>239</sup> Hugh Davis, *De Jure Uniformitatis Ecclesiasticae* (London, 1669), Rrr1v.

<sup>240</sup> Samuel Purchas, *A Theatre of Politicall Flying-Insects* (London, 1657), A4v.

A printed version of Cartwright's poem foregrounds the shared narratology of texts and textiles by replacing 'Track' with the variant spelling 'Tract', a term which, as noted above, connotes a thread as well as a discourse, suggesting, as in Brideoake's poem, that individual stitches may be read for stories.<sup>241</sup> Tract also connotes the '[p]rotraction (of time), deferring, putting off, dilatory proceeding', suggesting further connections between fabric and dilation, and recalling the ways that Powlet's tracts frustrate attempts to discern where each 'ends'.<sup>242</sup> Thomas Gawen similarly finds what Parker calls 'the specter of endlessness' in Powlet's colours.<sup>243</sup> Admiring her rainbow—'the varied Bowe w<sup>ch</sup> Heauen bends'—he finds:

The Red appeares and yet the Blewe neere ends  
Here's Greene, and Yellowe's there, yet none can see  
Where Greene or Yellowe doth Beginn to be;  
Each into Other's transient ...<sup>244</sup>

Echoing Cartwright's observation of the embroidery's chromatic 'Transition', Gawen's wonder at the 'transient' threads suggests the spatio-temporality of Powlet's shading, evoking the '[p]assing by or away with time' as they pass into one another.<sup>245</sup> A terminus, however, proves elusive. The 'Blue' seems both 'near' and 'ne'er' ending. Transitions lead only to more beginnings which dilate, digress and, like Gawen's words, turn back on themselves. Recalling the conceptual common ground of rhetorical and material colours, Powlet's copious and various hues indicate a connection between chromatic diversity and chronological distension.

This temporal protraction is also produced in the experience of viewing. Both Cartwright and Brideoake 'gaze' at Powlet's skilfully blended colours, highlighting how curious stitchery could hold the eye, provoking a ponderous view which is reproduced in the poets' lingering descriptions. At the same time, the 'breife Imag'rie', combined with the 'Quick and Liuelie' figures, seems to impel brisker ways of looking which

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<sup>241</sup> *Parnassus Biceps*, L1v.

<sup>242</sup> 'tract, n.3', *OED Online*, December 2016, def. 1.b.

<sup>243</sup> Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies*, 26.

<sup>244</sup> Bodleian Bodl. 22, 3v.

<sup>245</sup> 'transient, n. and adj.', *OED Online*, December 2016, def. 1a.

suggest connections between spatial and temporal brevity. Brideoake remarks that ‘Bethlem’s so neere a minutes paines will bring/ A nimble eye to looke on Juda’s King’ and notes of the Nativity that ‘A Running eye/ May read y<sup>e</sup> roome a stable where they lie.’<sup>246</sup> As indicated above, the embroidery’s minuteness seems both to compress and distend time.

Powlet’s chromatic dilation accords with the distended nature of biblical narrative. As Parker highlights, biblical history is replete with figures and structures that protract space and time, reflecting the ‘deferred judgement and ending’ of Christianity.<sup>247</sup> These structures are evident at the level of Powlet’s pictorial narrative as well as within the threads themselves. Moving from the figures depicted visiting Christ’s tomb to the Ascension, Beesley compounds his praise of Powlet’s artistic eminence with a reflection on narrative continuation: ‘Nor doth the glorie of the worke here end,/ But doth (as fit it should) the Heauens transcend/ It makes our Sauour soare aboute the skie’.<sup>248</sup> Beesley’s parenthetical ‘as fit it should’ not only distends the sentence, textually reflecting the textile dilation, but mimics the delay in Christ’s ascension, deferred for forty days after his resurrection.

The rainbow observed by Gawen also signals deferral. Symbolising the covenant between God and earth, it is promised to appear in the Book of Revelation. Like the threads which compose Powlet’s rainbow, this ending as yet eludes Powlet’s audience. At the same time, the rainbow also looks backwards typologically to Genesis where it appears to Noah as a token of God’s covenant.<sup>249</sup> Symbolising Noah’s reprieve from what Parker terms ‘the almost final closure of the Flood’, this rainbow not only encodes a further level of delayed closure but emphasises that the temporality created by typological narrative is neither straightforward nor successive.<sup>250</sup> As Jonathan Gil Harris observes, the supersessionism which governs typology means that

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<sup>246</sup> Bodleian Bodl. 22, 4v, 9v, 10r.

<sup>247</sup> Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies*, 11.

<sup>248</sup> Bodleian Bodl. 22, 9r.

<sup>249</sup> Revelation 4:3; Genesis 9:13–16 (KJV).

<sup>250</sup> Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies*, 11.



even as ... time supposedly moves forward it is inadvertently dogged by another, recursive temporality that not only retains the superseded past in the present but also discloses that present to be an uncanny reproduction of the abjected past.<sup>251</sup>

Gil Harris's comments resonate with the experience of Powlet's 'neere end[ing]' colours and, in particular, evoke the complex temporality suggested by Brideoake's observation that 'y<sup>t</sup> purple thread/ Now seemed white, and nowe againe 'tis Red'.<sup>252</sup>

Brideoake's first 'now' seems suspended between past, present and future. On the one hand, its position after the initial 'purple thread' seems to connote 'the time directly following on the present moment'. Yet its jarring conjunction with the past tense 'seemed' suggests that we should rather read the first instance as 'just now', connoting 'the time directly preceding the present moment'.<sup>253</sup> This recursive temporality carries over into the second 'now' which, whilst joined to a present tense verb, offers itself as a reiteration of the first half of the line. As it moves forward, the line seems to turn back further still; the adverb 'again' suggests a recursive motion '[b]ack to or towards the point of starting' which is underscored by the echoing rhyme of 'Red' and reflects the thread's chromatic return from white towards purple.<sup>254</sup> Powlet's recursive threads emphasise how biblical histories, especially, resist the temporal structures of sequential narrative.

The scrutiny which these scholars accorded to Powlet's coloured threads reveals just how closely and thoughtfully embroidered stories were considered. While undoubtedly shaped by discourses of gift-giving and patronage, the poems highlight how embroidery's skilled composition was regarded with a keen critical and technical eye. These poems should prompt us, in turn, to look more intently at the materials of early modern narrative, thinking not just about images but about processes, techniques, instruments and fibres. Attending to embroidery's meaningful material structures will

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<sup>251</sup> Jonathan Gil Harris, *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 31.

<sup>252</sup> Bodleian Bodl. 22, 9v.

<sup>253</sup> 'now, adv., conj., n.1, and adj.', *OED Online*, December 2016, defs. 2a, 3.

<sup>254</sup> 'again, adv., prep., and conj.', *OED Online*, December 2016, defs. 1a, 1b.

enhance our understanding of early modern narrative structures in texts as well as textiles and shed new light on how needles shaped the threads of written stories.

## Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted a rich vein of material similes and metaphors running through early modern texts. I want to conclude with a particularly extensive example, taken from John Lightfoot's *The Harmony of the Four Evangelists* (1644), which demonstrates just how deeply considered such metaphors were. Lightfoot opens his prefatory epistle to the reader with the following observation on the composition of the gospels:

*The veile of the Sanctuary was supported by foure Pillars, and wrought with great variety of workes and colours: So is the Story of the veile of Christs flesh by the foure Evangelists, and the Texture of it of like variety. For one relateth what another hath omitted, one more largely, what another more briefe, one more plaine, what another lesse, one before what another after, one after one manner, and another after another: And so they bring their severall peeces of Imbroidery, differing in colours, but not in substance, various in workmanship, but not in the ground-work, to constitute and make up a perfect and sacred Tapestry and Furniture in the House of the Lord*

....<sup>255</sup>

Presenting Holy Writ as wrought, Lightfoot's fabric conception of the four evangelists' work sits suggestively alongside descriptions of Powlet as the 'fifth Evangelist' and her embroidery as 'Gospell'.<sup>256</sup> Positioning the pen as a needle, it indicates that narrative embroideries might be seen as materially consistent extensions of an already textile biblical history. As indicated in a marginal reference, Lightfoot's material gospels are grounded in the embroidery created for the Tabernacle in Exodus 36. Using this as an Old Testament type for '*the Story of the veile of Christs flesh*', he foregrounds the

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<sup>255</sup> John Lightfoot, *The Harmony of the Four Evangelists* (London, 1644), A4r.

<sup>256</sup> Bodleian Bodl. 22, 1v, 3v, 4v, 7r, 9v.

significance of embroidery and fabric within biblical history and asks readers to think about metaphor in relation to actual textiles.

Lightfoot's attention to the *'variety'* of this veil resonates strongly with the forms of *copia* discussed in this chapter. Questions of largeness or brevity recall issues of scale and amplification, as well as pointing to overlaps between temporality and spatiality, whilst the elements' relative *'plain[ness]'* evokes the extent to which certain features could be embellished, rhetorically or materially. Their *'differing ... colours'* and *'various ... workmanship'* suggest embroidery's copious hues and stitches. This diversification is contained, though, by the gospels' unity in 'substance' and 'ground-work', suggesting how coherence might be created materially, as well as indicating the unifying role of embroideries' foregrounds and backgrounds, particularly in works which related multiple incidents across multiple pieces. Lightfoot's description of the multi-authored gospels resonates with collaboratively wrought textiles such as those discussed in chapter one, including the Hardwick Hall Tobit table carpet which was wrought in pieces before being sewn together.<sup>257</sup> While this chapter has focused on single-authored pieces, Lightfoot's metaphor suggests that individual voices and styles might be recognised within collaboratively produced works, inviting further consideration of how materials like those created for Hardwick Hall could offer servants a literary voice.

Lightfoot's creation of the Harmony equally constitutes skilled material labour. Using terms with which we are now familiar, Lightfoot presents stitchery as a model of careful composition and rhetorical control, explaining that his task is *'[t]o sew these parcels together into one piece, and so to dispose and place them in their proper order, as the continuance and Chronicall method of the History doth require ... a thing of no small paines and difficulty'*.<sup>258</sup> Lightfoot's material understanding of his craft evokes contemporary methods of harmonizing which were practised, most notably, at Little Gidding. This Anglican community created gospel harmonies by cutting up printed Bibles to create fragments of material text which they then rearranged and pasted into new volumes, combining the four gospels into a single history. Continuities with needlework were registered not only in the images which were pasted alongside the text, some of which used sources

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<sup>257</sup> Levey, *Embroideries at Hardwick Hall*, 279–80.

<sup>258</sup> Lightfoot, *The Harmony of the Four Evangelists*, A4r.

similar to those employed as patterns for embroidered biblical histories, but in the women's use of their 'own Needles ... to binde Bibles'.<sup>259</sup>

Lightfoot's sewing also resonates with the work of poetic rhapsody which, as Piers Brown has revealed, describes the process of 'song-stitching': the sewing together of separate or scattered pieces of poetry into a coherent and ordered body of work. Such stitching becomes literal in examples where loose sheets are sewn together into booklets.<sup>260</sup> As these rhapsodies highlight, the material techniques discussed in this chapter were part of much broader (and still neglected) understandings of how needlework participated in and shaped literary *techné*.

This chapter has revealed how early modern writers and readers were immersed in a world of stitched stories and embroidered rhetoric, which offered alternative grounds for literary activity and pervaded textual structures at a simultaneously conceptual and concrete level. Fabric techniques, forms and materials shaped understandings of the relationship between structure and style, emplotment and expression, in textual and textile stories. The complexly various, multi-stranded narratives created and inspired by the needle indicate the rich grounds that early modern embroidery offers for scholars of narrative form and emphasise that far more work is needed if we are fully to understand the formative work of the needle and thread in shaping early modern literary discourse.

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<sup>259</sup> Thomas Fuller, *The History of the Worthies of England* (London, 1662), Gg4v. On the Little Gidding harmonies, and on their visual sources, see Smyth, "Shreds of holiness", 452–81; Adam Smyth, 'Little Clippings: Cutting and Pasting Bibles in the 1630s', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 45, no. 3 (2015): 595–613; George Henderson, 'Biblical Illustration in the Age of Laud', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 8, part 2 (1982): 185–94. Whitney Trettien's thesis considers the relationship between sewing and the creation of the Little Gidding harmonies; it is currently embargoed, 'Cut/Copy/Paste: Composing Devotion at Little Gidding' (abstract of PhD thesis, Duke University, 2015), accessed January 29, 2017, <http://dukespace.lib.duke.edu/dspace/handle/10161/9928>.

<sup>260</sup> Piers Brown, 'Donne, Rhapsody, and Textual Order', in *Manuscript Miscellanies in Early Modern England*, ed. Joshua Eckhardt and Daniel Starza Smith (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 39–55.

## Conclusion

MY task is done. Whatsoever remaineth is voluntary & over-measure, onely to hemme the end of our historie that it ravel not out ....

-- Thomas Fuller, *The Historie of the Holy Warre*, 1639, Gg1r.

Let us imagine, for a moment, a classroom dominated by a different cultural paradigm. A classroom in which you introduce students to an early modern canon, not of texts, but of textiles. The students explore stitched stories, ditties, hieroglyphs, emblems and prayers, on themes from religious debate to gender politics, engaging aspects of intellectual, national, political and social history. Many students eagerly anticipate the seminar on Elizabeth Powlet whose work is a mainstay of the school curriculum. The students learn skills of close analysis, looking at concealed and coded meanings, and examining techniques of ornamentation. Don't just identify stitches and materials, you remind them: think about their function. Why have sad colours and plain stitch been used here?<sup>1</sup> How has this embroiderer manipulated the conventions of the sampler to situate themselves in history? What intertextile references are evident? How has the needleworker used the sampler's controlled form to express and discipline her highly-wrought emotions?

The students have begun to consider their research projects. One student is intrigued by sewing coteries, and explores how needleworkers shared techniques and patterns, and responded to one another's work. Another, inspired by recent work on the history of emotions, will examine the story of a woman so affected by her embroidery of Icarus that she tried to make her own feathered suit and met a gruesome end.<sup>2</sup> A third is frustrated by the lack of men being studied. Was there no Elijah Powlet? You suggest that he look at recent scholarship which has begun to recover the neglected history of male needleworkers. Or perhaps he might enter the field of textual criticism; textile scholars still regard writing as a niche concern, but there are some rather

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<sup>1</sup> 'A gentlewoman yt married a yonge Gent who after forsooke whereupon she tooke hir needle in which she was excelent and worked upon hir Sampler thus', c. 1603, in *Early Modern Women Poets (1520–1700): An Anthology*, ed. Jane Stevenson and Peter Davidson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 155–56.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Pierre Camus, *Alcimus and Vannoza*, trans. anon. (London, 1677), D5v–D6v.

charming books written by men. Perhaps the pen could be a needle? Perhaps men did not find compiling their commonplace books as tedious as we might assume? Perhaps writing did more than instil virtuous masculinity? Perhaps it might even be as much creative and intellectual work as sewing? This emboldens another student, who has heard that the bobbins upon which thread were wound were made of recycled letters. She will look at thread's chirographic associations and consider how traces of ink left on the silk could inform an embroidery's meanings.<sup>3</sup> You are intrigued: letters have rarely been regarded as more than providing needleworkers with a ready supply of waste paper. Maybe writing has more lessons to teach us than we have acknowledged.

This classroom may seem a utopian fancy, which elides the difficulties and limitations facing early modern needleworkers. Nevertheless, inverting the hierarchy between the needle and the pen serves as a useful corrective exercise, asking us to question whether textiles have always and necessarily been subordinated to texts. It reminds us that many of the qualities which we prize in the practice of writing and in literature were not only evident in, but modelled by, stitchery, and that pens as well as needles might be viewed as (sometimes unwelcome) instruments of bodily and social discipline.<sup>4</sup>

For early modern audiences, the imaginative leap which our classroom demands would have been considerably less than it seems now. The textually dominated world in which we live has conditioned us to view cultural history in terms of a literary teleology where the pen is assumed always to have had the upper hand. It is difficult for us to acknowledge or even imagine a time when texts and textiles were on a more level footing. Modern attitudes to needlework exemplify Margaret Ezell's observation, in relation to women's manuscript writing, that '[b]y unconsciously permitting our perceptions of the past to be shaped by unexamined ideologies, perhaps unwittingly carried over from certain privileged texts or theories, we may have infused the values and standards of those texts and theories in our constructions of the past'. Ezell suggests that we may thus 'have unintentionally marginalized a significant portion of

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<sup>3</sup> Alexander Craig, *The Amorous Songes, Sonets, and Elegies* (London, 1606), H7v–H8r; George Gascoigne, *A Discourse of the Adventures of Master F.J.* (London, 1573), A3r–v.

<sup>4</sup> Compare Jonathan Goldberg, *Writing Matter*, esp. chapters 1 and 2.

female literary experience'.<sup>5</sup> This thesis has demonstrated that, in disregarding and diminishing the importance and complexity of needlework, we have marginalized a significant portion of early modern cultural experience and activity for both women and men.

For early moderns, the needle occupied not the margins but the centre ground. Sewing was a major cultural practice and form, as well as a prevalent and illuminating conceptual framework. It was understood to be as capable of composing complex forms and ideas as other artistic, creative and expressive media. Needlework, as practice and as product, was prominent in both the physical environment and in the imaginative realm. Almost all women had a wealth of hands-on needlework expertise. A significant number of men too had varying degrees of practical experience with needles and thread, from basic mending to professional skills in embroidery and tailoring. Many more men assisted and accompanied female relatives and companions in their work, winding bobbins, acquiring patterns and materials, reading aloud to them while they sewed, and taking an involved interest in their projects. Most of the population had some immediate familiarity with needlework as a practice and this made them alert to its status as skilled embodied work which was cognitively, psychophysiological, spiritually and affectively productive. This, in turn, informed understandings of the sewn objects which cloaked bodies and spaces. Material characteristics and methods were regarded with an eye which was both technical and imaginative, alert to the complex ideas, genres and styles which could be worked out and expressed in both the visual design and physical form of needlework objects.

The intricacies of embroidery yielded a productive interplay between material and metaphor which extended into conceptual and analogical realms. Daniel Selcer has argued that what he calls “figures of material inscription”—‘the book, print, reading, writing, etc.’—constituted an ‘important rhetorical and conceptual framework’ for philosophical interpretation. These figures are not ‘exogenous metaphors ... that express ideas that precede their material figuration’ but ‘are precisely the material bodies

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<sup>5</sup> Margaret J. M. Ezell, *Writing Women's Literary History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 7.

in which several types of philosophical discourse circulate'.<sup>6</sup> This thesis has made a cognate argument about what we might term the episteme of the needle. Like the figures examined by Selcer, figures of material fabrication work 'simultaneously in the corporeal and conceptual registers' to engender modes of thought, inquiry and understanding, and 'channel those who encounter them into particular bodily postures and motions'.<sup>7</sup> The material and embodied epistemologies which needlework prompted and developed were applied widely to early modern experience and structured the ways in which people understood literary and textual forms, spiritual experiences, theological problems and social relations, to name but a few.

As practice, product and metaphor, needlework has much to contribute to established and emerging fields of study. This thesis has made a case for embroidery's place in histories of skilled making, embodiment and cognition, in histories of the book and of reading, in histories of masculinities as well as femininities, and in studies of literary form, particularly narratology and rhetoric. It has engaged with issues of sociability, pious practice and spiritual experience, and has indicated stitchery's contribution to theological and political controversies. Scholars have typically, and perhaps rightly, been cautious of 'idealiz[ing] the limited possibilities that needlework offered women'.<sup>8</sup> Yet despite the important steps made in recent years, the limits within which we envisage and engage with stitchcraft continue to be narrower than they were for early moderns. Whether displayed within household spaces or in settings like the University of Oxford, needlework's reach could be extensive in both social and ideological terms. Those who used sewing to work through ideas and feelings, to express and advocate beliefs, and to shape their environments, did not need to subvert the form, nor were they simply making the best of the media available to them.

We need to stop regarding needlework as a niche or peripheral concern, of interest only to those with a self-declared interest in textile history or women's work. Studies of sewing demand a paradigm shift in literary studies and cultural history at large. This asks us not only, in the terms of Juliet Fleming and Wendy Wall, to think

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel Selcer, *Philosophy and the Book: Early Modern Figures of Material Inscription* (London: Continuum, 2010), 4, 6.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 4–5.

<sup>8</sup> Calabresi, 'You sow', 99.



about 'writing' as a technologically and materially diverse practice. It also asks us to engage with needlework on its own terms, resisting the urge simply to apply existing critical and interpretive *schema* and instead attending to the distinctive qualities of needlework. Doing so will allow us to think more productively about the material forms of writing, as well as other artistic and creative media. Although this thesis has explored the particularly well-established and extensive common ground of texts and textiles, as Susan Frye has suggested, the needle was also used alongside pencils and paintbrushes; future research might usefully look further at what 'dull Painters [could] learne' from needlework, to borrow the words of John Beesley on Powlet's embroidery.<sup>9</sup>

A reconsideration of the relationship between the needle and the pen thus requires us not just to reappraise the needle, but to look at texts in new and different ways: ways which are attentive to the material presences and resonances evident in the physical and metaphorical content of texts. Textiles constituted a major conceptual model for early modern readers and writers, and they shaped and modelled the ways that people created and interacted with texts. Metaphors like Fuller's hem are neither dead nor isolated. An extensive network of material terms and structures threaded its way through early modern texts and prompted people, alive to fabric work and skill, to bring a wealth of practical and connoisseurial textile expertise to bear. Scrutinising these fabric figures will illuminate the interconnection of textual and material concerns, shedding new light on how the producers and consumers of early modern texts crafted and responded to features such as the *mise-en-page* and stitching and binding, and were alert to the material fore- and afterlives of their papers.

Attending to needlework will allow us to recover the experiences and cultural contributions not only of women but of other figures who have eluded scholarship and who have been marginalised in historical and literary records, such as the poor needlemen whom I discussed in chapter one. While an extensive examination of needlework in relation to the social order is beyond the scope of this thesis, future research might usefully examine further the kinds of cultural participation which household servants and poor men and women experienced in sewing.<sup>10</sup> Acknowledging

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<sup>9</sup> Bodleian Bodl. 22, 8v.

<sup>10</sup> Susan E. Wiseman's work-in-progress on the literary experiences of servants promises to contribute to this field, 'Renaissance Ideas and Local Contexts?.'

how work performed by these stitchers informed the thinking and epistemologies of such canonical figures as Erasmus and Shakespeare, and left its mark in their work, has the potential to destabilise modern hierarchies of cultural capital.

Although, as this thesis has shown, needlework was not exclusively ‘women’s work’, gender politics is undoubtedly at the root of its modern scholarly neglect. This thesis therefore seeks to position itself alongside studies like that of Wendy Wall, which urges us to engage fully with a ‘rich and previously unacknowledged literate and brainy domestic culture’ and emphasises the need for continuing scrutiny of women’s productive and aesthetic handiworks.<sup>11</sup> My study has emphasised the need not to turn women’s authority within cloth culture into evidence of a feminine subculture, implicitly inferior to and beneath the notice of male culture. Rather, women’s expertise and pre-eminence in fabric handiwork gave them a cultural authority which allowed them to shape not only their own cultural experiences but those of others.

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<sup>11</sup> Wall, *Recipe for Thought*, 2.