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Arachnid Authorship: Intertextual Web-Weaving as a Reflection of Women's Authorial Identities

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ABSTRACT

In my scholarship, I address how, during the late 16th and mid-17th centuries, works of early modern English literature by women used Arachne imagery to articulate both competition and cohesion. These women used web and weaving descriptions that intersected with their actual weaving and needlework, which often incorporated text. Authors such as Queen Elizabeth I, Mary Queen of Scots, Esther Inglis, Isabella Whitney, Mary Sidney Herbert, Mary Wroth, Margaret Cavendish, and numerous others participated in this intersection of textual and textile production. I intend to clarify how women's domestic work contributed to authorial identity and explore how using Arachne as a figure of self-expression and authorship functions in women's weaving, needlework, and book production. I hope to discover how the shared language of the domestic space of weaving becomes an intertextual shared language among female authors in which women can acknowledge the roles other women play as contributors and competitors in literature.

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“Women and fiction remain, so far as I am concerned, unsolved problems.”

–Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*

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“Indeed, I would venture to guess that Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman.”

–Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*

Chapter 1

Introduction

From classical antiquity to modern day, women have long used embroidery, weaving, and textile creation for both functional and expressive purposes. These practices have traditionally been associated with women's domestic tasks. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word "text" means "the wording of anything written or printed; the structure formed by the words in their order; the very words, phrases, and sentences as written."¹ It enters the English language from the French word *texte* which comes from the word meaning "to weave." As the concept of text and weaving are irrevocably linked in the English language, it is necessary to examine one of the greatest eras for both text and textile production: the English Renaissance. According to Katherine Wilson, the global production, use, and circulation of textiles carried a significant amount of economic and cultural importance between 1400 and 1700. Textiles functioned as both everyday items and markers of distinction.² Because the textile industry was so essential to the Renaissance, the intersection between women's textile and textual endeavors raises questions about the economic impact of women authors.

To begin, it is necessary to first examine how references to textile production were incorporated into the textual endeavors of women authors. While many early modern women authors include descriptions and metaphors regarding webs, weaving, and embroidery in general from their experience in the domestic sphere of women's weaving and needlework, many authors

¹ *OED Online*, s.v. "text, n.1," accessed 27th April 2023, www.oed.com/view/Entry/200002.

² Katherine Anne Wilson. "Textiles: 1400 to 1700." *Renaissance and Reformation*, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1093/obo/9780195399301-0435>.

specifically incorporate classical allusion to weaving in their works. As the Renaissance brought forth a resurgence of classical learning, allusions to classical mythology, specifically stemming from the works of Ovid, were a prominent component in the literature of the period. Specifically, references to Ovid's myth of Arachne wove themes of literary and textile production together. As articulated by Jones and Stallybrass, "Homer and classical fables were subjected to readings that dematerialized women's textile work in order to produce a feminine ideal of behavior, an elite ideal that obscured women's economic labor in a cloth-based society by transcendentalizing spinning into a symbolic exhibition of virtue."³ In an economy where the lowest-paid form of female labor was spinning wool, and the most expensive form of courtly production was tapestries, it is necessary to consider how women authors reinterpret both the myth of Arachne and the practice of weaving to articulate cohesion and competition in their socio-economic climate.⁴

Readers in the early modern period would have been familiar with the story of Arachne from Ovid's ubiquitous *The Metamorphoses*. To summarize, Arachne was a young, mortal girl with an extraordinary weaving talent. As Arachne grew more renowned for her talent in weaving, she was compared frequently to Minerva, the Roman goddess of wisdom, war, and weaving, for her craft. Minerva (also known in Greek myth as Athena), first appears as an old woman, warning her that it is enough to seek fame among mortals, but to yield to the greatness of the gods and ask for Minerva's forgiveness for her boasting. In response, Arachne scorns her, causing Minerva to shed her disguise, and they begin their contest. Minerva weaves a tapestry

³Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 103.

⁴ Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 101.

depicting her victories along with mortals who have been punished for their insubordination by the gods, the twelve Olympians, and her triumph in winning Athens in her competition with Neptune. Arachne weaves her reply, depicting the gods using metamorphosis to mistreat mortals, such as the deception of Europa and Leda's rape, of Asterie held by the eagle and Danaë, and the golden shower. Each of Arachne's scenes demonstrates the gods using metamorphosis to deceive and violate mortals, particularly women. Arachne's weaving is without fault, and Arachne's success engages Minerva, causing her to destroy Arachne's tapestry and beat her with a shuttle. Arachne then attempts to hang herself from shame, but Minerva shows mercy and transforms Arachne into a spider, destined to continue her talent by spinning thread and weaving webs.

Since women were contributing to the Renaissance not only through textile production but also through textual production, women poets in the late Elizabethan and early Jacobian periods must be given greater attention for their contributions to English society. As elucidated by Marcy North, from 1545 onwards, one or more publications attributed to female authors and translators could be found at a London bookseller's stall.⁵ While women wrote far less than their male contemporaries, quantifying the number and influence of female authors by using only their literary publications undercuts their influence.⁶ In the early 17th century, Mary Sidney Wroth and Elizabeth Cary (who tried but partially failed to remain anonymous) attempted to publish first-edition folios, which were large and expensive formats, and experienced great criticism from their peers resulting in their works failing to be reprinted and becoming suppressed.⁷ As North explains, these literary ventures were transgressive "not just because women were using print,

⁵ Marcy L. North, "Women, the Material Book and Early Printing," in *The Cambridge Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing*, ed. Laura Knoppers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 68. <https://doi.org/10.1017/ccol9780521885270.005>.

⁶ North, "Women, the Material Book and Early Printing," 68.

⁷ North, "Women, the Material Book and Early Printing," 71.

but because they were choosing a grandiose (even provocative) format.”⁸ Like their male counterparts, many early modern women appeared most in publication in quarto and octavo.⁹ Therefore, while women’s textile work was essential in contributing to the economy of the English Renaissance, they also held economic contributions in literary production but were limited in the scope of literary production they could contribute to. Economically, the folio is to the literary realm of production what the tapestry is to textile production of the period: expensive to produce and an indicator of high status. Consequently, as women attempted to publish folios and engage in the most expensive mode of literary production, it is significant that these women chose to allude to tapestries, the most expensive mode of textile production, to do so. It forces one to acknowledge the significant impact women had on the Renaissance’s economy through textile production, and how they reference their textile contributions in their textual endeavors to break into more expensive modes of publication into the literary economy, almost creating an ethos as to their qualifications as competitors via their economic contributions. Within women’s literary contributions, women writers, having to compete fiercely with both their male and female counterparts, frequently incorporate Arachne allusions and weaving imagery into their writing, reflecting their roles as competitors and contributors to the economy of the Renaissance’s textile and textual production.

Are these authors referencing Arachne and weaving in a way that follows the traditional pattern of their social and economic worth, and when do these authors deviate? How do these authors use these references in comparison to their own socio-economic status? Most of all, in a socially competitive myth (Arachne and Minerva) rooted in an economically competitive trade

⁸ North, “Women, the Material Book and Early Printing,” 71.

⁹ North, “Women, the Material Book and Early Printing,” 71.

(weaving and textile production), how do these authors use these competitive motifs to reflect the competition they faced as authors? Authors such as Queen Elizabeth I, Mary Queen of Scots, Isabella Whitney, Mary Sidney Herbert, Mary Wroth, Margaret Cavendish, and numerous others participated in this intersection of textual and textile production. I intend to clarify the ways in which women's domestic work contributed to authorial identity and explore how using Arachne as a figure of self-expression and authorship functions in women's weaving, needlework, and book production. By doing so, I argue that women use web-weaving and Arachne allusions to craft their identities as authors, representing both competition and cohesion in writing.

Liz Oakley-Brown provides important context for translation practices of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in her work *Ovid and the Cultural Politics of Translation in Early Modern England*. Brown crafts an essential frame to my argument as to how early modern women writers engage with and incorporate Arachne and web-weaving allusions, as well as informs the significance of many of these authors' needlework and its connection to this myth. Oakley-Brown provides that "Ovid's poem was an integral part of a humanist programme of education. Certainly, the pedagogical location of translation rendered it a more visible act and some translators enjoyed high status socially."¹⁰ This is an important piece of framework as it reveals that translations of Ovid were well-known in the period and that the act of translating Ovid signified high status. While I do not argue that the women writers I discuss were translating Ovid, these women are engaging in a form of metaphorical translation by crafting and reconfiguring their interpretation of Arachne through allusion. Doing so reflects how these women challenge their social and gender hierarchies by engaging with high-status material to

¹⁰ Liz Oakley-Brown, *Ovid and the Cultural Politics of Translation in Early Modern England* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 3.

break into the high-status realm of literary print production, especially first folios. Brown also reveals that “In the *Metamorphoses*...Arachne functions like a translator” demonstrating how she weaves metaphorical narratives in her tapestry.¹¹ I will use Brown’s observation that Arachne becomes a translator to retell the stories of mortal women who have been victims to the gods to reflect how on a larger scale, the process of alluding to Arachne becomes a way for female authors to translate their own gendered struggles as competitors. Therefore, further study as to how early modern women authors engaged with this essential aspect of education and further attention to how women may have used this myth to impact their social status is necessary.

Notably, in “The Spinner and the Poet: Arachne in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*,” Byron Harries argues that Arachne functions as a tool for Ovid’s expression of his poetic identity. Harries argues that “Arachne is thus a poetic creation in the sense that she is fashioned out of the conventions and allusive adaptation of familiar poetry. Her special art provides Ovid with the opportunity to weave into his portrait of her the kind of skillfully contrived allusion which confirms that the essential artistry displayed here is the poet’s own.”¹² From a more feminist perspective, Nancy K. Miller introduces the critical term, “arachnology,” as a framing term for how to analyze both the story of Arachne and its interpretations. An “arachnology” is a “critical positioning which reads against the weave of indifferentiation to discover the embodiment in writing of a gendered subjectivity; to recover within representation the emblems of its construction.”¹³ Miller argues that Arachne’s story must be read “both as a figuration of woman's

¹¹ Oakley-Brown, *Ovid and the Cultural Politics*, 56.

¹² Byron Harries. “The Spinner and the Poet: Arachne in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.” *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 36 (1990): 66. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s006867350000523x>.

¹³ Nancy K. Miller, “Arachnologies: The Woman, The Text, and the Critic,” in *Textiles: Critical and Primary Sources*, ed. Catherine Harper, (Berg Publishers, 2012) 252.

relation of production to the dominant culture, and as a possible parable (or critical modeling) of a feminist poetics.” Using arachnologies allows for an analysis of Arachne and her reinterpretations to “discover in the representations of writing itself the marks of the grossly material, the sometimes brutal traces of the culture of gender; the inscriptions of its political structures.”¹⁴ Arachne was initially crafted as a tool for poetic expression. Therefore, it is necessary to examine how varying women authors adapt the figure of Arachne to weave their identities as authors. Using these analyses, I specifically argue that early modern women writers reference Arachne to demonstrate their own poetic identities as women authors taking on the status of competitors to challenge daunting (potentially even god-like) social, gender, and economic hierarchies. Arachne allusions in these works are more than just a literary device within the context of their works, they reflect the larger process of these women challenging these hierarchies through an allusion that is both rooted in women’s domestic sphere and a hallmark of high-status classical learning, a privilege usually exclusive to men.

Queen Elizabeth I, Mary Queen of Scots, Mary Sidney Herbert, Mary Wroth, Isabella Whitney, and Margaret Cavendish each adapt the myth of Arachne in their own way, a significant endeavor socially, and each adaptation reveals a different facet of their textile engagement. For Elizabeth and Mary, Arachne’s story becomes a coded social, artistic, and political battle that spans text and textiles. Beginning in poetry and ending in embroidery, the queens engage in both a political and authorial competition. Poetry and embroidery become shears capable of wounding. Mary Sidney Herbert becomes an Arachne-like weaver as well but adapts the ethos of Arachne to be much more collaborative to complete her brother’s psalms.

¹⁴ Miller, “Arachnologies,” 255.

Poetry and embroidery now become a loom of literary expression with space for multiple collaborators, but each piece is unique. However, for both Herbert and her niece, Mary Wroth, incorporating the language of weaving into their literature marks the competition they face being women writers in a realm of male-dominated authorship. While both Herbert and Wroth incorporate textile imagery to collaborate and compete with male counterparts, Whitney takes a fiercely competitive stance against other authors, regardless of gender. Writing and webs become both traps and tools of creation. Like Mary, Whitney becomes an embodiment of Arachne as a crafter of textiles, using cloth metaphors to characterize her literary craftsmanship and even creating her own “arachnology” of classical portrayals of women in poetry. Poetry becomes slips able to be sheared, refashioned, and redistributed by women. Finally, Cavendish spins a “garment of memory” in crafting her poetry collection, using spinning not only to articulate her literary competition with her contemporaries, but also to engage in a practice once meant to confine women to a private domestic space and break into a published, authorial one. Hence, I will show how these women use web-weaving and Arachne allusions to craft their identities as authors, representing both competition and cohesion in writing.

Chapter 2

Webs of Known Noblewomen

In the late 16th-century and early 17th-century women writers articulate competition and cohesion in authorship through web-weaving and Arachne allusions. Notably, networks of women who had personal relationships with one another exchanged both literary works using weaving and Arachne imagery, as well as exchanged textiles with woven or embroidered statements. Queen Elizabeth I uses allusions to Arachne and Minerva in her poetry to weave her identity as a successful ruler and author. Mary Sidney Herbert crafts a weaving metaphor in her poetry, which she exchanges with Elizabeth, to demonstrate Herbert's identity as a collaborator in her brother's literary legacy, while also stitching a space for herself as a competitor in the literary field. Herbert also uses textile metaphors to describe herself as a livery robe for Elizabeth, representing political and authorial hierarchy in terms of their poetic and textile relationship. Like her aunt, Mary Wroth expresses her role as a literary competitor by using web-weaving as a means to express crafting female identity, as well as reflecting the larger ethos of the complex "web" and deceitful tangles that women must navigate in the publishing industry.

A variety of prior scholarship exists regarding how Queen Elizabeth I, Mary Sidney Herbert, and Mary Wroth have used textiles in their texts, and even how they have woven text into textiles. Jennifer Summit demonstrates that Queen Elizabeth criticized Mary Queen of Scots through the language she incorporates in "The Doubt of Future Foes," and how Mary responds to Elizabeth's poem through her emblems, contrasting explicit criticism with Elizabeth's unspoken threat to Mary. Ina Habermann argues that in Mary Sidney Herbert's "Even Now That Care,"

weaving is a metaphor for Sidney and her brothers' cohesive authorship.¹⁵ Michele Osherow expands upon this, articulating the formal similarities between Sidney's psalms and verses and early modern needlework.¹⁶ She continues that Sidney's weaving imagery invoked an intertextual language that would have been familiar to Elizabeth, whom the poem was for. Most notably, Susan Frye has written extensively on how early modern women's needlework and weaving were closely related to and even intertwined with women's writing, creating a network of communication between women and a way for women to represent their identities. Frye pays close attention to Mary Wroth's *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania* and its vast descriptions of how cloth becomes central to women's personal, political, and authorial agency in the romance.¹⁷ I intend to expand upon this scholarship to demonstrate how women specifically used web-weaving and Arachne allusions to voice their identities as female authors, acknowledging the intertextual communities of women that depicted women as competitors and contributors in literature. While many scholars have touched on the intertextual nature of these women's contributions, I will clarify the significance of Arachne in these women's works. Significantly, in Elizabeth's "The Doubt of Future Foes" (c. 1568-71), Herbert's "Even Now That Care" (1599), and Wroth's "In this strange labyrinth how shall I turn?" from *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* (1612) and *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania* (1621), each author incorporates web-weaving and Arachne allusions in their works to reflect themes of competition and cohesion.

¹⁵ Ina Habbermann. "Two, by Their Bloods, and by Thy Spirit One: Sir Philip Sidney and Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke." *Bi-Textualität : Inszenierungen des Paares : ein Buch für Ina Schabert*, 2000, 29–44.

¹⁶ Michele Osherow. "Mary Sidney's Embroidered Psalms." *Renaissance Studies* 29, no. 4 (2015): 650–70. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rest.12166>.

¹⁷ Susan Frye. *Pens and Needles: Women's Textualities in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 159.

In “The Doubt of Future Foes,” Queen Elizabeth uses Arachne and web-weaving allusions to reflect her role as a competitor, both as a queen and as an author. In the poem, Elizabeth uses allusion to assert her superior capability as a ruler as opposed to Mary Queen of Scots, implying she is the victorious Minerva in the story. To contextualize, Elizabeth composed this poem around the time that Mary fled Scotland for England to seek refuge during a time of great political unrest. Upon returning to Scotland after the death of her husband King Francis of France, the Roman Catholic Mary Queen of Scots found that in her absence, Scotland had been reformed to Protestantism, and faced violent opposition from many, chiefly the Calvinist preacher John Knox. While many Catholics advocated for Mary’s rightful claim to the English throne, the conflict between Mary’s Catholic status and the newly Protestant country became disastrous. After the murder of Mary’s second husband —Henry Stuart, Earl of Darnley—she rashly married James Hepburn, 4th Earl of Bothwell, which led to her being accused of conspiring to murder Darnley and consequently led to her imprisonment. Throughout her imprisonment, Mary frequently wrote her cousin, Elizabeth, asking for refuge. However, Elizabeth was wary of Mary’s arrival for fear that she would garner Catholic support for Mary’s claim to the throne and thus pose a threat to Elizabeth. Hence, this poem serves as a threat to Mary as a potential “future foe.” Elizabeth writes that “falsehood now doth flow, and subject faith doth ebbe”¹⁸ likely referencing the result of Mary appearing in England. Further, Elizabeth establishes a poetic competition between her and Mary by incorporating the words “flow” and “ebbe” into her hostile poem, which are the same words that Mary opens her “Sonnet to Queen Elizabeth I of England” (1568) with. The exchange of poetry between the queens reflects the

¹⁸ Elizabeth I, “The Doubt of Future Foes,” in *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, ed. Leah Marcus, Janel Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), ll. 3.

way they “adapted poetic topoi as well as the conventions associated with the private writing of ladies to construct a language of female rulership that expressed the public dilemma of this case in a covert language of figures.”¹⁹ Not only does the adapted poetic topoi stress the significance of using private and feminine literary language to engage in political conflict, it also illuminates the establishment and importance of coded language and symbols for the two queens.

Mary begins her poem, “One thought, that is my torment and delight, / Ebbs and flows bitterweet within my heart / and between doubt and hope rends me apart.”²⁰ Mary’s language of “doubt” that “ebbs and flows” is then copied and adapted by Elizabeth to signify the “doubt” of Elizabeth’s “future foes” which leads to flowing falsehood and ebbing faith in Elizabeth’s court. Clearly, Elizabeth adopts Mary’s own literary style to oppress her both from a poetic standpoint and a political standpoint. Yet the bitter exchange between the two queens becomes a reflection of the competition between Minerva and Arachne when Elizabeth incorporates key language to allude to the myth, portraying herself as Minerva, a position of divine strength and rule. Elizabeth not only attacks Mary as a queen but also as a poet and an embroiderer. Mary then functions as Arachne both in her subordinated position, as Arachne’s significance as a reflection of poetic voice, and as a weaver. The queens’ textual exchange also carries a textile component, further highlighting the significance of the intersection of textile and textual exchanges as competition for authorship, as well as socio-political conflict.

Elizabeth first alludes to the mythical competition and invokes Minerva in line 4 when she argues that the falsehood ‘should not be if reason ruled or wisdom weaved the web’ thereby

¹⁹ Jennifer Summit, *Lost Property: The Woman Writer and English Literary History, 1380-1589* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) 194.

²⁰ Mary Stuart, “Sonnet to Queen Elizabeth I of England,” in *Bittersweet within My Heart: The Collected Poems of Mary, Queen of Scots*, ed. and trans. Robin Bell (London: Pavilion, 1992), 65.

invoking Minerva by referring to the “wisdom” and “reason” Minerva represents. From the position of Elizabeth in competition with Mary for queenship, this line also alludes to the story of Arachne, a competition in which Minerva emerges victorious. With this line, Elizabeth makes her superior ruling ability clear by positioning herself as both Minerva and the victorious queen while issuing a poetically veiled threat to Mary Queen of Scots. Additionally, if Elizabeth is positioning herself as Minerva and Mary as Arachne, then it must be acknowledged that Arachne does technically win (or at least tie) the competition in the classic myth. By highlighting her attributes of wisdom and reason, Elizabeth provides a further ethos reminding her audience of her strong attributes that make her a stronger leader. Furthermore, portrayals of Elizabeth as Minerva were an artistic trend and device during Elizabeth’s rule, lending further explanation as to why Elizabeth would choose to represent herself as Minerva. In what Helen Hackett calls the “Three Goddesses” motif, Elizabeth was constantly likened to goddesses Juno, Venus, and Minerva for her power, beauty, and wisdom, and this motif was used extensively in “literary panegyric” of the 1570s and ‘80s.²¹ Elizabeth’s association with these goddesses demonstrated essential religious, political, and social power to Elizabeth’s reign as it “helped to negotiate the challenge of asserting that she was God’s anointed and his earthly agent to advance the true faith, while avoiding forms of praise of her sacredness that might smack of idolatry and the Catholic cults of saints.”²² This motif also may have been a response to the issue of Elizabeth’s unmarried status because Elizabeth’s “monarchical power and intellectual ability—both essential to a ruler

²¹ Helen Hackett, “A New Image of Elizabeth I: The Three Goddesses Theme in Art and Literature,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 77, no. 3 (2014): 238. <https://doi.org/10.1525/hlq.2014.77.3.225>.

²² Hackett, “A New Image of Elizabeth I,” 240.

but problematically masculine—could be made more acceptable by means of identification with Juno and Pallas and could be balanced against the safely feminine beauty of Venus.”²³

Notably, the Three Goddess motif was also a reminder and celebration of Elizabeth’s role in the suppression of the Northern Rebellion by Catholics who supported Mary Queen of Scots.²⁴ Therefore, this line of the poem may also be interpreted as Elizabeth attempting to urge her subjects to “weave” with wisdom, meaning that Catholic citizens should rule themselves better and “weave” (meaning to conduct themselves and obey Queen Elizabeth) with wisdom. In making her citizens the actors of the weaving, with weaving signifying using religious beliefs to rule themselves better, Minerva and Arachne can then reflect the struggle between Catholic and Protestant citizens. Perhaps, then, Protestantism is playing the role of Minerva, whereas Catholicism plays the role of Arachne, and while Queen Elizabeth can acknowledge that Catholicism is a worthy competitor, wisdom, i.e., Protestantism, will remain more powerful, influential, and victorious.

This sonnet further reflects Elizabeth’s attempt to weave herself as the victorious competitor in queenship but also may reflect Mary’s response to “The Doubt of Future Foes” with her own needlework. In “The Arte of a Ladies Penn’: Elizabeth I and the Poetics of Queenship,” Jennifer Summit explains that embroidery was one of the few hobbies Mary was permitted to enjoy, as it was a valued skill for the Renaissance woman. Summit continues that embroidery was not only a leisure habit but also could be used to make a public statement, much as the tapestries crafted by Arachne and Minerva made public statements. Summit argues that in

²³ Hackett, “A New Image of Elizabeth I,” 242.

²⁴ Hackett, “A New Image of Elizabeth I,” 238. See Hackett’s analysis of Hans Eworth’s painting, *Elizabeth I and the Three Goddesses* (Three Goddesses I), 1569.

response to Elizabeth's poem, Mary uses embroidery to deliver a counter-threat by incorporating Elizabeth's intentional word choice. Mary's largest embroidery endeavor was the "Marian Hanging," composed between 1570-1585 during her imprisonment at Hardwick Hall. She completed her "Oxburgh Hanging" between 1569 and 1571. Summit states, "Mary's emblems appear to interpret and answer these images in 'The Doubt of Future Foes.' Where Elizabeth imagines her enemies' plots to be 'frutelesse' because 'grafted,' Mary's emblem of the 'scien graften into a stock' envisions such grafting to be a source of fruition ('bound about by bands, yet budding forth fresh')." ²⁵ That is that while Elizabeth thinks her enemies will be unsuccessful because their plots are "grafted," Mary's embroidery depicts a palm tree that cannot be held down by weights, continuing to stand strong. Thus, Mary inverts Elizabeth's criticism in her embroidery, depicting what Elizabeth deemed a weakness as a strength. The intentional figurative language Elizabeth uses to oppress Mary becomes the source of Mary's strength, much like the fate Arachne suffers.

By using allusion to prophesize Mary's downfall (much as Minerva's tapestry foretold Arachne's downfall) and incorporating strategic language to criticize Mary's queenship, Elizabeth portrays herself as a victorious goddess, a powerful ruler, and a strong author able to manipulate the threads of Mary's fate. Elizabeth exemplifies this not only through explicit acts of power but also through her rhetorical and figurative authorship. However, by attacking Elizabeth's poem through an embroidered reply, Mary uses the exchange economy of embroidery to establish her rank as superior. To elaborate, scholar Lisa Klein argues in her work "Your Humble Handmaid: Elizabethan Gifts of Needlework" that the gift-giving economy

²⁵ Jennifer Summit, "'The Arte of a Ladies Penne': Elizabeth I and the Poetics of Queenship," *English Literary Renaissance* 26, no. 3 (1996): 419, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6757.1996.tb01505.x>.

during the Renaissance was an essential method of reaffirming and reinforcing hierarchy, having the power to both manipulate or empower certain relationships. Arguing that Elizabeth had a particular knack for this method of manipulation, Klein explains, “The popularity of richly embroidered personal gifts has been attributed to her female vanity and her extravagant taste. While not denying these traits, I submit that a personal gift such as an embroidered dress or book is particularly appropriate for fostering the mutual obligation that was the aim of the gift exchange. A hand-wrought gift has a particular intimacy, authority, and efficacy that other gifts, like money or plate, lack.”²⁶ To reiterate, giving embroidered or other hand-made gifts during the Renaissance held a distinct power that other gifts did not. Mary gifted Elizabeth many of her embroideries as a sign of good faith in this gift-giving economy. Elizabeth’s weaving imagery evokes this hierarchal system of gift exchange that Mary would be familiar with and engaged with, making it more poignant that Elizabeth uses this system to establish herself as above Mary, both talent-wise and in the political hierarchy.

Maureen Quilligan also stresses the significance of embroidery exchange in her article “Elizabeth's Embroidery,” illuminating how Elizabeth herself participated in this culture. Quilligan references Elizabeth’s translation of Marguerite de Navarre’s *The Mirror or Glass of the Sinful Soul* for which she also created an embroidered cover. Elizabeth then gifted her embroidered translation to Katherine Parr when Elizabeth was just eleven years old. Because Parr was also an author, this may have been one of Elizabeth’s primary engagements with literary competition, demonstrating her ability literally and visually. Quilligan argues, “We usually understand the pen and needle to be opposed in the protofeminist discourse of the

²⁶ Lisa M. Klein, “Your Humble Handmaid: Elizabethan Gifts of Needlework,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 50, no. 2 (1997): 471, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3039187>.

Renaissance, of course, but here, in Elizabeth's first production, the pen and needle go together in a first gestural of intrafamilial authorship."²⁷ Additionally, while it is clear that Elizabeth intends for Mary to indirectly receive the message of this sonnet, the fact that this sonnet is given to Mary indirectly further slights Mary in this gift-giving economy. Mary responding to the language of the poem using weaving to assert her strength sends a particularly scathing message in the established language among Renaissance women to exchange gifts of needlework to foster more positive relationships. Adopting the imagery of Elizabeth's poetry, Mary manipulates the practice of embroidery exchange to then criticize Elizabeth's ability as a ruler, eliminating a common avenue of interpersonal negotiation and exchange in the domestic space of women. Yet the pen and the needle are also linked in authorial voice, Elizabeth then silences Mary's authorial voice by positioning herself as a Minerva figure who, in the way that Minerva transfigures Arachne into a spider, barring her from participating in mortal culture and lowering Arachne's social status, Elizabeth does the same to Mary, blocking her attempt at bolstering her relationship with Elizabeth through embroidery exchange and lowering her social standing within her political hierarchy.

From a gendered standpoint, the narrative Elizabeth weaves presents a complex situation for women in power. On the one hand, Elizabeth portrays her strength as a competitor for rulership and her identity as an author. On the other hand, it is not very feminist to pit two powerful women against one another. Like the myth of Arachne and Minerva, both queens have an equal claim to greatness. However, Elizabeth portrays herself as Minerva as a method of demonstrating her divine right to the throne rather than taking an Ovidian approach of

²⁷ Maureen Quilligan. "Elizabeth's Embroidery," *Shakespeare Studies* 28 (2000): 212.

representing herself as Arachne. By indirectly attacking Mary through the imagery of weaving, Elizabeth communicates to Mary in the language of women's domestic spaces that she is superior not only as a ruler and poet but as a *female* ruler and poet. Mary engages in the same message through her embroidered responses. It also holds significance that Elizabeth and Mary appear to engage in a method of intertextual communication that is largely centered around gardening and weaving metaphors. Weaving would have been typical domestic tasks for women, and gardening was a common topic of interest for women and therefore would create recognizable imagery for both women. However, the gardening and weaving imagery incorporated is used in a threatening manner, thinly veiling potential violence and destruction that may emerge from the power struggle between the two queens. Using gardening and weaving to foreshadow potential violence appears to be the antithesis of what these domestic tasks usually symbolize: creation, harvest, and renewal. Perhaps the inversion of the typical symbolism of gardening and weaving also symbolizes the inversion of the power struggle taking place: two female rules struggling for power, an oddity in a world accustomed to and favoring two male monarchs struggling for power. Hence, inverting these typical symbols could be an intentional tactic to represent not only the foreignness of a female-centered power struggle, but also a demonstration of how female domestic tasks become a literary language between female authors. Therefore, by alluding to the tale of Arachne and imagining a kingdom in which "wisdom weaved the web" Elizabeth reflects on her role as a competitor not just against Mary, but as a competitor in weaving spaces for women's voices in literature.

Mary Sidney Herbert (1561-1621), the Countess of Pembroke and sister to Sir Philip Sidney, was a significant writer and literary patron during the Elizabethan Era in England. She is most prevalently known for completing her brother's translations of the Psalms of David

posthumously, signifying her emergence into the public literary sphere. Many of her own works incorporate religious themes, including elegy and translation. Mary Sidney Herbert received an extensive education, including Latin, French, and Italian as well as training in needlework, lute playing, and singing.²⁸ Much of Herbert's writing took place beginning in the 1580s, and she published under her own name, which was somewhat unusual for aristocratic women at the time.

In "Even Now That Care," Mary Sidney Herbert inserts web-weaving imagery to reflect her role as a collaborator in cohesive verse and a competitor as a woman author. In the dedicatory poem to Queen Elizabeth I, Herbert references the process of her and her brother Philip working in collaboration to create the Sidney Psalms, rewriting the Psalms of David into English verse. In referring to her continuing her deceased brother Philip's work, she writes, "But he did warp, I weav'd this web to end."²⁹ Herbert uses the imagery of web-weaving to describe the process of writing this poem, stating that while Philip "did warp" or craft part of this work, it was Herbert who was able to complete it and "weav'd this web to end" representing the collaborative aspect of crafting their poetry. To elaborate, the warp is the yarn that runs the length of the fabric. The yarn that runs across the width is called the weft. Therefore, while Philip Sidney may have provided some element of structure, it was Herbert who both completed the structure as well as crafted and embellished the piece. However, Herbert refers to the poem as a web she must weave, invoking the domestic space of women and their textile work, along with the story of Arachne. By using this imagery, Herbert portrays herself as an Arachne,

²⁸ "Mary Sidney Herbert Countess of Pembroke," Poetry Foundation, accessed March 23, 2024, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/mary-sidney-herbert>.

²⁹ Mary Sidney Herbert, "Even Now That Care," in *The Broadview Anthology of Sixteenth-Century Poetry and Prose*, ed. Marie H. Loughlin, Patricia Brace, Sandra J. Bell, Alan Rudrum, Joseph Black, and Holly Faith Nelson (Peterborough, ON): Broadview Press, 2020, 27.

weaving herself into the very fabric of English literature and thus crafting a poetic identity for herself.

Herbert furthers her textile metaphor as an expression of collaborative authorship in her prefatory poem “To the Angel Spirit of the Most Excellent Sir Philip Sidney,” Herbert reflects on their collaborative literary efforts in her poem, lamenting “Behold, oh, that thou were now to behold / This finished long perfection’s part begun, / The rest but pieced, as left by thee undone.”³⁰ Herbert references the Psalms as a textile “piece” a few stanzas later, recollecting, “Nor can we reach, in thought, / What on that goodly piece time would have wrought / Had divers so spared that life (but life) to frame / The rest.”³¹ While Herbert’s tone is mournful, she also demonstrates the extent to which the representation of her collaborative efforts are located in the realm of the textile, having now to “wrought” the “pieces” that have been “left by thee undone.” By using textile imagery to draw attention to the theme of “finishing” or “endings,” the reader is directed to pay careful attention to the way that Herbert concludes her writings. Gavin Alexander demonstrates that:

By rewriting Sidney’s endings she crosses some threshold between the two poets—a threshold of time and poetic; what was linked becomes merged. It is a nostalgia that is not content to come after, but must be present. That the revision of Sidney came not first but last, and that the final copying of Sidney’s psalms came after that of hers confirms this. She places herself before him; she inverts chronology, and influence. And by having

³⁰ Mary Sidney Herbert, “To the Angel Spirit of the Most Excellent Sir Philip Sidney,” Poetry Foundation, accessed November 30, 2023, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/55243/to-the-angel-spirit-of-the-most-excellent-sir-philip-sidney>.

³¹ Herbert, “To the Angel Spirit.”

his poems head to her endings Sidney is almost forgotten as their originator: she becomes their aim.³²

Alexander shows Herbert's formal approach to completing the Psalms, particularly concerning her rhyme scheme and showing how Sidney's texts "conform to her aesthetic" and "regularize their geometry."³³ He continues that "the licence for this is that she is only influenced by him, so the alteration is implicit in his works in the first place."³⁴ Hence, if we consider Alexander's analysis of Herbert's formal pattern endings and how this places Herbert in an almost more authorial role than Philip in conversation with Osherow's analysis of how Herbert (throughout her psalms) uses rhyme scheme to mimic formal embroidery patterns (each of which can carry different significance and alter the interpretation of her psalms), it is evident how textile becomes an essential method for Herbert to express her identity as an author.

In her paper "Two, by their bloods, and by thy Spirit on: Sir Philip Sidney and Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke" Ina Habermann articulates that Herbert uses the metaphor of weaving a cloth to represent the "different but essential" tasks both Herbert and her brother completed in writing their poetry together.³⁵ Habermann continues, arguing that weaving is not a gendered metaphor but rather suggests the joint labor of the siblings "in the service of true religion."³⁶ Habermann concludes by stating that Herbert as a female author, represents an "exception to the rule and who becomes officially entitled to adopt the voices of male writers like Petrarch and also of the Psalmist in order to preserve her brother's memory."³⁷ While I agree

³² Gavin Alexander, "The Last Word: Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke," *Writing after Sidney: The Literary Response to Sir Philip Sidney 1586-1640* (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2006) 90.

³³ Alexander, "The Last Word," 125.

³⁴ Alexander, "The Last Word," 125.

³⁵ Ina Habermann. "Two, by Their Bloods", 37.

³⁶ Ina Habermann. "Two, by Their Bloods", 38.

³⁷ Ina Habermann. "Two, by Their Bloods", 40.

that Herbert uses weaving to represent the different tasks of authorship she and her brother performed, I argue that this imagery is very much a gendered metaphor, portraying Herbert as an Arachne in competing in the literary sphere for her voice as a female author to be acknowledged for its talent.

To begin, it is significant that Herbert uses the imagery of weaving, specifically web-weaving which alludes to Arachne, to describe her and Philip's writing process. This sparks interest as both the practice of weaving and the story of Arachne operate within the domestic space of women. Herbert places her and her brother in the female space of weaving to show that men and women can collaborate in the women's space of cloth-making, which therefore reflects that men and women can collaborate in the men's space of literature. Herbert continues her weaving imagery throughout the poem, referencing her poem to Elizabeth (and the Protestant faith) by writing "And I the cloth in both our names present,/ A livery robe to be bestowed by thee."³⁸ While Habermann may argue that Herbert is only an exception due to her adopting masculine voices in a masculine tradition, I disagree because Herbert continues to portray her and Phillip as equal in the weaving of this text while also placing Phillip in the feminine sphere of weaving. Yet even Habermann's comment reflects how Herbert had to compete in the masculine sphere for recognition of her poetic identity, much as Arachne was required to compete to prove her skill. Klein comments on Herbert's presentation of the sonnets as a "livery robe," elaborating on Herbert's participation in the Renaissance culture of gift exchange. Mary is inviting Elizabeth to make a livery robe that would then be given back to Mary to wear (and make Mary a servant to Elizabeth), reflecting the collaborative nature of Elizabeth improving

³⁸ Herbert, "Even Now That Care," ll. 34-35.

upon Herbert's work. Klein writes, that Herbert "referred to her own 'handmaids taske,' alluding to the works of her hand as well as to her subservient position before God and her queen. These various hand-made works - Esther Inglis's book, Mary's skirt, Arbella's gloves, and Pembroke's poems - had a unique capacity to evoke the giver, her hands occupied in painstaking and loving labor and out-stretched in an attitude of presentation, devotion, or supplication".³⁹ By participating in the culture of presenting a hand-embroidered gift to Elizabeth, Herbert is not simply trying to reaffirm her relationship with Elizabeth, Herbert is engaging with Elizabeth through a specific means of communication developed by women: the exchange of embroidery. Having engaged in this practice herself with Katherine Parr, Elizabeth would understand the intricacies of Herbert's embroideries as not simply a superfluous embellishment, but rather a way for Herbert to establish both her own identity in skill while also using the intricacies of her design to prove her dedication to Elizabeth. Much like Herbert carefully weaving her own authorial voice into her psalm continuations, Herbert also uses her embroideries to establish her identity with Elizabeth.

Additionally, Herbert's use of Arachne and web-weaving allusions acknowledges female authors' role as competitors in English literature. As Michele Osherow details in her paper "Mary Sidney's Embroidered Psalms," Herbert's formal structure of her poetry reflects some of the formal patterns of her textiles. Specifically in Sidney's "Even Now That Care," Osherow writes that "Sidney's intertextual movement might have been familiar to Elizabeth, who similarly gifted text and textile"⁴⁰ and that allusions to textile and needlework create a frame to Herbert's poetry that reflects a gift exchanged among women. While Herbert's intertextual imagery may have

³⁹ Klein, "Your Humble Handmaid," 476.

⁴⁰ Osherow, "Mary Sidney's Embroidered Psalms," 664.

been familiar to Elizabeth as a form of gift exchange, it also may have served as a poetic exchange regarding female authorship. To explain, Herbert most likely would have been familiar with Elizabeth's poem "The Doubt of Future Foes" due to George Puttenham's *The arte of English poesie* published in 1590, which included Elizabeth's poem, calling it "the most bewtifull and gorgious of all others."⁴¹ It is possible that Herbert may have read this poem and understood Elizabeth's allusion to herself as Minerva, competing for both queenship and authorship in her realm. As a response, Herbert may have adopted the same web-weaving imagery in her own poem "Even Now That Care," written in 1599, to acknowledge their shared roles as competitors being female authors in English literature, especially as this poem was a gift to Elizabeth.

Notably, at the time of these women's writings, Julie Campbell reveals the intense literary competition between learned women. "In part because of Queen Elizabeth's prominent position in international politics, and in part because of Continental literary boasts about learned women in Italy and France, the English were acutely aware of a sense of nationalistic competition between learned women, even though many writers warned English women against imitating Continental women."⁴² Both Elizabeth and Herbert were English writers "held up for comparisons."⁴³ A gift of embroidery along with text may have been a way to further engage in this culture among women, acknowledging the struggle for female authorial identity. It is also a possibility that in gifting the cloth to Elizabeth, Herbert acknowledges their shared roles as competitors, with both women, much like Arachne, having to face incredible odds at establishing

⁴¹ Puttenham, George. *The arte of English poesie Contriued into three bookes: the first of poets and poesie, the second of proportion, the third of ornament*, (1589), 207.

⁴² Julie Campbell, *Literary Circles and Gender in Early Modern Europe a Cross-Cultural Approach* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), 132.

⁴³ Julie Campbell, *Literary Circles*, 132.

their position as authors not in spite of but in accordance with their gender. Like Arachne, both Elizabeth and Herbert have an inherent disadvantage: their gender. While Arachne's inherent disadvantage was her mortality in the face of an immortal, Elizabeth and Herbert face the unchangeable status of their sex in a world where masculinity is much more highly valued. In gifting clothes and using weaving imagery to craft poetic identity, both women intentionally seem to identify with Arachne in an economic and literary exchange that favors the voices and skills of women, rather than men.

As Susan Frye writes in her book *Pens and Needles: Women's Textualities in Early Modern England*, "many women used the conservative traditions of the household arts and biblical texts to articulate their capacity for sexual, legal, religious, and psalmic identities, in ways that connected them to other women, past and present, as well as to the political events of their time."⁴⁴ Therefore, including an allusion to Arachne by incorporating weaving imagery in poetry creates a shared language among women authors, reflecting an intertextual movement to weave women's voices into the sphere of English literature. This intertextual language acknowledges the competition that female authors, like Arachne, must partake in by not only competing with other authors on account of their literary skill but also by proving that women have a place in English literature.

Moving into the seventeenth century, Mary Wroth's *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, uses web-weaving imagery to reflect her role as a competitor and as a woman author, much like Arachne. To begin, Wroth's *Urania* is a long and winding prose romance that weaves through the adventures and infidelity of Amphilanthus and his romance with the loyal Pamphilia.

⁴⁴ Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 159.

At one point, Amphilanthus comes across a maiden who sits in a tree as she compares catching fish on a hook to being captured by love. The maiden sings, “Love peruse me, seeke, and finde/
How each corner of my minde/ is a twine/ woven to shine./ Not a Webb ill made, foule fram’d/
Bastard not by Father nam’d,/ such in me/ cannot bee.”⁴⁵ The maiden later explains her history, describing her “strength of mind busied like a Spider, which being to crosse from one beame to another, must worke by-waies, and goe farre about, making more webs to catch her selfe into her owne purpose, then if she were to goe an ordinary straight course: and so did I, out of my wit weave a web to deceive all, but mine owne desires.”⁴⁶ In the context of the story, the maiden uses the imagery of weaving a web to reflect her creation of her own self-purpose. In both instances when the maiden mentions web-weaving, the web is woven in the maiden’s mind, demonstrating her sharp wit, but also her self-made identity. While the reflection of self-identity and demonstration of wit through weaving is reminiscent of the story of Arachne, it also reflects on a larger scale Wroth’s creation of her own poetic identity. As the spider “must worke by-waies, and goe farre about, making more webs to catch her selfe into her owne purpose,” Wroth shows a woman identifying with the meticulous labor it takes to craft her own purpose and identity.

The description of building a web also symbolizes spaces that are a “trap” and the creation of new spaces. Spider webs are often traps in early modern imagery. As illuminated by Griffin, “Wroth’s romance can be read as an act of resistance against the appropriation of *Arcadia* by other editors, publishers and authors – as was the Countess of Pembroke’s 1593

⁴⁵Mary Wroth. *The Countess of Montgomery’s Urania* (Women Writers Project: Northeastern University, 1621), li1r, Women Writers Online.

⁴⁶ Wroth. *The Countess of Montgomery’s Urania*, li2v.

edition. Wroth imitated her aunt's gesture in trying to claim *Arcadia* back into their family circle, but she did so by publishing her own romance as opposed to a new edition of Sidney's."⁴⁷

Wroth's use of web imagery becomes a way to represent the numerous traps that not only her female characters fall into in their quests for personal identity, but also the numerous traps that women authors face in the literary industry at the time. Lamenting on her marriage proposal from Charimellus, the maiden describes how she used her "wit" to "weave a web to deceive all, but mine owne desires."⁴⁸ Web-weaving in this instance describes the delicate and tumultuous balance between women's agency and desire. While speaking in the context of marriage, the maiden reflects on her own romantic desires at odds with what her father will allow, resorting to weave a deception in which she claims she "had privately vowed unto [herself], never to be betrothed, nor assured, untill the time [she] married" to which Charimellus responds that he "hated forward woman, and could love none but such an one, who he must win by suite and love."⁴⁹ This instance reflects the tension between women's agency and women's desire, as the maiden comes to be tangled in the web of matrimony as her agency is opposed by both her father's declaration and her marriage to Charimellus. The maiden attempts to weave a web of deception using cunning language to appeal to both Charimellus and her father, but ultimately ends up ensnared in the delicate web of male authority that the maiden must yield to. Although in a sense the maiden's verbal web-weaving undermines her, this description reflects how words are a concept that women could "weave" to attempt to mitigate or untangle themselves from gender roles. While the maiden does fail this task, this does not necessarily mean that Wroth has

⁴⁷ Aurélie Griffin, "Mary Wroth's *Urania* and the Editorial Debate over Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*," *Études Épistémè*, no. 22 (2012): <https://doi.org/10.4000/episteme.388>.

⁴⁸ Wroth. *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, li2v.

⁴⁹ Wroth. *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, li3r.

determined that women are destined to fail in verbal deceit. Rather, it can be taken as a commentary on the complex webs women were forced to navigate in gender hierarchies, and by locating this struggle in the language of weaving, Wroth places power back in women's domestic spaces as a source of ingenuity, rather than a space women are forced into and subjected to. On a larger scale, it also reflects the complex web of misogyny women authors faced in the publishing industry. Just as the maiden is hated for being forward, Wroth comes to face similar criticism in being "forward" enough to attempt to publish *Urania* as a folio edition.

Wroth weaves many complex narratives into *Urania*, which may reflect how other women (or even Wroth herself concerning Sidney's *Arcadia*) could often feel trapped by masculine narrative structure. What I mean by this is that women authors may have felt trapped either in literary conventions created by men, feeling that their work would not be accepted if they did not write in the same traditions established by men, or feeling trapped in the way female characters were typically portrayed by men (take the Petrarchan tradition, for example). Women authors then get trapped in a sticky web of literary trappings. However, Wroth presents the idea of weaving a web of self-purpose to escape this trap. Wroth does so on a larger scale in *Urania* by weaving a web of female storytelling. That is, it is primarily the women in Wroth's story who tell stories or engage in craftsmanship. In *Urania*, "the woman is ostensibly an equal with the men in terms of story-telling, yet Wroth allows her to usurp the story-telling by only alluding to Aphilanthus's tale while having the "Maide" tell hers in its entirety. Wroth thus subverts the traditional power structure as seen in the *Arcadia* in which men tell stories to women, but women mainly tell stories to other women, and women's stories are often cut short."⁵⁰ This functions not

⁵⁰ Julie Campbell, *Literary Circles*, 182.

only on the narrative level to represent the careful crafting and complex minds of female characters, but also on a personal level for Wroth to craft her own identity as an author.

Susan Frye illuminates that “Wroth weaves language to clothe her romance according to feminine associations with cloth, as well as according to Sidneyan political and rhetorical strategies suspended among the early modern connections between the verbal and visual, text and textile, the wellspring of early modern English women's textualities.”⁵¹ Wroth does indeed carry the Sidneyan strategies of the textile, using the domestic space of women (weaving) to tease out the message of how women must compete on both the literary and gender levels to enter the space of authorship in English literature. Wroth portrays women’s domestic weaving spaces in Dalinea’s castle, first introducing Dalinea in the context of her sitting “under a Cloth of Estate, of Carnation Velvet, curiously and richly set with Stones, all over being Embrodered with purle of Silver, and Gold” after passing numerous “hangings of Needle-worke, all in Silke and Gold,” depicting Paris and the rape of Helen.⁵² Along with her detailed descriptions of needlework, Wroth further ties women’s spaces of needlework to women’s literary circles by detailing that Dalinea appeared to be reading to her ladies while they “wrought.”⁵³ Helen Smith further articulates the female space of weaving, pointing to how, in Dalinea’s castle, “the Ovidian narrative is recreated in visual form,” positing that “Wroth's needleworkers absorb the text as part of the process of cultural work, and the lush descriptions of the tapestries which decorate Dalinea's castle reveal the extent to which the needleworkers appropriate the literary text and rework it.”⁵⁴ Wroth’s textile description of weaving female identity reflects her attempt

⁵¹ Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 222.

⁵² Wroth. *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, O3v.

⁵³ Wroth. *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, O3v.

⁵⁴ Helen Smith, *Grossly Material Things: Women and Book Production in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 200.

to craft her own identity as a female author, making her an Arachne of poetic creation. Yet Wroth's association with Arachne also reflects the competition she faced to be considered an author in English literature. Not only was this the first prose romance written by a woman in English, but according to the Folger Shakespeare Library, the publication of this novel led to great controversy as a woman's virtue was considered compromised if her work appeared in print, which *Urania* did.⁵⁵ Hence, Wroth uses web-weaving imagery as a tool for the creation of female identity within the story, and as a tool for crafting her own poetic identity expressed through the language of the textile shared and understood within the domestic spaces of women. The weaving and spider imagery are reminiscent of Arachne, who was a tool of poetic expression for Ovid, but also for Wroth as she identifies with Arachne in being a female competitor, weaving a prosodic tapestry that represents female authorship.

Wroth continues her use of classical allusion and weaving imagery in her poem "In this strange labyrinth how shall I turn?" from *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* (1612). However, this poem diverts from the Arachne allusion and instead alludes to the story of Theseus and the minotaur in Greek mythology, in which Ariadne, princess of Crete, provided a thread for Theseus to carry through the labyrinth to find his way out of the labyrinth upon slaying the minotaur. Notably in this poem, Wroth adopts the first-person narrative, subsequently identifying herself as Theseus rather than Ariadne. The poem concludes "Yet that which most my troubled sense doth move,/ Is to leave all, and take the thread of Love."⁵⁶ In Jennifer Munroe's piece "In

⁵⁵ "The Countess of Montgomery's Urania," *Folgerpedia*, accessed April 27, 2023, https://folgerpedia.folger.edu/The_Countess_of_Montgomery%27s_Urania.

⁵⁶ Mary Wroth. "A Crown of Sonnets Dedicated to Love," From *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*. TCD Blackboard, accessed April 27, 2023, https://tcd.blackboard.com/webapps/blackboard/execute/content/file?cmd=view&content_id=_2576828_1&course_id=_77854_1&framesetWrapped=true.

This Strang Labourinth, How Shall I Turne?': Needlework, Gardens, and Writing in Mary Wroth's *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*," Munroe argues that "Wroth draws on needlework and gardening as material frameworks in which women already actively and effectively negotiated positions for themselves in order to make a space for women in another framework, that of original published poetry."⁵⁷ Munroe suggests that the labyrinth reflects the intersection of gardening and needlework, with the search for space and design of the labyrinth reflecting both the design of early modern gardens and the artful designs and patterns of needlework. Therefore, by using the labyrinth to create a space for female self-expression, Wroth not only sustains the weaving metaphor to do so, but also becomes an Arachne figure herself, weaving a new space for women to express their own identities and authorship. Wroth's labyrinth is a metaphor for being in love and having no way to express it publicly. If the labyrinth is the space that Wroth creates for other female authors to find self-expression, then needlework is recommended as the point of reference to guide other women through the world of authorship.

As the poem concludes with Wroth acquiescing to abandon other ties to trusting the threads of love, Wroth further urges other women to trust in an established language of communication and practice among women (embroidery) as a means of self-expression. As the exchange of embroidery has already been an established method of fostering social bonds and renegotiating hierarchies in relationships between women, exchanging methods of literature that mimic the patterns of embroideries becomes a new method of female authorship and self-expression. While Wroth sustains the practice of weaving imagery to symbolize the competition

⁵⁷ Jennifer Munroe, "'In This Strang Labourinth, How Shall I Turne?': Needlework, Gardens, and Writing in Mary Wroth's 'Pamphilia to Amphilanthus.'" *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 24, no. 1 (2005): 36. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20455210>.

for the expression of female authorship, making her an Arachne-like figure herself as a poet, Wroth also transitions to the classical allusion of Theseus and Ariadne instead of continuing the allusion to Arachne and Minerva. By switching to this alternative allusion in which thread is not used as a method of competition but rather cohesion, as well as portraying herself as Theseus instead of Ariadne, Wroth may be attempting to sow seeds of cohesion between male and female authorship. The female speaker in Wroth's poem never escapes the labyrinth, instead winding up in the labyrinth at the end of the corona. Wroth's use of the corona genre reiterates this formally, as the poem winds around to tie itself to its beginning, much like a thread. Because the female speaker remains trapped, adopting the masculine voice offers Wroth an escape from the labyrinth, raising questions about what freedoms shifting the gendered voice can allow in literary production. In portraying herself as a male hero using references to the practices of female domestic space, Wroth gives a certain ethos to the female domestic space of embroidery, demonstrating how female domestic spaces have made it possible for male success, and can be a potential avenue for women's success and achievement as well.

In conclusion, late 16th-century and early 17th-century women writers use web-weaving and Arachne allusions to craft their identities as authors, representing both competition and cohesion in their writing. Queen Elizabeth I casts herself as Minerva to portray herself as a victorious queen and successful female poet, while Mary Sidney Herbert also engages in the language of web-weaving to show her role as a collaborator in the Sidneys' literary legacy as well as position herself as a fierce competitor in the realm of English literature, much like Arachne. Like her aunt, Mary Wroth aligns herself with Arachne as an authorial competitor but also weaves a new web of poetic expression and female identity. Thus, the shared language of the domestic space of weaving becomes an intertextual shared language among female authors in

which these women can acknowledge the role each other plays as contributors to and competitors in the realm of English literature.

Chapter 3

Whitney Weaving Poems and Cloth

Isabella Whitney is believed to be the first Englishwoman to have written original poetry and published said poetry, making her one of the first professional women writers. In Isabella Whitney's "A Sweet Nosegay, or Pleasant Posy" (1573), Whitney adopts a textile language to suggest a feminine connotation to her work and thus establish herself as a competitor in the male-dominated sphere of authorship at the time. In her work "To the worshipfull and right vertuous yong Gentyelman, George Mainwaring Esquier: Is. W. wissheth happye health with good successe in all his godly affayres" Whitney uses both gardening and the textile imagery as metaphor for her writing, which also particularly locates her writing in women's domestic sphere. Using gardening language, Whitney implores Mainwaring to "favour to these slips in which I trust you shall finde safety," hoping that he will "accept this my labour."⁵⁸ While Whitney is heavily using gardening language, slip can mean both a shoot of a plant, a scrap of dress material, or a scrap of paper. In both senses of the word as a gardening metaphor or clothing metaphor, Whitney intentionally locates her works in a distinctly feminine sphere of authorship. In a sense, Whitney is establishing herself as a distinctly female author in the realm of literature at the time, offering a sampling of slips to build a tapestry or garden of her works.

Whitney continuously uses the metaphor of the slip in terms of her self-fashioning as an author. Namely in her sequence "A sweet Nosgay, Or pleasant Posye: containing a hundred and ten Phylosophicall Flowers, &c," even though Whitney refers to these poems as flowers, the

⁵⁸ Isabella Whitney, "A Sweet Nosegay, or Pleasant Posy," Women Writers Online, accessed November 11, 2023, <https://wwo-wwp-northeastern-edu.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/WWO/search?keyword=a+sweet%20nosegay#!/view/whitney.nosegay.xml>, A5r.

form of Whitney's poetry greatly resembles a quilt made of multiple slips, visually resembling quilted squares with each slip being four lines. As Whitney Trettien writes, "Whitney's innovation within this genre is to draw attention to and exploit the prescriptivist gendering of 'gathering' as a form of authorship. She does this through the metaphor of the textile slip."⁵⁹ Whitney "gathers," presents, and relies on her slips heavily to demonstrate her role as a competitor in the realm of poetry at the time. In her selections, her references to slips reflect her authorial preferences and decisions. As she opens her work by referring to her poem selections as slips, it is reasonable to read her following references to "slips" in her poetry as a reference to her own authorship. In "The Auctor to the Reader," Whitney reverts to the metaphor of her slips as a garden, writing "A slip I tooke to smell unto, / which might be my defence. / In stynking streetes, or lothsome Lanes / which els might mee infect: / And sence that time, I ech day once / have viewd that brave prospect."⁶⁰ In this section, Whitney's "slips" or flowers are items she uses to provide relief from the city, yet on a larger scale, they also reflect her poetic identity. As Whitney has already identified her slips to symbolize her poetry, her slips then reflect how her poetry becomes a source of solace for her when navigating the streets, which calls into question what the streets and lanes represent. Whitney later in her poetry alludes to her own "rights" and consequently, her authority as an author, writing "And now I have a Nosegay got, / that would be passing rare: / Yf that to sort the same aright, / weare lotted to my share."⁶¹ Because Whitney continues with a strong theme of using her slips to represent crafting her authorship, and later questions which rights are afforded to her in her authorship, then it is possible that the streets and

⁵⁹ Whitney Trettien. "Isabella Whitney's Slips: Textile Labor, Gendered Authorship, and the Early Modern Miscellany," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 45, no. 3 (2015): 505–21, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10829636-3149131>.

⁶⁰ Whitney, "A Sweet Nosegay," A6v.

⁶¹ Whitney, "A Sweet Nosegay," A7r.

lanes she writes of are not simply literal, but also reflect the avenues and competition Whitney is up against. In attempting to navigate the avenues of authorship, Whitney must rely heavily on her own poetry and thus herself lest she be “suffocated” by the competition around her. As Whitney’s competition consisted of social, legal, and economic barriers of the time, as well as contemporary authors, Whitney expresses her frustration and anxieties in self-fashioning herself as an author, questioning what is “lotted to [her] share.” By arranging her poems as “slips” and using her poetry as a source of protection and strengths, Whitney calls attention to her role as a competitor through the metaphor of the slip.

Whitney continues the thread of her authorial competition throughout her poetry, engaging in the language of textile to demonstrate her own agency once more in “The maner of her Wyll, & what she left to London: and to all those in it: at her departing.” In her will to London, Whitney diligently lists numerous textiles and clothing items that she leaves to London. By doing so, I argue she is asserting her role as both a contributor and competitor in English literature by using the language of textile. To begin, Whitney writes that London is “full of Wollen leave: / And Linnen store in Friday streete, if they mee not deceave,” and to Mercers, she leaves “silke so rich,/ as any would desire.”⁶² Whitney dictates exactly what London receives from her, which is literally her writing but metaphorically a collection of garments. Doing so reflects how Whitney locates her authority in cloth. What may seem odd about Whitney’s will is that she leaves her clothes to recipients such as the linen store or mercers who would already own these items. However, Whitney’s endowments are contingent on not being deceived, making her exchange a matter of personal authority rather than necessity. This personal authority

⁶² Whitney, “A Sweet Nosegay,” E3v-E4r.

suggests that her cloths are transformed into symbols of worthiness, which on a larger scale, reflects her selective nature in distributing her “slips” or “poems.” Whitney links cloth and poems to then reflect the coveted nature of women’s writings, acting like a “rich silk” that any would be lucky to receive. Portraying her writings in this fashion also reflects how Whitney uses the imagery of cloth to portray her writing as desirable and thus to seek patronage.

Whitney contrasts the economic influence women wield in the textile industry with the scope of their economic influence in the literary industry, thus using this contrast to promote women’s literary endeavors from an economic standpoint. In her “Wyll,” Whitney redistributes women’s economic agency in literary production by declaring that the bookbinders “evry weeke shal mony have, / when they from Bookes depart,” locating the literary industry in its mercantile nature.⁶³ She establishes a personal stake in the literary economy by claiming, “my Printer must, / have somewhat to his share: / I wyll my Friends these Bookes to bye / of him, with other ware.”⁶⁴ The possessive use of “my” printer recalls Whitney’s own role as a woman who is part of the literary publishing economy, as Whitney’s first editions “Copy of a Letter” (1567) and “Sweet Nosgay” (1573) were printed in quarto.⁶⁵ From an economic standpoint, “Copy of a Letter” must have had some success, seeing as printer Richard Jones was willing to publish “Sweet Nosgay,” but no second editions were published.⁶⁶ With these lines, Whitney asserts her influence over the publishing industry by first proposing that booksellers can only make money when they are selling books, and offering her own “wyll” to convince her friends to buy the books, thus casting herself as an essential force for stimulating the literary economy. Using her

⁶³ Whitney, “A Sweet Nosegay,” E6v.

⁶⁴ Whitney, “A Sweet Nosegay,” E6v.

⁶⁵ North, “Women, the Material Book and Early Printing,” 69.

⁶⁶ North, “Women, the Material Book and Early Printing,” 75.

“wyll” as a means to stimulate the bookselling industry both asserts her own agency or mental force as a woman in the literary industry while also playing on the title of her poem, proposing that her “Wyll, & what she left to London” will be a stimulating force for the industry. Whitney is then expressly commenting on women’s economic liberty to publish literature.

Whitney continues by alluding to the importance of a woman’s financial status to her ability to publish. To expand, Whitney immediately follows her lines on bookselling by expressing that she wishes for “Widdoers ritch” to marry poor maidens to “set the Girles aflote,” while conversely wishing for “wealthy Widdowes” to help “yong Gentylnen” by being “courteous to them” yet not allowing their “Bags too long bee full, for feare that they doo burst.”⁶⁷ It is essential to note the gendered divide Whitney creates by expressing that male widowers marry young maidens to support them financially, but while she also wishes for female widows to support young gentlemen, she does not wish for widows to remarry and cautions them to monitor the young gentlemen’s spending. This divide reflects how being a widow afforded women a unique financial liberty that women could use to bolster their chances at literary publication. As a widow, a woman could be afforded money or property left to her in her husband’s will that she would have no other way of gaining access to. This would give a woman the financial means to be able to write and attempt to publish without the dire pressure of seeking patronage. By using a “Wyll” to comment on the economic liberty widow-ship afforded women, Whitney reflects on her personal financial challenges that women face in endeavoring to publish their works in addition to also reflecting on the financial contributions that women, namely widows, have in stimulating the literary economy by padding the pockets of young men. The

⁶⁷ Whitney, “A Sweet Nosegay,” E6v.

reversal from widowers financially supporting maidens to widows supporting gentlemen can also symbolize a reversal in gender hierarchies in which women now have the power and means to publish literature and benefit from the bookselling economy.

By placing her address to booksellers after a lengthy catalog of the garments and other textiles she has left to London, Whitney uses the formal order of her “Wyll” to comment on the disparities between the economic impact women can have through their contributions to the textile industry as opposed to what they can contribute to the publishing industry. By first cataloging a variety of textiles, Whitney recalls women’s essential contributions to the textile economy, which is an expected and accepted space for women to operate as producers and consumers. However, by then leaving the garments to men and instead following with a financial description of the ways women may stimulate the literary economy, Whitney structurally crafts an entryway for women writers to endeavor into the bookselling market. Whitney crafts an ethos for women writers by bridging their established textile contributions with women’s roles as literary patrons, proposing greater support for women authors from an economic standpoint.

Whitney’s use of textile language and imagery to relate the formal structure of her work to women’s literary authority is continued in the treatment of and referral to her poems as “slips.” By capitalizing on the language of slips, Whitney uses terminology from women’s textile spaces as a method of agency in writing, further linking textual and textile production. Trettien calls further attention to this, writing, “If Whitney’s writing is new it is not because it engages questions of her own originality, creativity, or humility, but because it responds to the metaphors that were structuring very particular practices of authorship at that moment. By reorienting the authorial ‘gathering’ of the humanist miscellany around the cutting, slipping, shearing, and rearranging that she does as a female reader, Whitney exploits the rich semantic network of the

word slip, as it refers variously to plants, paper, and needlework motifs, to carve out a space for her own composition.”⁶⁸ Whitney makes her authorial gathering clear in “The Auctor to the Reader,” describing her role as an author in crafting her “Nosegay” which requires her “to slip, to shere, or get in time,/ and not his braunches kyll: Yet barres he out, such gréedy guts,/ as come with spite to toote.”⁶⁹ Whitney demonstrates her authority in shearing, but is careful not to kill the branches, which reflect the pre-existing works of literature in the tree that is the literary canon. Thus, Whitney’s processing of sleeping and shearing reflect how she wants to contribute to the existing fabric and traditions of English literature.

Additionally, it is significant that Whitney chooses to highlight her agency in her parting poem, “A farewell to Reader.” Trettien writes:

In her final “A farewell to the Reader,” Whitney emphasizes the importance of maintaining her collection of textile slips, those cuttings imbued with her memory, as she pleads, “I must request you spoyle them not, / nor doo in peeces teare them / But if thy selfe doo lothe the sent. / ge[v]e others leaue to weare them” (sig. C5v). Drawing on the multiple resonances of the word slip, then, Whitney retunes the language of virtuous pruning and extraction to that of protective collecting, encouraging her readers to cut up her work even as she imagines the act of cutting as preserving her authorial legacy — much as cutting and reworking textile slips helped preserve the memory of those who made them.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Trettien. “Isabella Whitney’s Slips,” 516.

⁶⁹ Whitney, “A Sweet Nosegay,” A8r.

⁷⁰ Trettien. “Isabella Whitney’s Slips,” 517.

Whitney claims an additional level of agency in her poetry by not only pruning or shearing it with her own style, but also by deciding who will receive her “slips.” Whitney writes “For this I say the Flowers are good,/ which I on thee bestow.”⁷¹ Referring to her poetry as flowers, Whitney praises her authorial ability as well as reiterates her agency by determining to whom she bestows her poetry. Whitney must double down on her agency here to highlight how she identifies herself as an active competitor in the world of authorship. In “A farewell to the Reader,” Whitney describes her frustrations as a competitor, writing in rage that “were she a man,/ that with my Flowers doth brag.”⁷² Here, Whitney directly identifies her competition with men, and the authorial opportunities and barriers that differ between men and women authors at the time. If Whitney were a man, then her poetry would be viewed societally as an endeavor to brag about, rather than to justify.

Whitney, in her poetry, then becomes an Arachne-like figure in the way that she refashions the narrative of many classical women in her poetry, as well as her role as an author. In “A Sweet Nosegay,” Whitney acknowledges the classical tradition, writing, “I straight warty wery of those Bookes, / and many other more, / As Virgill, Ovid, Mantuan, / which many wonders letterse. / And to refresh my ma letters muse.”⁷³ Whitney then claims that for the women that authors Virgil and Ovid write about, “my love consistes in this / my whole delight, and pleasure all I take. / To decke the wight/ that worthie praise is:.”⁷⁴ Whitney expresses she derives her pleasure for granting “Ladies” worthy praise, and the type of praise Whitney defines as worthy is that which “her defieth, as Auctor of her stryfe” which contains a “perfect

⁷¹ Whitney, “A Sweet Nosegay,” A8r.

⁷² Whitney, “A Sweet Nosegay,” C5v.

⁷³ Whitney, “A Sweet Nosegay,” A5v.

⁷⁴ Whitney, “A Sweet Nosegay,” B1r.

wisdom.”⁷⁵ In these lines alone, it is already apparent how Whitney begins refashioning these classical women, starting with the figure of Daphne from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. To give a summary, the god Phoebus Apollo, struck by Eros’s arrow, falls madly in love with a nymph named Daphne pursuing her to no end. As Daphne does not welcome his advances and wishes to remain a virgin, she flees from him until she arrives at a stream and her father, a minor river deity, transforms her into a laurel tree so that she may escape Phoebus’s advances.

In her stanzas praising ladies, Whitney uses imagery that heavily evokes the myth of Daphne to signal her intention to refashion the portrayal of these classical women. Not only does Whitney directly mention her familiarity with Ovid, she also alludes to Daphne by opening her commendation with: “Marching among the woods of fine delighte/ Where as the Laurell branch doth bring /increase/ See loe, of Ladies fresh, a solem sight: I viewd, whose walkes betokened all their/ ease:”⁷⁶ The imagery of marching through the woods recalls the moment when Daphne flees from Pheobus through the woods, and Whitney makes this allusion exceptionally clear through her reference to the laurel branch, which is the figure of Daphne. But why does Whitney allude to Daphne, conjuring a larger ethos of classical women in poetry, and what does she craft with this allusion? Travistky argues that “[Whitney] presents [classical women] from a feminine point of view, and identifies her own position with the subordination and restriction of her classical counterparts. Whitney expresses her understanding of the passive role played by the subordinated female in the game of marriage, and of the ubiquity of the double standard. The Letter succeeds in making a personal statement which maintains the dignity of this protesting

⁷⁵ Whitney, “A Sweet Nosegay,” B1r.

⁷⁶ Whitney, “A Sweet Nosegay,” A8v.

woman poet.”⁷⁷ While Whitney does express an understanding of these subordinated figures, she also writes of their subordination in a way that still highlights these women's strengths and uses a resistance-like diction that seems to challenge these women’s agency, or at the very least, their portrayals. After alluding to Daphne, Whitney describes “Ladies,” who have now been framed to represent classical women, describing that “some did twist the Silke of lively hewe / Some others slipt the Braunch for prayes / dew.”⁷⁸ The reference to twisting silk calls attention to classical figures Arachne and Penelope, while slipping the branches returns to the Daphne allusion.

Whitney first re-authors the portrayal of these women in discussing how some women “slipt the Braunch for prayes dew.” With the prior attention to slips, Whitney describes these women as shearing or pruning branches for praises due. Whitney portrays these classical women with the ability to be selective or make certain decisions that result in due praise, much like Whitney voices her own authorial choices in arranging her “slips” of poetry. While these classical women do play more subordinated roles and Whitney is not disputing that, Whitney is acknowledging the roles they play as contributors and creators in their stories and advocates for their acknowledgment.

As these classical women engage in the process of slipping the branch, it raises the question: what is the branch? One potential reading is that these women are taking sprouts/prunings from the tree, which could have numerous different significations. One interpretation would be that the branches directly reflect Daphne, and on a larger scale. Many other classical women figures. By having the branches reflect Daphne, Whitney is calling

⁷⁷ Betty Travitsky, “The ‘Wyll and Testament’ of Isabella Whitney,” *English Literary Renaissance* 10, no. 1 (1980): 80, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43446961>.

⁷⁸ Whitney, “A Sweet Nosegay,” A8v.

attention to the more common Petrarchan tradition as well as Daphne's typical portrayal in love poetry where the lover, such as Phoebus, feels enslaved to love and is chasing a lover they cannot attain. In this traditionally masculine tradition of writing about women, women are heavily objectified yet not given their "prayer dew." By referencing ladies taking slips from Daphne, Whitney highlights the women who have drawn from this tradition, yet still lack acknowledgment, whether those women be authors writing of love, or the women referenced in this poetry. Regardless, through incorporating this metaphor, Whitney becomes an Arachne-like figure using the language of textile (slips) to draw attention to these women's subordination and restrictions and reflect the competition women face in being poets and subjects of poetry. Whitney argues, in her poetry, that "slips" of these portrayals of women be taken and fashioned into something new, which Whitney does through her poetry.

A second potential reading of the slips is that the branches reflect Whitney herself and the slips are her poetry, furthering Whitney's role as an Arachne-like creator and competitor. Throughout the poem, Whitney has established the conceit that her poems are "slips." As she characterizes her poems as slips, she also characterizes herself as a maidservant. While this subordinated role mirrors the subordinated role that her classical references were restricted to play, it also echoes the language of the domestic and reflects her desire to compete in the canon of English literature, exploring her own authorship further. To elaborate, scholar Laurie Ellinghausen argues that Whitney's decision to refer to herself as a maidservant is a strategic move to explore her relationship as a woman with her literary property.⁷⁹ She writes "By adopting the voice of the forsaken former domestic, Whitney harnesses the questions of sexuality

⁷⁹ Laurie Ellinghausen, "Literary Property and the Single Woman in Isabella Whitney's *Sweet Nosgay*." *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 45, no. 1 (2005): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sel.2005.0005>.

and property that maidservants raised to compose her own narrative of intellectual labor. While the text contains rhetorical moves familiar to readers of Renaissance women's writing—transgressions balanced by apologies and pleas for male protection—her position as a single, unemployed woman permits her to explore the productive potential of her newfound lack of enclosure.”⁸⁰ As she refers to herself as a maidservant for this end, this goal may also reflect how Whitney intends for her self-comparison to the branch to be interpreted. As a maidservant, Whitney poses the question of the breadth of literary property available for her to claim. As such, the branch serves as an extension of this metaphor, reflecting the canon of English poetry. Whitney, in her role as a maidservant, expresses the limitations but also the daringness of her role as a female poet, taking “slips” or fragments of her own poems from the canon. By taking slips, Whitney plays with boundaries afforded to the role of maidservant in taking the agency to create and refashion aspects of English literature to become her own. Significantly, Whitney does so by using language significant to the domestic spheres of women, such as gardening and textile work associated with “slips,” as Whitney also alludes to the classical women with limited agency and the Petrarchan tradition of writing about women. As a result, Whitney embodies the figure of Arachne, using her “slips” to question the agency, property, and acknowledgment afforded to her as a woman author competing with gendered limitations to be recognized in the canon of English literature.

⁸⁰ Ellinghausen, “Literary Property,” 5.

Chapter 4

Cloth and Cavendish: Spinning Self-Image

Margaret Cavendish (1623-1673), Duchess of Newcastle, was a well-known author and natural philosopher, engaging in philosophy, science, poetry, and playwriting. Although she never received a formal education, she was an avid scholar with access to many libraries. In Margaret Cavendish's *Poems, and Fancies* (1653) Cavendish uses web and weaving imagery to reflect her identity as an author. To start, Cavendish opens "The Epistle Dedicatory: To Sir Charles Cavendish, My Noble Brother-in-Law" by referring to her book as:

True it is, Spinning with the Fingers is more proper to our Sexe, then studying or writing Poetry, which is the Spinning with the braine: but I having no skill in the Art of the first (and if I had, I had no hopes of gaining so much as to make me a Garment to keep me from the cold) made me delight in the latter; since all braines work naturally, and incessantly, in some kinde or other; which made me endeavour to Spin a Garment of Memory, to lapp up my Name, that it might grow to after Ages.⁸¹

As Cavendish uses metaphor to refer to poetry as "Spinning with the braine," she creates a significant link between women's textile work and female authorship. Starr comments on Cavendish's terminology, stating that "Cavendish repeatedly figures herself and her work in Arachne-like terms."⁸² Cavendish elaborates on this metaphor by referring to her authorship as spinning a "Garment of Memory," locating her literary endeavors in the textile world.

⁸¹ Margaret Cavendish, *Poems, and Fancies*, Women Writers Online, accessed November 23, 2023, <https://www-wwp-northeastern-edu.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/WWO/search?keyword=weave;f1-date=17th%20c.#!/view/cavendish.fancies.xml>, A2r.

⁸² G. Gabrielle Starr, "Cavendish, Aesthetics, and the Anti-Platonic Line," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 39, no. 3 (2006): 302. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30053472>.

Cavendish inserts an undertone of competition by establishing a binary within what is more “proper” for women’s pursuits (writing or spinning) but also by articulating her desire to be remembered for her authorship “to lapp up my Name, that it might grow to after Ages.” While the themes of weaving and female competitions of authority recall the myth of Arachne, I will first start by unraveling Cavendish’s allusion to a different classical myth: the myth of Penelope and her shroud. In *The Odyssey*, Penelope deflects her numerous suitors as she awaits Odysseus’s return by promising that she will select a suitor upon the completion of her shroud. Every day, she begins to weave her shroud, and every night, she unravels it to remain loyal to her husband until his return.

Penelope was a crucial figure for Renaissance art and literature as “Renaissance appropriation of Penelope as a model of female virtue knots together idealizations and contradictions that expose the gap between the material processes of textile production and the versions of ‘woman’ produced by ideological labor.”⁸³ Further, there were two predominant portrayals of Penelope, the Homeric Penelope in which Penelope is described as a “weaver,” and the Ovidian Penelope who is described as a “spinner.”⁸⁴ Significantly Cavendish adopts the language of Penelope as a spinner, which was a trend in Renaissance literary English texts that subsequently signified a “more narrowly defined femininity” as “spinning was contrasted to weaving as a less ambitious, more repetitive task” that loses the element of Penelope’s cunning associated with weaving.⁸⁵ However, spinning is also associated with women’s roles as creators of life, literally and socially, and connects to phrases like the “thread of life” or “lifespan,”

⁸³ Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 110.

⁸⁴ Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 110.

⁸⁵ Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 111.

giving women's spinning an essential role in the creation of life.⁸⁶ Additionally, "in social classes in which women's thread making was recognized as a valuable product, spinning was associated with potentially threatening feminine will and power."⁸⁷ Cavendish wittily uses the motif of spinning and its connection to writing poetry to overturn gendered hierarchies of "feminine virtue" and limitations on female authorship. Cavendish begins by attributing autonomy to the brain itself as "all brains work naturally, and incessantly" which "made" Cavendish "endeavour" to write her poems. Although Cavendish claims it would be more "proper" for a woman to spin, she articulates that the natural thing for the brain to do is to write poetry. Cavendish portrays this process as though she is a passive agent to her brain's demand. By establishing a dichotomy through the language of spinning between what is "proper" socially and what is "natural" intellectually for a woman to partake in, Cavendish subverts women's social roles and claims her own "natural" authorial identity.

Cavendish then weaves in the myth of Arachne in articulating her desire to "Spin a Garment of Memory" which, if not leading to recognition in her lifetime, will lead to her posthumous success. Cavendish claims that regarding her writing, she "cannot say the Web is strong, fine, or evenly Spun, for it is a Course peice; yet I had rather my Name should go meanly clad, then dye with cold."⁸⁸ Recalling that Arachne attempted suicide before Minerva spared her life by transforming Arachne into a spider, Cavendish linking her anxieties about her work surviving her to images of webs and spinning conjures the ethos of Arachne. As Arachne neared her death, she was transformed from woman to spider, her weavings turning from

⁸⁶ Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 111.

⁸⁷ Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 126.

⁸⁸ Cavendish, *Poems, and Fancies*, A2v.

tapestries to webs. Here, as Cavendish reflects on the permanence of her work and her own mortality, her poems morph from a Garment to a Web. This transformation in Cavendish's language along with a shift in allusion (from Penelope to Arachne) signifies her own anxieties of her authorship being disregarded on account of her gender. As Fung demonstrates, "By linking domestic labor to poetic creation, Cavendish's paratextual materials not only authorize her creativity but invest it with the same importance as the labors of a female householder."⁸⁹ By rooting these fears in women's domestic realm of spinning and using allusions that distinctly portray women in competitions/as competitors, Cavendish shows the struggle in the gendered hierarchies of authorship that women faced while also departing from spinning being a practice to exercise virtue and instead linking spinning to an intellectual exercise of literary ability. This carries implications for the freedom and limitations of early modern women's textual and textile endeavors as Cavendish redefines the language of spinning to become woven into and even synonymous with the language of writing.

In Cavendish's poem, the labor of spinning morphs into the creative process of weaving, with Cavendish dictating the thread of her fate through her writing, causing weaving and writing to almost become a synonymous process. Cavendish writes that "Fate hath Spun the thread of this part of my Life, which Life I wish may be drawne forth in your Service."⁹⁰ Again, Cavendish locates a force that seems to have authority over her, this time being the external force of fate rather than the internal force of her brain. Yet while Fate "hath Spun the thread" of Cavendish's life, Cavendish (or at least, her brain) has the authority to spin the thread with

⁸⁹ Megan J. Fung, "Art, Authority, and Domesticity in Margaret Cavendish's *Poems and Fancies*," *Early Modern Women* 10, no. 1 (2015): 30, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26431355>.

⁹⁰ Cavendish, *Poems, and Fancies*, A2v.

fingers, meaning to craft it how she sees fit, which she chooses to do through writing poetry. This contention in Cavendish's spinning imagery reflects a struggle for authority, which Cavendish continuously grapples with in her relationship to classical humanist learning. To explore the nuances of Cavendish's allusions along with the potential to connect Cavendish's weaving and spinning imagery to Penelope and Arachne, I will consider Elizabeth Scott-Baumann's chapter "Margaret Cavendish: Nature and Originality" to unravel Cavendish's natural imagery and imaginative autonomy. Scott-Baumann argues that Cavendish resists classical learning and appropriation of Greek and Latin texts and philosophies.⁹¹ Cavendish "challenges the authority of ancient authors with the evidence of her own experience and opinion," casting herself as their rival.⁹² Cavendish views these classical models of learning as "repressing individual thought" and "suggests such learning is ornamental rather than useful, even for men."⁹³ Scott-Baumann points to Cavendish's *The Worlds Olio*, arguing that Cavendish's usage of the Ovidian verb "Metamorphos'd" articulates Cavendish's stance that "reading too many classical poets almost reduces an author to part of their works. Extensive reading dilutes the self, and results not in a creative poet, but in an inert storehouse for received knowledge. This received knowledge is unoriginal and uninspired, nor is it even useful in an educational sense."⁹⁴

Clearly, despite Cavendish's unfamiliarity with Greek and Latin languages, she is familiar with the works of these classical authors and references them frequently. In "Of Poets, and their Theft," Cavendish refers to poets who use classical references and allusions as "Many

⁹¹Elizabeth Scott-Baumann, "Margaret Cavendish: Nature and Originality," in *Forms of Engagement: Women, Poetry and Culture 1640-1680*, (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2013) 40.

⁹² Scott-Baumann, "Margaret Cavendish," 41.

⁹³ Scott-Baumann, "Margaret Cavendish," 42.

⁹⁴ Scott-Baumann, "Margaret Cavendish," 40-1.

there are, that Sutes will make to weare, / Of severall Patches stole, both here, and there;”⁹⁵

Interestingly, Cavendish refers to the theft of these poets as stolen patches, recalling the “Garment of Memory” that she hopes to achieve in writing her poetry. The art of writing poetry, in Cavendish’s world, continues to be associated with the realm of textile production. Cavendish continues that:

Some take a Line, or two of Horace Wit,
And here, and there will a Fancy pick.
And so of Homer, Virgill, Ovid sweet:
Makes all those Poets in their Book to meet:
Yet makes them not appeare in their right shapes,
But like to Ghosts do wander in dark Shades.⁹⁶

If we consider Scott-Baumann’s reading that Cavendish is against classical allusion for fear of crafting an authorial voice that is simply a “Ghost” of classical figures, condemned to “wander in dark Shades,” then we must scrutinize the relationship Cavendish takes to her allusive figures. Applying Scott-Baumann’s frame, Cavendish’s rejection of classical quotation illuminates her anxiety that her own authorial identity will be lost if she relies too heavily on classical learning for “help” in entering “Fames Court.” Yet, Cavendish’s anxieties do not exclude her from using classical allusion, it simply demonstrates her authorial choices in ensuring her own voice is not lost in classical references. This anxiety, then, adds a heightened significance to Cavendish alluding to Penelope and Arachne: two women engaged in different

⁹⁵ Cavendish, *Poems, and Fancies*, R2v.

⁹⁶ Cavendish, *Poems, and Fancies*, R2v.

spheres of competition who use weaving, or, “spinning” to express and maintain their distinct identities.

Cavendish does indeed use classical allusion, despite her criticisms of the practice, not only inferring allusions as previously mentioned but also directly naming classical figures. In “To Poets,” – which Cavendish places immediately before her aforementioned poem “Of Poets, and their Theft,” – Cavendish writes, “Tis true, my Verses came not out of Jupiters Head, therefore they cannot prove a Pallas: yet they are like Chast Penelope’s Work, for I wrote them in my Husbands absence, to delude Melancholy Thoughts, and avoid Idle Time.”⁹⁷ Cavendish concedes that if her poetry is not wise, it is at least chaste, furthering the social significance that “spinning” held as a virtue to “avoid Idle Time.” By associating her writing poetry with the same virtuousness brought by Penelope’s spinning, Cavendish reorganizes women’s social roles to include authorship as something that is “virtuous” to fit within the scope for what is acceptable practice for women’s idle time. What is unspoken in Cavendish’s rationale for writing her poetry is that in *The Odyssey*, Penelope was not simply weaving to “delude Melancholy Thoughts” nor “avoid Idle Time” but rather to create her own game or method of cunning to stave off her vying suitors. In Penelope’s story, there is an element of her having to compete with these men intellectually, using her craft to reflect her cunning. Cavendish does similar work, using allusion not in place of her voice, but rather as a comparison to imply the competition she faces with masculine hierarchies in authorship.

In her poem “To All Noble, and Worthy Ladies,” Cavendish proposes that poetry is natural to women. Cavendish argues, “*Poetry, which is built upon Fancy, Women may claime, as*

⁹⁷ Cavendish, *Poems, and Fancies*, R1v.

a *worke* belonging most properly to themselves: for I have observ'd, that their *Braines* work usually in a *Fantasticall motion*.”⁹⁸ Cavendish paints a portrait of the housewife in her address to the “Noble” and “Worthy Ladies” by characterizing the textile interests and responsibilities of a housewife, describing “their *severall*, and *various* dresses, in their *many and singular* choices of *Cloaths*, and *Ribbons*, and the like, in their *curious shadowing*, and *mixing of Colours*, in their *Wrought workes*, and divers sorts of *Stitches* they imploy their *Needle*, and many *Curious* things they make.”⁹⁹ In doing so, Cavendish also likens women’s textile work to literary production. By drawing on women’s work, namely the textile connection to a housewife’s work, her tactic of “locating poetic writing in the mind” grants Cavendish the “license to elevate herself to the level of semi-divine housewives such as Nature, Hope, and Fame. The construction of the poet as housewife shields her from blame, and also enables her and other women writers to attain the levels towards which she aims — far above mortal men, in the company of divinities.”¹⁰⁰ Most significantly, Cavendish expresses, “But I imagine I shall be censur’d by my owne *Sex*;”¹⁰¹ As Cavendish weaves a depiction of her authorship as a garment that threatens to be “censur’d by my owne *Sex*,” Cavendish certainly recalls the story of Arachne who was also censured by her own sex, both by Minerva physically destroying her tapestry and transforming her into a spider, limiting Arachne’s capacity for expression. Starr articulates how Cavendish, along with many other women writers, was drawn to Ovid. This is reflected in Cavendish’s discussions of beauty and value as *The Metamorphoses* has a strong focus on women’s experience, imaginative facility, curiosity, and how these themes lead to change.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Cavendish, *Poems, and Fancies*, A3r.

⁹⁹ Cavendish, *Poems, and Fancies*, A3r.

¹⁰⁰ Fung, “Art, Authority, and Domesticity,” 34.

¹⁰¹ Cavendish, *Poems, and Fancies*, A3r-A3v.

¹⁰² Starr, “Cavendish, Aesthetics, and the Anti-Platonic Line,” 301.

Cavendish capitalizes on Ovid's potential for feminine metamorphosis, both in her personal life from duchess, to scientist, to author, and in her authorial identity.¹⁰³ Her goals to "metamorph" her own creative and intellectual endeavors would make Ovid's poetic portrayal of Arachne an appealing figure to identify with, with both Cavendish and Arachne challenging the threat of artistic censorship. Cavendish creates a literal metamorphosis in her language through her concluding lines to this sentiment, in which she uses vague pronouns to destabilize the subject of her sentence to allow for the potential for women authors to "rule," serving as literary and consequently political competitors. Cavendish writes, "and *Men* will cast a *smile of scorne* upon my *Book*, because they think thereby, *Women* inroach too much upon their *Prerogatives*; for they hold *Books* as their *Crowne*, and the *Sword* as their *Scepter*, by which they rule, and governe."¹⁰⁴ The subject of "they" becomes unclear here, first referring to men but then morphing the refer to women, thus passing the "Crowne" of dominance over literary authorship, production, and publication from men to women.

Cavendish recalls Arachne again in her poem "Of a wrought Carpet, presented to the view of working Ladies," describing "To weave a *Carpet*" that depicts "the *Gods* in *sundry shapes* / Are curious *wrought*, divulging all their *Rapes*."¹⁰⁵ This description depicts the same tapestry that Arachne wove, depicting the Gods' rapes and transgressions of mortal women. Both Cavendish's comparisons and allusions to Arachne recall themes of censorship and injustice against women while crafting artful works, both in text and textile. Hence, Cavendish's self-conscious and selective use of allusion to Arachne and Penelope serves

¹⁰³ Starr, "Cavendish, Aesthetics, and the Anti-Platonic Line," 302.

¹⁰⁴ Cavendish, *Poems, and Fancies*, A3v.

¹⁰⁵ Cavendish, *Poems, and Fancies*, Dd1r.

to use the themes of competition to reveal her own unique and individual style of authorship, while also parsing out the pressures of social and gendered hierarchies women must compete with in authorship. Starr articulates that “value here is labile, coming when individual choice is measured against the forces of constraint . . . For Cavendish, this becomes the foundation of her entire project: she seeks fame by way of a materially effective fancy that perceives truth, and brings a variety of new visions-that matter-to birth. Cavendish is the first of a number of women who draw, throughout the next hundred and more years, on Ovid and, to a lesser extent, on Lucretius, to ponder the fluctuations of value that accompany imaginative pleasure.”¹⁰⁶

Cavendish concludes her poem with the lines, “This peice the *patterne* is of *Artfull skil*, / *Art*, *Imitator* is of *Nature* still.”¹⁰⁷ These lines continue to allude to Arachne and her “Artfull skil,” but also through its presentation to “working Ladies,” the poem imagines the freedom for women to divulge truth in the form of artistry. Cavendish recalls Arachne’s woven depiction of rape and other transgressions of the gods, calling the carpet a work of “Artfull skil” reveals the value of women’s artistic endeavors in portraying truth. Her claim that art imitates nature refers to the tradition of pastoral art and poetry, but being prefaced by the images of rape and the story of Arachne, carries a more sinister implication. It carries the implication that art will imitate the nature of the artists themselves. This makes the adjective of “working” Ladies even more pertinent, suggesting that women’s art reflects their industriousness. It’s an inversion of Arachne, as Arachne was transfigured into an element of nature that imitated her former art. This inversion, then, suggests that hard-working women can create truthful works of “Artfull skil,”

¹⁰⁶ Starr, “Cavendish, Aesthetics, and the Anti-Platonic Line,” 302.

¹⁰⁷ Cavendish, *Poems, and Fancies*, Dd1r.

demonstrating Cavendish's use of Arachne-allusion to concretely imagine women's fame in literary production and authorship.

Chapter 5

Stitching Authorship

The English Renaissance was as highly a material culture as it was a literary one, yet there lies a prominent intersection between the two fields. Women such as Queen Elizabeth I, Mary Queen of Scots, Bess of Hardwick, Esther Inglis, and Mary Sidney Herbert each had significant embroidered endeavors, many of which have a markedly literary intersection. Through exploring the broader connection between early modern women writers and their relationship to textiles, studying how the shared language of the domestic space of weaving becomes an intertextual shared language among female authors in which women can acknowledge the roles other women play as contributors and competitors in the realm of English literature. This intersection carried significance for the social hierarchies within which these women operated, as “one function of the conflation of needle and pen was to reassure readers of women’s texts of their authors’ respectability. Public eloquence could be justified if it was framed by a narrative that demonstrated the writer’s domestic virtue as a needlewoman.”¹⁰⁸ While many early modern women authors had to strike a careful balance between manuscript and print culture to have their literary works recognized in both the private and public spheres, needlework offered an alternative. As “women stitched themselves into public visibility by negotiating among the ideological and commercial versions of needlework that they found in diverse and often conflicting sources” which would create a possibility of “stitching political meanings into sewn texts,” the needle and thread become “materials through which they could record and commemorate their participation not in reclusive domestic activity but in the larger

¹⁰⁸ Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 148.

public world.”¹⁰⁹ Therefore, women’s influence on literary craft and interpretation is closely interwoven with their textile endeavors.

Mary Queen of Scots’s embroideries held great socio-political significance by serving as symbols of her fierce political rivalry with Queen Elizabeth I, engaging in an Arachne-like competition of thread with Queen Elizabeth I. Most notable are Mary’s “Marian Hangings” at Oxford Hall, which she created with Elizabeth Talbot (more widely known as Bess of Hardwick) at Bess’s country house in the 1570s during Mary’s imprisonment.¹¹⁰ Mary’s classically coded literary, embroidered, and textile competition with Elizabeth is congruent with coded tactics. Frye illuminates, “Although both men and women used a variety of codes in this period, women’s codes derived their significance from particularly gendered situations and found expression in particularly gendered ways, whether in needlework, commissioned portraits, or writing.”¹¹¹ In her needlework, Mary “made a statement understood by her contemporaries as a political complaint and a threat to Elizabeth’s sovereignty. A central panel of a wall hanging worked by Mary... pictures a hand descending from heaven with a pruning hook, cutting down a vine, with the motto ‘Virescit Vulnere Virtus’ (‘virtue grows strong by wounding’). Contemporary Englishmen read the motto as referring to Mary’s determination to survive her imprisonment by Elizabeth.”¹¹² One obvious political complaint made by Mary to Elizabeth that reflects her struggle for Queenship is found in her embroidery *A Catte*, depicting a ginger-crowed cat toying with a grey and fleeing mouse.¹¹³ Here, Mary uses her embroidery to reflect

¹⁰⁹ Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 134.

¹¹⁰ Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 156.

¹¹¹ Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 56.

¹¹² Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 154.

¹¹³ Mary Stuart, *A Catte*, ca. 1569-84, silk on canvas, 29.5 x 29.5 cm, The Royal Collection Trust, accessed November 20, 2023, <https://www.rct.uk/collection/28224/embroidered-panel>.

the way she feels toyed with and trapped, like a cat and mouse, in the politics of queenship. Frequently, “Mary used all the forms of pen and needle available to her in order to assert her identities, which also meant subverting Elizabeth’s power. As a result, Elizabeth is necessarily present in all of Mary’s work.”¹¹⁴ Like Arachne, Mary embroiders a tapestry of images that reflect her socio-political struggles with subjugation, much as Arachne wove a tapestry showing the transgressions of the gods against mortal women for Minerva.

While Jones and Stallybrass credit the subjects of Mary’s and Bess’s “Marian Hangings” to “emblem books by Guillaume Paradin and Bernard Salomon and Conrad Gessner’s 1560 book of woodcuts,” it is essential to analyze how the careful composition and minuscule details of these embroideries also signify Mary’s sentiments of political competition.¹¹⁵ As already mentioned in my first chapter, Jennifer Summit illuminates that Elizabeth uses the imagery embroidered by Mary to oppress Mary, both poetically and politically, in Elizabeth’s poem “The Doubt of Future Foes” (c. 1568-71).¹¹⁶ Elizabeth’s language in “The Doubt of Future Foes” plays on Mary’s own language in Mary’s poem “Sonnet to Queen Elizabeth I of England” composed in 1568. The “Marian Hanging,” composed between 1570-1585, also continues the textual and textile competition between Mary and Elizabeth artistically, socially, and politically. Their exchanges carry the ethos of the competition between Minerva as Elizabeth challenges Mary as a queen, a poet, and an embroiderer. Mary takes on the role of Arachne both in her subordinated position, as Arachne’s significance as a reflection of poetic voice, and as a weaver.

¹¹⁴ Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 56.

¹¹⁵ Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 156.

¹¹⁶ Summit, “The Arte of a Ladies Penne,” 419.

For one, we may consider which emblems are crowned, and which are not. As *A Catte Lvone* embroidery, as the lion is typically a symbol associated with the English monarchy. However, Mary does not crown the lion. Rather, Mary embroiders a crown in the middle of the emblem above her cipher, as by stitching their names, women “sewed themselves into a different memory system, a subculture recorded in physical objects that were nearly always transmitted among women.”¹¹⁷ The Lion is similarly depicted indoors on a checkered floor (like *A Catte*) as opposed to outdoors like the other animals. This reflects Mary’s own “trapped” position, confined to the country house. In doing so, Mary places the crown of an English symbol over her initials, motioning for her political right to rule the English throne, and weaving a new memory: a memory of Mary in control over the English throne.

Two more emblems to bear crowns are her Dolphin emblem and her Tortoise and Palm Tree emblem. Mary’s Dolphin emblem contains the word “Delphin” with a crown resting over Mary’s initials, and by combining a symbol of royalty with the figure of the dolphin, Mary may be playing on the French word “dauphin,” which was her husband Francis II’s title until his coronation. This symbolism serves as a testament to Mary’s queenship in France, serving as a testament to her political status, experience, and expertise. The Tortoise and Palm Tree emblem shows a tortoise climbing a palm tree with a crown atop the palm tree and the Latin inscription “dat gloria vires,” meaning “glory give me strength.” This design is a replica of the 1567 Scottish coin, which also contained the Latin “exvrgat devs & dissipentr inimici” meaning “let God rise

¹¹⁷ Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 156.

up and scatter the enemy.”¹¹⁸ Here, Mary adopts a symbol with both national and economic connotations and embroiders it, firmly locating this image in the female domestic sphere of textile labor, and also serving as a reminder of her political might. Like Arachne, Mary chooses specific images in her needlework that bear witness to Mary’s history of political might, drawing attention to the nations in which Mary has commanded political power in order to scatter the confidence of her enemies.

Two other emblems that bear crowns (that were embroidered by Mary) are the ones bearing Mary Stuart’s initials. One emblem shows Mary’s initials topped with a crown placed in-between two Scottish thistles with the Latin inscription “sa vertv matire,” meaning “its strength attracts me.”¹¹⁹ The other emblem is the central monogram, depicting both Mary Stuart and Elizabeth I’s initials with the Latin “arctiora svnt virtvtis vincvla qvam sangvinis,”¹²⁰ meaning “the bonds of virtue are tighter than those of blood” with a Scottish thistle lying crushed below the monogram. Both embroideries directly demonstrate Mary’s political power as a queen by combining her initials with the symbol of the crown and Scottish thistle. Additionally, Mary’s Latin inscriptions are significant literary claims to queenship, as it can be deduced that the strength of the crown and queenship is what attracts Mary. Notably, the motto allows for varying interpretations of the crown, which can also be interpreted as the English crown. Frye argues “the slippage between a picture and a motto or verse seems to have been the point, as early modern people valued the wealth of possible interpretations residing in juxtapositions of word

¹¹⁸ *Modern coin – HCR41673*, 1567, silver, The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, UK, accessed April 1, 2024, <https://hcr.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coin/hcr41673>

¹¹⁹ Mary Stuart and Elizabeth Talbot, *The Marian Hanging*, ca. 1570-1585, embroidered silk velvet in silks and silver-gilt thread, 227 x 294 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, accessed November 20, 2023, <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O137608/the-marian-hanging-hanging-mary-queen-of/>.

¹²⁰ Stuart, *The Marian Hanging*. All subsequent references to Mary Stuart’s emblems are derived from this source.

and image.”¹²¹ The symbolism of the Scottish thistle being crushed below the monogram paired with the Latin inscription reflects Mary’s power struggle with Elizabeth, in that Elizabeth’s need for power supersedes their familial relationship as cousins, and reflects Mary’s anxieties of the danger this competition poses for the nation of Scotland.

The only animal emblem that is crowned is that of the Phoenix, in which she stitches the word “Phenix” and shows a crowned phoenix outside with wings spread, burning above a fire pit. The mythical bird was said to live a long life before bursting into flames at the end of its life, only to be reborn again. Mary’s mother, Mary De Guise, adopted this symbol as her emblem, hence the phoenix is also an homage to her mother’s rule. Combining a symbol of rebirth and uprising with the central panel of the embroidery which suggests a pruning of the tree of Tudor lineage, Mary articulates a need for a “cleaning” or “rebirth” of political rule over England, proposing herself as a worthy candidate. In associating herself with the phoenix, Mary portrays that she will rise from the silent death Elizabeth has condemned her to in her imprisonment, and instead rise up as the true ruler of England and Scotland.

While Mary’s embroidered symbolism is significant in and of itself, it is also necessary to consider the function of using embroidery to engage in this political competition, as well as the use of Latin words stitched into these emblems. What does the medium of this competition mean for the domestic sphere of women’s textile work, and what does incorporating literary inscriptions say about women’s classical learning and literary authorship? For one, as Oakley-Brown chronicles, the “genealogy of Ovidian translation begins with an account of textile production.”¹²² Many Renaissance women took to embroidering Ovid’s stories, retelling them

¹²¹ Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 56.

¹²² Oakley-Brown, *Ovid and the Cultural Politics*, 127.

through how they embroidered different moments from Ovid's tales. Adapting from Arachne, "weaving becomes needlework and needlework encodes resistance to the invisible silence of women that the habit of sewing is supposed to ensure."¹²³ Mary breaks traditional social structures by becoming a political protester and competitor through her needlework, bolstering the power that women's needlework can serve as a form of resistance.

Mary also goes a step beyond the tradition of embroidering (and potentially retelling) Ovidian tales. Instead, Mary uses her embroidery to completely embody Ovid's tale of the competition between Arachne and Minerva. To explain, like Arachne, Mary becomes a "weaver" of protest against a larger power. Just as Arachne does, Mary selects significant symbols to reflect her feelings of subjugation, her claims to queenship, and examples of her strength and the might of her nation. Further, Mary employs a literary element of Latin inscription in her emblems. Significantly, Mary uses the same language as the Ovidian tale she embodies to craft literary attacks on Elizabeth. This imbues the political conflict in a deeper literary history of classical learning, continuing to locate the competition of the two queens in not only the political realm, but also the textual and textile realm. Latin holds many important connotations, but Mary also has a personal connection to the language. Susan Fry details that "in addition to learning languages, including Greek, German, and Italian, before she turned thirteen, Mary declaimed a Latin oration to a royal audience that defended the education of women by emphasizing the accomplishments of female exemplars."¹²⁴ Thus not only does Mary's Latin inscription recall Ovidian myth of female competition, it also recalls her argumentation for women's education.

¹²³ Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 158.

¹²⁴ Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 45.

During the Renaissance, “needlewomen clothed themselves, their intimate furnishings, and their public spaces with textiles that challenge any simple opposition between public and private, the domestic and the political, material labor and ‘immaterial’ memory.”¹²⁵ Mary intentionally embodies Arachne in challenging Elizabeth for queenship through her intersection of embroidered and literary exchanges, significantly making the more private act of embroidery during her imprisonment a public decree of her political power. Mary uses domestic art as a political tactic, imbuing it with literary phrases and classical allusions to construct and compete in a new language of competition between women: one that weaves text and textiles together. By embodying the competition of Arachne and Minerva to frame their political conflict, Mary and Elizabeth give new significance to English literary allusions to this classical myth, particularly from women authors, as it carries a powerful ethos of using this allusion, textile work, and weaving imagery to articulate struggles for power. These power struggles are demonstrated in the context of overcoming social/gendered, economic, and political barriers, but all threads led back to women’s struggles for authority, particularly in their literary endeavors.

¹²⁵ Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 171.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

In conclusion, Queen Elizabeth I, Mary Queen of Scots, Isabella Whitney, Mary Sidney Herbert, Mary Wroth, Margaret Cavendish, and numerous others participated in this intersection of textual and textile production. These authors engage with women's domestic work to demonstrate their identities as authors, taking stances as both competitors and contributors. In doing so, these women both incorporate and embody Arachne as a figure of self-expression and authorship. The women strategically incorporated web, spinning, cloth, and weaving imagery to overcome social, political, and religious barriers in the early modern period. As we unravel the coded language of embroidery, webs, and allusion to reveal how these women used myths and activities formerly used to subjugate women or keep women idle to flip gender hierarchies in authorship, and battle for patronage or political control, we craft a clearer picture of these authors' socio-economic contributions to their period, impacting both the literary and textile industry. The adoption and circulation of Arachne allusions and weaving metaphors become a shared motif among early modern women writers to articulate these hierarchies and overcome them in their writing, creating an entirely new tapestry of Renaissance literature. The shared language of the domestic space of weaving becomes an intertextual shared language among female authors in which women can acknowledge the roles other women play as contributors and competitors in the realm of English literature. By uncovering this culture further, we unveil the individual threads of numerous women's influence, both in text and textile, woven deeply into this period.

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Sydney M. Burns

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EDUCATION

- Pennsylvania State University** | Bachelor of Arts in English and Comparative Literature Expected May 2024
- Minor in Classical Greek
 - **Schreyer Honors College**
 - BA Honors Thesis: “Arachnid Authorship: Intertextual Web-Weaving to Reflect Women’s Authorial Identities”
 - **Honors: Phi Beta Kappa, The Department of Comparative Literature Student Marshal**
 - **Trinity College Dublin – Study Abroad Spring 2023**

EXPERIENCE and ACTIVITIES

- Center for American Literary Studies (CALs), Undergraduate Intern** August 2023–Present
Center for American Literary Studies | Department of English, Pennsylvania State University
- Plan, organize, and report on annual CALS spring symposium.
 - Propose and develop topics for the “Unprecedented” webinar series, identify and discuss with leading scholars on the topic, and assist in leading the seminar.
 - Research materials for programming, marketing, communications, and development.
 - Assist in co-sponsoring the Centre County Reads public humanities program on behalf of CALS.
 - Write features on CALS events for campus and community outlets.
 - Publish book review in *Centre Daily Times*.

- Rare Book School Scholar** July 2023
Rare Book School | Charlottesville, VA
- Gained proficiency in English secretary hand, italic hand, and mixed hands of early modern England.
 - Trained in online transcription platforms and digital image usage.
 - Developed proficiency in deciphering abbreviations, numbers, and dates from the Tudor and Stuart periods.

- Comparative Literature Department Outreach Intern** June 2022–Jan. 2023
The Comparative Literature Department | Department of Comparative Literature, Pennsylvania State University
- Worked closely with Dr. Charlotte Eubanks, Head of the Comparative Literature Department, and Dr. Jonathan Eburne, Director of Undergraduate Studies, to develop departmental programs including the Comparative Literature Department’s Open House, Career Night, and Majors and Minors dinner.
 - Managed the Instagram and Facebook accounts for the Comparative Literature Department.
 - Proposed new methods of student-faculty interaction and events within the department.

AWARDS

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|---|-----------------------|
| Kathleen Bole Memorial Award in The Paterno Liberal Arts Fellows Program. | March 2024 |
| Agnes Kennedy Tiley Scholarship in the College of the Liberal Arts | June 2023 |
| The Evan Pugh Scholar Award – Senior Pennsylvania State University, University Park | March 2023 |
| John W. Moore, Jr. Undergraduate Award in English Pennsylvania State University | Oct. 2022 |
| Martha Conor Memorial Scholarship Pennsylvania State University, University Park | Aug. 2022 |
| Cantwell Liberal Arts Scholarship Pennsylvania State University, University Park | June 2022 |
| The Samuel P. Bayard Award Pennsylvania State University, University Park | April 2022 |
| The President Walker Award Pennsylvania State University, University Park | March 2022 |
| Dean’s List Pennsylvania State University, University Park | Spring 2021-Fall 2023 |