

**Point, counterpoint, needlepoint: the tapestry in Margaret Cavendish's The Unnatural Tragedy**

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**Point, Counterpoint, Needlepoint:**

**The Tapestry in Margaret Cavendish's *The Unnatural Tragedy***

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**Abstract:** This essay explores the mention of a set of wall-hangings showing the story of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar in Margaret Cavendish's play *The Unnatural Tragedy*. It relates this to the prominence of actual tapestries and other hangings in the Cavendish family houses, following a tradition established by Bess of Hardwick. Cavendish herself had no interest in needlework, and tapestries in particular might have been a difficult topic for her because she associates them with pregnancy and childhood, matters on which she was sensitive because she was childless and aware that Newcastle had married her partly because he desired more sons. In *The Unnatural Tragedy*, however, these associations are put to good use by providing thematic echoes of both the play's main plot and subplot and also of Cavendish's own situation. Probably alluding to a set of tapestries in the royal collection, the Hagar panel speaks of the continuity of the royal line and by implication tropes dynastic continuity more generally, and thus forms an interface between the private space of the house and the public space of the world outside, underlining the extent to which this is a play with a public resonance as well as a purely private one.

In the seventeenth century, tapestries became an increasingly important feature in the decor of English country houses in the wake of James I's establishment of the Mortlake factory in 1613 and his encouragement of the planting of mulberry trees to supply the silk necessary for

their manufacture.<sup>1</sup> The households of William Cavendish, earl and later duke of Newcastle, and of his second wife, the prolific poet, fiction writer and playwright Margaret Cavendish, were no exception: Katie Whitaker notes of the furnishings that the Newcastles brought back from Antwerp, where they lived as Royalist exiles during the Civil War, that ‘One set of tapestries in particular, representing the four Evangelists, was so fine that tourists seeing it in England readily believed reports that it had cost William £2,000’.<sup>2</sup> In his interest in tapestries, William Cavendish was following not only a general trend but a family tradition established by his grandmother, the powerful and influential Bess of Hardwick, whose houses of Chatsworth and Hardwick had been virtually temples to the needle: Susan Frye notes that ‘Bess [of Hardwick]’s inventories reveal that there were over forty tapestries at Chatsworth alone’,<sup>3</sup> and Bess had herself executed and supervised many large-scale needlework projects, some in conjunction with Mary, Queen of Scots, who had spent a considerable part of her captivity in England in the custody of Bess’s fourth husband, Gilbert Talbot, earl of Shrewsbury. In this essay, I want to explore the mention of a tapestry showing the story of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar in one of Margaret Cavendish’s plays, *The Unnatural Tragedy*, which provides thematic echoes of both the play’s main plot and subplot and also of Cavendish’s own situation. Probably alluding to a set of tapestries in the royal collection, the Hagar panel speaks of the continuity of the royal line and by implication tropes dynastic continuity more generally, and thus forms an interface between the private space of the house and the public space of the world outside, underlining the extent to which this is a play with a public resonance as well as a purely private one.

In her *Sociable Letters*, Margaret Cavendish makes it quite plain that she herself has no gift for needlework: ‘I did Inwardly Complain of my Education, that my Mother did not Force me to Learn to Work with a Needle, though she found me alwayes Unapt thereto’ (she also refers

to needlework when she implicitly ranks it lower than writing in the dedication of *Poems and Fancies*).<sup>4</sup> The complaint, however, seems a rather half-hearted one, for Cavendish soon goes on to reflect that even if she did have the ability, she doubts the appeal of the occupation:

if I had been as Long Absent from my Lord as Penelope was from her Husband Ulysses, I could never have Employed my Time as she did, for her work only Employed her Hands, and Eyes, her Ears were left open to Loves Pleadings, and her Tongue was at liberty to give her Suters Answers, whereas my Work Employes all the Faculties and Powers of my Soul, Mind, and Spirits.<sup>5</sup>

Penelope was the subject of a famous embroidery at Hardwick Hall stitched by Bess of Hardwick, grandmother of Margaret Cavendish's husband. Bess clearly identified with Penelope, but Margaret equally clearly has no desire to do so, and this is in fact a phenomenon visible throughout her work: Emma Rees notes that 'Through an adroit manipulation of domestic images connected with varieties of needlework, Cavendish negotiates her position as a writing woman, and central to these passages, and arguably to much of her overall project is this motif of the virtuous Homeric Penelope'.<sup>6</sup> Rather than sewing like Penelope, Cavendish is much more interested in offering literary criticism of Homer, as the Sociable Virgins do in *The Unnatural Tragedy* when the First Virgin asks 'What say you of the Chronologer of the Gods and gallant Heroes, which was Homer?',<sup>7</sup> than in emulating his heroine. Her sympathies would in this if in nothing else be with Monsieur Malateste in the same play, who accuses his longsuffering first wife 'You are always at work, for what use is it? You spend more money in silk, cruel, thread, and the like, than all your work is worth' (p. 326).

Moreover, even if she did imitate her grandmother-in-law by taking a personal interest in needlework, wall-hangings are for Cavendish tarred by her apparent association of them with

a topic on which she was very sensitive, reproduction, since she was barren, and painfully aware that Newcastle had married her partly because he desired more sons. Elsewhere in *Sociable Letters*, wall-hangings feature as one of the frivolous and vainglorious things craved by pregnant women, who

to prove they are Prouder, and take more Pleasure in Being with Child, and in Lying in, than in Having a Child, is their Care, Pains, and Cost, in Getting, Making, and Buying Fine and Costly Childbed-Linnen, Swadling-Cloths, Mantles, and the like; as also fine Beds, Cradles, Baskets, and other Furniture for their Chambers, as Hangings, Cabinets, Plates, Artificial Flowers, Looking-glasses, Skreens, and many such like things of great Cost and Charge.<sup>8</sup>

Hangings here are identified as not only women's things, but specifically pregnant women's things. Perhaps too Cavendish was aware that Bess of Hardwick's one-time captive Mary, Queen of Scots had made bed-hangings for her two Scottish husbands, both of whom died unpleasant deaths. (Hangings were associated with conflict for Mary in other ways too: her later jailer Sir Ralph Sadler repeatedly removed her cloth of state, which her attendants repeatedly reinstalled.)<sup>9</sup>

In *The World's Olio*, hangings feature again, this time in connection with the education of children, another topic on which the self-consciously childless Cavendish can often be waspish. Cavendish first laments that some nurses and parents 'strive to make themselves Children in their speech, and not rather strive to make Children speak like wise men' and then that

as they breed them in their language, so they breed them in their sports, pastimes, or exercises, as to play with children at boe-peep, blind-man-buff, and Cocks hod, as they call them, that is, to muffle their head and eyes, and then they run about to knock

their heads against the doors, posts, and tables, to break their Legs over stools, thresholds, or to run into the fire, where many times they deform themselves with the mischiefs that follow; or to hide themselves behind hangings and old cubbords, or dirty holes, or the like places, where they foul their cloaths, disaffect the Brain with stincks, and are almost chokt with durt and dust Cobwebs, and Spiders, Flys and the like getting upon them; also to role upon the ground, likewise to stand upon their heads, when dancing might be learned with the feet, as easy as tumbling in several postures, and to stand upon the head; and is it not as easy to learn them to write, and read, as to build houses with Cards?<sup>10</sup>

Hangings may be convenient for games of hide-and-seek, but the space behind them is for Cavendish no Narnia-like door into a world of magic and alternative possibility but rather a non-space inhabited not by humans but by insects, where the brain cannot function and the body struggles to draw breath. On one side of the divide marked by the hangings is light, learning, literacy, company, domestic order; on the other, its opposite, a blank. Indeed elsewhere Cavendish explicitly associates this space with furtiveness: in *The Second Part of Natures Three Daughters, Beauty, Love, and Wit*, a stage direction tells us that ‘*Enter Monsieur Nobilissimo, and Madamoiselle Amor, and Madamoiselle La Belle comes and peeps through the Hangings, and sees them*’, and when Madamoiselle La Belle emerges her sister Madamoiselle Amor asks ‘So Sister, are not you asham’d?’ (Act II, Scene 4). Similarly in *The Female Academy*, a stage direction reads ‘*Enter a Company of young Ladies, and with them two Grave Matrons; where through the Hanging a company of men look on them, as through a Grate*’ (Scene 2). It is perhaps not surprising that in Cavendish’s fantasy of the perfect interior, there are no tapestries at all:

The whole Globe is Nature’s House; and the several Planets are Nature’s several Rooms; the Earth is her Bed Chamber; the Floor is Gold and Silver; and the Walls

Marble and Porphyrie; the Portals and Doors are Lapis-Lazarus; instead of Tapistry Hangings, it is hung with all sorts of Plants; her Bed is of several precious Stone; the Bed-posts are of Rocks of Diamonds; the Bed'shead, of Rubies, Saphires, Topasses, and Emeralds: Instead of a Feather-bed, there is a Bed of sweet Flowers.<sup>11</sup>

For her husband, hell is a place where 'Instead of costly Arras there / The walls poor sooty hangings were', that is, a place which lacks proper tapestries; for Cavendish, that might well be heaven, an Edenic vision.<sup>12</sup>

However she might feel about them in real life, though, Margaret Cavendish makes powerful dramatic use of a set of hangings. In her play *The Unnatural Tragedy*, the Steward orders,

My Master and our new Lady are comming home; wherefore you must get the House very clean and fine: You Wardropian; you must lay the best Carpets on the Table, and set out the best Chairs & Stools; and in the Chamber wherein my Master and Lady must lie, you must set up the Cross-stitch bed, and hang up the new suit of Hangings, wherein is the story of Abraham and Sarah, and Hagar her Maid. And you Pantlor, must have a care that the glasses be well wash'd, and that the Basin and Yewer, Voider and Plates be bright scowr'd, as also the silver Cistern, and the silver Flagons standing therein, and to have a care that the Table-cloaths be smooth, and the Napkins finely knip'd and perfum'd, and that the Limons, Orenge, Bread, Salt, Forks, Knives, and Glasses, be set and placed after the newest Mode.

(p. 348)

'The Cross-stitch bed' and 'the new suit of hangings' seem to be understood as two separate things, and given that there is a particularly famous set of tapestries showing the Abraham and Hagar story, which I shall be discussing later, I take the 'new suit of hangings' to be specifically wall hangings, and probably to be tapestry rather than the embroidery of which

the cross-stitch bed is made. *The Unnatural Tragedy* openly avows a debt to Ford, from whose *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* its brother-sister incest plot is borrowed, along with some verbal details,<sup>13</sup> and perhaps it was her source which prompted Cavendish to make dramatic use of hangings, for *'Tis Pity* offers an ironic use of needlework of its own, when Annabella, finding herself visited by her father immediately after committing incest with her brother, tells her attendant to 'Reach my work' so that she may maintain her appearance of innocence and virtue.<sup>14</sup> *'Tis Pity* itself, with its climax involving the removal of its heroine's heart, may conceivably remember the episode in *The Faerie Queene* in which Britomart, the knight of Chastity, sees the image of a depiction of a woman who, although still living, has had her heart removed; it is shown 'in siluer basin layd, / Quite through transfixed with a deadly dart', and Britomart sees this shortly after she has passed through a room hung round with tapestries of 'Cupids warres', showing Helle, Europa, Danaë, and various others of Jove's conquests.<sup>15</sup> More certainly, *'Tis Pity* unquestionably owes a debt to *Othello*, a play which Ford repeatedly reworked and which is clearly an influence on the murderous jealousy of Soranzo, and I think *Othello* is being evoked in *The Unnatural Tragedy* too. *The Unnatural Tragedy* doubly echoes the landscape of *Othello* when it opens with Monsieur Frere's proposal that 'Since we are come out of our own country to travel, we will go into Turkey', but his friend resolves to stay in Venice 'for the Curtezans sake' (p. 325). The Second Gentleman, like Cassio, is very anxious not to get drunk because 'I will not wilfully make my self uncapable, as I can neither be able to serve my King, Country, nor Friend, nor defend my Honour: for when I am drunk, I can do neither' (p. 327), and Madam Bonit also echoes Cassio when she says 'Heaven forbid that I should stain that which gave me a Reputation, my Birth, and Family, or defame my self, or trouble my conscience, by turning a whore for revenge' (p. 340). Most notably, on the last day of her life, Desdemona tells Emilia, 'Prithee, tonight / Lay on my bed my wedding sheets';<sup>16</sup> in *The Unnatural Tragedy*, the Steward tells

Nan 'you must see that the Linnen be fine, and the Sheets be well dry'd and warm'd' (pp. 348-9). Desdemona's sheets, together with her handkerchief, have been partly responsible for the fact that *Othello* has often been discussed under the rubric of domestic tragedy; *The Unnatural Tragedy* is clearly echoing that, but also developing it by its attention to the furnishing not only of the bed but also of the walls.

In this attention to walls Cavendish's play may be echoing another Shakespearean precedent, and one with a connection of its own to *Othello: Cymbeline*, where the villain's name of Iachimo reprises that of Iago and where the jealousy of Posthumus recalls that of Othello, and in which Iachimo describes how Imogen's bedchamber

was hang'd

With tapestry of silk and silver, the story

Proud Cleopatra, when she met her Roman,

And Cydnus swell'd above the banks, or for

The press of boats, or pride.<sup>17</sup>

As R. J. Schork notes, there is an ironic apparent appropriateness in the presence of this particular scene in Imogen's bedchamber: 'Iachimo, in selecting the narrative details of his wager-winning report, begins with an ominous historical analogue: a beautiful and sexually adventurous foreign queen throwing herself at the feet of a conquering Roman hero'.<sup>18</sup>

The presence of this tapestry in Imogen's bedroom is multiply suggestive. The motif of the river echoes the play's recurrent references to water; its staging of an encounter between a Roman and a 'native' echoes the play's strongly developed interest in the question of what the Romans did for us; and the specific moment caught in the tapestry also raises the question of chronological moment more generally, inviting us to remember that we catch here the time of impending change just before the birth of Christ, so that in a sense the question of

childbirth is immanent here too, albeit suspended as far as Imogen is concerned 'if indeed she and Posthumus have not yet consummated their marriage, as both the narrative and textual imagery suggest, for Cleopatra is just meeting Antony, Diana is bathing and has not yet spied Actaeon, and Tereus's rape of Philomel is suspended in the telling'.<sup>19</sup> Most notable is Iachimo's coupling of the tapestry with the book which Imogen had been reading before she went to sleep: 'here the leaf's turned down / Where Philomel gave up' (II.ii.45-6) - that is, just before she was robbed of the power of speech by Tereus cutting out her tongue, and so turned instead to needlework as a means of self-expression.

Shakespeare, then, had shown the way to weave tapestry within the fabric of a play, and this is what Cavendish also does. In *The Unnatural Tragedy*, the story of Abraham, Hagar, and Ishmael works on a number of levels. In the first place, it has potential relevance to Cavendish herself, since Hagar, whose situation is loosely equivalent to that of a second wife, conceives and bears Ishmael, while Sarah remains barren until the much later birth of Isaac, upon which Hagar and Ishmael are expelled from the house. Such self-reflexiveness would be well in keeping with Cavendish family tradition: Lanto Synge notes of Bess of Hardwick that 'Her needlework refers repeatedly to her husbands'.<sup>20</sup> Cavendish herself would never bear a child at all, let alone one which could displace the hostile stepchildren who were the legacy of her husband's first marriage, but she could dream, and it might have been doubly sweet to do so given the relentless concentration of the iconography of Cavendish houses on the legitimate bloodline, which led to her being surrounded by decorative schemes in which she herself perforce had no part.<sup>21</sup> However, the subject of the Hagar tapestry also has obvious thematic relevance to the play, for it tells a story which exemplifies ongoing negotiation about who is inside the family group and who is outside it. This echoes not only Cavendish's own position as a stepmother whose arrival was clearly unwelcome to her

grown-up stepchildren but also the main plot of *The Unnatural Tragedy*, in which the suitably exogamous marriage arranged for Soeur by her father is disrupted by the return of Frere, who rather than being properly reincorporated into the family from which he has long been absent instead disrupts and inverts it, disastrously disturbing the coding which governs its formation.

The story the Hagar tapestry tells relates even more directly to the sub-plot of the play, since it is being put into position on the orders of Monsieur Malateste, whose late wife Madam Bonit had a maid, Nan, with whom Monsieur Malateste had an affair which his first wife tolerated but which his new one will not, so that the question of whether Nan is or is not to be expelled Hagar-like from the house becomes a repeated motif in the play. Madam Bonit had attempted to do this and Monsieur Malateste forbade it, but his second wife ups the stakes by making it a deal-breaker for the continuation of their marriage, so he reluctantly assents and Nan has to go. There is also a suggestive variation on this theme in that Nan herself presides over the effective expulsion of Madam Bonit from the space of the house when she says to the other maids ‘It is a strange negligence, that you stand prating here, and do not go to help to lay my Lady forth’ (p. 345): what she is talking about here is actually laying out the corpse, but the odd word ‘forth’ introduces a definite sense of outness, which brings to the fore the question of what leaving the house actually means. For Cavendish herself, as for all those who had spent a large part of their lives as Royalist exiles, it clearly connoted dispossession and displacement. For members of the Cavendish family in general, it had more localised and particular meanings, for the Cavendish properties of Welbeck and Bolsover were rich in symbolic architecture and had served as the sites of both home theatricals (Margaret Cavendish’s own plays, and those written by her husband and by his two elder daughters, Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth Brackley) and, more grandly, entertainments written by Ben

Jonson and performed in front of the King and Queen. When a house testified so richly to the imbrication of public and private, particular resonance inevitably accrued to its boundaries, leading to an interplay between the wall itself, which marks the boundary between that which is house and that which is not-house, and the tapestry which hangs on that wall and which tells a story of expulsion from the house into the not-house. Susan Frye notes that at Hardwick Hall there were several items relating to Mary, Queen of Scots in Bess of Hardwick's Withdrawing Chamber because of Mary's own dynastic importance and its connection to that of Bess's granddaughter Arbella Stuart, who inherited from her father possible claims to the thrones of both England and Scotland. Public here mixes seamlessly with private, with the wall operating both as a wall and also as a screen onto which wider concerns are projected and which thus serves to connect the fabric of the house with the fabric of the wider world;<sup>22</sup> by the same token, when Margaret's husband William was created a Gentleman of the Bedchamber after the Restoration it was certainly less than he had hoped for, but it was still nevertheless something in that the bedchamber of the king was a political as well as a personal space.<sup>23</sup> In a sense, then, the scene that the Hagar tapestry shows encapsulates the essence of Cavendish family life and Cavendish household drama, in which the story of the family is inextricably interwoven with that of the nation and in which Welbeck and Bolsover have a dual identity as spaces consecrated to the family and as spaces which had first been used for the entertainment of the King and had subsequently been defended for him during the Civil War.

This dual identity is echoed in the question which attaches itself irresistibly to *The Unnatural Tragedy*, which is what kind of play it actually is. It may seem to have much in common with the pre-Civil War genre of domestic tragedy, since none of the characters is a head of state and the events it stages have no repercussions beyond the private houses in which they

occur: indeed its last line is 'I am sure there is a sad, a sad House to day', which seems both deliberately to refuse a moral and to underline the domestic setting. But is it also a public play? It is in part about the aftermath of exile, in that Monsieur Frere has been travelling so long that he is in effect a stranger to his own sister, and that this motif may have an applicability wider than the immediate Cavendish household is suggested by the Sociable Virgins' discussion of the accuracy of Camden, and specifically of his assessments of the behaviour of various prominent persons during the Civil War - a point on which Cavendish's husband Newcastle was sensitive, since his own flight to the Continent after the battle of Marston Moor had been attacked as premature.

A tapestry telling the story of Abraham, Isaac and Hagar certainly does have extradiegetic, extra-familial reference on a number of levels, in ways which once again spoke of exile, dispossession, and dynastic continuity, but on a national rather than a domestic scale. There were four tapestries from the usual ten-part Abraham story at Hardwick Hall, having been purchased by Newcastle's grandmother Bess of Hardwick in 1591. These were occasionally hung in the Withdrawing Chamber instead of the Virtues which were usually there, which both accounts for the unusually bright colours they retain and chimes with Lady Happy's idea in Cavendish's play *The Convent of Pleasure* that wall hangings should be changed according to the change of seasons;<sup>24</sup> however, they represent respectively 'The Meeting of Abraham and Melchisedek', 'The Return of Sarah by the Egyptians', 'God Appears to Abraham' and 'Rebecca at the Well', and so none of them touches on the story of Hagar. There was however a complete and far more famous set of ten gilt-thread tapestries telling the story of Abraham at Hampton Court, which represent the *editio princeps* from which the Hardwick versions are derived. These had almost certainly been commissioned by Henry VIII, for whom Abraham was a figure of great resonance because of his long wait for a son, in an

illustration of Lisa Jardine and Jerry Brotton's contention that 'in the early sixteenth century, the large-scale tapestry series became a series of symbolically over-determined artefact upon which the political hopes and aspirations of the imperial courts of the period were repeatedly projected'.<sup>25</sup> These Abraham tapestries had in due course descended to Charles I, but they were not dispersed along with the rest of the royal collection because Cromwell kept them for his own personal use. He did however have them valued, yielding a figure of £8260, which made them the most expensive set of tapestries in the collection (the Caesar set, which was valued next highest, was put at £5022).<sup>26</sup> They probably featured at the coronation of Charles II in the year before *The Unnatural Tragedy* was published (indeed Cavendish's apparent awareness of them could I think be taken as additional evidence in support of this idea, since Newcastle's eldest son Henry, who represented the family at the coronation,<sup>27</sup> could have reported back).<sup>28</sup> 'The Circumcision of Isaac' is of particular interest because it shows Sarah and Hagar both united, in the middle of the tapestry, and then later at odds, as on the right hand side Sarah expels Hagar and Ishmael from the household after she herself at last gives birth to a son, Isaac.<sup>29</sup> The implication for Cavendish's play might well be that if the new Madam Malateste were to give birth to a son she might well hope that any previous heirs could be displaced, even if Cavendish herself could only ever have entertained such an idea as an acknowledged fantasy. There was however another potential application to the world outside the play, for the year that it was published also saw Charles II marry Catherine of Braganza, and any child born of her would supplant his favourite but illegitimate son, James, shortly to be created duke of Monmouth, who was already a teenager just as Ishmael had been when Isaac was born.

Perhaps commissioned originally by Henry VIII for the coronation of his own Isaac, Edward VI, the Abraham tapestries, then, speak above all of the continuity of the royal line, and by

implication trope dynastic continuity more generally, and they also bear on the question of Charles II's marriage. In the context of Cavendish's play, the tapestry of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar, instead of opening into non-space, as in the *Sociable Letters*, thus forms an interface between the private space of the house and the public space of the world outside, functioning like the perspective glass which Cavendish drama in general is so fond of fantasising<sup>30</sup> and which symbolises the family's role in the affairs of the nation and the extent to which this is a play with a public resonance as well as a purely private one. *The Unnatural Tragedy* may be closet drama in its genre and domestic in its feel, but Cavendish's dramatic use of tapestry gives it a public resonance too, positioning it in a line of descent from Shakespeare and Ford and suggesting ways in which the domestic is at least potentially also the political.

#### Notes

With thanks to Dr Crosby Stevens of English Heritage.

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<sup>1</sup> Lanto Synge, *Antique Needlework* (Poole: Blandford Press, 1982), p. 63. Tapestries might also be displayed outdoors on occasion: William Alexander's 1607 play *The Alexandraean Tragedy* has a character speak of how at a celebration 'Strange Tapestries were stretch'd the streets along' (William Alexander, *The Alexandraean Tragedy*, in *Recreations With the Muses* [London: Thomas Harper, 1637], p. 126).

<sup>2</sup> Katie Whitaker, *Mad Madge* (London: Vintage, 2004), p. 236.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Frye, *Pens and Needles: Women's Textualities in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), p. 58.

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<sup>4</sup> Margaret Cavendish, *Poems and Fancies* (London: T. R. for J. Martin and J. Allestrye, 1653), where the epistle dedicatory to Sir Charles Cavendish declares:

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.

<sup>5</sup> Margaret Cavendish, *Sociable Letters*, edited by James Fitzmaurice (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2004), pp. 212-3.

<sup>6</sup> Emma L. E. Rees, 'A Well-Spun Yarn: Margaret Cavendish and Homer's Penelope', in *A Princely Brave Woman: Essays on Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle*, edited by Stephen Clucas (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 171-181, p. 171.

<sup>7</sup> Margaret Cavendish, *The Unnatural Tragedie*, in *Playes written by the thrice noble, illustrious and excellent princess, the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle* (London: A. Warren for John Martyn, James Allestry and Thomas Dicas, 1662), p. 337.

<sup>8</sup> Cavendish, *Sociable Letters*, p. 98.

<sup>9</sup> Frye, *Pens and Needles*, pp. 60 and 65.

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<sup>10</sup> Margaret Cavendish, *The World's Olio* (London: printed for J. Martin and J. Allestrye, 1655), pp. 60-1.

<sup>11</sup> Margaret Cavendish, *Nature's Pictures* (London: A. Maxwell, 1671), p. 273.

<sup>12</sup> William Cavendish, *The Humorous Lovers* (London: The British Library, 2011), p. 47.

<sup>13</sup> See Lisa Hopkins, 'Crime and Context in *The Unnatural Tragedy*', *Early Modern Literary Studies* special issue 14 (May 2004). Online: <http://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/si-14/hopkunna.html>

The tapestry is also discussed in Alison Findlay, "'I hate such an old-fashioned house":

Margaret Cavendish and the search for home', *Early Modern Literary Studies* special issue

14 (May 2004). Online: <http://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/si-14/findhate.html>

<sup>14</sup> John Ford, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, edited by Derek Roper (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), II.i.55.

<sup>15</sup> Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, edited by A. C. Hamilton (London: Pearson, 2001), III.xii.21 and III.xi.29.

<sup>16</sup> William Shakespeare, *Othello*, edited by E. A. J. Honigmann (London: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 4.2.106-7.

<sup>17</sup> William Shakespeare, *Cymbeline*, edited by J. M. Nosworthy (London: Cengage Learning, 2007), II.iv.69-72.

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<sup>18</sup> R. J. Schork, 'Theme and Characterization in "Cymbeline"', *Studies in Philology* 69.2 (April 1972), pp. 210-16, p. 212. Cavendish was interested in the question of Shakespeare and Cleopatra: in *Sociable Letters*, commenting on Shakespeare's genius, she asks 'who could Describe Cleopatra Better than he hath done' (p. 177).

<sup>19</sup> Frye, *Pens and Needles*, p. 181.

<sup>20</sup> Synge, *Antique Needlework*, p. 53.

<sup>21</sup> Dr Crosby Stevens, convenor of a research seminar on designing new furnishings for Bolsover, personal communication.

<sup>22</sup> Frye, *Pens and Needles*, p. 71.

<sup>23</sup> Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, p. 240.

<sup>24</sup> Margaret Cavendish, *The Convent of Pleasure*, in *Three seventeenth-century plays on women and performance*, edited by Hero Chalmers, Julie Sanders and Sophie Tomlinson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), II.ii.27.

<sup>25</sup> Lisa Jardine and Jerry Brotton, *Global Interests: Renaissance Art between East and West* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), p. 63.

<sup>26</sup> See <http://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/1046/the-story-of-abraham-series>

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<sup>27</sup> Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, p. 245.

<sup>28</sup> See <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/van-dyck-and-tapestry-england>

<sup>29</sup> For analysis of this, see Julia Reinhard Lupton, ‘Soft Res Publica: On the Assembly and Disassembly of Courtly Space’, *Republics of Letters* 2.2 (June, 2011), pp. 95-113, p. 99.

<sup>30</sup> See for instance Lady Jane Cavendish and Lady Elizabeth Brackley, *The Concealed Fancies*, in *Renaissance Drama by Women: Texts and Documents*, edited by S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies (London: Routledge, 1996), where ‘Sh’ says of Lord Calsindow ‘I wish he saw us in a prospective’ (III.iv.46) and Courtley imagines ‘a prospective, wherein you’ll see / My griefs of fuller moan, like rocks to be’ (IV.iv.13-14).