CREOLE DOMESTICITY:
WOMEN, COMMERCE, AND KINSHIP IN EARLY ATLANTIC WRITING

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by

Danielle Catherine Skeehan

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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This dissertation examines the parallel lives of texts and textiles in the long eighteenth century. Looking at the textile trade alongside early Atlantic printing and paper making practices invites us to consider how these two related mediums were fundamental to the social fabrication of Atlantic subjects and creole societies. While scholars have posited that the circulation of texts and images allowed readers to forge transatlantic communities, in an age of paper shortages, relatively low literacy rates, and fairly limited access to printed texts, far more people had ready access to one of the most basic—and yet most valuable—items of household and early industrial production: that item, of course, was cloth. Moreover, while I argue that women’s work with textiles plays an essential role in the Atlantic circulation of ideas and practices—a role, that is, that we usually attribute solely to print—this work, nonetheless, was also central to the rise of eighteenth-century print culture: printed on rag paper, bound in linen and silk boards, and stitched together with a variety of different threads, texts bear the mark of women laboring in flax fields and early cotton, wool, and silk cottage industries, and as spinners, seamstresses, and laundresses. Public prints have more to tell us than the words inked on the page: printed on paper made from household rags, novels, newspapers, broadsides, paper money, contracts, indentures, and manumission papers, in fact, narrate histories of domestic life and labor. That is, we might say that women’s cloth work keeps the transatlantic trade in books and texts alive and well. In this sense, cloth industries not only establish a discourse shared by laborers, manufacturers, and consumers; rather, we might say that textiles also, in fact, inhabit and colonize these print materials, thereby revealing the many ways through which women from diverse backgrounds may have “written” their way into public discourses dominated by elite men.
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Introduction

The Fabric of Early Atlantic Letters: Women’s Textualities and the Creole Public Sphere

In 1774, a Connecticut school girl at the Miss Pattens’ School in Hartford produced a sampler that weaves together pastoral iconography, Caribbean and North American imagery, alphabetic letters, numbers, and biblical verse.¹ Stitching this scene on linen with silk thread, the twelve-year-old Alice Mather’s sampler is striking for a number of reasons. Like most samplers, it combines popular imagery and verse, such as the reclining shepherdess and Proverbs 31.13 which extols that one of the particular qualities of a virtuous woman is that she “She seeks wool, and flax, and works willingly with her hands.” However, Mather makes several important revisions that translate the commonplace classical tropes found in eighteenth-century women’s needlework to a distinctly colonial context and that seem to respond to a particular moment in colonial history. Firstly, rather than occupying an “Old World,” pastoral landscape, her shepherdess in placed in an imagined, “New World” landscape that combines aspects of North American and Caribbean

¹ Alice Mather’s 1774 sampler was part of the exhibit “With Needle & Brush: Schoolgirl Embroidery from the Connecticut River Valley” (October 2, 2010- January 30, 2011), curated by Carol and Stephen Huber.
imagery: the rolling hills and farmland of Connecticut (suggested by the colonial style stucco house on the right) are populated with palm trees indigenous to the global south. Secondly, rather than dressed in classical robes, her shepherdess is dressed in contemporary mid-century clothing: a hoop skirt and petticoat, brocade stays, a short camblet coat, and what appears to be a tricorne hat. Thirdly, while her choice of Proverbs 31.13 is not necessarily surprising considering the fact that she depicts a shepherdess and needlework certainly constitutes work with ones hands, this particular verse gained increased popularity in the late 1760’s as women took to spinning and producing homespun wool and linen cloth as a way to protest the 1765 Stamp Act. What she seems to recreate, in fact, is an articulation of Republican womanhood that had been circulating since the mid 1760’s which sought to place women at the center of debates about the nature of British sovereignty in the Atlantic colonies.

I begin with Mather’s sampler because it invites us to ask how women’s textualities—their work with both the needle and the pen—may respond to and participate in public discourses largely dominated by elite men. I also begin with her sampler because of its eccentricities: the ways in which it deviates from established patterns and instead deploys a series of images, texts, and fabrics that ask us to read it as a “creole” object—that is, an object that utilizes globally produced materials (in the form of what is probably North American linen and China silk thread) and hybrid forms of representation. Combining genres that

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2 While tricorne hats were fashionable in the earlier part of the century, by mid-century they became increasingly associated with North American colonials and political dissent.
3 In this period, newspaper articles covering spinning competitions often quoted this Proverb, as did women’s conduct manuals. I discuss the use of Proverbs 31.13 more extensively in Chapter 3.
4 While the term “creole” is usually used to describe both free and enslaved peoples from European and African descent living within the Caribbean-Atlantic basin and signifies a subject’s coloniality and the nature of (un)belonging, I use the term here to describe a particular type of cultural production that responds to and reflects these conditions. “Creole” bears the Latin root, creāre: to create. This dual understanding of “creole” suggests a sense of cultural creativity and flexibility that is necessitated and created by geographic distance from metropolitan centers (whether understood as West African or European). The term “creole” signifies a certain
belong to the practice of natural history, the translation of classics, the interpretation of biblical verse, and political commentary, Mather’s sampler might be understood as a “material text” that uses a gendered form of literacy—needlework and embroidery—to stitch its very young author into what I would like to understand as a “creole public sphere.” I use the phrase “creole public sphere” in order to rethink work that has utilized the model of a Habermasian print public sphere and a “print revolution” in order to explain major eighteenth-century social, economic, and political developments. The phrase “creole public sphere,” that is, provides potential avenues for understanding the multiplicity of cultural forms, hybrid modes of cultural production, and a range of “textualities” that people used to record their lives and weave their way into the social fabric.

It would be useful here to elaborate on the ways in which this model diverges from that put forth by Jurgen Habermas in The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. Habermas defines the “bourgeois public sphere” as a space of rational-critical discussion and debate in which private people come together to form “publics” that serve as a means to check state power. His “publics” met in salons and coffee shops where they discussed politics, homelessness that defines creative acts of creole fashioning that result in new social arrangements and styles of literary and material production. In this sense, I am building off William C. Spengemann’s concept that “American” spaces and contexts lead to the development of new, hybridized cultural forms. This notion of hybridity also informs the work of scholars of the Caribbean and African diaspora, such as Paul Gilroy. See Spengemann, “The Earliest American Novel: Aphra Behn's Oroonoko,” Nineteenth-Century Fiction, Vol. 38, No. 4, Special Issue Dedicated to Blake Nevius (Mar., 1984), pp. 384-414; and Paul Gilroy, The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness (Harvard 1993).

5 Samplers were an essential aspect of women’s education in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Atlantic world. In both homes and schools, young girls were often taught to read and sew, rather than to read and write, and their education began and ended with the making of a sampler. For elite women, these embroidered “texts” that combined imagery, letters, numbers, and phrases were often displayed in family homes, reflecting the culmination of their “polite” education and displaying their suitability as future wives and mothers. For non-elite women, samplers, in turn, could serve as a recommendation to future employers seeking women skilled in work with cloth. Carrying samplers from home to home or shop to shop, future seamstresses used these “texts” as samples and recommendations of their skill with the needle. See Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory (Cambridge 2001); Juliet Fleming, Graffiti and the Writing Arts of Early Modern England (UPenn 2001); Susan Frye’s Pens and Needles: Women’s Textualities in Early Modern England (UPenn 2010).
commerce, and culture, and participated in the “republic of letters” by penning, publishing, and reading correspondence, political and economic pamphlets, broadsides, journals, newspapers, and literary texts.\textsuperscript{6} Habermas’ model has been important for accounting for the rise of print capitalism, literacy rates, and the emergent authority of bourgeois classes that impacted the eighteenth century and has, in many ways, provided \textit{the} dominant model for Early American literary studies over the course of the past several decades.

Early American scholarship, such as Michael Warner’s \textit{The Republic of Letters}, has used a Habermasian model to examine the connections between prints, publics, and sovereignty. Warner, in particular, argues that print came to represent or enact legitimacy: reading and writing became a way to “assert autonomy and citizenship” and “to make public use of their reason.” For Warner, print is a “technology of the self” that is simultaneously essential to subject formation but which also relies on self-negation: to enter public discourse, one must suspend any sense of self interest.\textsuperscript{7} However, the rise of Atlantic Studies provides a direct challenge to a Habermasian model reliant upon both a national framework and access to a common written and spoken language. As we now recognize, the Anglo-Atlantic world was a multi-lingual one and eighteenth-century print culture was circum-Atlantic in nature: well into the nineteenth-century North American readers were primarily reading British and European imprints. With fluid geographical boundaries and multilingual populations, the Habermasian model falls short of explaining the nature of communication and belonging—and the formation of what we could call “publics”—in this period. With this in mind, recent work has challenged the very nature of who could participate in public debate, what exactly

\textsuperscript{6} Jürgen Habermas, \textit{The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society} (Cambridge, 1991).

constitutes public discourse and where its the confines begin and end, and what motives and strategies govern its participants. Firstly, scholars who study race, gender, and class in the eighteenth century have questioned the relative inclusivity of Habermas’s public sphere. Secondly, many of these same scholars have critiqued the notion that reason—rather than self-interest, affect, or pleasure—dictates the terms of public discourse. Thirdly, they have interrogated the divide between public and private and which types of discourses and subjects are relegated to which sphere. Lastly, scholars have questioned the relationship between bodies and printed texts, bodies and public performance, and bodies and political dissent.

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8 See for instance Nancy Fraser, Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, and Paul Gilroy for a few of the more prominent studies thinking through the place of women and New World Africans in public discourse. Gilroy provides an alternative model to a “rational” public sphere in which subjectivity is “grounded in the idealized exchange between equal citizens who reciprocate their regard for each other in grammatically unified speech” (57). The black Atlantic, he attests, is instead a terrain shaped by “stereophonic, bilingual, or bifocal cultural forms...dispersed within the structures of feeling, producing, communicating, and remembering” (3). Fraser, in turn, argues that the bourgeois public sphere is in fact framed around the concept of exclusions rather than inclusion. And Dillon argues that under liberalism individuals are defined as “free, autonomous, and capable of self-government and rational behavior” and that “women have historically been understood to lack the independence necessary to function as liberal subjects” (2). In this context, women (as well as people of color) come to dialectically (through negation) define the liberal subject as white and male. Gender she argues becomes one of the most pervasive means of mapping the public and private spheres. See Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*; Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (MIT 1992); Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, *The Gender of Freedom: Fictions of Liberalism and the Literary Public Sphere* (Stanford 2007).

9 For instance, David Shields proposes that pleasure actually generated the formation of “private societies” (rather than perhaps “public spheres”) as spaces in which likeminded individuals brought together by common social interests debated public issues. See David S. Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America* (UNC 1997).

10 Seyla Benhabib’s work invites us to challenge the distinction between public and private—especially the privatization of issues that directly impact women (domestic oeconomy, reproduction, childrearing). While this work was increasingly coded as “private,” it was still widely discussed in public prints. See Benhabib, "Models of Public Space," *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (MIT 1992).

11 Joseph Roach builds on Paul Gilroy’s understanding of a “Black Atlantic”—the “circum-Atlantic” region bounded by Europe, Africa, and the Americas—but reimagines this sphere as embodied in performance. Like Gilroy, he attempts to eschew national boundaries, arguing that they are “a convenient but dangerous fiction” (5), and that instead the Atlantic world relies on the “three-sided relationship of memory, performance, and substitution” (2). He looks to national surrogation as a process through which forgetting, erasures, and new alternatives function to locate the individual firmly within the state, thereby also drawing boundaries of national difference that also erase the more complicated historic circum-Atlantic relationships. See Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (Columbia 1996).
The interventions outlined above provide a starting point through which to restructure our idea of public discourse and its role in subject formation. This dissertation puts forth the idea of a “creole public sphere” as a way to think about the Atlantic world as not simply transnational and multilingual, but multiliterate as well.\textsuperscript{12} Atlantic subjects, in fact, utilized a number of different mediums and tactics to mark their place in the world, to record their relationships with others, and to communicate messages and ideas.\textsuperscript{13} The sampler with which I began serves as just one facet of a range of communicative possibilities that did not take place with ink and paper and that, in fact, have a potentially wider audience that traditional texts. For instance, wampum belts, woven baskets, enslaved women’s embroidery, homespun cloth, British Guinea cloth, lacebark clothing and fans, and many other material objects bear the marks of their makers and, like texts, incorporate their makers and users into social worlds. However, the “tactile literacies” that inform their production and how they are “read” were available to a much wider audience than the “written word” as traditionally conceived.\textsuperscript{14} Moreover, as “texts” that traverse the supposed divides of public, private, and commercial, they offer new models through which to understand the relationship among the domestic, the social, and the economic, and place women as key mediators between these spheres—as spinners of the “texts” that traverse these perhaps not so separate spaces. Building on this premise, the concept of a creole public sphere provides an alternative model for how colonial and metropolitan subjects understood themselves as part of the same “world.” While scholars

\textsuperscript{12} Recent work pushing for a “hemispheric” take on American and Atlantic studies has shown the multilingual nature of communication in this period. See for instance the special issue, “Worlding American Studies,” \textit{Comparative American Studies}, Volume 2, Number 3, August 2004.

\textsuperscript{13} Work that touches upon non-textual “literacies” includes \textit{Early Native Literacies}, ed. Kristina Bross and Hillary Wyss (UMass 2008) and Elizabeth Hill Boone and Walter Mignolo’s, \textit{Writing Without Words: Alternative Literacies in Mesoamerica and the Andes} (Duke 1994).

\textsuperscript{14} By tactile literacy I mean non-written forms of expression that still merit the term “literacy” rather than comparatively pejorative terms such as “skill” or “competency.”
building off the work of Benedict Anderson have posited that the circulation of texts and images allowed readers to forge transatlantic communities, an attention to circuits of Atlantic commodity exchange puts forth a different thesis: namely, that in an age of paper shortages, relatively low literacy rates, and fairly limited access to printed texts, far more people had ready access to one of the most basic—and yet most valuable—items of household and early industrial production. That item, of course, was cloth.

This dissertation examines the parallel lives of texts and textiles in the long eighteenth century with particular attention to the role women’s work with textiles might play in the Atlantic circulation of ideas and practices—a role, that is, that we usually attribute solely to print. Drawing on methodologies that include material culture studies, economic history, and history of the book, I examine the blurry line between the work of texts and the work of textiles. Examining early printed texts produced for and by women, as well as rich body of literature related to textile production—for both men and women—alongside women’s cloth work, reveals both the materiality of texts and the textuality of textiles in new ways. While scholars of eighteenth-century Atlantic print culture have provided extensive examination of the role newspapers, novels, and political pamphlets play in the emergence of Atlantic “publics,” new work in history of the book has drawn us back to the material properties of these items themselves: printed on linen and cotton rag paper, bound in linen and silk boards, and stitched together with a variety of different threads, public prints have more to tell us than the words inked on the page. Looking at cloth production industries and the textile trade alongside early Atlantic printing and paper making practices reveals that women from diverse

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15 See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York, 2006). For Anderson, nation states are socially constructed communities in which members understand themselves as belong to that group and who are increasingly linked by common reading habits and similar access to the same discourses.
backgrounds were central to the rise of eighteenth-century print culture: the work of domestic servants, indentured laborers, and enslaved women laboring in flax fields, early silk mills, and as spinners, seamstresses, and laundresses is markedly present in the cloth and rags that will take a variety of public print forms ranging from novels, newspapers, and broadsides, to paper money, contracts, indentures, and manumission papers.

In this sense, textiles inhabit and even colonize print material and in doing so they challenge the monolingual nature of these texts; however, they also circulate on their own. Examining the materiality of texts and textuality of textiles invites us to think about how these two related mediums were fundamental to the social fabrication of Atlantic subjects and creole societies. Looking to “textualities” and examples of what I am calling “tactile literacies,” rather than simply texts, offers a way through which to understand how women, in particular, may have “written” their into public discourses to which they had only limited access. An examination of the material and symbolic intersections between texts and textiles allows us to see how peoples relegated to the periphery of a traditional print public sphere actively marked their place in the world and negotiated their relationships with others. This methodology allows for new ways of reading literary and non-literary texts that complicate what we mean by the “practice of letters,” as formulated by Michael Warner, as well as what types of “letters” we see shaping social relations, subject formation, and enfranchisement in the early Atlantic world. By remaining focused on text-based subject positions, scholarship has been reticent to address how extra-discursive, tactile, and embodied signifying practices refute the idea that writing alone serves as the primary source of subject formation. Cloth and clothing represent just such extra-discursive signifying practices and often emerge in contention with the logic of European communities shaped by a “rational” public sphere in
which subjectivity and national belonging are grounded in a shared corpus of texts and reading habits. Examining the cloth industry and developments in printing in tandem, I ultimately show how text and textile are spun together in such a way that a female poetics emerges in and through the world of Atlantic commodity circulation and exchange. These types of “material texts” expand the traditional confines of expressive and representational forms and provide a window into the lives of women often excluded from studies and methods focused solely on textual and text-based evidence.

THE PARALLEL LIVES OF TEXTS AND TEXTILES

As Katheryn Kruger has argued, “literary history and textile history were, at one time, interdependent.” Text and textile share the Latin root *texĕre*, meaning “to construct or to weave,” and the Latin, *textus*, means “that which is woven,” a “web,” or “texture.” In this sense, makers of textiles can, “with the same verb,” as Kruger argues, “contrive texts.” As Roland Barthes observed, “etymologically the text is a cloth,” and we might add, cloth serves as text. Building on this premise, Juliet Fleming has pointed out how what we now understand as a distinct divide between cloth work and the work of “text” and “writing” is largely anachronistic and central to agendas that seek to keep the “author function” in place. That is, the divide between woven work and written work is historically constructed and serves agendas seeking to understand the pen as a superior implement wielded by men by

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17 Kruger, *Weaving the Word*, 29
relegating work with cloth as an inferior trade or “craft” belonging to women.\textsuperscript{20} However, as Fleming argues, “paper was not necessarily the most obvious, or suitable, medium for writing in early modern England (nor, for that matter, was paper as ‘immaterial’ as it has since become).” She argues that a general paper shortage meant that early moderns wrote with different mediums on a variety of surfaces: cloth, objects, walls, and windows.\textsuperscript{21}

While Susan Frye and Juliet Fleming are more concerned with the \textit{surfaces} and \textit{implements} through which women create alphabetic and pictorial representations, the work of Peter Stallybrass and Ann Rosalind Jones argues for how even unadorned textiles were one of the most basic, elementary “fibers” of social life and essential to the making of culture. Moreover, whether this fiber was linen, wool, or silk, “all of it, until the industrial revolution at the end of the eighteenth century, passed through the fingers of spinners. The greatest number of these spinners were women.”\textsuperscript{22} Work with cloth, and spinning in particular, was defined as women’s work across class lines. For working women it was “a crucially necessary activity,” while for women of the upper and middling classes spinning and needlework “was praised as evidence of chaste industriousness”; but for all women, they argue, spinning was essential to social formations in the long eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{23} In the words of Kruger, “since fabric clothes the body as well as marks the body with the social text, the [producer of textiles] participates in the creation of culture.”\textsuperscript{24} Understanding textiles as social texts provides new avenues for learning about how women may have woven their way into the social fabric, and also asks us to embrace, in the words of Susan Frye, “a broader sense of text

\textsuperscript{20} See also Frye, \textit{Pens and Needles}.
\textsuperscript{21} Fleming, \textit{Graffiti}, 10.
\textsuperscript{22} Jones and Stallybrass, \textit{Renaissance Clothing}, 89.
\textsuperscript{23} IBID
\textsuperscript{24} See Kruger, \textit{Weaving the Word}, 25.
than the literary”—that is, to look at the many forms of “women’s textualities” that inform cultural production in this period.25

These interdependencies between cloth and text were not lost on early modern women writers. For instance, the first book of poetry written in the American colonies confronts, in the words of Frye, just these “the interrelations among writing, textile work, and gender” outlined above.26 In The Prologue to her 1650 collection of poems, The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America, published in London, Anne Bradstreet purposely positions her writing alongside domestic tasks such as sewing. She writes:

I am obnoxious to each carping tongue,
Who says, my hand the needle better fits.
A Poets Pen, all scorne, I should thus wrong;
For such despight they cast on female wits:
If what I doe prove well, it won’t advance,
They’l say its stolne, or else, it was by chance.

But sure the Antique Greeks were far more mild,
Else of our Sexe, why feigned they those Nine
And poesy made, Calliope’s own Child;
So ‘mongst the rest they placed the Arts Divine,
But this weak knot, they will soon untie,
The Greeks did nought, but play the fools and lye.27

25 See Frye, Pens and Needles, 9.
26 See Frye, Pens and Needles, 23
27 Anne Bradstreet, The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung up in America (London 1650).
Bradstreet begins The Prologue by recognizing how early modern ideologies identify work with the pen and the needle along gendered lines; however, she quickly exposes this as a new historical development. The Greeks, she asserts, had long recognized “poesy” as the “child” of the female muse, Calliope. Rather than an apology for “female wits,” she argues that acts of poesis—acts of making and producing culture—are, in fact, a female prerogative despite the fact that, in the age she writes in, “Men have precedency and still excel” as poets and wielders of language. In unwinding the historical connections between work with the pen and work with the needle, she also conflates them: her very argument for the historical premise of female authorship, she suggests, is merely a “weak knot” that early moderns will “soon untie.” She here evokes parallels between the work of argument making and the work of weaving, suggesting that not only are rhetorical acts grounded in the art of weaving various ideas together, but perhaps too that weaving should be considered a rhetorical act: both are forms of poesis and both are rooted in understandings of text and textile of sharing the same origin: texere, to weave and that which is woven.

When the English poet, Margaret Cavendish, penned the dedication to her Poems and Fancies three years later, in 1653, she echoes Bradstreet’s (albeit veiled) critique of the semiotic detangling of the work of texts and textiles along gender lines. Dedicating her work to her brother-in-law Sir Charles Cavendish, she writes:

I do here dedicate this my Work unto you, not that I think my Book is worthy of such a Patron, but that such a Patron may gaine my Book a respect, and Esteeme in the World, by the favour of your Protection. 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 kind or other;
which made me endeavor to Spin a Garment of Memory, to lapp up my Name, that it
might grow to after Ages: I cannot say the Web is strong, fine, or evenly Spun, for it is
a course piece; yet I had rather my Name should go meanly clad, then dye with cold;
but if the Sute be trimmed with your Favour, she may make such a shew, and appeare
so lovely, as to wed to a Vulgur Fame.  

Like Bradstreet’s Prologue, Cavendish’s dedication both recognizes how text and textile have
become “unspun” by early modern understandings of authorship, yet dexterously weaves
these types of production together again. She begins by distancing herself from women
spinners, citing her privilege as a woman who does not have to spin out of economic
necessity—who in fact has “no skill” in that particular art. Yet her prose simultaneously
draws parallels between “spinning with the fingers” and “spinning with the brain”: both take
one medium and alchemize it into another. Fibers become threads that are woven into cloth;
thoughts and memories become the basic elements that are woven into the stanzas that
comprise her poems. She asserts that her poems are, in fact, a “garment of memory.” While
she apologizes that this “garment” may not be “strong, fine, or evenly spun, for it is but a
course piece,” she also reasserts the interdependencies between the written language that
clothes one’s name, and the woven cloth that clothes one’s body: both are essential to the
social fabrication of early modern subjects.

While Bradstreet and Cavendish assert that women can be both weavers of texts and
textiles, by the beginning of the eighteenth-century, the divide between spinning with one’s

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fingers and spinning with one’s mind is increasingly codified. In fact, one result of a “print revolution” or the “birth” and “rise” of the public sphere and with it liberal political theory is that textiles as a form of poesis are “written” out of public discourse by emergent ideas of authorship that privilege ink on paper as the preeminent form of communication and subject formation. In this context, rather than makers of Atlantic culture, public discourses identify women as mere surfaces on which to display that culture: rather than makers of social texts, they are wearers and subjects of social texts.

With the rise of global eighteenth-century studies, we are now well aware of how the movement of peoples, materials, and texts informs the practice of letters in this period—as well as how the practice of letters imagined, authorized, and framed imperial commercial projects. While scholars such as Laura Brown and Felicity Nussbaum have explored how women’s bodies serve as a backdrop on which to display the ornaments of a global empire, I would like to interrogate how this happened. In the work of eighteenth-century writers, poets, and playwrights, women’s bodies and homes stage the spoils of empire. Dining tables and dressing tables are reconfigured as curiosity cabinets celebrating the reach of empire and presenting global commerce’s “offerings” as ready for consumption and use, and women are similarly reconfigured as the domestic or local signifiers of a global commercial empire, rather than its backbone. That is, predominate discourses “dress” women in the emblems of trade, exchange, and circulation rather than recognizing them as the makers of Atlantic culture and as central participants in its commerce. For instance, colonial curiosities and global commodities litter the lines of poems such as Alexander Pope’s *Rape of the Lock*. They tempt

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a servant’s virtue in Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela*. They structure desire in George Colman’s dramatic adaptation of *Inkle and Yarico*. Despite literary texts’ disavowal of women’s work with cloth in this period, however, they remained central to the production and consumption of the most widely produce, circulated, and consumed material in the Atlantic world: cloth.

**MATERIAL TEXTS AND THE CREOLE PUBLIC SPHERE**

By weaving together public sphere theory, Atlantic studies, material culture studies, and history of the book methodologies, this dissertation attempts to provide a new lens through which to understand the interrelated fields of commercial and cultural production and, in particular, how they are not only deeply reliant on gendered forms of labor but, in fact, produce eighteenth-century constructions of gender. Studies in eighteenth-century material culture have brought to light how non-textual items participate in various discourses and describe or “reveal” different social, domestic, and economic relationships. For instance, a single piece of linen cloth tells the story of field workers who planted and harvested flax, the women who spun its fibers into thread, the mill operators who bought the thread from spinsters, and the weavers who wove the thread into cloth—not to mention the men and women who played roles in its circulation via cart and ship. Fashioned into dress, this same linen cloth has additional stories to tell. As Linda Baumgarten notes in *What Clothes Reveal: The Language of Clothing in Colonial and Federal America*, “The language of clothing speaks status, occupation, aesthetic, social cohesiveness, propriety, and a host of other
meanings, subtle and overt.” In *The Politics of Fashion in Eighteenth-Century America*, Kate Haulman similarly argues that clothes—and fashion in particular—figured as a site through which to contest, codify, and articulate gender roles and gendered forms of power: clothes establish links between gender relations, social order, commerce, and political authority. Turning to the Caribbean, Steeve O. Buckridge’s *The Language of Dress: Resistance and Accommodation in Jamaica, 1760-1890*, examines how both enslaved and free New World African women used dress to resist the confines of slavery. Putting dress in conversation with other cultural forms such as music and religion, Buckridge reads dress as a means through which diasporic communities maintained and reconstituted social and cultural ties despite the conditions of slavery. Material culture scholars, that is, invite us to read cloth and clothing as social texts.

Turning to the objects and circuits of Atlantic cultural production from another angle, book historians such as Roger Chartier, Robert Darnton, David Finkelstein, David Hall, and Leah Price remind us that books too are material objects and have more to say than the words inked on the page. Like cloth, they also social texts—not just because they record the ideas and practices of a society; rather, the economic, social, and political relationships their production and the materials they are comprised of relate a series of social and economic relationships. As outlined above, from paper mill to printer, and from bookbinder to bookseller, a number of hands and materials go into the making of a “text.” Hand-stitched bindings (usually performed by women), linen and silk boards, and rag paper pages, make the

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line between finished text and finished dress blurry at best. The sheer number of texts about the arts of cloth production that circulated as reprints, translations, and pirated editions in the late seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries even suggests a parallel history between the textile trade and developments in the transatlantic book trade.

Each chapter in this dissertation examines the manufacture and Atlantic circulation of a particular type of cloth alongside the printed or written texts that make them visible. These texts include newspapers, broadsides, novels, ships logs, natural histories, agricultural tracts, treatises, journals, letters, and rich body of literature promoting a variety of textile industries such as silk, linen, and wool. These same tracts, pamphlets, and books were often printed and bound in the very mediums they discuss or make visible: linen and cotton rags were the most common component of eighteenth-century paper and books that directly or indirectly touch upon practices related to dying, spinning, planting flax, and raising silkworms were often bound in silk and linen and stitched together with a variety of different types of thread. Rather than impersonal “networks,” the use the phrase “fabric of early Atlantic letters” to gesture toward both the materiality of print culture—as well as other “textualities” in circulation—and the material nature of exchange in this period. Letters and texts are printed on rag paper, stitched together with thread, bound in cloth boards, and circulated via coach, ship, or foot, passing through multiple hands. While Anglophone print culture was largely a transatlantic enterprise, textile networks that were transoceanic in nature are present in the pages of printed texts and letters. These “material texts” provide a new model for understanding Atlantic literary and material culture and the social, economic, and political relations it structures. Working against the idea that subjectivity is grounded in a sphere of printed rational debate organized around a shared language and reading habits, the chapters
that follow provide a model of a material, creole public sphere grounded in and establishing
the importance of aesthetics, memory, and feeling to the continuity of social life. This model
reveals that social meaning, continuity, and belonging actually emerges out of the dialectical
struggle between reason and affect, the discursive and the embodied.

I begin the project with a study of Englishwoman Virginia Ferrar who, from her home
in Huntingdonshire, England, experimented with silk production and initiated a transatlantic
exchange of texts, maps, letters, drawings, poems, and silkworm specimens that would
eventually be collected and published as her 1655 book, *The reformed Virginian silk-worm*. In
chapter one, “Fashioning New World Nature: Women, Silk, and the Practice of Letters at the
“Birth” of the Public Sphere,” I examine an early manuscript version of Ferrar’s book that she
recorded in the margins of a 1635 atlas, and identify how her work with cloth informs her
writing practices and establishes a connection between domestic material production and the
practice of Atlantic letters. Following Ferrar’s writing as it transforms from marginal notes in
Mecator’s *Atlas* to printed text shows how gendered labor practices centered on domestic silk
production seem to have informed how she composed her book, as well as the audience she
imagined as her readership. In particular, Ferrar seems to imagine her writing as one
particular node within a network of silk growers and natural scientists all working from within
and transforming their homes into laboratories and curiosity cabinets centered on the
silkworm. I argue that Ferrar and her circle constitute a “public” framed through a common
interest in one particular form of domestic labor: silk production. In doing so, these writers

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33 I call this a “public,” along the lines that Catharine Gillespie defines publics in *Domesticity and Dissent*, in the
sense that it is a sphere “comprised of speakers/ writers and audience members/ readers and private insofar as it
establish connections between silk production, English domesticity, and the practice of letters in the long eighteenth-century. For Ferrar, women’s textualities involve both the spinning of texts and the spinning of textiles.

Subsequent chapters examine how similar types of domestic industry become central to the fabric of early Atlantic letters, and how writers’ experiments with form, style, and content are informed by an interest in the parallel poetics of text and textile. While Ferrar imagined her experiments with silk as transforming her into a cosmopolitan author, other texts imagine the production and consumption of textiles in the New World as central to “civilizing” or naturalizing New World populations and spaces. Chapter two, “Picturing Creole Domesticity: Texts, Textiles, and Bodies in the Visual Poetics of Encounter,” examines radical changes in the Atlantic world of commodity exchange that occur as a result of the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht. While scholars have examined how the Treaty gave the English increased monopoly over the slave trade, Articles 8 and 9 of the Treaty dramatically impacted the English wool industry and the lives of women involved by allowing for the import of French textiles. Men and women involved in wool trade protested openly in the streets of London and Manchester. Representations of protesting linen spinners, weavers, and dyers circulated alongside representations of women from the other end of empire. This chapter argues that representations of Indian and New World African women in the eighteenth-century theater helped to negotiate crises in the English textile industry—and Atlantic commerce more generally—following the Treaty of Utrecht. Dramatic productions such as Thomas Southerne’s Oroonoko and George Coleman the Younger’s Inkle and Yarico,
especially engravings depicting their heroines’ dress, help foster a desire for and naturalize foreign textiles and commodities.

Chapter three traces how the labor of women working at the spinning wheel in chapter two is coopted by elite and middling class women in the mid-eighteenth century and resignified as a form of feminine virtue. To do so, this chapter, “Of those Rags our Paper is Made”: Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* and the Transatlantic Book Trade in the Age of Homespun,” examines the Atlantic circulation of Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* and considers its role in fostering a North American fad for homespun linen in this period. Reading *Pamela* as a history of materials shaping a gendered bourgeois identity in a wider Atlantic and global context, I examine how the text models dependencies between textile industries centered linen production and print and papermaking industries. Because paper was made from linen rags, these connections are as material as they are symbolic. I argue that the protagonist’s own work with homespun cloth models alternatives to print for women to engage in political debate and enter public, political discourse. Specifically, it puts forth the production of homespun as a particular, gendered political practice, and homespun cloth as a means to broadcast one’s participation in public debate. Translated to a North American context, the novel may help colonists consider how homespun linen cloth—and the paper made from it—may help foster homespun publics. Bringing these two lines together, we can see how non-discursive domestic practices centered on textile manufacture and fashioning are at the heart of political participation, and in turn, the articulation of emergent understandings of female virtue that model new relationships between domestic oeconomy, commerce, and the practice of letters.
A final chapter, “Black Atlantic Material Texts: Guinea Cloth and the Fabric of Early Atlantic Letters,” examines the circulation of British-produced cotton “Guinea” or “Check” cloth between England, West Africa, and the Caribbean alongside the slave trade and Caribbean slavery in the late eighteenth-century. Textiles served as Atlantic currency and could be bartered for human beings, but enslaved Caribbean women also used their access to imported and locally produced cloth to establish kinship ties and negotiate relationships with free and enslaved peoples. Looking to ships logs and slave narratives that record the exchange of people for cloth, journals written by men and women such as Lady Maria Nugent, Thomas Thistlewood, and Mrs. Carmichael that record enslaved women’s work with cloth, and visual representations produced by Agostino Brunias, I explore how textiles structure a West Indian society that had limited access to texts or newspapers. Unlike the texts that constitute an Anglophone public sphere, enslaved women’s textiles establish the importance of aesthetics, memory, and feeling in the continuity of social life and reveal a dialectical struggle between reason and affect, the discursive and the embodied. Enslaved women used cloth and clothing as conduits to memorialize personal and collective histories, signify kinship, advertise status and skill, and provide material links within slave communities, to free Euro-creole communities, and to distant or unknown homelands.

As the chapters outlined above suggest, this project is framed as a series of case studies that reflect women’s parallel work with texts and textiles rather than comprehensive study of either the textile industry or print culture in the long eighteenth century. It is a project committed to understanding the work of women who did not necessarily record their live on paper but whose lives are recorded nonetheless in the marks they made on a variety of different material objects. Cloth of course wears away so the record we have of these lives is
most often recorded in texts, account books, and journals that translate this material into the
written word. In this sense, this project reads the archive of women’s textualities against an
empiricist grain. I understand the archive, that is, as a practice rather than as a space or
repository that in any way reflects the actual world of eighteenth century peoples. The
archive, rather, represents a long history of power relations rather than a comprehensive
history, and the discursive material it collects reflects the agendas of its collectors and the
nature of these items use: we have access to more texts than textiles precisely because textiles
were more widely circulated, used, and recycled into the very texts comprising the archive of
early Atlantic prints. In this sense, this project takes up the challenge of reading the archive in
new ways: of reading, in fact, what often is not there, rather than what is available to us as
eye Atlantic scholars.
Chapter 1

Fashioning New World Nature:

Women, Silk, and the Practice of Letters at the “Birth” of the Public Sphere

On January 16, 1907, Henry Stevens, a London dealer in rare books, wrote to George Parker Winship, then the librarian of the John Carter Brown Library, informing him that he had come across a copy of Saltonstalls’ Mercator Historia Mundi. Steven’s described the book as follows: “a very fine genuine original copy of the first issue of 1635 with some special characteristics in the shape of long MS Notes almost contemporary (1653-1654) relating to Virginia silk worms with drawings of them.” Stevens was intrigued by these marginal annotations. He continues: “This MS matter seems to be original and in reading it, it appears not to have been written all at once, but to have been added to from time to time. I thought at first it might have been copied from Hartlib or Williams but I have been unable to identify it.” The JCB purchased the book—and its paratextual material—for £31.10s. In fact, George Parker Winship was purchasing two books for the price of one: the print and visual material that comprised The Mercator proper, as well as the epistolary correspondence between its former owners carried on in the margins.

34 The authors Stevens refers to here are Edward Williams and Samuel Hartlib. The second edition of Williams’ 1650 Virgo Triumphans, alternately titled, Virginia: more especially the south part thereof, richly and truly valued, featured a lengthy discussion of “the discovery of silkworms, with their benefit.” Samuel Hartlib’s The Reformed Common-wealth of Bees was published in 1655, and included—in fact, added wholesale—Virginia Ferrar’s The Reformed Silk-worm. Both books were printed for and sold by the Ranter and radical, Giles Calvert, in the same year as Reformed. This suggests that Calvert simply bound Virginia Ferrar’s text within Hartlib’s—there are no changes or revisions between the editions. However, it is only in the second edition that Hartlib includes Ferrar’s Reformed.
This chapter is concerned with this second “book”—the one recorded within the marginal spaces where one text ends and another begins. Sometime in the early 1650’s someone had recorded—and illustrated—what appears to be an extensive conversation about silkworms in the margins of a 1635 edition of Gerhard Mercator’s Atlas; or, A geographick description of the world. This “second” text appears to be an early manuscript version of The reformed Virginian silk-worm published in London in 1655 and attributed to Virginia Ferrar of Little Gidding in Huntingdonshire, England. The marginal annotations in the Mercator, composed as a series of discursive conversations between Virginia Ferrar and her father John between 1653 and 1654, closely parallel the printed editions of The reformed Virginian silk-worm in both form and content: the printed text is also presented as a collection of letters, correspondence, and “advertisements” authored by Virginia and John Ferrar, with additional material from a host of other contributors including the Governor of Virginia, Edward Digges, and the natural scientist Samuel Hartlib.

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36 This copy of Mercator’s atlas is currently housed in the rare book collections at the John Carter Brown Library in Providence, Rhode Island. I would like to offer special thanks to Dr. Janice Neri and the staff at for helping to trace the provenance and authorship of the MS notes in the Atlas.

37 The publication history of this text is actually quite complicated. There was an earlier 1652 edition titled Glory be to God on high, peace on earth, good will amongst men: A rare and new discovery of a speedy way, and easie means, found out by a young lady in England, she having made full proo eof thereof in May, anno 1652. For the feeding of silk-worms in the woods, on the mulberry-tree-leaves in Virginia (Printed for Richard Wodenothe in Leaden-Hall Street, London 1652). The text was also included (as noted above) in Samuel Hartlib’s 1655 The reformed common-wealth of bees. / Presented in severall letters and observations to Sammuel Hartlib Esq. ; With The reformed Virginian silk-worm. : Containing many excellent and choice secrets, experiments, and discoveries for attaining of national and private profits and riches (Printed for Giles Calvert at the Black-Spread-Eagle at the west-end of Pauls, London 1655). The annotations in the Mercator appear to be written between the first publication and the second, revised edition. The primary difference between the two editions seems to be the inclusion of Ferrar’s experiments with the native Virginia silkworm rather than European varieties.

38 Edward Digges was Colonial Governor of Virginia from March of 1655 to December 1656. He was deeply invested in producing silk in Virginia, though this enterprise was largely unsuccessful.

39 The fact that the Ferrar family seems to have been connected to Samuel Hartlib is important. Hartlib was a German-British writer of tracts on scientific, agricultural, political, and educational reform. Beginning in about 1630, he developed an extensive circle of correspondents and was one of the most prolific writers of the Commonwealth era. His own work on education is said to have influenced his friend John Milton’s tract on education. He received a pension of between 100 and 300 pounds from Oliver Cromwell which, after the
The conversations that began in the margins of Mercator’s atlas appear to have generated a wider circle of correspondence that stretched from Huntingdonshire to London and across the Atlantic. From her home at Little Gidding in Huntingdonshire, England, Virginia Ferrar experimented with silk production and initiated a transatlantic correspondence with Virginia planters, English and European natural scientists, and amateurs who exchanged maps, letters, drawings, poems, and silkworm specimens. These materials would serve as the foundation for Ferrar’s silk treatise, titled *The reformed Virginian silk-worm*, which was published in London in 1655 and circulated throughout the Atlantic world. Focusing on the authorship, composition, and publication history of this particular silk treatise, we can begin to consider about how one woman used her knowledge of luxury textiles to position herself as an intellectual and to reform a world of letters dominated by men.

Following Virginia Ferrar’s writing as it transforms from marginal notes in Mercator’s *Atlas* to printed text invites us to think about the materiality of texts and the textuality of textiles in new ways. As I will show, gendered labor practices centered on domestic silk production seem to have informed how she composed her book, as well as the audience she imagined as her readership. In particular, Ferrar seems to imagine her writing as

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Footnote: The publication history of this text is actually quite complicated. These annotations closely parallel the printed editions of *The reformed Virginian silk-worm* in both content and concept: the printed text is also presented as a collection of letters, correspondence, and “advertisements” authored by Virginia and John Ferrar, with additional material from Edward Digges, who was Governor of Virginia between 1655 and 1656, as well as the writer and “intellegencer” Samuel Hartlib. There was an earlier 1652 as Glory be to God on high, peace on earth, good will amongst men. : A rare and new discovery of a speedy way, and easie means, found out by a young lady in England, she having made full profe thereof in May, anno 1652. For the feeding of silk-worms in the woods, on the mulberry-tree-leaves in Virginia (Printed for Richard Wodenothe in Leaden-Hall Street, London 1652), and was also included in Samuel Hartlib’s 1655 *The reformed common-wealth of bees. / Presented in severall letters and observations to Sammuel Hartlib Esq. ; With The reformed Virginian silk-worm. ; Containing many excellent and choice secrets, experiments, and discoveries for attaining of national and private profits and riches* (Printed for Giles Calvert at the Black-Spread-Eagle at the west-end of Pauls, London 1655). The annotations in the Mercator appear to be written between the first publication and the second, revised edition.
one particular node within a network of silk growers and natural scientists all working from within and transforming their homes into laboratories and curiosity cabinets centered on the silkworm. In this sense, Ferrar and her circle constitute a public framed through domestic nature studies and domestic labor centered on textile manufacture.\footnote{I call this a “public,” along the lines that Catharine Gillespie defines publics in Domesticity and Dissent, in the sense that it is a sphere “comprised of speakers/ writers and audience members/ readers and private insofar as it is separate from and oppositional to the state.” See Domesticity and Dissent in the Seventeenth Century: English Women Writers and the Public Sphere (Cambridge 2009), 44.} In doing so, these writers establish connections between silk production, English domesticity, and the practice of letters in the long eighteenth-century.

Throughout the long eighteenth-century, England’s sustained sponsorship of an English silk industry gave rise to a rich literary discourse describing and promoting the practice of silk culture. Silk promoters circulated and shared specimens, silk samples, and ideas within a transatlantic community of readers and experimenters. Promoters were responding to new English consumer desires: what Lord Carew described as “a madness for silk.”\footnote{Quoted in Edward Eggleston, The Beginners Of A Nation: A History Of The Source And Rise Of The Earliest English Settlements in America with Special Reference to the Life and Character of the People (1896), page 77.} Because silk was imported into England from countries with their own burgeoning silk industries such as Spain, Italy, and France, it seemed important to stop the flow of English specie into foreign coffers.\footnote{For how the diversification of the colonial economy might offer England a place in the global textile market dominated by the Dutch, French, Italian, and Spanish see Jeffrey Knapp, An Empire Nowhere: England, America, and Literature from Utopia to The Tempest (University of California Press 1992) and Mary Schoeser, Silk (Yale 2007).} However, English silk promoters were driven by two additional factors: firstly, they saw domestic silk production as a way to exploit a growing population of cheap and disempowered labor in the form of women and children; and secondly, by also outsourcing silk production to the colony of Virginia, they could reform a colonial monoculture centered on that “noxious weed,” Tobacco. By transforming its tobacco
fields into silkworks, Virginia could become yet another Peru. For these writers, the *phenomenon* of silkworm metamorphosis served as a *natural* sign for how cultivation of this insect might also transform English commerce, politics, and publics.\footnote{See Knapp, *Empire Nowhere*. Silkworks could profitably employ a growing population of unemployed laborers in England, as well as promote the “civilization” of colonial spaces and indigenous peoples, and diversify colonial agricultures overly reliant upon tobacco production.}

This chapter seeks to place Virginia Ferrar and her work with sericulture at the intersection of three scholarly conversations. Firstly, Ferrar’s experiments with New World silkworms and her published treatise invite us to attend to role women played in the proliferation of natural history writing in the mid and late seventeenth century. As scholars such as Susan Scott Parish, Natalie Zemon Davis, and Carolyn Merchant have argued, both colonial and metropolitan women were central to the production of knowledge about New World Nature: they collected and circulated specimens and produced illustrations and written observations that were essential to the production of natural history as a genre mediating New World imperial commerce.\footnote{For the role of gender in science writing see Susan Scott Parish, *American Curiosity: Cultures of Natural History in the Colonial British Atlantic World* (UNC 2006); Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (Harper 1990); Natalie Zemon Davis, *Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth-Century Lives* (Harvard 1997); Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven, C.T.: Yale University Press, 1985); Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986).} Secondly, while their work is often couched within the authorizing prefaces of male editors or folded within a circum-Atlantic correspondence carried out amongst men, women’s work with New World nature is embedded within emergent public prints using scientific discourse and natural history to test emergent ideas of liberal political theory and possessive individualism. Furthermore, women’s work with New World plants and insects—and Ferrar’s work in particular—infuses the proto-liberal language of these religio-scientific, Utopic agricultural tracts and pamphlets with vocabularies that traditionally inform the home—childbirth and motherhood, marriage and romance—and that
challenge our understandings of the divide between the public and private, the home and the polis. Attending to actors who Catharine Gillespie calls “Liberalism’s mothers,” provides avenues through which to understand how gendered domestic practices engender public discourse.⁴⁶ Looking to one form of domestic work in Ferrar’s writings—sericulture—shows how cloth and fabric, in the words of Peter Stallybrass and Ann Rosalind Jones, “reworked and transformed the imagined boundaries between the domestic and the political, the private and the public” and how women’s work with cloth was as central to “the economic and social fabrication…of Renaissance subjects” as was the practice of letters.⁴⁷

A discourse centered on the transformative poetics of silk culture, I argue, allowed women just such an avenue through which to enter conversations usually dominated by men. While scholars such as Benedict Anderson, Jürgen Habermas, and Michael Warner, among others, have posited that the circulation of texts and images allowed readers to forge transatlantic communities, silk promoters put forth a different thesis: namely that practices related to the growing, harvesting, and marketing of silk would weave together the various peoples of the British Atlantic world. Shut out of the birth of the public sphere in the pamphlet wars of the English civil war, which involved preachers among other participants, Ferrar turns instead to spinning and to material practices that enable her to write herself into

⁴⁶ Gillespie argues against the supposed divide between “public” and “private” spheres, writing: “Their private spheres of public performance were the kitchen, the birthing room, the bedchamber…” (262). For the role of women writers and the domestic at the “birth” of the public sphere see Catharine Gillespie, Domesticity and Dissent in the Seventeenth Century: English Women Writers and the Public Sphere (Cambridge 2009); and David Zarret, Origins of Democratic Culture: Printing, Petition, and the Public Sphere in Early Modern England (Princeton 1999).
⁴⁷ For a study of the role of cloth as material texts, see Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory (Cambridge 2001), page 13-14; and Susan Frye’s Pens and Needles: Women’s Textualities in Early Modern England (UPenn 2010).
the world of print, poetry, and utopian thinking usually dominated by men.\(^{48}\) In Ferrar's writing about textile production, we see that text and textile are spun together in such a way that a female poetics emerges in and through the world of Atlantic commodity circulation and knowledge production. Her experiments with the poesis or poetics of silk production becomes a way for a woman to assert her centrality to Atlantic world culture—a way to write and spin her way into a new poetics. In doing so, she also reimagines the domestic sphere as a transatlantic institution, and characterizes women as makers of culture and as important agents of colonization and as producers and framers of New World knowledge.

Virginia Ferrar’s silk treatise imagines a utopic Anglo-Atlantic circuit of production, which weaves together Native American resources, Atlantic commerce, and women's authority as makers of culture. Women were central to the story of silk production: because the task of caring for silkworms fell primarily to women and children who raised worms in their homes, silk studies frame sericulture as a feminized labor and discourse.\(^{49}\) The result, I argue, is that women were not mere consumers of global commodities; rather, discourses promoting silk culture in both colonial and metropolitan homes identify women and their homes as important agents of imperial commerce, as active participants in the culture and expropriation of colonial resources, and as producers of New World knowledge.\(^{50}\)

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\(^{48}\) While Gillespie argues that women sectarians were essential to emergent forms of public discourse, Ferrar’s use of material texts more closely resembles the types of gendered participation in public debate put forth by Stallybrass, Jones, and Frye.

\(^{49}\) Silk production has a long history of being associated with women’s labor, dating back to the early years of Chinese sericulture, and that was transferred to European sericultural practices along with the domesticated silkworm (\(Bombyx mori\)) itself: women tended mulberry trees, fed the worms, and wound and spun the silk. These Chinese silkworms followed the routes of the silk road, and in the hands of early Spanish sericulturists, were introduced to the American colonies. See Xinru Liu, *The Silk Road in World History* (Oxford University Press, 2010); and Paul M. Tuskes, Michael M. Collins, and James P. Tuttle, *The Wild Silk Moths of North America: A Natural History of the Saturniidae of the United States and Canada* (Comstock, 1996).

\(^{50}\) For work on how women’s bodies serve as a backdrop on which to display the ornaments of a global empire, see for instance Laura Brown, *Ends of Empire: Women and Ideology in Eighteenth Century English Literature* (Cornell 1993) and Felicity Nussbaum, *The Global Eighteenth Century* (Johns Hopkins 2003).
Virginia Ferrar was the daughter of John Farrer and the niece of Nicholas Ferrar who served as Deputy Treasurer of the Virginia Company of London. As the story goes, Virginia was named for the colony of Virginia “so that [in] speaking unto her, looking upon her, or hearing others call her name,” her father “might think upon both at once.” She expressed a life-long interest in the prosperity of the colony and regularly served as her father’s right hand, penning much of his correspondence with Virginia planters. Upon its dissolution in 1624, the Ferrar family moved to Little Gidding in Huntingdonshire, England where they established a small community focused on religious education. Ferrar’s education included the domestic arts, such as embroidery and spinning, but also bookbinding, gilding, lettering, illustrating, and printing. Ferrar was also an avid reader and left her mark on the books that

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51 Another uncle, William Ferrar, actually settled in Virginia, establishing Ferrar Island in James River. John Smith’s History of Virginia mentions that ten people were killed at his house during the March 22, 1621/22 Indian Massacre (vol. 2, p. 75). It appears that the family also had plantations in Bermuda. See The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Jul., 1903), pp. 41-46.
52 She was born December 24, 1726—so roughly a couple years after the dissolution of the Virginia Company of London. See Life of Nicholas Ferrar p. 184
53 Michael Lloyd Ferrar—who had access to the family papers—says she was deeply involved with all matters related to Virginia. He writes: “she was as well known to the people of Virginia as if she lived there; she conducted her father’s correspondence with the settlers, and after his death kept on the good work till her own death thirty years later...Had the Life of Nicholas been supplanted by a Life of John by his son John, we should the daughter Virginia occupying a very high place in the record, quite as high in her own sphere as was her cousin Mary Collet in her sphere” (qtd in Skipton 185)
she read, such as her family’s copy of Gerhard Mercator’s Atlas in which she recorded her early impressions of silkworms and silkworm metamorphosis.

The community at Little Gidding was an eccentric one. Consisting of an extended family circle including Virginia’s aunts, uncles, and cousins, the group was deeply committed to spiritual practices but also to their arts, specifically bookbinding. Phillip Lee Phillips writes,

The Farer family, who formed a little colony unto themselves in ‘Little Giddings,’ Huntingdonshire, England, seem to have occupied themselves at various literary pursuits, and to this early training Virginia Farrer was indebted for much miscellaneous information. The following is from the ‘Dictionary of National Biography,’ in the notice of Nicholas Farrer: ‘It was one of the Farrer’s principles that every one should learn a trade, and the trade practiced at Little Giddings was that of book-binding. An ingenious book-binder was entertained to instruct the whole family in the art of binding, gilding, lettering, and pasting—printing by the use of the rolling press.’ 54

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54 See Phillip Lee Phillips, Virginia Cartography: a Bibliographical Description, 31
An education that included bookbinding and book illustration may have trained Virginia Ferrar to think of books as material objects that are made, used, and circulated. And furthermore, her domestic chores and “work,” which would have included embroidery and sewing samplers—as well as sericulture—may have helped her to find parallels between these practices and to think about fabrics and textiles as their own kind of material texts.\(^{55}\)

Despite her retired life at Little Gidding, Virginia Ferrar was a participant in a wider web of writers, readers, friends, printers, and booksellers who were equally invested—financially and imaginatively—in the future of New World settlements in Virginia. From this retired location, John continued to correspond with Virginia planters—for instance, his younger brother William had settled there in the 1620’s—and Virginia regularly served as his amanuensis. In the *Life of Nicholas*, written by Michael Lloyd Ferrar, the author notes: “she was as well known to the people of Virginia as if she lived there; she conducted her father’s correspondence with the settlers, and after his death kept on the good work till her own death thirty years later.”\(^{56}\) He comments further, “It is likely that the associations of her name and family tended to concentrate her interests upon Virginia from a very early age, and it is certain that when she came to years of discretion this interest strengthened and matured into something which can be described as expert knowledge of the colony and its conditions.”\(^{57}\)

Their wider circle of correspondents included the author and scientist Samuel Hartlib, the natural scientist Edward Williams, the governor of Virginia Edward Digges, the metaphysical poet George Herbert, and a host of colonial planters, amateur scientists, and a

\(^{55}\) While I use the term “work” here, the activities she engaged in must be understood as significantly different from “labor.” That is, ladies’ work is tied to practices that are not necessarily physically labor intensive but “polite” instead. See Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, Part II.

\(^{56}\) Skipton, 185

\(^{57}\) Skipton, 184
few novice colonial poets. She collaborated with her father to produce a number of different texts intended for colonial and metropolitan readers. These works included *A Perfect Description of Virginia* (1649), attributed to John, but referred to by Virginia under the title *Health and Wealth* in her *Reformed Virginia Silk-worm* and claimed as her own work.\(^{58}\) In this text he mentions that a book treating silkworms will be published soon. This particular silkworm text appears to be Edward Williams’ 1650 *Virgo Triumphans*. Roughly a year later it seems that Virginia and John Ferrar began working on a map of Virginia that was engraved, printed, and sold in 1651 by the same printer and bookseller that had published the second edition of Edward Williams’ *Virgo Triumphans*, and there is some evidence that, while printed and sold separately, they were often purchased in tandem and glued or sewn into the front pages of Edward Williams’ text.\(^{59}\) By the time *Virgo Triumphans* went into its third edition in 1667, a revised Ferrar Map was included. Moreover, it was attributed to Virginia Ferrar.

In addition to having their hands in the printing of texts, Virginia and John Ferrar served as distributors—sending their books to colonial Virginia. In return, they received letters and gifts. As one of her correspondents commented, “Virginia gave you its name, you could give Virginia your books, this [being] the onely [thing], that is wanting in that countrye.”\(^{60}\) This particular comment recognizes books and correspondence as linking literate

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\(^{58}\) In *Reformed*, she ventriloquizes the voice of a male editor, and writes: “The same Lady, who last year sent you her Books of *Health and Wealth*, (who hath the happiness to beare the honorable name of your incomparable Countrey) continuing her sincere affections to the advancing of your welfares in all kindes” (73). Ventriloquizing male voices—her father’s and brother’s for instance—seems to be one of her tactics for side-stepping the problems of female authorship. I believe she does this in correspondence as well—until her father’s death in 1657. But her interlocutors seem to always understand that they are corresponding with Virginia herself.

\(^{59}\) The John Carter Brown Library’s copy of the second edition includes the earlier version of Ferrar Map, glued into the front cover.

\(^{60}\) From the Ferrar Papers, March 25 1649/50: Edward Johnson in Virginia to Virginia Ferrar. Quoted in Edward L. Bond, *Damned Souls in a Tobacco Colony* (find page)
colonists to cosmopolitan cultures centered on reading and writing, but also recognizes Ferrar’s place within that culture. In addition to letters and texts, she exchanged material objects, tools, artifacts, and specimens with Virginia colonists. For instance, along with copies of her *Reformed Virginian Silkworm*, she sent a wheel with which to spin the silk she hoped her book would teach colonists how to produce. And in return for books one Virginia planter named John Stioring, sent her “a token” of his appreciation in the form of baskets and pipes made by Native Americans and New World specimens. In turn, the governor, Edward Digges—to whom she directs some lines at the end of her pamphlet—praises her experiments and refers to her as the “Virtuous Lady Virginia” in their continued correspondence regarding silk production. Supporters responded in verse as well: an anonymous correspondent, for instance, directs his lines “To the honor’d Lady Mrs./ Virginia Ferrar on her new/ discovery of the Silk-trade /in those parts of the world,” and Virginia’s cousin, John Collett, pens the following lines in her honor: “You, sweet Cozen, have made known/ How Silkworms feed and spin alone.”

A fabric or constellation of writers, printers, and texts contribute to and emerge out of the margins of the Mercator atlas with a common thread tying them together: namely a discourse centered on how to export to colonial Virginia one particular aspect of domestic industry—sericulture. For these authors, spiders, silkworms, butterflies, spinsters, and writers seem to share a capacity to transform—or alchemize—one kind of material or form into another. Rather than epistolary networks, the Ferrars seem to have thought of their activities

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62 Stioring wrote: “I have sent you a token, that is an Indian basket and three Indian Pipes and three for my mother, and I have sent you a sea tree and a oyster pearl, and there is with the rest of the things in the basket a roote for youre father as I am towld with great vertu in it.” See *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Jul., 1903), p. 45
63 IBID
and their letters as forming threads that interwove the family and their correspondents in London, Europe, and Virginia into the wider fabric of cosmopolitan letters. Virginia’s uncle Nicholas Ferrar for instance, employs the metaphor of spinning and sewing when he writes to cousin Arthur Wodenoth in 1630, warning him not to interrupt “…that web of friendship which I hope might otherwise prove a pattern in an age that needs patterns.”

Another one of the Ferrar’s close correspondents was the metaphysical pattern poet George Herbert whose work similarly reflects an interest in the intersections of language, words, and materiality. On his deathbed, Herbert sent the Ferrar family a collection of handwritten poems that they would publish as a book called The Temple: Sacred poems and Private Ejaculations. This collection included Herbert’s well-known pattern poem, “Easter Wings” which is printed sideways across two pages of the book in the shape of wings. While the content of the poem addresses bodily sins and the redemptive and transformative powers of faith, the wings represent this idea of spiritual transformation or redemption. Herbert uses an image drawn from nature to symbolize resurrection and in doing so imagines poetics as a process through which language serves as a conduit between material “things” and their symbolic significance. The typographical arrangement of the words on the page creates a spoken picture and a visual poetics that challenges the divide between the discursive and the

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64 Nicholas Ferrar wrote to advise his cousin Arthur Woodnoth on a matter of business on 10th May 1630. Quoted in Phillips.
material, between letter and image, and between alphabetic and pictorial methods of representation: the poem is both seen and heard. While it is unclear whether his wings are meant to represent an angel, a bird, or a butterfly, his connection to the Ferrar family makes it possible that he may have modeled his wings on the discourse and practice of silk production that was so central to life at Little Gidding. In the words of the poet, “if I imp my wing on thine/ Affliction shall advance the flight in me.” Just as the weaving of the chrysalis serves to transform the silkworm into a “higher” form, so Herbert’s writing will serve as a type of spiritual conversion.

Virginia Ferrar’s manuscript notes in Mercator’s Atlas as well as her printed texts seem to take up the work of early modern poets such as Herbert that explore the materiality of the written word; however, as I will explore in the following section, Ferrar’s own play with the material of texts and textuality of material objects seems to make an important revision to male authored texts: utilizing their concern with material aesthetics, Ferrar models new forms of gendered self-making centered on women’s work with textiles rather than writing.

A STORY OF TWO BOOKS: NOTES IN MERCATOR’S ATLAS AND VIRGINIA FERRAR’S SILK TREATISE
Despite the dissolution of the Virginia Company in 1624, the Ferrar family maintained a strong interest in the colony of Virginia throughout the seventeenth century, and John and Virginia Ferrar engaged in extensive correspondence with people living in and associated with the region. In particular, much of this correspondence and the information it related—for instance, a reference to a letter from the Ferrar’s friend and then governor of Virginia, Edward Digges—found its way into the marginalia contained in the family’s copy of the Mercator Atlas. This paratextual material not only records and responds to a set of transatlantic letters and prints, but also incorporates the writings John and Virginia Ferrar which was styled as a series of signed correspondence carried on between father and daughter. The annotations relating to sericulture are dated 1653 and 1654 and belong to two different hands each of which signs their “letters” with a personal mark. Virginia uses a “V” and John uses “J.F,” and on occasion draws a finger pointing to key passages in the Mercator to which he wants to draw his daughter’s attention. In particular, the commentary on the Virginia silkworm is written in the section of the text describing and characterizing the region of Virginia, and the authors of the manuscript notes respond to the Mercator’s printed text as well as record their impressions of what sericulture could bring to the colonial Virginia.
the text describes. While the annotations in the Mercator are not a complete manuscript version of what will become the *Reformed Virginian silk-worm*, they do reveal a stage in the text’s development from manuscript notes, illustrations, and letters to printed and published text.

This particular copy of *The Mercator* reminds us that books are material objects, as well as conveyors of information—that they have writers, readers, and *users*. John and Virginia Ferrar’s entries in *The Mercator* place them in all three of these roles: as they read Saltonstall’s text, they respond in writing in the margins—both to each other and to the text—and then *use* the marginal spaces to begin drafting a new text that extends the Saltonstall’s material on the possibilities of New World wealth. For John and Virginia Ferrar, one of the most promising avenues to wealth presented by the New World was silk production. And they were not the only ones who thought so. As Henry Stevens gestures at in his 1907 description of the book, both Samuel Hartlib and Edward Williams had published pamphlets exploring the possibilities of Virginia silk production; however, the marginal annotations in *The Mercator* do not copy from these texts directly. Rather, what they do reveal is a web or constellation of writers, readers, friends, printers, and booksellers who seem equally invested in the future of New World settlements in Virginia in the final years of the interregnum and the first years of the Restoration. While *writing*—printed texts and pamphlets, correspondence, maps—provides one material thread that ties them together, their interest in another material act—sericulture—serves as the prior discourse that informs these discursive

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65 Firstly, the notes most likely respond to the years 1653-1654 and Hartlib’s text that includes Virginia Ferrar’s silkworm tract did not come out until 1655. Secondly, while Williams’ tract was published in 1650, there are no directly copied lines. Virginia Ferrar does, however, refer to Williams in the published copy of *The Reformed Virginia Silk-worm*, and clearly there was a connection between her and Hartlib: he wrote the preface to her book and included her book within his own and both were printed and sold by the same bookseller in the same year.
acts. As a series of texts concerned with the production of textiles this body of writing develops possible connections between domestic industry and women’s participation—directly and imaginatively—in the project of New World colonialism, as well as the role that a fabric, like texts, plays in connecting people across vast expanses.\footnote{A discussion of the actual practices of growing silk is provided in a section that follows.}

Dwelling for a moment on two pages from the Mercator Atlas, it becomes clear that we are, in fact, reading \textit{two texts} at the same time; and, moreover, it is difficult to discern where exactly one text \textit{ends} and another \textit{begins}. Ferrar’s notes and illustrations begin on the final pages of the section of the atlas titled “New Virginia” and ultimately wrap around the map of New Spain on the right. Penned between 1653 and 1654, the notes represent Ferrar’s first attempts to place her domestic work with silkworms in a global context. Her notes respond to, critique, and revise the printed word in the Atlas with her own impressions about how silk production may serve as avenue through which to reform commercial and agricultural projects in Virginia.

Figure 5: Marginal notes in Gerhard Mercator’s Atlas; or, A geographicke description of the world (London, 1635), p. 904-5. John Carter Brown Library.
Ferrar also, quite literally, places herself and her ideas on the New World map. Her writing and her illustrations could be said to colonize the borders of the places the Atlas describes and depicts. Represented in life-size, her illustrations of silkworm cocoons on the left page and the silkworm creeping along on the edges of the right page dwarf the map of Western New Spain, notably the site of one of colonial America’s first successful silkworks. Moreover, the suggestive shape of the silk cocoons themselves invites us to consider whether this may be a rather clever way for a woman to appropriate a male-authored text.

As the penned paratext infiltrates the printed text it reorients, rewrites, and *writes over* the New World spaces it discursively inhabits. Reading two texts at once—the Atlas and the manuscript notes—asks readers to travel between center and periphery and between England and the New World. Unlike the printed text, the notes do not need to be—and cannot be—read from left to right; rather they are positioned in both horizontal and perpendicular relationship to the printed text in a tactic that reimagines the relationship between up and down, left and right, center and periphery. That is, we have to read globally, spinning the

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67 As a global demand for textiles expanded throughout the seventeenth century, the English followed in the footsteps of the Spanish in seeking to promote colonial silk production. Silk production in the New World dates to some unsuccessful attempts to introduce sericulture to Hispaniola in 1501 and the Carolinas between 1521 and 1525. A silk weavers guild was established in New Spain in 1542, and Spanish American silk works were successfully established in Michoacán, Nueva Galicia, and Oaxaca. See Douglas, R. Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination: Plebeian Society in Colonial Mexico City, 1660-1720* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1994).
book like one might spin a globe. In this sense, the book is repurposed and reformed. In a process that is not unlike unspinning and re-spinning of silkworm cocoons to serve new purposes in new forms, the book is turned inside out, and instead of housing Mercator’s maps and descriptions it serves to illustrate her text. In other words, Ferrar seems to draw direct parallels between what might be understood as the transformative poetics of silk production and the practice of letters here: her writing works within visual, tactile, and discursive registers. That is, we cannot simply read the letters inked on the page; rather, her text could be said to make meaning out of the negative spaces of the book proper and in the ways in which the book is handled—not just *read*.

The shape of the penned silkworm cocoon on the left page mirrors the non-linear, global patterning of the penned notations in which text seems to spin out—or in—in various juxtaposed layers. The relationship between text and image captured in the silkworm illustration and mirrored in the spiraling of text throughout these two pages, develops a sort of visual poetics as the printed text becomes cocooned, if you will, within her notations. In the actual drawing of the silkworm cocoon, the writer experiments with this method, weaving words and image together. The description of the insect becomes an integral part of drawing, echoing it formalistically with curving letters as well as providing descriptive information. In turn, the image gives credibility to her words and emphasizes the fact that she has observed the Virginian silkworms with her own eyes. In fact, presented as a dissection, the drawing invites the reader...
to travel in yet another direction—that is, to read three dimensionally, imagining this drawing as the cross-section of a three dimensional object whose round shape would protrude out of and into the text it inhabits—not unlike bookworms that bore their own non-traditional paths through the material of texts.

Her education, including bookbinding, book illustration, and embroidery, may have trained Virginia Ferrar to think of the writing of texts and the spinning of textiles as parallel practices and mediums central to gendered acts of self-making. As Ferrar’s words and illustrations travel from the margins of Mercator’s atlas into print, she continues to draw parallels between the work of texts and the work of textiles. In the printed text, she translates material practices into print and continues to play with the page as a visual field. Most importantly, her printed text represents the spatial reconfiguration of center and periphery—as her notes become printed text, she too transforms from commenter at the margins to author at the center of the page. This play with the ideas of spatial and material reconfiguration are particularly legible in a pattern poem included in the 1655 edition. The pattern poem translates image or object into text that then serves as image. That is, it weaves together matter and language—it uses letters to shape, or in her words fashion, a silkworm cocoon resembling the illustration that was included in her manuscript notes. Both her method and her use of the term “fashion” draw parallels between textual
composition and textile production. In addition to rapidly changing styles of dress, the word *fashion*, of course, means both the shape or form of something as well as the practice of shaping, forming, marking, or embellishing. Her poem suggests that whether she spins fibers or thoughts from her home at Little Gidding, she is participating in practices that fashion or shape belonging within a larger Atlantic empire.

THE POLITICS AND POETICS OF GENDERED SELF MAKING

Like the silkworm itself, the printed text of *The reformed Virginian silk-work* is a strange beast—while it re-forms her notations, it also collects and stitches together material from a variety of authors. Notably, the text was published in the final years of the interregnum, and while the Ferrars were loyalists, many of their correspondents were not. However, their common interest in silk transcends their politics. By alternating her narrative between her solitary observation of the metamorphosis of insects at her home with reports and poems penned by friends and naturalists from around the Atlantic world, Virginia Ferrar constructs a multi-vocal and multi-generic text that imagines a cohesive public consisting of a network of mostly female silk growers rather than a public divided by religious and political tracts written primarily by men. This allows her to provide yet another reformation: rather than the usual framing of New World nature as feminized, exotic, and available—a frame that would potentially exclude women readers from occupying the subject position of male explorer—her text provides a reframing or reforming of New World nature that is essential to
acts of female self-fashioning and self-making rather than as a site of potential violence. Ferrar playfully refers to these processes of transformation and “re-forming” in the title of her published tract which signals that the text is a departure, transformation, or reforming of an earlier version; however, the title also gestures to how cultivating the Virginia silkworm—which she notes is ten time larger and weightier than the European variety—could transform or reform England’s participation in the silk trade, as well as New World geographies that the author felt were overly reliant on tobacco production; instead, she posits a form of gendered domestic industry as central to the “reformation” of New World nature.

Virginia Ferrar’s silk treatise imagines a utopic Anglo-Atlantic circuit of production, which weaves together Native American resources, Atlantic commerce, and women's authority as makers of culture. Silk production becomes a way for a woman to assert her centrality to Atlantic world culture—a way to write and spin her way into a new poetics. At the outset of this chapter, I suggested that we attend to the way in which textiles function as texts. In Ferrar’s writing about textile production, we see that text and textile are spun together in such a way that a female poetics emerges in and through the world of Atlantic commodity circulation and knowledge production.

Parrish has examined the problems women faced in entering fields of natural history. She writes: “They had seen the persistent allegorization of ‘Nature’ as a naked female body laid open to male investigation…Other times they saw ‘Nature’ as a luminary that shone especially for women” (17). She argues that “pastoral poetry…allowed women to imagine themselves living in a particularly female-centered green space that was authorized by antiquity and free from rapine” that allows women to use ‘Nature’ “as a site for making rather than losing one’s self.” (176). See Parish, American Curiosity.
In her capacity as Utopian “reformer,” Ferrar was often compared to both Minerva and Arachne. While Minerva was the goddess of poetry, wisdom, commerce, weaving, and crafts, Arachne was the mortal woman and expert spinner and weaver who dared to challenge the goddess to a weaving competition. When Arachne wins, Minerva turns her into a spider. Conflating Ferrar’s spinning and her written text, an anonymous poet writes: “How quietly she draws Arachne’s finest twist; Lo here a Text, Fond women, for your hands, not for your tongues/ Expounding! which have Scripture strangely vexed, Ruining Kingdoms with your vocal Lungs.”69 If the Fable of Arachne is about the danger of women contesting religious and political authority largely associated with masculine power, this poet seems to invoke Arachne as a warning to Ferrar: if she challenges the male prerogative to speak and preach she’ll be transformed into the non-human. She will be unmade. The Fable of Arachne was often referenced in seventeenth-century conduct literature that seemed increasingly committed to convincing middling and upper class women to spin. As Jones and Stallybrass have noted, spinning may have been about the production of thread, but it was also about the production of women.70 In conflating Minerva and Arachne here,

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the author belies, in the words of Jones and Stallybrass, “the tension between the insistence that women play a crucial role in the production of textiles, above all through spinning, and the fears that women will weave their way into the social fabric.” The myth of Arachne and Minerva tells us about the tensions between “the relegation of female labor to the uncelebrated work of spinning (Arachne as spider) and the creation of social memory in the narrative weavings of Minerva.”

71 Renaissance Clothing, pg. 12.
Virginia Ferrar seems to be located at just such a critical node between the production of cloth and the production of culture, a position the poet above seems to recognize. As the poet moves from Ferrar’s text to textiles—that is, to a text for one’s hands rather than one’s tongue—he inevitably recognizes the slippage between texts and textiles and how textiles may serve as texts in their own right—as material texts that composed and read with one’s hands. Furthermore, the playful use of a name poem experiments with material texts—in the form of woven textiles as well as texts that play with the visual field—as avenues for subject formation: that is, it experiments with these mediums as forms that can make, unmake, and remake their subjects. Like pattern poems or Ferrar’s manuscript notes in the Atlas, the name poem must be read spatially as well as discursively. Her name, stretched vertically on the page, creates the occasion for and frames the content that moves horizontally. In this sense, the visual poetics of the name poem mirror woven textiles that thread fibers along vertical and horizontal planes in order to create a fabric. Furthermore, the formal logic of the poem imagines Virginia Ferrar—both her name and her person—as the tenterhooks upon which to stretch a textual and material fabric that was remaking the relationship between domestic industry, New World nature, and the practice of letters.

The acrostic name poem makes the point that it is okay for a woman to spin, but not to preach. Or to put it another way, it is acceptable for a woman to engage in acts of making,
creating, and producing culture—to engage in a poesis—associated with her hands rather than her tongue. The poet writes: “Rare Maid, a Spinster, not a Preacher Bee.”\(^{72}\) The acrostic poem reveals, however, that Virginia Ferrar is producing a text precisely when she is told \textit{not to speak}. Shut out of the birth of the public sphere in the pamphlet wars of the English civil war, which involved preachers among other participants, Ferrar’s turn to spinning and material practices enables her to produce textiles, texts, and a materialized model of gender that reconfigures heterosexuality at the time: a reconfiguration the understands the domestic sphere as a transatlantic institution—rather than merely a site of biological and social reproduction—and characterizes \textit{spinsters}—women makers and reformers of culture—as important agents of colonization and as producers and framers of New World knowledge.\(^{73}\)

In this sense, Virginia Ferrar and George Herbert share more than an interest in butterflies. Both remained unmarried throughout their lives and their writing seems to experiment with possible alternatives to heterosexual romantic love, marriage, and cohabitation. Herbert scholars have, of course, long recognized the devotional poet’s reforming of secular love poetry—in the vein of John Donne and others—into the language of spiritual reflection.\(^{74}\) In the “Easter Wings” poem discussed above, for instance, Herbert uses

\(^{72}\) Ferrar, \textit{Glory be to God} (London 1652).

\(^{73}\) Notably, while the term “Spinster” was originally appended to the names of women to denote their occupation, from roughly the seventeenth century forward it became the legal designation of one still unmarried. The idea that spinsters engage in a sort of creative poesis—that they spin texts—resonates well into the eighteenth-century and Richard Steele’s short-lived periodical, the \textit{Spinster}, certainly draws such connections, when it opens with the lines: “I write myself Spinster, because the Laws of my Country call me so.”

the language of heterosexual love to represent his path to spiritual redemption—the language of scorned, penitent, and forgiven lover serves as a model for his path to salvation. Lines such as “With thee, let me combine,” experiment with a bodily and embodied spirituality that essentially questions the supposed divide between flesh and spirit and imagines. As Juliet Fleming has noted, literary forms such as “hieroglyphs, ideograms, acrostic poems, imprese, emblems, mottoes and other ‘devices’” reveal an “almost magical way of thinking about the physical properties of language.” In these kinds of literary forms, “matter appears to bind thought” rather than serve as a mere surface for the free expression of ideas—that is, where ideas “take the form” and form “the implement on which it appears.” 75 That is, forms such as Herbert’s pattern poems share logic with more embodied forms of expression such women’s samplers, tapestries, and needlework. Moreover, it lends this type of “work”—work deeply associated with female domestic labor—aesthetic value. Herbert’s poetry may have appealed to a woman like Virginia Ferrar, who at an early age decided to remain unmarried, but who also sought to establish her authority within the home—an authority that an unmarried woman might have a difficult time laying claim to.

While Herbert imagines a sort of embodied spiritual sensuality, Virginia Ferrar constructs a female dominated domestic space modeled on the domestic oeconomy of the silkworm. For Ferrar and others, silkworms and silk moths or butterflies are described with feminine pronouns throughout their entire lifecycle: nary a male silkworm or moth seems to enter Ferrar’s silk treatise or her home. In this sense, silk texts frame silk culture as a feminine practice carried out by women caring for an all female cast of silkworms. I’d like to suggest

75 See Juliet Fleming, Graffiti and the Writing Arts of Early Modern England (UPenn 2001).
that Ferrar’s gendering of the silkworm’s serves as a way to imagine and lay claim to the
domestic as a site of female authority—as a site, that is, that does not need the authorizing
presence or generative force of a male figure. Unlike the cultivation of other “crops,”
silkworms are very much a part of domestic spaces and their lifecycles are shaped by and in
turn shape what I’d like to call the socio-spatial organization of the home: hatched in
bedchambers and transferred to rooms transformed into silkworm nurseries, the practice of
silkworm culture mirrors that of human reproduction but with one important difference: men
are absent from the picture.

In order to show how this works, I’d like to turn again to Ferrar’s treatise and her
treatment of silkworms and moths in their various life stages. While clearly male and female
silkworms are necessary for propagation, in Ferrar’s text only female silkworms seem emerge
from their shells or transform into moths. Positioning herself as a third person observer, Ferrar
writes: “as the nature of this wise creature is, when her food begins once to appear, she comes
forth of her shell.” Continuing through the passage, the “she’s” seem to self-multiply. That is
the “she” silkworm melds into the “she” who lays the “Mulberry-leafe upon these little
crawling creatures,” and the “she” who carries “the leafe and them upon it to the tree.”
Ferrar’s syntax does not simply align their work with her own. It also conflates her body with
that of her female silkworms. In this sense, the layering of different “shes” breaks down the

76 The silkworm cycles through four stages or “sicknesses”: 1) infant worms are hatched; 2) they mature into
adulthood worms; 3) they spin cocoons; 4) and emerge as moths. North American varieties included Antheraea
polyphemus, Anisota senatoria, and Hyalophora cecropia and in the hopes of producing new kinds of silk early
English silk promoters invited colonists to experiment with domesticating these “wild” varieties.
space between the human and non-human, and imagines acts of writing, rewriting, spinning, and reforming as the self-replicating work of virginal female laborers.\(^77\)

Despite the absence of male figures in this process, the language of silkworm generation reflects an emergent socio-spatial organization of the home that would become central to bourgeois life, subject formation, and moral authority. That is, a socio-spatial organization in which sexual reproduction happens in the increasingly private space of the bedchamber and social reproduction, education, and socialization happens in spaces turned over to group use. Ferrar, in fact, sees the silkworm cocoon as a miniature of the bedchamber: describing the cocoon as a “silken dormitory,” she frames it as a site hidden from the public eye. However, even as she borrows from a socio-spatial organization centered on heterosexual reproduction, she also imagines silkworm metamorphosis and the regeneration of new silkworm populations as a process that does not seem to need male anatomy at all. Take for instance, these lines. Ferrar writes: “When the leaves of Mulberry-trees begin a little to bud forth, take the eggs of your Silk-worms, and lay them in some warm place about you, in a little safe box, but in the night either lay them in your bed or between two warm pillows, until such time as the Wormes begin to come forth.”\(^78\) According to another source, the most ideal “warm place” for women to keep their worms was, in fact, between their breasts. The language here suggestively reframes both the bedchamber and the woman’s body, and in doing so may be said to also reframe the way that power and authority get mapped onto the socio-spatial organization of the home. The language and practice of silk production, could be

\(^77\) We could understand this as an extension of Gillespie’s argument that women used “domestic identities and rhetorics as a language through which to articulate liberal precepts rewrote many of the scripts that were said to govern women’s identities and lives, by fashioning speaking subjectivities that transcended limitations of class and gender.” See Domesticity and Dissent, pg. 263.

\(^78\) Virginia Ferrar, The reformed Virginian Silkworm (1655 edition), page 3
said to represent a domestic fiction that imagines the new forms of courtship, marriage, and household organization that are central to modern subject—or insect—formation and which women, in particular, play central authorial roles. Moreover, this claiming of domestic authority must be read as a political act.  

In *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, Nancy Armstrong argues that early novels “reorganized the country house around a woman who had nothing but a gendered form of literacy to offer.” Rephrasing this slightly, we might say that Virginia Ferrar reorganized her country house around an insect—one, in fact, that seemed to offer her a gendered model of self-making. Her text captures this gendered model of self-making and provides a perspective on the practice of letters that is deeply informed by gendered labor practices, domestic industry, and a new social organization of the home: notably, however, this is a social and spatial organization that posits the home as a pivotal institution of imperial order. That is, her texts and her practices frame private domestic nature studies and women’s work, in particular, as fundamental to the privatization of new world nature, and the cooption of indigenous labor and knowledge. In doing so, she also seeks to reform New World nature; instead of the traditional representation of the New World as feminized, exotic, and available—a representation that would potentially exclude women readers from occupying the subject position of male “explorer”—her text reforms New World nature as essential to acts of female

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79 Carole Pateman has argued, “Because republican critiques by Locke (as well as Hobbes and Rousseau) liberated men from kingly rule in the political sphere by situating them as rulers over the domestic realm.” In this sense, Ferrar is claiming domestic authority at just the moment when the nature of one’s relationship to the state is being actively contested and women are being reinscribed as subject to the authority of husbands and fathers to whom authority over their persons, homes, and bodies of female relatives is understood as a political right. See Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford 1988). As Gillespie argues, “at the very moment when political relations among men were said to be founded on contract and consent, the ostensibly gender-neutral concept of ‘person’ was invested with gender-based stereotypes that resubjected ‘weak’ and ‘childish’ women to male rule…the inevitability of female subordination is written into its very marrow.” See *Domesticity and Dissent*, pg. 27.

self-fashioning and self-making. As a result, “wild” New World spaces no longer seem dangerous, threatening, or uncontrollable, but instead become associated with feminized domestic practices such as embroidery, drawing, flower arrangement, and sericulture.

However, the practices that she characterizes as a “fit recreation for Ladies”—and arguably components of a bourgeois woman’s “gendered literacy”—were, of course, understood as work for laboring classes in England and for indigenous and colonial peoples in North America. It seems that the silkworm as signifier, metaphor, and specimen could be aligned with other populations as well. For instance, silk tracts regularly refer to the worms as one’s “brood,” linking them to the animal world on one level, but also to the increasingly negative use of the term to describe the offspring of laboring classes. The understanding that these worms live, labor, and die to produce luxury goods for the elite, only furthers the suggestion behind the term. The worms whose cocoons will become silk are killed before they hatch, thus stealing their labor and their lives to feed the consumption of luxury goods. The worms that are allowed to hatch live only to reproduce the next generation of insect laborers before they die. In another poet’s words: “Your labour to the pleasing task is due,/The willing insect toils and spins for you.”

In this construction, the silkworm takes to the task willingly and with pleasure. The logic is that if you feed and house your workers, you have the right to their lives and labor. As a theory of labor suggested for implementation in New World colonies, it no doubt sounds eerily familiar.

Promoters of silk cultivation in England saw it as a way to provide work for a growing population of cheap and largely disempowered labor—that is women and children, and by the 1660’s, it was estimated that silk production employed roughly forty thousand men, women,

and children. In turn, promoters of New World silk production, such as Virginia Ferrar, imagined silk cultivation as an active way of “civilizing” colonial spaces and indigenous peoples. Ferrar’s contribution to early silk cultivation and promotion was unique in the way that it imagined utilizing the Native Virginian silkworm, as well as the “natural” labor of Native American peoples. She put forth, in other words, a plan to “indigenize” silk production in Virginia. By the time she wrote her treatise, laws were already in place that required Virginia landholders to plant a certain number of mulberry trees per acre, as well as to train at least one woman in each colonial household in the art of reeling silk. However, Ferrar imagined a role for Native Americans in this economy, as well: they could grow the Virginia silkworm in what she calls their “humble houses” and sell the cocoons to colonists. In this way, her theory went, “lazy Indians,” in her words, could be integrated into the economic and cultural routes of a commercial empire—even if in notably uneven ways. Selling silk cocoons to English buyers would both transform Indians into active consumers of English commodities and help “reform” English-Indian relations.

The opportunity to reform political and economic ties with native communities was perhaps an anxious concern following the massacres that shaped Virginia in the 1620’s. To

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82 James I required English landholders to plant ten mulberry trees for every 100 acres of an estate. In 1624, any garden less than one acre had to contain at least four mulberry trees, while the 1636 edict to plant “white Mulberry Trees, and attend Silk Worms” was repealed in 1641 and reinstated in 1642. Disobedient colonial planters were fined ten pounds of tobacco for noncompliance. The royal sericulturalist John Bonoeil called for landowners to plant no fewer than two or three thousand trees, anything less being “onye for women wantonly to keepe a few Silk-wormes, with a few Mulbery trees, more for pleasure than for profit.” See Bonoeil, Observations to be Followed for the making of fit rooms, to keepe Silk-wormes in (London: Felix Kyngston, 1620), p. 7, 15-16 and Treatise of the Art of making Silk (London: Felix Kyngston, 1622), pp. 34-5; Charles E. Hatch, Jr., “Mulberry Trees and Silkworms: Sericulture in Early Virginia,” Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 65.1 (1957): 3-61; Joseph Ewan, “Silk Culture in the Colonies,” Agricultural History 43.1 (1969): 129-142.

83 The 1622 Indian massacres were the culmination of two decades of conflict between colonists and the Powhatan confederacy. When Powhatan died in 1618, his brother Opechancanough became chief. Opechancanough did not believe peaceful relations with the colonists could be maintained. Conflict came to a head in the spring of 1622 when a colonist murdered one of Opechancanough’s chief advisers. Opechancanough
do so, Ferrar proposed that Native Americans be paid “five shillings…in any Commodity they desire” for each pound of silkworm cocoons they brought to Virginia planters. In doing so, Ferrar writes, “there may be good hope of their civilizing and conversion; so that they may be likewise great gainers, in body and soul.” 84 This reformation of Native-English relations sought to simultaneously turn Indians into purveyors of New World nature and consumers of European goods—that is, promoters sought a way to naturalize indigenous bodies, souls, and labor into a wider Atlantic commercial economy and belief system. They saw silk as the most profitable way to educate indigenous “desire” and naturalize—if in notably uneven ways—native populations as politically and economically subject to English rule.

While silk production was never particularly successful in seventeenth-century England or the British colonies, it was productive of a rich literary discourse that lasted throughout the century. This literature allows us to see the home as a site of intellectual as well as social and material production and to examine the ways in which women “wove their way into the social fabric”—in the words of Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass; a social fabric that for Virginia Ferrar also included her family’s “web of letters.” 85 These texts reveal certain attitudes about the difference between recreation, labor, and work that cut along class and race lines, as well as regions. However, what this potentially reveals is how what might be understood as a domestic industry practiced by people of different classes, races, and regions was deeply woven into the wider fabric of Atlantic economic and political life:

then launched a series of attacks on 31 separate English settlements and plantations along the James River. One of these attacks actually took place at the home of William Ferrar on Henrico Island and thus would have had particular resonance with the Ferrar’s at Little Gidding. The massacres also directly impacted the dissolution of the Virginia Company and thus figured into the Ferrars’ removal as Deputy Directors and their retirement to Little Gidding.

84 Ferrar, *The Reformed Virginian Silkworm*, p. 11.
85 Jones and Stallbrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, pg. 3.
textiles were perhaps as central to the social fabrication of the Early Modern world and to the making of early modern subjects, as was the practice of letters. Moreover, in texts such as Virginia Ferrar’s *The reformed Virginian silkworm*, these may not have been distinct signifying practices. The formalistic and representational strategies of her text inevitably—if associatively—draw parallels between it and the material it discusses, and invites us to think about how textiles parallel texts as forms that circulate, tell stories, convey messages, and incorporate their users into the social world. Working at the intersections of alphabetic and non-alphabetic texts, Virginia Ferrar reveals not only the parallels between these forms, but that the separation of “tactile” work—spinning, embroidery, weaving—and more “traditional” understandings of what constitutes a written text is, in fact, a historical one that was perhaps being codified at this particular moment in the history of printing. According to Jones and Stallybrass, needlework served as a way through which “women stitched themselves into public visibility” and recorded their “participation…in the larger public world.”

Looking forward into the eighteenth century, the material roots of texts continue to be implicit, but developing understandings of authorship and a privileging of the texts over textiles assists in writing women’s textualities centered on fabric production out of public discourse.

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86 Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, pg. 134.
In December 1719, Richard Steele published a short-lived periodical titled *The Spinster: In defence of the Woolen Manufactures*. Writing under the pseudonym “Rebecca Woolpack,” Steele’s periodical responded to recent crises that beset England’s wool industry as a result of a new fad for Indian calicoes and muslins. While the East India Company had been importing Indian fabrics since the late seventeenth century, the combination of economic recession and new fashions that favored the use of cotton rather than wool fabric resulted in the unemployment of vast numbers of spinners and weavers. In the summer before Steele began publishing his periodical, wool workers protested openly in the streets of London and Norwich, besieged Parliament, destroyed a number of calico printing presses, and violently attacked women wearing calico, tearing their clothes off their bodies. The Spitalfields Riots of the summer of 1719 only abated when the weather cooled and women went back to wearing wool; however, they began again the following summer when warm weather made calico popular again. In order to pacify the increasingly violent population of 250,000 disaffected

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87 *The Spinster* was reprinted in *The Town Talk: The fish-pool, The plebian, The old Whig, The spinster, etc* (London 1789). All references refer to this edition available through Google Books.

wool workers, Parliament passed a bill prohibiting the importation, sale, and use of all calico fabrics in England. However, in order to also appease the East India Company, they purposefully did not ban the sale of calico to North American and West Indian markets.\textsuperscript{89}

Richard Steele’s periodical, published in support of the spinners and weavers that made up the backbone of England’s wool industry, was part of a rich literary discourse responding to the calico crisis from both sides.\textsuperscript{90} While the vast and often violent assemblage of wool workers occupying London streets certainly served to “publish”—that is to make public—their cause, they needed men such as Steele to put their grievances into print. Despite their exclusion from practices of print, wool workers seemed to recognize its importance and in the fall of 1719 approached Steele in order to ask him to take up and “publish” their cause.\textsuperscript{91} In an era when print was becoming the dominate medium through which political and economic debate occurred, to remain “out of print” meant that the wool workers plight would not be properly heard. Without validation in print, protesting wool workers were simply bodies in the street: print, however, made those bodies legible and gave their mass assemblage meaning.

Steele’s periodical initiated a print or pamphlet war that made the plight of spinners and weavers legible to his middling class and elite readers; however, this work also draws important parallels between the spinners work with cloth and the author’s work with words

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\textsuperscript{89} See Eacott, “Making Imperial Compromise,” pg. 737.
\textsuperscript{90} Additional publications circulating in this period include: The Weavers’ True Case; or the Wearing of printed Calicoes and Linen destructive to the Woolen and Silk Manufactures” (October 1719); The Female Manufacturers’ Complaint, Being the humble Petition of Dorothy Distaff; Abigail Spinning-Wheel, Eleanor Reel (January 1720); The Linen Spinster, in the defense of Linen Manufacture, attributed to Jenny Distaff; An Answer to the Spinster, in a letter from Jenny Distaffe to Rebecca Woolpack her half sister (winter 1720); and Brief Answer to a Brief State of Question between the printed and painted Callicoes, and the Woolen and Silk Manufactures, with an Appendix directed to The Spinster (winter 1720).
that is important to this project. Speaking from the perspective of “Rebecca Woolpack,” Steele writes:

I write myself Spinster, because the Laws of my Country call me so, and I that Name us’d in all Writings and Instruments as the Addition and Distinction of a Maiden or single Woman if this Island, denotes to us, that the general Expectation of our Lawgivers was, that the Industry of female Manufacturers would be most laudably employe’d this way, and therefore they give the Office of the Spinster as a Title to the Gentlewoman.\(^9^2\)

Steele’s rather puzzling prose in this passage unmakes a distinction between the work of texts and the work of textiles. His language weaves together the writing of text and the spinning of wool fibers and suggests that both serve as a means of subject formation.\(^9^3\) In lines such as “I write myself Spinster,” he suggests that women’s work in spinning thread makes them legible political and economic subjects, and posits that spinning—that is “the Industry” of women workers—is a way in which these women weave themselves into the social fabric.\(^9^4\) To deny women work of this kind not only denies them income; rather, it disrupts the social fabric of laboring populations that are supported by a network of cloth work: sheep farmers, women spinners, male weavers, tailors, and seamstresses are bound together by their work with wool fibers.

\(^9^2\) Steele, *The Spinster*, pg. 2-3.

\(^9^3\) For readings of textiles as social and material texts see Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge 2001); Juliet Fleming, *Graffiti and the Writing Arts of Early Modern England* (UPenn 2001); Susan Frye’s *Pens and Needles: Women’s Textualities in Early Modern England* (UPenn 2010).

\(^9^4\) For more in depth discussion of women’s roles as spinners see chapters one and three.
I begin this chapter with the calico crisis of 1719 and the responses that occurred both in print and in mass protest because it invites us to consider the intersections between texts and embodied models of representation when it comes to “picturing” the social body. While the calico crisis is legible to us today because of the body of writing it produced, this writing was responding to and making legible acts of representation that were happening outside of print: hands that would have been employed in spinning wool fibers are instead destroying calico printing presses and tearing calico fabrics off the backs of women in the streets. While these protests were certainly violent, they were also deeply symbolic. Marching with distaffs in hand from their homes in Spitalfields to the Palace of Westminster where Parliament was meeting to debate what to do with a growing population of angry wool workers, weavers and spinners cut a path through London which would have taken them directly through London’s financial district. Home to the Royal Exchange and the offices of both the East India Company and the South Sea Company, London’s financial district housed the very companies and institutions that were responsible for their plight. In other words, we might say that the wool workers’ path to political retribution took them first to the very heart of the problem: the institutions that were channeling Atlantic commodities into London shops and thereby radically reshaping economic, political, and social relations throughout the Atlantic world. While we can only imagine what might have happened when this “mob” reached the East India House—still under construction in 1719 and 1720—we can assume that they most likely continued the chant that was ringing throughout London: “Shall the Ingy calicoes be worn whilst the poor weavers and their families perish?”

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96 Quoted in George Rude, Hanoverian London, 1714-1808 (Sutton 2003), pg.186.
The literary discourse debating the calico riots frames it as a national crisis with two women at its very center: laboring women who spin and elite women who wear (or more accurately, do not wear) their manufactures.\textsuperscript{97} For laboring women, a lack of work meant that they would not be able to provide extra support for families, which meant that either they could not marry and have children or that young children would be abandoned to local parishes, or worse, run wild in the streets: that is, the very virtue of England’s laboring class was at stake. In turn, these discourses posit elite women’s volatile tastes and consumption habits as the central cause of the problem and the resulting crisis: a taste for foreign fabric meant both the financial and social ruin of an English nation reliant upon the labor, production, and reproduction of its working population. To consume and wear fabrics of foreign production, the logic went, was not only distinctly un-English but it would lead to the destruction of the social body: the woman dressed in the products of foreign labor not only “looks” less English, but she is also essentially destroying English manufactures and English working class families who make them.

Publications such as Steele’s imagine women spinsters—and the labor of spinning—as the backbone of English society: they are the makers of the fabric that has long defined England’s place in the world of Atlantic commodity exchange and are therefore essential makers of English culture. However, following the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht, this role was increasingly challenged by new commercial relationships with European nations and their colonies. While scholars have examined how the Treaty gave the English increased monopoly over the slave trade, Articles 8 and 9 of the Treaty dramatically impacted the English wool

\textsuperscript{97} Debates about calico, more than any other fabric, are centered on women because these fabrics are solely used in women’s dress and in home furnishings.
industry and the lives of women involved by allowing for the nearly duty free import of French textiles, in particular, and changing the terms and conditions through which English woollen textiles were exported. The calico riots—and the printed discourse that ensues—represent just one response to the anxieties about how Atlantic commerce was changing the lives—and appearance—of people in the metropole. Additional responses, as this chapter will examine, took the form of a variety of print mediums and were translated to the English stage.

While rioting spinners and weavers openly dramatized their plight in the streets of London streets, literary discourses used print to “picture” the connections between women’s bodies, dress, and national belonging. The English stage in this context served as a venue through which to materialize and bring to life the discursive pictures painted by authors such as Steele, Addison, Pope, and others. For instance, dramatic adaptations of Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko* and Richard Ligon’s “Inkle and Yarico,” which were performed throughout the eighteenth century, use textiles—and the bodies of the women who make and wear them—to map how imperial commerce was redefining the nature of national belonging, understandings of national character, and the very contours of nation and colony. English dramas not only staged discussions happening in a metropolitan print public sphere; rather, they also staged women from the other ends of empire.\(^9^8\) Staging the “other” women of empire, I argue, served two purposes: firstly, since cloth and clothing are social texts that interpolate wearers into social worlds, picturing the dress of creole, African, and Indigenous women serves as a way to visually map the demographics of empire and to locate its insiders and outsiders; secondly, staged representations of empire’s “other” women were obviously not accurate

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representations; rather they serve as foils through which to discuss how imperial commerce was shaping gender roles and understandings of feminine virtue at home.

This chapter has three sections. Firstly, I discuss how threats to the English wool industry give new social and economic meaning to the textiles that comprise women’s dress. While dress is always as symbolic as it is material, expanding commercial networks in the eighteenth century—and the new textiles they made available to English consumers—were reconfiguring the social body, both in the sense of what it looked like as well as who it wove into the “social fabric.” Secondly, I discuss how these expanding networks initiate the project of picturing women. Periodicals, essays, and poems interrogating the relationship between cloth and the body it clothes locate women’s fashions as central to issues such as national character and imperial commerce. And thirdly, I examine how the theater works through these concerns by staging the bodies of creole, African, and Indigenous women. As Parliament passed laws seeking to protect domestic textile industries, the theater helps visualize New World populations as consumers of English exports such as wool and re-exports such as calico, while naturalizing them into roles as guides and laborers in the extractive practices of colonialism. In this sense, this chapter looks at the relationships the textile trade establishes among three women: the “spinster,” the “woman of quality,” and the “creole.”

ENGLISH WOOL WORKERS AND THE ATLANTIC TEXTILE TRADE, 1700-1720

Between 1700 and 1720, English wool workers waged an almost continuous war against imported textiles. They protested the East India Company’s importation of Indian
textiles, as well as Article 8 and 9 of the Treaty of Utrecht which opened up the textile trade with France, allowing for the importation of French linens and silks. At the end of the seventeenth century wool was England’s most valuable export, and up until this period sheep farmers and workers involved in cloth manufacturer were figured as the moral fiber of English industry; however, in this twenty-year period, foreign-produced linens, silks, and calicoes reflecting a new world of Atlantic commodity exchange reoriented domestic wool workers’ place in the world.  

Women’s domestic industry—in the form of spinning—was one of the least visible yet most widely threatened sector of the English textile industry. Spinning was—and would continue to be—an essential form of domestic labor that tied women and their homes to local economies and the wider circuits of global commerce. Wool manufacture remained a cottage industry for much of the century, meaning that once wool was “harvested” raw wool would be distributed to local women to be spun into thread.  

Spinning meant extra income for working women; however, it had long been figured as a form of domestic virtue for working and elite women alike. Long figured as a nation of sheep farmers and wool workers, spinning was also essential to configurations of national character.  

A number of laws and acts—as well as more literary publications—proliferated in this period, seeking to both protect the wool industry throughout as well as valorize the labor and virtue of its workers—women spinners, in particular.

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100 See Kerridge, Textile Manufactures and Smail, Merchants, Markets, and Manufacture.

101 See Jones and Stallybrass, Renaissance Clothing, Part II.
For instance, in the following proposed law from the Lancashire Record Office in 1702, wool is represented as a learned art or expressive form central to gendered understandings of female industry:

In every town, to have a "matronlike woman" to teach girls to read, spin, and do needlework, to whom parents should be obliged to send their daughters…That manufactures be thus encouraged; that every woman, without distinction of quality, be obliged to spin a small quantity--such as 20 pounds--of wool or flax every year, and deliver it to the company at a set price; and that those who spin the finest and make most cloth in every parish, should be rewarded with a spinning-wheel; and if any young woman gained the prize twice, the magistrates should be obliged to offer her a suitable husband.102

The proposal reflects early aspects of women’s education: girls were taught to read, spin, and sew rather than to read and write.103 Women’s work with cloth, in other words, is considered as a type of “literacy” and represents gendered forms of poesis. This proposal understands textiles as mediums that incorporate their “authors” and users into social and economic worlds. In other words, women’s work with cloth is fundamental to the fabric of these rural societies. Not only is strong spinning and needlework worthy of reward, but these skills figure as the means through which women’s value is articulated and are essential to kinship ties: a good spinner is a good wife. and a suitable husband.

102 “AN ADDRESS, signed "W. S.,” to JAMES, EARL OF DERBY, in which the writer proposes certain new laws for the Isle of Man.” Lancashire Record Office: DDKE/acc. 7840 HMC/1081, 1702-36.
If the proposal above outlines the significance of domestic industry tied to textile production to the social and biological reproduction of English subjects, trends favoring imported textiles were not simply an economic threat to the domestic wool industry; rather the virtue of England’s laboring populations itself was at stake. This threat took two forms in this period. Firstly, Indian cotton calicoes were a lighter weight, colorful, and inexpensive substitute for woolens that cost nearly one-eighth the price. Secondly, following the Treaty of Utrecht, the influx of French silks and linens further diversified the fabrics available to English consumers at relatively affordable prices.

Wool workers responded to these crises en mass and in print. The calico import trade was largely neutralized by Acts passed in 1700 and 1720. The 1700 Act banned the importation of all printed and dyed calicoes from India, China, or Persia but allowed for the continued importation of plain—unprinted and undyed—calicoes. As a result, calico printing businesses sprung up in great numbers as entrepreneurs transformed technologies designed to print on paper for use in printing on cloth, and calico again seemed to represent a threat to the wool industry. To appease rioting wool workers, the 1720 Calico Act not only restricted the importation of all calicoes but, in fact, made "the Use and Warings in Apparel of imported chintz, and also its use or Wear in or about any Bed, Chair, Cushion or other Household furniture" a finable offense. Notably, these restrictions only applied to metropolitan

104 Cotton calicoes were also called chintz, muslin, fustian, and gauze depending on the finishing techniques. For the relatively cheap pricing of calico in comparison to wool see Eacott, “Making Imperial Compromise.”
107 1720 Calico Act.
England. North American and West Indian colonies continued to be ready markets for these textiles; in fact, they were their biggest markets for a greater part of the century.  

The second major threat to domestic wool production was caused by the Treaty of Utrecht. Articles 8 and 9 of the treaty outlined new trade agreements with France that threatened to flood English markets with French-produced textiles, as well as textiles dyed blue with French Caribbean produced indigo that would be cheaper than the English equivalents. In light of these Articles, a number of printed critiques circulated that condemned these textiles’ ties to non-national spaces and non-national labor and expressed concern over how these items would “unmake” the social body: laboring classes would starve and elite classes would take on the airs of foreign courts. The author of the *British Merchant*, for instance, writes:

> What I expect from this Treaty is no Vent at all for any of our woolen manufactures to the French nation, but such an inundation of wrought silks and linens from that country, as must carry out yearly great quantities of our bullion, destroy numberless looms in the silk, linen, and woolen manufactures…we are able to make all the silks and linen we have occasion for, for our own uses so that we really want hardly any thing from abroad that is manufactur’d; and if we wear it, tis a folly.”

The author contends that Articles 8 and 9 will reduce men and women involved in textile industry to poverty and make the nation “cash poor.” However, he also posits that foreign cloth would represent the wearer’s—and by proxy, the nation’s—“folly.” Clothes mark the

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108 See Eacott, “Making Imperial Compromise.”  
109 Harkness, “The Opposition to the 8th and 9th Articles.”  
110 See *British Merchant; Or, Commerce Preserv’d* (London 1713), pg. 155. Available at The Library Company of Philadelphia.
body, and foreign textiles would mark English bodies as both foolish and compromised: folly in this period was also used to signify a lack of “chastity” or “virtue.” International commerce, the author suggests, represents a kind of intercourse with foreign nations that will compromise the social body.

Scholars have considered the how new markets in textiles such as calico, linen, and silk triggered new social and economic relations from a number of angles: they have reflected on the causes of their popularity in this period; how and why debates surrounding importation centered on women’s consumption habits; how reactions in print and in public protest compared to other forms of political debate in the long eighteenth century; and how this trade impacted industrialization. However, they have largely ignored how textile networks may have helped articulate the contours of belonging in the British Atlantic world. As Jonathan Eacott writes, speaking of the Calico Acts in particular, “a wide cross section of people, particularly in London, rhetorically invoked colonists in [these] debates,” and “assigned the colonists new functions and positions as distinct consumers of India goods within the empire’s economic system.” For Eacott, the 1720 Calico Act, in particular, demarcates colonial and metropolitan consumer groups by imagining the American colonies as rich targets for re-export markets; however, in a period in which cloth serves as social text that marks the body of its wearer, I would add that non-English textiles—including but not limited

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to calico—serve as a means of visualizing the demographics of empire. After the 1720 Act, the woman dressed in calico would certainly be recognizable as a colonial subject; however, women in China silks, Peruvian brocades, and North American furs would be equally suspect.

PICTURING WOMEN

In the first quarter of the eighteenth century, British authors were actively debating the relationship between cloth and the body it clothes. If clothes are social texts that reveal a series of social and economic relations, they seem to ask, then how do they define their wearers? Moreover, if clothes weave one into a social world, with the rapid expansion of global textile networks what worlds might English subjects find themselves woven into? A variety of new fabrics, prints, and colors increasingly available to English consumers resulting in new fashion trends for elite and middling class English women—as well as demanding seamstresses and lady’s maids to develop new skills or “tactile” literacies when it came to fashioning these materials. These new textiles and fashions gave rise to a rich literary discourse committed to “picturing women”; that is, to describing, critiquing, and circumventing the relationship between cloth and the female body. 113

London’s financial district—the home of the East India Company’s English headquarters and one of the locations of the calico riots—served as a particular locus of fascination and derision for authors involved in the project of picturing women in the first quarter of the eighteenth century As the home to merchants, money-lenders, joint stock

companies, and the Royal Exchange, writers of the day such as Daniel Defoe, Richard Steele, Joseph Addison, and Edward Ward associate the neighborhood with the acquisition of New World wealth and commodities, as well as with the iniquities of trade and anxieties about the contamination of the metropole by racial and national others as exotic commodities infiltrate the domestic spaces of the nation and seemingly threaten the “virtue” of its people. As a site generated by international trade and commerce, it is defined by its permeability. Other than the nation’s ports, this is the place where global markets permeate the metropole and where an international community of merchants congregates. Women, moreover, were active players in this world.\(^\text{114}\) They worked and shopped in stores located at the Exchange and modeled understandings of cosmopolitan consumption and desire. As the Grand Duke Cosmo of Tuscany noted, the Exchange contained “great numbers of very rich shops of drapers and mercers filled with goods of every kind…[that are] for the most part under the care of well-dressed women, who are busily employed in work.”\(^\text{115}\) Women wore and staged the wares they offered for sale.

As producers of material social texts and publics, women’s bodies and “habits”—their clothes as well as their behavior—are at the very center of questions of national, social, and economic importance. In the first quarter of the eighteenth-century, English authors actively debated the role of women as producers and consumers. Writers such as Joseph Addison, for instance, interrogate the role of women in the currents of global commerce. Should they be


active participants in and mutual “makers” of this world? Or merely a backdrop on which to display of the reach of imperial commerce? For Addison, it is merchants who “knit mankind together in a mutual intercourse of good offices, distribute the gifts of Nature, find work for the poor, add wealth to the rich, and magnificence to the great.” Merchants, in Addison’s phrasing, exchange their “wool for rubies.”116 Addison’s language is particularly suggestive: the ability to alchemize wool into wealth belongs to merchants, whose commerce, in turn, “knits” mankind together. Effectively writing women wool spinners out of the narrative, he adapts the language of cloth work to the work of commerce and identifies merchants—rather than spinners, weavers, or seamstresses—the makers of Atlantic culture and trade the fabric that weaves its actors together.

Cataloguing the items, peoples, and places “knit” together by trade, he does begin to imagine how the Englishwoman is woven into this world. He writes:

Nature seems to have taken a particular Care to disseminate her Blessings among the different Regions of the World, with an Eye to this mutual Intercourse and Traffick among Mankind, that the Natives of the several Parts of the Globe might have a kind of Dependance upon one another, and be united together by their common Interest. Almost every Degree produces something peculiar to it. The Food often grows in one Country, and the Sauce in another. The Fruits of Portugal are corrected by the Products of Barbadoes: The Infusion of a China Plant sweetned with the Pith of an Indian Cane: The Philippick Islands give a Flavour to our European Bowls. The Single Dress of a Woman of Quality is often the Product of an hundred Climates. The

Muff and the Fan come together from the different Ends of the Earth. The Scarf is sent from the Torrid Zone, and

the Tippet from beneath the Pole. The Brocade Petticoat rises out of the Mines of Peru, and the Diamond Necklace out of the Bowels of Indostan (204-205).\textsuperscript{117}

Addison’s account is a blazon of imperial commerce. Traveling from the Pole to the Torrid Zone, touching down in Barbados, China, India, and South America, his list describes the commodities “native” to each “degree”—including, it seems, native peoples. In his puzzling phrasing, the Englishwoman is only figured in this picture through her dress. Syntactically, the “dress” rather than the “woman” is the subject of the sentence and articles of this dress have the capacity \textit{to act}: muffs and fans “come together,” and petticoats and necklaces “rise.” In this sense, a composite of materials that seem to possess self-volition “make” the woman of quality: she only figures in this account as metonymically referenced by the items that comprise her dress. Addison’s syntax troubles the relationship between cloth and the body it clothes and therefore between surface and subject. Rather than harnessing raw materials as a means of self-making or subject formation, the female body serves as an avenue for the cultivation of Nature’s gifts. Her quintessential Englishness is derived from the ways in which she can stage the spoils of otherworldly origins. To put it another way, globally sourced textiles \textit{unmake} the English woman.

While Addison revels in the world of commodity of exchange, a number of other prominent authors view commerce’s impact on English subjects—and women in particular—with concern and even derision. Alexander Pope, perhaps most notably, takes up this topic in

\textsuperscript{117} See Mackie, \textit{The Commerce of Everyday Life}, pg. 203-206
his satire of the “Woman of Quality.” In *The Rape of the Lock*, published in 1712, the “spoils” of a variety of geographies that litter Belinda’s dressing table also take on a life of their own. Pope writes:

Unnumber'd treasures ope at once, and here

The various off'rings of the world appear;

From each she nicely culls with curious toil,

And decks the Goddess with the glitt'ring spoil.

This casket India's glowing gems unlocks,

And all Arabia breathes from yonder box.

The Tortoise here and Elephant unite,

Transformed to combs, the speckled, and the white.118

The commodities of global trade infiltrate this most intimate of spaces. Gems and ivory from the India and China trade, perfumes from Arabia, and tortoise shell (possibly) harvested from the Atlantic “ope,” “appear,” “breathe,” and “unite.” Trade transforms Belinda’s dressing table into a curiosity cabinet celebrating the reach of empire and presenting the “offerings of the world”; but we might also consider how Belinda herself is figured as part of this menagerie—as yet another treasure or specimen “transformed” by trade into a commodity.

However, Pope’s poem also seems to reflect on how trade impacted laboring women in London. Rather than English servants, Pope attributes the labor of dressing Belinda to “busy Sylphs” who “surround their darling care.” They “set the head,” “divide the hair,” “fold

the sleeve,” and “plait the gown.”\textsuperscript{119} By attributing the labor that goes into shaping Belinda’s appearance to sylphs, Pope seems to comment on the exportation of labor and production to non-national locales where costs of production are less expensive. In this instance, labor occurs in places such as India, China, and the American colonies where “pagan” sylphs work for nearly free. The result, of course, is that Belinda’s maid, Betty, risks being displaced: if she is “prais'd for labours not her own,”\textsuperscript{120} then she may also be disposable. Echoing the complaints of wool workers, Pope’s fleeting reference to Betty comments on how new Atlantic configurations of labor and production impacted English laborers, especially those involved in English textile industries such as spinners and seamstresses.

Foreign-produced textiles weave English women into \textit{colonial} formations of labor, production, and power, and invite us to read these descriptions as scenes of colonial encounter. In “Coloniality, Performance, Translation: The Embodied Public Sphere in Early America,” Elizabeth Maddock Dillon defines “colonial encounter” as “a \textit{scene}—an embodied performance,\textsuperscript{121} that is “shot through with operations of power and violence.”\textsuperscript{122} While her work looks at the translation of English texts to New World contexts, I would like to suggest that in the descriptions of English women dressed in the globally sourced materials outlined above, authors such as Addison and Pope similarly stage scenes of colonial encounter: it is through the body of their “woman of quality” that a relationship with colonial spaces and peoples is embodied and performed.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{119} Pope, \textit{Rape of the Lock}.
\item \textsuperscript{120} Pope, \textit{Rape of the Lock}.
\item \textsuperscript{121} Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, “Coloniality, Performance, Translation: The Embodied Public Sphere in Early America.” Translating America: The Circulation of Narratives, Commodities, and Ideas Between Italy, Europe, and the United States (Plymouth 2011?), pg. 179.
\item \textsuperscript{122} Dillon, “Coloniality, Performance, Translation,” pg. 178.
\end{itemize}
Debates about how Atlantic textile networks impact English textile industries make colonial spaces and colonized people visible. For instance, the author of *The Female Manufacturers’ Complaint* blames foreign textiles “made by heathens and pagans who work for a halfpenny a day” for “the ruin” of English wool workers.\(^{123}\) In turn, Richard Steele suggests that the East India Company was importing more than calico textiles into London: Indian servants were infiltrating the metropole as well. Inventing a dialogue that he supposedly overheard between two Indian servants outside of the East India House in Leadenhall Street, he records the following:

The poor Indian, governing himself by outward appearances, and what he observed wherever he went, was overheard to say, “I cannot see, Pompey, in what the people of this country excel those of ours, except it be that they are governed by their wives; they go to our country to bring home to their women fine dresses from head to foot.”\(^{124}\)

Steele’s Indian speaker suggests that the entire East India trade is driven by women’s consumer desires. Moreover, in allowing women to dictate the conditions of commerce, men risk being “governed by their wives.” Steele’s anecdote reflects discourses that associate the rise of credit and fortunes made in trade—as well as men who make their fortunes this way—with “feminine” characteristics: the values of stocks and bonds are not stable and fluctuate with the emotion driven “fancies” and “fashions” of the people.\(^{125}\)


\(^{124}\) *The Town Talk: The fish-pool, The plebian, The old Whig, The spinster, etc.*, pg. 423

But what might we make of the fact that Steele chooses to frame this critique through an overheard conversation happening between two Indian servants at the heart of London’s financial district? I argue that Steele stages a scene of colonial encounter. By asking readers to look at London through the eyes of the Indian speaker who governs himself “by outward appearances,” he asks readers to adopt a new way of seeing—a way of seeing imported to the metropole along with Indian textiles. What is different about this scene of colonial encounter, in other words, is that it happens in the metropole and it reverses what might be understood as a colonial gaze with its concommitent power relations. In this sense, Steele suggests that—rather than England colonizing India—Indian textiles are colonizing England, specifically through the way that they mark English women’s bodies.

Steele seems to recognize how cloth and clothing embody, reveal, and “stage” social relations. As parting advice in the first issue of *The Spinster*, for instance, he recommends women to follow the example of *The Spartan Dame*, a play written by Thomas Southerne and performed in 1719. He writes, “As I am talking to the female world, whose apparel is the cause of this evil…let me recommend imitation of the Sparten Dame, now represented on the stage, where they will find the duty of a lady not restrained to domestic life, but enlarging the concern for her family into that of her country.”

Steele rehearses the argument that the welfare of home and country are interrelated: a concern for one’s family extends to a concern for one’s nation. However, Steele suggests that dress is an active way to enact or perform one’s duty to nation. To a certain extent, Steele identifies the protesting spinners and

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127 In the play itself, Cleo (the eponymous heroine) models the following relationship to dress: “My beauties, such as they are, are honest, and my own; they go to bed with me, with me they rise, and need not many hours in putting on, besides, for me to court my morning glass, and practice looks, were loss of time indeed. I am already what the vanity of a fond dressing pride, in all its height, and wantonness of expectation can
weavers for whom he writes as engaged in just such a public performance—they are all Spartan Dames whose domestic work with wool secures England’s commercial place in the Atlantic: they are a model, Steele suggests, that elite women would benefit from mimicking.

STAGING COLONIAL ENCOUNTER

Costume was an important facet of English theatergoers’ experience. Costume designers seem to have had two techniques for visualizing and representing “foreignness”: the “fashion” or style of the costume and the materials that went into making it. Engravings depicting the costumes of various Imoindas and Yaricos often combine styles of “foreign” fashion—elaborate headdresses, for instance—with items standard to English dress—petticoats, stays, and hoops—to which they incorporate material objects associated with foreign locals: exotic feathers, North American furs, and beads. While feathers and beads may resonate as “otherworldly” almost immediately, the fabric used would also register with an English public: the most common fabrics that were used in these costumes were the silks and calicoes that seemed to threaten the livelihoods of English wool workers. Featuring costumes comprised of Indian cotton muslin and calico, Chinese silks, and American beads, feathers, and furs—often all at the same time—these costumes did not necessarily represent any particular woman or nation; rather, they served as social material texts that staged

raise my wishes to; I am your wife, most honour’d in that title; and despise th’ applause and breath of any other praise, than of my virtue, and obedience now. “These lines from The Spartan Dame depict a woman who seems to be the very opposite of Pope’s Belinda. See Plays Written by Thomas Southerne, Esq: The fate of Capua, etc. (London 1774), pg. 101. Available through Google Books. These lines from The Spartan Dame depict a woman who seems to be the very opposite of Pope’s Belinda.
“otherness.” As imported French and Indian textiles are mapped onto the bodies of the non-English women that dramas stage, global commercial networks materialize on the stage as spectacle—as a site through which audiences can practice fantasies of conquest as well as visualize the demographics of empire and nation that are tied to the legible performance of identity through aesthetic, embodied signifiers such as dress. This is not to say that playwrights and the people working on costumes had any direct stakes in the wool workers’ plight—although tailors and seamstresses would certainly have known the origins of the materials comprising second-hand dresses they altered for the stage were made of. Rather, I argue, English publics were familiar with reading cloth and clothing as social texts that clothe the body in a series of social relations—relations, that is, that may locate one extra-nationally. While theater often stages the various New Worlds as viewers would like to see them—as a virtual paradises populated by exotic peoples and plants—it also serves as an avenue through which to demarcate the demographics of empire through visual, if imagined, characteristics.

In this sense, the stage was uniquely positioned as a meta-geography: As a site that performs or mimics life and stages material bodies and objects, the English theatre is an apt space through which to explore how material practices and material texts—in the form of textiles, that is—are shaping the contours of nation and colony, colonizer and colonized. While Southerne’s Spartan Dame may have provided a model for elite metropolitan women to mimic, dramas featuring New World places and peoples staged her counterparts: Imoindas, Yaricos, and a variety of Indian Queens and Princesses were some of the most popular


heroin on the English stage in the long eighteenth century. In particular, dramas featuring the “other women” of empire reveal how imperial commerce is a “bodily enterprise” both in the sense of transporting large numbers of bodies across vast spaces, but also in the sense of controlling, disciplining, or deploying those bodies for the benefit of empire. In this setting, women and racial others become sites through which to map English dominance, and drama helps develop discursive strategies for managing these types of bodies through the performance of their outward representations.

Staged originally in 1695 and popular throughout the eighteenth century, Thomas Southerne’s dramatic adaptation of Aphra Behn’s Oroonoko visualizes the tensions inherent in gendered, creole identity. Southerne’s adaptation is most notable for two changes to Behn’s original text: he adds the comedic plot following the husband-hunting adventures of the Welldon sisters, and recasts Imoinda as the white daughter of a European gentleman who had immigrated to Angola. By reimagining Imoinda as a European woman born outside of Europe, Southerne recasts her, in other words, as a colonial or creole subject. Staged throughout the eighteenth century, the various costumes of different Imoindas serve as material texts recording evolving anxieties about the nature of coloniality, and how living in colonial spaces marks one’s body and one’s “habits.”

130 See Nussbaum, Rival Queens.
131 For the connections between staged bodies and identity, see Cynthia Lowenthal, Performing Identities on the English Stage (Southern Illinois 2002); for the idea of empire as a bodily enterprise, see Joyce Chaplin, Subject Matter: Technology, the Body, and Science on the Anglo-American Frontier, 1500-1676 (Harvard 2003).
132 Joyce Green McDonald argues that Imoinda represents the “enforced invisibility of the black female subject in the Americas' dominant cultural discourse” (2 ) See McDonald, “The Disappearing African Woman: Imoinda in Oroonoko after Behn.” ELH. Volume 66, Number 1, Spring 1999, pp. 71-86. Nussbaum also discusses Imoinda’s “whiteness.” She writes: “Actresses who first appeared on stage were, of course, often considered sexually corrupt, a characteristic which was sometimes portrayed as racialized as well. Unlike the racial mixture embodied in the blackened white actors playing Oroonoko and Othello, femininity resists being reconceptualized as racial mixture in a nation coming to define itself and its women to a significant degree by skin color and quality.” See The Limits of the Human: Fictions of Anomaly, Race and Gender in the Long Eighteenth Century (Cambridge 2003), pg. 19.
While there are few descriptions of Imoinda’s costume from the early eighteenth-century, several images of actresses in that role circulated as frontispieces for later printed editions of the play. For instance, when Elizabeth Hartley played Imoinda in the mid-eighteenth century her costume combined elements of the familiar and the foreign: utilizing aspects of English, Native American, and African dress, it layered aesthetics and social texts from different regions—real and imagined—and time periods. In many ways, Imoinda’s costume reads like a series of layered ethnographies all mapped onto the body of the white creole woman. She wears a silk petticoat, embellished with leaves, vines, and feathers, which gained popularity in the earlier quarter of the eighteenth century, and which was most likely made from French silks entering English markets after the Treaty of Utrecht. In turn, the lace ruffles on her sleeves could be French or Dutch in origin. Draped over the French petticoat, the next layer appears to consist of either patterned Indian cottons made to look like furs native to either the Americas or the African continent. Her headdress similarly conflates geographies by combining imported feathers with flowers naturalized to England. And lastly, holding a bow and arrow she signifies both an aristocratic pastime for elite women as well as European fantasies about indigenous, Amazonian “types.” In many ways, her clothes represent the fantasy of primitive accumulation inscribed onto the body of the colonial

133 Engraved by Guy Green between 1777-80, Liverpool. Included in Bell’s British Theatre (Liverpool 1780). Archive.org.
woman, as well as the realization of that wealth as seen in the appearance of cosmopolitan women such as Pope’s Belinda and Addison’s woman of quality.

Imoinda’s dress is a social and material text that embodies “scenes” of colonial encounter: it characterizes the uneven power relations structured by Atlantic commerce but also serves as a site through which cultural meanings could be made and contested. At once familiar and disorienting, theater costumes such as this one may have helped formulate, in Robyn Wiegman’s words, a “cultural trust in the objectivity of observation”\textsuperscript{134} that was essential to the discursive production of identity and so fundamental to representations of encounter. The stage, and circulating representations of the characters presented, may participate in mapping the demographics of empire by training “the eye not only how [to see] but what to see.”\textsuperscript{135} But what exactly would English theatergoers \textit{see} when they witnessed a performance of \textit{Oroonoko}? And how would they read the connections between the social script of Imoinda’s dress and the body it clothes, marks, and defines? By dressing Imoinda in a combination of foreign textiles and out-dated English fashions, this engraving locates the creole woman both temporally and spatially at the edges of English modernity.

When Mrs. Kemble played Imoinda in 1791, the character’s costume underwent new changes that associate her even more directly creole populations and colonial export

\textsuperscript{134} Robin Wiegman, \textit{American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender} (Duke 1995), pg. 9
\textsuperscript{135} Wiegman, \textit{American Anatomies}, pg. 22.
markets. The loose fitting bodice and skirt, tucked up at one side—in comparison to tight laced stays and formally embroidered petticoat in the previous depiction—are reminiscent of Agostino Brunias’ depictions of Afro-creole women that began to circulate in England in the 1770’s in which he depicts creole women’s dress. Moreover, rather than silk brocade, Mrs. Kemble’s Imoinda appears to be dressed entirely in printed Indian calicos and muslins. As discussed above, the Calico Act of 1720 meant that Indian muslins were not readily accessible in England; however, they were both available in the West Indies and desirable because they were lighter than silks or linens. Unlike the depiction of Imoinda discussed above, this engraving dramatizes the transformation of West Indian islands into markets for Britain’s re-export trade. Rather than using an imagined composite of unlikely materials to signal the creole woman’s illegibility, by dressing her in Indian muslins this engraving, in fact, interpolates her into English textile networks that were re-exporting cotton muslins to both West African and West Indian markets: calicoes were exchanged for people on the coast of Africa and used to clothe enslaved populations in the West Indies. But this is not to say that this engraving is without ambiguities of its own. Superimposing the figure onto a landscape that appears to be English as represented by the rolling hills and deciduous trees, the engraving uses both dress and landscape to represent creole identity and signal her unbelonging: Imoinda may be European but long residence elsewhere means that she can no longer fit into English landscape. The caption at the bottom of the engraving further signals the tensions of creole identity: “There’s something in that name, that voice, that face—Oh if I know myself I cannot be mistaken.” The quote—“if I know myself I cannot be mistaken”—

137 I discuss this trade more fully in chapter 4.
raises the question of whether creoles can truly know themselves. Imoinda’s character and the way different women actresses portray her would invite theatergoers to ask, who and what are creoles, where do they belong, and with whom?

The account of Inkle and Yarico takes up and revises these concerns as it is adapted throughout the eighteenth-century. First appearing in Richard Ligon’s 1657 *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbadoes*, the story was adapted as a 1711 essay in *The Spectator*, as poems and epistles written from the perspective of Yarico, and as a 1787 comic opera written by George Coleman the Younger and performed throughout the Atlantic world on stages in Dublin, Kingstown, Jamaica, New York, and Boston. In most versions of the tale, Yarico protects the ship-wrecked Inkle from her countrymen and they become lovers, living in a home carved out of an American wilderness and removed from the society of both Englishmen and Amerindians. When an English ship comes to the island, Yarico forsakes her own home and country to remain with Inkle and they travel to Barbados where, surrounded again by his own countrymen and the temptations of the market, he sells Yarico and her unborn child into slavery. In its various adaptations, the story comments on how commerce leads to the corruption English subjects; however, as in Thomas Southerne’s *Oroonoko*, “Inkle and Yarico” also asks questions about what types of relationships Atlantic commerce establishes between people of different races and nations and what forms of cultural production and uneven power relations scenes of encounter stage.

“Inkle and Yarico” is especially interesting in the ways in which reverses the scene of encounter depicted in adaptations of *Oroonoko*. Rather than a European woman interpolated

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into social and economic relations figuring West African and Caribbean societies, it stages or pictures the encounter between an English trader and an indigenous woman. Moreover, Inkle’s origins bring us back to the location with which I began this chapter: London’s financial district. Steel describes Inkle as the “third son of an eminent citizen, who had taken particular care to instill into his mind an early love of gain, by making him a perfect master of numbers and consequently giving him a quick view of loss and advantage, and preventing the natural impulses of his passions, by prepossession towards his interests.” Inkle is a London “cit”—a member of the commercial classes whose wealth is linked to trade and fortunes made or lost in Exchange Alley. Rather than identifying the New World as a site of potential corruption for English subjects, Steele seems to suggest that this is something that happens at home. Raised in the shadow of the Royal Exchange, Inkle’s love of gain, mastery of numbers, and prepossession to act only from motives of self-interest are all firmly established before he reaches the Americas.

Perhaps for these reasons, the scene of encounter in “Inkle and Yarico” dramatizes the commodification of New World specimens and raw materials. Nearly all adaptations of the story are particularly curious about what, exactly, Yarico and her home look like. Steele, for instance, describes their encounter as follows:

The Indian grew immediately enamoured of him, and consequently solicitous for his preservation: She therefore conveyed him to a cave, where she gave him a delicious repast of fruits and led him to a stream to slake his thirst. In the midst of these good offices, she would sometimes play with his hair, and delight in the opposition of its colour, to that of her fingers: Then open his bosom, then laugh at him for covering it.

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139 *English Trader, Indian Maid*, pg. 86.
She was, it seems, a person of distinction, for she every day came to him in a different
dress, of the most beautiful shells, bugles and bredes. She likewise brought him a great
many spoils, which her other lovers had presented to her; so that his cave was richly
adorned with all the spotted skins of beasts, and most party-coloured feathers of fowls,
which that world afforded.\textsuperscript{140}

The description seems to vacillate quickly between romance and what might be understood as
ethnography or natural history. The passage begins by describing the intimacy developing
between Inkle and Yarico: she provides shelter, food, and physical intimacy. However, this
particular commerce serves only to foreshadow another type of commerce. Cataloguing her
dress and the furnishings in her home, the passage shifts both in style and tone as it list of
potential commodities: shells, beads, skins, feathers, and of course, Yarico herself who is “a
person of distinction.” Not unlike natural histories, this account taxonomizes new World
specimens, raw materials, and inhabitants in order to make them legible as specimen-
commodities for English consumers.

More so than Steele’s earlier version of “Inkle and Yarico,” Colman’s dramatic
adaptation establishes more direct links between the traders and merchants, such as Inkle,
associated with London’s financial district, and the commodification of New World spaces
and peoples and the establishment of the Americas as markets for England’s re-export trade.
For instance, Inkle’s servant, Trudge, exclaims: “What a fool I was to leave London for
foreign parts!—That ever I should leave Threadneedle-street, to thread an American forest,
where a man’s as soon lost as a needle in a bottle of hay!”\textsuperscript{141} Threadneedle Street, of course,
was the London home of the South Sea Company. Trudge’s repetition of the word “thread”

\textsuperscript{140} \textit{English Trader, Indian Maid}, 85
\textsuperscript{141} George Colman, \textit{Inkle and Yarico}, pg. 186. Accessed through Project Gutenberg.
here gestures to how commercial textile networks weave together the various peoples and places of an English empire. Threadneedle Street’s reach extends to American forests, reimagining New World forests and the people who call them home as markets for English goods and suppliers of raw materials and labor. While the term “thread” relates to the difficulty of finding one’s way in what is imagined by the author as an overgrown and uncultivated forest, Trudge is also making a sexual pun: both Threadneedle Street and the American forest are imagined simultaneously as spaces connected to economic gain and sexualized geographies of exchange—sites in other words that conflate sex, accumulation, and commerce.142 Inkle himself takes this metaphor further, as he contemplates how to make American spaces turn a profit: “how much it [the forest] might be able to produce by the acre,” he ponders, and “if so many natives could be caught, how much they might fetch at the West Indian markets.”143 The American forests are imagined as sites that produce raw labor and material ready for English commercial and romantic consumption, suggesting that romantic desire and careful economic planning are linked in the bourgeois imaginary—the natural impulses of his passions are tempered by his interests.

142 The etymology of “Threadneedle Street” is not entirely known, but it has been suggested that the name could be a reference to its former name, “Gropecunt Lane,” which, as the euphemism suggests, was much frequented by prostitutes. The metaphor of threading a needle maintains some of this reference and seems to suggest that the Royal Exchange functions as both a site of economic and illicit sexual commerce.

143 Colman, *Inkle and Yarico*, pg. 177.
While Steele’s account and Colman’s script simply list the items that define Yarico’s person and home, engravings that accompanied printed editions of George Coleman the Younger’s stage adaption, *Inkle and Yarico: An Opera, In Three Acts*, “picture” and reframe the scene of encounter. In particular, they recreate the passage from Steele above by imagining the New World spaces as sites of both romantic desire and material gain. These images most often frame the encounter as a scene of discovery in which Inkle “finds” a secreted Yarico; however, the two engravings included here reflect very different imperial projects. The first stages Yarico as nearly naked and as a part of and merging with the natural landscape. The second, stages her as dressed in classical looking robes that appear to be made of the Indian cottons sold in American markets. Both images are reminiscent of DeBry’s *Vespucci Awakens America* in which New World spaces are aligned with vulnerable yet sexually suggestive indigenous women’s bodies and European men are pictured as awakening their productive and reproductive potential, engravings of Yarico similarly situate her body and her home as sites of material and sexual exploitation. However, while the first frames Yarico—dressed in feathers and beads and sleeping on a fur mat—and the world she inhabits as potential site for extractive colonial practices, the second image shows her dressed in the cotton muslins so important to
England’s re-export trade. The two images serve as bookends in the project of imperial commerce as extractive practices give way to the making of American spaces and peoples into markets for and consumers of British goods.

The wool workers’ public protests, with which I began this chapter, shaped the contours of Atlantic commercial markets in the long eighteenth century in fundamental ways. The 1720 Calico Act created a market for Indian goods in the Americas, but also imagined how the monopolization of the supply of these goods would both protect English manufactures and the people who produced and appease East India traders and merchants. Reimagining calico as solely a re-export commodity served to channel the wealth created by this trade through London without endangering its own textile industry and textile workers. Newspapers such as the British Gazetteer reported the large quantities of calicoes exported to “the West-Indies,” as well as “New-England, New-York, Jamaica, and other Countries.”¹⁴⁴ These publications helped situate American colonies as the prime markets for textiles that Londoners could no longer buy but which were still considered a profitable and important trade. By imagining the colonies and the metropole as distinctly different markets in which different textiles—and therefore fashions—were available shaped the parameters of belonging along visual registers and calico was used to stage the other women of empire.

Clothing and ornamentation, of course, were central to staging the peoples and places of empire. As race and gender become two significant modes through which subjectivity and agency are defined and regulated, styles and aesthetics of dress emerge as demographic technologies that can organize and police subjects—free and bound—and in this setting

¹⁴⁴ Quoted in Eacott, “Imperial Compromise,” pg. 760-1.
become the means through which value, agency and subjectivity were being contested throughout the eighteenth-century Atlantic world. In this sense performance—whether in dramas proper, in forms of public protest, or in staged scenes of encounter—is central to discourses examining the contours of belonging and dress is one particularly important facet of performance. The language of dress informs lexicons of virtue, refinement and taste that are important to imagining, circulating, and staging value in Atlantic spaces. In an age when increased social and financial mobility was challenging traditional sites of order and the traditional means of representing value, dress is an important means of recognizes who belongs and who does not, but also serves as a means to challenge these prescribed roles: after all, dress points to an inherent tension when it comes to subject formation: one can put clothes on, take them off, and perform different roles as the actresses of New World drama exhibit too well.
Chapter 3

“Of those Rags our Paper is Made”: Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* and the Transatlantic Book Trade in the Age of Homespun

In November 1766, a Rhode Island shopkeeper named Molly Maylem advertised an assortment of imported goods and textiles for sale at her shop on Thames Street, just a block away from the Newport harbor. She lists Irish linens, cotton checks, silk sprig camblets, calicoes, fur muffs and tippets, lawns and cambricks, silk gloves, fashionable ribbons and hair flowers, hats ready made, shoes and silk clogs, Barcelona handkerchiefs, white and colored thread, and cotton laces. To this unwieldy list of imported loot, she adds, “good stays, ready finished, and a sett of Pamela, in 4 volumes.” ¹⁴⁵With a wink and a nod to subscribers of *The Newport Mercury* who may have already read Samuel Richardson’s novel, *Pamela*, Molly Maylem’s advertisement “hides” the novel within the women’s corsets she has for sale. That is, Maylem *recreates* an important scene from Richardson’s novel—the one in which Pamela sews her letters into her corset in order to hide them from that curious reader, Mr. B. In other words, we might say that the shopkeeper translates material practices into print:

¹⁴⁵ *The Newport Mercury*. Newport, RI: November 3-10, 1766; Issue 427, pg. 3.
rather than using needle and thread to *sew* letters into undergarments, as Pamela does, Maylem uses ink and paper to discursively recreate this moment from Richardson’s text.

In Molly Maylem’s advertisement, text and textile are spun together in such a way that a female poetics emerges in and through the world of Atlantic commodity circulation and exchange. Her ad, in other words, invites us to attend to the textuality of textiles as well as the materiality of texts. Pushed to the borders of a print public sphere as imagined by Jurgen Habermas, Benedict Anderson, Michael Warner and others, women such as Molly Maylem may have exploited the blurry line between the work of texts and the work of textiles in order to engage in new acts of poesis—that is, to engage in practices of creating and producing that establish women’s authority as makers of Atlantic world culture and that assert their centrality to Atlantic culture and commerce.

This chapter considers what Richardson’s *Pamela* was doing on the other side of the Atlantic amongst all of those corsets. We are not used to thinking of *Pamela* as an American text, but that is precisely what I would like to do. It was, in fact, the first “novel” to be *printed* in North America, by none other than Benjamin Franklin. Moreover, it was printed on


North American-made paper, milled just outside of Philadelphia.\textsuperscript{148} *Pamela* not only sold well throughout the eighteenth-century; it seems to have been one of the best-selling and most popular texts in eighteenth-century North America. According to one source, “American women, like their English sisters, had volumes of *Pamela* in their libraries, Pamela fans in their hands, and Pamela engravings on their walls.”\textsuperscript{149} Pirated and abridged copies, dramatizations, and sequels flooded the market—in the words of James Hart, “*Pamela* had hundreds of daughters, and readers loved them all.”\textsuperscript{150} Examining the novel’s publication and reception history in a transatlantic context, we can parse out how the transformative poetics of textile manufacture and fashioning inform the gendered acts of self-making that the text itself models. Printed and read in North America, *Pamela* was, in fact, refashioned into an “American” seduction tale responding to the conditions of colonialism and commerce in North American settings.

Richardson’s epistolary novel was, of course, conceptualized as a women’s guide to letter writing. Styled as a series of letters to the protagonist’s parents, the novel tells the story of a 15-year old maidservant, Pamela Andrews, whose employer, Mr. B, abducts her, locks her up in one of his estates, and attempts to seduce and rape her. When Mr. B intercepts and reads her letters, he becomes enamored by her innocence and intelligence, and eventually marries her. Scholars have long identified Richardson’s *Pamela* as foundational to the genre

\textsuperscript{148} In C. William Miller’ *Benjamin Franklin’s Philadelphia Printing: A Descriptive Bibliography* (Philadelphia, PA: American Philosophical Society, 1974) the author suggests that Franklin’s edition of *Pamela* is printed on American paper most likely made at a paper mill outside of Philadelphia. While it does bear a Dutch watermark (a crown fleur de lis LVG | IV—the LVG stands for Lubertus van Gerrevinck), papermakers would on occasion counterfeit Dutch watermarks in order to try to pass their wares off as the more desirable Dutch paper. Special thanks to James Green at the Library Company for this information.

\textsuperscript{149} See James Hart, *The Popular Book: A History of America’s Literary Taste* (Berkley 1950), page 55. Hart notes that Benjamin Franklin may have been the first to publish Richardson’s *Pamela* in North America, but American booksellers were listing imported copies for sale as early as 1742.

\textsuperscript{150} Hart, *The Popular Book*, 57.
of British domestic fiction and central to the revision of earlier, status-focused understandings of kinship relations.\footnote{151} Influenced by Nancy Armstrong’s now classic \textit{Desire and Domestic Fiction}, studies of eighteenth-century domesticity have traditionally focused on English national spaces and have been particularly interested in the discursive patterns that give new significance to the home and the domestic woman at its center. In Armstrong’s words, Richardson “reorganized the country house around a woman who had nothing but a gendered form of literacy to offer.”\footnote{152} But what exactly constitutes a “gendered form of literacy”? By remaining focused on text-based subject positions, scholarship has been reticent to address how extra-discursive, tactile, and embodied signifying practices challenge the idea that writing alone serves as the primary source of subject formation.

By couching Richardson’s \textit{Pamela} within the material objects of international trade, Molly Maylem’s advertisement invites us to do just that: to read the text in the light of a material history as well. Or more simply put, it asks us to read the text as a history of materials shaping a gendered bourgeois identity in a wider Atlantic and global context—materials, moreover, that include texts and paper, but also cloth and other textiles. While Pamela’s letters are certainly an important aspect of the text, I’d like to note that it is also, in many ways, a story about clothes: making them, acquiring them, putting them on, and taking

\footnote{151} Scholars tracing the “rise of the novel,” such as Ian Watt, Leonard Davis, Michael McKeon, and Nancy Armstrong, take up Richardson’s \textit{Pamela} in their studies, and provide various accounts for the emergence of novelistic fiction—the rise of the middle class, shifts in literacy, new modes of print production, or the influence of different early modern genres such as the brief true report, the romance, and the captivity narrative; however, most are firmly located within a British metropolitan center in terms of where their accounts of this “rise” come from (Armstrong’s and Tennenhouse’s \textit{The Imaginary Puritan} is a notable exception). Similarly, scholars examining how commerce impacts fiction—such as James Thomson, Chatherine Ingrassia, Laura Brown, Deidre Lynch, and Mary Poovey—focus primarily on British markets, readers, and texts.\footnote{152} See, in particular, Nancy Armstrong’s \textit{Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel} (Oxford, 1986).
them off. Moreover, I argue that these are not entirely unconnected practices: eighteenth-century paper—the paper that comprises Pamela’s “accounts” and letters—was, after all, made out of discarded and worn clothing. Thus we might say that an international trade in cloth may have kept the transatlantic trade in books alive and well. That is, the parallel poetics of text and textile, invite us to think about the role that women’s work with textiles might play in the Atlantic circulation of ideas and practices—a role, that is, that we usually attribute solely to print. Reading domestic fictions as material texts establishes a link between domestic labor and “literacies” centered on textile production, manufacture, or fashioning, and the practice of letters—a link that inevitably establishes the centrality of women from different classes, races, and regions to both the material production of domesticity, as well as an Atlantic print culture that sought to codify and make legible the practices and participants that define its parameters.

The goals of this chapter are two-fold: firstly, I seek to examine how Richardson’s Pamela models dependencies between the work of texts and the work of textiles. As a foundational domestic fiction, it seems to make legible and articulate the importance of

153 Variations of the words “dress” and “undress” occur 87 times in Pamela; variations on “cloth” and “clothe” appear 79 times; “Virtue”—including its use in the novel’s subtitle—occurs 89 times. In comparison, variations on “dress” occur just 5 times in Clarissa, the word “clothes” appears only one time (“cloth” is entirely absent), and “virtue” occurs 23 times. This suggests, at least at a numerical level, that cloth and clothing—as well as acts of dressing or undressing—may be as important a theme in the text as “virtue.” Moreover, as they are given equal space, Richardson may recognize a parallel between them. All references to Samuel Richardson’s Pamela are from the Project Gutenberg electronic edition available here: http://www.gutenberg.org/files/6124/6124-h/6124-h.htm. I have used the digital edition in order to be able to mine the text for evidence such as the instances above. Because this text does not have page numbers, I have referenced citations according to letter. 154 See James Green The Rittenhouse Mill and the Beginnings of Papermaking in America (Philadelphia 1990), 15. He writes: the “papermaking process began with the rag dealers, who collected worn out linen and cotton clothes and carted them to the mill on crude forest roads.” He writes that once at the mill “the rags were weighed, sorted into various qualities, hacked up and torn apart—the buttons and hooks having first been removed—and dumped into a pile and moistened with water to begin fermentation.” From there, the rags were hammered down into a “pulp,” and eventually transferred to a chest or vat where the “vatman,” lowering his mould into the vat, extracted pulp in the shape of large sheets of paper. Other workers removed these proto-paper sheets and placed them in bundles or reams to be stamped and eventually dried.
embodied practices and tactile literacies to domestic discourses, practices, and spaces. Secondly, I will consider what, in the years leading up to the revolutionary war, made this novel so popular with a North American readership. I argue that the protagonist’s own work with homespun cloth models alternatives to print for women to engage in political debate and enter public, political discourse. Specifically, it puts forth the production of homespun as a particular, gendered political practice, and homespun cloth as a means to broadcast one’s participation in public debate. Bringing these two lines together, we can see how non-discursive domestic practices centered on textile manufacture and fashioning are at the heart of political participation, and in turn, the articulation of emergent understandings of female virtue that model new relationships between domestic oeconomy, commerce, and the practice of letters.155

Texts and Textiles in Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela*

*Pamela’s* duel focus on clothes and letter writing invites us to attend to how the materiality of texts and the textuality of textiles may be essential to the new understandings of domestic life and labor, as well as the articulation of a “new female ideal,” that the text models. Placed alongside advertisements in British and colonial newspapers, *Pamela’s* letters

155 The term “oeconomy” is an early use and spelling of “economy” that refers directly to household management rather than the management of national or state resources. At its root is *oikos*, referring to the household, house, or family, and more generally to a center of domestic activity that is structured by women. The English prefix *eco* is a translation of the Greek *oikos* suggesting a correlation between household management and the management of national and state resources.
nearly read like a correspondence between merchants and retailers, and like shopkeepers she records the gifts she receives from Mr. B or his mother in precise detail so that her readers will understand their value. In fact, contemporary authors such as Henry Fielding and Eliza Haywood critiqued what they saw as Pamela’s desire for and shrewd acquisition of material possessions, most notably clothes. Rather than the naïve ingénue whose virtue protects her throughout the story, Haywood’s and Fielding’s satires suggest that her use of clothes points, in fact, to a rather sophisticated “knowledge” of various types of material and sexual “commerce”: that is, she is well-versed in the lexicon of a British marketplace for women’s apparel and women’s bodies. And, to a degree, they are right: she is no undiscerning consumer, and she knows the value of the wares she brings to market. Her letters explicitly spell out the value of her stock in such a way that will allow a reader—or potential “investor”—to judge and credit the quality of her “store.” In fact, an embodied erotics of the marketplace is so integral to her written accounts that we can no longer consider the domestic woman as produced by writing and through her written accounts alone.

While scholars have long focused on the role that Pamela’s writing plays in articulating and securing her virtue, I would like to point to the moment in which she enters the marketplace—when she buys her own clothes—as an equally transformative event. Pamela’s lists of clothes link her to two textile networks: Firstly, a network of imported,

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156 See Henry Fielding’s *An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews* (London 1741) and Eliza Haywood’s *The Anti-Pamela; or Feign’d Innocence Detected* (London 1741).
157 Armstrong argues that when “Pamela gain[s] the power of self-representation” she “redirect[s] male desire at a woman who embodied the domestic virtues” (109-10). By “self-representation,” Armstrong and others are particularly interested in Pamela’s role as literate, writing subject, and understand self-representation—and the subjectivity produced—as a purely discursive project. It is through writing, in other words, that Pamela can revise earlier, status-focused understandings of kinship relations and produce the desire for a new relationship between men and women focused on the home and the domestic woman at its center; however, as noted above, I think it is important to look for other forms of “self-representation” that might not include print—or at least to consider where print and other non-discursive forms of communication might intersect.
internationally produced textiles; and secondly, to a network of local English men and women spinners and weavers producing cloth for export and local consumption. For instance, of the clothes she receives from Mr. B and his mother, most are the products of foreign manufacture:

Since my last, my master gave me more fine things. He called me up to my late lady's closet, and, pulling out her drawers, he gave me two suits of fine Flanders laced headclothes, three pair of fine silk shoes, two hardly the worse, and just fit for me, (for my lady had a very little foot,) and the other with wrought silver buckles in them; and several ribands and top-knots of all colours; four pair of white fine cotton stockings, and three pair of fine silk ones; and two pair of rich stays. I was quite astonished, and unable to speak for a while; but yet I was inwardly ashamed to take the stockings; for Mrs. Jervis was not there: If she had, it would have been nothing. I believe I received them very awkwardly; for he smiled at my awkwardness, and said, Don't blush, Pamela: Dost think I don't know pretty maids should wear shoes and stockings?158

While Great Britain did begin producing some of its own silk in the mid-seventeenth century, as well as promoting the production of silk in the North American colonies, this industry never gained a strong global presence.159 Pamela’s silk shoes and stockings most likely are made from silk cloth manufactured in France, or perhaps even China, and filtered through English ports. In turn, French and Flemish lace was fashionable in this period—more so than English produced lace.160 This suggests that when Richardson first published Pamela many of

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158 *Pamela*, Letter VII.
159 See Chapter One for a discussion England’s promotion of the silk industry beginning in the mid seventeenth-century.
160 For a brief history of lace production in Europe see Melinda Watt, “Textile Production in Europe: Lace, 1600–1800” (metmuseum.org). She notes that “Although France was the trendsetter [in lace production], Flemish laces always rivaled the French due in large part to the unsurpassed quality of their linen thread. The combination of climate, soil, and the skill with which the flax crop was processed in Flanders produced thread
the items listed above may have traveled global circuits of production and exchange before making their way to her closet.

But the scene is also interesting in how it maps global commodities onto one of the most private spaces in the household. The scene takes us into the private, intimate recesses of a woman’s closet, delving into the even more private recesses of drawers that contain items of intimate apparel: the stockings, stays, and even shoes that make Pamela blush and feel “inwardly ashamed.” The movement from the more public spaces of the home to the intimacy of the closet continues into interior recesses of Pamela’s psyche. Pamela’s blush—the outward sign of her inward recognition and internalization of the sexual nature of this exchange of items with Mr. B—is produced by a pair of foreign manufactured shoes and stockings. If the bourgeois woman the text represents is characterized by her capacity to articulate and replicate interiority in writing, then the production of this interiority is deeply connected to the global commodities that structure desire in this scene.

If the clothes above link “shameful” desire to global textile markets, the clothes Pamela purchases for herself link “correct” bourgeois desire to newly expanding textile industries in England. In the 25 years leading up to the American Revolution, the large American market for British textiles led to a push to produce a wider range of textiles, especially linen and cotton fabrics. Moreover, as England expanded its role in the slave trade, Yorkshire, Lancashire, and Manchester-produced textiles traveled transoceanic routes to be exchanged for African captives on the West African coast, and to clothe New World slaves in the Caribbean.\textsuperscript{161} In fact, the production of English textiles for larger Atlantic markets may

\textsuperscript{161} For a discussion of England’s expanding wool and cotton textile production see Chapter 4.
have been a leading factor in British Industrialization. On the home front, however, this increased demand for cloth would have offered opportunities to British men and women, such as Pamela’s father and mother who, respectively, weave cloth and spin thread to generate extra income. In this sense, the clothes she buys for herself link her to this network of local spinners and weavers. From “the wife and daughters of a nearby farmer,” she buys:

- a good sad-coloured stuff, of their own spinning, enough to make me a gown and two petticoats; and I made robings and facings of a pretty bit of printed calico I had by me.
- I had a pretty good camblet quilted coat, that I thought might do tolerably well; and I bought two flannel undercoats; not so good as my swanskin and fine linen ones, but what will keep me warm […] I got some pretty good Scotch cloth, and made me, of mornings and nights, when nobody saw me, two shifts; and I have enough left for two shirts, and two shifts, for you my dear father and mother […] Then I bought of a pedlar, two pretty enough round-eared caps, a little straw-hat, and a pair of knit mittens, turned up with white calico; and two pair of ordinary blue worsted hose, that make a smartish appearance, with white clocks, I'll assure you; and two yards of black riband for my shift sleeves, and to serve as a necklace; and when I had 'em all come home, I went and looked upon them once in two hours, for two days together: For, you must know, though I be with Mrs. Jervis, I keep my own little apartment still for my clothes, and nobody goes thither but myself. You'll say I was no bad housewife to have saved so much money.

Pamela’s new wardrobe consisting of home-spun petticoats, wool hose, and knit mittens, links the emergence of the domestic woman the text presents to nationalist fantasies of economic autarky. This fantasy distances this woman from Atlantic circuits of commercial exchange—
and thus the sense of shame Pamela expresses above—positing instead the fiction that she is tied to an inherently English, pre-industrial, cottage economy. However, both locally and internationally produced textiles did have wide networks of exchange and, as suggested above, producing and consuming English textiles would have bolstered the reach of Great Britain’s commercial empire and provided work for Englishmen and women at home.  

Louis Truchy engraved the painter Joseph Highmore’s depiction of Pamela in her new wardrobe for an early edition of the novel. In this engraving, Pamela displays her bundles of conferred clothing and new clothing to the housekeeper Mrs. Jervis while Mr. B voyeuristically peers through the door.  

The engraving in many ways visualizes the transfer of desire from the woman dressed in articles of cosmopolitan consumption to this “new female ideal” whose homespun dress seems to embody fantasies of national homogeneity outlined above. While Pamela is fully clothed in the scene, the crumpled clothes on the floor and Mr. B’s penetration of the site makes it seem as if a scene of seduction has already taken place—the empty

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162 Bans in the 1720’s, for instance, were passed to prevent the import of fabrics like Chintz so as to protect English linen and wool industries. See Kriger and Inikori.  
163 “Pamela and Mrs. Jervis with Bundles of Clothing.” Engraving by Louis Truchy based on Joseph Highmore's paintings of scenes from Pamela, Or Virtue Rewarded by Samuel Richardson. ca. 1740-1760
clothes signifying an absent, potentially naked body. The scene, in other words, eroticizes the transformation of human relations into a series of economic relationships structured by the objects exchanged. The empty clothes scattered on the floor and replaced by the ones she wears figure significantly into the making of bourgeois desire. In this sense, we could say that the bourgeois desire the text models is as dependent upon textiles and material objects as it is in new ways of “accounting” for virtue; in fact, these objects intermingle with a new commodity: the bourgeois woman. Bourgeois desire, therefore, transfers the economic character of human relations into a new romantic relationship that simultaneously denies the market driven nature of these new formulations of kinship. To put it more simply, bourgeois love adapts commodity exchange into a new series of sexually-infused economic relationships that must mask the actual labor of the domestic woman now figured as commodity without transferable value—that is, as having value not in her property but in her character.

Through this change in attire, Pamela attempts to transform herself from a fine lady’s maid into a small town seamstress linked to the local production and exchange of cloth and clothing. That is, the clothes she wears are produced locally and she in turn will produce clothes for local consumption. Expecting her arrival, her father writes, “we shall live happily together; and what with my diligent labour, and your poor mother’s spinning, and your needlework, I make no doubt we shall do better and better.” The domestic woman—and feminine virtue—she seems to assert, is homegrown and self-fashioned. Her change of attire signals a simultaneous rejection of Mr. B’s aristocratic libertinism as well as the model of cosmopolitan consumption that he and his gifts represent. A model of consumption, that is,

164 I’d also note that it is a scene of consumption that masks scenes of labor along the lines of Marx’s theories of commodity fetishism—in other words, the hidden naked body is equivalent to hidden labor and perhaps masks modes of production that connect Pamela’s wardrobe to scenes of global commerce and production.  
165 Pamela, letter XXVII.
with deep connections to global circuits of exchange, and by proxy, colonial spaces and the bodies of New World slaves and other disenfranchised laborers that produce much of the material.

The combined assault of Pamela’s letters and her homespun clothes so directly challenges Mr. B’s own model of cosmopolitan consumption that he seeks to strip her of both of them. In one of the most memorable scenes in the novel, Richardson explicitly links Pamela’s clothes and her papers. More explicitly, he links her work with text to her work with textiles, and suggests that these are inseparable practices when it comes to “saving” Pamela’s virtue and modeling new avenues of gendered self-making. Having sewn her letters into her stays—as the shopkeeper, Molly Maylem does in her advertisement—Pamela is quite literally clothed in the texts that testify to her character and these layers of cloth and paper are what separate Mr. B (and Richardson’s readers) from Pamela’s naked body. Groping about her clothed body and searching within the folds of her dress—Mr. B comments, “it is my opinion they are about you; and I never undressed a girl in my life: but I will now begin to strip my pretty Pamela and I hope I shall not go far before I find them.” Mr. B’s threatens more than her body: he threatens to “unmake” or “strip” Pamela of the cloth and paper that serve as her claim to political subjecthood.

Escaping yet again, Pamela undresses herself so she can un-sew the letters from her undergarments. Rather than being “undone” or “unmade” by Mr. B, Pamela undresses, unmakes, and remakes herself. She narrates, “I went to my closet, and there I sat me down, and could not bear the thoughts of giving up my papers. Besides, I must all undress me, in a manner, to untack them…So I took off my under-coat, and with great trouble of mind,

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166 Samuel Richardson, Pamela, letter XXXII.
unsewed them from it.” This is a scene that speaks directly to new ways of thinking about print discourses and their role in subject formation. Rather than an embodied practice—such as oratory, performance or, in the case of Pamela, the making and wearing of clothes that are literally occupied by a body—here we see the disembodiment of print as it is quite literally separated from the body it signifies. When she ceases to wear her letters they can circulate freely from her body and testify to her character among new audiences—such as Mr. B’s sister and neighbors—who are not directly in contact with Pamela.

However, we might also say that the idea presented in this scene of letters-as-clothes or clothes-as-letters would signal to readers that the book in their hands is (symbolically, of course) comprised of the letters that formed Pamela’s dress—they, in other words, are reading parts of her dress, and even more skeptical readers would be forced to recognize that they could be reading “parts” of some woman’s former dress. In this sense, Mr. B’s threat to undress Pamela and strip her of her clothes in order to find her letters is reminiscent of the papermaking process more generally in which cloth is broken down in order to be remade into text. In order to “produce” or “discover” her letters, he must turn her dress inside out—he must turn material signifying practices into discursive ones.
This particular engraving, published in *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* in London in 1747 depicts the process of turning cloth into paper. Labor in papermaking mills was divided by gender: women sorted incoming rags and men fermented rags and molded rag pulp into rag paper sheets. In this sense, women served as mediators between embodied signifying practices related to work with cloth, and male dominated practices connected to work with paper, and eventually text as rag paper took on a variety of public print forms. With the understanding that cloth and rag paper are close cousins, what makes a colonial edition of *Pamela* “American” may be the fact that it is published on North American-made paper, derived from rags collected from North American homes—rags that may have formerly made up some colonial woman’s dress.

Figure 16: “Manner of Sorting Linen Rags & Method of fermenting them for Making Paper.” *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* (London 1747).
Rags and Rag Paper: Printing and Reading Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* in North America

The North American writer Richard Frame articulated the material and symbolic connections between cloth and the production of texts as early as 1692 in his poem, “A Short Description of Pennsilvania.” Prior to the 1690’s, most quality writing and printing paper used in both England and North America was imported from Holland; however, the Anglo-Dutch wars meant that access to good, white paper was a consistent challenge. In response to this challenge, papermaking mills began to spring-up on both sides of the Atlantic, in the early 1690’s, that used Dutch papermaking technologies and even sometimes stolen or counterfeit Dutch molds, complete with the watermarks of Dutch papermakers. Describing a Germantown paper mill, Frame’s poem itself is printed on some of the first American-made paper and functions both as an advertisement for the paper it is printed on and as an economic essay outlining commercial and symbolic relationships between cloth and papermaking industries. He writes:

A Paper Mill near German-Town doth stand,

So that the Flax, which first springs from the Land,

First Flax, then Yarn, and then they must begin,

To weave the same, which they took pains to spin.

Also, when on our backs it is well [worn],

Some of the same remains Ragged and Torn;

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167 In C. William Miller’s *Benjamin Franklin’s Philadelphia Printing: A Descriptive Bibliography* (Philadelphia, PA: American Philosophical Society. 1974) the author suggests, for instance, that Franklin’s edition of *Pamela* is printed on American paper possibly made at a paper mill outside of Philadelphia, but it bears a Dutch watermark (a crown fleur de lis LVG | IV—the LVG stands for Lubertus van Gerrevinck). Papemakers would use counterfeit Dutch watermarks in order to try to pass their wares off as the more desirable Dutch paper.
Then of those Rags our Paper it is made,
Which in process of time doth waste and fade:
So what comes from the Earth, appeareth plain,
The same in Time returns to Earth again.\textsuperscript{168}

Frame’s delineation of the paper trade’s dependency on cloth producing industries suggests that early papermaking mills—and, by proxy, early North American printers—are reliant upon men and women that work in flax fields, spin flax into yarn, weave it into clothes, wash it in homes, and wear it on their backs until “it is well worn.” In this sense, what is gestured to but not named in this poem is a relationship between business, print, and domestic economy.

Printers seem to be in a prime position to recognize domestic spaces as mediating a relationship between paper and cloth, and texts and textiles: the domestic is located at a pivot where the making and unmaking of one form leads to the manufacture of the other. Rags were an important commodity and both British and Colonial North American printers often ran advertisements in newspapers and on the last pages of their books offering to buy rags. Printers, and writers by proxy, thus seem highly aware of the source of the paper they are printing on, and they give these domestic products—or even domestic “waste”—value in the marketplace.\textsuperscript{169} Reflecting back on the eighteenth-century, nineteenth-century American author Joel Munsell’s comments, “we behold with satisfaction and amazement, what has been brought about by the aid of a commodity so insignificant in the eyes of the world as linen and

\textsuperscript{169}By 1818, the value of rags collected in the United States was estimated to be $900,000 per year. See Joel Munsell, \textit{Chronology of the origin and progress of paper and paper-making} (Cambridge 1876), page 71. Archive.org.
cotton rags.” ¹⁷⁰ He continues: “[Paper mills] consume the cast-off habiliments of the population of the whole world.”¹⁷¹ In fact, in the two decades leading up the publication of Pamela in 1740, the number of rag paper mills in both England and North America expanded dramatically. Munsell estimates that in the late seventeenth-century, British paper accounted for the generation of roughly 28,000 pounds annually, but by 1730 generated roughly 780,000 pounds annually. North America witnessed a similar expansion of the number of mills and reams produced annually, as is reflected in the number of ads in colonial papers offering to buy rags.¹⁷²

When Benjamin Franklin published the first colonial edition of Pamela in 1742, he was fully immersed in both the printing and paper wholesaling industries. In the 1730’s he had begun the challenge the Rittenhouse Mill’s near monopoly over papermaking in the Philadelphia region by supplying non-Rittenhouse mills with rags. By 1788, as he tells Brissot de Warville, he had his hand in establishing up to eighteen different mills. The paper he printed his Pamela on most likely came from one of these local mills that he helped to establish and sold rags to in early decades of the eighteenth-century.¹⁷³ North American printers, such as Franklin, who had their hands in both ends of the business—they were rag buyers and sellers as well as commercial printers—were thus, inevitably (if tangentially), invested in both the cloth production industries and the text producing industries. Furthermore they served as intermediaries, structuring circuits of production and exchange filtered through the home: their paper advertises cloth for sale that, eventually, becomes the rags that are remade into paper that can again advertise or make legible the cloth and textiles that inhabit

¹⁷⁰ Munsell, page 4.
¹⁷¹ Munsell, page 13.
¹⁷² Munsell, 33-36.
¹⁷³ I am indebted to Jim Green at the Library Company of Philadelphia for providing this information.
texts. In this sense, colonial dry-goods shops that sell books and printer’s shops that sell cloth seem to take-up the project of *Pamela* by interrogating the relationship between the work of texts and the work of textiles. For instance, Benjamin Franklin’s *Pennsylvania Gazette* in 1756 offered “READY MONEY for clean LINNEN RAGS at the New-Printing-Office, in Market-street, Philadelphia.” Similarly, Franklin’s sister-in-law, Ann Smith Franklin, ran her husband’s printing business from 1734 to 1763 and, in addition to printing *The Boston Gazette*, they seem to have printed on cloth intended for clothes and furnishing. She advertises “Linens, Calicoes, Silks, &c., in good Figures, very lively and durable colours, and without the offensive smell which commonly attends the Linens printed here.” In turn, Mary Katherine Goddard, the printer of the first signed copy of the Declaration of Independence, similarly ran a dry-goods store out of her printing shop and advertised cash for linen and cotton rags.

The non-consumption and non-importation agreements that circulated in major North American cities in response to the 1765 Stamp Act impacted both the cloth and printing industries in significant, interrelated ways. As men and women agreed to forgo purchasing commodities imported on British ships, they had to find new ways of securing two important commodities: cloth and paper. Moreover, as suggested above, because cloth and paper are parallel mediums, a shortage in cloth meant that existing paper mills would have a difficult time finding the rags to make paper with—paper for bills of exchange, contracts, bills of lading, broadsides, and newspapers themselves: that is, a shortage of rags and rag paper poses a very real threat to the functionality of commercial, political, and social relations. Newspapers record two reactions to this crisis that I will in explore in this section: firstly, a

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175 Ibid, 321.
new valuation of spinning and women’s production of homespun linen cloth; and secondly, a new valuation of linen rags themselves—the “ragged and torn,” worn out linen that figures as the end result of the cloth papers called upon women to spin. Finally, I hope to show how Richardson’s *Pamela* may have figured into these new valuations of women’s work and items of household production. Translated to a North American setting, *Pamela*’s commentary on homespun may have helped support discourses seeking to politicize the home, home management, and gendered labor in new ways. That is, it may help inform practices and values that come to characterize Republican womanhood as a political identity tied to domestic oeconomy.

In early 1766, as non-importation and non-consumption agreements circulated in cities such as Boston, the outward, public appearance of women and their management of the interior spaces of their homes became important indexes of a family’s political and financial commitment to Republicanism. In this setting, advertisements for textiles and women’s clothing shared space in newspapers with a rising number of condemnations of the “woman of fashion” and the female consumer. One critic, writing in *The New-Hampshire Gazette* in 1764, goes as far as to question “Whether a Woman of Fashion ought not to be declared a publick Enemy?” In lieu of consuming imported textiles and clothing, women were called upon to produce their own “homespun” cloth. Laurel Ulrich notes that newspapers record roughly sixty spinning bees between 1768 and 1770, in addition to numerous articles and letters praising the industry of these young women whose labor at the spinning wheel was

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assuring colonists their “rights, property, and privileges.” For Ulrich, “boycotting English goods gave household production a new significance.” With the politicization of cloth production, spinners and seamstresses, rather than shopkeepers or women of fashion, emerge as Revolutionary heroines. The legendary Ann Cooper Whitall, for instance, supposedly kept at work on her spinning wheel as British cannons fired at her house, and another heroine, Betsy Griscom Ross, is remembered best for sewing the American flag rather than, as a widow, running her late husband’s upholstery shop.

In the spring of 1766—just a few months after shop owner Molly Maylem listed Pamela for sale in her Newport Mercury advertisement—newspapers in Newport and Providence recorded this new fad for spinning matches. Working class women, women servants, and enslaved women had regularly engaged in spinning flax and wool for employers and slaveholders and as a means of generating extra income; however, spinning matches record a new phenomenon: young, unmarried women from well-to-do families sitting down at the spinning wheel. For instance, in March 1766, The Newport Mercury reports:

We hear that 20 young Ladies of the best Families in Providence, had a Spinning Match at a Gentleman’s House last Tuesday, where the Performance was surprising,

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180 There is, in fact, little evidence that she did sew the flag, whereas there is evidence that she ran the upholstery shop.
182 Married women, such as Benjamin Franklin’s wife, also took up spinning in order to clothe themselves and their household. Franklin writes to his wife: “As the Stamp Act is at length repeal’d, I am willing you should have a new Gown, which you may suppose I did not send sooner, as I knew you would not like to be finer than your neighbours, unless in a Gown of your own spinning. Had the trade between the two Countries totally ceas’d, it was a Comfort to me to recollect, that I had once been cloath’d from Head to Foot in Woolen and Linnen of my Wife’s Manufacture, that I never was prouder of any Dress in my Life, and that she and her Daughter might do it again if it was necessary.” However, young, unmarried women—such as Franklin’s daughter—were the focus of most of the newspaper accounts.
and made a brilliant Appearance, and had a Dance in the Evening: There is several more of the same Kind to be performed there—A laudable Example for all Ladies in Newport and elsewhere, who purpose to promote Industry, and retrieve from Ruin a sinking Country.  

Another report, from The Providence Gazette, assures that the “Eighteen Daughters of Liberty,” who “hath discovered a laudable Zeal for introducing Home Manufactures,” “were young Ladies of good Reputation.” These reputable “Ladies,” furthermore, “exhibited a fine Example of Industry, by spinning from Sunrise until Dark, and displayed a Spirit for saving their sinking Country rarely to be found among Person’s of more Age and Experience…unanimously resolved that the Stamp Act was unconstitutional,” and agreed “that they would purchase no more British manufactures unless it be repealed.”

These articles reconceptualize spinning as genteel work practiced by “Ladies” of good repute with newly conceptualized ties to political discourse. While still a form of domestic labor and domestic oeconomy, it is not practiced as a means of generating income; rather, spinning becomes a way for young, unmarried women from well-to-do families to generate character and, perhaps even, a political identity. For instance, a spinning bee reported in The Boston Post suggests that participants even “resolved to Marry as soon as a good Opportunity presented, but to have no Person but what was willing to risque his Life in Defence of…their Country’s Liberty.”

Their character is articulated by a now politicized form of domestic “work” that will inform the marriages they enter into—marriages, that is, that are imagined as reproducing a particular type of political subject.

184 The Providence Gazette. Providence, RI: March 12, 1766; supplement 2.
That is, reports that recast spinning as the pursuit of unmarried genteel North American women (rather than that of laboring women) politicize the act by associating it with resistance to the Stamp Act and make spinning—and by proxy, the wearing of homespun—a desirable and marketable characteristic of the marriageable—and most likely, propertied—woman. Rather than journalistic reports, we could say that these are advertisements for a new commodity: the English bourgeois woman modeled by *Pamela* recast as the “daughter of liberty.” Nowhere is this more visible than in an “account” printed in *The Newport Mercury* in May 1766 (above). Addressing his “account” to the printer of *The Newport Mercury*, this particular numerical narrative translates actions and events into data. That is, it attributes economic and numerical value to emergent understandings of feminine “virtue.” Roughly reproducing the lines from Proverbs 31:13, the author writes: “This is the Character of a virtuous Woman:—She seeketh Wool and Flax, &t.—she layeth her Hands to Spindle, and her Hands hold the Distaff.—Her Price is far above Rubies.”

Even as it suggests that a woman’s value is in her character and certain types of labor, the account itself—which transforms “character” into calculable statistics—belie the material conditions that continue to determine women’s value and virtue. That is, this ad translates a much older understandings of feminine virtue to the conditions of the market and emergent ways of crediting, articulating, and making value legible on paper. More
so than in the narrative accounts above, this is a public print that advertises these women’s value by recreating numbers and statistics that would more likely be found in home account books or in the account books of dry goods merchants that record women bartering homespun thread for commodities available in shops.\textsuperscript{187} What is being bartered here, however, is something different: thread is being bartered for the public, discursive articulation of character. Notably, the only other women whose names were regularly published in print in this period were women who failed to conform to the non-consumption and non-importation acts—women, that is, whose characters were inherently suspect, or to put it another way, were being rendered suspect by the particular way in which their names entered print.

I’d like to suggest at this point that “accounts,” such as the one above, posit printers and public prints as important intermediaries in articulating the particular value of this “new” woman;\textsuperscript{188} however, they do so by establishing connections between women’s work with cloth and the discursive legibility of feminine virtue—a project that is arguably indebted to Richardson’s\textit{Pamela}. But this of course raises the question as to what extent can we trace the influence of \textit{Pamela} in North America. It is difficult to establish exactly how many men and women in North America were reading the novel. Franklin included a French translation among the books he sent to his daughter from France during the years of the Revolutionary War, and the writings of Eliza Lucas Pinckney, Ester Edwards Burr, and Abigail Adams make reference to reading the text.\textsuperscript{189} Circulating and lending libraries, such as The Library Company of Philadelphia, certainly included \textit{Pamela} in their corpus and booksellers

\textsuperscript{187} In an era when bills of credit and specie were a rare means of exchange, women of laboring classes, in particular, often exchanged flax and wool thread for items available in dry goods shops.

\textsuperscript{188} These valorizations of women producing and wearing homespun may exemplify what Elizabeth Maddock Dillon identifies as “a public articulation and valuation of women’s domestic position.” See Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, \textit{The Gender of Freedom: Fictions of Liberalism and the Literary Public Sphere} (Stanford UP 2004), page 4.

throughout New England and the Mid-Atlantic continued to advertise the novel throughout the 1760’s and 1770’s. In other words, Pamela seems to have been actively sold and read in the midst of non-consumption and non-importation agreements.

In this setting, it perhaps seems surprising that Pamela—of all texts—would continue to prove popular with North American readers; it did remain popular, however, and did so perhaps because it offered women readers a different model through which to frame their place within an increasingly politicized Atlantic commercial circuit of exchange. Specifically, it put forth the making and wearing of homespun—in lieu of textiles filtered through British ports—as a political act. For instance, as Pamela was pirated, abridged, and resold in North American settings, some of the only passages that are copied in full and word-for-word are the ones describing Pamela’s acquisition and manufacture of her “homespun” dress. These abridged editions were more popular with North American readerships—perhaps, in part, because they were less expensive, as Leonard Tennenhouse suggests; however, the continued focus on the production of homespun may have also provided a model through which colonial women could participate in spheres of political discourse and public debate usually dominated by men.

While homespun linen cloth serves as a “material” text in and of itself that participates in and enters public debate, these items of domestic production also wove their way into the more traditional understandings of the practice of letters in this period. Once worn out, they were sold to paper mills, shredded into pulp, and reformed into paper: rags have real and symbolic value. The non-consumption and non-importation agreements meant that there was

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190 I believe that these abridged Pamelas were for the most part, however, printed in England until the 1790’s when a few “American” abridged editions began to be published.

a shortage of paper itself in the period, leading people with the capital to do so to establish a rash of new paper mills in this period.\textsuperscript{192} If homespun linen may have figured as a way to reject British-produced textiles in the late 1760’s, the household production of worn linen rags is imagined as equally important to ensuring the survival of a North American print culture that is framed as essential to social reproduction.

Richard Frame was not the only writer to recognize the connections between rags as a form of domestic production and the production of public prints. An article in the \textit{Boston New Letter} in 1769 announces that “the bellcart will go through Boston before the end of the next month, to collect rags for the paper mill at Milton, when all people that will encourage the paper manufactory may dispose of them.” The address continues with the following poem:

\begin{quote}
Rags are as beauties, which concealed lie,
But when in paper how it charms the eye’
Pray save your rags, new beauties to discover,
For paper, truly, everyone’s a lover:
By the pen and press such knowledge is displayed,
As wouldn’t exist if paper was not made.
Wisdom of things, mysterious, divine,
Illustriously doth on paper shine.\textsuperscript{193}
\end{quote}

Addressing the public in verse, the poem above attributes the production and dissemination of public knowledge to “pen and print.” However, it also revises a public fascination with homespun: here, we see instead what seems to be the public’s “romance” with rag paper prints and letters: “For paper, truly, everyone’s a lover.” In this rather odd construction, the

\textsuperscript{192} Munsell, 44.
\textsuperscript{193} Munsell, 42.
public is a lover of paper—notably not knowledge or the ideas inked onto paper. Furthermore, words such as “beauties” and “charm” give anthropomorphic characteristics to paper—they give papers lives. In many ways, the poem likens rags and rag paper to women’s bodies that produce the cloth to begin with—but with a twist: rather than concealing women’s hidden “beauties”—in the form of clothes—the rags themselves are what “charm” the “eye” once they are transformed into paper. That is, the woman who would produce and inhabit the cloth that becomes rags is erased from the picture altogether as the object itself—the rags alchemized into paper—emerges as the object of desire. The fetishization of paper as object of romantic desire rewrites the clothes-as-letters and letters-as-clothes scene from Richardson’s Pamela once again: it, in facts, writes the wearer out of scene all together. To put it another way, it enacts the material process through which public prints are distanced from the bodies that once produced and wore them: it enacts the disembodiment of public prints and their deep connections to women’s labor and household economies.

Despite the erasure of women in this poem, articles such as the one above do recognize print as deeply reliant upon domestic oeconomy as well as the importance of the domestic to the production of people and prints essential to the reproduction of publics. Benjamin Franklin himself adopts the pseudonym “Homespun” in his articles critiquing the Stamp Act and continues to tease out the connections between cloth production, rags, rag

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194 In another address, that ran in 1801, the author David Buell, the postmaster of Troy, New York, similarly establishes paper as the most ideal romantic partner: Please to save your Rags. The press contributes more to the diffusion of knowledge and information than any other medium; rags are the primary requisite in the manufacture of paper; without paper the newspaper of our country, those cheap, useful and agreeable companions of the citizen and farmer, which in a political and moral view are of the highest national importance, must decline and be extinguished.194 Rather than the Republican woman, the address identifies newspapers as the “useful and agreeable companions of the citizen and farmer” that ensure the reproduction of “political and moral” publics. Similar exhortations ran in newspapers through the first decade of the nineteenth-century. See Munsell, 62-70.
paper, and public prints that characterize the practice of letters in this period. The pseudonym “Homespun” posits homespun colonial cloth as a way to challenge what was, in essence, a tax on public prints and documents. However, it also establishes ties between this cloth and public printed discourse. He imagines homespun cloth—and by proxy the rejection of British commerce—as integral to protecting the right for these ideas to circulate freely and not be unduly taxed. This understands the domestic production of homespun, paradoxically, as a public enterprise deeply connected to preserving the functionality of a print public sphere, and locates the labor of the domestic woman at its center. To take this logic further, homespun may have been central to the production of a distinctly American print public sphere—a public sphere *imagining* itself as grown and produced (like homespun itself) under local conditions, in response to local demands, and printed on paper made from North American-produced linen and cotton rags.\(^{195}\)

As this chapter has sought to show, an attention to textiles provides a wider lens through which to examine the lives of colonial women in this period, and significantly challenges the idea that women and their households were disconnected from public discourse. Furthermore, the connections between domestic oeconomy and public prints posits domesticity as a symbolic and material national *industry* that serves discourses seeking to establish the myth of a geographically contingent and economically sustainable national space. On a practical level, this “home” produces cloth for its own use, but it also perhaps

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\(^{195}\) While much of the cloth produced in North America was woolen, and therefore not appropriate for paper, according to *Ireland and the Americas: Culture, Politics, and History: Volume 2* (ABC-CLIO 2008) by James Patrick Byrne, Philip Coleman, and Jason Francis King, Irish immigrants brought flax production techniques to North America as early as the 1720’s and 1730’s and by the mid-eighteenth-century centers of Irish immigration such as Londonderry, NH were known for its linen textiles (460). This suggests that a least a limited amount of the rags used in paper-making may have been made from North American linen. Moreover, it traces yet another interesting network between cloth, text, and an emergent American print public sphere.
produces “American” publics—or publics that may imagine themselves as part of a nation rather than a colonial outpost. In this sense, early ationalist discourses may have used—and revised—the myth of Republican womanhood and the home she inhabits to shape the parameters of the inclusion and exclusion in an American nation-state—parameters that both domestic oeconomy and public prints participate in producing. By inclusion and exclusion, I intend to suggest who is recognized by the state and who is not. Clearly the early Republic is not a homogenous state, but politically it was important to imagine it as one. The public praise for the woman in homespun, maps belonging along understandings of labor informed by race and class. The woman in homespun obscures the labor of field workers and domestic servants by putting her own (supposed) sacrifice and labor to the forefront. The American bourgeois woman dressed in the products of a local economy becomes the body through which a homogenous understanding of group identity can be reproduced, and by coding the labor of the home and the home itself as the territory of this woman, polices who and who cannot produce domestic spaces and recognized publics. In other words, a study of the production and consumption of textiles and their various afterlives brings into relief how fantasies of racially homogenous and self-sustaining home and nation are produced in colonial newspapers and imported or reprinted English domestic fiction. The image of the spinning woman at the center of the home producing cloth for local, private consumption may have become a poignant metaphor for colonials trying to imagine themselves as a self-sustaining nation-state rather than a colonial outpost entirely reliant on an import trade. Homespun, of course, also solves the problem of too many assertive women in the marketplace and locates their labor firmly in the home—spinning enough thread to weave into garments for one’s family would be a time-consuming venture.
As the examples above suggest, shops operated by women, such as Molly Maylem with whom I began this chapter, could be understood as a plausible expansion of women’s roles as household managers, as well as the expansion of household life and labor into more public commercial settings.\footnote{According to Dorothy A. Mays, “Women were the sole proprietors of a number of shops in colonial America” and in the late 1750’s and 1760’s “as many as 10 percent of New York shops and 25 percent of Philadelphia shops were run by women.” Patricia Cleary, in turn, notes that, “Over 160 women in Philadelphia and over 170 in New York retailed wares between 1740 and 1775. Less than three dozen women in each city can be found prior to 1750.” As Patricia Cleary notes that “women’s participation in business,” as both shopkeepers and consumers, “[may be understood] as constituting a logical and expected extension of their familial responsibilities,” and adds that we can also understand “women’s shops as spheres of feminine activity” that may have “served as acceptable places for women to interact in the same way that taverns and coffeehouses functioned as locales of male culture.” Building on this premise, Ellen Hartigan-O’Connor has argued, “international commerce, in the form of goods and people, left its stamp on every kind of work that women did” and, significantly, that “women’s work lives linked local transactions to international transformations.” See Dorothy A. Mays, Women in Early America: Struggle, Survival, and Freedom in a New World (ABC CLIO 2004), page 359; Patricia Cleary, Elizabeth Murray: A Woman’s Pursuit of Independence in Eighteenth Century America (University of Massachusetts Press 2003), page 183; and Ellen Hartigan-O’Connor, The Ties that Buy: Women and Commerce in Revolutionary America (U of Pennsylvania 2009), page 39.} Between the 1750’s and 1760’s North American women of the middling and upper classes immersed themselves in this new world of consumer goods that included a transatlantic trade in texts such as Pamela, as well as imported cloth and clothing. However, by the late 1760’s, when Molly Maylem placed her advertisement in The Newport Mercury, British economic policies such as the Sugar Act and the Stamp Act were causing increased tensions between colony and metropole. As non-importation and non-consumption agreements circulated in cities such as Newport, the outward, public appearance of women became important indexes of a family’s political and financial commitment to colonial economic and political independence. Like the unruly desires presented in seduction novels, such Richardson’s Pamela, colonial shops threatened to unravel the authority of husbands and fathers: they provided avenues of economic independence, access to gendered forms of sociality, and opportunities for self-fashioning.\footnote{T.H. Breen notes that “colonial censors couple the flood of British goods with the appearance of new kinds of women who seemed bent on taking control of their own self-fashioning” and feared the “disruptive changes” that}
years leading up to the revolution, international commerce continued to shape the appearance and economic possibilities of women in North America. While examples of women shopkeepers point to how commerce may make available new opportunities for independence for women, they do so in the face of discourses reimagining the role of women, and reinventing the home as a site fundamental to the reproduction of cultural values. In other words, in the years immediately prior to and following the Revolution women retailers and consumers find themselves situated in defiance of emergent formulations of the domestic woman and bourgeois desire that are foundational to the ideal Republican woman. The virtuous Republican woman with simple fashion tastes who is imagined as securing the “Liberty” of the (as yet imagined) nation, also becomes an image through which citizenship and belonging gets mapped alongside visibly demarcated boundaries of race and gender. Samuel Richardson’s Pamela seems to figure into this evolution. Moreover, its sustained popularity throughout the eighteenth-century is surprising considering how many new novels were available. It models how dress and homespun can function as a form of resistance. Dress, furthermore, is an important way of making visible and of visualizing demographics and belonging and in colonial settings, in particular, dress has the capacity to signal group identity that move us beyond the written word.

On October 1, 1768, Jamaican overseer and plantation owner, Thomas Thistlewood, recorded the following incident between two enslaved seamstresses: he writes, “Phibbah’s Coobah marked on Silvia’s smock bosom. D T S J H, for Dago, her husband; Mr. Meyler’s Tom, her sweetheart; and John Hart[nole], who she is supposed to love best; and other ornaments [a sketch follows]:

D T S J H
(all that heart loves best)

Here’s meat for money
If you’re fit I’m ready
But take care you don’t flash in the pan.

Figure 19: Thomas Thistlewood Journal, October 1, 1768

Coobah and Silvia had been assigned the task of sewing and mending clothes for other enslaved workers, but clearly Thistlewood caught them in the act of doing something much different: Coobah, it seems, could “write” and the materials she wrote with were needle, cloth, and thread. Between 1750 and 1786 Thomas Thistlewood wrote nearly 10,000 pages detailing his life and activities, the planting and harvesting of crops, and his brutal treatment of enslaved workers; however, on this day Coobah’s “text” disrupts the aesthetic flow and the discursive authority of the record: in order to record and transcribe her unauthorized act, he must also accurately

198 In Miserable Slavery, Thomas Thistlewood in Jamaica 1750–86, ed. Doulas Hall (Kingston, 1999), 159.
acknowledge her act of authorship and imitate the formalistic qualities of her text. Whether or not Coobah could write in a traditional sense—with ink on paper—her embroidered writing circulated far more broadly than any of Thistlewood’s private recordings: worn outside the clothing, Silvia’s smock served as a public broadside. In fact, what Thistlewood recorded that day was an early example black Atlantic women’s writing in which the author converts the very tools of her labor as an enslaved seamstress into a medium through which she can tell stories of love and kinship, as well as sexual exploitation and loss.

The account reveals a curious tension between the “literate” white text and the “material epistle” which circulates on Silvia’s body and invites us to reevaluate what we mean by the “practice of letters,” in Michael Warner’s formulation, as well as what types of “letters” we see shaping social relations, subject formation, and enfranchisement in the early Atlantic world. Material texts and the types of tactile literacies that inform their production complicate the print nationalism theories of scholars such as Jürgen Habermas and Benedict Anderson, and modify our understanding of which “authors” and what “texts” constitute the corpus of early Atlantic literature. By remaining focused on text-based subject positions, scholarship has been reticent to address how extra-discursive, tactile, and embodied signifying practices challenge the idea that writing alone serves as the primary source of subject formation. Paul Gilroy has argued that scholars should look for the “anti-discursive

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199 Douglass Hall suggests that the journals were “intended simply as private, personal, aides-memoire.” See In Miserable Slavery, vix.
201 By tactile literacy I mean non-written forms of expression that still merit the term “literacy” rather than comparatively pejorative terms such as “skill” or “competency.” See Jürgen Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society (Cambridge, 1991) and Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism (New York, 2006).
constituents of black metacommunication” that are grounded in “dramaturgy, enunciation, and gesture” rather than in “textuality and narrative.” Cloth and clothing represent such extra-discursive signifying practices and often emerge in contention with the logic of European communities shaped by a “rational” public sphere in which subjectivity and national belonging are grounded in a shared corpus of texts and reading habits. Unlike the texts that constitute an Anglophone public sphere, textiles establish the importance of aesthetics, memory, and feeling in the continuity of social life and reveal a dialectical struggle between reason and affect, the discursive and the embodied.

The goals of this chapter are two-fold: firstly, I seek to shed light on how textiles structured black Atlantic belonging. Like written or printed texts, textiles can serve to circulate and convey messages, as well as to incorporate their makers and users into a social world. However, unlike texts, techniques related to the manufacture, fashioning, and care of textiles are deeply associated with forms of female domestic industry that range across race and class lines, as well as geographies, and point to an Atlantic archive of gendered “literacies” and signifying practices. Enslaved women used cloth and clothing as conduits to memorialize personal and collective histories, signify kinship, advertise status and skill, and provide material links within slave communities, to free Euro-creole communities, and to distant or unknown homelands. As Coobah’s text suggests, textiles are records in their own

203 Jennifer Morgan argues that women were fundamental to Afro-creole slave cultures: without “the benefit of the cultural knowledge and skills possessed by African women” it would have been difficult “to negotiate the shoals of New World slavery.” “Without the presence and participation of African women in the project of New World settlement,” she continues, “there could be no return to some semblance of normal life.” See Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia, 2004), 196-7. See also Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650-1838* (Bloomington, 1990); Hilary Beckles, *Natural Rebels: A Social History of Enslaved Black Women in Barbados* (New Brunswick, 1989); and Marietta Morrissey, *Slave Women in the New World: Gender Stratification in the Caribbean* (Lawrence, 1989).
right and fundamental to the social fabrication of Atlantic subjects and creole societies. Secondly, I will examine practices related to cloth production, fashioning, and care that are embedded within cosmopolitan letters. Our focus on texts, written documents, and official historiographies makes communities structured by material texts and tactile literacies difficult to track: cloth and clothing wear away and only the written record (kept primarily by Europeans) remains. However, textiles are a regular feature of the records kept by slave traders and slaveholders such as Thistlewood, as well as natural histories and ethnographies produced by men such as Edward Long and Bryan Edwards.\(^{204}\) As Coobah’s “text” suggests, this written documentation may, in fact, frame a prior discourse: that is, a set of embodied signifying practices structuring communicative acts between enslaved peoples such as Coobah, Silvia, and the men the smock names.\(^{205}\) To put it another way, material texts are perhaps the primary discourse for which Anglophone writing merely serves as a discursive background.

Material texts call into question what we mean by “networks” in Early American and Atlantic studies.\(^{206}\) Certainly, objects and texts travel along established routes and create a

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\(^{204}\) Cloth, for instance, was an important commodity that slave traders traded for African captives, and Caribbean slaveholders were, in turn, required to cloth New World slaves. Men such as Thistlewood also used gifts of finer textiles and items of clothing when negotiating sexual relationships with enslaved women—textiles that enslaved women could in turn use to signify their status as Thistlewood’s mistress or repurpose and hawk at Sunday markets.

\(^{205}\) In her study of discourses about the Haitian Revolution Sibylle Fischer has noted, “Silences only show up against some sort of discursive background.” Diana Taylor similarly invites scholars to look for examples of embodied practices. See Sibylle Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Durham, 2004), x, and Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, 2003).

corpus of shared practices and ideas among people living vast distances from each other. However, the impersonal term “network” ignores both the material nature of exchange in this period—letters and texts are printed on rag paper and circulated via coach, ship, or foot, passing through multiple hands—as well as less established or informal routes within which ideas and practices may circulate. This chapter uses the term “fabric” of Atlantic letters to highlight the material nature of exchange and challenge the idea that “belonging” is produced almost exclusively by metropolitan and transatlantic prints traveling along established routes of exchange. A study of Caribbean publics invites such an approach because scholars have difficulty accounting for what a Caribbean print public sphere might look like. While scholars such as Eric Williams, C.L.R. James, and Paul Gilroy have long argued that Caribbean geographies defined by slavery are at the foundational center—rather than the periphery—of Anglophone enlightenment, these studies primarily see the Caribbean as producing capital that fuels knowledge production elsewhere.207 For instance, there were a limited number of presses, most of which reprinted news from Europe, and West Indians relied almost exclusively on books imported by dry goods merchants.208 Books written by West Indians were mostly published in either Europe or North America with European and North American audiences in mind.209 This assessment characterizes the Caribbean as merely

207 See Eric Williams, Capitalism and Slavery (Chapel Hill, 1994) and C.L.R James, The Black Jacobins (New York, 1989)

208 In terms of free women’s engagement with Atlantic print culture, many metropolitan and creole writers suggest that Caribbean women did not do much reading at all. As Jamaican author, Charles Leslie, writes, “The ladies read some, dance a great deal, coquet much, dress for admirers, and at last...run away with the most insignificant of their humble servants.” While we cannot take this negative assessment of creole femininity at face value, it does reveal a certain tension between the author’s “ideal” community which might be structured by rational and critical engagement with an Anglophone printed discourse and what he sees as the degeneration of women living within communities structured by embodied practices—dancing, dressing, and flirting. See Charles Leslie, A New and Exact Account of Jamaica (Edinburgh 1739). Courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia.

209 Thistlewood for instance regularly records ordering English books through Jamaican dry goods merchants. Work on Caribbean publics and print cultures includes Roderick Cave, “Early Printing and the Book Trade in the
a site of material acquisition, appropriation, and exploitation; however, examples of black Atlantic material texts embedded within writing about the West Indies suggest that sophisticated embodied signifying practices may have served to display, communicate, and memorialize personal and collective histories, as well as to represent insider knowledge of places, plants, and practices. That is, these “texts” establish the possibility of belonging despite the conditions of New World slavery: cloth and clothing provided avenues through which the African Diaspora could chart material and narrative continuities between the memory of an African past and the conditions of their Caribbean present.  

GUINEA CLOTH AND THE FABRIC OF NEW WORLD SLAVERY

When Manchester businessmen began producing “Guinea Cloth” in the mid-eighteenth century they were, in fact, entering into three markets: a West African market for cloth, a concomitant Caribbean market for enslaved Africans, and lastly a Caribbean market for the cloth that would clothe Caribbean slaves. Textiles directly shaped the contours of an early black Atlantic diaspora: they circulated as Atlantic currency, were exchanged for

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210 In the case of the natural histories and ethnographies that reached European and North American readers, the knowledge they disseminate is arguably that of local guides and enslaved women working with natural resources, as well as exchanging materials within informal markets for imported and locally produced materials. Recent studies of natural histories, such as Susan Scott Parrish’s American Curiosity: Cultures of Natural History in the Colonial British Atlantic World (Chapel Hill, 2006) and Christopher Iannini’s Fatal Revolutions: Natural History, West Indian Slavery, and the Routes of American Literature (Chapel Hill, 2012), have been increasingly in tune to who, in addition to the acknowledged authors, may have served as informal experts in the collection of the knowledge that natural histories disseminate.
people in the African slave trade, and characterized the material conditions of Caribbean slavery. 211 “Guinea Cloth”—the name given to cotton and linen “check” British textile manufacturers produced for export—became the primary textile exchanged for enslaved peoples on the West African coast. Joseph E. Inikori argues that the “cotton textile industry in England was dependent almost entirely on the slave economy of the Atlantic system.”212 From 1750 to 1774, 48 to 86 percent of this kind of “check” cloth was exported either to West Africa or to New World slave plantations.213 William Darity, Jr. notes that some English families cornered all sides of this market: the business activities of the Hibbert family, for instance, “included a 3,000 acre sugar plantation in Jamaica and a sugar commission enterprise in London as well as a cotton cloth manufactory in Manchester—an intrafamily triangle trade.”214 Guinea cloth was the essential “fabric” of New World slavery.

In 1788, Samuel Taylor, a Manchester textile producer, characterized the profits and reach of the “check” or “Guinea cloth” trade as follows:

The value of goods annually supplied from Manchester and the Neighbourhood for Africa, is about £200,000, from which, if I deduct the small value which is taken for the purchase of wood, Ivory, etc. which cannot amount to £20,000, there remains upwards of £180,000, for the purchase of Negroes only. This value of manufactures employs immediately about 18,000 of His Majesty's subjects, men, women and

211 Stephanie Smallwood notes that merchant ships were “floating marketplaces,” and as captains unloaded stores of “guns, iron bars, knives, and, most importantly, a half-dozen varieties of textiles” (emphasis mine), they replaced these commodities with a human cargo. See Stephanie Smallwood, Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora (Cambridge, 2007), 65.
children. . . . The coarse kinds of goods serve for a School or means of improvement to Workmen to enable them in time to work finer goods… Besides the manufactures which are directly furnished by the manufacturers of Manchester for the African trade, they equally furnish for the West India Trade, which is intimately connected with the former.215

In the space of a paragraph, Taylor travels between four distinct regions which he sees as woven together by the production and consumption of Guinea cloth. Taylor’s description is striking in the way that it imagines how this fabric “intimately”—in his words—binds English laborers, British merchants, West African consumers, and New World slaves into the wider fabric of eighteenth-century imperial commerce. Global markets for textiles such as Guinea cloth initiate modes of cross-cultural exchange and embed workers, producers, consumers and enslaved peoples within these circuits: rather than shared texts and reading habits, material and embodied practices related to the exchange of this fabric formulate the uneven power relations among different actors in the Atlantic world.

When English manufacturers began producing Guinea cloth, they were forced to make a study of and mimic the African patterns, prints, and aesthetics of African-produced cloth as well as the brightly printed Indian cottons that sold well in thriving West African textile markets. 216 This marks a moment at which West African consumer desire effectually

216 Colleen Kriger notes that West African “markets for textiles predated the direct trade with Europeans, and conditioned its operation” and suggests “regional preferences…structured this trade: striped cloths were exchanged for gold on the Gold Coast, while indigo-blue cloths were most desired in Gabon and Angola in exchange for ivory and slaves.” Similarly, Joseph E. Inikori argues that “These early export opportunities were
changed—or began to creolize—textile production and textile aesthetics in England. This challenges England’s own conceptions about the unilateral movement of culture from metropole to colony or from West to East, as well as how we usually characterize the flows of capital, culture, and power between Africa and Europe. A West African market for cheaply produced textiles caused a change in the aesthetics of dress in the wider Anglophone Atlantic world as fabrics mimicking the tastes of West African buyers were also sold in English domestic markets, as well as markets in colonial North America and the West Indies. Indeed, what they were mimicking was the material representation of an already long history of economic and material exchange between Europe, Africa, and India embedded in the cloth itself.

As a producer of check or Guinea cloth, Taylor seems to recognize how this long history of commercial and aesthetic exchange shapes the texture and appearance of the cloth his company produces, and in turn how the practices related to its manufacture may develop “intimacies” between people from different regions. Prior to this moment English merchants had imported Indian cottons for export to African consumers as their own linen and wool manufactures had only found limited buyers. However, where English woolen manufactures, especially wools dyed red, did find a limited market, such as in Benin and Yoruba, African

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217 For instance, Inikori argues: “The rapid expansion of exports which followed, together with the multiplier effects on the domestic market for cottons and other manufactures, provided the favorable environment for the rapid transformation of the industry’s technology and organization between the late eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries.” Inikori, 345.

218 Of course, imported textiles had long reached English buyers, and English textile producers eagerly utilized imported manufacturing techniques—in the form of silk spinners and seamstresses from Europe, for instance, in the early years of silk production.

219 For a history of the exchange of these materials see Colleen Kriger, “Mapping,” 107.
textile producers unwove these woolen textiles and rewove them into African cotton cloth that was then exported to coastal African textile markets. Similarly, imported silk on the Gold Coast was unwoven by the Asante and rewoven in the form of Kente cloth—cloth that quite literally weaves together the products and labor of vastly different geographies. The striped and checked patterns that characterize these types of mixed-media textiles would be one of the primary “prints” or styles English Guinea cloth producers attempted to mimic. Guinea cloth, in other words, has the capacity to signify and to tell the story of how Europe underdeveloped Africa, in the words of Walter Rodney: embedded in the very fabric is a history of economic relations, aesthetic practices, and uneven distributions of power characterizing the routes of New World slavery.  

While Guinea cloth may “weave” together producers, traders, and laborers from different regions of the world, what is only gestured at in Taylor’s account is how this cloth radically “unweaves” or severs material and psychic connections to home and family for the men and women sold into New World slavery.  

In accounts written or told by peoples sold into slavery, cloth often catalyzes the process through which people are transformed into commodities and points to three significant events that characterize the transition from freedom to enslavement and commodification in the route from coastal West Africa to the Caribbean: 1) men and women were traded for items such as cloth, 2) they were stripped of their own clothes, and 3) they were re-clothed by slaveholders.  

Of the exchange of people

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221 This paper is primarily interested in the African diaspora, but clearly industrialization exploited European workers as well and disrupted family ties as workers left homes for cities and worked for nearly unlivable wages with little right to contest poor treatment.
and cloth, Ottobah Cugoano notes in his 1789 *Narrative*, for instance: “I saw him take a gun, a piece of cloth, and some lead for me.” Venture Smith records a similar exchange: “I was bought on board by one Robertson Mumford, steward of said vessel, for four gallons of rum, and a piece of calico, and called VENTURE, on account of his having purchased me with his own private venture. Thus I came by my name.” As Mumford strips Smith of his name and renames him, he identifies Smith as interchangeable with the rum and the calico that were exchanged for his person—Mumford’s “venture” in Rhode Island-produced rum and cloth becomes a “venture” in human commodities.

In Ukawsaw Gronniosaw’s 1772 *Narrative*, two yards of English-produced check catalyze his expropriation from Bornu society and his interpolation into the social structure of the ship as a slave. He writes that the Dutch Captain “bought me for two yards of check, which is of more value there, than in England.” He continues:

When I left my dear mother I had a large quantity of gold about me, as is the custom of our country, it was made into rings, and they were linked into one another, and formed into a kind of chain, and so put round my neck, and arms and legs, and a large piece hanging at one ear almost in the shape of a pear. I found all this troublesome,

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223 See Ottobah Cugoano, *Narrative of the Enslavement of Ottobah Cugoano, a Native of Africa* (first published in 1787), 124. All quotations here refer to the 1825 London edition available through University of North Carolina’s Documenting the American South digital archive project: http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/cugoano/menu.html

and was glad when my new Master took it from me—I was now washed, and clothed in the Dutch or English manner.\footnote{225}

Gronniosaw’s account exhibits how clothes and ornamentation can tell personal and collective stories and histories. From his account we learn that gold ornamentation is a “custom of our country”—most likely Bornu—but also that it was a gift from his mother. Notably, his description of these ornaments as “chains,” “put round my neck, and arms and legs,” suggests material ties or “links” to home; however, this language is also reminiscent of the experience of many enslaved Africans who would make their way to the coast in African-produced hemp or rope chains which were then exchanged for the iron chains and manacles on board European ships. By appropriating Gronniosaw’s clothing and re-clothing him in the “Dutch or English manner,” the Dutch Captain severs Gronniosaw’s ties to both nation and kin. The “livery” of the Dutch Captain—rather than gold chains signaling kinship—marks his status as a slave. It is an expropriation of the most brazen sort—the lifetime of a human being's labor is bought with goods of very small comparative value. Therefore, it was important for Gronniosaw to assert to his English audience that “check” has more buying power in West African markets than it does in England. He seems to be working through a theory of value that must account for practices in which people and cloth are interchangeable and metonymically linked. In doing so, he uses the reference to check or Guinea cloth to assert the value of his person and his labor.

\footnote{225 A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African Prince, as Related by Himself (Bath 1770), 9. All references refer to the digital copy available through University of North Carolina’s Documenting the American South digital archive project: http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/gronniosaw/gronnios.html}
Unlike Gronniosaw, most African captives did not receive clothes while on ships traveling the Middle Passage. Rather, most men and women were reduced to nakedness—a state signifying the severing of ties to home and family, as well as the “bare life” which would characterize their experience as New World slaves.\textsuperscript{226} For enslaved men and women who survived the middle passage, Caribbean laws required slaveholders to clothe enslaved workers meaning that the transition into West Indian slave economies included new clothing. For instance, in his 1774 *History of Jamaica*, Edward Long cites a 1696 law that states: “Male slaves are to have jackets and drawers; and female slaves, jackets and petticoats; supplied them once a year, under penalty of five shillings, to be paid by the owner or master for every default.” He adds the footnote: “On every well-regulated plantation they are allowed, besides a suit of warm woollen cloaths, hats, caps, checks, handkerchiefs, working aprons...beads, needles, thread.”\textsuperscript{227} Of the items Long mentions here, are the same “checks” that were manufactured for West African markets. Against the conditions within which African captives became New World slaves, cloth and clothing—particularly check—would play an integral part in reconstituting memories of African pasts and negotiating Caribbean presents: the check or “Guinea cloth” that was manufactured for West African markets and mimicked tastes and aesthetics dictated by West African consumers may have been familiar to newly enslaved Africans as well as a significant material mnemonic for creole men and women belonging to the African Diaspora.

\textsuperscript{226} See Rediker, *The Slave Ship*. Stripping captives of clothing was part of the “unworlding” they experienced as they left the African littoral, but Rediker suggests there were practical reasons as well: clothes represented places to hide weapons.

The clothing provided by slaveholders operates on several levels to make, unmake, and remake its wearers. As Peter Stallybrass and Ann Rosalind Jones have argued, “Clothing is a worn world: a world of social relations put upon the wearers body.” “Clothing,” they suggest, “reminds. It can do so oppressively, of course…But whether oppressively or not, memory is materialized.”

By “memory materialized,” Jones and Stallybrass suggest that cloth functions on a register similar to text: it can articulate the past and incorporate people into their present social world. As suggested above, the distribution of “check” could signify homelands from which enslaved Africans were now irrevocably severed: it served as the means through which many were sold into slavery and, once in the Caribbean, continues to serve as a material marker and reminder that their bodies are no longer legally their own. For instance, Mrs. Carmichael, the wife of a West Indian planter, uses the general term “Negro clothing” to describe the types of materials slaveholders distributed to enslaved workers—materials that consisted of “strong blue woollen cloth, called Pennistowns—(the same that is so generally worn by the lower classes of females in Scotland for petticoats); that sort of coarse, strong, unbleached linen, known by the name of Oznabrags.”

While “lower class” women in Scotland might wear blue Pennistown wool, in the Caribbean Guinea cloth, Pennistowns, and Oznabrags incorporated enslaved workers into the fabric of New World slavery.

228 In their discussion of livery in Renaissance England, Stallybrass and Jones argue that “Livery acted as the medium through which the social system marked bodies so as to associate them with particular institutions” and “which incorporated retainers and servants into the social body of their master or mistress.” English servants clearly operated within less exploitive conditions than Caribbean slaves; however, the oznabrags and check or “Guinea” cloth distributed yearly may have enforced similar modes of obligation and assignation. See Peter Stallybrass and Ann Rosalind Jones, Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory (Cambridge, 2000), 3, 5-7.

229 Mrs. Carmichael, Domestic manners and social condition of the white, coloured and negro population of the West Indies, Volume I (London, 1833), 142-3.
Many women who survived the middle passage arrived in the Caribbean with the knowledge and skill to manufacture clothing from imported textiles, as well as plant materials indigenous to both African and Caribbean geographies.\textsuperscript{230} Enslaved women sewed garments for themselves and for slaveholders, and often bore the brunt of transforming textiles into wearable clothes for their own immediate “families” (including blood relatives, housemates, and shipmates), as well as for unattached men who may not have known how to sew. They were often apprenticed to Jamaican milliners, asked to copy styles from imported ladies magazines, and on occasion were sent to Europe to learn metropolitan styles.\textsuperscript{231} Thomas Thistlewood, for instance, records this type of labor in his journal and apprenticed two enslaved women to local seamstresses to learn to sew clothes for him and for others on the plantation. He records that he “Bought of Mr Jeremiah Meyler, a Congo girl, 9 or 10 years old, 4 feet and 1 inch high, give 42 pounds cash. Had a receipt, named her Sally, and intend her for a sempstress.”\textsuperscript{232} He apprenticed her to another enslaved woman named Doll who belonged to a Mrs. Blake, and agreed to pay Doll a doubloon when Sally’s training was complete. When Sally failed to learn the trade, he sent another young girl, Bess, to a woman named Mrs. Emetson. In early 1768, Bess returned to Thistlewood’s plantation to begin sewing clothes for other slaves.\textsuperscript{233} While this work often represented the expropriation and theft of women’s labor, when it came to sewing clothes for their own use, enslaved women

\textsuperscript{230} According to Steeve O. Buckridge, women adapted these skills to the material conditions of their new environment, and passed on this knowledge to new generations. This is the most extensive study of women and dress and Caribbean society to date, especially when it comes to women’s use of local plant materials in the manufacture of textiles. See Buckridge, \textit{The Language of Dress: Resistance and Accommodation in Jamaica 1750-1890} (Kingston, 2004).

\textsuperscript{231} Thomas Thistlewood apprenticed two enslaved women at different points, one of whom was born in Africa and sold into Caribbean slavery, and another who was born into Jamaican slavery. For more on Caribbean slaveholders sending enslaved women to Europe as apprentices see Karol K. Weaver, “Fashioning Freedom: Slave Seamstresses in the Atlantic World.” \textit{Journal of Women’s History} 24.1 (2012): 44-59.

\textsuperscript{232} In \textit{Miserable Slavery}, Thomas Thistlewood in Jamaica 1750-86, 126.

\textsuperscript{233} Ibid, 152.
used dress to reclaim their bodies as their own, to produce kinship ties, and to navigate circuits of familial and social obligation. Moreover, Afro-creole women also applied their knowledge of African dying and washing techniques to care of imported European cloth and to the manufacture of cloth from indigenous plant materials such as lace bark, and often passed this knowledge on to Euro-creole populations as well. 234 The Caribbean fashioning of cloth, in other words, links women such as Mrs. Emetson, Doll and Bess, who passed on their knowledge of the needle, as well as formulations of “taste,” in official and unofficial apprenticeships.235

While labor related to the production of clothing may represent uneven distributions of power, the knowledge and aesthetic practices that inform this labor constitute a type of embodied public discourse that shapes communities structured by material practices. While conferred clothing marked the body, it did often offer people greater mobility and status, as well as represent items that could be repurposed or bartered within slave economies and at Sunday markets.236 A thriving internal island trade serving both free and enslaved peoples

234 See Buckridge, The Language of Dress.
235 On occasion, however, slaveholding women such as Mrs. Carmichael supervised the sewing of clothing for the enslaved women working on her plantation. She would have understood this as part of her own domestic labor. She writes, “for two months before Christmas, and also Easter, I used to be as busy as possible, cutting out dresses, superintending the trimmings, and inventing different fashions for them,—for they imagine that what is too common, cannot be very genteel.” Providing ready-made clothes would mean that slaveholders could control the appearance of enslaved women as well as promote their own understandings of “virtuous” domestic labor. However, here at least, the enslaved women for whom Mrs. Carmichael sews engage in subtle acts of subterfuge. In promoting Mrs. Carmichael’s sense of superiority and competence, they avoid the labor of making these clothes themselves. While Mrs. Emetson taught Bess to sew in the English fashion, Mrs. Carmichael was, in turn, forced to “invent” or modify English cutting and sewing techniques to appease the aesthetics of the enslaved women for whom she sewed on occasion. See Mrs. Carmichael, Domestic Manners, 148.
236 For instance, in Charles Leslie’s 1739 A New and Exact Account of Jamaica, the author cites one of many laws regulating the movement of Caribbean slaves: “None shall give Leave to any Negro-slave except such as wait upon their Person, or wear Liveries, to go out of their Plantations, without a Ticket or White-servant, in which Ticket is to be exprest their Name, from whence, and whither going, on Penalty of 40 s.” See Leslie, A New and Exact Account, 228.
made a number of additional textiles available to enslaved men and women. These included silk, Indian muslin, English-produced cottons, island-produced plant fiber textiles such as lace bark, as well as different types of locally produced dyes that women used to change the color of conferred clothing. Informal markets structured by the manufacture or exchange of different textiles offered many enslaved men and women avenues through which they could resignify the material and embodied representation of their bondage—namely, the often coarse, conferred clothing given to them by slaveholders. The production of clothes suited to their taste played a significant role in producing new ties within, as well as beyond, an Afro-Caribbean Diaspora. And in the case of women such as Coobah, with whom I began this chapter, “marking” English-produced textiles with their own expressions and transforming English textiles into clothes suiting their own taste may have challenged the aesthetic and social authority of slaveholders. Informed by embodied, performative, non-literary signifying practices, clothing structures black Atlantic publics that contest an Anglophone legal and discursive record that contends that enslaved peoples’ bodies are not their own: clothing can serve as material testimony or petition, operating within and constituting an embodied public sphere structured by tactile literacies and material memories.

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237 See Buckridge, *The Language of Dress.*
TRANSATLANTIC PRINTS AND BLACK ATLANTIC MATERIAL TEXTS

Turning to examples of black Atlantic material texts, we can begin to imagine the kinds of publics they inform as well as how they may participate in enlightenment-era knowledge production traditionally understood as driven by print. Caribbean women’s tactile literacies and knowledge of local environments could be said to inform and frame the practice of cosmopolitan letters as seen in Thistlewood’s journal or Edward Long’s *History of Jamaica*. In the case of the natural histories and ethnographies that reached European and North American readers, the knowledge they disseminate is arguably that of local guides and enslaved women working with natural resources, as well as exchanging materials within informal markets for imported and locally produced materials. Black Atlantic material texts—as constituted by cloth and clothing—may be seen to *inhabit* European books thereby undermining the monolinguistic or myopic narratives of their European writers. Non-textual forms of communication and expression are clearly difficult to tease out of written or printed texts—what we are reading are material texts in translation filtered through the lens of Anglophone authors. Moreover, when textiles show up in account books, ship’s logs, personal records, or natural histories they often tend to stand in for or obscure histories and relationships that may be unthinkable or unspeakable in “polite” European letters: for instance, the exchange of human lives for textiles of comparatively little value or coercive sexual relationships negotiated through gifts of cloth and clothing. Embedded in these “literate” white texts, cloth and clothing tell stories regardless of whether their writers or wearers want them to and gesture toward prior communicative acts, modes of affiliation, and
practices structured by a set of embodied signifying practices that Anglophone writing seeks to eschew.

For some women, clothes served as material texts that help to lay claim to the rights of romantic affiliation and kinship—despite the asymmetrical nature of these relationships—in the absence of a legally and discursively recognized marriage. Thomas Thistlewood, for instance, regularly records his distribution of textiles among different enslaved women with whom he had sexual relationships. He gave a woman named Jenny “some beads,” “2 yards of Brown Oznabrig…4 yards of striped Holland…an handkerchief,” a “blue bordered coat,” a “plain blue” coat, and a “bordered zacca.”238 Several days later he records taking back the coat and the beads. He and Jenny, it appears, must have quarreled; however, the only way to track their volatile relationship is through the clothes he gives and then reclaims. After Jenny, Thistlewood entered into a relationship with Phibbah which lasted until the end of his life and resulted in her manumission. In the early days of their relationship, he records giving her “10 yards of brown oznabrig…2 pistoles in money, mosquito net, 3 cakes of soap, about 3 ½ yards of cloth.” In turn, Phibbah gave Thistlewood “a gold ring, to keep for her sake.”239 While Thistlewood only records the flows of commodities in his journal, the items he gifted to Phibbah and which were worn on the body would serve as public record of their relationship: the gifts Phibbah received from Thistlewood mark her as his mistress, and the ring she gives to him acts as a reminder of that fact to both Thistlewood and other women. Textiles could also serve as legal testimony, as was the case with John Thistlewood, Phibbah’s and Thistlewood’s manumitted son, who pursued a relationship with an enslaved

238 *In Miserable Slavery*, 32-3.
239 Ibid, 79.
woman named Mimber. When John died under suspicious circumstances, the only evidence is “a piece of fine printed linen & a woman’s hat” that cost seven pounds—money that is still owed to “Messrs Wilson and Benison.” Mimber “stiffly denies” any relationship with John, but it seems that he may have been poisoned by a man named Port Royal for his involvement with her. The clothes tell a story that is otherwise absent from the official record or only recorded as “debt” in the account books of Wilson and Benison. However, as they continue to circulate on Mimber’s body they serve as a material mnemonic: the clothes are the record or the material text that tells the story of their relationship.

While slavery is a power relationship that could not confer clear or lasting agency on enslaved peoples, enslaved women were also not simply passive victims: access to imported and locally produced textiles and informal markets allowed many enslaved women to establish social and familial ties despite the uneven power relations characterizing West Indian society. The material texts embedded within Thistlewood’s journal reveal how some women may have negotiated their status as slaves, as well as how slavery continually disrupted the formation of stable kinship ties. In the case of Coobah and Silvia with whom I began this chapter, both women carried on asymmetrical relationships with white men. The smock, as well as the articles of cloth listed above, represents relationships negotiated through the body. The song or phrase Coobah embroiders on Silvia’s smock attests to the bodily relationships it signifies. The lines “Here’s meat for money/If you are fit, I’m ready/ But take care you don’t flash in the pan” serve as innuendo, and show how sexual relationships with white men may have yielded material assets but, as was most often the case, offered little

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240 Ibid, 276.
241 When Coobah marked the smock, she was pregnant and gave birth to a “mulatto girl,” according to Thistlewood, two months later.
stability. What is often left, at the end of a relationship, is the record of it in the form of the clothes and gifts exchanged for sexual favors. However, the case of Coobah and Silvia suggests that women often took charge of how this extra-discursive record was materialized and memorialized and suggest how these records may have framed publics structured by embodied, material practices.

Historian Steve O. Buckridge suggests that the material memories retained and embodied in cloth and clothing styles assured the “survival of Africans and their descendants against European attempts at cultural annihilation.” He writes that “Africans brought aspects of their culture such as folklore, music, religion, dress, and the knowledge of plants with them to the Americas…[and that these] cultural characteristics were also transmitted to the descendants of African slaves.” The result, he notes, is “a vibrant Creole culture.”242 I would add that one of the features of this “creole culture” is the centrality of enslaved women as seamstresses, “head dressers,” and domestic workers, and that we see evidence of this survival embedded within Anglophone texts and images that translate the tactile literacies of New World Africans for English audiences.

While deceptively peripheral to texts such as Edward Long’s History of Jamaica, Afro-Caribbean women’s relationship to cloth production, fashioning, and care is fundamental to much of the knowledge that his text produces and disseminates about New World ecologies. Volume III, for instance, includes extensive lists of West Indian plant materials that could be used as “Vegetable Soaps,” “Perfumes” (to scent clothing), “Dyes and Pigments,” and “Substances for Cloathing.” He records how New World Africans fashioned

242 See Buckridge, Language of Dress, 61.
clothes and accessories from a number of plant materials: from the leaves of the Palmeto-Royal they made hats, seeds from the Great Macaw Tree were transformed into necklaces, the cotton from Silk-Cotton trees was woven into garments which could then be died “a fine fixed blue colour” with the Indigo-Berry or a “rusty, iron colour” with oil dyes produced from the Cashew Nut. In turn, the gum from the Lignum-Vitae tree could be used as soap to “wash painted linens, and other stained garments.” 243 Of these items, the “Laghetto, or Lace-Bark Tree” is perhaps the most interesting. According to Long, “The ladies of the island are extremely dexterous in making caps, ruffles, and compleat suits of lace with it…equal to the best artificial lace.” 244 Moreover, lacebark may have been familiar to his readers as a token of transatlantic diplomacy: in the late seventeenth-century, Sir Thomas Lynch, then Governor of Jamaica, presented Charles II with a lacebark cravat made on the island. The lacebark cravat combines Caribbean raw materials and elite English fashion, and would serve to testify on Lynch’s behalf that his island can produce marketable commodities as well as maintain English aesthetics, cultural forms, and practices.

Long neither credits Afro-Caribbean women for this knowledge, nor elaborates upon how these materials were manufactured into clothing or items used in the fashioning and washing of clothes. So who were the women that acted as guides and purveyors of the knowledge he includes in his books? This is a moment in which the knowledge and labor of these women enters the official Anglo-American record and raises the question: to what extent did the tactile literacies and material memories of enslaved Caribbean women impact the production of texts for metropolitan readers? The clothes that women manufactured in

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244 Ibid, 745.
excess to conferred clothing may have served as the material texts that inform authors’ characterizations of West Indian ecologies—ecologies that these authors seek to list and render legible while simultaneously silencing or disavowing the source of this knowledge.

The lacebark cravat was a material epistle that served as a promise as well as a reminder; however, unlike most examples of Atlantic correspondence, it also embeds within it material practices belonging to women who Long only identifies as “ladies of the island.” The knowledge of lace-bark production would most likely fall within the realm of Afro-Caribbean women who brought this knowledge with them from Africa and passed it on to descendants. Long’s book, in turn, translates these material texts into written language: the knowledge they represent and the plants they come from are absorbed into the Anglophone record, and as Long taxonomizes their various parts and relates how they are made the material text becomes a new specimen-commodity ready for harvesting. When collected within natural histories, the knowledge and labor of these women, as well as their bodies, is coopted to exhibit the potential of Caribbean ecologies: these women are a part of the ecologies they work within and are therefore equally exploitable.

On one level, natural history writers depict the kind of Caribbean world that Europeans would want to see: a virtual paradise in which cultural and economic blending is relatively benign. Following in this tradition, Agostino Brunias—an Italian draughtsman—worked in St. Vincent, Dominica, and Antigua producing works for planters, bureaucrats, and

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245 His use of the term “ladies” suggests that he is attributed the knowledge and labor of Afro-Caribbean women to the white women who “own” their labor. Long would, most likely, refrain from calling enslaved women “ladies.”

246 Buckridge comments, for instance, that “European settlers did utilize the products of tree bark and bark clothing, and many perhaps, benefited from the profits of their slaves’ activities in this type of industry.” See Buckridge, 65.
military officials. Many of his paintings were intended as souvenirs circulating in ways similar to modern day postcards and his works were also used to illustrate Bryan Edwards’ *History, Civil and Commercial, of the West Indies*. We cannot take Brunias’ work at face value: he was, after all, producing work for European elites who often wanted to remember the Caribbean in a certain light. For these reasons, Beth Fowkes Tobin has called Brunias’ work “ethnographic art.” She writes that “The clothing that Brunias records in his paintings identifies his subjects as types of Caribbean people” and suggests that these “are taxonomic images of specimens, not representations of individuals.” While Brunias’ works pay a certain taxonomic attention to dress that may be understood as “ethnographic” in nature or—as in Long’s plant studies—as a way of “collecting” women for study, he also inevitably captures examples of Caribbean publics structured by embodied and material practices: markets and festivals channeling the exchange of produce and textiles rely on a variety of bodily attitudes and practices—hawking, dancing, eating, flirting—that structure certain types of social and economic relations.

I would like to conclude this chapter with a reading of Brunias’ *Dominica Linen Market* produced sometime in the 1770’s. Many of the material ties and relationships outlined above come together explicitly at Sunday markets. Sunday markets seemed to be a particularly curious attraction for European writers, as well as a significant site of social, economic, and cultural exchange for enslaved Caribbean peoples. These markets provide some evidence for how cloth and clothing may have structured interdependencies between Euro-creole and Afro-creole populations, as well as the importance of creole women to

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247 See Beth Fowkes Tobin, *Picturing Imperial Power: Colonial Subjects in Eighteenth-Century British Paintings* (Durham, 1999), 139.
European textile markets, and how women’s dress played an important role in knowledge produced about the Caribbean and Caribbean peoples. The term “creole” defines peoples from European and African descent living within the Caribbean-Atlantic basin and signifies a subject’s coloniality and the nature of (un)belonging; however, I am also interested in the creative components of what it means to be “creole.” I use Kamau Braithwaite’s model, put forth in *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820*, though not without some hesitation. Braithwaite argues that “people, mainly from Britain and West Africa, who settled, lived, worked and were born in Jamaica, contributed to the formation of a society . . . which, in so far as it was neither purely British nor West African, is…creole.”

Braithwaite calls the process through which this particular social formation takes place “creolisation.” For Braithwaite, creolisation is a “way of seeing the society, not in terms of white and black, master and slave, in separate nuclear units, but as contributory parts of a whole.” While Braithwaite resists categorizing Jamaican, and by proxy Caribbean, culture as defined by the juxtaposition and antagonisms between white elite society and New World African societies, he does often posit the processes of creolisation as unidirectional. For instance, he argues that enslaved peoples and free persons of color often sought to “mimic” the cultures of the white elite, but that the “Euro-creole elite,” in turn, were unlikely to “absorb in any central sense the…tradition[s] of the majority”—that is, of Afro-creole slave populations. The result, he argues, is a “pervasive dichotomy” between Euro-elite and Afro-creole Caribbean societies. Attention to the uses and shifting styles of dress within the Caribbean reveals a different story.

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248 Both the French créole and the Spanish criollo suggest a relationship between geographic distance from metropolitan centers (whether understood as West African or European), as well as the sense of cultural creativity and flexibility necessitated by that distance. Both terms describe persons born or living in locales “away from home” and bear the Latin root, créâre: to create.


251 *The Development of Creole Society*, page 309.
and a much different result. Creolisation, as we can see in Brunias’ works, is both a cultural and material process that points to the fundamental influence of creative Afro-creole cultures.

In this particular painting, the ships and shorelines in the background serve as a reminder that Caribbean markets were dominated by British imports. From these ships we see offered for sale linens, striped Hollands, check or “Guinea cloth,” cotton muslins, oznabrags, pennistowns, as well as perhaps locally produced “lace bark” and thread spun from local plant fibers. While Brunias depicts mixed-race women along with white creole and black creole women; his painting attempts to maintain a clear racial hierarchy despite the inevitable mixing the market produces: while free women of color are situated as superior to and standing over enslaved women, most of whom are seated and offering wares for sale, they still remain inferior to white women in the painting, such as the woman with the umbrella held over her by a slave. As Barbara Bush has argued “as a woman, the female slave shared a common subordination with all women but, where gender united black and white women, race and class divided them.” In other words, Brunias’ works seem to uphold European assumptions that, in the words of Lucille Mair, "the black woman produced, the brown woman served, and the white woman consumed."

252 Braithwaite also notably omits Amerindian cultures. While this study focuses primarily on Euro-creole and Afro-creole cultures, Amerindian society was an important facet of creolisation—especially, perhaps, for Jamaican Maroon communities. Amerindians, arguably, passed on knowledge of local plant and animal life that made the creolisation of West African and European peoples possible.  
253 Barbara Bush, Slave Women in Caribbean Society, xii.
However, I would also suggest that the very conditions of the mixed-crowd marketplaces structured by the exchange of textiles, in particular, begin to dismantle this reading: while this is not an egalitarian space, the rules of assemblage and exchange seem to be controlled by market women of African descent. For instance, one could argue that, in fact, two women share center stage in *Dominica Linen Market* and their relationship is structured by the exchange of cloth. The “language” of cloth functions as a potentially equalizing force and informs the exchange between the white creole woman and the market woman—a language characterized by touch, sight, knowledge of market prices, the cloths’ origins, and its capacity to signify. In this sense, Brunias’ marketplaces illuminate the aesthetic authority and primacy of women buyers and sellers who seem to be of African descent. He depicts, for instance, a number of different styles of dress—ranging from European cuts, to African-influenced headdresses, to creolized stylistic combinations. Women of different racialized backgrounds wear headdresses and shawls made from the check or “Guinea cloth” that was also traded in West African markets. The market woman has adopted a few of the aesthetic qualities of European dress: a full skirt and ruffs, for instance. Rather than open and wide flowing sleeves that would facilitate physical labor, her sleeves are cinched at the elbow and fashioned into three-quarter length ruffs that keep her forearms free to sew or spin. And, in turn, the Euro-creole buyer has adapted to the climate of the region and adopted some of the characteristic styles of Afro-Caribbean women. She wears an elaborate turban and, tellingly, she is wearing the Indian muslin that was popular in West African textile markets and which is better suited to warm weather, providing greater mobility than silks or linens. Brunias may

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have attempted to depict Euro-creole women as superior, but he also seems to recognize Afro-creole women as major purveyors of British exports within Caribbean circuits of exchange.

If the West African littoral is a site where African captives’ ties to home are severed or unwoven, the textile market is a site where new ties are established. The market, in this reading, is a site of assembly that challenges Anglophone authority and the “rules” of white, bourgeois sociality, or in turn, a white bourgeois public sphere: it is dominated and controlled by Caribbean women of color and centered on the exchange of fabrics rather than texts or “polite” conversation. However, these fabrics function in ways that are not entirely different from—even if they are at odds with—an Anglophone print public sphere: they are communicative devices, they can challenge the exercise of power, and they structure communities around the use of a common language—here, however, it is the language of cloth. However, unlike an Anglophone public sphere, markets are sites that establish the importance of aesthetics, memory, and feeling in the continuity of social life. Mrs. Carmichael acknowledged the power of Afro-Caribbean aesthetics when she noted, in 1833, that she was “very much amused by observing what connoisseurs the negro women are of dress,--standing near me, at one time, I heard them criticize every thing I wore, both in the material and the make.” While Mrs. Carmichael seems to disparage this expertise, she also inevitably recognizes Afro-creole women’s role within Caribbean society as judges, agents, and tastemakers—tastes and aesthetics that, furthermore, influence her own style of dress. Her

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255 It is also a site, however, where Anglophone aesthetics are deconstructed and reconstituted as “creole.” As imported English textiles reach Afro-creole buyers they are made to signify in new ways; moreover, when Euro-creole buyers purchased cloth from the Afro-Caribbean women at the market, they purchased cloth that has travelled through Afro-creole circuits of exchange. In turn, these buyers are also influenced by the different ways these textiles can be fashioned. Sellers use their own bodies as templates to advertise the quality and potential of as yet unfashioned textiles. For new European arrivals, Afro-Caribbean women served as models for how to dress in an unfamiliar climate. See Mrs. Carmichael, Domestic manners, 46.

256 Mrs. Carmichael, Domestic manners, 46.
comment exhibits a reversal of the colonial gaze with its concomitant relationship to knowledge production and power: rather than the observer of the habits of her domestic slaves, Mrs. Carmichael—specifically her dress—is the object of their observation and derision. By titling these women connoisseurs—experts, judges, critics—she inadvertently acknowledges their central role as judges and agents in a West Indian society—a role that could lead to degrees of empowerment, mobility, and agency for enslaved Caribbean women just as access to the world of letters may have served a similar purpose for literate English subjects.

When Agostino Brunias painted *Dominica Linen Market*, he recorded much more than the exchange of cloth. What he recorded was a shared tactile language centered on conversations between Afro-creole and Euro-creole women about the “material and the make,” in Mrs. Carmichael’s words—that is, what type of cloth is offered and how it can be fashioned. By the end of the eighteenth-century turbans and muslins would enter the lexicon of British women’s dress as well. This suggests that England did not simply export cloth to the Caribbean but, in the form of creole women returning to the metropole, imported new tastes, styles, and languages, as well—that is, forms of expression featuring the aesthetics and tastes of Afro-creole women: painted cottons, shorter sleeves, and headdresses. For instance, as Mrs. Carmichael writes “the heat of the climate, which renders it quite impossible for any one to wear in that country the same clothing as in England; and it is no exaggeration to say, that the modesty of that lady who would appear in England with no thicker clothing than she can endure in the West Indies, would be thought rather questionable.” However, women did begin to appear in Europe who wore these fashions. For instance, Lady Nugent describes a

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257 Mrs. Carmichael, *Domestic Manners*, page 155.
ball gown made after the creole fashion as having “Scarcely any sleeves...[and] the body made very much like a child’s frock, tying behind, and the skirt round, with not much train.” Notably, the dress was sent to her by Madame Pauline Le Clerc, Napoleon’s sister and the wife of General Le Clerc who Napoleon sent to reestablish French control over Saint Domingue. Madame Le Clerc was in Haiti between 1801 and 1802. The dress she had made for Lady Nugent in late November 1802 was most likely made in France but with a creole aesthetic in mind. In other words, when Madame Le Clerc returned to France in the fall of 1802, she may have brought methods of creole fashioning with her—possibly in the form of Caribbean seamstresses—and the dress she sent back to Lady Nugent combined creole and French aesthetics.

Unlike the unilateral route of the slave ship from coastal Africa to the Americas, textile markets and trends in dress have a circumatlantic movement. Combining European and African styles and manufacturing techniques, clothes produced by Caribbean women impacted the creolisation of dress in the Caribbean for free and bound women alike—trends that free white women would, in turn, import to Europe and North America. In this sense, while clothes and domestic goods inevitably signal class and belonging, they also foster possible avenues for self-making through “literacies” that are not predicated upon the printed word, common reading habits, or access to literature. In particular, local and international markets in cloth and clothing provided avenues through which enslaved women could establish material ties and memories to distant homelands, and to challenge the power and primacy of slaveholding European men and women. Moreover, as Afro-Caribbean women’s

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258 Lady Nugent’s Journal of Her Residence in Jamaica from 1801 to 1805, edited by Philip Wright (University of West Indies Press 2002), page 133.
labor, knowledge and taste influences the kinds of information collected within the natural histories, ethnographies, and journals written from the position of European men and women, their “tactile” literacies could be seen to shape two seemingly distinct markets: firstly, a Caribbean market for imported and locally produced textiles, and secondly, a market in texts about Caribbean peoples, plants, products, and manners. In this sense, Afro-Caribbean women played a central role in shaping West Indian society—for West Indians and for metropolitan readers alike. The material texts that constitute creole fashioning ask us to rethink the flows of culture and power between England, Africa, and the Caribbean and to understand how cloth and clothing functioned as sites of cultural retention, resistance, and influence.