

A LOOM OF HER OWN?: WEAVING MEN AND SPINNING  
WOMEN IN THOMAS DELONEY'S  
*JACK OF NEWBURY*

by

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A THESIS

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## ABSTRACT

To show how popular (male) sentiment pushed against female participation in cloth production during this period, I will look closely at Thomas Deloney's *Jack of Newbury*, a romance novel whose protagonist conquers the weaving world by subjugating powerful women who claim (or could claim, if they so chose) economic authority. This novel, my primary text, reveals how early Renaissance authors deliberately warped images of spinning women from traditional economies and classical mythology in order to redefine the occupation's boundaries. As this literature entered public discourse, spinning became more and more associated with marital and domestic responsibilities, so it is no coincidence that the word "spinster" now changed from a neutral, denotative term describing one's occupation to a pejorative, connotative term describing one's marital status. As this final point suggests, my thesis's central goal is to show how Renaissance literature distorted historical records and reappropriated popular narrative motifs in order to create highly effective economic propaganda. Deloney is an apt figure to examine in this effort because he was himself a yeoman silk weaver who frequently distorted the past (both literary and actual) in an effort to reform his guild through the written word.

My approach to the topic of femininity and literary/cultural production has been heavily influenced by Jack Zipes' article, "Spinning with Fate: *Rumpelstiltskin* and the Decline of Female Productivity," and Roger A. Ladd's article, "Thomas Deloney and the London Weavers' Company." Zipes' work describes the economic changes that punctuated the spinning industry during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries that provided the sociohistorical backdrop for the

Rumpelstiltskin tale. I argue, in response to this claim, that the movement, and indeed the evolution of the spinning woman as a fairy tale archetype, can be traced to a much earlier point in time. The place and prestige of women within the *métier* began to suffer before industrialization significantly altered the spinning profession, as guild documents from the London Weavers' Company clearly exhibit. Ladd's article, on the other hand, has shaped my discussion of authors/literary figures and their affect on economic policies as it relies heavily on these same documents and other economic records.

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## INTRODUCTION

Although the London Weavers' Company is the oldest guild in England, the weavers faced several potentially devastating setbacks during the last few decades of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Pressures from political embargoes against foreign exports and imports, poor harvests and enclosure movements, and an overwhelming influx of foreign weavers dampened the wool market and forced prices to plummet. As a reaction to these and various other pressures, the weavers' guild passed several ordinances that sought to narrow the guild's membership and control the number of economically viable looms: the guild limited the number of apprentices allowed every master, restricted the number of looms each could operate, and completely forbade the apprenticeship of women. In the midst of these economic setbacks of the late sixteenth century, Thomas Deloney, a yeoman weaver, balladeer, and novelist, wrote the prose novel *Jack of Newbury*, a narrative that follows the life of John Winchcomb, the eponymous Jack, as he overcomes a myriad of personal and professional obstacles and carves out a large, quite profitable, niche for his weaving business. But Deloney does more than present a straightforward success story with this novel. In order to reform his foundering craft, he revises the history of the weaving guild and the literary representation of weaving women. He presents a world in which men are the unquestionable stewards of the weaving art and women merrily accept their newly menial role as spinners. When his source, John Winchcomb's life, does not provide or allow for just such a world, Deloney does not hesitate to create one. In fact, the tensions between history and fantasy that so dominate *Jack of Newbury* spring from these

creative moments and lend a powerful force to the narrative as a whole. It seems that the very moments Deloney stretches beyond the bounds of historical probability function the most smoothly, appeal most directly to his audience. After all, Jack's life, as Deloney writes it, would have had an almost irresistible appeal to the male weavers whom the author addresses, for it presents a tidy microcosm of success—one of domestic, economic, and civic stability. Deloney suggests, it seems, that male weavers who follow Jack's lead, especially in their dealings with women, cannot help but achieve the same level of prosperity. If the textile industry as a whole would only model itself on the image within this novel, England itself could recapture the prosperity of the past.

Despite Deloney's ability to communicate this political agenda within an entertaining narrative, modern readers may well find *Jack of Newbury* unremarkable in terms of subject, for in many ways, it is strikingly similar to twenty-first century novels. In the first chapter, Deloney introduces his protagonist, a character loosely based on the historical figure John Winchcomb, and over the course of ten chapters, organized chronologically, narrates the man's journey from the everyday working world of a bachelor craftsman to the more successful, privileged realm of husband, master, and political savant. The various obstacles and triumphs of Jack's life remain the focus throughout the work, despite digressions into subplots and an abundance of minor characters. The novel, though at times fractured by sudden shifts in plot, tone, and focus, lacks the "experimental" complexity that characterizes many modern novels, and the conventional use of chapters, a traditional timeline, and one unwavering perspective further encourages modern readers to see *Jack of Newbury* as a rather primitive precursor to the popular novel as we now know it.



When the novel was first written over 400 years ago, however, these very characteristics contributed to the text's extraordinary success. The earliest surviving edition of *Jack of Newbury* was published in 1619, but the work was entered in the Stationers' Register more than twenty years earlier, in 1597. From this, we could infer that a second edition of *Jack of Newbury* was printed after 22 years of circulation, which would be interesting, of course, but would not clearly demonstrate the work's enormous level of popularity. Fortunately, the 1619 edition provides an important bit of information in the inscription: "Now the eight time Imprinted, corrected, and enlarged by T.D." Thus, from the time the novel was first published to the time the earliest extant edition was printed, the work had already gone to press seven times! The fact that the 22 years of steady publication has been lost is in itself telling: as one scholar put it, "no earlier copy of this popular novel has survived the onslaught of its avid readers" (Stemmler 48). It was literally read out of existence. After the 1619 edition, *Jack of Newbury* was again published at least seven times during the seventeenth century; surviving editions from 1626, 1630, 1633, 1637, 1655, 1672, and 1680 indicate the work's enduring appeal and more than justify the fact that Laura Stevenson includes *Jack of Deloney* on her list of Renaissance "Best-Sellers" (248).

Deloney, who gained his first modicum of fame as a moderately successful and influential ballad-writing silk-weaver, clearly found his medium, one which allowed his skill as a balladeer and his background as a craftsman and political representative of his guild to coalesce in hugely popular, hugely profitable ways. Before he turned to prose narratives, Deloney's career was plagued with controversy. Surviving records indicate that the author was twice imprisoned for two particularly polemical texts, the "Complaint of the Yeoman Weaver Against Immigrant Weavers" and a lost ballad "On the Want of Corn." Although the first text offers a valuable glimpse at the early modern cloth industry, which I will more fully investigate later, the

complaint was not so well received by the French church in London, to whom Deloney and his coauthors had addressed their appeal. The impertinence of the weavers' requests annoyed the church officials, and when they reported the weavers to the authorities, the author and all 14 of his associates soon found themselves in Newgate Prison. Unfortunately for Deloney, this experience was repeated the following year, when the lord mayor banned his ballad, "On the Want of Corn." Although the ballad is lost to modernity, the contents can be reconstructed from a letter written by the lord mayor; apparently, the ballad complained about the scarcity of grain during one of the worst food shortages in England's history, causing "some Discontentment among the poor," and then offered a highly critical depiction of Queen Elizabeth, who speaks "with her people in dialogue wise in very fond and undecent sort," (Lawlis, *The Novels of Thomas Deloney* xxviii; Ladd 983). Both of these incidents reveal Deloney's enduring concern for his class, a concern which later found expression, and acceptance, through his novels.

But what about this generic shift brought Deloney so much success? To some degree, the popularity of *Jack of Newbury* may have depended on the very attributes modern readers could find stale. The fact that the story is written almost entirely in prose would have been, if not entirely new, new enough to be exciting and different. Other genres dominated the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: dramas and sonnets, broadsides and pastoral epics. Prose fiction was just coming into its own; it would not lead to the modern novel until the eighteenth century,<sup>1</sup> as illustrated by Ian Watt's important study, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding*. Indeed, Watt's description of the novel hinges upon two key terms which discredit the notion that Deloney was an early novelist: later works like *Moll Flanders*, *Pamela*, and *Tom Jones* emphasize "realism" (as in Aristotelian mimesis) and artistic "originality" (as opposed to the Renaissance practice of imitating earlier models) in a way that *Jack of Newbury* does not.

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<sup>1</sup> The word "novel" as we now understand it was not solidified in literary discourse until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (OED).

Deloney's work is not historically and situationally accurate enough to be considered "realistic." Although Merritt E. Lawlis praises the work for its "realistic dialogue" (*Apology for the Middle Class*, 7) between members of the middle class, the description of Jack's workshop, the relationships between Jack and the nobility, and the depiction of the textile industry are all blatantly ahistorical, built upon the fantastic and romantic rather than the actual. As Watt notes, medieval and Renaissance authors worked under a different understanding of time and history than later writers, like Defoe and Richardson (23). Early Modern authors tended to favor moral realism—what was true or evocative to the story—over historical fact, while the eighteenth-century novelists were far more concerned with accurate representations. Ironically, the very fact that Deloney based his prose fiction on a historical figure detracts from Watt's definition of "originality"; Deloney, like many of his predecessors and contemporaries, did not invent his plot but relied upon the traditional sources—"mythology, history, legend, or previous literature" (23). Somehow, *Jack of Newbury* manages to be simultaneously too historical and not historical enough.

Clearly, Watt's definition of "the novel" leaves *Jack of Newbury* and many other Renaissance prose works in an uncomfortable limbo. Michael McKeon seeks to redress this issue in his study, *The Origins of the English Novel: 1600-1740*; he discusses many of the early modern conventions that typify Deloney's work as earlier precursors to the eighteenth-century developments and questions the extent to which Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding freed themselves from the earlier "romance." Prose romances did not fade out of existence during the eighteenth century, and works such as *Pamela* and *Robinson Crusoe* are replete with romantic touches. McKeon also challenges the relationship between "the rise of the middle class" and "the rise of the novel," which Watt argues is based on issues of realism and individuality. "[W]hat,"

McKeon asks, “are we to make of the unsettling argument that middle-class individualism originated not in eighteenth-but in thirteenth-century England?” (3). A sharply defined history of literary genres remains as elusive as a history of social structures. We can no more pinpoint the development of a working class than we can define the emergence of a genre. As McKeon suggests, the processes of social and literary development are more organic than mathematic, more akin to evolutionary theory than the scientific method (7).<sup>2</sup>

Yet, as Theo Stemmler illustrates in his chapter “The Rise of a New Literary Genre: Thomas Deloney’s Bourgeois Novel *Jack of Newbury*,” micro-levels of literary evolution can fruitfully bear scrutiny. In some ways, Stemmler responds to McKeon’s work on the novel by arguing that Deloney’s work contributes to the development of prose fiction, and thus to the development of what would later become the novel, by taking working class lives and struggles as his primary subject, a choice that would not be possible if the middle class were not already a formidable presence in England’s social fabric. According to Stemmler, Deloney’s choice to focus on an ordinary citizen separated the author from the preceding traditions, which often revolved around characters of noble or even divine descent (48). Here, again, our author’s history as a ballad writer and yeoman contributed to his success; he was able to adapt the usual content of broadsides (“the destinies of non-aristocratic people”) to his new purpose and incorporate his knowledge of England’s labor situation in order to present something at once fresh and wholly relevant to his audience, who were beginning to prosper as the economic importance of the middle class challenged their literary and political underrepresentation (50-51). Laden with pressures and tensions from nearly every sphere of English life—class conflict,

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<sup>2</sup> See also J. Paul Hunter’s work, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth Century English Fiction*. While Hunter does not specifically mention Deloney, he thoroughly discusses the problematic relationship between novel and prose romances and concludes that episodic digressions (as in *Jack of Newbury*) tend to mark romances rather than novels, but even he concedes that this distinction is often blurred.

nationalism and the history of England, intensifying gender struggles, and competition in the global market—the novel depends on a thorough understanding of all that was at stake to Deloney and those “avid readers” who attached themselves to the new working class hero.

And, indeed, there was much to be won or lost by the end of the sixteenth century, when the English wool industry faced a series of potentially devastating obstacles, many of which were rooted in the earliest days of English textile production. As Roze Hentschell argues in *The Culture of Cloth in Early Modern England*, understanding the development of the wool industry and its place within the early modern imagination becomes vitally important since this industry shaped, strengthened, and upheld the nationalistic core of England’s identity on the global scene throughout much of the Renaissance. And since the question of historical realism clearly bears upon *Jack of Newbury*’s status as a literary text and its reception as an Early Modern cultural phenomenon, taking a moment to explore this issue seems both wise and worthwhile.

## THE HISTORY OF ENGLAND'S WOOL INDUSTRY

Hentschell opens her book on cloth culture and nationalism by explaining that “[it] is impossible to comprehend the development of English nationalism during the early modern period without also understanding the culture of cloth” and recognizing the “tremendous cultural importance” of wool (1). According to her argument, those who produced cloth simultaneously (and knowingly) produced a national culture, one that has been intimately associated with English identity for many millennia. William Leggett argues this point in his exhaustive history of the wool industry, *The Story of Wool*:

Undoubtedly, the aborigines, who lived in Britain during the Bronze Age from 3500 to 2500 B.C., wore some form of crude woolen garments. Strabo, the Greek historian who was born in 53 B.C., advances this surmise in one of his historical writings, and, as it to confirm his theory, remnants of wool have been found in burrows of ancient Britons of about that period. (147)

Leggett continues this vein of argument by suggesting that the cultivation of sheep and the fabrication of woolen cloth must have advanced considerably by the sixth century BC to support the occupying Roman army, which was forced to be self-sufficient in terms of food, shelter, and clothing since physical aid from the continent would hardly have been cost effective. The Britons were, at any rate, fully capable of producing all the woolen cloth they required and an additional surplus by the third century AD, when Alexandrinus, a Roman historian, compared the cloth trade in England to the same craft in Rome, finding that the natives ““had succeeded in placing British woolen products on a level with Rome itself”” (150). Whereas Eric Kerridge maintains that the quality of Roman fabrics during this period must have depended upon imported English

wool, he argues that Rome's native sheep produced only "undifferentiated and uncrimped" wool fit for "crude cloths" (1). The improvements must have continued into the next century because the fourth-century geographer Dionysius Periegeter describes British cloth as "'made of the wool of Britain which is often spun so fine, that it is, in a manner comparable to a spider's web'" (150). Between the Bronze Age and the fourth century BC, the people of England developed their textile craft from domestic necessity to global commodity; although Hentschell's description of the textile industry as both "ancient" and "famous" is apt, her use of these terms offers only the slightest suggestion of the true depth and acclaim Britain's textile tradition has enjoyed.

Yet this history did not proceed along a clear, unobstructed path but was rather characterized by a number of vacillations between progress and regress. The burgeoning industry rapidly deteriorated once the Roman armies departed during the fifth century, presumably to defend Rome. Without the occupying army, the Britons faced wave after wave of foreign invaders, none of whom seemed inclined to follow the Roman lead in planting permanent settlements with self-contained economies. Soon, a large number of the spinners and weavers who prospered under Roman rule fled to the continent to settle in France. Despite such impediments, the industry regained some of its former success between the seventh and tenth centuries when "homes of all ranks" engaged in textile production. At this point in time, the distinction between commercial and domestic forms of production had not been made—commercial goods were simply domestic surpluses. This period also supplies the first recorded comments concerning the division of labor within cloth production; Aldheim recommended weaving as an "occupation for maidens," and Saxon princesses became so skilled with their shuttles that they began working intricate patterns and images into their cloths (153).

The advances made during these centuries sought to recapture something of the success experienced under Roman rule, but the true recovery began in 1066 when William of Normandy conquered England, bringing with him the ancestors of the Brittany weavers and soon inviting others from various continental cloth centers to settle in Carlisle. The centuries that followed maintained the same trend, with Flemish weavers forming the majority of imported citizens. England's textile industry (and by extension, England itself) welcomed and, in a substantial way, relied upon these immigrants, many of whom were formally invited by the crown or else "graciously and profitably" received as they fled the nearly constant political and religious persecution of the continent. In 1120, Henry I saw an opportunity to nurture the growing industry even more and ordered the immigrant artisans to "[scatter] and [relocate] to teach weaving in our realm" (158). As Leggett writes, "There can be no dispute about the value of these trained artisans...to the textile economy of England during the medieval period" (157). By the second half of the twelfth century, England's wool industry had recovered to such an extent that it could rightfully claim "a position of primacy in European cloth markets" (159).

The twelfth century also witnessed the development of a formal guild system in London, and the fact that the London Weavers' Company was the first English organization to receive a charter should not be surprising. Issued in 1155 by Henry II, this document sets the scene for future tensions within the guild and, I might add, provides a substantial background for whatever tensions may drive *Jack of Newbury*, by entrenching the guild in a long-standing power struggle between the crown's right to control international trade and the guild's right to control its own business. With its very concrete terms in regard to the guild's yearly fine, originally two marks of gold due at the feast of St. Michael, the founding charter firmly stated the guild's indebtedness to the king, without clarifying the king's role in protecting the guild and its interests. The charter



uses far looser terms where the guild's rights are concerned: Henry II "[forbids] that any one do unto [the guild] thereupon any injury or contumely" ("The Charter of Henry II to the Weavers of London" qtd. in Consitt 181). In addition, the king rather nebulously promises the guild all the "liberties and customs" it had under King Henry I. What, exactly, does the king mean by promising that the weavers will be "lawfully treated" and live "in peace and freely and honourably and rightly as ever better and more freely and rightly they had in the time of King Henry [I]"? The original charter does, however, set up and affirm the absolute monopoly of the weavers' guild, complete with buying and selling rights throughout London. And, as Frances Consitt argues in *The London Weavers' Company*, this founding document also reveals the very early seeds of latent (and contradictory, given the historical importance of immigrant weavers) xenophobia against foreign cloth workers, as well as many other problems that would unfold between the guild and the city government over the following centuries (1-32).

After the London guild received its charter, the whole of England's wool industry continued to develop and solidify its claim as Europe's primary wool broker. Leggett argues, however, that the industry did not truly become a "national asset" until the reign of Edward III, which was "truly a great milestone in England's economic history" and earned the king the titles "The Father of English Commerce" and, even more tellingly, "The Royal Wool Merchant" (167, 174). The king continued to encourage master cloth-weavers from Flanders to become citizens of England and to join the cloth guilds as quickly as possible, while at the same time he sought to impose a monopoly on English raw wool, which was being exported to the continent, turned into cloth, and sold back to England. The last of these measures proved difficult to impose, as only commoners wore clothing woven in their own country given the enduring status of cloth from Ghent and Ypres, but the failed statutes mark the first formal recognition of the potential profits

available through a more controlled, crown-relegated industry and illustrate Edward III's influence on and expectations of the nation's economy. It was not until the crown banned the export of all English raw wool and the import of finished cloth "under penalty of life and limb" that the monopoly gained any semblance of stability (172).

Leggett insists that "the seeds planted by Edward III in the 14<sup>th</sup> century blossomed into a thriving industry until, in the reign of Queen Elizabeth in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, woolen production was England's most important activity" (174). But while the positive influence of Edward III would be hard to overestimate, the second half of the sixteenth century posed a unique set of challenges to the textile market that all converged to negatively affect the welfare of the nation's coffers and cloth-workers. While in 1454 Parliament declared that "the making of cloth within all parts of the realm is the greatest occupation and living of the poor commons of this land," the century that followed this statement grew more and more precarious for all levels of the textile industry, from production to distribution (Bowden xv). Peter J. Bowden suggests considering these problems in regard to the skyrocketing unemployment rate. First, "in the sixteenth century, unemployment was thought of mainly as an agrarian problem brought about by the displacement of labour through the spread of sheep farming" (xvi). Enclosure movements were (and to some extent, have remained) highly controversial, and their effects on the contemporary wool industry were as complex as the debates surrounding them. More land devoted to sheep farming meant, of course, the displacement of labor described above but also an increased production of raw wool. If the other aspects of the wool industry remained static throughout the sixteenth century, the excess wool may have proven more profitable; however, Bowden continues his analysis of the unemployment rate by explaining that the seventeenth-century textile market was typified by a collapsed foreign market (xvi). In other words, the raw materials of production increased steadily

while the market for the finished goods shrunk dramatically, due in large part to foreign trade embargoes imposed by the crown. Although both of these efforts were meant to encourage and promote the national wool industry, they both had the opposite effect; furthermore, the nation as a whole suffered from the sudden depression and, as Bowden asserts, many actually blamed the cloth industry.

The present discussion of England's wool industry began with Hentschell's introduction, in which she described England's cloth industry as both "ancient" and "famous." I have attempted to illustrate the accuracy of these two adjectives and their capacity to structure the history and development of this craft, but I have thus far elided Hentschell's final description: "decayed." The pressures mentioned above undoubtedly contributed to the contemporary perception that the industry was failing. In 1583, Philip Stubbes attributed the degeneration to the domestic desire for foreign goods, a desire which the ban on foreign imports attempted to curb. Stubbes wrote, "If we would content our selves with such kinde of attire as our owne countrie doeth yield us, it were somewhat tolerable...we impoverish our selves buying their trifling Merchandizes" (qtd. in Hentschell 2). In 1609, Robert Johnson expressed his hope that the New World would provide a release valve for the industry, "so much decayed in England" (qtd. in Hentschell 2). Four years later, the proclamation "for the True Working and Dying of Cloth" reiterated the problems of the industry and specifically blamed the manufacturers: "the Trade of Clothing hath been much discredited by the corrupt desires and practices" of those in the cloth-making community (qtd. in Hentschell 2). Hentschell further characterizes England's relationship to its main manufactured good by asserting that cloth was both England's pride and shame; it was that "which brought glory and honor to the nation—and in many instances defined it—while simultaneously engendering contempt and ignominy for the nation" (qtd. in Hentschell

2). While the historical John Winchcomb may have lived during the overwhelming prosperity of the late fifteenth century, Thomas Deloney was born to a different era, during which the textile market was attempting to make the most of its history and reputation while struggling to recover from its recent decay.

Deloney's decision, then, to base his novel on the pseudo-historical life of John Winchcomb builds upon all three of these characteristics: ancient, famous, and decayed. He employs the "ancient" tradition of cloth work in order to heighten the cultural importance of his novel; the "famous" reputation of the industry to emphasize the centrality and innate Englishness of those engaged in clothwork; and the implied "decay" of his own time to contrast the supreme prosperity enjoyed by his protagonist. If Deloney is attempting to assert the importance and merit of the bourgeois class, what better way than to depict an occupation widely recognized as integral to the economic, political, and social well-being of his country and yet endangered by internal and external pressures? Consider, for example, Deloney's preface, his epistle to the reader of *Jack of Newbury*. He begins, "To all famous Clothworkers in England, I wish all happiness, prosperity, and brotherly affection," and continues, "Among all manual arts used in this land, none is more famous for desert, or more beneficial to the Commonwealth, than is the most necessary Art of Clothing" (3).<sup>3</sup> Clearly, the concept of a famous industry is important to Deloney, but he is also concerned with the antiquity of the trade, which is why he dedicates his work, "which hath raised out of the dust of forgetfulness a most famous and worthy man," to his cloth-working brethren in order to illustrate "the great worship and credit which men of this trade have in former times come unto." The last quote, with its emphasis on times past, also suggests something of the industry's decayed nature. Deloney subtly complains that his contemporaries

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<sup>3</sup> All *Jack of Newbury* quotes are from Merritt Lawlis' *The Novels of Thomas Deloney*. Lawlis closely follows the 1619 edition of the novel as his copy-text.

are no longer regarded with such respect. So doing, Deloney reminds the members of his audience that they, too, participate in this “ancient” and “famous” industry and that their position within the trade bespeaks their worth, warrants respect, and requires their assistance in facing the current adversities.

## LIMITING COMPETITION: DELONEY AND CONTEMPORARY ATTEMPTS TO CONTROL THE “OTHER”

Deloney was well aware that the enclosure movements and foreign embargoes mentioned above were not the only challenges faced by his contemporaries; the shrunken market and continued immigration from the continent also caused intensified competition among the London weavers. As G.D. Ramsay says, the “rivalry” and “friction” began as early as 1570 and continued to “separate the immigrant families from the native textile workers” for several generations (15). In addition, the foreigners were blamed for consuming too many local goods and resources, which was a serious allegation during the last decades of the 16<sup>th</sup> century when poverty and unemployment plagued the nation (16). By 1595, this atmosphere of contention led Deloney and several other native weavers to submit the aforementioned petition, “Complaint of the Yeoman Weaver Against the Immigrant Weavers,” to the French Church in London, asking the Minister and Elders of the congregation to intercede in order to prevent “the great and amazing endamage of the Comon wealth” and the “utter spoile and begerrie of the Queenes liege people of this facultye” (qtd. in Consitt 312-3). Although the reputation and strength of the English cloth trade was built upon centuries of open immigration, encouraged by a succession of rulers from William of Normandy to Edward III, the authors of this complaint saw foreign weavers as unwelcome, rapacious competitors. Ironically, the immigrants who once stimulated the English economy were by the late sixteenth century seen more as a pox than a blessing.

The nature of the complaints levied by Deloney and his coauthors suggest that noncompliance, competition, and overconsumption caused the gravest tensions between the two groups. Four specific charges dominate the letter:

First, many of [the immigrants] kepe Apprentices and Lomes twyce or thryce as many as they ought whereby such an intolerable multitude of workemen are growne, that nowe one is not able to live by another. Secondly, they doe not refuse to teache their Countrymen, when new come over, the Arte of Silke weaveinge, though before they were a Taylor, a Cobler, or a Joyner... Thirdly, they sett Wooemen and Maydes at worke, whoe, when they are become perfect in the Occupacon doe marry with men of contrary trade, and soe bring that which should be our lyvinges to be the mainteynance of those that never deserved for it, and theis likewise increase an infinite number... Fourthly, they have opened and discovered the secrete of our Occupacon to their worke Maisters, that now they are growne as Cunninge in any worke as ourselves... And by this meanes many a poore Englishman is quite undone with his wife and poore Children, and brought to such misery as is lamentable to be rehearsed. (qtd. in Consitt 313-314)

A common thread runs through all four of these accusations: the immigrants ignore guild regulations and multiply the number of clothworkers to an unbearable degree, effectively excluding natural born Englishmen from what they saw as their native, rightful trade.

The problems set forth in the “Complaint of the Yeoman Weaver” naturally find expression in *Jack of Newbury*, and many scholars have argued that the novel should be read as a fictionalized extension of the earlier letter. Roger A. Ladd, for example, argues that both *Jack of Newbury* and *Thomas of Reading*, one of Deloney’s later novels, attempt to rewrite contemporary guild policies regarding immigrant weavers by “present[ing] an idiosyncratic ideology of his craft that combines past and present ideals of craft governance,” an attempt which, from Ladd’s perspective, failed, as immigrant weavers continued to participate throughout the industrialization. Mihoko Suzuki, too, identifies the political aspects of Deloney’s novels and highlights the role *Jack of Newbury* played in representing the underclass during the

London apprentice riots of the 1590s. Significantly, both of these scholars also discuss Deloney's attitudes toward female weavers, giving a reading of *Jack of Newbury* that is both ahistorical and almost propagandistic. Ladd suggests that the textile industry traditionally allowed for "a limited amount of gender equity" since early guild documents from the London Weavers' Company include both masculine and feminine subjects (993), and Suzuki takes the next step by arguing that Deloney targeted powerful women in a sort of "carnavalesque lowering" in order to create an "English nation of male workers" (Ladd 993, Suzuki). These arguments make two important assumptions: first, that Deloney wrote with a clear purpose of reform and, second, that Deloney's purpose was recognized by the masses who consumed, and to some extent internalized, his writings.

Although Deloney's audience for *Jack of Newbury* was different than the audience of his complaint, his purpose in co-authoring the earlier document remains relatively unchanged throughout his prose novels. Thus far, my references to women weavers have been mere hints, insinuations apparent through St. Aldheim's description of weaving as an occupation fit for maidens. But the late medieval and early modern periods allude frequently to the feminine nature of textile production. Tasks from sorting, combing, carding, spinning, and even weaving were all lumped together as "women's work" for the vast majority of European history, but the traditional division of labor faced growing opposition during the century preceding Deloney's life.

Many gender studies critics have focused on explaining the impulses which led men to exclude women from the more prestigious and lucrative industries during the fifteenth century. For example, Katrina Honeyman and Jordan Goodman's article, "Women's work, gender conflict, and labour markets in Europe, 1500-1900," analyzes the concept of patriarchy as ideology and as a tool for measuring social change. To that end, they claim that two of the most



intense periods of gender conflict emerged at the end of the fifteenth century and then again in the early nineteenth century because “artisans and other skilled men believed their position of economic strength and thus patriarchal power to be under threat” (608). And in *Women of the Renaissance*, Margaret King points out that women workers were nearly as ubiquitous as mothers: “in all of history it has been woman’s lot, as it was Eve’s, not only to bear children, but also to work” (62). This statement connects both kinds of labor to Original Sin and implicitly suggests that both are punishments women must bear. King goes on to describe the working life of women across Renaissance Europe, focusing a large portion of her discussion on spinning and weaving and asserting that women were heavily involved in all facets of production until male workers took over:

Though women’s involvement in textile production was perduring, the level at which they were permitted to participate shifted downwards as cloth production became increasingly organized and taken over by male supervisors and workers. Skilled work became the province of the male-exclusive guilds of weavers and cloth cutters, and women were left the carding and spinning, the early stages of the process, or the production of rougher cloth or clothing products intended for female use. (67)

According to King, men actively took over the tasks previously dominated by women and forced them into unskilled labor. She states that the conditions and movements that precipitated this change began taking shape as early as the fourteenth century and intensified over 300 years until the industry had been completely transformed and women were excluded from the highest echelons of cloth production.

Originally, women participated in the full spectrum of clothwork. Until the invention of the spinning jenny in 1764, this meant that women in most cloth-producing societies relied upon remarkably similar processes in manufacturing household fabrics. The raw material (flax, cotton, silk, or wool) had to be gathered, cleaned, and sorted. Next, the fibers were combed and

carded to insure that the material was of equal length and texture. The fibers then had to be twisted into thread, which was sometimes spun again to create a multiple-ply yarn. Once this had reached the requisite thickness, women prepared the loom by stringing the warp and setting the weft. Depending upon the type of fabric desired, different finishing processes were employed: scouring, burling, fulling, rowing, and shearing.<sup>4</sup> Since textile production was often considered a domestic task to be completed from home, women were the primary workers. In *Women's Work: The First 20,000 Years: Women, Cloth, and Society in Early Times*, Elizabeth Wayland Barber speculates that the original division of labor took shape largely because the tasks were compatible with child-rearing, and although they required continuous physical labor, they were easy to resume once interrupted. Whatever the reasons for the original division of labor, the struggles of the late sixteenth century disrupted the accepted hierarchy and troubled weaving men, who then sought to consolidate their control over the craft through guild ordinances and literary texts like *Jack of Newbury*.

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<sup>4</sup> For a full description of the various steps involved in clothmaking, see Lipson's *Woollen and Worsted Industries* (128-42) and Kerridge's *Textile Manufactures in Early Modern England*, which both provide highly thorough discussions of the origin and development of the English cloth industry with focuses on different types of cloth and their various methods of production.

## REWRITING TEXTILE WOMEN: GUILD DOCUMENTS AND THE WESTERN NARRATIVE TRADITION

Images of spinning and weaving women appear throughout the history of Western narratives, but many sixteenth century authors appropriated these images and forced them into a new mold during the economic crises. If women were to be spinners and carders rather than weavers, the images themselves had to change to match the guild ordinances that enforced their demotion. While Greek and Roman references to textile women support the ancient industry within those cultures, the references would not have complemented the new dynamics of the Early Modern period. The depiction of women within the textile industry must, even at the cost of centuries' worth of tradition, match the contemporary industry, as England's literary texts and guild documents illustrate. The link between "texts" and "textiles," both derived from the Latin word for weaving (*texere*), had to remain unbroken, so the literary transformations of the Early Modern period were necessarily interwoven with the guild reformations of the period (Hackett 13).

The history of textile production in Greece and Rome suggests a thoroughly traditional division of labor, and the vast majority of literary representations adhere to the same model. In *Opera Muliebria: Women and Work in Medieval Europe*, David Herlihy traces the development of clothwork from the Ancient Middle East to the Middle Ages, initially focusing on Egyptian tomb and papyri illustrations that depict "houses' of weavers, supervised by women" (2) and then on the later Greek *gynaecium*, the part of affluent houses that was reserved for women and

their work, ““where no man goes unless a close relative”” (3). Herlihy also quotes a text from 173 AD which describes the town of Patrae;

The women of the town outnumbered the men by two to one and they “are the most charming in the world.” Most of them gained their livelihood, he reports, ‘from the fine flax that grows in Elis, weaving from it nets for the head as well as dresses.’ Their very numbers indicate that they did not work as members of family units. Probably they worked at home alone or in small shops for wages. (qtd. in Herlihy 4)

Roman women, too, were frequently praised for their diligence in textile production. Grave inscriptions often include such references: “The feminine virtues most frequently cited are piety, modesty, chastity, amiability, and dedication to working wool” (6). One particularly telling inscription from the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD claims that the woman being commemorated, Allia Potestas, was strong, pious, faithful, and well-groomed and that “wool never left her hands without reason” (qtd. in Herlihy 6). The connection between textile work and femininity was not solely based on childcare, then, but also on skill and productivity (as in the description of Patrae) and virtue (as in the grave inscriptions).

The images of spinning and weaving women found within the Western narrative tradition further complicate the image of women textile workers.<sup>5</sup> In literature, spinning and weaving are more abstract, often symbolizing women’s identity, sexuality, and power, as well as the female capacity to communicate—especially when the communication is somehow subversive.<sup>6</sup>

Looking at the literary representations alongside historical records demonstrates the full cultural importance of spinning and weaving women by allowing us to connect historical realities to their

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<sup>5</sup> For more specific and thorough information on the role of textile production in mythology see Scheid and Svenbro’s *The Craft of Zeus* and Weigle’s *Spiders and Spinners: Women in Mythology*.

<sup>6</sup> A similar connection (between these phases of textile production and femininity) has been revealed in a variety of cultures, and studies by Kinga Ilona Márkus-Takeshita (focusing on Iran), Kathleen Anne Cross M’Closky (Navajo), Brinkley Messick (North Africa), Sharisse D McCafferty (Mexico), Jón Haukur Ingimundarson (Iceland), and Millie Creighton (Japan) have highlighted the importance of textile production and its relationship to women and identity formation.

more subtle metaphorical underpinnings. In Greco-Roman mythology alone, the variety of legends that incorporate thread, yarn, and the tasks of spinning and weaving is astounding: Penelope weaves and unravels a tapestry to stave off over-zealous suitors and virtuously awaits Odysseus's return; the Parcae spin, measure, and cut the thread of life; Philomela weaves her tragic tale into a tapestry, which only women read and understand; Ariadne leads Theseus out of the labyrinth with a golden thread;<sup>7</sup> Arachne challenges Pallas Athena (who is credited with teaching humans the art of clothwork in the first place) to a weaving contest and is transformed into a spider for her impudent creation; and when Hercules is enslaved to Omphale, he must endure the ultimate humiliation, wearing women's clothing and participating in their women's work—specifically spinning and weaving.

John Scheid and Jesper Svenbro further connect the metaphor of weaving to marriage, politics, and poetics. Their highly nuanced work, *The Craft of Zeus*, provides a useful definition of metaphors which will guide my own discussion of literary appropriations of this economic and domestic reality: a metaphor “is a figure of thought used by an entire civilization, repeated, modified, and resurrected over time without ever becoming fixed or dead” (2). For practical purposes, perhaps, textile production was placed in women's hands, but the signifying power of these activities and their associated symbols extends beyond the realm of physical necessity, as made manifest across millennia of historical and literary traditions, from the Classical era, throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance. My interest, then, is in how the clothworking metaphor complements very real economic situations and is taken up by male authors, like Deloney, who “repeat, modify, and resurrect” the theme in order to effect changes in their own cultures.

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<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, the earliest fabric artifact (from around 15,000 B.C.E.) possibly fulfilled the same role; given the archaeological providence of the find, many have speculated that the surviving fragment of thread once functioned as a guiding rope which led men out of intricate cave systems (Barber 51).

As with most literary movements, the revision of weaving and spinning metaphors fell out of vogue and reemerged several times throughout the Western canon, usually when the textile market was facing adversity. In terms of English culture and literature, one of these vogues came in the Middle Ages, when characters like the Wife of Bath and Griselda are both partially defined by their relationship with fabric. It is no coincidence that the composition of *The Canterbury Tales* roughly coincides with the expanding market for English textiles and intensified competition from the continent.<sup>8</sup> After all, Chaucer introduces Alisoun as a woman whose skilled clothwork surpasses the fabrics of Ypres and Ghent even before he describes her physical appearance (15). Later, when the Clerk introduces Griselda, clothwork again becomes part of an early introduction. Chaucer's audience learns within a few stanzas that Griselda is poor, young, virtuous, beautiful, abstemious, and hard-working, especially at tending her father's sheep and working their wool (326-327). Although not all of the women in *The Canterbury Tales* weave, those who do are practically defined by this activity—their ability to create fabric forms a central part of their identity, a part which the audience must understand before any other characterization takes place.

Once the market stabilized, the literary prominence of weaving and spinning waned, only to reemerge again in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This time, however, many authors dug deeper into antiquity for their revisions. Of course, the European Renaissance takes its name from the Italian word *rinascita*, meaning “rebirth,” and a large portion of this so-called rebirth involved the translation and dissemination of Classical texts, including political tracts, epic poetry, and collections of mythology, like Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Yet many of the translators who popularized these texts did not endeavor to maintain all of the original content of these tales

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<sup>8</sup> For more information about the medieval European cloth industry, especially in terms of competition with England, see Chorley's “The Cloth Exports of Flanders and Northern France” and Werveke's “Industrial Growth in the Middle Ages.”

and instead changed a number of important details regarding women's roles. To reflect the contemporary (or, in some cases, idealized) gender standards of the Early Modern period, the original hierarchy of the Greco-Roman world was elided. Many characters from antiquity found themselves reincarnated rather than reborn—gone were their traditional traits, habits, and occupations, replaced by characteristics which would prove more evocative and exemplary to the contemporary audience. Many of these fundamental changes reveal a deliberate emphasis on rewriting weaving women into the more benign role of spinner.

For example, consider how the Procne and Philomel's story changed over the course of the sixteenth century. Arthur Golding's 1565 translation of *Metamorphoses* depicts the traditional story: Tereus, the king of Thrace, rapes his sister-in-law, Philomel, and removes her tongue so she cannot tell the story of the king's assault, but the abused woman uses her remaining skill as a weaver to create a tapestry depicting her brutal fate and revealing Tereus's guilt to the world. In later translations, however, Philomel's skill is downgraded from weaving to embroidery—a craft which maintains its communicative potential, but in no way threatens the contemporary gender divisions which maintained weaving as a masculine craft and spinning, carding, lace-working, and embroidering as feminine skills (DeWitt 37-40). Thomas Cooper, George Pettie, and George Gascoigne all present this same sterilized image, so to the Early Modern audience who read these works, the final source of Philomel's power was always presented as properly feminine—she spins or embroiders; she does not weave (Linton 29).

These literary shifts were presaged by several large, gradual changes in guild organization. As the market for textiles expanded and the finished products of cloth production became goods rather than necessities, male entrepreneurs, eager to learn these skills in order to capitalize on the burgeoning trade industry, challenged the femininity of these processes and

slowly redefined what was considered “proper.” Significantly, the movement to wrest textile production from feminine hands first manifests itself in England through a series of ordinances passed by a particularly powerful guild: none other than the London Weavers’ Company.

Although the position of women clothworkers remained relatively secure throughout the first few centuries of this guild, documents from the late fifteenth century outline a sudden and intense agenda aimed at forcing the women who had so actively participated in the craft for thousands of years to occupy more menial positions as carders or spinners—for the first time in history, women were systematically discouraged, and eventually forbidden, from weaving.

Centuries of documents from the London Weavers’ Company provide an unusually clear image of how this change evolved. Medieval documents from the London Weavers’ Company offer a balanced view of the labor situation, as demonstrated by the opening sentence of “The Ordinances of the Weavers’ Fraternity” from around 1378:

...men and wummen bygunne a fraternitie in the cite of Londone in the wurschepe of the Assumpcion of Ore Lady Seinte Marie, Crystes blissede moder, of the whiche fraternitee the names of bretheren and sustren bene withinne wrete and they haven makede certeyne ordinaunces statutes and poyntes withinne wret... (qtd. in Consitt 191)

The phrase “brothers and sisters” and “brotherhood and sisterhood” are repeated throughout the document. Women weavers are included, almost unfailingly, alongside every brother and brethren, although “he” did remain the pronoun of choice. A similarly gender-neutral tone dominates the “Ordinances of the Weavers’ Craft” of 1456, which begins by stating that “...no maner man nor woman of the Crafte of Wevers, Wollen nor Lenyn sette up no lomes neither in London nor in Southwerk nor in no places to London perteynyng onlesse than he or she brynge A Letter testimonial fro the contrey or place that he or she come fro of their gode name and



fame” (qtd. in Consitt 213). As in the earlier ordinance, women are acknowledged as members of the craft almost as frequently as men.

Although now outdated, Alice Clark’s seminal text *Working Life of Women in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century* suggests that this type of equity was quite normal until the end of the fifteenth century.<sup>9</sup> She argues that women and the labor they provided played an “absolutely indispensable” role in the textile industry: “for in all ages and in all countries spinning has been a monopoly of women” (93) She also goes on to state, almost quixotically, that “this monopoly is so nearly universal that we may suspect a physiological inability on the part of men to spin a fine even thread at the requisite speed,” an idea I doubt many modern feminists would seriously entertain. But Clark’s general discussion of the seventeenth-century textile industry reveals that much had changed since the preceding centuries when women had quite large stake in the textile world. During the fifteenth century, continental women controlled a large portion of the silk business but in England, “the silk women did not weave silk cloth, but dealt in raw silk thread, and in the processes that went into making it up into a variety of products such as ribbons, laces, and girdles...the silk women also dealt in the finished goods” (Sim 94). Although the English women did not have their own guild, as the French women did, they were still a “respected body” that participated in many aspects of the business (95). For example, female weavers in London often took apprentices, just as the men did and under very similar terms. Where they survive, references to female apprentices offer one method of gauging the involvement of female weavers in England’s textile industry. Alison Sim discusses a few of these records in her work, *The Tudor Housewife*:

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<sup>9</sup> Despite gaps in research and an occasionally questionable methodology, Clark’s discussion of the labor situation lays the basic groundwork for many more contemporary studies and is often still quoted as one of the most important works dealing with female productivity in the Renaissance, despite the fact that it was published in 1919.

Two indentures survive in the Public Records Office, one for a Yorkshire girl and another for a girl from Lincolnshire, both of whom were bound apprentices in London. The indentures bind the girls to both the silk woman and her husband, but state that the girls are to learn the woman's craft. The girls are to serve for seven years, to behave well, are not to waste their master and mistress's goods, and are to cherish their business. In return, the master and mistress promise to take charge of and instruct the apprentice in the wife's craft, to chastise her in meet fashion and to give her food, clothing, footwear, a bed and all other necessities. (95)

At first it may seem like the female apprentices serve both master and mistress, but the evidence repeatedly refers to the craft as belonging to the wife, and so the business relationship is figured as between the two women. Disputes, too, were often primarily between the weaving woman and her apprentice; one surviving account of such a dispute concerns Joan Woulbarowe and her former mistress, who were embroiled in a particularly bitter argument concerning some silk that Joan was supposed to have delivered on her mistress's behalf (96).

Apparently, apprenticeships between women were subject to the same troubles as those between men, and as with the male apprenticeships, those between women also revolved around more than the craft and included basic instruction in business matters as well as the mechanical aspects of making textiles. Legal records suggest that female apprentices often traded, bought, and sold textile products for themselves, which caused the usual legal issues when ownership, profits, and shares were disputed, as illustrated above. Women were clearly considered full members of the guild, and not just members of the religious and social portions as Ladd suggests, with their own responsibilities regarding apprentices, business productivity, and legal matters (993). Some of the more affluent female weavers even left substantial sums of money to their guilds and their apprentices in their wills. For example, Joyce Williamson left £100 to the Clothworkers' Company in the late sixteenth century, suggesting that she must have been an

active member. Joyce also left £1000 to her apprentice (who was also her goddaughter), so the younger woman obviously had a personal involvement with the company too (Sim 98).

Even by the thirteenth century, however, this level of involvement was not the norm, and I do not intend to argue that commercial weaving persisted as a female craft throughout the Middle Ages. I do, however, wish to highlight the fact that a woman could choose to be involved in the higher levels of production without facing legal restrictions during this period. As Sim writes, “A woman’s involvement in a guild must have depended very much on her personality and on her relationship with her husband” (98). Again, women had a choice, and their involvement was possible, even encouraged, during times of prosperous trade relations, since booming businesses contributed to the guild’s coffer, no matter the source’s gender. Although Deloney and his contemporaries saw women weavers in a negative, even dangerous, light, the industry’s history suggests that women weavers were common during times of strength and stability—the healthier the English textile market, the more frequently women could participate.

But this extraordinary freedom and relative independence would not last forever. By the time “Articles of the Weavers’ Craft” was published in 1492, the “brothers and sisters,” “man nor woman” of the London Weavers’ Company’s earlier documents became “any person” and brethren and sustren became merely brotherhood, and again by the time “Shorter Minutes of the Assemblies of the Weaver’s Company and of the Court of Assistants” was recorded in 1555, women weavers were mentioned only once, as wives of the company rather than members in their own right. The shifting attitudes toward women in the guild first manifest themselves in the language, which may seem subtle, but the first ordinance attempting to control and limit the female presence followed soon after. “The Shorter Minutes” included an ordinance *against* taking female apprentices:

Also it is ordeyned and agreed that no maner of persone or persones of the said craft of silke wevers shall take any woman to his apprentice in the payne that every person doing the contrary to forfeit and paie for every muneth that he dothe kepe any suche apprentices iij<sup>s</sup> iiij<sup>d</sup> to be employed to the uses abovesaid. (qtd. in Consitt 230)

This sentiment is reiterated in the 1577 text “Regulating the Weaver’s Guild,” but this time the prohibition is further elaborated: “It is ordeyned and agreed pat no maner of person or persones usinge or exercising | the said Arte or Mysterie of Weyvinge shall kepe, teache, instructe or bringe upp in the use, exercising or Knowledge of the same Arte or Mysterie of Weyvinge any mayden, Damsell or other Woemen whatsoever” (qtd. in Consitt 292). In addition, the fine against including women in the weaving business was increased to “sixe shillinges and eightpence” (292). While the older prohibition prevented women from becoming apprentices, it did not affect women who already knew the craft and/or who were already employed, but in 1577, this was not the case—women were no longer allowed to learn or even continue practicing the craft regardless of their occupation before the ordinance was passed.

Finally, we arrive in 1595, the year Thomas Deloney co-wrote “Complaint of the Yeomen Weavers” and just two short years before he first published *Jack of Newbury*. As discussed earlier, this complaint levied serious accusations against the prosperous foreigners, not the least of which was the third complaint, that they taught women the craft: “[the foreign weavers] sett Wooemen and Maydes at worke, whoe, when they are become perfect in the Occupacon doe marry with men of contrary trade, and soe bringe that which should be our lyvinges to be the mainteynance of those that never deserved for it, and theis likewise increase an infinite number” (qtd. in Consitt 313). Thus, the problems with women and aliens are interwoven. Both groups of weavers were originally welcome participants in England’s cloth trade, even contributing to its initial success, but both groups were systematically excluded as the

sixteenth century came to an end. As Ladd elaborates in his article and as the extant business records and legal ordinances show, the London Weavers' Company was especially concerned with foreign weavers, as ordinances of 1585, 1589, and 1594 all addressed the guild's anxieties about the alien weavers. Both Consitt and Ladd assert that these ordinances were clearly not as successful as hoped, as they needed to be passed repeatedly over half a century, but the ordinances issued against women were ultimately more successful—women were, in fact, relegated to spinning and carding; references to women engaging in other types of clothwork all but disappeared.

The sudden change in accepted gender roles dramatically affected the contemporary literary tradition, starting in the early sixteenth century and extending throughout the remainder of the Renaissance and well into the Romantic and Victorian periods. As the pressures from foreign trade embargoes, enclosure movements, heightened patterns of immigration, and poor harvests troubled the textile industry, a number of literary texts, like the translations of mythology and *Jack of Newbury*, which sought to rewrite the historical hierarchy of cloth production, proliferated, and Deloney himself occupied a central position within these historical and literary movements, as the cultural embeddedness of this novel indicates.

## *JACK OF NEWBURY* AND THE CONTEMPORARY MARKET

According to Ladd, Thomas Deloney set about writing *Jack of Newbury* in hopes of reforming his guild, specifically with regard to foreign weavers, by presenting an idealized version of their past and present ordinances and customs. Deloney certainly seems very much embedded in the contemporary politics of his guild. In *Jack of Newbury*, his opening address states that his purpose in writing about John Winchcomb is to put forward a depiction of one successful weaver, so that “they [Deloney’s readers] may behold the great worship and credit which men of this trade have in former time come unto” (3). The author clearly meant for his text to function as a mirror, as a how-to guide for aspiring yeoman (male) weavers. After four chapters of progress in the economic and political spheres, Jack lectures his servants about how they, too, could attain fame and dignity if they are diligent, loyal, and hard-working, through what Jack describes as “surpassing wisdom and manhood.” This lecture, delivered as Jack surveys his collection of portraits depicting illustrious men, serves to educate both the servants of the novel as well as the real servants of the craft, to whom the opening epistle is addressed (53).

Ladd ultimately argues that *Jack of Newbury* fails to reform the guild, but this is not necessarily true. I believe Deloney’s concern is not simply, or even primarily, the role of foreign weavers within the sixteenth century textile market, but rather the changing role women played within this industry. Ladd’s reading establishes that the prose work has a definite political goal, but he fails to acknowledge the significance of Deloney’s stated audience. Ladd does not deal with the fact that Deloney’s novel addresses the “men of this trade” rather than the “brothers and

sisters” or “men and women” of the ancillary guild documents. If we look closely at the episodes within *Jack of Newbury* that deal with working women, we see that these portions of the text dominate the references to alien weavers. Perhaps Deloney’s efforts to reform his guild did not, in fact, fail; perhaps we have just misread his purpose. More often than immigrant weavers, women—and Jack’s dealings with them—shape the development of Deloney’s protagonist and provide the structure for much of the author’s proposed lesson. Even when the plot refers to women only obliquely, the anxiety produced by their presence and the importance of Jack’s control over them is undeniably great, from the first time Deloney introduces Jack and throughout the protagonist’s journey.

For example, the opening chapter of *Jack of Newbury* introduces the protagonist as an industrious and pleasant broadcloth weaver, one who is ever-ready to spend his wages. But this characterization soon changes, and the change is described through an explicitly feminine image, a female spirit who controls Jack and the loom which he works. Before this spirit gets a hold of Winchcomb, he is of such a “merry disposition” and “happy conversation” that he is known “in all his country,” among rich and poor alike, as Jack of Newbury (5). Deloney is quick to note that this weaver is not simply a good-time fellow; Jack keeps himself in “comely” and “decent” apparel and avoids drunkenness, so “behave[ing] himself with honest mirth and pleasant conceits that he [is] every gentleman’s companion” (5). Jack is, in other words, a very meet reflection of the working class audience Deloney addresses in the epistle.

Jack’s journey to social prominence begins almost immediately, and, significantly, after the action of a woman. In just the second paragraph, Jack’s master dies and his “comely ancient” widow “commit[s] unto [Jack’s] government the guiding of all her workfolks for the space of three years together” (5). Jack quickly takes control of this established business, and under his

diligent guidance, “all things came forward and prospered wondrous well.” Jack is so committed to his work, so devoted to the constant management of his mistress’s shop, that his merry-making habits change dramatically: “No man could entice him from his business all the week by all the entreaty they could use, insomuch that in the end some of the wild youths of the town began to deride and scoff at him” (5-6).

But given the history and contemporary state of Deloney’s craft, the youths’ derision takes a peculiar, provocative form. Their accusation is not simply that Jack works too much, but rather that he is enthralled by some supernatural controlling force: “‘Doubtless,’ quoth one, ‘I doubt some female spirit hath enchanted Jack to her treadles, and conjured him within the compass of his loom that he can stir no further’” (6). Although this quip seemingly suggests that Jack is too tied (literally) to his work, the fact that a “female spirit” has trapped him is telling. Through this accusation, Deloney figures women who work the treadles—the foot pedals of looms—as constraining influences. The quote also suggests that a woman who controls the loom can control, or at least exert an extraordinary influence on, hard working, honest men like Jack. Though the female spirit may not be malevolent in the strictest sense, she could be likened to our modern day “ball and chain,” and she is certainly the first example of a weaving woman (spirit or otherwise) meddling in Jack’s life and contradicting the aforementioned guild injunctions by controlling a loom. Jack’s mistress, too, notices the protagonist’s “good government and discretion” and counts herself blessed “to have such a servant that [is] so obedient to her, and so careful for her profit; for she had never a prentice that yielded her more obedience than he did or was more dutiful” (7). Indeed, the widow is so taken with Jack (or, rather, with Jack’s obedience to her) that she decides to make him her next husband.



The development of this relationship is complex. When Deloney first introduces his readers to the widow, he writes that she is a “very comely ancient woman, and of reasonable wealth” (5); like many Elizabethan widows, she has inherited her husband’s wealth and business, and similar to many of the widows Sim writes of, she chooses to maintain her first husband’s business after his death, all the while looking for a suitable suitor—although she never looks far once she becomes enamored with Jack. Nonetheless, she does entertain the affections and hopes of three other men of various occupations: a tanner, a tailor, and a parson. Thus, when Jack questions the dame about her marriage options and says, “I pray you let me entreat you to know their names that would be your suitors, and of what profession they be,” the contemporary audience might well assume that the protagonist is about to encourage the widow to abide by the guild regulations, that a weaver’s widow should marry within the trade (7). But at this point, contrary to the audience’s expectations, Jack contradicts Deloney and the 1595 “Complaint of the Yeoman Weavers” by encouraging the widow to choose a husband of a different craft. Though Deloney later depicts the widow as a scheming, disobedient gossip, it is she who initially follows Deloney’s contemporary guild rules, quite against the advice and urging of Jack. So to Deloney’s intended audience, the widow does well by marrying Jack and keeping her wealth and her apparent knowledge of the craft within the same company of weavers.

We can only speculate as to why Deloney writes of Jack’s first marriage in this way, deliberately allowing his protagonist to contradict the ideals of the guild. Perhaps Deloney did not want his protagonist to seem overeager in courting his own mistress; after all, the author later insists upon marriage as a strictly feminine concern and while it may have been a shrewd business move, such behavior would be considered highly presumptuous on Jack’s part. One simply did not woo one’s mistress, even if she was widowed, and Deloney might have been

hesitant to depict this protagonist actively wooing his dame. Jack is, after all, presented as a role model for Deloney's contemporaries, and yeoman weavers were not encouraged to court their superiors. Socially speaking, then, the widow must play the active role of suitor if the marriage is to occur, and it absolutely must in order for Jack (and the novel itself) to succeed.

But Deloney's depiction of Jack's first marriage is not without precedent. Lawlis argues that the entire first chapter of *Jack of Newbury* adapts (and "transcends") part of a popular jestbook, "The Burning of John" from *A C. mery Talys*:

In both stories (1) there is a middle-aged and unnamed woman whose husband has died recently, leaving her well-to-do; (2) the widow falls in love with her young apprentice, whose name is John; (3) the widow's maid has a minor role in furthering the love affair between the widow and John; (4) eventually the two lovers spend a night together in the widow's bedroom; and (5) the next morning they have a sumptuous breakfast together. (xvii)

Such narrative similarities cannot be ignored—Jack's first romance unfolds just so—and Deloney's knowledge of the jestbook seems certain. As a balladeer, he was, after all, highly active within the realm of popular publications, and many of his other novels include adaptations of and allusions to a number of other jestbooks. Yet Lawlis points out that the very texture and meaning of this particular adaptation is greatly changed in *Jack of Newbury*. Deloney adds depth to the bare-bones plot of the original and includes more insight into the widow's character. Lawlis, too, credits Deloney for the additional complexity, writing that "Deloney has converted the raw jest into an exciting episode that moves along smoothly while it gives us a convincing insight into the widow's character" (xviii). Compared to the jestbook's widow, Jack's mistress seems complex and crafty; she gets what she wants, one way or another.

Deloney's depiction of Jack's first marriage was likely driven by a sense of propriety and the economic imperative to appeal to the audience. Jack could not function as a paradigm weaver

if the audience saw him as even remotely predatory or, worse, grasping and acquisitive, and Deloney may not have achieved the same level of success if he did not build upon the popularity of existing texts, like jestbooks and broadside ballads.

But the issue of the widow's initiative is further complicated by her activity within the weaving shop. In case some may argue that the widow's knowledge of the craft appears minimal since she entrusts the workings of the shop to Jack, Deloney includes a scene where the widow sits beside the protagonist to make quills (12-13).<sup>10</sup> Here she actively participates within her first husband's business, which again seems to contradict Deloney's purpose. Here it seems appropriate to quote Ladd at length:

Deloney's idealization of the past is only partial, however, through his acceptance in *Iacke of Newberie* of the trend toward gender exclusion. In particular, he carefully restricts the position in the craft of Jack's first wife, as Jack attains the rank of master clothier through his industry and a convenient marriage to his master's widow. The widow's activities are not expressed in terms of a gild in the novel, but she does occupy the loophole allowing women in the craft in the London Weavers' 1596 Ordinance, and her first action as a new widow was to "commit vnto his [Jack's] gouernement the guiding of all her worke-folkes for the space of three years together." She hears of Jack's increased industry with his greater responsibility, and although she names him a "Prentice," his position seems more that of a journeyman, elevated above his initial station and on a more equal social fitting with the widow as her "Secretarie." On the other hand, she orders him at one point to "take there thy quills" (Works, 9), or to get back to work as a weaver, so we can presume that managing the business does not occupy all of his time, and that she remains his superior.<sup>11</sup>

While Ladd is correct to emphasize Jack's promotion through marriage, what he calls "marry[ing] a mastery," this passages also emphasizes the widow's involvement in the workshop. And whereas Ladd sees her bequeathal of the quills to Jack merely as an act of superiority, essentially commanding Jack back to work, I suggest that she is relinquishing the last

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<sup>10</sup> OED, quill: "A piece of a hollow plant stem, esp. of a reed, on which yarn is wound."

<sup>11</sup> Ladd, 995.

vestiges of her power in the workshop by handing over the quills to a man, almost as if she must compensate for her active role in courting Jack by ceremoniously assuming an inactive role in the business. Deloney assures his readers, the male weavers of his own time, that this widow poses no real threat; she may be unusually aggressive in marriage, but she has no desire to function within the workshop. She is acting as the weavers of the 1590s, including Deloney, would have all women act: in the span of one chapter, the dame becomes widowed, correctly relinquishes her claims to the workings of the business (quills and all), marries Jack and promptly dies, leaving her first husband's business in her last husband's quite capable, quite male hands.

Once Jack is himself a widower and an established weaver, he has "the choice of many wives: men's daughters of good credit and widows of great wealth" (26). Although, as Deloney claims, one in Jack's position could have his choice of the finest, wealthiest women available, he chooses one of his own servants, a woman from a poor family who could have no claims whatsoever to the governance of his shop. Among her various qualities, she is described as "careful in her business, faithful in her dealing, and an excellent good housewife" (26). In essence, Jack replaces the highly knowledgeable, highly active weaver's wife of the past with the perfect bride, one that Deloney's contemporary audience would acknowledge as far superior since she shows no signs of meddling in the properly masculine realm of business. Whereas previous centuries may have valued his first wife's able-bodiedness in dealing with looms, quills, and spinning wheels, Jack's second choice (and the only one he makes for himself of his own volition) is a housewife, as the contemporary audience and guild would greatly desire.

Before the young woman will consent to marry Jack, however, she must gain her father's permission, which means that Jack must entertain the "poor man" at the Winchcomb manor (26).

The description of Jack's workshop is clearly meant to astound Deloney's audience as much as the prospective bride's father. Aside from the numerous exaggerations, the description breaks from the normal prose of the narrative and shifts into a ballad, allowing the "Balletting Silke-weaver's" skills as a songster to shine in a form that allows (or even demands) some imagination and would have been familiar to his audience (Nashe 84):

Within one room, being large and long,  
There stood two hundred looms full strong;  
Two hundred men the truth is so,  
Wrought in these looms all in a row.  
By every one a pretty boy  
Sat making quills with mickle joy.  
And in another place hard by  
A hundred women merrily  
Were carding hard with joyful cheer,  
Who singing sat with voices clear.  
And in a chamber close beside  
Two hundred maidens did abide,  
...  
These pretty maids did never lin  
But in that place all day did spin,  
And spinning so with voices meet  
Like nightingales they sung full sweet.  
Then to another room came they  
Where children were in poor array,  
And everyone sat picking wool  
The finest from the coarse to cull;  
The number was seven score and ten,  
The children of poor, silly men  
And these, their labours to requite,  
Had every one a penny at night  
Beside their meat and drink all day,  
Which was to them a wondrous stay.  
Within another place likewise  
Full fifty proper men he spies,  
And these were shearmen every one  
Whose skill and cunning there were shown;  
And hard by them there did remain

Full four score rowers taking pain.  
A dye-house likewise had he then,  
Wherein he kept full forty men,  
And likewise in his fulling mill  
Full twenty persons kept he still. (26-27)

The very form of this description emphasizes the fanciful undercurrents of Deloney's supposed history. Elizabethan ballads frequently dealt with historical or contemporary happenings in hyperbolic, often whimsical, terms. Ballads do not function as straightforward historical records. They must be read carefully, with an understanding that the form is notorious for blurring the lines between fact and fiction. Deloney's description cannot be used as proof of John Winchcomb's actual operation anymore than ballads about monstrous births can be used to generate reliable statistics on Early Modern birth defects.<sup>12</sup> Based solely on the above description, however, E. Lipson argued that the textile industry had a marked tendency toward a factory system, but the opposite was actually true, for all the reasons Clark enumerates in her own study: the government did not approve of such a system, women with families could spin at home while supervising children, and it was not nearly as cost effective as the putting out system, in which each step of the production process was carried out under different roofs and, in some cases, by different guilds. What Deloney presents here is not fact but fiction, full of devices which mark it as a literary invention rather than historical record. The entire ballad, for example, is reminiscent of an epic catalogue, presenting Jack's entire workforce: quill makers are stacked upon weavers, spinners upon carders, sorters upon shearers, and so on. The effect of the catalogue is expansive, meant to create a thoroughly impressive image of Jack's operation. In addition, the lines describing the spinning women who sing "like nightingales" allude to Procne,

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<sup>12</sup> For more information about monstrous births and broadside ballads, see Aaron Kitch's "Printing Bastards: Monstrous Birth Broadside in Early Modern England" in *Printing and Parenting in Early Modern England* and David Cressy's *Birth, Marriage and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* and *Travesties and Transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England*.

who was originally a weaver, not a spinner as suggested here. Like Cooper, Pettie, and Gascoigne, Deloney adapts the Roman myth to reflect his own time.

Although Deloney deviates from the historical reality of John Winchcomb's time in this description, the author certainly succeeds in creating a clear image of the ideal workshop, one which impresses all spectators (including Jack's future father-in-law) and reemphasizes the proper hierarchy of the textile industry. Men are responsible for weaving, first and foremost, but also shearing, rowing, and fulling. Women are responsible for carding and spinning, and children provide the remaining labor, sorting the raw wool and making quills. In this idealized community or workers, each group serves its role happily, without concern for ambition, jealousy, pride, fatigue, poverty, or discontentment. The message is clear: if everyone would mind his or her place and not strive against the way things ought to be, textile production could right any number of social ills. This point simply reiterates one of Jack's principle acts of virtue, which was emblazoned on the front page of the 1619 edition of *Jack of Newbury*, immediately following the opening title: "...he set continually five hundred poor people at work to the great benefit of the commonwealth" (1). Deloney's description, then, not only serves a function within the narrative, but presents a clear model for the division of labor within the textile industry, one that would, he argues, greatly benefit the entire nation, even as it contradicts the regulations set forth by Deloney's own guild.

After Jack marries his second wife, he embarks upon the next step of his journey to prosperity and renown: he seeks the favor of King Henry VIII and Katherine of Aragon. When the king goes on a progress to a nearby city, Jack receives (or, rather, intercepts) the king and throws a banquet in honor of the royal retinue, during which time Jack's workers function as entertainment. Deloney writes that, after dinner, Jack "had caused all his folks to go to their

work, that his Grace and all the nobility might see it; so indeed the Queen had requested” (40). To please the nobility, the weavers set about their work and sing a song about the role their craft plays in classic mythology and biblical history. The weavers begin their song with a strange image: “When Hercules did use to spin,/ And Pallas wrought upon the loom,/ Our trade to flourish did begin” (40). Readers should immediately notice the difference between the earlier ballad and these lines; before this, Deloney has insisted upon the complete opposite division of labor. Hercules, a man, should absolutely not spin and Pallas Athena, goddess, should absolutely not work the loom. If Deloney intended this as an evenhanded tip of the hat to his craft’s history, however, he could have chosen any number of myths that depicted Athena as the goddess of weaving, but his reference to Hercules spinning changes the fundamental message of these lines. In the legend alluded to here, Hercules does in fact spin, but only as part of his punishment for accidentally killing one of his friends. In order to atone, Hercules becomes the slave of the Lydian queen, Omphale, who humiliates and shames the hero by dressing him in women’s clothing and forcing him to work in a *gynaecium*. So Deloney casts the history of his trade and women’s original role within it in a decidedly negative light; he acknowledges that women used to weave, but places this admission next to an image of threatened masculinity. Despite initial appearances, here, again, Deloney emphasizes what he considered to be the proper division of labor—the fact that women were once in charge of looms is discolored by the reference to Hercules. In the author’s eyes, the earliest days of textile production were backwards, even perverse. Although the craft begins to flourish during this time, this faulty distribution of labor must be corrected before the industry can reach its true potential.



The weavers' song continues along these lines, emphasizing Deloney's ideal gender divisions, but when the topic turns to the Trojan War, classic mythology grows more and more distorted in order to accommodate the author's agenda:

But while the Greeks besieged Troy  
Penelope apace did spin,  
And weavers wrought with mickle joy,  
Though little gains were coming in.  
For love and friendship did agree  
To hold the bands of amity. (41)

In the original myth, Penelope is most famous for working the loom rather than the spinning wheel or spindle and distaff, but here she is depicted as a spinner rather than a weaver, perhaps because this is what Deloney and his contemporary audience would prefer. By making this change, Deloney neutralizes if not completely sterilizes the figure. The next two stanzas immediately following the reference to Penelope focus first on Helen, who "had [she] then sat carding wool /.../ She had not been Sir Paris' trull / Nor cause so many lose their life," and then on Paris himself, who had he "been making quills with sweet content, / He had not then his friends undone" (41). Proper diligence and gender distribution in regard to the weaving craft becomes a sort of peacemaking antiseptic against unnecessary strife and bloodshed. If Helen had minded her place and Paris had resigned himself to a properly masculine task like making quills rather than foolishly chasing after love, the entire Trojan War could have been averted.

The spinners, too, sing a song for the king and queen, but theirs does not concern the history of the craft nor so much as mention spinning or weaving. The weavers' song is labeled as such, while the spinners' song is labeled simply "The Maidens' Song" (43). The male weavers are identified by their occupation, but the female workers are defined by their young, unmarried status, which profoundly affects the type of song they sing, which is about love and courtship, about a dastardly knight from Scotland who tricks the "fair flower of Northumberland" to free

him from prison on the pretences that he came forth, daring much peril, for the sake of her love. The knight swears that he is mad over her and that he will make her queen of his country, but all the while, the knight is just scheming his way back home and once safely delivered, abandons the woman and relieves her of her horse. The song ends when knights from her homeland come to rescue her, the classic damsel in distress.

In some ways, the scene as a whole and the song itself are reminiscent of the medieval French genre, the *chansons de toile*. Literally meaning “songs of cloth,” *chansons de toile* were sung by spinning, weaving, and embroidering women, just like the spinners’ song above. True *chansons*, however, focus on love, are set in a workshop, and involve two generations of women, with the older offering advice on romance to the younger (Herlihy 58).<sup>13</sup> Contrasting the traditional genre to Deloney’s invention again reveals a latent anxiety towards women in the weaving workshop, for the original setting is erased in favor of the outdoors and the powerful relationship between the textile women is rewritten to emphasize the virtue of the rescuing Englishmen:

They took her up behind them then,  
Follow my love, come over the strand,  
And brought her to her father’s again,  
And he the good earl of Northumberland.  
All you fair maidens be warned by me,  
Follow my love, come over the strand,  
Scots were never true, nor never will be,  
To lord, to lady, nor fair England. (47)

Instead of focusing on their occupation, the spinners sing about romance and the dangers of trusting foreign men. Here, it seems, Deloney simultaneously addresses the issues of women’s

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<sup>13</sup> For the earliest recorded *chanson de toile*, see Jean Renart’s *Guillaume de Dole*, written around 1228. This particular song cautions the young maiden to mind her clothwork more than she minds her lover, who will only cause her pain. In this *chanson*, as well as Deloney’s, it is better for women to focus on their work rather than engage in doomed courtships. The emphasis in these songs is on being able to recognize a proper suitor from an improper one and, of course, continuing to spin until that proper love arrives.

roles and the negative effects of foreign interference. The spinners need not concern themselves with the history of the textile industry—they need only understand the process of courtship and that foreigners do not make good suitors, that they cannot be trusted under any circumstance. The note of warning is as pertinent to the young maidens as it is to Deloney’s audience, the male weavers of the sixteenth century.

In addition, the vast difference between the content of these two songs suggests a linguistic movement, related to the shifting gender divisions, in *Jack of Newbury* and Deloney’s contemporary culture at large. At the same time that Deloney was writing his novel, the vocabulary used for discussing women in the weaving industry was slowly evolving. “Spinster,” the word previously used to simply denote the trade of women, was becoming more and more connotative, leaning towards the modern usage, “an unmarried woman,” one generally considered past the marriageable age. According to the second definition in the OED, spinster is “[appended] to names of women, originally in order to denote their occupation, but subsequently (from the 17<sup>th</sup> century) as the proper legal designation of one still unmarried.” By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, spinster has fully settled into its thoroughly modern usage: “old maid.” I suggest that Deloney’s choice to focus the spinners’ song around the act of courtship rather than around the act of their physical work supports his and his guild’s agenda to redefine the proper area of women’s attention in order to lessen the production of wool and increase their profits by raising the prices of their finished goods while simultaneously encouraging the women to keep spinning. Rather than focusing on their occupation, spinsters of the pre-17<sup>th</sup> century kind should direct their full attention to their possible romantic prospects, lest they become a spinster of the post-17<sup>th</sup> century variety. If, as Ladd suggests, Deloney was unsuccessful in limiting the involvement of immigrant weavers, perhaps the effort to restrict guild membership was two-pronged, with

this effort proving more successful over time than the original “Complaint of the Yeoman Weavers against the Immigrant Weavers.” After all, spinning and related activities during the 17<sup>th</sup> century belonged more and more to the domestic sphere. The proper spinning and weaving woman spun and wove for her family alone, perhaps selling the surplus for profit; only those unfortunate enough to be “*still* unmarried” would actually spin for a living (*OED*, emphasis mine).

Although the vast majority of Deloney’s spinners are young unmarried women, he does depict another, quite different character engaged in spinning—Will Sommers, the king and queen’s fool. The scene that develops between the female spinners and this man indirectly recalls the weavers’ earlier allusion to Omphale and Hercules, who was punished and humiliated by wearing women’s clothing and participating in their work—spinning and weaving. Here, however, the spinning is the offense, the reason for the punishment, not the punishment itself. Once the noble crowd leaves the spinners’ to their work, the king and queen’s fool, Will Sommers, lingers among the maidens and sets himself to their work. The spinners try to extract from Will the penalty for engaging in their craft, but the fool refuses payment, playfully offering to pay in kisses; soon, however, the negotiation takes a gruesome turn. When the spinners realize that the fool will not make payment of any sort, they first bind and gag him, then continue their abuse:

[O]ne of them got a couple of dog’s droppings and, putting them in a bag, laid them in soak in a basin of water, while the rest turned down the collar of his jerkin and put an host cloth about his neck instead of a fine towel. Then came the other maid with a basin and water in the same, and with the perfume in her pudding bag flapped him about the face and lips till he looked like a tawny moor. . . The smell being somewhat strong, Will could by no means abide it, and for want of other language cried “Ah ha ha ha!” Fain he would have spit and could not, so that he was fain to swallow down such liquor as he never tasted the like. (50-51)

That the king and queen later laugh at this scene suggests that Deloney meant Will's punishment as a comic interlude, but a modern audience cannot help but shudder at the excessiveness of the punishment given the scale of the offense. To Deloney, however, Will's behavior justifies an immediate, severe reaction from the maidens. Will poses as great a threat to their livelihood as a weaving woman poses to Jack's (and Deloney's); the punishment must be, at the very least, memorable.

But this scene serves not only as an injunction against male participation in spinning, although that warning certainly rings clear. In addition, Deloney implicitly encourages the women to take ownership of their occupation and guard it from outsiders, men in this case; he wants, in effect, for women to be as fiercely protective of their occupation as Deloney is of his. By so illustrating the spinners' punishment, the author accomplishes two concomitant goals: he again emphasizes the properly masculine task (weaving, not spinning) and depicts women who are actually empowered, rather than limited or constrained, by their new role as spinners.

Yet Deloney does not concern himself solely with delineating gender roles in writing *Jack of Newbury*. Jack's accomplishments extend beyond his domestic and economic life and into the civic sphere. Once he has conquered his wife and his workshop and ingratiated himself with the court, Jack tackles another cause, one clearly dear to Deloney's own heart. Arguably, this last feat is the most realistic, the most achievable of Jack's astounding accomplishments, partly because it is based more upon Deloney's own life than the original John Winchcomb's. In an autobiographical flourish, Deloney stages a scene in which Jack rallies many of England's most famous clothiers to petition the king regarding "the want of traffic into other countries." The circumstances surrounding this letter seem suspiciously similar to the same circumstances

which prompted “A Complaint of the Yeoman Weaver.” The gist of Jack’s complaint is as follows:

By means of the wars our King had with other countries, many merchant strangers were prohibited for coming to England, and our own merchants (in like sort) forbidden to have dealing with France or the low countries. By means whereof the clothiers had most of their cloth lying on their hands, and that which they sold was at so low a rate that money scarcely paid for the wool and workmanship. Whereupon they thought to ease themselves by abating the poor workmen’s wages, and when that did not prevail they turned away their people—weavers, shearmen, spinners, and carders—so that where there was a hundred looms kept in one town there was scant fifty. (56)

The motivations behind this letter clearly mirror Deloney’s own in writing the present novel—both are responses to limited markets and decreased profits, both sought to limit the cost of production, and both resulted in limitations placed on viable looms. However, unlike “A Complaint of the Yeoman Weaver,” which only succeeded as a sort of stop-gap in assuaging the larger problems facing the contemporary market, Jack’s letter succeeded in permanently changing the king’s policy. In fact, the king’s response is overwhelmingly positive; he immediately addresses his lords and commands, “Let these men’s complaint be thoroughly looked unto, and their grief redressed, for I account them in the number of the best commonwealth’s men” (57-8) Queen Elizabeth took no such action; in fact, historical records do not suggest that she was even aware of Deloney’s “Complaint.”

Perhaps this is the great irony of *Jack of Newbury*, that Deloney’s protagonist succeeds where the author himself could not. Deloney lived in a world full of unyielding obstacles, and his efforts at reform were often met with censure and, in some cases, jail time. The world he creates for Jack, on the other hand, is one of opportunity, of peaceable division of labor, of respect and renown. The fantasy of *Jack of Newbury* recasts the history of textile production and the economic predicaments of the late sixteenth century to create an encouraging atmosphere, not

just for the production of fabrics but for the betterment of the entire commonwealth. Although the strands of this narrative often seem to diverge, they are ultimately woven together in one purpose: revolution. In *Jack of Newbury*, women are central to this revolution. If the proper division of labor within the textile industry could have prevented the Trojan War, as Deloney suggests, maybe a similar reform in England could provide some relief from the economic crises of the sixteenth century.

## CONCLUSION: *JACK OF NEWBURY*, GENDER DYNAMICS, AND FUTURE NARRATIVES

For all intents and purposes, Deloney and those who sought to exclude women from the weaving craft succeeded. Women continued to participate in the textile industry throughout industrialization, but only in menial, wage-earning positions. Lower class women, especially, persisted in this role. Spinning was no longer considered an admirable pastime, appropriate for even noble women. Yet, as Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass discuss in *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, spinning as a precursor to weaving was necessary for both the male weavers, who depended on the thread spun by women to weave their fabric, and the impoverished female spinners, who worked for meager, barely life-sustaining wages (104-11). *Jack of Newbury* and many other sixteenth-century texts served to denigrate the spinning profession and redefined the action as one appropriate only for women of the middling and upper sorts as a domestic duty, more akin to virtuous industriousness and feminine constancy than an economic imperative.

Redefining terms, professions, symbols, and mythology cannot simply be done overnight, and so it was with the spinning women and those few women who were brazen enough to operate at the higher, more definitively masculine levels of cloth production. The first hint at this change can be glimpsed in the 1492 document, “Articles of the Weavers’ Craft,” when the all inclusive language of “brother and sister” shifted to simply “persons,” allowing for the exclusion of women but not explicitly so. By 1555, with “Shorter Minutes of the Assemblies,” women



were forbidden from joining the guild, since taking a female apprentice was outlawed. To the London Weavers' Company, completely denying women's right to participate beyond the spinning process was just a short step from there, for the guild soon passed another ordinance declaring the illegality of maintaining a female weaver in 1577. In less than one century, in 83 years to be exact, female weavers went from accepted members of the business community to commercial vagabonds, lumped together with the illegal immigrants the guild also feared.

Thomas Deloney certainly plays a part in this economic, ideological, and finally, linguistic shift by portraying in *Jack of Newbury* an idealized weaving society that introduces women, through the widow's character, as at first obedient ordinance-abiding wives, who once widowed, marry within the trade and relinquish the quills to their properly masculine owner. Once the business is securely and legally in Jack's hands, the widow must vanish from the narrative in order for Jack's power as weaving master to be completely consolidated and unchallenged, as the real life weavers of the sixteenth century could only dream for their business. Deloney effects this vanishing by simply writing the character out and replacing her with a younger, and hence less experienced in the trade, servant who can lay no claim to Jack's dominion. Deloney even defines Jack's new bride as the perfect housewife, suggesting that her realm of expertise exists in an entirely separate and safe environment than Jack's business sphere.

But it is not just through marriage relationships that Deloney redefines appropriate female participation in the cloth-making industry; the juxtaposition of "The Weavers' Song" to "The Maidens' Song" also reveals a literary agenda—the redirecting of female attention to the marriage market rather than the woolen one. The song the spinners sing makes no mention of their craft, while the weavers' song focuses on mythology and claims that the great tragedy of

the Trojan War could have been averted had Helen known her place (which is by the spinning wheel) and had Paris properly minded his quills. According to these representations, an ideal world—one without political strife and senseless bloodshed—can be achieved by the perfection of the weaving industry: If women spin and men weave, all will be well.

After *Jack of Newbury* was published and became wildly popular in 1597, the mission to exclude women from the upper echelons of the weaving industry through literary depictions and mythic reimaginings continued. Jones and Stallybrass base their discussion of spinning and feminism around adaptations of the myths of Arachne, Penelope, and the Fates. Their discussion of Diego Velasquez's painting, *Las Hilanderas* or *The Fable of Arachne* (1657), is particularly stimulating, as they discuss the meaning of the foregrounded peasant spinners, who card, spin, and skein wool, in relation to the background, which features ambiguously dressed and depicted women, supposedly Minerva and Arachne.<sup>14</sup> Jones and Stallybrass suggest several readings of the painting's strange assimilation of images. Perhaps Velazquez represents the subordination of myth to reality, the rural aspects of spinning as opposed to the courtliness of tapestries, or competing allegories of "virtue and vice over women's labor in textile production" (94). Although the authors immediately reject the final reading, arguing that "such transparent allegory is resisted in Velazquez's painting," reading the interplay between the two focal points of *Las Hilanderas* in terms of vice and virtue is entirely productive, since similar allegorizations proliferated during the Renaissance—as the authors readily acknowledge (94). Furthermore, reading the painting in this light supports the developing trend that depicted spinning as a morally laudable activity for women of all social classes, while weaving was seen as beyond the feminine forte and thus reprehensible as a female profession. What could provide a better

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<sup>14</sup> I have included an image of this painting as the first appendix.

depiction of this relatively emergent split than the punitive myth of Arachne, which ends with the titular character soundly reprimanded for her presumptuously artful weaving?

Similar movements, each representing the newly defined proper sphere of feminine activity, emerged throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century, gaining momentum as time passed. By 1625, when the ballad “The mad-merry pranks of Robbin Good-fellow” was printed, folklore surrounding supernatural entities such as Robin Goodfellow (Shakespeare’s Puck) and Rumpelstiltskin began flourishing around Europe. In these overtly propagandistic literary pieces, bad women or women who boast of their spinning skills are unable even to work the spinning wheel adequately and must be rescued by male intermediaries. The last stanza of the first part of the 1625 ballad, commonly attributed to Ben Jonson, begins:

Yet now and then the maids to please,  
I card at midnight up their wool:  
And while they sleepe, snort, fart, and fease,  
With wheele to threds their flax I pull:  
I grind at will  
Their Malt up still.  
I dresse their hemp, I spin their tower  
If any wake,  
And would me take,  
I wend me laughing ho ho ho. (Pepys 1:80-81)

Much like the *Rumpelstiltskin* myth, which emerged during the late 18<sup>th</sup> century in literary form but existed prior to that as oral folklore, the “sluttish”<sup>15</sup> female spinners depicted in this ballad and in many works of years following *Jack of Newbury* required the assistance of male helpers if they were to successfully complete their carding and spinning duties. Jack Zipes, in *Fairy Tale as Myth/Myth as Fairy Tale*, relates the rise of such “spinning tales” to the decline of female

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<sup>15</sup> The OED defines “sluttish” as lazy for this period.

productivity and the appropriation of the narrative tradition that occurred during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries:

By depicting the protagonists [the maidens] learning how to spin to maintain control of spinning as production, the *Rumpelstiltskin* narratives celebrated at one time the self-identification of a young woman. However, these narratives also indicate how men inserted themselves into the initiation process and intervened to appropriate the narrative tradition. Consequently, initiation became framed within a male discourse. (52)

As I have argued, the process of male appropriation did not start in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, nor was its primary focus originally the “narrative tradition” Zipes refers to. Before the folklore and literary fairy tales Zipes discusses emerged and before the men of the 18<sup>th</sup> century could claim the narrative tradition belonging to spinning women, a movement had to begin three centuries earlier—in the guild ordinance of 1492—that catalyzed the entire process and continued, indeed blossomed, throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> century with the aid of literary texts just like Deloney’s *Jack of Newbury*.

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APPENDIX 1: DIEGO VELASQUEZ'S *LAS HILANDERAS*

