Death by Embroidery

Tales of Intrigue, Secrets, and Scheming in the Tudor Era

THL Eachna of Clonmakate, CKP, CBM, CVO
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In this paper I show that cultural changes,-a result of the Reformation, led to a significant increase in the literacy of women. This new exposure to literacy directly informed a budding interest in embroidering emblems, creating a new pathway for private communication.

I discovered this secret language while, in October of 2020, I attended an online lecture by Dr. Nicole LaBouff, a PhD Historian and Associate Curator of Textiles at the Minneapolis Institute of Art, entitled "The Embroideries of Mary, Queen of Scots and Bess of Hardwick Remembered." In her lecture, Dr. LaBouff described how literary emblems influenced the embroideries of both Mary and Bess. The lecturer pointed out that the ideas for their embroideries were inspired by written works that were generally not acceptable for women, particularly works of natural history and Latin mottoes. On the surface they appeared to be appropriately feminine, even decorative. But ultimately functioned along the same lines as contemporary informative devices reserved for men. They used embroidery for their intellectual advancement, resorting to stitching coded emblematic devices at a time when literary practices started to expand due to Humanism (LaBouff, The Inspired Needle: Embroidery Past and Present 2020).

Emblem Books

Emblem books were first introduced into England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, and quickly became very popular during the 16th century, ending at the end of the 17th century. They were used in two ways: to create Emblems and Impresas (Bath 2008, 49)

Queen Catherine de Medici influenced the common usage of the Impresa when she brought examples from Italy. An Impresa is an emblematic device which joins together a symbolic image with a motto, or word, that expresses the feelings or intentions of a person (49).

An Emblem would have a symbolic image with an accompanying motto that would normally be in Latin (8). It would be up to the viewer to interpret the meaning of the symbolism and what the relationship one to the other was. Without an intelligible connection between word and image it is not an emblem (37).

The first Emblem book was published by Andrea Alciati and was immediately sought after. His book, *Emblematum Liber* had 90 printings between 1548 and 1551, and contained mottoes and epigrams, all in Latin. Another 20 or so emblem books were published on the continent in the same time. The first English emblem book by Geffrey Whitney, titled *A Choice of Emblemes*, was not published until 1586.

Emblem books were illustrated with woodcuts and were displayed in a variety of applied and decorative arts, including embroidery. See Figure 1 for an example of a page from an Emblem book.

The Reformation and Cultural Growth

Until the Reformation all bibles were published in Latin, and no lay person was allowed to read the bible, even if they had studied Latin. The Church considered that no lay person could properly understand or interpret the Bible correctly without religious training. After the

Reformation and England's break with Rome, lay people were allowed to read the bible, and versions started appearing in the vernacular.

The first book ever published by a woman under her own name was Queen Katherine Parr (Henry VIII's sixth and final wife). She wrote "*The Book of Common Prayer*" parts of which have been identified in the current "*Anglican Book of Prayer*."(Norton 2018, 219). After Queen Katherine published her book, more women were emboldened to publish their works of translations, prayers, and sermons.

Prior to the Reformation, most embroidery was ecclesiastical, and much was done by the professional males of the *Broiderers Guild in London*. England was already known for its fine Opus Anglicanum work, especially from 1250 to 1350 (see Figure 2). During the tumultuous 14th century of the Black Death and war, decimated workshops could not meet the demand for their fine work (Synge 1982, 15). The professional workhouses turned to making heavily embellished ceremonial items, which left an opportunity for girls in households to embroider household items.

During the Reformation, Henry VIII seized most of the property belonging to the Catholic church. Therefore, since Ecclesiastical embroidery was no longer in favor, all existing copes, chasubles, altar cloths, etc., were sold, dismantled for their precious gold and jewels, gifted to courtiers, or sent overseas. Once Tudor England separated from Rome, the state's outlook stabilized, and it entered a period of increased secularization in everyday life. The country experienced a period of rapid cultural growth (Synge 1982, 27).

When King Edward VI legalized clergy marriages, it created a new class of people in England—the clergy's wives and daughters. However, many parishioners were reluctant to accept them. The wives were declared "whores" by the Roman Catholic church, and their children were "bastards" (Eales 2013, 27). The clergy responded in the early 17th by portraying their female relatives as paragons of religious piety, using literacy as the weapon in this campaign. All members of the clergy household, including servants, were expected to be literate and able to read the bible. Jackie Eales, Professor of Early Modern History at Canterbury Christ Church University, believes the creation of thousands of clerical households helped disseminate educational opportunities to local communities (Eales 2013, 32).

World Exploration and Classes

The 16th century in England was a time of world exploration. It was a time of "info-lust" and "information overload" when people tried to manage the massive quantities of information available (LaBouff 2018, 318). With the widespread use of the printing press, printed books became accessible, greatly influencing the dissemination of this newfound information. They chose printed volumes of information and collected natural history items that they displayed in their "Cabinets of Curiosity". Making annotations in book margins was encouraged, and the compilation of "commonplace books" containing favorite sayings and passages, sorting them by themes was encouraged (318). The purpose of these books was to recall the information. However, this education was reserved for boys.

Another consequence of the explorations of the world was the growth of the merchant class. The distribution of wealth was increasingly polarized between those whose only

resources lay in what their hands could provide and the propertied class (Parker 2010, 69). A merchant class formed in between the two, as they arranged to sell exotic items imported from the New World. This new merchant class wanted to increase their wealth and social standing by emulating the wealthy. Prosperity was shown by the building and furnishing of new houses, with textiles being an important display of ostentatious wealth (Levy 1993, 15). Needlework became more domestic in character and mostly amateur, instead of professional. And they were copied from the many books that were available which gave them woodcuts to copy, frequently drawn out by a man employed for that purpose. Many of the larger households had a man whose sole job was drawing pictures to embroider (Parker 2010,77).

Education of Girls in Tudor England

Records of education of Tudor girls are extremely limited. Typically, girls were taught in their homes by either their mothers or possibly a governess in wealthier families. Instruction for girls was limited to reading, religion, sewing, music, dancing, and cooking, and was based on the skills needed to take care of a house and family. Mothers basically taught their daughters what they knew. Note, writing was not necessarily considered a required subject for the girls to learn until late in the 16th century.

As part of their education, girls, in every class, were taught sewing to make clothes and mend them. Even Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII's first wife, was skilled in shirt making and made most of his shirts (Norton 2017, 56). However, with the importation of the fine embroidery needle in the 1540s, the art of embroidery became a regular part of the education for aristocratic women (la Bouff 2020). In the sixteenth century, it served two purposes:

providing the upper class an education that separated the elite from the middle class, and feminized this form of education (Parker 2010, 73). The place of needlework in a woman's education primary by the seventeenth century.

Sir Thomas More, one of the early proponents of the Humanist movement, was one of the first aristocrats who believed that girls should be educated. In turn, they would be able to help their husbands create a Christian home after marriage and raise their children virtuously (Norton 2018, 54). Margaret More wrote a translation of a religious work, *"Treatise on the Paternoster"* (1526) by Erasmus, a friend of her fathers, who was one of the first Humanists who recommended educating women.

However, Richard Hyrde wrote an introduction to the translation with a dissenting viewpoint. He felt that educating young women was "neither necessary nor profitable, but also very noisome and jeopardous." The opinion at the time was learning Latin and Greek would enflame the young women's stomachs toward vice (54), and it was totally unsuitable. In 1582 Richard Mulcaster, the head of a prestigious grammar school, wrote 55 paragraphs on the education of boys, but only one paragraph for the education of girls in his book "Elementarie,' a guide to good practices in teaching. He stated: "girls should not be permitted to attend grammar schools or universities; but they had some capacity for learning" (55). He did believe, however, that girls should only be taught to read as it is their biblical duty for them to be taught a skill to fully embrace religious teaching (55).

David Cressy, British Historian and Humanities Distinguished Professor of History at Claremont Graduate University, argued that women's literacy, meaning the ability to both read

and write, was very low before the Reformation at about 1%. According to Dr. Cressy's studies, over the next two centuries women's literacy grew by approximately 5% during the reign of Elizabeth and reached 10% by the middle of the 17th century. At that time, the literacy rate for men was about 50%. Dr. Cressy attributed the increases in literacy to what he called the "push factor" of humanist and protestant ideologie, together with the "pull factors"created by changing social and economic conditions (Eales 2013, 26).

Needlework as a Form of Expression

Dr. LaBouff correlated the lack of education of young girls with the trend of embroidering emblems taken from the many emblem books, natural history books, and Latin adages printed during the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. Girls were neither expected nor encouraged to read or compose intellectual works, so they used the emblem books to embroider hidden meanings. That, combined with the Elizabethan love of allegory, inspired girls to design emblematic works and puzzle out the meaning (LaBouff, The Inspired Needle: Embroidery Past and Present 2020). Amateur embroiderers copied woodcuts in natural history and Latin motto books and used them as their inspiration for their intellectual advancement (Frye 2013, 3). Therefore, emblems and their use in embroidery were central to the culture of the Elizabethan upper classes (Parker 2010, 76). This ultimately led to an increase in the education of girls from all classes.

Susan Frye, in her book "*Pens and Needles, Women's Textualities in Early Modern England*" argued that "women from about 1540 to 1700 expressed themselves in several media that also record the ongoing redefinition of the feminine" (Frye 2013, xv). Humanist

reevaluations of the Catholic Church and the Reformation changed the ways in which Protestants and Catholics valued literacy, the vernacular, and publication in manuscript and print (Frye 2013, 10). At the same time they valued the intersections between language and pictures which gave them the ideas to use embroidery to create. The rise of the nation-state, the exploration, exploitation, and seizure of the newly discovered points around the globe in the name of the empire, together with England's increasing participation in global trade and industrialization, help to explain why profound shifts occurred in how people conceived of religion, politics, race, class and gender (11).

The presentation rooms of the Tudors were composed of these intersecting texts, which included the cloth of estate with their royal coat of arms, its inscription *Dieu et Mon Droit (God is my right),* the carved wooden ceiling containing the Tudor roses, and the oriental carpets imported from the Middle East. Every conceivable surface became a site for embroidery, a painting, or writings. The aristocracy emulated this decorating approach, and by the turn of the 17th century merchant and middle-class families of varying amounts of wealth clearly copied it. Every house, whether large or small, displayed elaborate plasterwork ceilings, furniture, paintings and a great deal of embroidery. They had tapestries, beds hangings, chair cushions, draperies, and any other household item that could be embroidered (Frye 2013, 5). Most of these were worked by amateur ladies of the household. Linen canvas with wool embroidery (known as crewel work) was common. Though many items were made of a velvet background with silk and gold threads were common in the more aristocratic houses. (Synge 1982, 30)

In Figure 3, we see a group of women gathered to do their daily work. One is working on lace, probably for the house. Another had a slate frame and is working on a piece of

embroidery. There is music as well with one lady playing the virginals and another male apparently singing. But there is a lady (probably lady of the house) on the right side reading a book to the group. This setting was common for the large houses when the ladies would work on pillows, table rugs, pelmets, draperies, etc. (LaBouff, The Inspired Needle: Embroidery Past and Present 2020)

The Oxburgh Hangings

I am going to concentrate on investigating the work of Mary and Bess as they have, by far, the largest remaining collection of embroidery which includes many examples of Emblems which are the Oxburgh Hangings. This is not surprising as generations of family would save the work of a Queen, carefully passing it on. No doubt other ladies embroidered Emblems, despite few extant examples remaining. Bess was one of the premier ladies in Elizabeth's court. With the desire to have an ostentatious display of textiles in the homes of social climbers, others would have made similar embroidered emblems.

Mary probably brought Emblem books with her when she arrived to live with the Earl of Shrewsbury as Bess had few books listed in her inventories. She led far too active of a life to read large numbers of books. Recognizing the sources that supplied Mary with patterns not only helps us reconstruct her meanings, but also allows us sometimes to see things more clearly than earlier viewers did. They may have had the object in front of them, but they failed to recognize the relative sources and iconology (18). Especially when it was a bed hanging which they only saw for seconds and had no reason to look at carefully.

Four printed Emblem books can be shown to have provided direct patterns for Mary and Bess' emblematic embroidery. The main book was *Devises Heroiques* by Claude Paradin which was first published in Paris in 1551. It became one of the most popular sources for woodcuts of Emblems, both in needlework and in painting. It contains mostly Impresas from royal or noble people, many of whom were related to Mary (23).

A very similar collection was published by Gabriele Simeoni's "*Le imprese heroiche et morali*". In 1561 it was reprinted with the emblems from Paradin's book as a combined edition with 216 emblems. Neither Paradin nor Simeoni invented these emblems. They were all elegant or celebrated courtly devices that they copied. The other two books which Mary can be shown to have copied directly are the "*Dialogo dell'imprese*" of Paolo Giovio, and the "*Emblemata*" of Hadrianus Junius. Giovio's Dialogo was originally a prose treatis on the art of the Impresa, which set the precedent for more theoretical works on their composition. It was unillustrated until the publisher provided 112 woodcuts to illustrate Giovio's examples. This book was often published with Paradin and Simeoni's woodcuts, so people could purchase all three at once (24).

The most popular book for the embroidering of animals are the woodcuts that appeared in the *Historia Animalium* written around 1550 by Conrad Gessner (See Figure 4). This monumental work contained more than 3,000 folio pages, published in five successive volumes. He broke all animals down into type: quadrupeds, birds, fishes, and serpents (Bath 2008, 71). He did not necessarily personally see the animals he drew but based his drawings on accounts of sailors who traveled to the New World. He also networked with other naturalists of the time

and copied their work. Mary was quite interested in Gessner's books as they included a section on the animals of Scotland.

Understanding some of these conventions surrounding the way Impresas were used at court will show why emblematic devices in Mary's needlework had telling political consequences and why the imagery embroidered was not merely a matter of fashionable taste or the innocent arts of decision. The pictures Mary embroidered on her cushions or bed hangings were used as evidence in a court of law and influenced the life-or-death verdicts affecting great men. The Duke of Norfolk, the most powerful man in England, and his son, the Earl of Arundel were both condemned based on embroidered pillows. The Duke was beheaded and his son, the Earl of Arundel was poisoned while in prison (58).

The Earl of Shrewsbury was asked by Elizabeth's secretary, William Cecil, several months after Mary arrived as his prisoner if she was attempting to communicate with others or escape. The Earl assured him that Mary had not. He wrote "This Queen continueth daily to resort to my wife's chamber where with the Lady Lewiston and Mrs. Seton she useth to sit working with the needle in which she much delighteth and in devising works (Swain 1973, 63)." He added that their conversation was of trivial importance. He apparently did not inspect the works with the needle.

Mary and Bess apparently worked out a shape coding for their embroideries. These shapes probably were modeled after the embroidery of Catherine de Medici. The large emblematic centerpieces are all large squares, with personal monograms and impresas. The plant slips with Latin inscriptions were octagonal, and the animal embroideries were all in the

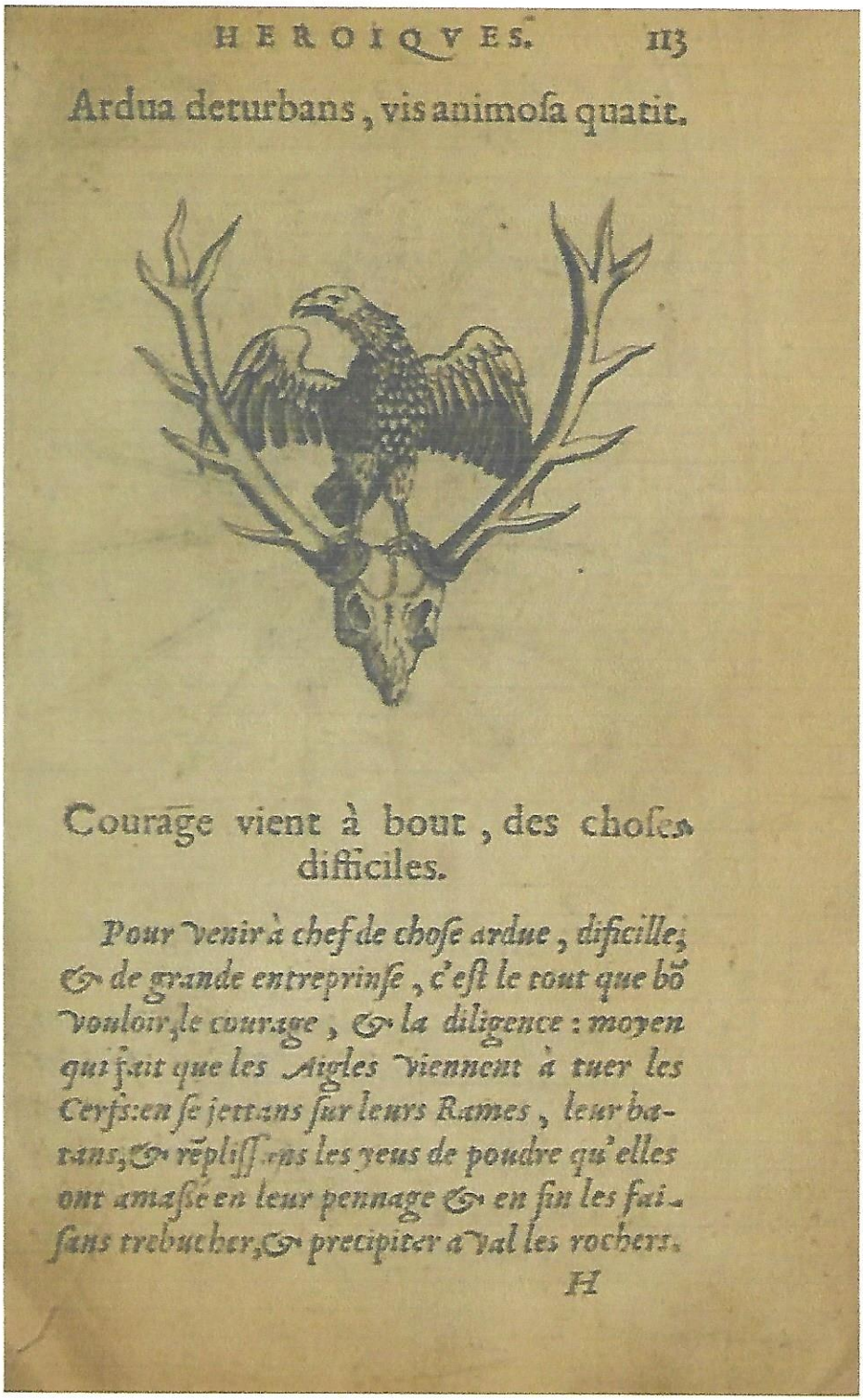
shape of a cruciform (11). The latin mottoes surrounding the octagons were taken from a number of sources. However, Erasmus' Adagio is where the majority of them came from. And the mottoes did not necessarily have anything to do with the plants.

The slips contained in the Oxburgh Hall hangings are not the only embroideries that contained Emblems. Mary also embroidered cushion covers that copy Emblems from Emblem books. They have her personal cipher and the rose, lily, and thistle, representing the three countries which she had claim to (17), so we know they were embroidered by Mary. However, I will not be investigating them in this paper.

Mary and Bess stitched a number of octagons containing slips of plants or trees, and Latin sayings around the perimeter. The Latin mottoes don't necessarily seem to be related to the slips. But the plants could hold some special meaning in the Elizabethan time period. The pattern for the plant slips were mostly taken from yet another book, *Commentarii in Dioscoridis* by Pier Andrea Mattioli. He was an herbalist and a physician who printed over 900 woodcuts of plants and trees.

Figure 1

A page out of an Emblem book, title Heroiques



HEROIQVES. 113

Ardua deturbans, vis animosa quatit.

Courage vient à bout, des choses difficiles.

Pour venir à chef de chose ardue, dificille, & de grande entreprinse, c'est le tout que bõ vouloir, le courage, & la diligence: moyen qui fait que les Aigles viennent à tuer les Cerfs: en se jettans sur leurs Rames, leur battans, & rẽplissans les yeus de poudre qu'elles ont amassée en leur pennage & en fin les faisans trebucher, & precipiter à val les rochers.

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Figure 2

Examples of Opus Anglicanum chausubles with elaborate goldwork and silk threads. From 1300-1400.

Photos taken by Sharon Gray at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Figure 3

Ladies in a garden embroidering, Whole folio Ladies seated at their embroidery, including one engaged in lace-making, and another at the virginal, with a man beside her singing. Behind, a formal garden, with clipped hedges, parterres, and fountain. Off to the right a lady is reading to the group. Image taken from Album Amicorum of Gervasius Fabricius. Originally published in Wurzburg and Salzburg; 1603-1637.

Downloaded from the British Library/Science Photo Library

Release details

Model release not required. Property release not required.

Blickling Hall, Norfolk, England

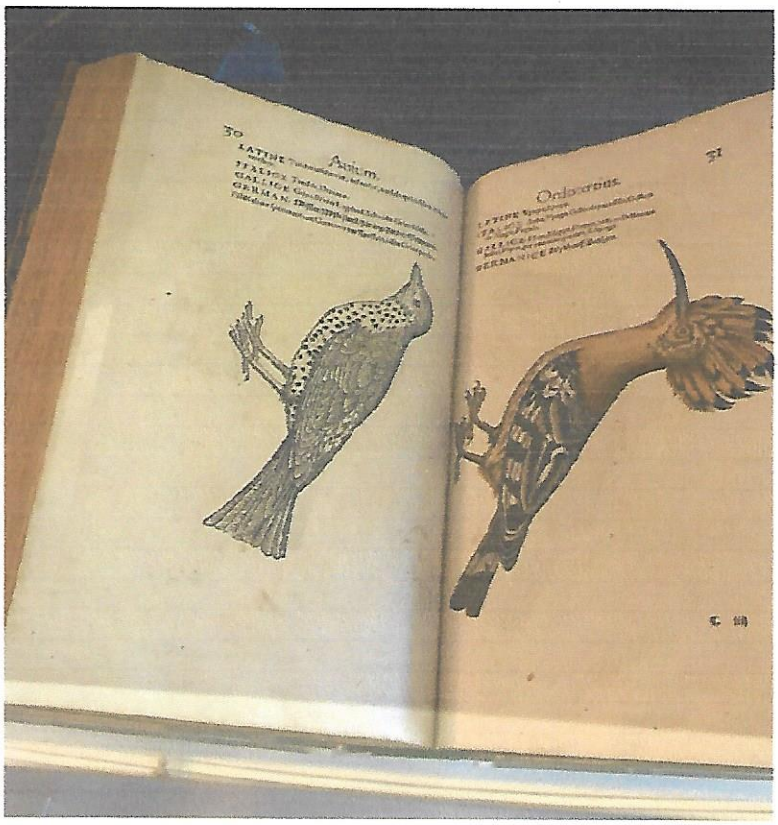
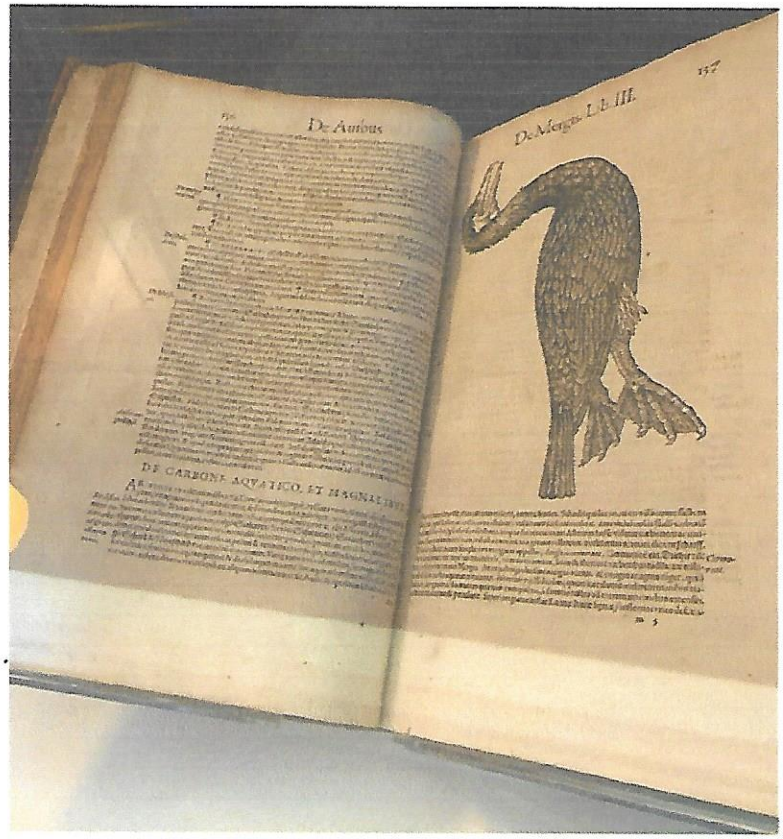


Figure 4

These are photos of an extant copy of Gessner's *Historia Animalium*. Gessner printed 5 volumes of his work, and many editions were printed.

Photos taken by Sharon Gray at Blickling Hall, Norfolk, England



Embroidery Examples

The Oxburgh Hangings are a group of panels mostly made up of slips stitched to green velvet with a red couched twist sewn around the slips to make large hangings approximately 7ft 6in x 8ft 6in (Levey 2007, 339). The slips on these hangings are also known as the prison embroideries, as they were made while Mary was the prisoner of The Earl of Shrewsbury. According to inventories, these needlework slips were made up into bed hangings, but there was no mention of them until the late 1700s. They now consist of three large hangings and a valance displayed at Oxburgh Hall, and an additional 27 loose pieces stored at the V&A museum (Staff n.d.). Three slips happened to become separated from the main collection and were purchased by the Friends of the Palace of Holyroodhouse in Edinburgh, and are displayed there.

The panels consist of four center embroideries, approximately 28" square, 16 whole and 7-part octagons approximately 15.5" x 15.5" at their widest points, and 101 whole or in part cruciforms approximately 10.5" x 10.5". The three complete hangings are decorated with ciphers and emblems relating to Mary for the Marion hanging, the Cavendish hanging based on Sir William Cavendish, and the Shrewsbury hanging for the Earl of Shrewsbury. The latter two hangings were probably mostly stitched by Bess of Hardwick. However, we have no proof who actually stitched them as many have no signatures (Levey 2007, 339).

The slips on the panels match other needlework pieces at Hardwick Hall, Bess' home, so we are fairly certain they were stitched in-house. The octagons and cruciforms are worked mainly with silk floss, including some with mixed colors. The stitch is a two-stage cross stitch over paired threads of linen and the long-armed cross stitch is used for the bodies of some animals. The eyes of most of the creatures are ringed with either couched gold filé or yellow

silk floss in an irregular stem stitch (Levey 2007, 341). When looking at places the stitching has worn away in the below photo, taken by Sharon Gray at Oxburgh Hall you can see, the linen

resembles modern Penelope fabric. And you can see the cross stitching. The stitch count is 13x12 per square inch. However, some of the mottoes or names are tightly worked, probably over a laid thread as they are slightly raised (341).

The squares were worked in a slightly different stitch and used more gold file than the smaller slips. The mottoes and some other details are worked in filé, but the rest of the square was done in silk floss in a tent stitch with a count of 24x23 per square inch. Straight stitches, together with couched lines of silk floss decorate the slips that project outward from the central squares (341).

We will look at the center square embroideries of the hangings first. The center squares are embroidered with ciphers and emblems which are typical of the Elizabethan enjoyment of devising enigmas and witty puzzles in their work (340). They are made in a style made popular at the French Court of Henry II, where Mary grew up and taught embroidery by Catherine de Medici. Though the stitching of emblems and ciphers were not only a concept of Mary and Bess. There are examples in the Burrell Collection, Glasgow (unable to obtain pictures) (7).

With all other pleasures denied to Mary it is understandable that as time went on, her needlework became more and more important to her. Large pieces were impractical because of the size of the frame required. Plus to start on a large piece would mean that she was admitting to herself that she would continue being a prisoner for a long period of time. A small piece of needlework, able to be held in the hand, was convenient and made the time pass more quickly (Swain 1973, 84)

Marion Hanging

Photo taken at Oxburgh Hall by Sharon Gray.

The center square of the Marian Hanging is a very contentious piece made by Mary. It depicts a disembodied hand descending from the sky holding a sickle to prune one of the two vines. The motto is *Virescit Vulnere Virtu*s "which means virtue flourishes by wounding." It can be read as a comparison between the trimmed but fruitful Mary and the barren Queen

Elizabeth I. The square also bears the crowned arms of Scotland and Mary's personal cipher of **M A** within the Greek letter **Φ** phi (for Francis, her first husband), (Swain 1973, 75).

Mary made a cushion with the same design and sent it to the Duke of Norfolk as a token of courtship. Despite Shrewsbury's diligence in preventing Mary from communicating with anyone, secret messages were exchanged. In 1569 it was suggested that she marry the Duke of Norfolk who was Elizabeth's cousin and had a strong claim to the throne. They were able to have secret letters delivered, and Norfolk gave her a diamond ring which she wore around her neck. The marriage plan leaked to the North of England where the Catholics regained hope that it was time to depose Elizabeth and place Mary on the throne. Elizabeth's secretary, Sir Francis Walsingham heard of the plot, apparently from Norfolk's mistress. Norfolk was immediately arrested and sent to the Tower where he was tried and found guilty. The cushion was one of the pieces of evidence which convicted him. He was beheaded in 1572 (75).

After this plot, the Parliament adamantly demanded that Elizabeth condemn Mary. They felt it was much too dangerous to let Mary live as there would always be the possibility of an uprising if the Catholics rose up and overthrew Elizabeth in favor of a Catholic Queen.

Shrewsbury Hanging

Photo taken by Sharon Gray at Oxburgh Hall

The device on the square panel is a representation of the fable of the thirsty raven who dropped pebbles into an urn until the water was raised high enough so it could drink. The motto is *ingenii largitor* which literally translates to “bestower of wit”. However, can be

interpreted as “necessity is the mother of invention.” This image and the motto were taken from the book *Devises Heroiques* of 1557 by Claude Paradin. The border is based on designs by Jan Vredeman de Vries book *Grottesco: in diversche manieren*. Although it does seem an appropriate image for Bess of Hardwick, it also seems appropriate for Mary, who was forced to live with her wits. The reference to the Earl of Shrewsbury in the hanging is an octagon containing the monogram of Elizabeth Talbot Shrewsbury. Also there is a monogram beneath a coronet of George and Elizabeth Shrewsbury on an octagon, with a border inscribed “George Shrewsbury.” (Bath 2008, 58)

The inspiration for this image is from Devises Heroiques. Downloaded from the Internet Archive of the University of Illinois.

Cavendish Hanging

Photo taken by Sharon Gray at Oxburgh Hall

This central square portrays tears falling onto smoking quicklime, with the Latin motto *Extinctum Lachrimae Testantur Vivere Flamman* (tears witness that the quenched flame lives). This is indicative of the Countess' love for her second husband and father of her children, Sir

William Cavendish. Further evidence is in the devices filling the borders, which include cracked mirrors, broken chains and rings, and a glove cut in half. The glove is a symbol of marital love. There are two shields of arms in the upper corners. One is of Sir Williams quartered with one of his ancestors. The other is of the Cavendish arms impaling the Hardwick arms. The lower corners contain the Hardwick stag and the Cavendish coiled snake, facing to the side. The monograms of WEC, EC, and ES are also present. Interestingly enough, Bess had two husbands after Sir William Cavendish – Sir William St. Loe, and the Earl of Shrewsbury, but continued to mourn her second husband.

Mary probably recommended the emblem and motto as they were the impresa of Catherine deMedici, her mother-in-law in France. Catherine was queen of Henri II and Regent of France. This emblem and motto were adopted by Catherine after the death of Henri in the fatal tournament of 1559 to express her enduring love for her late husband. The death of Henri II in a tilting accident made Mary the Queen of France (32).

La Pennas Paassan

Downloaded from the Collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum website.

The final large square of the Oxburgh hangings is a single piece cut from the green velvet backing and is stored at the Victoria and Albert Museum. After the beheading of the Duke of Norfolk, Mary followed his children, who would have become her stepchildren. His

son, Philip, was a Catholic, along with his wife Ann, which was rather dangerous for courtiers in Elizabeth's court. Philip decided to not return to court, but to live quietly on the Continent. Unfortunately, he was caught escaping in a small boat crossing the channel. He was then imprisoned with the utmost severity in the Tower of London. Margaret Swain believes this piece was going to be sent to Philip Howard during his captivity in the Tower. However, Mary was found guilty of treason and executed before she finished the cushion (Swain 1973, 57).

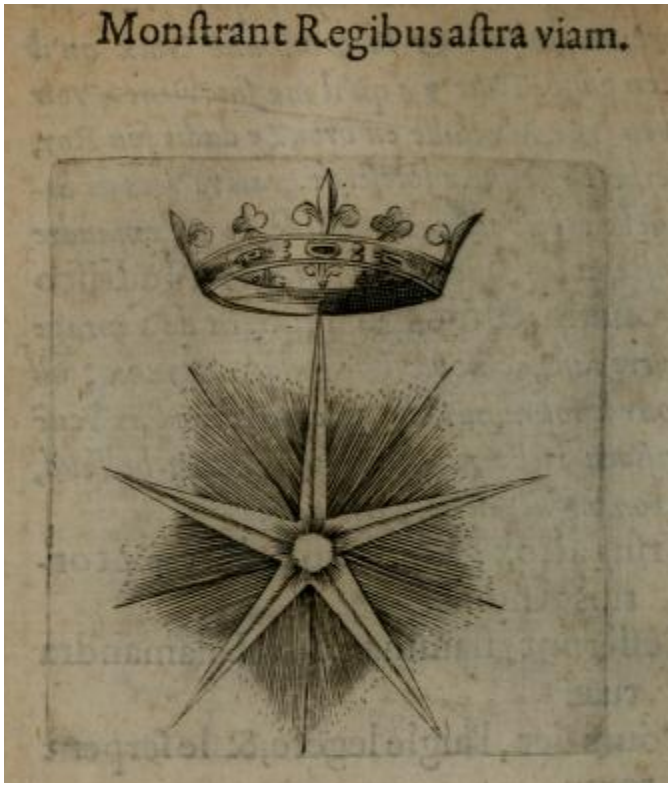
The center is an armillary sphere, from which feathers fall into a stormy sea filled with ships and sea-monsters, alluding to Philip being caught at sea. The Spanish motto "Las Pennas Passan Y Queda La Speranza (Sorrows pass but hope survives), and the emblems with their mottos carefully arranged in the border all reinforce the message of fortitude and courage under crushing adversity (87). The motto is probably punning on "pennas" as both "sorrows" and "feathers', while alluding to the armillary sphere as an instrument of navigation which can give sailors some hope of safe arrival despite the pains of voyage.

The arms of four countries in each corner, surrounded with the collar of their respective orders of chivalry, were meaningful to his father, the Duke of Norfolk. As Earl Marshal of England, Norfolk had been a Knight of the Garter, which surrounds the arms of England. The Order of St. Michael which surrounds the French arms, had also been conferred on the Duke. The Spanish arms surrounded by the collar of the Order of the Golden Fleece probably referred to Philip being named after Philip II of Spain, who was his godfather and a friend of his fathers. The royal arms of Scotland surrounded by the Order of the Thistle with her emblem above of the marigold turning towards the sun, and below the dog, symbolizing a faithful friend, would tell Philip who the sender of the cushion was (88).

There were a number of emblems from Paradin's Devises Heroiques around the outside of the square, including:

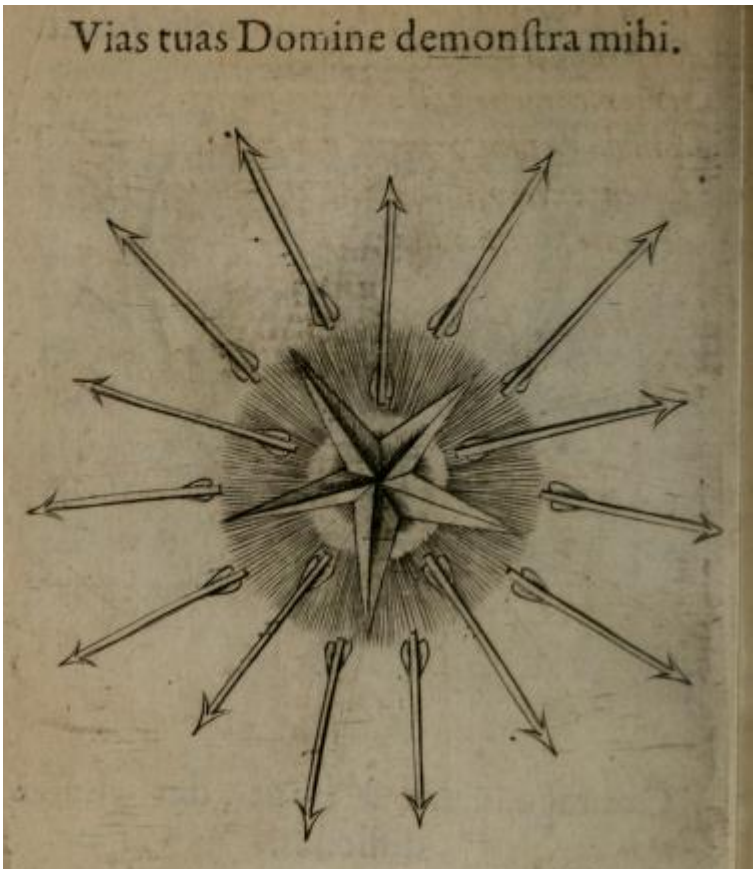
This is an eagle perched on the antlered skull of a stag, with the motto, "Ardva Detvrbans Vis Animosa Qvatit (The strength of courage shatters higher things). This is based on a description in Pliny's Natural History of the way an eagle will land on a stag's head and scatter dust in its eyes until the stag hurls itself blindly from a cliff. (Bath 2008, 30)

This screenshot and the following three screenshots were downloaded from the Internet Archive of the University of Illinois. The full manuscript is available on the Internet Archive.



This is a crowned five-pointed star, with the motto Monstrant Regibvs Astra Viam (the stars show the way to the king). This is the device of the Knights of the Star to express how, for French monarchs at least, the piety and persistence of the Magi could be relied upon to bring divine help and direction. (30)

In the upper right is a disembodied hand holding a scimitar with which it cuts a knotted rope that hangs from a cloud, with the motto *Nodos Virtute Resolvo* (By my strength/virtue I untie knots). This is the impresa of Jacques d'Albon, Mareschal de St. Andre, who died in 1561. It represents the Gordian knot which Alexander the Great cut in fulfilment of the prophecy that whosoever untied it would rule over Asia, another device of French provenance offering the hope of answers to knotty problems. (30)



On the lower left is the five-pointed start with arrows shooting out from it and the motto in an encircling banderole, the upper loop of which is damaged, but probably says "*Vias Tvas Domine Demonstra* (Show me your ways O Lord). It is the impresa on a ship belonging to Emperor Charles V as a reminder of the need to pray for divine directions. The motto quotes Psalm 25, verse 4. (31)

The Octagons

Photo taken by Sharon Gray at Oxburgh Hall

This is an octagon of a tortoise climbing a palm tree. The motto is *Dat Gloria Vires* (Glory Gives Strength). The palm tree is topped with a crown to indicate Mary. The tortoise was a well-known symbol for domesticity, because it carries its "house" on its back. There is a drawing in Paradin that looks exactly like the palm tree (39).

It looks like Mary just added the tortoise crawling up the trunk.

Of interest, the palm tree, tortoise and crown were engraved on the Scottish Ryal coin when Mary returned to Scotland after the death of her husband Francis II.

This screenshot was downloaded from the Internet Archive of the University of Illinois. The full manuscript is available on the Internet Archive.

The Scottish Ryal commemorating Mary's return to Scotland. Downloaded from the National Trust Collection.

Photo taken by Sharon Gray at Oxburgh Hall

This is an octagon on the Marian hanging that shows a crowned monogram spelling Elizabeth/Mary, flanked by a lily, rose and a thistle that lies bent or crushed beneath it. The lily and the rose are the kingdoms of France and England, and the thistle is Scotland. The motto is *Arctiora Svnt Virtvtis Vincula Qvam Sangvinis* which means "The bonds of virtue are tighter than those of blood." The word "Virtus" in Mary's mottoes mean both moral integrity and/or physical strength. It seems the motto is a reference to Mary's ties of blood status and power that should have joined the three kingdoms and two queens. Ties which she thought would support her in her troubles. (38)

Photo taken by Sharon Gray at Oxburgh Hall

The only reference to the Earl of Shrewsbury is on this octagon which is located on the Cavendish Hanging. It has the monogram of Elizabeth Talbot Shrewsbury, beneath a coronet of George and Elizabeth Shrewsbury. The border is inscribed “George Shrewsbury.” This is typical of the octagons done by Mary, and she probably suggested the pattern to Bess. (Levey 2007, 340)

Photo taken by Sharon Gray at Oxburgh Hall

This octagon contains three marigolds facing a radiant sun and the motto *Non Inferiora Secvtvs* (Not having followed lower things). The marigold that follows the sun had been selected as the personal impresa of Marguerite de Navarre, sister of Francois I. This device plays on her name as Marguerite is close to the name of the flower, the marigold, which follows the sun. The motto is from Virgil, and means she put all her thoughts, will, and affections towards that great sun which is God. Mary just added her own cipher containing the **MA** of her name and the Phi **Φ** of her late husband. (Bath 2008, 7)

Photo taken by Sharon Gray at Oxburgh Hall

As previously discussed, there were quite a few plant slips in the hangings, and this turnip is one example from the Shrewsbury hanging. The motto says *Eventvs Rei In Many Dei*, meaning "the outcome stands in God's own hands." The turnip is copied from a woodcut in Mattioli's *Commentarii in Dioscoridis*, which is a herbology which contains the meanings of many herbs and other plants. However, the meaning of the turnip is a mystery. (Bath 2008, 113) I used this example to show that not all meanings are apparent, and this would be one slip that would cause debate. Some of the plant slips seem to be arbitrary and hold no meaning.

Photo taken by Sharon Gray at Oxburgh Hall

This octagon on the Cavendish hanging is an oak tree with the motto *Integritas VI Robora Perennivs Est* (Integrity is more lasting than oak). This is clearly an emblem as the motto relates to the picture. The oak tree is once again copied from Mattioli's *Commentarii in Dioscoridis* (114).

Photo taken by Sharon Gray at Oxburgh Hall

This octagon is a cedar tree on the Cavendish hanging, which was again taken from Mattioli's *Commentarii in Dioscoridis*. The motto is *Vera Felicitas Semper Illesa* (true happiness is always unscathed). The cedar is a biblical tree, where it is associated with stateliness and divine favor. This emblem may also allude to the biblical tendency for these cedar trees to be felled. So, it could be referring to Elizabeth felling Mary. This is an example of an emblem as the words are significant to the image (115).

Birds and Beasts with Meaning

Photo taken by Sharon Gray at Oxburgh Hall

This slip of a dolphin is obviously referring to her late husband who was the Dauphin of France. The dolphin is leaping out of the water and the title Delphine is stitched across the top. A crown with Mary's initials are at the bottom. The dolphin woodcut was copied from a book by Pierre Belon titled *La Nature et Diversite des Poissons*, which was published in 1555. The book contained short descriptions in French, which Mary and her ladies would probably read to Bess as she spoke no French (101).

Photo taken by Sharon Gray at Oxburgh Hall

This is an interesting slip. It is a hawk taking down a rabbit and there is no motto or title. On the right there is the Tudor rose, and on the left the lily of France. The bottom is rather worn, but it looks like Mary's initials and the Scottish thistle. This is one of the several incriminating slips Mary stitched, implying that Elizabeth is the hawk, hunting Mary, the rabbit. I think its quite interesting that I was unable to find a description of this slip in any of the references.

Photo taken by Sharon Gray at Oxburgh hall

This slip is of a donkey carrying a pack on its back. The title is “An Asse”. There are two thistles for Scotland. But this one can be interpreted in several ways, which is what the ladies of this time period enjoyed. This slip probably resulted in much debate over what it really means. Again, I was unable to find any possible interpretations of the meaning in any of the references. The Earl did continue to move his and Mary’s households around to different houses on a fairly regular basis. It could pertain to the constant moving and the many asses it took to move her goods.

Downloaded from the Royal Collection Trust, Palace of Holyroodhouse, Scotland

This is another very incriminating slip of a ginger haired cat, standing for Elizabeth, playing with a mouse, which would be Mary. Her cipher is on the upper right side of the slip, and the title is A Catte. It is one of three slips that were purchased from Sotheby's to be displayed at Holyroodhouse.

The Cavendish Hanging

The Shrewsbury Hanging

The Marion Hanging

Appendix A

The Life of Bess of Hardwick

Mary was a prisoner with the Earl of Shrewsbury for most of the 19 years she was held prisoner in England by Elizabeth I. His wife, Elizabeth Talbot, Countess of Shrewsbury, also known as Bess of Hardwick, was her companion and they spent many days embroidering or designing embroidery patterns. At least until she became jealous of Mary and accused her of having an affair with her husband. Bess had a very interesting life, starting as a well-connected, but poor, daughter of a Gentleman farmer, and ultimately becoming one of the richest woman in England through advantageous marriages.

Bess was born the daughter of John Hardwick who worked the same 450 acres his family lived on for the previous two centuries. He was considered to be a country squire of minor gentry and was locally well respected and connected. Her mother, Elizabeth, was a good, sensible mother who cared for all 6 of her daughters and one son. Unfortunately, her father passed away at the age of 33 when Bess was still a babe in arms, and her mother remarried when she was two. This remarriage resulted in another three children. Bess was educated, starting at the age of 5, with her older sisters (Lovell 2006).

Her education was much poorer than that of Mary, Queen of Scots, and consisted of good manners and deportment, reading and writing, and a few other basics. She had the typical education of a young girl as we discussed earlier. Her entire education was based on the skills she needed to make a good marriage in a Household of a higher social standing. She would also have been taught to play a musical instrument, as music was the standard form of entertainment in the evenings. It is likely that Bess knew how to play the virginals as she always had an Instrument in her home. And she would have been taught embroidery. They probably had some servants, but only the most aristocratic households had enough servants to take care of all the chores. So, all the women of the household, down to the

youngest girls, helped with the baking, washing, cleaning, dusting, polishing, spinning, weaving, sewing, poultry-keeping, beekeeping, dovecote, and herb garden (Lovell 2006).

At the age of 12 Bess was sent away to serve in the household of Lady Zouche, a distant cousin. It was a common practice to send children to the home of the most influential relation they had. The children were not sent as servants per se, but they would learn the art of the courtier. Children of untitled gentry were sent to the home of a knight, children of a knight were sent to serve an Earl, children of an Earl were set to the home of a Duke or Prince. Bess was quite lucky as Lady Zouche had been a lady-in-waiting to two Queens — Anne Boleyn and Jane Seymour. Therefore, Bess had very good training in the running of an aristocratic household (Lovell 2006).

Bess' first marriage was to a neighbor, Robert Barlow., who she met at the home of Lady Zouche. At the time of their marriage in the spring of 1543, Bess was 15 and Robert was 13. Unfortunately, Robert passed away on Christmas Eve 1544. There is little known of this marriage as no records have been found. However, we do know that Bess demanded her widow's dower, and went to the courts to intervene. It is believed that the guardian of Roberts younger brother and heir did not believe the marriage was consummated, so he refused to give her any funds. The courts ultimately sided with Bess, but it took about 8 years (Lovell 2006).

After the death of her first husband, Bess became a waiting gentlewoman in the household of Lady Frances, wife of Henry Grey, Marquess of Dorset, at Bradgate Park in Leicestershire. Lady Francis was the daughter of the marriage of Princess Mary, King Henry VIII's younger sister, and Charles Brandon, the Duke of Suffolk. This landed Bess in the highest level of Tudor society. While there, Bess met William Cavendish and they were betrothed in 1547. William had earned a fortune by working for Thomas Cromwell. They seized the assets of the Catholic church during the reformation and Cavendish profited. He was twice as old as Bess, but they had 8 children in the 10 years they were married. He

passed away in 1557 and Bess became a lady in waiting to the new queen, Elizabeth I, where she traveled in the highest levels of Tudor society (Lovell 2006).

Bess was still young and attractive, and quickly caught the eye of Sir William St. Loe, the very wealthy Captain of Elizabeth's guard. They were married in 1559. His younger brother, Edward, was quite jealous of him marrying as he wanted to inherit the St. Loe lands and money. He tried to poison both Sir William and Bess at one time, and Sir William added Bess' name to the title of his lands. When he passed away in 1565, Bess became a very rich woman, and inherited 60,000 pounds in addition to his extensive lands. It is rumored that his brother poisoned him because he wanted to inherit the St. Loe money and land. But it had all been left to Bess. (Lovell 2006)

Bess married again for the fourth and final time in 1568 and became the Countess of Shrewsbury. George Talbot, 6th Earl of Shrewsbury, was one of the wealthiest and most powerful aristocrats in the Tudor court. She had made quite the leap in status, having been born the daughter of a minor country squire, and ending up married to the premier-ranking Earl in the land. She then became one of the most prominent women in Elizabeth's Court. (Lovell 2006)

Elizabeth chose the Earl of Shrewsbury to be the custodian of Mary, Queen of Scots due to his status in court, and his wealth. Adding Bess' wealth to his made them the richest in England, besides Elizabeth. Although she was officially a prisoner, Mary was still an anointed queen and still needed to be treated as such. Accommodation needed to be suitable for her and the many servants she had in her household. He was happily married, and less likely to fall in love with Mary, as did many men who came into contact with her. He was wealthy and could afford to house the Queen and her household. His loyalty to Elizabeth was unquestioned, and both he and his wife were staunch Protestants. With their many large properties, it was felt they would be able to easily accommodate Mary and her household, while still providing security. (Lovell 2006)

The Shrewsbury's were honored that Elizabeth had chosen them to be the custodians of Mary but had no idea she would be with them for over 19 years. Bess and Mary at first became fast friends and spent their days embroidering or designing embroideries together, as we will see. However, the number of people in her household, and her demand for expensive items such as silks and linen for embroidery, created a rift. Combined with Bess' jealousy of Mary, it led to the breakdown of the Shrewsbury's marriage.

But in the end the daughter of a poor Squire became the second riches woman in England after Elizabeth, and her children were well taken care of. One of her grandchildren even had a claim to the throne, but all were titled.

Appendix B

The Life of Mary, Queen of Scots

To understand Mary's motivation for her more controversial embroideries, we need to understand her life. She exhibited her frustration with her life as a prisoner of Elizabeth I through her embroideries. Most of these embroideries were completed during her prison years while she and Bess, Countess of Shrewsbury spent their days working on embroidery, or devising new embroidery works.

Mary was born on 8 December 1542 to James V of Scotland, and his wife Marie de Guise. Five days after her birth, James suddenly died, and Marie became Queen of Scotland. Her mother, Marie de Guise, with the backing of France, acted as Regent (Swain 1973, 11). At the time King Henry VIII was King of England and although England and Scotland were two distinct countries, he regarded himself as overlord of Scotland. His sister, Margaret Tudor, was the mother of James V and Henry felt he had the right to have a say in the governance of the smaller country. At the time, Henry had just beheaded his 5th wife, Catherine Howard and Elizabeth was still considered to be illegitimate. England was a staunchly Protestant country as the reformation was in full swing. There had been centuries long warfare between the two countries, but Henry realized there was a way to end hostilities. He had a son, Edward, and through the Treaty of Greenwich he offered a marriage between Marie and his son, thus uniting the two countries (Guy 2018). Unfortunately, the treaty was never signed by Scotland because of the power struggle between the Catholic regency subsidized by the French, and the Protestant pro-English party. The Catholic regency won out, largely due to French money.

Mary was crowned at Stirling at the age of nine months on 9 September 1543. Henry, of course, resumed hostilities at this slight and destroyed much of the South of Scotland in the battle of Pinkie Cleough. The Scottish Catholics in power realized that their only hope in holding off the English was by asking for military help from France. The French King, Henry II, sent military help with the

understanding that Mary would be sent to France to be raised and would marry the Dauphin, Francis. As the future Queen of France she would be raised a Catholic. (Guy 2018)

Mary left Scotland on 7 August 1548 at the age of 5 with her ladies, her gentlemen, and her four Maries who were young girls from noble families. The French court was considered to be the most brilliant, sophisticated, and advanced court in all of Europe. Therefore, her upbringing had a huge influence on her later life, as she was raised as the future Queen with the future King and his siblings. Catherine de Medici was the Queen of France and had a huge influence on Mary. Mary was brought up to believe she was a "precocious prodigy, irresistible as a beauty and beyond gainsaying as a queen. With such unremitting adulation, it was very hard for her to know the true nature of her abilities and limitations." (Dunn 2005, 97)

Catherine de Medici was raised in Florence and taught Mary skills she brought from the Italian Renaissance, especially embroidery. (Wardle Vol 64, 1981) Mary learned many languages including French, Italian, Spanish, Greek and Latin, which was the language of the church. Her education and welfare were overseen by her De Guise grandmother and her mother's brothers, the Duke de Guise and the Cardinal of Lorraine, and was far better than the typical education of a young women of that time. She had an almost identical curriculum as the Dauphin, which was highly unusual for a young girl (Guy 2018, 71). Mary learned that "scheming, duplicity, and opportunism were the everyday tools of a successful courtier, and the ability to anticipate and out-scheme was the response of a successful queen" (Dunn 2005, 127). In all things, she was taught that her future lay in France as the wife of the Dauphin and her duty to Scotland was largely ignored. In all things, Mary had only the best –the finest linen, the finest gowns, and attendants on hand at all times (Guy 2018).

Mary and the Dauphin were raised together as friends, which was very unusual in the age of arranged marriages for political purposes. Mary acted as an older sister to the small and sickly Dauphin, and they often rode and played cards together. They married on 24 April 1558 when Mary was 15 and the Dauphin was 14.

In the meantime, Henry VIII of England died in 1547, and his son, Edward VI by his third wife, Jane Seymour, succeeded him. However, Edward did not reign long and died in 1553. He was the first King of England to be raised as a Protestant and named another protestant, his first cousin once removed, Lady Jane Grey, as his successor. However, after only 9 days on the throne Jane was deposed by Mary Tudor, daughter of Henry's first wife, Catherine of Aragon, and was crowned Queen of England. Mary Tudor did not reign long either, and she passed on 17 November 1558. Her successor was Henry's second child, Elizabeth Tudor, by Anne Boleyn.

The accession of Elizabeth to the English throne was met with great scorn at the French court. Elizabeth had been proclaimed to be illegitimate by Act of Parliament in 1536 and was a Protestant. The French court quickly proclaimed Mary to be the Queen of England, Scotland, and Ireland. Mary's Uncle, the Cardinal of Lorraine, had the heraldic arms of England to be blazoned along with the arms of France and Scotland, and placed it on all plate and furniture belong to the Dauphin and Dauphine. Ushers clearing a path for Mary would cry out "make way for the Queen of England", and her heraldic arms were further embellished with an imperial crown to represent her "Franco-British" empire. Her Uncles, the Duke of Guise, and the Cardinal of Lorraine, wrote letters to all the heads of Europe proclaiming Mary and Francis the King-Dauphin and Queen-Dauphine of France, Scotland, England, and Ireland. They also wrote the Pope requesting his ruling on the matter and asking him to appoint Mary Queen of England in Elizabeth's stead. As it turns out, Phillip II of Spain was courting Elizabeth and was opposed to the Guise's plan, despite being insulted by Henry VIII divorcing his aunt, Catherine of Aragon. As

Spain held the balance of power, the Pope could not offend him, and did not support the Guise's political plan. All parties were short of funds and preferred peace (Guy 2018, 91).

On 10 July 1559 the French King, Henry II, died suddenly in a jousting accident and Mary and Francis were crowned King and Queen of France. However, they did not remain King and Queen of France for long. Unfortunately, Francis II, always a sickly child, died on 5 December 1560. Mary became the Dowager Queen of France and once it was evident she was not pregnant, Catherine de Medici made it clear that she needed to return to Scotland.

There follows the complicated dance of intrigue that occurred between Mary and Elizabeth, that went on for many years. The number one goal of all rulers is to have children to continue the dynastic rule, and Mary was no different. However, that meant she needed a husband and soon. The Scottish lords were quite adamant that Mary needed to marry a Scottish citizen as they did not want an absentee Queen again.

Mary unfortunately settled on Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley, and son of the Earl of Lennox, a Catholic. He had a strong claim to the English throne, and Elizabeth did not approve. However, too soon after they were wed Mary realized his true nature. He was vain, arrogant, and unreliable. He was also a syphilitic drunk. But she did get pregnant and produced a male heir for Scotland and presumably England if Elizabeth did not marry. Darnley was not happy with his role of King consort because Mary refused to give him the Crown Matrimonial, meaning he would have been the successor to the throne if she died childless. And then Darnley, being jealous of Mary's personal secretary, David Rizzio, and thinking he was the reason he had not been given the Crown Matrimonial, developed a protestant plot to kill Rizzio. (Guy 2018) A number of protestant lords, burst into Mary's private rooms while she was having supper with Rizzio and other of her attendants, and stabbed him 56 times.

That permanently alienated Mary from Darnley, and Mary relied on James Hepburn, the 4th Earl of Bothwell for protection. In the meantime, she gave birth to a son, James Charles Stuart, who became James VI of Scotland and James I of England and Ireland. Bothwell was a protestant and had eyes on Mary and the throne. He conspired with other Protestant lords to kill Darnley so he could marry Mary and become the King of Scotland. Darnley was killed on 10 February 1567 while residing at Kirk O'Field, Edinburgh. He was staying there undergoing treatment for Syphilis. Mary visited him during his stay and promised he would be able to return to her at Edinburgh Castle when he was cured.

Bothwell then forced his other conspirators into signing a bond requesting Mary to marry Bothwell. He also kidnapped her and allegedly raped her (though some said she went willingly), which resulted in their marriage. This was a very controversial move, and many of the lords in Scotland objected to the marriage. Mary was imprisoned at Loch Leven castle and Bothwell escaped to Denmark where he was imprisoned the rest of his life. Mary was forced to abdicate the Scottish Throne in favor of her one-year-old son. She t hen escaped from Loch Leven with the help of the castle owner's son, and ran to England, believing Elizabeth would help her regain her throne. Much to Mary's dismay, this began an imprisonment of almost 19 years, culminating in her execution in 1587. During this period of imprisonment, she stitched a large number of embroidery pieces. (Staff n.d.)

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