

# CHAPTER 10

## WORK GENDERING SPACE? ROMAN GENDER, TEXTILE WORK AND TIME IN SHARED DOMESTIC SPACE

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This chapter re-examines literary sources on Roman domestic textile production in elite or near-elite contexts to establish how stylistic and narrative devices in descriptions of spinning and weaving women parallel – and, in fact, reinforce – our understanding of household space-use based on the assessment of the material record. Dominated by male authors of the upper classes, literary sources<sup>1</sup> often depict textile production as taking place in close-knit contexts where women interact predominately with other women.<sup>2</sup> Although we can assume the presence of other household members in or near at least some of these spaces, they are rarely described as engaging with either textile work or workers performing these tasks.<sup>3</sup> As active participants, male literary characters only enter these contexts by surrendering defining aspects of their masculinity: literary texts describe male spinners as cross-dressers.<sup>4</sup> The strongly gendered activity of engaging in textile work at home<sup>5</sup> appears to erect invisible boundaries around its participants, limiting engagement but permitting visibility and display. The negotiation of these permeable but seemingly persistent boundaries, as well as their relative effectiveness in different temporal settings, is my primary interest in this essay.

Building on recent analyses of archaeological evidence for the spatial distribution of textile work set out and contextualized in an initial section below (10.1), the first half of the chapter deals with literary sources depicting textile work undertaken in busy domestic environments during the day (10.2). Depictions of women at work at night are examined in the final half of the chapter (10.3, 10.4 and 10.5). Throughout, I investigate how separating effects, generated by the workers' intent focus on a specific task, are heightened by socially controlled boundaries, dictating varying behaviour for different times of the day, restricting or enabling the access of outsiders to the household or family members to female work spaces. I will argue that this additional element of social control emphasizes the specific gendered associations of domestic textile work.

### 10.1 Locating domestic textile work

Allison's analysis of artefact distribution within dwellings at Pompeii showed that textile tools, especially loom weights, were frequently found in the *atrium* or in rooms adjoining

it, rooms into which visitors may have had an unobstructed view and from where sounds of activities would carry into spaces open to visitors.<sup>6</sup> This matches literary evidence from the Republic to Late Antiquity on the *atrium* or equivalent central spaces as a location for the textile work of the *matrona*,<sup>7</sup> a positioning which permits the display of her work to household visitors to contribute to the social authority of the *dominus*.<sup>8</sup> Although the configuration of Roman domestic space gradually changes with rooms around inner peristyle gardens becoming increasingly important as representational spaces,<sup>9</sup> areas accessible to visitors and used for multiple purposes from late Roman sites continue to yield finds of loom weights and other textile implements.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the chronological distribution of archaeological and literary sources alike indicates a continuum of visibility for domestic craft production throughout Roman antiquity.

Despite the importance of such display, there is considerable emphasis on sequential use of multi-functional spaces in current scholarship with a primarily archaeological basis, and a reluctance to assert that in these spaces, some activities did overlap (Cooper 2007: 14; Foxhall 2012: 124; Nevett 2010: 114; Wilkinson 2015: 73; Cianca 2018: 38–9). Literary sources permit a more confident interpretation of the evidence, confirming that textile work in the elite household sometimes coincided with the execution of other tasks, including the regular daytime reception of visitors.<sup>11</sup>

Display of status-inducing activities to visitors presupposes mechanisms to control outsider access to people or privileged spaces, regardless of whether that access is direct and physical, or achieved through sight lines or sound that carries across permeable boundaries (Grahame 1999: 55; 59–71; Cooper 2007: 15–17). Architectural features, such as narrow entry ways and so on, are part of such control mechanisms (Berry 2016: 130–8; on doors, esp. Lauritsen 2011; Proudfoot 2013; on staff managing the *salutatio*, Goldbeck 2010: 100–4) but social norms on when and how to visit are equally significant (Dickmann 2011: 71 on social norms relating to visits; Berry 2016: 128–9 on the need to reinforce continually fixed and symbolic boundaries). These norms are the essential framework within which the separating effects of a worker's intent focus and gendered associations of specific tasks can come into play.

### 10.2 Daytime domestic textile work and its soft boundaries

In this section, I discuss three literary passages illustrating the simultaneous use of domestic space for different activities. Here, textile work is set alongside other work or activities. Through their structure and focalization, these narratives of shared work space reflect behaviours necessary in participants and observers for the completion of complex tasks in multi-purpose spaces.

In the first century CE, Quintilian sets out a fictitious court case concerning the rape of a daughter by one of her father's dinner guests. He notes that she served at table on the evening concerned, but at any other time of the day she might have been observed at her spinning.<sup>12</sup> This task, then, would have been carried out in a space visible or directly accessible to visitors. In this fictitious court case, the statement that the daughter could

have been seen spinning also underpins the depiction of both father and daughter as members of a hard-working, virtuous household.

Illustrating the continuity of this practice well into the late fourth century CE, Jerome's *De Virginitate* describes how the Roman housewife is beset by an onslaught of sensory impressions from various tasks she is supervising around the home:

inde infantes garriunt, familia perstrepat, liberi ab oculis et ab ore dependent, computantur sumptus, impendia praeparantur. hinc cocorum accincta manu carnes terit, hinc textricum turba commurmurat: nuntiatur interim uir uenisse cum sociis.

Hieron. Virg. Mar. 20

There babies prattle, slaves make a racket, children hang on to her face and word, outlays are totted up, charges prepared. Here, a group of cooks have girded themselves and are tearing at meat, here, the crowd of weavers chatters: it is announced, meanwhile, that the master has arrived with friends.

The noise of the weavers at work carries to other parts of the house, suggesting that they are in a reasonably central space and that the *socii* (companions) entering the house with the *dominus* are exposed to the noise. A reference to a lunchtime meal (*prandium*) suggests a daytime setting (*TLL prandium*; Suet. *Calig.* 58.1; *Claud.* 34.2; Apul. *Met.* 9.5.6). To capture this chaotic environment, Jerome surveys the activities of the whole household, moving quickly from one group of household members to another (children, administrative staff, cooks, weavers and friends of the master). The paratactical sentence structure encourages us to perceive them as separate units. The cooks function as a group to the extent that although the rolled-up sleeve (*accincta manu*) of one cook is described in detail, no noun or pronoun is given: the partitive genitive *coquorum* marks him only as one of several cooks. The weavers are similarly described as a collective (*turba textricum*, crowd of weavers; the noun used is the feminine *textrix*, weaver). Here, the compound verb *commurmurat* underlines that they chatter amongst themselves (Varro *Sat. Men.* 380; Cic. *Pis.* 61; *TLL commurmuror* I) rather than with other household members. Unlike the wife tasked with the supervision of all tasks, the respective groups of workers are unaffected by the other activities around them. It is possible that the structure of Jerome's description reflects behaviour required by workers executing cognitively complex tasks in busy spaces.

These passages from Quintilian and Jerome concern textile work undertaken in space shared with visitors to, and members of, the household. Both passages imply that visible domestic textile work contributes to the social status of the household, but that active exchanges between different users of the same space are limited. The separating effect arising from the focus of workers on their specific tasks noted in Jerome's text also has a far earlier parallel, where the gendered associations of textile work have a greater impact. In the *Georgics*, Vergil describes the life on a humble farm during the winter:

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et quidam seros hiberni ad luminis ignis  
peruigilat ferroque faces inspicat acuto.  
interea longum cantu solata laborem  
arguto coniunx percurrit pectine telas [...]

Verg. *Georgics* 1.291–4

[A farmer] remains awake, shaping torch brands with sharp iron by the wintry light of the late-night fire. Meanwhile the wife, easing her long toil with song, runs the rasping pin beater through the warp.

Here, husband and wife work side by side in the light of the hearth fire. As in Jerome's household scene, analysis of Vergil's vocabulary and narrative structure hint at how workers in such a setting relate to each other. The husband's task of shaping torch brands is described by the verb *inspicat* (1.292, lit. cut to a shape resembling an ear of wheat). As noted by Thomson, this is effectively a *hapax legomenon* and the precise meaning may not be immediately understood (*TLL inspico*; Thomson 1988: 118). The commonly used near-homonym *inspicio* (inspect, observe) therefore likely also influences the reader, creating an image of the husband as raptly intent on the tools and materials in his hands. The linking *interea* (1.293, meanwhile) initially implies that the pair work companionably side by side. By mentioning the sound of the wife's song (*cantu*, 1.293) before specifying her tasks, Vergil suggests that the sound carries between them, connecting husband and wife without one significantly interrupting the activity of the other. Yet Vergil also hints that the wife sings mostly to herself, since *solata* (easing) has the sense of a Greek reflexive middle, often describing how someone distracts themselves – rather than another person – from worry or grief.<sup>13</sup> The observations on sounds subsequently generated by her weaving support the narrowing focus on the wife alone: the rasping sound made by the pin beater (*arguto* . . . *pectine*, 1.294) as the weaver moves it through the warp is audible only in relative proximity to the loom. Vergil specifically captures the weaver's combined sensory experience (auditory and tactile) of moving her tools and hands through the warp (Öhrman 2018a: 145–7), rather than the experience of a bystander. Despite the initial emphasis on working side by side, the wife's work and her sphere of perception gradually emerge as distinct from those of her husband.

The humble countryside setting of Vergil's strongly idealizing passage cannot be unproblematically transposed to the historical circumstances of elite housing. Nonetheless, its inclusion in the *Georgics* suggests that its key features are recognizable to the implied audience of highly educated members of the elite. Even between family members in an intimate night-time setting, entirely without intrusions from outsiders to the household, engagement in individual tasks seems to generate permeable but distinct boundaries between the two individuals sharing their work space with each other. Through his choice of a husband/wife pair with strongly gendered tasks, Vergil aligns these work-generated boundaries with boundaries dependent on gender, and thus reinforces them. In the following section, we shall see that passages featuring women working alone or in all-female groups also suggest similar exclusionary effects of night-time female wool-work.

### 10.3 Night-time domestic textile work: the paradigm of Lucretia

The second half of this chapter explores the effects of separation and exclusion of others created by the combination of textile work, gender and (night-)time, first by identifying relevant features of Livy and Ovid's narratives of Lucretia (10.3), then by discussing the occurrence of these in other literary spinning scenes (10.4, 10.5). My interest is the representation of male characters (whether family members or outsiders) approaching or interrupting all-women textile-working scenes. Here, it is particularly relevant to recall that soft, or socially controlled, boundaries of access are tested and re-asserted on a continuous basis (Wallace-Hadrill 1988: 77; Allison 2007: 350; Berry 2016: 128–9, 136–41), and that literary sources help us identify sites of tension around such boundaries, just as they in themselves represent a means for its negotiation.

I have noted that domestic textile work was likely to be part of authority-building display to visitors during the morning and daytime hours. As suggested by the husband–wife scene in the *Georgics*, however, the same work undertaken at night was expected to take place amongst insiders to the household, although it, too, had the potential to reflect on the status of the household.<sup>14</sup> Livy's story of Lucretia, and her later rape by Tarquinius, famously illustrates both the status-inducing qualities of a housewife's late-night diligence at her wool-work and the expectation that this work, although it reflects a higher degree of personal commitment than its daytime equivalent (Ker 2004: 217–18; Cf. also Ambrose *De Viduis* 5.31; Niceta *De Vigiliis Servorum Dei* 1 p 56 13B), would normally be carried out within the circle of the *familia* only.

After the young Romans spend their evening in camp in drunken leisure, Livy emphasizes that their decision to ride to Rome to determine the contest of whose wife is the most virtuous is the extraordinary result of much wine (*incaluerant uino*, Liv. 1.57). Not expecting either male members of her family or guests, Lucretia is found devoted to her wool-work together with her slave girls (*sed nocte sera deditam lanae inter lucubrantes ancillas in medio aedium sedentem*, Liv. 1.57). The spatial setting recalls what we have seen in earlier passages: the workers are seated in a central space of the house. However, the temporal setting enhances the value-laden nature of Lucretia's work, attesting more strongly her personal commitment to duty. This emerges from the initial mention of the late hour (*nocte sera*), to which a concessive sense attaches, and from the phrase describing Lucretia's devotion to her work (*deditam*) with its connotations of self-sacrifice (*TLL do* 2.II; *OLD do* 22).

Lucretia is credited with the ability to inspire similar dedication in her slave women. Her position in the middle of their group is the first indication of this, that they are the subject of an active participle (*lucubrantes*, working in lamplight) is the second. The active voice grants the women slaves a level of agency, while the verb suggests commitment to their night-time work. (Contrast the topical description of slave girls lamenting the pressure from overseers in Ov. *Met.* 4.35 and Claud. 20.370–375.) Unlike other descriptions of noble women surrounded by working slaves (Tib. 1.3.83–90; cf. also Ov. *Her.* 3.69–82; 19.38–56; Verg. *Aen.* 8.407–415), Lucretia's group appears as a cohesive whole, claiming space for themselves in the middle of the house.

However, unlike textile work that continues alongside other (male-focussed) representational activities during the day, the work of Livy's Lucretia is swiftly put away when she welcomes the guests (*adueniens uir Tarquiniiue excepti benigne*). The present participle *adueniens* (arriving) in combination with the perfect *excepti* [sunt] (were welcomed) highlights Lucretia's immediate response to arrange a proper welcome, and we may assume her assistance in arranging Collatinus' victory feast. Notably, Livy pinpoints the beginnings of Tarquinius' desire for Lucretia to that feast (*ibi Sex. Tarquinius mala libido . . . capit*, there an evil desire seized Sextus Tarquinius): it is distinguished from the newcomers' first sight of Lucretia in the middle of the house.

Ovid's re-telling of Lucretia's story in the *Fasti* (2.723–848) shifts the emphasis towards the erotic, re-fashioning the character of Lucretia according to an elegiac paradigm (Newlands 1995: 146–74; Robinson 2011: 462–95; Chiu 2016: 54–61 explore extensively the elegiac features of Ovid's Lucretia). This more expansive account of Lucretia's story exhibits narrative features that will be important for the consideration of the separating effects, exerted even on privileged members of the household, of female textile work. Initially, Ovid's all-knowing narrator notes that while the other wives have been found celebrating into the night (2.739–40), the young men seek out Lucretia and find her at work (2.741–2). Ovid shows Lucretia seated by her couch: *cuius ante torum calathi lanaque mollis erat* (by whose couch was the basket and soft wool). Regardless of the precise location of her couch,<sup>15</sup> the word *torus* in Ovid's elegiac context contributes to fashioning Lucretia as an object of erotic desire (Newlands 1995: 149). The faint light illuminating the scene, where spinning slave girls accompany her and share her work (2.743–4), further encourages the reader to expect a specifically elegiac development of the story (Robinson 2011: 476; Chiu 2016: 54). However, the expectation of an explicitly erotic emphasis is not immediately met. Instead, Ovid elaborates on Lucretia's exchanges with her female companions. Conversation between them is within their own circle only: *famulae . . . inter quas* (slave girls . . . amongst whom) in 2.744 stresses that Lucretia's soft words are meant for her servants only (*nostros uiros* ('our men', Ov. *Fast.* 2.750) refers ambiguously both to the Roman menfolk, and to husbands or lovers of those present). The reader gains full access only as the male narrator ventriloquizes Lucretia's voice, representing it in a substantial speech covering nine lines (2.745–54). Here, Lucretia's motivations for her late-night work emerge: she wants to complete the cloak for her husband quickly, as she worries about the war and Collatinus' safety. In elegiac fashion, she interprets Ardea's opposition to the Roman forces from an exclusively personal point of view, condemning it for keeping Roman husbands away from home.<sup>16</sup> The Ovidian narrator notes the debilitating effects of this concern: Lucretia breaks down in tears, letting her spindle fall (2.755–6). The narrator evaluates the scene: this, too, suits her.<sup>17</sup>

Next, Ovid presents Collatinus' sudden return as a lovers' reunion, with his appearance a response to Lucretia's distressed worry. Collatinus' other companions are excluded from the narrative and no previous indication of their approach is given:<sup>18</sup> only the two lovers matter. Collatinus' exclamation *pone metum, ueni* (set aside your fears, come, 2.759) implies that he has overheard Lucretia's lament. However, as Lucretia falls into Collatinus' arms, the verb *pendere* (hang, weigh up) in 2.760 recalls the *pensa* spun by the

slave girls in 2.745 even as it refers to her weight in his arms: Ovid keeps the image of the wool-working Lucretia in the reader's mind (Newlands 1995: 147 on Ovid placing Lucretia's suffering centre-stage), making it pivotal to Tarquinius' burgeoning desire (2.761–2). As Tarquinius later prepares to seek her out again, he speaks longingly to himself: *sic sedit, sic culta fuit, sic stamina neuit, / neglectae collo sic iacuerе comae* [...] (thus she was seated, thus she was dressed, thus she spun her thread, thus did her hair fall forgotten over her neck, 2.771–2). The sequence of these recollections shows that they refer to Lucretia's spinning *before* she becomes conscious of Collatinus or his followers (Chiu 2016: 58 on the subversiveness of Ovid's eroticization of Luc). The celebratory feast, a turning point for Livy's Tarquinius, does not feature in Ovid's narrative, but Lucretia's wool-work becomes part of Tarquinius' erotic fantasies.<sup>19</sup>

#### 10.4 Ventriloquized speech, agency and the control of working space

Two aspects of Ovid's Lucretia story have specific bearing on the socially controlled boundaries through which space for female domestic textile work was negotiated within elite homes. First, there is Ovid's use of ventriloquized female speech – rather than a continuation of the all-knowing narrator's discourse – to express the thoughts of Lucretia at her work. The insertion of direct speech into a poetic narrative naturally serves many purposes, affecting pace, variety and vividness. Yet its use here also suggests that only a female character could fully enter the circle of wool-working women without fundamentally disrupting its dynamics. Other literary texts employ the same strategy, particularly to provide insights into the thoughts of spinners and weavers working through the night. It is prominent in Augustan elegy – a genre much concerned with fantasy about absent lovers – but also used elsewhere.<sup>20</sup> In the *Aeneid*, the mother of the young Eurylaos laments his death, distressed that she cannot dress his body in a shroud made by her own hands. She states that by working both day and night, she could allay her old woman's cares (*curas solabar anilis*, *Aen.* 9.489; Donat. *Aen.* 9.488–9). The role of craft as a distraction from cares occurs also in Propertius' third elegy, where the narrator returns after a night out to find his mistress asleep. When the narrator wakes her up, she complains in vociferous direct speech of having to distract herself with spindle and lyre through the night, suspicious that the narrator enjoyed the company of other women instead (Prop. 1.3, e.g. Lyne 1980: 118–19; Harrison 1994; James 2010: 333–5; Gardner 2013: 153–60; Robinson 2013: 107–15).

While not universally present, the tendency of authors to ventriloquize female direct speech in depictions of night-time textile work underlines that textile work spatially and temporarily determined *in this way* differs from similar work undertaken during the day and in parallel to other household tasks. Although its spatial settings are rarely explicitly defined,<sup>21</sup> night-time work emerges as an altogether more intimate affair, generally carried out in all-female settings. Vergil's farm scene hints that when it was undertaken in smaller spaces shared by necessity, it was ring-fenced and protected from interruptions by permeable boundaries similar to those employed in busy spaces shared by many

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workers engaged in different tasks during the day. In elite settings, however, a commonly depicted response to the intrusion of a male member of the household in a group of spinners or weavers at night is the interruption of their work. Though explicit evidence is limited to a relatively small number of literary passages (Liv. 1.57; Ov. *Fast.* 2.755–60; Tib. 1.3.87–92, implicitly in Hero's fantasy of Leander returning in Ov. *Her.* 19.55–64), it does suggest female agency in controlling the spatial setting for night-time domestic textile work by actively restricting male access through the suspension of work. This strategy of engaging with shared spaces and their other potential users contributes to gendering the task performed yet more explicitly: night-time spinning belongs to women only. This, in turn, makes the performance of this task (and its interruption) an important tool for performing female gender.<sup>22</sup>

### 10.5 Male fantasies of female space

The gender-specific exclusiveness of the night-time wool-workers' circle explains the second feature of Ovid's narrative to recur in several other literary depictions of women undertaking textile work at night. By expressing male curiosity of an all-female environment and likewise projecting certain content into its discourse, Lucretia's speech with its focus on Collatinus' absence represent the ongoing negotiation and reinforcement of the boundaries which surrounded wool-working women. The daydreams of the Tibullan lover-narrator about his mistress spending her evenings spinning with the women of her household, until she can joyfully welcome him home (Tib. 1.3.83–92), correspond to Lucretia's concern for Collatinus in Ovid: Tibullus projects longing for a male absent lover onto the spinning Delia.<sup>23</sup>

Such projection is paralleled, and taken further, in two passages of full-scale ventriloquized female speech, both fictitious, poetic letters. In Propertius 3.6, Arethusa writes to her husband Lycotas, absent on a military campaign. She moves seamlessly from describing her nightly weaving of a soldier's cloak, due to be sent to Lycotas' camp, to lamenting bitter, lonely nights, which have replaced the sexual satisfaction a wife should expect.<sup>24</sup> Ovid's Penelope is more explicit: her letter to Odysseus transforms her famous delaying tactic of weaving and nightly unpicking into an attempt to distract herself from Odysseus' absence in her bed chamber:

non ego deserto iacuissem frigida lecto,  
nec quererer tardos ire relictæ dies,  
nec mihi quaerenti spatiosam fallere noctem  
lassaret uiduas pendula tela manus.

Ov. *Her.* 1.7

I would not have lain chilled in a deserted bed, nor would I, abandoned, complain  
the slow passing of the day, nor would the hanging web tire my widowed hands as  
I sought to fool the long night.

Ovid couches Penelope's complaints in erotic terms, using a series of unfulfilled conditional clauses to make clear that sexual inactivity is not Penelope's choice. Following the complaint of her deserted bed (*deserto . . . lecto*), the reference to long nights (*spatiosam . . . noctem*) suggests how she would have otherwise liked to see them filled. Finally, Ovid's otherwise frequent use of *lassare* as referring to post-coital exhaustion is inverted,<sup>25</sup> with the loom offering Penelope only an undesirable substitute for her absent husband.<sup>26</sup>

Elegiac authors like Propertius, Tibullus and Ovid project onto spinning and weaving women such male concerns as are suitable to the subject matter of elegy, while at the same time reflecting practical aspects of Roman textile work. They acknowledge the amount of time textile production demands, the boredom it occasionally causes, and the ability of an experienced spinner or weaver to daydream while continuing their work. Rooted in a different genre, Vergil ascribes to Eurylaus' mother anxiety for her son's safety in battle as she weaves, but also concern for her own frailty in old age:<sup>27</sup> her age has disqualified her from being considered an object of erotic desire (Cokayne 2003: 118–22; Richlin 2014: 70–2). Among Christian authors, the fantasies take a different direction: Ambrose praises a good wife, who spins threads of precious virtue and interweaves her husband's clothing with praiseworthy diligence as she awaits his return (Ambrose *Expositio Euangelii Secundum Lucam* 8.11). Although this passage lends itself to metaphorical interpretation, it also sets out desirable behaviour between spouses in concrete terms: it derives from a section in Ambrose's commentary on divorce.

From the literary passages discussed above, it is evident that textile work in these settings, more strongly access-restricted through the combination of gender and their specific temporality, becomes a site for male fantasy, both reflected and re-created in literary texts.

## 10.6 Conclusions: boundaries reinforced

Narrative strategies used in texts dealing with spinners and weavers at work reveal Roman means of negotiating shared space. In daytime settings, the need to present the household as an influential and industrious unit prompts and enables the simultaneous execution and display of tasks undertaken by household members, seemingly regardless of participant gender.

In night-time contexts, where access to the elite home was more exclusive, negotiation of space between different groups of household members or other insiders comes more strongly to the fore. In these settings, participant gender emerges as a more prominent dividing factor. We have seen that, unless presented by an all-knowing narrator,<sup>28</sup> descriptions of women performing textile work at night either reflect their ability to exclude others from their space through use of ventriloquized female speech, or call to mind the specific circumstance under which men could approach them. Even where male internal narrators make textile-working women the subject of erotic fantasy, these narrators are, like Ovid's Tarquinius, generally privileged family members with potential

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access to more private spaces in the home (see the fantasies of elegiac narrators about their female lovers, Tib. 1.3.83–92; Prop. 3.6.15–18).

Nonetheless, from an overarching perspective, literary depictions of all-female textile working scenes allow male authors and (mainly male) ideal audiences to enter and explore domestic settings otherwise restricted by time or participant gender. Audiences may fully explore the discourse and behaviours surrounding these temporally determined gendered activities. The appeal of such exploration is evident in Ovid's *Fasti*, where viewing the wool-working Lucretia as sexually attractive is simultaneously marked as suspect (it is primarily voiced, after all, by the villainous Sextus Tarquinius) and enticing: through his evaluation of Lucretia's appearance in 7.257–8, we saw that the Ovidian narrator, too, entertained thoughts later fully developed by Tarquinius. Despite this, the comparatively high frequency of explicit male ventriloquizing of female voices among such literary scenes signals the strength of the intangible boundaries that generally surrounded elite Roman women at their night-time wool-work. The difficulty even for a male narrative *persona* to transgress them suggests their strength.

Read with their genre-specific aims and aesthetics in mind, literary sources reveal the existence and testing of task- and gender-related boundaries within the elite or would-be elite domestic space. Yet most references to spinning and weaving women in Roman literature are neither specifically spatialized nor temporally determined, nor do they feature explicit male intrusions into female working environments. While this chapter has highlighted texts which alert us to potential sites of friction around boundaries in the shared domestic space, a far larger number of non-spatialized or neutral references to domestic textile work suggests that these spaces were usually shared without issue, the place for female textile work within them self-evident.