“Text and Textile: Knitting and Narrative”

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In this talk I will discuss the relationship between text and textile, from Penelope’s shroud, to James Joyce’s exhortation to “weave, weaver of the wind”, by looking at knitting in literary contexts and texts. Examples will be drawn from the work of various authors including Dickens, Conrad, Wharton, Alcott and Stein, in order to explore how knitting, which is often illustrative of daily life in the context of the story being told, or part the life of the author in various ways, signifies differently in each case. And because this talk will include an historical contextualization of what it meant to knit, and a focus on who was knitting when the texts in question where written, I will also address how knitting is represented, i.e. as menacing and threatening, or comforting and domestic. When, for example, is knitting a kind of coding or archiving, and for what purpose? When is knitting emancipatory, creative production, and how and when does it become a drudge? Is knitting narrated as a form of “invisible” labour, or a moment of deep connectivity? And finally, are there larger connections to be drawn between, knitting, textuality and creativity more generally?

A picture containing text, outdoor, grass, old

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