

<b>Institution: University of Chester</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 29: English Language and Literature</b>
<b>Title of case study: The Textile Stories Project</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Deborah Wynne's research into nineteenth-century literature's engagement with material culture is internationally recognised. Her latest work on textiles underpins the <i>Textile Stories Project</i>, a celebration of the rich heritages of fabric, fashion and costume, particularly in literary contexts. The project is designed to appeal to members of the public with an interest in textiles, crafts, fashion, and the costume drama and has influenced public understanding of the significance of nineteenth-century literature. By demonstrating the role of textiles in literary contexts, the project also creates opportunities for general readers to enhance their understanding of, and pleasure in, the literary culture and screen adaptations.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Professor Wynne, a Category A researcher at Chester since her appointment in 2001, currently researches the relationship between nineteenth-century literature and material culture. Her second monograph, <i>Women and Personal Property in the Victorian Novel</i> (Ashgate, 2010), for which she received an AHRC Research Leave grant in 2008-09, focuses on representations of women's relationship to the object-world and includes an examination of the role of textiles as women's property in the work of Dickens, Eliot and James. It has attracted favourable reviews in scholarly journals, and one chapter has been reprinted in a book collection of major essays on Dickens: <i>Dickens, Sexuality and Gender</i>, edited by Lillian Nayder (Ashgate, 2012).</p> <p>From this research Wynne has developed her latest project on the cultural significance of textile discourses, <i>Literary Fabrics: The Textile Languages of Novels and Costume Dramas</i>, funded by an AHRC Fellowship for 2013-14. This book will demonstrate how personal and collective narratives are signalled via cloth, analysing Victorian and Edwardian writers' representations of textile work (such as needlework, weaving, fabric manufacture, and retailing), and relating these to the contributions of costume designers in contemporary screen adaptations of novels.</p> <p>Wynne's research on the costume drama originated with a book chapter published in 2009, 'The Materialisation of the "Austen World"' in <i>Textual Revisions</i>, ed. B. Baker (Chester Academic Press, 2009). This was followed by a lecture delivered to the Gaskell Society in 2011 linking the activities of Gaskell and Charlotte Brontë as needlewomen and writers, as well as highlighting the relationship between their textile references and the design of costumes in screen adaptations. The positive responses of the audience stimulated ideas for the development of the <i>Textile Stories Project</i>, for many non-academic readers directly linked their love of literature to the pleasures of viewing costume dramas, valuing the power of costume to bring narratives and historical contexts to life. The project provides opportunities for members of the public to explore these links and engage with aspects of academic research.</p> <p>Wynne's research moved in new directions in 2012 when she collaborated with Dr Amber Regis, an early career researcher at the University of Sheffield. Their research into the role of costume in the creation of various 'Miss Havishams' in film adaptations of <i>Great Expectations</i> developed into a co-authored journal article, 'Miss Havisham's Dress: Materialising Dickens in Film Adaptations of <i>Great Expectations</i>'. The essay argues that Dickens's Miss Havisham has a fascinating afterlife, long functioning as an iconic figure of the ageing spinster. New versions of Miss Havisham and her well-known wedding dress are regularly recreated by filmmakers. The essay proposes that the cinematic Miss Havishams offer visual representations of shifting cultural anxieties surrounding the ageing woman. Wynne now works with Regis and Dr Sarah Heaton (University of Chester), who researches popular culture, fashion and American literature, in the organisation of <i>Textile Stories Project</i> events and managing its popular blog.</p>

**3. References to the research**

1. Deborah Wynne, *Women and Personal Property in the Victorian Novel* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).  
Wynne was awarded an AHRC Research Leave Grant in 2008-09 to complete this scholarly monograph. Two chapters, on Dickens and on George Eliot, contain sections analysing women's relationship to 'soft wealth', that is, textiles. The book was reviewed in *Victorian Studies* (2012), *Dickens Studies Annual* (2012), and *Dickens Studies Quarterly* (2011). The chapter on Dickens has been reprinted as: 'Circulation and Stasis: Feminine property in the Novels of Charles Dickens', *Dickens, Sexuality and Gender* (ed.) L. Nayder (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012): 147-163, one of a series of edited collections reprinting recent major work on Dickens.
2. Amber R. Regis and Deborah Wynne, 'Miss Havisham's Dress: Materialising Dickens in Film Adaptations of *Great Expectations*', Special Issue: The Other Dickens: Neo-Victorian Appropriation and Adaptation, *Neo-Victorian Studies*, 5:2 (2012): 35-58.  
This essay was peer reviewed by two anonymous readers. The journal is internationally renowned as a major forum for research relating to neo-Victorian texts and contexts.

**4. Details of the impact**

By harnessing contemporary interests in textiles, fashion and costume dramas, Wynne's public engagement activities raise public awareness of the relevance and significance of nineteenth-century literary texts, while her research into the role of costume and textiles in screen adaptations has been informed by audience responses at these events. The peer reviewers of Wynne's AHRC Fellowship application commended her impact activities as innovative in their potential to enhance general readers' engagement with literary texts, and the grant includes £1870.50 to fund the 2014 *Textile Stories* Study Day. The following public lectures delivered by Wynne were informed by her *Literary Fabrics* research (audience numbers are given in brackets):

- 'Literary Fabrics: Texts, Textiles and Costume Dramas', Textile Society Symposium, London 19/03/2011 (64);
- 'Textiles in the Writings of Elizabeth Gaskell and Charlotte Brontë', The Daphne Carrick Lecture, The Gaskell Society, Manchester 09/04/2011 (48);
- 'Arnold Bennett's Representations of Clothing', The Arnold Bennett Society, Stoke-on-Trent 09/06/2012 (46);
- 'Hades! The Ladies!: Selling Textiles in Victorian and Edwardian Literature and Culture', Professorial Inaugural Lecture, University of Chester, 07/11/2012 (83);
- 'Dressing and Undressing in *Pride and Prejudice*: Viewing the 1995 BBC Adaptation', The Jane Austen Society (Midlands Branch in Stafford), 27/04/2013 (28);
- 'Reading, Writing and Sewing with the Brontë Sisters', workshop for sixth formers, The Queen's School, Chester, 02/05/2013 (10);
- 'Miss Havisham's Dress' (with Amber Regis), Textile Stories Study Day, University of Chester, 15/06/2013 (41);
- 'Reading *Pride and Prejudice* and the Drama of Costume', Reading Group Meeting, University of Chester, 06/07/2013 (18).

The *Textile Stories* Study Day in June 2013 brought together 41 participants, including teachers, NHS workers, members of local sewing groups, textile artists, students of textiles and fashion in the FE sector, volunteers and paid employees from the heritage sector, retired people and creative writers. The free event was organised around the idea that stories from the past can be read through surviving textile objects, while textile representations in novels and film adaptations help readers to a greater understanding of social and cultural histories. Wynne, with Regis and Heaton, presented talks and workshops, along with invited speakers (including professionals from the

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Yorkshire Fashion Archive, the Grosvenor Museum, Chester, a theatre historian, and a local textile artist). The event was fully funded by the English Department from its QR funding.

Regis and Wynne presented a talk at the study day based on their co-authored article, 'Miss Havisham's Dress'. While everyone in the audience had heard of Miss Havisham, only a minority had read Dickens's *Great Expectations*. Regis and Wynne provided the audience with a short excerpt from the novel and led a general discussion on Dickens's character and her various appearances on screen, focusing on costume's role in creating an updated 'Havisham' to speak to each new generation, showing how literary texts can be effectively reread and reinterpreted in visual forms.

Feedback indicated that the *Textile Stories* Study Day enabled participants to make new connections between different cultural forms. Many stated that they had learned something of imaginative value, encountered academic research in an interesting way, and some felt inspired to use what they had learned in their practices as textile artists and needleworkers. Feedback comments include:

- 'A really inspiring day, I have not been to anything like this before! Informative and unusual';
- 'Lovely day, full of interest & variety. Very pleased that I could enjoy (and have access) as an ordinary person, with a strong interest in textiles, "old things" & social history. Look forward to more';
- '[I]t's been very educational and inspirational to develop my creative processes further. It was great meeting others at this event';
- 'I didn't know what to expect, coming, as I do, from an interest in the retail side of the textile story, also [... learned] how textiles have been so important in fashion and class';
- 'A fascinating and varied day, with lots of stories to think about. [...] Very encouraging to hear about so many different aspects of research';
- 'Interesting to hear of link between age of film and dress given to Miss Havisham';
- 'I loved the Miss Havisham lecture. Very interesting take on the character of women and their place in film'.

Feedback from participants at other events indicate a similar experience of educational value and inspiration: 'I've had a really enjoyable day and leave with lots of ideas to think about' (Jane Austen Society member); 'Just wanted to say a big thank you for our Bronte talk on Thursday. I thoroughly enjoyed the afternoon and found all your information so interesting - I didn't realise how fascinating the sisters were [...]. You'll be pleased to know I've taken some books out of the school library and am brushing up on my Brontes!' (Sixth Form Pupil, The Queen's School, email communication).

The blog for the *Textile Stories Project*: <http://dwtextilestories.blogspot.co.uk/> offers a miscellany of research topics and personal narratives relating to the social and cultural significance of fabric. It has extended the reach of the project beyond the UK. By 03/07/13 there had been 3,536 hits in the UK, US, Europe, Australia, Russia, China, India, Canada and New Zealand. One follower of the blog from the US, a quilter, commented on a post about Jane Austen's references to fashion and needlework in her letters: 'What a wonderful article!' (26/03/13).

Plans for further public engagement events are in place: a *Textile Stories* Study Day is being organised for 2014 (supported by the funding from Wynne's AHRC Fellowship), while Wynne is scheduled to deliver two public lectures on textiles in literature and culture at literary festivals in the autumn of 2013.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

The *Textile Stories* Archive is held by the English Department. It contains print outs of the blog's user statistics and comments from the blog's users (to corroborate the quotation in Section 4); additionally, there are scanned feedback forms from participants at the *Textile Stories* events and public lectures and print outs of email communications (to corroborate the quotations in Section 4).