



Rigmaroles and Ragamuffins: Unpicking Words we Derive from Textiles

Elinor Kapp

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The English language has developed over many centuries from many diverse languages and cultures, some now lost. If we want to bring to life something of its impressive history, we might use the metaphor of a great river into which streams and rivulets constantly flow. Alternatively we could liken it to a mighty tree that has grown organically from buried roots, spreading out into a living canopy of innumerable and constantly renewed twigs and leaves. Elinor Kapp prefers to think of English as a wonderful piece of embroidery, stitched with a multitude of varied threads onto a base of primitive communication. The upper surface dazzles us with its range of colours, tones and textures. But to understand its construction, we need to take a look at the underside of the work. Here we can see the untidiness – the awkward seams, peculiar knots and frayed ends. In places, time has worn away our words to leave threadbare gaps; in others, swathes have been cutaway by changing tastes and trends, allowing flamboyant new threads to be spliced in. When we unpick the English language, it is quite startling to find how many of our common words, sayings, figures of speech, folklore, myths, nursery rhymes and stories come from thread and all the fascinating processes it had to go through to create textiles. Rigmaroles and Ragamuffins is the result the author's long involvement with textiles as an embroiderer and her recognition of the therapeutic potential in textile crafts. Elinor is also fascinated by the way English weaves the threads of our past into today's figures of speech, bringing richly layered meaning to our lives. This second edition of this popular book includes a brand new introduction by the author. Sample: Spin-Off (from p.110) There is so much to learn about the ideas that come from spinning that maybe we need a spin-off. The term comes from the action of clearing all wool off the distaff in order to start afresh with new wool, and hence a spin-off is something new, but derived from a previous idea or activity.

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