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Quilts as Visual Texts

By

Marcia Inzer Bost

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Professional Writing in the Department of
English

In the College of Humanities and Social Sciences of Kennesaw State University

Kennesaw, Georgia

2010

Certificate of Approval

College of Humanities & Social Sciences
Kennesaw State University
Kennesaw, Georgia
Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that the Capstone Project of
Marcia Bost

Has been approved by the committee
For the capstone requirement for the Master of Arts in
Professional Writing in the Department of English
At the December 2010 graduation

Capstone committee:



Member



Member

Dedication

The capstone project is dedicated to those who gave me the quilts and the knowledge of quilts that I have used for this project:

My mother, Julia Layman Inzer, whose quilts I am finishing;

Her mother, Alma Lewis Layman, who quilted my early quilts and whose eccentric color choices inspired me to study quilt design;

Her mother, Molly Belle Lewis, who left a masterpiece quilt to whose standards I aspire;

My father's sister, Barbara Inzer Smith, who always has the quilting advice I need;

Her mother and my grandmother, Grace Carruth Inzer, whose corduroy quilt provides warmth on a cold day; and

Her mother, Bertha Carroll Carruth, whose example of a strong, independent woman still inspires me and whose quilts still grace family beds.

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Introductory Essay

Following a rather meandering path that included newspaper reporting and editing, teaching grades 1-3 and 7-12, as well as 13 years teaching freshman composition, I first entered the Master of Arts in Professional Writing at Kennesaw State University in the fall of 2008. My application portfolio included two papers that included quilting: a short story (based on my grandmother) about a quilter who uses her quilts to work through her sorrow and an imaginative dialogue with Janisse Ray in response to her memoir, *Wild Card Quilt: Taking a Chance on Home*. This capstone project has its genesis in those writings as well as professional presentations that I have previously made.

In pursuit of meaning in quilts, I gave a presentation at Troy State in 2004, entitled “Quilts in Alice Walker: Comfort, Conflict and Synthesis.” In order to have visuals for this presentation, I reproduced Celie’s Sister’s Choice quilt, using reproduction fabric from the 1930s in yellow (after Shug’s dress) and blue (Celie’s only new dress in the novel). Using a brown and rust African print, and a rust 1890s reproduction print, I also stitched an interpretation of Corrine’s quilt, which she made in Africa to include both African stories and animals and American-inspired Nine Patch blocks. Because Walker wrote about Harriet Power’s Bible Quilt (to be explored in a later chapter of this capstone project), I took my inspiration for the African animals from Power’s quilt to stitch those animals described in Corrine’s quilt.

I have also presented a talk entitled “Soft Covers for Hard Times: Quilting in the Classroom” at the 2005 state conference of Georgia Council of Teachers of English, which included the stories of quilts in books representing reading levels from

kindergarten to college. With some modifications, I have also given that presentation to two quilt guilds of which I have been a member. For my writing sample submitted to the doctoral program at Georgia State University, I also wrote about a quilt that embodies an enthymeme in its composition (Fannie B. Shaw's Prosperity Quilt, which will be further explored in a later chapter). Thus, this capstone project will build on the research and study that I have already done and will carry it further as I apply the rhetorical theories that I have learned at Kennesaw State University.

At the time of my enrollment at KSU, I had a rather limited and specific goal: complete two courses to update my high school teaching certificate because my husband's job in the home construction business was evaporating like a puddle in the summer sun. In order to get funding for those two courses, I sought a Graduate Research Assistantship and transferred from the Certificate Program to the full Masters program. I took the two courses I was most interested in: Creative Non-fiction and Teaching Writing to Speakers of Other Languages.

For the Creative Nonfiction class, I wrote about my last visit to my parents' farm, describing the place and the memories it evoked just before it was sold to settle a lawsuit. Although I have dabbled in writing poetry and short stories for years, I struggled with the "show--don't tell" rhetoric of creative writing and with the workshop format. I did not entirely grasp the contrastive rhetoric of memoir writing, making my first and only "B" on the graduate level, but I certainly gained an appreciation for the difficulties of ESL students who come to this country and find that their previous composition strategies do not work.

However, the composition/ rhetoric class was a revelation. I had previously read some scholarly articles, having subscribed for several years to *College English*, and had

even purchased a book about theories of visual rhetoric. In this composition/ rhetoric class, my scattered exposure to academic writing came together. I love it when the light comes on in my students' eyes, and this time it came on for me. In my final paper for this class, I argued for the use of literature in teaching academic writing. Even though it was not workshopped or otherwise reviewed beforehand by the professor, it received an A plus.

A vital part of that "eureka" moment was my work as a GRA in the Inclusive Education Department. There I was working with a professor who had tremendous experience. Under her guidance, I wrote all the documents necessary for putting the English as a Second Language (ESL) endorsement courses online. I had previously taken these three courses (linguistics, culture, and methods) in my Masters of Education degree program at West Georgia State University and had even taught the linguistics course at the undergraduate level at Atlanta Christian College. My work in Inclusive Education created a wonderful synergy with the composition/ rhetoric course. Not only was I encountering some of the academic writers in both contexts, but also I was able to review for a composition/ rhetoric assignment a new textbook that I read for the GRA work. Our work was not complete in one semester and a missing computer competency certificate kept me from immediately obtaining the update of my teaching certification, so I agreed to my professor's strong recommendation that I continue my education and GRA work. Our online courses were submitted to the Quality Matters review process for Kennesaw and (with revisions) were approved in the summer of 2010.

That spring semester I took the Issues and Research in Professional Writing course and Professional and Academic Writing course. My topic in the Issues class was

not the same as the one for this capstone project, but an historical event in my hometown (the 1946 Battle of Athens). However, the organizational, research and revision skills that I sharpened in this class served me well while writing the capstone. The Professional and Academic Writing course also helped me to better understand the publishing field, as well as many detailed editing choices. I find that my teaching style and style of responding to papers is modeled on the editor's role.

Although my husband was blessed to find a new job, I did not have a GRA assignment lined up for the fall semester of 2009 and thought that my time at KSU was at an end. However, just before the semester began, the new chair of the Inclusive Education Department called. Within three working days, I was enrolled and had a GRA job. That semester I took Understanding Writing as a Process and did an internship at Luther Rice University and Seminary, where I have taught freshman English and world literature for four years.

In the 2009 fall semester, I put to use the editing skills that I had learned in the previous spring in the Profession and Academic Writing course. As part of an internship, I read and edited eight academic articles for the spring 2010 edition of an online theology published by LRU, *The Journal for Biblical Ministry*. I was particularly glad to have discussed querying the author, since I was editing writing by my more-educated colleagues, and not my students to whom I can give more prescriptive directions. I also drew on my previous experience as a newspaper editor in formatting the pages. The dean who serves as editor of the journal was pleased with my work, and he has asked for my help for the next issue, which will probably be out in 2011.

Because the theme of that issue was the Parables of Jesus, I saw a connection between the parables and education in general and wrote my first published academic article, “Parables and Pedagogy.” Because this article was targeted to a different audience (busy pastors and Bible teachers, rather than composition/ rhetoric students and professors), I had to rethink and rewrite it several times. Some of that discarded research ended up in my final paper for the Understanding Process class, which was entitled “Telling the Story of Composition.” In this paper I attempted to synthesize all the diverse theoretical positions in the articles that we had read and passionately discussed. I envisioned the concept of “story” as an organizing motif and imagined the three leading viewpoints as sites overlapping each other like circles in a Venn diagram.. The experience in writing this paper served me well as I tried to bring together the theories of rhetoric and the choices made in the act of quilting. This course also solidified my decision to switch from the creative concentration to the composition and rhetoric concentration within the Professional Writing Program. I discovered that I really liked the pedagogic aspect of composition and rhetoric, and it built on my previous teaching experience and independent reading.

I continue to process and use the concepts gained in this class. This experience of discussing concepts and the theoretical background have proved invaluable as I am beginning my doctoral program. The question (how is knowledge formed?) posed by the professor on the first evening has provided me with the genesis of an article that I have submitted to the *Journal for Biblical Ministry* for the next issue. In this article I suggest that the first question that should be asked is not the epistemological one, but the ontological one, because one’s ontological foundation frames the possible

epistemological answers. Entitled “The Art of Asking Questions: Dealing with Postmodernism,” it is undergoing peer review.

At the same time in my GRA work, I was using my Chicago Style Manual and many concepts from the Professional and Academic Editing course. Under the direction of Dr. Greg Meyjes, I edited a compilation of excerpts from the Bahá’í Writings and related sources on the question of an international auxiliary language. We dealt with the minute details of editing, formatting, and citing these texts, some of which are unauthenticated by Bahá’í authorities. I also put to use the skills learned in the Issues class when I assisted Dr. Meyjes in researching comparable books for his proposal letter for his book. Other research projects for Dr. Meyjes have included intercultural competency, and religion in the public schools. Assisting Dr. Meyjes in evaluating KSU’s Quality Enhancement Plan in Global Learning for Engaged Citizenship, another student worker and I quantitatively analyzed administrative reports of global engagement.

In the spring of 2010, the Teaching Writing in High Schools and Colleges course continued my immersion in rhetorical theory, as well as providing useful strategies for improving my teaching. For this course, I first wrote my teaching philosophy. In “Pondering Pedagogy” I wrote:

By training and by experience, I think I am an expressivist. In education courses on teaching writing in high school, we had as a textbook Donald Murray’s *A Writer Teaches Writing*. This method resonated with me because my undergraduate degree was in English and journalism and I spent eight years writing as a journalist. However, I discovered on reading *Writing Without Teachers* by Peter Elbow that I do not write like an expressivist, with multiple

freewriting attempts before a structured paper emerges. I'm partial to lists as a prewriting activity; such a list can easily become a traditional outline. From there, I develop a paper as a storyboard, with separate pages for each point where I can jot down my ideas as well as copy and paste quotations from sources. Elbow, on the other hand, recommends multiple freewriting attempts and workshops. He also comments: "If you have a way of writing that works well for you, keep it (and teach it to others)." (72) On reflection, I find that I do actually teach like I write, but I would like to bring into my pedagogy what I have learned.

This reflection helped me rethink how I was teaching, especially the way that I respond to student writing. I will apply these insights as I continue to revise my courses and as I continue with my education. The assignment to compose a syllabus and an outline for a composition course will be helpful in my future teaching. I will also use this experience as a springboard for writing my final paper in my first doctoral course, *Teaching With Computers at GSU*. I will use the techniques that I learned in this course (as well as the GSU course) as I write the rationale and activities for a new course at LRU, *Writing for the Web*, which has received approval from the curriculum committee but has not yet been scheduled.

During the spring of 2010, I also took the Poetry course, which was somewhat outside the pattern of my other courses, but I did take the opportunity to write a sonnet (which was well received) about Corrine's struggles in making her African American quilt, as described in Walker's *The Color Purple* and based on my experience of reproducing the quilt. I found that I could write without dripping sentimental adjectives (which were strongly prohibited) if I retold the stories of others. For example, my "love"

poem featured my mother's comment that she knew my father loved her because he warmed her bedpan. For my final poem, I told the story of a Cambodian refugee with whom I had sat during her final struggle with lung cancer. From this course, I gained an appreciation for the interplay of facts and imagination to portray a situation. Following the lead of several feminist theorists, I have used imaginative accounts of quilting in this capstone project to illuminate possible meaning of these visual artifacts.

Having been accepted into the doctorate program in Rhetoric and Composition at Georgia State University in April, I took two summer classroom courses in order to finish that requirement for graduation from the Master's of Professional Writing Program. I took an applied course on writing reviews. Assigned to report on a professional reviewer, I chose the area of art critics. As part of that report, I learned about using a fairly new format: a Prezi. This new, non-linear type of presentation is free to educators and provided me with the platform for my first oral report on the doctoral level: visual rhetoric in the context of teaching with computers. Because of the format, I was able to present the theories we were reading in a manner that was "outside of the box" of regular print documents.

Because a class on Essay Writing was canceled, I prevailed on Dr. Meyjes to do a directed study with me. He continues to be interested in international auxiliary languages, and I wanted to learn strategies for learning a second language since I will need to be able to read one for my doctoral work. We settled on Esperanto, a language invented in the late 1800s by a Polish Jew, L. L. Zamenhof. Advocates for this language claim that it is the easiest one to learn because it has no irregularities—all the words adhere to a limited number of rules. In addition, the language itself carries no cultural negatives; each new

learner brings his or her own culture into the language community. Aside from the internet, there is only one Esperanto group in Georgia, which I was unable to attend. This lack of culture and other speakers actually hindered my learning. I was not able to hear the language actually spoken on a continuing basis so my connections between the written and spoken language remain tenuous. However, I was able to write sentences and conversations in Esperanto much quicker than I had when I was studying Spanish in high school. In addition, I did find that more of that Spanish vocabulary still lurking in my mind that I had previously suspected. In the future, Dr. Meyjes and I hope to write a scholarly paper on the strategies of second language learning by a student considerably beyond the so-called optimal age for such learning.

Several threads emerge from my time at KSU: stories and story theory, second language learning, and visual rhetoric. Although my schedule did not permit me to take visual rhetoric as a course at KSU, I am using the textbook edited by a KSU professor in this project. Through this capstone project, I hope to find the rhetorical tools and theories of visual rhetoric that will enable me to disentangle the messages that might be hidden in quilters' choices of color and pattern and to discover what embodied statements are encoded in the very act of quilting.

Although quilts are most often lovingly pieced of fabric scraps and used as warm coverings, as they were by my family, some quilters go beyond creating a pleasing decorative object by investing their creations with meaning, whether consciously or unconsciously. In this capstone project, I will investigate the rhetorical theories and concepts that might demystify that meaning. Examples of such rhetorical choices will be drawn from historic, contemporary, and fictional quilts. This project will indeed be the

capstone of my educational experiences at KSU, drawing from most of my courses here. It will further serve as the foundation for future research and scholarship, although I have not yet settled on the topic for my doctoral dissertation.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

“A quilt is a text. It speaks its maker’s desires and beliefs, hopes, and fears, sometimes in a language any reader can understand, but often in an obscure language available only to the initiated.”

Judy Elsley

The study of quilts has given rise to two groups that have little in common, according to Lorrie Weidlich, the first person to present a dissertation on quilting for a doctorate in Folklore. Surveying twenty years of quilt scholarship in 1994, she notes that those who write about quilts are divided between the quilt world consisting of quilters, quilt historians, and museum personnel and the academic world whose inhabitants are focused on feminism, folklore, and art. “Those moving in the quilt world refer to themselves as ‘quilt scholars’ or ‘quilt historians’... Academic scholars, on the other hand, tend to define themselves by their training.” (2). Weidlich points out that academic scholars complain about the lack of “theoretical and critical perspectives” in publications from the quilt world, where researchers describe themselves as scholars (2-3). Weidlich sees an expanded horizon for both groups: “quilt scholarship is one role in a complex women’s sphere providing multiple opportunities for empowerment for the women who inhabit it, no less than the pursuit of a career in the (formerly male-dominated) academic world empowers the women who choose that route and accept the standards of that world” (3). Both are roles leading to empowerment although there seems to be little overlap in either members or outlook.

In my observation, quilters are most often concerned with the mechanics and read magazines and books about how to construct a particular quilt; they seek to know the process and replicate the artifact. Quilt historians, who write primarily for quilters, search for historical records that provide the context for particular quilts, usually acknowledged masterpieces, seeking to understand provenance. The journal *Uncoverings*, published by the American Quilt Study Group which was founded in 1980, primarily focuses on this historical aspect of quilting. On the other hand, academics tend to be feminists, writing in the fields of literary or art criticism or women's studies. Seeking to understand the culture out of which nineteenth-century quilts emerged, they study quilts primarily to find examples of women's struggle against paternal conventions leading to suffrage. While there are a few crossovers (as noted below), much of the writing about quilts falls into one world or the other.

If a quilt is a text, as Elsley states but does not elaborate upon (1), the insights of a third world could also be applied to the study of quilts: the visual rhetoric. Those who write within this academic field have not extensively examined the quilt. My project stands in the gap between these three worlds and seeks to understand the meaning of quilts using the insights of all three. I will argue that the quilt is a text, one to which not only semiotics may be applied (as Elsley does), but also the concepts of rhetoric. I have worked inductively, first finding quilts that seemed to speak, describing them from a quilter's perspective, and then seeking rhetorical or feminist concepts that reconstruct the quilter's voice. My project will be limited to quilts made before 1950, when making of quilts suffered a decline in popularity due to increased prosperity and other factors. Although quilting—in both its practical and artistic expressions—has enjoyed a

resurgence, those modern quilts will not be examined due to space constraints. Similarly, since most of Amish quilts were made in the twentieth century, as other communities were abandoning the practice (Granick 31), these quilts will not be examined either.

I envision myself as one who has my left foot in the feminist camp as a beneficiary of wider academic opportunities (although I do not espouse feminist rhetoric uncritically) and my right one in the visual rhetoric camp as a student of rhetoric. At the same time, I have both hands busy piecing quilts, even as I will piece my project together. I position myself as a reader of quilts, one who as Bal describes, enables the past to “make sense to the present” and one who “can understand it, sympathize with it, or respond with astonishment, surprise, even horror” (x). Finally, I will argue that quilts should be considered as texts, wherein the makers have used visual elements, words, and the embodiment of memory to express their ideas.

Rhetorical/ Composition World

Although visual rhetoric is a growing as a field for academic study, few have applied those rhetorical principals to quilts. Following a turn towards the visual (Mitchell 540), rhetoric has recognized the importance of images, which can be included along with words in the interpretation of meaning. For instance, Lester Failey, Diana George, Anna Palchik, and Cynthia Selfe in their textbook for composition classes, *Picturing Texts*, provide lists of evaluative questions for a variety of visual artifacts. These artifacts are, however, the usual suspects: photographs, films, advertisements, and paintings, as well as accompanying written texts. Quilts are mentioned once, by bell hooks, who connects snapshots taken by her grandmother to the quilts she also made, as if quilts give greater artistic credibility to those snapshots (186). However, Faigley, et al., do open the possibility that the terms of rhetoric may be used to examine other visual artifacts as they

explain the connection between visual and verbal: “Description, comparison, point of view, emphasis: all are concepts that apply to both words and images. These concepts refer to basic decisions we make about how to represent the world” (25). If quilts are texts, they are first of all images to which the questions of visual rhetoric can be applied. Many of the quilts whose meaning will be explored in my project reflect their makers’ decisions of how to represent their world, especially those that include figures and words.

The possibility that quilts can be viewed through a visual rhetoric lens is opened by Marguerite Helmers in “Framing the Fine Arts Through Rhetoric.” She extends the genre of visual rhetoric to any “fine art” and includes textile design (63). She explains the differences between the “Sister Arts” tradition of using the terms of one art to analyze another and visual rhetoric. She writes that rhetoricians are asking different questions, not about correspondences, but “how visual images are themselves carriers of meaning” through choices about positioning, context and the inclusion of written words (64). With much of her insight coming from art history, Helmers focuses on the interaction of three factors: the viewer, the place of viewing, and the object itself. She theorizes that the meaning comes from the interplay of these three elements and can be discovered without supporting documents. (65) Although she also writes about the structure of art exhibitions, those considerations are beyond the scope of my present study although that praxis may provide a rich site for future studies as museums display more quilts as art and as a new textile museum opens in Carrollton, GA. Moreover, the photographs of many of the quilts that are analyzed in my project were found in museum publications based on art exhibitions. Books that are from museum shows include the following: Arnett, William, Alvia Wardlaw, Jane Livingston, and John Beardsley, *The Quilts of*

Gee's Bend: Masterpieces from a Lost Place; Cuesta Benberry, *Always There: The African-American Presence in American Quilts*; Janet Catherine Berlo and Patricia Cox Crews, *Wild by Design: Two Hundred Years of Innovation and Artistry in American Quilts*; Merikay Waldvogel, *Soft Covers for Hard Times: Quiltmaking and the Great Depression*; and Sandi Fox, *Wrapped in Glory: Figurative Quilts and Bedcovers 1700-1900*. These books, as well as *Georgia Quilts: Piecing Together a History* with editor Anita Zaleski Weinraub, provide much of the material from which my project is fabricated.

If quilts are texts, then they will be able to deliver the full range of messages and strategies chosen by a speaker or writer. Can visual artifacts deliver those messages, including even persuasion? J. Antony Blair in "The Rhetoric of Visual Arguments" contemplates the possibility of visual persuasion. Such persuasion, he writes, must include a change in behavior or attitude and the person persuaded must also be free to choose otherwise. Persuasion is different from argument because "arguments supply us with reasons for accepting a point of view" (44). He answers two objections to applying the term "argument" to visual artifacts: the visual is too vague, and "arguments must have propositional content" (46). Verbal communication can sometimes be vague as well, so this objection would not automatically reject the possibility of a visual argument, he writes. To counter the second objection, he presents an example of a proposition that is expressed visually: a pre-World War II cartoon by David Low that argued the collapse of Czechoslovakia would have a disastrous effect on England (the cartoon shows a large pile of boulders ready to fall on an Englishman if the bottom bolder ("Czecho") is pulled out.

Blair also points out that arguments do more than change beliefs; rhetors also try to show that a belief already held by the listeners commits them to a new attitude, belief or behavior (48). So, he reasons, there can be arguments without propositions. He adds, “Most of the candidates for visual arguments are combinations of the verbal and the visual” (49). He gives a very narrow definition of “argument”:

To be an argument, what is communicated by one party to another or others, whatever the medium of communication might be, must constitute some factor that can be considered a reason for accepting or believing some proposition, for taking some other attitude or for performing some action. (49)

Blair attributes the power of a visual argument to its ability to efficiently convey numerous images quickly with the aura of reality, especially when the rhetor selects symbols that will “resonate the audience on the occasion and in the circumstances” (51). He lists genres of visual argument as cartoons, film (especially narratives such as Oliver Stone’s *JFK*), advertisements (especially those on television), and even the backdrops of the US Capitol which provide the reporter with “visual influence through association and power of visual symbols” (58). The audience is critical to a visual argument, filling in the gaps and contributing to its own persuasion (59). Blair provides a foundation on which I will argue in chapter 3 that a quilt should also be one of those visual artifacts with a combination of visuals and words that is capable of presenting an argument.

In a similar manner, Maureen Daly Goggin in “Visual Rhetoric in Pens of Steel and Inks of Silk: Challenging the Great Visual/Verbal Divide” opens the possibility that visual rhetoric can be used to discuss textiles, as she applies visual rhetoric and semiotics to the eighteenth and nineteenth century needlework. Stating that needlework is a

“powerful place to look for alternative semiotic resources and acts of meaning making” (90), she analyzes the history of embroidery samples as a transformation from an invention tool by professional artists to a demonstration of stitching skill by novices, which was merely decorative with a limited number of stitches. She suggests that theorists begin with the means of production as a meaning-making act, rather than the artifact itself (106). In her earlier essay exploring some of the same ideas, Goggins states that she intends “to push at boundaries of what counts as rhetorical practice and who counts in its production” (310). She focuses on the practice of samplers as a way of “both recovering past efforts at meaning-making that have been ignored or have remained outside the rhetoric scholar’s gaze, as well as recognizing a broader range of current endeavors” (311). She points out that the “needle arts” (and I would include quilting) have been viewed by women as both a blessing and curse: “a tool of oppression and an instrument of liberation,” among other things (312). She notes that a handful of rhetorical scholars have studied the quilt as an interpreted text, that is the meaning and semiotics of quilts (N. 5, p. 333). I will argue that quilting is another such practice of meaning-making and another place that meaning can be recovered, as I analyze the specific quilts in the chapters that follow.

If quilts are texts, they will work in a manner similar to other visuals, perhaps even better because they were constantly on display. The effectiveness of visuals in a coordinated campaign is explored by Charles Hill in “The Psychology of Rhetorical Images.” Visuals persuade because of “presence,” a term which “refers to the extent to which an object or concept is foremost in the consciousness of the audience members” (28). Physical presence of a visual artifact is the best way for a rhetor to persuade the

audience to accept his/her claims, according to Hill. Visuals do so because of their vividness, which makes an emotional connection to the audience (31). Hill explains that images allow the audience to take a mental shortcut and a relatively quick decision, while ignoring more abstract information. Quilts that make visual an explicit emotional appeal, such as some of the political quilts that are discussed in chapters 2 and 3, are exactly the kind of artifacts whose effects Hill is describing. His claim that visual artifacts communicate by their presence add to the credibility of quilters as interpreters of quilts.

Memory as Rhetoric: Theories about the place of memory in rhetorical practices also have useful concepts to illuminate the reading of quilts. Rhetorical theorist Sharon Crowley has explored the ancient canon of memory and advocates the return of memory as invention in composition classrooms. However, there are dissenting voices as to the place of memory in post traditional rhetoric. While acknowledging Crowley's contributions, Liz Rohan in "I Remember Mamma: Material Rhetoric, Mnemonic Activity, and One Woman's Turn-of-the-Twentieth-Century Quilt" reverses this classical progression from place to memory in the delivery of oral rhetoric. Based on her study of a diary account of the making of a quilt, Rohan suggests that memory should be considered "a veritable rhetorical cannon in its own right, a means of persuasion, and also its end, a process that requires the development of complex rhetorical devices—both material and cognitive" (370-371). More of Rohan's propositions will be discussed in chapter 4. She also draws from the feminist perspective to analyze the effect of the Victorian cult of the feminine on this quilt-making activity and to dismiss quilting after approximately 1900 (when it fell from favor with the suffragettes and their daughters the feminists) as a site for rhetorical activity.

Some quilts were constructed as memorials, as will be discussed in chapter 4. These memorial quilts can be interrogated using some of the principles of those who write about the rhetoric of memory. For example, In “Mediated Memory: The Language of Memorial Spaces,” L.J. Nicoletti explores how monuments can “reveal slant, audience, persuasion, [and] effective design” (51). Following the events of September 11, 2001, she led her students to analyze memorials using the design elements of “symbolism, setting, audience, scale, permanence, and inscriptions” (56) as well as the “syntax of visual rhetoric—effective design principles, the construction of identity, the intersection of text and image...” (61). Nicoletti writes, “Rhetorically or symbolically embedded in every memorial structure, whether large or small, is a thesis, usually highly condensed” (64). Memory as displayed in quilts more closely resembles that of a tombstone, to which these principles can also be applied.

Practical Application. In addition to these theories of rhetorical moves, the classroom applications proposed by rhetoric theorists can be used to analyze quilts as visual artifacts. One such book is *Writing the Visual* edited by Anne Richards and Carol David. In their introduction, “Fields of Vision: A Background Study of References for Teachers,” they survey the pictorial turn and offer terms that are useful in analyzing any visual artifact: icon, index, and symbol. All three terms can be applied to quilts: quilts contain icons, such as appliqués of flags and ships; they can be an index indicating the existence of a rhetor who may otherwise be mute; and they may contain words, as well as patterns of arrangement that have accepted names. In the same volume, Nancy Allen in “Seeing Rhetoric” argues that “visuals can be very persuasive, carrying information as well as appealing to our emotions” (47). She explains how Aristotle’s classic appeals of

logos, ethos and pathos can be both illustrated visually. If this is true of other visual artifacts, these terms can also be applied to the discussion of the meaning of quilts.

In another effort to bring the theories of visual rhetoric into pedagogy, Ryan Jerving proposes “Thirteen Ways of Looking at Black-and-White Photographs.” The assignment that he devised for students is an effort to change the unexamined, unthinking acceptance of the visual and to suggest that visual representation, especially in photojournalism, can be a problem in and of itself because it is perceived as reality (208). He invites students and instructors to adapt his approach to other visual genres, stating: “In addition to all the ‘Thirteen Ways’ handout does in terms of introducing grammars of analysis, rhetorics of synthesis, or symbolics of context, it is most crucially intended as a generative model for approaching other types of visual culture ...” (212). Although quilts are historically different from photographs that Jerving assigns his students to analyze, new technology for printing digital photographs on fabric has allowed quilters to sometimes merge the two genres. Even in their original state of fabric and needlework, quilts often offer a visual representation to which Jerving’s heuristic can be applied, as will be discussed in detail in chapter 2.

The Feminist World

In contrast to those who write about visual rhetoric and have not yet discovered the quilt as a text, feminists had an early fascination with quilting whether they wrote fiction, analyzed fiction, or theorized about art. Some of the nineteenth century writers were feminists, as Berlo points out. She gives the example of Eliza Calvert Hall, author of *Aunt Jane of Kentucky*, published in 1907. As well as being a writer, Hall was a campaigner for women’s rights. Her fictional character is too often “quoted as if she were an ethnographic informant,” Berlo posits (9). Berlo also characterizes both the feminist

movements of the 1920s and the 1970s as “fundamental in constructing an American quilt narrative that was equal parts mythology and history, fueled by nationalist ideologies and feminist pride” (9). Consequently, the viewpoint of the feminists and their interpretations of quilts may be colored by their search for that pride.

The privileged place of *Aunt Jane* as the iconic quilter continues today, especially in the writing of feminists in literary criticism and women’s studies. A recent compilation, *Quilt Stories* edited by Cecilia Macheski, contains an excerpt from *Aunt Jane* as well as other short stories and poems by feminists in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. “In the imagery of the quilt women writers found the literary model they needed,” Macheski explains in the “Introduction.” In describing these works, she points out that “the writers, all women, envision the quilt as a cherished storehouse of women’s experiences, memories, dreams, power, and pride” (2). She adds that all these writers use the metaphor of the quilt to “ask us to go beyond merely recognizing the artistic beauty of the designs; they insist that we read the whole fabric to find the thread of women’s history stitching the shapes together” (2). In my project, fictional accounts such as those excerpted in *Quilt Stories* will be used, not as ethnographic sources, but as imaginative possibilities to understand the meaning quilts might have had when the historic record is silent.

In addition, literary critic Elaine Showalter in her book *Sister’s Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women’s Writing*, used the history of the quilt as a metaphor standing for the varying fortunes of women’s writing. She considers quilting as “crucial,” but not “a transhistorical and essential form of female expression, but rather as a gendered practice that changed from one generation to the next, and that has now

become the symbol of American identity at the fin de siècle” (147). In her survey of women’s writing and quilting, Showalter points out that the connections between the processes of quilting and writing were made early, going back to the Album quilts of the 1840s that were treated as “page[s] in a remembrance book” and to an 1845 anonymous article by a Lowell, MA, factory girl who described a quilt “as if it were a textile scrapbook” (151). Like most feminists, she credits the women’s movement in the late 1960s with reviving quilting and elevating it to a new aesthetic . Showalter quotes art critic Lucy Lippard: “Since the new wave of feminist art began around 1970, the quilt has become the prime visual metaphor for women’s lives, for women’s culture” (161). Thus, we see some interaction between art and feminism, but women who actually quilt are generally left out of that conversation.

In another instance of feminist fiction and quilting, Jane Przybysz analyzes an unfinished short story by local color writer Ruth McEnery Stuart at the turn of the twentieth century which features a woman talking to her quilt and herself about the value of quilting. The unnamed speaker in this handwritten story voices her struggle to improve herself through “culture-schemes” and reflects on whether she has spent her time wisely and whether a quilt can be an art form. At issue is possibly the type of quilt itself—the Victorian Crazy Quilt, which had fallen out of favor. Przybysz analyzes the source of the conflict as both male censure and feminist rejection. Ironically, it was feminists who first recognized the quilt as an art form—if made before 1900. After that date, they reject it as emblematic of women’s confinement to the domestic sphere.

Feminists writing about quilts were also active in the field of art criticism and theory. The first feminist to champion the quilt as art is widely acknowledged to be

Patricia Mainardi, writing in 1973 in the short-lived *Feminist Art Journal* (see for example, Schapiro in Robinson 31). Mainardi advocates that quilts should receive the same place of pride and study in Women's Studies that African art receives in Black Studies (331). She writes that studying the quilt can provide insights to the problems of women artists who are trying to answer "questions of feminine sensibility, of originality and tradition, of individuality versus collectivity, of content and values in art" (331). She supports her argument with a history of quilting and specific, early examples, focusing on the names of the quilt patterns as well as the context of women's lives and the lack of masculine appreciation for these art forms. She particularly criticizes as tokenism the Whitney Museum of American Art's 1971 groundbreaking exhibit entitled *Abstract Design in American Quilts*. With Mainardi's manifesto, feminists had found their modern metaphor for championing women's rights.

In spite of Mainardi's position, there have been earlier, pre-feminist explorations of quilts as art. Folklorist Fanny D. Bergen wrote about quilts as "The Tapestry of the New World" in 1894. In telling their stories and describing the block patterns used, she compares quilters to noblewomen of Medieval Ages who stitched on tapestries, as well as to Penelope in the *Odyssey*. She touches on themes enlarged upon by later writers: the memory embodied in quilts, the designs that indicate conscious choice and creativity, the near anonymity of quilters, whose only record may be a name on a quilt. She attempts to connect the symbolism of quilt block patterns with symbols of other cultures. Overall, her treatment is nostalgic and romantic since she connects quilters to medieval ladies in castles and to classical literature. In addition, Marie Webster in *Quilts and How to Make Them*, first published in 1915 and recently reissued by her granddaughter, codifies much

of the oral history of quilts. She attributes the continuing popularity of quilting to a real love of the work, which gives women pleasure as they patiently stitch until their masterpieces are done (123). Webster, who also published quilting patterns, thus gives an alternative view to the feminization of quilt history.

In addition to art criticism, quilts also play a part in feminists' discussion of women's lives. For example, Elaine Hodges, Pat Ferrero, and Julie Silber, in *Hearts and Hands: The Influence of Women and Quilts on American Society*, trace the history of women through their quilts. That history begins in the early 1800s when sewing was credited with "socializing females into a narrowly defined and arbitrarily gendered notion of 'femininity'" (27). The feminist interest in quilts is "claiming quilt culture as a 'heritage of our own.'" (97). Hedges, et al., take the phrase from Nancy F. Cott and Elizabeth H. Pleck, eds. *A Heritage of Her Own: Toward a New Social History of American Women*. Hedges also points out that the quilting achievements of women must be "viewed in the larger context of women's work and oppression within a patriarchal society—an oppression of which needlework was not only symbol but actuality." ("Quilts and Women's Culture" 18). In commentaries such as these, the culture out of which the quilts came seems to be given more consideration than the quilts themselves.

Quilts continued to be connected with art, as Hedges wrote in "The Nineteenth-Century Diarist and Her Quilts" for the catalog that accompanied an Oakland Museum quilt exhibit in 1982. Hedges writes, "for innumerable nineteenth-century women, quilting became, unlike mere clothing construction, not only necessary work but also a creative outlet, a form of personal artistic expression. Such creative activity enabled women to transcend the limiting daily routine" (294). Hedges details the exchange of

letters and scraps of cloth between a mother and her grown daughters in Connecticut, New York, Nebraska and Wisconsin. “For the Shaw women, fabric scraps and the quilts made from them were what photographs would be to a family today: they verified existence and became the loving ties that bound. They were tactile communication and reassurance” (297). The Shaw women’s piecing of quilts serves as a metaphor for the feminist reconstruction of women’s lives, according to Hedges (298). In these readings of quilts, the artifact itself is less important than the theories that can be proposed to provide a foundation for the art and advocacy that feminists wish to undertake today.

Feminist scholars have also proposed that quilting be considered in terms of poetics and semiotics. Claiming that “quilting is a ‘mother tongue,’ a visual language and culture indigenous to women,” Mara Witzling suggests quilts be understood through their “graphic wit, embodiment of emotions, and function (619). In discussing the purpose of quilts she uses the terms “commemoration, remembrance, and commentary” (624). Although she does not make the connection, these terms have resonance in rhetoric, as will be discussed in chapter 4. In her description of quilting activities today, Witzling at least acknowledges that quilts continue to serve as a medium of expression. While analyzing modern art projects, Judy Elsley discusses the semiotics of quilting. She further describes book as patterned after the Log Cabin quilt block with the center square of each block/ chapter being this idea that quilts are texts. She writes about fiction that incorporates quilts, such as Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*, as well as contemporary projects such as the A.I.D.S. quilt and Suzanne Lacey’ performance art in *Crystal Quilt*. She also relies on literary theory while focusing on the women who wrote the stories and made the quilts (1-2). Although she declares the quilt be a text in the very first words of

her book, she does not elaborate on this concept. My project will give that elaboration.

While these are useful perspectives, most feminist writers tend to stay within their world and rely heavily on their conceptual framework, rather than looking at the quilts inductively, as my project does.

In her summation of three papers presented at a session of the 1993 American Studies Association, Hedges notes that the quilt may be a victim of its own literary success. “So much has by now been written about quilts, and so widely available have they become, that the quilt has entered the popular imagination as a new cultural icon, replacing the melting pot as a metaphor that seems best to describe the nation” (5) While its use as a metaphor, especially on book covers, is “a tribute to quilts as extraordinarily resonant objects of women’s work and art, “ such widespread use might be “metaphorical overload” (5-6). Inaccuracies stemming from Harriet Beecher Stowe’s description in “The Minister’s Wooing” and performances at 1860s Sanitary Fairs have not critically examined according to a presentation by Przybysz (6). In “Marketing an American ‘Heritage,’”“ Elsley examined the controversy over the 1991 licensing by the Smithsonian Institute of the right to mass produce 100 of its ‘heirloom’ quilts in China. The uniqueness and context of the quilts was especially important, Elsley pointed out, “because these textiles often represent women’s texts, sometimes their only way of speaking, telling their stories, and recording their existence. To place a quilt in its context, to acknowledge its aura, in other words, becomes a way to reclaim women’s history. When quilts are stripped of this context, we lose their textuality, and thus women’s history and culture are lost as well” (7). Some quilts have lost that context, as will be discussed in chapter 2.

Some feminists have provided a framework for rediscovering that meaning. In the nineteenth century, quilting had become a “major discursive genre which provides opportunity for women to engage in special kinds of individual or social speech actions” (57), according to Joan Mulholland. She suggests that there are three sites for the making of meaning in quilting: the selection of patterns, the actual work, and speech activities by individuals and groups. (57) In her historical review of quilting in America, she notes that amount of work put into some quilts showed that they served a purpose beyond utility. In early pioneer communities, a set of quilts made by a young woman became “a major speech act” proclaiming her readiness for marriage and domestic chores. In Victorian times the quilt was “seized upon as a means of symbolizing women’s devotion to the ideology of the home” including the stitching of “masterpiece” quilts which told of the maker’s social and economic status (61-61).

The quilt and its speech acts went public with friendship medley and fundraising quilts, featuring signatures of those making the blocks or paying for the privilege of having their names embroidered thereon. These quilts, Mulholland notes, resembled petitions, with the tradition of “issue” quilts being continued today through such projects as the AIDS quilt. The block’s name could serve as an addition “level of signification, between the individual piece and the whole text” (64). While many patterns spoke to a woman’s domestic life, others were political in nature, such as Lincoln’s Platform and Tippecanoe and Tyler Too (a political slogan from the 1840 campaign of William Henry Harrison and John Tyler). She notes that the final stage of the development of a discourse is theorizing and explanations, identifying her paper as part of that final stage. My project would also fit into that category.

The success and multiplication of feminist writing about quilts has led Berlo to declare the whole process mythmaking. As an art professor writing in 2003, Berlo looks at quilts from an aesthetic viewpoint, one that she states has been neglected in the 25 years of feminist quilt studies (5). She challenges what she calls the feminist “scrap bag myth” that all quilts were made of old clothes. She is a quilter herself as revealed in her autobiographical book, *Quilt Lessons: Notes from the Scrap Bag of a Writer and a Quilter*. Although she acknowledges that for some poor quilters the scrap bag quilt was literally true, she points out that many of the nineteenth century quilts studied today were made of new materials, either purchased for the project or saved from new dress making projects (10-11). In my observation, the quilts that have been preserved in private and museum collections are those that were made as for purposes other than keeping the family warm. Those family quilts were used and washed until they wore out. The quilts available for study today are ones that women saved because they made them for other purposes. As such, they are not valid for generalizing about *all* quilts made in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but they do provide excellent examples of quilts used for rhetorical purposes, as will be discussed in the following chapters.

The Quilting World

I offer my observations as one who has been actively involved in the quilting world for more years than I care to state. I pieced my first quilt top at age 10—a Nine Patch of white and bright yellow squares which my maternal grandmother quilted by sewing machine. Lying on my bed as I type this is an appliqué quilt with huge pink and red flowers in six small pots. It was made by my great-grandmother before 1911. Since she died in childbirth when my maternal grandmother was only two years old, I speculate that this quilt was a bridal quilt, often a masterpiece that illustrated a woman’s skill and

readiness for marriage. On the paternal side of the family, my aunt quilts and my grandmother and both great grandmothers also quilted. In short, my quilting heritage and membership in the quilting world runs deep.

Being a quilter is important to the understanding of quilts. In 1978, Nancilu B. Burdick began a decade-long project to research and write about the quilts of her grandmother, Talulu Gilbert Bottoms, whose life spanned the Civil War in Georgia to the end of the Second World War. After Burdick began to piece a quilt herself, she writes: “Only then did I truly begin to know my grandmother” (11). Those who write from the viewpoint of art or other perspectives can misunderstand the process. For example, the advocates for the artistic qualities of the African American quilts of Gee’s Bend, AL, describe one of them as an “opulent masterpiece,” pointing out that its unusual shape must have been intentional (Beardsley et al 58; quilt on 56). A closer look by anyone who quilts will reveal that it obtained its irregular shape because of the kinds of scraps that were available to the maker: cotton, flannel and double knit, which shrink at different rates when washed. A quilter will understand this problem, possibly having shrunk a few pieces herself, and will not mistake a result based on the properties of fabric for an artistic intention, even while she appreciates the great artistry that takes leftover material and creates an artifact both beautiful and useful.

Many quilt world publications are books and magazines that instruct quilters how to make the quilts whose photographs accompany the text. Some magazines also include an historical column, such as the “This Old Quilt” by Gerald Roy in *Fons and Porter’s Love of Quilting*. Growing out of the quilting world, and supported by quilters who buy their books, are quilt historians. Virginia Gunn, editor *Uncoverings*, describes the work

that quilt historians do as mature scholarship that focuses “on understanding and telling an interpretation of the past based on careful documentation” (qtd. in Ducey and Crews 6) The process includes careful examination of the artifact to determine its materials and construction, study of published sources to determine the social context, and study of documents such as letters and census records, as well as a concern for technical aspects of the quilt such as the dimensions and numbers of blocks.

Those quilters who want to learn more about quilts generally turn to history and the study of textile production. Writing from this perspective, Carolyn Ducey and Patricia Crews in “Discovering Memory and Meaning in Quilts” suggest several methods for revealing the “many layers of meaning held within a quilt.” These include careful attention to how the artifact was made, which might discover if it was made according to the directions from published patterns. “Considering the social context during which a quilt was made can help us understand its significance. A researcher may ask who made the object, what economic, cultural, and social role the maker played in society, who used the object, and what role the object itself played in society” (3) They also suggest that traditional historical documents such as census forms, marriage and death certificates, and the like be used to place the quilt in its context, especially if it is a signature quilt.

Prominent among these historians is Barbara Brackman, who has written numerous books including *Quilts from the Civil War* and *Facts and Fabrications: Unraveling the History of Quilts and Slavery*. Brackman’s careful documentation provides historic depth to the controversial story of the Underground Railroad quilts, as will be discussed in chapter 2. Another historian and quilter, Kyra Hicks has written the definitive book on Harriet Powers, the African American quilter from Georgia whose

quilts now hang in two East Coast museums, as discussed in chapter 3. Also in this group of historians are Roland Freeman, photographer and museum curator who documented the quilts of African Americans across America, and John Rice Irwin, collector and museum founder who documented the quilts of East Tennessee. Their insights and the quilts that they photographed are used in several chapters.

Another historian is Cuesta Benberry, who wrote *Always There: The African-American Presence in American Quilts*, in which she acknowledges the support of more than 100 quilting friends. Benberry's careful analysis dispels the myth, reinforced by commentary on the Gees Bend quilts, that African American quilts were always asymmetrical with vivid colors. She prefers to give voice to the quilters themselves and notes that "A small percentage of African American quilts are visually exotic; the majority are not" (16). Benberry's insights are also employed in interpreting the Harriet Powers quilts in chapter 3.

Quilt collector and historian Linda Otto Lipsett, in *Remember Me: Women and Their Friendship Quilts*, also provides a careful historic reading of seven quilts relying on census records, genealogies, war records, patents, and a nineteenth century women's magazine. Her interpretations of friendship quilts will be included in chapter 4. With this sort of scholarship, she is writing from a textile studies perspective. In describing this perspective, Carolyn Ducey and Patricia Crews in "Discovering Memory and Meaning in Quilts" suggest several methods for revealing the "many layers of meaning held within a quilt." These include careful attention to how the artifact was made, which might reveal if it was made according to the directions from published patterns. "Considering the social context during which a quilt was made can help us understand its significance. A

researcher may ask who made the object, what economic, cultural, and social role the maker played in society, who used the object, and what role the object itself played in society” (3) They also suggest that traditional historical documents such as census forms, marriage and death certificates, and the like be used to place the quilt in its context, especially if it is a signature quilt. The research of these quilt historians will add to the visual analysis of the quilts in my project.

Crossovers

The borders are not fortified between the quilt world and the academic world of feminists (most often writing in the fields of women’s studies, literary criticism and art theory), and there are several examples of crossovers. Although some feminists state that meaningful quilting stopped when women won the right to vote (Hedges, Ferrero, Silber 97), other acknowledge the existence of the quilting world. For example, Berlo, an art professor as well as a quilter, acknowledges that women continued to quilt and traces several spikes in quilting activity during the Colonial Revival of the 1920s, the Depression of the 1930s, and the Bicentennial of the 1976. In each case women took up quilting and saw themselves as carrying on a tradition—even if it was, as she claims, built on myth (7-8). Indeed, the quilt world continues to be robust, with 21.3 million quilters contributing to a \$3.85 billion industry, according to the 2010 Quilting in America survey (Hodapp 7). Even in a changing cultural environment, women (and a few men) still find quilt making an opportunity to express themselves.

In another crossover, *The Quilter’s Newsletter* (with the motto of “art, craft, community” above the masthead) tries to span the quilt world (craft) and those artists who use fabric as their medium. In addition, Susan Jenkins and Linda Seward combined forces to write *The American Quilt Story: The How-to and Heritage of a Craft Tradition*.

Jenkins began as a quilt collector, eventually opening her own gallery for American quilts in London, and became intrigued about the history of the antique quilts she was buying. The first part of the book, written by Jenkins, is an attempt to “try to define that quilting tradition within the broader context of the American social experience; and, in particular, through the experience of American women” (7), drawing on the writing of feminists as she does so. The second part is written by Linda Seward and includes directions to recreate 30 antique quilts, catering to the quilt world’s emphasis on process. Such crossovers are relatively rare, however.

One undertaking that attempted to bring together the quilt world and the feminist art world was a 1983 project conceived by Charlotte Robinson and recounted in *The Artist & the Quilt*. Robinson describes this project as bringing about collaboration between women artists and traditional quilters. The artists designed their art, and the quilters translated that design into fabric and quilted it. Within the book, feminist history and theory are also provided in separate essays by Jean Taylor Federico and Miriam Schapiro. Significantly, the quilters do not speak on their own behalf and are sparsely quoted.

This particular artist/ quilter collaboration is not without its critics, even within the feminist community. Susan E. Bernick in “A Quilt is an Art Object when It Stands Up like a Man” harshly criticizes that project. She sees it as “probably the lowest point in the history of feminist involvement with quilting” because the quilters were treated as second class within the collaborative process. She terms the whole process exploitation (142). Noting that quilts were art before feminists acknowledged them as such, Bernick writes that the claim that art quilters have made quilts into art is both arrogant and

erroneous. The feminist claim to have discovered quilts as art is also false, she writes (145). This attempted collaboration illustrates the pitfalls when women from two worlds of such differing values attempt cross the boundaries.

The Continuing Divide

In spite of these attempts at crossing the boundaries, the conceptual divide continues. For example, not all of those who write about quilts agree that they represent the text of oppressed women. As noted above, Webster foregrounds the delight in creating as the primary motivation for quilters. In addition, after an extensive study of her grandmother's life and time (beginning with Talulu's own handwritten memoir), Burdick comments about Talulu and her female relations: "Their needlework does not reflect oppressed women who felt like slaves in their own households. Instead, they show how women, in spite of their hard and often short lives, found their own quiet liberation in creative work—work that also gave comfort and joy to others" (165). In *A Hands of Steel in a Velvet Glove: Purpose and Fulfillment through the Gender Sphere*, Sylvie A. Shires also finds problematic the stereotype of the oppressed nineteenth century woman and the oppressive male, pointing out that "women generally fully approved the ideals of the Domestic Sphere and took pride in applying themselves to live by them" (10). Her 2008 dissertation aims at shattering that myth to reveal a nineteenth century woman "who, far from oppressed or weak, was strong and assured, delighted in her femininity, believed in her calling as woman, wife, and mother, was secure in her position as complementary to man's" (20). The perspectives of Weber, Burdick, and Shires have far more resonance within the quilting world than of the feminists. Quilters are usually far more interested in adding to their fabric stash and making new quilts than in theorizing about the meaning of their activities.

The continuing divide is also illustrated in the recent competing theories about the meaning and use of the Underground Railroad patterns. In 1999, Jacqueline Tobin, a writer of women's stories, and Raymond Dobard, an art history professor, startled the quilt world when they suggested that specific quilt patterns were used to communicate safe houses and routes along the Underground Railroad, a network of sympathizers who provided for runaway slaves before the Civil War. Drawing on one African-American quilter's family stories and the traditions of secrets both in spirituals and black Masonic organizations, they propose the theory that quilt blocks had secret meanings. This theory led Laura Horton in *Uncoverings* to point out the continuing divergence of the quilt world and the world of academia. In reflecting on the Underground Railroad "code," she concludes that the basic difference between quilt historians and theorists is "a conflict between two different belief systems" (216). Although many quilters embraced the story of the Underground Railroad quilts and made quilts based on the story, the controversy continues between quilt world scholars and academic theorists and illustrates the continuing divide.

Quilts as Visual Artifacts

If quilts are texts, they represent a pre-digital, pre-turn example of visual rhetoric, especially the pre-1950 ones described in the following chapters. The choice of a quilt as a visual artifact goes beyond what first theorists about visual rhetoric posit as suitable subjects. Barthes, for example, limits the site of inquiry to "reproductions of reality" (17). There are several problems with quilts as visual artifacts. In an undocumented, unannotated quilt, the "floating chain" of signifieds has not been fixed; thus the reader/viewer is not guided by a linguistic message that identifies and interprets the visual

(Barthes 39). A quilt in Barthes' terms would be constructed like a drawing and would require an apprenticeship to understand it (43). I argue that quilts should be considered as visual texts, one to which theories of visual rhetoric and rhetoric in general can be applied. In drawing together the worlds of academia and quilting, I will use a variety of theoretical lens to explore quilts as texts.

As a text, quilts contain units of meaning much like words. These units of meaning will be explored in Chapter 2 "Quilt Talks: How Quilts Communicate." The theories, concepts, and terms of rhetoric will be applied to quilts that have been separated from all or most of their particular history. The knowledge of the names that the quilt world has for various patterns will also be utilized to discover the meaning of quilts. Jerving's thirteen terms will be applied to one quilt that, although containing multiple and complex images, has not been attributed to any specific quilter. In this chapter I will follow the model of Elsley and propose a semiotics of quilts, one that can then be applied to any quilt. This semiotics is possible because the quilt is a text.

Extending the analysis of quilts beyond their surface, Chapter 3 "Quilt Works: Rhetorical Tasks of Quilts" will explore quilts whose provenance and purpose can usually be determined. These quilts employ words and images to convey a message, and as such can be considered texts. These quilts appear to be made by quilters who wanted to state a message, one that could be a political position, an encomium, a synthesis, an analysis, or even an argument in Blair's narrow definition. I am attempting in Chapter 3 to sketch the broad outlines of the genre of quilts and provide specific examples of quilt texts that might fit into this genre. I will also explore the similarity for the quilt genre to epideictic discourse, which functions "to generate, sustain, or modify a community's

existence” (Jasinski 211) and also reinforces certain community values (210). As texts, quilts can convey patriotism and optimism, support secession, support the union, “vote” for a president, struggle against confining traditions, record journeys, and preach a sermon

The act of quilting and its resultant meaning will be explored in Chapter 4 “Embodiment: How the Act of Quilting Makes Meaning,” which will discuss meaning in relation to quilts that in some way memorialize either the quilter, her relationships or her departed loved ones. I am using the term *embodiment* in the sense that Burke uses it: “A representation of artistic purpose” (89), which manifests itself in the material world as a quilt. The chapters begin with the description of a quilt that serves as an icon, illuminating the difficulties of interpretation and the rhetoric of the quilts described therein. In each chapter, I present these attributes of quilts as examples of quilts behaving as texts.

Chapter 2 Quilt Talks: How Quilts Communicate

An abandoned quilt top lies on top of a bicycle seat in an old junk shop. Never having been finished, it lacks batting or a back. The pieces are random, joined in the style known as a Crazy Quilt without a readily visible pattern. Without a backing and stabilizing quilting stitches, it is beginning to fray. This quilt serves as the icon for this chapter, where I will explore the meaning of quilts that can be gleaned from their surfaces. Since it is for sale along with other yard sale rejects, this iconic quilt has become a “floating chain of signifieds” (Barthes 39). Thus, the reader/ viewer is not guided by a linguistic message that identifies and interprets the visual, and an apprenticeship will be needed to understand it (Barthes 39, 43). This necessary connection of quilts and their stories was noted even by Bergen, who writes that a colorful quilt “is an album of family and neighborhood history in which are preserved in cipher, to be translated only by the maker or one who by tradition has inherited them, the tales, character-sketches, and so on, clinging about the homely collection of odd patches” (360). Often this easy familiarity with quilts is lost when a quilt leaves the family, whether it goes to a museum like the quilts that have been preserved or to a junk shop.

The problem of reading a quilt is further compounded because quilts were constructed, first of all, to keep the children from freezing; however, as the quilts of Gees Bend have shown, they can also become an expression of the quilter’s artistry. Gee’s Bend quilter Helen McCloud explains, “We didn’t have no blankets then, so I had to keep

making them things. I had to run six beds, children sleep two in a bed back then, sometime need four and five quilts on a bed, according to the weather” (Arnett, et. al., 90). As Freeman pointed out in his chronicle of African American quilts, some are intended for other purposes as well: transmitting culture, recording family events, healing physical and emotional illnesses, and honoring “significant rites of passage” such as weddings or births (Freeman xviii). However, when we are looking at a quilt which has been separated from its story, we cannot assume that the quilter was doing more than fulfilling a necessary duty.

Still, some meaning can be inferred from an examination of a quilt’s surface. The quilter has a choice of fabrics, which may of course be limited by her time and station in life, a choice of colors and combinations, choice of patches or appliqué, and a choice of patchwork patterns. For example, the iconic quilt for this chapter includes a piece of turquoise nylon of the type popular in nightgowns in the 1950s and 1960s. This fabric provides the earliest date possible date for the quilt. Quilts made since the 1980s are most often, but not exclusively, made of high grade cotton; this trend possibly sets another parameter for the dating of the quilt. Yet the unknown seamstress has chosen an aesthetic from the late 1890s when Crazy Quilts were stitched and embroidered of silk and wool.

While the meaning of this iconic junk shop quilt may never be solved, Silas House’s novel *Clay’s Quilt* provides a possible imaginative connection to this iconic quilt top. Clay’s uncle is piecing a crazy quilt of random pieces, including “a bright turquoise square crowded with small, yellow flowers” that reminds Clay of his mother (38). Because she died when he was four, Clay has few memories of her and wishes “that he could piece the story of his mother in the same way. He might find scraps of her life,

stitch them together, and have a whole that he could pull up to his neck and feel warm beneath...It would be a story made up of scraps, but that was all he had” (40). This is a fictional story, to be sure, and the character cannot be treated like an ethnographic informant (Berlo 9). The character, however, does seem to express the near universal longing for relationship. His longing inspires us to imagine that the quilt might have been made of scraps of clothing from a woman who died in the 1960s; now thirty years later it has been cleared out in an estate sale and drapes over a bicycle in a junk shop, stripped of its story and nearly of its meaning. If that interpretation could be confirmed, this quilt might properly belong in chapter 4, where the embodiment of memorial quilts is discussed.

Fortunately, not all quilts are quite as lost as the iconic one described above. With the examination of the quilts in this chapter, I am following Elsley in proposing a semiotics of quilts. I am using the term *semiotics* here in the sense that Wray does: communication through a sign that “functions in the mind of an interpreter to convey a specific meaning in a given situation” (qtd. in Leeds-Hurwitz 6-7). While Elsley found meaning in the intersection of contemporary quilts and feminist fiction, I am also bringing in visual rhetoric and knowledge from the quilting world to interpret the surfaces of quilts, whether that sign is color, shape, the block pattern, the names of patterns, the disruption of those patterns, or the combination of all of these within a whole quilt.

Making Meaning through Color

When looking at the surface of quilts, we must remember that meaning comes from more than the object itself. The interplay of viewer and the place of viewing also contribute to the meaning (Helmets 65). Therefore, the interpretations of others who have viewed some of the quilts discussed in this chapter will also be included. Visual rhetoric

theorists instruct the viewer to carefully consider color used with texts and web pages with little elaboration on color's possible meanings (Faigley, et al., 446; Hocks, "Teaching and Learning Visual Rhetoric" 203, 204) or they ignore color altogether (Jerving). In fact, the use of color to visually organize the sections in a 1998 online article was considered challenging to the linear, text-only expectations of scholarly writing (Hocks "Understanding Visual Rhetoric" 636, 638). The meaning of color in this instance was specific to the article and therefore of little help in understanding its use in quilts. Therefore, it is to the culture that we must turn for the meaning of colors. The interpretation of color is particularly culture-bound (Berger 33). The Japanese, for instance, think of white as a funerary color, while in the West this color is associated with purity and with weddings.

Single Color Quilts. Some of the earliest quilts were made of a single color and were called whole cloth quilts, even though sometimes the "whole" cloth was created by stitching together two or more pieces of fabric. The quilting stitches themselves form the only decoration although extra stuffing from the back can be used to accentuate the depth of the design. These quilts are often among the most elegant available today and may have been made to display the family's sophistication and connection to a European heritage. This legacy can be seen on several levels in a Pennsylvania whole cloth quilt, dated 1805. This quilt was made in Pennsylvania "by, for, or with Rachel DePuy," with whose name it is labeled. According to Sandi Fox, in her book that accompanied a museum exhibition of figurative quilts in 1990, it "reflects a thematic simplicity and a technical sophistication that were characteristic of the time" (*Wrapped in Glory* 32). Its elegant and detailed stitching indicates a maker who had the money to buy the cloth for

this 109-by-101-inch quilt and the leisure time to stitch and stuff the motifs. The central motif is a flowering tree of life under which “stand a rather fashionably garbed shepherd and shepherdess” with their stuffed sheep. Under these figures the following verse is stitched, then threaded with cord from the back (a process known as cording) so that it stands out:

If on earth there is found true bliss

Sure it's in a life like this

They watch their flocks 'tis all their care

Of natures sweets profusely share

May heaven grant me som such calm retreat

For in this world I wish not to be great. (*Wrapped in Glory* 35)

Two large pineapples, a traditional symbol of hospitality also used by artisans working in other materials, are quilted at the top edge. The remaining three edges of the quilt are a series of deep swags, another motif that decorated wallpaper and other furnishings for the home (*Wrapped in Glory* 34). Fox notes that “the idyllic scene on the DePuy quilt is in the tradition of those pastoral themes worked on English and American needlework” (*Wrapped in Glory* 35). This may have been a bridal quilt made for Rachel, according to Fox, since entwined hearts are also quilted and corded in each of the lower corners. The white color, traditionally associated with weddings, supports the interpretation that this is a marriage quilt, as do the romantic verse, the tree of life, and the pineapples—all of which combine to wish the couple an idyllic life.

From the literature and history of this period in Europe, we can discover some of the cultural background of all these diverse elements. The fashionable clothes, worn by

those whose occupation is ordinarily considered lowly, alludes to pastoral poems of the Renaissance and Neoclassical periods that suggest that living the simple life of a shepherd is ideal. In English poetry, the pastoral poem with shepherds speaking of their love was perfected by Sidney and Spenser in the Tudor era (Anderson and Buckler 391). This genre was later revived and popularized in the Neoclassical period from 1660-1784 (1255). The idealization of shepherds seems to have been widespread among the upper class and those who aspired to it. When this quilt was made, Marie Antoinette was famous for playing at being a shepherdess, wearing “frilly little apron tied over a pastel frock, a decorative staff wound with streaming pink ribbons, and a mile-high hairdo obviously ill suited to the tending of livestock” (Weber 1). With its fashionably dressed shepherds and solid white surface, this quilt follows the same idealization. While Pennsylvania was relatively more settled than the rest of the colonies and the new country in the 1700s, this quilt would still have been a nostalgic symbol and possibly a claim of social prominence.

Others have interpreted one-color quilts such as this through a feminist lens to reconstruct their meaning. In her quilt history, Jean Taylor Federico suggests that whole cloth quilts, especially the white ones, might have been made to copy the more expensive Marseille throws. If this theory is accurate, a whole cloth quilt means that the maker was grasping for social prominence without the income to do so. Federico also points out that the popularity of such American-made quilts “coincides with the rise and development of the neoclassical style, about 1779-1840” (21-22). The use of white, she suggests, was symbolic of classical purity and the motifs such as feathers and wreaths were also found on furniture and decorative plasterwork. In addition, Eleanor Munro, in describing the

religious significance of quilts, links the basket motif, frequently found in these white-on-white quilts, to the Hindu concept of yantras, the symbols of female and male powers in the universe (46). Since knowledge of Hindu symbols was not likely in early American culture, Munro's interpretation seems to be a projection of her twentieth century aesthetics on quilts. Much more likely is the connection to the neoclassical stories.

Not all whole cloth quilts were made of white fabric—at least one surviving whole cloth quilt is blue. Fox also describes a blue silk quilt made around 1700 by an unknown quilter: “The appearance of human figures, flora, and fauna on this work places it stylistically in the tradition of the earliest extant examples of bed quilts, three of Sicilian origin worked at the end of the fourteenth century” (*Wrapped in Glory* 14). Although made in Goa, India, it was exported to the European market and depicts hunting scenes, including hounds and foxes. The hunters wear clothes similar to those worn by the Pilgrims with doublets, “pumpkin breeches” and stockings and boots. The central motif is a quilted trophy with bow and arrows which may represent a simplified version of a trophy celebrating the Greek goddess Diana, which was found in printed German pattern book. (*Wrapped in Glory* 16). Although it is now in the Los Angeles Museum of Art, no provenance is given for this quilt. Evidently, it came to America and, with its elegant stitches and classical European motifs on silk, provided a colonial family with prestige, but with a color that can be interpreted as individualistic.

Other Color Choices. Since most quilters did not have the money or leisure to make whole cloth quilts, they typically used scrapes left over from making clothes. Thus, color choices were a major part of composing a quilt. An example of making meaning through color alone is found in the book by preservationist and founder of the Museum of

Appalachia, John Rice Irwin. He writes of a quilt that served to make a statement of support for the Union in an area heavily sympathetic to the South (154-155). A Union flag was sewn by a young woman and flown at her father's school. After her family had been confronted by Confederate soldiers, she cut the flag apart and pieced a quilt with a pattern having no direct connection to the flag. Only the similar colors of the flag and the quilt connected the two, allowing the quilter to make a statement without exposing her family to further harassment. This quilt illustrates that color alone can create meaning. The red, white, and blue combination of colors continues to be interpreted as an indication of patriotism, even without the motifs of stars and stripes.

Contrast of Color. Many quilters have instinctively place dark and light colors next to one another, the better to show the patterns they have chosen. Visual rhetoric theorists have also described this design possibility: "One important design pattern is *notan*, a Japanese word that means dark and light. The idea of *notan* is expressed in the ancient Chinese symbol of Yin and Yang, in which light and dark revolve in equilibrium around a center. Often there is a clever reversal of foreground and background in the *notan* pattern..." (Faigley, et al. 40). An example of *notan* can be found in The Widow's Quilt (Mainardi 341). It was made by an unknown quilter in New Jersey in the nineteenth century and now is owned by the American Museum in Britain. Made for a single bed, it appears to be five blocks wide by eight blocks long, with the finished blocks being approximately 10 by 10 inches. There is a narrow black border. Each block has black "Darts of Death" (by Mainardi's designation) floating in a background of white. These narrow black strips flare from a point in a "v" formation; the pattern in each block resembles three arrows with the points stacked in each other. The quilter is apparently

using the tradition of darts and arrows to symbolize mortality, a motif that is found in seventeenth and eighteenth Puritan tombstones (Duval and Rigby 132). The quilting stitches themselves may also have an additional symbolism. The white background is quilted with the shape of lyres in such a way that the darts stand in relief. The quilting patterns of the weeping willow, the harp, or the lyre were common in widow's quilts (Orlofsky 227). In addition to symbolism typically used in mourning quilts, this maker also displays sensitivity to the symbolism of color. Black is a common color to indicate mourning in Western countries, while white is the color generally connected with marriage.

Making Meaning through Choice of Block Patterns

When quilters put together their bits and pieces of cloth, they have available an increasing number of block patterns. Bergen mentions between two hundred and three hundred patterns that she had collected in 1894 (368). Marie Weber, in her 1916 book about quilts, lists more than 460 (169-177). Barbara Brackman, a contemporary quilt historian, has documented more than 4,000 in her *Encyclopedia of Pieced Quilts Patterns* (9). These blocks were typically repeated to make the size of quilt required, providing a sense of order even when the colors may be quite diverse. Visual theorists have noted that repetition can be a strategy to unify a design: "In art and design, the unifying structure may be apparent or it may be invisible. Methods to establish unity include the use of repetition or of an overall pattern" (Faigley 46). Older patchwork quilts almost always feature the repetition of patterns pieced in sections known as blocks although album quilts (which will be discussed in the following chapters) break this tradition. This repetitiveness was not only a design choice, but often a necessity as women attended to other chores between opportunities to piece.

Names of Blocks. As quilters left the Eastern seaboard and moved westward with their families, the patchwork pattern names become important. Mulholland points out that part of a quilt's message is its pattern name, which speaks directly of its meaning (7). Others have also found that these names "are descriptive of the occasions of their day from literary to political . . . Great causes of the time --- the Civil War, the Mexican War, the concerns regarding slavery -- are commemorated in quilt names" (Orlofsky and Orlofsky 263). Mulholland also notes:

When patchwork broadened its message from the domestic to the political there were added such names as Dolly Madison's Star (one of the very few to take a specific public woman's name), and Lincoln's Platform, as well as the many State names. The many Rose patterns were taken up for political use---like the rosettes worn by political candidates: in one case a black center was deliberately put into an old rose pattern so that it could show support for the abolitionist cause, and it was named Radical Rose. Significant contemporary battles, both won and lost, were recorded in block names--Nelson's Victory, Burgoyne Surrounded--as were some political slogans--Tippecanoe and Tyler Too and Montana's 54-40 or Fight. (7)

Even though the names of patterns can give a hint of the maker's intended meaning, the variance of pattern names can be a further complication in reading. As the Orlofskys point out,

Exactly the same pattern can be identified by a number of names. For example an early pattern usually know as "Indian Trail" has at various times and places been called: "Forest Path," "Rambling Road," "Winding Walk,," "Old Main's

Ramble,” “Climbing Rose, “Rambling Rose,” “Flying Dutchman, “Northwind,” “Storm at Sea,” “Weathervane, “Tangled Tares,” “Prickly Pear,” and “Irish Puzzle.” (246)

Using a quilt pattern’s name to interpret a quilt’s meaning will necessarily mean correctly discerning which name of several options was used. A label, if the quilter attached one, could be the determining factor. If no label or family story has come with the quilt, quilt historians who have pinpointed names as to their time and place of usage can be helpful.

Reasons for Name Changes. Bergen also pointed out the variability of block names for the same geometric arrangements (368). Most consisted of geometric figures like the square, the triangle and the rectangle, along with the rhombus. “The same pattern occurs in various parts of the country under the most diverse names. This is especially true of the mathematical combinations. Now and then there is an evident reason for the names given to those multitudinous designs, but oftener they are apparently purely arbitrary,” she observes. Quilters in the past may have been following the same process that I have observed in contemporary quilting magazines: they have taken a traditional pattern, varied the color or the orientation, perhaps setting it on point, and called it by a name that has a personal meaning.

The name changes could have been based on the needs and rhetorical choices by the quilter. Hedges et. al state: “In the course of time, and with geographical movement within the United States, name changes and small design variations were introduced in response to local needs and to both sectional and national events” (16). She also tells the story of “a subversive wife who had her husband sleep under a quilt that bore, unknown to him, a pattern named after the political party he opposed.” (18) The husband can

perhaps be forgiven for being clueless due to the similarity of the Democratic and Whig Rose patterns, which both include a large red appliqué flower in the center and four buds extending from it. However, the quilter might have had far more success in persuading the reluctant husband if she had not hidden the pattern's name. As Hill points out in his analysis of the psychology of visual appeals, visuals persuade because of "presence," a term which "refers to the extent to which an object or concept is foremost in the consciousness of the audience members" (28). If the husband had been reminded of his wife's opinion every time he lay down or arose, he might have eventually been convinced.

The Circle as a Pattern. Many of the patterns used by quilters make use of squares, rectangles and triangles. Another geometric figure that sometimes appears in quilts is the circle. Jessica Helfand in "Squaring the Circle" discusses the implications of the circle as a pattern in visual artifacts. She calls the circle "unbiased, solid and unwavering in its geometric simplicity, denoting unity and eternity, totality and infinity" (85). She also suggests that the circle represents the universe and cycles such as the seasons, a life and the planets' orbits. Helfand adds, "Over time and across many cultures, the circle has come to represent an ideal of unsurpassable perfection, yet it eludes mathematical exactness. It is thus the essence of all that is natural, primordial and inescapably human" (85). The circle is represented more in the technology of previous centuries, she suggests, adding, "yet in contemporary culture we expect our information to be framed by rectangular, Cartesian coordinates." (87) Quilting would be one of those technologies rooted in history that still privilege the circle.

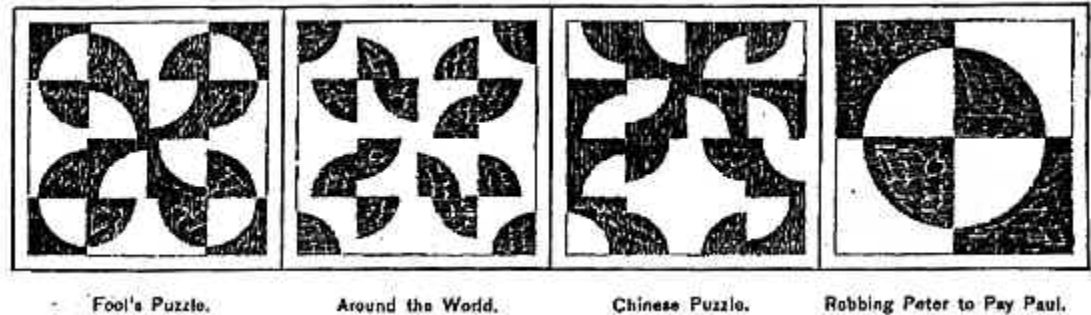
Circles more often show up in patterns of quilting stitches such as the clam shell and the feather. However, there are a few early block patterns that incorporate circles. Webster lists two blocks based on this geometric shape: Circle within a Circle and Memory Circle (121). A quilt made in 1950 by Gees Bend quilter Lucy T. Pettaway is a later example of circles as a quilt pattern. The 83-by-85-inch quilt is composed of ten rows with nine blocks each. The blocks with red or red print backgrounds and white circles alternate with squares of white with red or red print circles. There is a red border on two sides. The quilter called it “Snowball” (151). The circle is also incorporated in such appliqué patterns as the Rose Wreath. Webster also describes a quilt made by Miss E.J. Hart in 1858 which features the large wreath. She describes the pattern: “The design element of the wreath is a compact group of flowers, fruit, and leaves, which is repeated ten times in making the complete circle” (84-85). These quilters may simply have liked the way the circles and wreaths looked. They may also have seen the circle in the manner that Helfand describes, as a symbol of perfection or eternity. Prior to modern cutting technology, perfect circles were harder to achieve. Appliquing these circles so that the shape remains stable is also difficult. Therefore, the circle could also indicate that quilter is declaring her mastery of this painstaking process.

Among older quilts the parts of a circle used in a pattern is even more common than the entire circle. Bergen gives this account:

One of the most complicated of the geometrical designs that I have encountered is made by cutting a number of small squares out of white cotton cloth and an equal number out of colored cloth. A quadrant of a circle is then cut from one corner of each of these squares. By various combinations of these quadrants with the

remains of the squares, a number of patterns have been evolved, somewhat resembling one another, but bearing very different names. (368-369).

Those names include the Fool's Puzzle, Around the World, Chinese Puzzle, and "Robbing Peter to Pay Paul."¹



Beginning in the 1870s, the Women's Christian Temperance League reconfigured this quarter circle pattern so that it resembled a continuous, but crooked path. The new pattern was called Drunkard's Path. The colors of the league were blue and white, and often quilts with Drunkard's Path blocks were made in these colors. (Jenkins and Seward 85, Hedges et. al 87). Such quilts combined both the color and the pattern as a way of stating a meaning. The rhetorical purposes of such "public" quilts will be discussed in the next chapter.

One Block's History. It would be quite beyond the scope of my project to discuss in depth the meaning and history of all 4,000 quilt patterns. One will have to do for illustrating how time and place contributes to the changing meanings of a quilt pattern. Bergen writes that she found the history and symbolism of quilt patterns leading into



¹ The line drawing of these blocks and other black and white images are from Bergen's article, on which the copyright has expired.

“strangely interesting by-ways” (369) and describes the connections of one. This particular pattern is made up of twelve small right isosceles triangles of one color and twelve of a second number. It was sent to her from northern Ohio with the name of “catch me if you can.” The same pattern was known in western Massachusetts as the Windmill. Without explaining possible trade routes, she suggests that it is a good representation of the sacred cross of India. This symbol means “man” and also stands for the mysteries that Buddha committed to his disciple before his death. In addition, the symbol means 10,000 in Chinese and insinuates the possession of as many perfections. As such, it is often placed over the heart of Buddha. It is also found in Hindu writing, on the Thor’s ax in Scandinavia, on the crowns of Tibetan kings, and on shells in Tennessee burial mounds. The Oriental traveler was apt to discover this pattern on his bed when traveling to out of way places, she writes. The Sanskrit word for this pattern is *svastika*. Writing through a folklore lens, Bergen does not describe how or why the symbol might have spread to or from the United States from the Far East, apparently attributing its wide spread use to some universal symbolism. Bergen’s analysis was written thirty years before Adolph Hitler chose the same symbol to represent his fascist ideology, and the block pattern has fallen out of favor.

The Disruption of Patterns. Sometimes a design element is deliberately turned, changed or left out to make a point. Irwin records two quilts that do so: the Bear’s Paw Friendship quilt (50) made by women in Union County, Tennessee, and the Carolina Lilly (67). Nineteen women signed blocks of the Bear Paw quilt; the twentieth square has a man’s name on it, possibly the recipient, possibly the husband-to-be of the recipient. Sally Turner’s block has blue toes in an otherwise brown and white block.

Elizabeth Harrell's Bear Paws are turned backward. Irwin explains, "There was a common belief, adhered to by many, that to make a quilt too fancy and too perfect would be to tempt God. The Bible clearly points out our imperfection; to ensure that everyone knew he was imperfect, quilters sometimes deliberately created a flaw, such as the blue toes and the backward toes." (50). Irwin also records a quilt (made near Knoxville, TN, between 1890 and 1900) that leaves one stem of the Carolina Lilly pattern is unconnected. These quilts remind us that when we are looking for meaning in the symbols on the surface of quilts, we must not necessarily dismiss disruptions as mistakes. The disruption may be a deliberate choice which points to meaning.

The Problem of Meaning in the Underground Railroad Patterns

The story of the Underground Railroad quilts is illustrative of the difficulty of discovering the meaning of quilts from their surface only. In *Hidden in Plain Sight*, Jacqueline L. Tobin writes of a startling story shared with her by quilter Ozella McDaniel Williams, who was selling quilts in the Charleston, SC, marketplace. According to Williams, runaway slaves and conductors on the Underground Railroad had used specific quilt patterns as signals along the road to freedom. Williams did not at first tell Tobin the whole story, and Tobin checked with African American quilters, African textile experts, and folklorists. Tobin and her coauthor Raymond G. Dobard report that "most of them had heard that quilts had been used as a means of secret communication on the Underground Railroad, but none were exactly sure how" (18). Williams later reveals that the quilt blocks had special meaning. Some of the blocks and meanings are summarized as follows:

- Monkey Wrench—get ready tools ready to go
- Bear's Paw—follow the bear trails

- Crossroads—travel to cities like Cleveland, Ohio
- Log Cabin with a red center—stop at this safe house
- Bow Tie—change from slave clothes to those of middle class free blacks
- Flying Geese—go north
- Drunkard's Path—don't move in a straight line (Tobin and Dobard 189-193, Bryant 17-18)

Williams remembered her mother and grandmother telling the stories.

We would all sit underneath a large oak tree at night and our parents would tell us stories. This is where my mother and grandmother would show us how to quilt. Holding up a particular quilt pattern, my grandmother or mother would instruct us in the sewing of it and also tell us how that particular pattern was placed inside of the story I told you. (165)

Tobin and Dobard include a chart comparing African symbols, American quilt patterns, and Masonic emblems and showing the similarities between the emblems of African secret societies and such quilt blocks as the Nine Patch and the Hourglass or Bow Tie (194). As support for the Quilt Code, they point to other codes (66-67) and to the establishment of the Prince Hall Masonic Order (58-59). Indeed, Masonic symbols appear on the quilt by African American Harriet Powers, discussed in the next chapter. An historic interview and documents show that renown Underground Railroad conductor Harriet Tubman would piece quilt blocks while waiting in the woods for nightfall and the opportunity to continue taking her escapees northward (62-63). The book includes a photograph of a Log Cabin quilt, which was said by its owner to be made circa 1830. Tobin and Dobard point to the narrowly woven stripes of backing fabric as confirmation of its age (photo caption, page not numbered). Also pictured is a Log Cabin quilt reported to be made in the 1840s by a slave woman and given to the founder of a settlement in

Canada where there were many free blacks living (photo caption, facing page.) After Williams' death, Tobin and Dobard concede that the code, especially the secondary code of additional quilt blocks, needs more interpretation. "In keeping with the African Secret Society traditions, with obvious layering of meaning throughout the entire code, and with Ozella's own intentions to not reveal anything all at one time, perhaps we are now left to ponder and accept Ozella's original words and realize that 'you will get the story when you are ready' "(179). Thus, Tobin and Dobard provide some documentation for the *possibility* of quilts being used as a code, but nothing concrete beyond the testimony of one woman's family stories.

Other researchers have found little evidence of this use for quilt patterns. Freeman on his cross-country trips taking photos of African American quilters stopped by the Fountain City, ID, Levi Coffin House, a stop on the Underground Railroad. He comments, "None of the quilts brought there by slaves had survived," and he was told that those at the house had been made locally. (267). Although he records the story of one escaped slave (254-262), Freeman's photographs are of the quilts of the slave's granddaughter, not of quilts that helped guide his escape, nor does her story of her grandfather mention quilts. However, Freeman does write of one authentic slave quilt. The Slave Chain Quilt that he photographed was made by Phoebe Johnson in 1967, and is a variation of the Wedding Ring quilt with the half circles arranged so that they meet in links of a chain rather than overlapping wedding rings. Johnson made this quilt to replace one made by her great-grandmother Phoebe Mae (born c. 1814) in browns and blacks and given to her daughter (the maker's grandmother) when the daughter was sold "down South" to Mississippi. Johnson made her more colorful version after the last piece of the

original quilt was placed in her brother's casket when he died (39-40). Thus, this authentic slave quilt functioned much as the memory quilts that will be discussed in chapter 4, embodying loved ones. It was not an aid in helping the slave escape.

In the same way, Brackman's research has shown that there is no confirmation of Williams' story. Brackman points out that "historians require more than one fragment of evidence to support a fact" (6). She states that the story of quilts used as signaling devices on the Underground Railroad is a myth like the stories of George Washington cutting down the cherry tree and of Betsy Ross making the first flag. In fact, some of the block patterns described as being put in these freedom quilts have been dated as later inventions. The Log Cabin pattern only goes back to the 1860s, while the Drunkard's Path and the Double Wedding Ring were developed long after slavery (7). However, she provides a "poetic license" (suitable for framing and hanging over one's sewing machine) for quilters who want use these modern patterns to illustrate the history of slavery. She adds this caution: "This license may not be used to interpret the symbolic levels of meaning in historic quilts. Unlike us, nineteenth century women often expressed their poetic feelings in verse rather than in quilts" (9). She also provides instructions for using twenty patterns from her quilt index to "add layers of symbolic meaning to a quilt's visual beauty" (9). The symbolism and interpretations of the patterns, however, are those invested by the individual quilter replicating the quilt, not those theorized by Tobin.

Such creative illustration was the theme of an exhibit of quilts in Oberlin, Ohio, one of the sites of Underground Railroad. Entitled "Threads of Freedom: the Underground Railroad Story in Quilts," the exhibit included contemporary quilts utilizing appliqué and patchwork to tell the horrors of slavery and the strength of the African-

American family (Oberlin College). It included one Abolitionist Quilt made in 1841 by Quakers who signed their names as supporting immediate emancipation. This antique quilt features individual blocks such as the Rose of Sharon, the Carolina Lily, the Rose Wreath and several other flower patterns. It also includes one block that looks very much like one named by Brackman as Slave Chain. Furthermore, this process of contemporary quilters interpreting past is categorized by Berlo as mythologizing. Berlo describes the theory in *Hidden in Plain Sight* as “the latest trend in the mythologizing of quilts” and except for its popularity, hardly worth remembering (12). The controversy continues with the quilt historians insisting on strict proof and the theorists elaborating on possibilities. When looking at simple the surface of a quilt, we must be cautious that we do not project our theories, hopes and wishes onto those quilts in a manner never envisioned by their makers.

Making Meaning through Visual Rhetoric

Visual artifacts can convey messages in a variety of ways, as Ryan Jerving points out in “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black and White Photograph.” The assignment that he devised for students is an effort to change the unexamined, unthinking acceptance of the visual and to suggest that visual representation, especially in photojournalism, can be a problem in and of itself because it is perceived as “utterly transparent, simply delivering up the day’s happenings” (208). He invites students and instructors to adapt his approach to other visual genres, stating: “In addition to all the ‘Thirteen Ways’ handout does in terms of introducing grammars of analysis, rhetorics of synthesis, or symbolics of context, it is most crucially intended as a generative model for approaching other types of visual culture ...” (212). Many of categories he proposes can be also be applied to quilts because quilters sometimes use those techniques to express themselves.

The following is the application of the thirteen ways to one specific quilt: the S.J. Buell quilt, a four-by-four blocks, 70-by-70-inch Crazy Quilt made circa 1880-1900 (Hedges et. al 92). In this application, the word “photograph” is replaced by “quilt” and the word “camera” by “viewer.” Italics indicate Jerving’s terms, which were not parallel.

Cropping. Jerving points out that this category is designed to ask “how might things be different” (213). He also suggests that viewers think about how a change in perspective might change the image. While quilts do not reflect the same kind of framing as photographs, they often have borders around their entire edges and sashing that bisects pieced blocks. Crazy Quilts customarily have no sashing or strips between the quilt blocks, and this one conforms to the aesthetic of having no visual separation between very busy block designs. There are two outer borders—one is relatively wide and red and lies closest to the blocks evenly on all sides; the other is rather narrow and has the same beige color binding. Both have an irregular sawtooth design, which is very unusual. None of the block designs overlap or “escape” into the border, resulting in a visual kaleidoscope in the center confined by the red and beige borders. Inner sashing might have calmed the design and bring attention to the individual images within the quilt, rather than the entire quilt.

Visual cues such as blocking and the directing of the eye. The sixteen blocks appear to have been stitched separately since none of the design elements continue from one block to the next. This method of construction would have allowed the quilter to carry her work with her and made it easier to add embellishments such as embroidery. This method would have also allowed her to “make it up as she went along” or to design each block separately and then lay out the blocks and decide which arrangement was

most pleasing. None of the blocks repeat the same design although four have strong diagonal stripes and several have slanted images, such as fans and an umbrella. The slant of the stripes work against “the tendency to read in a ‘Z’ pattern: horizontally from top left to top right, diagonally from top right to bottom left, and horizontally again from bottom left to bottom right” (Jerving 213). None of the blocks appear to be highlighted by the rule of thirds. As Jerving explains, this rule “assumes four privileged points at the intersecting lines of an imaginary tic-tac-toe board laid across the photo” or other object (213). Thus, the quilter does not appear to privilege any of the designs except the perhaps the center one, which will be discussed below.

Aestheticization. Jerving calls this “the effect of art as opposed to the effect of fact,” in which the photograph aims for art, rather than reality. Although some modern appliqué quilts can incorporate photos printed on fabric or they can mimic photos through the positioning of numerous small pieces, this quilt predates that technology. Each of the sixteen blocks contains at least one appliquéd or embroidered image, including fans, cattails, a ship in full sail, a horseshoe, a running horse, a basket of fall leaves, a bowl of flowers, a bowl of fruit, a dove, a cross, a two-story house, a crane, and one Victorian ladies’ boot. The relative size varies—two of the fans are bigger than the house, for example, and the horse in one block is much smaller than the crane in another. Some of the flowers look as if they might have been images printed on another piece of cloth that has been cut and appliquéd in the *broderie perse* technique popular at the turn of the nineteenth century (see Fox 26). However, the overall impression is not one of realistic representation, but of each image contemplated individually.

Characterization. Jerving explains this aspect as “the photographed subject’s surrounding environment” or context (214). Unfortunately, the maker of this quilt is known only by the name S.J. Buell that is embroidered on the flag of the ship. Hedges seems to use the published photograph of the quilt as an opportunity to write about Sarah Josepha Buell Hale, the editor of *Godey’s Lady’s Book* although no connection can be definitively established between the editor and the maker of the quilt.

Costume. There are two small figures on the quilt; both are children embroidered in outline in the lower right hand corners to two different blocks. A girl appears to be playing with a hoop on the sidewalk of the house. The boy is seated with his face turned away from the viewer in a triangle that has been pieced into the corner of the square that contains a bowl of fruit as the central and much larger motif. Both appear almost ghostly. The inclusion of a child on a mourning quilt will be discussed in detail in a later chapter, but this is one possible interpretation of these figures. Another interpretation is that these figures were copied from popular decorative arts. There is sketch by children’s book illustrator Kate Greenway that resembles the girl with a hoop. The style of the dress is the same although the hair and the stance is different (Taylor 93). This sketch was published after Greenway’s death in 1901. If the sketch and the quilt image are related, the date of the quilt would be slightly later.

Framing. Jerving asks that reader notice “how the photograph’s subjects are positioned within the frame and in relation to one another” (214). “Staging often works as a metaphor,” he adds. When a quilt has an even number of blocks as this one does, there may not be a central or strongest subject. The subject in this quilt that is most eye-catching is the ship. Its full, white sails extend from the left edge of the block to the right

edge and contrast sharply with the blue background of this block and with the red ship's body. The waves are reduced to a few rows of outline stitching. The block is placed near the center, being the second block on the second row. This is also the block where the name is recorded. Its style is different from the collages that all the other blocks present. It might be a block from an earlier time or earlier quilter, here added as a memory.

Camera distance. Jerving explains, "Importance is often implied by the percentage of the total frame taken up by a given figure or object" (215). The quilter's distance, as seen in the varying sizes of the images she creates, implies a series of compositions, taken up as she had time. The two subjects largest in relation to the block and therefore closest to the quilter are the fans that adorn the top left block and the right bottom block, the beginning and the ending of the "Z" reading pattern. However, fans were a common motif in Crazy Quilts, and their importance should not be overstated.

Camera angle. This quilter presents most of her subjects straight on, almost flatly. The exceptions are the seated boy, who is turned away, and the cross, which has dark and light beams which give the impression of looking up at it while the light strikes it from above with a three-quarters view. This more realistic treatment may indicate a privileging of this image for the quilter.

Lighting. This term as applied to quilts will be based on relative interplay of colors, although Jerving does not mention color. Although most Crazy Quilts, being made of bits of wool and silk from Victorian clothing, are dark, this quilt has a relatively light palate, with a lighter blues being especially prominent. Almost every block has beige, cream or white as an important color. These lighter colors are either the background of an appliquéd image such as the fruit, flowers, horseshoe and ladies' boot

or a wide stripe embellished with rows of embroidery. There are some lively red accent pieces: the boat's hull, a fan's base, random red plaid strips, and the sections of the umbrella. In the umbrella, those red sections alternate with a deep yellow. The yellow accent is repeated in a paddle fan, a basket, and the background of the cross. All together these colors combine to create a cheerful impression, only somewhat contained by the wide red border.

The camera's presence—the camera as narrator. Jerving explains that subjects in a photograph sometimes interact with the camera by looking straight at it and showing an attitude toward it. This question might apply to quilts with central, realistic images (as in some modern art quilts), but it doesn't seem to have an application here. The images in the quilt do not acknowledge the viewer. They seem to be solely objects of the quilter's thoughts and handiwork.

Genre—type of image, as recognized by the viewer. Jerving explains that genres of news photography include demonstrations, talking heads, and the grieving parents. Photography genres based on art include landscapes, still lifes, and stereotypes. (216) In quilting, these genres would have to be the type of quilt: a traditional block pattern, an appliqué quilt, a whole cloth quilt, and an art quilt. The Crazy Quilt is a recognized subgenre of the appliqué quilt. The fans, the multiple appliquéd images in a single block, and the stripes are recognized features of Crazy Quilts, as is the extensive embroidery. Such quilts are not usually stitched with a batting in the center, but the back and front are tied together at intervals with a strong thread or yarn. The ties of this quilt provide an additional red "pop" along the seams of the blocks. Missing are conventions such as the spider and its web and the dark fabric of most Crazy Quilts. The ship featured in its own

block without other images intruding is unexpected for this sort of quilt and thus indicates a conscious decision by the quilter to include it.

Representing the Representation. Jerving points out that photographs often include art or other icons such as billboards. There are indeed pictorial quilts that include scenes of miniature quilts hanging on a line or being made by the quilter. Some modern quilting fabric has been printed with such scenes. This sort of representation is not made in this quilt. The interpretation could be made that the quilter did not reflect upon her art, but simply created it.

The Photograph's Setting. Jerving notes that captions and placement of a news photograph impacts its meaning (216-217). A photo of this quilt is published in a book theorizing on the impact of quilting on women's lives. It occupies a page by itself, with most of its caption discussing the work of a woman with a name similar to the one embroidered on the quilt, but in no way definitively connected to it. In this context, the Crazy Quilt is being used to further a feminist viewpoint; this perspective is especially clear when one reads the much larger caption for the quilt on the facing page, which details the life of Abigail Duniway, who founded a radical pro-suffrage magazine in Portland, OR, while supporting her family by sewing. This quilt on the facing page was donated to the first National Woman Suffrage Bazaar in 1900, and thus contemporary with the Crazy Quilt. A photograph of the Crazy Quilt was previously published in *Treasury of American Quilts* with only the comment that "the rich fabrics, handsome designs, and extraordinarily fine embroidery make this a superlative example of a Victorian Crazy quilt, worthy of a museum" (Nelson and Houck 27). The quilt is in a private collection and apparently has no story attached to it.

Jerving states that his questions, adapted from the social texts accompanying 1930s documentary photography, are “a set of tools for prying open further discussion, a list of heuristically useful but ultimately insufficient points of reference for other kinds of visual culture” (208). Indeed, this sometimes repetitive analysis of the surface of a quilt can only go so far. The reader can see that the quilter worked, block by block, perhaps without an overall plan, adapting her fabric, stitches, and appliqué images to suit the moment. In the end she has a lively, bright quilt that records instances of her life, but that is still a life that is mostly hidden from us. Are the children ghosts or merely decorative figures? Was the ship appliquéd by a woman in the previous generation? Did fans have a special meaning or do they just fit the Crazy Quilt aesthetic? Although Helmers suggests that the object, the viewer, and the place of viewing are all that is needed for interpretation (65), we see that in the case of this quilt, more questions are raised than are definitively answered. More cannot be said of the significance of the individual images without knowing who the maker was or even where it was made. To paraphrase the character in House’s novel: it’s a story made up of scraps, but that is all we have in this case.

Semiotics of Quilts

Following the example of Elsley, I have attempted in this chapter to set forth a semiotics of quilts, seeking communication through a sign that “functions in the mind of an interpreter to convey a specific meaning in a given situation” (Wray qtd. in Leeds-Hurwitz 6-7). While the interpretations of symbols have been illustrated by specific quilts, the strategies for reading a quilt’s surface could be applied to any quilt, even one that has lost all or most of its story. The exploration of meaning through color has indicated that a white, whole cloth quilt can communicate a wedding blessing, a desire

for or achievement of social prominence, and a connection with a sophisticated European heritage. A solid blue silk quilt can convey the same meaning, with an individualist twist. Colors alone can also proclaim patriotism, as shown in the red, white, and blue quilt. With an increasing number of quilt patterns available, the quilter could choose one whose name conveyed meaning: these could refer to political affiliations, patriotic victories, nature, or even the tragedy of broken dishes when there would be none to replace them on the frontier. The quilter might also choose a circle to express perfection or the one of several quarter circle patterns to discuss economics or condemn drunkenness. Even the disruption of a pattern might be fraught with meaning, since a quilter could thereby declare that only God is perfect. However, establishing meaning based on just the name of the pattern used can be difficult, since the names changed and the popularity of the pattern could decline, as the history of the swastika pattern indicates. The story of the Underground Railroad quilt patterns illustrates that modern readers of quilts need to be careful that they are not projecting their own romantic meanings onto the artifacts made by nineteenth century women. Visual rhetoric, such as Jerving's "Thirteen Ways" can provide terms with which to interrogate a quilt's design, but may ultimately raise more questions than it answers. We can make a more precise interpretation of quilts that contain words or that are still connected with their stories. Those quilts will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 3 Quilt Works: Rhetorical Tasks of Quilts

If quilts are texts, as I argue, then they will be able to perform the rhetorical tasks of texts by communicating messages in abstract ways. In this chapter, I am attempting to sketch the broad outlines of a genre of quilts as distinct from such categories as speeches, concessions, and scientific reports (Jasinski 268) and to delineate subcategories of the quilt genre, providing specific examples of quilt texts that might fit into these subcategories. In addition, I describe and interrogate the “family resemblances” (Wittgenstein referenced in Jasinski 269) between quilts and verbal texts such as sermons and campaign speeches. Jasinski points out that these verbal texts are part of the genre of epideictic discourse, first described by Aristotle, which now functions “to generate, sustain, or modify a community’s existence” (211). Epideictic discourse also reinforces certain community values (Jasinski 210). The first group of quilts considered in this chapter have a family resemblance to the genre of epideictic discourse because they express positions of support for the country as well as for political causes as diverse as secession from the union and its preservation.

Some family resemblances will also be explored between quilts and the kinds of texts traditionally assigned to freshman composition students: analysis, synthesis, and persuasion. Educators will recognize these as higher order objectives delineated by Benjamin Bloom in his taxonomy. I will be using the term *analysis* in this educational context, as the dissection of a topic in order to understand it (Bloom 144). Bloom defines synthesis as “the putting together of elements and parts so as to form a whole” (162), and I will be using the term in the same sense. As Bloom notes, this process can result in a

creative recombination that is a whole new text (162). I argue that quilts are texts that can combine diverse elements such as genres, fabrics, and cultures to make that creative whole. Blair's narrow definition of a persuasive text (49) will be used to evaluate three quilts that include the persuasive reasons within the quilt.

An Iconic Quilt

The iconic quilt for this chapter, one that illustrates the characteristics of the merging of image and word and the meaning that can arise from this hybrid, is appropriately enough called the Alphabet quilt. Made circa 1890 in Arkansas by Elizabeth Grace Jones Dunn, it was brought by her great granddaughter to the Georgia Quilt project, one of several state-wide documentation projects. The surface embellishment of the Alphabet quilt consists of words—just words—in all capitals, marching from a narrow dark border across the quilt with scant attention to spelling, spacing or hyphenation. In the book based on the project, editor Anita Weinraub writes, “The family speaks of Dunn’s piety, suggesting that this quilt represents her thoughts on human frailty and divine goodness at the end of her life” (35). The words on the quilt include the phrase “when this you see, remember me” (which was common on friendship quilts, which will be discussed further in the next chapter), followed by the words of Psalm 117, verse 1 and a phrase from Psalm 55, verse 6 (wings like a dove). Included between the verses are these personal words (spelling and punctuation preserved, but spaces and lower case added): “O I shal soon be dying: time is pasing away but on my Lord reling I hail the Hapy day: oh that I had wings like a dove then would fly away ad be at rest after seventy eigt yers and six months E G Dunn Fini” (35). The last seven words and initials run up one the side of quilt as if they were added after the quilter ran out of room. The connection to the Bible is obvious; what may not be obvious is that

Dunn is writing in the tradition of hymns sung in the era, and well into the twentieth century, which took verses and added personal applications. Although not exactly the same, her words mirror the form of “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty,” written by Joachim Neander in 1680 and translated by Catherine Winkworth in 1863 (Neander). With her choice of appliquéd words, Dunn has thus made a rhetorical choice to give testimony to her faith using the medium of a quilt. Clearly, this quilter treated her quilt surface as a text to be composed; she did not hide her convictions in the names of the pattern or in the colors. She is engaging in the reinforcement of community values, as well as leaving a durable text proclaiming those values even after she has “flown away.”

The Historical Context

Most quilters did not go as far as limiting the surface embellishment of the quilt to just words, but instead added words to the patterns and color choices to make their messages clearer. Beginning in the nineteenth century, more women began adding political phrases, proverbs, or other sayings to the quilt surface. One favorite quote appears to have been an admonition by abolitionist Sarah Grimke: “May the point of our needles prick the slave owner’s conscience” (Mulholland 6). Thus, words were included to give explicit expression to the statements that the maker intended, whether these were religious, political, or patriotic and as such were part of epideictic discourse.

During this time, women did not vote and ordinarily did not make public speeches, although a few were beginning to write novels, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe with *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Hedges, Ferrero, and Silber point out women used their quilts throughout the nineteenth century to express “public narratives,” becoming in the process “active agents in important historical change” (11). Brackman comments, “Many abolitionists were women who felt so strongly about the antislavery cause, they dared

overturn traditional gender limitations on public speaking and publishing” (85). More than just speaking, they did needlework of all sorts, including quilts, to sell at anti-slavery fairs, beginning in 1834.

Hedges, et al., point out that women were encouraged to gather up literal fragments of time and materials as part of the art of housekeeping, as early as 1829. Sewing was part of the work that women did, and those writing instructions for feminine behavior thought sewing would encourage attitudes of selflessness and service to others (both the family and the poor), as well as proper decorum, which included modesty and quiet, retiring manners (26). Hedges contends that sewing was a means of “socializing females into a narrowly defined and arbitrarily gendered notion of ‘femininity’ ” (27). Ironically, the close ties that women formed enabled them to extend their perceived superior moral authority to the “major reform movements of the century-- abolition, temperance and suffrage” (28). In some cases, women used their quilts as texts and made rhetorical choices about the images and words they would include to make their points. In doing so, they composed quilts that expressed opinions for and against political positions and traditions, quilts that synthesized diverse cultures, and quilts that preached, analyzed, and persuaded.

Quilts as Epideictic Discourse

According to Jaskinski, communities are in need of epideictic discourse when they are threatened in some way (212). The threat of the War of 1812 gave rise to two epideictic ventures: a political cartoon and the Boo-Hoo Bedcover, which was made around 1813 by Mary Beebe Strong in Windsor, CT. The linen cover (which does not appear to have been quilted) is approximately 86 by 78 inches and is embroidered with figures of men and women, divided into five couples, perhaps depicting the five stages of

life, along with leaves, pinwheels, and birds. Near the center, multi-pointed star medallion is embroidered a fanciful half bull, half peacock creature being stung by a hornet. The beast has the word “Boo-o-o” coming out of its mouth. Fox explains that this creature was copied from an 1813 etching done by Amos Doolittle in the same state (*Wrapped in Glory* 40-41). With a head, torso, and front legs of a bull (a symbol of England) and the hind quarters and tail of a peacock, the creature represents the victory of the U.S.S. *Hornet* over the British ship *Peacock* on Feb. 24, 1813. In Doolittle’s cartoon, the hornet is proclaiming victory for “Free Trade and Sailor’s Rights.” The creature is crying “Boo-o-o-o-hoo.” Doolittle, as he states in a letter, considered his engraving as caricature that would inspire the country and relieve any fears that they had during the 1812 war with Britain (40). The quilter evidently added her heartfelt concurrence by embroidering the same creature on her bedcover, with the placement and orientation such that it would confront the person getting into the bed on the right-hand side. Both the cartoon and the bed cover reaffirm the young country’s independence and are thus epideictic discourse.

Quilters, most of whom were probably wealthy enough to have leisure time, also took the opportunity afforded by Baltimore Album quilts to reaffirm the optimism of the age. In the 1840-1850s, this kind of quilt with highly stylized, red and green wreaths and flowers in urns became popular (Hedges, et al. 34-35). These quilts sometimes included ships and trains peacefully coexisting with nature in the forms of flowers, wreaths, birds, and symmetrical trees. Hedges points out that the popular culture at the time did not foresee pollution or destruction of nature by increasing industrialism: “Baltimore album quilts might be seen as the textile expression of this popular optimism” (36). With their

incorporation of realistic images made possible by new fabric printing processes, “the album quilts were in their way a hymn to technological progress” (36). Some Baltimore album quilts focus solely on the decorative flowers and wreaths, so the inclusion of the more mechanical motifs would have been a conscious rhetorical choice made by the quilter to express hopefulness about the industrial changes that were transforming America from an agricultural to an industrial society. Quilters thus seem to be mirroring the popular cultural attitudes of their time in another example of epideictic discourse.

Statements of Political Support. In addition to patriotic and optimistic statements such as the Boo-Hoo quilt and the Baltimore Album quilts, quilters sometimes chose express their political opinions. One example is the Session Quilt made by Mrs. Philip Drury Cook of South Carolina in 1860. As historians Patsy and Myron Orlofsky point out, “Mrs. Cook’s zealously for the cause of South Carolina and her ardent belief in secession manifested itself in the patriotic motif of this quilt” (190). Ironically, the quilted eagle center motif includes the banner proclaiming “E Pluribus Unum,” which contrasts with the quilt’s name and the names of governors supporting states rights. The fact that Lady Liberty and the word “secession” stand on the top of the national symbol which holds the national motto may indicate that Mrs. Cook believed that the principle of liberty superseded the necessity of union and gave states the right to succeed.

From the other side of the political field and several states north comes the Van Fleet Flag Quilt (Hedges et al. 78). In 1866, Mrs. Alfred Van Fleet of Illinois made a 80-by-66-inch flag quilt. The red, white, and blue borders on three sides show that it was meant for a bed with the flag’s stripes running across the bed and the field of stars at the top right of the bed. The border pieces are arranged to look like a ribbon with white

appliquéd stars on the blue patches. What is unique about this quilt is that Mrs. Fleet embroidered the details of her husband's service on the third white stripe from the top of the quilt. The list of forty-seven battles ends in 1863, although he served longer than that. Records show that he was shot from his horse at Gettysburg but survived and returned to the war (78). Perhaps Mrs. Fleet lost some of her ardor for the Union cause after her husband's narrow escape; nevertheless, the quilt makes as a patriotic statement in support of her husband and the Union.

After the war, patriotic sentiments continued to be expressed in quilts as seen in the Union Star quilt (Hedges et al. 10). Elizabeth Holmes pieced and appliquéd the Union Star quilt (so named by the quilter in letters appliquéd in the lower right). That name and the quilt's date of 1869 possibly indicate the celebration of the readmission of six Southern states into the Union the previous year. (Tennessee was readmitted in 1866; the last four would be readmitted in 1870.) However, the forty white LeMoyne stars exceed the number of states in the Union (there were only 33 by 1876), so the stars may only have been decorative elements. The royal blue background is pieced from large blocks approximately 25 by 20 inches with a couple of smaller strips to even out the rectangle. White appliquéd leaves and red, white, and blue outer borders finish the quilt.

In addition to the name of Abraham Lincoln, the quilter included the names of Grant and Colfax (who were elected president and vice president in 1869); these names are appliquéd in big white letters in lower center, followed by the words "The Union Forever." Because of the landscape orientation, the words can best be read from the side of the bed, rather than from the foot, in a manner that prefigures a wall hanging. At the bottom of the quilt with the year the quilt was made and her name, the quilter has

appliquéd her age (Hedges et al. 68). Two hand prints, which might belong to the quilters, are appliquéd after her age. Hedges comments on this quilt: “In addition to memorializing Lincoln, in her quilt Elizabeth Holmes cast her ballot in the only way that she could.” (10). Although the location of its making is unknown, it was undoubtedly a Northern or Western state since Lincoln and Grant would be vilified by some Southerners for another 100 years. Thus, Holmes was making a highly political and, at the time, very divisive statement, although she may have intended something more conciliatory.

As these examples show, quilts can engage in epideictic discourse that reinforces certain community values. These quilts have a family resemblance to other epideictic texts because they express positions of support for the country as well as for both sides in the Civil War.

Statements against Conventions. A statement in support of a country, political party, or policy is just one rhetorical task chosen by quilters. Women also used their quilts as an opportunity to push against the restrictive customs of their day. Even this function can be epideictic because it seeks to reshape and question authority (Jasinski 212-213). For example, the Old Maid Quilt of 1871 represents a flouting of conventions and a statement for women’s liberation. Most young women of the 1800s worked on quilts that they would use when they married, completing the engagement and bridal quilts just before the big event. Susan Elizabeth Daggett flaunted this tradition by vowing, when she was only 18, that she would never to marry (Fox *Wrapped in Glory* 98). In 1859, she and her friends in Canadaigua, NY, formed a society for moral improvement and fun, setting a goal of the group presenting an album quilt to each member on her marriage. When Daggett was 30 and still holding to her vow not to

marry, she received an Old Maid Quilt; the central block, contributed by her church's pastor, shows a pen drawing of caricature of a spinster threading a needle. Orange leaves, standing for autumn, are appliquéd around the central block and in the first dark blue inner border. Surrounding that border are fifty white blocks with penned comments from her friends. One illustrates the era's attitude toward unmarried women: "An old Maid,/ Once a bright and shining light/ But now forever dark/ Her life burns out unknown, unsung/ She dies without a spark" (101). The over-all impression given by the words and images of the quilt is that spinsterhood is the death of a woman's dreams. However, Daggett may have gotten the last laugh. She served as assistant woman principal of Vassar College for two years as well as president of a Woman's Board of Missions for fourteen years. Her quilt reminds us that some women happily pursued nonconventional paths, in spite of teasing from their married contemporaries, and in the process reshaped community values.

The Suffragette Album quilt demonstrates a further protest against the status quo of women in the 1800s. Hedges et.al., place the date of the quilt shortly after the first United States National Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, NY, in 1848 (95). Fox dates this quilt as circa 1875 (*Wrapped in Glory* 108). This later dating may be confirmed by two blocks showing soldiers with gray uniforms: a soldier leaves a woman in white in one block and is reunited with her in another. A third block shows two gray-uniformed soldiers standing at attention beside a flag pole flying a white flag. These blocks would date the quilt after the Civil War and perhaps place of its making in the South, if the color is actually gray not simply a faded blue. Both the maker and the place are unknown, according to Hedges.

Two blocks earn the Suffragette Album quilt its name: one shows a woman driving her own horse and cart with the banner “women’s rights”; the other shows a woman addressing a mixed crowd of men and women with a similar banner. A third block, possibly related to the suffragette cause, shows a man mixing something at a table while watching a small girl play. Yet, those blocks don’t seem quite so radical because they are enclosed in a border of traditional appliquéd feathers and alternated with squares of appliquéd apples, cherries, strawberries, peaches, and flowers such as a dogwood and a tulip. Other appliquéd blocks show a young girl praying, an old man walking a dog, and an old woman and a young girl (possibly a grandchild). Taken all together, the quilt seems less of the radical statement that Hedges makes it than a story of a life in the last part of the nineteenth century.

In addition, Fox gives this interpretation of the Suffragette Album Quilt, “Although certain segments of the quilt quite clearly present the activities of a Platform Lady (one who spoke out in public forums) reordering her priorities, the balance of the illustrations seem more sentimental than strident” (*Wrapped in Glory* 111). Fox notes that the maker of this quilt was possibly Emma Civey (Mrs. Jacob S.) Stahl or Mrs. Stahl’s mother. It was given to Mrs. Stahl’s daughter, Mrs. Marion Gabriel, who was born in Elgin, IL, in 1882. Gabriel probably wrote the descriptive list of the scenes that was attached to the quilt. This description points out that the man doing dishes is “owlish and cross, represented by the owls” (embroidered at the corners of this block). Gabriel also comments that the deer under the oak represents freedom and that the ravens are bringing food to the grandmother who is giving cake to her grandchild (112). The ravens may be an allusion to the biblical story of Elijah in the wilderness, where these birds

brought food to him (I Kings 17), illustrating God's provision. Gabriel's commentary does not explain the symbolism of the child praying by the empty chair. Fox asks, has the mother died or simply gone to a suffragette meeting? Neither the maker nor her daughter/commentator resolves that question. The block can be interpreted either as a statement in support of women's rights or as a warning about excessive activity for that cause.

While the Suffragette Album quilt has been interpreted as pushing against the restrictions of society, other women rebelled against the act of quilting itself. Hedges et al. point out that Frances Willard, the longtime president of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, respected the members' "domestic loyalties" that led to numerous quilt-related activities to promote the cause while avoiding needlework as much as she could. (91). In a similar vein, Oregon suffragette and pioneer Amy Duniway claimed that quilts were "primary symbols of women's unpaid subjection" (Hedges et al. 94). However, Duniway did make a Grandmother's Flower Garden quilt composed of almost 1,000 tiny hexagons. Written on a corner of the quilt is the information that it was pieced in November, 1869, and quilted in November, 1900, by Duniway. It was donated to the first national Women Suffrage Bazaar to raise money for the movement (93). Hedges comments, "If by the end of the century, in the suffrage movement, quilts had become a problematic and ambivalent symbol of women's status, they had by then served a most important purpose"—that of easing women's transition into the twentieth century (11). Yet the quilt continued to be a medium of expression for women, some on the margins of society, well into the twentieth century, as the Depression quilts discussed next will illustrate.

Hedges et al. also declare that quilts became unnecessary as “the voice of disenfranchised women” (95). In making this declaration, she and other feminists miss the quilts from the Depression Era that clearly make arguments. One such group of quilts is called the TVA Quilts by Waldvogel and the Black Power quilts by some of their makers. The makers were the wives of African-American men employed as dam construction workers by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) in northern Alabama. The design was drawn by Ruth Clement Bond, wife of the Black personnel officer. Like many other women in the Depression, these quilters had returned to the aesthetic of “making little do something” (Waldvogel, 78). To represent the power that electricity was bringing into their lives, Bond drew a full length Black figure holding a lightening bolt in his upraised hand. As reported by Waldvogel, Bond describes the quilt project as raising understanding through participation in new cultural approaches; Bond stated that she “developed these nontraditional designs hoping to ‘break through ignorance.’ She did not specify whose ignorance or of what kind” (82). Rose Thomas was one of the quilters who adapted Bond’s design, appliquéing just the upraised Black hand holding the lightening bolt. Thomas explained the meaning of the block: “We were pushing up through obstacles—through objections. We were coming up out of the Depression, and we were going to live a better life through *our* efforts. The opposition wasn’t going to stop us” (81). These appliquéd images, especially when viewed in the context of the softer colors of most Depression quilts and the Jim Crow laws of the times, were “strong, almost shocking” (82). These women’s quilts and their hope for Black Power preceded the Civil Rights movement and a more popular use of that term by more than a quarter of a century. The image of a Black hand grasping the lightening bolt claims for this

disadvantaged community both the benefits of technology brought to their rural area by TVA and a corresponding, but long-delayed, political clout. Even though the Old Maid's quilt, the Suffragette Album quilt and the Black Power quilts push against the community values of their time and place, they resemble the verbal texts of epideictic discourse because they question authority and perhaps had the effect of reshaping those community values.

Quilts Illustrating Synthesis

Quilts that demonstrate a synthesis perform a different rhetorical task: bringing together diverse elements such as fabric and cultures. Alice Walker in *The Color Purple* suggests that a quilt could express a synthesis in a manner similar to written rhetoric. Showalter notes, "For Walker, the pieced quilt is an emblem of a universalist, interracial, and intertextual tradition" (20). These syntheses are most clearly shown through the story of Celie's sister, Nettie, who is serving as a missionary in Africa. In a letter, Nettie recounts how she tried to prove to her mentor Corrine that she and Corrine's husband have not been lovers but that their adopted children resemble Nettie because they are her niece and nephew.

Then I remember her [Corrine's] quilts. The Olinka men make beautiful quilts which are full of animals and birds and people. And as soon as Corrine saw them, she began to make a quilt that alternated one square of appliquéd figures with one nine-patch block, using the clothes the children had outgrown, and some of her old dresses. (Walker *The Color Purple* 192-3)

It is only when Corrine traces the patterns with her finger that she remembers buying the cloth back in the United States, meeting Celie, and realizing that she is the birth mother of her adopted daughter Olivia.

Thus, Corrine has made use of two diverse traditions to hold this painful memory. The nine-patch block is a traditional American pattern that is often used in a girl's first quilt and it also served Walker in her writing process. Walker pointed out that she could not have written the novel without quilting. She notes that she quilted when her characters were not talking to her but off doing something else (Freeman 152). This synthesis by Corrine of American and African quilting traditions illustrates one of the major themes of Walker's ground breaking novel. Walker also brings together male and female roles. Although quilting in America has traditionally been a female activity (Mulholland 57), the Olinka men quilt, as noted above. In the novel, when Celie returns from living with Shug, Alfred reveals that he liked sewing with his mom, until everyone laughed at him. Under Celie's influence, he again picks up a needle and begins sewing (Walker *The Color Purple* 278, *The Same River Twice* 129). The happy ending of *The Color Purple* is in part due to this synthesis of the male/ female roles and of the African and American traditions such as face tattooing, as Nettie returns home with Celie's children and her Olinka daughter-in-law. Thus, synthesis is one possible rhetorical move made by quilters.

In addition to Corrine's fictional synthesis of African and American fabrics, the synthesis of materials can be seen in quilts that are metaphorically called mother-daughter quilts, not because they are made by two relatives but because they incorporate the fabric from two different eras. This sort of synthesis happened in the 1920s when quilters split the traditional Nine Patch pattern in order to use the dark fabrics left over from the Victorian era with the newer pastels produced after the second World War (Roy "Splitting the Nine Patch" 12-14).

The synthesis of genres can also be illustrated in quilts. Synthesis of quilting and journal keeping was practiced in a Road to California quilt (Hedges et al. 56) made by members of the Hezlep and Shuey families, as they traveled from Illinois to California during 1858-1859. There is a family resemblance already, as Hedges et al. note. The quilt blocks include the dates and the places of their piecing, along with notes such as “Piec (e)s cut in winter of 1858,” “left Illinois for California—April 15th 1859,” “Crossed the Plains,” “Arrived in Columbia, California on October 28, 1859,” “Seven months on the road” and an enthusiastic “Ho for California!” (Hedges et al. 56). Such a synthesis was hinted at in the use of pattern block names to commemorate historical events in chapter 2. The embodiment of memory in quilts will be discussed in more depth in chapter 4. What is clear from this quilt is that women sometimes made the rhetorical choice to use fabric as a text to record events that might have in other circumstances been recorded on paper, thus bringing together the function of one genre into the materiality of another.

Harriet Powers’ Creation and Bible Quilts. Alice Walker also points the way to quilts that offer a concrete example of cultural synthesis: the Creation Quilt, now in Boston Museum of Art, and the Bible Quilt, now in the Smithsonian, both by Harriet Powers, of Madison and Clarke County, GA. As Alice Walker commented in 1986, “Though it follows no known pattern of quilt-making, and though it is made of bits and pieces of worthless rags, it is obviously the work of a person of powerful imagination and deep spiritual feeling” (quoted in Holmes 178). It is possible that Walker had these quilts in mind when she described Corine’s Quilt which was discussed previously.

The Harriet Powers quilts serve as an excellent example of synthesis on several levels, as well as being mentioned in almost every book on quilting history. In commenting on “this unique icon of Americana,” Freeman acknowledges that the Bible quilt crosses cultural barriers with its visual depictions of people and events: “Often when people see the Harriett Powers’ Bible quilt, even if they’re neither versed in the Bible nor know African-American history, they still respond intuitively to her images and recognize that her quilt possesses incredible integrity and meaning. It is also powerful in its cross-cultural use of imagery with echoes of African culture“ (103) . He does not specify what echoes he finds there although other scholars have commented on the similarity of her figures to those found on the banners made by the Fon people in Benin, also known as Dahomey (John Michael Vlach summarized in Hicks 112; Cuesta Benberry 43). Power’s quilts are the only two nineteenth century ones documented as having African roots, according to Hedges. “In their narrative concept, format and technique, they clearly hark back to the traditional appliquéd tapestries of Dahomey in western Africa” (Hedges et al. 46-47). Thus, Powers’ quilts illustrate synthesis of cultures, although they are far more possibly even an intentional sermon, as will be discussed below.

Some have questioned whether there is indeed an African connection. Berlo claims that most quilt scholars think that Powers’ quilts have more in common with American quilts of that era “than with supposedly ancestral African traditions greatly removed in time and space, such as appliquéd flags made by the Fon people of West Africa” (13). Berlo also attributes the visual characteristics of these quilts to “a shared visual culture” spanning a wide variety of materials in the nineteenth century (13). Even

if the African antecedents cannot be proved, there remains a juxtaposition of African and American animals, which is extraordinary given her likely education.

Powers' story is illustrative of the difficulties of being an African-American woman in the nineteenth century. Born a slave in 1837, she was unable to live with her husband until after the Civil War. They managed to prosper in the postwar Reconstruction era and bought four acres to farm. The Bible Quilt was seen by Jennie Smith, a white artist and art teacher in Athens, GA, at the Northeast Georgia Fair in 1886, who offered to buy it, but Powers did not sell it until a family financial crisis forced her to do so in 1890 or 1891. Smith could pay only \$5 for it and in 1895 had it displayed at the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition. After the wives of the faculty at Atlanta University, a leading African-American institution, saw the quilt, they commissioned Powers to make another one as a gift for a white trustee, Rev. Dr. Charles Cuthbert Hall. This larger quilt is sometimes called the Pictorial Quilt or the Creation of the Animals Quilt and is now in the Boston Museum of Fine Art. New research by African-American quilter and author Kyra E. Hicks shows that this quilt hung on the wall of Synton House, the Hall family home, for nearly 60 years before being purchased and donated to the Boston museum (80).

The Bible Quilt has eleven blocks of varying sizes and is sashed with a light brown fabric that may have faded from red. It shows five scenes from the New Testament and five from the Old Testament, with one that could be from either testament: Satan surrounded by six stars and holding a seventh. While Powers identifies only the hooded black figure as Satan, she may have been referring to Revelation 3 where the seven churches, to whom the book is addressed, are depicted as having stars; the number seven

also frequently used in Revelations, generally in connection with the coming wrath prophesized there. Thus, with this square Powers seems to be emphasizing this biblical doctrine of divine judgment.

The Creation Quilt was made circa 1898; it is 105 x 69 inches and oriented as a landscape which would indicate it was designed to hang on a wall, as indeed Hicks discovered. It has fifteen blocks in three rows of five blocks each. Each block is approximately 20 by 32 inches, with a one-inch sashing of white dotted brown material with red cornerstones. The two blocks at the right are sashed with a wider striped material that seems similar to ticking and shows stains, indicating that the quilter may have run out of the sashing material and had to bring in another fabric as she was setting the blocks together. There are four blocks showing meteorological events considered signs from God, one showing evil people in Virginia and Betts the hog, three showing the creation of animals, five other Old Testament stories, and two New Testament stories.

Both quilts show her skillful interweaving of these diverse events as if they are part of a larger story of God's divine provision. Many of the animals that are depicted are from Africa. In the earlier Bible quilt, the camel, elephant, leviathan (probably a whale), and ostrich appear with Adam and Eve and the footed snake in the Garden of Eden. Sheep surround Cain as he kills his brother; African animals attend Cain as he searches for a wife. The only non-biblical image in this earlier quilt is a star at the feet of Judas, who is surrounded by his thirty pieces of silver; Powers' comments to Smith indicate that this is a star that appeared in 1886 for the first time in 300 years. (*Fox Wrapped in Glory* 139). This event may have happened while Powers was working on her quilt.

Near the center of the later Creation quilt is block with only African animals – stylized elephants, giraffes (of the same dotted fabric as the sashing) and lions. Powers’ comments on this block (Fox 131) indicate that this is a continuation of the depiction of the creation with two of every animal: camels, elephants, “gheraffs,” and lions. The first block of creation also shows birds, including crows, possibly peacocks, and doves. Between the two creation blocks in the exact center (a place of greatest impact according to Jerving) is a block with red shooting stars and a family of four throwing up their hands in horror. This block is based on a meteor shower of 1833, four years before Powers was born (Holmes 178). Powers’ comment is, “The falling of the stars on Nov. 13, 1833. The people were frighten [sic] and thought the end of time had come. God’s hand staid the stars. The varmints rushed out of their beds” (Fox 141). A literal appliqué of a hand—apparently God’s merciful hand—also appears in block depicting Adam and Eve’s temptation and in the block depicting “the red light night of 1846,” which Powers would have experienced as a child of nine.

The block immediately to the right of the creation of the African animals (the last in this row) shows the angels blowing trumpets and emptying the seven vials of wrath (Fox 141). This picture of a future event foretold in Revelation blended in quilt with an event in Genesis and a one in the nineteenth century show that Powers was synthesizing time as well as cultures, as indicated with the African animals and American events.

It is from fiction that we can get an imaginative account of how such a quilt may have been used in life. In an excerpt from *Black April* (originally published in 1927), Julia Peterkin describes a day in the life of a plantation—a day that includes a quilting bee organized by Big Sue. At the quilting, the elderly host, Maum Hannah, breaks up the

bickering between Big Sue and a man's wife over that man by bringing out her Bible quilt. The twenty squares of the quilt depict biblical stories ranging from Adam and Eve and the Serpent to David and Goliath to Jesus standing by the cross. As Maum Hannah tells the stories, they become real to her listeners: she ends her sermon with the invitation for listeners to pray and try to escape hell (Peterkin 168-169).

Thus, there exists the possibility that Powers intended her quilt to persuade her listeners to likewise fall on their knees and pray for forgiveness. Much like a sermon, her comment on the protection of God from the meteors indicates an application of Biblical principles to contemporary life. Also suggestive is her inclusion of Bob and Kate Bell of Virginia, two rich people who had taught nothing of God and whose entrance into hell is signaled by the chiming of a clock (Holmes 187); this allusion to a cautionary tale merits more research. The faith exhibited by her quilts was probably a factor in her son Alonzo's becoming a Baptist pastor. A newly discovered description by Lorene Diver, an Iowa quilter who saw the earlier Bible quilt at the 1895 Atlanta exhibition, notes: "her [Power's] idea was that so many tributes were paid to stars, leaves & blossoms by taking them for quilt patterns that she would 'preach the gospel' in patchwork—tell the story of the fall of Adam & Eve..." (Hicks 34). On the back of a professional photo that she commissioned, Diver refers to the quilt as "A Sermon in Patchwork." She also left a handwritten copy of a letter that Powers wrote to her after Diver tried to purchase the quilt, where Powers notes that she learned to read when she was 11 years old (and still a slave) and that she was reading the Bible more than ever (38). Census records found by Hicks confirm that Powers and her son Alonzo could read but that her husband could not (112, 157). Her unlettered family members may have been the first recipients of her

sermon. Thus, Powers' quilts were not only a synthesis but may also have been a persuasive sermon in a time when women were barred from the ministry. This interpretation of her quilt as a sermon brings it into the genre of epideictic discourse, as well.

It is worth noting that Power's Bible quilts were not the only ones that testified to the Christian Scriptures. One photo taken of the Bible quilt at the Atlanta Exhibition shows an appliquéd quilt of the Lord's Prayer in the background (Hicks 159). Quilt historian Cuesta Benberry also notes that another such quilt, made circa 1900, has been handed down in the African-American Drake family of Thomaston, GA (44). This quilt has only four blocks and includes symbols that may stand for Masonic orders. Eleanor C. Gibbs also wrote of a Bible quilt in 1922 in the *Atlantic Monthly*: the Black washerwoman considered her Bible quilt her best work and shared her difficulties in depicting Daniel in the lion's den and the three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace (Berry 45). Hicks describes this article as account as fictional (125).

There may also have existed such a tradition of making Bible quilts in the community of white quilters as evidenced by Alice MacGowan's short story, "Gospel Quilt," originally published in *Ladies World*, September, 1909. MacGowan tells of a quilt begun by a mountain woman to compensate for her marriage to a shiftless man. The figures were crudely appliquéd on a large piece of muslin, "with no feeling whatever for form, proportion or color," and made solely to excel somewhere and overawe others (148-149). Some later examples of biblically inspired quilts include Bertha "Birdie" A. Meckstroth's 1933 Easter Quilt, consisting of an appliquéd, lacey looking cross with a border of bats (Roy, "A Thoroughly Modern Quilter" 12) and Wanda Byrd's pictorial

Crucifixion Tree, c. 1984 (Rice 26). Further research to substantiate this epideictic tradition is also merited.

Quilts Expressing an Analysis

Quilts can also perform the rhetorical task of analysis, the division of a topic into its parts and explanation of the relationships between the parts. Two quilts that illustrate synthesis were made in the 1930s and are connected with the National Quilt Contest sponsored by Sears in 1933. With the theme of “Promoting the Tradition,” thirty winning quilts from local and regional contests were displayed in the Sears Building in Chicago. While there were quilts submitted with the Century of Progress theme, none won a regional contest. The winning quilts, on the other hand, were traditional pieced and appliquéd quilt designs (Waldvogel 40). Margaret Rogers Caden won the national contest and received the \$1,000 prize. A controversy later arose because Caden only designed the quilt and had the employees of her shop piece and quilt it. “Although Miss Caden paid the women their regular pay, they did not share in the \$1000 prize money” (Waldvogel 46)

One of the themed quilts that won the local Knoxville, TN, contest presents an analysis. Made by Samantha Allison Wise, it was eliminated in the Atlanta regional contest but still displayed in Chicago. Called the Century of Progress, the 71-by-92-inch quilt featured twelve pieced and appliquéd blocks set with white sashing and a white border. The blocks included a stagecoach pulled by a single horse, a 1920s airplane, the futuristic Sears building (in the center), a bus, a steam ship with three stacks, a blue star labeled “Arcturus” In the upper left hand block, Chicago appears as it looked in 1833 as a wooden fort with canoes beached near it. There is also a 1930s car and a rocket. Although the blocks are visually separated by the sashing, together they present a

historical picture of progress: from the stagecoach to the airplane, from the wooden fort to the Sears Building, from the steamship to the rocket and ultimately the stars. Wise's analysis seems to be that progress has taken place in the past, so therefore it will continue.

The second analysis quilt, the Road to Recovery, was motivated by the Wise's quilt. Mary Gasperick of Chicago was particularly inspired by the Arcturus star (Waldvogel and Salser). In 1939 she entered the Road to Recovery quilt in the New York World's Fair contest. Coming at the end of the Depression and the beginning of troubles in Europe, this contest did not attract as many entrants as the 1933 Sears contest had. The entries for this contest had to be an original design, reflecting the thoughts of the maker, rather than a traditional pattern, and based on the theme of the fair, which was "Better Living in the World of Tomorrow." The Road to Recovery quilt did not win a prize, but is now in the National Quilt Museum in Paducah, KY. A series of eighty quilts by Gasperick have been documented by the National Quilt Study Museum.

The Road to Recovery quilt shows two 1930s cars, one with a trailer, climbing a steep hill from the foot of the quilt towards the top, where the signature spire and round glass building, of the New York's World Fair (the Trylon and the Perisphere) are appliquéd. The Quilt Index documentation adds: "Quilted inscriptions bottom to top read: CHICAGO, 1929, 1930, 1931, 1932, 1933, 1934, 1935, 1936, 1937, 1938, culminating at the top with NEW YORK WORLD'S FAIR 1939. Road signs pointing the way read: 'Road to Recovery' and 'New York City.'" Gasperik wrote in her native Hungarian the following:

This dear old lady is trying to bear the trials of poverty inflicted upon her by the depression, and in passing along with the years, she must stop and rest to gather fresh courage to reach the “World of Tomorrow.” Heedless of the traffic, only one thought persists in her mind, to attain her goal. The autumn leaves represent the poverty of the depression as it touched humanity. The birds are singing songs of encouragement. Beyond those mountains lies Recovery, the New York World's Fair of 1939." (Translated by daughter Elsie Krueger, “The Road to Recovery: Full Record”)

Gasperick often said that the woman on the bench represented the quilter herself. As a counterpoint to the autumnal leaves, she also included a pair of robins, a traditional harbinger of spring and hope. At one point the road passes between two large calico rocks (the “mountains” of her description) and disappears before it curves back into view. While Gasperik’s depiction of the tired woman and the steep hill illustrates the difficulties of the Depression, the overall impression is one of hope. Her analysis seems to be that although it’s been an uphill climb and she is tired, the difficult days of the Depression are almost over. History, indeed, proved her correct in this analysis.

The Quilts Demonstrating Persuasion

Three quilts, two stitched almost a century before the third, illustrate persuasion in a quilt. J. Anthony Blair, in *Defining Visual Rhetoric*, asks if a visual artifact, such as a cartoon, can be said to make an argument. He gives a very limited definition of “argument”:

To be an argument, what is communicated by one party to another or others, whatever the medium of communication might be, must constitute some factor

that can be considered a reason for accepting or believing some proposition, for taking some other attitude or for performing some action. (49)

He found that one cartoon did meet this standard, and only one was needed to prove the possibility. The three quilts—two advocating the abolition of slavery and the Prosperity Quilt—also meet that criteria by including within the quilt itself reasons for accepting the proposition they advocated.

Acting on Grimke's admonition to prick the hearts of slaveowners with needles, two quilts have survived that not only express antislavery views but also explicitly argue against this institution. Deborah Coates, Quaker and wife of a prominent abolitionist in Lancaster County, PA, sewed a printed triangle patch into her quilt that shows a printed figure of a slave in chains, kneeling on one knee with his hands clasped in a praying gesture. The inscription reads, "Deliver me from the oppression of man." The sentiment was popular on items such as china, pen wipes, and needle cases. Hedges et al. label the quilt pattern used by Coates as unknown, but it is named "Flying Birds" by Jeff Brumbeau in *The Quiltmaker's Gift*. Coates' argument seems to be that the slave is a human being who is being oppressed by his fellow man, and therefore, he should be freed, free as the flying birds. Coates did more than support her husband's position with her needle; their home was station #5 on one of the many routes of the Underground Railroad, according to research of a descendent (Hedges et al. 70-71). This quilt that makes an argument against slavery is thus part of the larger movement. Since it reaffirms community values (at least those of some Northern communities), this quilt can also be considered an example of epideictic discourse.

Also as part of the Abolitionist Movement, women held fairs at which they sold handmade items to benefit the cause. Hedges includes a photo of one block of an Evening Star cradle quilt, made in 1836, in Massachusetts. This quilt is currently in the collection of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, Boston, MA. It shows a white background with star points of red with white dots. The center block contains a poem appealing to a mother's heart (Hedges et al. 72). Fox in *Small Endearments*, quoting the account of a fair in the *Liberator*, published in Jan 2, 1837 by William Lloyd Garrison, also describes a cradle quilt made of patchwork stars with this poem in the central star:

Mother! When around your child
You clasp your arms in love,
And when with grateful joy you raise
Your eyes to God above –
Think of the Negro-mother
When *her* child is torn away—
Sold for a little slave, oh, then,
For *that* poor mother pray. (105)

Brackman identifies Lydia Marie Child as its quilter and references another “North Star bed cover” described *The Liberator* in 1846 (85), raising the possibility that two such quilts may survive.

This quilt's main appeal is one of pathos, arguing that motherhood transcends race and because of the common human tie of motherhood, women should support the abolition of slavery. Together with Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and

other heart-wrenching accounts of the inhumanity of slavery, this quilt is one of a community of voices raised against the institution.

A hundred years later, one of the 100 best quilts of the twentieth century makes a vivid statement about the Great Depression and reasons for hope. Fannie B. Shaw's Prosperity Quilt contains thirty appliquéd squares; all but four show people of various occupations looking around a brick corner. What they see is not revealed; all the viewer sees is a blank wall of more bricks. Two additional squares show one animal each—a donkey and an elephant, representing the national political parties—looking around the same corner. These blocks associate both hopefulness and the bleakness with the Depression.

Shaw's quilt was a response to President Herbert Hoover's proposition that "Prosperity is just around the corner." Comments from a 1988 interview with Shaw are posted on the website of the Dallas Museum of Art, which houses the quilt:

My inspiration came from Herbert Hoover. Every time you picked up the paper or heard the radio he would talk about good times around the corner. He would make it sound so good. I wondered if I could make a picture of what he said and what he meant. I went to bed one night and couldn't get it off my mind. (The Prosperity Quilt Exhibit Notes)

Thus, the accompanying documentation confirms that Shaw intended the quilt as a political statement, arguing for a certain interpretation of Hoover's remarks.

Shaw's description of the quilt includes this observation: "All these people from all walks of life are peeping around the corner for better times" (qtd. in Avery 36). The Dallas Museum of Art exhibit notes describe the mood of the quilt as one of "deliberate

optimism.” With twenty eight of the blocks showing that dead-end brick corner, a basis for optimism is difficult to find. The remaining two blocks give what appear to be Shaw’s reasons. Near the center, the farmer, who may be her husband, is plowing a field towards either the rising or setting sun, with the words “The backbone of the nation goes on.” This square shows Shaw’s conviction that it is the farmer who keeps on plowing and feeding the nation who will enable the nation to survive and to thrive again.

The square in the lower right corner appears to show Shaw’s conviction that the government would ultimately give the aid needed to end the Depression. It shows Uncle Sam coming around the corner bearing a bag with the words “legal beer, farm relief, gold, aid.” At his feet are bags labeled with dollar signs. Under Uncle Sam’s feet, appears this: “I am here” (“Fannie B. Shaw”). The exhibit notes point out that federal aid did not come for another ten years. As with Blair’s cartoon, it is the combination of images and words that allow this quilt to argue that better times will come and to give the reasons: the continuing hard work of farmers and financial aid from the federal government.

Summary

As these quilts illustrate, women created a tradition of using quilts as their texts to express a variety of rhetorical choices, forming a genre of quilts. Resembling the genre of epideictic discourse, quilts convey patriotism and optimism, support secession, support the union, “vote” for a president, struggle against confining traditions, record their journey, and preach a sermon. Resembling Bloom’s higher order objectives, quilts also convey messages in the subcategories of synthesis, analysis, and persuasion. The examples in this chapter synthesize fabric and cultures, analyze the economic trends, oppose slavery, and argue that hard work and government help would end the

Depression. Thus, women through the years have made the words and images of the quilt into a text that performs a variety of rhetorical tasks. The deepest embodiment of women's rhetoric can be seen in memory quilts, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4 Embodiment: How the Act of Quilting Makes Meaning

Sometimes the significance of a quilt is realized through its making. For example, I made my brother a quilt even though he was mentally challenged and unable to appreciate it as much as my sisters would, for whom I also made quilts, using blocks pieced by our late mother. My action communicates that my brother is as valuable a person as my non-challenged sisters are. However, this proposition would not have been clear from just viewing the cheerful yellow and white Nine-Patch quilt, and indeed the meaning was not even clear to me at first. However, a label (it was originally unlabeled as many quilts are) might have illuminated this point. The quilt was draped over his coffin when he died in 2005 and returned to me.² In this case, the act of quilting, the narrative, and the associated memories give the quilt its meaning. As such it exemplifies of the kinds of quilts that will be analyzed in this chapter.

Embodiment, Theories, and Memory

The reading of quilts began in chapter 2 by considering the surface of plain, unlettered quilts which had been separated from their stories. Chapter 3 read quilts whose purpose has been inscribed by their makers, categorizing the types of messages that those quilts delivered. This chapter looks at the embodiment of memory in the process of quilting. The term *embodiment*, a central one for this chapter, is frequently used by feminists. (See for example the writing of Kristie S. Fleckenstein.) While many uses of the term seem to be synonymous with *incarnation* or *quintessence*, some feminists go further and relate the term to a philosophical perspective that directly connects self and

² This practice of foregrounding quilts was also a part of the funeral of the mother of my aunt by marriage; the rhetorical meaning of this practice that merits further research.

body in a relationship that is a site for much study. According to Kathleen Lennon, feminists use the term to frame the ongoing debate about how the body, especially one that is different in gender or race, affects the making of meaning in social and political thought. They also draw on poststructuralist and psychoanalytic frameworks to consider how the body relates to the mind within its environment. However, I am using the term *embodiment* in the sense that Burke uses it: “A representation of artistic purpose” (89), which manifests itself in the material world as a quilt. The quilts in this chapter can be described as instances of embodiment. Thus, the term in this paper means that a quilt, made by a woman’s hands, is uniquely an extension of her body, mind and spirit and that its making constitutes a unique site for meaning.

Some theorists put the process first when considering the meaning of a text. For example, Maureen Daly Goggin in “Visual Rhetoric in Pens of Steel and Inks of Silk: Challenging the Great Visual/Verbal Divide” suggests that theorists should begin with the means of production as a meaning-making act, rather than with the artifact itself (106). She also notes the importance of being a practitioner in the reading of quilts: “learning what semiotic resources are available (domain knowledge) and how to use them (procedural knowledge) is part and parcel of knowing how to read and write a *textile*” (emphasis in the original, 91). It is through such knowledge that the quilt maker is able to embody herself, her memories, and her intentions within the quilt. Choosing an emphatic order from least to greatest, I am concluding with process because it seems to be the site of the deepest meaning invested in quilts by their makers.

The argument may be made that all quilts embody the makers. This universal embodiment of meaning in a quilt depends upon a reality of quilting: the quilter will, at

some time during the process of piecing the top and quilting together the layers, prick her finger and bleed on the quilt, especially if it is hand quilted. The time-honored remedy is for the quilter herself to use her own saliva to rub out the stain—water or another person’s saliva will not work, according to the folklore. Thus, the maker literally leaves a part of herself in the material of the quilt.

The embodiment is also enacted in the emotion that may be attached to the quilt by both its maker and its recipient. Nancilu Burdick understands her grandmother’s quilts in this sense when she describes some of the more than one hundred that her grandmother made and gave away. Comments Burdick: “Her way of responding to any of her family’s troubles or illnesses was to do what she could to help and to make tangible her love in the gift of a quilt” (146). When Burdick was ill with tuberculosis, she was the recipient of one of these quilts, a woolen quilt with crazy blocks of scraps alternating with blocks of appliquéd birds. It not only comforted her during her recovery, but she allowed her own children to use it when they were ill or “simply needed something warm and soft and made by loving hands to give them a feeling of comfort and security” (Burdick 146). Quilts like this also provided a link between generations. The making of a quilt, Burdick writes, “gave meaning and purpose to their [quilters’] lives. All one has to do today to sense that link and that meaning is to touch and look ever so closely at an old handmade quilt” (166). This connection, embodying as it does absent family member(s), explains why quilts have been preserved and are still being made even after the necessity of making and using them has passed.

Another characteristic that distinguishes the quilts discussed in this chapter is the narrative quality of the memories encoded in their making (Bal, summarizing Marita

Struken xvi) and finally the embodiment of that narrative in bits of fabric stitched together. While several of the quilts in previous chapters might serve as a medium of memory to make sense of the past (as described by Bal, x), the quilts in this chapter seem to have been explicitly designed to contain memories, and indeed to the critical reader, they continue to serve as “site-specific acts of memory” transmitting a “second generation” memory (Bal xiv, xii) long after the quilter has passed from the scene.

These explicitly designed quilts can be categorized as friendship quilts, which are those made or signed by friends, often for those moving west; as quilts made to record personal history; and as memorial quilts of several varieties. These memorial quilts were sometimes made by the quilter herself with a plea that she be remembered and may be her “masterpiece” quilt. They were sometimes made to encode the maker’s memories of the deceased or even made of the deceased person’s clothing as a way of keeping that person’s memory close. The memorial quilt embodied the essence of the absent person and called to mind his or her life, or even, in the case of the Marie Hanks quilt to be described in this chapter, the life that might have been.

Friendship Quilts

In their history of quilting in America, Patsy and Myron Orlofsky list several types of quilts distinguished by the occasion of their making: these include Album Quilts, which they further subdivide into those made for presentation, friendship, gifts for brides, and display of collected autographs (233). Such album quilts have a long history. Federico tells of an album quilt (quoting from an 1857 *Godey’s Lady’s Book and Magazine* article), which was even then more than 60 years old. The quilt thus dated from the 1790s. It had belonged to the mother of an older woman in Charleston, SC, and contained 100 squares, each designed and signed by a different maker. This quilt was an

early example since most friendship quilts were made between 1840 and 1850 (25).

Although it was a form that could have been chosen earlier—and perhaps the fragility of fabric limits our knowledge of those earliest quilts—the heyday of the friendship quilt coincides with the great migrations west.

Lacking telephones, computers, or even reliable mail service, pioneers who moved west had one sure way to take the memories of their loved ones with them: friendship quilts lovingly pieced and signed. Hedges et. al give this potent description:

In carrying quilts, and especially friendship ones, on the overland trails, women could, in a sense, bring their loved ones with them. The staggering number of such quilts made during the height of the migrations to places like Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Minnesota, Wisconsin, the Plains states, Oregon and California in the 1840's and 1850's, and the care with which so many of them have been handed down, speak of their deeply felt value. They helped pioneers transcend the anguish and heal the pain of lifelong separations. (52)

Hedges also points to “the need for beauty and for color” as one means of “psychic survival” in a barren and isolated land, fueling the dependence on quilts for decorating as well as warmth. Turkey red was one of the most popular colors during this time (57).

Lipsett describes how a friendship quilt was different from everyday quilts that were made for warmth and worn out: “It had names on it, names of her loved ones, some of them no longer living, and it held memories. That made it special. It was her personal treasure, and she stored it in her old hope chest or some other special place” (27). These friendship quilts provided women with an embodiment of the familial and social network that they were leaving behind.

In the short story “My Grandmother’s Quilt,” Paulette Jiles provides an imaginative look at how quilts served as links to those left behind. Set in Missouri in the 1880s, the story traces the childhood of two girls who go to live with their grandmother and then with other relatives after their mother dies of brain fever. In one scene, the girls’ grandmother and two aunts look at old quilts brought from Virginia thirty years before and remember all the relatives whose clothes are represented there. The quilts become their only heritage when they are shuffled from relative to relative because quilts do not break and they do not slip into cracks (53). When she is still very young, one of the girls, Lula Belle, begins collecting scraps for a quilt and the stories that go along with the fabric (Jiles 36). At the end of the story when she is getting married, Lula Belle realizes that the quilt will take her many years to make and that she will tell the stories of pieces of fabric and the people they represent many times to her children. Her embroidering and expanding the stories will be part of their charm.

The following specific quilts illustrate the range of uses to which the friendship quilts were put. A quilt might also be made to welcome newcomers, which seems to be the case with a New Jersey signature quilt with the inscription “Presented to Mr. and Mrs. Rev. Wm J. Nice, Dec. 1st, 1852.” Records confirm that the names inscribed on the blocks of this Floral Album quilt are members of the Upper Freehold Baptist Church and that Rev. Nice became the pastor there in 1852 (Ducey and Crews 9). This tangible form of welcome is another way that women used quilts to give express their regard. Also, friendship quilts were sometimes made by the young women of the neighborhood for an eligible bachelor in hopes that one of them might be the lucky one to marry him and sleep under it. Such a quilt was made by the ladies near Knoxville, TN, in 1884 for James Peter

French, who was a craftsman and farmer, as well as being from a respected family. Perhaps the quilt also served as a hint to French, who was in his mid-thirties and still a bachelor. Within a few months he married one of the women involved in making the quilt (Irwin 164). Thus, we see young women seizing the opportunity afforded by the necessity of quilting and the moral imperative of wisely using time and materials (as explored in the previous chapter) to send a message of their availability and suitability for marriage.

These examples are representative of the large number of Friendship quilts that have been preserved. Lipsett explains the motivation of the quilter: “in one simple, unpretentious way, she created a medium that would outlive even many of her husband’s houses, barns, and fences: she signed her name in friendship onto cloth and, in her own way, cried out, ‘Remember me’ ” (30). As illustrated, friendship quilts embody family and friends in a variety of ways. They were taken along the trails west to represent home and the folks left behind, they were given in welcome and as a announcement meant to solicit marriage (in the nicest possible nineteenth century way, of course). The fabrics used in these quilts, the names inscribed on them, and the stories that went with both fabric and names thus embody the makers.

Quilts as Embodied History

When pioneers arrived at their destination, sometimes they made quilts that recorded their journey and arrival. Several of the quilts recorded in the California Quilt Project and published in *Quilts: California Bound* fit this description. Hedges also features photographs of one such history-recording quilt. Hannah Williams, later chronicling her and her husband’s 1853 trip on the Oregon Trail, stitched their tintype likenesses into the fabric of the tent that they had used with the embroidered note about

the dear “old tent.” Hedges points out, “Here, we are looking at textiles as text, ‘reading’ a nineteenth century textile for a deeper and more intimate understanding of what life was like for ordinary Americans. Hannah Williams has truly left us a ‘page’ of that history” (Hedges et. al 52). This sort of quilt was a means of preserving not only history but also pieces of the actual fabric used during the historic journey. Another example of the historic aspect of a quilt is a genealogy recorded on an unfinished square in the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Fold Art Collection (Orlofsky 216, plate 75 caption). The pieced Double Starburst has the name of Ebenezer Rollins and the dates of his birth, marriage, and move to another town written in ink in the center. The names of his children are written in ink on the points of the stars, with other family members inked in the corners. Although such genealogies were usually recorded in the family Bible, here the quilter chose to record the family tree on a quilt square.

Other historical quilts feature whole communities. More than one thousand names are embroidered on a signature quilt dated 1918-1919 and made in Pennsylvania. The names are arranged by groups on blocks so that they extend from the center like spokes of a wheel; the blocks containing these wheels form the only design of the quilt. This quilt includes names of soldiers who served in the World War I, with the names of the deceased marked by red stars. The reason for the making of this quilt is unclear, but many groups used this kind of quilt as a fundraiser, charging a nominal amount to put a person’s name on the quilt (Orlofsky 241). Another quilt made in Kansas in the early twentieth century uses a similar wagon wheel arrangement to memorialize the pastors and members of four churches (Benberry Figure 19). With forty blocks and a central medallion (also a “wagon wheel” of signatures), the quilt contains more than 400 names

embroidered in turkey red on a white background. These quilts have been preserved because of the names recorded on them; such preservation indicates the value that subsequent owners saw in the chronicling of the names of people who might otherwise remain unknown.

Signature quilts that were used for fundraising also served as a means of recording history. A signature quilt made circa 1895 by Margaret Culberson, mother of the first pastor of Park Street United Methodist Church in Atlanta has 810 names, including a mayor, a governor, judges, founders of Rich's department store, and a school principal (Morrill 228 photograph caption). The full-size bed quilt is made of twenty-seven rows by thirty rows of half square red and white triangles in 2.5-inch square blocks. The names were inscribed on the white sections. While some are famous like author Joel Chandler Harris, others like Old Man Bennett and Snowball Jones remain unknown. Some quilters set out to collect the signatures of famous people of their eras, sending them bits of fabric with the plea that they sign and return the fabric. For example, an 1863 Tumbling Blocks quilt by Adeline Harris Sears of Rhode Island has the signatures of 360 people, including President Abraham Lincoln (Orlofsky 167 photo caption). A Crazy Quilt made by Sallie Yost in Missouri between 1884 and 1893 includes the signatures of Robert Louis Stevenson, Kate Greenway, and President Ulysses S. Grant (166 photo caption). Grant sent a tie, while Robert Louis Stevenson cut off part of his bathrobe sash and sent it from Samoa (240). These quilts illustrate a different relationship between the famous and the general public than exists today.

Some friendships quilts have also served as rich resources for historians mapping social interactions. Such a quilt is The Emlen-Williams Quilt, made in 1851 for Sarah

Williams on her marriage to Samuel Emlen in Philadelphia, PA (Hunt 42). Hunt traces the effects of a theological controversy in the Quaker community by tracing the all legible names of the ninety-one people who signed the points of the LeMoyne star blocks of this quilt. While most of the names (starting in the important center of the quilt) are of family, two signatures name people on the opposite side of the schism (Hunt 50). Hunt comments, “Thus, the quilt preserved for Sarah the names and associations of her family, friends, schoolmates, neighbors, and church members who would have been closest to her throughout her teenage years” (48). The quilt is now in the collection of the Winterhur museum. A similar quilt made for Sarah’s cousin Margaret Williams for her 1855 marriage is in the collection of the Germantown Historical Society. With correlation to membership lists from church and women’s groups, both quilts provide a glimpse of social life through the names inscribed on them and the interaction that went on between the two groups divided by a theological debate.

A somewhat similar process is at work in a quilted pillow made by Mary Prince and pictured in Hedges et. al (79). Made in 1910, the center part of the pillow is a poem recalling the Civil War in Tennessee, when the maker was just twenty. It celebrates the homespun dresses made and worn by those who formerly wore imported silk while admitting the sad memories of the war:

For our hearts was weary
and restless.
And our life full of care,
The burden laid up on us
seemed greater than

we could bear (Hedges et al. 79).

The central block is surrounded by bits of homespun from Civil War era dresses, made and worn by Prince and her friends. This pillow illustrates the same embodiment of fabric and story that is found in the friendship quilts. Without this sort of heart-felt record, the privations and tragedies of the Civil War might have gone unrecorded in the written historical record that highlights armies, battles, and political leaders.

Quilts thus supplement and enlarge the written historical record. As Mara Witzling points out, “quilts are important historical documents that transmit information about women and their lives that might otherwise have been overlooked” (620). As we have seen, quilts recorded the journey west, family genealogies, communities uniting to raise money or support for their causes, relationships across community schisms, and the heart’s reaction to tragedy. These quilts incorporated names and often fabric connected to those people, and thus, they embody social relationships and emotional connections that provide a rich context for written historical records.

Memorial Quilts

The lives and deaths of ordinary folks seldom merit chapters in history books, which usually concentrate on the broad trends and national leaders. However, quilts usually concentrate on the specific: the maker, the departed relative, the absent family, the community. As Jody Fernald pointed out in her analysis of a Maine Friendship quilt, without that textile “the participants ... would have been long forgotten” (qtd. in Witzling 620). Quilts made to embody the memory of a single person serve a similar function. Such memorial quilts can be subdivided into those made by the quilter so that others will remember her and those made to remember the deceased, possibly by incorporating remnants of his or her clothing.

Masterpiece Quilts. Sometimes quilters made their own memorial quilts, following the human instinct to make something tangible to leave behind. Men might leave a business, a building or a book; women in the nineteenth century were more likely to leave a quilt (Hedges *Hearts and Hands* 50). Burdick defines her grandmother's legacy as making a work of art "both useful and beautiful" (emphasis in the original), extending the opportunity of living with beauty to all (168). Arnett confirms in his comments on the quilts of Gees Bend, "Quilts are always (even if unintentionally) self-portraits" (39). John Rice Irwin lists this instinct to leave a legacy as one of the reasons that women quilt: "One of the basic, innate human traits is the desire to be remembered—and quite naturally to be remembered in a fond and complimentary way.... Very often the only kind of permanent recognition a woman got was through a beautiful and expertly sewn quilt" (31). Miriam Shapiro adds that masterpiece quilts, "more often represent and 'act of pride' than an 'act of necessity' " (qtd in Berlo 21). Stitched somewhere on the masterpiece quilt might be this plea: "When this you see, remember me," a sentiment that was also common on tombstones. For example, this appeal of pathos was part of the message of the Alphabet Quilt described at the beginning of chapter 3. As another example, the Orlofskys feature a full page photo of a Variable Star quilt whose appliquéd heart-and-leaf border is broken by large embroidered letters announcing: "1843 Charlotte Smiths When this you see Remember me" (244). Irwin also records a Crazy Quilt made by his grandmother in the late 1890s that included, along with the embroidered words of the Lord's Prayer and the caption "God Bless Our Family," the request "Remember Me" (42). These quilts show that quilters, like the builders of monuments and buildings, wished to be remembered and left their pleas embodied in quilts.

The short story “The Bed Quilt” by Dorothy Canfield, originally published in 1927, gives an imaginative view of the making of a masterpiece quilt. An old maid, Aunt Mehetabel Elwell, lives with her brother’s family and is delegated the dirtiest, most boring chores. She is almost invisible with quilting as her one art. When she gets an idea for an original, almost impossibly complex quilt block and begins to stitch it, the family, the neighbors, and even strangers come to admire the work in progress. After it is finished, her brother insists she enter it in the county fair, where it wins first prize. When trying to describe her day-long vigil admiring her masterpiece hung at the fair, she thinks of the poetic language of hymns, but rejects those words as being too religious and not “nearly striking enough” (Canfield 265). This unlikely fictional heroine exemplifies the women, known and unknown, who turned to quilting to give their life meaning.

The making of a masterpiece quilt was not without its conflicts, as illustrated by an unfinished, handwritten short story by local color writer Ruth McEnery Stuart at the turn of the twentieth century. In this story, a woman talks to her quilt—a Crazy Quilt that has taken a year of her life—and reevaluates her feelings towards it. Jane Przybysz analyzes the story and suggests the quilter’s internal struggle is due to changing social trends: male censure of the Crazy Quilt because it represented an obsession and the feminist rejection of the Victorian aesthetic of ornamentation that applied to the female body as well as in home decoration. At first the speaker in the story calls the quilt her poem and a thing of “beauty and harmony” (Przybysz 11-12). Then, she questions her choices and calls the quilt “a jingling, rattling doggerel” which has kept her from more worthy cultural pursuits such as learning German or Italian (12). The woman in the story was reflecting the growing number of literate women who favored intellectual study over

education in sewing (Witzling 629). It is the act of quilting that has made the woman reevaluate her life and her quilting choices. Making quilts is acceptable only if they are practical and made to warm the body, the speaker of the story says. She warns against seeing a quilt as art: “If one need to make a quilt let her see to it that it be well-done, soft warm, pleasing to the eye...let her not deceive herself with so inadequate a medium, in attempting to express more than a good coverlet” (Przybysz 12). However, she cannot bring herself to part with her quilt because it belongs to her. The speaker says to her quilt, “Let me draw you over my shoulders, folding in and forgetting your crazy patches, and go to sleep” (12). In short, the woman chooses to acknowledge her embodiment in the quilt even if others reject its form as unworthy. As the introductory quilt in the second chapter shows, women are still choosing the Crazy Quilt form in spite of its denunciation by feminists around the turn of the twentieth century.

Mourning Quilts. As in the example that introduced this chapter, a quilt can embody memories of a deceased person solely because of the narrative attached to it. Another such a quilt was made by Susan Alston Smalls and preserved by her granddaughter Martha German on Pawley’s Island, S.C. (Freeman 184-186). Freeman’s photo of this quilt shows that it is a Housetop pattern (often called the Church Steps outside the African American community), which is a series of narrow strips pieced around a rectangle centering each block. The colors alternate generally on opposite sides, forming the steps or the slanting rooftop. Multicolored sashing connects the blocks in this quilt, which appear to be four across and five down. The edges are ragged and may indicate that another row was once attached there (Freeman 187). German recounts how she would go to a church with her grandmother and how her grandmother would talk

with the spirits of those who had passed on (Ibid. 186). The quilt thus becomes a tangible link for German, not only with her grandmother, but also with other ancestors.

As with the introductory quilt that I made for my brother, the process of making the mourning quilt can give it meaning. The quilt might not even be prominently displayed, doing its work quietly through the stitching. Such a quilt was one made in the late nineteenth century by a Nebraska mother when her baby daughter died. As Dorothy Boettner tells the story, her grandmother was so distraught by the death that she was unable to function. A neighbor, who had lost her own child, set the newly bereaved mother to piecing and embroidering a crazy quilt of velvet and silk. Boettner continues the story: “Gradually she got better.... Grandma got hold of her life again and finished the quilt and folded it up and put it away.” She never used it and displayed it only when asked (Jenkins and Seward, 49). The quilt had done its job, leading the mother to encode her memory of her daughter and to heal through the process.

This sense of embodied narrative informs the suggestion by Liz Rhoan that memory is a rhetorical end, and not merely as a means of invention, as suggested by Sharon Crowley. In fact, Rohan’s use of memory comes closer to the classical oratory practice in which speakers connected the architecture of a council chamber with the points they wished to make (Crowley 1). Instead of using columns and doors as a mnemonic device, quilters use scraps of fabric, some of which may be from the clothing of the deceased. As Crowley points out, classic rhetoric was being replaced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by a more rational, less audience-oriented way of composing (15). At the same time, quilters were composing textiles that emphasized memory in the classical manner, as this chapter illustrates.

In her study of a diary about an early twentieth-century quilt made to memorialize a mother, Rohan suggests that a nineteenth-century fear of forgetting led to the embodiment of memories in material objects such as quilts and diaries (369-370). She explores the record left by Janette Miller (1879-1969), detailing the memories connected with scraps of dresses used in a quilt made in honor of her deceased mother, Cora. Since the quilt was not archived along with Miller's diaries in the University of Michigan's Bentley Historical Collection (it may not have survived), conclusions about the process of memory-making rely totally on the written record. The quilt was apparently started by Cora during her lengthy illness and finished by Janette after Cora's death in 1902, using scraps from both of their dresses. During this era clothing was particularly a part of a women's identity, according to Rhoan: "They communicated via their clothes; clothes were central signifiers" (373). Whitzling also points to the close relationship of women and cloth (624). In her diary, Janette acknowledges this relationship when she writes, "By the pieces of her dresses you will remember her" (qtd. in Rhoan 372). Thus, this diarist illuminates an on-going practice of embodiment—including pieces of a deceased one's clothing into a memory quilt.

This practice was evidently widespread, in part because clothing was "often the only surviving possessions of deceased spouses, parents, siblings, or children, thus holding the power, or at least the memory, of departed ancestors and loved ones," as Arnett and others argue (60). For example, Missouri Pettway of Gees Bend, AL, made a memorial quilt out of the work clothes of her husband, Nathaniel, following his death in 1941. The bed-sized quilt has blocks and strips made of cotton, corduroy, and cotton sacking material. The narrative is given by Arlonzia, daughter of maker:

It was when Daddy died. I was about seventeen, eighteen. He stayed sick about eight months and passed on. Mama say, "I going to take his work clothes, shape them into a quilt to remember him, and cover up under it for love." She take his old pants legs and shirrtails, take all the clothes he had, just enough to make that quilt, and I helped her tare them up. Bottom of the pants is narrow, top is wide, and she had me to cutting the top part out and shape them in even strips (Arnett et al. 67).

A photograph of the quilt shows the stains and faded knees of the work clothes that embody Nathaniel's hard work as a farmer, labor that his mourning widow no doubt shared. Arlonzia's task to cut up the pants to shape something new is similar to moves in music and dance which "memorializes what has been lost" (McKay and Stewart 159). Arlonzia preserved the quilt after her mother's death. Such preservation is typical of the memorial quilts that are available to us: generations coming after the maker have valued the embodied memories encoded within this recycled fabric. In addition, Irwin recounts two quilts made in East Tennessee that also used clothing of the deceased. Since the custom was to dress the body in new clothing before burial, the mother of Martha Stooksbury (who died in 1885 at age 19 of typhoid fever) took her nicest dress and made a Feathered Star quilt. The daughter of Laura Sharp Stooksbury, a cousin of Martha's, also made a quilt from Laura's silk dress, following her death at age 42 while giving birth to her fourteenth child (Irwin 158-159). The practice of the diarist from Midwest is confirmed by mourning quilts from Tennessee and Alabama which embody the clothing of the deceased and thus the memories held by the survivors.

However, a mourning quilt need not include the deceased's clothing. For example, Elizabeth Roseberry Mitchell of Lewis County, KY, made what is known as the Kentucky Coffin Quilt in 1839 (Orlofsky 227). Most of the 79 ½ inch by 80 inch quilt is composed of LeMoyne Stars in shades of brown (which might have once been red but now are faded). The center block is a cemetery with an appliquéd fence, corner posts, and an ornate gate and embroidered vines. Four coffin shapes labeled with names from Mitchell's family rest in this block. A fenced walkway connects this center block to the outer border, which is also fenced. Sixteen coffin blocks line the border, each labeled with the name of a family member who had not yet died. Shadowy outlines on the cloth may show that those in the cemetery were also once appliquéd in the border and presumably transferred on their death. On the Kentucky Coffin quilt, Berlo writes "Although she made the quilt after the death of two of her sons, Mitchell clearly envisioned it as a family record—not only of herself, her husband and their eleven children, but their future families as well" (16). The tradition may have been continued by the maker's daughter and followed the tradition of mourning pictures that were embroidered and painted (Witzling note 34, 635). No one's name was added to the quilt after 1870, and it was passed down through the family for ninety years (Berlo note 74, 137). This description of a tombstone by L. Nicoletti also applies to memory quilts:

A tombstone may literally argue through inscription that the deceased is "beloved" or was a devoted child, spouse, or parent. Its form and placement, however, encapsulates additional arguments: that survivors respect and remember the deceased, that it is personally and/or culturally important to memorialize the dead, that others should take note of this loss. (64)

In this quilt, the depiction of the final resting place of deceased loved ones serves as the memorial, supplementing the marble and granite stones that traditionally serve that purpose.

A mourning quilt, like that recorded in Jeanette Miller's diary, may be started during the last illness of the deceased; it is then called a Death Watch quilt and may include the dying person's participation. The six sisters of the Lilly family in Baltimore County, MD, made such a quilt during the final illness of their brother Eli in 1847 (Orlofsky 230, 231 captions). The quilt is a traditional Baltimore Album quilt with 17 inch squares appliquéd and embroidered with single flowers, bouquets, vines, wreaths, potted flowers, a bowl of fruit, and a lyre. Eli himself signed the block with the lyre, which was (as noted in chapter 2) a symbol of mourning. In this case, the sisters not only used their time wisely (as dictated by the Victorian cult of the domestic culture—see Hedges et. al 26), they also preserved the signature of the deceased, which embodies his participation in this memorial quilt.

The embodiment of memory in a memorial quilt may be very subtle. The memory aspect of the Marie Hanks quilt, dated 1857, is more hidden but deliberate. This 78-½-inch by 67-inch quilt has six large urns with red cockscomb flowers appliquéd in two rows, with each row facing outward to be viewed from either side of the bed. Vines, sprouting from smaller urns and adorned with birds and berries, provide a border. The white background is quilted in vines and flowers and, almost hidden among them, the quilter's name in stitches. At the upper right hand corner is appliquéd in larger green letters "Marie C. Hanks. Charleston. Coles County Ill. 1857" (Fox *Wrapped in Glory* 88) Quilters seldom inscribed their quilts with their names twice—indeed most are not

inscribed at all. This double inscription led Fox to speculate that the appliquéd name referred to a deceased child, represented by a small figure of a girl in the lower right hand corner, interrupting the flow of the curving vine border (89).

The quilt bears many motifs of the needlework mourning samplers: the urns, the garden, the figure (Fox *Wrapped in Glory* 90). The figure of the girl shows great detail and care: her red dress is embroidered, her pantalets are embroidered to approximate eyelet fabric, her face is inked and embroidered and slightly padded to stand out. The child's hair is real human hair. The deceased's hair was often saved and worn in a locket, such as the one embroidered around the girl's neck (89-90). However, the reader of quilts must be careful not to put undue emphasis on the human hair. As John Campbell points out in his nineteenth-century how-to book, the weaving of human hair into jewelry and wigs was a lucrative business outside of the rituals of mourning (260-262). The classification of this quilt as mourning text cannot rest on that the inclusion of hair alone.

However, Fox points to other symbols within the quilt that attest to this classification. The bare feet and the red dress were symbols sometimes used in oil paintings of the era to symbolize a deceased child (Fox *Wrapped in Glory* 91). In addition in the quilt, the girl stands on an appliquéd circle similar to a hoop, which Fox speculates symbolizes eternity. Fox's research shows that Marie Hanks gave birth to a stillborn daughter in the year the quilt was completed, confirmed by the parents' obituaries and a handwritten family document. As Fox points out, the girl represented on this quilt is not that stillborn baby but possibly the child as she would have been if she had lived to three or four years of age. The urns, being filled with flowers instead of having a lid and representing the ashes of the deceased, speak of life (91-92). In addition, the interruption

of the vines appliquéd in the border may be significant. According to superstition, if a vine in either appliqué or a quilting motif was broken, the break foretold of a life cut short (Orlofsky 147). The appliqué figure of the girl breaks the pattern at the lower right hand corner and the flower pots on the right hand side of the quilt are not connected by a vine as are the ones on the left and bottom sides of the quilt. The name, which may be the child's is appliquéd at the upper right hand corner. The broken vine is an additional indication that something tragic happened while Hanks was making the quilt. Thus, Marie Hanks' quilt takes the memorial quilt beyond the ordinary parameters and crosses the boundary from history and memory into the imagination of what might have been.

Summary

The pathos is evident throughout the quilts examined in this chapter, as quilters struggled to express and deal with their separation, mortality, and grief through the process of making their quilts. These quilts are making meaning at what Witzling termed as "a more primal level" characterized by "an emotional timbre" that gave them value (623). The themes of mourning and separation are embodied in these textiles by the process of quilting, which includes the cutting and reassembling of fabric. Before the advent of modern rotary cutters and acrylic rulers enabled a precisely straight line, quilters would cut a small gash in the fabric and then rip it with a sound that can grate on the ears. This traditional process mirrors the tearing of family bonds due to separations and adds to the primal nature of quilt making. These quilts probably included the literal embodiment of the quilter when she pricked her finger and then blotted the blood with her own saliva. The quilts certainly embodied the memories and the narratives attached to the quilt by the makers, whether through her handiwork, the signatures, or the fabrics

associated with the deceased. Through quilts, memory became a rhetorical end in itself, a mnemonic means of enshrining absent or deceased loved ones and even a way of imagining what might have been.

My project began with a quote from Elsley declaring that quilts are texts. If a quilt is a text, it is a visual one, and the insights of visual rhetoric can be applied to it. In chapter two the theories, concepts, and terms of rhetoric, particularly Jerving's thirteen ways of looking at an artifact, were applied to quilts that have been separated from all or most of their particular history. In that chapter, I proposed a semiotics of quilts based on color, contrast, pattern and the disruption of pattern. If the meaning of a quilt is ambiguous, that vagueness does not indicate they are not texts but that they share the characteristics of images, one of which is capacity to be interpreted in multiple ways. While looking at surface of quilts provides possibilities for meaning, determining the precise meaning that their makers intended them to have requires appliquéd words or a story.

Extending the analysis of quilts beyond their surface, Chapter 3 "Quilt Works: Rhetorical Tasks of Quilts" proposed a genre of quilts based on these tasks, such as analysis, synthesis and persuasion. A family resemblance was discovered between quilts and genre of epideictic discourse. With their advocacy for patriotism, secession, preservation of the union, and reunification, these quilts served to reinforce the community values. These quilts also challenged these values, serving the epideictic purpose of redefining authority. The quilts in that chapter also served purposes similar to written texts such as sermons and scrapbooks.

The act of quilting and its resultant meaning was explored in this chapter with the discussion of quilts that in some way memorialize either the quilter, her relationships or her departed loved ones. The quilts in these examples became an embodied text, one that visually illustrated this embodiment in the Burke's sense of "a representation of artistic purpose." These interpretations of quilts are possible only because a quilt can indeed be a text: one that shares the ambiguity and techniques of other visual texts, one that performs tasks like written texts, and one that affords the quilter an opportunity to compose an embodied text.

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