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A Stitch in Crime: Quilt Detective Novels

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The author examined the surprisingly large number of detective novels that feature quilts or quilting. Although quilts and murder seem an unlikely match, there are remarkable similarities between quilts and detective novels; quilts work well as a focus for the genre. The theoretical points are illustrated with reference to detective novels in which quilts or quilters play a significant part. An annotated bibliography of nineteen quilt detective novels (and one play) is included.

Quilts and murder are like oil and water; surely they do not mix. Quilts, after all, represent everything that is comfortable and safe in a domestic setting while murder is the disruption of all that calm order. If we put those stereotypes aside, however, we find that much of the adult fiction featuring quilts, quilters, or quilting takes the form of mystery or detective novels.[1] A good place to start making such an assessment is Betty Reynolds's wonderful *Internet Quilt Fiction Bibliography*. Of the 63 books listed, 25 are detective or mystery novels, while 38 (which include short stories, plays and poetry), are not.[2] It seems, then, that almost half of the current quilt fiction available takes the form of detective novels.[3]

Before we get too carried away with what appears to be a unique pairing of detective novels and quilts, however, we need to realize how many detective novels focus on a particular interest. You like dogs? Try Susan Conant's *Gone to the Dogs* or *A New Leash on Death*.[4] Perhaps you prefer cats. Yes, there are sleuthing cats. Lilian Jackson Braun has written "The Cat Who" mysteries, including *The Cat*

Who Had 14 Tales and *The Cat Who Knew Shakespeare.*[5] Do you have an interest in twelfth-century England? Try the Brother Cadfael series by Peter Ellis. Closer to home, Tony Hillerman has written fourteen mysteries focused on Native American culture in the Southwest. If you enjoy cooking, you could try Diane Mott Davidson's *Catering to Nobody*, which the dust jacket describes as "a pretty tasty mystery . . . the recipes and loving descriptions of food are guaranteed to make your stomach growl."[6] Murder, it seems, mixes well with any hobby.

My aim, then, is not to show that mysteries about quilts are unique, because special interest mysteries are, in fact, common. Rather, I want to raise a few questions and attempt to answer them: what is the connection between quilts and murder, and why is the detective novel such a popular and successful genre for writing fiction about quilts? Although quilts and murder seem very different, there are some striking similarities that make the quilt detective novel such a popular form.

We need to begin by defining that term: "quilt detective novel." The most important characteristic is that quilts or quilters play a significant part in a murder mystery. In some cases, that means one particular quilt lies at the center of the solution to the crime as in Katherine Hall Page's *The Body in the Kelp*, Susan Glaspell's *A Jury of Her Peers*, Barbara Michaels's *Stitches in Time,* or Jill Paton Walsh's *A Piece of Justice.*[7] Often the main characters are quilters, as in Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* or Paula Gosling's *The Dead of Winter.*[8] Sometimes, the protagonist owns a quilt shop, as in Carolyn Banks's *Patchwork, a Novel of Suspense*, or Lizbie Brown's *Turkey Tracks.*[9] Or, the novel could be set in the context of a quilt show, as in Sara Hoskinson Frommer's *Buried in Quilts*, Jean Hagar's *Death on the Drunkard's Path*, or Aliske Webb's *Murder at the Quilt Show.*[10]

What makes a quilt such an adaptable feature of detective novels? For a start, a detective novel is constructed rather like a quilt. Both quilt and detective novel are composed of layers. In the case of a quilt, the top, batting, and backing fabrics constitute the layers; the whole sandwich held together with quilting stitches. The detective novel is also composed of layers, as literary critic Peter Huhn explained:

> The plot of the classical detective novel comprises two basically separate stories–the story of the *crime* (which consists of action) and the

> story of the *investigation* (which is concerned with knowledge). In their narrative presentation, however, the two stories are intertwined. The *first story* (the crime) happened in the past and is–insofar as it is hidden–absent from the present; the *second story* (the investigation) happens in the present and consists of uncovering the first story.[11]

The detective novel comes to a successful close when the story of the crime and the story of the detective's uncovering of it coincide. The detective, in a sense, quilts the layers together to make one seamless story. For example, in Earlene Fowler's *Irish Chain*, the amateur sleuth and heroine of the novel, Benni Harper, solves the crime by making connections between a present-day double murder in a nursing home, and events that occurred forty years previously.[12] It is only when Benni takes an interest in the history of the Japanese internment during the Second World War that she is able to quilt together the two narratives that lead her to solving the crime. The detective's job and the reader's pleasure lie in the gradual stitching of the two narratives into a single, cohesive story. The novel ends, and a quilt is completed, when the layers, either textual or textile, are layered perfectly on top of one another.

But what of the batting, that vital third layer that gives weight and substance to the two outer layers? The personal lives and relationships of the characters in the detective novel comprise this layer. We are as interested in the detective's love life, his or her daily struggles, and the details of his or her life as we are in the solution to a crime. Writers understand how attached the reader becomes to a particular detective, often writing a series of novels featuring the same central character, as for example, Earlene Fowler's Benni Harper. When we first meet her in *Fool's Puzzle*, Benni is a young rancher, recently widowed, adjusting painfully to a new way of life and managing an art gallery.[13] By the second book, she has solved one murder, embarked on another, and met the visiting chief of police, Gabriel Ortiz. Sparks fly as the two spar with each other, both frustrated by and attracted to each other. In the third novel, Benni and Gabriel are married, and solving crimes together.[14] The reader cares as much about Benni and her tumultuous romance with Gabriel as about whodunnit.

Perhaps the most extreme example of how deeply we care about the daily fabric of the characters' lives can be found in Margaret Atwood's novel, *Alias Grace*. Atwood fictionalizes the historical case

of Grace Marks, a young servant who was convicted of murdering her employer and his mistress in 1843. After spending many years in jail, Grace's conviction is revoked and she is released. This detective novel is unusual in that it is never clear whether Grace participated in the murder; and Atwood's novel, in which Grace tells her own story in painstaking detail, does not answer the question. Yet we care more about the daily texture of Grace's life than about her innocence or guilt, so that the resolution of the crime becomes almost irrelevant to the details of her life. Atwood's ability to evoke so vividly the consuming details of Grace's life make this a compelling novel. Usually, though, the reader moves towards the revelation of who-did-it; so a successful 467-page detective novel that never resolves the crime is a *tour de force* on the part of the writer. In the end, the skill and craft of the unseen hand of the writer or the quilter will determine the success of the particular text(ile).

The best fabricators, whether of quilts or detective fictions, work with the understanding that the reader or viewer comes with a set of very clear, if unstated, expectations. In a detective novel, we know there will be a murder, or two, within the first few chapters of the book. We expect to encounter several suspects, a lot of clues, some of which will be red herrings, and a gradual unfolding of events that will eventually reveal what actually happened, who committed the murder(s), and why. Just as there are specific rules about what constitutes a detective novel, most of us accept fairly clear rules about what makes a quilt. Most quilters know about using 100 percent cotton fabric, the virtue of tiny, regular quilting stitches, or the importance of balancing color and design. In its most traditional form, a quilt is as formulaic in structure and content as a detective novel. There is a pleasure in seeing a well-made, traditional quilt that is similar to the pleasure of reading a detective novel that fulfills all our expectations. As critic, Christine Anne Evans, said:

> Its [detective novel] wide appeal depends in large measure on its ease of access, and this easy access is premised primarily upon its reliance on familiar formal strategies. . . . They please because they show the reader what he or she already knows and wants to know again.[15]

That formula can be soothing and predictable, to the point that a friend of mine, an avid reader, describes detective novels as "Prozac in print."

Yet if a writer or quilter does no more than follow the rules, we end up with competent but uninspiring quilts, and rather dull detective novels. The pleasure lies not only in seeing the quilt or the novel done well, but also in seeing some variation on the pattern that tweaks traditional expectations, offering something new and different. Indeed, it is often the tension between keeping and breaking the rules that makes for an exciting quilt. For example, as a number of quilt historians have pointed out, many quilts made by rural Southerners, including African-Americans, went unrecognized as art until the last fifteen years because they broke the very rules I named above.[16] A single quilt might be made of a mixture of different textiles–polyesters, velvets, cottons, and silk–and the design may have an improvised look, as if the quilter started in one corner and worked inspirationally rather than mathematically. The quilt stitches, too, might take little account of size or tidiness. When we understand how the rules of quilting have limited our view of what makes an acceptable quilt, we can begin to recognize the brilliance of those rule-breaking quilts.

Quilts and detective novels, then, are simultaneously formulaic and flexible forms; on the one hand they conform to widely accepted conventions, while on the other, there is always room for creativity. That tension between keeping and breaking the rules, which makes both quilts and detective novels exciting, can be formulated as the distinction between what literary theorist Roland Barthes described as the "text of bliss" that disturbs our expectations, and "text of desire" which conforms to our expectations.[17] Most quilt detective novels can be categorized as texts of desire, living up to our usual expectations, but Atwood's novel, for example, acts as a text of bliss because by breaking the primary rule of the genre, that of resolving the crime, she invites us to rethink the predictable boundaries we had assumed.

The reader, then, begins a detective novel with the expectation of a murder and its resolution. But that murder represents a broader issue than that one particular crime. The murder often happens in a well-ordered, provincial world where such an event is both unexpected and shocking. The world to which we have been intro-

duced is ruptured by the murder, shaking up the entire community. The fragile fabric of social relations is torn by the crime, and the successful detective, in revealing the murderer, helps the community to stitch itself back together. The community members cannot re-establish normal relations until the murder has been solved because they no longer know who is telling the truth, and who they can trust. As readers, we find this process of rupture followed by synthesis, comforting. We like to think we live in civilized, safe communities, and yet the nightly news and our own experience tell us that this is not always so. As Evans said, "detective fiction represents the symbolic reaffirmation of the civilized space, where evil in the form of murder represents the external source of the threat to it."[18]

A good example of rupture and reaffirmation of the civilized space can be found in Katherine Hall Page's novels featuring Faith Fairchild, a minister's wife, who is sufficiently affluent to spend her summers on Sanpere Island off the coast of Maine. Faith is a professional caterer, but spends much of her time caring for her small son, Ben, and plays an active part in the local community. This comfortable and safe world is shattered in *The Body in the Kelp* when a couple of murders take place. The entire island is implicated in the unexpected violence. We cannot return to catering and child care until the murderer is revealed and removed. As John Cawelti said, the classic detective novel "affirmed the basic principle that crime was strictly a matter of individual motivations and thus reaffirmed the validity of the existing social order."[19]

Quilts, like fictional detectives, offer us the safety, order, and tranquility of the world as we would like to know it. Evans used the word "consolatory" to describe detective novels, while many people describe quilts with a similar word: "comforter."[20] As Carol Chadwick said of Agatha Christie's plots, they are soothing:

> because of the basic underlying tenet of all standard murder mysteries. The reader always knows the mystery is going to be solved and good will triumph over evil. Unlike the tumult of the sixties, things in the world of the mystery are always orderly. The reader knows that all the riddles put forth in the beginning of an Agatha Christie mystery will be solved without ambiguity. [21]

Although there are exceptions, quilts appeal to us in large part because they suggest an orderliness and safety in a basically unsafe and chaotic world. The work of the Boise Peace Quilters illustrates this idea. Protesting against nuclear war, this group of Boise housewives and mothers have spent the last fifteen years making quilts to commemorate peacemakers across the globe. The quilt, as a symbol of order and comfort, works well for them; it counteracts the fact that we live in the dangerous world of nuclear proliferation.[22]

As well as providing comfort, both detective novelists and quilters make patterns. A good detective is the person who, unlike everyone else in the novel, is able to look at a collection of apparently haphazard data, and put it together in a cohesive pattern that leads to a true reading of the events. Quilters, too, are clearly makers of patterns. Most of the traditional quilt pattern names are derived from the everyday experience of the women who lived through often trying times. Drunkard's Path, Log Cabin, or Rocky Road to California suggest stories of hard times that women translated into quilt patterns that made the experiences bearable. Even today, many quilters use quilt patterns as a way to deal with difficult situations, as we can see in the many quilts that respond to Desert Storm.[23]

In Jill Paton Walsh's *A Piece of Justice*, Imogen Quy, an avid quilter and nurse at St. Agatha's College in Cambridge, shares this same passion for discerning patterns. At the beginning of the book, Imogen is looking at a quilt design with her quilt group, trying to distinguish the blocks so she can figure out the pattern. In many ways that initial scene acts as a synecdoche for the rest of the book as Imogen becomes increasingly involved in figuring out a mystery, and of course a couple of murders, connected with a famous mathematician. Her ability to dissect and understand the quilt pattern stands her in good stead to do something very similar with the lives and events of the people around her. Indeed, Imogen's facility in discerning patterns makes her such a good detective that she, not the local police, solves the mystery and reveals the murderer.

Like the detective novel, a quilt is usually shaped by specific borders that encompass the design, within which the pattern, however sophisticated, is worked out. Usually, the detective investigates a murder within an enclosed society of a limited number of relationships because the crime must be solved within the parameters of the world as it is presented to the reader. In the case of Imogen

Quy, she is bound by the limits of the small academic world of a Cambridge University. In Lizbie Brown's *Turkey Tracks*, Elizabeth Blair, an American widow living in Bath, England, finds herself enmeshed in the complicated relationships connected with the local stately home, Wetherburn. Jean Hager sets her novel, *Death on the Drunkard's Path*, in a bed-and-breakfast inn that hosts participants in a local quilting convention. There are as many ingenious ways to draw the perimeters of a social world as there are ways to enclose a quilt. For example, in Carolyn Banks's *Patchwork, a Novel of Suspense*, the protagonist, Rachel, has started a new life for herself in Austin, Texas, so her world is defined by the very few people she knows there. Paula Gosling isolates her characters, in *The Dead of Winter*, by placing them near the Canadian border in winter, and then deluging the small community with several snow storms.

Perhaps the most significant parallel between quilts and detective novels is the stress both place on an attention to detail. Quilting, the very symbol of domestic life, requires careful, detailed, patient work, while most crimes in detective novels are solved through an accurate reading of domestic details, whether the detective is male or female. We are all familiar with Sherlock Holmes's legendry ability to solve a crime by paying close attention to the details: Was the victim left or right handed? Did the dog bark at night? Why is the miser repainting his house?

For an illustration of the importance of details, we can look first at one of the earliest and then at one of the latest texts in the genre of quilt detective fiction. Susan Glaspell wrote *Trifles*, a one-act play, in 1916, and later translated it into the short story, *A Jury of Her Peers*. The local sheriff and the county attorney are called to a remote farm to discover who murdered John Wright, the owner, who has been strangled in his sleep. His wife is the chief suspect, but the men find no clues to convict her. While the men tramp around the farm looking for evidence, their wives, who accompany the two men, wait in the kitchen. They find a strangled canary in Minnie Wright's sewing basket, and when they look at her unfinished quilt project, they notice a change in the stitching:

> Here, this is the one she was working on, and look at the sewing! All the rest of it has been so nice and even. And look at this! It's all over the place! Why it looks as if she didn't know what she was about![24]

Putting the evidence together, the two women figure out that when John Wright killed her bird, the only lively and colorful thing in her house, Minnie murdered her husband out of loneliness and frustration. The central irony of the play is that the women, not the men, look carefully enough at the shabby kitchen to realize what happened and thus solve the crime. They decide to hide the evidence by restitching the quilt in order to protect Minnie Wright.

Margaret Atwood, in her novel, *Alias Grace*, published eighty years after Glaspell's play, makes domestic detail the ultimate focus of the book. In the story, Grace recounts her life with painstaking attention to the specific the jobs she did:

> The floor was dirty as a stable, and I wondered when it had last been given a good cleaning. I'd swept it first, of course, and now I was washing it in the proper way, kneeling down with each knee on an old clout because of the hardness of the stone, and with my shoes and stockings off, because to do a good job you have to get right down to it, and my sleeves rolled up past my elbows and my skirt and petticoats pulled back between my legs and tucked behind into the sash or my apron, which is what you do, Sir, to save your stockings and clothes, as anyone knows who has ever scrubbed a floor. I had a good bristle brush for the scrubbing and an old cloth to wipe up, and I was working from the far corner, moving backwards towards the door; for you don't want to scrub yourself into a corner, Sir, when doing a task like this. [25]

Grace tells these details as if she were being cross-examined in a trial, and in fact, she is–by Simon Jordan who is trying to establish if she is sane and/or guilty. While Atwood pays inordinate attention to domestic detail, at the same time she eludes the primary expectation of a detective novel by never solving the crime. Detail merely leads, in a thoroughly postmodern way, to more detail. The attention to detail has the effect of shifting the focus of the book from the sensational double murder to the routine minutiae of Grace's life. In effect, Atwood is suggesting that a woman's daily round is both more interesting and more important than murder, which is quite a radical reorientation of the usual cultural emphases we see in newspapers or television news reports.

Any good detective understands that details matter, even if he or she does not take them to Atwood's extreme. The genius of an exemplary detective is that he or she can pore through the deluge

of domestic details to decipher the true meaning of the events. The detective has learned to read the clues, which to the reader appear to be written in an unknown language. The murderer, in effect, is the writer while the detective is the reader. In a parallel way, many quilts tell stories in a non-verbal language as women use their fabrics to inscribe what matters to them, as for example, women's suffrage at the turn of the century. Quilts have long been a way for women to express ideas, thoughts, and feelings, often in cipher, which they cannot or do not wish to commit to paper or speak out about. As Annette wrote as long ago as 1845 for *The Lowell Offering*:

> Yes, there is the PATCHWORK QUILT! Looking to the uninterested observer like a miscellaneous collection of odd bits and ends of calico, but to me it is a precious reliquary of past treasures; a storehouse of valuables, almost destitute of intrinsic worth; a herbarium of withered flowers; a bound volume of hieroglyphics, each of which is a key to some painful or pleasant remembrance, a symbol of–but, ah, I am poetizing and spiritualizing over my *patchwork quilt.*[26]

Such now famous quilts as Harriet Powers's Bible quilts are indeed "bound volume(s) of hieroglyphics" which we have learned to read in order to understand their true meaning.

As one might expect, when entering the traditionally woman-defined world of quilting, the detectives in quilt fiction are all female. Often, in fact, there is a male detective, the official arm of the law, with whom our heroine works or fights as she goes about solving the crime. In some novels, such as the Benni Harper stories, the heroine and the legal detective move towards romance and marriage, while in others, such as Jean Hager's *Death on the Drunkard's Path*, the surly Sergeant Butts is openly rude to Tess Darcy:

"Now, Miz Franks, get on with what happened," Butts said. "I'll decide if it was an accident or not. And I don't need any help from amateur snoops. I know how to do my job."[27]

Of course, we readers know that he does indeed need an amateur's help, and there are no prizes for guessing who solves the crime first.

The women detectives in these quilt novels prove in many ways

different from their male counterparts. In "classic" detective novels, such as Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, the detective remains at an emotional distance not only from the participants in the case, but from pretty much any other emotional entanglement. In the "hard-boiled" tradition of Raymond Chandler or Dashiell Hammett, the detective often becomes involved, but the attachment is dangerous or even fatal.[28] The amateur sleuths of detective fiction differ, too, from such female detectives as P. D. James's Cordelia Gray, or V. I. Warshawski's Sara Paretsky. Those tough loners operate in the hard, cold world of men, often drink, carry a gun, and can expect to be beaten up in the course of the book. The women detectives in most quilt novels have quite a different profile. For a start, they are amateur rather than professional detectives, often drawn into a crime because it happens in their community, not because they seek it out. Perhaps because of their amateur status, these women are almost never violent, and do not carry guns. In fact, they are usually stalwart members of their community rather than renegades or oddballs. For example, Elizabeth Blair, in Lizbie Brown's *Turkey Tracks*, is an American widow living in England, who has established herself in the community by opening a quilt shop. Jess Gibbons, in Paula Gosling's *The Dead of Winter*, is a single school teacher in her small Canadian community, and Tess Darcy, in Jean Hager's *Death on the Drunkard's Path*, also single, owns the local bed-and-breakfast house.

Apart from sharing a high level of independence, often out of necessity because they are single, divorced or widowed, these women detectives often form strong connections with other women. Faith Fairchild, in *The Body in the Kelp*, maintains a close friendship with the lively Pix; Imogen Quy, in *A Piece of Justice*, only becomes involved in solving murders because of her friendship with her lodger, Fran Bullion. Benni Harper is both helped and hindered by her energetic and curious grandmother, and the two wives in Susan Glaspell's *Trifles* establish a tentative friendship that leads to solving the crime.

Moreover, to a lesser or greater degree, these women are taking charge of their lives. In terms of the five stages of women's development, discussed in *Women's Ways of Knowing*, most of the protagonists have reached the fifth stage.[29] These five stages represent a movement from passivity to assertiveness, from no sense of

self to self confidence. If we look at the earliest detective fiction, Glaspell's 1916 *Trifles*, we see the two women pass through the first two stages of "silence," where women view themselves as mindless and voiceless, and then "received knowledge," where women see themselves as capable only of receiving knowledge, not producing it. When the county attorney says, "No, Mrs. Peters doesn't need supervising. For that matter, a sheriff's wife is married to the law," he is presuming that his wife is no more than a receiver of knowledge.[30] By the end of the play, the two women probably have not passed beyond "subjective knowledge," a stage at which knowledge is conceived of as "personal, private and subjectively known or intuited."[31] That may well explain why they do not share the information about the true nature of the crime with the men.

Not surprisingly, most contemporary detective fiction shows women who have passed the fourth stage of development, that of "procedural knowledge" which is a "a position in which women are invested in learning and applying objective procedures for obtaining and communicating knowledge."[32] In fact, contemporary quilt detectives solve crimes *because* they have reached the fifth and final stage of development, that of "constructed knowledge," where a woman sees knowledge as contextual and experiences herself as a creator of knowledge. In effect, a detective can be defined as the person who generates the most plausible story to explain apparently mysterious events.

Finally, there is one more similarity: both quilts and detective novels find an academic home in a fairly recent area of study, "popular culture." In the past, many of my academic friends admitted their guilty delight in reading detective novels as if it were a sin to indulge oneself in such a way, and they certainly would not have included such books in their class syllabi. Yet such distinguished literary critics as Umberto Eco, Geoffrey Hartman, Frank Kermode, and Jacques Lacan have published essays on this particular genre, hopefully paving the way for more general acceptance.[33]

Quilts and detective fiction, then, go together like hand and glove: they are both simultaneously formulaic and flexible, thoroughly enjoyable, and often highly sellable. Moreoever, detective fiction provides a quilter with a convenient vehicle for writing, in great detail, about quilts and the business of making, showing, and

selling them. Quilts and detective novels–it is a match made in heaven!

Acknowledgments

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Notes and References

1. I will use the terms "detective novel" and "mystery" interchangeably in this paper, although technically the detective novel is a sub-genre of mystery novels.
2. Betty Reynolds, *Internet Quilt Fiction Bibliography.* http://www.nmt.edu/~breynold/quiltfiction.html.
3. A familiar quilt pattern often serves as the title to a quilt detective novel, indicating immediately the connection in the story between quilts and murder. For example, Lizbie Brown's *Broken Star* and *Turkey Tracks*; Earlene Fowler's *Fool's Puzzle, Irish Chain* and *Kansas Troubles*; and Jean Hager's *Death on the Drunkard's Path.* The particular pattern, however, does not necessarily play a part in the story.
4. Susan Conant, *Gone to the Dogs* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992); Susan Conant, *A New Leash on Death* (New York: Berkley Publishing Group, 1996).
5. Lilian Jackson Braun, *The Cat Who Had 14 Tales/The Cat Who Knew Shakespeare* (New York: Jove Books, 1992).
6. Diane Mott Davidson, *Catering to Nobody* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1990).
7. Katherine Hall Page, *The Body in the Kelp* (New York: Avon Books, 1991); Susan Glaspell, *Trifles* (New York: Frank Shay, 1916), as reprinted in *Quilt Stories*, ed. Cecilia Macheski (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1994), 194-206. [While all the other examples quoted in this paper are novels, *Trifles* takes the form of a play. In terms of content, however, it qualifies as a quilt murder mystery.]; Barbara Michaels, *Stitches in Time* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995); Jill Paton Walsh, *A Piece of Justice: An Imogen Quy Mystery* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995).
8. Margaret Atwood, *Alias Grace* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996); Paula Gosling, *The Dead of Winter* (New York: Mysterious Books, 1996).
9. Carolyn Banks, *Patchwork: A Novel of Suspense* (New York: Crown Pub-

lishers, 1986); Lizbie Brown, *Turkey Tracks* (New York: Bantam Doubleday, 1995).

10. Sara Frommer Hoskinson, *Buried in Quilts* (St. Martin's Press, 1994); Jean Hager, *Death on the Drunkard's Path* (New York: Avon, 1996); Aliske Webb, *Murder at the Quilt Show* (Englewood, CO: Quilt Inn Publishing, 1995).
11. Peter Huhn, "The Detective as Reader: Narrativity and Reading Concepts in Detective Fiction," *Modern Fiction Studies* 33 (Autumn 1987): 452.
12. Earlene Fowler, *Irish Chain* (New York: Berkley Prime Crime, 1995).
13. Earlene Fowler, *Fool's Puzzle* (New York: Berkley Prime Crime, 1994).
14. Earlene Fowler, *Kansas Troubles* (New York: Berkley Prime Crime, 1996).
15. Christine Ann Evans, "On the Valuation of Detective Fiction: A Study in the Ethics of Consolation," *Journal of Popular Culture* 28 (Fall 1994): 160.
16. For a more detailed discussion of this issue, see: Cuesta Benberry, "White Perspectives of Blacks in Quilts and Related Media," in *Uncoverings 1983*, ed. Sally Garoutte (Mill Valley, CA; American Quilt Study Group, 1983), 59-74; Laurel Horton, "Nineteenth Century Middle Class Quilts in Macon County, North Carolina," in Ibid., 87-98; Gladys-Marie Fry, "Harriet Powers: Portrait of a Black Quilter," *Missing Pieces: Georgia Folk Art 1770-1976* (Atlanta: Georgia Council for the Arts and Humanities, 1976).
17. Evans, 160.
18. Ibid., 164.
19. John G. Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 105.
20. Evans, 159.
21. Carol S. Chadwick, "Nancy Drew–The Perfect Solution," in *Private Voices, Public Lives: Women Speak on the Literary Life* ed. Nancy Owen Nelson (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 1995), 47.
22. The Boise Peace Quilters was formed by women living in Boise, Idaho, in the early 1980s as a way to protest the proliferation of atomic weapons. This group of approximately forty women create sophisticated, one-of-a-kind quilts which honor individuals whose work encourages world peace.
23. See, for example, Nancy Cameron Armstrong, "Quilts of the Gulf War, Desert Storm–Participation or Protest?" in *Uncoverings 1993*, ed. Laurel Horton (San Francisco, CA: American Quilt Study Group, 1994), 9-44.
24. Glaspell, 201.
25. Atwood, 274.
26. Annette (pseudonym for Harriet Farley or Rebecca C. Thomson), "The Patchwork Quilt," *The Lowell Offering 5* (1845): 201-3; reprinted in *Quilt*

Stories, ed. Cecilia Macheski (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1994), 11. (Page references are to reprint edition.)

27. Hager, 93.
28. Cawelti makes a useful distinction between the "classic" detective novel, and the later "hard boiled" detective novel. Briefly, the classic detective novel focuses on a single crime, an anomaly in an otherwise orderly and moral society. The detective does not indulge in romantic escapades, and always remains emotionally detached from the case and those involved. Sherlock Holmes would be a good example of the classic detective. The hard-boiled detective, however, often becomes entangled emotionally in the case, to the point that he is forced to make a moral choice at some point. The world of the hard-boiled detective is shot through with crime and sleaziness, the murder being merely the tip of the rotten social iceberg. Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe represents this second kind of detective. Most quilt detective novels are a hybrid: "classic" in that they usually assume an orderly world that has been temporarily disrupted by murder, but "hard-boiled" because of the degree of romantic and emotional attachments on the part of the protagonists.
29. Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarul, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).
30. Glaspell, 206.
31. Belenky, 15.
32. Ibid.
33. Glenn Most and William W. Stowe have edited a useful collection of articles on detective fiction written by literary theorists and critics over the last two centuries. Many of them are seminal texts in the field. See Most and Stowe, *The Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1983) which includes: Jacques Lacan's "Seminar on *The Purloined Letter*," Umberto Eco's "Narrative Structures in Fleming," Frank Kermode's "Novel and Narrative," and Geoffrey H. Hartman, "Literature High and Low: The Case of the Mystery Story."

Annotated Bibliography of Quilt Detective Books

Atwood, Margaret. *Alias Grace.* London: Bloomsbury, 1996.

A fictionalized account of an 1843 murder case in which Grace Marks was found guilty of murdering her employer, Kinnear, and his mistress, Nancy. Grace, who narrates most of the story, is a skilled needlewoman and quilter.

Banks, Carolyn. *Patchwork: A Novel of Suspense.* New York: Crown Publishers, 1986.

Rachel has started a new and anonymous life for herself in Austin, Texas, because she thinks her son, Drew, is a psychopath who wants to kill her. Someone, however, is still pursuing her. Rachel works in a quilt shop owned by Peyton, her only friend in Austin.

Brown, Lizbie. *Turkey Tracks.* New York: Bantam Doubleday, 1995.

Elizabeth Blair, a middle-aged American widow who moves to England, opens a quilt shop in Bath. She becomes involved in solving a murder committed at a local stately home, Wetherburn. Also by Lizbie Brown: *Broken Star.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993.

Dallas, Sandra. *The Persian Pickle Club.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995.

This story is about a group of Kansas women who quilt together, and protect one another from a dark secret.

Fowler, Earlene. *Irish Chain.* New York: Berkley Publishing Group, 1995.

Benni Harper, a widow in her thirties, is involved in a tumultuous romance with the new local police chief, Gabriel Ortiz. The two of them compete to solve a double murder at the local old people's home. Benni curates a local art museum that displays quilts.

Also by Earlene Fowler: *Fool's Puzzle.* New York: Berkley Prime Crime, 1994; *Kansas Troubles.* New York: Berkley Prime Crime, 1996; *Goose in the Pond.* New York: Berkley Prime Crime, 1997.

Frommer, Sara Hoskinson. *Buried in Quilts.* New York, St. Martin's Press, 1994.

Joan Spencer is the manager of the local orchestra, practicing for a recital at the prestigious annual quilt show. Joan becomes involved in solving the murder of the bossy show organizer, as well as helping to locate some missing quilts.

Glaspell, Susan. *Trifles,* first published New York: Frank Shay, 1916; reprinted in *Quilt Stories,* ed. Cecilia Macheski (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1994), 194-206.

Originally published in 1916, this one-act play shows how two women solve a murder mystery by examining the log cabin quilt the suspect was piecing.

Gosling, Paula. *The Dead of Winter.* New York: Mysterious Press Books, 1996.

Jess Gibbons, a keen quilter, teaches home economics at the local high school in a small town near the Canadian border in Great Lakes country in the middle of a particularly cold winter. An ice fisherman discovers the body of a ne'er do well under the ice and Jess becomes involved in solving the mystery.

Hager, Jean. *Death on the Drunkard's Path.* New York: Avon, 1996.

Tess Darcy owns a bed and breakfast Victorian house, inherited from her aunt. She becomes involved in a quilting convention in town, as a number of her guests are participants. A famous quilter is killed at the convention, and Tess is drawn into the investigation.

Harper, Karen. *Dark Road Home.* New York: Signet, 1996.
Brooke, a defense attorney from Columbus, hides out from a stalker in Ohio Amish country where she temporarily manages a quilt shop employing local Amish women.

Lawrence, Margaret. *Hearts and Bones.* New York: Avon Books, 1996.
Midwife Hannah Trevor joins police officer Will Quaid to solve a murder in Maine in 1786. Hannah pieces together the evidence in the same way she pieces her quilts.

Mason, Sarah J. *Sew Easy to Kill.* New York: Berkeley Prime Crime, 1996.
Two detectives investigate the murder of a member of the community sewing class at St.Catherine's, a private girls' school.

Michaels, Barbara. *Stitches in Time.* New York: HarperCollins, 1995.
Rachel Grant works in a vintage clothing store where she encounters a mysterious antique album quilt that has magic sewn into it.

Page, Katherine Hall. *The Body in the Kelp.* New York: Avon Books, 1991.
Faith Fairchild is renting a cottage on Sanpere Island, off the coast of Maine, when Matilda Prescott, a wealthy widow, dies leaving a quilt top inscribed with the words "Seek and ye shall find." The quilt, which is sketched at the beginning of the book, becomes a map for finding hidden treasure and a clue in solving a couple of murders. Also by Katherine Hall Page: *The Body in the Basement.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994.

Paton Walsh, Jill. *A Piece of Justice: An Imogen Quy Mystery.* New York: St Martin's Press, 1995.
Imogen Quy, an avid quilter and nurse at St. Agatha's College in Cambridge, becomes involved with a mysterious biographical project taken on by one of her lodgers, Fran Bullion. The key to the mystery, and several murders, lies in a particular quilt owned by farmers in Wales.

Sutton, Margaret. *Clue in the Patchwork Quilt.* New York: Grossett & Dunlap, 1941.
In this novel for young adults, detective Judy Bolton solves the mystery of her missing cousin through a patchwork memory quilt. The author's heirloom bowtie quilt served as the inspiration for this book.

Taylor, Phoebe Atwood. *The Crimson Patch; an Asey Mayo Mystery.* New York: W.W. Norton, 1936; reprint Woodstock, VT: Foul Play Press, 1986.
Originally published in 1936, and set in rural Cape Cod, this story features a murder victim found wrapped in a quilt.

Webb, Aliske. *Murder at the Quilt Show.* Englewood, CO: Quilt Inn Publishing, 1995.
A murder mystery set at a local quilt show.