

The Victorian Crazy Quilt as Comfort and Discomfort

by Jane Przybysz

The significance of quilt making and other needlework to the women who accomplished it and the societies in which it was made, has been discussed for some centuries by both observers and practitioners of the crafts. For some who sewed it was elevating and ennobling, for others it was apparently largely drudgery. Very few accounts, however, looked at the implications of quilt making for women's roles and societal change. Thus the discovery by Jane Przybysz of the unpublished musings of an accomplished female writer who used the crazy quilt, an icon of Victorian ideals, as the central symbol in a discussion of changing values, is of unusual importance. Ms. Przybysz here publishes the manuscript for the first time and discusses some of its implications.

—Editors' Note

In the spring of 1993, while visiting the Manuscripts Archives at Tulane University's Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, I happened upon a hand-written text by Ruth McEnergy Stuart titled "To Her Crazy-quilt...A Study of Values." I glanced briefly at the work, noted its considerable length, and marveled that it was written circa 1900 as a soliloquy charting a mother's shifting perception of what it meant to have spent a year of her life creating a crazy quilt. Before leaving the Archives, I ordered a copy.

Waiting for the copy to arrive by mail, I wondered who Ruth McEnergy Stuart was, and why she apparently never finished this piece. What might her dramatic monologue contribute to our knowledge of late 19th century crazy quiltmaking practices, or of the meanings turn-of-the-century quiltmakers attributed to the crazy quilts they made? How did Stuart's text compare with contemporaneous narratives prominently featuring crazy quilts? And finally, how might "To Her Crazy-quilt...A Study of Values" help explain the rise and fall of the crazy quilt fashion in the United States? These were the questions "To Her Crazy-quilt" implicitly posed, and which I will address in this introduction to a transcription of Stuart's hitherto unpublished text.

The first of eight children born to a wealthy Louisiana planter's family in 1849, Ruth McEnergy grew up in New Orleans, regularly visiting the family's Avoyelles Parish plantation.¹ Little is known about her early life, though she apparently attended both public and private schools in New Orleans until the onset of the Civil War, which significantly depleted the family's fortunes. In its aftermath, Ruth took a job teaching primary school and apparently assumed responsibility for much of the family's housekeeping, cooking, and sewing.

In 1879, McEnergy visited a sister-in-law living in Arkansas.

There she met and married a well-established cotton planter and three-time widower, Alfred Oden Stuart, after knowing him for only three weeks. Writing about McEnergy's unusually brief courtship, Helen Taylor posits that the move may have been "a desperate attempt to escape the heavy demands of home life in New Orleans" (91).

As Stuart's fourth wife, Ruth settled into a comfortable life in a colonial house on her husband's vast plantation, where former slaves and poor whites were employed as domestics and field hands. Three years later, she gave birth to a son, Stirling. Only a year later, however, her husband died without leaving a valid will. Shortly thereafter, Ruth returned to New Orleans to live with a sister, and began writing to support herself and her son. It appears that the claims of children born to her husband's three previous wives may have superseded those of Ruth and Stirling, leaving them in reduced financial circumstances.

Several years later, while vacationing with her son in North Carolina, Stuart happened to meet Charles Dudley Warner. Then editor of *Harper's Magazine*, Warner would bring Stuart national acclaim as a writer of "local color" stories—humorous and sympathetic tales of southern blacks and "hillbillies" she claimed to have studied on her husband's plantation, and of Italian, Cajun, and black folk she had encountered in New Orleans. By the early 1890s, Stuart had moved to New York City where she traveled in artistic and literary circles that included the grand dame of the decorative arts movement, Candace Wheeler, and her daughter Mrs. Keith, and writers such as Mrs. Margaret E. Sangster, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman and Kate Douglas Wiggin, all of whom took up the crazy or patchwork quilt as a theme at some point in their writing careers.²

By the turn-of-the-century, Ruth McEnergy Stuart had established herself as one of the three most successful female writers of "local color" fiction from Louisiana, sharing that honor with Kate Chopin and Grace King. Her sister, Sarah, had joined her in New York, serving as surrogate wife to Ruth and mother to Stirling, enabling Stuart to write, travel extensively giving dramatic readings, and participate in the activities of the Barnard, MacDowell, and Wednesday Afternoon cultural clubs.

While "To Her Crazy-quilt" was one of any number of dramatic monologues Stuart composed, it differs markedly from the majority of the writing for which she became well known in that it is not of the "local color" variety, set in the South and featuring persons unlike herself. Rather, "To Her Crazy-quilt" appears to take up the problem of a woman of Stuart's own class and race. This may help explain why the

monologue was never completed or published. Stuart may have felt its subject matter would discomfort readers who had come to expect less serious fare about "other" folks. And unlike earlier pieces by Stuart which had focused on white, middle-class women's lives—"To Her Crazy-quilt" did not rely on humor or heterosexual romance to bring the story to a satisfying sense of closure.

Having found no evidence confirming she ever actually made a crazy quilt, I have not been able to determine if Stuart based "To Her Crazy-quilt" on personal experience.³ When popular women's magazines started mentioning crazy quilts in the early 1880s, however, Stuart would have been positioned financially and socially, as the leisured wife of a wealthy planter, to undertake the making of a crazy quilt.⁴ Hence, it is quite possible that the monologue documents the initial stages of Stuart's own transformation, in the aftermath of her husband's death, from a middle-class wife and mother to a professional writer and public speaker.

It is just as likely, however, that by the time she drafted the dramatic monologue, circa 1900, Stuart conceived of the crazy quilt as a metaphor for the imagined space she and other female writers and artists had negotiated for themselves. It was a space that was neither the private, "feminine" world of love and ritual which Carroll Smith-Rosenberg has so aptly described (and of which fancywork was a marker), nor the public, "masculine" world of reading, writing and speaking to which the "New Woman" sought entry. Instead, it was a space between the so-called separate spheres, or a hybrid of them both.

Compared with other late 19th century narratives in which crazy quilts play a central role, "To Her Crazy-quilt" is unique both in form and content.⁵ To my knowledge, no other account takes the form of a soliloquy in which a quiltmaker speaks aloud to her crazy quilt or to herself.⁶ No other 19th century story involving crazy quilts features a protagonist who is a mother, presumably a married woman, reflecting at length upon the ways a crazy quilt and other needlework have figured in her life. Contemporaneous stories featuring crazy quilts most frequently portray young unmarried female protagonists tied to plots which turn on whether the boy wants or gets the girl who makes a crazy quilt. No other story articulates, but fails to resolve, the intensely ambivalent feelings a crazy quilt occasions its maker.

To my mind, the 19th century crazy quilt text with which "To Her Crazy-quilt" most resonates is that reported by Jonathan Holstein in *The Pieced Quilt: An American Design Tradition* (1973) as having been applied directly to a crazy quilt. "[E]mbroidered on a simple black velvet patch, in the midst of the most incredible profusion of textures, colors, embroidered animals, plants, and countless 'show' stitches," the text read "I wonder if I am dead" (62). This one sentence suggests that the process of creating a crazy quilt had perhaps led its maker to a startling self-awareness.

The protagonist of "To Her Crazy-quilt..." explicitly characterizes the experience of making a crazy quilt as one of

personal transformation—of coming to a new consciousness and self-awareness. The crazy quilt represents those very "irresponsibilities" which enabled her to see her way "to better things." Something about the process of making the quilt enables the narrator to see herself and her needlework from a new perspective.

What "the better things" were to which the protagonist referred is not exactly clear. But the language Stuart used to set women's fancywork in opposition to nature's beauty, objects made for "use," and women's pursuit of a liberal arts education, indicates her notion of "the better things" was shaped by two things: the advent of a modernist, utilitarian aesthetic in home decoration spawned by the arts and crafts movement, and a backlash against the Victorian feminine ideal, particularly its sentimentalization of motherhood.

As Virginia Gunn has noted, by the late 1880s the home decorating tastes of trendsetters like Stuart's New York City neighbor Candace Wheeler had shifted. These women increasingly rejected the ornate, detail-oriented, and often oriental-inspired fancywork that crazy quilts typified in favor of objects that incorporated simple, streamlined, arts and crafts movement or "colonial" designs.⁷ Objects whose forms were perceived as an outgrowth of their functions, patterning themselves after things as they were formed and found in "nature," increasingly displaced as "fashionable" those which were perceived as merely "ornamental." Turn-of-the-century feminist and progressive educators' faith in rationality, science and technology as keys to social progress buttressed this shift in home decorating trends.

The formation of women's clubs devoted to promoting women's cultural achievements, particularly to creating opportunities for white, middle-class women to acquire the liberal arts education previously reserved primarily for more affluent women and men—also appears to have contributed significantly to the devaluing of Victorian fancywork in the last decade of the 19th century. Proponents of woman's suffrage, dress reform, and home economics all sought to distance themselves from images of sentimentality and feminine excess they associated with Victorian fancywork. Pro-suffrage writer Eliza Calvert Hall, for example, had the protagonist of her book, *Aunt Jane of Kentucky*, reject the crazy quilt in favor of traditional "colonial" designs. As a strong supporter of women's rights and suffrage, as well as a member of several literary clubs, Stuart would have been very familiar with many club women's arguments against woman's role as mere "ornament," and against the ornaments, like crazy quilts, which had come to signify Victorian femininity.⁸

"To Her Crazy-quilt" also suggests that a fear of female sexuality may have contributed to the decline in the fashion for crazy quilts, and underpinned this shift in home decorating aesthetics towards a valuing of "clean" colonial or modernist designs. In her defense of the crazy quilt, Stuart's narrator refutes accusations, popularized by women's magazines, that the quilt is "guilty of profanity," and "vulgar." In

her critique of the quilt, she likewise points up its "irresponsibilities," particularly its status as a "mistress" who is not "true." All of these terms may indicate that the crazy quilt fell from favor, at least in part, because it came to be associated with moral impropriety and illicit female sexuality. Also, if the quilt was a "mistress"—true or not—its maker implicitly was a "master." So it may be that women increasingly shunned undertaking the making of crazy quilts because such quilts came to connote "masculine" ambition.

While 19th century females were generally encouraged to hone their needlework skills as a sign of industry and submissiveness, some concern was expressed by members of the medical community at the turn of the century that the relationship between women and needlework, and women and fabric, was perhaps problematic. Freud and Breuer, in their *Studies On Hysteria* (1893-1895) noted that the hypnoid states their female patients experienced seemed "to grow out of the day-dreams which are so common even in healthy people and to which needlework and similar occupations [repetitive, monotonous chores] render women especially prone." (13) They found that physically restricted and emotionally constrained women who were intellectually curious and ambitious in ways considered "unfeminine" often indulged in systematic day-dreaming of the sort they might experience when engaged in needlework. And it was in the context of this day-dreaming or "private theater," where thoughts highly charged with affect apparently escaped regulating and normalizing cultural narratives, that they became "ill."

Then, shortly after the turn-of-the century, French psychologist Gaetan Gatian de Clerambault published an essay, "Women's Erotic Passion For Fabrics," in which he described the cases of three hysterical women between the ages of forty and fifty whose passion for fabric and "useless" objects of feminine adornment had led them to shoplift from department stores. He found them to be frigid in heterosexual contacts, but fully capable of satisfying themselves sexually by fondling fabric or rubbing it against their bodies. For these women, fabric served as a stand-in for their own bodies or that of another—often an idealized "maternal" body—to which they could safely surrender both identity and agency. In other words, some women's passion for the trappings of femininity purportedly aimed at attracting and pleasing a man, in fact afforded them erotic self-sufficiency, intense narcissistic pleasure, and maternal comfort.

This increased wariness regarding the (homo)erotic pleasures and narcissistic self-sufficiency needlework perhaps afforded some women may help explain why, for example, Dulcie Weir resolved her short story, "The Career of a Crazy Quilt," published in the July 1884 issue of *Godey's Lady's Book*, with a double wedding. The two young middle-class female friends, protagonists of the tale, are completely caught up with making crazy quilts, particularly with trading samples

of fabric and embroidery motifs and with the challenge of acquiring different bits of silk. One alienates her fiance through what he perceives as her aggressive, unfeminine, and morally-tainted efforts to obtain silk from any number of male acquaintances. The other schemes to obtain free scraps of fabric from department stores by illegal means. By ending the story with a double wedding, whereby the first girl is reunited with her fiance and the second weds an employee of the firm she had attempted to defraud, Weir effectively neutralized the threat crazy quilts presented to the social fabric, particularly to the heterosexual contract and dominant cultural constructions of femininity that arguably constituted the warp and woof of that fabric. Rather than have her heroines remain intimates with one another as "slaves" to their crazy quilts (as the anonymous but apparently male author of an 1890 poem "The Crazy Quilt," published in the October 25, 1890 issue of *Good Housekeeping*, observed of all makers of crazy quilts), Weir turned them into slaves of the more socially acceptable kind—compliant and obedient, middle-class wives.

While it would seem I've strayed far from the text of "To Her Crazy-quilt," I want to suggest that the narrator's continued attraction to her quilt, her ability to be "charmed" by it, and her ultimate retreat to its comfort at the end of the monologue—despite her consciousness that it had come to represent a Victorian feminine ideal to which she no longer fully subscribed—might be understood in light of the role crazy quilts, fabric, and other forms of needlework played in the erotic and emotional life of late 19th century women. For professional women like Stuart who, to stay in the good graces of her publishers and the public, played the role of the morally irreproachable, hardworking, ever cheerful hostess and southern lady, a crazy quilt may have been one of the few sources of sensual pleasures in which she might guiltlessly indulge.

Even more important, perhaps, for the bright, ambitious woman who, like Stuart's fair protagonist, found her various "culture-schemes" forever stalled by the arrival of yet another set of "pink feet," a crazy quilt might have been the poem, the mother, and surrogate lover whose making and presence occasioned self-reflection, and provided the sense of pleasure, autonomy, and assurance which gave her the courage both to see her way to better things, and to see familiar things—particularly her own needlework—in new ways. For the home-bound wife and mother, the crazy quilt may have been the "private theatre" in which she first heard herself speak aloud that which had been unspeakable.

In the end, what is most important about "To Her Crazy-quilt," is not its status as fact or fiction. The piece stands as a record of how an affluent southern wife and mother-turned-professional writer and New Yorker made sense of the fashion for crazy quilts. Drawing upon the rhetorics of a number of aesthetic and social movements, Stuart con-

structed one mother's experience of making a crazy quilt, offering both a critique and a defense of how needlework functioned in white, middle-class women's lives at the turn-of-the-century.'

To Her Crazy-quilt...A Study of Values
by Ruth McEnery Stuart

"Yes, I suppose you continue to be beautiful, my quilt, even after the day of the ordinary crazy-quilt is past. The truth is I put my best self into you. You were to me—before I waked from the delusion—my one poem, the first form in which something within me seemed to find full expression.

There is not—as has been said—an inharmony [sic] about you. The scraps of silk of which you are composed actually fit, and their colors are never guilty of profanity, one to another."

You began to grow from the top left-hand corner and zig-zagged with consistent irregularity until the bits of green in your south-Eastern extremity fit precisely into the violet fragment above it—completing the square and the color marvel.

There is no point at which a triangle or parallelogram throws a corner or side vulgarly over its neighbor's territory.

Each color holds its individual place just as distinctly as those of a Kaleidoscope in any given combination or as the bits that compose a mosaic."

Were you transparent as the glass panes of a cathedral window, your exquisite intricacy of composition would become only more apparent. The thing you seemed to express, as you grew beneath my fingers were beauty and harmony and a sort of perfection, to attain which is always a delight to the composer, be he architect, musician or simply a sewer of patches, as was I.¹²

He who works to an end making a multitudinous detail conduce to the forming of a graceful unit is, in so far as he succeeds, an artist.

If the unit express [sic] a worthy thought—if the thought declare itself only, in a caressing restfulness to the eye, it is thus far soul-satisfying."

He who touches the human soul, ever so faintly—as to wake it to [momentary] consciousness of being—is he not a poet. And his medium of expression?" Ah! are you not my poem my pretty pretty quilt?"

The speaker was a fair dark eyed woman and she sat alone before a combination of brilliant patches, the work of her own hands."

Pausing here in her soliloquy, she sighed heavily.

"So you seemed to me[.]" she resumed presently[.] "So you seemed to me, my silken wonder, until so short a time ago it seems only yesterday."

Only yesterday—only the day before the today of my new consciousness—and in the fresh clear dawning, how you are transformed!"

The mark of a year—a whole, full rounded cycle, with all its golden moments open to all that time can sieze [sic] or hold, is put into this miserable inadequate expression of what any half-clouded morning sky may put to shame—even a dreary wintry sunset cover with confusion."

The [jilting] blaze that spurts about my fire of smouldering logs gives more pleasure in its brief twinkling life—a glowing autumn leaf with its defiant denials of the subsidence of life within its veins is to you, my poor patchwork quilt, as a song from a poet's throat compared to a jingling rattling doggerel.²⁰

But why have you thus ceased to charm me, my pretty quilt? I look and see that you are, as I meant you should be, your own best expression of art, and yet you are no longer a pleasure. No longer are you to my fond eyes a Kaleidoscope's color-marvel—a symphony in hap-hazards—a poem of complements.

You are a map— Ah me, a map of my own ignorances.

For a whole year I buried my energies in this poor thing, energies obedient to my will and that might have been profitably bent toward some worthy acquisition of knowledge.²¹

I know not the German tongue nor the speech of Italy.

Dante the divine is mine only through inadequate translation.

Each brilliant patch in you, my poor color study, has become a province in the great map of my state of ignorance.. They are German lessons unstudied—Italian poems unlearned—history forgot.

The golden thread that connects while it defines them is the whole year—the golden stream of time.

This golden demarkation [sic] made of you, my quilt, a unit expressing harmony.²²

On my map it is a definer of barren fields and it means unculture. It is a gleaming boundary of untilled lands.

Quilts are good to make, to have, to keep, and time well spent in their weaving when one is cold or his brother in need of warmth. The tedious stitching of intricate shapes fitted to a [mat] might be worthy work were time eternity with infinite space for all finite or infinite Endeavors.²³ It is in time with all its brevity fitting employment for the feeble-minded.²⁴ [B]ut when one's days are short and it takes three score years to half-learn what others have thought or spoken or done is it not a pity to consume the ten years left for individual progression in sewing patchwork?

And yet—and yet I would not part with you, my crazy, crazy quilt, for in your very irresponsibilities I have been able to see my way to better things. You are newly cataloged in the book of my regard as one of a despised family.²⁵ Fish-scale jewelry, flowers of wool and waxen fruits are your near of kin. Yes I grant you are the flower of your family, my quilt, but of the same strain.²⁶ The strawberry mark is upon you—you cannot deny your blood. Such are your companion diverters of energies, consumers of time, betrayers of true art.

"Art is long and time is fleeting," and if in the whirlagig

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we seize her for our mistress, let us see to it that she be true.

Let us be sure that in making a careful estimate of its values we take into life the things most worthy, discarding for want of time, lesser considerations. And away with false art!

While I sit and gaze upon you, my quilts, you seem to change into a mirror and straining my eyes I see myself sitting before you while over my shoulders hover a cloud of ghosts.²⁷ Long white headless things come and go and come again. They are richly embroidered garments and—ah me, how I recognize the stitches, every one my own!

And now I understand. They are ghosts—the departed phantoms of tediously wrought undergarments of fine linen—an "odd-moments" series of early follies and they are come to haunt my latter-day ignorances.²⁸

A certain intricate device—how I remember the moments that oddly indeed ran to hours while I criss-crossed and darned in the firmly drawn threads²⁹

I shall call this my Carlyles French Revolution which to rend and study demanded a thieving of time from other things.[.]³⁰ And you, with your little square-set yoke all done in whirls, Yes, I know you. [Y]ou are "Mortry's Dutch Republic" which—must I own it?—Even yet I but half know. Babies have come with the years and put their little pink feet firmly down upon so many of my culture-schemes.³¹ But why particularize?

If one need to make a quilt let her see to it that it be well-done, soft warm, pleasing to the eye. [Glut let her not deceive herself with so inadequate a medium, into attempting to express more than a good coverlet.

The perfection of art in articles of use is first to have them suggestive of their object.

The highest art in the planning of a life consists in so considering its values as to subordinate or even to exclude much of the detail that so mars many of the canvases upon which some of our noblest figures are cast.

The fond young mother who sits, one foot gently stirring the cradle while she tediously knits lace for the petticoat's hem of her babe, adds with her knitting nothing to his well being.³²

The culture she might be gleaning the while she works would broaden and lift his growing life to higher things.³³

So comes a swarm of reflections inspired by your much abused presence—my quilt—my "comfortable" that despite the odium I have put upon your face, are soft and light and warm.³⁴

Let me draw you over my shoulders, folding in and forgetting your crazy patches, and go to sleep.³⁵

Jane Przybysz works at the McKissick Museum, University of South Carolina, as the Principal Investigator on the Southeastern Crafts Revival Project, a National Endowment for the Humanities-sponsored study of the networks of individuals and organizations that promoted the revival of craft in the southeastern United States during the first half of the twentieth century. She is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of

Performance Studies at New York University. She gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Dr. Wilbur Meneray, Head of Special Collections; Sylvia Metzinger, who served as the Acting Head of Special Collections in Dr. Meneray's absence; Leon Miller, Head of Manuscripts; and Courtney Page, Administrative Assistant at the Tulane University Library.

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—, "The Woman's Exchange of Simpkinsville," pp. 307-355 in *A Golden Wedding, and Other Tales*, NY: Garrett Press, The American Short Story Series, Vol. 78, 1969, reprinted from the 1893 edition published by Harper & Bros.

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Endnotes

- ¹There appears to be some question as to McEnery's year of birth. Some sources list 1852 as her birth year.
- ²Mrs. Margaret E. Sangster was the author of "The Crazy Quilt," a poem published in the January 12, 1884 issue of *Harper's Bazaar*, and reprinted in Virginia Gunn's 1984 essay, "Crazy Quilts and Outline Quilts: Popular Responses to the Decorative Art/Art Needlework Movement, 1887-1893." Mary E. Wilkins Freeman wrote several short stories in which quilts played an important role: "An Honest Soul," *A Humble Romance and Other Stories*, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1887, pp. 71-83; "Ann Lizzy's Patchwork," *Young Lucretia and Other Stories*, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1892, pp. 68-81; "A Quilting Bee in Our Village," *The People of Our Neighborhood*, Philadelphia, Curtis Publishing Company, 1898, pp. 118-28; and "The Patchwork School," *Pot of Gold and Other Stories*, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1892, pp. 68-81. Kate Douglas Wiggin wrote, "The Quilt of Happiness," *Ladies' Home Journal*, December 1917, pp. 10-11. See Dorothy Cozart's "Women and Their Quilts as Portrayed by Some American Authors," pp. 19-33 in the 1981 *UNCOVERINGS*, published by the American Quilt Study Group for additional late-nineteenth century stories featuring quilts. See also *A Patchwork of Pieces: An Anthology of Early Quilt Stories, 1845-1940*.
- ³In an 1896 interview with John D. Barry, Stuart reportedly claimed, "My characters are all drawn entirely from imagination. I have found that in writing stories, facts or bits taken from life intact hamper instead of helping me. There is always a question as to a real incident's fitting naturally into a new situation. I always fancy I can see the stitches around the patch" (762). This quote may shed some light on why Stuart never finished or published "To Her Crazy-quilt." The story may have consisted too much of "facts or bits" taken from her own life which hampered her writing process. Also, that she used a textile metaphor for a literary text may suggest the degree to which Stuart imaginatively linked sewing and writing processes, rather than seeing them as adversarial in the ways Elaine Hedges has outlined in "The Needle or the Pen: The Literary Rediscovery of Women's Textile Work."
- ⁴Though little research has been done to determine what classes of women stitched crazy quilts when they first became popular, when the craze peaked, and long after the fashion had passed, it appears there was a democratization of the practice over time. Wealthier women who visited exhibits of oriental art at the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, who took classes in embroidery or otherwise became involved with the aesthetic movement, and who subscribed to women's magazines are likely to have been among the first to stitch crazy quilts. In her essay, "American Needlework in Transition, 1880-1930," Rachel Maines suggests that the economic interests of thread and silk companies in the last decades of the 19th century fueled a resurgence of interest in embroidery and fostered innovative design efforts, a fact which may help account for the advent of the crazy quilt fashion. She also notes that publications in which such designs initially appeared were too expensive for most women, but that the proliferation of inexpensive needlework magazines in the early decades of the 20th century put such designs within the reach of needleworkers of all classes. Indeed, it seems crazy quilts eventually were made by working class and rural women, often out of wool or cotton fabrics, rather than the silks and satins, and with much less decorative embroidery.
- ⁵For other stories featuring crazy quilts, see *A Patchwork of Pieces: An Anthology of Early Quilt Stories, 1845-1940*. It contains "The Career of a Crazy Quilt," by Dulcie Weir, published in the July 1884 issue of *Godey's Lady's Book*; "A Story of a Crazy Quilt," by L. E. Chittenden, *Peterson's Magazine*, December 1885; and "Ruth's Crazy Quilt," by Sydney Dayre, *Harper's Young People*, Vol. VII, June 15, 1886. See also "A Crazy Quilt" by Madge Carrol, *Arthur's Home Magazine*, Vol. 53, October 1885.
- ⁶Interestingly enough, a poem entitled "Crazy," written by Alice E. Hanscom and published in the May 1884 issue of *Dorcas Magazine* is subtitled "(She embroiders; He soliloquizes.)" The poem was constructed as monologue spoken by a man as he watches a woman whose "glance is fixed" on "that kaleidoscope of brilliant

silken bits" upon which she silently embroiders, apparently unmindful of his presence.

- ⁷See "'Fine Arts and Fine People': The Japanese Taste in the American Home, 1876-1916" by Jane Converse Brown in *Making the American Home: Middle-Class Women & Domestic Material Culture, 1840-1940* for an excellent overview of the taste for oriental bric-a-brac and oriental-inspired fancywork among late-19th century middle-class women.
- ⁸See Naomi Schor's *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* for a discussion of how attitudes towards the "detail," which historically has been associated with the ornamental and everyday and thus marked as feminine, has changed over the past two hundred years.
- ⁹While I have not read all the published works of Ruth McEnery Stuart for references to quilts, I did read her story, "The Woman's Exchange of Simpkinsville," and would direct readers interested in Stuart's representation of quilting to this work. While it is generally assumed that organizers of women's exchanges excluded patchwork quilts from the items they were willing to sell, and there is evidence to support this assumption (see Gunn essay), Stuart's fictional story provides a different and quite compelling account of why patchwork quilts were not to be found for sale in women's exchanges. "The Woman's Exchange of Simpkinsville" suggests that quiltmakers boycotted women's exchanges both for economic and social reasons.
- ¹⁰After "fit," there appears crossed out the text, "one into another."
- ¹¹After "individual," the word "task" appears crossed out.
- ¹²The words "beauty and" were inserted with a caret before "harmony."
- ¹³The word "declare" was written above the crossed out word, "express."
- ¹⁴The question mark was inserted with a caret.
- ¹⁵The words "Ah! Are you" were written above crossed out words, "Are it." "A" poem was revised to read "my" poem.
- ¹⁶Preceding "combination" but crossed out appears "a bit of." After "patches," but before "the work," the following text appears crossed out: "work, addressing herself, as we perceive, to an imaginary person."
- ¹⁷After "silken," the word "quilt" appears crossed out.
- ¹⁸After "yesterday," the word "and" appears crossed out.
- ¹⁹The word "hold" appears crossed out after "time can."
- ²⁰"You," was inserted with a caret between and above "to my." "Rattling" was written above the word "ringing" which was crossed out.
- ²¹The word "bent" was inserted with a caret after "profitably."
- ²²After "made," the phrase "for me" appears crossed out.
- ²³The words "intricate shapes" were inserted with a caret above crossed out text, "silken patches." The words "or infinite" were inserted with a caret in the space above "finite Endeavors."
- ²⁴After "It is," "in time with all its brevity" has been inserted with a caret. Preceding the word "feeble-minded," appears crossed out "senile or."
- ²⁵Before "You" at the start of the sentence appears "and" crossed out.
- ²⁶After "Yes," "I grant" has been inserted with a caret above "you are."
- ²⁷Before "While" appears the word "In" crossed out. "You seem" initially read "it seems."
- ²⁸Before "ghosts" appears what seems to have been the start of the word "actually" crossed out after "actu." The words "haunt my" appear above the word "represented," which has been crossed out.
- ²⁹Before "moments" appears what seems to have been the word "time," which has been crossed out.
- ³⁰"This" appears crossed out at the start of the sentence. "The" is crossed out before "French Revolution." "Rend" appears above the word "learn," which was crossed out.
- ³¹This entire sentence appears in the margin above the sentence, "But why particularize?" which appears either to have been underlined for the sake of visual clarity (rather than emphasis), or intended to be crossed out.
- ³²The text, "with her knitting" has been added with a caret after "adds."
- ³³Before the word "works" appears crossed out "knits."
- ³⁴After "So comes," "a" has been inserted with a caret. Later in the same sentence "your" has been written above the crossed out word, "its," before "face." Before "are soft," what appear to be partial words—"conti" and "con" appear, but are crossed out.
- ³⁵After "folding in" appears crossed out "your p."