

I Remember Mamma: Material Rhetoric, Mnemonic Activity, and One Woman's Turn-of-the-Twentieth-Century Quilt

This essay examines the annotated description of a quilt produced by one woman to memorialize her mother who died in 1902. The quilt's function is analyzed in relationship to nineteenth-century mourning rituals and to other mnemonic aides produced and used in the nineteenth-century domestic sphere to remember—like scrapbooks and, later, photography. This study promotes memory-making as a rhetorical end and suggests a study of technologies employed in the nineteenth-century domestic sphere might reshape our conception of mnemonic activity and also a perceived separation between the rhetorical canons.

Went to the doctor's. Worked a long day. Walked both ways. Went to pay Miss Hull the \$1.50. She wouldn't take it. Said buy a birthday present with it. I was reading in Conan Doyle's [Through the] Magic Door, a criticism of Pepys' diary. He wondered so much why Pepys wrote it—all those trivial things. He even spoke of those who seriously and soberly wonder if Pepys wrote it on purpose to give long distant posterity a glimpse of his times. How absurd. Might as well say that is why I write all this stuff. And Pepys' is even more trivial and certainly much more morbid than mine because he puts in more of the trivial things. By an accident it was not destroyed—it is interesting because quaint and old. Mine might suffer a similar accident—and how silly if people wondered why I wrote it! Why should people of olden time be incapable of trivial motives as well as we [sic]. Ask any of the thousands who keep diaries if they keep them for posterity to learn what where [sic] the customs of 1908 and see them smile. Why do I keep it? First because Anna Miller kept one during her visit to the World's Fair and had so much to remember it by. Second because Mamma and I tried to remember when things happened and could not decide upon a

date. Later because I haven't a memory and it is convenient, also because I enjoy bringing up old times by reading old ones, and last because I like to say things without inflicting it upon my friends, and not a reason but a result—I find I can review my days and bring myself up short when on the wrong track better when I see it written before me.

—Excerpt from the diary of a twenty-eight-year-old librarian,
Janette Miller (September 30–October 1, 1908)

According to Janette Miller (1879–1969) in this diary passage, “any of the thousands who keep diaries” like herself write not for posterity but more likely in response to very personal and specific exigencies, such as a poor memory or the desire to keep records about a significant cultural event—like the World’s Fair.¹ This latter purpose for diary-keeping in fact shapes a bulky portion of Janette’s first blank-book diary that she completed when a teenager living near Chicago in 1893. Reflecting upon her several reasons for diary-keeping, both in contrast to Pepys’ and in conjunction with their joint interest in record-keeping, Janette considers the diversity of purposes for keeping diaries—the diary’s possible use in the future as an educational tool for those curious about the past or its purpose as a behavior modification device—helping her to recognize when she had come “up short” in the past. But her overall interest in diary-keeping is its memory-keeping function.

From the onset of her diary-keeping at age fourteen, Janette produced about a dozen diaries before abandoning the practice in 1909 when she left the States for Angola to be a missionary—a career she maintained for the rest of her long life. On top of writing in her diaries from 1894 to 1909, she also maintained a scrapbook during her teenage years when her family lived in Hancock, Michigan; Evanston, Illinois; and Omaha, Nebraska. Later when Janette was in her twenties living in Detroit, her diaries evolved into a kind of hybrid diary and scrapbook. She pasted scraps of letters, photographs, drawings, menus, church sermons, accounts, and recipes amidst accounts of her daily life. She began using blank-book diaries when a teenager and then in 1901 at twenty-one, she started to use manufactured diaries, called Daily Reminders, which allowed her one page to record her daily activities.

Janette’s attachment to a material object—a diary—as an *aide-mémoire* (Ash 223) and her certainty that she had a “poor memory” corresponds with Richard Terdiman’s assertion that there was a “memory crisis” beginning in the nineteenth century among individuals in Western industrialized culture. Much as we feel our memory is hampered by information overload today, nineteenth-century people felt they had too much to remember. Janette, whose identity was

largely shaped by nineteenth-century values, was not the only one worried about remembering around the turn of the twentieth century. The perception that it was becoming more difficult to remember, along with the growth of capitalism that led to the mass production and distribution of goods, reinforced a perceived relationship between memory and material objects. Memory-keeping thereby became a business—represented, in part, by the establishment of the antique industry in America by 1890 (West 158). This memory-keeping business likely precipitated the production of the Daily Reminders, the manufactured diaries Janette used for record-keeping throughout her twenties in the early 1900s. As Terdiman explains the phenomenon, “The nineteenth century institutionalized and exploited this connection between memories and objects in the form of a brisk trade in ‘keepsakes’ and ‘souvenirs’” (13). Manufactured diaries (like Janette’s Daily Reminders) evolved from the popular pocket diary that were first manufactured and distributed in the middle nineteenth century—which reflected not only technological developments in the printing industry but also “a continuing preoccupation in America with numeracy, calculation and record keeping” (McCarthy 279). One might thus regard Janette’s diary as a “keepsake,” a souvenir for recalling daily activities and major cultural events like the World’s Fair. For Janette, and those who shared her concerns, material objects were epistemologically linked to record-keeping and recollection processes. Memory had to be housed outside the mind—elsewhere, in things.

While Terdiman recognizes the relationship between material objects and memory as a modern phenomenon, in her study of mnemonic activity among medieval monks, Mary Carruthers suggests a metaphorical link among materiality, memory, and cognition, a connection that might broaden an understanding of the relationship among objects, memory, and rhetorical practices in general by considering memory as craft. Carruthers argues that medieval scribes made their parchments, pens, and inks while medieval monks similarly “made” memories through “cognitive pictures and schemes” (5). Memory as craft promotes as well David Kaufer and Brian Butler’s rearticulation of rhetoric as design, positioning the rhetorician as a creative organizer of “known materials” (7). Under this paradigm memories might be regarded as “things” in their own right, yet housed *inside* the mind.

I introduce the *aide-mémoires* of Janette Miller, a middle-class woman coming of age at the turn of the twentieth century, to further theorize memory as it is infused in objects while offering more evidence of rhetorical activity, and particularly memory, as “craft” both literally and theoretically. Memory as craft, as practiced in the domestic sphere at the turn of the twentieth century, posits memory as a veritable rhetorical canon in its own right, a means of persuasion, and also its end, a process that requires the development of complex rhetorical de-

vices—both material and cognitive. Janette, in fact, employed a range of material objects—diaries, letters, clothing scraps, drawings, and photographs—all veritable “souvenirs,” which she infused with meaning to aide her memory of people, places, and events. These mnemonic devices foreground memory-making as a complex multimodal endeavor dependent on a wide range of technologies, all which mediated Janette’s memory-making activity connected to values prescribed to middle-class women at the end of the nineteenth century. An understanding of rhetoricians like Janette Miller as “craftsmen” not only draws attention to memory-making as a multimodal endeavor but, like the argument for rhetoric as design, potentially challenges an understanding of rhetorical activity as a linear process, beginning with invention and memory and ending with the delivery of a static body of knowledge. As Winifred Bryan Horner considers how contemporary technologies transform our notion of memory and encourage an understanding of blurred distinctions among the rhetorical canons, in this article I consider how technologies employed in the nineteenth-century domestic sphere might also reshape our conception of mnemonic activity and a perceived separation among the rhetorical canons (175). This focus on materials produced and “published” in the domestic sphere also furthers Maureen Daly Goggin’s recent declaration that we must “push the boundaries of what counts as rhetorical practice and who counts in its production” (310).

To contextualize memory as craft and its corresponding relationship with material objects, I turn to a particularly compelling “souvenir” that Janette produced and left behind in the archives, now housed at the University of Michigan’s Bentley Historical Library: a description of a quilt—a quilt that was presumably made around 1902. The quilt (unavailable to me) was likely made to commemorate the bond Janette shared with her deceased mother, Cora Miller, who died when Janette was twenty-two in 1902, and whom Janette called Mamma. According to Janette’s diary reports, her mother’s death was particularly grueling. She developed symptoms of a serious illness in 1897, which included headaches and later convulsions that worsened with the years. Her mother then spent all of 1901 in bed, and Janette was her primary caretaker.

Janette placed this description written on eleven small pieces of notebook paper in an envelope taped to the inside cover of her scrapbook. She annotated each of the forty-one scraps of clothing worn previously by herself and her mother in the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s. Through this document Janette described the item of clothing the piece had previously belonged to and in some cases linked clothing pieces with one another—based on the event where the clothing was worn or the item of clothing the pieces shared. A short note in the archives along with Janette’s documents hint that Janette might have finished this quilt that her mother had started when aware she was going to die. It reads, “Mamma

died with her needles in this made for us to remember her. By the pieces of her dresses you will remember.”² Hypothetically, Janette’s inclusion of her own dress pieces in the final product was an improvisation of the memorial artifact her mother had started and thereby coupled Janette and Mamma via a mutual past that centered clothing in particular as a source of identity formation and memory-making.

Mamma’s belief that her clothing pieces memorialized her life parallels Terdiman’s argument, beginning in the nineteenth century, about the perceived relationship between memory and objects. Mamma’s words also echo the popular sampler verse, “When you see this remember me” (qtd. in Swan 8). The corresponding sentiments associating material, literally, with memory that thus link together two relatively similar mnemonic devices produced in the domestic sphere—samplers and quilts—potentially frame lessons learned from Janette’s quilt document. The explicitly stated purpose of the quilt and the sampler as mnemonic objects suggest a perceived interface between various mnemonic activities—sewing and writing. As Bruno Latour suggests, “If one ever comes face to face with a technical object, this is never the beginning but the end of a long process of proliferating mediators, a process in which all relevant subprograms, nested one into another, meet in a ‘simple’ task” (192). Indeed, an understanding of Janette’s quilt document necessitates an investigation of the wide range of media, the “relevant subprograms” she followed and produced for meaning and memory-making that fused people, places, and things.

Clothing as Mnemonic Material

American archeologist James Deetz argues that when examining history we can’t always rely on what people report is true to determine their values, but rather the arrangement of the things they’ve left behind (260). Consequently, I pose that the placement of this document within Janette’s other materials can help us first theorize significant associations among sewing, print literacy, and nineteenth-century values within the middle-class feminine domestic sphere, as practiced particularly, of course, in the Miller household. As I mentioned, Janette placed this description in an envelope in front of her scrapbook, which chronicles the activities of the Miller family in the late nineteenth century.

The events recalled via the dress pieces described in the quilt correspond with the events and photographs featured in the scrapbook; both the quilt and the scrapbook thus tie Janette with Mamma via a past taking place in particular and significant geographical locations. The understanding of clothing as mnemonic material documenting certain places and times is a primary example of Cheryl Buckley’s claim that for women in particular “dress and dress making are cul-

tural sites where identity, place and memory figure prominently" (58). The connection among identity, place, memory, and clothing scraps highlighted in this document also has compelling connotations for a study of memory when considering the relationship between "place" and memory established in classical rhetoric. As Sharon Crowley explains place and its relationship to memory among ancient rhetoricians, "The centrality of the term *place* to both ancient memory arts and ancient rhetorical activity is tantalizingly suggestive. In each art, a place is a mental storage facility" (38). The connection between place and memory is often associated with the fifth-century magician, Simonides, who—according to Cicero—encouraged the relationship between memory and places by suggesting that rhetoricians imagine facts located in imagined locations—facts could be remembered as places like people sitting at a table (467).

Memory as craft does, however, violate this association. Memory is prescribed by Cicero as an aide for rhetoricians who might use recalled facts and events as resources for the future, but remembering for Janette was both a resource *and a rhetorical end*. Janette's clothing scraps were signifiers that helped her to remember particular places that were both geographical and ideological—*topoi* in the broadest sense. Piece thirty-three of the quilt, for example, Janette explains this way: "Dark brown (chocolate) [d]ress I had when I went over to play with Gracie Waters. Swung in her hammock and watched the dress trail behind because it was longer than usual." The clothing scrap in this case is a window to a particular scene and a particular place in which, as Buckley puts it, "identity, place and memory figure prominently." Janette doesn't remember so that she can create rhetoric but rather creates rhetoric and corresponding mnemonic crafts so she might remember.

In her recent book outlining the importance of dress to nineteenth-century women, Carol Mattingly asserts that "dress was a means of control, a way of disciplining women" but that "it also provided an effective means of resistance as many women used clothing and 'feminine' style to escape the silence to which they had been relegated" (7). Mattingly argues, in effect, that dress for women rhetoricians during this period was not just about style, so to speak, but delivery; women were read through their clothes. They communicated via their clothes; clothes were central signifiers. Kathryn Wilson similarly describes the relationship between women and clothes during this era: Women were both objects and agents of fashion (148). Janette's use of clothing scraps as memory aides corroborates Mattingly's and Wilson's assertions. The role of clothing within turn-of-the-century domestic culture also blurs the distinction between memory and invention. Materials, again literally and figuratively, were constantly being created and thus interpreted as fodder for future crafts, or memory-making. Janette's document suggests that clothes, for example, were often

“made over” in the Miller household. The first piece in the quilt was from one of Janette’s dresses in the fourth grade, which was “[t]rimmed with silk from Mamma’s tan dress.” The invention and so-called delivery of rhetorical materials in this domestic context were likely also blurred for Janette when considering that Mamma was ill for several years before she died. Thus, Janette, like Mamma who began a quilt before her death, may have begun to memorialize events and their corresponding artifacts, such as the clothing worn by the mother and daughter, long before Mamma’s death and the eventual completion of the quilt and its complement—the scrapbook.

Quilts and Nineteenth-Century Values

This practice undertaken by Janette and Cora Miller—making a quilt to memorialize and remember past events—was popular among women in the mid nineteenth century and thus was most likely familiar to Cora Miller, born in the 1850s. These sewed items were called friendship or mourning quilts and “[b]ecause these quilts were intended to keep memories alive, a mixture of old and new fabrics was often used” (Kiracofe 80–81). Sometimes these quilts were signed—a practice that again suggests an understood association between sewing and writing within nineteenth-century domestic culture. The proliferation of quilt-making among women in the nineteenth century—due to the mass production of fabric, the invention of the sewing machine, and the elaboration of dress design that gave women more choices for scraps when it came time to make a quilt—coincided with women’s identity as mourners. Mourning became an elongated ritual only when death became less commonplace, and thus matter of fact, after the eighteenth century. “Nineteenth-century moralists believed women were more sensitive, more pious, and generally closer to heaven than men” (DePauw 42–43), an extension of the true womanhood paradigm dictated by nineteenth-century Christianity, prescribing that women uphold familial and social relationships. The values they practiced and preached were “piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity,” which aligned their biological assignment as mothers with their spiritual assignment as women (Muncy 4).

Although the more-or-less rigid framework of true womanhood was being challenged and transformed at the century’s turn when Janette presumably made her quilt, Janette continued to be influenced by the true-women values so important to her mother. Moreover, Janette was in fact the chief mourner in her family after her mother’s death. Her father’s precarious economic position, prompting an immediate move from the household where Cora had died, coupled with his rather hasty courtship and marriage to a new woman soon after his wife’s untimely death, invariably suppressed Cora’s memory in the Millers’ everyday lives. This left the grieving process to Janette, who mourned her mother in private via her diary and in

letters to and from female friends. Memories of Mamma were threatened and thus needed to be “preserved” through artifacts—such as a diary, a scrapbook, and a quilt. Women’s overall attention to memory-keeping through objects, in this case quilts, also matches Terdiman’s theories about memory-making and its relationship to objects in the nineteenth century. People were worried about forgetting. They, like Janette, needed “stuff” like diaries and quilts to help them remember. Quilts, in fact, were used to keep records by women in signature quilts who used these textiles to transcribe names of family members, their deaths, and their relationships to one another on their family trees (Clark 179). Women like Janette, coming of age in the late nineteenth century, were likewise encouraged to use diaries to record and memorialize relationships—particularly relationships with their mothers, a facet of “being good” (Hunter 47).

Epistemological Associations between Writing and Sewing in the Domestic Sphere

Janette’s quilt and scrapbook are further allied via a process of meaning-making employed by Janette in her scrapbook and later in her diaries. She often cut up portions of letters, thus marking them equally sufficient for signifying memory as parts to a whole—fabric pieces are to dresses, and to memories, as letter scraps are to letters. The corresponding relationship between sewing and writing in the Miller women’s lives’ is reinforced by Janette’s choice to use narrative to describe a semiotic item: the missing quilt. These mininarratives about each piece could be diary entries. Piece thirty-five of the quilt reads like a diary entry. It’s described as a piece from a dress made of loose blue serge, a type of fabric. “I wore in 1896,” Janette wrote, “when Mamma, Frank and I visited Burlington [...] on our way to Mich[igan].” The piece performs double duty as mnemonic material because it was “worn in class picnic picture 1896.” For piece thirty-seven, it’s possible that Janette actually consulted her diary or one of Mamma’s records to write the annotation, perhaps because she hadn’t necessarily a memory to accompany the clothing scrap. This scrap is from her red cashmere “waist,” a blouse. It was “made by Mrs. Van Buren, (time of business meeting, Mar. 2 1896).”

Design and Nineteenth-Century Mother–Daughter Relations

The use of fabric scraps and writing to represent memories and emotional bonds corresponds with primary activities “permissible” to women in the nineteenth century: sewing and letter-writing. Nan Johnson explains, for example, that advice to nineteenth-century women about letter-writing dictated that women use writing to maintain familial and domestic harmony, true womanhood

values (79). Likewise, Elaine Hedges argues of sewing in the nineteenth century, "The advice literature [. . . shows] that sewing was encouraged, and even prescribed, as domestic obligation, as creative opportunity, as the source of virtue, and the exemplum of good manners" (*Hearts* 24). Ann Ruggles Gere also points out that middle-class women associated sewing not only with aesthetics but also with benevolence during this epoch (75). Thus the similar function of fabric pieces and letters among the nineteenth-century artifacts Janette left behind reinforces what we know about America's nineteenth-century domestic past—the venues and *topoi* for expression assigned to women in what Jacqueline Jones Royster might call "local" sites for language and action (231). Women like Janette and Mamma used writing and sewing to signify their piety.

While these artifacts—the scrapbook and the diary—can represent the women's subjugation and concession to hegemony, they also provide a portrait of the women's active engagement and expertise with these particular materials for communication, memory-making, and identity construction. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin might deem this use of two respective mediums for memory-making—quilting and writing—as an example of remediation whereby new and old mediums reinforce and interact with one another—in this case clothing scraps and letter scraps. As they explain it, "The very act of remediation [. . .] ensures that the older medium cannot be entirely effaced; the new medium remains dependent on the older one in acknowledged and unacknowledged ways" (47). However, Latour's concept of "translation" might also explain the relationship among mediums among Janette's mnemonic materials. Translation, according to Latour, is the relationship among material objects, people, and experience that results thereby in "the creation of a link that did not exist before and that to some degree modifies the two" (179). Janette, and presumably her nineteenth-century counterparts, has in effect emphasized a link between two otherwise mutually exclusive mediums for design—writing and sewing. Bolter and Grusin's concept of remediation suggests a linear relationship between media—one medium might for instance replace the other once the second gains cache. Translation allows an understanding of several mediums being used and understood simultaneously by rhetoricians, and nonhierarchically. The concept of clothing scraps as "data" for creating a new artifact such as a quilt might be regarded as a form of translation because letter scraps can be understood as performing the same function as quilt pieces—the letter scraps act as "pieces" that can be arranged in a meaningful pattern as with fabric pieces in quilts. Each medium can be understood in relation to one another. Fabric pieces are thus "modified" in their relationship to letter scraps. Readers might understand these otherwise semiotic artifacts as performing the same function as print texts—creating and maintaining memories.

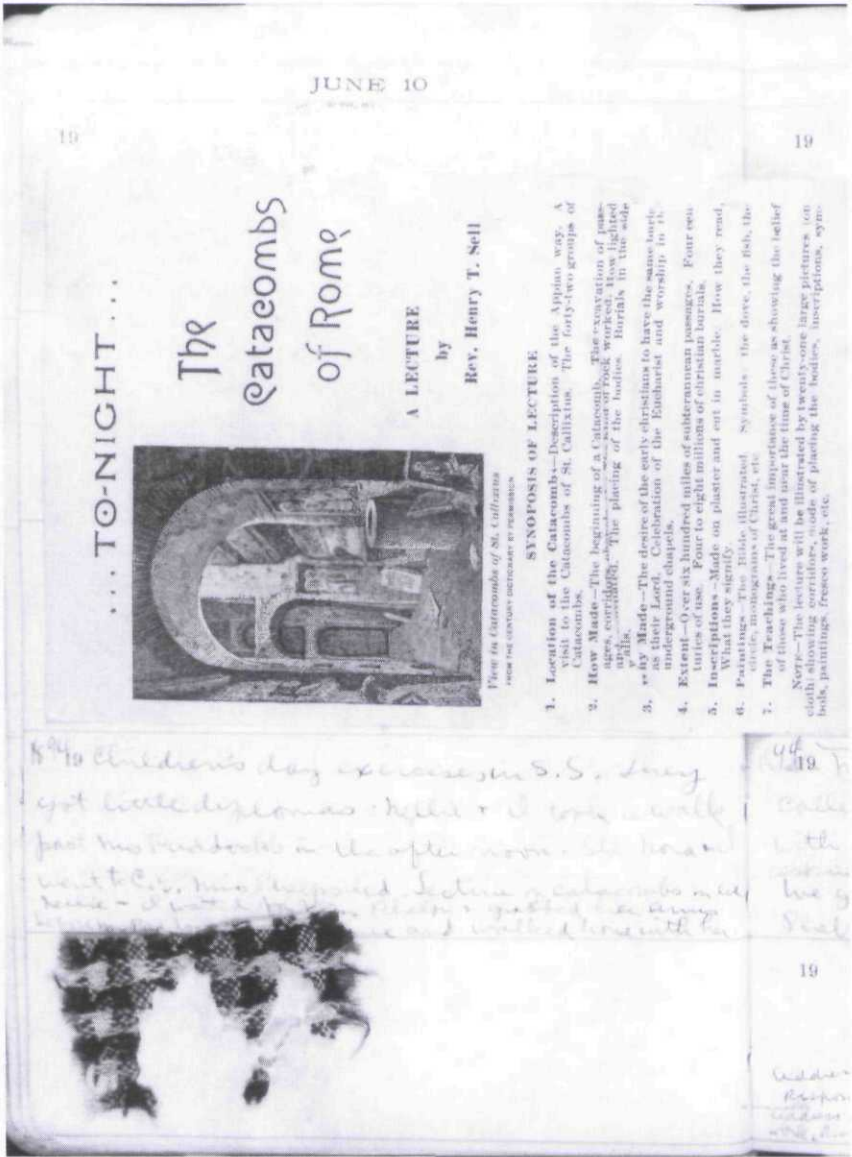


Fig. 1. A page from Janette's scrapbook where she pasted in a dress scrap along with text documents suggesting the relationship between text and textiles as materials equally sufficient for documenting events or relationships. Copy of original image held by the Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. Reproduced with permission.

Janette's quilt-making process and the documentation of this process also highlights a fluid or blurred relationship among invention, memory, and arrangement—which, like “translation,” encourages connections over hierarchy and linearity. From this document it appears that at the onset of her quilt-making, and even its annotation, Janette attempted to arrange the dress pieces chronologically; she even wrote the date above her first “pieces.” On the top of the first piece she has written, for example, “1891-2,” beginning the quilt with a piece from a dress that she wore in the fourth grade. The second piece is “set” in a memory a year later, 1892–93, a tan dress she wore the following year. When wearing it she was “out on [her] wheel [a bike] in [the] rain.” It was caught on a doorknob and the mending made her late. Both of these pieces, incidentally, evoke memories of Mamma. Mentioned earlier, the first piece was trimmed with a tan dress that Mamma had worn, possibly the original dress that was made over, piece two. Mamma was most likely present in this memory, too, as the actor who performed the mending that made Janette late. By piece four Janette stopped writing dates on the top of the pieces. Perhaps she sacrificed symmetry to aesthetics, sewing together like pieces, or had begun to realize that memories are not necessarily recalled chronologically. There were pieces she wanted to include from dresses worn in memories she did not recall personally such as piece nine, the “[p]ale yellowish greenish” piece, from “a new dress Mamma happened to have in April 1873 when she suddenly decided to be married and was married in that dress because it was fresh and new at the time.” Thus, the overall arrangement of these pieces proposes a discovery that linearity was an insufficient framework for memorializing Mamma.

This arrangement also challenges an assumption that memory is “exact recall” rather than messy impressions that are nonetheless meaningful. In fact, within many of these annotative narratives, Janette placed a question mark, signifying thus the nebulous process of recollection. The description of piece thirteen, for example, has several question marks. Janette describes this dark green fabric as a piece from dark green material “made for Mamma in Evanston 1892 (?) Made (?) over (?) by Julia Howland with stiff white chemisette—worn and worn made over and worn and *worn* till 1896 (?) She liked it.” Janette apparently was unsure when the dress was made, when exactly Mamma stopped wearing it and how many times it was made over.

As I mentioned earlier, this quilt can also be linked not only to the scrapbook as an object but also to Janette's methods of shredding letters inside of it and also within her later diaries, the Daily Reminders. The process for memory-making in this case might be read and thus “translated,” by reading one with the other, a relationship between sewing and quilting also noted by Hedges when analyzing arrangements made by women in nineteenth-century scrapbooks

("The Nineteenth" 293). The meaning of the dress piece from Mamma's wedding dress could be translated, made comprehensive, by analyzing shredded letters arranged together by Janette in her scrapbook in one of its back pages. These letters were written by Mamma, Janette's father, ("Papa" or Charles), and Mamma's mother. These documents describe Janette's parents' secret marriage—necessarily kept secret so that "they," presumably Papa and Mamma, could keep their "school positions."

I speculate that Mamma and Papa met while working at a school in Hancock, Michigan, that Mamma eventually quit teaching, and that Papa got a job as an insurance agent in the town. As with the annotation of the quilt pieces, in this quilt-like diary arrangement, Janette has provided some minicommentary on top of the letter scraps so that a prospective reader might understand their context.

One of the letters written by Mamma, reads in part, "[E]verybody in Yorkville knows it and several have gone out of their way to tell her [maybe Cora's mother] what they thought about it and in no case was their opinion very flattering [. . .]. I don't *care a snap* as long as it is all right." Another scrap, presumably from the same letter reads, "You realize that I have been mar[ried?] [a]lmost four weeks—a queer kind of honeymoon this has been and how different from the one I always had in my imagination. I believe though it was for the best." The scrap from Papa's letter reads, "Oh! I do hope I will hear from my darling Cora tomorrow [. . .]. I don't care and I am not ashamed to tell if they wish to know." The last letter scrap, from a letter written by Cora's mother, to Papa reads, in part, "My dear Charlie how can I help loving you when you are so good to that little girl of mine that has gone and wandered up among the snows of the north and pretty near lost herself in the drifts [. . .]. She says you are the most thoughtful man she ever saw [. . .]. How glad I was to hear, yet I knew."

The value that Janette placed on letter scraps to create narrative patterns and records that parallel the value she placed on fabric scraps is further evident in a letter scrap Janette sent to her brother, Frank Miller, when she was a missionary in Angola as late as 1937. The letter was cut in two; the middle half is missing. Like the letter scraps in the above narrative about her parents' secret marriage, Janette annotated this text as well, "Mamma to Papa before they were married. A very precious relic."³ In her diary Janette also referred to diary notes and the cutting up of magazines suggesting the association women like Janette and Mamma made between literate material like magazines *and* fabric scraps.

Janette actually draws attention to the linking of materials and events through devices we might regard as hypertextual. Piece twelve, a piece of ribbon, for example, made it into the quilt because of its relationship to piece three, a party dress Janette wore in sixth grade, a purple dress Janette wore in 1894, and, finally, piece twenty-one, a green and plaid dress with white and red lines, a

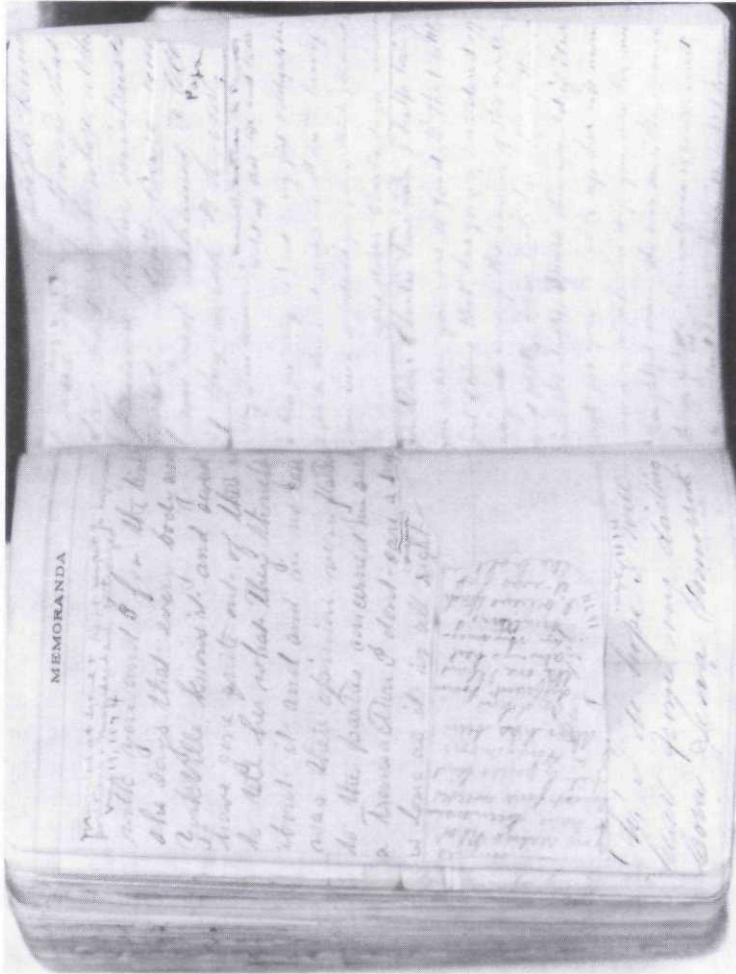


Fig. 2. These letter scraps narrate Cora and Charles Miller's secret marriage. Janette has written at the top of the letters on the left, "Married at home & kept secret to keep school positions. Misjudged and criticized. May 19, 1874." Copy of original image held by the Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. Reproduced with permission.

dress that Janette had on while Rollin (Janette's uncle) was sick and dying at home with Mamma in 1891.

The focus on design that privileges relationships, either human relationships, as with signature or mourning quilts, or the aesthetic relationships between "pieces" in the actual quilt, might also correspond with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century values in America among women, values shared by Janette and Cora Miller. As Carroll Smith-Rosenberg explains the phenomenon: Women who were thrust together by the roles in the domestic sphere "turn[ed] trustingly and lovingly to one another" (74). While those of us living in contemporary society do not find hostility or conflict between mothers and daughters unusual, and might actually expect this conflict as an inevitable step in a young woman's maturing process, in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, "normal relationships between mother and daughter was one of sympathy and understanding." In fact, Smith-Rosenberg asserts, "An intimate mother-daughter relationship lay at the heart of the female world" (64). In a culture emphasizing communions among women, as reinforced by their domestic activities like quilting, which mimicked and commemorated these connections, verbal or literate critique was logically threatening if not merely puzzling.

A letter pasted in Janette's scrapbook, presumably written by Mamma when Janette was a teenager, indicates that mother-daughter bonding was prescribed to Janette by her mother and that Mamma used print rhetoric rather than mere verbal exchange, as well the females' shared belief system, to reinforce and restate this bonding when breached:

My Dearest Daughter: Your nice little note was very acceptable it did me lots of good. I was feeling so badly all the afternoon to think we must be so unhappy all the time. And I asked the Lord to help us both and he has. Yes I will forgive you and you must try and think before you say such awful things. It is not alone that it hurts my feelings but it hurts yourself a thousand times more. Goodnight, With love, Mamma (May 21-22).

This reference to a fight or misunderstanding between mother and daughter, and the corresponding apology, is not unheard of in our contemporary society where many mothers and daughters lean on one another for emotional support, and inevitable scuffles result in eventual reckonings or apologies. However, Mamma believed Janette's adverse behavior toward her was in effect a violence to herself, which parallels the worldview that boundaries between mother and daughter were indistinguishable; when hurting Mamma, Janette hurt herself. One might also argue that Janette was being "disciplined" to be

an obedient daughter and, ostensibly, like all “true women,” an obedient wife in the far-off future.

Janette’s relationship with dolls and doll’s clothing referenced in her quilt annotation might thus indicate that through clothes Janette was also being disciplined as a “mother” concerned with dressing well: a tenet of nineteenth-century womanhood. Janette thus used her quilt to memorialize both her mother *and her values*. Piece sixteen, for example, Janette describes as a gray corduroy coat that “[a]fterwards became a doll coat.” With piece twenty-three from a “green and dark red plaid flannel dress,” Janette reports that she had her picture taken with a doll. Ella Church in fact prescribed young girls’ involvement with dressmaking as seamstresses for their dolls in her 1882 advice manual, *The Home Needle*. “The practice acquired in making dolls’ dresses nicely,” Church wrote, “and it should be insisted upon that they be made nicely—is an invaluable preparation to a girl for making her own dresses” (49). It’s therefore no surprise that clothing should signify and memorialize mother–daughter relations along with verbal and written materials. Janette’s use of her own clothing to make her doll clothes might help us understand furthermore how a mother’s clothing, and clothing in general, was understood as both a mnemonic artifact and a functional material good within nineteenth-century domestic culture.

Quilting and Photography

While we might understand Janette’s quilt document in reference to clothing and letter-writing, her process for memory-making also nods significantly to photography. This is logical because Janette was a proficient photographer and reportedly used her photographs as guides for her paintings as an amateur artist. Handheld Kodak cameras were just becoming affordable and thus popular in the late 1890s after the mass distribution of the relatively affordable Brownie camera between 1895 and 1900, the precise years Janette came of age and developed her interests (West 24). The first piece in the quilt incidentally came from a dress when Janette had her picture taken at school; several other pieces are mentioned in the quilt as significant because Janette was photographed while wearing the dress from which the piece came. Thus photography is yet another medium Janette used to craft memories, a means for memory-making, which we might use to read her other mnemonic activities. We might “translate,” for example, her descriptions of the quilt pieces as “Kodak moments” that she had begun to conceptualize as a photographer. Another record from Janette’s diary further suggests a tacit association between clothing scraps and photographs among women at the turn of the twentieth century. Around the new year in 1906, Janette had sent her friend Annie a “waist pattern”; in Annie’s reply she sent Janette “Ko-

dak” pictures of herself and her children. Janette’s sketches of the dresses in her later diary entries and in her quilt document also suggest the effects of new technologies on mnemonic activity among women creating rhetorical documents in the domestic sphere. Janette may have adopted this practice of sketching dresses by watching older women in her community. Elaine Hedges reports that “the popularity of ink drawing immediately preceded the advent of photography” and that “such drawings, along with written messages,” appeared on quilts shortly before photograph became popular and commonplace (*Hearts* 33).

Nancy Martha West’s analysis of snap photography at the turn of the twentieth century—promoted particularly by the Eastman Kodak company—corroborates some of the imagined anxieties Janette may have experienced when memorializing her mother via her “crafts”: sewing, writing, drawing, and photography. At the turn of the twentieth century when there was both a perceived relationship between memory-keeping and objects, as well as mass uncertainty about an increasingly complex future, West argues that snap photography became “an obligatory act of preserving memories as defense against the future and as an assurance against the past” (13). West calls snap photographs “instant antiques” (16). Snap photography shapes a present moment

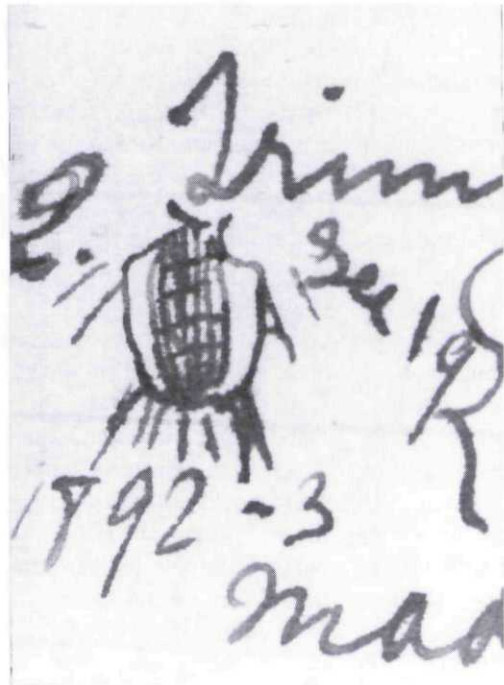


Fig. 3. An enlarged drawing of a dress to accompany a description of piece two, Mamma’s tan dress. Such drawings accompany a third of the quilt annotations’ mini-narratives. Copy of original image held by the Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. Reproduced with permission.

that is paradoxically understood as a memorial to the past. One might argue the same of Janette's clothing pieces and even her letters. These objects—clothing and letters—were likely easily understood as *aide-mémoires* in the same way that snap photography fuses the present and past in an instant. Janette might have acutely internalized the anxieties of her age about memory, promoted by Kodak company and its technologies, when considering that memory, and particularly a memory of Mamma, was threatened first by Mamma's illness, then by Mamma's death, and finally by Janette's father's remarriage. To put it crudely, Mamma was potentially and then actually antiquated—within Janette's world while she came of age and as the century turned. Nostalgia for a bygone past including Mamma, and the nineteenth-century values she professed, was invariably built into the Millers' mother-daughter relationship—and thus their rhetorical activity.

A Final Stitch?

Janette's compulsion to memorialize her mother via a quilt in the early 1900s also coincidentally parallels the burgeoning ridicule of quilt-making as a prideful form of expression among women, by society at large, and by women who wanted to assert their identities apart from an explicitly feminine past. As early as the 1890s, Elaine Showalter points out, some women, and particularly suffragists, rejected sewing as an activity as well as a symbol of female artistic endeavor (157). By the 1920s quilting was outright ridiculed in the popular press both by literary critics and art historians who "belittled even the most basic elements of quilt practice, as feminine, trivial and dull" (Showalter 161). Also coincidentally, Janette stopped writing in her diary in 1909, a year after she composed the passage I share at the beginning of this article. Upon her decision to become a missionary in Africa, Janette decided that she no longer had time to keep a diary when abroad.

The rejection of invention and mnemonic material crafted in the private sphere and Janette's choice to abandon the diary-writing I have linked to quilt-making corresponds also with the rhetoric of modern feminists whose ideals significantly shaped perceptions and attitudes about and among women in the early 1900s. Propelling women into the public sphere as equals to men as voters, modern feminists also attacked the worldview embraced by women like Janette whose identities were grounded in true women values. Modern feminists deemphasized women's attention to "nurturant service and moral uplift," values also shaping nineteenth-century mother-daughter relations like the ones shared by Janette and Cora Miller, and the values therefore shaping Janette's mnemonic material (Cott 37). The use of photographs to maintain memories and relation-

ships in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries might illustrate, then, broadened opportunities for women to express themselves as well as Bolter and Grusin's notion of remediation—photography usurped the use of clothing scraps for memory-making just as photography usurped the need for sketches, according to Hedges. Likewise, women were no longer limited to sewing and letter-writing in the private sphere for expression and identity formation, and thus memory-making. With more opportunities for expression outside the home, perhaps quilting became a less compelling form of expression for women like Janette. An attraction to photographs among women like Janette might also indicate an instinct to employ the visual for documentation, a value that had been established via sewing and a corresponding expertise with fabric and dress design—there was an easy “translation” between the mediums and their usefulness for memory-making. However, the mass rejection of particularly feminine mnemonic crafts—like quilting—is a reminder that remediation can be political, dictating what “counts” as epistemological rhetorical material and who are thus deemed “craftsmen.”

Notes

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²Miller, Janette. “Miscellaneous Missionary Material,” Papers of Janette Miller, Congregationalist Missionary to Angola, Box 1 Bentley Historical Collection.

³Miller, Janette. “Tres Fontaines Oct. 1 1937,” “Correspondence 1936–1939,” Papers of Janette Miller, Congregationalist Missionary to Angola, Box 1, Bentley Historical Collection.

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