



Quilting Brought Me to the Promised Land

by Massimilla M. Harris

Almost two decades ago I found myself being drawn into the art and craft of quilting. Before long I realized that my outpouring of creativity was being generated by my deep feelings of despair and surrender. Today my quilts are still a work in progress and you can see pictures of some of them on our website, www.budharris.com.

Years before I thought of quilting I had moved from Italy to Switzerland to attend the C.G. Jung Institute. That move was immensely therapeutic as it gave me the chance to examine my life, what it was and what it had been. I was busy going to lectures and seminars and above all going to analysis, questioning myself and diving into my unconscious. Months turned into years that were difficult and exhilarating and this experience was a rejuvenating bath for my soul as I navigated through symbols, complexes and archetypal images. But, as this time was ending I discovered that moving from Switzerland to America was a far bigger story. As this transition approached my dreams were encouraging. However I soon realized that I was living a paradox. On the one hand I was with my husband, had love in my life and my feet on solid ground. And yet, on the other hand, as soon as I landed and got off the plane it seemed like I was losing my ground, was a fish out of water and was on a bridge to nowhere. I tell the story of how making my quilts helped me adjust to life in America next to their pictures on our web site. It is a narration of how I joined the culture of my past with the culture of my future and was able to mend my life stitch by stitch, scrap by scrap, color by color.

As Bud and I left the airport in a taxi headed toward Atlanta, I was soon filled with dismay as we encountered the huge

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tangle of expressways. Everything I saw was new, seemed artificial and on a scale larger that I could have imagined. There was a crush of cars and trucks, no room for walking and it all seemed unfriendly to people. I looked curiously at houses that seemed to have no basement and I was upset and puzzled. By contrast, I thought of my childhood neighborhood and the church I grew up in. It was a beautiful cathedral with frescos by Mantegna, statues by Donatello, and it was built upon the remains of a IV century temple of Venus. Now I was looking at the extreme opposite of everything I had known, architecture, lifestyle and culture. I was overwhelmed and unable to articulate the feelings churning in my gut and I felt cut off and alien.

Several months later I discovered a book on quilts while browsing in a bookstore. As I turned the pages I was slowly overjoyed. This was a starting point that led me to join with a culture of women quilters from many backgrounds but that had one thing in common: the love of creating something beautiful with their talents and fabrics, something simple or complicated, that gained its value because it had received the patient work of the needle. In that creative work I found a piece of the root that would enable me to reconnect to myself. Needle in hand my energy awakened and my imagination began to fly.

These quilts illustrate the story of re-creating myself. They “sew” together my old Italian culture with my new American one and they reconcile the dilemma of the paradox I faced of having found my ground and having lost it at the same time.

Shown here are two of my quilts that I want to tell you about. The first one is “The Sacrifice of Isaac” and measures 16” by 14”. The material I have used is cotton, linen (for Abraham’s clothes) and seed beads for Isaac’s head, Abraham’s face and the angel’s face. This quilt shows Abraham raising his arm to give his son Isaac a fatal blow. Isaac is depicted as a small child as he was shown in the medieval miniature art of Italy. In reality he was probably grown. The angel on the left is holding Abraham’s sword with one hand

and with the other he is indicating the ram caught in the bushes that should become the sacrifice.

We have heard this story so many times that it is easy to forget the power of such a sacrifice that not only calls for a surrender but also that one takes action to kill someone who is dear and carries the promise of the future. In Italy we have an expression, “sputar sangue”, spitting blood, that is used to describe a situation that costs us to the point where we are pushed to our very limits.

Earlier in his life Abraham had become a symbol of being prepared to leave everything and to go where God led him. In addition he was generous to his brother’s son when he allowed him to choose the place he wanted to live. He was generous to his family, loyal to God and requested nothing in return. As this story with Isaac unfolds we can imagine that in his heart he had already sacrificed his son and that his heart, that of a father, was broken. His obedience to the voice of God simultaneously brought him unimaginable grief and ultimate glory.

It has been important for me to remember that Jung makes an important distinction between “gift” and “sacrifice”. In CW11 par. 390 he reminds me that gifts have many meanings and “there is always an unspoken ‘give that thou mayest receive.’” Jung continues by saying, “If it is to be a true sacrifice, the gift must be given as if it is being destroyed.” This is an intentional loss and at the same time again, because if you can give yourself away it proves that you possess yourself. Later Jung continues, “The sacrifice proves that you possess yourself, for it does not mean just letting yourself be passively taken: it is a conscious and deliberate self-surrender, which proves that you have full control of yourself, that is of your ego.” Abraham from whom the story of salvation (the psychological journey out of living unconsciously) began, is the person moving in the direction of the promised land that is not on a map but is in the soul. Abraham shows me symbolically what my attitude toward leaving the old and sacrificing things precious to me and even dear to my vision of the future must be. And Jung explains this journey psychologically. Both have brought me a lot of comfort as I journey on in my life.

The jolt of leaving Europe and coming to the States taught me that we have to be able to sacrifice our visions of who we are and how we see ourselves in every transformation. Each glimpse of our shadow, anima or animus, will disturb our vision of ourselves. Every major complex we confront will cause us to sacrifice our self-image in order to work it through. Our expectations of the future, the future we dream of, long for, and that motivates us, will fall before the sacrificial knife of the Self. If we truly follow the callings of the Self they will be into uncharted territory. That is why Jung said that Individuation, following the voice of the Self, is always a defeat for the Ego.

I followed the call to become an analyst and went to Zurich, expecting to return home and live in my culture as an analyst. Instead, and much to my surprise, I was called to sacrifice this entire vision for something new and different, which led me to the confrontation of a loss similar to the one Abraham faced, and eventually to the symbolic city of Babylon.

“The City of Babylon” is the second quilt I want to discuss. It measures 25” by 35”. The quilt shows a series of small and large buildings crowded together with all of their doors closed which gives a feeling of negativity and opposition. The colors in the quilt are kind of bright but poorly matched. In the center and toward the upper part is a quotation in Latin from

Isaiah 14:13 that reads: “You who used to think to yourself will climb up to the heavens; and higher than the stars of God I will set my throne. I will sit on the Mount of Assembly in the recesses of the north. I will climb to the top of the thundercloud, I will rival the Most High.”

Two other quotations are in the lower part, one on the left, the other on the right. They are both from Revelations, one from chapter 18:21-24 and the other from chapter 20:15 and they both talk about the destruction of Babylon and the second death. Surrounding the many buildings and thus forming a “frame” are two green serpents. They have a beaded edge of a shiny red color that reminds us of the slippery quality of a snake. The fangs and tongues of the snakes are also beaded and their eyes are two identical buttons.

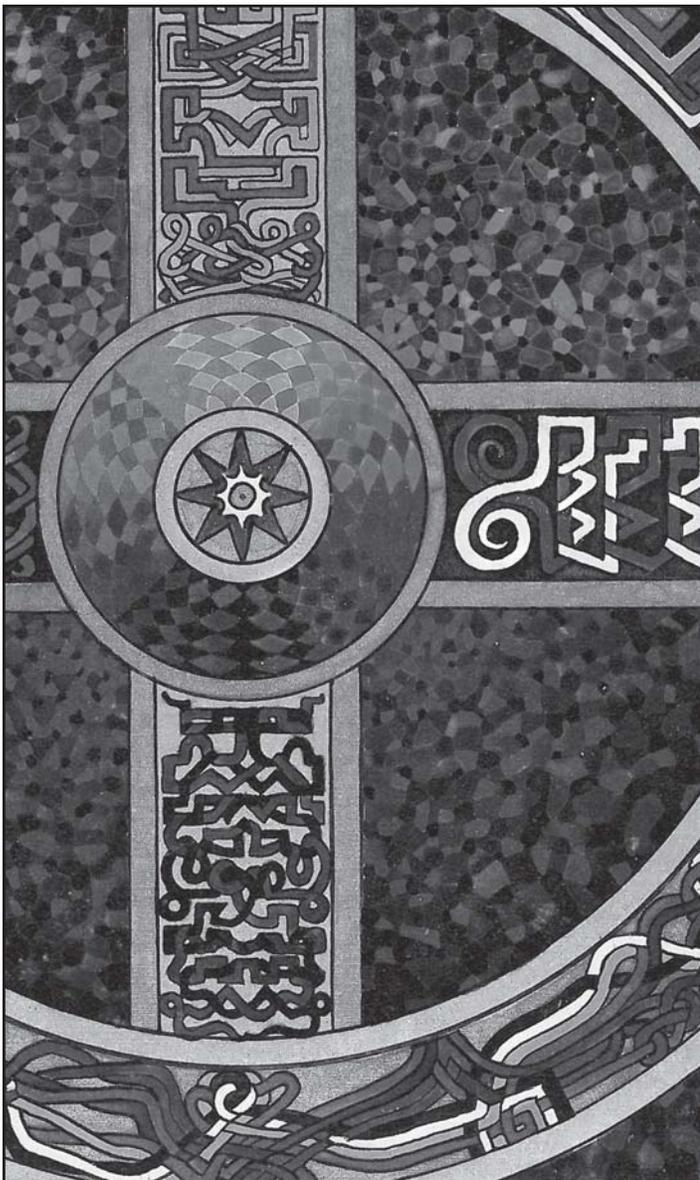
I found it very interesting that the name Babylon is derived from the Hebrew verb *balal*, which means “to confuse” thus connecting the image of the city with the story of the confusion of tongues. It is the antithesis of Paradise, and it symbolizes the victory of the material world of the senses over the soul and the consequential disintegration of the personality. When I first came to the States I felt like I was indeed “living in Babylon” in the sense of being lost and confused. My ancient and elegant town of Verona was gone, and my initial look at Atlanta was overwhelmed with materialism, the power of money and finance, the abundance of size in everything and even the over-



The City of Babylon

powering richness of the food. I wanted so badly to go home, if not to Italy to Switzerland, or anywhere in Europe. I desperately wanted my way and no other way. When I look at this second quilt, the town with many buildings, no windows and closed doors, it clearly reflects the emotional state that I was experiencing. I too had become closed, defensive and shielded against the outside because of the pain in my heart. Today I am aware that by looking at how arrogant my new country seemed to me, I was secretly becoming arrogant myself.

Today it seems like a long time ago that I was overcome by these thoughts and conflicts. As I sewed them into form in a special culture of women I realized that I felt at home here in America. And as I see Italy through new lens I also see their centuries of corruption, political scandals and that they have their own version of Babylon. I also saw the indifference of Italians to the needs of their neighbors and the kindness inherent in the women I was quilting with. With Jung's help supporting this process of transformation I have learned that the "promised land" is in my own soul.



detail of painting from *Red Book*

To Kill a Chicken

by Wilson Elijah McCreary

I wrung their necks.

Grandma thought it time

I was ten or so.

Here's how...

Consider size, age, sex, etc.

and catch the chicken

Hold the chicken by the head

and whirl.

The head doesn't rotate

and the body does.

Soon the neck is felt to break.

Grab the neck below the break

with the other hand

and pull the head off.

Drop the body and the head

and run.

Blood spurts and

the chicken's legs pump

as though trying to run

from something evil

though taking a random path

no longer driven by whatever logic

a headed chicken might possess.

Wilson E. McCreary is a semi-retired computer systems engineer. Connected to Jung through poets, lots of reading and conversation, Wilson writes a little poetry, makes a little music and talks to his archetypes—his people inside—when they will.