

## You Can Say That Again

by Dolores Andrew

What do Cole Porter, Van Gogh, Dr. Seuss, Mondrian, Jane Austen, Mozart, and The Beatles have in common? Of course, they were all creators of well-known works in various art forms. In addition, they each used the technique of repetition. The design principal of repetition is one of the most basic techniques used in all creative work, including needlework. When the creator repeats something, the device reinforces the image so that the theme will stay with the viewer, reader, or listener.

The method is recognizable in music when a note or a phrase is repeated frequently, or sometimes constantly, throughout the composition. The device is obvious in a simple tune such as "Three Blind Mice," but classical composers used it in their works as well. Rossini tied his overtures together by repeated phrasing. Beethoven repeated the theme over and over again in his "Violin Concerto," and used melody repetition in many of his other compositions. Wagner used a "Leitmotif" for each of the characters in his "Ring" operas. This repeated identifying phrase helps the audience to recognize them in his often confusing and convoluted libretti. The same technique of recognition is employed in the familiar "Peter and the Wolf." A distinctive musical phrase repeated on a particular instrument identifies each of the characters in the story.

Writers often use repetition as a plot device in literature. Edgar Allen Poe quoted the Raven repeatedly to create a feeling of mystery and dread. Jane Austen used repetition for humor. She repeated a word or a phrase to emphasize a character flaw, a character's nervous quirk or as a repetitious annoyance to the other characters in her books. A contemporary and blatant exponent of the principal of repetition is Dr. Seuss. His repetition of simple words and phrases and repeating rhyming sounds has helped millions of children to learn to love to read. Jack Benny and his writers used the repeated running gag to create very effective comedy. Even repeated sound effects such as Benny's Maxwell automobile and Fibber McGee's closet were radio comedy classics.

Repetition in art takes many forms. It can be a repeated shape or line. However, the repeated element does not have to be identical to the original. The artist can enlarge it, reduce it, reverse it, or vary color and value to create repetitive elements. Van Gogh repeated similar brush strokes, Mondrian repeated and modified shapes, and Seurat did it with dots.

In music, also the composer may repeat a phrase or a melody in different forms. As in art, the repeated notes do not have to be identical. The composer may vary volume, vary the tempo, modulate to a different key, or assign the melody to a different orchestral instrument to modify the color and value of the repetitive element. A classic example is Revel's "Bolero." Ravel repeats the same phrase at the same tempo throughout the piece. However, the volume changes as different instruments pick up

the theme with a variety of textures building to the stunning climax at the conclusion. The composers of Broadway musicals such as Cole Porter and Oscar Hammerstein made very effective use of repetition in their work. In the musical, "Music Man," Meredith Willson used the same tune twice with different tempos and different lyrics, to great effect. Try singing the march, "Seventy-Six Trombones" to the slower waltz tempo of "Goodnight My Someone." As a result, the tunes of these Broadway composers have become memorable classics. The Beatles' song "Yellow Submarine" repeats the title phrase effectively. Rock and Roll and the contemporary popular music that has grown from it have exaggerated the art of repetition in music. These compositions repeat tempo, melody and lyrics over and over with a sometimes mind-numbing sameness.

Repetition is common in the art of needlework. The stitcher uses it to create a pattern or shape. A counted cross stitch piece uses the same stitch throughout, but variations in color and placement of the stitch create a picture. Assisi embroidery is usually monochromatic, but even the repeated stitches of the same color can create a picture by where they are placed. A stitch can be repeated for effect whether it is as simple as a cross stitch or as complicated as an Amadeus stitch. French knots can shape a Santa's beard, buttonhole stitches may create lace, or Gobelin can create many shapes and patterns. Long and short can create shading by varying the length and color of similar stitches. The chain stitch can be repeated in several of its many variations to produce different textures and effects just as an arranger assigns a melody to different instruments in an orchestra.

Simple shapes created, rearranged or reversed are a basic component of quilting. Triangles and squares are often varied, turned and overlapped. Triangles repeated in one fashion become a pattern called "Flying Geese." Arranged in another way the pattern is called "Hour Glass." Repeating squares can also create quilt patterns. Depending on how they are handled, the patterns created have become known as "Trip Around the World," or "Log Cabin" among others. When combined squares and triangles are repeated, a number of star patterns emerge. The quilting stitches themselves when repeated in swirls, scallops, leaves, and circles across the surface of the piece create yet other designs while fastening the layers together.

Repetition is one of the most basic but exciting principles of design. Without it, Poe's mysteries, Austen's humor, or Dr. Seuss's silliness would not exist. Without it, there would be no Peter or The Wolf. Without it, Picasso's line and Mondrian's shapes would be meaningless. Without it, many beautiful stitch and quilt patterns would not be possible.

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Dolores Andrew is a long time member of Valentine/NAN. She received her Teachers' Certification in 1976, and her Judges' Certification in 1987. She served for many years as Director of Judges' Certification and simultaneously laid the groundwork for the Exemplary. She continues to participate in NAN board activities by representing the organization at the International Council of Needlework Associations. She continues to judge needlework and art shows nationwide, and is currently enrolled in NAN's Master Judge Program. In her other life she is retired from teaching art at the Maryland Institute, spends her summers at an artists' colony in Rehoboth Beach DE, and is a wife, mother of three, and grandmother of several