Abstract:

*American Girl dolls represent a rich and deeply revealing source of rhetorical artifacts that have been largely overlooked by the adult-focused academy. The 1985 Addy Walker doll and her accessory kit, contextualized in the book* Meet Addy *represent an important rhetorical source that provides a complex representation of one African American family's journey to freedom. The purpose of this study is to explore the richness of description that contextualizes each of Addy's accessories, and to show that the interplay of object and text creates a site specific rhetorical situation. The original Addy doll and her accessories are precisely constructed in her text, rendering them a complex and nuanced toy for young girls; however, this complexity and nuance is not assured in contemporary iterations of the doll. This analysis provides a glimpse of the ways that toys can serve as a valuable source of cultural texts and an argument in favor of attending to the texts and toys of childhood.*

## A Close Textual Analysis of Iconography in *Meet Addy*

Writing in 1928, Walter Benjamin described the way that children's toys reflect adult culture. According to Benjamin, children's toys "cannot bear witness to any autonomous separate existence, but rather a silent signifying dialogue between them and their nation."[1] Benjamin thought that children's toys reflect as much on adult culture as they do children's and provide an interesting distillation of the material prejudices and world views of adults. Despite this potential, comparatively little academic attention is paid to toys or to children's culture. Studies

1 Walter Benjamin, "The Cultural History of Toys," in Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, ed. Michael Jennings et al. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 116.

of childhood are confined to disciplines like child psychology or children's literature and are overlooked by adult-focused academia. According to Beverly Lyon Clark, a critic of children's literature, the academic disregard for children's culture is rooted in our collective unwillingness to "attend to children's perspectives."[2] Clark uses the term *kiddie lit* as a distillation that captures "our culture's ambivalence towards children and children's literature, [which is] dismissive? self mocking? pejorative? ironical?"[3] Children's toys, praised by Benjamin as particularly valuable and revealing cultural texts, are routinely ignored by the academy, while children's literature is excluded from anthologies, belittled, and undervalued. The academy has so far done an inadequate job of describing how the texts and toys of childhood help shape cultural values and illustrate ideals.

American Girl dolls, the expansive series of books that accompanied them, and the catalogues that advertised them, along with the emerging online culture of adolescent doll consumers represent a rich and deeply revealing source of rhetorical artifacts, which has hitherto been largely overlooked. American Girl dolls and their associated books are a particularly rich anomaly in terms of cultural texts because they function not as one rhetorical act but two—the book, which serves as textual justification for the doll, and the doll which serves as a come-to-life version of the text. The combination of these two artifacts creates a conversation—a mesh—that enhances the cultural significance of both artifacts, both rhetorically and temporally. There are, after all, lots of dolls and lots of children's books for little girls—but few of all toys (and even adult products) cultivate a following as ferociously loyal as that of American Girl. The

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[2] Beverly Lyon Clark. 2003. *Kiddie lit: The cultural construction of children's literature in america*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), 7.

[3] Clark, Kiddie Lit, 2.

forces that make American Girl dolls and books an appealing consumer product—their ties to American history, their unique identities, and their material and cultural scope—also make them valuable cultural artifacts fully capable of the "silent signifying dialogue between them and their nation" that Benjamin describes.

**Background**

In 1984, text book author Ms. Pleasant Rowland went shopping for her two young nieces. She found that the toy store sold only baby dolls that needed caring for or adult fashion dolls that represented aspirational womanhood. While real women in the 1980s were redefining their role in the workplace and changing American culture, the doll isle had yet to catch up. Sensing a need, Ms. Pleasant and her friend Ms. Valerie Tripp invested one million dollars of savings from text book royalties to create a line of premium 18-inch vinyl dolls modeled on nine year old girls from carefully planned historical fiction stories. The line, called American Girl, was quickly popular and the richly detailed dolls—and the mail order catalogues that preceded them—became icons of 1990s girlhood.

Assuming that you do not live in a sad doll-less vacuum of American pop culture, you've probably noticed that these dolls have only grown in popularity since the 1990s. Since 1986 more than 27 million American Girl dolls have made their way to the homes of eager girls and equally eager collectors. Today there are  26 permanent brick and mortar American Girl stores throughout the US, Canada, and Mexico (along with a smattering of seasonal pop up stores) where girls can shop for the now $115 dolls, their $24 basic accessory kits, and countless additional accessories. This contemporary iteration of American Girl is the result of the Pleasant Company's 1998 sale to Mattel for $700 million, which produced a redirection of the brand

including a decreased focus on the dolls' historical backstories, more new dolls, and a slight redesign of the doll's bodies and eye sockets (which got smaller and bigger, respectively).

Addy Walker—the first black American Girl doll—was introduced in 1993. Addy's story begins in 1864 as she and her mother prepare to escape from slavery following the sale of Addy's father and brother to a neighboring plantation. The Addy series chronicles Addy's harrowing escape and her subsequent life in Philadelphia during the Civil War; her story contains significantly more hardship than any of the later dolls'. Ms. Connie Porter wrote the six books that accompanied Addy and said of them, "I wanted children to see African American people as part of strong, loving families, caught up in slavery, doing what they had to do to survive."[4] Like all American Girl dolls, Addy was initially released with an optional $20 accessory kit that contained objects introduced in her first book, titled *Meet Addy*. Addy's original accessories included a bonnet with a blue satin ribbon, the kerchief she uses to carry her belongings, a drinking gourd, a cowrie shell necklace, and an historically accurate half dime coin. As I will show in this paper, the descriptions of each object in *Meet Addy* serve as justification for the inclusion of those objects in Addy's accessory kit by contextualization and association with 19th century African American traditions and culture. Each of Addy's accessories has special symbolic significance.

**Literature Review**

In this paper, I will approach the object descriptions in *Meet Addy* methodologically via close textual analysis in order to explore the descriptions that contextualize each of Addy's accessories and to show how the interplay of object and text creates a site-specific rhetorical

[4] Brit Bennet, "Addy Walker, American Girl." *The Paris Review*, May 28, 2015, accessed December 5, 2015, http://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2015/05/28/addy-walker-american-girl/

situation that places the doll at the apex of cultural meaning. I will use a critical stance wherein I am more concerned with the power of these passages as "representative anecdotes" of American values packaged into tiny doll accessories than with an agent. Indeed, it would be difficult to attribute one unique agent to this artifact since, while Ms. Porter is technically the author of the *Meet Addy*, the Pleasant Company and its team of historians determined the general arc of Addy's story and developed the doll and her accessories before commissioning the book.[5] I will also pay close attention to how the object descriptions in *Meet Addy* serve as justification for Addy's accessory kit and how these descriptions, combined with their material artifacts, serve to create a unique site-specific rhetorical situation that enhances the meaning of both the text and the doll.

In "Critical Rhetoric: An Orientation Toward Criticism," Raymie E. McKerrow describes the difference between a critique of domination, which reveals oppressive power structures, and a critique of freedom, which focuses on the power to "be other than what one is at the present moment."[6] In *Meet Addy,* this difference allows for a critique of the dominative power of the dolls as consumer products and a celebration of their progressive power as icons of American history and feminist play. It's possible to renounce the Addy doll and her books as a product of consumer capitalism; however, I believe it's also possible to explore how the doll and her accessories—in their original 1985 iteration—represent the power of children's toys as vehicles of culture that can transmit positive messages and tech often-ignored stories. In *Meet Addy*, Addy's accessories are carefully woven into the story and given abstract value so that they do not

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[5] Elizabeth Mehren, "Writer Brings Painful Part of Past to Life," *Los Angeles Times.* November 28, 1994.

[6] Raymie E. McKerrow, "Critical Rhetoric: An Orientation Toward Criticism," in *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method*, ed. Jim A. Kuypers. (In press), 7.

appear as mere commodities defined only by their exchange value. Instead, these objects seem more like icons intended to teach little girls about the horrors of slavery, the importance of bravery, and the value of family. In 1985, the Addy dolls were thoughtfully crafted, exhaustively researched, and manufactured by a company run by women. It is possible (perhaps likely) that the recent Mattel dolls, with their less harrowing backstories and expanded accessory lines, might have crossed the subtle line to domination, but that's not so easily said of the 1985 Addy doll.

The purpose of closely analyzing this text is to explore the richness of description that contextualizes each of Addy's accessories, and to show that the interplay of object and text creates a site specific rhetorical situation. The combination of Addy's accessories and text creates a unique rhetorical situation according to Loyd F. Bitzer's description:

> Let us regard rhetorical situation as a natural context of persons, events, objects, relations, and an exigence with strongly invites utterance; this invited utterance participates naturally in the situation, is in many instances necessary to the completion of situational activity, and by means of its participation with situation obtains its meaning and its rhetorical character.[7]

The American Girl Dolls and their books, in combination with the little girls and parents who read them compose a unique context of persons and objects. Each doll, dressed in unfamiliar period clothing, invites utterance to contextualize her time period and her personality. The objects contained in a basic American Girl Doll accessory kit certainly invite utterance—they are arbitrary objects (like a gourd or leather pouch), independently not the most logical choices for

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[7] Lloyd F. Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation." *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 1 (1968): 1-14.

play. They ask for contextualization—justification—through the story that came packaged with each doll. By crying out for context that can only be provided through her story, each doll, with her book and her accessories, creates a unique web of interconnected meaning, a rhetorical situation that depends on the interplay of each entity.

Close textual analysis is an appropriate method for unpacking these delicate object descriptions because it allows careful interpretation of language, even in small, relatively simple texts. Since *Meet Addy* is a fictional historical adventure story designed for a young adult audience, the story is short and simple to understand. It's language is not lofty or terribly abstract, and symbols and metaphors are presented in a manner straightforward enough for a child to grasp. Therefore a method that allows a "microscopic" reading of the text is ideal.[8]

Close textual analysis is also a useful method for this study because it allows the critic to make abstract conclusions from the text and to "move deeply" into the subject.[9] According to Michael Leffe, it "requires an exercise of judgement at some level of abstraction, and it eventuates in something we might call theoretical understanding of the particular case."[10] Close textual analysis is meant to, as Samuel Becker describes, "'explain' the way a message 'works.'"[11] By "moving deeply" into the subject and drawing abstract conclusions about the "way a message 'works,'" I will show how *Meet Addy* serves to imbed symbolic meaning into

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[8] Stephen E. Lucas, "Justifying America: The Declaration of Independence as a Rhetorical Document" in Thomas W. Benson, ed., *American Rhetoric: Contexts and Criticism* (Carbondale, Il: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989): 22.

[9] Stephen E. Lucas, "The Renaissance of American Public Address: Text and Context in Rhetorical Criticism," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 74 (1988): 241-260.

[10] Michael Leffe, "Textual Criticism: The Legacy of G. P. Mohrmann," *Quarterly Journal Of Speech* 72 (1986): 378.

[11] Lucas,"The Renaissance of American Public Address."

the objects that compose Addy's accessory kit, thereby contextualizing the accessories and justifying them as symbolically loaded icons, and not simple commodity doll toys.

Leffe's discussion of the intersection of time and rhetoric is also relevant to *Meet Addy,* with its accompanying doll and accessories. Like traditional oratory, a children's book to accompany a doll is a "temporal art." The Addy doll and her original accessories were only available from 1993 until 2014, when she was rereleased with different accessories.[12] As I have described, the particular meaning of *Meet Addy* depends on a highly site specific rhetorical situation that requires both text and doll/accessories. *Meet Addy* is temporally located in this twenty year span between 1993 and 2014, and additionally located to reading acts where the audience is familiar with the doll and accessories. This temporal location is significant because it assumes a particular attitude towards childhood, a particular tolerance of consumerism, and a particular understanding of the role of dolls. *Meet Addy* read today in the company of a modified doll with different accessories means something different that it did in 1993. By unpacking the particular text used to describe Addy's objects to see how they are justified as symbolically important to Addy's life, and then comparing that temporal location of Addy and her accessories to the 2014 Mattel rerelease, we might see some of this difference.

**Analysis and Interpretation**

As I have noted above, Addy's original accessory kit included her kerchief, gourd, half-dime, cowrie shell necklace, and bonnet; however, these are not the only objects to appear in *Meet Addy.* In fact, Addy encounters lots of different objects in the first half of the book—including a bucket, cotton borer worms, and her rag doll—which are visually illustrated next to

[12] American Girl Wiki. "Addy Walker (Doll)." Last modified February 11, 2015. http://americangirl.wikia.com/wiki/Addy_Walker_(doll)

the text that describes them, but conspicuously missing from her accessory kit. Disregarding the absence of particular items, the contents of Addy's accessory kit are relatively predictable. Most American Girl doll accessories included some variation of a purse, hat, coin, and piece of jewelry; however, Addy was the only doll that came with a kerchief instead of a purse and with an extra accessory: the gourd.[13] Therefore, we can assume a level of flexibility and artistic intention with Addy's accessory kit that allowed deviation from American Girl Doll norms. In addition, the careful textual detail paid to the objects that compose Addy's accessory kit was not standard for descriptions of other objects in the book (like the bucket or rag doll), so we can assume that Addy's accessories are meant to have special textual significance that other objects do not have.

**The Kerchief**

The first of Addy's accessories to appear in *Meet Addy* is her kerchief, which is introduced on page 28—approximately half way through the 60 page text. At this point in the story, Addy's father and brother have been sold to a neighboring plantation, and Addy's mother, Ruth, fears Addy too will soon be sold. Sensing the tragedy of this impending future, Ruth decides to enact the escape plan she and Addy's father perviously developed. After revealing her plan to Addy, Ruth directs Addy to "go to my pallet and get what's under it."[14] Under her mother's pallet (a cornhusk-filled sack used to sleep on), Addy finds "two large kerchiefs and

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[13] Nethilia T. Campbell, "Historical Clothes Reviews and Historical Accessories: Addy's Meet Outfit and Meet Accessories," *American Girl Outsider Blog*, June 19, 2014, http://americangirloutsider.blogspot.com/2014/06/historical-clothes-reviews-and.html.

[14] Connie Rose Porter and Melody Rosales, *Meet Addy: An American Girl, (*Middleton, WI: Pleasant Co, 1993), 28.

some clothes. But they were not clothes for a woman and girl, but for a man and a boy."[15] Ruth explains that she will "pack them kerchiefs with some food, a drinking gourd, things like that" and that they will wear the men's clothing to make their scent difficult to trace.

Here, at the inception of her journey, Addy receives the first object of her accessory kit: a calico kerchief. The kerchief is significant chronologically; it is a material symbol of the impending escape. By packing a kerchief with supplies and disguises, Ruth turns their escape plan from idea to action. By asking Addy to retrieve the kerchief (instead of simply handing it to her), Ruth integrates Addy into her plan of action. Addy becomes a girl who will escape with her mother as a partner and carry her own supplies. While Addy's kerchief is not given explicit symbolic significance in the text (as her other accessories are), the kerchief is significant because it is included in her accessory kit. The toy kerchief is, first of all, a useful tool for a doll who might need to carry things, but it also a marker of the beginning of Addy's new life and an object she takes with her to freedom.

Addy's accessory kit is composed only of items that Addy has with her at the end of her journey as she crosses into the North. Therefore, all of Addy's accessories are historically and symbolically loaded—they are the only possessions of a young escaped slave. Everything Addy owns in the world, she now carries in her kerchief. This is additionally significant, because, until the end of the book, Addy does not even technically own her body. She is a slave, then a runaway slave, and finally at the culmination of her journey she becomes legally a free girl. Each of Addy's five accessories is important because they collectively represent the only five items Addy owns at the beginning of her new, free life.

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[15] Porter, *Meet Addy*, 28.

**The Gourd**

Addy's drinking gourd is introduced on page 28 along with her kerchief. Unlike the kerchief which functions rhetorically as a tool for Addy's journey, the gourd reappears with special significance in the text. On page 39, Addy and her mother have finished their first night of running and they take refuge in a cave and refresh themselves by eating cornbread and drinking from the gourd. Now liberated from their master's control, Addy and her mother are free to stop and rest, to make their own decisions, and to eat and drink whenever they choose.

The water gourd and the symbolic act of drinking is additionally important because, on three separate occasions in the short text, Addy is ordered to serve water to others. On the plantation, Addy's jobs included taking a bucket of water to slaves working in the fields and attending to her master as he ate with guests. In one scene Addy is punished after she tries to take her father water at an improper time, as a cover for warning him that he will be sold.[16] In another scene Addy is punished after filling her master's glass too full and spilling water on the table.[17] In a third scene Addy inadvertently finds herself in a camp of sleeping confederate soldiers and, disguised as a boy, she is ordered to bring water to a groggy soldier who has mistaken her for a camp servant.[18] Addy's subjugation is defined by her role as a water carrier—these three scenes, plus another scene where she picks cotton, are the only scenes that depict Addy in relation to her white masters. Therefore three-fourths of the textual examples of Addy's work as a slave involve her as a water carrier. Before this scene in the cave with her mother, we never see Addy eat or drink—we only see her serve water to others.

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[16] Porter, *Meet Addy,* 18.

[17] Porter, *Meet Addy,* 17.

[18] Porter, *Mett Addy,* 50.

Originally the Addy Doll came with a real gourd, which was later replaced with a plastic gourd following a nation-wide gourd shortage.[19] Objectively, a gourd doesn't seem like the best children's toy. However, by contextualizing the gourd as a drinking vessel and imbuing it with the significance of freedom and the memory of oppression, Addy's gourd becomes an accessory justifiable by is symbolism. It is also interesting that The Pleasant Company originally wanted to give the Addy doll an authentic gourd. The inclusion of a real miniature gourd, and not a plastic facsimile, suggests The Pleasant Company's commitment to authentically reproducing Addy's accessories, rife with symbolic meaning. Addy's gourd needs contextualization, but the text also benefits form a faithful reproduction of imagery like an authentic water gourd.

**The Half-Dime**

Addy's next accessory is a half-dime piece modeled on a "Seated Liberty Half-Dime." The half-dime is introduced on page 34 as Addy and her mother prepare to escape. A family friend called Uncle Solomon approaches Addy and asks what she's got behind her ear. He snaps his fingers and says, "'Why look what's come out of your ear. You must have forgot to wash behind it. Look at this half dime I found there.'"[20] When Addy asks him to reveal his trick, Solomon replies, "'It's magic. You hold on to that half dime. You gonna need it where you going. Freedom cost, you hear me? Freedom's got its cost."[21] Therefore, Addy's half dime is not introduced as a simple piece of currency but as an important tool of freedom embedded with magical powers.

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[19] "Addy Walker (Doll)," last modified February 11, 2015, http://americangirl.wikia.com/wiki/Addy_Walker_(doll).

[20] Porter, *Meet Addy,* 34.

[21] Porter, *Meet Addy,* 34.

When Addy and her mother leave their cabin that night, Addy notices that the moon shines in the sky "looking like a half dime sitting in the bottom of a well."[22] The full moon allows them to see as they run through the forest on their way towards a safe house. Here, Addy compares her magical half dime—a tool of freedom—to the moon that facilitates her escape through the dark forest. The dime becomes a metaphor for phenomena, natural and manmade, that help Addy on her journey.

The dime reappears again at the end of the story asAddy and her mother prepare to leave the safe house run by Miss Caroline. Addy offers the dime to Miss Caroline as payment for her kindness and for the new clothes she has given to Addy and her mother, but Miss Caroline refuses saying she doesn't need any payment and is just happy to help. This short interaction serves as final proof that the dime does not have monetary significance—it is important as a magical marker of the help that Addy and her mother receive on their journey.

Demonetizing Addy's coin in this way is a radical act. For most of the other American Girl dolls, the real metal, historically accurate coin included in their accessory kit was a sentimental way of emphasizing the doll's place in history, and not an important part of their story. In *Meet Addy* however, the dime functions as a symbol of the help Addy receives as she escapes to freedom. The dime, tied to Addy's helpful uncle Soloman and to Miss Caroline, compared to the guiding light of the moon, suggests that human help and compassion are more important gifts than money.

**The Cowrie Shell Necklace**

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[22] Porter, *Meet Addy,* 40.

Addy's cowrie shell necklace is easily the most important object that she acquires on her journey. The necklace is introduced on page 39 as Addy and her mother hide in the cave. After eating cornbread and drinking from the gourd, Addy's mother presents Addy with the shell saying, "This cowrie shell belonged to Poppa's grandma. She was stole from Africa when she was no bigger than you. None of her family was on the ship with her when she came here from across the water. She wore this shell on a necklace."[23] Her mother then pulls out a leather shoelace that belonged to her older brother Sam and explains that she wanted Addy "to have something of his, too." Addy wears the cowrie shell necklace for the rest of her journey. She touches the cowrie shell when she is afraid and needs courage, she notices the cowrie shell pressed into her body as she hugs her mother, and she holds it tightly as she hides in the wagon on the way to Philadelphia, thinking of her brother, father, baby sister, and great-grandmother. Addy's cowrie shell necklace is a clear symbol of her heritage and a reminder of the family she's left behind. Given *Meet Addy*'s form as a work of children's fiction, the transparency of this symbol makes sense. Ms. Porter made sure that little girls wouldn't be able to ignore the special significance of Addy's necklace.

Outside the text, cowrie shells have a long history as currency in West Africa (and in many other parts of the world) and as symbolically important reminders of home for Africans kidnapped and transported to the Americas. A 2003 excavation at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello revealed a cowrie shell with a hole drilled for a cord (like Addy's) on the site of a former slave dwelling.[24] Therefore, Addy's cowrie shell is not simply a rhetorical symbol but a symbol rooted

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[23] Porter, *Meet Addy,* 34.

[24] Thomas Jefferson Foundation Inc. "Cowrie Shell." Last modified 2010. https://www.monticello.org/site/research-and-collections/cowrie-shell.

in the real experiences of African slaves. It symbolizes not only Addy's family, but the hundreds of thousands of families destroyed by the slave trade and the enduring legacy of West African culture in America.

The Addy doll originally came with a real cowrie shell strung on a leather cord; however, like the gourd, the authentic shell was later replaced by a plastic facsimile strung on a woven black string. Given the rhetorical significance of Addy's shell, replacing it with a plastic replica seems ironic. Cowrie shells were exceedingly common; they were once sold in bushels by the hundred thousand and used as packing material on sea voyages. Replacing it with plastic standardizes the shell and makes it easier to manage in an otherwise plastic doll universe, but it ironically transforms an icon of African heritage into another plastic product of Western industrial production. In addition, by replacing the leather cord (which was mean to represent Sam's shoelace) with a woven string, Mattel has removed this piece of Sam from the doll. In *Meet Addy*, the careful textual detail paid to Addy's shell and cord is meant to completely shroud her necklace with family heritage, both intimate and global. What is left in a plastic cowrie shell on a woven cord is an empty, standardized likeness of a beautifully representative symbol.

**The Bonnet**

The last of Addy's accessories is introduced on page 58/59 as Addy prepares to leave the safe house with Miss Caroline, who provides Addy and her mother with new clothes. Addy receives a striped pink dress, a pair of drawers, and a straw bonnet that "just fits" her. Addy then ties "the ribbon of the hat under her chin, [and stands] straight and tall for her mother to see."[25] Her mother begins to cry. This scene is particularly significant considering that Addy and her

[25] Porter, *Meet Addy,* 34.

mother have spent the latter half of the book dressed in ill-fitting men's clothing, crawling through mud, with their hair tied up. In this scene, Addy is able to let her hair down—to put on display her fully realized iteration. Addy, dressed in a new pink button-up dress and a real straw bonnet, liberated from the rags of her slave journey, is a free girl at last.

Addy's new outfit is significant not just because it replaces the dirty boys' outfit she's worn for most of the book. Her new outfit is significant also because clothes were a luxury during this time period. In 1864, most clothing was specially sewn by tailors and seamstresses. Thus this gift of dresses is doubly significant due to the rarity of clothing, and the fact that most slaves had only one or two changes of clothing, or none at all.[26] Also important are the varied ways clothing has been used to subjugate/elevate particular groups in historical memory. Slaves are often described as wearing "loincloths" or rags, although they were not usually so deficiently dressed.[27] Although Addy herself is never depicted wearing rags, The Pleasant Company's placement of Addy in a beautiful pink dress is a strong visual symbol that distinguishes her from the conventionally pitiful, ragged image of slaves. Her beautiful pink dress—likely made from cotton picked by slaves—and her new bonnet—vastly different from the head adornments of West Africa or the tied kerchiefs worn by slave women—are symbols of Addy's new status as a free American girl.

**Conclusion**

Addy's accessory kit is defined not only by what it includes but by what it does not. Addy comes with the objects that are the most important symbols of her journey to freedom—not

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[26] Knowles, Katie. "Fashioning Slavery: Slaves and Clothing in the U.S. South, 1830--1865." Order No. 3729570, Rice University, 2014): 6.

[27] Knowles, "Fashioning Slavery," 4.

simply with an interesting array of decorations from her book. Addy does not take her rag doll Janie with her as she escapes because she leaves Janie for her baby sister, who must remain behind on the plantation. The objects that furnish the first half of *Meet Addy*—the bucket, the cotton worms, the rag doll—are not given any special spiritual or familial significance in the story. They are simply ornaments of Addy's slave life—they are reminders of her oppression. When Addy mobilizes to escape, she begins to acquire new, symbolically loaded objects—the kerchief, the gourd, the dime, and later the necklace and bonnet—that she will take with her into a new life. Addy's accessory kit furnishes the doll with objects tied to her bravery and freedom, rather than her oppression as a former slave. The Addy doll, dressed in the pink dress she receives on the underground railroad and wears as she crosses into the North, with the symbolically loaded objects she acquires on her journey, is an icon of freedom. The doll's accessories are not simply the most interesting objects from her story, but symbols of her bravery, her family, and her freedom realized.

The highly detailed object descriptions analyzed above serve to justify Addy's accessories as play things by contextualization. Objectively, the purse, coin, handkerchief, necklace, and hat that composed a standard accessory kit for each American Girl doll are not the most interesting toys. However, by contextualizing these objects within a story, they gain the significance of situation. They become necessary objects of life with material and abstract significance. *Meet Addy* serves to contextualize Addy's accessories and justify them as interesting, important objects of play imbued with sensual, spiritual, and familial significance—rather than simple commodities.

This contextualization is especially important given Mattel's 2014 rerelease of the Addy doll. This 2014 version of Addy wears a purple dress and comes with a modified bonnet, a faux cowrie shell necklace, and a vinyl purse decorated to look like a crazy-quilt. Addy, however, retains her original story, now compiled into an anthology of Addy's first three books: *Meet Addy*, *Addy Learns a Lesson*, and *Addy's Surprise*. In this doll, the careful web of text and artifact is shattered. Addy retains only a facsimile of her most important accessory: the cowrie shell necklace. She does not keep her drinking gourd, with it's symbolic connection to water, she does not keep her magical dime, or her new silk-ribbon bonnet. She does not even keep the pink pinstripe dress that signals the beginning of her new, free, life. Instead, 2014 Addy features accessories that are simple commodities, totally divorced from the contextualizing power of her story—totally uninterested in the power of symbolism or the value added by human relationships.

As a toy, the doll and the book are highly site specific in that they need one another. The accessories are enhanced as play things by the additional context from the story, while the story is made more interesting by the addition of material icons featured in the text. Removing the accessories from the context of the book decimates this mutually beneficial relationship. The gourd without the books becomes just a gourd—not a life-sustaining tool for achieving freedom. The book without the gourd (and the other accessories) becomes just another story about slavery, without additional play value. Therefore changing these accessories—as Mattel has done in Addy's 2014 rerelease—means changing the site specific rhetorical situation of the doll-book relationship. Addy's rerelease eliminates the careful rhetorical web of object significance spun in the text and reinforced by material realization of Addy's rhetorically loaded accessories. In

changing Addy's accessories, Mattel destroys Addy's carefully constructed rhetorical situation and renders the doll and the book disassociated commodity shells.

In *The Political Unconsciousness,* Fredric Jameson describes a utopian future where "our own cultural tradition—the monuments of power societies… the stories of fierce market competition and the expressions of commodity lust and of the triumph of the commodity form—will be read as children's books, recapitulating the barely comprehensible memory of ancient dangers."[28] He imagines that one day—through the power of historical fiction—children will learn about our present preoccupation with commodities as "a memory of ancient dangers." Perhaps in this future children will read about Addy's 2014 rerelease, the commodification of her formerly iconic accessories through destruction of their rhetorical situation, and the confusing consumer world nine-year-old girls once navigated.

[28] Jameson, Fredric. 1981. The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic act. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press.

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