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OBJECTS OF IMMORTALITY:  
HAIRWORK AND MOURNING IN VICTORIAN  
VISUAL CULTURE

*I'll weave a bracelet of this hair;--  
Although these locks so hallowed are,  
It seems like sacrilege to wear  
Such relics of the dead.*

*I've seen them clust'ring 'round a brow  
Which drooped beneath affliction's blow,  
And slumbers in the church-yard now,  
With all its beauty flown.*

*The hand that dressed these locks with care,  
And 'ranged them 'round that brow so fair,  
And oft clasped mine with friendly air,  
Is turning back to dust.*

*And closed those eyes, whose radiant beams  
Surpass'd imagination's dreams,  
Yet whisp'ring still, were but faint gleams  
Emerging from the soul.*

*Farewell, dear friend, these locks I'll keep,  
Till in the grave with thee I sleep;  
There, like thee, may I cease to weep,  
And, with thee, wake to sing.<sup>1</sup>*

*Sarah S. Mower, 1851*

In John Everett Millais' painting *Only a Lock of Hair* from c. 1857-8, a young woman holds a small pair of scissors in her right hand, poised to sever a lock of her hair that she holds in her left. This painting alludes to the practice, common in Europe and America in the nineteenth century, of giving and keeping locks of hair as tokens of affection, as well as mementos of the deceased. *Only a Lock of Hair* refers to hair given as a love token, while Sarah S. Mower's poem above refers to hair kept in remembrance of loved ones after their death. The poem also describes the transformation of the hair into hairwork: "I'll weave a bracelet of this hair." During the nineteenth century, hair was often made into hairwork objects and jewelry: it was an artifact of affection and a material for memory. This sentimental treatment of hair was not a uniquely nineteenth-century phenomenon: in the anonymous article "The Hair as Remembrancer," published in the United States in 1848, the author states that "the custom of keeping the hair of deceased friends, is one of the oldest that we can trace into the records of time."<sup>2</sup> The author goes on to explain that this tradition "has arisen from its convenience, and its being the part which under certain circumstances will last the longest of any in the body."<sup>3</sup> Because of its capacity to retain its original qualities even after being severed from the body, hair was seen as symbolic of enduring life. Hair itself was a treasured memento, and both locks of hair and hairwork were exchanged as living, sentimental tokens of love and friendship in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In the context of mourning jewelry, hair was seen as a living extension of the departed individual. This function of hairwork can be understood when placed in the context of ideal images of death and dying in the visual culture of the nineteenth century, which equated beauty with life and immortality. The idealized body lying in repose, without decay, was a pervasive image in the visual culture of the nineteenth century. The desire to preserve the bodies of the dying was acted out on an aesthetic level: by capturing the last mo-

ments of the subject's life in a sketch or painting, taking death masks, through post-mortem photography, and through the preservation of a lock of the loved one's hair. In what follows, I will argue that nineteenth-century sentimental hairwork was inextricably linked to portraiture, even when it was not anchored to the miniature portrait. Like the miniature portrait and the photographic portrait, hairwork was an objectified extension of the body, kept as a personal and sentimental memorial. For those who possessed it, hairwork had the capacity to reconstruct the body into an ideal form that could live beyond death.

Like postmortem photography and other objects associated with mourning and memorialization from the nineteenth century, hairwork has unfortunately often been dismissed as a disturbing relic from the past. Today, the Victorians in particular are often misunderstood as pathologically death-obsessed, and their culture is seen as one celebrating death.<sup>4</sup> Nineteenth-century hairwork has long been characterized as “a macabre and unsavory product of a bygone era,” discussed primarily in connection to mourning culture.<sup>5</sup> James Stevens Curl, a historian of architecture, discusses hairwork only in connection with mourning jewelry of the period and what he terms “the Victorian celebration of death.” Curl describes mourning jewels including hairwork as “curiously unnerving objects” which “often excel in the art of evoking sentiment.”<sup>6</sup> Curl applauds the intricacy and craftsmanship in hairwork, but admits that “the affect on contemporary sensibilities is likely to be one of distaste.”<sup>7</sup>

Misunderstandings regarding the purpose of nineteenth-century hairwork unfortunately abound, and this is reflected in the early literature on the subject. In a 1974 article discussing hairwork in the Minnesota Historical Society's collections, Virginia Rahm writes “of all the fads and fashions which flourished in the Victorian era, that of creating and wearing ornaments made of human hair ranks among the oddest and one of the more macabre.”<sup>8</sup> Rahm goes on to character-

ize the Victorian period as “a time in which good taste was all too often overwhelmed by the quest for the sentimental, the unusual, and the bizarre.”<sup>9</sup> This is tame criticism when compared to the introduction to an Antiques exhibition catalogue in 1945, quoted by Irene Guggenheim Navarro: “The gruesome idea of wearing jewelry made from the hair of a loved one who has died is hard for the matter-of-fact person of today to grasp... These articles of jewelry were ‘worn with sadistic pleasure.’”<sup>10</sup>

This assessment of hairwork ignores its meaning and social use in the nineteenth century and demonstrates a lack of understanding of not only these objects, but the nineteenth-century approach toward sentimentality and death in general. While nineteenth-century attitudes toward death and dying certainly differed from those in current circulation, it is incorrect to state that the original intent of hairwork was macabre or gruesome. Nineteenth-century society allowed and expected its members to express their emotions and to grieve openly through the social ritual of mourning. Rather than being obsessed with death, nineteenth-century Westerners were consumed with the need to memorialize the lives of their loved ones, to objectify and treasure them through talismans of memory.

The preservation of a lock of a loved one's hair or its transformation into sentimental hairwork was a practice well-established by the nineteenth century, though the diversity of styles of hairwork expanded greatly during that time period. Ornamental hairwork first gained popularity in the seventeenth century, where it was “fashioned as both love tokens and death memorabilia.”<sup>11</sup> In the seventeenth century, hair was plaited and preserved under crystal in brooches that often also had enamel memento mori motifs, such as a skeleton holding an hourglass. The date of death and the name of the individual commemorated often appeared on the reverse, and it was common for these objects to be given as tokens of remembrance. The brooches

functioned as mourning jewels—the hair preserved under crystal belonged to a specific person, was the element that personalized it, and it could be worn during the period of mourning. The seventeenth century hairwork mourning jewel acted as a memorial and as a secular relic: a reminder of the specific loss of an individual loved one as well as a general exhortation to ‘remember your death’ (*memento mori*) and morally prepare for one’s own mortality. The *memento mori* aspect of these objects had diminished significantly by the nineteenth century, but the memorial function of sentimental hairwork endured.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, hairwork was often united with the miniature portrait. Cynthia Amnéus, in “The Art of Ornamental Hairwork,” notes that miniature portraits “were often commissioned to commemorate momentous life events such as births, betrothals, deaths, or other joinings or separations.”<sup>12</sup> She connects the purpose of the miniature portrait with the sentimental artifact of hair: “like fragments of hair, they were mementoes meant to maintain a bond between the sitter and the beholder whether separated simply by distance or death.”<sup>13</sup> In miniature portraits, the hair belonging to the individual depicted often appeared on the reverse. In the case of this particular early nineteenth century miniature portrait, hair surrounds and frames the portrait itself, completing the likeness (Fig. 4.1). Fine amounts of chopped hair were also incorporated into narrative mourning scenes, as can be seen in this mourning brooch from 1788 (Fig. 4.2). Amnéus distinguishes between portraiture and hairwork, commenting, “while the miniature portrait provided a visual substitute for an absent loved one, a snippet of hair was a tangible connection—the literal body reworked.”<sup>14</sup> After the birth of photography, the lock of hair or hairwork continued to be united with the photographic portrait, as can be seen in Fig. 4.3 and Fig. 4.4. Hair could also appear on its own, as the sole material of hairwork jewelry, such as in Fig. 4.5 and Fig. 4.6, without an accompanying likeness.

Hairwork attained new heights of fashionable popularity in the nineteenth century, reaching its zenith from 1830-1880.<sup>15</sup> Hairwork was combined with other media and sometimes hairwork objects are not easily classified, as the materials comprising the object often span categories: a painted miniature often includes hairwork on the reverse, a hairwork bracelet may include a portrait photograph, and the treatment of the hair itself varies widely, depending on the specifics of time and place. The multiplicity of media employed in these objects makes both the act of categorization and the task of uncovering their purpose equally difficult. The form hairwork jewelry took also changed over time: after 1830, hair was no longer merely preserved under glass, but could be elaborately braided to form bracelets, necklaces, and watch chains (Fig. 4.7). A diagram of such an intricately braided bracelet can be seen in this illustration from Mark Campbell’s *Self-Instructor in the Art of Hair Work* from 1867 (Fig. 4.8).

Helen Sheumaker, author of *Love Entwined: The Curious History of Hairwork in America*, explains that by this time hairwork was connected to “sentimental fashion.”<sup>16</sup> She differentiates between the styles of hairwork in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the specific meanings they create, remarking that in the nineteenth century, earlier styles of hairwork “were modified to provide even more open displays of hair and the affections it represented, and new styles developed that did not simply include hair but were fully composed of hair.”<sup>17</sup> This aesthetic difference reveals the changing nature of sentimental expression, and Sheumaker posits, “in the eighteenth century, the sentimental associations of hair were obliquely displayed” whereas in the nineteenth century, “hairwork and the sentimentality it conveyed was worn for others to observe.”<sup>18</sup> It is important to note that the hair was always connected to the person from whom it was taken, and despite the vicissitudes of fashion, the material meaning of sentimental hairwork remained unchanged.

**FIGURE 4.1**



**FIGURE 4.2**



**FIGURE 4.3**



**FIGURE 4.4**



**FIGURE 4.5**



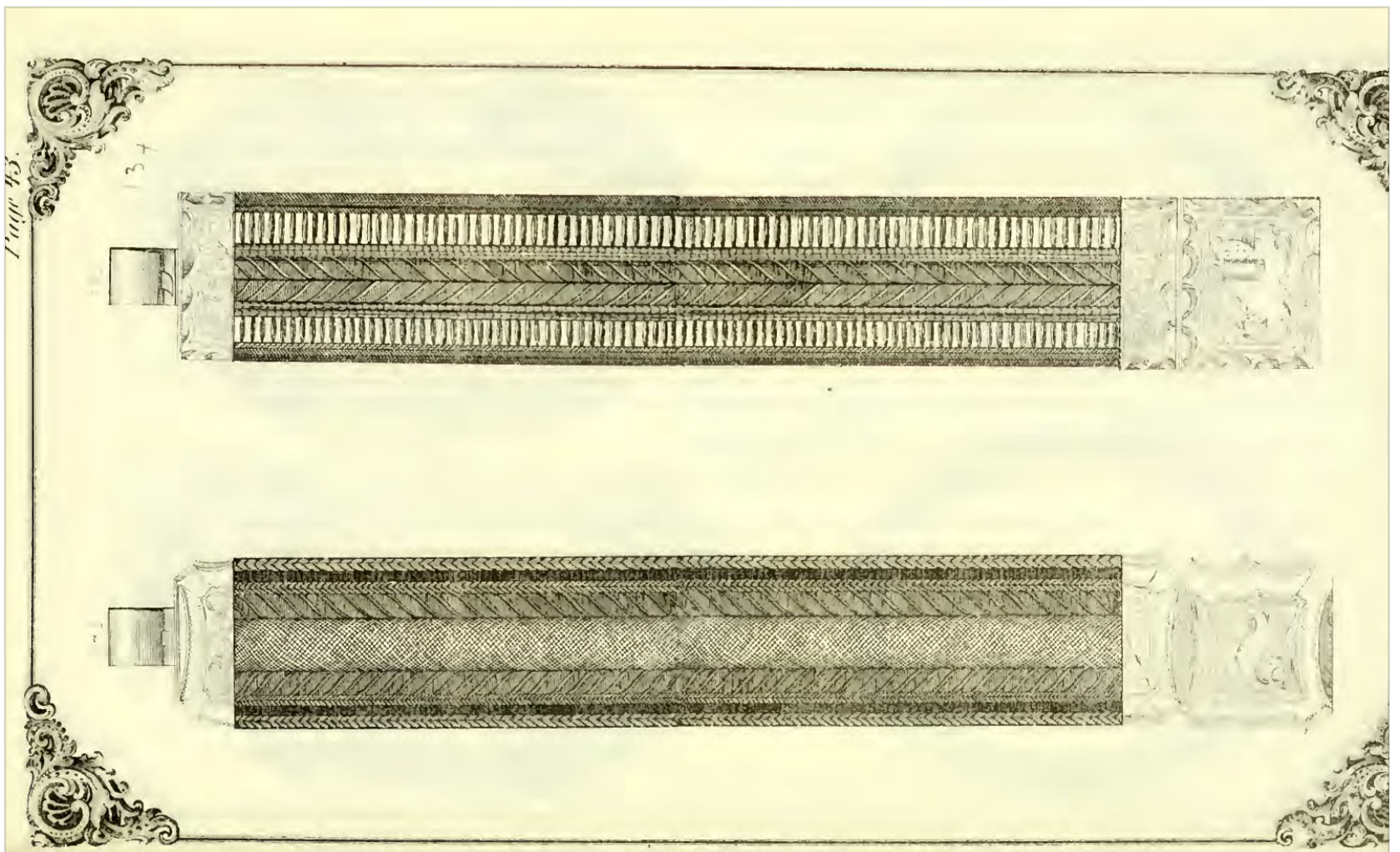
**FIGURE 4.6**



FIGURE 4.7



FIGURE 4.8





Hairwork was not confined to jewelry, but also included hair wreaths and locks of hair saved in albums, and the makers of such objects included both professional and amateur practitioners. By the mid-century, the hair wreath and the hairwork bracelet had risen to prominence. The hairwork bracelet or necklace (or even watch chain) consisted solely of elaborately braided or worked hair save for the clasp. The hair wreath was a larger, intricate construction of hair, which was wrapped around wire and worked into the form of a flower wreath. The former style was worn close to the body, whereas the latter was made for display within the home. The lock of hair, preserved as a sentimental artifact, can be considered the vernacular form of hairwork. Elaborately worked hair was available to those who could afford to commission professionally made hairwork, or those who had mastered the skill of working hair themselves. Hair was seen as meaningful, in the context of sentimental and mourning culture, because it was seen as an extension of the body that could endure indefinitely.

In the small body of scholarly literature that addresses hairwork as its subject, hair is often discussed as a relic. Sheumaker describes it as such in her prologue to *Love Entwined*, asserting, “when we encounter hairwork... we confront a relic of the living, breathing reality of someone long deceased. Because these scraps of hair were saved to remember someone, we behold that person’s self through a fragment of the body.”<sup>19</sup> This description vividly illustrates both hair as a relic and perhaps accounts for the underlying reason behind contemporary aversions to hairwork. Amnéus similarly remarks that because of its “imperishable” state, “hair is a privileged human relic” bestowed “only to those most familiar.”<sup>20</sup> In “Materializing Mourning: Hair, Jewellery and the Body,” Marcia Pointon also identifies hair and hairwork as a relic.<sup>21</sup> Deborah Lutz, in “The Dead Still Among Us: Victorian Secular Relics, Hair Jewelry, and Death Culture,” claims that hairwork functioned as a secular relic, stating that “for the

Victorians, artifacts of beloved bodies still held some of the sublime, fetishistic magic of those outmoded holy relics of bygone days.”<sup>22</sup> Lutz elaborates this point, pointing out that “behind many Victorian narratives of personal relic collecting is the wish that the relic, rather than being a *memento mori*, might mark the continued existence of the body to which it once belonged.”<sup>23</sup> Unlike other fragments of the body historically venerated as relics, hair recalls the living state of the body: it remains the same after death, unlike the rest of the body, which is subject to decay.

The metamorphosis of hair into hairwork—its transformation from bodily fragment into treasured relic—was a means to give mortal remains an immortal body. C. Jeanenne Bell points to a quote by Leigh Hunt (1784-1859), which she states “sums up beautifully the Victorian’s love of hair”:

Hair is at once the most delicate and lasting of our materials; and survives us, like love. It is so light, so gentle, so escaping from the idea of death, that with a lock of hair belonging to a child or a friend, we may almost look up to heaven, and compare notes with angelic nature; may almost say, “I have a piece of thee here, not unworthy of thy being now.”<sup>24</sup>

This quote by Hunt remained popular throughout the nineteenth century, was later reproduced in *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, and illustrates more than the Victorian’s love of hair: it reveals hair’s meaning to the Victorians as a substance associated not with death, but with eternity and life. Interestingly, Bell does not mention that Leigh Hunt’s quote dates from before the Victorian period, and can be found in an essay written at least a quarter of a century before it began appearing in *Godey’s Lady’s Book*.<sup>25</sup> Lutz does make the important note that “behind many Victorian narratives of personal relic collecting is the wish that the relic, rather than being a *memento mori*, might mark the continued existence of the body to which it once belonged.”<sup>26</sup> Within sentimental hairwork, the rhetoric of life, not death prevails.

The essential component of sentimental hairwork was its medium: the hair of the loved one. Women who undertook the arduous, painstaking task of creating their own hairwork could turn to instructions from magazines and manuals. Instructions for making hairwork circulated in the print culture just as motifs and styles of hairwork did. An early guide to hairworking was published in Leipzig, in 1822: Emilie Berrin's *Gründliche Anweisung für Frauen auf alle mögliche Art Haargeflechte nach der jetzigen Mode zu fertigen, als: elastische Leibgürtel, Armbänder, Halsbänder, Uhrbänder, Ringe etc.* (Thorough Instructions for Women on the Production of All Possible Kinds of Hairbraids According to the Current Fashion: Elastic Waist-Belts, Bracelets, Necklaces, Rings, etc.). In Britain, *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* provided instructions for working hair, as did Alexanna Speight's *The Lock of Hair: Its History; Ancient and Modern, Natural and Artistic, with the Art of Working in Hair*, published in London, 1871. In America, *Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine*, *Arthur's Home Magazine*, and Mark Campbell's *Self-Instructor in the Art of Hair Work* (1867) were available to instruct the ambitious amateur. *Godey's Lady's Book* presented to its American readers in 1850 instructions for working hair:

By acquiring a knowledge of this art, ladies will be themselves enabled to manufacture the hair of beloved friends and relatives into bracelets, chains, rings, ear-rings, and devices, and thus insure that they do actually wear the memento they prize, and not a fabric substituted for it, as we fear has sometimes been the case.<sup>27</sup>

A similar sentiment is expressed in Mark Campbell's *Self-Instructor in the Art of Hair Work*, in which Campbell addresses "Persons wishing to preserve, and weave into lasting mementoes, the hair of a deceased father, mother, sister, brother, or child," stressing that by making the hairwork themselves, the maker "can also enjoy the inexpressible advantage and satisfaction of *knowing* that the material of their own handiwork is the actual hair of the 'loved and gone.'"<sup>28</sup>

This emphasis on public anxiety regarding the possibility of a substitution of material, that is to say, a stranger's hair exchanged for a loved one's, which would be anathema to the purpose of hairwork, illustrates the supreme importance of the hair of the loved one in sentimental hairwork. One of the most important features of amateur hairwork is that, because it was made at home or for close friends, the authenticity of the hair could be assured. Isabel Richter, in *Trauer Verkörpern (Mourning Embodied)* discusses Emilie Berrin's guide to hairworking, in which Berrin relates the following anecdote. Because he was going on a journey, her cousin Alphonse demanded:

...quite a pound of tenderness his from his young beloved, which would result in a talisman from the hands of a beautiful fairy, to relieve him from the pain of separation. Moved by the evidence of his deep love, his beautiful wife gave him the sacrifice of a lock of her long black hair, which the happy Alphonse undertook to have braided in Leipzig.<sup>29</sup>

Alphonse retrieves the finished work, wrapped in paper, from the hairworker and on his way home he addresses "the sweetest words to the beloved braid."<sup>30</sup> As it turned out, the finished piece contains the blonde hair of an unknown woman, much to Alphonse's surprise and dismay, and "once the illusion was destroyed, the talisman had lost all its magic."<sup>31</sup> According to Richter, it was for that reason that Berrin "inculcated in her students that 'bought hair awakened none of the sentiments which inspired in these ladies the desire to learn the art' of hairworking."<sup>32</sup>

The purpose of hairwork is similar to that of the portrait: to preserve the body in an ideal form in which it could remain and be remembered. Both of these material fragments were kept as treasured artifacts (hair as hairwork or a single lock of hair, the features of the face through a painted likeness, a photograph, or a death mask) that could endure beyond death. The rhetorical connection between the facial features of the loved one and their hair can be seen not only in the miniature portrait, but

in sentimental poetry of the nineteenth century as well.

Through looking at hairwork in conjunction with sentimental poetry of the period on the subject of death—particularly the death of children—it is also possible to come to a better understanding of the purpose of the beautification of death in the nineteenth century. Many features of the nineteenth century’s aestheticized presentation of the dead body as a sleeping body significantly predate the Victorian era. The rhetoric of beautiful death was in place well before the advent of photography and the post-mortem photograph. Francis Chantrey’s funerary sculpture, *The Sleeping Children*, from 1817, embodies the ideal of nineteenth century postmortem presentation. William Lisle Bowles both describes and commemorated the sculpture in a poem of 1826:

*Look at those sleeping children; softly tread,  
Lest thou do mar their dream, and come not nigh  
Till their fond mother, with a kiss, shall cry;  
'Tis morn, awake! awake! Ah! they are dead!*

*Yet folded in each other's arms they lie,  
So still—oh, look! so still and smilingly;  
So breathing and so beautiful, they seem,  
As if to die in youth were but to dream*

*Of spring and flowers! Of flowers? Yet nearer stand  
There is a lily in one little hand,  
Broken, but not faded yet,  
As if its cup with tears were wet.*

*So sleeps that child, not faded, though in death,  
And seeming still to hear her sister's breath,  
As when she first did lay her head to rest  
Gently on that sister's breast,*

*And kissed her ere she fell asleep!  
The archangel's trump alone shall wake that slumber deep.  
Take up those flowers that fell  
From the dead hand, and sigh a long farewell!*

*Your spirits rest in bliss!  
Yet ere with parting prayers we say,  
Farewell for ever to the insensate clay;*

*Poor maid, those pale lips we will kiss!*

*Ah! 'tis cold marble! Artist, who hast wrought  
This work of nature, feeling, and of thought;  
Thine, Chantrey, be the fame  
That joins to immortality thy name.*

*For these sweet children that so sculptured rest  
A sister's head upon a sister's breast  
Age after age shall pass away,  
Nor shall their beauty fade, their forms decay:*

*For here is no corruption; the cold worm  
Can never prey upon that beauteous form:  
This smile of death that fades not, shall engage  
The deep affections of each distant age!*

*Mothers, till ruin the round world hath rent,  
Shall gaze with tears upon the monument!  
And fathers sigh, with half-suspended breath:  
How sweetly sleep the innocent in death!<sup>33</sup>*

According to Bowles, through the art of sculpture, Chantrey memorializes and immortalizes not only the dead children or his patron, but himself as an artist. By transforming the form of their bodies into an artistic presentation, he ensures that “the cold worm can never prey upon that beauteous form.” Felicia Dorothea Browne Heman (1793-1835), in 1829, approaches the same sculpture and subject matter in her poem *The Sculptured Children on Chantrey’s Monument at Lichfield*.

*Fair images of sleep!  
Hallow'd, and soft, and deep!  
On whose calm lids the dreamy quiet lies,  
Like moonlight on shut bells  
Of flowers in mossy dells,  
Fill'd with the hush of night and summer skies;*

*How many hearts have felt  
Your silent beauty melt  
Their strength to gushing tenderness away!  
How many sudden tears,  
From depths of buried years  
All freshly bursting, have confess'd your sway!*

*How many eyes will shed  
Still, o'er your marble bed,*

*Such drops, from Memory's troubled fountains wrung!*

*While Hope hath blights to bear  
While Love breathes mortal air,  
While roses perish ere to glory sprung.*

*Yet, from a voiceless home,  
If some sad mother come  
To bend and linger o'er your lovely rest;  
As o'er the cheek's warm glow,  
And the soft breathings low  
Of babes, that grew and faded on her breast;*

*If then the dovelike tone  
Of those faint murmurs gone,  
O'er her sick sense too piercingly return;  
If for the soft bright hair,  
And brow and bosom fair,  
And life, now dust, her soul too deeply yearn;*

*O gentlest forms! entwin'd  
Like tendrils, which the wind  
May wave, so clasp'd, but never can unlink;  
Send from your calm profound  
A still small voice, a sound  
Of hope, forbidding that lone heart to sink.*

*By all the pure, meek mind  
In your pale beauty shrined,  
By childhood's love—too bright a bloom to die!  
O'er her worn spirit shed,  
O fairest, holiest Dead!  
The Faith, Trust, Light, of Immortality!<sup>34</sup>*

Heman's poem evokes the intimate loss of a mother, referring to "the soft breathings low/ Of babes, that grew and faded on her breast." Like Bowles, Heman envisions the bereaved mother taking comfort in the immortality promised though the "Fair images of sleep," the figures of the sleeping children, just as Bowles imagines all mothers and fathers as being capable of being moved by the monument.

The impact of Chantrey's *Sleeping Children* continued to be felt in the Victorian period, on both sides of the Atlantic. Samuel Irenaeus Prime reproduced Heman's poem in his book *Thoughts on the Death of Little Children*, published in New York in 1852. Prime directly addresses the reader,

The child is dead. The eye has lost its lustre. The hand is still and cold. Its little heart is not beating now. How pale it looks! Yet the very form is dear to me. Every lock of its hair, every feature of the face, is a treasure that I shall prize the more, as the months of my sorrow come and go.<sup>35</sup>

This book, written three years after the death of one of his younger sons, can be best described as a manual for how to process one's grief as a parent in the event of the death of children.— an all-too-common occurrence in the nineteenth century. This excerpt links two aspects of the body: "every lock of [the child's] hair, every feature of the face" becomes "a treasure that I shall prize the more, as the months of my sorrow come and go." Through the painted or photographic likeness and the art of sentimental hairwork, these precious bodily fragments were transformed into treasured relics. In this passage, a connection is established between the lock of hair and the features of the face of the dead child. Both ephemeral subjects of the parents' gaze become objectified as treasures to be prized during the period of grief and mourning to follow. Hairwork objects and likenesses of the deceased, physical objects to be treasured, allowed the bereaved access to the image of their lost loved one after they were buried.

Before the advent of photography, most people did not have the means to image themselves: the common person did not have access to or ownership of his or her own image. The finality of death erased forever the features of a beloved face, and it is no small wonder that those who could attempted to preserve the bodies of the dying through portraiture: the production of a sketched or painted likeness, or an impression taken to create a death mask, or by preserving a lock of their loved one's hair. Beyond its status as an artifact of the body, hair could recall the body's living state. The lock of hair referred to the unique individual from whom it was taken and functioned a reminder of that individual. Post-mortem as well as pre-mortem photography captured the last image of the loved one before their body was laid to rest. It was not uncommon for the post-mortem photograph to be the only image, living or dead, of the

subject, especially in the case of children. Post-mortem photography attempted to represent the dead subject either with eyes open and retouched to seem alive, or as sleeping bodies, lying in repose like the figures in Chantrey's *The Sleeping Children*. Both approaches to representation reframe the dead body as a living one.

The poem, "On Seeing a Deceased Infant," in which the author describes the act of looking at a dead child, provides valuable insight into the underlying ethos behind postmortem photography. Published in *The Ladies Garland*, 1825, this poem predates the invention of the daguerreotype and makes evident the pre-existing cultural need for photography, specifically post-mortem photography, as a means to document the last moments of a loved one.

*And this is death! How cold and still,  
And yet how lovely it appears!  
Too cold to let the gazer smile,  
But far too beautiful for tears.  
The sparkling eye no more is bright,  
The cheek hath lost its rose-like red,  
And yet it is with strange delight  
I stand and gaze upon the dead.*

*But when I see the fair wide brow  
Half shaded by the silken hair,  
That never looked so fair as now  
When life and health were laughing there;  
I wonder not that grief should swell  
So wildly upward in the breast,  
And that strong passion once rebel  
That need not, cannot be suppress.*

*I wonder not that parents' eyes  
In gazing thus grow cold and dim,  
That burning tears and aching sighs  
Are blended with the funeral hymn;  
The spirit hath an early part  
That sweeps when earthly pleasure flies,  
And heaven would scorn the frozen heart  
That melts not when the infant dies.*

*And yet why mourn? that deep repose  
Shall never more be broke by pain;  
Those lips no more in sighs unclose,  
Those eyes shall never weep again.  
For think not that the blushing flower  
Shall wither in the church-yard sod,  
Twas made to gild an angel's bower*

*Within the paradise of God.*

*Once more I gaze — and swift and far  
The clouds of death and sorrow fly;  
I see thee like a new-born star  
Move up thy pathway in the sky;*

*The star hath rays serene and bright  
But cold and pale compared with thine;  
For thy orb shines with heavenly light,  
With beams unfailing and divine.*

*Then let the burthened heart be free,  
The tears of sorrow all be shed,  
And parents calmly bend to see  
The mournful beauty of the dead:  
Thrice happy — that their infant bears  
To heaven no darkening stains of sin;  
And only breathe life's morning airs  
Before its evening storms begin.*

*Farewell! I shall not soon forget!  
Although thy heart hath ceased to beat,  
My memory warmly treasures yet  
Thy features calm and mildly sweet.  
But no, that look is not the last,  
We yet may meet where seraphs dwell,  
Where love no more deplores the past,  
Nor breathes that withering word — farewell!<sup>36</sup>*

Here, "the mournful beauty of the dead" is linked to the promise of immortality. The beautification of death, coupled with allusions to the afterlife, was a means to give the bereaved solace in the face of mortality, to assure them that their loved ones lived on after death. By presenting the dead as beautiful, by posing the dead as still alive, by preserving and wearing the hair of the dead, the bereaved extended the lives of their departed. These excerpts of sentimental poetry illustrate the deeply-rooted cultural desire to have the ability to preserve the image of the self and one's loved ones, which photography addressed as a new medium.

Hairwork should be viewed not just as an accompaniment to the portrait, but also as an object that functioned as a kind of portraiture. Hairwork represents an absent body, that of a unique

person, and simultaneously functions as an extension of the original subject. The painted miniature portrait, which often included hairwork, was authenticated in two ways: through the faithfulness of the likeness, which could vary, and by the presence of hairwork, which as we have seen, was only valuable if it was authentic. Authentic hair created an authentic portrait. Interestingly, after the invention of photography, hairwork continued to be united with the portrait in photographic jewelry. The photographic portrait, though it was used interchangeably with the painted portrait, differed in how it communicated meaning. It did not just imply that an individual sat for a portrait, it verified it, through the process of photography. Like hairwork, photography operated as a trace of the individual: the photographic hairwork object doubly authenticated the identity of the subject. A further example of the rhetorical connection between the features of the face and the lock of hair of a loved one can be found in Alexanna Speight's *The Lock of Hair*, part historical essay, part guide to hairworking from 1871. Speight discusses the association of hair with the head from which it originated, and the act of recollection:

When we think or speak of human hair we naturally enough associate it with the human head. The mind recalls the curly locks of youth, dwells upon the flowing tresses or gigantic superstructure of womanhood, or mournfully turns away from the spare and scattered grey covering of old age. But however we may look upon it in admiration or in sorrow, we still connect hairs with heads.<sup>37</sup>

More importantly for the connection between portraiture and hairwork, Speight goes on to discuss hair as an agent for actuating a memory of the face, referring to "the few solitary hairs which call back the dear face never more to be seen, scenes never again to be revisited, and incidents long held by the past among its own."<sup>38</sup> The primary audience for the hairwork object consisted of the very people that knew the subject of the hairwork best: they could identify and recognize the hair of their loved one. Hairwork, for the private, intimate viewer, functioned as an object that invoked

remembrance through visual and tactile memory, and it is not difficult to imagine the original viewer calling to mind the absent face of the distant or deceased loved one as they contemplated the hairwork object.

Sentimental hairwork retains the individual identity of its unique subject, and it seems to have always had this function as an object of remembrance. Like a portrait, hairwork can refer to a subject that can be living or dead, and this is part of how both portraits and hairwork function as symbols of immortality. Hair was an extension of the body that could endure indefinitely; it recalled the living state of the body; it could survive after the rest of the body had decayed. Therein lies its significance as a token of exchange: in a society that valued the aesthetic presentation of dead bodies as beautiful, immortal, and incorruptible, hair was highly valued as an object that embodied these elements. Hair was seen as having the capacity to bring to mind the features of an absent face, the ability to recall those features even from beyond the grave. It is no surprise that hair, the eponymous "remembrancer" of "The Hair As Remembrancer," and a material of memory, was worked into hairwork, which was worn on the body and displayed in the home. Hairwork was a means to reconfigure or reconstruct the body into a perfect form that could endure through the immortality of hair: an intimate portrait of life, not of death.

I would like to thank Hayden Peters for granting permission to me to use images of hairwork and miniatures from his impressive website The Art of Mourning to illustrate this paper, and I would like to encourage all who are interested in reading more about these topics to consult <http://artofmourning.com/>. Further, I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. H. Rodney Nevitt Jr., and my thesis committee, Dr. Jessica Locheed, Dr. Jenni Sorokin, and Dr. David L. Jacobs for supporting my research, and Dr. Rex Koontz for encouraging me to pursue this topic in my graduate studies. Last but not least, I would like to thank The Art of Death and Dying Symposium for providing me with the opportunity to share my research on nineteenth century hairwork and mourning with the interdisciplinary and diverse group of academics interested in the arts of death and dying.

## Notes

1 Sarah S. Mower, *The Snow-Drop: A Holiday Gift*, ed. Jacob Young, 2012.

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3 "The Hair as Remembrancer," *The Literary World* (Philadelphia: E. A. and G. L. Duyckink, July 15, 1848), 461.

4 James Stevens Curl, *The Victorian Celebration of Death*, (Stroud, UK: Sutton, 2000).

5 Irene Guggenheim Navarro, "Hairwork of the Nineteenth Century," *Antiques* 159 (March 2001): 487

6 James Stevens Curl, *The Victorian Celebration of Death*, (Stroud, UK: Sutton, 2000), 201.

7 James Stevens Curl, *The Victorian Celebration of Death*, (Stroud, UK: Sutton, 2000), 201.

8 Virginia L. Rahm, "MHS Collections: Human Hair Ornaments," *Minnesota History* 44, no. 2 (July 1, 1974), 70.

9 Virginia L. Rahm, "MHS Collections: Human Hair Ornaments," *Minnesota History* 44, no. 2 (July 1, 1974), 71.

10 Lillian Chaplin Bragg and Cornelia Wilder, *Savannah's antique hair and mourning jewelry*, Savannah, Ga., 1945. Referred to in Irene Guggenheim Navarro, "Hairwork of the Nineteenth Century," *Antiques* 159 (March 2001), 487.

11 Cynthia Amnéus, "The Art of Ornamental Hairwork," in *Perfect Likeness: European and American Portrait Miniatures from the Cincinnati Art Museum*, ed. Julie Aronson and Marjorie E. Wieseman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 64.

12 Cynthia Amnéus, "The Art of Ornamental Hairwork," in *Perfect Likeness: European and American Portrait Miniatures from the Cincinnati Art Museum*, ed. Julie Aronson and Marjorie E. Wieseman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 64.

13 Cynthia Amnéus, "The Art of Ornamental Hairwork," in *Perfect Likeness: European and American Portrait Miniatures from the Cincinnati Art Museum*, ed. Julie Aronson and Marjorie E. Wieseman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 64.

14 Cynthia Amnéus, "The Art of Ornamental Hairwork," in *Perfect Likeness: European and American Portrait Miniatures from the Cincinnati Art Museum*, ed. Julie Aronson and Marjorie E. Wieseman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 64.

15 Sheumaker, Helen, "'This Lock You See': Nineteenth-Century Hair Work as the Commodified Self," *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 1, no. 4 (1997): 421–445, 421.

- 16 Sheumaker, Helen, *Love Entwined: The Curious History of Hairwork in America*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 18.
- 17 Sheumaker, Helen, *Love Entwined: The Curious History of Hairwork in America*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 18.
- 18 Sheumaker, Helen, *Love Entwined: The Curious History of Hairwork in America*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 20.
- 19 Sheumaker, Helen, *Love Entwined: The Curious History of Hairwork in America*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), xiv.
- 20 Cynthia Amnéus, "The Art of Ornamental Hairwork," in *Perfect Likeness: European and American Portrait Miniatures from the Cincinnati Art Museum*, ed. Julie Aronson and Marjorie E. Wieseman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 64.
- 21 Marcia Pointon, "Materializing Mourning: Hair, Jewellery and the Body," in *Material Memories: Design and Evocation*, ed. Marius Kwint, Christopher Beward, and Jeremy Aynsle (New York: Berg Publishers, 1999), 45.
- 22 Deborah Lutz, "The Dead Still Among Us: Victorian Secular Relics, Hair Jewelry, and Death Culture," *Victorian Literature and Culture* Vol. 39, Issue. 1 (2011): 128.
- 23 Deborah Lutz, "The Dead Still Among Us: Victorian Secular Relics, Hair Jewelry, and Death Culture," *Victorian Literature and Culture* Vol. 39, Issue. 1 (2011): 130.
- 24 C. Jeanenne Bell, *Answers To Questions About Old Jewelry* (Krause Publications, 2011): 33.
- 25 Leigh Hunt, "Criticism of Female Beauty," *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*, Vol 10, (1825): 77.
- 26 Deborah Lutz, "The Dead Still Among Us: Victorian Secular Relics, Hair Jewelry, and Death Culture," *Victorian Literature and Culture* Vol. 39, Issue. 1 (2011): 130.
- 27 Anonymous, "The Art of Ornamental Hairwork," *Godey's Lady's Book* 41 (1850): 377.
- 28 Mark Campbell. *Self-Instructor in the Art of Hair Work*. (Chicago: Mark Campbell, 1867): 2.
- 29 Translation by author. From Isabel Richter, "Trauer Verkörpern: Schmuck aus Haaren in der Bürgerlichen Trauerkultur im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert," in *Haar tragen. Eine kulturwissenschaft Annäherung*, Köln 2004, 162. "...durchaus ein Pfund der Zärtlichkeit seiner jungen Gemahlin mit sich führen, welches, gleich einem Talisman aus den Händen einer schönen Fee, den Trennungsschmerz ihm lindern sollte. Gerührt von den Beweisen seiner innigen Liebe, brachte ihm seine schöne Gemahlin das Opfer einer Locke ihres langen schwarzen Haares, welches der überglückliches Alphonse in Leipzig flechten zu lassen sich vornahm."
- 30 Isabel Richter, "Trauer Verkörpern: Schmuck aus Haaren in der Bürgerlichen Trauerkultur im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert," in *Haar tragen. Eine kulturwissenschaft Annäherung*, Köln 2004, 162.
- 31 Isabel Richter, "Trauer Verkörpern: Schmuck aus Haaren in der Bürgerlichen Trauerkultur im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert," in *Haar tragen. Eine kulturwissenschaft Annäherung*, Köln 2004, 162.
- 32 Translation by author. From Isabel Richter, "Trauer Verkörpern: Schmuck aus Haaren in der Bürgerlichen Trauerkultur im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert," in *Haar tragen. Eine kulturwissenschaft Annäherung*, Köln 2004, 162. "Von einem Haarkünstler erhielt er bald das in Papier eingewickelte Produkt, das ihn, so die Erzählerin Berrin, auf dem Heimweg sehr berührt und veranlasst habe, bereits "an die geliebte Flechte die süßesten Worte" zu richten. Die in Auftrag gegebene Haararbeit entpuppte sich jedoch als blonde Haarflechte einer unbekanntes Frau, die der Haarkünstler mit dem angeblich qualitativ besseren blonden Haar zu rechtfertigen suchte. Aber "die Illusion war einmal vernichtet, der Talisman hatte alle seine Zauberkräfte verloren." Ihren Schülerinnen schärfte Berrin daher ein, dass "gekaufte



Haare keines von den Gefühlen (erwecken), welche diesen Damen das Verlangen einflößten, die Kunst des Flechtens zu lernen.”

33 William Lisle Bowles and George Gilfillan, “Chantrey’s Sleeping Children,” in *The Poetical Works of William Lisle Bowles*. (Edinburgh: J. Nichol, 1855), 288-89.

34 Samuel Irenaeus Prime, *Thoughts on the Death of Little Children.... with an Appendix Selected from Various Authors*, Michigan Historical Reprint (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2006), 73-74.

35 Samuel Irenaeus Prime, *Thoughts on the Death of Little Children.... with an Appendix Selected from Various Authors*, Michigan Historical Reprint (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2006), 9.

36 William Bourn Oliver Peabody, “On Seeing a Deceased Infant,” in *The Literary Remains of the Late William B. O. Peabody*. (Boston: B. H. Greene, 1850), 434-435.

37 Alexanna Speight, *The Lock of Hair: Its History; Ancient and Modern, Natural and Artistic, with the Art of Working in Hair*, (London, 1871), 5.

38 Alexanna Speight, *The Lock of Hair: Its History; Ancient and Modern, Natural and Artistic, with the Art of Working in Hair*, (London, 1871), 83.

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