THE COALITION OF MASTER'S
SCHOLARS ON MATERIAL CULTURE

Author(s): Sophie Renken

Published by: The Coalition of Master's Scholars on Material Culture

URL: https://cmsmc.org/publications/performativity-of-mourning-jewellery

Date Published: June 4, 2021

Citation: Renken, Sophie. "The Performativity of Hair in Victorian Mourning Jewellery." The Coalition of Master's Scholars on Material Culture, June 4, 2021.

CMSMC is run by fellow master's scholars as a platform for colleagues to disseminate their work. We are an independently run organization and are not affiliated with any university or institution. This work is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

For more information about The Coalition of Master's Scholars on Material Culture, please email us at admin@cmsmc.org

The Performativity of Hair in Victorian Mourning Jewellery

By: Sophie Renken

Abstract: Mourning rings were popular items of remembrance in the Victorian era which commonly incorporated the hair of a departed loved one. The role of hair within this type of jewellery is discussed in relation to performativity; a theory that has been successfully employed by a variety of fields to better understand the nature and effects of certain kinds of performance, particularly those that closely relate to the expression and construction of identity. The form of mourning rings, the processes involved in their construction and the messages they communicated to society are examined in reference to performativity, to ascertain the value of considering the mourning ring tradition within this theoretical framework. This article asserts that the processes involved in the construction of mourning rings were not merely representational but performative, as they both symbolise and create transitions between conventional states. Moreover, mourning jewellery was an invented tradition within the larger culture of performative mourning, that addressed the need to reconstruct gendered class identities in the wake of profound social change.

Keywords: *mourning jewellery, performative mourning, mourning rings, Victorian death rituals*

Introduction

This article asks whether performativity theory helps us to understand the use of hair in Victorian mourning jewellery. In the tradition of hair-work jewellery the mourning ring is uniquely situated. Mourning rings are exceptional in a number of ways: firstly, they evolved out of an older hair-work tradition; secondly, they were not exclusively associated to one gender; and thirdly, rings, more than other forms of jewellery, are traditionally associated with solidifying bonds between individuals. This article focuses on two mourning rings to explore their physical nature, the methods of their creation and how they factored into the lives of their owners. Performativity theory is applied to help explain the effective power of the transformational processes entailed in the creation of mourning rings. These transformations take place between binary oppositions, crucially between subject and object, and life and death, and in turn effect transitions for individuals and relationships. I argue that these transformations construct mourning rings as performative, rather than simply representational artefacts, which can establish and solidify ties between individuals.

This examination then considers the role of mourning rings within the wider culture of Victorian mourning. Judith Butler's theories on performativity are consulted to consider to what extent hair was used performatively in its invocation of sentimentality and gentility, to construct gendered, middle-class identities. The themes of social anxiety, competition and conspicuous consumption are used to argue that Victorian mourning practices were performative in that they consisted of citational actions used to express and construct identity. Hair is held as a means of communicating an understanding of the language of sentimentality, conveying an alignment with what was considered to be a middle-class ideology. The wider context of Victorian society reveals why hair-work became such a widely accepted and revered tradition which was emulated across class boundaries. This argument stipulates that

hair-work jewellery was used as a performative means of constructing middle-class identities, while also calling to a more deep-rooted sense of humanity.

Background

Mourning rings were items within a larger field of mourning jewellery, which itself was part of an extensive mourning industry. Many items of mourning jewellery incorporated the hair of a lost loved one within the design including rings, brooches, and necklaces. The fashion for hair-work jewellery reached its peak around the 1860s when hair jewellery expanded outside of mourning to become popular fashion accessories across society.

The earliest manifestations of this hair-work tradition began in the sixteenth century, when *memento mori* rings were used both as a means of remembrance and a reminder of the wearer's own mortality. From then on, they were used by royalty and aristocracy as memorials of loved ones as well as items that reflected status, often in extravagant, ornamental designs. However, by the Victorian era, they had begun to appear throughout the social hierarchy, incorporating Victorian conceptions of sentimentality and personal remembrance.

This work looks specifically at two mourning rings, from the catalogues of the Victoria and Albert Museum. They involve moderately divergent methods of composition and can be attributed to different social strata. These rings illustrate the percolation of this tradition throughout society and highlight the marriage of class and sentiment in Victorian mourning jewellery.

Particular attention is paid to the significance of hair within these rings. Hair attained previously unknown heights of social and economic significance in the Victorian era. It took on socially recognisable meanings and connotations, becoming an effective medium of symbolic discourse. Numerous Victorian authors used hair as a plot device, evidencing a

public understanding of how hair could communicate ideas of love and death, denote close relationships and hint at secrets.

Performativity

The theory of performativity grew out of the field of linguistics when Austin began to consider how certain forms of speech can also be actions.[1] Today, the definition of performativity has expanded to include any kind of action that, when performed at the right time and within the right conditions, is a recognisable form of communication that can effect change. The crux of what makes an action performative is if it "effects the transition from one conventionally recognised state to another".[2] These performative actions do not consist of a few solitary acts, but through the repetition of a set of social norms. It is this "stylized repetition of arts" that Butler describes as the fabric of identity.[3] Such actions are varied and are performed by and upon the body. For instance, fashion can be considered to be performative in that adornment can act as a means of discourse, that conveys a message to the onlooker: their gender, affiliations, rank, and more broadly, their position within "regimes of value".[4] As such, belonging is something that is "achieved" through performative action.[5]

The following work discusses how the hair-work tradition of the Victorian era, specifically focusing on mourning rings, links to these ideas of performativity. By examining the processes that go into the creation of mourning jewellery, most crucially the treatment of hair and the processes of transformation and change that it undergoes, I consider to what extent these actions can be considered to be performative. This addresses how these transformations tied into social convention and what larger changes these actions both represent and construct. Hair-work deals with the intersection of a number of binary states- living and dead, present and absent- and involves a number of symbolic physical transformations that encapsulate the movement between these states. These transformations

are examined in relation to how they construct the physical body, the person as a whole and the relationship between individuals.

Further examination of hair-work jewellery within a wider social context illustrates the potential of such jewellery to establish cultural identities. Drawing on Butler's theories regarding how repeated citational actions formulate identity, I argue that the wearing of hair-work jewellery can be performative, employed for the purposes of evidencing an awareness of middle-class sentimental gentility. The links between class, gender and mourning jewellery are discussed in reference to the 'invention of tradition' as it relates to performative mourning in this period. A wider examination of mourning culture reveals how performative mourning became a means of expressing (and thus performatively constructing) gendered class identities, and how mourning rings fit within this tradition.

Object Stories

Before the performative functions of mourning jewellery can be considered, it is first necessary to understand what they were and where they came from. The Victorians were not the first to fashion rings with hair. From the seventeenth century, rings began to incorporate human hair, either plainly revealed or concealed within the piece. These earlier examples were known as '*memento mori'* rings and served not simply as objects of remembrance, but as reminders of an individual's own mortality.[6] As such, the iconography most commonly employed in these designs were synonymous with death in a very general sense: skulls, urns, skeletons, and so on. By the Victorian era, the mourning ring had taken on a more personalised function, specialised for the memorial of a single individual, and as such had little need for the more universalised imagery of death used previously.

Furthermore, Victorian examples had more of a sentiment of continued life than impending death.[7] This period also saw a "democratisation" of jewellery, which enabled the

expansion of this tradition beyond the narrow confines of royalty and aristocracy to become pervasive across society.[8]

Deetz and Dethlefsen's study of American gravestones between the seventeenth and nineteenth century also witnessed a similar alteration in the iconography of death over time. [9] They found that shifts in imagery followed broad social and religious trends and were also influenced by more contextual factors, such as local tradition and personal wealth. Their survey shows a parallel decline in the more morbid imagery of death such as skulls, coffins and bones (akin to the early *memento mori* designs), towards more classical, symbolic imagery such as weeping willows and urns. While they observe this to be a "depersonalisation of death and memorial" in the case of mourning rings, the reality appears to be the reverse.[10] Nevertheless, this research provides a backdrop for the assumption that the material culture of death can be regarded as a medium through which social, religious, and historical trends can be examined.

Therefore, the material culture of death, such as mourning rings, can speak of the conditions of the society that produced them. In regard to Victorian Britain, the tradition of incorporating hair into mourning jewellery became very popular. Queen Victoria herself had eight pieces of jewellery made that incorporated locks of Prince Albert's hair upon his death, kept between Victoria and their children.[11] Though Victoria was notably synonymous with mourning, this tradition was by no means exclusive to royalty.

Figure 1: *Ring commemorating George the 7th Earl of Waldegrave, from the Victoria and Albert Museum* © Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Must be maximum 768pi digital use/5 year license

A large number of mourning rings were produced by the upper middle-classes that when examined today appear, if not beautiful, then morbidly fascinating. The first ring this article considers certainly falls within this group (Figure 1, pictured above). This ring is from the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. It was made in memory of a highly affluent individual in society, George the 7th Earl of Waldegrave, who died in 1846 at only 30 years old. This piece was produced with gold, black enamel, and hair. The ring forms the shape of the ouroboros, a snake swallowing its own tail, an image known to represent eternity.[12] The snake's eyes are made with small inlaid diamonds, a popular choice amongst the more expensive pieces of mourning jewellery as diamonds, unlike other forms of precious stone, were regarded as unique, and thus contributed to the singularity of the piece.[13] Hidden beneath the snake's head is a small compartment containing a lock of hair, meaning its presence may only be known to the wearer. The inside of the ring is inscribed with "George Edward Earl of Waldegrave. Obt. 28 Sepr. 1846 Aet 30" (sic). The inscriptions on such rings

were not always so objective. Some used inscriptions as further means of personalisation. One notable example is the mourning ring Ada Lovelace left to her domineering mother, Lady Byron, upon Ada's death in 1852, inscribed '*Malgré Tout*', French for 'despite everything'.[14] This offers us a brief but meaningful insight into the nature of their relationship and shows how mourning ring designs were often highly specific, particularly tailored not simply to commemorate the individual, but to capture the essence of the unique relationship between two people.

Though externally anonymous, the exuberance of the individual's character is displayed through the ornate, somewhat eccentric design. This seems appropriate given the rebellious personality of the Earl of Waldegrave who led a rather scandalous life, having married his brother's widow before being imprisoned for the assault of a police officer.[15]

Less wealthy individuals also partook in this tradition. Morning rings were produced across social classes with materials of varying quality, depending on the expense the family could accommodate. The poorest in society were inevitably excluded from the mourning ring tradition, not being able to accommodate the expense. However, many still kept a lock of hair of their departed as a memento.[16]

Figure 2: *Ring commemorating George Chapman from the Victoria and Albert Museum, made by Henry Hobson and Son of Birmingham* © Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Must be maximum 768pi digital use/5 year license

The second ring this article considers, while still a worthy memento, appears to have less aristocratic origins than the first. The ring pictured above in Figure 2 also resides within the Victoria and Albert Museum's collections. This mourning ring was made in 1860 and consists of gold, black enamel, and plaited hair. The hair is featured far more prominently, wrapped around the circumference of the band. The open exposure of the hair gives this ring a more tangible dimension. It is a more blatant and tactile feature, meant to be seen and touched. It appears to consist of more downgraded techniques and materials than the previous item. Though it is marked as being 10 carat, it has been assessed as being closer to 8 or 9 carat. [17] The bezel is engraved and decorated with enamel, featuring the initials G.C. for George Chapman, who the donor cited as the grandfather of her old nurse. It is not entirely clear whether this ring was made as a memorial or as a token of love. It is possible it did not begin as a token of mourning but became so later in its life. This potential is inherent in hair jewellery given hairs ability to outlive the individual and thus, become a lasting reminder of

the departed.[18] Though still a striking piece, the lower grade materials and more simplistic design indicates that this ring commemorated a less affluent individual. It bears a resemblance to the increasing number of mourning rings that were mass produced towards the latter half of the 19th century. Mourning became a large industry at this time and standardized mourning rings could come pre-made, often with the words "in memory of" already in place, ready for the name and hair of the individual to be added upon its purchase.[19] Though such rings produced for the lower-middle classes were less monetarily precious, they were no less personally meaningful. A great many examples of these rings can be found on antique and auction websites which indicates how prolific this tradition would have been.

These examples show the divergent forms mourning rings could take, their differences largely the product of wealth (or at least pecuniary strength), personal taste, and the personality of the subject. These differences impact the very formation of the rings. Though they both feature hair, they utilise it in different ways. These two rings show how hair could be concealed or exposed. It was also common for the hair to be placed under a panel of glass, so it was encased but still on display. The most significant commonality between these items was how they were destined for exchange between specific individuals. The widespread nature of the tradition indicates that there was something recognisably poignant about the exchange of such items. These rings are clearly evidence of an intimate network, but how far could they be considered to *establish* that intimate network? The processes involved in the creation and exchange of such hair-work jewellery, and the culmination of these processes to form a tradition, is explored further by considering the performative potential of such actions.

Transitional Matter, Transitional Relationships

The construction of mourning rings entails a number of hair-work processes that exemplify and create transitions between states, both within and between individuals. These processes focus on the transition and transference of hair within mourning jewellery, notably cutting, exchanging, weaving, containing, and wearing. I argue that the use of hair-work for preservation, connection, and memory is not just representational but performative. The transitions of these items do not simply mirror transformational processes metaphorically, but create those transformations, though some more overtly than others. The role of such rings is examined in light of the weight of social convention that was attached to the exchange of hair, that lent such a binding, transformational power to this action. However, first it is necessary to establish what properties of hair make it so apt for these uses.

Hair is a very long-lasting and malleable form of matter. It maintains its aesthetic qualities even after it is separated from the body and can be easily reshaped and contained.[20] It has remarkable endurance, saved from the impact of death from the moment it is cut from its owner.[21] It is a substance that struggles to be categorised, lying at the junction between a number of binary oppositions: "life and death, subject and object".[22] This duality means that, though inanimate, it is very much tethered to life. It grows directly from an individual's living body and is thus unique and unrepeatable. Its very existence is owed to the life of that person and as such is fundamentally connected to them. Moreover, hair has historically been a site of self-definition, its length and style employed in the framing of the self.[23] Because of this, it can be felt to capture the "essence" of a person, something of their own unique and unrepeatable nature.[24] This capacity allows it to act, in effect, as a place-holder for the individual, a substitute for the body as a whole, through which that person can be preserved.

The underlying links to this hair-work tradition and the theory of performativity lie in the understanding that the processes of creating hair-work were citational of social norms,

and effected change due to the context within which they were performed. Moreover, these changes were transitional between "conventionally" recognised states.[25] It is convention that gives these actions, within the proper context, consistent, socially recognisable meanings and thus, performative power. Outside the proper context, the performative power of an action is eradicated. For instance, the cutting of hair need not be a performative action. Hair cut by a hairdresser, with whom the individual shares no special relationship, can hardly be considered performative. Although hair retains all the same physical properties and organic links to life, it achieves no significance within this setting. However, the cutting of hair in the context of creating hair-work takes on a whole new character.

Cutting

Unlike the mundane task of getting a haircut, hair that was cut for use in mourning rings was not done with the intention of removal, but preservation. *This* cutting of hair represented a singular, "unrepeatable act".[26] The act of cutting represents a frozen moment in time, a fixed, irreversible event, marking the transition of the hair from subject to object; a transition the whole body undertakes in death.[27] It forms a point in time forever materialized.[28] The nature of that lock of hair is forever changed- it has entered a new state. On occasions where the hair was cut upon the death bed, that hair encapsulates the very moment of loss. When hair is cut under these circumstances, it is done with the awareness that the body it is connected to will die and decay making it the present reminder of a future absence.[29] In this sense, while it marks an absence, it establishes a presence. Preserving the hair inextricably marks the preservation of that moment and, in a way, the person. When hair is cut for use as a memorial it becomes a memento. Parkin describes how any form of memento, when it is closely associated with a particular individual, becomes regarded as an extension of that individual's "personhood".[30] This effect must be intensified exponentially

if that memento is in fact an extension of the person, in the most literal sense: a "supernatural continuation" of the body beyond death.[31] In this sense, the lock of hair surpasses representation, as the hair does not simply represent the individual, but *is* the individual, isolated and preserved from death. Pointon notes how the decision to save a lock of hair marks a "transition": it is a physical manifestation of the decision to defy loss and separation, by enacting a transformation that allows the individual to be preserved.[32]

The temporal significance attached to the cutting of hair for means of preservation, and the implication this has for the preservation of the individual, gives this action a ritualistic quality of attempting (and in a way achieving) to preserve life in the face of death. The process of cutting illustrates the intention to preserve the individual, while actively creating the relic through which the individual is preserved. Ergo, the individual is not just represented through the hair, but preserved through the performative act of cutting. This new state of the hair- now object where it was subject and eternal in its removal from death- becomes laden with a significance that is known and understood by all who share this tradition, giving this process the character of a performative action.

Exchanging

The exchange of hair is the most conspicuously performative process in the formation of hair-work. Whether exchanged for use within jewellery or not, in life or in death, this action was highly significant within the context of Victorian Britain. For reasons mentioned above, when hair was exchanged between individuals, it was very much seen as giving oneself, in a tokenised form. In life, the exchange of hair was a widely recognised means of conveying deep affection and enacted a profound, relationship defining moment, marking the transition to a more intimate, often romantic attachment.[33] It was a promise made once given, and so was not taken lightly. On the part of the giver, it is a clear confession of love which

the receiver must then accept with the understanding that to do so would be to accept and reciprocate that love, often with the expectation of future marriage.[34] This exchange could also be initiated by the request for a lock of hair from a would-be lover and- understanding the commitment entailed in the ritual- this request would sometimes be denied by those unprepared to make such a pledge.[35] When done with mutual understanding and participation between the giver and receiver, this action affected the transition to a new kind of relationship. In light of this, the exchange of hair appears to have been a highly effective discourse for establishing intimate relationships.

Consequently, it is unsurprising that jewellery involving hair was not strictly associated with mourning, but was incorporated into other kinds of sentimental jewellery in the Victorian period, most notably betrothal and marriage jewellery.[36] Similarities between these forms of hair-work jewellery are inevitable, given how the sentiments of love and loss seem destined to become entangled. Emily Palmer received a mourning ring containing a lock of her sister's hair after she passed in 1852. She spoke of how her family felt a ring to be most appropriate given how rings are a "bond of love". [37] This statement implies the belief that mourning rings, like wedding rings, bind people together. The exchange of these two kinds of rings certainly have commonalities, particularly in how they performatively established a covenant between two people. The exchange of either ring communicates a promise and, like with speech, a promise conveyed is a promise made. Whether in death or life, the exchange of hair, like the exchange of rings, clearly denotes a lasting unity. Such exchangeable items have a distinct, socially recognisable, personally consequential meaning beyond their physical form, that allows them to enact a binding effect on relationships.

Like wedding rings, mourning rings only act to convey this binding power within a certain context. Without the presence of love between the two individuals, the action would

be essentially meaningless. The action only has a performative power because the participants are invested in it. This idea is exemplified by Charles Dickens in the novel *Great Expectations*, who describes the lawyer's clerk, Mr. Wemmick, as wearing four mourning rings to which the narrator sarcastically muses how he must be "quite laden with remembrance of departed friends". The clerk has clearly scavenged the rings from the funerals he has attended with the lawyer.[38] This uncomfortable collection converts the mourning rings into meaningless trinkets, devoid of sentimental value. The rings were not meant for him and thus have no performative power, their significance lost to the opportunistic clerk. This example emphasises how the performativity of such rings is entirely dependent on the conditions of their exchange. Without the proper conditions the ritual is ineffective and the action loses its performative potential. Therefore, we see that, like a spoken vow, the exchange of hair has the power to enact the change it speaks of, acting as an eminent discourse with effective power. However, this exchange only has power within the appropriate context, between the appropriate individuals who will invest this ritual with its performative capacity.

Weaving and Containing

The process of weaving was a key step in the conversion of hair into a piece of jewellery. This process transforms the hair from a detached, organic remnant to a design element: meant to be worn and displayed. This is a divergent point within the production processes as it could take place in either a domestic or professional setting. As aforementioned, many mourning rings were mass produced, often using large-scale industrial manufacture methods. This depersonalised process was met with scepticism and mistrust by those who feared their loved ones' hair would be substituted with the hair of a stranger, subverting the sentimental function of the jewellery. [39] There is certainly evidence that this fear was not irrational.[40] Partly in reaction to this, hair-working became a popular trend

amongst middle-class women, supported by the wider society that believed it promoted delicacy and self-discipline, desirable traits in the archetypal Victorian domestic goddess.[41]

Wearing

The inherent role of any piece of jewellery is to be worn. The wearing of jewellery can be seen as having dual purposes. Firstly, to wear jewellery is to carry it with you on your body, often involving contact with the skin. The second purpose of jewellery is display. This first purpose can be seen as the culmination of all the previous processes: the hair has been isolated and frozen in time, it has been gifted to a loved one, it has been crafted into a portable, wearable item and now it can be worn. This wearing of the hair-work jewellery provides the physical connection between the departed and the bereaved: two bodies, one full and animated and the other, embodied and inanimate, residing together in a union made by the sensory interaction of the jewellery and the body.[42] The hair provides this connection, a tangible link between two individuals that can transcend distance or death. Performatively speaking, this is the evidence and fulfilment of the promise made through the exchange of hair, physically manifested. This ability to at once state the intention to preserve a connection and simultaneously embody this connection lies in the contradiction of such jewellery as being both subject and object. Ofek speaks of the paradoxical duality of hair-work jewellery as an objectification of something inherently intangible, the love between individuals, as well as the personification of an object, experienced by some so vividly as to feel as if their loved one is there with them.[43] Arguably, this duality is what allows this practice to be at once symbolic and literal, a promise and its fulfilment, a contradiction that can be seen to lend hair-work its performative character. It establishes a physical connection, real and tangible, in the face of separation.

This ability of hair-work to act as both a promise and its fulfilment can also be applied to the memory function of such jewellery. Preservation and interaction with such

items clearly illustrate the intention to remember the individual it commemorates. To the wearer, contemplation of the hair reawakens memories of the individual to whom the hair belonged and recalls the unique relationship they shared. This effect however is only produced under the correct circumstances, between the correct individuals, much like the previous processes. To the appropriate wearer, this item conjures memories that become imbued in the item. The item thus becomes a vehicle through which memories can be stored and revisited, allowing the past to be "held captive" and reawakened via engagement with the object.[44] Such sentimental jewellery enabled a "reliving of the emotional experience", meaning that mourning rings, more than just illustrating the intention to commemorate the individual, actively facilitated the act of memory.[45] They are a "materialization of memory", literal and physical, that have effective power within the appropriate context.[46] This takes their function beyond the symbolic or representational, to the performative.

These processes, when performed correctly and under the appropriate conditions, can effect change. The transitions that take place through the hair, namely its transition from subject to object, and then object to exchangeable ornament, entail literal and symbolic transitions. When regarded as a sequence of "scripted behaviour", akin to a ritual or ceremony, we can see how these processes are embedded with social significance, which lends them a performative power beyond mere physical transformation.[47] Exchange of such rings can therefore act to solidify the ties between individuals through a symbolic discourse. While the hair symbolises the relationships between individuals, it also establishes a physical link between them, making such items not simply representational but performative. In this sense, performativity can be seen to aid the examination of such jewellery in that it helps us to ascertain how transitional matter can affect transitional relationships.

Performativity and Identity

As mentioned previously, mourning rings were part of an extensive mourning industry that had developed in Victorian Britain, an industry characterised by class and gender-based distinctions. The performative role of hair-work jewellery can be situated within the significant changes that were taking place in Victorian Britain, and how these changes brought about a crisis of identity within society. The 'invention of tradition' through performative action is thus presented as a means of forming and stabilising identity: particularly as it relates to the Victorian performance of class and gender.

The Victorian era was a time of profound social change. With industrialisation came a new upper class, born from entrepreneurs and businessmen, with the money to spend on excessive displays of luxury previously confined to the aristocracy.[48] This new bourgeoisie became intermingled into a pre-existing class structure founded on nobility and rank, creating a new, increasingly fluid and convoluted class system.[49] A sense of certainty, and with it, belonging, were felt to be lacking in the face of such seismic change, creating a crisis of identity within society.[50]

Mourning rings were a part of an increasingly commodified mourning industry, driven by class competition and anxiety around conformity. Mourning had become a performative means of constructing social identities, with the identities produced through this performance- as well as the social reaction to these performances- being heavily gendered and class-centric. Mourning rings, despite the universality of their sentimentality, were not free of class connotations. Indeed, class has been clearly marked on the two rings examined, with wealth being conspicuously displayed through the varying finery of the casing. Even the hair-work within was not entirely immune from connotations of class, due to the commodification that hair experienced within Victorian Britain.

Sheumaker informs us that, like the wider culture of mourning, hair became swept up in the "pervasive commodification of the market".[51] It was utilised not just in the production of sentimental jewellery but a variety of popular hair ornaments. In 1851 alone, England was said to have imported 10,862 pounds of hair from France.[52] Mass media played a role in the popularisation of hair jewellery, with advertisements for hair workers and designers appearing extensively in newspapers and periodicals, as well as instructional guides being released so women could produce it themselves.[53] Hair-working became an incredibly popular hobby amongst middle-class women and began to be considered a key skill within the middle-class women's repertoire that "aligned with middle-class domestic ideology".[54] These domestically produced pieces did not necessarily confine the hair under glass or within a locket, like the rings examined, but were often made entirely of exposed hair, woven together into chains and bands to form necklaces, bracelets and earrings. [55] It was considered an "agreeable and profitable occupation" for Victorian women who were able to sell their creations and thus earn money without compromising the ideals of Victorian womanhood.[56] The popularity of this tradition made hair-work jewellery a must-have fashion accessory.

The fashion for hair-work was thus largely born from its association with middle class ideology, seen to be indicative of an individual's appreciation and engagement with middle-class conceptions of sentimentality.[57] As well as being fashionable, it conveyed the 'proper' emotions in the face of death, evincing emotional refinement and compliance with middle-class ideals. The object's fundamental sentimentality was recognisably emblematic of the individual's sophistication, signalling to the world a level of taste and sensitivity that formed a crucial part of the performance of middle-class identities. Therefore, hair-work jewellery recognisably cited middle-class ideology, and thus can be seen to construct the middle-class identities it claimed to express.

These considerations present the hair-work tradition as a performative mechanism for

the construction of gendered class identities. However, it could be argued that the performative power of mourning rings ran deeper, proclaiming a commonality that transcended class or gender. In regard to gender, mourning rings cannot be considered to perform gender as, unlike the vast majority of mourning adornment, they were gender neutral items. Though such hair-work was largely produced by women, the wearer, as well as the individual being commemorated, could be either male or female. In regard to class, hair-work jewellery had value beyond class connotations by virtue of its authenticity. The contradictory nature of hair-work, outlined in the previous chapter, allows it to play the paradoxical role of a "non-commodifiable commodity".[58] Its singularity made it impervious to the kind of mass reproduction that other commodities had undergone, giving it an authenticity that people craved in the midst of a world that felt increasingly artificial. Hair carried a weight of sincerity and timelessness that stood it apart from the uncertainty of a changing world. Moreover, the poignancy of hair was experienced on both sides of the religious divide. Lutz describes how interpretations of hair-work relics can be two-fold, either read as a harkening back to older forms of religious belief or illustrative of a secular desire to cling on to memory as the last vestige of a life that is invariably ended by death. [59] The connection provided by hair-work was felt by believers and non-believers alike because it was physical and thus irrefutable. Because of this, sentimentally itself fails to be exclusively subsumed under any ideology.[60] It was this ambiguity that allowed sentimentality to be shared across religious and class boundaries, allying people in the pursuit of an ideal, common language of love and loss that could be understood by all. Performatively speaking, this expression of sentimentality was a means to establish a sense of commonality, by reminding people of the fundamental conditions of life that bind them together. This 'invention of tradition' can be regarded as a reaction against the alienation of change. The identity crisis this change prompted was countered by attempts to re-establish a feeling of belonging that transcended the social,

calling to more deep-seated notions of personhood. The authenticity of hair-work thus invokes a sense of common humanity in an attempt to re-establish a sense of community.

Therefore, mourning can be seen as a performative means of constructing identities centred around class and gender. The identity crisis of the Victorian era appears to have thrown into sharp relief the importance of performance for gaining and maintaining group affiliations. It stimulated new performances and, through them, new identities that better fit within the modern world. Performative mourning was an invented tradition, meant to confer a legitimacy to constructed identities by grounding performance in an imagined legacy. However, though mourning rings fit within this wider culture of mourning, they also stand apart from it. Though not immune from class connotations, they also spoke of more elemental truths. Mourning rings articulated sentiments that were not bound by class, sentiments that were experienced equally by all in society, thus evoking a common humanity.

Conclusion

Performativity can be seen to offer new perspectives on the transformational processes that go into the creation of hair-work jewellery, transformations that are grounded in social convention. These transformations became invested with the meaning and power to transform relationships and evoke presence in the wake of absence, though only under the appropriate conditions. The duality of hair as both subject and object allows it to maintain physical connections across the boundary of life and death. This practice, that achieved the status of tradition, conferred a binding power between individuals and social groups, making it performative rather than simply representational. The emergence of a large-scale mourning industry during the Victorian era allowed mourning to be used performatively to establish class and gender-based identities. The identity crisis of the Victorian era precipitated attempts to establish a sense of belonging through emulated performance: a performance that was

produced both by and upon the body. Mourning jewellery was thus a performative medium that allowed for the construction of gendered middle-class identities by aligning with the values of middle-class domestic ideology. Moreover, this common language of sentiment could be seen to evince more deep-rooted notions of personhood in the attempt to re-establish a sense of authenticity in the face of profound social change. In light of these conclusions, we can see that the theory of performativity can help generate a valuable understanding of the use of Victorian mourning jewellery.

Endnotes

[1] John Austin, *How to do things with words.* (Oxford University Press, 1975).
[2] Donald Gardner, "Performativity in Ritual: The Mianmin Case" *Man.* 18, no.2 (1983), 348.
[3] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity.* (Routledge, 2002), 140.
[4] Elizabeth Wissinger, "Judith Butler: Fashion and Performativity" in *Thinking Through Fashion: A guide to key theorists,* ed. Agnes Rocamora and Anneke Smelik (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 289.
[5] Vikki Bell, "Performativity and Belonging: An Introduction" *Theory Culture and Society* 16, no.2 (1999): 3.
[6] Rachel Harmeyer "Object of Immortality: Hairwork and Mourning in Victorian Visual Culture" in *Proceedings of the Art of Death and Dying Symposium* (University of Houston, 2018):35-6. http://hdl.handle.net/10657/3003
[7] Deborah Lutz, "The Dead Still Among Us: Victorian secular relics, hair jewelry and death culture" *Victorian Literature and Culture* 39, no.1 (2011): 130.
[8] Charlotte Gere and Judy Rudoe, *Jewellery in the Age of Queen Victoria: a mirror to the world* (London: British Museum Press, 2010), 82.
[9] Edwin Dethlefsen and James Deetz, "Death's Heads, Cherubs and Willow Trees: experimental archaeology in colonial cemeteries" *American Antiquity* 31, no.4 (1966).
[10] Dethlefsen and Deetz 1966, 508.
[11] Lutz 2011, 132.
[12] John Morley, *Death, Heaven and the Victorians* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1971), 67.
[13] Gere and Rudoe 2011, 102.
[14] Patricia Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford University Press on Demand, 1996), 298.
[15] Victoria and Albert Museum Collections, "Mourning Ring" Record created April 2006. https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O123418/mourning-ring-unknown/
[16] Julie-Marie Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain 1870-1914* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 215.
[17] Victoria and Albert Museum Collections, "Ring" Record created April 2006. https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O123454/ring-unknown/
[18] Deborah Lutz, *Relics of Death in Victorian Literature and Culture (*Cambridge University Press, 2015), 134
[19] Galia Ofek, *Representations of Hair in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 45
[20] Lutz 2015, 134.
[21] Sonia Bedikian, "The Death of Mourning: from Victorian crepe to the little black dress" *OMEGA- Jounral of Death and Dying* 57, no.1 (2008): 40.
[22] Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin, *Women and the Material Culture of Death* (Ashgate Publishing, 2013), 2.
[23] Ofek 2009, 1.
[24] Helen Sheumaker, '"This lock you see: Nineteenth century hair work as the commodified self" *Fashion Theory 1, no.4* (1997): 422.
[25] Gardner 1983, 348.
[26] Lutz, *Relics of Death,* 144.
[27] Lutz 2015, 135.
[28] Christiane Holm, "Sentimental Cuts: Eighteenth-century mourning jewelry with hair" *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38, no.1 (2004):140.
[29] Holm 2004, 140.
[30] David Parkin, "Mementoes as Transitional Objects in Human Displacement" *Journal of Material Culture* 4, no. 3 (1999): 304.
[31] Pamala Miller, "Hair Jewelry as Fetish" in *Objects of Special Devotion: Fetishes and Fetishism in Popular Culture*, ed. Ray B. Browne (Popular Press, 1982), 90.
[32] Marcia Pointon, "Materializing Mourning: hair, jewellery and the body" in *Material Memories: Design and Evocation* ed. Christopher Breward, Jeremy Aynsle and Marius Kwint Pointon (Berg 3PL 1999), 48.
[33] Gere and Rudoe 2011, 165.
[34] Schu-chuan Yan, "The Art of Working in Hair: hair jewellery and ornamental handiwork in Victorian Britain" *The Journal of Modern Craft* 12, no.2 (2019): 127.
[35] Kathleen Oliver, "With my Hair in Crystal": mourning Clarissa" *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 23, no. 1 (2010): 38.
[36] Charlotte Gere and Judy Rudoe, *Victorian Jewelry Design, (*H. Regnery Company, 1973), 247.
[37] Jalland 1996, 298.
[38] Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* in Gere and Rudoe 2010, *177.*
[39] Ofek 2009, 46.

[40] Alexanna Speight, "The Lock of Hair: its history" in *Ancient and Modern, Natural and Artistic, with the Art of Working in Hair* (London, 1871).
[41] Yan 2019, 129.
[42] Yan 2019, 127.
[43] Ofek 2009, 51.
[44] Jane Wildgoose, "Beyond All Price: Victorian hair jewelry, commemoration and story-telling" *Fashion Theory* 22, no.6 (2018): 703 ; Denise Turner, "'Memories are Made of This': personal reflections on the creation and maintenance of memorials and mementoes" *Bereavement Care 33, no. 3* (2014).
[45] Helen Sheumaker, *Love Entwined: the curious history of hair-work in America* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), ix.
[46] Pointon 1999, 56.
[47] Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick, "Introduction: Performativity and Performance" in *Performativity and Performance* (New York, Routledge, 1995), 2.
[48] Cynthia Curran, "Private Women, Public Needs: middle-class widows in Victorian England" *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 25, no.2 (1993): 218.
[49] Gere and Rudoe 2010, 101.
[50] Miriam Bailin, "Dismal Pleasure: Victorian sentimentality and the pathos of parvenu" ELH 66, no.4 (1999): 1016.
[51] Sheumaker 2007, 426.
[52] Ofek 2009, 22-23.
[53] Lutz 2015, 132; Yan 2019, 131.
[54] Yan 2019, 125.
[55] Harmeyer 2018, 36.
[56] Mark Campbell, *Self-instructor in the Art of Hair Work: Dressing Hair, Making Curls, Switches, Braids, and Hair Jewelry of Every Description* (Chicago, 1867), 2 And Yan, "The Art of Working in Hair".
[57] Sheumaker 1997, 422.
[58] Sheumaker 1997, 422.
[59] Lutz, *Relics of Death*, 153.
[60] Balin 199, 1015.

Bibliography

Austin, John Langshaw. *How to do things with words*. Vol. 88. Oxford university press. 1975.

Bailin, Miriam. "Dismal Pleasure": Victorian Sentimentality and the Pathos of the Parvenu." *ELH* 66, no. 4 (1999): 1015-1032.

Bedikian, Sonia A. "The death of mourning: From Victorian crepe to the little black dress." *OMEGA-Journal of Death and Dying* 57, no. 1 (2008): 35-52.

Bell, Vikki. "Performativity and Belonging: An Introduction." Theory, Culture & Society 16, no. 2 (1999): 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1177/02632769922050511.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 2002.

Campbell, Mark. *Self-instructor in the Art of Hair Work: Dressing Hair, Making Curls, Switches, Braids, and Hair Jewelry of Every Description*. Chicago, 1867.

Curran, Cynthia. "Private women, public needs: middle-class widows in Victorian England." *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 25, no. 2 (1993): 217-236.

Dethlefsen, Edwin, and James Deetz. 1966. "Death's heads, cherubs, and willow trees: experimental archaeology in colonial cemeteries." *American Antiquity* 31, no.4 (1966): 502-510.

Gardner, Donald. S. "Performativity in Ritual: The Mianmin Case." *Man*, New Series 18, no. 2 (1983): 346-60.

Gere, Charlotte, and Judy Rudoe. *Victorian Jewelry Design*. H. Regnery Company. 1973.

Gere, Charlotte, and Judy Rudoe. *Jewellery in the age of Queen Victoria: a mirror to the world*. London: British Museum Press, 2010.

Goggin, Maureen Daly, and Beth Fowkes Tobin, *Women and the Material Culture of Death*. Ashgate, 2013.

Rachel Harmeyer "Object of Immortality: Hairwork and Mourning in Victorian Visual Culture" in *Proceedings of the Art of Death and Dying Symposium.* University of Houston. http://hdl.handle.net/10657/3003 2018.

Holm, Christiane. "Sentimental cuts: Eighteenth-century mourning jewelry with hair." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38, no. 1(2004): 139-143.

Jalland, Patricia. *Death in the Victorian family*. Oxford University Press on Demand. 1996.

Lutz, Deborah. "The dead still among us: Victorian secular relics, hair jewelry, and death culture." *Victorian Literature and Culture* 39, no. 1(2011): 127-142.

Lutz, Deborah. *Relics of Death in Victorian Literature and Culture*. No. 96. Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Pamala Miller, “Hair Jewelry as Fetish” in *Objects of Special Devotion: Fetishes and Fetishism in Popular Culture*, ed. Ray B. Browne. Popular Press, 1982.

Morley, John. *Death, heaven, and the Victorians*. Pittsburgh. University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971.

Ofek, Galia. *Representations of hair in Victorian literature and culture*. Ashgate Publishing, 2009.

Oliver, Kathleen M. "“With My Hair in Crystal”: Mourning Clarissa." *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 23, no. 1(2010): 35-60.

Parker, Andrew, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. "Introduction: Performativity and performance." *Performativity and Performance*. New York. Routledge, 1995.

Parkin, David. "Mementoes as transitional objects in human displacement." *Journal of Material Culture* 4, no. 3(1999): 303-320.

Pointon, Marcia. 1999. "Materializing mourning: Hair, jewellery and the body." in *Material memories*, edited by Christopher Breward, Jeremy Aynsle and Marius Kwint. 39-57. Berg 3PL, 1999.

Sheumaker, Helen. "“This Lock You See”: Nineteenth-Century Hair Work as the Commodified Self." *Fashion Theory* 1, no. 4 (1997): 421-445.

Sheumaker, Helen. *Love Entwined: The Curious History of Hairwork in America*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007.

Speight, Alexanna. "The Lock of Hair: Its History." In *Ancient and Modern, Natural and Artistic, with the Art of Working in Hair.* London, 1871.

Strange, Julie-Marie, *Death, grief and poverty in Britain, 1870–1914*. Vol. 6. Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Turner, Denise. "‘Memories are made of this’: personal reflections on the creation and maintenance of memorials and mementoes." *Bereavement care* 33, no. 3(2014): 92-96.

Wildgoose, Jane. "Beyond All Price: Victorian Hair Jewelry, Commemoration & Story-Telling." *Fashion Theory* 22, no. 6(2018): 699-726.

Wissinger, Elizabeth, 2015. “Judith Butler: Fashion and Performativity.” In *Thinking Through Fashion: A Guide to Key Theorists* edited by Agnes Rocamora and Anneke Smelik. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015.

Yan, Shu-chuan. "The Art of Working in Hair: Hair Jewellery and Ornamental Handiwork in Victorian Britain." *The Journal of Modern Craft* 12, no. 2(2019): 123-139.