

“This Memento Strangely Fair”: Hairwork Jewelry in America

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THESIS

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SUMMARY

This thesis explores the emotional and cultural dimensions of hairwork jewelry in nineteenth-century America, investigates the connections shared between hairwork jewelry and wearer, and analyzes how hair acquired its sentimental significance in American culture. Whether composed of hair from a living or deceased person, hairwork jewelry served as a tangible memory object that physically and emotionally linked together loved ones. Through the evocative sensory experience of wearing, touching, and viewing hairwork jewelry, individuals conjured the memory of absent loved ones embodied in hairwork.

Through an examination of how the design and construction of hairwork jewelry changed over the course of the nineteenth century, this thesis considers how the precious substance of hair, in a variety of ornamental forms, stimulated remembrance and contemplation. By tracing the origins of photographic hairwork jewelry to late-eighteenth-century watercolor portrait miniatures with hairwork, this study uncovers the desire Americans felt for a memory object containing “dual likenesses” of a loved one: a pictorial representation and a fragment of hair. A comparison of photographic hairwork jewelry and the watercolor miniature with hairwork demonstrates how the pairing of portrait and hair generated a potent memory object with a strong emotional resonance.

Nothing but a lock of hair,
Yet I treasure it with care;
Though I often wonder why,
It so speaks of days gone by,
For it seems a little thing
From the past such thoughts to bring.

– Bertha Berton, “A Lock of Hair,”
Peterson’s Magazine (1873)

The souvenir speaks to a context of origin through a language of longing, for it is not an object arising out of need or use value; it is an object arising out of the necessarily insatiable demands of nostalgia.

– Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (1992)

An absence can be more poignant, more noticeable, more obsessive, than any presence.

– Richard C. Solomon, *In Defense of Sentimentality* (2004)

INTRODUCTION

1. A PRECIOUS SUBSTANCE: SENTIMENTALITY AND HAIRWORK JEWELRY

Deeply implanted in middle-class culture, sentimentality pervaded the lives of nineteenth-century Americans, embedding itself in etiquette, literature, fashion, and mourning rituals. In accordance with the cult of sentimentality, all aspects of personal conduct, in both the public and private realm, expressed an individual's sincerity, sensitivity, and morality. As theorized by cultural historian Karen Halttunen, the middle class adhered to the cult of sentimentality as a reactionary measure, as a means of protecting themselves from "the tide of hypocrisy that seemed to be engulfing American society" during the nineteenth century.¹ Growing fluidity in the social world of the nineteenth century made it more difficult for Americans to identify the class status of strangers. In this context, the display of sentimentality in social rituals and personal conduct served to demonstrate that Americans belonged to the middle class. This explanation for the prevalence of sentimentality during the nineteenth century, however, perpetuates the reputation of sentimentality as the contrived expression of emotion.

To an extent, the twenty-first-century stigmatization of sentimentality as a mawkish display of false emotions echoes nineteenth-century concerns with the sincerity of feelings. Although sentimentality has acquired pejorative connotations over the past century, a more nuanced understanding of sentimentality recognizes its potential beyond its associations with excessive emotion. As historian Robert C. Solomon writes in his

¹ Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830–1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 60.

book *In Defense of Sentimentality*, “It is as if the very word ‘sentimentality’ has been loaded with the connotations of ‘too much’—too much feeling, too little common sense and rationality, as if these were opposed instead of mutually supportive. It is as if sentimentality and its sentiments are never warranted and always inappropriate.”² Objects categorized as sentimental elicit a range of emotions from an individual, varying from grief to compassion to sympathy to nostalgia. Connecting sentimentality to the material realm, June Howard, writes, “...When we call an artifact or gesture sentimental, we are pointing to its use of some established convention to evoke emotion; we mark a moment when the discursive processes that construct emotion become visible.”³ In the process of recognizing an object as inherently sentimental, the viewer discerns a familiar element—a trope—that makes the emotion easy to discern.

The history of hairwork jewelry is interwoven with feeling. In nineteenth-century America, hair functioned not only as the material medium of but also the medium of memory in sentimental and mourning hairwork jewelry. Enmeshed in American culture, hairwork jewelry appealed to men and women’s desire for a private yet publicly comprehensible manifestation of love and mourning. Within the realm of objects, hairwork jewelry produced a remarkable tactile experience in that the materiality of hairwork embodied an absent or deceased loved one. Permanent yet malleable, hair re-worked into jewelry offered the possibility of keeping near the memory of a loved one. Nineteenth-century Americans treasured the simple lock of hair as a memento that triggered remembrance; however, the tactile engagement individuals experienced while

² Robert C. Solomon, *In Defense of Sentimentality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 4.

³ June Howard, “What Is Sentimentality?” *American Literary History* 11, no. 1 (Spring, 1999): 76–77, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/490077>.

wearing hairwork jewelry heightened the possibility of recollection. As memory objects, the prolonged physical contact between the wearer and her hairwork jewelry elicited a specific kind of remembrance generated through the sensory engagement of touch.⁴

Additionally, hairwork jewelry acted as a sentimental memory object because it involved a conscious emotional engagement with a thing and an awareness of introspection,⁵ such as a sense of affection or longing for the person embodied in the hairwork.

Perceived as a synecdoche for the whole body, hair provided Americans with a precious memento of their beloved. The emotional experience of wearing hairwork jewelry hinged on the relationship shared between loved ones; hence, the owner of hairwork jewelry needed to first possess memories of the individual whose hair gave the object its sentimental value. If the perception of absence—of either the deceased or the missing—defines grief,⁶ then the ownership of hairwork jewelry preserved the memory of a loved one through the metonymical power of hair. Just as a remedy provides a means of counteracting or eliminating something undesirable, sentimental and mourning hairwork ensured that the lucid memory of a loved one remained physically and emotionally present.

⁴ Marius Kwant, “Introduction: The Physical Past,” in *Material Memories: Design and Evocation*, ed. Marius Kwant, Christopher Breward, and Jeremy Aynsley (Oxford: Berg, 1992), 2.

⁵ Peter Goldie, “Emotion, Feeling, and Knowledge of the World,” in *Thinking about Feeling: Contemporary Philosophers on Emotions*, ed. by Robert C. Solomon (Cary, North Carolina: Oxford University Press, 2004), 96.

⁶ Solomon, *In Defense of Sentimentality*, 80.

A hairwork bracelet worn by Mary Catherine Foster (1831–1909)⁷ illustrates the type of hairwork jewelry popularized during the mid-nineteenth century (fig. 1). Within the bracelet, five plaits of hairwork—layered in an alternating pattern according to their type of weave—join together to make a panel measuring one-and-a-half inches in height and six inches in length. Organized into a pattern of weaves, the bracelet contains hair plaits shaped into interlocking circles, ribbed chains, opaque twists, and fine mesh. The range of patterns applied to the hairwork plaits prevents the bracelet from looking monochromatic; varying from coarse cord to fine netting, the diversity of weaves creates gradations of brown hues. The opacity of the plaits fluctuates according to closeness of the weave. Only the interlocking links along the top and bottom of the bracelet retain the smoothness and luminosity associated with ordinary strands of hair. Whereas light passes through the lacy texture of the middle section, the tightly entwined twists and ribbed chains of the outer plaits appear dark in tone. Although the brunette shade of the hairwork bracelet hints at the organic origins of the material, the handicraft processes used to construct the assortment of plaits remove hair from its natural state. The hairwork bracelet demonstrates not only the maker’s ability to transform strands of hair into an array of textures but also her mastery over the malleable material of human hair. Epitomizing her control over the hair, the maker bound together small circular links of hair with tightly wrapped strands—confining the loops into an orderly chain that retains its shape more than 150 years after its construction.

⁷ Wisconsin Historical Society, Object File 1945.1327. Mary Catherine McCool, the daughter of Joseph McCool (1794–1844) and Eleanor Nevius McCool (1793–1883), was born in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania in 1831. The McCool family moved to Freeport, Illinois in 1840. In 1849, Mary McCool wed Charles Foster (1819–1872) of Monroe, Wisconsin. Charles and Mary Foster’s youngest daughter Mary S. Foster (1871–1960) deposited the bracelet at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin in 1919 (see deposit book, 167). In 1945, Mary Stuart Foster officially donated the hairwork bracelet to the Wisconsin History Society. Foster also donated a hairwork necklace with acorn pendants and an elliptical hairwork pendant made by her grandmother Eleanor Nevius McCool.

Figure 1



Figure 1. Tablework Hairwork Bracelet, Worn by Mary Catherine McCool Foster, brown hair, c. 1850. Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison Wisconsin. Author's photograph.

The prevalence of hairwork jewelry during the nineteenth century rested upon the established cultural perception of hair as a precious substance. In “From the Museum of Touch,” literary critic Susan Stewart describes “a paradox of materiality” which surfaces in two contrasting classifications of “precious” objects.⁸ In one category, gemstones and metals, such as diamonds and gold found in jewelry of great monetary worth, earn their status as precious because of their natural durability and divisibility without loss of value; in the second set, objects—some inherently fragile—become precious through the amount of labor and maintenance a culture invests in protecting them against the erosion of time.⁹ Creating its own paradox of materiality, hairwork jewelry dwells within both categories of precious objects.

The resilience of hair against time, its ability to retain its shape, texture, and color long after cut from a person’s head, endows hair with its precious quality. Despite the disparity among the economic values of human hair, gold, and gemstones, all three materials share attributes of durability and a history of use in jewelry. Resistant to wear and time, sentimental and mourning jewelry made of hair, gold, and gemstones symbolizes the enduring bond between two people. Additionally, the amount of time and labor invested in transforming human hair into ornaments such as the McCool bracelet establishes hairwork jewelry as a historically precious object. If precious objects “store our labor,”¹⁰ then the intricate work of hairwork as a handicraft—the labor of fashioning individual strands of hair into decorative forms—testifies to the preciousness of hairwork jewelry. While mid-nineteenth-century designs for hairwork jewelry favored earrings,

⁸ Susan Stewart, “Prologue: From the Museum of Touch,” in *Material Memories: Design and Evocation*, edited by Marius Kwint, Christopher Breward, and Jeremy Aynsle (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 30.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

necklaces, bracelets, and watch-chains constructed entirely from hair, thus making the hair of a loved one more palpable, the placement of hairwork within the glass compartments of locket and brooches in previous decades also enhanced the precious quality of hairwork. The enshrinement of hair beneath glass—a custom in hairwork jewelry dating back to the seventeenth century—transformed ordinary locks of hair into a secular relic, protecting it from the effects of time. As evident in seventeenth-century *memento mori* ornaments, eighteenth-century portrait miniatures, and nineteenth-century sentimental and mourning jewelry, Americans have valued and treated hairwork as a precious substance capable of keeping a loved one close.

2. THE MEMENTO THEY PRIZE: HAIR IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY WOMEN'S MAGAZINES

In 1850, two popular women's magazines *Peterson's Magazine*, in its November issue, and *Godey's Lady's Book*, in its December issue, introduced their readers to the art of hairwork with an identical instructional article. After its initial presentation of hairwork, *Godey's Lady's Book* published instructions on "The Art of Ornamental Hair-Work" in serial form the following year. Describing hairwork as an art recently imported from Germany, "Hair Work—No. 1" promoted hairwork as an elegant drawing-room activity similar to needlework in that it required few materials and occupied little space. Contrary to the magazine's description of hairwork as a novel German import, eighteenth-century Americans wore professionally made sentimental and mourning jewelry consisting of watercolor portrait miniatures and hair arranged into decorative

designs and pictorial scenes. In comparison to the ornate arrangements of hair beneath glass found in eighteenth-century hairwork jewelry, the hairwork designs of the mid-nineteenth century favored jewelry composed entirely of hair. The pivotal change in hairwork jewelry during the mid-nineteenth century centered on the popularity of hairwork as a domestic handicraft of middle-class women.

The articles in *Godey's Lady's Book* and *Peterson's Magazine* reassured their readers that although hairwork had been “hitherto almost exclusively confined to professed manufacturers of hair trinkets,” women could create their own beautiful jewelry by following the instructions provided.¹¹ “By acquiring knowledge of this art,” the author claimed, “ladies will be themselves enabled to manufacture the hair of beloved friends and relatives...and thus ensure that they do actually wear the memento they prize, and not a fabric substituted for it, as we fear has sometimes been the case.”¹² The introduction of hairwork to women readers in 1850 emphasized the sentimental value of hair, the importance of authenticity in hairwork jewelry, and the superiority of hairwork made by amateur hands.

Skepticism of the reputability of businesses heightened women's anxiety, and the possibility of wearing stranger's hair contradicted the sentimentality at the center of hairwork jewelry's cultural and personal significance. Although *Godey's Lady's Book* emphasized suspicious practices of professional hairworkers in its December 1850 issue, the magazine soon became the first mass marketer of hairwork jewelry in America. In

¹¹ Mlle. DeFour, “Hair Work—No. 1,” *Peterson's Magazine* (1849-1892) OL. XVIII., (1850): 202. <http://proxy.cc.uic.edu/docview/137441636?accountid=14552>. “Hair Work,” *Godey's Lady's Book* (1848-1854) (1850): 377. <http://proxy.cc.uic.edu/docview/126095100?accountid=14552>.

¹² Ibid.

July 1854, *Godey's Lady's Book* included hairwork jewelry in a fashion-plate illustration and, in the subsequent November issue, added hairwork jewelry to the list of goods available through its mail-order service. Initiated in 1852, the mail-order service “for ladies living at a distance,” advertised under “Fashions: Notice to Lady Subscribers,” offered jewelry, bridal wardrobes, spring and autumn bonnets, dresses, stationery, children’s wardrobes, cake-boxes, worsteds, mantelets, and mantillas.¹³ To place an order with the Editress of the Fashion Department, the magazine required the customer to send detailed instructions of the item she desired, along with a payment in the form of a check. The check covered the price of the goods ordered, the commission fee charged by the magazine for procuring the clothing, jewelry, and accessories, and the shipping cost of mailing the finished order to the customer’s home address.

The Editress of the Fashion Department promised the prompt delivery of goods shipped express to any part of the country. In 1860, five out of six Americans lived outside of cities, making mail order a convenient means of buying consumer goods.¹⁴ Although mail-order services and catalogues brought goods within reach of the rural population of America, mail-order companies faced criticism, particularly from local merchants who, perhaps in the interest of their own businesses, discouraged customers from making mail-order purchases. Merchants warned their customers of disappointment, claiming that mail-order companies swindled customers and sold substandard

¹³ “Fashions—Notice To Lady Subscribers,” *Godey's Magazine and Lady's Book*, February 1855, 50, ProQuest American Periodicals Series Online, 187.

¹⁴ Thomas J. Schlereth, “Country Stores, County Fairs, and Mail-Order Catalogues: Consumption in Rural America,” in *Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America, 1880–1920*, ed. Simon J. Bronner (Winterthur, Delaware: The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1989), 339.

merchandise.¹⁵ Whereas a product purchased in-person permitted the buyer to inspect the item herself before making a payment, the customer purchasing an item through mail-order service placed her confidence in the credibility of the distant company.

Godey's Lady's Book regularly advertised its buying service in "Notice to Lady Subscribers" (fig 2) and offered hairwork jewelry through the mail-order service as late as March 1883.

Figure 2

LADIES' ORNAMENTAL HAIR.		
Grecian Curls, arranged on comb,	\$7 00 to	25 00
Fancy Hair Bows,	6 00 "	10 00
Hair Waterfalls,	6 00 "	10 00
Hair Side Braids,	8 00 "	20 00
Hair Back Braids,	8 00 "	30 00
Puffs for Rolling the Hair,	2 00 "	5 00
KNIT GOODS.		
Split Zephyr Sacque for Infants,	\$2 00	
Zephyr Sacques for Infants,	3 00	
Ladies' Breakfast Cosseys,	6 00	
Ladies' Sontags,	3 50	
Ladies' Crochet Shawls,	\$9 00 to	30 00
Gentlemen's Afghans,	30 00 "	150 00
Infants' Afghans,	15 00 "	50 00
Ladies' and Children's Roman Scarfs,	2 50	
Gentlemen's Smoking Caps,	5 00 "	20 00
Gentlemen's Slippers,	3 00 "	15 00
HAIR JEWELRY.		
Bracelets,	\$5 00 to	30 00
Ear-rings,	5 00 "	20 00
Breastpins,	4 00 "	20 00
Rings,	2 00 "	10 00
Fob Chains,	8 00 "	30 00
Charms, by the piece,	2 50 "	5 00
Studs,	9 00 "	15 00
Sleeve Buttons,	9 00 "	15 00
She can also supply Ladies' and Children's complete Wardrobes, Dresses, Cloaks, Trimmings, Millinery, Jewelry, Silverware, Orné Balls, Zephyrs, Wedding and Visiting Cards, Paper and Envelopes, Card-cases, etc. etc.		
Address	FASHION EDITRESS, Care of Godey's Lady's Book, Philadelphia.	

Figure 2. *Fashion Editress' Advertisement, Godey's Lady's Book, May 1867.*

¹⁵ Ibid., 366.

The mail-order service allowed women to submit locks of hair and instructions for design to professional hairworkers, who would then return the finished pieces to the buyers. Customers who participated in the buying service placed their confidence in the taste of the Editress of the Fashion Department, whom they believed could select fashionable clothing and accessories tailored to their individual preferences and budgets. The Editress of the Fashion Department performed the function of mediator between customers and the hairwork business who fulfilled the jewelry orders. Consequently, ordering hairwork jewelry required women to entrust their faith not only in the buying service but also in the hairwork business. Sent in as loose hair and returned as finished jewelry, the mail-order service denied women the experience of performing or observing the transformation of hair into hairwork.

Elevating women's mistrust in the hairwork industry, rumors circulated about hairworkers using "dead hair," human hair removed from wigs and hairpieces, as a substitute for the hair submitted by customers.¹⁶ Within the cultural milieu of mid-nineteenth-century America, dead hair, devoid of personal meaning, stood in contrast to the "animated" hair of a loved one, brought to life by "affection, affiliation, and love."¹⁷ The possibility of wearing dead hair undermined the sentimental basis of hairwork jewelry. If professional hairworkers sold jewelry constructed from "dead hair" to their customers, then unknowing wearers might sacrilegiously invest emotional value in the hair of strangers. Americans' anxiety about the hair trade, however, preexisted their distrust of the business practices of professional hairworkers. In commodity form, hair

¹⁶ Sheumaker, *Love Entwined: The Curious History of Hairwork in America*, 68.

¹⁷ Ibid.

gained its monetary worth based on its length, color, and texture; yet, the undisclosed origins of hair used in wigs and artificial hairpieces troubled middle-class Americans.

Whereas the hair of a loved one could bring out feelings of veneration, the hair of strangers could elicit reactions of disgust. The class status and morality of the people who supplied the hair industry with its raw material disturbed some middle-class Americans, particularly women. According to historian Carol Rifelj, the widespread belief that hair came from executed criminals and prostitutes generated fears of proper women's exposure to the remains of degenerates.¹⁸ The phrase "dead hair" alluded to not only the emotional state of the hair—its lack of sentimental substance—but also its potentially repulsive origins. The essay "False Hair, and Where It Comes From," in the June 1866 issue of *Godey's Lady's Book*, did little to alleviate readers' anxiety over the human hair trade. Suggesting that no young woman would willingly sell her hair, the essay began, "If we could watch in secret the rape of each lock, we should be able to give a series of pictures of human agony such as life but rarely presents, for we may be sure that, as a rule, a young woman would almost as soon lose her life as that glorious appendage, on which so much of her beauty depends."¹⁹ *Godey's Lady's Book* established Paris as the emporium of the hair business and identified the long, dark tresses bought from peasant girls of Brittany as the finest hair in the industry. Romanticizing their "picturesque" headdresses and portraying the Bretonnes as virtuous maidens, the essay proclaimed the peasant girls as the exception to the morally inferior category of people who typically sold their hair.

¹⁸ Carol de Dobay Rifelj, *Coiffures: Hair in Nineteenth-Century French Literature and Culture* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2010), 212.

¹⁹ "False Hair, and Where it Comes from." *Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine* (1854-1882) 72, (1866): 508, <http://proxy.cc.uic.edu/docview/126049443?accountid=14552>.

According to the magazine, the young women, who kept their hair concealed underneath white caps according to cultural practices, sold their hair to dealers at county fairs in exchange for a few *sous* or a brightly colored cotton handkerchief. The discrepancy between the meager payments the Bretonnes received versus the profit dealers made from their hair pointed to a problem of ethics in the false hair business. Furthermore, the article sensationalized other resources of false hair, such as criminals compelled to cut their hair as punishment and for hygienic purposes, poverty-stricken women forced to sacrifice their hair as a last resort, and the repugnant, alleged harvesting of “churchyard hair.”²⁰ By purchasing and wearing false hair, the essay argued, decent ladies implanted themselves in the disreputable business practices of the hair trade and placed themselves in intimate contact with criminals, the poor, and the dead. As wives and mothers, nineteenth-century women needed to protect and preserve the sanctity of the home from the hypocrisy and contamination of false hair, argued the article. Subsequently, women dreaded the possibility of wearing hairwork jewelry constructed from false hair because the use of such a base substance entangled the profane with the sacred.

Perceived as false and deceptive, wigs and artificial hairpieces gained notoriety as unnatural implements used to alter a person’s appearance. In an age consumed with maintaining sincerity and shunning hypocrisy, the middle-class regarded artificial hairpieces as a means of disguising one’s true self. From the 1830s and into the 1850s, sentimental culture idealized transparency in the appearance of women, believing that “true womanly beauty was not an accident of form; it was an outward expression of a

²⁰ Ibid.

virtuous mind and heart.”²¹ Accordingly, wearing artificial hair conflicted with sentimental standards of women’s fashions, which promoted classical silhouettes and simpler hairstyles but discouraged the use of cosmetics.²² Middle-class women turned to *Godey’s Lady’s Book* to guide them in proper forms of dress that would enhance their feminine beauty while adhering to the sentimental ideal of fashion.²³ Attesting to the “cultural centrality” of the magazine, by the time of the Civil War, *Godey’s Lady’s Book* claimed a national distribution of over 150,000 subscribers.²⁴ Through its watercolor fashion plates, literature, and instructional guides, *Godey’s Lady’s Book* dispelled advice about personal appearance, domesticity, and morality to its female readers. During its sixty years of publication, *Godey’s Lady’s Book* played a key role in the disseminating of American middle-class values and served as the tastemaker for at least two generations of women.

Published in tandem with instructional guides on hairwork jewelry and nonfiction articles about the history of hair, the sentimental literature of women’s magazines, including *Godey’s Lady’s Book* and *Peterson’s Magazine*, perpetuated the division between false and authentic hair. Often told from the perspective of male narrators, satirical poems and didactic stories describe the experiences of men who fall in love with beautiful women—only to discover that the rich blonde tresses they admired were switches, or detachable pieces of false hair. In “Grace Eversleigh’s Golden Hair,” the

²¹ Halttunen, *Confidence Men, Painted Women*, 71.

²² *Ibid.*, 83.

²³ Isabelle Lehuu, “Sentimental Figures: Reading Godey’s Lady’s Book in Antebellum America,” in *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. by Shirley Samuels, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 74.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

narrator recalls his deep infatuation with Miss Eversleigh whose exquisite hair was “the purest, pale, golden hue...so luxuriant that the fair, young head appeared to bend beneath its weight.”²⁵ Despite his older sister’s warning that “All is not gold that glitters,” the twenty-two-year-old narrator adores Miss Eversleigh, particularly her profusion of blonde hair, and asks for her hand in marriage.

When the narrator compliments his sweetheart’s newly arranged braids and curls during an afternoon of horseback riding, Grace responds, “Many girls, as you perhaps know, do not scruple even to wear false hair; but this appears to me to be contrary to purity and dignity of womanhood. A true woman would not seek admiration and notice by adorning herself with borrowed ornaments.”²⁶ In an ironic twist foreshadowed by the narrator’s sister and Grace Eversleigh’s allegorical name, the horseback riding disturbs the artful arrangement of Grace’s hair, causing her artificial hairpieces to tumble through the air and onto the ground. Disillusioned with the fact that Grace’s hair was worth only as much as she paid for it, the narrator leaves Grace without a word and never sees her again. The moralistic story of Grace Eversleigh and its successor, the poem “Ye Ballad of Ye Golden Hair,”²⁷ warned female readers of the personal consequences of embellishing their hair with false tresses. By portraying artificial hair as dishonest, vain, and ruinous to romantic relationships, fashion magazines reinforced the sentimental conviction that women should maintain transparency in their appearance and intensified readers’ distrust of artificial hair.

²⁵ L. MacDonell, “Grace Eversleigh’s Golden Hair,” *Peterson’s Magazine (1849–1892)* OL. LXII., (July 1872): 23, <http://proxy.cc.uic.edu/docview/137560646?accountid=14552>.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Edward H. Braithwaite, “Ye Ballad of Ye Golden Hair,” *Peterson’s Magazine (1849–1892)* OL. LXXXVII., (Jan. 1885): 57, <http://proxy.cc.uic.edu/docview/137469398?accountid=14552>.

Concurrent with cautionary tales of false tresses, sentimental poems ennobled the simple lock of hair and its power to preserve and resurrect memories of the absent and the deceased. From the 1840s and into the 1880s, *Godey's Lady's Book* and *Peterson's Magazine* published poetry about men and women's reflective experiences of touching and looking at locks, curls, and tresses of hair. Poems such as "To a Ringlet of Hair," "Tale of a Lock of Hair," "Only a Woman's Hair," "The Lock of Hair," "The Tress of Hair," "Only a Curl of a Baby's Hair," and the song "Only a Lock of Her Hair"²⁸ contemplate how a mundane material such as hair could encapsulate the essence of person. The repetition of "only" in titles of the poems about hair signaled a literary trope that continued to appear for decades in women's sentimental literature. The enigmatic lock of hair, unadorned yet imperishable, survived as the sole trace of person, outliving its mortal source. Whereas a piece of hair bore no emotional significance to a stranger, the speakers of the poems perceived hair with great care and, in the process of handling the material, drew out its personal and emotional associations.

In Bertha Berton's poem "A Lock of Hair," the speaker considers the emotional resonance of a humble lock of hair: "Silent, yet it has a voice/That can make the heart rejoice/Or may weigh it down with care,/Sorrow deep, or dark despair."²⁹ Berton

²⁸ D.E.W., "To a Ringlet of Hair," *Godey's Magazine and Lady's Book (1844-1848)* 29, (1844): 114; Margaret, "The Tale of a Lock of Hair," *Godey's Magazine and Lady's Book (1844-1848)* 36, (May 1848): 280.; Ivie, "Only a Woman's Hair," *Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine (1844-1848)* (October 1867): 310; T. Gray Ashton, "The Tress of Hair," *Peterson's Magazine* LXXIV.5 (November 1878): 325; A.M. Nesmyth, "Only a Curl of a Baby's Hair," *Peterson's Magazine* LVIII.1 (July 1870): 41; Bertha Berton, "A Lock of Hair," *Peterson's Magazine* LXIV.5 (November 1873): 316; "Only a Lock of Her Hair," *Peterson's Magazine* LXXV.2 (February 1879):13. These titles are only a sample of the poems about hair published in *Godey's Lady's Book* and *Peterson's Magazine* during the height of hairwork jewelry.

²⁹ Bertha Berton, "A Lock of Hair," 7-10.

bookends the poem with the line “Nothing but a lock of hair,”³⁰ using the statement as a rhetorical device that underscores the metonymical role that “this memento, strangely fair”³¹ innately possesses. Sentimental poetry about hair conformed to a formulaic arc, beginning with the lamenting of a person’s death or absence, followed by recollections of the person’s youth, beauty, or innocence, and ending with the recognition and reverence of hair as palpable and everlasting memento. Mourning the loss of his wife, the devoted husband in Ivie’s “Only a Woman’s Hair” holds “a soft brown ringlet, tinged with gold”³² and envisages the moment when he and his wife meet again:

I’ll catch the gleaming of your curls
Across the azure fields of heaven.
Be sure that I shall know you, love,
‘Mid all the angels standing there,
And clasp you in my longing arms,
And kiss once more the golden hair.³³

The locks of brown hair saved after the death of his wife serve as a mediator between heaven and earth. Simultaneously, the curl of hair reinforces the sense of separation caused by his wife’s death and draws her physically nearer to him. He holds a remnant of her brown curls, a synecdoche for her whole self, and imagines how he will fully embrace his wife in the afterlife. Amid the bright blue skies of heaven, he will recognize his wife from afar because he treasured the lock of her golden hair during her absence.

“Only a Lock of Woman’s Hair” and other sentimental hair poems reassured readers that they, too, could find solace in the reflective and private viewing of locks of hair. Poems about pensive contact with locks of hair instructed readers in the

³⁰ Berton, “A Lock of Hair,” 24.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ivie, “Only a Woman’s Hair,” 2.

³³ Ibid.

performative handling of hair and provided examples of the genuine feelings human hair elicited from an emotionally attuned individual. Gestures such as twining hair around one's fingers, caressing the hair in one's hands, and holding a lock of hair close to one's face demonstrated how the sentimental individual engaged with the hair of a loved one. Most importantly, whether taken from the living or deceased, the sentimental value of hair and its potency as a memory object hinged on the material's lingering connection to a loved one.

Categorizing hair as either false or authentic, *Godey's Lady's Book* and *Peterson's Magazine* shaped middle-class women's perceptions of hair, formulating a binary in readers' imaginations. The artificial hairpiece, potentially made of 'dead hair,' circulated as a commodity form, whereas the honest token of a lock of hair contained immeasurable personal value. Validating women's fear of hair as a commodity as well as their sentimental regard for the hair of loved ones, instructional guides and handicraft manuals printed and advertised within the pages of women's magazines persuaded women to create hairwork jewelry themselves.

3. MEMORY MAKERS: WOMEN, HANDICRAFT, AND HAIRWORK

The mid-nineteenth-century introduction of intricate designs for bracelets, necklaces, and watch chains made entirely of hair coincided with the adoption of new tools and techniques in the crafting of hairwork. Bracelets, earrings, and necklaces took the shape of spheres, acorns, crosses, serpents, hearts, anchors, integrating nineteenth-century sentimental and religious symbolism into designs. To achieve these shapes

required carved wooden forms used as molds during the weaving process. To construct hairwork necklaces, watch chains, and bracelets with hollow forms, the maker used the tablework process, similar to lace making. Table-worked hair required a circular table, measuring about thirty-three inches in height, with a hole cut in the center and a padded form that held pins in place (fig. 3).

Figure 3

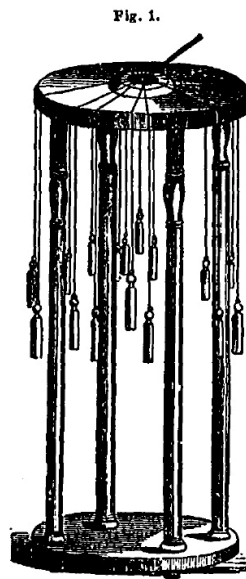


Figure 3. *Braiding Table Illustration, “Fig. 1,” Godey’s Lady’s Book, December 1850.*

Using lead weights to anchor sections of hair, the maker wove the hair in a hand-over-hand method. The finished weave formed inside of the circular space of the cut tabletop (fig. 4).

Once the weave was completed, the maker removed the cords or wooden forms inside the pieces, boiled the pieces in a soda water solution, and allowed them to dry.³⁴ A necklace made by Eleanor Nevius McCool (1793–1883) provides an example of table-worked hairwork jewelry (fig. 5).

Figure 4

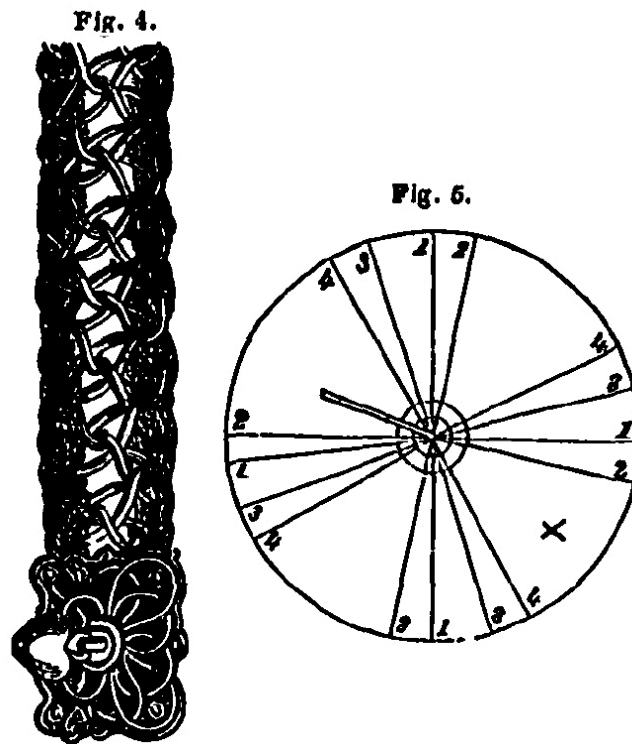


Figure 4. *Pattern for a Bracelet, Godey's Lady's Book, December 1850.*

³⁴ DeLorme, *Mourning Art & Jewelry* (Atglen, Pennsylvania: Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 2004), 67.

Figure 5



Figure 5. Eleanor Nevius McCool, Hairwork Necklace with Acorn Pendants, brown and blonde hair, gold mountings, c. 1850. Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison Wisconsin. Author's photograph.

McCool constructed the open-weave necklace using acorn- and sphere-shaped wooden forms for the necklace beads and the drop pendants. Made predominantly from brown hair, McCool added small amounts of blonde hair from one of her six children, creating a light diamond pattern along the forty spheres and three acorn pendants.³⁵ Symbolic of

³⁵ Eleanor Nevius McCool and her husband Joseph McCool (1794–1844) had six children: William Thomas McCool (b. December 18, 1818); Oliver Hazard Perry McCool (b. August 29, 1820, d. May 10

strength and longevity, the acorn drop dangling at the center is composed entirely of blonde hair. McCool would have purchased the gold-filled findings, including the end caps, hook and barrel clasp, curved pendant rod, and cylindrical spacers, from a jeweler or mail-order catalog. A gold end cap at the bottom of each acorn, where McCool removed the wooden form used during the construction of the pendant, secures the woven structure. At the top of each acorn pendant, a gold cap with a jump ring provides a way of attaching the three pendants to the rod. McCool's daughter Mary Catherine Foster (1831–1909) personally wore the hairwork necklace and later gave the necklace to her daughter Mary Stuart Foster (1871–1960) of Madison, Wisconsin. Mary Stuart Foster donated the necklace to the Wisconsin Historical Society in 1945 along with other hairwork jewelry inherited from her mother.³⁶

In the catalog section of Mark Campbell's *Self-Instructor in the Art of Hair Work, Dressing Hair, Making Curls, Switches, and Braids and Hair Jewelry of Every*

1896); Jane McCool (b. July 8, 1822); Lucretia McCool (b. August 9, 1824, d. March 4, 1897); Eliza Anne McCool (b. November 24, 1826, d. 1916); Mary Catherine McCool (b. January 14, 1831, d. 1909). Abraham Van Doren Honeyman, *Joannes Nevius: Schepen and Third Secretary of New Amsterdam Under the Dutch, First Secretary of New York City Under the English, and His Descendants, A.D. 1627–1900* (Honeyman & Company, 1900), 294–295.

³⁶ Wisconsin Historical Society, Object File 1945.1326, *Hairwork Necklace*, Eleanor Nevius McCool, c. 1850. In addition to the acorn hairwork necklace, Mary Stuart Foster donated the hairwork bracelet discussed in the introduction of this paper (1945.1327) and a cross-stitch sampler made by Mary Catherine McCool in 1845 (1945.1331). Mary Stuart Foster, a graduate of the University of Wisconsin in 1894, served as the head of the Reference Division of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin Library from 1904 until her retirement in 1944. See also: "Miss Foster Dies; Headed Historic Library Division," *Wisconsin State Journal* (November 28, 1960), <http://newspaperarchive.com/wisconsin-state-journal/1960-11-29/>. Michael Edmonds, *150 Years of the State Historical Society Library* (State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, WI: 1998), http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/libarch_study/library_history.pdf.

Description (1867), the engraving *Necklace #239* (fig. 6) illustrates a tablework necklace design bearing a resemblance to the McCool necklace.³⁷

Figure 6

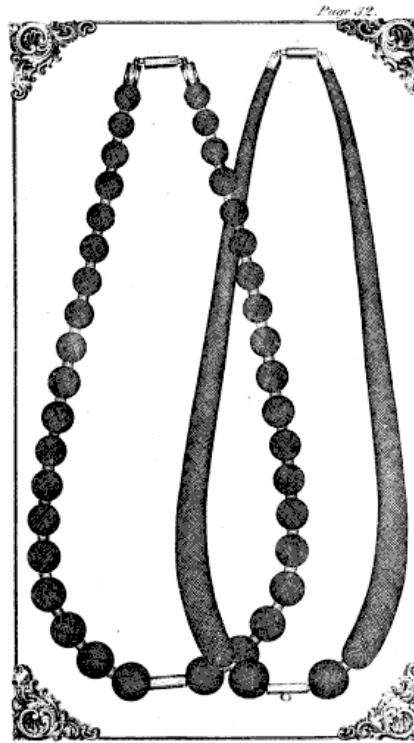


Figure 6. Mark Campbell, Illustration for *Necklace #239 and #240*. *Self-Instructor: Art of Hair Work, Dressing Hair, Making Curls, Switches, Braids, and Hair Jewelry of Every Description, Comprised from Original Designs and the Latest Parisian Patterns* by Mark Campbell. New York and Chicago: 1867.

Although the necklace lacks the acorn pendants and the subtle diamond effect McCool created with her child's blonde hair, the illustration shows a similar design with thirty-nine open-weave balls separated by cylindrical spacers. The design also shows an

³⁷ Mark Campbell, *Self-Instructor: Art of Hair Work, Dressing Hair, Making Curls, Switches, Braids, and Hair Jewelry of Every Description, Comprised from Original Designs and the Latest Parisian Patterns* (New York and Chicago: 1867), 32.

identical hook and barrel clasp and elongated rod spacer for pendants. An instructional manual as well as a mail order catalog, Campbell's *Self-Instructor in the Art of Hair Work* contained a price list offering readers who made hairwork at home two options: women could purchase the findings and assemble the jewelry themselves, or they take their hairwork and findings to a local jeweler. Alternatively, the catalog offered to assemble hairwork jewelry for their customers through its mail order service. This transaction allowed the customer to send her hairwork to be mounted by a professional along with a written or illustrated description of the style desired. In 1867, the catalog listed the cost for *Necklace #239* as "Mount's. \$5.00" or "Compl't. \$10.00."³⁸ In the 1875 edition of *Self-Instructor in the Art of Hair Work*, the cost for the mountings and completion of the same necklace increased to "Mount's. \$7.00" and "Compl't. \$10.00."³⁹

Spanning three generations of female owners, the heirloom status of the McCool hairwork necklace attests to the familial significance of hairwork. The entwining of blonde and brunette hair in the McCool acorn necklace encapsulates how hairwork linked family members together in a tangible object. Historian Talia Schaffer describes how domestic handicrafts made by a woman in her home "appeared to be an extension of her body, as well as carrying the signs of her taste and skill. The woman's hands had held it, her mind had planned it, her eyes had gauged it, and she had communicated...her intangible subjectivity to the completed object."⁴⁰ By using human hair as a material in handicrafts, women preserved family history and fabricated long-lasting material objects

³⁸ Ibid., 274.

³⁹ Mark Campbell, *The Art of Hair Work: Hair Braiding and Jewelry of Sentiment with Catalog of Hair Jewelry* (1875), ed. Kaethe Kliot and Jules Kliot (Berkeley, California: Lacis Publications, 1989), 195.

⁴⁰ Talia Schaffer, *Novel Craft: Victorian Domestic Handicraft and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (New York, Oxford Press, 2011), 33.

often inherited by succeeding generations. In addition to hairwork jewelry, nineteenth-century women and girls created hairwork albums, archiving familial relationships and friendship through simple braids and plaits sewn into paper and made ornate hairwork wreaths, uniting loved ones in hairwork flowers and loops symbolic of eternity. The crafting of hairwork objects metaphorically and materially linked loved ones together and demonstrated women's roles as memory keepers of their homes and caretakers of the families. The durability of hair, in comparison to the fragility of the human body, resonated with nineteenth-century women who assumed the responsibilities of caring for the ill and deceased. As material culture historians Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin explain, women's engagement with and manipulation of the material world is "informed by a deep knowledge of the materials used and as such they are participating in the creation, maintenance, and communication of knowledge about those materials."⁴¹ As the archivists of family history, women crafted memory objects such as hairwork jewelry from materials that held special significance as mementoes. The crafting of hairwork necessitated that women engage in prolonged, tactile contact with the hair of a loved one, evoking memories of the loved one in the mind of the maker.

In the preface to *Self-Instructor in the Art of Hair Work*, Campbell promises readers that his guide will unveil the process of transforming locks of hair into elegant mementoes. First published in 1867, over a decade after *Godey's Lady's Book* began to offer its mail-order hairwork service, Campbell's introduction echoes the rhetoric used in *Godey's Lady's Book* and *Peterson's Magazine*. Campbell addresses women's anxieties

⁴¹ Beth Fowkes Tobin and Maureen Daly Goggin, "Introduction," in *Women and Things, 1750-1950: Gendered Material Strategies*, ed. Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin (Farnham, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009), 3.

concerning professional hairworkers, writing: “Persons wishing to preserve, and weave into lasting mementoes, the hair of a deceased father, mother, sister, brother, or child, can enjoy the inexpressible advantage and satisfaction of knowing that the material of their own handiwork is the actual hair of the ‘loved and gone.’”⁴² Drawing on the established cultural significance of hairwork, Campbell positions his guidebook as an essential tool in the preservation of memory. Campbell’s text asserts that a woman could guarantee the authenticity of hairwork mementoes and preserve familial bonds by creating hairwork herself. Through this strategy, Campbell sought to promote his hairwork manual by contrasting untrustworthy business practices with the satisfaction of making hairwork at home. Although Campbell published his instructional manual on jewelry and hairstyles, sold jewelry mountings through his catalog, and offered a mail-order service, contemporary handicraft guides such as C.S. Jones’s *Ladies’ Fancy Work: Hints and Helps to Home Taste and Recreations* (1875) also claimed to contain essential tips for hairwork made at home (fig. 7).

Figure 7

HOUSEHOLD ELEGANCIES.
The Most Beautiful Ladies' Book ever Published.
Get it for your Work Basket or Parlor.



A splendid new book, devoted to a multitude of topics of Household Art, Taste, and Fancy Work, Transparencies, Leaf Work, Worsted Work, Work Boxes, Baskets, Wax Flowers, Fret Sawing, Picture Frames, Wall Pockets, Paintings, Straw Work, Hair Work, Head Work, &c., &c. Over 300 pages; 250 Engravings. A charming gift to any friend. Price \$1.50 by mail, postpaid.

WINDOW GARDENING.—A standard book, superbly illustrated, devoted to the culture of Plants, Bulbs, and Flowers, for in-doors. Has handsome Designs of Hanging Baskets, Flowers, and Parlor Decorations. 250 Engravings. Price \$1.50 by mail.

LADIES' FANCY WORK.—Just published. A charming book, devoted to Feather Work, Paper Flowers, Fire Screens, Shrines, Rustic Pictures, a charming series of Designs for Easter Crosses, Straw Ornaments, Shell Flowers and Shell Work, Bead, Mosaic, and Fish Scale Embroidery, Hair Work and Card-Board Ornaments, Cottage Foot Rests, Window Garden Decorations, Crochet Work, Designs in Embroidery, and an immense variety of other Fancy Work to delight all lovers of Household Art and Recreation. Price \$1.50.

All above for sale by Booksellers every where, or sent by mail on receipt of price.

Address **HENRY T. WILLIAMS, Publisher, 46 Beekman St., New York.**

Figure 7. *Household Elegances* Advertisement, *Harper’s Weekly*, November 1876.

⁴² Mark Campbell, *Self-Instructor: Art of Hair Work*, 10.

Campbell and Jones's instructional guides both encouraged and reflected women's preference for making hairwork in the home. Jones echoes Campbell in her accusations that hairwork manufacturers deceitfully sold the hair of strangers to innocent buyers. Yet, in comparison to Campbell's promotion of the benefits of creating hairwork at home, Jones's criticism makes a stronger appeal to the emotions of her readers. Even if hairwork professionals used the actual hair sent to them through the mail, Jones dramatized workers' lack of emotional investment in the craft as near sacrilege:

The professional hair-manufacturers can doubtless perform this work more artistically, and bring it to a far higher degree of perfection than the mere amateur; but when we take into consideration the liability of having the hair of some other person substituted for that of our own cherished friend, or that careless hands have idly drawn through their fingers the tresses which it appears almost sacrilegious to have even looked upon with a cold glance, the thought is repugnant.⁴³

Readers of poems published in mid-nineteenth century women's magazines understood Jones's warning about the careless hands of a professional hairworker. The poignant experience of handling a lock of a loved one's hair did not occur in the hands of a stranger who performed the repetitive task of constructing hairwork jewelry.

In contrast to utilitarian work required in the management of a household, fancywork—a genre of handicraft—served as ornaments for the self, decorations for the home, and sentimental souvenirs. The category of fancywork encompasses a variety of mediums, including needlework, assemblage, and collage, but emphasizes illusion and

⁴³ C.S. Jones, *Ladies' Fancy Work: Hints and Helps to Home Taste and Recreations* (New York: Henry T. Williams, 1876).

transformation in women's handicrafts.⁴⁴ The transformation of ordinary materials into decorative objects is central to fancywork; scraps of paper, cloth remnants, and other salvaged household items provided women with the components of fancywork. As the humble materials of fancywork imply, fancywork existed outside of a consumer economy. Women may have traded or sold fancywork to each other within the context of a craft bazaar, but more often women adorned their own homes with fancywork or gave fancywork objects as gifts to friends and relatives.⁴⁵ Lacking monetary- and utilitarian-value, fancywork objects, including hairwork jewelry, acquired their importance from their makers. For women who invested their time and labor into reworking ordinary materials into intricate objects, the experience of making fancywork brought them personal satisfaction and provided them tangible objects symbolic of their identities and values.

Addressing the materiality of fancywork, historian Andrea Kolasinski Marcinkus explains how fancywork placed a stronger emphasis on “the connections or memories the objects retained rather than the object itself...these objects not only embraced an ephemeral aesthetic, but utilized this quality to establish permanence to memory, relationships, and life events.”⁴⁶ Although Marcinkus focuses on the preservation of botanical material such as leaves and moss, her observation that fancywork made with

⁴⁴ Beverly Gordon, “Victorian Fancywork in the American Home: Fantasy and Accommodation,” in *Making the American Home: Middle-Class Women & Domestic Material Culture, 1840-1940*, ed. Marilyn Ferris Motz and Pat Brown, (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1988), 64.

⁴⁵ Schaffer, *Novel Craft: Victorian Domestic Handicraft and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 11.

⁴⁶ Andrea Kolasinski Marcinkus, “Preservation and Permanence: American Women and Nature Fancywork in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Women and Things, 1750-1950: Gendered Material Strategies*, ed. Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin (Farnham, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009), 129.

natural objects “paradoxically used fragile materials to portray permanence”⁴⁷ resonates with the fundamental qualities of hairwork jewelry. The crafting of hairwork parallels the material metamorphosis associated with fancywork. Taking the mundane material of human hair, women transformed the locks of their family and friends into ornate jewelry for personal adornment.

Regardless of its aesthetic inferiority to expertly crafted hairwork, nineteenth-century hairwork made in the home possessed greater sentimental value infused in the process of its creation. Distinct from late-eighteenth-century mourning hairwork jewelry and the watercolor portrait miniature with hairwork, both made by professional hairworkers and miniaturists, hairwork made in the home emphasized the maker’s identity as integral to its significance. The process of crafting the objects imbued hairwork with its sentimental substance—ensuring that the preservation of memories began in the construction of the lasting memento.

4. DUAL LIKENESSES: PHOTOGRAPHIC HAIRWORK JEWELRY AS MEMORY OBJECTS

The pairing of hairwork jewelry crafted in the home and professionally made photographic portraits demonstrates how handicraft and business intersected during the mid-nineteenth century. With the invention of photography in 1839, photographic hairwork jewelry emerged as a new type of memory object capable of conveying permanence and encapsulating the intimate relationship between the wearer and the loved one made ever present by the photograph and hairwork. As memory objects, both

⁴⁷ Ibid., 138.

hairwork jewelry and photography served as things created specifically to stimulate memories and furnish recollections of the past. A person's physical engagement with memory objects—the process of holding and viewing hairwork and photographs—evoked remembrance.⁴⁸ For nineteenth-century Americans, however, hairwork and photography presented two distinct likenesses of the self. Whereas middle-class Americans regarded photographs as mechanical representations of a person's physical self, they perceived hairwork as the embodiment of a true, authentic self.⁴⁹ Unlike photographs, which attempt to accurately capture a person's countenance, hairwork belongs to a class of objects in which memory resides in contextual associations.⁵⁰ To value hairwork as a memory object required a person to know and feel affection for the person whose hair constituted the jewelry. For this reason, hairwork possessed greater authenticity as a memory object and emblem of sentimentality.

This distinction between hairwork and photography offers one explanation for why mid-nineteenth-century hairwork jewelry gave precedence to the hair, rendering the photograph minuscule, concealing it in the interior, or enclosing it in a locket. As new photographic processes became readily available in the 1840s, 1850s, and 1860s, hairwork jewelry designs incorporated the daguerreotype, ambrotype, tintype, and albumen print. Photographers offered daguerreotypes and ambrotypes in a range of standard sizes from the largest whole plate, measuring 6.5 by 8.5 inches, to the smallest sixteenth plate, measuring 1.375 by 1.625 inches. Daguerreotype and ambrotype plates

⁴⁸ Marius Kwint, "Introduction: The Physical Past," 2.

⁴⁹ Sheumaker, *Love Entwined*, 49.

⁵⁰ Elizabeth Edwards, "Photographs as Objects of Memory," in *Material Memories: Design and Evocation*, ed. Marius Kwint, Christopher Breward, and Jeremy Aynsley (Oxford: Berg, 1992), 222.

could be trimmed down to fit a mat opening, case, or jewelry setting. Introduced in 1856, the tintype offered middle-class and working-class customers an inexpensive alternative to its photographic predecessors. In addition, photographers offered tintypes in “gem-size” measuring ½ by 1 inch—ideal dimensions for scrapbooks, photo albums, and photographic jewelry.⁵¹ Since photographers sold the smallest size of a tintype, daguerreotype, or ambrotype at the lowest price, the placement of a photograph in hairwork jewelry—whether made by a professional hair worker or a woman in her home—was not a costly addition.

Donated to the Art Institute of Chicago by Carolyn Wicker in 1918,⁵² two tablework hairwork bracelets with miniature daguerreotypes provide examples of photographic hairwork jewelry (fig. 8). Although the condition of the two bracelets differs, the pair shares the same style of hairwork, etched gold-filled clasps, and glass compartments. Cursive script on the versos of the clasps not only provides the names of the young women in the photographs—“Lizzie” and “Phebe”—but also distinguishes the individuals embodied in the hairwork. Beneath their tiny glass compartments, each bracelet holds a miniature daguerreotype portrait, one of Phebe Sears (b. 1829) and the

⁵¹ An 1865 advertisement for the Arcade Gallery in Providence, Rhode Island offered customers sixteen of the largest gems, twenty-five large gems, or fifty fairy gems for the price of twenty-five cents. Janice G. Schimmelman, “The Tintype in America, 1856–1880,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 97, no. 2 (2007): 129–130, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20020419>.

⁵² Digital collection records identify the jewelry as American hairwork bracelets with daguerreotypes made circa 1840 but otherwise provide no information regarding the objects or their donor. No physical file for the hairwork bracelets (1918.23 and 1918.24) exists in the records of the Decorative Arts Department. Wicker donated a third piece of hairwork jewelry in 1918, an elliptical hairwork brooch with a black enamel ivy border and photograph of a boy (1918.25). The 1995 inventory of the decorative arts collection lists the hairwork brooch as missing. The Chicago History Museum owns a leather-encased ambrotype (c. 1858–1859) of Phebe and Elizabeth J. Sears’ brother Edward H. Sears (b. 1819, died in Sterling, Illinois) and his infant son Edward Jones Sears, Jr., which Carolyn Wicker donated. Edward Jones Sears, Jr. was born in Chicago in 1858 and died in 1883 at age 24. Chicago History Museum, Cased Image, CI-0226.

other of her sister Elizabeth “Lizzie” J. Sears (1827–1907), mother of Carolyn Wicker (1865–1945).

Figure 8



Figure 8. “Lizzie” and “Phebe” Sears Hairwork Bracelets, brown hair, gilt mountings, daguerreotype, unknown artist, c. 1850. The Art Institute of Chicago. Author’s photograph.

The daughters of farmer John Sears (1783–1860) and Jane Pendry Hancock (1786–1829), Phebe and Elizabeth “Lizzie” Sears were born in Bristol, New York.⁵³ In 1850, Elizabeth “Lizzie” Sears, about twenty-three years old, and Phebe Sears, about

⁵³ Samuel Pearce May, *The Descendants of Richard Sares (Sears) of Yarmouth, Mass., 1638–1888: With an Appendix, Containing Some Notices of Other Families by Name of Sears* (Albany, New York: Joel Munsell’s Sons: 1890), 200. Ancestry.com, *U.S. Federal Census Mortality Schedules, 1850–1885; Bristol, Ontario, New York; M4; 1860; 79; 10*. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

twenty years old, lived with their father and stepmother Rhoda Sears (b. 1790) in Bristol, New York.⁵⁴ In 1853, Elizabeth “Lizzie” Sears married Charles Gustavus Wicker (1825–1889), a wealthy Chicago businessman, politician, and developer who presented Wicker Park as a gift to the city.⁵⁵ After the death of her husband in 1889, Elizabeth Wicker moved from Chicago to Santa Barbara, California, where she died at age 80. Elizabeth Wicker’s ashes were interred in the Wicker family plot at Graceland Cemetery in Chicago.⁵⁶ Museum bulletins from the 1920s and 1930s chronicle Miss Carolyn Wicker’s loans and gifts of non-Western textiles, jewelry, and decorative objects to the Art Institute of Chicago and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.⁵⁷ In contrast to the array of textiles and non-Western art objects Carolyn Wicker donated to museums during her lifetime, the Lizzie and Phebe Sears hairwork bracelets possess an ancestral history. Wicker’s donation of the hairwork jewelry eleven years after the death of her mother implies she inherited the bracelets from Elizabeth Wicker, but the provenance is unclear.

Based on the type of photograph, style of hairwork, and approximate age of the sisters in the portraits, the Phebe and Lizzie Sears hairwork bracelets were likely made in

⁵⁴ Ancestry.com, *1850 United States Federal Census; Bristol, Ontario, New York; M432_571; 42B; 90*, (National Archives Microfilm Publication M432, 1009 rolls); Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29; National Archives, Washington, D.C. Phebe Sears does not appear in any subsequent census records.

⁵⁵ Wyllys S. Abbot, Hon. Charles G. Wicker." *Magazine of Western History (1884-1891)* 12, no. 6 (1890): 656a. <http://proxy.cc.uic.edu/docview/137695746?accountid=14552>.

⁵⁶ "Obituary 1 -- no Title." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1922), Nov 05, 1907. <http://proxy.cc.uic.edu/docview/173377449?accountid=14552>.

⁵⁷ “Costume Exhibit Closes: 4,500 Visited Two-Week Show in Rockefeller Center, *New York Times* (1923-Current File), Jun 07, 1938. <http://proxy.cc.uic.edu/docview/102540695?accountid=14552>. Wicker donated strips of Mexican beadwork and a band of Japanese block-printed silk and fragment of crepe to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1922. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 17, no. 10 (October 1922): 222, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3254305>. *The Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago* lists “Miss Carolyn Wicker” as the donor of a Filipino necklace made of copper filigree and the lender of 49 objects and textiles from Morocco, India, and Java. *The Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago*, 8, no. 7 (October 1924): 95, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4116459>. For more examples of textiles and art objects to the Art Institute by Carolyn Wicker see Volumes 18, no. 7; 32, no. 1; 23, no. 2; 31, no. 7; 22, no. 3; 31, no. 6.

the early 1850s, perhaps prior to the marriage of Elizabeth Sears to Charles G. Wicker. In the photograph of Phebe Sears (fig. 9), her face appears long, her lips thin, and her skin smooth. For the portrait, she parted her hair down the center, smoothed it down, and pulled it back tightly. The daguerreotype shows no details of her clothing except that the fabric seems light in color. In comparison to Phebe's portrait, the details of Lizzie's face (fig. 10) are clearer.

Figure 9



Figure 9. “Phebe” Sears *Hairwork Bracelet*, brown hair, gilt mountings, daguerreotype, unknown artist, c. 1850. The Art Institute of Chicago. Author’s photograph.

Figure 10



Figure 10. “Lizzie” Sears *Hairwork Bracelet*, brown hair, gilt mountings, daguerreotype, unknown artist, c. 1850. The Art Institute of Chicago. Author’s photograph.

Lizzie’s hair, which grazes her ears and swoops back, is also parted down the center and appears to be in a low hairstyle likely held in place with a net. This reflects hairstyles fashionable during the late 1840s and early 1850s and provides a clue to the time period of these portraits.⁵⁸ In addition, Lizzie wears a white collar of medium proportions with soft points over a dark colored blouse or dress. The collar separates into wings that extend toward the middle of her shoulders. Worn daily by middle-class women in the

⁵⁸ Joan L. Severa, *Dress for the Photographer: Ordinary Americans and Fashion, 1840-1900* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1995), 66.

mid-nineteenth century, Lizzie's white collar, particularly its shape, corresponds to the period suggested by her hairstyle.

The maker of the hairwork bracelets intertwined three tubular plaits of table-worked brunette hair to create the braided bracelet bands. While the Phebe bracelet band remains intact, the braided band of the Lizzie bracelet is loose and untwisted. A comparison of the two bracelets shows how the maker interweaved three plaits to create the bands. The plaits of the damaged bracelet lay horizontally as separate strips, their hollow shape is flattened where the hairwork meets its etched clasps. Originally, the three plaits seamlessly fused with the clasp, as demonstrated by the Phebe bracelet, which retains its looped shape and remains fastened. The flattening and fraying of the Lizzie bracelet possibly resulted from wear, poor construction, or improper storage since its accession nearly a century ago.

The bracelets use a diamond-shaped pattern, also called a double elastic bracelet band, formed by weaving together dozens of strands of hair using the tablework method.⁵⁹ When braided together, the diamond patterns of the three plaits overlap, creating areas of varying opacity and lightness. The interlacing plaits cause the diamond pattern to intersect, obscuring areas of the opposite plaits and distorting the regularity of the diamond pattern. The frayed and flattened end of the bracelet also exposes the organic matter of the bracelet band: fractured strands of dark brown hair protrude from the plaits and disrupt the consistency of the diamond pattern. As the flattened plaits of the Lizzie bracelet suggest, the cylindrical plaits of hair were woven around a circular wooden rod,

⁵⁹ The diamond-pattern weave of the Wicker bracelets most closely resembles the "Double Elastic Bracelet Braid" illustrated in Mark Campbell's 1875 hairwork manual. Mark Campbell, *The Art of Hair Work: Hair Braiding and Jewelry of Sentiment with Catalog of Hair Jewelry* (1875), ed. Kaethe Kliot and Jules Kliot (Berkeley, California: Lacis Publications, 1989), 106.

which the maker removed once she completed the weave, giving the plait its hollow form. In the areas where the plaits remain intact, the hairwork feels flexible, maintaining its tubular shape, yet bending easily to the curves of the wrist. The hollow form and strength of tightly woven hair endow the bracelet with a springy, resilient texture.

When held, the hairwork bracelets feel featherlight but not flimsy. The gold clasps of the bracelets, etched with a scroll motif, add an insignificant weight to the jewelry. Although light, the thickness of the layered plaits causes the bracelet band to extend outward, creating volume and cushioning the wrist. Unlike hairwork sheltered behind glass lockets and brooches, the bracelets' fine mesh texture and the damage to the Lizzie bracelet implies that they were more susceptible to wear. The deterioration of the "Lizzie" and "Phebe" engravings on the verso of the clasps—their names smoothed by friction—exhibits the strongest trace of the wearer's physical interaction with the bracelets.

The bracelets' etched gold-filled clasps (0.5 x 1 inch) serve as both functional fasteners and decorative compartments for the miniature daguerreotypes (0.8 x 0.4 inch). Just as the hairwork and engravings betray signs of wear, the clasps show oxidation from age. The oxidation creates gradations of color in the plumage-like etchings, with patches of the original yellow gold peeking through patina. Scalloped along the edges, the borders of the clasps enclose the daguerreotypes in structures resembling picture frames. This framing accentuates the preciousness of the images and emphasizes their small scale.

The clouded and scratched glass housing the photographs, however, obscures the minute facial features of Lizzie and Phebe. Between the photograph and the glass, flecks of debris conceal areas of Phebe's forehead and chin, making the darkened image even

more difficult to discern. The bracelet must be held at various distances and angles to get a complete sense of Phebe's appearance. Subsequently, a single photograph of the bracelet fails to capture the nuances of the portrait. The photographic image of Phebe provides an impression of her appearance rather than a clear representation. The miniature scale of Phebe's portrait heightens the intimacy of these gestures of looking; only one person can view the photograph of Phebe in close proximity at a time.

The placement of the photograph in the bracelet implies that, although the portrait faces outward and is unconcealed, the wearer of the bracelet was intended as the primary viewer. If an individual wanted to fully examine the photograph, she needed to be in intimate proximity to the wearer. The scale of the photographs does not weaken their power as sentimental objects; on the contrary, the portraits of the Sears sisters perform a feat particular to the miniature, the ability to "create an 'other' time, a type of transcendent time which negates change and the flux of lived reality."⁶⁰ The miniature photographs thus work in tandem with the hairwork to preserve the sisters' presence—capturing time in the image and preserving a bodily artifact despite their physical absence.

Describing hair as "the raw material of memory,"⁶¹ art historian Geoffrey Batchen draws attention to the cultural significance of hair in nineteenth-century America as an authentic memento that provided makers of sentimental and mourning jewelry with the main component of hairwork. Hair may function as 'the raw material of memory,' but hairwork jewelry requires a physical metamorphosis of hair in which the maker alters its

⁶⁰ Stewart, *On Longing*, 65.

⁶¹ Geoffrey Batchen, *Forget Me Not: Photography and Remembrance* (Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum, 2004), 69.

texture and form through cutting, dissolving, weaving, and braiding. Tablework hairwork jewelry involves the transformation of a bodily substance—human hair—into an elaborate form that retains the color of the hair but not its previous texture or density. The dark brown color of the bracelets suggest an organic material, yet the process of working the hair into fine, tubular nets erased any other indication of its bodily origins.

Hairwork literally reshapes hair into intricate patterns and delicate textures—transforming strands of human hair into decorative objects through fancywork techniques appropriated from other craft practices. The diamond-pattern tablework of the Phebe and Lizzie bracelets demonstrates the disparity between locks of hair and hairwork bracelets. To recognize the bracelets as hairwork jewelry, the viewer must possess sufficient knowledge of hairwork as a handicraft to understand the objects’ material and construction. The working of Lizzie and Phebe’s hair into bracelets disguises their hair, adapting the hair into a wearable decorative object that functioned as the materialization of the intimate relationships the wearer shared with the sisters.

The intimate proximity of a hairwork bracelet to the wrist invited repeated contact between the hair of a loved one and the skin of the wearer. Stewart categorizes touch as the sense most closely tied to emotion and feeling and explains that the tactile experience of touch involves the exertion of pressure not only upon objects but also ourselves.”⁶² Stewart draws attention to the phrase “to be touched by,” meaning to produce feelings of affection, gratitude, or sympathy.⁶³ Stewart’s postulation that within the action of touch an object reciprocates pressure upon the subject blurs the distinction between thing and

⁶² Stewart, “Prologue: From the Museum of Touch,” 31.

⁶³ Ibid.

person.⁶⁴ When applied to the tactile experience of feeling a bracelet or necklace composed of human hair, Stewart's proposition animates hairwork jewelry, activating the bodily material with the ability to touch as well as be touched. The photographic portrait paired with hairwork served as a reminder of the human source of the bracelet material, heightening the potential for memory activation. The photographic hairwork bracelets of the Sears sisters offered the wearer talismanic fragments latent with memories that only a loved one of Phebe or Lizzie could materialize. Although both the photograph and hairwork embody the qualities of a memory object in that they were made for the purpose of remembrance, the wearer needed to possess a sense of affection or longing for the women before engaging with the bracelets.

The coupling of hairwork and photographs in jewelry raises questions about whether the combination of the two memory object types betrayed an inadequacy in either hairwork or photography. Called the "pencil of light," photography seemingly traced reality as it appeared in life producing an objective representation of person in a photographic portrait.⁶⁵ Batchen asks whether the addition of a lock of hair to a silver locket containing a tintype portrait of a man, for instance, "is a vernacular commentary on tracing itself, on photography's strengths and limitations as a representational apparatus."⁶⁶ Although Batchen inquires about the tintype portrait specifically, his question remains applicable to other photographic processes, including the daguerreotype and ambrotype. The history of hairwork and the watercolor portrait miniature—a medium

⁶⁴ Kwint, "Introduction: The Physical Past," 5.

⁶⁵ Frank, *Love and Loss: American Portrait and Mourning Miniatures*, 277.

⁶⁶ Geoffrey Batchen, "Ere the Substance Fade: Photography and Hair Jewellery," in *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images*, ed. Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (London: Routledge, 2004), 33.

existing prior to and contemporaneously with photographic hairwork jewelry—complicates Batchen’s inquiry of photography as a representational apparatus and its relationship to hairwork. Following Batchen’s remark then the addition of hairwork to the painted miniature may also speak to the strengths and limitations of watercolor as a representational medium.

Comparisons of the photographic portrait and watercolor miniature yield different historical interpretations and verdicts concerning whether photography displaced the watercolor miniature as Americans preferred type of portraiture. Similarities such as the small size, portability, and encasement of early photographs and watercolor miniatures propelled the rivalry between the two forms of portraiture during the mid-nineteenth century.⁶⁷ The photographic portrait presented customers with a more accurate likeness of a loved one in the precious scale of the miniature. Two advertisements printed side by side in the May 28, 1855 issue of the *New York Daily Times* illustrates how businesses positioned the photographic portrait as the successor to the inferior watercolor miniature (fig. 11). Endorsed by an unnamed “celebrated portrait and miniature painter,” Root’s Photographic Gallery, located at No. 363 Broadway, proclaimed that its gallery displayed “the finest specimens of the Art ever produced.”⁶⁸ Directly below the Root’s Photographic Gallery announcement, J. Gurney & C.D. Fredericks, listing a New York address at No. 349 Broadway and a Paris address at No. 46 Rue Basse de Rempart, advertised photographic portraits and life-size oil paintings completed in one sitting.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Frank, *Love and Loss: American Portrait and Mourning Miniatures*, 277.

⁶⁸ "Classified Ad 10 -- no Title," *New York Daily Times* (1851-1857), May 28, 1855. <http://proxy.cc.uic.edu/docview/95885017?accountid=14552>.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Figure 11

[Advertisement.]
VERDICT OF THE ARTISTS.—A celebrated portrait and miniature painter, while at Root's Photographic Gallery, remarked that it was the unanimous opinion of the Artists of this City that Root's Photographs were the finest specimens of the Art ever produced. Call at No. 383 Broadway, and judge for yourselves.

[Advertisement.]
PHOTOGRAPHIC PORTRAITS.—Life and Cabinet sizes in oil and pastel. Miniature sizes, superior to the finest ivory painting; uncolored photographs, equaled by no other establishment in the world. Perfect likenesses taken in any style or size from daguerreotypes of deceased persons. Life size oil paintings on canvas by this process at one sitting, taken only by
J. GURNEY & C. D. FREDERICKS,
No. 46 Rue Basse de Rempart, Paris, and
No. 349 Broadway, New-York.

Figure 11. "Verdict of the Artists" and "Photographic Portraits" Advertisements, *New York Daily Times*, May 28, 1855.

The speed at which Gurney & Fredericks claimed they could complete a life-size oil painting suggests that portrait artists competed with the swift process of photography. Declaring their miniature size photographs as "superior to the finest ivory painting," Gurney & Fredericks lauded photography as the finer medium. Yet, Gurney & Fredericks also recognized customers' preference for oil paintings and offered to paint "perfect likenesses taken in any style or size from daguerreotypes of deceased persons."⁷⁰ The 1855 advertisements illustrate how although the photographic image did not immediately overtake the watercolor miniature as the preferred medium of portraiture, photography influenced the business practices of portrait painters.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

While the confrontation between the watercolor miniature and photographic image exists as its own complex and contested narrative, the history of hairwork intersects both forms of portraiture. From the mid-eighteenth century into the later half of the nineteenth century, hairwork found a suitable partner in the two media. The pairing of photographic portrait and hairwork marks the continuation of the coupling of hairwork and image in sentimental and mourning jewelry. Hairwork does not function to resolve deficiencies in either medium: rather, the pairing of portrait and hairwork signifies a desire for dual likenesses in sentimental and mourning jewelry. Hairwork complemented the painted and photographic portrait through the synthesis of the bodily material of a person with her pictorial representation. As a fragment of a person's body removed from its corporeal context, the inclusion of hair with a portrait signified an emotional intimacy between the sitter and the recipient. Hairwork expressed their longing to remain close to one another regardless of the circumstances separating them. The fusion of likenesses produced a potent memory object possessing the capacity to make the absent present.

5. **“FADELESS AND BRIGHT ARE THE TREASURES OF HEAVEN”: HAIRWORK AND THE MOURNING MINIATURE**

In late-eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth-century America, the portrait miniature with hairwork played an important role in gift exchange and the marking of an engagement, long separation, or death of a loved one. While the history of the portrait miniature in England spans over 400 years, the presence of miniatures in colonial America began with European settlers who brought family miniatures with them to North

America. By the mid-eighteenth century, miniatures in colonial America had grown in popularity, corresponding with an expanding economy and changing attitudes toward familial bonds. Art historian and museum curator Robin Jaffee Frank attributes the demand for miniatures to the mobile middle classes—the landed gentry, merchants, and professionals—who desired to express links of kinship and affluence associated with the miniature’s original owners, the upper class.⁷¹ According to Frank, “Miniatures crafted identities, elevated status, and cemented social bonds, giving a public gloss to a private art.”⁷² The commission, ownership, and display of miniatures reflected romantic and familial bonds and served as a visible sign of prosperity and fashionability for the middle and upper classes.

Depending upon the owner’s gender and taste, miniatures were housed in leather cases, displayed as decorative objects on stands, or mounted in jewelry settings such as a pendants, bracelets, or rings. The small scale of the miniature encouraged intimate viewings of the portrait. In contrast to large-scale paintings, the small scale of the portrait miniature elicited an intimate engagement, “revealing a private self meant to face inward.”⁷³ As a realistic likeness of a person worn on the body, the portrait miniature set in jewelry reiterated the close relationship between the owner and the sitter by placing the likeness against the wearer’s chest or wrist.

Watercolor miniatures frequently featured painted portraits on their front side and hairwork designs on their versos. Professional miniaturists typically painted watercolor

⁷¹ Robin Jaffee Frank, *Love and Loss: American Portrait and Mourning Miniatures* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 5.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

portraits and designed hairwork as commissions by clients. Unlike photographic hairwork jewelry, which often fused the professional photograph with hairwork made in the home, professional artists created both components of the watercolor miniature with hairwork. Few miniatures include the signatures of their makers, making it difficult to identify specific miniaturists.⁷⁴ Although some painters including John Ramage (1748–1802), James Peale (1749–1831), Benjamin West (1738–1820), John Singleton Copley (1738–1815), and Samuel Folwell (1770–1824) established themselves as well-known watercolor miniaturists, the makers of many miniatures with hairwork remain unknown.

Portrait miniaturists commonly offered the addition of hairwork, called “fancy devices,” to their customers. In late-eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth-century advertisements, miniaturists rarely listed the price of hairwork alone and referred to hairwork as a fancy device—equating the hairwork of a miniature with “an object of fancy as well as a product of an artisan’s craft.”⁷⁵ Defined as “something artistically devised or framed; a fancifully conceived design or figure,”⁷⁶ the fancy device functioned to embellish the portrait miniature. The level of intricacy and style of hairwork devices spanned from daintily arranged braids of hair to entire miniature scenes composed of hair rendered into different shapes and textures.⁷⁷ Using the palette-work method, miniaturists created fancy devices by entwining hair into ornamental designs such as plaits and

⁷⁴ Ibid., 13.

⁷⁵ Helen Sheumaker, *Love Entwined: The Curious History of Hairwork in America*, 6.

⁷⁶ “Device, n.” *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed., December 2009, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/161910>.

⁷⁷ The New York Historical Society owns a collection of tools, including frames, tweezers, anvils, awls, picks, a curling iron, calipers, chisels, and scrapers, used for making watercolor miniatures and hairwork. The tools belonged to Irish American miniaturist John Ramage (1748–1802).

basket-weave patterns and curled hair with a hot iron into delicate Prince of Wales feathers. The manipulation of hair using cut-work and dissolve methods transformed the hair to the extent that its natural structure and texture became nearly imperceptible in some designs. Cut-work, a technique akin to mosaic work, required artists to separate strands of hair over paper layered with glue; once dry, the artist cut the hair-covered paper and positioned the pieces into desired shapes on ivory or vellum. The dissolve method required the artist to macerate hair into powder using a mortar and pestle and then combine the pulverized hair with a sepia pigment to be used in the fine details and lettering of miniature scenes. Rather than completely dissolving into the pigment, the particles of hair formed a suspension in the liquid.⁷⁸

Late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century miniaturists integrated the palette-work, dissolve, and cut-work methods into hairwork designs that transformed human hair into pictorial scenes complementing the portrait miniature. As a memory object, the miniature with hairwork mourning scene memorialized the deceased and offered the bereaved a palpable representation of their grief. In the event of the death of the sitter, a miniaturist could later add a mourning scene to the verso of the portrait miniature, altering the portrait miniature from a token of affection into a memorial piece.⁷⁹ As objects of personal ornament functioning within prevailing social customs, mourning jewelry took on the task of representing grief within a specific cultural context. The portrait miniature reiterated the identity of the person memorialized in hairwork-

⁷⁸ Robin Jaffee Frank and Katherine G. Eirk, "Miniatures under the Microscope," Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin (1999): 71, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40514578>.

⁷⁹ Robin Bolton-Smith and Dale T. Johnson, *Tokens of Affection: The Portrait Miniature in America* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1990), 2.

mourning scenes, while the hairwork-mourning scene itself distinguished the portrait as an object of mourning. By including conventional mourning imagery composed of a loved one's hair, the mourning miniature operated within established mourning customs.

Popular motifs found in miniature mourning scenes thus signaled the presence of hairwork in the jewelry. Miniaturists paired archetypal imagery of the languishing female mourner, donning a gossamer white gown and veil denoting her purity, with portrait miniatures and locks of hair on double-sided pendants and brooches. As Anita Schorsch explains, the iconography of mourning jewelry reveals, "the loosening of the Christian conscience, the lessening of Old Law rigor, the allowance for ornament, and a return to the natural garden with a characteristic American emphasis on new Adamic beginnings."⁸⁰ Replacing the skeletons, hourglasses, and skulls of *memento mori* jewelry, delicate, lightly colored scenes of female mourners in neo-classical robes weeping over urns and tombs prevailed in late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century hairwork jewelry.⁸¹ Hair of the deceased provided artists with the medium used to create painted representations of female mourners. By pulverizing hair and mixing it with pigment, the

⁸⁰ Ibid., 48.

⁸¹ As a tradition brought from England to colonial America, the origins of hairwork mourning jewelry in America derive from jewelry made in seventeenth-century England. Rings worn by Royalists in tribute to King Charles I after his execution in 1649 marked the beginning of hairwork jewelry's popularity in England. The circumstances of the death of Charles I, his trial for treason and beheading at the end of the English Civil War, generated the cult of Charles the Martyr. In addition to sermons and architectural memorials dedicated to Charles I, commemorative jewelry provided royalists with a more personal means of demonstrating their fidelity to the martyred king. Royalists wishing to express their political allegiance and religious veneration of Charles I wore gold and rock crystal mourning rings with elliptical designs, allowing the wearer to conceal or display the King's miniature portrait at his or her discretion. Another design for commemorative rings with a locket compartment, permitted the owner to wear the commemorative ring closed, secreting the miniature portrait or lock of hair of Charles I. Charles's status as martyr increased the desirability of jewelry claiming to hold a lock of his hair, linking the martyred king's hair to the tradition of the relic. Gold rings memorialized Charles I with an oval crystal bezel containing a flat braid of hair—possibly the hair of the King himself—overlaid with the cipher "C.R. K.R." rendered in thin gold wire. See: Pamela Miller, "Hair Jewelry as Fetish," in *Objects of Special Devotion: Fetishism in Popular Culture*, ed. Ray B. Brown (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1987), 94. Jeanenne C. Bell, *Collector's Encyclopedia of Hairwork Jewelry: Identification and Values* (Paducah, Kentucky: Collectors Books, 1998), 9.

hairwork artist reworked the natural material of the deceased into a pictorial illustration of the allegorical mourner.

To create scenes of female mourners in jewelry, miniaturists and hairwork artists transformed hair into various consistencies, shapes, and forms. Using the cut-work method, artists often arranged pliable strands of hair from the deceased into the foliage of weeping willows, which bent down toward the mourner. Spread out into arched forms, minuscule pieces of hair constituted the empathetic branches of the anthropomorphic trees. Appearing to console the mourner, the languid weeping willows suggested that the natural world, too, grieved with her. In contrast to the skeletal forms found in seventeenth-century *memento mori* jewelry, the female mourner figure, though limp with grief, presented the human body in a youthful and ideal form. The motifs of female mourners, weeping willows, urns, and tombs recurred in mourning miniatures; however, the presence of initials and names on the diminutive graves served to customize the pieces. The use of hair as the medium for mourning scenes provided the strongest, yet visually subtle, personalization. The watercolor-on-ivory miniature of *Mary (Polly) Lawton Bringham* (figs. 12 and 13), painted by James Peale (1749-1831) in 1790 provides an excellent example of a hairwork mourning scene with a female figure on its verso.⁸²

⁸² Thanks to Monica Obniski, the Assistant Curator of American Decorative Arts at the Art Institute of Chicago, for bringing the mourning scene to my attention. The miniature of Mary (Polly) Lawton Bringham is currently on display at the Art Institute, lying angled on a muslin-covered wedge. Neither the object nor its label offers any indication of the hairwork on the miniature's reverse.

Figure 12



**Figure 12. James Peale, *Mary (Polly) Lawton Bringham*, watercolor on ivory, 1790.
The Art Institute of Chicago.**

Figure 13



Figure 13. P. Parnell (attributed), *Mourning Miniature for Mary (Polly) Lawton Bringham*, sepia mixed with hair on ivory, 1793. The Art Institute of Chicago.

The daughter of Robert and Mercy Easton Lawton, both of Quaker ancestry, Mary “Polly” Lawton was born November 25, 1761 in Newport, Rhode Island.⁸³ “Historic Miniatures in America: Heirlooms Treasured in American Homes that have Come down through the Generations from the Great Days when a Republic was in the Making,” an

⁸³ Eleanor H. Gustafson, “Collectors’ Notes: Which Sitter Sat?” in *The Magazine Antiques* 148 (August 1995): 142. This article discusses the findings of Lance Humphries who revised the identification of the sitter in the Peale miniature. Before Humphries’s correction, the Art Institute erroneously identified the sitter as Rachel Brewer Peale (1744-1790), the first wife of Charles Willson Peale. Humphries recognized the misnaming of the miniature after reading the article “Historic Miniatures in America,” *The Journal of American History* 4, no. 4 (1910): 569-570. In 1983, the Art Institute corrected the identification of the miniature. The article does not mention the hairwork-mourning scene on the miniature’s reverse.

essay published in 1910, profiles Polly Bringhurst as one of the “brilliant women of Colonial America.”⁸⁴ Tracing Bringhurst’s lineage to Thomas Lawton, who settled in Portsmouth, Rhode Island in 1638, the essay establishes Polly Bringhurst as a descendent of a distinguished family, which included four Rhode Island governors among her ancestors. In 1910, George P. Lawton, of New York City, owned the miniature, which became a Lawton—rather than Bringhurst—family heirloom after the death of Polly Bringhurst’s widower John Bringhurst in 1800.⁸⁵

In his book *Mémoires*, Louis Philippe, comte de Ségur (1753-1830), a French officer stationed in Newport during the Revolutionary War, recounts his adoration of seventeen-year-old Polly Lawton, the comely daughter of a Quaker he met while quartered in Newport. Ségur describes at length Polly Lawton’s beauty, recalling, “So much beauty, so much simplicity, so much elegance, and so much modesty were, perhaps, never before combined in the same person.”⁸⁶ Comparing her graceful figure to her plain dress, Ségur describes her conservative attire as an attempt to conceal her striking form. Her white gown, cambric cap covering her hair, and muslin neckerchief noted by Ségur follow the Quaker conventions of dress and bear similarities to the clothing she wears in her portrait miniature painted over a decade later.

Other nineteenth-century sources note how Polly Lawton gained the attention of Claude Victor, Prince de Broglie (1756-1794), a French soldier who fought in the American Revolutionary War and left a journal of his impressions of early American

⁸⁴ “Historic Miniatures in America,” 569.

⁸⁵ After 1910, James Graham & Sons, New York acquired the miniature, presumably from the Lawton family. The Art Institute of Chicago purchased the miniature from James Graham & Sons in 1958.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

society. Describing Polly Lawton as “Minerva herself who had exchanged her warlike vestments for the charms of a simple shepherdess,” the Prince de Broglie recounted:

She enchanted us all, and, though evidently a little conscious of it, was not at all sorry to please those whom she graciously called her friends. I confess that this seductive Lawton appeared to me a *chef-d’oeuvre* of Nature, and in recalling her image, I am tempted to write a book against the finery, the factitious graces and the coquetry of many ladies whom the world admires.⁸⁷

Just as Ségur contrasted Polly Lawton’s plain attire with her radiance, the Prince de Broglie notes how the cap of fine muslin covering her hair “had the effect of giving Polly the air of a Holy Virgin.”⁸⁸ While the memoirs of Ségur and the Prince de Broglie celebrated the beauty of the young Quakeress, “A Newport Belle,” published in *The Youth’s Companion* in 1884, profiles Polly Lawton as a “Daughter of Liberty” who assisted Rhode Island troops by sewing clothing and shoes out of worn-out textiles and discarded materials.⁸⁹ Polly Lawton’s contributions to the war effort appealed to nineteenth-century writers who wished to claim her as a patriotic ancestor. The nineteenth-century interest in revolutionary history accounts for the tendency to immortalize Polly Lawton as a Newport belle.

On April 30, 1789, Polly Lawton wed the Philadelphia fancy-goods merchant John Bringhurst (1764-1800) at the Friends Meeting House in Newport. After their wedding, John and Polly Bringhurst returned to Philadelphia, where the couple enjoyed a

⁸⁷ Frances Pierrepont North, “Newport a Hundred Years Ago,” *Lippincott’s Magazine of Popular Literature and Science* (Sept. 1880) 26, ProQuest American Periodicals Series Online 351.

⁸⁸ “Our French Allies,” *The Literary World: A Monthly Review of Current Literature* (January 12, 1884): 15, ProQuest American Periodicals Series Online, 3.

⁸⁹ “A Newport Belle,” *The Youth’s Companion* (Nov 20, 1884) 57: 47, ProQuest American Periodicals Series Online, 460.

prominent social life and attended events held at the presidential mansion.⁹⁰ Although the financial success of John Bringham declined after the death of his wife, the couple established their residency on South Third Street, an affluent area of Philadelphia near High Street, where George Washington and Thomas Jefferson lived.⁹¹ While residing in Philadelphia, Peale painted Polly Bringham's portrait in 1790, as an inscription on the miniature indicates.⁹² The portrait captures Polly Bringham gazing directly at the viewer with a faint smile. Encircled by an oval gold frame, the portrait miniature depicts Polly Bringham wearing a gray soft cap delicately tied under her chin and a cream-colored transparent shawl, upholding her identity as a married woman and Quaker. Her Quaker cap gathers at the crown with pleats and covers the majority of her hair, leaving only the perimeter of her light brown hair visible. Her simple lavender dress with a square neckline and lack of jewelry also conforms to the plain dress promoted in Quaker theology. The olive-gray background of the portrait harmonizes with the subdued tones of the portrait.

⁹⁰ Josiah Granville Leach, *History of the Bringham Family, With Notes on the Clarkson, De Peyster and Boude Families* (Philadelphia, 1901), 38.

⁹¹ Harwood A. Johnson and Diana Edwards, "Ornamental Wedgwood Wares in Philadelphia in 1793," *The Magazine Antiques* (January 1994) 145: 166. According to Johnson and Edwards, Bringham often owed borrowers money. On July 25, 1794, the Quakers disowned Bringham for failing to pay his debts. Over a decade after his death, the Wedgwood firm continued its attempt to collect money Bringham owed from his uncle Thomas Pole.

⁹² Bradley Brayton Bucklin (1825–1915) painted a copy of Peale's miniature of Polly Lawton Bringham which now hangs in the Redwood Library and Athenaeum in Newport, Rhode Island. Bucklin's oil painting, titled *Polly Lawton*, measures 27 x 22 inches. George Lawton donated Bucklin's painting to the Redwood Library in 1876. Bradley Bucklin was born in Little Falls, New York on March 21, 1825 and died in Troy, New York on April 5, 1915. Bucklin worked in Troy as early as 1859 and, in 1865, exhibited his work at the National Academy. Thanks to Whitney Pape, Ezra Stiles Special Collections Librarian at the Redwood Library for providing me with this information. For additional biographical information on Bucklin, see George Cuthbert Groce and David H. Wallace, *The New-York Historical Society's Dictionary of Artists in America, 1564–1860* (Yale University Press, 1957), 93.

On February 11, 1793, three years after Peale painted her portrait miniature, Polly Bringhurst died at the age of thirty-two. After her death, her widower commissioned the hairwork-mourning picture on ivory added to the verso.⁹³ Whereas Polly Bringhurst's bonnet obscures most of her brunette hair in her portrait, a braid of her hair frames the scene on the reverse. Hidden from museum viewers, the scene portrays a female figure mourning at a tomb, encircled by braided brown hair.⁹⁴ Wearing a white neoclassical gown, the woman leans forward, expressing her sorrow through the gestures of resting her right arm on the tomb and holding her head with her left hand. Behind the female mourner, drooping branches of cypress trees symbolic of mourning imitate her weary posture. A white swan, sitting to the left of the female figure, symbolizes romantic love and supports the belief that John Bringhurst commissioned the mourning miniature in his wife's memory.

During a cleaning of the miniature in 1990, conservator Carol Aiken discovered a signature and address written on the backing paper of the memorial scene. Written in ink, the creator of the hairwork memorial scene signed the verso of the hairwork card: "P. Parnell/South Second."⁹⁵ Parnell's signature reveals several details about the makers and components of the *Mary (Polly) Lawton Bringhurst* miniature. Most significantly, Bringhurst did not commission the mourning scene from James Peale, the miniaturist who painted the portrait of Polly Bringhurst in 1790. The Art Institute of Chicago credits

⁹³ Judith A. Barter, et al, *American Arts at The Art Institute of Chicago: From Colonial Times to World War I* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1998), 124–26.

⁹⁴ Barter, *American Arts at The Art Institute of Chicago*, 126.

⁹⁵ Carol Aiken, letter to Milo M. Maeve, 24 November 1990, American Arts Department, 1958. 410, The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois.

Peale, a prolific miniature painter in colonial America, as the maker; however, P. Parnell created the hairwork scene in 1793.

The depth of information provided by miniaturists and hairworkers about their work varied. Peale initialed and dated his portrait of Polly Bringhurst in the lower right, but Parnell's signature on the piece of backing paper remained hidden between the two ivory discs. Occasionally miniature painters and hairworkers included trimmed trade cards recording their name, business address, and the date of creation inside of the miniature case. These trading cards not only documented the maker of the miniature but also kept the components of the miniature securely in place. Viewing the maker's information, however, requires the disassembly of the parts of the miniature.

On the memorial backing paper, Parnell listed his address as "South Second," referring to South Second Street in Philadelphia near the location of the Bringhurst family home before and after Polly Bringhurst's death. In January 1792, John Bringhurst signed a four-year lease for a three-story brick building at 12 South Third Street. The first floor, with a display window facing South Third Street, functioned as a shop for Bringhurst's fancy-goods business. The Bringhurst family lived in the two upper stories on the building.⁹⁶ After Polly Bringhurst died in 1793, John Bringhurst likely took Peale's portrait miniature and locks of his wife's hair to Parnell's place of business on South Second Street. According to Leach's *History of the Bringhurst Family*, John

⁹⁶ Johnson and Edwards, "Ornamental Wedgwood Wares in Philadelphia in 1793," 169. Anthony W. Robinson, another Philadelphia hairworker, took out an advertisement in the August 18, 1798 issue of *The Weekly Magazine of Original Essays, Fugitive Pieces, and Interesting Intelligence*. Robinson, advertising his work in "Jewellery, Hair-Work, Enamelling, &c." moved his business from 30 South Second Street to 36 Chesnut Street in 1798. Robinson may have been an apprentice or former competitor of Parnell. "Advertisement 1 -- no Title," *The Weekly Magazine of Original Essays, Fugitive Pieces, and Interesting Intelligence* (1798–1799) 3, no. 29 (Aug 18, 1798): 95A-95a, <http://proxy.cc.uic.edu/docview/88903490?accountid=14552>.

Bringhurst “was never the same after her [Polly’s] death” and “always wore around his neck a miniature containing a lock of her hair.”⁹⁷ The bail of the chased gold frame indicates the owner wore the miniature as a pendant strung upon a ribbon or cord. John and Polly Bringhurst’s son John Bringhurst, born August 29, 1792, died at the residence of his grandfather Robert Lawton on January 23, 1803.⁹⁸ The portrait miniature thereafter became an heirloom in the Lawton family.

6. IN SILENT SORROW O’ER THY TOMB I’LL MOURN: THE FEMALE MOURNER

Mourning jewelry fused the dead with the living: the material remains of the deceased served as the medium for embodying the grief of the mourner. Memorial jewelry commissioned in tribute to the deceased provided a visualization of the mourner’s grief using the established iconography of mourning, such as sorrowful female mourners, weeping willows, and tombs bearing the initials of the deceased. Although angels, children, and dogs appeared in mourning scenes, the choice to portray women as mourners corresponded with predominant Christian and Classical philosophies of the late eighteenth century. Pastoral scenes alluded to biblical settings, particularly the “Garden of Eden, where life began, and the Garden of Gethsemane, where Christ was arrested, leading to his Crucifixion and Resurrection, which brought the promise of eternity.”⁹⁹ The veil of the woman lamenting her loss referenced Aethernitas, the Roman

⁹⁷ Leach, *History of the Bringhurst Family*, 38.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Frank, *Love and Loss: American Portrait and Mourning Miniatures*, 123.

personification of eternity, and associated the mourner with the “renunciation of the corporeal.”¹⁰⁰ While these biblical and classical allusions sustained the popularity of the female mourner, the circulation of images also accounted for the prominence of the female mourner in eighteenth-century fine art and decorative objects. Art historian Anita Schorsch cites *Fame Decorating the Tomb of Shakespeare* (c. 1770) by Swiss-born artist Angelica Kauffman (1750-1807) as the first mourning design copied by American artists.¹⁰¹ In Kauffman’s oil painting, a female mourner, wearing a Grecian gown with billowing sleeves, places flowers upon Shakespeare’s tomb in a garden setting.

Tracing reiterations of the mourning scene, Schorsch describes a colored print of the Kauffman painting, created circa 1782 by Italian engraver Francesco Bartolozzi, as the first copy of *Fame Decorating the Tomb of Shakespeare* to circulate in Europe and America, followed by copies rendered in other mediums, including oil paint, silk needlework, and hairwork. Although some copies closely imitated Kauffmann’s mourning scene of Shakespeare, others memorialized George Washington, who died in 1799, and Werther, the protagonist of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s 1774 novel.¹⁰² Just as the execution of Charles I prompted royalists to wear commemorative jewelry in honor of the martyr king, the death of Washington gave rise to memorial art and jewelry in America. Perceived as the “benefactor-savior” and an “instrument of God,” Americans credited Washington as the leader responsible for winning political freedom and religious

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Anita Schorsch, “Mourning Art: A Neoclassical Reflection in America,” *American Art Journal* 8, no. 1 (May 1976): 9. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1594005>.

¹⁰² Ibid., 9-11.

liberty for the American people, who equated America as a kingdom on earth.¹⁰³ The patriotic events and memorial services held in Philadelphia, then the capitol of the United States, honoring the late president spurred the popularity of mourning iconography in America.¹⁰⁴ In the New England and Middle Atlantic regions, the proliferation of commemorative art honoring Washington ranged from oil paintings to silk needlework to mourning jewelry. Rings with bezels bearing miniature likenesses of Washington echoed the style of commemorative rings made for Charles I.¹⁰⁵

Samuel Folwell, the miniature artist and hairworker largely responsible for the popularity of Washington miniatures, created Washington memorials on ivory using common mourning iconography. Folwell, who opened a hairwork instructional academy located in Philadelphia in 1793, sold his Washington memorial jewelry to middle- and upper-class patrons who desired a visual display of their spirituality and patriotism.¹⁰⁶ In one example of a Washington memorial hairwork pendant (c. 1800), Folwell portrays a female mourner sitting next to Washington's grave in sepia tone. A portrait of Washington, painted on the face of the tomb, establishes the pendant as a memorial piece for the late president, yet the mourning iconography resembles older expressions of personal loss rendered in hairwork.¹⁰⁷ Dressed in a conventional neoclassical gown, the

¹⁰³ Schorsch, "A Key to the Kingdom: The Iconography of a Mourning Picture," 44–47.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 60.

¹⁰⁵ Fales, *Jewelry in America, 1600-1900*, 92-3. Fales describes the controversy over the true and false likenesses of George Washington sold the year after his death. Philadelphia jeweler John B. Dumoutet claimed to produce the only true likeness of Washington because he owned an engraved plate with Washington's portrait. A New York jeweler, John Cook & Company also advertised that they sold "approved" locket and ring miniatures of Washington.

¹⁰⁶ Susan M. Stabile, *Memory's Daughters: The Material Culture of Remembrance in Eighteenth Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 225.

¹⁰⁷ Frank, *Love and Loss: American Portrait and Mourning Miniatures*, 111.

young woman rests her heavy head in the palm of her hand and stares longingly at Washington's tomb. A fringe of her long hair falls over her face imitating the vertical lines of the wilted tree branches.

The prevalence of the female mourner in the symbolic vignettes in mourning jewelry points to the gendering of mourning as a feminine activity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The visualization of grief was manifested in the form of the female figure because women were believed to embody the emotional realm of human nature. In *Memory's Daughters: The Material Culture of Remembrance in Eighteenth Century America*, scholar Susan Stabile explains how female mourners occupied a liminal space during the post-revolutionary period. Although social customs categorized mourning as a feminine duty, women faced public criticism for mourning excessively. Late eighteenth-century critics denounced immoderate public displays of grief as insincere and criticized women for using material goods to feign mourning. As the century progressed, Americans passed sumptuary laws which limited conspicuous mourning attire and etiquette manuals instructed women on acceptable modes of grieving.¹⁰⁸ By adorning themselves with painted hairwork scenes similar yet not identical to their contemporaries' jewelry, mourners made their personal loss discernable to the public while continuing to comply with proper expressions of grief. Scenes of neoclassical female mourners rendered in hair and sepia represented the ideal of grief rather than a portrayal of the wearer herself in mourning.

The adherence of cultural codes of public mourning, however, was only one aspect of women's relationship to death and dying in the late-eighteenth and early-

¹⁰⁸ Stabile, *Memory's Daughters: The Material Culture of Remembrance in Eighteenth Century America*, 210.

nineteenth centuries. Responsible for “both the mundane and aesthetic duties of mourning,” women not only organized funereal arrangements and beautified the home for visiting mourners; they also physically engaged with the deceased—washing, anointing, and wrapping the bodies of loved ones.¹⁰⁹ While acting as caretakers of the deceased, women conserved materials relevant to remembrance. In the process of preparing the body for burial, women began the activity of memorializing loved ones by saving locks of hair of the deceased for use in mourning jewelry. Although the makers of hairwork and artistic treatment of hair in mourning jewelry changed during the nineteenth century, hairwork remained significant within women’s lives and mourning customs. As the archivists of their families’ history, women preserved the hair of loved ones as secular relics. Women’s positions as caretakers of deceased and creators of family memories continued into the second half of the nineteenth century with the making of mourning hairwork jewelry in the home.

7. THE MOST SACRED VINE; HAIRWORK AS SECULAR RELIC

Paired with the portrait miniature of the deceased, plaited hair enshrined beneath glass offered the bereaved a secular relic. Whereas hairwork-mourning scenes required artists to alter the shape and texture of hair, the plaited form preserved hair in a more natural and recognizable state. According to Susan Stewart, a relic, the material remains of a person, serves as a “souvenir of the dead.”¹¹⁰ The souvenir brings closer an otherwise

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 181, 194, 209.

¹¹⁰ Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, 140.

distant person, event, or thing, offering a trace of an experience or individual. It authenticates a past experience by providing its possessor with a referent, around which she builds a narrative structured by memory. Stewart distinguishes the relic from other mementoes, claiming that relics mark the “transformation of meaning into materiality more than they mark, as other souvenirs do, the transformation of materiality into meaning.”¹¹¹ The materiality of the souvenir is secondary to the meaning the owner attaches to it; the souvenir is satisfied with a substitution of the original material of the thing or event it represents. Subsequently, the bodily origins separate the relic and its materiality from the broader conceptualization of the souvenir. In comparison to the souvenir, the relic extracts its meaning from the bodily material itself. It shares a specific relationship with death, functioning as a material object of what remains of a person’s body. The status of plaited hair in memorial jewelry as a relic hinges on its reference to the death of a loved one and the physical absence of that person’s body.

As a relic, its relationship to the deceased makes precious the plaited hair; its potency derives from its physical contact with a particular person and its status as a surviving corporeal trace. The treatment of hair in mourning jewelry reinforces its relationship to the holy relic. By taking a small amount of hair and placing it behind glass, the small quantity and jewel-like presentation transform hair from ordinary material into a material believed to contain a person’s essence. Its enshrinement beneath glass links hairwork set in mourning jewelry to the religious relic traditionally preserved within an ornate repository encrusted with jewels.¹¹² Bearing similarities to the small

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² “Relic, n.” *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed., December 2009.,

scale, richly decorated reliquaries of holy relics, plaited hair in mourning miniatures often includes embellishments of seed pearls and ciphers of fine gold wire, enhancing the preciousness of the hairwork. If the relic references death, as Stewart asserts, the glass encasement of hairwork suggested the possibility of eternal preservation and protection from decay. Although untreated hair demonstrates remarkable tenacity, the presentation of hairwork inside of glass assures the wearer that the elements of time will not desecrate the relic.

The coupling of mourning scenes with plaited hair under crystal bezels on the versos of brooches and pendants suggests that late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century wearers desired dual likenesses of their loved ones—the identifiable portrait and the more intimate hairwork. In her essay “Sentimental Cuts: Eighteenth-Century Mourning Jewelry with Hair,” historian Christiane Holm describes the structural capacity of two-sided lockets to reveal and conceal: “If the pictorial side of the locket is shown to the viewer, it works like a common mourning memorial; if it is hidden, it is set in contact with the body of the wearer...In this case, seeing is substituted by touching and the bodily memory is installed ‘at the back’ of the shown remembrance.”¹¹³ The two-sided hairwork locket with glass compartments on each side requires the wearer to direct her vision downward to view the pendant, yet the hairwork on the reverse guarantees that the loved one remains physically close. Although the closeness of the locket to the body keeps the hair in intimate proximity, the mourning locket denies the wearer the

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/161910>. An entry for this word was first included in the *New English Dictionary*, 1906.

¹¹³ Christiane Holm, “Sentimental Cuts: Eighteenth-Century Mourning Jewelry with Hair,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38, no. 4 (2004): 142, doi: 10.1353/ecs.2004.0059.

experience of feeling the hair. Hairwork beneath glass makes the familiar untouchable, transforming corporeal matter into an object of secular devotion.

8. **YOUR LOVE AND LIKENESS NEAR: SENTIMENTAL PORTRAIT MINIATURE**

The sentimental miniature *Mrs. Charles Donald McNeill (Martha Kingsley McNeill)* features both a watercolor on ivory portrait and braided brown hair with a cipher (fig. 14 and 15). Painted in 1800 by an unknown artist, the portrait miniature depicts Martha McNeill (1775-1852) at age twenty-five, wearing a white, high-waist gown with a scooped neckline and wrap bodice. She sits with her torso and sloping shoulders slightly turned, gazing straightforward at the viewer with a self-composed expression. The style of her unembellished dress, made of a gauzy muslin fabric, echoes the empire silhouette popular during the last decade of the eighteenth century. In addition to her unornamented gown, her lack of jewelry gives her an understated appearance. In her portrait, Martha McNeill wears her Brunette hair tightly pulled back with angled bangs swept across her forehead, concealing a section of her left eyebrow. Her Brunette hair and dark, expressive, round eyes contrast with her pale complexion and the pastel hues of the watercolor. The muted background, a softly painted light blue sky with clouds, complements the simplicity of the portrait. On the reverse of the miniature, a wide gold frame etched with a black enamel border encircles loosely braided brown hair preserved under glass. The thickness of the smooth gold frame, nearly equal to the diameter of the glass compartment, produces a dramatic effect. A cut gold cursive cipher of “MMN” identifies the hair as belonging to Martha McNeill.

Figure 14



Figure 14. *Mrs. Charles Donald McNeill (Martha Kingsley McNeill)*, unknown artist, watercolor on ivory, 1800/03. The Art Institute of Chicago.

Figure 15



**Figure 15. Verso of Mrs. Charles Donald McNeill (*Martha Kingsley McNeill*),
unknown artist, braided brown hair and gold cipher, 1800/03.
The Art Institute of Chicago.**

The daughter of plantation owner Zepheniah Kinglsey and Isabella Johnston, Martha Kingsley—the maternal grandmother of American painter James McNeill Whistler—was born on August 14, 1775 in Wilmington, North Carolina. Martha Kingsley was the second wife of Dr. Charles Donald McNeill (1760-1828), born in

Wilmington and educated at the University of Edinburgh.¹¹⁴ After the death of his first wife Alicia Clunie, McNeill married Martha Kingsley.¹¹⁵ Martha Kingsley McNeill gave birth to six children: Isabella McNeill; Mary McNeill; William Gibbs McNeill (1801-1853); Anna Mathilda McNeill (1804-1881); Charles Johnson McNeill (1802-1869); and Catherine “Kate” Jane McNeill (1812-1877).¹¹⁶ Based on the birthdates of her children, the portrait miniature of Martha McNeill likely commemorates her marriage to Charles McNeill.

In 1908, the owners of the Martha McNeill miniature, Mrs. George D. Stanton and Emma W. Palmer, also possessed a silhouette miniature of Charles McNeill composed entirely of hair (fig. 16).¹¹⁷ Placed in a pendant setting, Martha McNeill likely wore the silhouette of her husband on a ribbon or chain around her neck. The pairing of the miniatures suggests Charles and Martha McNeill exchanged the miniatures as tokens of affection around the time of their wedding. Although social ties and financial affairs continued to affect marital pairings, romantic love and affection began to hold greater influence in the formation of marriages.¹¹⁸ The practice of engaged couples and

¹¹⁴ Elizabeth Robin and Joseph Pennell, *The Life of James McNeill Whistler* (London & Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1908), 8.

¹¹⁵ The Correspondence of James McNeill Whistler: Biography, “Daniel McNeill, 1760–1828,” http://www.whistler.arts.gla.ac.uk/correspondence/people/biog/?bid=McN_CD&firstname=&surname=mcneill.

¹¹⁶ The Correspondence of James McNeill Whistler: Biography, “Martha McNeill, 1775–1852,” http://www.whistler.arts.gla.ac.uk/correspondence/people/biog/?bid=McNe_M&firstname=martha&surname=mcneill.

¹¹⁷ Pennell, *The Life of James McNeill Whistler*, 8. The Pennell book includes photographs of the Martha Kingsley McNeill portrait miniature and the Charles Donald McNeill silhouette miniature “done in hair.”

¹¹⁸ Frank, *Love and Loss: American Portrait and Mourning Miniatures*, 185.

newlyweds exchanging miniatures paralleled this cultural change in marriage customs at the turn of the century.

Figure 16



Figure 16. Dr. Charles Donald McNeill (*Done in Hair*) from a Miniature in the Possession of Mrs. Dr. George D. Stanton and Miss Emma W. Palmer, c. 1800.

The potential of the miniature to sustain romantic relationships made the portrait miniature especially desirable during the early nineteenth century. As an object solidifying an intimate bond between the miniature's subject and its owner, the miniature represented an ideal gift for husbands and wives to exchange. The small scale of the miniature not only encouraged close viewings of the portrait but also made the miniature portable in the event that work or travel separated spouses from each other.¹¹⁹

Experienced at an intimate distance characterized by “unmistakable involvement,” owners of the miniatures wore the portrait as jewelry or held the encased miniature close

¹¹⁹ Katherine Rieder, “Gifting and Fetishization: The Portrait Miniature of Sally Foster Otis as a Maker of Female Memory,” in *Women and Things, 1750–1950: Gendered Material Strategies*, edited by Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin (Farnham, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009), 253.

to their faces, interacting with the miniature in an emotional zone.¹²⁰ Although the ownership of a portrait miniature alone implied the possession of a lover, the presence of hairwork imbued the miniature with an intimacy specific to early-nineteenth-century sensibilities. Within courting rituals, a lock of hair functioned as a synecdoche for the body as a whole. Consequently, the gift of a lock of hair from a woman to a man signaled the giving of the self, and conversely, the possession of the other.

Separated by nearly fifty years, the portrait miniature of Martha McNeill (c. 1800) and the hairwork bracelets of Phebe and Lizzie Sears (c. 1850) demonstrate the desire Americans felt for dual likenesses in sentimental hairwork jewelry. The pairing of hairwork and image—first in the form of watercolor miniatures and later in diminutive photographs—reveals that while the medium of portraiture changed, the emotional resonance of hairwork and portraits persisted. The McNeill pendant and Sears bracelets share similarities in their components, including portrait, hairwork, and personal inscription, yet the differences between the miniature and bracelets illustrate how the appearance, production, and consumers of hairwork jewelry changed over a period of five decades.

¹²⁰ Beverly Gordon. "Intimacy and Objects: A Proxemic Analysis of Gender-Based Response to the Material World," in *The Material Culture of Gender/The Gender of Material Culture*, edited by Katharine Martinez and Kenneth L. Ames, 240. Winterthur, Delaware: The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, Inc., 1997. Gordon categorizes four distance zones, the intimate, the personal, the social, and the public, based on Edward T. Hall's book *The Hidden Dimension* (New York: Doubleday, 1966).

9.
PROCURING A PRESENCE: HAIRWORK, PORTRAIT, ALCHEMY

In comparison to the costly materials of the watercolor miniature—thin discs of ivory, convex glass, and gold housings—human hair, whether skillfully arranged or presented in its natural form, possessed little monetary value. Susan Stewart makes a distinction between the miniature and the miniature with hairwork, describing the miniature “enclosed with a lock of hair, a piece of ribbon, or some other object that is ‘part’ of the other” as “contagious magic.”¹²¹ With contagious magic, once an object comes into contact with someone, it permanently remains in contact with the individual no matter the temporal distance. The imperishability of human hair as well as its bodily origins make hair a particularly potent object in relation to contagious magic. A corporeal substance removed from the human body, hair also provides tangible proof of a person’s corporeal existence. Once separated from a person, a lock of hair retains its shape and texture defying the cycle of decay that deteriorates living matter. If cut from a young person’s head, hair eludes the aging process and retains the vibrant shades of youth.

The miniature with hairwork is imbued with magic because, unlike the miniature alone, it “guarantees the presence of an absent other.”¹²² Although Stewart speaks specifically of the watercolor miniature with hairwork, the pairing of hairwork with a photographic image offers a similar presence. The connotations of “presence” alludes to the conjuring of a person or spirit seemingly from nowhere through the process of evocation. Jewelry combining hairwork and portrait offers the absent other in two

¹²¹ Stewart, *On Longing*, 126.

¹²² Ibid.

contrasting forms: the pictorial representation and the real, palpable piece of hair. The convergence of the representation and the real within hairwork jewelry, however, results in a contradiction of proportion. As Marcia Pointon explains, “The presence of body substance asserts a difference of scale and material that serves to isolate the cipher or the miniature, thrusting it further into a world of inorganic illusion while emphasizing the scale of the human to which the hair belongs.”¹²³ In the process of engaging with the hairwork and portrait, the viewer activates the link between the painted or photographic representation and the hair of the sitter. From Pointon’s perspective, hair isolates the representation by drawing attention to its reduced size. Neither the miniature nor hairwork presents the absent in full scale or in full form: the portrait draws attention to the fragmentation of hair from the body, and the tangibility of hairwork betrays the portrait as a two-dimensional representation.

Although the miniature with hairwork represents a pictorial likeness of a person, the manifestation of the missing requires alchemistic exercises in both its construction and interaction with its wearer. As Stewart posits, hairwork draws out the presence of the absent other through contagious magic, or its retainment of a person’s aura. Rather than merely stimulating memory, the portrait and the hairwork provide the elements required in the alchemistic process of conjuring a loved one’s presence. The objectives of alchemy—to transform base elements into precious metals such as silver and gold and to concoct an extract promising eternal life—parallel the construction of hairwork, which produces a precious memory object made from a mundane bodily material. Just as alchemy endeavored to discover the elixir of immortality, the imperishability of hair promises the endless preservation of a person’s essence in a tangible substance.

¹²³ Pointon, “‘Surrounded with Brilliants’: Miniature Portraits in Eighteenth-Century England,” 59.

The emotional resonance of hairwork jewelry hinges on its capacity to incite memories of the absent through the senses of vision and touch. The construction of the hairwork itself, however, marks the first of two transmutational instances occurring in the life of the portrait with hairwork: the wearer of the jewelry, too, engages in an alchemistic performance involving the synthesis of the portrait and the accompanying hairwork. Since the portrait offers a representation and hairwork a real fragment, the union of the two components triggered particularly potent memories of the absent.

CONCLUSION

10. “LONE RELIC OF A CRAZE OF 40 YEARS AGO”: HAIRWORK JEWELRY AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

As a sentimental object treasured for its capacity to evoke memory and emotion, hairwork jewelry occupied a vulnerable position when, in the late nineteenth century, sentimentality began to dwindle. By the end of the nineteenth century, the popularity of hairwork in both its handicraft and commodity form had faded. A news story with the headline “Still Makes Hair Jewelry: Lone Relic of a Craze of 40 Years Ago—One Small Factory Able to Supply the Demand in New York,” published in *The Boston Sunday Globe* in 1904, offers an explanation for the decline of hairwork at the end of the nineteenth century. In calling the hairwork business “a lone relic,” the story diminishes the business as an antiquated trade and hairwork jewelry as an anachronistic product. The connotations of relic as an object of reverence no longer applied to hairwork from the reporter’s perspective. Profiling one of the last remaining hairwork jewelry businesses in

America, the story describes how the original manufacturer's elderly daughter continued to manage the hairwork business after the death of her father, a successful proprietor and skilled hairworker who reportedly constructed a memorial from the hair of Abraham Lincoln. In the previous century, the New York hairwork jewelry business employed over forty young women who skillfully compose hair rings and brooches "by the million." In 1904, hiring young women capable of constructing hairwork jewelry was difficult, according to the news story. No longer "an age for counting hairs,"¹²⁴ by the early twentieth century, hairwork as a handicraft had waned. By the turn of the century, the New York City business nearly ceased to receive orders, with the exception of the Christmas season, when customer requests accompanied by envelopes of hair still arrived in the mail.

The news story pinpoints one possible reason for the demise of hairwork jewelry: "Sentiment and business seem far apart; yet many a big business has risen on sentiment and has toppled when its unsubstantial foundation melted beneath it. The manufacture of hair jewelry was one of these."¹²⁵ To an extent, the reporter's observation of the incompatibility of sentiment and business echoes the rhetoric of women's magazines and instructional manuals published in the second half of the nineteenth century. As sentimentality succumbed to criticism in the late-nineteenth century, hairwork jewelry, too, lost its sentimental cache.

The decline of sentimentality and waning of hairwork businesses, however, fails to account completely for the decline of hairwork jewelry at the end of the nineteenth

¹²⁴ "Still Makes Hair Jewelry: Lone Relic of a Craze of 40 Years Ago—One Small Factory Able to Supply the Demand in New York," *The Boston Sunday Globe* (December 4, 1904): 36, ProQuest American Periodicals Series Online.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

century. Although the news story portrays the daughter, who learned the art of ornamental hairwork from her father, in a sympathetic tone, the reporter's description of the objects displayed inside of the shop expresses a distaste for hairwork: "On the walls are more ghosts. That stone and weeping willow that Mrs. Deacon Smith used to have in her front room; those kneeling female figures and baskets of flowers of all the colors that come from hair, that one can still remember on the walls of the cold, inhospitable spare bedrooms in one's childhood."¹²⁶ The materiality of hairwork—its bodily origins—and the somber subject matter of the mourning miniatures and floral wreathes repulse the reporter, whose opinion of hairwork expresses a twentieth-century attitude toward the human body and death.

Americans' gradual distancing from death and changing attitudes toward the body paralleled the decline of hairwork jewelry. If sentimental Americans "domesticated death," cultivating their private grief into public mourning,¹²⁷ then mourning hairwork jewelry functioned as a way of ordering, structuring, and taking control of death. The early-twentieth-century modernization of death, particularly the shift to the professional care of the deceased, resulted in "the curtailing of the lengthy formality of mourning customs" and "prevented death from overshadowing the lives of relatives and friends of the deceased."¹²⁸ Although women continued to occupy the role of family archivists, their participation in preparing the body for burial lessened. Family members of the deceased may have kept a lock of hair, but the hair was likely secreted away, tucked in an envelope

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ James L. Farrell, *Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830–1920* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 34.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 220.

rather than publicly displayed in an object of personal adornment. Once intensely personal but made anonymous over time, hairwork jewelry is perhaps too bodily and too intimate for twenty-first-century Americans. The notoriety of hairwork jewelry as morbid and grotesque eclipses its sentimental meaning within the context of a different cultural landscape.

The synthesis of portraiture and hairwork additionally complicates the classification of miniatures in museum collections. Although frequently deemed secondary to the medium of watercolor on ivory, hairwork provided the portrait miniature with a corporeal material that infused the object with personal significance. As decorative objects and jewelry, portrait miniatures with hairwork occupy a liminal space in the categorization of objects in museums. Indicative of the hierarchical classification of the portrait miniature and its supplemental hairwork, the display of the Polly Bringham and Martha McNeill miniatures at the Art Institute of Chicago conceals the versos from view, privileging watercolor-on-ivory as the greater medium. Despite current displays of the miniatures and the fact that their accompanying texts do not acknowledge the existence of hairwork on the versos, the synthesis of hairwork and portrait was central to the emotional resonance these memory objects held for their owners. Design historian Glenn Adamson's definition of supplement—"that which provides something necessary to another, 'original' entity, but which is nonetheless considered to be extraneous to that original"—applies to the relationship hairwork shares with the portrait miniature. The term supplement, as interpreted by Adamson, acknowledges the rich interconnection between the miniature and hairwork and collapses the hierarchical delineation of art and craft that disjoins the object. As a result of its multiple components, the portrait

miniature with hairwork cannot be designated within the existing typology of art and craft objects.

In comparison to the depth of information available about some portrait miniatures, including the biographies of watercolor miniaturists and the wealthy families who commissioned portraits, photographic hairwork jewelry most often contains no records of the sitter, jewelry maker, or photographer. The lack of historical documents associated with the photographic hairwork jewelry and the ubiquity of both photography and hairwork during the mid-nineteenth century results in histories of photographic hairwork jewelry as object types. Comparing personal photographs to relics, historian Elizabeth Edwards writes:

Like relics, photographs are validated through their social biography: ordinary remains...become treasured, linking objects to traces of the past, the dead, a fetishized focus of devotion. Finally they return to the ordinary, indeed disposable object, the detritus of material culture, as they cease to have meaning for the living beyond a generalized "pastness."¹²⁹

Edwards's description of the trajectory of vernacular photographs closely parallels the life cycle of hairwork jewelry as a memory object and secular relic. Without the social biographies that once infused hairwork jewelry with meaning, it becomes a historical artifact of a now distant culture of sentimentality. The human hair used in hairwork jewelry loses not only its sentimental value as a precious substance but also its capacity to evoke memory.

¹²⁹ Elizabeth Edwards, "Photographs as Objects of Memory," in *Material Memories: Design and Evocation*, ed. Marius Kwint, Christopher Breward, and Jeremy Aynsley (Oxford: Berg, 1992), 226–227. Edwards borrows the concept of "pastness" from Patrick Geary, "Sacred Commodities: The Circulation of Medieval Relics," in *The Social Life of Things* ed. Arjun Appadurai, (Cambridge, 1986).

Hairwork jewelry may continue to circulate among descendants of their original possessors; however, museum collections and antique dealers often function as the caretakers and owners of hairwork jewelry. Today, the Phebe and Lizzie Sears photographic hairwork bracelets lie wrapped in yellowed tissue paper in a tray filled with antique jewelry in storage at Art Institute of Chicago. Unlike other more valuable pieces of jewelry kept in red velvet-lined cases and leather boxes decorated with gilt ornamentation, the Sears bracelets are simply stored, the accession numbers written in pencil on the tissue paper. The damaged hairwork jewelry will likely remain in the permanent collection but will never undergo restoration or be lent to another cultural institution for exhibition.

Inscribed on sentimental and mourning hairwork miniatures in diminutive lettering, the phrase “the further the distance the tighter the knot,” suggests that hairwork linked loved ones together, securing and strengthening their love no matter the temporal or metaphysical distance separating them. Hairwork jewelry fastened the emotional ties between loved ones; yet, over time—without the individuals who first imbued hairwork with its personal significance—the knot loosens, the sentiment slackens. Hairwork jewelry, a memory object composed of the precious hair of a loved one, possesses its own emotional lifespan, which diminishes with the death of the people who infused the material with sentimental value. The emotional resonance of hairwork jewelry is transitory.

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Verso of *Mrs. Charles Donald McNeill (Martha Kingsley McNeill)*, unknown artist, braided brown hair and gold cipher, 1800/03 (The Art Institute of Chicago). Object File 1933.780.

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