

SENSORIALITY AND HAIR JEWELLERY IN NEO-VICTORIAN FICTION AND CULTURE¹

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In this essay I will focus on the role played by hair jewellery, a widespread craft in the nineteenth-century Anglo-American context, in neo-Victorian literature and culture. I will consider hair jewels as objects that are remnants of the Victorian past, but also as personal items that evoke affective responses through the senses. In this take on (neo-)Victorian literature and culture, I will consider the *entanglement* of subjects and objects, human remains (hair) and jewels, past and present, death and life in contemporary renditions of the Victorian craftwork of hair jewellery. Finally, I will argue that this fictionalisation of Victorian material traces allows us to mediate on the links and associations between the Victorian past and our (sensorial) responses to them, and that it opens up the ways to interrogate the affective relations between subjects and objects, the past and the present, then and now, as well as their impact upon our future.

KEY WORDS: hair jewellery, material culture, Victorian period, neo-Victorianism.

Sensorialidad y joyería hecha con cabello humano en la ficción y cultura neo-victorianas

En este artículo me centro en el papel que desempeña la joyería realizada con cabello humano, un arte muy extendido en el siglo XIX y en el contexto angloamericano, en la literatura y en la cultura neo-victorianas. Analizaré estas joyas como objetos que provienen del pasado victoriano, pero también como artículos personales que estimulan respuestas emocionales y afectivas a través de los sentidos. En esta aproximación al neo-Victorianismo, me ocupo del entramado e imbricación que se crea entre sujeto y objeto, entre restos humanos (el pelo) y las joyas, entre el pasado y el presente, entre la muerte y la vida en versiones contemporáneas del arte victoriano de la joyería realizada con cabello humano. En definitiva, mi argumento gira en torno a la capacidad de las huellas materiales de la época victoriana de mediar entre el pasado victoriano y nuestras respuestas sensoriales ya que nos permiten dilucidar las relaciones afectivas entre sujeto y objeto, el pasado y el presente, así como su influencia e impacto sobre nuestro futuro.

PALABRAS CLAVE: joyería realizada con cabello humano, cultura material, época victoriana, neo-Victorianismo.

In April 2019 a Victorian ring was found in a Welsh attic, and the woman who found it took it to be valued on a BBC antiques show. The ring was considered to be worth £25 until a lock of hair was found inside it and the ring ended being valued £20,000. It revealed that the lock had belonged to Charlotte Brontë, and that it had Charlotte's name inscribed, as well as the date of her death: 1855. The veracity of this hair piece

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was later confirmed by the main curator of the Brontë Parsonage Museum (Newton, 2019). This trinket attests to the relevance of the craft of hair jewellery in the Victorian age, as well as the fascination that it continues to exert today, particularly when the owner was a celebrity. In this essay I aim to focus on the role played by hair jewellery, a widespread craft in the nineteenth-century Anglo-American context, but which is traced back to the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, in neo-Victorian literature and culture. I will consider hair jewels as objects that are remnants of the Victorian past, with a cultural significance, but also as personal items that evoke affective responses through the senses, and, that, as human remains, foster ethical engagement when displayed in museums and installations. I wish to offer a reading which goes beyond a commodity-based approach towards a more complex and nuanced stance that interrogates subject-object relations in the Victorian past, and today. Phenomenology, material cultural studies and critical notions such as polytemporality and entanglement will provide the broader interdisciplinary critical framework for my account of this (neo-)Victorian burgeoning fascination with objects, bodies and sensoriality through the hair artefact. Neo-Victorian texts, both fictional and non-fictional, like Catherine Chidgey's *The Transformation: A Novel* (2005) and Deborah Lutz's *The Brontë Cabinet: Three Lives in Nine Objects* (2015), among other narratives which feature hair jewellery and sensoriality to varying degrees, will be analysed from the said approach.

Neo-Victorianism invests in the Victorian age and, as a contemporary literary and cultural movement, seeks to explore past voices, figures and topics, that speak to contemporary audiences, too. This dual nature has been amply acknowledged by critics (Gamble, 2009: 128; Heilmann and Llewellyn, 2010: 210), and it has constituted one of its trademarks since the field crystallised with the founding of the on-line journal, *Neo-Victorian Studies*, in 2008. As Jessica Cox aptly states, although the movement is still in the making, "still taking shape" (2017), what remains clear since its inception is the field's double orientation, oscillating between past and present, which further indicates the fluidity of the movement, both as a genre and as an academic enterprise. In addition, neo-Victorianism has contributed to laying bare not only common assumptions, contradictions and fissures in the Victorian period, but also it has been able to identify similarities with current preoccupations. Crucially, the Victorian age probed the boundaries of subject and object, the human body and things, proposing a dynamics of networks and entanglements, and calling for a fluid conceptualisation of the subject in relation with the object world. And this is very closely related to our own posthuman condition, since "[w]ith the emergence of new technologies, the rise of the Digital Age and the proliferation of virtual forms of human interaction it has become necessary to re-think materiality itself" (Boehm, 2012: 10). My argument lies in the fact that the interplay between past and present can be facilitated through bodily objects, human remains and things in neo-Victorianism,

thus challenging dichotomies and calling for a more nuanced relationship with the Victorian past. Finally, I will argue that this fictionalisation of Victorian material traces in contemporary literature and culture allows us to meditate on the links between the Victorian past and our (sensorial) responses to them, and that it opens up the ways to interrogate the affective relations between subjects and objects, the past and the present, then and now, as well as their impact upon our future.

Since the 1980s, Victorian scholarship has significantly paid heed to material culture, and the relations between subjects and objects in Victorian literature and culture, an effort which has engaged a wealth of disciplines, including social history, psychology and cultural studies. As the Victorian age, because of industrialisation, also brought about mass production of goods, material culture first focused on a Marxist interpretation of the market system in Victorian times, in terms of consumption, until the advent of the “material turn” with the establishment of “Thing theory” as an all-encompassing approach. Jennifer Sattaur traces this development of the study of objects and things in Victorian literature from the 1980s, when critics used more Marxist perspectives, through to the 2000s with Bill Brown’s “Thing theory”. Sattaur marks Andrew H. Millar’s book, *Novels Behind Glass* (1995), as the stepping-stone for a new discipline which would focus specifically on the object, on the commodity itself, and praises it for paving the way for “Thing theory”. She goes on to suggest that “the significance of the object always extends beyond the merely economical exchange value associated with it by consumer theory” (Sattaur, 2012: 348). Drawing on Martin Heidegger’s “The Thing”, Bill Brown first delineated his theory in “Things” (2001), and later developed the theoretical tenets in *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (2003), where he re-read American literary texts in the nineteenth century, that he defines as “an age of things” (2003: 5). His aim is “to render thought thing-like [...] [and to demonstrate] that the human investment in the physical object world, and the mutual constitution of human subject and inanimate object, can hardly be reduced to [commodity relations]” (2003: 5). Then, “Thing theory” offers more than just a theoretical engagement with objects that pervade in Victorian texts and culture, as this perspective highlights “fundamental questions about identity and identification, the construction of the individual subject, and the mediated relations that subject forms with the material world and with society” (Sattaur, 2012: 356).

Although there are more recent approaches to materiality such as OOO (object-oriented ontology) and speculative realism, where the human being is deprived of centrality as the focus is entirely on the thing and its relation with other things, I am particularly interested in the multiple ways in which objects and subjects interact, participating contextually and relating to one another in a networked scenario. In this, I am following the critical notion of “entanglement”, proposed by Ian Hodder: “[h]umans and things emerge contextually in relation to each other. Since humans

and things are dialectically and relationally construed, so in different contexts different types of materials, things and humans are produced. What is a human and a thing depend” (2012: 33). In his approach to human dependence on things, Hodder embarks on an analysis of several perspectives, among them, the phenomenology of Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Hodder sees in Heidegger the seeds of his own idea of entanglement when stating that Heidegger “seeks a full embedding of humans and things in each other” (2012: 29) by means of his notion of being-in-the-world. In turn, Merleau-Ponty, who also “shared Heidegger’s concern with the lived world of everyday activity” (Thomas, 2006: 47), tackled the ways in which the human being depends on things, considered human beings another object in a world of objects, and paid special attention to perception, understood as an approach to human-object interaction through our embodied experience: “in handling a thing, moving it around, feeling it, looking at it, we come to understand how our body works, how the different parts interrelate, how we can be coordinated. *There is thus a two-way dependence of human bodies and things*” (Hodder, 2012: 30; emphasis added). It remains clear that, from this phenomenological perspective, the human body functions as a mediator between subjects and objects, perceived “as an assemblage of matter, embodied perception, and lived experience that links the object world and the self” (Boehm, 2012: 5). An object is perceived through the senses, and it makes an impact upon the body through the sensorial apperception.

Sensoriality and/in the Victorian literature and culture started to attract significant critical attention in 2009 when a special issue on the Victorian sensorium, based on the conference proceedings from the Australasian Victorian Studies Association conference at the University of Otago (New Zealand), was published in the *Australasian Journal of Victorian Studies*, and William Cohen published his well-known *Embodied: Victorian Literature and the Senses*. Wendy Parkins developed, in her introduction to the special issue, the ways in which aspects of embodied experience, also including affect, emotions and the senses, have been considered by Victorian scholars who show an interest “in visual and material culture [...] [but also pay] attention to the interrelation between body, mind and imagination in sensory encounters with things” (2009: 2). In turn, William Cohen undertook an in-depth study of many Victorian writers and journalists who challenged the dualist Cartesian notion of the human, based on the dichotomy mind/body, through an emphasis on embodied subjectivities, and the fluid interaction between inside and outside, thus bearing similarities to twentieth-century theoretical tenets about the body. In fact, following Merleau-Ponty, among others, Cohen explores the body “as a sensory interface between the interior and the world, as a process of flux and becoming” (2009: xiii). This burgeoning fascination with sensoriality in Victorian literature and culture has gained momentum with the recent publication of Catherine

Maxwell's *Scents and Sensibility: Perfume in Victorian Literary Culture* (2017), and Pamela K. Gilbert's *Victorian Skin: Surface, Self, History* (2019), for example.

These critical interventions into Victorian literature and culture significantly develop the erasure of distinctions between subject-object, underlining the close proximity and the intertwining of bodies and objects in literary and culture renditions of the Victorian period. This is better understood by the so-called "framework of sensoriality": "it is through the commingling of bodies (and of things) that sensorial experience is enacted" (Hamilakis, 2013: 68, 70). This framework is further defined as "a new philosophical framework on sensoriality, placing the emphasis [...] on the field of sensorial flows and affective interactions, on sensorial memory and intercorporeality, and on the conditions that enable such affective sensorial flows to come into being" (2013: 109). More importantly, this sensorial approach does not limit itself to any temporal boundary since "[i]t is material memory itself, memory evoked and activated through the sensorial interaction with matter" (2013: 119). If every sensorial perception by means of interaction with the object/matter is at the same time past and present, does it offer a durational quality into the future? Then, does the object display multi-temporality? In my view, the object (read, a hair jewel), as a material trace, is a locus of memory, but it is also an embodied presence dissolving boundaries of space and time, which calls for an inclusive view of time, encompassing past, present and future. Then, objects, relics, remnants can be regarded as material *traces* of the past but with an orientation towards the future. In this sense, in being multilinear, dynamic and fluid, the notion of the historical "trace" becomes apt for a consideration of the material remnants of the past, as well as for a re-orientation towards the future, particularly for a feminist view of historical processes. Victoria Browne has proposed the term "polytemporality" to indicate the multiple temporal directions that the "trace" possesses.

Drawing on Paul Ricoeur's study of the "trace", notably deployed in volume three of his *Time and Narrative* (1985), and Edmund Husserl's phenomenological conceptualisation of time, Browne advances her theory of multiple temporalities and how, in her view, "temporal existence is always a complex blend of presence and absence, retention and protention, recollection and expectation. This basic phenomenological framework offers a useful entry into thinking about time as nonlinear" (2014: 28). Her theorisation aims to offer new models or methods to address the complexities of feminist historiography, and thus to sidestep the traditional "wave" or "stage" trope in feminism. She finds such model in the notion of "polytemporality", "a shifting *entanglement* of trajectories and temporalities: of feminism as multilinear rather than unilinear" (2014: 46; emphasis added). Interestingly, the notion of "entanglement" also appears here, now applied to a particular model of feminist historiography, understood as multiple and nonlinear. In what follows, I will focus on the *entanglement* of subjects and objects, human

remains (hair) and jewels, past and present, death and life, in contemporary artistic renditions of the Victorian tradition of hair jewellery.

The Victorians were fascinated with jewels and, although at first only upper-class women wore them (since men had increasingly stopped wearing jewels), the advent of mechanical reproduction contributed to producing more accessible secondary jewellery and this implied that middle-class women could afford manufactured jewels (Arnold, 2011: 5). An analysis of jewels in fiction allows for several layers of interpretation: as cultural objects, they project beliefs, ideas and cultural norms; as an object endowed with an individual meaning, the jewel is invested with affect, and it tells a story of the individual who wears the jewel, or has a tactile encounter with it. Then, “[a]n object like a piece of jewelry opens itself to a double reading—it is an object with personal meaning for the individual, and with an established meaning for the culture at large; therefore, its reading is located in the space between private and public domains” (Arnold, 2011: 20). Among jewels, diamonds proliferated in the Victorian age, and it seems that this was, partly, due to a tradition imported from India to show off prestige through jewellery, and the “influence that British colonial endeavors in India exerted upon Victorian domestic culture” (Arnold, 2011: 78). Nowhere is this more visible than in the story of the Koh-i-Noor Diamond, narrated in detail in Jean Arnold’s study on Victorian jewellery (2011: 80-83): the British soldiers invaded the state of Punjab, and dethroned the young maharaja, Duleep Singh. The British were entitled to take hold of the maharaja’s jewels, and although some were left to Duleep Singh, the Koh-i-Noor Diamond was offered as a gift to Queen Victoria. As Arnold poses, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert decided that it should be cut, and the Diamond “thus underwent a physical and cultural transformation” (2011: 81), experimenting a significant reduction of its original shape, and symbolically representing the impact Britain’s rule had over India. I will not delve into the connections between the historical Indian Diamond and the fictional gem in Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone* (1868), as Arnold devotes a substantial section of her work to that. Interestingly, one neo-Victorian novel, Essie Fox’s *The Goddess and the Thief* (2013), offers a reading into this historical event, coupled with other relevant aspects such as gender issues and the role of Spiritualism for women in Victorian times. Fox’s novel underscores the inherent complex meanings embedded in the historical Koh-i-Noor Diamond, and through her fictional revisitation of that event, she discloses what the jewel may have signified for other individuals. In a conversation between two main characters, Alice Willoughby and Lucian Tilsbury, it is revealed that the Diamond has been claimed back, and that Mr Tilsbury wants to give it to Singh:

Give the jewel to Prince Duleep? [...] I have every sympathy with Duleep. What right have the British to raid other lands for nothing more than

material gain, to force the natives to bow to their gods, to depose rightful regents from their thrones? If that is not desecration and theft then I would like to know what is! (2013: 252)

The above passage reveals reactions to the jewel, which serve as commentaries on British imperialism in a domestic setting, thus aligning both nation and home as happens in Collins's *The Moonstone*. In addition, Fox's novel also features a widowed Queen Victoria, grieving for the death of Prince Albert in 1861, which is faithful to history since Queen Victoria remained in mourning clothes for the rest of her life when Prince Albert passed away. In the novel *Alice*, the protagonist, describes the Queen's apparel on seeing her for the first time after Albert's death: "I could only stare at Victoria. The Queen [...]! How time and grief had altered her since that day in the Crystal Palace. Now, rather than wearing a garland of rosebuds her head was crowned with a mourning cap" (Fox, 2013: 70). Victoria's obsession with Prince Albert's death was observed not only in her wearing mourning clothes until her death in 1901, but also in her wearing black jewellery, and jewellery "containing Albert's hair [that] reinforced the affinities between husband and wife in the process of materializing mourning" (Yan, 2019: 126). Mourning jewellery, including hair jewellery, became very fashionable, reputedly due to Queen Victoria's mourning practices.

Human hair, as memory material, had been incruised in jewellery and in other objects since the seventeenth century in Europe, but it became widespread not only across Europe, but also in North America from the 1850s to the 1880s. Nineteenth-century magazines, catered for middle-class women's tastes, contained many articles on how to produce "commemorative hair wreaths at home" to pass the time (Wildgoose, 2019: 706), as well as detailed instructions as to how to fashion hair in different object pieces (brooches, lockets, earrings, rings, chains, to name a few). As Shu-chuan Yan sustains, this craft was predominantly female and it was circumscribed to the domestic environment; then, hair "fancywork" participated in negotiating female identity, agency and space through domestic craft which allows us to investigate "the relationship between femininity and hair fancywork in the context of Victorian materiality and to highlight the importance of its production in the domestic in understanding Victorian sentimentality and fashion" (Yan, 2019: 125). In this sense, hairwork is positioned as part of a commodity culture where hand-crafted ornamental hair becomes relevant in shaping female identity in the Victorian period.² However, I would like to draw more attention to the symbolic significance of those hair pieces as artefacts that were instrumental in the second half of the nineteenth century, a predominantly death culture, both in Britain and in the States, promoted

² Hair pieces proliferated in Victorian culture, as can be also seen in the popularity of hair albums, and the display of hair art in the 1851 Great Exhibition (Lutz, 2015a: 132).

by Queen Victoria's own mourning practices, among other reasons. Arguably, hair artefacts manifest that double quality about jewels mentioned before, both private and public, but also in keeping the memory of a dead relative alive, those objects blur the boundaries of death and life, presence and absence, past and present, human (remain) and object: "Victorian fascination with hair jewellery is just one exemplification of the fluidity and instability of these boundaries within its material culture" (Yan, 2019: 126). Magazines such as *Art Recreations* or *Ladies' Fancy Work* often regarded hair pieces, "hairlooms", as "*memento mori*", as in one article from *Ladies' Fancy Work* (qtd. in Wildgoose, 2019: 707). Interestingly, a hair jewel, a locket, constitutes a fit example of *memento mori* in Charles Dickens's life and fiction. Maria Bachman's article on the importance of lockets from the perspective of material culture unveils a connection between a grieving Dickens and the writing process of *Oliver Twist* (1840-1841), a novel in which it is patent that Dickens attempted to provide unity and coherence to the plot through an evocative object: the locket (Bachman, 2016: 40). By paying attention to the secreted story of the locket, Bachman displays the multiple associations and relations between subjects and objects, as well as the locket's "evocative capacities" in the novel: "it is an object of love and broken promises [...]; an object of mourning and memory [...]; and an object that seems to promise financial gain and security" (2016: 43). However, it is the other connection, "the other tale of a locket", in Bachman's words (2016: 49), that ties the personal with the fictional: this is about Dickens' obsession with Mary Hogarth's sudden death that took place on May 7, 1837, which greatly affected Dickens to the extent of failing to meet one submission deadline when he was working on *Oliver Twist*, as Bachman mentions, which had never occurred before. So traumatised was the writer, and so great was his loss that he decided to wear a *memento mori* —a locket that had belonged to Mary was turned into a mourning locket as it contained a lock of Mary's hair. According to Bachman, it is possible to argue that this locket may have evoked so many associations that it finally found its way into fiction, in *Oliver Twist*: "Dickens's entanglement with these material surrogates for Mary Hogarth impacted [...] the direction and flow of the narrative" (2016: 51).

In her well-known study *Representations of Hair in Victorian Literature and Culture* (2009), Galia Ofek affirms that there was a craze for hair jewellery, for hair memorabilia, both sentimental and mourning one, in nineteenth century Europe and America, and that it was a fetish, conjoining "human beings and objects, possessors and possessed, spirit and matter, mass industry and the most sacred personal emotions" (45). It was not only a domestic craft to be performed by the middle-class in their environments, as explained before, but it also became an industry. Then, the three most notorious hair specialists were George Dewdney, Anthony Forrer, and Charles Packer (Yan, 2019: 136), who attended to the Queen (this applies to Dewdney and Packer), and who also advertised their abilities and talents as hair artists, thus

turning their hairwork into profitable activities, pointing out the “relationship between consumerism and craftwork in the mid-Victorian era” (Yan, 2019: 136). Along these lines, Catherine Chidgey’s *The Transformation: A Novel* (2005) unfolds the story of a *perruquier*, Lucien Goulett III, “an Artist in Hair” (Chidgey, 2005: 59), who, having fled from a mysterious past in France, ends up in Tampa (Florida) in the last decade of the nineteenth century, to work making wigs and other hair artefacts. His first-person narrative interweaves with that of Marion Unger, a local widow, whose story is told in third person. As the novel progresses, they will become entangled in a story focused on the *perruquier*’s fixation with Marion’s golden hair. In her review of the novel, Justine Jordan states that this is a novel where everything “comes back to hair” (2005: n.p.): the monstrous Lucien provides the reader with detailed information about hair, hairwork and his own tricks to obtain enough supply:

There is a belief that the hair of cadavers is of inferior quality. In my opinion this rumor springs from the unease the vain feel when confronted with death: they do not wish to entertain the thought that their postiche has been fashioned from the tresses of a corpse. [...] I am happy to confirm that the dead of hospitals and prisons provide a reliable supply. (Chidgey, 2005: 65)

The *perruquier*’s obsession with Marion’s hair to accomplish her “transformation” (he is determined to make for her such a hairpiece that would surpass any other hair artefact made before) is clearly manifested in his ramblings as a madman, and ends up involving a young Cuban, Rafael Méndez, who works in the cigar factory, in his mad plot. Rafael will have to cross boundaries of all sorts, scavenging and desecrating tombs and sacred places only to collect valuable hair, and to satisfy the *perruquier*’s obsessive hairwork. As those above-mentioned hair artists, the *perruquier* makes a living trading with hair, which helps the reader contextualise and see the relevance of hair as merchandise in nineteenth-century America, more specifically, Tampa, the setting of the novel, in the years before and after the Cuban War of Independence (1895-1898). These three characters will build up a triangle of friendship, hairwork and madness in which a hair artefact, Marion’s “transformation”, functions as catalyst to reveal the characters’ true natures. Because of the *perruquier*’s evil dealings, Marion finds Rafael hurt when he is scavenging her trash bins looking for her combs. This fits some topical references to hair as polluted or contaminated because of hair artists’ malpractice, which was frequently mentioned in magazines and articles: “[i]n February 1875, the *Ladies’ Gazette of Fashion* warned its readers against ‘human-hair trade’, which provided supplies from drains and gutters. [...] the concept of boundary ambiguity seems to be at stake [...] the main house and its ‘dirty’ margins (the gutter and the drains)” (Ofek, 2009: 9-10). All in all, *The Transformation* provides useful information about hair and hairwork in the nineteenth century, including hair jewellery, underlining the differences between manufactured hair jewels (created by

a professional like the *perruquier*) and home-crafted ones, which were poorly made, in his view: “[a] number of disastrously home-crafted examples may be seen on the earlobes, wrists, cuffs, and bosoms of the citizens of Tampa, but thankfully there are some wise souls who choose to employ a professional, an Artist in Hair, to do the job” (Chidgey, 2005: 60). This happens to Marion, who decides to order a bracelet as a mourning jewel, a relic from her deceased husband, because she finds herself unable to hand-craft a hair piece on her own:

She had seen other women wearing beautiful pieces of mourning jewelry fashioned from the hair of the dead —buttons and lockets and rings, braided bracelets and watch guards caught with heart clasps, brooches of willow trees weeping over graves. When Jack had died she had taken the pair of small, sharp scissors she used for embroidery and cut a small section of hair from the back of his head. [...] She was not good with her hands [...] and she did not think she could have borne it had she made a bad job, for once the hair was ruined there was no more. (Chidgey, 2005: 100-101)

On seeing the manufactured piece finished (in which not only her hair, but also the *perruquier*'s hair had been braided without her knowing), Marion cannot help but share with the artist the feelings the hair artefact evokes:

The craftsmanship was so fine she hardly dared touch it, but the wig-maker lifted it from the box and fastened it about her wrist. [...] Marion felt her throat tightening with tears. “Poor Jack,” she said, surprised to hear herself speaking his name. She never mentioned him to strangers, but she felt suddenly grateful to the wig-maker who had woven this beautiful memento for her. [...] She gave him segments of information that, until then, she had kept stored inside herself, as untouched as the contents of an attic. (Chidgey, 2005: 174)

When Marion wears the hair-braided bracelet and touches it, emotions are evoked and memories are activated through a framework of sensoriality, thus dissolving the boundaries between past (when her husband Jack was alive) and present (that shared moment with the hair artist), between subject and object, between death and life. Therefore, as seen in the above passage, the hair jewel encapsulates how Victorian death culture entangled a web of meanings and feelings between subjects and objects, providing tangible relics of the beloved's dead body as a death keepsake.

Deborah Lutz's *Relics of Death in Victorian Literature and Culture* (2015) tackles relic culture in Victorian Britain and makes a distinction between the relics of the famous, as part of Victorian celebrity culture, and the relics of individuals whose value is circumscribed to a few people, when the relics filtered popular culture. In her

discussion of relic culture, she resorts to medieval times and the power invested in saints' relics, and she devotes a whole chapter to hair jewellery in Victorian literature and culture, secular mementos commemorating loss while simultaneously (and paradoxically) preserving life. Lutz delves into the permanence and durability of hair (compared to other body parts) even after death, and incrusting hair into a jewel reinforces the idea of duration and survival: “[t]he play of presence and absence begins when the relic is touched—the fragment of the body and the memories are *here*, the being itself, its whole corporeality, *gone*” (Lutz, 2015a: 137; emphasis original). Then, as death keepsakes, hairwork contains multiple temporalities (polytemporality) in which different moments intersect, including that of the wearer and that of the reader/viewer: hair jewels were considered (and still are) “portable materials of stopped time” (Lutz, 2015a: 144), and manifested a desire to contact the dead in a tangible manner, to make them permanent against decay and loss. Lutz refers to well-known examples of hair pieces as relics in Victorian literature, for example, in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847), in Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* (1853), and in Thomas Hardy’s *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874).³

Acknowledging the multiple temporalities of hairwork underlines the ways in which “hair jewellery materializes grief as secular reliquary and micro-museum” (Pointon, 1999: 56). In this sense, Deborah Lutz’s *The Brontë Cabinet: Three Lives in Nine Objects* (2015) represents both a secular reliquary and a museum or cabinet of curiosities.⁴ Holding an ambiguous status in between biography (through the objects the Brontë possessed and daily used), literary criticism and artefact, Lutz’s work has fascinated critics and Brontë followers since its publication. Special attention should be given to chapter 7, “Death Made Material”, where hair artefacts are mentioned and described not only in relation to the Brontë family, but also in the context of Victorian death culture. Lutz affirms that when Ellen Nussey died (Charlotte Brontë’s closest friend), “she had at least three hair bracelets, four hair brooches, a hair ring, and a couple of loose locks, much of it hair from the Brontë family” (Lutz, 2015b: 200), which attests to the popularity of hair jewellery in the family and in Victorian culture as a whole. Furthermore, hairwork connected with the Brontës can be found in libraries and museums in Europe and in the States, which constitutes “a collection of

³ A contemporary case in point is Laura Purcell’s *Bone China* (2019), a novel which briefly refers to a hair jewel, a mourning ring, where the protagonist’s deceased wife’s hair, “plaited with that of the two children” (196), keeps to sustain the atmosphere of death and loss permeating this neo-Victorian novel. This interplay between past and present, subjects and objects, calls for the power invested in these hair jewels, also in contemporary fiction.

⁴ I have addressed Lutz’s *The Brontë Cabinet* in connection with memorabilia and objects in a chapter in the collection *Neo-Victorian Things: Reimagining Nineteenth Century Material Cultures*, edited by Danielle Dove and Alice Kroll (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, in press).

fragments of the dead” (Lutz, 2015b: 202), and which fuels the Brontë fandom’s desire for a physical connection with those material remnants, traces, as secular pilgrimages.⁵

Significantly, if a museum can be understood “as a massive collective defence against death, so the individual mourning jewel functions as a museum in miniature” (Pointon, 1999: 42), arresting time and loss and preserving life through evocative objects. Hair displayed in museums, installations and exhibitions has been a source of interest for artists, critics and curators alike. There are several hair museums across the world, and it is impossible to calibrate the number of hair clippings and samples in museums, such as the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, which had been collected by individuals “between the 1860s and the 1940s” (Tarlo, 2016: 262). These items have lost neither their evocative power, nor their relevance to the past, and to the present: “the hair held in the collections of the Pitt Rivers and other museums is attracting a very different type of attention from some of the descendants of those from whom it was originally taken” (Tarlo, 2016: 267). In the last ten years, controversy over hair has been heated, as to whether or not it is considered human tissue, which finally comes down to the ambiguity of hair as a bodily component. Jane Wildgoose has done research into “the unique status” ascribed to human remains, such as hair, in museums, as well as into the ways in which human remains can be studied as *objects*, and as *subjects*. Moreover, she poses the following research question: “[h]ow may an artist’s comparative study of the collection, interpretation and exhibition of human skulls for scientific research, contribute to public understanding of the legacy and ‘unique status’ of human remains in museum collections today?” (Wildgoose, 2019: 703; DCMS, 2005: 7, 8, 16). She acknowledges that “the question of human remains in museums is a developing issue” (2005: 8), and that it is one topic that needs to be treated with sensitiveness to different cultures and beliefs. In fact, the 2005 document *Guidance for the Care of Human Remains* was amended in 2008 “to include in the category of human remains ‘hair and nails, taken post-mortem’”. In other words, hair removed from people after they have died is classified as a form of human remains” (Tarlo, 2016: 270). Therefore, ethical concerns come to the fore when using hair remnants to create works of art. Interestingly, Esther R. Berry examines sculptural portraits by artist Loren Schwerd, on hair pieces found after the 2005 Hurricane Katrina, which function as memorials to African-American victims, drawing on the Victorian hairwork and the power of those hair artefacts as death keepsakes to evoke past bodies and lives, as well as to underline endurance and permanence through the object. Then, “while Schwerd’s portraits refer to the techniques and meanings of Victorian hairwork for private mourning and remembrance, they also deepen these associations in conjuring historical memory and making ‘Black lives matter’ in public

⁵ For more information about the Brontës and relic culture, see the chapter “Migrant Relics” in Lutz (2015a).

mourning and memorial” (Berry, 2019: 3). More than ever, in the current context of “Black Lives Matter”, hair jewellery proves to have a long-lasting life beyond Victorian material practices.

To conclude, I have discussed hair jewellery, mostly mourning pieces, as part of Victorian material culture, and as an intrinsic component of nineteenth-century death culture, which manifested a desire both to memorialise the dead and to arrest time and death by incrusting a human remain, a relic, in an object. Its endurance and longevity prove that the hair jewel can be considered as a polytemporal object that dissolves time limits, crisscrossing time and space, probing the boundaries between subject and object, death and life. As I have demonstrated, the object (read, a hair jewel), as a material trace, is a locus of memory, but it is also an embodied presence flattening out different space/s and temporalities, and encompassing past, present and future. In so doing, the hair piece allows for a meditation on the entanglements of subjects and objects, the Victorian past and the present, through sensorial engagement, which manifests the affective interaction between the Victorian past and today’s culture. Clearly, hair jewellery, as evocative objects in literature and culture, continues to have a long-lasting influence today through artwork and museum installations, as well as through the representation in neo-Victorian works and artefacts, which illustrate our contemporary fascination with things Victorian, and the impact of Victorian engagement with materiality upon our current anxieties and preoccupations with (dis)embodiment and human connectedness today.

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