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Intimate Things, Remembrance, Elegiac Remnants

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ABSTRACT

The embodied afterlife of the slow intimacy between wearer and worn is what makes the left-behind clothing of the beloved dead the memory-scented remnants of their life that we hold on to, wear, and wrap around ourselves for solace in an attempt to bring them back to us. It is not surprising, then, that the poetry of mourning or elegy, which is the focus of this article, is often shaped around such a mnemonic and metonymic intimate thing. But, as the poems discussed here intimate, the clothing of the dead also stirs less straightforward emotions and the conundrum of what to do with these remains sometimes surfaces love's hidden ambivalence. Tracing the afterlives of these remnants in examples from life and literature, this article offers a feminist reflection on the variable textures and textualities of slow intimacy as wearing, mourning, and reading practice.

Keywords: elegy, intimate things, memory, mourning, remnants

For my mother, whose too brief life left few material remnants.

We imbue some of the things we accrue and carry with us and sometimes lose with memories and use them as prompts for the stories we tell about our lives. Portable personal memorials, they materialise emotions and sensations from the past, vividly calling to mind a particular time, beloved person, animal companion, place. They make us remember ourselves as we once were or wanted to be. Most intimate of such intimately evocative things are the clothes worn over time by someone we had loved and lost. Peter Stallybrass movingly describes how his attempts at invoking the presence of his friend Allon White after his death had failed until he had worn the handmade jacket that had belonged to him to a conference and had been undone by emotion while reading his paper:

> And then, as I began to read, I was inhabited by his presence, taken over. If I wore the jacket, Allon wore me. He was there in the wrinkles of the elbows, wrinkles which in the technical jargon of sewing are called 'memory'; he was there in the stains at the very bottom of the jacket; he was there in the smell of the armpits. Above all, he was there in the smell. (Stallybrass, 1993: 36)

Mnemonic and metonymic, the clothes of the beloved dead are the reliquaries of their embodied presence in the persistence of smells, stains, creases, as much as of the unbearable absence their empty lifelessness confirms. Yes, we murmur, it was there … then … when … fingering memories like prayer beads in the ritual of remembering, scenting out faint traces of their dear body's familiar incense. 'When someone dies, the clothes are so sad. They have outlived / their usefulness and cannot get warm and full', says the speaker in an Emily Fragos poem, as she 'explain[s] death' to the personified clothes of the 'spouse' who 'is not coming back', consoling herself by consoling them (2015: n. p.). It is not surprising that we often find these mysterious, memory-saturated remnants of a life at the heart of the poetry of mourning or elegy, a genre Diane Fuss valorises for the 'considerable reparative powers' there are in its 'earnest attempt to buoy the living by holding on to the dead', prompting her to describe elegy as 'the poetic equivalent of a human life preserver' (2013: 6, 7).

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INTIMATE THINGS

A memory from my childhood, partly true, partly fabricated, as memories tend to be. I must have been five or six, and made curious by my young aunts' excited whispers, my grandmother's stern disapproval, I discovered, by eavesdropping outside my grandmother's bedroom, the latest small-town scandal of a man caught in adultery because he had kept the 'intimate things' of his lover in the cubby-hole of his car. The barely stifled wild hilarity of my recently married aunts' breathless riffing on the theme of things in holes and my grandmother's fierce admonishments were what drew me in then and delight me still. They were scandalised and fascinated too, turned-on by the intensity of his desire that would risk discovery by keeping the panties – as I discovered the 'intimate things' were – of his lover with him on his daily drives, perhaps even to the place where we lived. Its sexiness was breath-taking. What did it all mean, I wondered, this man driving around with the panties of a woman not his wife in his car, why were they there, had she lost them, how and where, was she looking for them, how did he find them, was he returning them to her, why were my aunts and grandmother so worked up about them, laughing and cross at the same time, and why did it all make me feel strangely feverish, enthralled, confused?

Prompted from the unconscious, my memory vignette materialises around the enigmatic 'intimate thing' at the centre of this scene of women's secret talking about secret, bodily things, underneath which tugs the undertow of an often awkward, shaming knowledge of embarrassing stains and smells. 'Intimate things' – that useful doubled euphemism for women's underwear and the 'private parts' 'down there' they touch and hide. Writing about secrets and hiding places, Gaston Bachelard notes that 'all intimacy hides from view' because intimacy is equated with what is private and associated with the sexual (in Hunt, 2014: 226). My aunts' charged metonymic play with the cubby-hole as vagina – a word that would have triggered wilder hilarity still, I imagine, but one they would not have used despite being nurses – registers the ambivalence triggered by the panties' public circulation, actual in the car's traversal of the neighbourhood and discursive in the gossip that spread like wildfire as the secret, female, sexual, shameful thing became, in Foucault's terms, 'an incitement to discourse' (1990: 34). The panties had, of course, been worn and were not clean as panties ought to be, as my young self knew then by taking her cue from the grandmother's especial indignation at this reiterated detail of the story. I believe now that what stirred my aunts' desire as much as it did their disquiet was the intimation that for the lovers the panties had not been a thing of shame but a treasured erotic mnemonic.

MOMENTS OF BEING

Preparing to write this paper a lifetime later, the memory unexpectedly surfaces as one of those 'moments of being' Virginia Woolf describes in her brief memoir 'A Sketch of the Past' written near the end of her life (1939–1940). These 'exceptional moments', she writes, stand out from 'the cotton wool of daily life', revealing a 'hidden pattern' which 'is or will become a revelation of some order' because 'it is a token of some real thing behind appearances'; 'make[ing it] real by putting it into words' is a process she describes as 'a great delight', 'the strongest pleasure', and 'rapture' (Woolf, 1985: 72). As Jeanne Schulkind explains in her introduction to these autobiographical sketches, 'memory is the means by which the individual builds up patterns of personal significance to which to anchor his or her life and secure it against the "lash of the random unheeding flail"', an image Woolf uses to describe the emotional devastation her parents' death caused her (1985: 21). These intense, revelatory, and enduring memories that are an impetus to writing are almost without fail imbricated with loss, as the 'first memory' of the patterned cloth of her mother's dress in the memoir shows. Recollected as her infant self's sense of physical intimacy with her mother's body, of sitting 'on her lap' and seeing 'the flowers [of the dress] she was wearing very close', the memory endures in the immediacy of sensory detail qualified by the uncertainties of recall when the adult woman 'can still see purple and red and blue, I think, against the black; they must have been anemones, I suppose' (Woolf, 1985: 64).

It is only later in the sketch that the significance of this memory and its substitution of the mother's dress for her body emerges in Woolf's reflection on 'the influence of [her] mother' who was 'in the very centre of that great Cathedral space which was childhood' and who after her early death 'obsessed' Woolf until she wrote *To the Lighthouse* when she was forty-four (Woolf, 1985: 81). She initiates this extended meditation on memory, loss, and writing by considering,

> How immense must be the force of life which turns a baby, who can just distinguish a great blot of blue and purple on a black background, into the child who thirteen years later can feel all that I felt on May 5th 1895 – now almost exactly to a day, forty-four years ago – when my mother died. (Woolf, 1985: 79)

The sensory details of the recollection are reiterated and elaborated again in relation to the mother's dress when a few pages later she writes, '[m]y first memory is of her lap; the scratch of some beads on her dress comes back to

me as I pressed my cheek against it', with the interruption 'comes back to me' creating a syntactical entanglement of past and present that is typical of bodily remembering.

VIBRANT MATERIALITY

My memory's retrieval of a piece of clothing as a complex marker of intimacy carries a very different emotional charge than Woolf's memory does, although similarly entangled with maternal loss and its long-term consequences. Both experiences however show in their different ways how '[o]bjects become mnemonic *things* when they become part of a meaningful assemblage', as Linsey A. Freeman, Benjamin Nienass, and Rachel Daniel argue (2016: 4, original emphasis), which also accounts for the narrativising impulse they inspire. These authors suggestively convey the peculiar intimacies of the human-clo/thing assemblage when they point out that it is 'when they have rubbed up against the human in a memorable way (or when the human has rubbed up against them)' that 'traces of past experiences have been created with and held within them' (2016: 4), thus explaining the density of associative memory clothes continue to carry. Drawing on Jane Bennett's theory of 'vital materiality' or 'vibrant matter', they see 'objects as vibrating with history and memory, objects resonating in shared vibrations with persons' (Freeman, Nienass and Daniel, 2016: 6; Bennett, 2010). Of such memory-freighted vibrant things, it is, perhaps, an item of worn clothing that best embodies the 'energetic substantiality' that Bennett associates with 'thing-power' as it 'commands attention, exudes a kind of dignity, provokes poetry' or even 'inspires fear' (Bennett, 2004: 350).

Here, the seventeenth-century poet Robert Herrick's 'Upon Julia's Clothes' immediately comes to mind:

> When as in silks my *Julia* goes,
> Then, then (me thinks) how sweetly flowes
> That liquefaction of her clothes.
>
> Next, when I cast mine eyes, and see
> That brave Vibration each way free;
> O how that glittering taketh me! (1968: 261)

The poem appears to have nothing to do with memory or loss or history beyond the immediate enthralment of the lover to whom, as the critic John Roe points out, 'an unyielding, free Julia appeals […] more than an obliging, complaisant one' (1999: 354). While it might lack Herrick's overt use of the *carpe diem* theme evident in his 'To Virgins, to Make Much of Time', the poem's celebration of Julia's erotic playfulness in which her body and clothes merge in a swirl of *jouissance* implicitly conveys her vitality and unselfconscious abandon as 'brave' in the face of life's uncertainty and brevity, the fact of her mortality as much as his. Rather than fear, however, Julia's silk dress inspires awe in the speaker, and it would retain in the folds of its delicate fabric the memory of this 'glittering' moment of being for him if she should die.

Something of the same delighted celebration – and cerebration – of the 'vital materiality' of clothes appears in Woolf's novel *Orlando: A Biography* written for and about Vita Sackville-West. Described by Sackville-West's son Nigel Nicolson as 'the longest and most charming love-letter in literature', in it:

> Virginia explores Vita, weaves her in and out of the centuries, tosses her from one sex to the other, plays with her, dresses her in furs, lace and emeralds, teases her, flirts with her, drops a veil of mist around her, and ends by photographing her in the mud at Long Barn, with dogs, awaiting Virginia's arrival next day. (1973: 209)

The novel is configured as the biography of its protagonist who lives for 350 years and changes sex during the narrative, a conceit that prompts the narrator of this love-letter novel into a disquisition on the adage that clothes maketh the man and, of course, the woman, thus anticipating Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity by almost a century. 'Vain trifles as they seem, clothes have […] more important offices than merely to keep us warm', the narrator avers (Woolf, 1942: 108). 'They change our view of the world and the world's view of us', and, he continues, 'there is much to support the view that it is clothes that wear us and not we them' because, although 'we may make them take the mould of arm or breast', clothes 'would mould our hearts, our brains, our tongues to their liking' (Woolf, [1928] 1942: 108). There is an echo of these words behind Stallybrass's often-quoted description of his friend's jacket in the essay referred to above in which he reminds us that '[b]odies come and go; the clothes which have received those bodies survive' and continue 'to carry the absent body, memory' (1993: 45, 37).

This embodied afterlife of the intimacy between wearer and worn is what makes clothes the memory-scented remnants of a life that we often hold on to, wear, and wrap around ourselves for solace in an attempt to bring the longed-for dead back to life, welcoming, like Stallybrass does, their haunting touch. Reflecting on her partner's illness and death in 'Darning Mark's Jumper: Wearing Love and Sorrow', Karin De Perthuis finds consolation in Stallybrass's essay when she recognises that:

> *This* is the embodiment of grief, of mourning. Unexpected garments – a ragged jumper, an old jacket – are not what you wear to mourn; rather, the wearing is the mourning itself, the materialisation of the absent body. To believe in the possibility of such haunting is to banish the notion that clothes are empty of the person who once wore them. Instead of inanimate, ghostly and empty, they are poetic, vital and alive; the dress, the jacket, the jumper, a body remembered. Maybe even (why not?), its soul. (De Perthuis, 2016: 68, original emphasis)

Sleeping in her partner's jumper after his death, she is 'wrapped in arms that once wrapped him', the scratch of its 'prickly wool' on her skin 'consoling [her] deeply', which in turn prompts 'vivid, potent dreams' of him (De Perthuis, 2016: 61). In her essay on clothing as archives of memory, Carole Hunt singles out this 'suggestive power of textiles to communicate memory and meaning through properties other than the purely visual [such as] evocations of sound, touch, smell and warmth' (Hunt, 2014: 226). These are the ephemeral languages of the private, the near, the slow, the intimate that we associate with being connected to another body (and, yes, soul), the loss of which we feel on the skin, in the gut, in the heart's ache, on the tongue. If these are the senses of loss and severance for which the poetry of mourning or elegy attempts to find words, then it often similarly drapes itself in the worn garments of the beloved dead, whether lover, parent, or child.

ELEGIAC REMNANTS

'[F]rom its inception', Fuss writes in *Dying Modern*, the elegy was defined by 'the dance of eros and Thanatos' because 'elegiac utterances were provoked by the loss of what one desired and the desire for what one lost' (Fuss, 2013: 6). This dance is at the heart of Donald Hall's collection of poems titled *Without* published after the death at 47 of his wife the poet Jane Kenyon. One gets a vivid sense of the character of the companion, collaborator, and lover he grieves and celebrates from Kenyon's own clever, delightfully sexy clothes-poem 'The Shirt':

> The shirt touches his neck
> and smooths over his back.
> It slides down his sides.
> It even goes down below his belt –
> down into his pants.
> Lucky shirt. (Kenyon, 2020: 7)

In 'Last Days' and 'Letter in Autumn', references to Kenyon's clothing recur in the speaker's attempts to come to terms with her death and his failure to do so as he must contrive to live without her. In these memorialising threnodies, the domestic details of their everyday life together at Eagle Pond Farm during their 23-year-long marriage are anchored in the erotic, in their 'painted Victorian bed' (Hall, 1999: 62). 'Last Days' catalogues their meticulously practical, rational preparation for her inevitable death following the 'terrible news' that '[t]he leukemia is back' and that '[t]here's nothing to do' as she returns to 'die at home' in this marriage bed which she had at an earlier time decorated with festive lights for his recovery after hospitalisation (Hall, 1999: 35), both of them expecting her to outlive him because of the nineteen-year age difference, as he noted in an interview (Hall in Cramer and Hall, 1998/1999: 496). Taking refuge in the distancing use of third-person pronouns, Hall's speaker recounts how the couple prepared poems for her new collection and 'picked / hymns for her funeral, and supplied each / other words as they wrote / and revised her obituary' (Hall, 1999: 37). Later, as if compelled into an even harsher realism by the imminent ravages of bereavement, he asked, 'What clothes / should we dress you in, when we bury you?' and together they decided on 'her favorite Indian silk they bought / in Pondicherry a year /and a half before, which she wore for best / or prettiest afterward' (Hall, 1999: 38). This prompted recollections of 'their / adventures – driving through England / when they first married, and excursions to China and India', and '[a]lso they remembered / ordinary days – pond summers, working /on poems / together, / walking the dog, reading Chekhov / aloud' (Hall, 1999: 38). These are the bearable memories with which their life together is surveyed as a continuum of shared experience, habit, routine, and ritual that can be spoken of with humour and a degree of equilibrium as they approach the abyss of separation. It is a retreat from its devastation that cannot be sustained, however, and '[w]hen he praised / thousands of afternoon assignations / that carried them into / bliss and repose

on this painted bed, / Jane burst into tears / and cried, "No more fucking. No more fucking!"' (Hall, 1999: 40). Throughout the poem, Hall archives Kenyon's voice in direct speech, a calm, charming participant in a final conversation up to this point of crisis, here, when her control at last gives way at the realisation that such bodily pleasures, such vital intimacies are at an end.

Written six months after Kenyon's death, 'Letter in Autumn' eschews distance for the immediacy of the speaker's grief as the direct address of the epistolary form is used to tell her what his life is like without her. Their bed recurs as symbolic of their marriage and of her death, which Hall as speaker implies was also the death of what comprised the 'we' of their relationship and consequently the death of who he was with her when he writes,

> I sleep where we lived and died / in the painted Victorian bed / under the tiny lights / you strung on the headboard / when you brought me home / from the hospital four years ago. / The lights still burned last April / early on a Saturday morning / while you died. (Hall, 1999: 62)

Her absence permeates their home as an irrefutable presence in what she has left behind, the intimate things of her life that remain undisturbed as if waiting for her return: her 'jeans or lotions or T-shirts' which he 'cannot discard'; her 'tumbles / of scarves and floppy hats' which he 'cannot disturb' (Hall, 1999: 62). Enumerating the rituals of perpetual mourning in his letter-poem, he tells her that their dog Gus, who 'no longer searches for you', retrieved 'one of your white slippers / from the bedroom' when guests visited, reminding them of Kenyon's absence and the urgency of finding her with this Cinderella-like slipper. In both elegies, Hall's grieving is textured by the everyday details of what being without Kenyon feels like as he mourns a marriage in which, he once explained in an interview, '[w]e found that we could be kind to each other, virtually all the time' because '[w]e were determined to be happy in our relationship' (in Cramer and Hall, 1998/1999: 509).

In 'Four Years' by Pamela Johnson Gillian, a longer period of mourning had passed, as the title suggests, and the speaker's retrospective reflection on her partner's death is narrowly inflected through the memory of his clothes and specifically the process of discarding rather than keeping them. The first line's almost blunt refusal of sentimentality asserts that '[t]he smell of him went soon / from all his shirts', recusing the speaker from what she might have implicitly rejected as a cliché of romanticised mourning by opting for a more realistic account which nevertheless still conveys the devastating loss entailed in the disappearance of that last bodily trace (Gillian, 2002: 387). As if angered by this second abandonment, this failure to comply with promise or expectation, she 'sent them for jumble, /and the sweaters and suits', but because '[t]he shoes / held more of him; he was printed / into his shoes', she 'did not burn / or throw or give them away' (Gillian, 2002: 387). In contrast to the overt personification of the clothes in Fragos's poem referred to earlier, here it is by implication in the language of punishment enacted or withheld. The shoes are saved from destruction because they retain 'more' of the essence of the man who died and are therefore uncannily alive in themselves, and, as the idiom activated here implies, difficult to step into or fill. Yet, unworn for four years, 'Time has denatured them now' and there is '[n]othing left' of the man she had loved in them (Gillian, 2002: 387, 388). The poem's tenor hinges on this brief line, in which emotion so strictly controlled in the first section starts to seep through in the second section where clothing disappears altogether to make way for the 'minute' ephemera of bodily shedding as a register of absolute absence:

> But I want to believe / that in the shifting housedust / minute presences still drift: / an eyelash, / a hard crescent cut from a fingernail, / that sometimes / between the folds of a curtain / or the covers of a book / I touch / a flake of his skin. (Gillian, 2002: 388)

As is hinted at in Gillian's poem, love's ambivalence is often surfaced or intensified by the left-behind clothes of the dead and the conundrum of what to do with them, at least partially because of the difficult emotions they stir in us. In Alison Townsend's 'My Mother's Clothes', the focus shifts from the bereaved lover's perspective in the previous poems to the daughter's as she contends with not only her own loss but her father's when, '[a]fter the party / that came after the funeral, / when the last neighbors had gone home / with their sympathy, empty casserole / dishes and promises to call soon', he 'asked her [mother's] sisters / if they wanted her clothes' (Townsend, 2002: 111). Like an awkward magician, he 'threw the closet door open', pulling out 'her fake fur coat / with the pink satin lining, / a pair of silver party shoes / she'd worn twice' and 'homemade dresses she'd sewn' like tawdry treasures or costumes for a fancy-dress party to the consternation of the aunts who 'stepped back as if / he'd struck them, or they could / catch cancer from touching / what once touched her' (Townsend, 2002: 111). The daughter, witness to her father's clumsy, well-meant act of adamant generosity and kindness, and her aunts' stubborn refusals tainted with shame and disapproval, 'wanted to hurl [her]self at their feet / and beg them to take something / even if they only threw it away / when they got home', desperate to do '[a]nything / to stop [her] father standing there, / her dresses draped in his arms / like the photographs of him / carrying her over the threshold' (Townsend, 2002: 111). This claustrophobic family scenario appears to be a world away from Stallybrass's embrace of the worn, dirty, smelly loveliness of his friend's old jacket and its 'vibrant materiality'. Yet,

here, too, a recuperation is achieved through the daughter's compassion for her father which causes the visual conflation – a kind of double-exposure effect – of the present moment of loss they find themselves in, figured in the mother's empty dresses the father holds in his arms, and the fullness of the past moment in all its potentiality captured in the photograph which had most likely been taken on the day of her parents' wedding. She remembers *for* him, one might say, when he is overwhelmed by grief into a stubborn pragmatism as he faces this other 'threshold', death, over which in a metonymic transposition he carries his wife's dresses. As Margaret Gibson explains, '[w]hile getting rid of objects quickly is a response to grief, even an act of grief, it is also a way of blocking emotion and a contemplative process' (2008: 17).

But what of the daughter's grief? This image of her young parents is the pivot on which the elegy tilts into a deeper interiority, precipitated by the speaker's sense of failure to intervene in the stalled exchange between her father and aunts:

> But all I could do was stand / in the closet later for hours, / shutting the door, and wrapping / myself in the shape and scent / of what remained of her, / until the pain left and I slept, / and my father found me, / curled under the fur coat, / with the pink satin lining, / my cheek pillowed against / the sparkling silver shoes / he took to Goodwill / the next morning (Townsend, 2008: 111).

Her act of retreat in which she shuts herself into the wardrobe with her mother's clothes constitutes a juxtapositional corrective of the father's earlier throwing open of its door that reclaims the private intimacies of mourning the mother's body – 'the shape and scent / of what remained of her'. It is also a burrowing back to the intensely physical, animal intimacies between mother and daughter that adulthood precludes and for which the feral comfort of 'the fur coat, / with the pink satin lining' under which she falls asleep is a surrogate. As the final line of the poem confirms, the clothes were given away, but there is a reassuring gentleness, a suggestion of caring and respectful passing on and the promise of an afterlife for these clothes in the word 'Goodwill' which differs markedly from 'sen[ding] them for jumble' as Gillian's speaker does with her husband's clothes.

I conclude my discussion of this narrowly specific sample of poems with an excerpt from Paula Meehan's beautiful elegy 'Child Burial' in which the grieving mother speaks to the dead child as she prepares his body for burial as if preparing him for a long journey. 'I chose your grave clothes with care', she tells him, having selected his 'favourite stripey shirt' and 'blue cotton trousers' in an honouring of the child's preferences that the mother carries with her as sure knowledge and perpetual memory (Meehan, 1991: 29). That this is also a giving up of something essential of his that could have been held on to is implicit because '[t]hey smelt of woodsmoke, of October, / your own smell there too' (Meehan, 1991: 29). Carefully, caringly she 'chose a gansy of handspun wool, / warm and fleecy' because '[i]t is so cold down in the dark', as if the child were still alive and vulnerable to the harsh elements (Meehan, 1991: 29). Anne Fogarty describes this aspect of the poem as 'the mother's feverish attempt to perpetuate her child's existence' but notes that 'the tactile nature of these garments serves ultimately only to underline his absence' (Fogarty, 2009: 219). The transition into a realisation of loss and the finality of separation is apparent in this line which leads to the mother's more explicit readying of the child for this other life beyond life that he enters without her in which, she forewarns him, 'No light can reach you and teach you / the paths of wild birds, / the names of the flowers, / the fishes, the creatures. / Ignorant you must remain / of the sun and its work' (Meehan, 1991: 29). The reiterated 'you' of her address keeps the child present in the ambit of the poem's interlocutory scene as the mother rehearses the instructions of and in nature the child would as a matter of course have learnt had he lived, which both he and she must now forego. There is in this mourning turn to nature something of the myth of Persephone and her mother Demeter's devastating anguish at her loss to Hades that haunts the elegy. This maternal anguish, though contained in her initial lessoning of her small child in death's deprivations, erupts in a pitiful keening of endearments that emphasise his smallness and vulnerability: 'my lamb, my calf, my eaglet, / my cub, my kid, my nestling, / my suckling, my colt' (Meehan, 1991: 29).

READING INTIMATELY

As I have endeavoured to show in this article, mourning – in life and literature – is often mediated by the left-behind clothing of the dead which carries in folds, stains, scent their 'human imprint' (Stallybrass, 1993: 57) imparted by what I have here described as the slow intimacy between wearer and worn. The reading of elegy instantiates a similar slow intimacy between reader and poem because it is premised on our unhurried, vulnerable opening of ourselves to the bereavement of others. In her introduction to the collection of essays in *Scenes of Intimacy: Reading, Writing and Theorizing Contemporary Literature*, Jennifer Cooke notes how 'different types of reading are productive of different textual intimacies' and she suggests that '[a]cademically attentive close reading is one form of intimate engagement with a text' (Cooke, 2013: 4). This essay and others written for the original conference and this special issue are in their different ways responses to the implicit invitation extended to us not only to think

about slow intimacy but to think slowly and to read the world and the word intimately. This is a kind of deep reading that is transformative, as the poet Jane Hirshfield avers, because 'attentiveness only deepens what it regards' and 'we are altered only by what can touch us', registering in the word "touch" the texturing of intimacy I have traced in my reflections in this article (1998: vii). For her, it is specifically poetry's 'transforming intimacy' that is singular since it 'enters awareness [and] is experienced as part of, as continuous with, the self' (Hirshfield, 1998: vii). As Ted Cohen has argued, in poetry and in language generally, this "achievement of intimacy" is mediated by metaphor, because '[t]here is a unique way in which the maker and the appreciator of a metaphor are drawn closer to one another' (1978: 8). In this three-step dance, he explains, 'the speaker issues a kind of concealed invitation' which 'the hearer expends a special effort to accept', which in turn 'constitutes the acknowledgment of a community' (Cohen, 1978: 8). In elegy, I have attempted to show, a piece of worn clothing can convey such a resonant invitation which we recognise and respond to with empathy, thus becoming through this softening of the boundaries of the self a part of what Fuss calls 'a community of mourners' (2013: 109). In Fuss's writing on elegy, the ambit of the communicative conviviality of metaphor suggested by Hirshfield and Cohen is enlarged to include the company of the dead, because elegies, she argues, when '[s]tripped down to their most basic impulse are answers to a call – responses to those beyond our reach, yet responses all the same', while 'they are also themselves calls – attempts to restore the bonds of communication' (2013: 109). In the few examples discussed here, a loved worn garment mediates this reciprocal calling to and from the bereaved, constituting mourning itself as a perpetual slow intimacy with the dead.

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