

The Year of Magical Thinking: The Suddenness of Grief

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“Life changes fast.

Life changes in the instant.

You sit down to dinner and life as you know it ends.

The question of self-pity.”

- The Year of Magical Thinking, Joan Didion

Contextual Review and Concept: Grief is a universal emotion that every one of us has suffered at one point or another. It is a complex and difficult emotion with a surging ebb and flow. Joan Didion captured this suddenness of loss and the ensuing grief in her memoir *The Year of Magical Thinking*. In her text, Didion documents the loss of her husband, “*You sit down to dinner and life as you know it ends.*” His death was sudden and unexpected. Although everyone experiences grief differently, we share a few common threads. To begin with, grief is very sudden and disruptive to the order and structure that we assign to life. Secondly, grief comes and goes in waves. With this coat, I wanted to capture these two aspects of grief.

“Grief is different. Grief had no distance. Grief comes in waves, paroxysms, sudden apprehensions that weaken the knees and blind the eyes and obliterate the dailiness of life”

• The Year of Magical Thinking, Joan Didion

Process, Technique, and Execution, and Cohesion: The modified hooded duffle coat is made of a duchess satin that was fully lined and interfaced with woven interfacing to add volume and stability. The color of the fabric is Victorian lilac which captures the melancholy mood associated with grief. Topstitched straight seams lend structure to the front of the coat, and deliberately emphasize the order and structure of grief. Two large patch pockets were purposefully exaggerated in size to offer the wearer a sense of comfort. The idea being, being enveloped in a soft warm place while at the same time providing a place to store objects (a photo, a necklace, perfume) related to the lost person. The voluminous back of the coat represents the heaviness of grief as well as its fluidity. Since the back is very wide and tends to push forward an interior back yoke was created to hold it all together. In addition, 4 layers of crinkled organza were hand-stitched using a stabbing stitch to create the effect of waves which signify the waxing and waning intensity of grief.

Additional structural support systems, other than the interior yoke were used in the construction of this coat. For example, stay tape was applied to the side seams and armhole seams to reinforce

the structure of the coat, while the front of the coat was fused with two types of interfacing to give it more structure and more weight. Furthermore, horsehair is used in the back hem allowance to add structure to the 4 layers of hand-stitched crinkled organza waves. Finally, a Chanel-style chain was used at the bottom of the front hem to add more weight to balance the coat. The hood provides safety to the wearer from outsiders' looks, allowing the mourner to grieve in privacy when desired. The shoulders of the coat are purposefully dropped to add softness and a sense of fragility to the wearer. The stabbing hand stitch, the inner back yoke, the horsehair, and the front chain give this coat a couture quality.

Significance, Rationale, Contribution: Starting from a book about grief, we interpreted grief, and created a garment that captures the suddenness of grief as well as the ebbs and flows of grief like waves.

Originality and Innovation: We created a unique pattern for the garment, and used the language of fashion design to communicate the concept of grief. In addition, the waves of organza bridge the distance between art and fashion design.

References

Didion, J. (2005). *The year of magical thinking*. Alfred A. Knopf

