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978-1-107-07744-7 - Relics of Death in Victorian Literature and Culture

Deborah Lutz

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AND CULTURE

Nineteenth-century Britons treasured objects of daily life that had once belonged to their dead. The love of these keepsakes, which included hair, teeth, and other remains, speaks of an intimacy with the body and death, a way of understanding absence through its materials, which is less widely felt today. Deborah Lutz analyzes relic culture as an affirmation that objects held memories and told stories. These practices show a belief in keeping death vitally intertwined with life – not as *memento mori* but rather as respecting the singularity of unique beings. In a consumer culture in full swing by the 1850s, keepsakes of loved ones stood out as nonreproducible, authentic things whose value was purely personal. Through close reading of the works of Charles Dickens, Emily Brontë, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Thomas Hardy, and others, this study illuminates the treasuring of objects that had belonged to or touched the dead.

DEBORAH LUTZ is Associate Professor of Victorian Literature and Culture at Long Island University, C. W. Post Campus. She is the author of *Pleasure Bound: Victorian Sex Rebels and the New Eroticism* (2011) and *The Dangerous Lover: Gothic Villains, Byronism, and the Nineteenth-Century Seduction Narrative* (2006).

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For Mindy Duncan Lutz
April 20, 1971 – March 12, 2007
and
Stella Lutz
February 1996 – May 25, 2007

*But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.*

—Tennyson

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