



Desiring the Dead: Necrophilia and Nineteenth-century French Literature (Legenda)

Prof. Lisa Downing

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In the nineteenth century, literature shared with the medical and psychological sciences a strategy of examining the most extreme manifestations of human desire. While fetishism, sadism and masochism still resonate as concepts with critical currency, necrophilia has received little attention. In this groundbreaking study, Lisa Downing rescues necrophilia from the margins of sexual desire, relocating it as a symptom and a pervasive fantasy of modern subjectivity. Drawing case material from the nineteenth-century French canon the author brings works by Baudelaire and Rachilde into dialogue with foundational European texts of sexology and psychoanalysis. She reads against the grain of traditional Freudian theories of sexuality, the conventions of nineteenth-century literary scholarship, and feminist critiques of the 'masculine' morbid aesthetic in order to bring to light a model of desire whose problematic nature afflicts existing discourses about sexuality and gender in nineteenth-century France and beyond.

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