

Representations of Hair in Victorian Literature and Culture by Galia Ofek. Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2009. xi, 271 pp. + 14 colour plates, 18 b/w illus. ISBN 978-0-7546-6161-0. \$99.95; £55.00.

For the modest price of seven dollars, hair fetishists may purchase a jar of jam containing a speck of the late Princess Diana's hair, infused with gin, then combined with milk and sugar. Boasting that the jam represents a "small triumph over mortality," the London catering firm of Bompas and Parr created this delicacy for sale at the June 2010 "Surreal House" exhibition at the Barbican Gallery (<http://www.jellymongers.co.uk/>). An attentive semiotic interpreter such as Galia Ofek, author of *Representations of Hair in Victorian Literature and Culture*, would no doubt appreciate Bompas and Parr's attempt to preserve, in comestible form, the Victorians' "widely trafficked and consumed" system of hair signs.

That traffic in hair continues, though in altered form: latter-day collectors of Victorian hair will almost always find a trove of capillary treasures on eBay. On offer recently were a cameo mourning locket enclosing intricately braided light-brown hair (\$350); a brass "sweet-heart" locket with interwoven blond and brown hair (\$240); a watch fob made of woven hair (\$65); and a brass mourning locket for a baby, containing an infantine curl (\$195). Such objects, even now, convey a multitude of meanings. Their monetary value underscores not only the persistence of the Victorian predilection for building collections of curiosities, but also our own cultural fascination with Victorian objects, costumes, personalities, and narratives. Manufactured for the preservation and display of hair mementos, these lockets and brooches epitomize the connection between hair-fetishism and systems of commodification and marketing in the Victorian period. And like faded snapshots of strangers, the hair objects tell – and also, inevitably, withhold – lost stories: the anguish of the grieving mother who snipped her dead baby's curls; the bashfulness (or boldness) of the young woman who asked her fiancé for a lock of his hair to braid with her own; the doting woman who transformed the hair of a loved one – whether living or dead – into an intricately braided artefact.

These objects evoke, too, the cultural and temporal distance between us and the Victorians whose preoccupation with hair – especially women's hair – both created and reflected a complex and sometimes contradictory system of important cultural signs. As Ofek argues, in mid-to-late nineteenth-century England, women's hair became "the site where different definitions of fetish worship intersected and often overlapped, merging the commercial, the sexual and the social aspects of fetishism into an important cultural discourse." Expressions of this complex and ubiquitous discourse included the manufacturing and advertising of hair artefacts, hair-working kits, and hair-care products;