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Continuing Bonds with the Dead: Parental Grief and Nineteenth-Century American Authors (Amer Lit Realism & Naturalism)

Harold K. Bush

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Harold K. Bush's *Continuing Bonds with the Dead* examines the profound transfiguration that the death of a child wrought on the literary work of nineteenth-century American writers. Taking as his subjects Harriet Beecher Stowe, Abraham Lincoln, William Dean Howells, Mark Twain, and W. E. B. Du Bois, Bush demonstrates how the death of a child became the defining "before-and-after moment" in their lives as adults and as artists. In narrating their struggles, Bush maps the intense field of creative energy induced by reverberating waves of parental grief and the larger nineteenth-century culture of mortality and grieving.

Bush explores in detail how each of these five writers grappled with and were altered by the loss of a child. He writes, for example, with moving insights about how the famed author of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* found himself adrift on a river of grief when meningitis struck down his daughter, Susy. In his deeply learned exploration of Twain's subsequent work, Bush illuminates how Twain wrote to cope with Susy's death, to make sense of her persistent presence in his life, and possibly to redeem her loss. Passionate and personal, Bush's insightful prose traces the paths of personal transformation each of these emblematic American writers took in order to survive the spiritual trauma of loss.

The savage Civil War was America's shared "before and after moment," the pivot upon which the nation's future swung. Bush's account of these five writers' grief amplifies our understanding of America's evolving, national relationship to mourning from then to the present.

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