



# **This Mortal Coil: The Human Body in History and Culture**

*Fay Bound Alberti*

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How humans have felt and thought about the body - our bodies - has never been static. Rather, it has shifted across times and cultures, taking and losing definition due to any number of forces and trends-philosophical, religious, cultural, technological. Sometimes we imagine our identity purely as an extension of our fleshly self and its assemblage of functions, organs, and appendages, sometimes as something entirely separate and discrete-trapped as opposed to defined by our "mortal coil," as Hamlet frames it in his famous soliloquy. So, too, over time, our ideas about what constitutes the desirable, the healthy, the beautiful, and the whole have remained partial, each an impression formed by its particular moment in time.

In this probing and illuminating new book, Fay Bound Alberti deploys the global histories of medicine, pathology, and sensibilities to examine our changing notions of the human body. Each chapter focuses on one part - bones, skin, sexual organs, spine, tongue, heart - revealing the cultural meanings tied to each, the repercussions of these associations, and ultimately the harm that comes of distinguishing mind and body, the parts from the whole, as is so often the case in Western medicine.

*This Mortal Coil* explores many enduring themes: the nature of identity, the relationship between the brain and the heart, and the gendering of our physical and emotional selves. Moving beyond the surface and down to what lies beneath, Bound Alberti provides a rich and fascinating account of the human body, shedding light on the role scientific developments - from medical care to plastic surgery to cloning-play in how we look at and shape ourselves. Bound Alberti's provocative and engrossing book reveals how the mortal coil can be unwound, then looked at as if for the first time.

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