

grasping, amoral (mostly male) shopkeepers who would lie to clinch a deal or worse, plant items in shoppers' parcels and bags in order to blackmail them over false shoplifting charges.

Indeed there are mythic resonances even with the present. Whitlock makes a brief remark (one of the many fascinating asides that are scattered through the text) in the conclusion that shoplifting is not to be defined only a "crime" or even as an uncontrollable psychiatric illness manifested in women, but both in the nineteenth century and now it is a deliberate strategy of balancing the demands of display and appearance that are expected of the responsible citizen of the polis with a possible lack of funds to maintain the appropriate social front. One thinks of Anarchist "manuals" that advocate shoplifting as a disruption of capitalism (as well as a low cost means of getting what one wants) to the urban myth of the architecturally impressive "Macmansions" of the outer suburbs with bare and makeshift interiors, as all the spare cash goes into the mortgage whilst the fixtures are sold off as collateral to short term money lenders.

The demand for a publication record on a modern and viable academic CV ensures that many excellent texts come to publication but to a great extent go unnoticed by potential readers. To keep up with the yearly output of Sage, Berg and Ashgate – to name typical examples – would be a fulltime job in itself, not to mention the considerable lists maintained by publishers attached to specific institutions and the slightly more highly profiled and commercial outfits such as Routledge. Thus the reviewer is not only given the happy opportunity of engaging with a particular text that might otherwise have been far back on their list of priorities but also can assist in ensuring that a particular text does not miss in action amongst the myriads of deserving titles by capable academics.

Juliette Peers

***Poetical Remains: Poets' Graves, Bodies, and Books in the Nineteenth Century*, by Samantha Matthews. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004. x + 310, 16 illustrations. ISBN 0-19-925463-X (hardcover).**

To the Victorians, Death was a lively presence. The state of the body and of the soul after death loomed large in the cultural imagination for multiple, interrelated reasons, ranging from sanitary (the scandalous state of inner-city churchyards gave rise to earnest reform efforts), to commercial (new, socially exclusive suburban graveyards began to be built), to theological (Swedenborg's ideas about the proximity and materiality of spirits had broad influence), to literary, perhaps best illustrated by the crowds waiting to read of Little Nell's expiration. Characteristic of the period was the urge to memorialise the famous dead, though a number of

Victorians were discomfited by the haste, voyeuristic impulse, and profiteering aspect of “marketing the dead.” Alice Meynell deplored the fashion of biographers to emphasise the death over the life, writing, “a poet is easily – too easily – caught dead.” Even Mrs. Gaskell’s acclaimed biography of Charlotte Brontë caused John Blackwood to write to George Henry Lewes in 1857, “I detest this bookmaking out of the remains of the dead.”

The commodification of poets’ remains – physical and literary – is Samantha Matthews’ focus in *Poetical Remains: Poets’ Graves, Bodies, and Books in the Nineteenth Century*. This is an ambitious, wide-ranging, and frequently fascinating book that illuminates the Victorian “culture of material and immaterial commemoration” (11). Drawing from the disciplines of literary studies, cultural studies, and history, Matthews offers complex and provocative readings of a series of textual and material memorials. The book’s structure is broadly but not neatly chronological – so Rossetti’s death is analysed before that of Robbie Burns – and Matthews discusses the remains of some of the major figures of the nineteenth century, from Keats and Shelley to Wordsworth, as well as a few minor figures, such as Thomas Hood and the Scottish poet Mary Tighe. Matthews’ prose style is exceptionally lively, which, in combination with a wealth of intriguing subject matter, leads to the occasional accretion of diversions: for example, into the discussion of Burns is crammed all-too-brief references to resurrection men, dissection and doubtful science. Throughout, Matthews’ focus is steadfastly secular; she’s interested in material transactions, whether literary or bodily, so spiritual aspects of Victorian after-life speculations are outside her purview.

Each chapter discusses one or two poets, and a feature of the Victorian mortality machinery that is particularly relevant to this particular death; thus the contestation of Burns’ physical remains and their disposition is discussed in the light of contemporaneous anxieties over exhumation. The third chapter, “The Grave of a Poetess,” is possibly the richest. In readings of the death of Mary Tighe, of Felicia Hemans’ poem on the subject and of subsequent memorial poems, Matthews argues skilfully for “the grave” as a rhetorical construction as much as a material place. The role of empathy and identification in the poetry she highlights, and the subsequent problematising of authenticity, are tremendously suggestive for scholars interested in problems of female authorship. Mary Tighe’s posthumous fate and fame has received far less attention than the (in)famous histories of Keats and Shelley’s respective early deaths, discussed in chapter four, but these like all of Matthews’ case histories are related with freshness and considerable verve. Matthews discusses the fates of Keats and Shelley in the context of exclusion, exile and quarantine. She argues in chapter five that Wordsworth’s far more peaceful death and grave were read by the Victorians through his own work, most importantly through the *Prelude*, but also through his many other specific pronouncements on graves (Wordsworth’s essay on the poetics of epitaphs was quoted by sanitary reformer Chadwick). The somewhat slighter Chapter 6 discusses the ironies of the interment of Thomas Hood

(the poet of "The Shirt") in the intensely wealth- and class-conscious surrounds of Kensal Green cemetery. In chapters seven and eight Matthews discusses Browning and Tennyson, both "brought home" to be buried in Westminster Abbey's Poet's Corner, and argues that these public interments were gestures in service of "an anodyne master-discourse of late-century patriotism" (228). This argument finds more specific support in the case of Tennyson than of Browning, whose tricky "unpoeticalness" caused many problems to those who wished to transform him into a representative public poet.

Matthews' book makes a valuable and original addition to previous work in nineteenth-century death studies, in particular Millgate's *Testamentary Acts* and Douglas-Fairhurst's *Victorian Afterlives*. While Millgate concentrates on poets' own efforts to shape their "posthumous lives," Matthews trains her primary focus on the efforts of others to safeguard or perpetuate poetic remains, taking into account in the final chapter the participation of the press and new technologies such as the telegraph in the memorialising culture. Less theoretically dense than Douglas-Fairhurst's book, though no less analytically sharp, Matthews sheds searching and sympathetic light on the Victorian culture of death and memory. Meticulous historical scholarship is tightly woven into the complexly structured chapters; the close readings of the texts are accessible, insightful and on occasion humorous. In its broad-ranging scope and interdisciplinary focus, Matthews' book also enjoys some of the felicities of broader collections such as Goodwin and Bronfen's *Death and Representation*, and Regina Barreca's *Sex and Death in Victorian Literature*, both of which offer provocative readings of depictions of death in the visual as well as literary arts. Matthews' inclusion of and detailed analysis of illustrations (of poets' graves, memorials, and several of their own drawings) is for the most part apposite and illuminating, though on occasion, as with Dante Gabriel Rossetti's frivolous sketch of his dead wombat, the image seems too slight for the weight of analysis appended to it.

Matthews' book points to fundamental questions, no less urgent to today's readers and writers, of authenticity and of the commodification of literary productions, human as well as textual. The final two chapters, which consider an increasingly modern late Victorianism, make some particularly provocative suggestions, as for example when Matthews considers the creative role played by the reader, who helps to author a posthumous "life" when a dead poet is memorialised. The relationship between words and reputation, and how closely both relate to the most personal concerns about mortality and survival, animated the Victorians to an extraordinary breadth and variety of efforts; Matthews analyses these efforts perceptively and sympathetically.

F. Elizabeth Gray
