

Madeleine Callaghan, *Shelley's Living Artistry: Poems, Letters, Plays*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018. Pp. 296. £75. ISBN 9781786940247.

Callaghan's single author study of Percy Bysshe Shelley is a sensitive and ranging account with three main strands. Firstly, it possesses a relatively self-conscious methodological commitment to neo-formalism. This is evident in some of its key critical interlocutors from Shelley scholarship – Michael O'Neill, Stuart Curran, Harold Bloom and Earl Wasserman to give but four – as well as the relative absence of certain preoccupations dominant in Romantic Studies today, such as political context, print culture and coterie. An astute observation on rhyme scheme, the snap of a couplet, the shape of verse, or an instance of intertextuality is never far away. Secondly, driven by her concern with the casting of life into art, Callaghan foregrounds the letters as points around which chapters come to be organised. Hence the pursuit of phantoms, as raised in a letter to Thomas Jefferson Hogg, leads into readings of *Alastor* and *Laon and Cyntha*, whilst a loaded exchange between Keats and Shelley frames her interpretation of *Adonais*. The third strand, although announced in that recurrent concern with life and art, is perhaps more oblique but arguably the most fundamental. I would suggest that this is, at heart, a book about the constitution and evolution of Shelley's authorial identity. Callaghan's interest in Shelley's relations (both real and poeticised) with other writers, the dramatization of proxy poet figures across the verse, and above all the various ways in which the private and the personal could be given literary expression continually reiterate this focus.

What emerges is a mobile, self-revising and deeply reflexive Shelley. This is not out of line with prior critical assessments: at times, the interpretations remind one of Jerrold E. Hogle's superb 1988 study *Shelley's Process*, although Callaghan gives relatively short shrift to psychoanalytic concepts, and indeed theoretically-inclined criticism more generally. Due to the book's commitment to neo-formalism, some of the most impressive readings come when language's ability to construct and deconstruct literary positions is at stake, and when language reaches a limit. One might consider here the interruption of Byronic-Shelleyan dialogue by the maniac's ravings in *Julian and Maddalo*, or the way that language's corrosive distortion by tyranny in *The Cenci* interrogates the utopian force of language implicit in *Prometheus Unbound's* choral fragments. It would have been interesting to address this Shelleyan pessimism more insistently, as it marks a haunting and indeed perhaps unavoidable limit to the poetic achievement that Callaghan frequently cites and endorses.

It covers a very comprehensive range of material, allying with recent trends in Shelley scholarship in engaging overlooked elements of his oeuvre: there are important chapters here on the *Esdaile* and *Scrope Davies* notebooks, for instance. Sometimes the three strands mentioned above do tend to diverge, as readings pursue their own logic and partly lose sight of the letters which supply the chapters with their spurring principle. Equally, it is a shame that there was not more systematic consideration of the epistolary as a rhetorical mode: the unique force of letter-writing is gestured at within individual examples, but no broader theorisation of the Romantic epistolary is given. In this context, more sustained attention to Shelley's verse-epistle *Letter to Maria Gisborne*, as well as consideration of other forms of occasional verse and poems addressed to friends, would have been fascinating extensions of the study's thesis. However, it is a valuable, ranging and deeply informed contribution, and this reader was left intrigued by what tensions and frictions would occur if Callaghan was to juxtapose Shelley's work with other models of how Romantic contemporaries translated life into art. To any reader sympathetic to neo-formalism, and indeed any reader sympathetic to

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Shelley (who can be as frustrating a poet as a brilliantly incandescent one), this study will repay attention.

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