

Michael O'Neill and Anthony Howe (eds) with the assistance of Madeleine Callaghan, *The Oxford Handbook of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. 689 + xxi. £98. ISBN 978019955836.

This hefty volume of 42 essays over almost 700 pages 'seeks both to reflect and to shape current Shelleyan scholarship and criticism' (1) and there can be little doubt that this superb addition to the *Oxford Handbook* series succeeds in its dual ambition. With the assistance of Madeleine Callaghan, Anthony Howe and Michael O'Neill have brought together a stellar cast of international scholars to reflect on the state of Shelley studies within the field of Romanticism.

The book is divided into five sections. 'Biography and Relationships' has five chapters which build on the biographical work of Holmes, Cameron, Bieri, and Wroe and wish to be 'biographical studies that will reconcile the poetry and prose' (8). Thus in the first chapter 'Shelley and the British Isles' we have Shelley in Dublin egging on the downtrodden Irish and then contemplatively writing various poems; that said, it was not quite clear to me how recording these events chronologically represented any life-writing 'reconciliation' that might be thought of as particularly insightful or innovative, well written and appropriately detailed though all these pieces were. By way of aside, one wonders too what the anti-colonial Shelley might have thought of the decision to go with the politically-loaded term 'British Isles' in the opening essay title? In any case, these are informative pieces for someone looking for more than what the *DNB* offers. 'Shelley and his Publishers' by Stephen C. Behrendt is worth singling out as it exemplifies the rich depth of many essays in the *Handbook* series: the meticulous detail in which Shelley's interactions with the publishing world are offered provides a suggestive overview of early nineteenth-century London's publishing world more generally.

The second and third sections on 'Prose' and 'Poetry' (8 and 12 essays respectively) neatly reveal the breadth of the book's achievement. 'Poetry' is marked by a committed formalism – O'Neill, at least, clearly admires the critical tradition that postulates Shelley as 'a poet who embodies the quintessence of poetry' (1) – but there is scrupulous attention paid in 'Prose' (and beyond) to the political, philosophical, and historical contextual backdrop of Shelley's writings. Michael Scrivener's piece on 'Politics, Protest, and Social Reform' is particularly rich as it traces Shelley's early philosophical anarchism but teases out other formative influences such as materialism and liberalism. The editors have done a careful job in ensuring that understudied prose works, such as Shelley's statement on the freedom of the press, his *Letter to Lord Ellenborough* (1812), receive adequate discussion.

There are a further 12 essays in part 4 'Cultures, Traditions, Influences' and 5 in the final section 'Afterlives'. Here we have chapters which consider Shelley's debt to figures such as Rousseau, Tasso, Goethe, Milton, Spenser, and Pope. Ian Balfour's discussion of 'Shelley and the Bible' includes a fascinating snippet on the image of Ezekiel's chariot within Shelley's poetry and his debt to Robert Lowth, a writer mentioned usually in relation to Blake. 'Editing Shelley' is Michael Rossington's contribution and as one of the Longman editors he is particularly well placed on this subject. The editing issue, as O'Neill's introduction and many other essays as well as Rossington's make clear, is crucial to our current understanding of Shelley as a major poet. Certainly, the very existence of the *Handbook* is largely attributable to a series of remarkable editorial endeavours, both completed (*Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts*, 23 vols 1989–2002) and ongoing (Longman's *Poems of Shelley*, 3 volumes of a projected 5 complete and Johns Hopkins University Press's *Complete Poetry of PBS*, 3 volumes of a projected 8 complete). These projects seek to mediate a significant consequence of Shelley's early death for literary scholars: that

manuscript drafts and fair copies are the sole authority for a large chunk of his work. The Longman edition, for instance, anticipates 450 poems, a large increase on the 70 that were offered in the 1904 Clarendon edition. The availability of these editions, buttressed by budget-friendly editions by Norton and Oxford, have largely enabled the scholarly rehabilitation of Shelley. Moreover, a great strength of these essays, taken as a whole, is the degree to which information within these recently edited manuscript sources is synthesized with published material. With the advent of The Shelley-Godwin Archive (<http://shelleygodwinarchive.org/>), a joint endeavour of the New York Public Library, the Maryland Institute for Technology, and the Bodleian Library, Oxford, scholars will soon be able scrutinize these manuscripts themselves and having the *Handbook* under one's belt will be a helpful first step in identifying areas of interest.

This reader had a couple of reservations. Firstly, the contributors are heavily weighted in favour of senior academics. Undoubtedly, there are many benefits to accruing such accomplished scholars but a couple of more emerging voices may have been facilitated within such a compendious collection. Secondly, while it is certainly true that the essays have a long critical view and offer a splendid account of the evolution of Shelley studies, it does not feel quite up-to-date. The final essay on 'Shelley Criticism from Deconstruction to Present' takes as its subject how Shelley was dealt with by the Yale School (somewhat depoliticized) and by New Historicism (radicalism recuperated). However, what of Shelley and ecocriticism or gender studies – or even post-colonialism? These are strange absences in an otherwise extremely impressive achievement.

David O'Shaughnessy
Trinity College Dublin