

Shelley's Defences of Poetry¹

Michael O'Neill

Durham University

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) was a poet who possessed, in his own words, “the power of communicating and receiving intense and impassioned conceptions respecting man and nature.”² Yet the greatness of his poetry, this essay will argue, does not essentially reside in his capacity to articulate his strong libertarian beliefs. These beliefs may be the ground of his conscious intellectual being. They show the influence of many thinkers, including that enshrined in the *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), written by his father-in-law, William Godwin. But the supposition that Shelley uses poetry as the vehicle for the endorsement of a system of ideas is fundamentally erroneous, as he himself argues in two important places for understanding his poetics: the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, where he asserts that “Didactic poetry is my abhorrence” (232) and *A Defence of Poetry*, where he develops a sophisticated theory of poetry's primary appeal to the imagination and argues that “A Poet ... would do ill to embody his own conceptions of right and wrong, which are usually those of his place and time, in his poetical creations, which participate in neither” (682).

Shelley's importance and achievement as a poet derive from the way in which he tests, dramatises, anatomizes and enacts the processes involved in belief or, indeed, doubt. He turns out, surprisingly given the terms of his reputation as a poet hurrying always to exalt principles of liberty, love, and equality, to be one of the major exemplars of Keats's ideal of “*Negative Capability*” (*Keats Letters* 1. 193). Shelley is often prepared to open his poetry to differing interpretations, to allow the reader's mind to be the final courtroom of the poetry's

appeal. The Poet of *Alastor* (1816), Shelley's enigmatic poem of driven and disappointed quest, might illustrate the dangers of what in the poem's Preface is described as "self-centred seclusion" (92). But the poem's narrative form prevents any simply moralistic reading from enjoying un-interrogated sway. Told by a Narrator, who expresses deep admiration for the Poet as a "surpassing Spirit" (714), and whose unsatisfied longing for communion with nature tallies with the Poet's failed attempt to find an embodied form of the "veiled maid" (151) of a particularly vivid dream, *Alastor* ricochets between unconvinced acceptance of "Nature's vast frame" (719) and despairing longing for something beyond "Art and eloquence, / And all the shows 'o the world" (710-11). It comes to a close without closing off an openness to all that resists final closure.

As in many of Shelley's poems, the ambiguities of *Alastor* owe much to Shelley's complex response to a precursor poet, in this case Wordsworth, whose solemnly melodious blank verse and themes of solitude and relationship with nature in *The Excursion* and *Tintern Abbey* provide the frame within and against which the younger poet works. Shelley's dealings with Wordsworth are not merely antagonistic. He may question aspects of the older poet's creed and perceived ideology. Yet Shelley's poetic remodelling implies the importance of Wordsworth's mode of vision. Wordsworth is probing central questions, even if his answers do not compel Shelley's assent. Wordsworth is the precursor brought to mind yet redefined in two major shorter poems written the year *Alastor* was published: "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" and "Mont Blanc." In the former, Shelley is at once the radical atheist of *The Necessity of Atheism* (1811) and the Notes to the early *Queen Mab* (1813) who contends that "Every reflecting mind must acknowledge that there is no proof of the existence of a Deity" (81) and the visionary individualist who redefines "God" in his unfinished *On Christianity*. There, Shelley reprises a central conviction of the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" when he

writes: “There is a power by which we are surrounded, like the atmosphere in which some motionless lyre is suspended, which visits with its breath our silent chords, at will” (Shelley *Prose* 251). If “intellectual beauty” is experienced within the mind, its ultimate source may be intra- or extra-human (“visits” and “power” lend support to the latter possibility), and is certainly beyond what in *A Defence of Poetry* Shelley calls “the determination of the will” (696).

The “Hymn” creates a lyric form that in its longer and shorter lines, and subtle rhyming, mimes the coming and going of the “Power” and the waxing and waning of the poet’s confidence. It plays its own variations on Wordsworth’s theme of visionary loss and subsequent recovery in his “Ode: Intimations of Immortality.” Whereas Wordsworth writes a poetry of plangent lament, Shelley, as he switches in his third stanza, say, from deriding orthodox “Frail spells” to launching his own “Frail spell” in the direction of “Thy light alone” (29, 32) displays a beautifully unprotected abruptness. The unadvertised swiftness of movement from scepticism to self-generated faith is typical of the drama going on in and animating his poetry. In “Mont Blanc” (version A), he again brings Wordsworth to mind, and “The everlasting universe of things” (1) that “Rolls through the mind” seems to participate in the “motion and a spirit” (102) that “rolls through all things” (103) in *Tintern Abbey* (quoted from Gill (ed.)). But if Wordsworth celebrates “a sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused” (96-7), Shelley offers a warier, more sceptical view.. And yet at the poem’s close, responding to his own more deeply sustained sense of the mind’s power (shown in the echoes of Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan” at the close of section 4, echoes that offset the grimmer naturalism of preceding lines), Shelley suggests the dependence of any sense of sense on “the human mind’s imaginings” (143).

Shelley is a poet of emotional and conceptual extremes conveyed in verse of great distinction, force and subtlety. He is a poet of desire, of the longing for change, for “some world far from ours” (“To Jane [‘The keen stars were twinkling’]” 21-22) that is our world redeemed. But he is also a poet who writes compellingly about all that thwarts desire. He is to his fingertips a poet of criss-crossing perspectives; if his poetry “enlarges the circumference of the imagination by replenishing it with thoughts of ever new delight” (*Defence of Poetry* 682), it continually attunes itself to what in the Preface to *The Cenci* he calls “sad reality” (314). “Two Spirits: An Allegory,” for all (or possibly because of) its editorial quandaries, is a quintessential Shelleyan lyric of divided impulses. The poem exists only as a rough draft with multiple cancellations and unclear indications in places of final or near-final choices, but what is manifest is that it has found a precise lyric configuration of its own, in its stanzaic structure, rhymes, and images. Although the poem dramatizes the clash between caution and idealistic desire, it immediately complicates both positions; the First Spirit warns but sees the lure of desire; the second persists in desire, but sees the dangers he is facing. The poem sets exalted terror against exhilarated commitment to “the flood of the tempest dark” (26), and arrives, in its coda, at a fine balance between suggestions of loss and recovery. It ends with a “traveller” (43) who “awakes on the fragrant grass” (47) and “finds night day” (48), just tilting the poem towards a residual trust in the heart’s best hopes, even as it characteristically puts the reader on the spot, implicitly asking him or her why “day” and “night” should be invested with stable and hierarchical symbolic significances.

Something comparable occurs at the close of “Ode to the West Wind,” Shelley’s major short poem. There, Shelley concludes his wrestling with the angel of the wind, at once verbally embodied “breath of Autumn’s being” (2), and image of revolutionary inspiration, by shaping an apparently rhetorical question out of the final couplet of the five that turn

headlong *terza rima* invocations and pleadings into vertiginous sonnets. Apparently rhetorical, since Shelley prompts the reader to ask why there is any reason other than human desire that the spiritual, poetic, and political should model their processes of change on those evident in the cycles of the seasons. The compulsion to honour the drive towards betterment impels the poem through its progressive uncovering of the poet's "sore need" (52), a need for the wind's revivifying power to re-animate his words. In the last section, the poet rises, phoenix-like, out of the ashes of his sprawled abasement at the hand of chastising experience, experience that forces him to exclaim, "I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!" (54). True to the reversals and shifts that make the ode a record of shaped but inwardly conflicted struggle rather than a polemical exhortation, Shelley, in this last section, pleads with the wind in such a way that plea becomes impassioned command. He cries: "Drive my dead thoughts over the universe / Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth" (63-4). The lines concoct their own, very Shelleyan blend of pathos and power, out of their ability to combine assertion, evident in the strong stress on "Drive," with awareness of failure, seen in the reference to "dead thoughts," and hope for the future, shown in the reference to the emphasized "new birth."

"Ode to the West Wind" wishes to "Scatter" (66) the poet's "words among mankind" (67), literally to disseminate them, "Ashes and sparks" (67) that will, the poem hopes, have the effect that, in *A Defence of Poetry*, Shelley ascribes to Dante's work and all "high poetry": a capacity to serve as prompts to "inextinguishable thought" (693). This sense of poetry as working on the reader's imagination is the spring of Shelley's poetic practice in *Prometheus Unbound*. It is not enough, for example, for us to dismiss Jupiter as "the tyrant of the world" (3.4.183); through Prometheus' double-signifying "recalling" of his curse, we have to recognise how tyranny takes two to dance its savage tango. The very hatred and contempt

which Prometheus expresses towards Jupiter establish the two figures as caught up in a strangely twinned alliance, from which Prometheus can only break once he realizes the psychodynamics of his dependence on hatred. At the same time, enslaving as hatred can be, its expression is also a necessary first step in the eventual liberation imagined in the lyrical drama. As it moves beyond the rocky dungeon of the Caucasus, *Prometheus Unbound* continually appeals to the reader's desire to imagine the new, the transfigured, the yet to be. It does so through lyrical measures that appeal to yet brilliantly frustrate and redirect the senses into "thought's wildernesses" (1. 742), as in the "Life of Life!" (2. 5. 48) lyric chanted by a "Voice in the Air" to the transformed Asia; through dialogic scenes, as when Asia catechizes Demogorgon about the origins of evil in 2. 5; through verse whose negations memorably allow the altered and the old to occupy the same poetic space, as when the Spirit of the Hour proclaims that after the fall of Jupiter and the coming of a renovated world "None wrought his lips in truth-entangling lines" (3. 4. 142); and through visions whose re-organizing energy seems to mime the work of the imagination itself, as when Panthea in Act 4 depicts the earth as a "multitudinous Orb" (253) that "Grind the bright brook into an azure mist / Of elemental subtlety, like light" (254-5). That "azure mist / Of elemental subtlety" has a self-reflexive dimension and might describe the vision to which the poem tends. Yet, even at the end, Demogorgon is at hand to advise of the need, should tyranny return, "to hope, till Hope creates / From its own wreck the thing it contemplates" (4. 573-4); pushed into the rhyme position, "creates" assumes a special, self-generating heroism.

At the same time, in the roughly contemporaneous *Julian and Maddalo*, the Shelleyan surrogate Julian asserts, "Where is the love, beauty and truth we seek / But in our mind?" (374-5), only to be told by his friend and intellectual adversary, the Byronic Maddalo, "You talk Utopia" (179). The poem, subtitled "A Conversation," uses its deftly modulating,

frequently enjambed couplets to create a poem of gripping interest. If we sway between Julian's optimism and Maddalo's electrifyingly authoritative pessimism, we are also taken in the depths of a third speaker's mind, the Maniac. Torn between a desire to repress and speak of emotional trauma, the Maniac speaks "Of the mind's hell" (441). He does so in tones that veer between near-paranoia and the confessionally anguished, even as he asserts that "to myself I do not wholly owe / What now I suffer" (321-2). The very syntax of that phrasing suggests the difficulty of understanding the self (and others). It is a difficulty enacted with great humaneness by a poem that at its close places us uncomfortably close to "the cold world" which "shall not know" (617), Julian decides, what happened between the Maniac and his Lady.

The libertarian hopefulness that is apparent in the *Prometheus Unbound* volume of 1820 concedes that hope's major guarantor is hope itself, a state inseparable from self-aware commitment to the imagination. In later poems Shelley gives greater prominence to the potentially perilous nature of the imagination. *The Triumph of Life*, the poem on which he was working at the time of his death by drowning, uses its Dantescan form, a dream-vision in fluid *terza rima*, to reassess the gap between aspiration and reality, between what "glimmers" as possibilities (see lines 33 and 431, and what appears to erase such possibilities. Different lights blaze, shine, and gleam through the poem, now evoking the stars that give some form of approach to hope, now suggesting the ordinary light of the sun that threatens to obliterate star-light, and now describing the blinding glare cast by the Car (or chariot) in which the ominous figure of Life sits. Over and over, history presents the poet-narrator with the spectacle of good undoing itself; life overcomes virtually all who live with the exceptions, it would seem, of Jesus and Socrates, exemplary figures who fled back to their "native noon" (131). In the midst of this desolate vision, the poet-narrator meets Rousseau, kindler of

revolutionary flames, and author of idealising erotic fiction and anguished confession, and through Rousseau's narrative we are offered, in condensed symbolic form, a version of the archetypal Romantic figure. Like Shelley and Byron, in their different ways, Rousseau has "suffered what [he] wrote, or viler pain!" (279). Rousseau's account of his encounter with the "shape all light" (352) reruns yet looks freshly at Shelley's career-long pursuit of ideals; the shape's muse-like quality suggests that whatever drives the poetic imagination may be disturbingly ambivalent. Yet what the shape is or stands for we find hard finally to tell; what we do know is what Rousseau experiences; and what he experiences, an experience in which the shape seems to blot out his thoughts, yet vanishes until she becomes a yearned-for, glimmering absence, he does not fully understand; and the poetry is able to evoke this incomplete understanding with ruthlessly vigilant empathy.

Shelley, then, is a poet who knows that many readers (and perhaps an aspect of himself) would agree with Maddalo that he "talk[s] Utopia": he makes poetic capital out of this knowledge by allowing for alternative perspectives (as in *Julian and Maddalo*), or by coming at his obsessions from unusual, re-invigorating angles. *The Witch of Atlas*, for instance, a poem of prodigal, bewitchingly comic fantasy, almost sends up the typical Shelleyan concern with a veiled ideal, when it describes the witch weaving a veil that will serve as "A shadow for the splendour of her love" (152). Shelley is not a poet who writes the same poem over and over; his poems are particular and differentiated, and subtly alert to their own mode of being. So *Prometheus Unbound* explores its own particular world in Act I, when Earth speaks of a shadow-world that includes "Dreams and the light imaginings of men, / And all that faith creates or love desires" (200-01). That first line momentarily stands at an angle to the lyrical drama, itself an embodiment of "Dreams and the light imaginings of men," even as

the next line switches perspective, and mounts an implicitly strong defence of “All that faith creates.”

Nor would it be right to ignore the various plausible poets we can extract from the overall oeuvre. There is Walter Bagehot’s Shelley, a poet of “peculiar removed essences of lyrical rapture” (Bagehot, 4.121). There is the tough-minded, politically radical Shelley, idealistic, yet aware of “the unbending realities of actual life” (*A Philosophical View of Reform* 664). And there is the deconstructive Shelley decentering centres, calling into question all essences. These Shelleys overlap. “The Cloud” combines playful lyric mythmaking with contemporary scientific knowledge to produce a poem which comes at its big themes lightly. In the last lines of “The Cloud”, “convex” (79) is right for an observer looking down at the earth’s atmosphere; the point brings out the “peculiar removed” position of the cloud, a speaker who stands apart from the human and yet who is at the same time turned by the jauntily anapaestic verse into something like the elusive principle of life itself. The cloud is turned too, into a symbol of libertarian hope, with its refusal to be squashed, and of the imagination, with its capacity for transformation. In its light-hearted yet triumphant way “The Cloud” answers the riddle of mutability which haunts the *Prometheus Unbound* volume. In that volume Shelley comes up in “The Sensitive Plant” with the seemingly Platonic assertion that “For love, and beauty, and delight, / There is no death nor change” (*Conclusion*, 21-22). “The Sensitive Plant” has, by this stage, turned from enchanting if tremulous fable into vividly relished nightmare; beauty has been destroyed in the third part, and Shelley’s response is to create from its wreckage a knowingly fictive and “modest creed” (*Conclusion* 13) based in the fact that “nothing is, but all things seem” (*Conclusion* 11). Riskily and affectingly he removes himself, or appears to remove himself, from the world of process which in “The Cloud” he

celebrates. “I change but cannot die” (“The Cloud” 76) strikes a note which, for all its playfulness, is at the centre of Shelley’s view of life and poetry.

Yet the longing for a state of certainty beyond process is typical too, and out of that quarrel will emerge much of the drama that animates the concluding section of *Adonais*, Shelley’s elegy for Keats. In that poem, the desire to affirm that an imagined absolute (“The One”) is superior to experienced process is seemingly strong, as when Shelley asserts that “The One remains, the many change and pass; / Heaven’s light forever shines, Earth’s shadows fly; / Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass, / Stains the white radiance of Eternity, / until Death tramples it to fragments.” (460-4). In fact, the quotation reveals how Shelley moves beyond and away from the tone of calm philosophical statement of the opening line. The famous image brings with it fraught complexities, brought to a focus in the emphasis placed on the pivotal verb “Stains.” If life disfigures “the white radiance of Eternity,” another meaning of the verb acknowledges that life also enriches the radiance. Death may destroy the screen between us and the white radiance, yet its trampling brutalism cannot but elicit a degree of flinching; suddenly the “many-coloured dome” possesses a fragile beauty. In keeping with this compelling dramatization of to-and-fro impulses, Shelley asks apparently rhetorical questions that turn out not be rhetorical at all (see lines 459 and 469), and finally depicts himself as questing after an absolute which he seems forever fated not to reach, as he is “borne darkly, fearfully, afar” (492).

In its final resurrection the cloud says, “I arise and unbuild it [i.e. the blue dome of air which is its cenotaph] again” (“The Cloud” 84). “[U]nbuilding” is a crucial activity in Shelley’s work, which decreates in order to recreate, and bears on the vexed and rich question of Shelleyan belief. Should one, for instance, we see the Power of “Mont Blanc”, the One in

Adonais and, say, Liberty in “Ode to Liberty” as secularized mirror images of the God of Christian theology? The answer must surely be “no” to the degree that Shelley’s affirmations are acutely aware of their fictional status. Shelleyan answers are imaginatively created and dynamically provisional, as when we are told how, “burning through the inmost veil of Heaven, / The soul of Adonais, like a star, / Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are” (*Adonais* 493-95). The poem may end with the word “are”, a word suggestive of being, but it ends too with a typical hint of veils within veils; if the poems glimpses what it would be like to abide with Adonais, it knows too that there are miles to go before it sleeps.

When “Liberty” is invoked as “Thou heaven of earth!” (“Ode to Liberty” 166), the phrasing uses religious language to enforce its humanist and historical view that Liberty exists only as realized by human beings within particular societies. But Shelley’s humanism sees no reason why it should deny itself the intensity of feeling often associated with religion. In *Epipsychidion* Shelley borrows religious language to describe the idealized “Emily” in the passage beginning “The glory of her being, issuing thence, / Stains the dead, blank, cold air with a warm shade / Of unentangled intermixture, made / By Love, of light and motion” (91-3), and proceeding to an intuition of “one intense / Diffusion, one serene Omnipresence” (93-4). Throughout the poem, Shelley is aware, like T. S. Eliot’s Sweeney, that he has “gotta use words” (Eliot 135) and he continually confronts the limits of expression. Yet here, as elsewhere, his sense of language’s limitations frustrates much less than it enables his poetry. He may have jotted, at the end of his essay “On Love”, that “These words inefficient and metaphorical—Most words so—No help—” (*Major Works* 821, n. 632). Yet the fact that words are “metaphorical” is one way he finds of freeing himself from their traditional associations; so in the *Epipsychidion* passage, the process of redefinition works so bewilderingly and yet purposefully that we have, in reading, to give up the notion that we can

identify Emily by seeing her as a solely a person or merely an idea (such as an incarnation of Intellectual Beauty); the way she is described, rather, illustrates Shelley's point that the poetry seeks to mark the "before unapprehended relations of things" (*A Defence of Poetry* 676). The poetry involves the reader in the process of seeking to comprehend how Emily can be "Scarce visible from extreme loveliness" (104), even as we are instructed to "See where she stands!" (112), an instruction that demands we see through, not simply with, the eye. Or, as Harold Bloom puts the matter memorably, "The problem is to describe a secularized epiphany that cannot be described, but Shelley was a specialist in the indescribable" (Bloom 51). Indeed, as he presents "a mortal shape indued / With love and life and light and deity" (112-13), Shelley even prompts to us to redefine our understanding of what a "secularized epiphany" might be. All categories are under something close to assault through a use of words whose micro-behaviours conduce towards erosion of separating barriers; so, here, the assonance involved in the last three nouns persuades them to co-habit a newly existing space.

It is pointless for the critic to reproach Shelley, as F. R. Leavis did, for failing to possess a firm grip on the actual since for Shelley the actual does not exist until defined in the light of the mind's sense of its potential (194). In Shelley's greatest poetry his terms bear witness to his attempt to redefine; so in the passage just referred to from *Epipsychidion* familiar abstractions take on new life, coming together, briefly, into an original "intermixture," which both reflects "The glory of her being" and is only a staining of it. The passage sets going a characteristic and energizing friction between the sense (just round the corner here: see 123 and following lines) that words are inadequate and that they can, at full stretch, just glimpse what it is they wish to say, between the impulse to come to rest on some assured absolute (here "that Beauty," 102) and the swerving away from that, between the poetic self-

consciousness and the other-awareness which coalesce in a phrase such as “Scarce visible from extreme loveliness” (104) which describes the poem and “The glory of her being.”

Such an emphasis on self-aware fictionality makes Shelley a Romantic forerunner of Wallace Stevens. Shelley is never so coolly dandified as the poet who writes, “The final belief is to believe in a fiction, which you know to be a fiction, there being nothing else. The exquisite truth is to know that it is a fiction and that you believe in it willingly” (Stevens 163). But the poet who ends “Mont Blanc” with a question that lays the burden for making meaning on “the human mind’s imaginings” (143), who at the end of “The Sensitive Plant” offers us an extremely immodest assertion in the form of a modest creed we might find pleasant to consider, who in mid-course in *Adonais* revises a previous stanza’s doubt to assert that the dead Keats “is not dead, he doth not sleep” (343), who argues that the “desire to be for ever as we are . . . is . . . the secret persuasion which has given birth to the opinion of a future state” (133 rev) and who in a note to “Hellas” says that it is the poet’s province “to attach himself to those ideas which exalt and ennoble humanity” (*Major Works* 585), has little to learn from Stevens about fictiveness. Yet Shelley does not, for all his scepticism and self-awareness about the workings of desire, abandon the idea that there is possibly a true state of things whose light exceeds the might of our obscure organs. Thus, the close of *Epipsychidion* leaves unresolved whether the failure of the poet’s quest to ascend “Into the height of love’s rare Universe” (589) can be laid at the door of language’s inadequacy to do justice to the concept of some ineffable union, or whether the notion of some such union can only ever be asserted, never wholly and fully experienced.

It is, however, for the daring and originality with which Shelley’s poems explore the possibilities of poetry that they claim our admiration. Their generic experimentation is

central to this daring and originality. Shelley remodels many forms, producing in *Hellas*, for instance, his second major example of a lyrical drama, which draws on Greek classical practice (Aeschylus's *The Persians*) to produce a poem that speaks to the immediate historical present and future as it addresses the War of Greek Independence, and sets contemporary political struggle in the context of a cyclical vision of historical and cosmic change. Again, propaganda is held in abeyance. In the final choral lyric, Shelley sets a cyclical view of history, according to which "The world's great age begins anew" (1060), against a "weariness" induced by all cycles, "The world is weary of the past," the poem finishes, "O might it die or rest at last!" (1100-1). Once again, a Shelleyan poem concludes not in a state of final certitude, but on a more suspended note that awakens doubts and uncertainties. Yes, the poem is partisan, but it sets the Greek struggle for liberty in the context of an awareness that all struggle might or must involve "hate and death" (1096) and that there may be an unbridgeable gulf between an immutable idea of Hellenic culture and its value, one "based on the crystalline sea / Of thought and its eternity" (698-9), and the actualities of contemporary conflict. In "Ozymandias," Shelley uses the sonnet-form not to monumentalize, but to declare the folly of all monuments, especially those built by tyrants in their own vainglorious self-praise. The poem itself must take the place of the sculptured wreck it interprets as an emblem of tyranny's inevitable passing away, but how art is to avoid complicity with power is also a theme of the poem. For one thing, the artist who "well those passions read" (6) was able to insinuate criticism even as he ostensibly affirmed tyrannical greatness. Thus art is always capable of freedom, even if the full realization of that freedom may lie in the minds of later beholders. More disquietingly, though, is the implicit question whether art's creations are themselves subject to inevitable decay. Yet here, as he traces democratizing, erasing vistas of empty "sands" (14), Shelley hints at the ongoing role for poets, since their achievement is always in need of renewal, of rediscovery, and of recreation.

Cultural entropy is inevitable, we are told at the start of *A Defence of Poetry*, “and then, if no new poets should arise to create afresh the associations which have been thus disorganized, language will be dead to all the nobler purposes of human intercourse” (*Major Works* 676). The drama and dynamism which this essay has sought to trace in Shelley’s poetry finds its eloquent apologia in these words by him. In turn, his multifaceted influence on poets as diverse as Browning and T. S. Eliot bears witness to the fact that his work has gone on stimulating new and diverse forms of creativity.

WORKS CITED

Bagehot, Walter. *The Collected Works of Walter Bagehot*. Vol 4. Ed. Forrest Morgan and Richard Holt Hutton. 5 vols. Routledge, 1995; Bloom, Harold, “Visionary Cinema of Romantic Poetry,” *The Ringers in the Tower: Studies in Romantic Tradition*. The University of Chicago Press, 1971; Eliot, T. S., *Collected Poems*. Faber and Faber, 1974; Jones, Steven E. (ed.), *The “Julian and Maddalo” Notebook*. Vol. XV of *The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts*. Garland, 1990; Keats, John. *The Letters of John Keats 1814-1821*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins. 2 vols. Harvard University Press; Leavis, F. R., *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry*. 1936. Penguin, 1972; Shelley, Percy Bysshe, *The Major Works*. Ed. Zachary Leader and Michael O’Neill. Oxford University Press, 2003, 2009 corr; *The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Vol. 1. Ed. E. B. Murray. Clarendon Press, 1993; Stevens, Wallace, *Opus Posthumous*. Knopf, 1957; Wordsworth, William, *The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill. Oxford University Press, 2000.

¹ This essay has been published as ‘Percy Bysshe Shelley, Poetry’ in *The Encyclopedia of Romantic Literature*, ed. Frederick Burwick (3 vols., Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012). The author would like to thank Frederick Burwick, Marilyn Gaull, and Wiley-Blackwell for their agreement to reprint the essay in *The Wordsworth Circle*. He would also like to acknowledge the late Jonathan Wordsworth for inviting him to speak on a panel about Shelley at the Wordsworth Summer Conference in Gasmere in 1992; the essence of this essay’s thinking about the “essential Shelley” was drafted for or thought about in connection with that panel.

² *A Defence of Poetry*, in *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works*. Ed. Zachary Leader and Michael O’Neill. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, 2009 corr.. All quotations from Shelley, unless otherwise stated, are from this volume. Page numbers for prose are supplied parenthetically.