

Shelley's *Adonais* as a Communicative Elegy

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Introduction

Peter Sacks discusses English elegy tradition in *The English Elegy* from the Freudian psychoanalytical view. He interprets elegy as "the very means and practice of substitution" (Sacks 8). He regards language as the essential *raison d'être* of elegy: "The dead, like the forbidden object of a primary desire, must be separated from the poet, partly by a veil of words" (Sacks 9). Words have the magical power of substitution for a narrator to get rid of the mentally lost. His difficulty with *Adonais* derives from Shelley's negation of re-creating the narrator's spiritual force by words or poetry. In *A Defence of Poetry*, he defines poetic composition as an imperfect representation of ideal poetry: "when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conception of the poet."¹ Inspiration "arises from within" (504) but the poet only feebly translates it into words. He simultaneously has a privilege and a flaw in realizing his own art. So composition itself is imperfect as compensation for or substitution of "pre-language" in the poet's consciousness. In this sense, poetry is inevitably an elegy, which mourns the loss of its original idea and is doubly insufficient for substituting the losses of inspiration and of the dead in an elegy.

Sacks's last question highlights problems not only about the elegiac genre but also about Shelley's anxiety about poetic composition and publication: "'Adonais' surely concludes on a suicidal note, and we may wonder what measure of success to accord the poet's work of mourning. Has Shelley not somehow burst beyond the elegy as a genre? The problem is deep-seated, for in many ways Shelley's poem has, since its first epigraph, worked against the possibility, the very form and texture, of poetry itself" (Sacks 163). This paper investigates the conclusion of *Adonais* and tries to answer this question and to witness the poem both as traditional and as a new type of elegy.

i

The opening of *Adonais* imitates that of "Elegy on the Death of Adonis" by Bion, and the description of Venus in the latter—"Wildered, ungirt, unsandalled—the thorns pierce / Her hastening feet and drink her sacred blood" ("Fragment of the Elegy on the Death of Adonis," lines 18-19)²⁾—expects Shelleyan political rendering in the former: "human hearts, which to her aery tread / Yielding not, wounded the invisible / Palms of her tender feet where'er they fell" (lines 210-2). "Elegy on the Death of Bion" becomes the model for Shelley's cursing the critic of the *Quarterly Review* as the supposed murderer of Keats: "What moral was so cruel as to mix the drug for thee, or to give it to thee, who heard thy voice?" (390, n.). In accusing something or somebody as the cause of the lamented person's unexpected death, pastoral elegy contains features of protestation specially related with public neglect of poets. Shelley refers to classics in order to revive them in a socio-political context for the early nineteenth century.

Spenser's *Astrophel* and Milton's *Lycidas* are very important English pastoral elegies for *Adonais*. Shelley's elegy is indebted to *Astrophel* in its description of Keats's apotheosis and in its reference to Sir Philip Sidney. *Astrophel* is changed partly into a flower and partly into a star, just as *Adonais* ascends to heaven as the spirit of Lucifer. Sidney is included in the posthumously honoured poets in stanza 45 of *Adonais*. The theme of an unhappy poet's death and reward must have been helpful for Shelley to compose his elegy. Spenser writes in Colin's speech in "A Pastorall Aeglogue upon the Death of Sire Philip Sidney Knight": "O harmfull death, / O deadly harme. Vnhappie Albion / When shalt thou see emong thy shepheards all, / Any so sage, so perfect?" (sic) (lines 49-52). Shelley repeats it in his elegy: "Albion wails for thee" (line 151). Shelley not only historicizes and authorizes the death of Keats, referring to Spenser, but also changes his personal lament into a public one. This lamentation anticipates Shelley's anxiety about himself in the future, triply identifying Sidney, Keats and himself. Shelley writes to Joseph Severn on 29 November 1821 about the similarity between Keats and himself as to their unpopularity: Shelley "may differ from Keats in more important qualities, at least resembles him in that accidental one, a want of popularity" (*Letters* 2: 366).

In *Adonais*, Shelley estimates Milton not only as "the Sire of an immortal strain" (line 30) and "the third among the sons of light" (line 36) but also as a revolutionist who "went, unterrified / Into the gulf of death" (lines 34-6). Shelley believes that "his clear Sprite / Yet reigns o'er the earth" (lines 35-6) and influences the later poets as a spiritual champion. *Adonais* owes much to *Lycidas*.³⁾ Not only in its techniques, but also in its themes it is given much suggestion because *Lycidas* in

fact treats the problem of poetic career and of social neglect of talented poets. J. Martin Evans says: "Milton first came face to face with some of his most profound and personal anxieties about the future direction of his own life" (Evans 41). Using shepherd figures as pipers and caretakers of sheep, Milton questions his future careers as poet. In *Lycidas*, he asks:

Alas! What boots it with uncessant care
To tend the homely slighted shepherd's trade,
And strictly meditate the thankless muse (lines 64-66)

Facing Keats's premature death as a poet, Shelley could understand Milton's agony in establishing identity at the shocking death of King.

Shelley questions about public approbation of premature and unfortunate poets in *Adonais*. He used pastoral elegy for disguising personal problems. As Oscar Wilde says, a most classical form allows a most personal narration: "Yes, the objective form is the most subjective in matter. Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth" (Wilde 389).

ii

Following traditional pastoral elegies, Shelley uses some conventional phrases, figures and images in the first thirty-seven stanzas. Most of the mourners in the first section are Keats's poetic imaginings and personified conceptions. The most important figure here is Urania not only because she plays roles of mother and lover of Keats, not only because she represents "the sky" where Keats goes back to, but also because she represents the neglected poetic Muse. In spite of the fact that Urania lends inspiring power to Keats, she is lost and must be sought after for her lamentation. This indicates that poetic inspiration is lost and neglected. In fact, she is injured by public negligence:

Out of her secret Paradise she sped,
Through camps and cities rough with stone, and steel,
And human hearts, which to her aery tread
Yielding not, wounded the invisible
Palms of her tender feet where'er they fell:
And barbed tongues, and thoughts more sharp than they,
Rent the soft Form they never could repel (lines 208-14)

Shelley not only attacks the public but expostulates Keats's problems with them

in Urania's bewailment. Comparing him with Milton as a spiritual champion, Shelley considers that Keats's naïvety indirectly caused attacks from critics: "Why didst thou . . . with weak hands though mighty heart / Dare the unpastured dragon in his den?" (lines 236-8). Shelley implies not only maturity but also popularity or public approbation of a poet by "the full cycle" when he proposes them as possible solutions: "Or hadst thou waited the full cycle, when / Thy spirit should have filled its crescent sphere, / The monsters of life's waste had fled from thee like deer" (lines 241-3). Byron, for example, was not only able to deal with criticism but also gained unparalleled popularity among contemporary poets: "how they fled, / When like Apollo, / from his golden bow, / The Pythian of the age one arrow sped / And smiled!" (lines 248-50). But the contemporary poets are more or less in the situation similar to Keats's. Chatterton is represented as the most symbolical unfortunate figure in the second part of *Adonais*: "Chatterton / Rose pale, his solemn agony had not / Yet faded from him" (lines 399-400).⁴ Keats death might have seemed like a recurrent catastrophe of the destiny of Chatterton.

Shelley highly estimated contemporary poets: "It is impossible to read the compositions of the most celebrated writers of the present day without being startled with the electric life which burns within their words" (508). Therefore, Shelley was angry not just with the critic of *Quarterly Review* but also of with society and the public: "I have dipped my pen in consuming fire to chastise his destroyers" (*Letters* 2: 302). *Adonais* insists on reading the loss of poetic genius not as personal but as a social phenomenon. In the preface, he indignantly comments on the reviewer of *Quarterly Review*: "Miserable man! you, one of the meanest, have wantonly defaced one of the noblest specimens of the workmanship of God" (391). The death of a poet is much more significant than that of a tyrant, as Keats himself says in his letter to Leigh Hunt on 10 May 1817: "Does Shelley go on telling strange Stories of the Death of kings? Tell him there are strange Stories of the death of Poets - some have died before they were conceived 'how do you make that out Master Vellum'."⁵ Similarly, William Hazlitt, in his review of "Shelley's Posthumous Poems," criticizes the indifference of critics to the deaths of contemporary poets, alluding to Keats and Shelley:

A canker had blighted the tender bloom that o'erspread a face in which youth and genius strove with beauty. The shaft was sped—venal, vulgar, venomous, that drove him from his country, with sickness and penury for companions, and followed him to his grave. And yet there are those who could trample on the faded flower—men to whom breaking hearts are a subject of merriment—who laugh loud over the silent urn of Genius, and play out their game of venality and infamy with the crumbling bones of their victims!⁶

According to Shelley, the death of a poet is to be directly connected with the loss of public spiritual fortune. Shelley discusses this problem in detail using the image of exile. Describing his own persona as an unfortunate poet, he defines his forehead as Christ's or Cain's: "He answered not, but with a sudden hand / Made bare his branded and ensanguined brow, / Which was like Cain's or Christ's—Oh! that it should be so!" (lines 304-6). Christ and Cain are extreme opposites, but they are nonetheless victims of or exiles from the society. His forehead is unfairly "branded and ensanguined" by society, which tends to exclude what it cannot evaluate by its standard code.⁷ Shelley pessimistically perceives the distance between contemporary social codes and poetic truths.

iii

Shelley is ambivalent about the standard of evaluating poets. As he critically compares Keats with Byron, Shelley acknowledges the importance of popularity as public influence. It is contradictory to this secular evaluation that neglected poets can be supremely rewarded in heaven, or "Fame's serene abode" (line 45) or "appointed height" (line 390): "the pure spirit shall flow / Back to the burning fountain whence it came, / A portion of the Eternal, which must glow / Through time and change, unquenchably the same" (lines 338-42).⁸ It is ironical that Shelley had to justify "death" somehow to persuade the reader of the social importance of unpopular poets. As Bernard Beatty says, it is his theoretical salvation for the doomed poets: "It is only by continually advertent to the horrors of present existence in this 'dull dense world' (line 382) which, naturally, would oppose or even murder young poets such as Chatterton, Sidney, and Lucan, that Shelley can generate, rhetorically, conviction in himself and his readers about some other order of exemplary existence" (Beatty 227). Life must be connected with a glorious and rewarding death for such aspiring poets.

Rome functions as the center of dramatic events in *Adonais*, not just because Keats was buried at the Protestant Cemetery there, but because it symbolized human vanities: "Or go to Rome, which is the sepulchre / O, not of him, but of our joy: 'tis nought / That ages, empires, and religions there / Lie buried in the ravage they have wrought" (lines 424-7). Such vain desires are sharply contrasted with the glories of intellectual power in poetry like Keats's: "And he is gathered to the kings of thought / Who waged contention with their time's decay, / And of the past are all that cannot pass away" (lines 430-32). In this sense, Rome is the best example to dwarf earthly achievement and, in contrast, to praise posthumous canonization.

The same Protestant Cemetery is also the graveyard for Shelley's son, William Shelley. According to Mary Shelley, Shelly wrote the following: "This spot is the

repository of a sacred loss, of which the yearnings of a parent's heart are now prophetic; he is rendered immortal by love, as his memory is by death. My beloved child lies buried here" (*SPW* 552). In *Adonais*, too, Shelley indirectly mentions William and reveals his emotions: "like an infant's smile, over the dead / A light of laughing flowers along the grass is spread" (lines 440-1). It is possible to conjecture that his affection towards William strengthens the suicidal tone of *Adonais*.⁹⁾

Here pause: these graves are all too young as yet
 To have outgrown the sorrow which consigned
 Its charge to each; and if the seal is set,
 Here, on one fountain of a mourning mind,
 Break it not thou! too surely shalt thou find
 Thine own well full, if thou returnest home,
 Of tears and gall. From the world's bitter wind
 Seek shelter in the shadow of the tomb.

What *Adonais* is, why fear we to become? (lines 451-9)

Death is beautified by the emotions of the narrator's "mourning mind" in the home of "tears and gall." The last line can be interpreted as reading, "What William is, why fear I to become?" It is possible to identify the emotional source of lamentation in *Adonais* as William's death. Keats can be considered partly as a persona of William. We can find parallel expressions in lamentation of Keats and William. In *Adonais*, he describes Keats: "He is a presence to be felt and known / In darkness and in light, from herb and stone" (lines 373-4) and "He is a portion of the loveliness / Which once he made more lovely" (lines 379-80). Similarly he delineates William's active spirit after death: "Let me think thy spirit feeds, / With its life intense and mild, / The love of living leaves and weeds / Among these tombs and ruins wild" ("To William Shelley, I" 11-14). William is his domestic hope and Keats his artistic one. But these hopes are now lost and do not inspire the poet any more. The logic of blissful death is now more persuasive to the narrator: "Why linger, why turn back, why shrink, my Heart? / Thy hope are gone before: from all things here / They have departed; thou shouldst now depart!" (lines 469-71). Shelley concludes in evaluating that death rewards and reanimates the narrator's spirit by making it rejoin with the "departed hopes": "No more let Life divide what Death can join together" (line 477). But the actual attempt of transcendence makes the narrator's journey extremely difficult and perplexing in the last stanzas.

iv

The last stanza summarizes Shelley's conflict of personal agonies and philosophical doubts; his ambivalent attitude towards death and a future state remains unsolved.

The breath whose might I have invoked in song
 Descends on me; my spirit's bark is driven,
 Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng
 Whose sails were never to the tempest given;
 The massy earth and sphered skies are riven!
 I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar;
 Whilst burning through the inmost veil of Heaven,
 The soul of Adonais, like a star,
 Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are. (lines 487-95)

"The breath" the poet invoked is comprehended as inspiration coming to the poet. So the spirit which drives Shelley towards death is both his own and "the soul of Adonais" beaoning from the eternal.¹⁰ This involves the fundamental problem of language in transcendence, as in *Epipsychidion*: "The winged words on which my soul would pierce / Into the height of love's rare Universe, / Are chains of lead around its flight of fire" (lines 588-90). Poetry vainly tries to represent the transcendental by the power of words, which are produced from the human body. This indicates the impossibility for men to cross the bar with their bodies. This limitation is represented by "the inmost veil" or the image of clouds. The logic of *Adonais* attempts to reach the infinite by the power of the finite. This is possible only when the poet in the elegy dies and loses poetic utterance. It is a great contradiction that the poet loses his voice in order to get the voice. According to Leighton, "to reach the desired realm of 'the Eternal' is a triumph only gained at the price of silence and despair" (Leighton, *Sublime* 149). Naturally, the poet in his last journey lingers and hesitates.

But unlike, for example, Alfred Tennyson's "Crossing the Bar," the narrator does not look towards death but back to life, emphasizing the relationship between his solitary situation on board and the people left on the shore: "Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng / Whose sails were never to the tempest given" (lines 489-90). This suggests that, despite his resigned attitude towards life and death, he manifests his earthly desire. His anxious attention is paid more to earthly fame and popularity than to eternal glory after death.

Shelley insinuatingly discloses in the last stanza the same anxiety which Milton also expressed in *Lycidas*: "Alas! What boots it with uncessant care / To tend the homely slighted shepherd's trade, / And strictly meditate the thankless muse" (lines 247-8). In fact, nothing consolidates the poets' status during their lifetime except public approbation. Shelley seems to admit that even immortal fame cannot be awarded without readers' sanction. Even when a poet denies audience, his poetry is invariably read, evaluated and sometimes canonized. If poetry is an act of collaboration in artistically rendering personal experience into general, the poetic or logical discourse must be constructed in communicative efficacy to the reader. *Adonais* was composed for publication; Shelley was so keen on influencing to the public through reading and must have known how the poem would impress them. The ending stanzas, therefore, should be read as a message through his ambiguous attitude. Poets' deaths were such an important issue, but poets' reward too. Since the whole message of poets' deaths and glory is directed to the reader, according to Simon Haines, "as an attack on a hostile or uncaring readership of poetry" (Haines 207), the question of earthly fame depends on the reader too.

v

I would like to propose a hypothesis that Shelley expects the pastoral recuperation not within the poetic structure but from the actual response from the reader. He implies that the narrator's anxious journey, which portends another death and another elegy, can be prevented by the reader's positive sympathy with him and other unfortunate poets. In other words, the narrator's attitude or pose of suicide demands the reader's participation in evaluating neglected poets through the elegy, and it becomes an act of substitution for the losses of Keats and poetic inspiration. The reader's re-evaluation of Keats and the unfortunate poets in the elegy almost promises approbation of Shelley and the elegy itself. Because the loss in *Adonais* contains a problem with the reading public, it must be solved by a metafictional method. Shelley ingeniously adapted the genre of pastoral elegy; he doesn't break the structure of loss and recuperation of pastoral elegy, but develops its function even beyond the text itself. So, against many contemporary critics' opinions, *Adonais* never finishes with despair and disappointment.¹¹⁾

Shelley's self-praise of *Adonais* as "a highly wrought *piece of art*" (*Letters* 2: 294) should be considered in this context. It not only exhibits the talent of Shelley as a poet in his skillful handling of a conventional form but also exploits a new adaptation of the genre through new interpretation of its rules. Shelley is modern and farsighted in considering the poem's communicative aspect as the fundamental function of elegy. Modern elegy must mean more than just the substitution of loss

and grief; it is expected to represent social and political advocacy because it is published in the period when a great number of people are instantly killed in wars with modern weapons.¹²⁾ Shelley seriously worried about the proposed problem of socially excluded or tormented poets in *Adonais*. He intimates that the reader's cooperation is indispensable in recovering the common loss of the dead poet. Shelley was confident with the new communicative elegy and anticipated that the poem would be far more controversial and attractive than conventional elegies. He declares that he does not care about criticism from classicists in his letter to John Gisborne on 18 June 1822: "The 'Adonais' I wished to have had a fair chance . . . let the classic party say what it will" (*Letters* 2: 434).

Adonais is a pastoral elegy which implicatively requests positive participation in sympathetic reading for compensation. The more conventional the form is, the more effectively contrastive will be the communicative device. Of course, Shelley hoped that his message could lead to gaining his readers and social approbation. He wrote to John Gisborne on 10 April 1822: "I know what to think of *Adonais*, but what to think of those who confound it with the many bad poems of the day, I know not" (*Letters* 2: 406). Also in his letter to Leigh Hunt on 25 January 1822, he shows how important he considers the poem as the last public appeal: ". . . pray tell me if Ollier has published *Hellas* and what effect was produced by *Adonais*. My faculties are shaken to atoms & torpid. I can write nothing, & if *Adonais* had no success & excited no interest what incentive can I have to write?" (*Letters* 2: 382). *Adonais* was written almost as the last appeal from Shelley to the public.

For Shelley, poetry, from its communicative nature, cannot be complete within itself as an art. It always functions towards the reader becoming "at once the centre and circumference of knowledge" (503). He did not believe in language as perfectly reproductive of original conceptions, but he finds the meaning in writing about them and communicating them through publishing.¹³⁾ Even if composition cannot fully realize the poet's original conception of the ideal, reading supplements it in sequential dissemination and common understanding of the knowledge that poetry contributes to making a bridge between this world and the possible better one. Shelley tactically uses self-ironical tone of suicide in order to attract the reader's attention to this problem. In the very act of complaining of unrewarding poetic composition, he paradoxically persuades us of the importance of re-valuing poetry.

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- 1) Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers, eds, *Shelley's Poetry and Prose* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977) 504. All quotations from Shelley's poems and prose are from the same text, unless elsewhere referred, and shown in parenthesis either by page or line number.
- 2) Thomas Hutchinson, ed., *Shelley: Poetical Works* (Oxford University Press, 1970) 721. Hereafter as *SPW*.
- 3) Shelley directly owes some poetic devices to *Lycidas* too, like the Muse, Urania, and apotheosis of the dead. Shelley describes Milton in his fragment in 1820 using Urania: "I dreamed that Milton's spirit rose, and took / From life's green tree his Uranian lute" ("Fragment: Milton's Spirit," lines 1-2). Shelley himself refers to Urania as his own Muse in the letter to Thomas Love Peacock on 15 February 1821: "I had the greatest possible desire to break a lance with you, within the lists of a magazine, in honour of my mistress Urania" (*Letters* 2: 261).
- 4) Wordsworth mentions him in "Resolution and Independence"; Coleridge in "Monody on the Death of Chatterton"; Keats dedicates *Endymion* to Chatterton.
- 5) Robert Gittings, ed., *Letters of John Keats* (Oxford University Press, 1970) 11.
- 6) James E. Barcus, ed., *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1995) 340.
- 7) We can have a common understanding among critics about the interpretation of this Christ-Cain identification. Timothy Clark is interested in the artistic quality of the figure without explaining the reason he has become a victim of society: "The Christ-Cain identification confirms the interpretation of the figure as an embodiment of the kind of self-destructive yet potent creativity" (Clark 223). Carlos Baker gives an orthodox outline of the figure: "... the allusion to Cain was doubtless intended to suggest, not that Shelley was not his brother's keeper, but that in the attempt to guide his brothers he had succeeded only in becoming, like Cain, an outcast and a wanderer in the world's wilderness" (Baker 218). Richard Cronin follows his interpretation: "But both Cain and Christ were rejected by their societies; both, in Blake's terms, were members of the devil's party. Cain, Christ, Shelley and Keats now represent the whole spectrum of social misfits for whom life is pain" (Cronin 192). Christine Gallant investigates Shelley's sense of guilt in the designation of the persona, which is probably related to his lack of confidence as a poet: "The 'frail Form' at once sorrows over the terrible sufferings visited upon him by a heartless world, and yet is not altogether innocent of causing them to happen" (Gallant 146). The bad image of Cain is used to depict the critic of *Quarterly Review*: "the curse of Cain / Light on his head who pierced thy innocent breast, / And scared the angel soul that was its earthly guest!" (lines 151-3).
- 8) Shelley writes in his letter to Byron: "Long after the *man* is dead, the immoral spirit may survive, and speak like on belonging to a higher world" (*Letters* 2: 309).
- 9) Shelley's love for William is strongly shown in 1817, hearing the Lord Chancellor's verdict. Mary Shelley writes: "he feared that our infant son would be torn from us. He did not hesitate to resolve, if such were menaced, to abandon country, fortune, everything, and to escape with his child" (*SPW* 551-2). He also wrote some poems about William: "To William Shelley" (1817), "Draft of the Poem to William Shelley" (1817), "Lines" (1817), "To William Shelley, I" (1819) and "To William Shelley, II" (1819). The fact that he showed much affection to William

suggests that he regarded William as the last hope of domestic peace and of the new relationship with Mary. William seemed to become, in this way, almost like the symbol of Shelley's own welfare, happiness and future. In "To William Shelley" (1817), he repeatedly identifies himself with William.

- 10) Stuart Curran argues that "the breath" indicates that of the West Wind. See Curran 176. Andrew Epstein half follows Curran's interpretation, pointing out the ambiguity of "the breath" as producing the rich context of the elegy: "the image further suggests a blurring of Keats's poetry with his own, a confusion as to whether Keats's or his own breath inspires him that Shelley finds as stimulating as it is threatening" (Epstein 123). Angela Leighton suggests, Shelley has discussed two kinds of breath: one of life and the other of poetic inspiration. The poetic breath promises him consummation of poetry but sacrifices the other breath of life: "To lose the life-breath is to die, but to lose the breath of poetic inspiration is to create poetry which entitles Keats to a kind of immortality" (Leighton, *Sublime* 133).
- 11) About the poem's conclusion, Angela Leighton pessimistically defines it as "a celebration of despair" (Leighton, "Deconstruction" 163). Richard Cronin considers the ending as "a pursuit of death" like that of *Alastor*. (Cronin 198). Ronald Tetreault shares Cronin's opinion: "The poem has turned itself demonically on him" (Tetreault 233). Simon Haines asserts that there is no "feelings from loss and grief to consolation and renewal" (Haines 219). Karen A. Weisman is of the same opinion: "I do not believe that Shelley intended that it be read, or even written, as practical consolation" (Weisman 142). Bernard Beatty too, keeps pessimistic interpretation of it as "a celebration of Death's potentialities" (Beatty 228). Wasserman considers it as confirmation of "the enlargement of the earthly soul" by death (Wasserman 485). All of these critics try to consider the elegy as self-complete and only within the limitation of fiction. To solve this problem, it is necessary to give the poem the context beyond the limitation, as Ross Greig Woodman suggests: "So long as Shelley functions within that illusory world, his theme in *Adonais* is despair. Once, however, he rids himself of that illusion, he is able completely to reverse his perspective and see not only himself but the universe aright" (Woodman 173). My argument attempts to propose a new interpretation, which must dispense with the fictional limitation.
- 12) Arguments like Lloyd Abbey's, therefore, are not regarding social function of poetry: "Nowhere in 'Adonais' does Shelley suggest that such realization has any more than private significance; its tendency is toward individual transcendence rather than toward social reform" (Abbey 111).
- 13) Jean Hall, for example, understands the limited faculty of language as the important factor in acquiring worldly knowledge and senses. Though Hall does not point out the communicative function of poetry, she indirectly suggests that our very inaccessibility to its real meaning provides us opportunities to consider the infinite within the finite, the incomprehensible within the understandable and the unwritten in the written. "And so poetry becomes 'the center and circumference of knowledge' because it is the great vehicle of human self-development. In this respect the paradoxical nature of poetic language—that language which attempts to say the unsayable—must assume its place as the facilitator of human growth. The poet who struggles to say the unsayable is involved in an interrelation of unlimitedness and limitation; for if on the one hand his or her intimations are 'elevating and delightful beyond all expression,' on the other, there are no words for what he or she senses. So like Shelley's ur-poet, the child at play, the poet gives self over unreflectively and wholly to uniting his or her impressions" (Hall, "The Divine" 149-50).