

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-62862-5 - Shelley and the Apprehension of Life  
Ross Wilson  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

## SHELLEY AND THE APPREHENSION OF LIFE

Percy Bysshe Shelley, in the essay 'On Life' (1819), stated 'We live on, and in living we lose the apprehension of life.' Ross Wilson uses this statement as a starting point to explore Shelley's fundamental beliefs about life and the significance of poetry. Drawing on a wide range of Shelley's own writing, and on philosophical thinking from Plato to the present, this book offers a timely intervention in the debate about what Romantic poets understood by 'life'. For Shelley, it demonstrates poetry is emphatically 'living melody', which stands in resolute contrast to a world in which life does not live. Wilson argues that Shelley's concern with the opposition between 'living' and 'the apprehension of life' is fundamental to his work and lies at the heart of Romantic-era thought.

ROSS WILSON is Lecturer in Literature at the School of Literature, Drama, and Creative Writing, University of East Anglia.

Cambridge University Press  
 978-1-107-62862-5 - Shelley and the Apprehension of Life  
 Ross Wilson  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

## CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN ROMANTICISM

Founding editor

Professor Marilyn Butler, *University of Oxford*

General editor

Professor James Chandler, *University of Chicago*

Editorial Board

John Barrell, *University of York*

Paul Hamilton, *University of London*

Mary Jacobus, *University of Cambridge*

Claudia Johnson, *Princeton University*

Alan Liu, *University of California, Santa Barbara*

Jerome McGann, *University of Virginia*

Susan Manning, *University of Edinburgh*

David Simpson, *University of California, Davis*

This series aims to foster the best new work in one of the most challenging fields within English literary studies. From the early 1780s to the early 1830s a formidable array of talented men and women took to literary composition, not just in poetry, which some of them famously transformed, but in many modes of writing. The expansion of publishing created new opportunities for writers, and the political stakes of what they wrote were raised again by what Wordsworth called those 'great national events' that were 'almost daily taking place': the French Revolution, the Napoleonic and American wars, urbanisation, industrialisation, religious revival, an expanded empire abroad and the reform movement at home. This was an enormous ambition, even when it pretended otherwise. The relations between science, philosophy, religion and literature were reworked in texts such as *Frankenstein* and *Biographia Literaria*; gender relations in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and *Don Juan*; journalism by Cobbett and Hazlitt; poetic form, content and style by the Lake School and the Cockney School. Outside Shakespeare studies, probably no body of writing has produced such a wealth of comment or done so much to shape the responses of modern criticism. This indeed is the period that saw the emergence of those notions of 'literature' and of literary history, especially national literary history, on which modern scholarship in English has been founded.

The categories produced by Romanticism have also been challenged by recent historicist arguments. The task of the series is to engage both with a challenging corpus of Romantic writings and with the changing field of criticism they have helped to shape. As with other literary series published by Cambridge, this one will represent the work of both younger and more established scholars, on either side of the Atlantic and elsewhere.

*For a complete list of titles published see end of book.*

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-62862-5 - Shelley and the Apprehension of Life  
Ross Wilson  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

# SHELLEY AND THE APPREHENSION OF LIFE

ROSS WILSON



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press  
 978-1-107-62862-5 - Shelley and the Apprehension of Life  
 Ross Wilson  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

## CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107628625](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107628625)

© Ross Wilson 2013

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2013

First paperback edition 2015

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*

Wilson, Ross, 1979–

Shelley and the apprehension of life / Ross Wilson.

pages cm. – (Cambridge studies in romanticism)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-04122-6 (hardback)

1. Shelley, Percy Bysshe, 1792–1822–Criticism and interpretation.

2. Life in literature. I. Title.

PR5438.W55 2013

821'.7–dc23

2013004685

ISBN 978-1-107-04122-6 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-107-62862-5 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>page</i> vi
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	viii
Introduction	i
1 Poetry and the theory of life	21
2 Living losing life	46
3 Mere wheels of work	66
4 Happier forms	86
5 Sounds of air	116
6 Poetry and the life of theory	142
Coda	166
<i>Notes</i>	173
<i>Bibliography</i>	209
<i>Index</i>	220

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-62862-5 - Shelley and the Apprehension of Life

Ross Wilson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Acknowledgements*

I have benefited in writing this book from the inspiration, assistance and encouragement of many individuals, including Rowan Boyson, Adelene Buckland, Kate Campbell, Cathy Caruth, Robert Clark, David Ferris, Tony Gash, Denise Gigante, Tom Greaves, Paul Hamilton, Mary Jacobus, Ewan Jones, Laura Kilbride, Jeremy Noel-Tod, David Nowell-Smith, Fred Parker, Reeve Parker, Ian Patterson, Rachel Potter, Henry Power, Rupert Read, Alexander Regier, Michael Rossington, Rebecca Stott, Stefan Uhlig, Nick Walker, John Wilkinson, my father Mike Wilson and Peter Womack. I am grateful to Linda Bree, Anna Bond, Liz Hudson, and Rob Wilkinson, to two anonymous reviewers for Cambridge University Press and to James Chandler, whose advice on the manuscript was invaluable. I am indebted to the following institutions, without whose support work on this book would have been impossible: the Leverhulme Trust; the Sir Isaac Newton Trust; the Faculty of English, University of Cambridge; Emmanuel College, Cambridge; and the School of Literature, Drama, and Creative Writing, University of East Anglia.

An earlier version of Chapter 5 appeared as 'Shelley's Sounds of Air' in *Thinking Verse*, Issue 1 ([www.thinkingverse.com/issue01.html](http://www.thinkingverse.com/issue01.html)), and some sections of Chapters 3, 4 and 5 draw on 'Poetry as Reanimation in Shelley', in Ross Wilson, ed., *The Meaning of 'Life' in Romantic Poetry and Poetics* (2009). Likewise, much of this book has its genesis in papers presented to various conferences, colloquia and seminars; suffice to say that I am grateful to the organisers and audiences of numerous such events over the past five years.

I should like to mention four individuals in particular for special acknowledgement. Lyndsey Stonebridge's support has been of the highest value, as has the friendship and intellectual companionship of Tom Rutledge. Adequate acknowledgement of my debt to Simon Jarvis scarcely seems possible; without the inspiration of his work and thought, and his

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-62862-5 - Shelley and the Apprehension of Life  
Ross Wilson  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

*Acknowledgements*

vii

practical advice and encouragement, this book would barely have been conceived. Finally, I should like to acknowledge the tireless support of my wife, Lesley Wylie. This book is for her, once again, and for our daughter, Flora.

# Abbreviations

<i>BSM</i> I	<i>‘Peter Bell the Third’ and ‘The Triumph of Life’</i> , ed. Donald H. Reiman (New York: Garland, 1986).
<i>BSM</i> V	<i>The Witch of Atlas Notebook: A Facsimile of Bodleian MS. Shelley Adds. e. 6</i> , ed. Carlene A. Adamson (New York: Garland, 1997).
<i>BSM</i> XVII	<i>Drafts for ‘Laon and Cythna’, Cantos V–XII: Bodleian MS. Shelley Adds. e. 10</i> , ed. Steven E. Jones (New York: Garland, 1994).
<i>BSM</i> XVIII	<i>The Homeric Hymns and ‘Prometheus’ Drafts Notebook: Bodleian MS. Shelley Adds. e. 12</i> , ed. Nancy Moore Goslee (New York: Garland, 1996).
<i>BSM</i> XIX	<i>The Faust Draft Notebook: A Facsimile of Bodleian MS. Shelley Adds. e. 18</i> , ed. Nora Crook and Timothy Webb (New York: Garland, 1997).
Hutchinson	<i>Shelley: Poetical Works</i> , ed. Thomas Hutchinson, 2nd edn, corr. by G. M. Matthews (Oxford University Press, 1971).
<i>Letters</i>	<i>The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley</i> , ed. Frederick L. Jones, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964).
<i>Poems</i> I	<i>The Poems of Shelley</i> , vol. I: 1804–1817, ed. Geoffrey Matthews and Kelvin Everest (London: Longman, 1989).
<i>Poems</i> II	<i>The Poems of Shelley</i> , vol. II: 1817–1819, ed. Kelvin Everest and Geoffrey Matthews (Harlow: Longman, 2000).
<i>Poems</i> III	<i>The Poems of Shelley</i> , vol. III: 1819–1820, ed. Jack Donovan et al. (Harlow: Longman, 2011).
<i>Prose</i>	<i>The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley</i> , ed. E. B. Murray (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).



*List of abbreviations* ix

<i>SPP</i>	<i>Shelley's Poetry and Prose: Authoritative Texts, Criticism</i> , 2nd edn, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (New York: Norton, 2002).
<i>Works</i>	<i>The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley</i> , ed. Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck, 10 vols. (London: Benn, 1926–30).

In citing from the *BSM* volumes above, I give first the Bodleian pagination followed by that of the Garland reprint.