CHAPTER 12

Educating the Imagination/ Defending Shelley Defending

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I

Shelley wrote *A Defence of Poetry* in 1821 as a response to Thomas Love Peacock's "The Four Ages of Poetry" (1820), which appeared in the first and only issue of *Ollier's Literary Miscellany*.[1] Charles Ollier, also Shelley's publisher, discontinued the periodical before the *Defence* could appear, and Shelley died before he could publish his essay as a pamphlet. Mary Shelley intended to publish the *Defence* in *The Liberal*, but that periodical also folded. The essay finally appeared as the opening work in Mary's edition of her husband's *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments* (1840), the year after her 1839 edition of *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Yet, despite these obstacles, what other factors explain the essay's delayed publication? The prophetic conclusion of Shelley's essay offers one answer:

> Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration, the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present, the words which express what they understand not, the trumpets which sing to battle and feel not what they inspire: the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the World. (*SPP* 535)

Shelley's poets capture through the vitality of their metaphors the future's dark shadows, yet without knowing their eventual impact. That is to say, poetry announces a world that *will have come*, as if the present already apprehends the future, but without any idea what it might mean ("words which express what they understand not"). Moreover, that this "influence" "moves" but "is moved not" suggests a potentially dangerous enthusiasm, a source of action and agency that also needs to be curbed. Evoking a preternatural feeling about the future, then, Shelley's *Defence* states its case as if by refusing, or not knowing how, to do so, like the narrator's thoughts "which must remain untold" in Shelley's last, unfinished poem, *The Triumph of Life*, even as he goes on to describe the scene of their cognition

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(21 [*SPP* 484]). Not telling also tells a different story and offers a different way of knowing the world, the sign of a malleable, adaptive mind built to deal with crisis. That certain forces would instrumentalize this creative capacity, however, makes such a mind all the more prone to influence.

The visionary ending of the *Defence* evokes the strange temporality Maurice Blanchot associates with prophetic speech, in which "it is not the future that is given, but the present that is taken away."[2] This "impossible future" is one we "would not know how to live and that must upset all the sure givens of existence."[3] The "thought of impossibility" draws us away "from the space in which we exercise power" to indicate a "reserve in thought itself, a thought not allowing itself to be thought in the mode of appropriative comprehension."[4] In Shelley's *The Triumph of Life*, this impossibility defines how the disaster of history shapes the mind, its thoughts perpetually generated and trampled by a "shape all light" (*SPP* 352). In this chapter, I want to align this impossibility with a mind liberated in order to find itself yet unable to find its bearings, and thus prone to uselessness. I associate this uselessness with an ongoing crisis in the humanities and the teaching of literature. Shelley's essay reads within a history indifferent to poetry the imagination's animating response to the deadening effects of utility, like the leaves of Shelley's West Wind scattered to announce a new birth. The humanities find themselves facing a similar struggle against the time's demand for relevance. While the outcome remains to be seen, let us at least consider what options Shelley's essay suggests. If an uncertain mind is the quality of any attempt to live in and with the present, thus making it vulnerable to appropriation, perhaps uncertainty nonetheless remains the mind's greatest capacity for change.

II

History has suspected the imagination at least since Socrates cautioned Ion about infecting his audience with the divine madness of Homer's inspiration. Socrates succumbed to his own warning when charged with corrupting the minds of Athenian youth, to which danger Plato replied by exiling poets from his ideal republic for taking fictions as truths, what Sir Phillip Sidney then taught as poetry's primary function. Caught in this conflict of sensations between rejecting and embracing poetry's utility, the *Defence* distinguishes between poetry as verbal art, anchored in its everyday practice and teaching or its evolution throughout literary history, and poetry as a transhistorical force for change. Shelley directs his rage against an emergent

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information age that threatens to bury us in facts, like Gradgrind in Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* or the law's grinding entropy in *Bleak House*:[5]

> We have more moral, political and historical wisdom, than we know how to reduce into practise; we have more scientific and economical knowledge than can be accommodated to the just distribution of the produce which it multiplies. The poetry in these systems of thought, is concealed by the accumulation of facts and calculating processes [...] The cultivation of poetry is never more to be desired than at periods when, from an excess of the selfish and calculating principle, the accumulation of the materials of external life exceed the quantity of the power of assimilating them to the internal laws of human nature. The body has then become too unwieldy for that which animates it. (*SPP* 530–531)

Amidst the relentless formation of "systems of thought" that inform and sustain culture, Shelley appeals to their original articulation as phantasy. If society forgets *this* "poetry," knowledge becomes the dead weight of the endless viscera archived by the "promoters of utility" in the "book of common life" (529). The only solution to such an "unmitigated exercise of the calculating faculty" is transformation through perpetual acts of imagination: "We want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know; we want the generous impulse to act that which we imagine; we want the poetry of life: our calculations have outrun conception; we have eaten more than we can digest" (529, 530).

While poetry's "vitally metaphorical" function contests "utility," however, the poetry Shelley describes is also a self-consuming artifact, in which "want" signifies a privation to be satisfied but also a desire for something evermore about to be that can't (*SPP* 512). Poetry seems caught between feeding the imagination's hunger for figuration and curtailing its gluttony. As both "centre and circumference of knowledge," at once the form and process of its own unfolding, poetry exposes the difference within our relation with the real and thus the profound absence of reality from itself (531). An earlier criticism surmised "two planes of thought in Shelley's aesthetics – one Platonistic and mimetic, the other psychological and expressive."[6] Waged between the desire for art's completion by the Ideal and the need to understand the desire itself, however, the *Defence* offers a kind of negative Platonism not unlike deconstruction's version of Shelley, in which language compensates for the absence of the things it represents. By negating reality, language exposes us to the unfathomable nature of our being that can never be filled except by creative acts that never satisfy the yearning. Indeed, there is something voracious and atavistic about poetry's drive to find new lands for the imagination to explore: "Poetry enlarges

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the circumference of the imagination by replenishing it with thoughts of ever new delight, which have the power of attracting and assimilating to their own nature all other thoughts, and which form new intervals and interstices *whose void for ever craves fresh food*" (*SPP* 517, emphasis mine). Rather than "imagine that which we know," poetry generates its own creative energy as if *ex nihilo*, the primal energy of a black hole whose impact exceeds representation, almost as if to feed on its own burnout.

If this relentless creativity is how poetry delights, what does it teach us, especially when the circumference drawn, then exceeded, by imagination is both within and beyond the poet's grasp? For Tilottama Rajan, the "self-displacing energy" of Shelley's poetry "insists on the imagination as dynamic and vital but thereby unable to fix meaning."[7] Addressing "episodes to that great poem, which all poets, like the co-operating thoughts of one great mind, have built up since the beginning of the world" (*SPP* 522), the *Defence* assumes "that the work is to be found in unassimilated portions of the text, in revolutionary sparks that a later reader develops, often in opposition to what the major portion of the text seems to say."[8] Thought "is precisely the site of a paradox: dissemination as the scattering and unfixing of unitary meaning, dissemination as communication."[9] Yet by suspending enlightenment as an alternate form of illumination, this indeterminacy invites other determinations.[10] For Shelley, the "true utility" of poetry "[renders the mind] the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought," by which pleasure the "imagination is enlarged by a sympathy with pains and passions" of others (*SPP* 529, 517, 520).[11] But such revelation exposes poetry to the distortion of its educative potential, to making the energy of thought a sensation that requires policing, even condemnation. The "vitally metaphorical" labor of interpretation that is the hallmark of the humanities also exposes this pleasure to ideological capture. In short, if our critical, affective, and transformational task is never to make up our minds in order to resist the status quo, the status quo can just as easily make up our minds for us. The rhetorical urgency of Shelley's response is very much to defend against this foreboding, which he senses in Peacock's essay. In doing so, however, does Shelley play into the hands of a crisis about which Peacock was only half kidding (if he was) or does it foment that crisis (especially if he wasn't)?

Against Peacock, Shelley insists that "the literature of England [...] has arisen as it were from a new birth" (*SPP* 535). But "as it were" suggests an uncertainty about the future that resonates to the present in the humanities. Retrofitting Shelley's reputation was one focus of the emergence of Romantic studies since the mid-twentieth century.

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Subsequent criticisms – feminism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, new historicism, queer studies, to name a few – have rethought Romanticism as a process of "restless self-examination" compelling our repeated analysis.[12] One might think that the new university, craving the "fresh food" of innovation for innovation's sake, would welcome this explosion of approaches, especially its informed social response. But this restlessness also marks our field as rather faceless. We might recall Arthur O. Lovejoy's discrimination of Romanticism as a multiple personality T. E. Hulme diagnosed by separating a healthy classicism from an unwieldy and morbid Romanticism. This fate has since become Romanticism's imaginative asset, the aesthetic incitement to robust and diverse political response. Yet has this protean nature come back to haunt us, urging us to make up our mind while preying on the fact that we can't?

Shelley's vision of poetry as the evolution of unanticipated mutations is a potent model for our field's ongoing revitalization, exemplified by this volume's editors and contributors. But the imagination's malleability makes it ripe for manipulation, the danger of which Shelley seems equally aware. His essay's vacillating nature doesn't help. The "vitally metaphorical" language of poets, which includes the writing of Dante, Homer, and Shakespeare, but also Plato, Bacon, and "the authors of revolutions" (*SPP* 515),

> marks the before unapprehended relations of things, and perpetuates their apprehension, until the words which represent them, become through time signs for portions or classes of thoughts instead of pictures of integral thoughts; 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. (512)

Later, Shelley goes from saying that poetry "lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar" (517) to suggesting that the "universe" eventually becomes "annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration," requiring poetry to "create afresh the associations which have been thus disorganized" (533). Between the limits of language, which confront us with the finitude of existence, and the potential for endless recombination within that finitude, Shelley emphasizes the transformative power of an "unapprehended inspiration." Yet is this recombination the symptom of the mind at work on itself or of a mind ready-made for brainwashing by the modes of ceaseless production capitalism has imposed on the modern university?

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Shelley's emphasis on the "unapprehended" should by now make us, well, a little apprehensive.[13] Thought's endless synergy also suggests an imagination stretched to absurdity, like the Grecian urn that teases Keats out of thought. Two of the more gothic moments in the *Defence* signal an endlessly deferred, missed, even pointless encounter with the very thing imagination means to attain. Shelley refers to "the mind in creation" as a "fading coal which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness," a force that can never be "durable in its original purity and force" (*SPP* 531). For "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" (531). Earlier he refers to the poet as a "nightingale who sits in darkness, and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds; his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why" (516). If poetry's transformational potential is proleptic, it arrives stillborn, in need of reanimation, like Mary Shelley's scientist obsessed with revivifying what in *Adonais* her husband calls "corpses in a charnel" (349). Yet it also marks an anxiety about alternative views post-1789. Such dangers threatened Edmund Burke but would not have threatened the man who wrote *The Necessity of Atheism*, and whose *Queen Mab* or *Laon and Cythna* were the target of censorship. Yet by 1821 such dangers surely inform *A Defence of Poetry*. What, then, should we do with Shelley's injunction to use the imagination to legislate a better world? Paul de Man's deconstructive Shelley posits a meaningless positing of meaning.[14] But what about the Shelley who still imagines the world can be changed, Shelley as patron saint of the Chartist movement, for instance?

III

Peacock's stadial theory of English verse ends in the brass age of his contemporaries, among whom the poet is a "semi-barbarian in a civilized community," the opposite of the "useful or rational man" and "cannot claim the slightest share in any one of the comforts and utilities of life of which we have witnessed so many and so rapid advance."[15] Peacock urges "intelligent men" to "stop wasting their time writing poetry and apply themselves to the new sciences, including economics and political theory, that could improve the world" (*SPP* 509).[16] But Peacock's satire, if it is satire, suggests a dangerous paradox about the advent of political economy informing progress in Shelley's time. For instance, Shelley's essay doesn't

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mention Adam Smith, whose invisible hand of the marketplace, articulated in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), haunts Shelley's text as the phantom menace of social change not entirely dissimilar to the power of the invisible mind forming itself within Shelley's conception of poetry. Either figure evokes a kind of gothic prosthesis governing two versions of progress uncannily related by assuming a social consensus or *sensus communis*. Shelley's poetry seems toothless for its evocation of a future *avenir* that may or may not materialize, whereas Smith's designation insists upon its eventuality as a way of "inevitably plotting the economic process toward a final state of equilibrium," a fiscal balance not unlike the impartial assurances of human sympathy in his earlier *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759).[17] Conversely, Shelley's displacing energy of poetry has more to do with revolutionary upset than with establishing equilibrium, just as the forces of economic progress, like those of affective exchange, have the potential to go awry, albeit not in a manner Smith would have advocated.[18]

What, then, does Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* tell us about the current state of crisis within the humanities? Paul Reitter and Chad Wellmon argue that "*the self-understanding of the modern humanities didn't merely take shape in response to a perceived crisis; it also made crisis a core part of the project of the humanities*."[19] Different from the "disordered desires, unruly passions, or the presence of evil" that were the object of an earlier *studia humanitatis*, the modern humanities are tasked with addressing "historical changes: industrialization, new technologies, natural science, and capitalism," not to mention climate change and the constant threat of geopolitical chaos, a "permanent relationship to the present [that] links the modern humanities to the temporality of crisis."[20] Because the humanities "*both depended on and played a crucial part in the rise of the modern research university*" in nineteenth-century Germany and then in the United States, the demands of instrumental rationality in providing "practical moral succour for a new age" immediately put them at odds with Max Weber's call for the humanities to "be conducted value free, without moral presuppositions."[21] This "'polytheism of values'"[22] aligns with Shelley's defense of imagination as the "great instrument of moral good" (*SPP* 517). Yet it traps the humanities between naming its singular purpose, its "world-historical mission," and the ongoing critique of its common ground, which is fundamental to this purpose but which makes proving our relevance that much more difficult.[23]

Perhaps, then, the crisis of the humanities stems from the assumption that they have "intrinsic value."[24] Shelley's *Defence* speaks to a historical continuity not unlike T. S. Eliot's tradition but rewrites its creative

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catalyst as the free radical of change, what *Prometheus Unbound* calls a "voice to be accomplished" (III.iii.67 [*SPP* 261]). At the end of Shelley's lyrical drama, Demogorgon, a placeholder for the impossibility of identity if ever there was one, urges us "to hope, till Hope creates / From its own wreck the thing it contemplates," not unlike Walter Benjamin's angel moving onward fueled by the toxic waste of catastrophe as, paradoxically, its constitutive possibility (IV.573–574 [286]).[25] But it is easy to overlook the fact that something has to or will inevitably *get wrecked* in the process. Which begs the question: might Shelley, if he saw how the humanities have evolved, contemplate their ruin as a necessary gesture to clear space for some future incarnation, if such an incarnation is even possible? We might ask the same question of Romantic studies itself.

IV

The title of my essay paraphrases Northrop Frye, for whom, as for the New Critics or Leavis's Great Tradition, the teaching of literature offers a bulwark of culture against the anarchy of one's historical moment, programmatically laid out in Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*.[26] Frye wrote *The Educated Imagination* as a work of public intellectualism in Canada as we anticipated our centennial in 1967.[27] That is to say, the stakes were not just academic but patriotic, indicative of "a great and free development of the national will." But Frye also shares Shelley's anxiety: "Is it possible that literature, especially poetry, is something that a scientific civilization like ours will eventually outgrow?"[28] He continues: "Shelley's essay is a wonderful piece of writing, but it's not likely to convince anyone who needs convincing."[29] Frye's groundbreaking study of William Blake, of course, was another sign of a resurgence of interest in Romanticism that continues to this day.[30] He defends literature as secular scripture, an autonomous imaginative realm that expresses Weber's "polytheism of values." Literature needed to reach beyond the history that produced it in order to outmaneuver the "promoters of utility" who "follow in the footsteps of poets, and copy the sketches of their creations into the book of common life" (*SPP* 529). Frye thus asks what it means to be educated in the first place, although he assumes a certain kind of education. As Deanne Bogdan argues, Frye avoids the politics of race, class, or gender that necessarily shape how teachers teach and readers read and have become essential to our understanding of the field. The *Defence* is especially attuned to these experiences because, for Shelley, poetry is "the only one [of the arts] that dictates the actual material of its expression," which means that "poetry alone actually produces

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the material of its own ontology" and thus actively expresses the shifting means of an unavoidable yet necessary confrontation with the political.[31]

Shelley uses the word "common" nine times in the *Defence*, which suggests an alliance with the status quo but also a countervailing response that itself risks being universalist. And there is the paradoxical situation in which poetry finds itself. Poetry expresses a continuous historical force, what in *Adonais* Shelley calls the "loveliness" of which each poem is a "portion" (*SPP* 379). Yet in the *Defence*, poems form the "unassimilated portions" (515) that do not necessarily add up to a "whole," avatars of history whose uncertain unfolding heralds an "unapprehended" future. This makes their protean nature one of the more transformative and disruptive aspects of Shelley's *Defence*. Poetry's defamiliarizing affects and effects confront us with the feeling of consciousness, and consciousness *as* feeling, that contemporary neuroscience is only beginning to understand.[32] That a poem might literally generate, impact, and shape in turn how we embody ourselves makes poetry – its making but especially its reading – a startling *existential* force that embeds us within the evolving process of discovering the new as the unknown. Yet this revolutionary urge chafes against the pedagogic demands of learning about the world in order to be its productive citizens. If the root of education is *educatio* (reading, breeding, bringing up) or *educare* (to train, bring forth, lead forward, raise up), then Shelley's *Defence* leaves maddeningly, even dangerously unstated what one is being led toward, trained for, a breeding that might even produce oppressive social forms. Even a universalist like Frye realized that a lack of common purpose might prove the Achilles' heel of the struggle of the humanities to justify themselves.

Ben Lerner begins his brief but brilliant *The Hatred of Poetry* by quoting Marianne Moore's aptly titled "Poetry":

> I, too, dislike it.
> Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one discovers in it, after all, a place for the genuine.[33]

The title names the poem's subject, but the real tension is between "I" and "it," as if to insist on an anonymity that engenders "perfect contempt," yet at the same time to name this diasporic site as a "place for the genuine" in which the "I" might find itself. With a nod to Shelley, Lerner writes that, as a rebuttal to the "'calculative' avarice of a materialistic society, […] the use of poetry is therefore entwined with its uselessness […] its lack of practical utility."[34] Yet "[i]t's precisely because of the contradictory nature of the poetic vocation – it is both more and less than work" – "that

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we are embarrassed by and disdainful of the poet's labor."[35] Put another way, that poetry is always already arcane and inscrutable is the power of its impotence, a counterintuitive gesture to be sure. Shelley himself said that *Prometheus Unbound*, one of Romanticism's most challenging texts largely untouched by critics until seminal readings by Earl Wasserman or Harold Bloom, "was never intended for more than five or six persons" (*Letters* II: 388).[36] We also need to remember that in place of the promised second part of his essay, which was to "have for its object an application of these principles [explored in the first part] to the present state of the cultivation of Poetry," Shelley instead wrote *Adonais*, an elegy that struggles almost literally to bring Keats back to life (*SPP* 535). This missing supplement suggests the failure to apply theory by turning interpretation to practical use – a melancholic response to that failure, a failed mourning for poetry's missed encounter with its own potentiality. And yet this failure of theory is at the same time the triumph of poetry.

Isn't such a *méconnaissance* precisely Shelley's point? The "true utility" of poetry can and should be *more poetry*, the feedback loop of imagination as the eternal recurrence of its creative potential to transform the world. This is Shelley's space of a revolutionary potential by which, as he states in "Ode to a West Wind," we "Drive [our] dead thoughts over the universe / Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth," and "by [our] incantation of [Shelley's] verse / Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth / Ashes and sparks, [his] words among mankind!" to herald the "trumpet of a prophecy" (63–69 [*SPP* 300–301]). We understand the value of educating the imagination to be the fulfilment of this potential. For Frye, this signified the cultivation of a learned civil society, which in the midst of the Vietnam War and civil unrest was at the very least a quaint notion. But something of his argument for the imagination's autonomy compels me here, by which I mean its radically disseminative energy among and between subjects, and thus as a challenge to the very notion of the subject. For we now exist on the fault line between a literature that tells the truth otherwise and one that can or should be put to use so that we don't accept the trap of the given. A poetry that never lies because it never affirms has morphed into fake news and alternative facts as we sift through what perpetual interpretation looks like when relayed to us by social media. Add to this the existential threat of a pandemic and we have Shelley's West Wind as a perfect storm: a neoliberal academy in which the humanities, always resistant to instrumentalization, a threat to be deactivated, need to be instrumentalized to maximum capacity or perish altogether. Shelley poses a terrifying prospect: poetry needs to solve the same problem it created in

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the first place. Writing an elegy in place of the second half of the *Defence* might be Shelley's yearning to opt out altogether before his final poem traps him in a world of "untold" thoughts.[37] Yet the silence of that final gesture, left in the wake of Shelley's drowning, leaves a "void that craves fresh food," leaves us to ask what hope might be created from the wreck it contemplates to educate our imaginations in perilous times.

In a recent collection of essays, Judith Butler, addressing the tension between universality and difference, argues "for critically re-evaluating [...] what cannot be measured by the metrics by which the humanities are increasingly judged."[38] She continues that "instrumentality" cannot be "the only way of thinking about what it means to make a difference."[39] Yet "instrumentality" now seems a foregone conclusion, so that we can only measure resistance in terms of what we desire to transform, if not overthrow. Even more ominously, such a compromise risks eliding forces that distinguish grievable from non-grievable life,[40] which in turn risks missing voices otherwise "blunted by reiteration." In the same volume, Paul W. Kahn locates the humanities in the "gap between what we know and what we create [...] One interpretation can only be met by another interpretation. What I have called 'thinking with' is what the humanities have always taught."[41] As a lawyer, Kahn understands the fungibility of truth: one person's interpretation might mean liberty while another's might lead to incarceration. Yet poetry has a different legislative impact, one that demands "humility before the power of creation that is revealed through the subject, but is not possessed by the subject."[42] Kahn goes one better than Butler: "This experience of free creativity, which goes to the heart of who we are but remains a mystery, is as close to the sacred as many of us are likely to get."[43]

What else could we be or should we ask for in the midst of the essentially migratory process of historical change? The question isn't a new one, even if the conditions for asking it exert a particular contemporary urgency. Charles Darwin, like his grandfather before him, made such observations unavoidable, however much the fallout regalvanized conservative forces through whose prescriptive view we are all, increasingly, being viewed.[44] But that is itself to invoke a language of crisis on which the humanities thrive, a crisis that materialized Shelley's response to Peacock in the first place. In *Suspiria de Profundis*, Thomas De Quincey writes: "Among the powers in man which suffer by this too intense life of the *social* instinct none suffers more than the power of dreaming."[45] "Habitually to dream magnificently," we "must have a constitutional determination to reverie."[46] One of De Quincey's solutions, besides opium, is solitude, a pulling away

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from social engagement – a rather dangerous thing to ask of those of us who are feeling the long-term effects of isolation.[47] If Shelley retreats from didactic literature, however, it is only to embrace the vitality of metaphor. My concern here is addressing the "usefulness" of the humanities at a time when wasting time with speculation and contemplation seems more than ever a necessity in stepping back from the world of things as they are in order to see their "obviousness" otherwise.

In the opening section of "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," W. H. Auden apostrophizes Yeats's passing as a moment of what Schopenhauer would call "deadening languor,"[48] of a boredom that barely registers an awareness of its creative potential: "O all the instruments agree / The day of his death was a dark cold day."[49] In the second section, boredom becomes the point:

> For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives
> In the valley of its saying where executives
> Would never want to tamper; it flows south
> From ranches of isolation and the busy griefs,
> Raw towns that we believe and die in; it survives,
> A way of happening, a mouth.[50]

Jonathan Culler says of apostrophe that it makes nothing happen in reality but it *does* make something happen in the poem, which is to indicate a different form of survival: "Nothing need happen because the poem itself is to be the happening."[51] Auden risks giving into boredom, for only then might we make ourselves still enough to hear and feel other stirrings. That is to say, apostrophe makes nothing happen although prosopopoeia animates objects to register the affect of a grievable life. Anticipating the survival of the spirit of poetry itself in the second section, this maneuver figuratively – which is to say within the ontology of the poem, literally – breathes life into the final panegyric of the third. Moving from pleasure to utility to meaning, Shelley's essay ends up with the idea of the poem as "happening," of figuration itself *as* happening. As a form of *un*acknowledged legislation, such an event remains radically indeterminate except to register the happening itself, although at the same time the experience is all too real. Shelley understood this when it came to mourning the grievable life of poets and their works: "O, weep for Adonais!" (2, 19, 73 [*SPP* 411, 412, 413]). It may be his only option was to turn Keats into a star, as if to forestall the struggle of mourning altogether. Yet by indicating "stages in a drama of mind" and thus the poem itself as a mode of consciousness, apostrophe, however painful, is able to sing, maybe even to redeem and silence the pain.[52] If relevance is what we are after, it may be necessary for

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us to avoid singing quite so stridently as Shelley does in the *Defence*, and yet at the same time to avoid getting trapped in the present in order to see beyond. But then again, regardless of whether or not things have always been thus, we may no longer have the luxury of not being defensive.

Notes

1 I thank Kate Singer and Omar F. Miranda for the invitation to contribute to this volume and for their incisive and generous commentary, which has made for a much better essay. I also thank the Department of English at Dalhousie University, where I gave an earlier version of this essay and from whom I received wonderful feedback.

2 Maurice Blanchot, "Prophetic Speech," in *The Book to Come*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 79.

3 Blanchot, "Prophetic Speech," 79.

4 Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 43.

5 For a recent account of the media ecology of Shelley's writing, see Yohei Igarashi, "Shelley amid the Age of Separations: Romantic Sociology and Romantic Media Theory," in Andrew Burkett, ed. *Multi-Media Romanticisms*, *Romantic Circles* Praxis Series (November 2016), https://romantic-circles.org/praxis/multi-media/praxis.2016.multi-media.igarashi.html.

6 M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 126.

7 Tilottama Rajan, *The Supplement of Reading: Figures of Understanding in Romantic Theory and Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 293, 292.

8 Rajan, *The Supplement of Reading*, 286.

9 Rajan, *The Supplement of Reading*, 296. See Jerrold Hogle's account of transference as the nomadic principle of Shelley's aesthetics. *Shelley's Process: Radical Transference and the Development of His Major Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 15.

10 See Joel Faflak, "The Difficult Education of Shelley's *The Triumph of Life*," *Keats-Shelley Journal* 58 (2009), 53–78. See also "Dancing in the Dark with Shelley," in Jacques Khalip and Forrest Pyle, eds. *Constellations of a Contemporary Romanticism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 166–185.

11 See Julie A. Carlson, "Like Love: The Feel of Shelley's Similes," in Joel Faflak and Richard C. Sha, eds. *Romanticism and the Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 76–97. See also Chris Washington, "The Dark Side of the Light: The Triumph of Love in Shelley's *The Triumph of Life*," in Joel Faflak, ed. *The Future of Shelley's Triumph*, *Romantic Circles* Praxis Series (October 2019), https://romantic-circles.org/praxis/triumph/praxis.2019.triumph.washington.html.

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12 Tilottama Rajan, *Dark Interpreter: The Discourse of Romanticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 25.
13 Timothy Webb argues that Shelley's use of negatives like "unapprehended" "insists on the difficulty of definition, the problems of communication, the cramping boundaries of language." "The Unascended Heaven: Negatives in Prometheus Unbound," in Kelvin Everest, ed. *Shelley Revalued: Essays from the Gregynog Conference* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1983), 37–62, excerpted in *SPP* 708.
14 See Paul de Man, "Shelley Disfigured," in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 93–123.
15 Thomas Love Peacock, "Four Ages of Poetry," in Russell Noyes, ed. *English Romantic Poetry and Prose* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 1249, 1250.
16 The editors continue that Peacock's urging of "intelligent men" to abandon poetry comes in light of his own "failing as a poet [who] had recently begun work at the East India Company" (*SPP* 509).
17 Stefan Andriopoulos, "The Invisible Hand: Supernatural Agency in Political Economy and the Gothic Novel," *ELH* 66 (1999), 739–758, 739. See also Julia M. Wright, "The Gothic Frontier of Modernity: The 'Invisible Hand' of State-Formation in Deadwood," in Jennifer Greiman and Paul Stasi, eds. *The Last Western: Deadwood and the End of American Empire* (New York: Continuum, 2012), 42–61.
18 As Anahid Nersessian notes, "[i]t seems (or so Shelley implies) that the robust intellectual climate of the Enlightenment did not see economics coming. Its dreams of music combined with optics, or physics combined with sculpture, has fallen by the wayside of a march of progress that takes the *oikonomia* of human civilization as its most distinctive priority." *Utopia, Limited: Romanticism and Adjustment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 181.
19 Paul Reitter and Chad Wellmon, *Permanent Crisis: The Humanities in a Disenchanted Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 3, emphasis in original.
20 Reitter and Wellmon, *Permanent Crisis*, 6.
21 Reitter and Wellmon, *Permanent Crisis*, 19, 18, emphasis in original.
22 Reitter and Wellmon, *Permanent Crisis*, 16.
23 Reitter and Wellmon, *Permanent Crisis*, 19.
24 Judith Butler, "Ordinary, Incredulous," in Peter Brooks and Hilary Jewett, eds. *The Humanities and Public Life* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 15–40, 27.
25 Speaking of the "state of emergency" in which he lives as "rule" rather than "exception," Benjamin describes the "angel of history" blown towards the future by the storm of progress fueled by the accumulating debris – "one single catastrophe" – of the past. Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," in Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, eds. *Selected Writings, Volume 4, 1938–1940*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Others (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 392.
26 Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

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27 Northrop Frye, *The Educated Imagination* (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1963).
28 Frye, *The Educated Imagination*, 8.
29 Frye, *The Educated Imagination*.
30 Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947).
31 Deanne Bogdan, *Re-educating the Imagination: Towards a Poetics, Politics, and Pedagogy of Literary Engagement* (Toronto: Irwin, 1992), 39, 41.
32 See most recently Michael Solms, *The Hidden Spring: A Journey to the Source of Consciousness* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2021).
33 Cited in Ben Lerner, *The Hatred of Poetry* (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2016), 7.
34 Lerner, *The Hatred of Poetry*, 71–72.
35 Lerner, *The Hatred of Poetry*.
36 Percy Shelley to John Gisborne, January 26, 1822. As a countervailing argument to Shelley's concern, see Omar F. Miranda, "Between Page and Stage: The Happy Medium of Romantic Drama," in Omar F. Miranda, ed. *On the 200th Anniversary of Lord Byron's* "Manfred," *Romantic Circles* Praxis Series (June 2019), https://romantic-circles.org/praxis/manfred/praxis.2019.manfred.miranda.html. Miranda makes the compelling argument that Shelley's play offers a kind of prototypical technological imaginary that anticipates the use of spectacle in Broadway and West End productions, thus offering what he calls a "happy medium" between the stageable and the purportedly unstageable elements of Shelley's lyrical drama.
37 In *The Apocalyptic Vision in the Poetry of Shelley* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), Ross Woodman calls *Adonais* "a metaphysical defence of self-murder," 172. See also Jacques Khalip's *Last Things: Disastrous Form from Kant to Hujar* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), which proposes the apparent dead end of lastness as a different attunement to survival.
38 Butler, "Ordinary, Incredulous," 33.
39 Butler, "Ordinary, Incredulous," 29.
40 See Butler's account of the precarity of life in *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2016).
41 Paul W. Kahn, "On Humanities and Human Rights," in Brooks and Jewett, eds. *The Humanities and Public Life*, 116–122, 120, 117.
42 Kahn, "On Humanities and Human Rights," 120.
43 Kahn, "On Humanities and Human Rights."
44 See the essays in Joel Faflak, ed. *Marking Time: Romanticism and Evolution* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018).
45 Thomas De Quincey, *Suspiria de Profundis*, in Thomas De Quincy, ed. *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater and Related Writings*, ed. Joel Faflak (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2008), 135.
46 Thomas De Quincey, *Suspiria de Profundis*, 134.
47 See Michael Pollan, *How to Change Your Mind: What the New Science of Psychedelics Teaches Us about Consciousness, Dying, Addiction, Depression, and Transcendence* (New York: Penguin, 2019), for an updated vision of how the

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same expansion of consciousness De Quincey advocates requires a momentary departure from the present.

48 Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 2 volumes, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover Publications, 1969), I, 164.

49 W. H. Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," in Stephen Greenblatt, Carol T. Christ, Alfred David et al., eds. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Volume 2, 9th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013), ll. 5–6 or ll. 30–31.

50 Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," ll. 36–41.

51 Jonathan Culler, "Apostrophe," in *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 149.

52 Culler, "Apostrophe," 148.

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