"The Most Sublime Act"

Essays on the Sublime



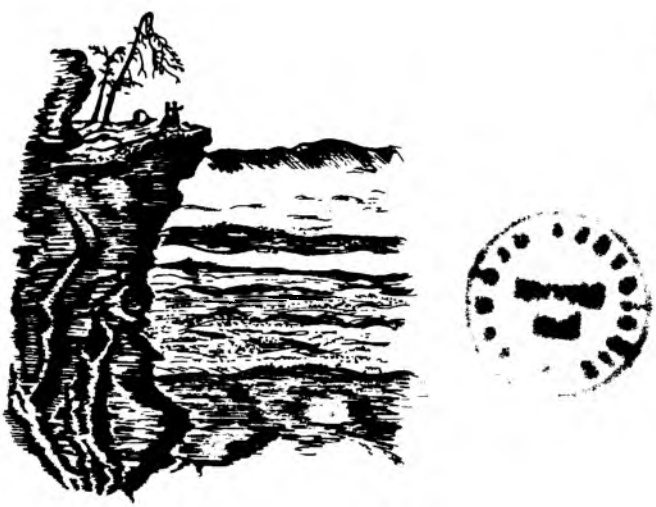
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Table of Contents

Foreword • 7

Noel GRAY
GEOMETRY and the SUBLIME:
Imagination and the Closure of Creativity • 11

Liliana BARAKOŃSKA, Małgorzata NITKA
A Reading of Distance in the Kantian Sublime • 21

Tadeusz SŁAWEK
"Sublime Labours": Blake, Nietzsche and the Notion of the Sublime • 28

Claire HOBBS
William Blake and Walter Benjamin: Under the Sign of the Sublime • 43

Tadeusz RACHWAŁ
The Unnameable. Representation(s) of the Sublime • 50

Emanuel PROWER
The Sublime and C.S. Peirce's Category of Firstness • 59

Marek KULISZ
Sublime, the Unclear • 68

Andrzej WICHER
Piers Plowman, the Sublime • 74

David JARRETT
The Downmarket Visionary Gleam: Popular Fiction and the Sublime • 97

Zbigniew BIAŁAS
Multitude of Ecstatic Butterflies: A Glimpse of the Sublime in Kitsch • 111

Jerzy SOBIERAJ
Towards Unity. Melville's Pictures of Civil War • 120

Marta ZAJĄC
Witkacy's Pure Form and the Concept of the Sublime • 126

Paul COATES
The Look into the Sky: Notes on Sublimity, Film and Gender • 136

Streszczenie • 149

Résumé • 152



Foreword

Even if the story of the concept of the sublime is, as Marek Kulisz argues in one of the papers in this book, a story of a certain mistake or mistranslation of the Greek *peri hypsous* into its Latin equivalent, yet the sublime remains an intriguing notion penetrating the areas of both aesthetics and ethics. And the very fact of a possibly erroneous choice of name for a concept does not interfere with the concept's productivity; in this respect the sublime would provide another proof, after Heidegger's unconcealment of the interlingual distortions of *logos* forcefully confined to the place of 'reason', of the profound indebtedness of Western philosophy to the Babelian operation of (mis) translation. It is perhaps for this reason that this volume, from the very outset, falls short of any precise definition of the sublime. Rather, it (mis) translates this category into a number of discourses ranging from philosophical, via literary, to a cross-cultural look into the domains of art and arts.

It is this positioning of the sublime at the intersection of the philosophical and aesthetic (let us remember Blake's famous aphorism from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* according to which "The most sublime act is to set another before you") which early on activated in this concept various meaning generating protocols. Kant's two statements from his analysis of the dynamic of the sublime seem to be trail blazing: in the first one the philosopher bridges the gap between ontology (things which are 'there', a landscape) and aesthetics ("To call the ocean sublime we must regard it as poets do, merely by what the eye reveals — if it is at rest, as a clear mirror of water only bounded by heavens; if it is stormy, as an abyss threatening to overwhelm everything"), in the other he grafts ethical reflection upon the aesthetic ("A feeling for the sublime in nature cannot well be thought without combining therewith a mental disposition which is akin to the moral").

This volume begins with two essays on Kant and his presentation of the sublime as a spectacle of stone and distance, the dramatic highlight of which is a certain crucial blindness of the power to imagine, a paradox of geometrical imagination deprived of adequate geometric signs. Hence the oxymoronic paradox of "geometry of irregularity" implicit in the idea of the idea closure "announced by Kant's blind imagination", as Noel Gray puts it in his paper, by the imagination which closes its eyes, as it were, to boundlessness and infinity translating (or perhaps (mis) translating) them into the idea-infinity in which human reason can still grasp, and thus also regulate, all irregularities in a geometrical fashion — an idea now reverberating in Fractal geometry which claims to be the geometry of what we see and feel.

What is thus also at stake in the Kantian notion of the sublime is a certain petrification of the infinite and the irregular which inaugurates the distance between man and monumental nature, nature translated into a monument which we should not approach too close lest it should lose its monumentality and become a threat, the full emotional effect which, in Kant, always "calls for regulation/discipline of distance" (Liliana Barakońska, Małgorzata Nitka). Yet, rather than securely living in the domestic (orderly regulated) space of home of beauty ("beauty is a peace-keeping force"), Kant goes to war so as to avoid the effeminating effects of peace, and to prove the distancing power of reason in the face of the sublime/enemy. War is not quite sublime for Kant, it only has "something sublime about it" provided it "is conducted with order and a sacred respect for the rights of civilians". It is exactly in homecoming from a war (between the faculties, for instance) that Kant's philosophical strategy finds a security of position (both epistemological and ontological) thus averting his eyes from both the beautiful as "too orderly" and the sublime as "too dangerous" so as to himself "elude being turned to stone in the face of Isis, the returning figure of Kant's writings".

Herman Melville, as Jerzy Sobieraj argues in his essay on *Battle Pieces*, qualifies the war with somewhat similar hesitation. On the one hand it endorses the sublime by being a "terrible tragedy of our time" and, on the other hand, precisely due to the Kantian "lack of respect for the rights of civilians it becomes morally suspect and thus alienates itself from the moral disposition of the sublime". It is this double qualification of "our times" as not only a "tragedy" but also as "the terrible" that puts the category of the sublime in question in Melville's *Battle Pieces*.

What somehow negatively links the philosophy of Blake and Nietzsche with Kant (or Burke) is Blake's and Nietzsche's denial that the sublime and the beautiful are two distinct things or categories. For Blake, as Tadeusz Sławek claims in his article, the sublime is not petrified in the solidity of some identity without the Other. Rather, the sublime is seen as the ability "to avoid formlessness" without consolidating into a form. This ability is realized in the

act of "sublime Labour", or hammering one's self, and not in the reproductive operation of memory. For Nietzsche, similarly, the problem of the sublime is the problem of its categorization in the classic formulations which are "too foreseeable and normative". Nietzsche's sublime is always excessive, more than itself, a rejection of all thought of self-identity achievable in the downward movement which he calls "descent towards visibility".

Claire Hobbs reads Blake and Walter Benjamin as collectors of "minute particulars", of proverbs or detachable quotations which are not so much repetitions of something else but reproductions which always already mean something else and whose use does not preserve the past but puts the past to use in the present. Dealing with particulars we thus always already deal with something else, with the "another" of Blake's "The most sublime act". Read as an act, or an action, the sublime in Blake and Benjamin subverts the action suspending and powerless (or even helpless) sublime feeling of Burke's or Kant's. By reinstating particularity "in an invincible concern for an other" both Blake and Benjamin also break with the transcendentality of the sublime, its movement towards the formless whose aesthetization by the eighteenth-century theorists of the sublime was a step towards fascism's aesthetization of "the politics of privation".

The notion of collecting features prominently in Zbigniew Białas' reading of the sublime which is interpreted in a manner reversing, if not parodying, Kant's moralized concept of the sublime immensity. In Białas's paper the sublime, in a characteristically postmodernist turn, is a concept where the aesthetically excessive (e.g. accumulation of cliches) meets its ethical equivalent (the sublime as the excess of desire resulting in the erotic obsession).

Commodifaction of the sublime traceable in cinema is also one of the themes in Paul Coats' essay on sublimity and film where the sublime is defined, in Thomas Weiskel's words, as the Oedipal defence against the ambivalence of a "wish to be inundated and a simultaneous anxiety of annihilation". Further, central for Kant's theory the separation of the beautiful from the sublime marks the emergence of the male identity as independent from the mother's domination.

Kant's conflict, or war, of faculties and his writings on the sublime form a theoretical background of J-F. Lyotard's attempts at theorizing the postmodern. The sublime which, as "unpresentable", could not be an object of a reasonable philosophical investigation for Kant whose interests in nature were interests in the "totality of rules" (as he defined it), becomes the sphere which postmodernism attempts, however paradoxically, at putting in presentation itself. Tadeusz Rachwal's essay traces such postmodern attempts beginning with H. P. Lovecraft's "The Unnamable" (using Lovecraft's "misspelled" version of the word) as a somehow anachronic expression of Lyotard's concern with the possibility that what is properly human might be inhabited by

the inhuman, and ending with Helene Cixous feminine voice as the voice approaching the sublime without positing it as a distinct category. Though, as she claims, her voice is a voice which has not sublimated, it is exactly in the refusal to being categorized that her "I will Yes" can "only go on and on, without ever inscribing or distinguishing the contours" in a writing without distance, the notion which motivated the theoreticians of the sublime such as Burke or Kant.

To speak about the sublime must also touch upon a discussion of the human perception and the inherent problem of the image transforming the reality of immediate consciousness into a visual and intellectual judgement. This relationship of 'being' and 'being represented' lying at the foundation of the sublime must attract semiotic analytical attention and, as Emanuel Prower's paper is trying to demonstrate, the Peircean notion of the First comes in handy when investigating the sublime as the metamorphosing power through which what is unsusceptible of mediation is rendered as interpretable (like Witkacy's "Pure Form", for instance, whose programmatic immediacy, as Marta Zając argues, makes it possible to relate it to the concept of the sublime).

Looking at the notion of the sublime in Langland's *Piers Plowman*, Andrzej Wicher argues that in the Middle Ages this notion was highly suspect on ethical rather than aesthetic grounds. The source of the suspicion was man's yearning for infinity and immortality whose manifestations could always be "of the devil's making". Hence the necessity of distinguishing between "the true sublime" and "the false sublime" which, on moral and religious grounds, is of vital importance as decisive about man's damnation or salvation. Langland's "metaphysical suspiciousness" reflected in *Piers Plowman* seems to result from his consistent attempts at unmasking the false sublime, at devising a reliable method of distinguishing between the true and the false sublime.

The theorization of the sublime on the aesthetic grounds in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries finds its reflection in the writings which become centered on the question of the landscape and a variety of literary and painterly conventions which worked towards the invention of vertiginous images of sublime power operating both within Gothic and Romantic traditions as well as in the practice of Thomas Cook's organized tourism. The focus on the sublime in Gothic fiction as well as its rigorous exclusion in modern detective fiction both spring, as David Jarrett claims in his paper, from explorations of the Romantic Sublime reinvigorated in the nineteenth century in the Victorian context of imperial expansionism.

It is with the task of approaching all these (and many more) issues (which as hinging on the threshold of the unpresentable or the unnameable cannot be a subject of a presentation pure and simple) that we present this volume to the Reader.

Tadeusz Rachwal & Tadeusz Slawek



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GEOMETRY and the SUBLIME: Imagination and the Closure of Creativity

For Immanuel Kant, there is a point at which the imagination is required to forego its ability to produce or create images. A particular moment whereat the imagination recoils back upon itself and reaches its limit by being unable to issue-up an image of that which Kant says has no limit, namely, infinity or absolute greatness or absolute extension. This actual experience of being unable to represent in the mind an image of absolute greatness, which in turn brings to consciousness the superiority of reason over the senses, Kant characterizes or names as Sublime. In his 3rd critique, the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant speaks of this experience as that moment, at which, "the mind is incited to abandon sensibility" (CJ: 92)[1].

As the imagination in his schema is to be understood as the highest plane of the sensible, the highest realm of the image, and as all images in this schema are thought of as having a finite extension, either ethereally so to speak, at the level of the imagination, or materially at the level of the empirical quâ perceptual, then it follows that this sublime moment whereat the imagination recoils back upon itself and foregoes its image making task is also the moment where geometry must forsake its dominion; must equally withdraw as it reaches its corresponding limit to speak of extension; a point whence-from geometry is no longer able to visualize the truth to space quâ the image, other than to acknowledge a certain pictorial exhaustion, or merely stand in a certain awe.

At this point and within the logic of the third critique, we might so easily say that, geometry becomes blind. Or more exactly, it is precisely because of the limits of the representational powers that attend this Kantian imagination, that is generated what appears to be a geometrical exhaustion; a reaching out by his

[1] CJ — *Critique of Judgement*, trans. J.C. Meredith (1986).

imagination, at the level of its geometrical identity, that erases its own image making task and in so doing serves to grant as we will see, a certain privilege to the higher reaches of intellection quâ Kantian reason.

Of course it will come as no surprise to anyone to say that, perceiving the imagination as something that stands in an architectonic fashion between intellection and perception and that acts to privilege in one way or another the upper reaches of intellection, has certainly enjoyed a long history in the discourses of philosophy and geometry. As indeed, has the idea that the imagination is a seemingly endless productive or creative plane for the generation of images on one hand, yet on the other hand, and more often that not, co-extensively, the imagination has also been argued to have limitations and/or defaults with respect to its representational and veracious powers.

For instance, a case in point, and one that stands as a formative moment for the whole idea of a generative imagination with attending limitations, is that of the ancient schema proposed by Proclus. A schema that I have argued elsewhere[2] is an attempt by Proclus to resolve an important difficulty confronting the Platonic system, concerning where to situate geometrical figures. However, rather than rehearse the features of this resolution again, let us on this occasion look instead at one or two of the elements of the basic structure of Proclus' schema[3] with a view to laying the ground so to speak, for an examination of Kant's critique of the imagination.

Thus so and to speak very briefly, Proclus granted the imagination an inter-mediate status between intellection and perception. With the imagination being understood by him as that which gives form to, or serves to image the pure ideas residing in the Platonic Nous or unitary upper reality. These pure ideas, which Proclus argues are undifferentiated and universal, are projected down from the Nous onto his geometrical screen or plane of the imagination whereupon they gain a pictorial expression as differentiated austere figures, sometimes referred to as the geometricals.

Furthermore, in Proclus' schema because the Nous or higher reality is nceived of as a partless whole or totality, then extension in this upper reality only in the form of a potentiality, not in the form of specific differentiations or limits. Hence, for Proclus, the Platonic upper reality partakes of no images and thus by definition, partakes of no geometry. This latter point of the Platonic higher reality or the upper realm of purity so to speak, being image free, re-appears in Kant's schema, as we will have cause to witness directly. However, it is worth drawing the distinction that, although Kant and Proclus

[2] *The Image of Geometry*, Persistence quâ Austerity-Cacography, and the Truth To Space (pending publication).

[3] For a general discussion on Proclus, see pp. XV—XLIII, and, with regard to our interests concerning the geometrical imagination, see pp. 1—98, both in *Proclus: A Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's Elements*, G. R. Morrow, trans. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970).

both attribute in slightly different ways a certain universal inter-Subjectivity to the images inhabiting their respective geometrical imaginations, Kant for his part, makes no suggestion that geometric images in the imagination are to be thought of as actual projections down from a higher realm of unattainable purity; quite the contrary: purity for Kant is precisely given to the imagination in the form of his transcendental aesthetic which he tells us in the first critique is an "a priori" "pure intuition" which constitutes, as he says, "the two pure forms of sensibility... namely, space and time" (CR: 67)[4].

Finally, in Proclus' schema the mathematical or geometrical imagination is understood as a productive or generative plane whose austere figures, coupled to precise rules of demonstration, act to privilege, as exemplars from and through which one might glimpse, if at all, the undifferentiated essentialities that are argued to govern and inform the higher reality of Platonic Being. By definition, understanding these austere figures as exemplars is to understand them as only approximating more or less the purity of Platonic ideas, and thus as such, they come to privilege the Platonic higher dominion of purity or what Proclus sometimes refers to as the upper reaches of intellection. Henceforth by definition, the geometrical imagination is thus thought of as having representational limits in being only able to generate exemplars, only able to approximate purity. Thus, geometry, has the endless task ever laying before it of seeking a unification by narrowing the margins of what will count as difference by striving to perfect again and again its measuring techniques of defining difference[5].

So, to quickly bring all this into focus: Kant's schema broadly resembles the Proclion one in that he grants, like Proclus, a hierarchical order or structure to intellection, imagination and perception, albeit that Kant is not overly interested in the Proclion idea of intellection projecting itself more or less onto the screen of the imagination. More importantly for our concerns, Kant, like Proclus, profits the imagination as a force that privileges at a certain point

[4] CR — *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N.K. Smith (1986).

Of course we are all aware that Kant understood this a priori geometry as being Euclidean, and thus, with the advent of other geometries, the scientific attention towards his theory of space with its Euclidean overtones, has diminished considerably; although equally, his theory still exerts a considerable influence on many contemporary theorizations of the aesthetic. However, as I have discussed in *The Image of Geometry*, Kant's theory of space, in my view, still has a great deal to offer critical discourses of science and the arts with regard to the question of the possible necessary relation between geometry and any thinking, apprehension, or production of space.

[5] As an aside, we may see here the legacy and continuing purview of geometry as that which defines difference at the self-same moment that it is grounded in a programme of unification. Or more exactly, geometry, thought in the Proclion terms as an off-spring of, or projection down from a higher unchanging unity, is then led to define difference ultimately towards a reunification; hence, geometry defines the parts as it ever strives to re-unite these self-same parts into a unified whole or totality.

the higher reaches of intellection; albeit once again, in contrast to Proclus' geometrical screen of impure approximations, Kant sees this privileging as being largely generated at that point that the imagination reaches its representational limits with respect to its failure to generate a specific image of infinity. In other words, for Kant, on this occasion, it is precisely the finite limits of the representational power of the imagination, and not any possible impurity of its attending images, that informs his programme of ascribing a higher value to what he understands as the upper reaches of the mind's activities.

Thus so, and from within the logic of Kant's schema of an inter-mediate imagination with all its attending representational limits, coupled to the imagination's role of privileging the upper reaches of intellection by the exhaustion of the imagination's representational powers, the following question may perforce be raised:

Namely, how are we to think this Kantian place that marks the edge of geometry's dominion; this Kantian imagination that is forced in a manner of speaking, to erase at a particular moment its image making task? How, in other words, are we to think a blind imagination, one apparently bereft of an image. That is, an imagination specifically at the level of its geometrical identity that is apparently stalled in its production by a failure to image infinity or absolute extension. Which is to say within our concerns, a geometrical imagination apparently bereft of geometry?

In short, how are we to think this Kantian imagination which in being stretched to its utmost representational limits, must then stare out with blind eyes over an unimaginable, or more precisely, a seemingly unimageable infinity; an imagination, for Kant, that recoils back upon itself and, for a brief vibrant moment, seems to lose its productive or creative vision? And let me add that, nesting or enfolded within this question is a matter that, in my view, goes deep into the very arcana of philosophy and of geometry with respect to their traditional division of intellection, imagination and perception: namely, can the image ever be successfully separated-out from the conceptual, or more exactly and to phrase it in a reverse fashion, to what degree is the image an ever present contaminative force in any conception that profits itself as image-free? And I use the word contamination, decidedly so that we may keep in the forefront of our minds the dangers of a fall into radical empiricism that ever faces contemporary geometry with its privileging of perception, and/or, the dangers of a fall into radical idealism that characterizes much of traditional geometry with its affection for homeomorphisms[6]. Conversely, the portal of empiricism ever stands before us, in any unproblematic collapsing of the empirical and the ideal[7].

* * *

[6] See p. 68 in. M. Serres's *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy*, J. Harrai & D. Bell, eds. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1982).

[7] See Derrida in Leavey: 1978: 77, regarding unproblematical dissolving of the empirical and ideality und unproblematical separation. Also on this point, see Bernet in Silverman: 1989: 141.

To explain the processes involved in the imagination's apparent fall into pictorial darkness or at the very least a pictorial despair, Kant begins by telling us that in the ordinary employment of our sensibilities we may derive or grasp immediately that an object, comprised of units, has extension, that it is a quantum. This immediate taking hold-of or grasping is what he calls an aesthetic estimation. Which, in the most general sense, means that the Subject is able to form immediately in his or her imagination a mental representation or image of the totality of any object in question with respect to its magnitude or size. The imagination intuits size absolutely might be another way of saying the same thing, as indeed Richard Klein has so aptly expressed it[8]. Or, in more vernacular terms: one can see immediately that everything has a size, or, one can perceive in a direct manner from any object itself that it has a magnitude. Thus, for Kant, it is not necessary in an ordinary everyday sense to compare any object in question with other objects in order to determine immediately that any particular object has a magnitude.

However, to express any object's magnitude or extension mathematically, which is to say to express it as a quantity, as numerically specifically this and not that extension, requires a system of related units of measures grounded in the process of an infinite chain of comparisons. In short, for Kant, all logical or mathematical measures are themselves dependent upon another measure ad infinitum and, hence, there is no "first or fundamental measure" (CJ: 98). Therefore, when we do speak of something as a fundamental unit of measure, and we are constantly obliged to do so Kant tells us, in order to avoid an infinite regress, then on such an occasion we initially and immediately determine its magnitude by evoking an aesthetic estimation.

In other words, we start all measuring by referring to a given standard but this standard itself, by definition of being taken as so given, is self-referential: it is to be compared only with itself. For this to be possible, logically necessitates the demand that we are able to grasp immediately in our imaginations the magnitude of the given standard without any comparisons with other object or units. Hence, for Kant, this necessity to adopt and accept a given standard in order to begin measuring at all, comes to mean, as he goes on to say, that "all estimation of the magnitude of objects of nature is in the last resort aesthetic", which further means, for Kant, that such magnitudes are "subjectively and not objectively determined", (CJ: 98). Which, by definition, also must come to mean that geometry, in its reliance on a set of fundamental figures or images of magnitudes with which to ply its trade or carry out its applications, is also, in the last resort grounded in a Kantian aesthetic estimation. Which further

[8] See, p. 35, in. R. Klein's, "Kant's Sunshine", in *Diacritics*, vol. 11 (1981).

means for Kant, that geometry at its most formative moment is also subjectively not objectively determined[9].

Following on from this, Kant tells us that to speak of anything as absolutely great, which is to say, great beyond comparison, it makes no sense then, in so speaking, to seek an "appropriate standard outside itself, but merely in itself" (CJ: 97). "It is a greatness", he says, which is "comparable to itself alone", and "hence", he adds, "it comes that the sublime is not to be looked for in the things of nature, but only in our own ideas" (CJ: 97). Which, once again to speak in the vernacular, means that for Kant, we may think the idea of infinity, or more precisely, think the idea-infinity, but we cannot image infinity to ourselves. We cannot issue-up to ourselves an image of absolute greatness; however for Kant we can certainly conceive of the idea of absolute greatness. Once again by definition, geometry also falls out of this equation, for, as all measures for Kant, are in the last resort aesthetic, which is to say image-bound, which is to say finite, then, to make any claim for the possibility of measuring absolute greatness quâ a geometry of infinity would lead logically to the less than attractive event of absolute greatness or infinity being ultimately reducible to some finite unit of measure and/or ultimately reducible to a finite shape.

Of course, if absolute greatness is comparable only to itself, then within Kant's logic it may also be thought of as the absolute fundamental measure if we accept his proviso that all fundamental measures can only be so given as

[9] It is interesting to note that the contemporary geometer, Benoit Mandelbrot, in his enterprise of arguing that Fractal geometry constitutes a radical departure from traditional geometry, appears to owe a partial debt to this Kantian idea that the estimation of the magnitude of objects is in the last resort aesthetic; albeit that this idea undergoes something of a transformation and reemerges firstly as Mandelbrot's claim that his fractal geometry mirrors Nature's own geometry and secondly, in his famous adage: "to see is to believe", B.B. Mandelbrot *Fractal Geometry of Nature*, New York: W.H. Freeman, 1983, p. 21. The transformation I am alluding to here, is that Mandelbrot reverses the polarity of Kant's idea by suggesting that Fractal geometry is immediately or intuitively obvious precisely because it is Nature's own geometry. Hence we might care to say that, for Mandelbrot, Fractal geometry is the very stuff that the perceptual world is made of. Or more exactly, in Mandelbrot's sense of understanding perception as referring to a certain unproblematical immediacy, this self-same perception is to all intents and purposes, merely the subjective expression of Nature's objective Fractal face.

What in fact Mandelbrot does in order to effect this reversal, at the same time leaving in place the Kantian immediacy of an aesthetic estimation, is simply to shift the a priori base of geometry, understood by Kant as extension and figure, from being an internal quâ Subjective condition of possibility for any apprehension of space, to one located externally in the world of Nature and understood by Mandelbrot as an iterative process gaining its expression in the form of fractals. Which is to say that, in Mandelbrot's schema, geometry still retains the status of an a priori for any apprehension of space, except that, it is now a material or empirical a priori wherein the Subject is forever immersed. Or to be more exact, perception for Mandelbrot, thus fits or conforms to the world, precisely, because the Subject quâ perception is a type of micro or local example of the macro or universal fractal world of Nature. Thus in a manner of speaking, and mindful that I am being now less than precise when I say that, for Mandelbrot, it is the Subject which is embedded in geometry, not so much geometry embedded in the Subject.

fundamental, by being initially taken as self-referential. Which is to say in a reverse fashion that, compared to absolute greatness, everything else is less great and hence, the only adequate measure of absolute greatness is itself. However, it needs to be noted in passing that, whilst, within Kant's logic, we may posit infinity as the absolute fundamental measure, equally, we are unable to employ it as such, for such employment is already ruled out of court by the imagination's inability to gain an aesthetic estimation of the magnitude of absolute greatness, which recall is an immediate estimation that is needed in order to begin measuring at all.

Now, in these last two points, we might care to say that, we have in a nutshell, Kant's privileging of reason by his critique of geometry quâ the imagination: namely, infinity cannot be logically imaged quâ measured for all images quâ measures are necessarily finite, but, as the idea infinity can obviously be thought, and also thought as the absolute fundamental measure but never employed as such, then, ergo, reason is so privileged in being able to conceive that which the geometrical imagination must stand exhausted in the face of.

However, in this schema of the privileging of reason by the imagination exhausting its image forming powers, Kant faces difficulties in strictly adhering to, or keeping distinct, the differentiated elements of his own architectonic structure. For in order to bring home the privileged status he affords reason, he is led to constantly employ or offer-up to us again and again, an image of the habitat, so to speak, of reason itself, which by definition and of course by extension, as reason thinks infinity, we may logically suppose that Kant's image of the home of reason comes to be also something of an image of infinity.

The image that I am speaking about is none other than the Subject itself in all its attending modalities. An image I would suggest, and remaining faithful to the logic of Kant's schema, that we perhaps find little difficulty in picturing to ourselves due to some finitude of the Subject necessitated by Kant's differentiation of the Subject from Nature[10]. Which is to say, within our concerns, a corporeal finitude, amongst other features of the Subject, that Kant leads the reader to tacitly assume as that which marks-off the internal processes of every Subject from the external raw processes of Nature[11].

Indeed, throughout Kant's whole argument at precisely those numerous moments when we are asked to grasp the privileged status of reason over the sensible, we are called upon implicitly to specifically picture ourselves to ourselves as a self that is capable of thinking the idea-infinity. And at other times in his text we are implicitly enjoined to generally picture ourselves to ourselves as a thinking entity in order to capture in its most simplest form,

[10] This notion of a differentiated Subject with respect to Nature forms-up one of the main arguments of Kant's discussion on the Dynamically Sublime, see CJ: 109—114.

[11] See CJ: 111.

Kant's argument that reason quâ ideas is solely the purview of what he calls human nature, in contrast to the dominion of Nature in general[12]. To say nothing of the necessity to have some image or other firmly in mind as to what constitutes the physical edges of the Subject, in order to grasp his idea that raw Nature may be used by reason as a schema for its [reason's] own ideas[13]. In fact, it is the very necessity of a certain tacit assumption of corporeality in order to mark-off the Subject from all other objects apprehended by the Subject, that I see as constantly coming back again and again to haunt Kant's entire programme of the possibility of conceptualizations devoid of images. For, whatever idea that posits itself as free from some attending image, is always to my mind, an idea that is at the very least, always attended at some level, by the Subject being able to picture to itself some image of itself thinking such an image-free idea.

For, to argue otherwise, to argue that the Subject in its thinking can ever successfully eradicate completely the image of itself as ever always in some way a corporeally-extended-thinking-self, is to offer-up a theory of Subjectivity devoid of Subjects. Which is to say, in a more complicated fashion, is to offer-up a theory of Subjectivity that demands a thinking-self that must erase the specificity of the self that is thinking, in order to think the general conditions that make possible itself as a specified self that can think. Whilst no one I would imagine would perhaps take undue issue with the idea that a theory of Subjectivity or even trans-Subjectivity need not of necessity be dependent upon any individual's understanding of where it might think its own corporeality begins and ends, it is something else again to attempt to grasp a theory of Subjectivity or trans-Subjectivity that unproblematically can forego the necessity of a corporeally extended Subject, whatever the borders of the Subject might finally turn out to be. In short, the possibility of pure thought must ever recede in the face of the necessity to ascribe some finite extension or other to that which does the thinking in order to even posit the notion of a Subject as something distinct from other things.

Thus, remaining faithful to the logic of Kant's schema, as long as the notion of a specific finite corporeality must, by any necessity, attend any definition of the Subject in order to speak of a differentiated Subject in relation to Nature at large, a differentiation that Kant is driven to by his very desire to mark-off the Subject quâ reason as the architect of any order apprehended by the Subject, then, Kant is equally driven to tacitly require of us a retention in our minds of an image of a finite Subject that is so differentiated. It therefore follows that, whatever this differentiated Subject at any particular time may be thinking, such thoughts demand that they be attended at some level by some image or other

[12] Kant alludes to this ability to picture to ourselves a self that is thinking such and such, as can be noted in CJ: 110.

[13] See CJ: 115.

of a finitely extended Subject in order to be differentiated as subjective thoughts and not merely the raw processes of a blind and unthinking Nature.

And finally, as geometry's dominion appears to be ever bound to the finitude of extension, and as the extension of the corporeality of the Subject has for so long been understood as an irregular shape, then, a geometry of irregularity would logically constitute a geometry of the Subject, at least if one identifies in any way the Subject with its corporeality. Which mindful of all of what we have been discussing concerning the contamination of some image of extension attaching itself to the Subject, in order to retain the coherency of such experiences as Kant's sublime moment, might eventually come to mean experience quâ perception being reducible to the geometrical. And such a prospect certainly now stands before us in the form of Fractal geometry that claims to be nature's own geometry; the geometry of what we see and feel, as Benoit Mandelbrot has expressed it.[14] And yet, this formulation by contemporary geometry of the truth to the Subject as a perceptual truth, a closing-off of intellection by the power of sight, may yet emerge as perhaps merely the mirror image of what we may now choose to understand as the *ideal* closure announced by Kant's blind imagination.

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[14] The recent development of Fractal geometry and the attending claims of it being Nature's own geometry, of it being able to mirror what we see and feel, places a certain urgency on the question of whether there can be a science of the beautiful, of the aesthetic; a science of creation or more exactly a direct mathematization of perception quâ experience. In fact, the way in which Fractal geometry with its symbiotic links to the computer has already reached-out into many diverse areas of everyday life, may be seen in the very act of this reaching-out to be generating or at least announcing the possibility of an upcoming crisis of identity in the artistic discourses with regard to who and what is going to speak the truth to experience.

Indeed, practitioners in the arts, against the backdrop of this growing computer literacy, proliferation and dependency with respect to the production at some level of much their work, might already have cause to argue that science is slowly bleeding-off the visual, slowly mathematizing, even manufacturing, what in the past has been one of the main stays of the arts, i.e., the aesthetic character of existence quâ experience; or, as Pierre Kerszberg so eloquently phrased it to me recently, perhaps "even taking over the very transcended character enfolded in the life-world". To be sure, a siphoning-off of the aesthetic coupled to a mathematical manufacturing of experiences is certainly one way to understand the recent developments in virtual reality technology.

And let us also note in passing, as even a cursory reading of the works of virtual realists and fractal geometres will quickly indicate, contemporary science in its growing interest in the image is all but silent in acknowledging the possibility of an intervention in its own theory formations by critical theories of the visual that have originated in other discourses; to say nothing of the threat posed by these discourses to any easy adoption by science of the image as an unproblematical representation of an ever elusive referent, or, any easy adoption of the image as an unmediated mirror.



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A Reading of Distance in the Kantian Sublime

Kant's text comes to be read from the vantage-point of footnotes and examples, its voice-overs. The discourse of *The Critique of Judgement* or, more precisely, "The Analytic of the Beautiful" is, in fact, instituted by a footnote which by being anchored to the title rather than the text comes before its letter. And as Jacques Derrida says this gloss "touches on a difficulty so decisive that one cannot see why it does not constitute the principal text of which it forms the ground bass, that is, the unwritten or underwritten space"[1].

It is adversaria, sundries written on the side, as if on the edges: citations and examples or observations reduced to the lower ranks of the text that augment a dossier of (the discourse of) the sublime, and form its back-bone.

The derivation of the example as of the thing taken out is always exotic. It enters the text as an expatriate, removed from its native space, and an envoy sent from afar. The example comes as one of many: its function is to represent which is the business of an ambassador, the one that arrives from the other territory to body it forth. The foreign service entails attachment: the example develops a relationship of contiguity with the thesis/statement whose truth it is to assert, whose legitimacy it is to corroborate. Apart from its existence of a typical instance the example signifies an object or action which should/should not be copied or followed; its vocation is twofold since it accommodates imitation as well as intimidation, both being the directions of pedagogy.

The code of the exemplary conduct, the protocol, furthermore specifies the didactic nature of the undertaking: the example is in the main to illustrate, that is explain a point. The pedagogy of the example is, however, mis-leading. In the

[1] J. Derrida, *Parergon. The Truth in Painting*, trans. G. Bennington and I. McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 70.

vicinity of the example one must be on the guard as it tends to take a wayward course walking out on the argument, steering clear of what it was to demonstrate. Even Kant, the philosopher always vigilant of mystagogues, falls prey of the deceptive teaching of the instance, takes a false step induced by its impostor guidance.

The examples picked by Kant to illuminate the concept of the sublime always come as visible imports carried from abroad of other texts or commonplaces/hearsay. Their secondhandness does not fail to label itself with a tag of "as it is said" introducing the example of St. Peter's in Rome or "what Savary reports" that announces the case of the Pyramids. Some other examples are voices of Burke and Addison, taken and alchemized, as if following the Burkean concept of distance and modification as imperative for the sublime[2]. *The Critique of Judgement* speaks in multi-far-ious tones, tongues and genders, in a modulating pitch of argument and the low-key of footnotes. Its polyphony, is set by Kant who has to know the score of the tonal montage[3].

The mechanism of the passages with the Pyramid and St. Peter's inserts evinces one of many a priori somersaults turned in/turned by the work: when the philosophical argument serves to illustrate the examples and bear witness to their accuracy. Kant's theory of apprehension and comprehension offers then an explanation of Savary's remark that

> in order to get the full emotional effect of the size of the Pyramids we must avoid coming too near just as much as remaining too far away. For in the latter case the representation of the apprehended parts (the tiers of stones) is but obscure, and produces no effect upon the aesthetic judgement of the Subject. In the former, however, it takes the eye some time to complete the apprehension from the base to the summit; but in the interval the first tiers always in part disappear before the imagination has taken in the last, and so the comprehension is never complete[4].

The sublime introduces the Analytic of the Distance: the distance between the cognitive faculties, the I and the Pyramids, the comprehension and its completion, the thesis and the example, the example and the text, the text and the land, the genre and the space (The example comes from Savary's book which is *Letters from Egypt*, and the letter, by definition, is always a genre of distance).

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[2] E. Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 36:

> When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are, delightful, as we every day experience.

[3] Cf. J. Derrida, "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy", in Oxford Literary Review 6.2 (1984), trans. J. P. Leavey, Jr. pp. 3—37.

[4] I. Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. J.C. Meredith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), §26, pp. 99—100. All the quotations will come from this edition and will be marked by the initial CJ and appropriate § and page number.

The distance spellbinds the discourse: the discourse of/on the sublime turns the discourse of/on distance, whose code is the code of spacing.

The full emotional effect calls for a regulation/discipline of distance, the distance is subject to negotiation, some middle ground which could bind apprehension and comprehension, make them enter into an alliance, move at the same pace, has to be found. ("In apprehension a manifold of sensible intuitions is run through and held, together, whereas in comprehension past sensible intuitions are held in memory alongside current ones, thus enabling the mind to grasp whole series of perceptions." [5]) The quoted stipulation of "neither too far nor too near" as mandatory to obtain "the full emotional effect" becomes unexpectedly controverted by what was designed to be its illustration. Being on overly distant terms with the object disqualifies or precludes any aesthetic judgement: too great remove abridges the apprehension which occurs as if at one go and in an incompetent manner leading to "no effect". "To see an object distinctly and to perceive its bounds is one and the same thing" [6]: the excessive distance frustrates the idea of infinity by reducing the magnitude to contours, translates it into outlines, clarity and consequently littleness: a clear idea is "another name for a little idea" [7].

The proximity of the Pyramids engages the eye in a study of vastness, scrutinized piecemeal. The close-up makes the apprehension fall out of step with the comprehension whose incongruity secures the desired collapse of the imagination. The tour of contemplation turns a journey of oblivion in progress of which "the parts first apprehended begin to disappear from the imagination as this advances to the apprehension of yet others" (CJ, §26, 99). To view the Pyramids from a close perspective is to watch them purblind, that is sand-blind. The onward course obliterates, blots out, the previous view; the space of the apprehension/comprehension is the sabulous space of a desert, whose landscape complements the Pyramids, the infinite surface susceptible to erasure, however only partial, and covering over, like Freud's Mystic Writing Pad which offers "an ever-ready receptive surface and permanent traces of the inscriptions that have been made on it" [8], like Rousseau's brain:

> ... my brain became as sand
> Where the first wave had more than half erased
> The track of deer on desert Labrador,
> Whilst the fierce wolf from which they fled amazed
> Leaves his sight visibly upon the shore... [9]

[5] P. Crowther, *The Kantian Sublime* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 96.

[6] E. Burke, *A Philosophical...*, p. 58.

[7] Ibid.

[8] S. Freud, "A Note upon the 'Mystic Writing-Pad' ", in *The Pelican Freud Library*, vol. 11, trans. J. Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 431.

[9] P. B. Shelley, *The Triumph of Life*, ll. 404—408.

"The comprehension is never complete" as the viewer cannot cope with the excessive nearness, cannot take in a whole, his imagination is sand-stormed, overpowered, as incapable of embracing a totality. Imagination not commensurate with the reason's concept of the object as a totum defers the accomplishment which remains forever far-off. The crisis of imagination evokes the presence of the sublime. The comprehension is built on sand.

Distance in the Kantian sublime is always a distance between man and stone. It is a distance which establishes and regulates a relationship between the body of man and the body of stone. Of stone which is introduced in the form of the pyramids and then punningly multiplied in the example of the Church of Saint Peter in Rome. (The Church, itself of stone, is named after the one who is the Rock).

The distance which mediates between man and stone inaugurates a petrifying relationship/a relationship of petrification as the visitor touring the places of stone is astonished, petrified, turned to stone. "One would almost say *medusé*"[10] as petrification is the business of Medusa, one of the Gorgons. The masks of the Gorgons were worn by priestesses to the triple goddess of the Moon in order to intimidate and divert the profane from penetrating the divine mysteries. Thus the mask of the Gorgon serves to hold aloof, keep at a distance; its monstrous grimace is that of an official admonition like the lapidary/lapidarian words of Isis, words which evoke eternity and are inscribed on the Temple thus obstructing entrance to another stone structure. "Perhaps, remarks Kant in a footnote, there has never been a more sublime utterance, or a thought more sublimely expressed, than the well known inscription upon the Temple of Isis (Mother of Nature). 'I am that is, and that ever shall be, and no mortal hath raised the veil from my face' " (CJ, §49). It is precisely the moment of lifting, unveiling, revealing that Kant is concerned or rather disconcerted about: we must not disclose, discover as that would afford a vision, a seeing, and that must be avoided. We must not see, we must a-vert our eyes to elude being turned to stone in the face of Isis, the returning figure of Kant's writings, the figure which functions as a premonition, a forebodying of the eternal. We must keep in mind the lecture on or reading of eternity Kant advances in *Das Ende aller Dinge* where eternity is qualified in terms customarily associated with stones: time, mutability, transitoriness, all which pertains to the phenomenal world, the whole nature is paralysed, petrified, literally, turned to stone.

To approach the suprasensible notion of eternity we perform a detour through that which is perceptible by the senses, a detour which takes us through a landscape of stone, landscape furnished with monumental executions in stone: the pyramids, St. Peter's Church, the writing of Isis. It is a landscape of hewn stone, polluted by the tool of man, and thus chiselled against the letter

[10] J. Derrida, *Parergon...*, p. 142.

of the law which, *ex post facto*, Kant enforces when he postulates: "we must not point to the sublime in works of art (e.g. buildings, columns and the like) where a human end determines the form as well as the magnitude ... but in rude nature" (CJ, §26, 100). Kant provides an example only to contradict himself, almost in the same breath, and yet, there is a delay: he displays the man-sculptured stone before imposing restrictions on it, as if suspending the law, deflecting it, putting it in parentheses (as he does with buildings, columns and the like).

Let us delay our journey for a while and pose a question about the metanarrative which warrants Kant's obsession with stone imagery. What is it that Kant seems to remind us of by way of highlighting, privileging, elevating the stone? Why does his high-handed gesture always appear to demonstrate, the monumental, the monumental which puts in mind: which reminds, but also monitors, admonishes, the monumental which demonstrates the monstrous? The monumental connotes threat and coercion, it seems to overpower our senses as it intimates the monstrous which, according to Kant, qualifies an object which by its size annihilates and reduces to nothing the end which constitutes its concept. The monument Kant erects cripples our senses, mutilates our bodies, brings them to a standstill, to the double stillness of Atropos, who arrests the tropic movement of the body as well as of language, imposing the motionless and silence of death. The monument in Kant's writing comes as a funerary monument. The stone is a monition of death, of death to come and of death which has already taken place. The sublime negotiates the distance between man and stone as the distance between man and death.

We should not forget, however, that the space of the sublime is imaginary, fictional as we ourselves project the sublime into nature: our experience of pain and danger is merely hypothetical. According to Kant:

> We may look upon an object as fearful, and yet not be afraid of it, if, that is, our e timate takes the form of our simply *picturing* to ourselves the case of our wishing to offer some resistance to it, and recognizing that all such resistance would be quite futile.
>
> (CJ, §28)

To illustrate his point Kant once again evokes the stony landscape:

> Towering rocks, menacing rugged cliffs ... make our power of resistance of trifling moment *in comparison* with their might. But, provided our own position is secure, their aspect is all the more attractive for its fearfulness.
>
> (CJ, §28)

The provision made in the name of safety seemingly concerns itself with the body, its totality and inviolability. The body must remain distant. Distance here is defined in terms of security and shelter, which seems to entrench and isolate the body in a far more radical manner than Burke does when he

postulates that "danger or pain" should not "press too nearly"[11]. Burke's stipulation against nearness becoming too oppressive locates the body at the indeterminate distance delineated by the ambiguity of "too"; whereas Kant removes the perceiving subject first away from nature without him and then still farther away from nature within him into the seclusion of his own mind. This double retreat results in man being a refugee from nature within and without him to the extent that he may actually risk exposing his body to danger (one must remember the prominence Kant gives to the, as he claims, ennobling state of war). Thus the body becomes entangled in the intricacies of distancing as now distance between the body and the rock is adjusted by the tension of the conditional "as if" which de-shelters or un-shelters the body and opens it onto the moment of the dangerous.

It is already obvious that our detour will be impeded, halted, maybe even rendered impassable by the imagination besieged with stone. The stone soon becomes an insurmountable obstacle, a stumbling block, a difficulty for imagination which, in its interminable progress, is unable to meet the demand to grasp absolute totality, the demand imposed on it by reason. Imagination is unequal to the task of presenting the infinite in the finite. The faculty of representation refuses to make present, it frustrates the logocentric desire for unmediated presence. Instead, it presents its own limits, bounds, its own deficiency as it recoils when, to quote J. Addison, "after a few faint efforts, imagination is immediately at a stand, and finds herself swallowed up in the immensity of the void that surrounds it"[12].

Addison, while narrating the scene of imagination being overwhelmed, incapacitated, rendered powerless, makes use of very powerful images. The scene is dramatically staged against a backdrop long ago appropriated by the imagery of the sublime which privileges the abyss as presentation of the sublime. It seems ineluctable that the discourse on the sublime should already be implicated in the sublime, should lack the necessary detachment, disinterestedness, and hence should be referred to as the discourse of the sublime, discourse which itself speaks the language of the void, chasm and abyss, discourse which puts itself *en abyme.*

The Kantian problematic of the abyss, which derives from the unbridgeable gap between faculties, between the faculty to conceive and the faculty to present, questions the symbolic relation between the concept and the image. As the imagination fails to present any object which would correspond with a concept, the image and the concept or, in other words, the signifier and the signified, are "doomed" to stay apart from one another. Their state of being apart conditions a special kind of distance between them, distance enmeshed

[11] E. Burke, *A Philosophical...*, p. 36.

[12] J. Addison, *Critical Essays from "The Spectator"*, Essay No. 420.

in the complexities of parts and departures. To understand the relationship between the symbolic order and distance, let us take recourse to the early history of symbol.

> For the Greeks, the *symbolon* was a piece of pottery or earthenware that was broken in two prior to someone's (usually a warrior's) voyage. One of the pieces remained at the site of departure while the other was carried by the traveller and "voyaged" with him. Upon his return, the traveller's piece of pottery served as a sign of recognition and as proof of his identity when it was rejoined with its matching complement. The word symbol referred to each of the pieces as well as to the act of putting the two pieces together: Gr. symballo = to put together [13].

The moment of putting together, the moment of accord, of identity never arrives as in the aesthetic of the sublime there is no relation of analogy or resemblance between the image and the concept. The sublime, which is not contained in a finite form nor in the infinite idea, is brought about at the moment of rupture, at the moment of incommensurability which, to borrow an architectural metaphor used by Freud to describe a style of writing, is "colossal and pyramidal" [14].

The sublime dramatizes the bounds of one's capacities as its presence perforce makes one aware of the inadequacy of imagination. This frustrating knowledge becomes a cautionary reminder that "the world as infinite totality" [15] lies not within the I's ken. The experience of the sublime extends to the subject the trauma of deficiency and noncompletion. "The sublime in one of its aspects is ... this chastening, humiliating power, which decentres the subject into an awesome awareness of its finitude, its own petty position in the universe, just as the experience of beauty shores it up" [16]. In the latter the compatibility of mind and reality is validated as the faculties of cognition (imagination and understanding) are united in a harmonious accord while the sublime generates roughness and turmoil which dislodge the imagination, throw it out of joint, call it into question.

The condition of the beautiful is a mode of repletion which spells completeness. Its topos is a sealed space of closure, a space of motherly protection. In the presence of the beautiful the faculties concur and their harmony brings about complacency, peace of mind. Beauty is a peace-keeping force. Peacetime is to be distrusted as the season in which there hold sway "the spirit of commerce, ignoble greed, cowardice and effeminacy". Peace is a state

[13] E. Rashkin, "Tools for a new Psychoanalitic", in *Diacritics*, winter 1988, p. 47.

[14] S. Freud, "The Interpretation of Dreams", in *The Penguin Freud Library*, vol. 4, trans. J. Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 403.

[15] T. Eagleton, "The Kantian Imaginary", in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 89.

[16] Ibid, p. 90.

of having a home, a dwelling place, as well as of things being at home. Economy, as an ability to run a household, also pertains to the feminine province of the domestic. Peace marks then the decline of the masculine and so does the beautiful.

The distinction between the beautiful and the sublime articulates itself as the divergence between the feminine and the masculine, as well as between peace and warfare. The military aspect of the sublime makes its appearance in Burke's *Inquiry...* where he registers the noise of artillery in unison with the excessively loud, one might say thundering, voices of Nature whose alarmingly dense volume can disconcert, untune, the imagination. Also Kant brings together Nature and war as danger zones conducive to the experience of the dynamical sublime.

> War itself, provided it is conducted with order and a sacred respect for the rights of civilians, has something sublime about it, and gives nations that carry it on in such a manner a stamp of mind only the more sublime the more dangers to which they are exposed ...
>
> (CJ, §28, 112—113)

Soldiery and warfare challenge the I's feelings, themselves proclaiming a state of war between the faculties, the state favourable to the sublime. As Eagleton remarks the sublime is the province of the martial and the masculine, which fields become curiously yoked in the name of Savary, the author of *Letters from Egypt* whose book, among other things, inspired Napoleon's military campaign in Egypt and in which another Savary, a French general, took part[17].

The presence of the sublime proves critical for the imagination, it brings a breach of its peace, rendering it destitute/out of place and engaging it in a tug-of-war with reason. The condition of warfare is that of estrangement; to go to war is to abandon home. The strategic value of every crisis proves, in the long run, beneficial: the collapse of imagination is imperative for the sublime to take place as only the moment of its failure can validate the out-distancing power of reason, the recognition of which can, in turn, lead to an armistice and a homecoming.

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[17] A footnote to the Polish edition of *The Critique* acts subversively since its underpage dealings attribute the comment on the Pyramids to the general and thus cancel the distance between the two Savarys. The footnote does not comply with the glossary code whose ranks it breaks by failing to be a signature tune of *academic* discourse.



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"Sublime Labours": Blake, Nietzsche and the Notion of the Sublime

I

In *Jerusalem* Blake inscribes the philosophy of sublime into the logic of contraries, the most powerful machinery of his thought. In the frontispiece of an early version of the poem we read that the landscape of Albion is formed by two principal "rocks" of "Sublime and Pathos"[1] which, however, are locked in a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, they are seats of solidity, foundational rocks upon which things can be built ("fix'd in the Earth", J. 1.4), but — on the other hand — they are not readily available as such, their solidity is suppressed by the "Spectrous Power" of "reason" which "covers them above". There are, at least, two important consequences of such a positioning of sublime. First, its foundational, originary, character must be validated by its Other — in this case the pathetic; if sublime is at the beginning of things then it is a beginning already doubled and divided (it is important to mark this initial dependence of sublime on the Other, as we shall come back to this crucial relationship later on). Second, the geological placing of the two rocks implies that a considerable effort and investment of energy must be made in order to excavate them from

The combination of pathos and sublime could possibly signal Blake's allegiance to the 18th-century aesthetics. In 1696 John Dennis was "led to reduce art to the expression of passion", and in this way "the sublime and the pathetic begin their long journey in each other's company".

(W. H. Monk, *The Sublime. A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England* (New York: 1935), p. 46)

[1] All the quotations from Blake come from *William Blake: Complete Writings*, ed. G. Keynes (Oxford: 1969) and are marked either by the initial of the title of a prophetic book followed by the plate and line number, or — in case of minor texts — by the letter K and the page reference.

underneath layers of soil, i.e. rationalist disfigurement. Thus, sublime must be penetrated into or towards, it is not readily available on the surface, and the ontological setting of the frontispiece which speaks of "a Void outside of Existence" which, in turn, "becomes a Womb" relegates this penetration both to the sphere of sexuality and a primeval territory of formative movements. We may refer to this realm as to a region of 'onto-geology'.

Sublime qualifies the boundary realm between 'being' and 'not being', the domain where a yet unformed entity acquires the status of a 'thing' (a movement and change from a "Void" to a "Womb") without losing sight of the nothing and absence which it carries at its center (here, after Lacan[2], one could claim that sublime is a rediscovery of the signifier which is a representation of a certain absence). But it also carries energies of the movement of rocks, in short — of a cataclysmic earthquake. This 'onto-geological' interpretation of sublime can be looked upon as Blake's philosophical rendition of the popular aesthetics of the romantic northern sublime of ragged mountains and contorted landscapes (itself founded, in part, upon Burnet's 1684 *Sacred Theory of the Earth*), but also — more importantly — it is supported by Blake's theology of a God suffering and compassionate rather than a God triumphant and punishing ("The long sufferings of God are not for ever"). A discovery of the sublime is matched not with mere awe and stasis of astonishment but with the dynamic of suffering and distortion.

> "... if we consider the whole surface of it [the earth] ... 'tis as a broken and confus'd heap of bodies, plac'd in no order to one another, nor with any correspondence or regularity of parts ... They [moon and earth] are ... the image or picture of a great Ruine, and have a true aspect of a World lying in its rubbish".
> (T. Burnet, *Sacred Theory of the Earth*, (London: 1684), p. 109)

II

The placement of the sublime at the junction of 'being' and 'not-being', in the territory of 'onto-geology', is strategic because it enforces the sublime as the most central power in Blake's aesthetics and his critical assessment of Western philosophy[3]. Thus, the "sublime labours" about which Blake speaks in Plate 10 of *Jerusalem* refer partly to his efforts to create a new philosophical discourse which would overcome the strict distinctions of genres and result in the hybridic form of 'Philosophy as Art', or 'Art as Philosophy', a discourse based not upon merely rational inferment but, primarily, upon the aesthetic

[2] See, e.g. J. Lacan, *Seminaire III* (Paris: Seuil, 1981).

[3] On the topic of Blake and sublime see V. de Luca, *Words of Eternity. Blake and the Poetics of the Sublime* (Princetown: Princeton University Press, 1991).

contemplation and practice of the everyday. The reverence for the Other implies ethical response founded upon necessarily aesthetic recognition of the Other's separateness. Thus, Blake's theory of the outline plays such a vital role in his system.

In his annotations to Reynolds' *Discourses* Blake radically opposes his adversary's view according to which the "grand style" consists in the escape from the „Gothic manner which attends to the minute accidental discriminations of particular ... objects" and locates "sublimity" precisely in the area of "discriminations"; "All Sublimity is founded on Minute Discriminations" (K, 453). Sublime marks then three significant moments in man's conceptualization of the world: first, it enforces a certain theory of arts based on the ontological importance of outline; second, it postulates the end of the universal, all inclusive knowledge opening, instead, the space for a new protocol of knowledge forming in which centrality is replaced by the periphery, and one supreme narration of the system substituted by local stories of particular objects ("To Generalize is to be an idiot. To Particularize is the Alone Distinction of Merit. General Knowledges are those knowledges, that Idiots possess", K, 451); third, it emphasizes the role of the individual vis à vis the systematic, the impulsive vis à vis the reasoning ("I have always found that Angels have the vanity to speak of themselves as the only wise; this they do with a confident insolence sprouting from systematic reasoning", K, 157). It is surprising that Blake mercifully chose not to comment at length of the passage in the same Discourse in which the survey of the "grand style" is preceded by the oath of loyalty to the political regime and social establishment. Paving the way for praising the authorities for opening the Royal Academy as the place of artistic formation, Reynolds speaks of "a general desire among our nobility to be distinguished by lovers and judges of the arts", and then hastens to praise the Monarch (George III) for his generosity urging the artists to show their gratitude: „let us shew our gratitude in our diligence, that ... at least ... our industry may deserve his protection"[4]. Evidently, for Blake, for whom "the tygers of wrath are wiser that the horses of instruction" (K, 152), such a pledge of allegiance was bound to produce not only politically but, first of all, aesthetically devastating results which privileged the art of blurred chiaroscuro (Titian, and the Venetians) over that of the clear outline (Rafael). Hence, the three principal domains of sublime — aesthetic, epistemological (philosophical), and political — coalesce into one: theory (and practice) of *Minute Particulars.*

[4] J. Reynolds, *Discourses on Art* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), p. 6.

III

Minute Particulars lead to a philosophy of the body which is based on (1) its liberation from the powers of ideological disfigurement, and (2) the sublimation of the body's understanding as merely a conglomerate of physiologically specialized organs. Blake's sublime is that of the body but conceived of in a special way, as the body radically naked, i.e. a body refusing to identify its own, ultimate nakedness with the sexual. What is perceived as the sexual liberation and 'baring' of the body is, according to Blake, merely a clever attempt at imposing an ideological "veil" (a frequent term in Blake's books) neutralizing the revolutionary nudity of man's body. Blake's is not the desexualized body, but a body whose sexuality remains more mysterious and open, more 'naked', thus not restricted to the genital zone, a body of alternative sexualities (in the plural) — a body sublime which differentiates its sexual practices refusing to identify and lock them in the sphere of the genital.

In Plate 69 of *Jerusalem* Blake surrounds the crucial claim that "Every Minute Particular is Holy" (J, 69, 42) with the images of two kinds of sexuality. First, he presents us with the "jealous" and "murderous" sexuality of Rahab, the ancient whore of Babylon, which inscribes the body into social economy (marriage as a system of social exchange: "The Female searches sea & land for gratifications to the/Male Genius, who in return clothes her in gems & gold") and restrictive, conventional law ("A Religion of Chastity, forming a Commerce to sell Loves", see also *The system of Moral Virtue named Rahab*, J. 39, 10). Second, Blake depicts the body of Beulah and of "the sanctuary of Eden", where "Embraces are Cominglings from the Head even to the Feet", i.e. where the holiness of "Minute Particulars" is opposed to the false pathetic or "pomposity" of Generalized Knowledge ("a pompous High Priest").

One should also note how the sublime body of displaced sexuality is implicated in the philosophy of outline. On the one hand, it is totally dependent on the contour and circumference ("For the Sanctuary of Eden is in the Camp, in the Outline", J, 69. 41), on the other hand, however, its power seems to transcend the limitations of the visual outline. We learn that "the Circumference still expands going forward to Eternity" (J, 71. 8), from which we can infer that the experience of the sublimity of the everyday is conditioned by two things; first, by the recognition of the difference, and second — by the acknowledgment of the fact that, when absolutized, this rule can turn into its own parody, into the Cartesianism of the subject contemplating external objects (whereas the sublime seems to be a science of *differance* in which there can be no subject prior to the otherness of objects).

At this moment a theory of sublime must touch upon a theory of the self: in Blake's version, the road towards sublime must be opened by a radical

critique of the *Selfish Center* (J, 71. 7). Thus, despite obvious associations with closure, Blake's outline does not homogenize a thing, does not turn it into a centralized entity, but just the opposite — it introduces within it openness and the space for "expansion" which instantly derails the object from its route towards the center and turns it towards unexpected margins and peripheries. The sublime body is necessarily founded upon the difference, the fundamental necessity of the Other, but it is not a difference stabilized and petrified, identifiable as the 'sexual' or 'psychological' difference, but a moving, ceaseless differentiation which prevents man from absolutizing the physiology of his/her body's organs on the way towards the discovery of the true 'nakedness' of the body above dychotomies. The movement towards the sublime body is then a trajectory above sexuality ("Humanity is far above sexual organization", J, 79. 73), but not outside it ("In Beulah the, Female lets down her beautiful tabernacle/Which the Male enters magnificent between her Cherubim/And becomes One with, her ...", J, 30. 34—36).

One could remark that such a link between sublime and self is noticeable in Lacan's philosophy of self as conditioned by the Other which always carries within itself a suspicion of sublime 'vastness' which prevents us from getting to know it: "'You are my wife'... 'you are my master'... What creates the founding value of those words is that what is aimed at in the message, as well as what is manifest in the pretence, is that the Other is there qua absolute Other. Absolute, i.e. he is recognised, but is not known".

(J. Lacan, *Le seminaire Livre III. Les Psychoses* (Paris: 1981, p. 48).

IV

To dismantle the unequivocal and mistifying image of human sexuality as a domain of unproblematic gratification, to turn it towards the sublime body, Blake speaks about it not only in terms of pleasure but, first of all, of hard work. When, at the beginning of *Jerusalem*, Los forces his Spectre to work with him, the stakes are double: to create an option for the philosophy of life as, to borrow a term from Nietzsche, a kind of "Joyful Wisdom" ("That Enthusiasm and Life may not cease", J, 9. 31; in *Annotations to Reynolds* we find a most general formula of this philosophy: "Enthusiasm is All in All", K, 456), and to open a perspective for the future rejuvenation of Albion by the "Sons and Daughters of Jerusalem to be" (J, 10. 3).

We learn right away that neither of the two purposes is attainable by means of either frivolous reflection of academic philosophy, or through an act of sexual union. The limitations of both are serious. The former tries to cover up, through ideological manouvers, the true reality of "Contraries" neutralized by the binarism of dychotomic divisions ("They take the Two Contraries ... they

name them Good & Evil; From them they make an Abstract, which is a Negation", J, 10. 8—10; in a concise formula, we deal with the "Abstract Philosophy warring in enmity against Imagination", J, 5. 68). The latter attempts to bypass the drama of sexuality by means of its reduction to either reproduction or mere pleasure which, in the latter case, subjects it to the punitive machinery of the moral law ("Every Emanative joy forbidden, as a Crime", J, 9. 14).

To counter such reductionist approaches Blake focuses on the philosophy of labour giving us, more than six decades before Nietzsche, his own version of "philosophizing with a hammer" which the German thinker describes in the preface to the *Twilight of Idols*. Los is presented as a cosmic blacksmith ("Out from the Furnaces of Los ... A pillar of smoke writhing afar into Non-Entity, Till the cloud reaches ... the Starry Wheels", J, 5.50—52), the master of the forge ("The Bellows & the Hammers moved compell'd by Los's hand", J, 10. 6), the wielder of the hammer and furnaces ("Loud roar my Furnaces and loud my hammer is heard", J, 9. 25), and — last but not least — a commanding force ("Groaning the Spectre heav'd the bellows, obeying Los's frowns", J, 9. 33).

Blake's/Los's philosophy of the hammer is the impassioned, eroticized thought of "sublime Labours" (J, 10. 65) resulting in two actions: architectural construction of the city of Golgonooza, and the sexual generation of "his Sons & Daughters";

> Yet ceas'd he [Los] not from labouring at the roarings of his Forge,
> With iron & brass Building Golgonooza in great contendings,
> Till his Sons & Daughters came forth from the Furnaces
> At the sublime Labours ...
>
> (J, 10. 62—65)

If we could trace the reasons why the labours are qualified as "sublime", we would be in a position to see further implications of this adjective in Blake's theory going beyond its already hinted foundation in the notions of the "outline" and "Minute Particulars". First, the labours are designed to curb the raging power of unrestricted reason represented by the Spectre itself. Even a cursory investigation of Blake's thought, however, reveals that his reservations concern not so much reason as such (in *Jerusalem* Blake speaks of the "Holy Reasoning Power" J, 10. 13), but its abuse resulting from its emancipation or alienation from other cognitive faculties. Los's forge is a place where the Spectre is again forced to co-operate, i.e. to abandon its haughty independence described by Blake as "Abomination of Desolation" (J, 10. 16). "Sublime" action is possible when reason is subjected to Poetic Imagination, when the Spectre "heaves the bellows obeying Los's frowns".

Second, such an epistemological turn is implicated in ethical consequences. Sublimity is a movement away from the "desolation" introduced by the emancipated and insulated reason. If we remember that the term 'desolation'

speaks of a land unfit for living, friendless, unhospitable, and ruined, we will be able to see why in the passage quoted above the forge and the roaring hammer announce, in an almost Heideggerian manner, a philosophy of not only sexuality but — first of all — dwelling. While creating his "Sons & Daughters" Los constructs the city of Golgonooza, i.e. a place of hospitality and conviviality. In fine, "desolation" eliminates the Other, redounds to the rigidity of human selfhood, whereas Golgonooza revives the presence of the Other and, hence, makes a turn towards sublime possible. One could argue that Blake's sublime, by betraying the characteristic features of the Romantic sublimity embodied so dramatically in Friedrich's painting *A Monk by the Sea* (man's loneliness and fragility vis-à-vis the elemental powers of nature, the case illustrating particularly well Kant's famous dictum that we should look for sublime in nature[5]) is interpretable mainly in ethical categories, as a rediscovery of the founding role of the Other in the construction of the human subject. This reading is not only supported by a famous Proverb of Hell according to which "The most sublime act is to set another before you" (K, 151), but also by the process of devolution of humanity under the impact of the Reasoning Power which neutralizes the Other not by its total erasure but, much more treacherously, by the substitution of the Other by the inauthentic and reproducible replica. In Blake's categories: imagination is eliminated — in the sphere of the relationship with the Other — by memory:

> But Albion fell down, a Rocky fragment from Eternity hurl'd
> By his own Spectre, who is the Reasoning Power in every Man,
> Into his own Chaos, which is the Memory between Man & Man.
> (J, 54. 6—8)

In other words, the ethical sublime consists in the ability to avoid formlessness, or if we could coin a neologism — 'unformedness' (*Chaos*) — without, however, petrifying in the solidity of a 'separate', 'unrelated' identity without the Other. This moment of transition, or 'shuttling' between the formed and unformed (in this context we should also remember Blake's phrase from *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, where he speaks of the human being as of one who "knows no fixed lot", K, 193) is the key factor in the ethical sublime necessarily leading to the implantation of the aesthetic dimension into the domain of ethics, since the act of the "sublime Labour", of hammering one's self, is the act of imagination or artistic creation opposing a merely reproductive operation of "Memory".

Third, such a philosophy of self brings us back to human sexuality. At the beginning of *Jerusalem* Blake gives his definition of the sexes as: "The Male is a Furnace of beryll; the Female is a golden Loom" (J, 5. 33) which corresponds

[5] See I. Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, sec. 27.

with the 'hammering' and 'shuttling' activities outlined above. Los's "sublime Labours" result in the generation of his "Sons & Daughters", and the adjective "sublime" describes less a 'specialized' genital operation but, rather, seems to refer to the extension of the sexual over all the areas of human body and life. Neither is it insignificant that the "Furnaces" produce also Erin, Blake's representative of free love whose praise he sang in *Vision of the Daughters of Albion.* Eroticization of existence (not to be mixed with its 'genitalization') is an important undercurrent in Blake's version of the sublime.

Fourth, sublimity also qualifies a certain state of "labour" in a society. Acknowledging the importance of Blake's philosophy of work, which cannot be approached in this essay, we can only briefly point out that the "Furnaces" of Los, i.e. of eroticized existence of the outlined — but not fixed — self, stand in opposition to "dark Satanic Mills" introduced by Blake in the Preface to *Milton.* The latter represent the enslaved labour of the early days of Industrial Revolution which confines both man's body (hence, in *Four Zoas* Blake argues for the liberation of industrial slaves: "Let the slave, grinding at the mill, run out into the field", FZ, 9. 670) and — more importantly — mind ("doomed to the sullen contemplation, men in their innermost brain/Feeling the crushing Wheels... write the bitter words/Of Stern Philosophy ...", FZ, 9. 818—820). On the other hand, Los' "Furnaces" stand for the technology not necessarily lighter or less demanding in terms of human effort (we know that "Los compell'd the invisible Spectre to labours mighty with vast strength", J, 10. 65), but the labour, although hard and enforced, is sublimated by its purpose, i.e. a construction of New Jerusalem ("Los works hard for Jerusalem's sake", J, 11.9). In fine, the sublime also implies the liberation of labour not from the stress of manual work but, first of all, from the confines and restrictions of false ideology which reifies and mechanizes man's thought.

V

Nietzsche, like Blake, would disagree with Kant's conviction that it is in nature where man should look for the examples of the sublime. Blake's "sublime Labours" were meant to emphasize the ontological, epistemological, and social status of the sublime which is to redefine human life in terms of excess and eroticized thought. Similarly, Nietzsche would begin with the following reservation: distinguishing sharply between sublime and beautiful (we should remember Blake's distinction between the "rock of sublime" and "the rock of pathetic") he speaks of the latter in terms of a "dream" (*Traum*), whereas he

Similarly, de Luca speaks of Blake's "eroticized conception of intellect" and defines sublime poetry as one which "addresses the Intellectual Powers by furnishing them with forms of desire, with an ongoing enticement that releases the uncurbed emanation of passion".

(V. de Luca, *Words of Eternity. Blake and the Poetics of the Sublime* (Princeton:1991), p. 29)

addresses the former as the "intoxication" (*Rausch*). In the notes we read that if one accepts the view that beauty resides in "the dream of Being" then, automatically, he will have to look at the sublime as a case of "the intoxication of Being" ("Wem das Schöne auf einem Traum des Wesens beruht, so das Erhabene auf, einem Rausch des Wesens"[6]).

We have to note that the philosopher approaches beauty and sublime applying to them terms well known from his early text on *The Birth of Tragedy* and central to all of his philosophy. *Traum* brings us to the Apollonian, while *Rausch* speaks on behalf of the Dionysian. Nietzsche seems to be making a point that beautiful belongs to the God of light and sanity, whereas sublime has been appropriated by the frenzy of the God of wine and madness, a conclusion justified by the final section of the same aphorism: "Das Schöne und das Licht, das Erhabene und das Dunkel" (N I, aph. 32).

When it comes to answering the question whether sublime is inherent to nature ("Ist das Erhabene der Natur eigentumlich") Nietzsche's reaction is negative: it turns towards the notions of "will" (*Willen*) and "measure" (*Mass*). Sublime, unlike beautiful, is generated by the "excessive will" (*das Übermass des Willens*), and by the "overloaded instinct" (*überladenen Triebe*). Sublimity consists in transcending the "measure" which, especially in relation with "will", seems to aim at pointing out the withering of the foundations of the Western subject. First of all, man is no longer 'measurable', i.e. identifiable as a separate and discreet unit in perfect control over both itself (the 'de-genderization' of the pronoun seems important here) and the world. Rather, human subject is now viewed as a temporary and superficial, Apollonian, sovereignity of the conscious over the unconscious. The sovereignity which must necessarily be overturned, and in this respect Nietzsche's philosophy of "revaluation of all values" (also the revaluation of the accepted hierarchy between the conscious and unconscious) is a philosophy of the sublime. If Nietzsche claims that it is the *Übermass des Willens* that brings the experience of the sublime, it is tantamount to saying that the sublime stems from the regions of human

[6] F. Nietzsche, *Nachlass I*, (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, Verlag, 1943), aph. 32. Nietzsche's work will be referred to by means of the following abbreviations followed by the aphorism number: Z — *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, D — *Daybreak*, N I — *Nachlass I*, N II, *Nachlass II*, GS — *Gay Science*, WP — *Will to Power*, KGV — *Nietzsche Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, e.g. G. Colli and M. Montinari (in this case the first number refers to *Abteilung*, the secong to the *Band*, and the third to the appropriate fragment).

subjectivity well beyond what Blake would describe as "Selfhood", and that "intoxication" or "ecstasy" (*Rausch*) are figurative modes of making the sublime available to language and thought. If, for Schopenhauer and Kant, sublime spells the essential fissure in the human self which 'fearlessly' observes itself watch something fearful (a sea-storm, for instance), then for the author of *The Birth of Tragedy* sublime marks the rediscovery not so much of a divided ego but of a self which keeps endlessly differentiating from itself, a self for which the split form of two entities is yet too specific and too definite, the abysmal self which — through this differentiation process — radically overcomes the Apollonian *principium individuationis.*

The category of sublime describes a subject which goes beyond the "measure" of its own limits, i.e. one which refuses to place itself in the territory of appropriateness, both in the sense of ontology (sublime refers to the self which is always different, always belongs 'somewhere else', is always 'im- proper') and economy (sublime excludes the use of possessive pronouns: "will", which according to traditional concepts of self consitutes one of its most characteristic features, in Nietzsche evidently belongs to the fundamental process of becoming over which the self extends only a very limited dominion).

Sublimity belongs to the domain of terror both ontologically (as it unconceals the abysmal structure of existence) and aesthetically (as it spells the end of the era of the normative aesthetics of the Age of Reason, but simultaneously overcomes the Romantic aesthetics originating — as the philosopher claims in the 370 aphorism of *The Gay Science* — from "impoverishment" rather than from "overabundance" of instincts).

The abysmality of existence does not signify, however, the disappearance of self (such a claim qualifies in Nietzsche as a romantic yearning for "rest, stillness... and redemption from self", GS, ap. *370*), but rather its totally different perception along the lines of "eternal return". When, in the same note quoted from *Nachlass*, Nietzsche speaks about sublimity and will, he links them with the idea of *Unmermesslichkeit* ("Die schaurige Empfindung den Unmermesslichkeit des Willens") to emphasize that neither self nor sublime can be exhausted in the traditional "measures" of 'ego' and 'identity'.

VI

It is precisely the doctrine of "eternal recurrence" that reveals the absymality of being in Nietzsche's thought. Without even trying to approach the intricacies of the notion, let us only point out that *Wiederkunft* is not

Alan Schrift interprets eternal return in a similar mode: "... what is essentially at issue is not the fact of the eternal recurrence ..., but the thought of the eternal recurrence, e.g. the thought that one commits oneself to performing eternally the actions that one chooses".
(A. Schrift, *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation* (New York: 1990), p. 70)

a return of the same, an exact repetition of an occurrence, but — rather — it is our willingness and readiness to accept the very possibility of things happening to us over and over again. Such a readiness evidently bespeaks the affirmative attitude towards reality and thus introduces a dramatic change into our being which is radically transformed by the very acceptance of what Nietzsche calls in *Ecce homo* "amor fati". In other words, the affirmative, joyful self is never at ease with itself, since — having affirmed the recurrence — it has become essentialy different from itself. *Wiederkunft* is then a thought of the self's radical non-identity, fundamental non-synonimity with itself. Like in Blake's doctrine of exuberance and excess, the eternal recurrence speaks of the overabundant self, or of the *Übermensch*.

Such a thought implies that even the concept of sublimity cannot be used as a final description of a new self. Hence, in Nietzsche, the sublime must necessarily be overcome: if the *Übermass des Willens* is to lead to *Übermensch*, then it must go through the stage of *Überwindung* (overcoming). The story of sublime in Nietzsche is 'un-measured' in the movement between the three *ÜBER-*. The first implication of this linguistic topography is that, despite the semantic temptation to read in the *ÜBER* a story of the extraordinary and unsual, Nietzsche painstakingly tries to reveal that — paradoxically — it operates in the sphere of the everyday. In another notebook remark the philosopher says that, when doing what one wants to do, one should avoid "lofty words", i.e. avoidance of the rhetorical sublime seems to be a precondition of the sublime experience of will: "Sein Liebtes tun, ohne es mit höhen Worten zu nennen — kann Heroismus sein Scham vor den erhabenen Gebärden" (N, II, aph. 566). Paradoxically, for Nietzsche, the very nature of sublime seems to reside in a recurrent movement between the everyday, the estrangement from it, followed by a return to the *heimlich*; the 'un-measured' can be approached only by means of a "measure". There is necessarily a sense of 'thrownness' in the experience of sublime, of being at the mercy of some unidentifiable power, but also — if sublime is to run its full course — it must overcome its 'thrownness' and create its own existential architecture. Both Blake and Nietzsche emphasize this architectural turn in the sublime, and in both of them it is a move towards a new sense of dwelling in which the aesthetic would merge with the ethical and ontological. Hence, the city of Golgonooza which is being forged in the Furnaces of Los, and Nietzsche's sense of the necessity of 'do-

The process of the necessary domestication of the sublime, of learning how to be at home in a setting which denies 'at- homeness' resembles the relationship between man and meaning in Lacan: "Meaning is the fact that the human being isn't master of this primordial, primitive language. He has been thrown into it ... Here man isn't master in his own house". (J. Lacan, *Le seminaire. Livre II*, (Paris:1978), p. 307).

mestication' of sublime: "Wer im Erhabenen nicht zu Hause ist, fühlt das Erhabene als etwas Unheimliches und Falsches" (N, I, aph. 780). The sublime can only be experienced as its own overcoming: we know what it is, when we begin to feel 'at home' with it, although the very tradition of sublime defines it as exactly the experience of not 'being at home with something'.

The overcoming (*Überwindung*) is signalled in *The Daybreak* where Nietzsche warns us that sublimity can be frequently falsified by pretentious neglect of the natural suppressed by the spiritual. In this sense we can say that a false sublime, i.e. a not overcome sublime results from a certain — as Heidegger would have put it — *forgetfulness of Being*. As we can clearly see from the 261 aphorism of *The Daybreak*, the sublime can be overcome by its own critique as a movement only apparently ennobling man by transporting him to some more lofty areas of being. When Nietzsche strips man of the pretences of divinity and rediscovers the animal in him (in the aforementioned aphorism he speaks of the "animal", *Getier*, which pretentiously walks on two legs, whereas it is much more natural on all fours), he launches a vitriolic attack on Kant and Schopenhauer for whom sublime consisted in the intimation of immortality, in the "supersensible side of our being" (*Critique of Judgement*, sec. 27).

The first step in experiencing sublime consists in recognizing its false pretences, i.e. in emphasizing that a true sublime can only be available as a sublime a *rebours* (not a "god", but an "animal" in man). The next stage is opened by a shock of this discovery. The not overcome sublime has a tendency to produce a satisfied man, a man who is "free, strong, broad, peaceful, and gay" (*frei, fest, breit, ruhig, heiter*, N I, aph. 779), whereas the principle of the Dionysian philosophy of the disturbed *principium individuationis* demands the shattering of the limits of such a self.

This can be achieved through the experience of the "perfect beauty" (*Volkomennen Schönen*) which excruciates and deranges one's self. Like in his theory of tragedy where Dionysus had to, ultimately, speak the language of Apollo, the sublime, when filtered from false and pathetic elements, will become the paralyzing force of the beautiful. In a *Nachlass* note we read: "Der Mensch des Erhabenen wird beim Anblick des Erhabenen frei, breit, ruhig, heiter; aber der Anblick des Volkomennes Schönen erschütert ihm und wirft ihn um: vor ihm verneint er sich selbes", N, I aph. 779). The violent rhetoric of "shattering" (*erschütert*), "rejection" (*umwerfen*), and "negation" (*verneinen*) makes one aware that a true sublime must be overcome and brought to the area of the radically beautiful (what is at stake is not just merely "beautiful" but "perfectly beautiful").

The completion of this process of *Überwindung* is presented in the 13th chapter of the second book of *Zarathustra* appropriately entitled "On the sublime ones" (*Von den Erhabenen*). A sublime person is the embodiment of a false, i.e. not overcome, sublime which does not remain in any relationship with beauty and which represents the force of the pathetic Nietzsche was alluding to in the passage from *The Daybreak* quoted above. Now, the sublime man is referred to not as a fake divinity ("*wie ein Gott*", D, aph. 261), but as a "penitent of spirit" (*einen Büsser des Geistes*). This description introduces the sublime man into the heart of the epistemological debate taking place in Nietzsche's works. The "penitent of spirit" is one who adheres to the model of science which focuses on the security and stability of truth. Not *überwünden* sublime represents the Cartesian model of the lofty thinking responsible for 'transporting' man to the 'heights' of cognition.'

But it is precisely this model which Nietzsche attacks in his books accusing it of absolutising one point of view as well as mistifying the role of language in the process of knowledge formation. We see now why the "penitent of spirit" is laden with "ugly truths" (*Behängt mit hässlichen Wahrheiten*): for Nietzsche, it is indispensible to underscore the fact that his new, "joyful" knowledge, the knowledge of the overcome sublime, deals not with truths but with values. The overcoming of sublime, like the overturning of the knowledge of Bacon, Newton, and Locke in Blake's thought, implies a movement towards "lightness" (see the importance of the metaphore of dance for both thinkers) and art. In Blake, the latter takes the form of a most intricate theory of imagination which becomes a metaphysical nature of man's being ("Art is the Tree of Life ... Science is a Tree of Death", K, 777); similarly, we can learn from Nietzsche that "art is the greatest *stimulans* of life" (WP, 808) and that "our fundamental intellectual life" is nothing else but a "spontaneous play of phantasizing force", KGV, V, 1:10). It cannot surprise us then that the "penitent of spirit", i.e. the unovercome sublime, does not locate itself on the level of "taste" and "liking" (*Geschmack und Schmecken*), and therefore turns out to be the enemy of life itself which, as we learn from the same chapter of *Zarathustra*, is unthinkable without debates over taste.

The first movement, however, leads us away from the "spirit of the heavy" (*Geist der Schwere*, Z, III:11) towards the new knowledge represented not by merely rational inference and experiment assuming the fundamental split between subject/object and mind/body, but by the non-dychotomic, physiological or — rather — BIOlogical response of laughter. The two movements are strictly connected in Nietzsche and, hence, when presenting

Monk notices that already Montaigne "laments the loss of the sublime ... and he blames this state of affairs on 'this new philosophy, which tells only of general laws', and which speaking only of 'pure understanding, of clear ideas, of reasons, of principles' neglects imagination ..." (W.H. Monk, *The Sublime...*, p. 55)

the "penitent of spirit", he can point out in one sentence that he mastered neither laughter nor beauty (*Noch lernte er das Lachen nicht und die Schömheit*), and as a result 'sad left the forest of cognition" (*Walde der Erkenntnis*).

The overcoming of sublime implies then a corrective of the cognitive by the aesthetic (art more important than knowledge: "Art is worth more than truth", WP, aph. 853), and then another sanative procedure — this time of the aesthetic by the biological (life more important than art: "We possess art lest we perish of the truth", WP, aph. 822, i.e. art has such an enormous value because it is the saving power of life). Such a critique of the sublime, like in Blake, involves a certain psychological model of man. For Blake, the ideal was provided by the creative impulse identified with disinstitutionalized Christianity (A Poet, a Painter, a Musician, an Architect: the Man or Woman who is not one of these is not a Christian, K, 776); Nietzsche, a violent critic of the Christian tradition, presents his model as that of man freed from the internalised pressures of ideology. This essential point acquires a most complete metaphorical representation at the very beginning of *Zarathustra* in the famous parable of metamorphoses (*Von den drei Verwandlungen*) in which man's transformation is pursued from the stage of the camel to that of the child, but in the context of Nietzsche's discussion of sublime a more physiological equivalent is used. "The penitent of spirit" is a "tense soùl" (*gespannte Seele*), i.e. one unable to experience joy and paralyzed by the restrictions of preconceived ideas. Thus, the overcoming of sublime implies a relaxation of the muscular tension (*mit lässigen Muskeln*) of the body.

The problem with the sublime seems, for Nietzsche, to consist in the fact that in its classic formulations (like in Kant, Burke, or Hegel) it remains too restrictive and well-defined (too muscularily "tense"), too foreseeable and normative, whereas the sublime must reject all thought of self-identity. Sublime is what is more than itself, what — never satisfied with itself — goes beyond itself (that is why Nietzsche could talk about a 'strong' but 'relaxed' body without tension), and therefore overcoming must be its essential prerequisite (hence even will, Nietzsche's crucial concept, must be overmastered by a new hero), but such a placing of the sublime inevitably turns it into beautiful. Thus in the chapter "On the sublime ones" the philosopher can claim that the sublime man must actualize his/her desire not in "satisfaction" (*Sattheit*) but in "Beauty" which is defined in terms opposite to the traditional presentation of the sublime; no longer do we undergo a movement upwards towards 'invisible' heights, an ascent, no longer do we speak of 'transportation' to the 'heights' but — contrariwise — about a descent, a movement downwards towards the visibility (*Sichtbare*): Nietzsche clearly defines beautiful as a "descent towards

That in this movement Nietzsche betrays romantic principles of sublimity becomes evident from this presentation of the romantic sublime which focuses on the exactly opposite turn of sublime: "The moment of the sublime is that moment before the visible dissolves and with it the poet's ability to make sense of impressions in words".

(J. Twitchell, *Romantic Horizons. Aspects of the Sublime in English Poetry and Painting, 1770–1850* (Columbia: 1983), p. 16)

visibility" ("Wenn die Macht, gnädig wird herabkommt ins Sichtbare: Schönheit heisse, ich solches Herabkommen") which radically opposes Kant's "supersensuality" and speaks of Nietzsche's attachment to the everyday which, in turn, in Heidegger's interpretation means that "the sensuous stands in a higher place and *is* more genuinely than the supersensuous"[7].

In the same chapter of *Zarathustra* Nietzsche suggests that the direction of the metamorphosis taking place in the overcome sublime leads us away from sublime itself towards the elevated. Man should be "elevated" rather than "sublime", Gehobener not *Erhabener*. This positioning of the sublime as a new, redirected elevation in which sublime is transformed into beautiful is also manifest in Nietzsche's presentation of "grand style" as the supreme example of the art of the Dionysian *Rausch*. According to the paradoxical nature of such a sublime (which can be such only after having turned into beautiful), the grand style is defined as precisely the domain of "measure", although this measure is not a mere intermediary between the extremes. Grand style occurs where there takes place "a triumph over the plenitude of living things; where measure becomes master" (WP, 819). A long detour brings us back to the question of *Mass* with which we started; this time, however, only to point out that there can be no art possible without a measure, and thus that sublime MUST be overcome partly for philosophical and ethical reasons (as clearing the way for a new type of consciousness ready to accept and say YES to the destabilizing paradoxes of becoming rather than sanctify the immobilizing logic of being) and partly for the reasons of the logic of aesthetic production which is founded upon the abysmal and unmeasurable flight/fall following the death of God (see, *The Gay Science*, aph. 125), but which can depict and think this new situation of humanity only by reintroducing the idea of measure which allows both chaos and law to unfold. The new measure of the overcome sublime, i.e. of the new beautiful, represents precisely this *Mass* which, remaining itself beyond measure (*unermesslich*), conditions both disarray and order, the Apollonian and the Dionysian.

Similarly, Alexander Nehamas notices that "Nietzsche would not accept Aristotle's view that moderation ... consists in a mean between excess and defect: these are for him the materials through which a higher synthesis, which he sometimes calls 'the grand style', may emerge".

(A. Nehamas, *Nietzsche. Life as Literature*, (Cambridge Mass.: 1985), p. 193)

[7] M. Heidegger, *Nietzsche, Volume One: The Will to Power as Art*, English trans. D. Krell (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), p. 198.



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William Blake and Walter Benjamin: Under the Sign of the Sublime

Like Walter Benjamin, William Blake was a collector. Blake's own particular mode of collecting was the aphorism, the proverb, the detachable quotation; a pursuit that Benjamin shared too. In "A Memorable Fancy" which occupies parts of Plates 6 and 7 of Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, collecting, it turns out, is a mode of activity that takes precedence over describing.

> As I was walking among the fires of hell, delighted with the Enjoyments of Genius; which to Angels look like torment and insanity. I collected some of their Proverbs: thinking that as the sayings used in a nation, mark its character, so the Proverbs of Hell, shew the nature of Infernal wisdom better than any description of buildings or garments[1].

Quotation is not repetition, but reproduction; if it retains terms, to quote Harold Bloom a little out of context, "it mean[s] them in another sense"[2]. Quotation, then, if it preserves the past, does so only in order to put the past to use in the present. No doubt it is simplistic, but not perhaps for all that inaccurate, to say that quotation, like history, can be made to serve truth or falsehood, oppressed or oppressors. Skewed out of context, a quotation can be pressed into the service of fascism or socialism, for example, or, indeed, as in the case of Nietzsche both at once. In his essay "Nietzsche and the Fascists",

[1] *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. D. Erdman, commentary H. Bloom (New York: Anchor, 1988). All subsequent quotation of Blake will be from this edition, and identified by 'E' and page number. I have also made use of the following abbreviations of Blake's prophetic poems: *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* — MHH; *Jerusalem* — J.; *Milton* — M; and *The Four Zoas* — FZ.

[2] Quoted in I. Balfour, "The Future of Citation: Blake, Wordsworth, And The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy", in *Writing the Future*, ed. D. Wood (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 121.

Bataille was surely right to wrest Nietzsche from the rampantly anti-semitic readings of a Frau Foster or a Herr Oehler, just as surely as he was wrong to claim in the same essay that "Nietzsche addressed *free spirits*, incapable of letting themselves be used"[3]. Indeed this claim is blatantly false. And not only for the simple reason that it does not tally with the historical facts that Bataille himself cites in his article, but also for the more ponderous reason that "there is no document of civilization", as Benjamin knew well, "which is not at the same time a document of barbarism"[4]. Let us repeat, quotation is putting the past to use in the present, even if, as one critic recently put it, "'use'" is "an unusable word"[5]. Quotation wrenches language out of its aesthetic self-sufficiency, the past where it has been quietly lying.

That the past is not citable in all its moments except for a redeemed mankind, as Benjamin says in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History", would seem to make the question of what is cited, rather than how, particularly pressing. Curiously, it is the question of to what, in the sense of what is revealed (truth or falsehood), that Blake's distinction between allegory and sublime allegory hinges[6]. For Benjamin, the question of what is cited is not a question that can be preempted this side of the Last Judgement. Until that day, "nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history" for "no moment can know what the next will bring"[7]. A sentiment that is powerfully echoed in a passage in Blake's *Jerusalem* where Los

> ... views the City of Golgonooza, & its smaller Cities:
> The Looms & Mills & Prisons & Work-houses of Og & Anak:
> ...
> And all that has existed in the space of six thousand years:
> Permanent, & not lost not lost nor vanish'd, & every little act,
> Word, work, & wish, that has existed, all remaining still
> ...
> For every thing exists & not one sigh nor smile nor tear,
> One hair nor particle of dust, not one can pass away.
>
> (J E 157—158)

[3] G. Bataille, "Nietzsche and the Fascists", in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. A. Stokl (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 184.

[4] W. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", in *Illuminations*, trans. H. Zohn, ed. H. Arendt (Suffolk: Fontana, 1973), p. 258.

[5] The phrase is Terry Eagleton's and appears in his *Literary Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell 1983), p. 208. It is perhaps useful to quote the context in which it is used: "... literature has a *use*. Few words are more offensive to literary ears than 'use', evoking as it does paperclips and hair-dryers. The Romantic opposition to the utilitarian ideology of capitalism has made 'use' an unusable word: for the aesthetes, the glory of art is its utter uselessness. Yet few of us nowadays would be prepared to subscribe to *that*: every reading of a work is surely in some sense a use of it".

[6] See R. Essick, *William Blake and the Language of Adam* (London: Clarendon Press 1989), pp. 96—90.

[7] See W. Benjamin, "Theses on...", p. 256; and "The Destructive Character", in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. E. Jephcott and K. Shorter, with an Introduction by S. Sontag (London: Verso, 1979), p. 159.

In his essay on "Karl Kraus", however, Benjamin does seem to suggest that there is a mode of quotation which more closely approximates to the task of brushing history against the grain:

> In the quotation that both saves and chastises, language proves the matrix of justice. It summons the word by its name, wrenches it destructively from its context, but precisely thereby calls it back to its origin. It appears, now with rhyme and reason, sonorously, congruously, in the structure of a new text. As rhyme it gathers the similar into its aura; as name it stands alone and expressionless. In quotation the two realms — of origin and destruction — justify themselves before language. And conversely, only where they interpenetrate — in quotation — is language consummated. In it is mirrored the angelic tongue in which all words, startled from the idyllic context of meaning, have become mottos in the book of Creation[8].

What attracts both Benjamin and Blake to quotation is its unreasonableness more than what it explains; they are interested in the enigma which it simultaneously restores and destroys as it deciphers.

Among the many Proverbs of Hell that Blake collects under the rubric of "A Memorable Fancy", there is one that cannot fail to be of interest in any discussion of aesthetics' classical category of the sublime. The proverb: "The most sublime act is to set another before you" (MHH E 36) not only translates the nameless — the conventional sign of the sublime — into the name of the other, but effectively subverts at a stroke the theoretical assumptions that dominated the eighteenth-century conception of the sublime. To be sure, Blake's notion of the sublime "act" which has the other firmly in its sights carries with it a significant ambiguity about the nature of such an act. Act cannot simply be read as a positive term anymore than feeling, can be read as a wholly negative one. Blake's definition of "act" in his "Annotations to Bacon's Essays" — "Thought is Act" (E 623) — only appears to heap ambiguity on ambiguity. For the thought of saving a drowning child is clearly not the same as an act to save it. Such an objection, however, is surely a travesty of Blake's case. For he evidently had something more significant in mind here than reiterating a philosophical truism. That "Thought is Act" can perhaps more fruitfully be read in the sense an act intimately coexists with reflection, or, put differently, that practice is theoretically informed. This view of the matter would seem to make of Blake a Marxist before Marx — a view which is by no means vacuous. Certainly, "unity of conception and execution", which Robert Essick identifies as Blake's "central aesthetic and epistemological doctrine"[9], would, up to a point at least, support such a view. But it is not a point that can be readily pursued here.

From Shaftesbury to Kant through Burke, the aesthetic of the sublime gets figured over and over again as a feeling, an unholy mingling of horror with

[8] W. Benjamin, "Karl Kraus", in *One-Way Street*..., p. 286.

[9] R. Essick, *William Blake and*..., p. 161.

pleasure. The Blakean sublime at work in the proverb from "A Memorable Fancy" is therefore a corrective to the conventional sublime. It is a corrective in at least two significant ways: firstly, by turning the sublime into an act rather than a feeling, the Blakean sublime strikes at the very heart of the conventional sublime in which action is suspended, rendered powerless in a moment of wondering self-estrangement. Secondly, by reinstating particularity in an invincible concern for an other, it breaks with the conventional sublime which transcends all particularity in pursuit of formlessness. This movement towards formlessness finds a corollary in the economic deprivation of the proletarian "as [the] one who is exploited", as Levinas remarks, "constitutes [the] absolute stripping of the other as other, as the de-formation to formlessness, beyond the simple changing of form"[10]. Levinas says the proletarian, not the proletariat; and this distinction parallels Blake's insistence, through the voice of Los in *Jerusalem*, on "Minute Particulars" as against "that Swell'd & bloated Form" (J E 251) the aggregate or general. Not that the general condition of the proletariat cannot be read off from the economic deprivation of the proletarian for Levinas, or Blake; rather, as Blake has Los say, it is in "Particulars" that "General Forms have their vitality" (J E 251).

Fascination with "Minute Particulars" is also a characteristic of Benjamin's work. "In its humble proportions", writes Terry Eagleton in his book on Benjamin, "the miniature has a political meaning, suggesting those 'inconspicuous and sober and inexhaustible' things with which the revolutionary must align"[11]. In his Annotations to the works of Sir Joshua Reynolds, Blake unequivocally aligns the sublime with the particular. Against Reynolds' claim that "art [must] get above all singular forms, local customs, particularities, and details of every kind" (E 647), Blake appends a typically energetic riposte: "A Folly/Singular & Particular Detail is the Foundation of the Sublime" (E 647). This riposte puts Blake in direct opposition not only to Reynolds — and by extension to Burke as well, whose Treatise on the Sublime and Beautiful he says he read in his youth and "on looking [it] over find that my Notes on Reynolds ... are exactly similar" (E 660) — but also to Kant who in his *Observation on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1764) observes that:

> There is a certain spirit of minutiae which exhibits a kind of fine feeling but aims at quite the opposite of the sublime. A taste for something because it is very *artful* and laborious — verses that can be read both forward and backward, riddles, clocks in finger rings, flea chains, and so on. A taste for everything that is over particular and in a painful fashion *orderly* ...[12].

[10] E. Levinas, "Ideology and Idealism", in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. S. Hand (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. 243.

[11] T. Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin of Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (London: Verso, 1981), p. 56.

[12] I. Kant, *Observations of the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, trans J. Goldthwait (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), p. 71.

Indeed, in a sense, Blake does aim at the "opposite of the sublime", if the sublime in question is the Kantian sublime. Kant, no doubt, if Blake had read him, would figure (alongside Bacon and Newton) as Los's Spectre, a self-alienated and alienating "Reasoning Power" (J E 153) that abstracts the universal from the particular, building "Stupendous Works" like the *Critique of Pure Reason*; and thus like Los's Spectre in *Jerusalem*: "Repeating the Smaragdine Tables of Hermes to draw Los down/Into the Indefinite" (J E 251). It is Los's "Hammer & Anvil" (J E 251) that ceaselessly resists "Indefinite", nameless matter; constellating, in almost Benjaminesque fashion, the infinite in the finite, the general in the particular. Thus Los

> Smiting the Spectre on his Anvil & the integuments of his Eye
> ...
> ... sent forth the Spectre all his pyramids were grains
> Of sand & his pillars: dust on the flys wing: & his starry
> Heavens; a moth of gold & silver making his anxious grasp
> Thus Los altered his Spectre & every Ratio of his Reason
> He alter'd time after time ...
>
> (J E 252)

The image of the Spectre's "Stupendous works" compacted between Los's hammer — his pyramids, grains of sand; his pillars, dust on the flys wing — resembles — perhaps deceptively, perhaps superficially (for the historical horizon is different) — Benjamin's "monad". The monad is a means of approaching what cannot be near in any other way. It is not a congealed moment of the past, but the "time of the now" [*Jeztzeit*] that rips homogenous history apart, bringing history to a sudden shocking standstill, a drastically abridged moment "shot through with chips of Messianic time"[13]. If this is not quite Blake's image of the Spectre's pyramids compounded by the hammer of Los into grains of sand, it certainly bears more than a passing resemblance to what, in *Milton*, Blake calls a "Moment", a "Globule of Mans Blood", "a Pulsation of the Artery" in which "all the Great/Events of Time start forth & are conceived" (M E 127). In the structure of the monad, writes Benjamin in the "Theses on the Philosophy of History", a historical materialist "recognizes the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed"[14]. Benjamin's monad, and Blake's Globule, can be read, in a manner that Kant finds scandalous in his *Observations*, "both forward and backward". For both monad and Globule are visionary moments. If they constellate the past, they also bear within them muffled strains of a poetry from the future. Even if it is a future to which, like

[13] W. Benjamin, "Theses on...", p. 263.
[14] Idem.

Benjamin's Angelus Novus, our backs are turned; but which, on the other hand, is just determinate enough to keep, as Urthona, Los's Great Spectre, "kept the Divine Vision in time of trouble" (J E 255).

Putting the sublime to work in seeking out the other, however distant, is already to forge a relation with this other. In Blake's hands, then, the aesthetic gropes its way towards an ethics. Blake's insistence on an ethics both material and spiritual in nature, which concerns itself as much with needs and desires as with pity, compassion, love and creative fulfillment, places Blake in direct opposition to Kant's moral law which spurns all contact with the particular. In a passage in *The Four Zoas*, that prefigures, in parodic form, later criticisms of Kant's categorical imperative as well as Bentham's happiness principle, Blake shows to what political uses moral duty abstracted from the sensual realm of human relations can be put:

> And Urizen Read in his book of brass in sounding tones
> Listen O Daughters to my voice Listen to the Words of Wisdom
> So shall [ye] govern over all let Moral Duty tune your tongue
> But be your hearts harder than the nether millstone
> ...
> Compell the poor to live upon a Crust of bread by soft mild arts
> Smile when they frown frown when they smile & when a man looks pale
> With labour & abstinence say he looks healthy & happy
> And when his children sicken let them die there are enough
> Born even too many & our Earth will be overrun
> Without these arts ...
>
> (FZ E 355)

"Moral Duty" held hostage by an abstract reasoning power is an instance of the "mind-forg'd manacles" Blake hears "in every cry" and "in every voice" of London's citizens (E 27). Not only is the moral law a means of maintaining Urizenic hegemony, it is also a method by which the subject is split down the middle, the head suitably screened from the heart, as it were. Into the breach of this falsifying system a lie can then be projected that turns the truth of the labourer's sickness and despair into health and happiness; greets a frown with a smile, and the suffering and affliction of the poor with stony (he)arts. To free ourselves from "these hypocritic Selfhoods" (J E 151), forged by abstract reasoning, Blake proposes again and again that we "Labour well the Minute Particulars" (E 645), much as Benjamin proposes that the historical materialist counter the historicist by seizing the stray image as it flashes up in a moment of danger. By compacting these stray images one upon the other, Benjamin's constellation effectively renders things in a non-identical relation with themselves, just as surely as Blake's labouring of minute particulars renders the self in a non-identical relation with itself. For it is precisely particulars, in the form

of human needs and desires, which hollow out a space that keeps us away from ourselves and *en route* to others. If this space raises once again the Spectre of "hypocritic Selfhoods", it is also the distance hollowed out and traversed by Los's hand that bears itself towards the hammer "To beat/These hypocritic Selfhoods on the Anvils of bitter Death" (J E 151).

Nor should we underestimate what is at stake in Blake's attempt to brush the conventional sublime against the grain by making of the sublime a feeling act towards the other, and recoupling, however tentatively, aesthetics with ethics. The conventional sublime which goes so far as to accept horror in order to experience it, at a discrete distance, reveals the horror of the sublime, its squalor, the judicious complicity which maintains it in a relation with the most insupportable aspects of power. For to turn one's near-destruction into an aesthetic pleasure of the first order, as the eighteenth-century theorists of the conventional sublime do, is, as Benjamin well understood, a prelude to fascism's aesthetization of the politics of privation, of which the sublimity of self-abnegation will play a part.



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The Unnameable Representation(s) of the Sublime

H. P. Lovecraft's narrator of *The Unnamable* is criticized by a friend for talking, of writing, about things which cannot be really talked or written about:

> Besides, he added, my constant talk about "unnameable" and "unmentionable" things was a very puerile device, quite in keeping with my lowly standing as an author. I was too fond of ending my stories with sighs or sounds which paralyzed my hero's faculties and left them without courage, words, or associations to tell what they had experienced[1].

One might suspect that the friend, Joel Manton, accuses Carter, the narrator and a writer, of writing about nothing, of giving names to things which are unnameable and thus nonexistent from the point of view of scientific or philosophical discourse for which, as Manton puts it, "it is quite impossible to refer to any object or spectacle which cannot be clearly depicted by the solid definitions of fact or the correct doctrines of theology"[2]. The world, both human and divine, is thus thinkable only as nameable, as capable of being properly named and expressed. To refer to something as unnameable is to deny the possibility of its (at least linguistic) presentation and definition simultaneously claiming some kind of presence for that something. In other words, promising to present the unnamable, the narrator leaves his heroes without words to express their experiences otherwise than as unnamable. This is exactly what happens in "The Unnamable". Joel Manton, paralyzed and terrified describes his experience to which he is gradually led by the movement of the narrative using a number of contradictory phrases only to eventually name it as unnameable:

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[1] H. P. Lovecraft, *The Lurking Fear and Other Stories* (New York: Eagle Books, 1971), p. 99.
[2] Ibid., p. 99.

> "No — *it wasn't that way at all.* It was everywhere — a gelatin — a slime — yet it had shapes, a thousand shapes of horror beyond all memory. There were eyes — and a blemish. It was the pit — the maelstrom — the ultimate abomination. Carter, *it was the unnamable!*"[3]

Lovecraft introduces his friend, and the reader, to the unnameable "unteaching" them the "deafness to the delicate overtones of life"[4] by way of "unnaming" the experience whose only name can be "the unnamable", the word which does not really name anything, still attesting to its (unnameable's) existence.

The unnameable can remain unnameable only as long as it remains unnamed, a negativity of sorts whose verbal actualization would annihilate it. Curing our "deafness", learning an ability to hear the "delicate overtones of life", leads straight to a St. Mary's Hospital in which Lovecraft's story ends, and where Joel Manton tries to express his experience. The expression of the unnameable would possibly become a cure, a return to the world without any overtones, a safe world of the "homely" names. Manton's failed attempt at expressing it leaves it as a lurking fear which is there, but whose expression has to be suppressed, repressed into the sphere beyond language as a meaning, or content, without a name. Though textually unpresentable, this content is bound to be mediated by a narrative which cannot repeat the experience. It can only posit it as a memory, as remembering, as an anteriority which cannot become an object of a history, of a science, and thus a source of anxiety, a form of expectation which Harold Bloom identifies with the poetic Sublime.

Bloom reads Freud as a poet of the Sublime who has "more in common with Proust and Montaigne than with biological scientists" because

> ... his interpretations of life and death are mediated always by texts, first by the literary texts of others, and then by his own earlier texts, until at last the Sublime meditation of otherness begins to be performed by his text-in-process[5].

No meditation of otherness, it seems, can be otherwise than sublime. Since, in Bloom's reading, the true origin of the Sublime in Freud is "the ego's earliest defense, its primal repression", then the idea of putting the repressed in presentation is a "parody of the Sublime" comparable to the id (the realm outside the ego) perceiving the id, which both Freud and Bloom find in Jung[6]. The meditation of otherness is thus bound to be "poetic" as it is incapable of bringing the other back home to the ego because once repressed,

[3] Ibid., p. 106.

[4] Ibid., p. 99.

[5] H. Bloom, "Freud and the Sublime: A Catastrophe Theory of Creativity", in *Contemporary Critical Theory*, ed. D. Latimer (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989), p. 556.

[6] Ibid., p. 550.

"images or thoughts ... *cannot* make their way into consciousness, yet their content can, on condition that it is denied"[7]. Like the poetics of Lovecraft's unnameable, the poetics of otherness is a negative poetics in which naming is a mode of the denial of the content which allows this content to "make its way" into the presentable without actually being presented. The unnameable is thus only an apparent opposite of the nameable in the way Freud's *das Heimliche* is only an apparent opposite of the uncanny, *das Unheimliche*, "for this uncanny", here is Bloom quoting Freud from *Beyond* the *Pleasure Principle*, "is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old-established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression"[8].

Something other, estranged, and yet familiar, domestic and close, is, of course, an oxymoron bringing to mind the oxymoron of the pleasurable terror or horror to be found in the eighteenth-century writings on the sublime, from Addison through Burke to Kant. "The feeling of the sublime", says Kant in *The Critique of Judgement.*

> is ... at once a feeling of displeasure, arising from the inadequacy of imagination in the aesthetic estimation of magnitude to attain to its estimation by reason, and a simultaneously awakened pleasure, arising from this very judgement of the inadequacy of sense of being in accord with ideas of reason, so far as the effort to attain to these is for us a law[9].

In other words, the sublime constitutes an object of our interest in Kant only as a kind of background against which the law of reason appears, or is signalled, as the awakened pleasure of human ability to judge. Though fearful, the sublime is simultaneously attractive because it actually grants us the (epistemological) security of position. As if extending Burke's idea that the sublime can be delightful only when its terrible aspects do not "press too nearly", when they are "at certain distances, and with certain modifications"[10], Kant sees such a distant, secure position away from nature. In *The Critique of Judgement* he says that the "boundless ocean rising with rebellious force" is attractive "for its fearfulness" only provided that "our own position is secure"[11]. Though he calls "the might of nature" "irresistible", he simultaneously posits human being away from the terrifying might of nature, inscribes the resistance within man in the way he inscribes the moral law within him leaving the starry sky at some very distant distance. "The irresistibility of the might of nature",

[7] Ibid., p. 548.

[8] Ibid., p. 543.

[9] I. Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. J. C. Meredith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 106.

[10] E. Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London: 1812), pp. 59—60.

[11] I. Kant, *The Critique...*, p. 111.

he says, "forces upon us the recognition of our physical helplessness as beings of nature, but at the same time reveals a faculty of estimating ourselves as independent of nature"[12].

The security of position in thus granted us somehow paradoxically, as Kant's "we" seems to be referring to creatures which are simultaneously natural and independent of nature. What Paul Crowther calls "the awareness of our moral existence" which enables us to recognize objects as fearful in Kant[13] is not the awareness which only accompanies us while "beholding mighty natural objects from the position of safety"[14] but is actually constitutive of that position as a gesture of resistance which, also simultaneously, marks the feeling of fear as actually somehow immoral. Like in Freud, no exploration of the fearful sphere of the sublime is thinkable in Kant, as it would demand the abandonment of the trench of the morally secure position. As unpresentable, the sublime is productive of a painful delight called enthusiasm which borders on *dementia*, and, according to Lyotard, "is a pathological attack and as has such in itself no ethical validity, since ethics requires one to be free of all motivating pathos"[15].

There is no sign of the sublime in Kant, and it is for this reason that "in itself" it is ethically empty, which emptiness testifies to the fullness and completeness of the moral law as the fright which we feel transcending, or actually transgressing, the moral order of things. Though unnameable (unpresentable), the sublime thus rendered as already categorised "otherness", is a somehow negative sign enabling us to estimate our (moral) being "independent of nature", a "simply negative presentation" (Kant's term) which, in Lovecraft, was an attempt to make us sensitive to the delicate overtones of nature, and which in Kant actually deafens us to those overtones as the "sounds" of the *Schwärmerei*, of the "tumult of exaltation" which is also a mark of insanity[16]. The "quasiperceptibility" (again Kant's term) of the sublime 'situation' makes Lyotard wonder whether there is a room for an aesthetic of the sublime in Kant. In *The Inhuman* he writes:

> The principal *interest* that Kant sees in the sublime sentiment is that it is the 'aesthetic' (negative) sign of a transcendence proper to ethics, the transcendence of the moral law and of freedom. In any case, the sublime cannot be the fact of a human art, or even of a nature 'complicit' ... with our sentiment[17].

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[12] Ibid., p. 111.

[13] P. Crowther, *The Kantian Sublime. From Morality to Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 110.

[14] Ibid., p. 110.

[15] J-F. Lyotard, "The sign of History", in *Post-structuralism and the Question of History*, eds. D. Attrridge, G. Bennington, R. Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 173.

[16] Ibid., 173.

[17] J-F. Lyotard, *The Inhuman. Reflections on Time*, trans. G. Bennington and R. Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), pp. 136—137.

Kant "invests" in the sublime (the word "interest" underlined by Lyotard suggest that what is at stake is a certain investment) which, as unpresentable, cannot be an object of a reasonable philosophical investigation, in order to gain the natural which would be complicit with our sentiments. If nature is a "totality of rules"[18], as he defines it in *Prolegomena* to Any Future Metaphysics, then the sublime experience is in fact contrary to the natural and the human both being, as it seems, one and the same thing whose regulation is prompted by sentiment, by the law of the heart. Hence the experience of the sublime can only be made accessible through the aesthetic imagination as beautiful, as an object of art which has already been "theatricalized and framed"[19]. What results from this "theatricalization" is exactly the security of position as an aesthetic distance which, according to Sartre, positions the aesthetic object "behind itself", so that "it becomes untouchable, it is beyond our reach; hence arises a sort of disinterest in it"[20].

If Kant began, as Anthony J. Cascardi claims, "the tradition in aesthetics which takes the beautiful as something essentially unreal"[21], then this "derealization" is in fact a realization of the unreal achieved by aesthetization of the sublime, by its framing, which gesture posits the sublime (already made beautiful) outside the natural as real, but still within the scope of the natural, human sentiments. Artistic beauty is higher than nature, as Hegel claimed, only provided that it also has some other nature which is still contingent with our sentiments. The sublimation of nature in art which moves nature above nature is simultaneously a desublimation of the sublime as unpresentable, a presentation of the pleasurable terror without the terror which results from the realization of the "unpresentabilty" of the sublime. What is at stake in the sublimation of nature, as Cascardi rightly claims, is "the process of raising and purifying nature by aestheticizing it"[22] and thus positing it as purifiable by man. This purification, as it seems, actually means potentiality of presentation which inscribes the law, Kant's totality of rules, within the order of art which thus becomes but an extension of the natural order of things. Art purifies nature of the terror of the sublime thus confirming the existence of the law and order within man.

A literary expression of terror is thus always already an aesthetic expression, a theatricalized, framed presentation which is simultaneously negative in

[18] I. Kant, *"Prolegomena" to Any Future Metaphysics*, trans. P. Carus, rev. J. W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1982), p. 62.

[19] Cf. A. J. Cascardi, "From the Sublime to the Natural: Romantic Responses to Kant", in *Literature and the Question of Philosophy*, ed. A. L. Cascardi (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 107.

[20] J.-P. Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination* (London: Methuen, 1972), p. 225. Quoted in ibid., p. 107.

[21] Ibid., p. 106.

[22] Ibid., p. 105.

the sense that it renounces what it attempts to present thus somehow cathartically purifying our nature by way of making it sensitive to the value of order and law. Such is, at least, Stephen King's position as regards the horror genre. In *Danse Macabre* he says that "the creator of horror fiction is above all else and agent of the norm"[23] and in an interview included in *Bare Bones* he enlarges upon the idea:

> ... horror fiction is really as Republican as a banker in a three-piece suit. The story is always the same in terms of its development. There's an incrusion into taboo lands, there's a place where you shouldn't go, but you do, the same way that your mother would tell you that the freak tent is a place you shouldn't go, but you do. And the same thing happens inside: you look at the guy with three eyes, or you look at the fat lady or you look at the skeleton man or Mr. Electrical or whoever it happens to be. And when you come out, well, you say, "Hey, I'm not so bad, I'm all right. A lot better than I thought". It has the effect of reconfirming values, of reconfirming self-image and our good feelings about ourselves. ... and let me further suggest that it is not the physical or mental aberration which horrifies us, but rather the lack of order which these situations imply[24].

Clinton voters, as it seems, do not read horror fiction or read it not as lacking order, but as a politically programmatic, positive rather than negative, kind of writing. Though Kant uses somehow different kind of idiom in his interpretation of the sublime, he also posits it as a taboo land of sorts which, as unpresentable, cannot in fact be presented in writing whose order demands the ordering of the presented. If Kant's sublime is rendered as an unreality of sorts, as an unnatural nature thus negatively being named as both "the unpresentable" and "the sublime", horror fiction offers us an orderly, because written, vision of disorder simultaneously rendering it as fictitious and thus derealizing it from the start. Horror fiction is thus both appealing and appalling, and what appeals to us is exactly the fiction of the appalling. It is the label "fiction", be it a written or an unwritten one, which grants the reader of horrors the security of position which does not put him or her in the position at which self-preservation is endangered. An intrusion to Stephen King's taboo lands is in fact a guided tour through the world of stuffed monsters displayed there only in order to confirm the value of the homely reality of the normal. Like Lovecraft's Manton from before his initiation into the unnamable, King's reader is always already convinced that the abnormal he is offered by a horror story does not actually exist thus, as it were, defeating the abnormal, denying the possibility of its intrusion into the normal which the horror story "presents".

Such a defeat of the abnormal is inscribed, according to Noel Carroll, within the "deep structure" of the horror fiction. From the point of view like King's, he writes:

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[23] S. King, *Danse Macabre Berkeley Books* (New York: 1987), p. 48.

[24] *Bare Bones: Conversations on Terror with Stephen King*, eds. T. Underwood and C. Miller (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1988), pp. 9 and 39.

> ... the deep structure of the horror fiction is a three-part movement: 1) from normality (a state of affairs in which our ontologico-value schema rests intact); 2) to its disruption (a monster appears, shaking the very foundations of the culture's cognitive map — which affront itself may be perceived as immoral/abnormal — and predictably, the monster also does forbidden things like eating people); 3) to the final confrontation and defeat of the abnormal, disruptive being (thereby restoring the culture's scheme of things by eliminating the anomaly and punishing its violations of the moral order)[25].

Since a deep structure is at stake, there also must be some "horror fiction competence" (running parallel to Culler's "literary competence" and Chomsky's "linguistic competence") within our minds which makes us not only competent to eliminate the anomalous (sentences, for instance), but which actually necessitates this elimination. Carroll sees this competence at work also in the "rituals of rebellion" (from saturnalia to the present day Carnival) in which "customary decorum, morality, and taboos may be relaxed", but which, though including "some criticism of the social order ... contain that protest in a way that preserves and strengthens it"[26]. Yet, as Carroll rightly notices, such an aprioristic allegorizing of horror fictions as purely ideological writings preserving the status quo does not work in cases (as is the case with Lovecraft's *The Unnamable*, for instance) where the "abnormal" is not quite eliminated or banished[27]. The politically or morally cathartic effect of such stories is at least doubtful. Moreover, rather than eliminating the horrifying, *The Unnamable* as it were attempts at normalizing it, at bringing it within the sphere of the familiar and thus, paradoxically, inscribing the unfamiliar within the familiar as a residue, an "overtone" of the other which contaminates the security of position by the very possibility of its "being there" and simultaneously "here", within the world of Stephen King's bankers in three-piece suits.

It is exactly the paradox of "unnaming" reality, of denying its absolute "nameability" which, though a negative gesture, does not render the unnameable as an anomaly or monstrosity which endanger human position, but posits the question which Lyotard, hardly a horror story teller, asks in the introduction to his *The Inhuman*: "... what if what is 'proper' to humankind were to be inhabited by the inhuman?"[28] The possibility of posing such a question necessitates a certain demolition of the secure distance which aestheticizes the sublime in Burke, Kant and elsewhere. This, according to Lyotard, can be done from the postmodern perspective which is the perspective of putting forward the unpresentable, the sublime, in presentation itself[29].

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[25] N. Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), p. 200.

[26] Ibid., pp. 200—201.

[27] Cf. ibid., pp. 201—202.

[28] J-F. Lyotard, *The Inhuman...*, p. 2.

[29] J-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 81.

What, however, is also at stake in the postmodern, the poststructuralist or the deconstructive seems to be the definite "the" delimiting the scope of the unnameable to a certain presentabilty which takes place, which can take place, only if the presentable, the aestheticized or the theorised is still available as a background, as marginalised foundation against which the postwhatever discourse defines itself as marginal. Without saying "no" to "the" o"the"r, neither does it quite say "no" to its opposite thus granting itself at least a marginal security of position exactly by saving the opposition. The Derridean "yes and no" answer to mostly everything is not, of course, the Kingean or Burkean escape to the normal, but it is simultaneously a gesture which sublimates the norm by contaminating it with the possibility of being an infinite play of discourse constantly overreaching itself. Yet this overreaching (dissemination, trace, transgression, abundance) actually posits the sublime as a positive category, as the norm of discourse, as a certain property which lacks properties. In a certain sense, the postmodern is thus a construction of the sublime, of the without properties, of the infinite, the inhuman, the unnameable which simultaneously renders this construction as desirable without quite identifying itself with it by way of questioning identity itself. It is in the paradox of putting the unpresentable forward in presentation that inscribes a finitude into the infinite within the postmodern discourse thus actually repressing, let us return to Freud for a while, the repressed within the posited possibility of its expression, by marking the repressed, somehow against the grain of Freud's speculations, as "wanted" within the sphere of the presentable. Hence a certain, however hidden, policing within the postmodern. The sublime, the unnameable is wanted, desired to be let free in a freeplay of the signifiers, but it is also clearly marked as transgressive or anomalous, as something to be coped with in writing, in making present without which Lyotard's "inhumanization" of reality would be its "dehumanization".

It is here, I think, in the necessity of a presentation which denies presentation, that the postmodern is incapable of saying a "yes", even to itself. In its criticism of properties, of the proper, the postmodern at the same time wants to avoid the position of being possessed, of being given but also of giving itself, as well as of being mad. It is here, I think, that the feminist criticism finds, generally, postmodernism almost as phallogocentric as Cleland's *Fanny Hill*, for instance. "Being possessed", says Hélène Cixous, "is not desirable for a masculine imagery, which would interpret is as passivity — a dangerous feminine position"[30]. The fear of being possessed is the gesture of repression of the femininity within the masculine which, according to Cixous, also forms the basis of psychoanalysis. In its denial of giving itself, of being possessed,

[30] H. Cixous, "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks (Ways Out) Forays", in *The Feminine Reader. Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*, eds. C. Belsey and J. Moore (Macmillan, 1989), p. 105.

poststructural discourse sublimates itself to the sphere beyond human reach so as to conceal its own femininity, the "being possessed" whose passive silence is threatening because it does not demand anything in return for the giving. In its denial of being possessed the masculine postmodernism gains identity exactly because of its refusal to give itself. The woman, the feminie, gives herself in the disintersted gesture coming from her "capacity to depropriate herself without self-interest"[31]. Hence the sublime is raised, or erected, by men as the threatening outside and simultaneously an abstract object of exploration in order to externalize their own femininity and to simultaneously objectify it as the unnamable, for instance, or as a mysterious overtone of nature which in women is natural voice singing from within as the voice of love:

> The Voice sings from a time before law, before the symbolic took one's breath away and reappropriated it into language under its authority of separation. The deepest, the oldest the loveliest Visitation. Within each woman the first, nameless love is singing[32].

"Women have not sublimated. Fortunately"[33]. For Cixous the sublime is a category of political/economic repression of giving, of being possessed. The nameless love which is the singing of the body is to be listened to rather than classified as the unnamable or the sublime.

Though far from being written about, the sublime is made audible throughout Cixous' text. Rather than representing, the femininine writing is to make human body heard, and what we hear is not the representation or theorization of the unnameable, of the repressed, of the sublime, but an outburst of the unconscious, of the suppressed "varied entirety, moving and boundless change, a cosmos where eros never stops travelling"[34]. Rather than, like Burke or Kant, stepping away from the sublime, or like Lovecraft, Lyotard or Derrida positing it as the unnameable, the unpresentable or the difference irreducibly attached to reality as the other, in Cixous we should let the feminine speak, "tear her out of the superegoed, over-Mosesed structure"[35] and listen to her voice without fear or horror as to our voice of love coming from within.

That such a voice of love may not sound very attractive to a Republican reader of horrors seems to be hardly questionable. Heard from within oneself, given by oneself as always already possessed and thus never one's own, such a voice can only be an affirmative one as regards what has been, very provisionally, termed here as the sublime; an "I will Yes" with which Cixous embarks towards a new writing which "can only go on and on, without ever inscribing or distinguishing the contours"[36].

[31] Cf. ibid., p. 104.
[32] Ibid., p. 111.
[33] Ibid., p. 114.
[34] Ibid., p. 108.
[35] Ibid., p. 116.
[36] Ibid., p. 108.



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The Sublime and C.S. Peirce's Category of Firstness

The task of confronting the idea of the sublime from a semiotic point of view seems to be a task ridden with contradictions. After all, the accepted view, following J-F. Lyotard[1], is that the sublime belongs to the realm of the unpresentable. And semiotics is a discipline which is a study of signs and it deals with what can be articulated and therefore presented, whether in discursive, i.e. verbal or presentational, i.e. visual signs, to use S.K. Langer's distinction[2]. Hence, considering the nature of the semiotic enterprise, the semiotician should perhaps heed early Wittgenstein's maxim that "(w)hat can be said at all can be said clearly; and whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent"[3]. In addition, writing to a friend about the *Tractatus Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein said: "I once meant to include in the preface a sentence which is not in fact there now... What I meant to write, then, was this: My work consists of two parts: the one presented here plus all that I have not written. And it is precisely this second part that is the most important one"[4]. Likewise, in what follows what I have not written will probably be more important than what I have actually written. I intend to tread the territory of the sublime by addressing, from a semiotic point of view, the notion of the unpresentable. To this end I will use C.S. Peirce's category of firstness which is, among others, a quality of immediate consciousness and as such it "is completely veiled from introspection"[5].

[1] J-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984), p. 78.

[2] S.K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key. A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1957), pp. 72—102.

[3] L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.

[4] A. Janik and S. Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973), p. 192: quoted by A. Keightley, *Wittgenstein, Grammar and God* (London: Epworth Press, 1976), p. 23.

[5] C.S. Peirce, *Collected Papers*, eds. C. Hartshorne, P. Weiss, Vols. I—VI, ed. A.W. Burks, Vols. VII—VIII (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1931—1935, 1958). The accepted way of referring to Peirce's Collected Papers is by volume and paragraph number: in this case CP:1.310.

I

The experience of the sublime, or of "such a distinct emotion of mind", to use Burke's phrase[6], alongside the "waking, nocturnal, neurotic, altered, psychotic (and) creative ... bring(s) the limits of the sign system into sharp focus and embrace(s) the edges of the cultural and non-cultural"[7], or of the presentable and the unpresentable. However, as Kołakowski[8] argues with respect to perennial metaphysical anxieties and unresolved questions of philosophy, the idea of the limit or of the unpresentable is internally contradictory. The internally contradictory nature of the notion of the unpresentable or rather of the veil which makes our articulation of certain realities impossible lies, according to Kołakowski[9], in the premiss which it presupposes, namely that we may have knowledge about the impossibility of knowledge. On the one hand, this premiss is, as Kołakowski says[10], the source of sceptical philosophy; on the other hand, it points to the hellish circle of epistemology predicated on the negative knowledge about the impossibility of knowledge and finally leads to the unleashing of horror metaphysicus[11].

Horror metaphysicus which has traditionally drawn sceptical philosophy into the vortex of nothingness is at the same time at the root of the experience of the sacred. One aspect of the experience that is pertinent here is the neoplatonic insight that the passage of time, "the moving present instant (as opposed to the divine eternal now)"[12] is a key factor in the experience of the sacred. This insight, which keeps reappearing in philosophy in various forms until the present day, draws on the perennial experience of the "somewhere else", of the "not here"[13] and of the not now.

C. S. Peirce also drew on the neoplatonic insight into the somewhere else and the not now, but rather than pursue the traditional metaphysical dilemma of choosing between chaos and the sacred cosmos, between uncertainty and truth, he made it the cornerstone of his non-Cartesian philosophy of mind and of the subject as well as of his sign theory. He wrote:

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[6] E. Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 117.

[7] C. W. Spinks, *Semiosis, Marginal Signs and Trickster. A Dagger of the Mind* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London: Macmillan Academic and Professional LTD, 1991), p. 136.

[8] L. Kołakowski, *Horror Metaphysicus* (Warszawa: Res Publica, 1990), pp. 15—18.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., p. 30 ff.

[12] Ibid., p. 38.

[13] Ibid.

> it is plain enough that all that is immediately present to a man is what is in his mind in the present instant. His whole life is in the present. But when he asks what is the content of the present instant, his question always comes too late. The present has gone by, and what remains of it is greatly metamorphosed[14].

In many respects a follower of Kant, Peirce considered the phenomena of always-too-late and of the great metamorphosis as "due to congenitial tendencies of the mind"[15]. However, he used this ancient insight, among others, to revise Kant's system of categories which he considered as particular rather than universal since, according to him, Kant's twelve categories "form a series or a set of of series, only one of each being present, or at least predominant, in any one phenomenon"[16]. What Peirce sought were universal categories which would at the same time be categories of consciousness, of being and of semiotics;[17] these categories would then serve as intermediate conceptions in the passage from the manyfold of sense impressions to the unity of a proposition or a judgement. In his search for such elementary conceptions that would belong to every phenomenon[18] Peirce arrived at his three categories which he simply called Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness and which are central to his sign theory or theory of representations in the mind. As K-O. Apel observes, "Peirce's philosophical approach may be understood as a semiotic transformation of Kant's transcendental logic"[19].

Since, unlike Kant, Peirce conceived of his categories as categories of thought or consciousness[20], Firstness became Kant's manifold of sense impressions[21], and thus he saw Firstness as predominant in "in the ideas of freshness, life, freedom ... in the unlimited and uncontrolled variety and multiplicity[22]. Thus, "(i)n the idea of being [emphasis — E. P.], Firstness is predominant ... on account of its self-containedness"[23]. On account of its self-containedness Firstness is "the consciousness which can be included within an instant of time (or it is) passive consciousness of quality, without recognition or analysis"[24]. As such, "it is our immediate consciousness (which is)

[14] CP: 1.310.

[15] CP: 1.374.

[16] CP: 5.43.

[17] W. L. Rosensohn, *The Phenomenology of Charles S. Peirce* (Amsterdam: B. R. Grüner, 1974), pp. 40, 45, 50.

[18] CP: 5.43.

[19] K-O. Apel, "From Kant to Peirce. The Semiotic Transformation of Transcendental Logic", in *Proceedings of the Third International Kant Congress*, ed. L. W. Beck, (Dodrecht, Holland: Reidel Publishing Company, 1972), p. 94.

[20] W. L. Rosensohn, *The Phenomenology...*

[21] CP: 1.302.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] CP: 1.377.

completely veiled from introspection"[25]. Secondness, on the other hand, is "consciousness of an interruption into the field of consciousness, (or) sense of resistance, of external fact, of another something"[26] while Thirdness is "synthetic consciousness, binding time together, sense of learning, thought"[27]. There are thus, according to Peirce, three modes of consciousness and of being: the mode of quality or possibility, the mode of fact or relation, and the mode of representation, thought or synthesis. These three modes represent a transition from the manifold of sense impressions to thought or proposition and are most easily discernible in the emergence of a sign relation or representation in the mind[28]. Thus the transition is from the manifold of sense impressions or being to being represented. The transition "is an event occupying time, and coming to pass by a continuous process"[29]. The continuous process or semiosis is the aforementioned metamorphosis of immediate consciousness into a question or judgement "which always comes too late". Elsewhere Peirce defined the metamorphosis as translation or interpretation and he wrote:

> There is no exception, therefore, to the law that every thought sign [or one instant in my state of mind — E.P.] is translated or interpreted in a subsequent one, unless it be that all thought comes to an abrupt and final end in death[30].

Thus, "the Immediate (and therefore in itself unsusceptible of medation [emphasis — E.P.] — the Unanalyzable, the Inexplicable, the Unintellectual) runs a continuous stream through our lives"[31].

II

In the light of the above asemiotic transformation or interpretation might now be attempted of J-F. Lyotard's "sublime relation between the presentable and the conceivable"[32]. On Peirce's terms, if I understand them adequatly, the conceivable would be, on an elementary level, the manifold of sense impressions or being which is unsusceptible of mediation, and the presentable would be representations in the mind or being represented. The chasm between the two would be Peirce's metamorphosis or translation, "an event occupying

[25] CP: 1.310.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] CP: 1.339.
[29] CP: 5.284.
[30] Ibid.
[31] CP: 5.289.
[32] J-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern...*, p. 79.

time" and always coming too late to capture the immediacy of experience. In this sense Lyotard's sublime relation may be treated as bringing into sharp focus the limits of sign systems and embracing the edges of the cultural and the non-cultural. Moreover, such a semiotic transformation of Lyotard's sublime relation would extend it to all other instances of the unsusceptible of mediation — the Unanalyzable, etc. which run a continuous stream through our lives. The point here is not to conflate the experience of the sublime with other experiences but merely to stress continuity between them and their common source, namely the incommensurability between "the moving present instant" or immediate consciousness and the thought into which it is subsequently metamorphosed or translated. As Peirce wrote: "Anything whatever, however complex and heterogeneous, has its quality sui generis, its possibility of sensation, would our senses only respond to it"[33]. Reflection and thought, on the other hand, "do not belong to the quality element of experience"[34]. Therefore, on reflection we may regard a particular experience of greater magnitude and/or heterogeneity than others; we may assign to it the attribute of sacredness or sublimity, but the principal chasm between the immediacy of experience and the judgement will remain the same, although further consequences of the experience may attract special attention, as seems to be the case with the experience of the sublime or of the sacred.

I will not make an attempt at a semiotic interpretation of the experience of the sacred, although it has been said that "(t)he Sublime ... revives as God withdraws from an immediate participation in the experience of man"[35], and therefore the affinities between the two experiences must be close. However, in order to emphasize the continuity rather than the discontinuity among the variety and multiplicity of immediate experiences, a semiotic interpretation will be applied briefly to two cases: the sublime as understood by I. Kant and the comic as understood by P. Berger, although these two experiences are often juxtaposed. In the former case, the motif of incommensurability, or to use Peirce's notions of metamorphosis or translation, is clearly detectable. As rendered by Kant, the experience or the pleasure of the sublime "only arises indirectly [emphasis — E.P.), being brought about by a momentary [emphasis — E.P.] check to the vital forces followed at once by a discharge all the more powerful"[36]. The momentary check to the vital forces may be interpreted, in terms employed here, as the manifold of sense impressions manifesting itself with a particular force within an instant of time; it is then followed by a judgement as to the attributes of the experience. This judgement and therefore an interpretation then becomes the source of pleasure or fear, or, as

[33] CP: 1.426.

[34] CP: 1.425.

[35] E. Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*.... Introduction by A. Phillips, p. X.

[36] I. Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. J.C. Meredith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), § 23.

Kant puts it, "a discharge all the more powerful"; and in line with Peirce's reasoning, this discharge is then subject to further interpretation, etc. With repect to the comic, P. Berger argues that "(t)he comic reflects the imprisonment of the human spirit in the world"[37]. "Humor", Berger writes, "at least for an instant [emphasis — E.P.] in which it perceives the comic dimension of the situation"[38] brackets the discrepancy or incommensurability of the situation in which a great philosopher loses his trousers[39]. Unlike in the case of Kant's rendering of the sublime, the motif of indirectness is not clearly detectable here. However, a semiotic interpretation of the experience of the comic may be recapitulated as follows: the instant in which the comic is perceived is the manifold of sense impressions, followed by a judgement in which the incongruity is recognized, and it is the judgement which is the source of the discharge, or the bracketing, usually manifesting itself in laughter.

Although E. Burke calls humor the enemy of the sublime[40], I would contest this formulation, again not in order to conflate such two disparate experiences, but in order to emphasize continuity between various experiences at the limits of the articulate or presentable. P. Berger stresses one crucial aspect of the comic, namely that the bracketing of the incommensurability of the situation in the experience of the comic, "no matter how great the inner terror or anguish of the mind perceiving it"[41], has a profound relativizing and liberating effect. Referring to power and laughter he writes:

> Empirical reason knows that all power is precarious and that eventually even Tamerlane must die. But the revelation of laughter points beyond these empirical facts. Laughter ... relativizes the seemingly rocklike necessities of this world[42].

In a similar fashion, the experience of the sublime, whether on Kant's or Hegel's account, as "a faculty of mind transcending every standard of sense"[43] or as "the 'One', substantial in itself, which itself is a pure thought dedicated to pure thoughts only"[44], likewise points beyond the rocklike necessities of this world. Herein lies, I would argue, the continuity between those experiences. Both are momentary, both are instantiations of the "moving present instant" which, to use Peirce's category of Firstness, is "the Immediate (and therefore in itself

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[37] P. L. Berger, *A Rumour of Angels. Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural* (Harmodsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1971), p. 90.

[38] Ibid., p. 91.

[39] Ibid., p. 89.

[40] E. Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry...*, p. XXII.

[41] P. L. Berger, *A Rumour of Angels...*, p. 90.

[42] Ibid., p. 91.

[43] I. Kant, *The Critique...*, § 25.

[44] S. Bungay, *Beauty and Truth. A Study of Hegel's Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 353—354.

unsusceptible of mediation ...) (which) runs in a continuous stream through our lives"[45]. The category of Firstness or the manifold of sense impressions in consciousness, due to its "unlimited and uncontrolled variety and multiplicity"[46] is, according to Peirce, dominant in the ideas of freshness, life (and) freedom"[47], as it is the monadic and potential element in the consciousness and the world.

III

Let me end with a handful of remarks which grow out of my Central European experience now at last practically fully open to the Western experience. Peirce intended the category of Firstness to point to the realm of the self-contained, "the 'One', substantial in itself", to use Hegel's phrase, the unanalysable and the potential in our consciousness. He also associated the category of Firstness with the idea of freedom and with the unlimited and uncontrolled variety and multiplicity of what is given to us in perception. It is therefore obvious that this congenitial tendency of the mind will have far-reaching consequences in the affairs of life, including the political domain. In *The Act of Creation* A. Koestler[48] raises the issue of the oceanic feeling of wonder. It is, according to him, the common source of religious mysticism, or in terms used above, the experience of the sacred in its particular intensity when "the moving present instant" and "the divine eternal now" are said to coincide; of pure science as in Kant's mathematical sublime; and of art for art's sake as in J-F. Lyotard's account of modern nostalgic aesthetics of the missing contents[49]. However, as Koestler warns, this self-transcending element, which is a common emotional bond of the sacred, the sublime and the aesthetic, assumes two forms, namely a participatory urge and a conquistadorial urge, and both are elements of the emotional make-up of man[50].

The participatory urge aside, I will briefly mention two instances of the conquistadorial urge in the political domain. The empiricist and neopositivist attempts to exorcise "the uncontrolled variety and multiplicity" in our consciousness are well known. L. Wittgenstein's passage from his earlier to his later philosophy is a particularly telling example that attempts at exorcising

[45] CP: 5.289.

[46] CP: 1.302.

[47] Ibid.

[48] A. Koestler, *The Act of Creation. A Study of the Conscious and the Unconscious in Science and Art* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1964), p. 255.

[49] Lyotard, *The Postmodern...*, p. 81.

[50] A. Koestler, *The Act of Creation...*

metaphysical anxieties by rendering them meaningless are futile. Here is H. Marcuse, a critic of what he calls one-dimensional society, focusing on the discourse or language that this narrow empiricist and neopositivist perspective fosters (my bracketed glosses aim at re-applying his insight to the post-totalitarian and post-modern era, and to the context of this paper):

> The functional language is radically anti-historical [antimetaphysical — E.P.] language: operational rationality has little room and little use for historical reason [metaphysical reason — E.P.]. Is this fight against history [metaphysics — E.P.] part of the fight against a dimension of the mind in which centrifugal faculties and forces might develop — faculties and forces that might hinder the total coordination of the individual with society?[51]

This anti-historical and, shall I add, anti-metaphysical operational rationality is, I understand, the precondition for the existence of Western societies as we now know them. I do not wish to express here however indirectly a longing for the metaphysics of yesteryear, and for the religious and political certainties that the mind believed it held[52]. However, "(t)he Sublime ... revives as God withdraws from an immediate participation in the experience of man", and "a dimension of the mind in which centrifugal faculties and forces might develop" remains.

The second instance of the conquistadorial urge is qualitatively different from the previous one. I mean here the totalitarian experience and one is tempted to say that the chasm between the two, the Western and the Eastern, approaches that between the unsusceptible of mediation or presentation and the presentable. Despite their contempt for humanity, the totalitarians were well aware of the "unlimited and uncontrolled variety and multiplicity" in human consciousness and they were determined both to control and to exploit it. The totalitarian ideologies of Nazism and Marxism-Leninism or those two diseases of power, to use M. Foucault's phrase, not only "used and extended mechanisms already present in most societies. More than that: in spite of their own internal madness, they used to a large extent the ideas and the devices of our own [i.e. Western — E.P.] political rationality"[53]. Those two ideologies may be seen as mad outgrowths of the conquistadorial urge which both exorcised and exploited at the same time "a dimension of the mind in which centrifugal faculties and tendencies might develop". The exorcisms accompanied by suppresion and physical elimination were carried out according to racial or class criteria. For the Nazis, the Jews and the Gipsies were racially inadequate and were to be eliminated; the Slavs, as racially inferior,

[51] H. Marcuse, *One-dimensional Man. Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), p. 98.

[52] J-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern...*, p. 77.

[53] M. Foucault, "The Subject and Power", *Critical Inquiry* 8 (1982), p. 779.

were to be reduced to serfdom. For the Marxists-Leninists, large segments of traditional society were socially dangerous elements as they were bearers of "false consciousness" and they were therefore to be isolated in labor camps or physically eliminated. The remaining population was to be reduced to "the reservoire of the necessary-labor power"[54], "a huge permanent concentration camp (where) (i)ndividuals are nothing but labor units"[55].

The Nazi and Marxist-Leninist undertaking was carried out to genocidal extremes unmatched by anything in history. The sheer magnitude of the two mad undertakings involved a wide-spread exploitation of the conquistadorial as well as the participatory urge in "the masses". This was most evident in the *Führer* principle and the personality cult as well as in torch-lit marches and parades with portraits, slogans and banners as well as in the art forms prescribed by the two respective ideologies. In addition, daily propaganda and brainwashing in schools, offices, factories and barracks as well as in the press, on the radio and in newsreels channelled both the participatory and the conquistadorial urge to destructive political and military ends. As a result, the totalitarian experience, tragic and fatal for many millions, plunged many other millions into individual and collective states of mind which defy description in ordinary "rational" discourse. One may argue that those very intensive experiences which were shared by many millions were instances of what Kant identified as the experience of the sublime. Those epoch-making parades and marches as well as the subsequent social and military events were certainly terrifying as well as splendid to many, and also noble to many others[56].

If, as Kant says, "(t)he various feelings of enjoyment or displeasure rest not so much upon the nature of the external things that arouse them as upon each person to be moved by these", then I will leave the rest unsaid.

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[54] L. Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, Vol. 2. *The Golden Age*, trans. from the Polish by P.S. Falla (Oxford, New York, Toronto, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 511.

[55] Ibid., p. 512.

[56] I. Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, trans. J. Goldthwait (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), p. 45.



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Sublime, the Unclear

Only that which has no history is definable.
F. Nietzsche

The word (signifier) "sublime" appeared for the first time in English in the Middle Ages and there was nothing unusual about it. Alchemists used it. To sublime meant to "subject (a substance) to the action of heat in a vessel so as to convert it into vapour, which is carried off and on cooling is deposited in a solid form"[1]. Latin was the language of research and, in such contexts, the use of a Latin word in any vernacular must have been seen as a matter of course. The appearance of the word was in a sense necessary because alchemy (which is a Greek or Arabic derivation meaning "the art of transmutation") needed predicates to denote and relate its activities. The simple words like burn, cool, etc. were to be found in the vernacular, but not those denoting more complex activities, such as transmute, sublime or calcine. These had to be taken from Latin — *transmutare*, *sublimare*, *calcinare* — though in the case of English usually indirectly, through French.

Among the many interesting things about alchemy there are two I would like to mention: one is perfection and the other, obscurity. The reason why they deserve our attention is because they show that the definition of the word "sublime" quoted above is a little misleading or at least incomplete, i.e. it must have been understood somewhat differently in the Middle Ages.

It is estimated that alchemy originated in Alexandria in the first century AD (Is it just a coincidence that the Greek treatise *On the Sublime*, once attributed to Longinus, was also written in the 1st century? The signifier was of course

[1] *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary On Historical Principles*, ed. C.T. Onions (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

different: the Greek title is *Peri Hypsous.*) Alchemy is said to have evolved from the process of mingling of Egyptian technology, Greek philosophy — particularly Aristotle, and the mysticism of the Middle East, especially Mesopotamia, where the theory of perfection had come from[2]:

> The astrologers of Mesopotamia believed in the coexistence of the macrocosm, the great world of stars and planets, and the microcosm, the small world of man. Events in the macrocosm were reflected in the microcosm, and vice versa. Thus, under the proper astrological influences a change of lead to gold might easily occur, and the proper way to bring this change about was to use the methods of the microcosm: growth and development. As men grew and changed, so could the metals grow and change; as the human soul perfected itself and passed through death and resurrection to the perfection of heaven, so could metals develop in the earth from the less perfect to the most perfect, gold ... the original alchemy was a practical series of chemical operations, guided by the accepted theory of the nature of matter, and in its actual operations directed by the astrological and religious ideas which circulated freely in Alexandria. This practical alchemy could be, and was, expressed symbolically in terms of the perfection of the human soul[3].

From the very beginning, then, words like "sublime", though used to describe chemical processes or laboratory proceedings, had very clear religious and philosophical connotations. One could go even further and question the validity of the word "connotation" with reference to the non-technical part of the meaning of "to sublime". Alchemists had less than a smattering of what we call chemistry. To put it bluntly, very often they simply did not know what they were doing, yet they believed they had the right theory. That theory, as was stated above, was a combination of philosophy and religion (mysticism), and since it had no application to the reality of the physical world, its vocabulary had always been and remained deeply symbolic. What today appears to have been a connotation was probably the central, dominant meaning. (That may explain the easiness with which alchemy moved away from chemical experiments towards mystical lucubrations.) Loftiness, nobility, grandeur, and other meanings that the word "sublime" is said to have acquired later, particularly in the 17th century, may have been associated with the word from the very beginning.

The mystical character of alchemy soon led into a division between practical and mystical alchemists[4]. The latter concentrated on symbolism and were not interested at all in any knowledge of chemistry. The practical alchemists, however, also contributed greatly towards confusion and obscurity of the subject as, under the influence of astrology and because they wanted to keep their trade secrets, they started inventing symbolic names for the

[2] Cf. "Alchemy", in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Chicago: William Benton, 1972).

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

substances and pieces of apparatus with which they worked. This aspect of alchemy was analysed at large by C.G. Jung:

> The peculiar character of this literature lies, however, in the fact that there exists a comparatively large number of treatises from which, apart from the most superficial allusions, absolutely nothing of a chemical nature can be extracted. It was therefore supposed — and many of the alchemists themselves wanted us to believe — that their mysterious sign-language was nothing but a skillful way of disguising the chemical procedures which lay behind it. The adept would see through the veil of hieroglyphics and recognize the secret chemical process. Unfortunately, alchemists of repute destroyed this legend by their admission that they were unable to read the riddle of the Sphinx, complaining that the old authors, like Gerber and Raymundus Lullius, wrote too obscurely. And indeed, a careful study of such treatises, which perhaps form the majority, will reveal nothing of a chemical nature but something which is purely symbolic, i.e., *psychological.* Alchemical language is not so much *semiotic* as *symbolic*: it does not disguise a known content but suggests an unknown one, or rather, this unknown content *suggests itself.* This content can only be psychological. If one analyses these symbolic forms of speech, one comes to the conclusion that archetypal contents of the collective unconscious are being projected [5].

Obscurity and perfection seem to have been the dominating concepts of alchemy, or at least its mystical branch. But can we perhaps be more precise about the relation between the two concepts, i.e. was it obscurity and perfection, or rather obscure perfection, or obscurity in perfection, or maybe perfect obscurity, or perfection in obscurity, etc.? We can multiply questions like that because grammar allows and even encourages us to do so. But do these questions help to elucidate the problem? It is not, for example, quite clear what it is we are doing when we place the two words (obscurity and perfection) side by side, because perfection remained a theory, though it was meant to become a practice, while obscurity, though it was basically linguistic, became a practice. What, then, we deal with is theoretical perfection and applied (or performative) obscurity. That theoretical perfection remained obscure while the applied obscurity was often really perfect in its execution. When we modify the two words, it becomes clear that in each case we use them in a slightly different meaning. Thus, modifying them helps a little bit, but on the other hand it only points to a greater complexity. It would, however, be quite interesting to try to define the sublime with the help of the two concepts: theoretical perfection and applied (or performative) obscurity.

Alchemy passed through several stages in its development, but from the 15th century it was the theory that gained the upper hand over the practical studies:

[5] C.G. Jung, "Forward to a Catalogue on Alchemy", in *The Symbolic Life*, vol. 18 of the *Collected Works* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 747.

> Throughout the history of alchemy we find — besides a considerable knowledge of substances (minerals and drugs) and a limited knowledge of the laws of chemical processes — indications of an accompanying "philosophy" which received the name "Hermetic" in the later Middle Ages. This natural philosophy appears first and particularly clearly in the Greek alchemists of the first to the sixth centuries AD. ... It was also especially evident in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when it reached its full development[6].

This philosophy was strongly influenced by magic and mysticism. Hence the name "Hermetic", from Hermes Trismegistus, the Egyptian god Thoth credited with various books on mysticism, astrology, theosophy, and other branches of occult knowledge. (Trismegistus means thrice-greatest. In the ancient times and the Middle Ages it must have been the most sublime idea imaginable. Or should we say unimaginable, because such a greatness was precisely beyond any imagination. Of course the works of the gods also belonged to the realm of the sublime. Manetho, an Egyptian high priest of the third century BC, has it that there were more than 30,000 books written to the dictation of Trismagistus. Even today 30,000 books is a stunning idea).

The relation between alchemical philosophy and the practical laboratory knowledge was explained by Jung in the following way:

> As the alchemists had no real knowledge of the nature and behaviour of chemical substances, they drew conscious parallels between the unknown processes and mythological motifs and thus "explained the former and they amplified these unknown processes by the projection of unconscious contents. This explains a peculiarity of the texts: on the one hand, the authors repeat what was said by their predecessors again and again and, on the other, they give a free rein to unlimited subjective fantasy in their symbolism[7].

The idea of the sublime started gaining popularity in England in the 17th century, i.e. when Hermetic philosophy reached its peak, when alchemists "produced little that was new, though much that was obscure", and when "alchemical symbolism and allegory become more and more complex"[8]. At this point, however, one could argue that it was just a coincidence, and that looking for a close link between these two phenomena is a rather far-fetched idea. The heightened interest in the sublime was sparked by the Greek treatise *Peri Hypsous*, not by alchemical writings. (It is easy to explain why it took so long for the treatise to exert its influence: though written in the first century AD, it remained virtually unknown for many centuries. Its first publication came out in 1554, then it was translated into Latin in 1572, and into English in 1652. Strangely enough, however, it was the French translation of 1674 by Boileau that evoked the most enthusiastic response in England[9]).

[6] C.G. Jung, "Alchemy and Psychology", in *The Symbolic...*, p. 751.

[7] Ibid., p. 751.

[8] *Encyclopaedia Britannica.*

[9] Cf. "Sublime", in *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. A. Preminger (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972).

But is the sublime of *Peri Hypsous* the same as the sublime of the 17th and 18th centuries England? In *The Longman Companion to English Literature* we find the following comment: "the traditional rendering of the Greek title is usually regarded as misleading"[10]. This view is confirmed by T. S. Dorsch, who in the introduction to his translation of the Greek treatise gives the following explanation:

> I have also followed tradition in translating the key-word of the treatise, hypsos, as sublimity. However, the word does not, as Longinus uses it, mean precisely what we associate with sublimity, that is an outstanding and unusual exaltation of conception and style. As Longinus defines it, it signifies a certain distinction and excellence of expression, that distinction and excellence by which authors have been enabled to win immortal fame[11].

Even, however, if the translation had been correct, i.e. if the meaning of the Greek word were closer to that of sublimity, the semiotic situation would not have been much different. By the time the Latin and English translations appeared, the word (signifier) "sublime", with all its possible meanings and connotations (signifieds), had already had a long history, a history closely connected with a substantial body of alchemical writings. Seeing the word "sublime" in the translation of a Greek treatise every educated reader must have been referred willy-nilly to that history, or at least part of it. And his understanding of the word could not have been all of a sudden replaced by a new one. At best, it could have been supplemented.

It does not seem difficult, for example, to prove that in his analysis of the sublime E. Burke was more influenced by the alchemical tradition than by Longinus. I have already mentioned the fact that throughout its history alchemy, as a result of both conscious and unconscious efforts, was sunk in obscurity, or more precisely obscurities of all kinds; very often to such an extent that one can say without much exaggeration that in many instances it represented nothing but obscurity. Many alchemists, it seems, produced their manuscripts with the sole purpose of making a deep impression on the reader (in order to confirm or strengthen their position of those dwelling in the realm of the sublime). For Burke this is precisely the mechanism of the sublime:

> The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully is Astonishment: and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. ... No passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear. For fear being an apprehension of

[10] "Longinus", in *Longman Companion to English Literature*, ed. C. Gillie (London: Longman, 1972).

[11] T.S. Dorsch, "Introduction" to *Classical Literary Criticism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984), pp. 24—25.

> pain or death, it operates in a manner that resembles actual pain. Whatever therefore is terrible, with regard to sight, is sublime too, ... Indeed terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently the ruling principle of the sublime. ... To make any thing terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary [12].

We can discern the following chain: sublime — astonishment — terror — obscurity, i.e. down at the bottom of all things sublime lies obscurity. Then, discussing passages from Milton, Burke again stresses the importance of obscurity:

> The mind is hurried out of itself, by a crowd of great and confused images; which affect because they are crowded and confused. For separate them, and you lose much of the greatness, and join them, and you infallibly lose the clearness. The images raised by poetry are always of this obscure kind [13].

Burke makes little use of the Greek treatise, and it is not surprising at all. His understanding of the sublime is quite different from that we find in Longinus, i.e. from "a certain excellence and distinction in expression"[14].

Let us now return to the semiotic situation outlined above. Burke was not much interested in *Peri Hypsous*, and there are strong indications that sublimity in the 17th century England was not understood the way it was presented in the Greek treatise. Nevertheless, it was nothing else but the French translation of *Peri Hypsous* that stimulated the amazing interest in the sublime in England. Analyzing the problem in such a way, we encounter a most peculiar, even weird situation: it appears that the career of the sublime was launched not so much by the concept introduced by Longinus, but just by the Latin word that appeared in translation. Using Saussurean terminology we would say it was the signifier of the Greek treatise that, quite irrespective of its signified, raised so much commotion in literature.

The European tradition is full of the sublime. For some reason the English literati of the 17th and 18th centuries needed to revive the concept and bring it to the fore, but why the reminder should have come in the form of a mistranslation is a real mystery. The ways of the sublime will have to remain obscure to us.

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[12] E. Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London: 1812), Part II, Sections I—III, pp. 95—99.

[13] Ibid., Part II, Section IV, p. 106.

[14] Longinus, "On the Sublime", in *Classical Literary...*, p. 100.



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Piers Plowman, the Sublime

Ponam pedem in aquilone, et similis ero Altissimo
I shall set my foot in the north, and I shall be like the most high
(I. 119)
Langland after St. Augustine after Isaiah

The person who utters the proud and sublime words quoted at the head of this page is the Satan himself, and this fact alone tells us a lot about Langland's sublime. It is indeed, to a large extent, on such upward flights of fancy that Longinus based his notion of the sublime, hoping to arrive at the heart of the mystery of artistic fame and immortality. The effects of hearing a sublime piece of music or poetry he describes in the following terms: "For by some innate power the true sublime uplifts our souls; we are filled with a proud exaltation and a sense of a vaunting joy, just as though we had ourselves produced what we had heard"[1]. In eulogizing "the true sublime", he was aware that there are many pitfalls in such ambitious striving, and it is easy to take pinchbeck for genuine gold, or to mistake the merely vulgar or pompous for "the true sublime"[2]. But he never questioned the desirability and the supreme value of the sublime as the sublime. And yet for Langland and perhaps for the Middle Ages in general the sublime as such is already highly suspect, and it is suspect on moral, rather than on aesthetic, grounds. In the Bible the voice that is constantly harping on and exploiting man's yearning for the sublime, the infinite, and the immortal is usually that of the devil. It is the evil one who promises immortality and omniscience to Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen, 3: 4—5), and it is he again who temps Christ with

[1] Longinus, "On the Sublime", in *Aristotle, Horace, Longinus: Classical Literary Criticism*, ed. T.S. Dorsch (London: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 107.

[2] Cf. Chapter 3 (Defects that Militate against Sublimity), in Longinus, "On the Sublime", pp. 102—103.

a vision of infinite power, having taken him onto the top of a high mountain (cf. St. Luke, 4: 5—8). The Satan then appears to be the master of the biblical and medieval sublime.

At the same time, it is clear that all those devilish tricks are performed in imitation of God, the true master of the sublime, and the master of promises, of which perhaps the most sublime is the one given by Christ from the top of the mountain of the Cross to one of the malefactors: "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise" (St. Luke, 23: 43). Longinus himself takes recourse to the "Jewish God", who provides him with a classical example of the sublime, the instantly fulfilled sweeping promise of dispersing the darkness of the world: "And God said, Let there be light: and there was light" (Gen, 1: 3)[3]. The sublime then, thought of, in keeping with Longinus, as something that "transports us with wonder"[4], or as joyful exaltation at the prospect of great promise being fulfilled, was no stranger to the medieval mind, on the contrary, it was, quite inevitably, at the very centre of the medieval, God-centred mentality.

If, however, the Middle Ages produced a 'sublime-centred' mentality, they also, by the same token, had to bring forth a heightened sense of suspiciousness towards the specific manifestations of the sublime, each of which could be of the devil's making, meant to tempt and lead astray the faithful with a high promise that shall be most dismally frustrated. One of the medieval commonplaces was, after all, the saying, *diabolus simia Dei* (the devil is an ape of God), but this raises immediately the question of how to distinguish, on the basis of Christianity, between the true and the false sublime. It is, however, essential to realize that this problem is of a different nature than Longinus's dilemma of telling the genuine from the spurious sublime. In the latter case the failure to make the proper distinction leads at worst to bad, pretentious and shallow poetry and to a waste of time, in the former case such a failure may easily amount to eternal damnation. Given the infinite cunning which the evil spirit is reputed to have at his disposal, the Christian task of separating the wheat from the chaff, the clever imitation from the original, the sacred from the profane, appears to be rather daunting. The difference in question may, at least at first sight, hardly be much of a difference, as opposed to the consequences of overlooking it, which may be very grave indeed. It is not surprising therefore that we find in medieval literature, and in *Piers Plowman* in particular, constant efforts to grasp this elusive, and yet absolutely vital, difference that decides about man's salvation or damnation.

Those two notions: the sacred and the profane I propose to treat as two aspects of the sublime, one holy, i.e. official, recommendable, with clear outlines, and the other unholy, i.e. shadowy, dubious, liable to being marginalized, stamped out, erased, or forgotten about. It seems that the very notion of the sublime

[3] Cf. Longinus, "On the Sublime", p. 111.
[4] Idem, p. 100.

implies such a duality, as is visible in the old saying attributed to Napoleon: "From the sublime to the ridiculous there is only one step"[5]. The discourse of the sublime is by definition extreme, it resembles tightrope walking und thus may swing violently between maximal understanding and gratification to complete alienation — something that Longinus was already well aware of[6]. Quite significant in this respect is also the semantic slippage that took place in the English language on the way from the noun, *pathos* with the sense, "a quality that excites pity or sadness", to the adjective, *pathetic*, which usually means, "arousing contempt"[7]. Langland's grappling with this problem consists in a long series of repeated attempts, none of which is satisfactory in the eyes of the author. Hence, perhaps, the air of fitfulness, the lack of the so-called logical development, and numerous paradoxes that typify this strange poem.

The problem of the sublime may also be approached from the point of view of the aesthetics, there is, namely, a certain fundamental similarity between the sublime and the category of the aesthetic impression as such. Both seem to yield the effect of easiness, and immediacy in the relationship between man and the Absolute, or the Other. Both also seem to bring about the opposite, but concomitant, effect of frustration caused by the disappointment of the great promises that inhere in them. As Terry Eagleton has remarked:

> The aesthetics offers the middle class a superbly versatile mode of their political aspirations, exemplifying new forms of autonomy and self-determination, transforming the relations between law and desire, morality and knowledge, recasting the links between individual and totality, and revising social relations on the basis of custom, affection and sympathy. On the other hand, the aesthetic signifiers what Max Horkheimer has called a kind of 'internalised repression', inserting social power more deeply into the very bodies of those it subjugates, and so operating as a supremely effective mode of political hegemony[8].

Thus, an ideology that accentuates the importance of the aesthetic side of life would, by the same token, be committed to a celebration of 'brotherly love' and, generally, of warm relations between people. It would also be committed to the individual's 'self-determination', and would regard with a lot of suspicion any attempts to 'determine' an individual 'from above', i.e. by all sorts of traditional or institutional authorities, such as the state, or the church, and by

[5] Cf. J.M. & M.J. Cohen, *Dictionary of Quotations* (London: Penguin Books, 1960), p. 268.

[6] Cf. Longinus, "On the Sublime", p. 103, where he berates the "false sublime" in the following terms:

> This is misplaced, hollow emotionalism where emotion is not called for, or immoderate passion where restraint is what is needed. For writers are often carried away, as though by drunkenness, into outbursts of emotion which are not relevant to the matter in hand, but are wholly personal, and hence tedious. To hearers unaffected by this emotionalism their work therefore seems atrocious, and naturally enough, for while they are themselves in an ecstasy, their hearers are not.

[7] Cf. H.W. Fowler, F.G. Fowler, R.E. Allen, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*. Eighth Edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 872.

[8] T. Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), p. 28.

the people who happen to concentrate most of the political power in their hands. The aesthetics would thus become a privileged discourse of perfect mediation, owing to which an individual could "translate himself" to others, make himself understandable and loveable, without sacrificing any part of the "self" to the dominant and oppressive ideology, i.e. without any unwanted intermediaries. At the same time, Eagleton argues, following Horkheimer, that there is some sort of a hidden pitfall in the aesthetic attitude which makes its partisans fall prey to the designs of the same institutionalized power, which manages, in a truly devilish way, to smuggle its notions into the minds of the independence seeking individuals and persuade them that they are their own notions. In such a case the mediated self would not be the "real" self, even if the person involved were not aware of it.

The obvious question now would be: 'is William Langland's outlook on life in any sense aesthetic?' It would of course be unreasonable to expect a 14th-century author to evince any understanding of the intellectual bends and twists that typify our attitude to the aesthetic. And yet, it is quite obvious that the question of the relationship between the ethic and the aesthetic troubled his mind as well. The following fragment contains an attack on poetry made, strangely enough, by a character representing Imagination in his conversation with the Dreamer:

'Amende thee while thow myght; thow hast ben warned ofte
Witth poustee of pestilences, with poverte and with angres — *violence; sorrows, afflictions*
And with thise bittre baleises God beteth his deere children: *rods*
Quem diligo, castigo.
And David in the Sauter seith, of swiche that loveth Jesus,
"Virgo tua et baculus tuus, ipsa me consolata sunt:
Although thow strike me with thi staf, with stikke or with yerde, *rod*
It is but murthe as for me to amende my soule."
And thow medlest thee with makynges — and myghtest go seye this Sauter,
dabble in verse-making
And bidde for hem that yyveth thee breed; for ther are bokes ynowe *pray; enough*
To telle men what Dowel is, Dobet and Dobest bothe,
And prechours to preve what it is, of many a peire freres, *'prove; pair (of) friars (C)*
(XII, 10—19)[9]

Langland's, or rather Will's (the author's persona) 'meddling with makings', or rather 'dabbling in verse-making'[10], is treated here as, at least potentially,

[9] My quotations from *Piers Plowman* are based on W. Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman (A Critical Edition of the B-text based on Trinity College Cambridge MS B. 15. 17 with selected variant readings, an Introduction, glosses, and a Textual and Literary Commentary)*, ed. A.V.C. Schmidt (London, Melbourne and Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1978; New York: E.P. Dutton & Co. Inc.), all references to this work will be given parenthetically after quotations in the text.

[10] Cf. W. Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, ed. A.V.C. Schmidt, p. 135.

a waste of time. Why should Langland take such a severe stand towards his own favourite pastime? A lot is known of course about medieval asceticism, and about the Christian fundamentalist distrust towards any activity in which the element of pure enjoyment seems to prevail over that of duty. But Langland provides us also with quite a 'practical' explanation of this problem. Poetry is not serious enough because it hampers the process of communication between the self and the supernatural Other by attracting too much attention to itself. This is particularly obvious when we compare poetry with prayer, the latter being much more clearly than the former 'a means to an end'. The relationship between God and man is likened here, in a very traditional manner, to the one between father and child, which means that the expected 'direct' way of address must be, for the child, an act of submission, which, in this case, is also submission to the Dreamer's earthly patrons who give him bread, fulfilling one of the chief wishes included in the Lord's Prayer: "and give us this day our daily bread". A simple and emotional prayer, conceived of as a concentrated expression of love, or, more precisely, of loving submission, is considered here a much more natural response to the challenge presented by God, than the elaborate composition of poetry that is likely to divert the poet's attention from 'heavenly matters' and lead to his getting 'bogged down' in the intricacies of the poetic craft, or in the largely irrelevant, from a 'spiritualist' point of view, details of a realistic presentation.

In taking such an attitude Langland resembles Horkheimer and Eagleton in their mistrust towards the cult of beauty. All of them 'smell a rat' in the aesthetic outlook, suspecting that it could be a bait which they are invited to swallow, as a result of which they would be held in bondage by various 'powers of darkness', whether they be 'the military-industrial complex', or the devil — 'the prince of this world'. Of course, Langland's motivation is very different from that of the above mentioned Marxist critics. He does not suspect art simply because it may breed an ideological submissiveness — having nothing against the very principle of submission, he fears that his indulgence in poetry may cause him to serve other masters than the ones he feels he should be loyal to.

We may find that the act of writing a book is suspect for Langland also on another count if we remember Langland's interjection: 'aren't there enough books'? ['for ther are bokes ynove']. These words are a trifle surprising if we consider that books in the 14th century were rather uncommon and highly treasured possessions. Of course Langland does not want to say that there exist enough copies of books, but rather that enough books have been composed. The Middle Ages apparently knew little of the modern notion of the infinite progress of knowledge, in which every new generation has a chance radically to improve, widen, or revise the intellectual legacy of their forbears. J.A. Burrow, writing about the medieval concept of the author, connects it with the derived notion of 'authority' and with the etymology of the word 'author', meaning originally 'the one who increases, or augments':

> Authority belongs to the auctor — an honorific title ... To be an auctor is to augment the knowledge and wisdom of humanity (both words derive from Latin augere 'increase'); and few latter-day writes can claim as much. The great auctores of the past, Christian and pagan, have already said almost everything there is to say[11].

It is quite clear that such a perception of the author comes close to that of God, as is also visible in the superficially unemotional definition of the author given by St. Bonaventure, in which he compares the author proper with other types of writers:

> There are four ways of making a book. Sometimes a man writes other's words, adding nothing and changing nothing; and he is simply called a scribe (*scriptor*). Sometimes a man writes others' words, putting together passages which are not his own; and he is called a compiler (*compilator*). Sometimes a man writes both other's words and his own, but with the others' words in prime place and his own added only for purpose of clarification; and he is called not an author but a commentator (*commentator*). Sometimes a man writes both his own words and others', but with his own in prime place and others' added only for purpose of confirmation; and he should be called an author (*auctor*)[12].

The author is then somebody who differs from the 'scriptor' in almost the same way as the Creator differs from His creation, inasmuch as all creations, in the medieval eyes, were but reflections of the eternal verities, referring us back to the only 'real' Creation, which cannot be repeated or improved upon, and to the Creator Himself[13]. To exalt the position of the author to this extent was bound to mean in practice that the 'author' became a title bestowed only on the 'great writers of antiquity', whose authority (meaning here precisely the state of being an 'author' in the medieval sense) was universally taken for granted. This process rarely yielded positive results as it often led ultimately to a virtual 'mummification' of the authors, which could be compared to the process whereby the original creation gods in primitive cultures started to be felt as distant and inaccessible, reaching the state which Mircea Eliade refers to as *deus otiosus*, 'the idle god'[14].

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[11] J.A. Burrow, *Medieval Writers and Their Work (Middle English Literature and Their Work)* (Oxford, New York, Toronto, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 32.

[12] Quoted after J.A. Burrow, *Medieval Writers...*, pp. 29, 30.

[13] At this point we may refer to the well-known 12th-century poem by A. de Lille:

> Omnis mundi creatura
> Quasi liber et pictura
> Nobis est et speculum;
> Nostrae vitae, nostrae mortis,
> Nostri status, nostrae sortis
> Fidele signaculum.

["Every creature in the world is, for us, like a book, a picture, and a mirror; it is a faithful sign of our life, our death, our condition, and our fate"]

[14] Cf. M. Eliade, *Historia wierzeń i idei religijnych*, vol. 1, trans. S. Tokarski, the original title, *Histoire des croyances et des idées religieuses* (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, 1988), p. 107.

Hence the complex nature of the danger facing Will, the narrator of *Piers Plowman*. On the one hand, his styling himself as an 'author', or 'maker' (the archaic English term meaning a poet which corresponds to both the etymology of the Greek word *poetes*, and the concept of the godlike poet as an 'original maker') is a presumptuous and arrogant gesture — 'bookish' knowledge, and even more, the act of writing books can easily be accused of unworthily and ineffectually imitating the act of Creation. For this reason, perhaps, Will talks self-deprecatingly of his 'meddling in makings', trying, as it were, to conceal the fact that he is actually in the business of writing an original work of art, which is something that few of his contemporaries in England attempted to do, and thus coming close to a blasphemous self-deification[15]. We seem to encounter an interesting paradox here — on the one hand, Langland reproaches himself for his artistic leanings because they make him take unneccessary detours and slow him down in his striving for the absolute, but, on the other, he is afraid of the easiness of the written word that may produce spurious effects behind which there will not be enough of a living or authentic authority.

The artistic writing then, as a means of mediation and signification, is found wanting as inefficient or as efficient only in a superficial way, but it does not mean that Langland rejects it. Having voiced his, rather conventional, objections, he proceeds to defend it and to defend himself as a 'maker':

I seigh wel he seide me sooth and, somwhat me to excuse,
Seide, 'Caton conforted his sone that, clerk though he were,
To solacen hym som tyme — a[lso] I do whan I make: *amuse; just as; versify*
Interpone tuis interdum gaudia curis.
'And of holy men I herde', quod I, 'how thei outherwhile *sometimes*
Pleyden, the parfiter to ben, [places manye].
Ac if ther were any wight that wolde me telle
What were Dowel and Dobet and Dobest at the laste,
Wolde I nevere do werk, but wende to holi chirche
And there bidde my bedes but whan ich ete or slepe'. *say my prayers except*
(XII, 20—28)

The Dreamer's argument, based first of all on the authority of the pagan writer, Cato, may be considered surprising as a reply to Imagination's criticism, appealing to Christian orthodoxy. But the Dreamer does not want to refute Imagination's claims, but only qualify them, hence he prepares an ontological niche for the aesthetic dimension of life, a sort of side-track, and he might have

[15] At least one critic did actually compare Langland to God: 'Like God, Langland strives to approach Unity through multiplicity and plenitude in his poetic cosmos'. (P. Raabe, *Imitating God (The Allegory of Faith in Piers Plowman B)* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1990) p. 168) which is not very surprising given the tradition of regarding *Piers Plowman* as an English counterpart to Dante's Divine Comedy.

felt that to establish such a niche no more was needed than second rate authorities. Thus we come again across a dualistic, and ambiguous manner of thinking in connection with the aesthetic. The words used with reference to writing: "solace, gaudia, pley", are referring to something short-lasting and not quite serious, something whose existence may be justified by its being merely a supplement of the "real thing", a seasoning of the main course. The saints mentioned by Langland use some unspecified amusements, probably poetry, "the parfiter to ben", which sounds like a nobilitation of art, but it seems more likely that in Langland's eyes a saint's saintliness was needed to counterbalance the potentially harmful effect of the artistic discourse, and turn it to a good use. In the final statement the Dreamer concedes that writing is his second best occupation he would not have to resort to if he knew with perfect certainty, i.e. from an external authority, the rules of good life. Writing and art in general appear here as a having their locus in a certain zone of uncertainty and serving to minimize the noxious effect of that uncertainty, again as a substitute for the 'real' certainty. After the state of certainty is achieved writing can be discarded in favour of prayer, functioning as a symbol of the "real", apparently because it is spoken and is supposed to come from "the depth of one's heart", though in itself it clearly is not the whole answer to Langland's problem of "Do-well, Do-bet, and Do-best".

There is naturally a rather intimate link between 'the aesthetic' and 'the sacred', even though to a man like Langland the common modernist postulate of a 'disinterested' enjoyment of beauty would sound like a thinly covered inducement to worship false gods. By the sacred, in the broadest possible sense of the word, I understand a disquieting or soothing presence that has a basically non-pragmatic, non-utilitarian character, and does not lend itself easily to the operations of reason. Eagleton himself talks of 'the aesthetic' in words that could be applied to the sacred, and could be regarded as a good definition of the sacred, if such a definition is at all possible:

> Within the dense welter of our material life, with all its amorphous flux, certain objects stand out in a sort of perfection dimly akin to reason, and these are known as the beautiful. A kind of ideality seems to inform their sensuous existence from within, rather than floating above it in some Platonic space; so that a rigorous logic is here revealed to us in matter itself, felt instantly on the pulses [16].

Let us compare it with E. Benveniste, who, writing about the pairs of terms referring to the sacred in Indo-European languages, such as the Avestan *spenta/yaozdata*, the Gothic *heils/weih*, the Latin *sacer/sanctus*, or the Greek *hieros/hagios*, says the following:

[16] T. Eagleton, *The Ideology...*, p. 17.

> The analysis of each of the testified pairs ... allows us to assume that there was in the prehistoric epoch a concept with two meanings — a positive one: something that is characterized by a divine presence, and a negative one: something which people are forbidden to touch[17].

The two above passages seem to be informed by the same dialectic of fear and fascination which typifies every genuine metaphysical experience, and which we have already encountered while talking about the sublime and the aesthetic. Benveniste's "negative aspect of the sacred" has in fact much in common with our understanding of the profane, seen as an 'accursed thing', and it demonstrates the closeness of the relationship between the sacred and the profane.

Let us have now a look at a fragment which exemplifies Langland's understanding of the dialectic of the sacred — it is taken from the sermon of Lady Church directed to the Dreamer:

And also the plante of pees, moost precious of vertues:	*peace; powers, virtues*
For hevene myght nat holden it, so was it hevy of hymself,	
Til it hade of the erthe eten his fille,	*eaten (C)*
And whan it hadde of this fold flessh and blood taken,	*earth*
Was nevere leef upon lynde lighter thereafter,	*leaf; linden tree*
And portatif and persaunt as the point of a nedle,	*portable; piercing; needle*
That myghte noon armure it lette ne none heighe walles	*(So) that; armour; stop*

(I, 152—58)

The whole imagery of the above vision of the 'plant of Peace' leans rather heavily on very obvious paradoxes, the 'plant of Peace' behaves in a bizarre fashion, it becomes the lightest when it seems to be at its heaviest, it 'eats its fill of earth', like a Gargantuan monster, only to become similar in subtlety to 'the point of a needle'. Langland's vision of the plant of Peace could be regarded as a bold attempt at reconciling the fundamentally hostile elements of 'love' and 'law', i.e. of the aesthetic and the ethical[18]. The heaviness of the plant seems to symbolize the material content of peace, the fundament of lawfulness on which it is based, while its subsequent lightness seems to stand for the freedom and indeterminacy of love, without which law becomes oppressive and insipid, for: *The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.* (2 Cor. 3: 6). At the same time, the earthiness of the plant may be treated as corresponding to that element of the sacred which is expected to satisfy the longing for "the real presence", while its later, slightly unearthly, spikiness and elusiveness would be associated with the

[17] E. Benveniste, *Le vocabulaire des institutions indoeuropéennes*, vol. II, p. 179. Quoted by M. Eliade, *Historia wierzeń...*, p. 135 [The translation from the Polish is mine].

[18] Those notions figure prominently in the immediate context of the discussed fragment, cf. *Piers Plowman*, B, I, 147—171.

forbidding, untouchable element of the sacred, the element that we could term, the sublime, without forgetting that it properly belongs to the zone of the sacred, and is never far away from the obsession with "the real presence".

There is a strange similarity between the vision of the plant of Peace and the description of the fall of Lucifer and the rebel angels in the same Passus I, who also appear to be too heavy for the heaven to hold them:

> And mo thousandes myd hym than man kouthe nombre — *more; with; count*
> Lopen out with Lucifer in lothliche forme — *Leapt; loathsome*
> For thei leveden upon hym that lyed in this manere — *because; believed; lied*
> *Ponam pedem in aquilone et aquilone, et similis ero Altissimo*
> And alle that hoped in myghte be so, noon hevene myghte hem holde,
> But fellen out in fendes liknesse [ful] nyn dayes togideres,
> Til God of his goodnesse [garte the hevene to stekie — *made; stick fast*
> And gan stable it and stynte] and stonden in quiete. — *cause it to rest*
>
> (I, 116—23)

The juxtaposition of those two fragments makes one realize how short is the conceptual and aesthetic distance between Langland's sublime and his 'anti-sublime' or false sublime, the consequence of which is a headlong fall instead of elevation. The passage also introduces the all-important topic of the "illicit mimesis", an imitation that betrays, threatens, and (literally) bedevils the original.

A similar dialectic of a 'positive' and a 'negative' interpretation of the aesthetic, and, by implication, also of the sacred is one of the main themes of Langland's thinking. Many fragments in *Piers Plowman* show that Langland was acutely aware of the dangers of an overly aesthetic attitude. Perhaps the most telling is the following one:

> 'The doughtieste doctour and devinour of the Trinitee, — *theologian*
> Was Austyn the olde, and heighest of the foure, — *(Who) was; greatest*
> Seide thus in a sermon — I seigh it writen ones — — *discourse*
> *"Ecce ipsi idiote rapiunt celum ubi nos sapientes in inferno mergimur"* –
> And is to mene to Englissh, moore ne lesse,
> Arn none rather yraavysshed fro the right bileve — *orthodox faith*
> Than are thise konnynge clerkes that konne manye bokes, — *clever; know*
> Ne none sonner saved, ne sadder of bileve — *more constant in*
> Than plowmen and pastours and povere commune laborers, — *herdsmen*
> Souteres and shepherdes — swiche lewed juttes — *unimportant, ignorant people*
> Percen with a Paternoster the paleys of hevene — *penetrate*
> And passen purgatorie penauncelees at hir hennes partyng
> That inparfitly here knewe and ek lyvede — *?incompletely*
> 'Ye, men knowe clerkes that han corsed the tyme cursed — *learned men;*
> That evere thei kouthe or knowe moore than *Credo in Deum patrem* — *learnt*
> And principally hir paternoster — many a person hath wisshed.
>
> (X. 450—65)

The above passage is of course deeply paradoxical, it is a very learned invective against learning, it also an aesthetic answer to the problem of the limitations of the aesthetic. Paradoxical is also Langland's ostentiatious scorn for the 'cunning clerks that know many books', since he certainly could be considered one of them, just as St. Augustine, in the quotation adduced by Langland, when condemning 'the wise men', unmistakably talks of himself as one of them.

To travesty the famous dictum of Alexander Pope, we might conclude that what our author seems to be saying here is that 'a lot of learning is a dangerous thing', dangerous because it can make you become satisfied with 'the second best', with the superficial, purely aesthetic — because useless, or not immediately useful, perfection of language, and of abstract concepts. Langland's criterion of usefulness has naturally little or nothing to do with what we might call practical or material profit, he talks all the time *sub specie aeternitatis* (under the aspect of eternity), truly useful for him are only those things of which it may be said that they are essential for an individual's eternal salvation, i.e. exactly aesthetic phenomena whose meaning is not exhausted by everyday considerations. In such circumstances it is small wonder that Langland should point to prayer as a positive aesthetic counterpart to the negative aesthetic phenomenon, i.e. the bookish knowledge. A prayer is also an aesthetic artefact, just like a book, it is made of words and has the status of something 'higher' and more 'spiritual' than the everyday existence. At the same time, the ideal prayer envisaged by Langland has the degree of warmth, directness and intimacy inaccessible to books and 'makings', and above all, it is far more efficient than they. Its efficiency, moreover, does not depend on the personal accomplishments of the person who resorts to it, a common sinner, and an uneducated yokel 'can pierce with a single Paternoster to the palace of Heaven'.

Let us have a look now at a typically medieval, i.e. clearly hierarchical, view on prayer.

> You must know that there are three degrees of prayer.
> There is first vocal prayer, either given us directly by God Himself, as the Paternoster, or by the Church, as matins, vespers, and the other canonical hours, or else composed by holy men and addressed to our Lord, our Lady, or the saints ... Generally speaking this kind of prayer is most suitable in the early stage of conversion ...
>
> The second degree of prayer is vocal, but without any set formula. This is when a man by the grace of God feels devotion, and out of his devotion speaks to Him as though when he were bodily in His presence, using such words as come to mind and seem to be in accord with his feelings ... This kind of prayer is very pleasing to God for it comes straight from the heart, and for that reason it is never made in vain. It belongs to what I have called the second degree of contemplation.
>
> The third degree of prayer is in the heart and without words. It is characterised by great peace and rest in soul and body. The man who would pray in this manner must have great purity of heart, for it is only possible to those who, either by long spiritual or bodily exercise, or else by sudden movements of love ..., have come to great inward peace ... This peace our Lord gives to some of his servants as a reward for their labour and a foreshadowing of the love which they shall have in the happiness of heaven' [19].

[19] W. Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, trans. D.G. Sitwell (London: Burns Oates, 1953) I, 29—30, pp. 41—42.

Hilton's 'scale of perfection' in reaching heaven through prayer is not really so inexorably hierarchical as it might seem at the first glance, it allows for'a sudden movement of love' through which we probably can attain to a *unio mystica* (mystical union) with a single leap. It may generally be said that in the above passage, just as in Langland, we can observe a powerful yearning for an immediacy of experience, which seems to favour a movement 'by leaps and bounds', rather than a patient and painstaking clambering upwards. This 'yearning for immediacy' might well be suspected of lying behind the notorious lack of a coherent, linear development in *Piers Plowman*, about which so many critics have complained[20].

It may be profitable to compare Hilton's degrees of prayer with St. Bonaventure's distinction between the scribe, the compiler, the commentator, and the author (cf. p. 5). Both classifications begin with the level of strict imitation, the level of 'speaking with others' words'. From this Hilton proceeds immediately to the level of speaking with one's 'own words', or with words inspired by God as a token of a special grace. This level seems to correspond to the highest category distinguished by St. Bonaventure, that of the author. But Hilton goes further, in the third degree of prayer the question of autorship disappears together with the question of composition and all the pain that it entails. The disappearance of material and conventional constraints does not lead, however, to a wild anarchy of any sort, but rather to an ultimate confirmation of the divine law, on the basis of spontaneous feeling alone.

It should not escape our notice that Langland greatly simplifies Hilton's scheme, proposing, as it were, an immediate passage from 'level one' to 'level three', coupling a simple recitation of set prayer by an ostensibly uninitiated person with the truly sublime and astonishing effect of 'piercing the heaven'. Langland's 'short-circuit' is hard or impossible to reconcile with a hierarchical way of thinking, and in this respect it is far more revolutionary and 'anti-medieval' than Hilton's views. As D.M. Murtaugh has remarked:

> Langland considered learning to be one species of good works, and he has his dreamer interpret Ecclesiastes 9: 1 — "Sunt iusti atque sapientes; et opera eorum in manu dei sunt" — to show the tenuous relationship of both to salvation (B.X. 436—47). And so the damnation of Aristotle and the salvation of the good thief are adduced to show the doubtful relevance of good works in a scheme of salvation that seems to have been determined "in the legende of lif longe er I were" (B.X. 381). All human endeavor is invalidated by the economy of grace, and the least learned of men gain salvation with a prayer.
>
> (B.X. 465—71).[21]

[20] A case in point is the statement by Pamela Raabe: 'And yet Langland is said to distrust allegory, to distrust it so intensly that he cannot stop himself from continually calling attention to it, breaking down its similitudes, and abandoning one after another in despair of finding any that is adequate to express the Truth'. Cf. P. Raabe, *Imitating God...*, p. 10.

[21] D.M. Murtaugh, *Piers Plowman and the Image of God* (Gainesville: A University of Florida Book/The University of Florida, 1978), p. 73.

Seen from this point of view Langland is a true precursor of the most radical currents of the 16th-century Reformation, with its doctrine of 'justification by faith', and indeed we can see how in his mind a single act of personal faith outweighs all possible human merits and deserts, together with the established social distinctions of a class society. The 'instant salvation' proposed by Langland has, unfortunately, as its concomitant, the perspective of an 'instant and unaccountable damnation' by a God who has been liberated from the rules of human logic and causality. It has been already been noticed that this line of Langland's thinking might have been inspired by the philosophy of the great English nominalist thinker, William of Ockham. Such is the opinion of D.M. Murtaugh, who, in connection with, *Piers Plowman*, says the following:

> Ockham and his followers denied the ontological status of grace as an essential constituent of merit, saying that it was simply a name for the fact of God's acceptance of man. This, combined with the Ockhamists' insistence on the absolute power of God, had a dual consequence. On earth, man's free will was given a fuller scope in that it could merit God's favour on its own. But in heaven, on the other hand, God's absolute freedom meant that He could choose at random those acts and those men who would be pleasing to Him. The resulting indeterminism was at once exhilarating and terrifying[22].

A combination of those two feelings: exhilaration and terror, may also serve as a good description of the medieval sublime, or even the sublime in general, and it may be useful to adduce here the definition of the sublime provided by Edmund Burke, where we can clearly observe a mixture of the elements of horror and irresistible fascination:

> The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully, is astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it. Hence arises the great power of the sublime, that, far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force. Astonishment, as I have said, is the effect of the sublime in its highest degree; the inferior effects are admiration, reverence, and respect[23].

The intoxicating visions of Burke and the nominalists seem be a fruit of a peculiar experience of minds, used to deference for hierarchic thinking, which suddenly envisage the possibility of taking a short cut allowing them to avoid, or at least shorten, albeit at a very high risk, the tortuous path upwards along which the weary traveller's hope of finally reaching the summit is constantly

[22] Ibid., p. 73.

[23] E. Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London: Longman and Co., 1812), pp. 95, 96.

frustrated by ever new vistas of a still more elevated terrain. At the end of the road there looms an irenic vision of an unshakeable certainty and the feeling of being at one with God or Nature. I feel tempted to claim that the rise of nominalism intensified, on the one hand, the need for the sublime, and, in the other, made the achievement of the sublime, in its positive sense, a much more hazardous and potentially traumatic affair. Such an effect was a direct consequence of dramatizing the ontological gap between the Creator and the creation, talking in semiotic terms, also between the signifier and the signified.

At the same time, there is apparently little in common between the medieval and romantic sublime with respect to the way such lofty feelings are experienced. Immanuel Kant, developing his concept of the 'dynamic sublime', states the following:

> To experience the dynamically sublime we must be in a position of safety: the boundless ocean rising with rebellious force, the high waterfall of some mighty river, and the like, make our power of resistance a trifling moment in comparison with their might. But, provided our own position in secure, their aspect is all the more attractive for its fearfulness[24].

It is quite obvious that such feelings were also familiar to medieval authors and audiences, (otherwise, romances and fantastic stories of all sorts would not have been so popular in those times) but they certainly would be considered too trifling and too idle for most serious writers to dwell upon. The medieval sublime is not so much a retrospective celebration of danger at the time of safety, but rather a celebration of a successfully accomplished labour at the time of a brief respite, it is, in a sense, a 'poor man's sublime', based on less fastidious tastes and on more elementary needs. The motif of labour in connection with the sublime and the absolute did not die with Langland. Eagleton draws attention to this problem in his discussion of Burke:

> The aesthetic experience of the sublime is confined to the cultivated few; and there would thus seem the need for a kind of poor person's version of it. Religion is of course one obvious such candidate; but Burke also proposes another, which is, surprisingly enough, the lowly activity of labour. Like the sublime, labour is a masochistic affair, since we find work at once painful in its exertion yet pleasurable in its arousal of energy... The sublime, with its 'delightful horror', is the rich man's labour, invigorating an otherwise dangerously complacent ruling class. If that class cannot know the uncertain pleasures of loading a ship, it can gaze instead at one tossed on the turbulent ocean. Providence has so arranged matters that a state of rest becomes soon obnoxious, breeding melancholy and despair, we are thus naturally driven to work, reaping enjoyment from its surmounting of difficulties[25].

[24] I. Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. J.C. Meredith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), § 28, pp. 109—110.

[25] T. Eagleton, *The Ideology...*, pp. 56, 57.

Eagleton seems to treat here 'religion' and 'labour' as alternative forms of the sublime, and is willing to call them both 'a poor man's sublime', but in Langland the sublime is apparently capable of forming one inextricable knot with labour and religion, a knot where the 'lowliness' of labour preconditions and completes the 'loftiness' of the sublime effect, and where religion, providing the mediating form of prayer, serves as the necessary glue holding the two elements together, in keeping with the probable etymological sense of the word 'religion' as derived from the Latin verb *religare* meaning 'to tie', or 'to bind together'[26]. If we accept Langland's point of view, the 'poor man's sublime' will appear to our eyes as the only genuine form of the sublime, not just a supplement to the 'rich man's sublime'. Burke wrote quite a lot about the link between labour and the sublime:

> Melancholy, dejection, despair, and often self-murder, is the consequence of the gloomy view we take of things in this relaxed state of body. The best remedy for all these evils is exercise or labour; and labour is a surmounting of difficulties, an exertion of the contracting power of the muscles; and as such resembles pain, which consists in tension or contraction, in every thing but degree. Labour is not only requisite to preserve the coarser organs in a state fit for their functions; but it is equally necessary to these finer and more delicate organs, on which, and by which, the imagination and perhaps the other mental powers act. ... In all these cases, if the pain and terror are so modified as not to be actually noxious; if the pain is not carried to violence, and the terror is not conversant about the present destruction of the person; as these emotions clear the parts, whether fine or gross, of a dangerous and troublesome encumbrance, they are capable of producing delight; not pleasure but a sort of delightful horror, a sort of tranquillity tinged with terror; which, as it belongs to self-preservation, is one of the strongest passions. Its object is the sublime[27].

It is clear that for Burke labour is a source of masochistic exhilaration as a one of the aspects of the Other, an exercise one occasionally takes to keep fit. For Langland labour is connected with the sublime and the absolute in a much more paradoxical way. The two coexist on the basis of the principle of 'extremes meet", the *unio mystica* being the rarest and the most sought after condition, while labour the commonest and the least attractive.

The relationship between the two may in fact break completely, as in the famous scene of Piers Plowman's tearing of the papal pardon:

> 'Piers!' quod the preest tho, 'thi pardon moste I rede;
> For I shal construe ech clause and kenne it thee on Englissh'. *explain*
> And Piers at his preiere the pardon unfoldeth — *request*
> And I bihynde hem bothe biheld al the bulle.
> In two lynes it lay, and noght a lettre moore,

[26] Cf. Sir W. Smith and Sir J. Lockwood, *Chambers Murray Latin-English Dictionary* (Edinburgh, London: Chambers, John Murray, 1976), pp. 629, 630.

[27] E. Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry...*, p. 255 & 257.

And was iwriten right thus in witnesse of truthe:
Et qui bona egerunt ibunt in vitam eternam;
Qui vero mala, in ignem eternum.
'Peter!' quod the preest tho, 'I kan no pardon fynde
But "Do wel and have wel and God shal have thi soule",
And "Do yvel and have yvel, and hope thow noon oother — *expect nothing else*
That after thi deeth day the devel shal have thi soule!"' — *But that*
And Piers for pure tene pulled it atweyne — *sheer anger, vexation*
And seide, *'Si ambulavero in medio umbre mortis*
Non timebo mala, quoniam tu mecum es.
'I shal cessen of my sowyng', quod Piers, and 'swynke noght so harde,
leave off; labour
Ne aboute my bely joye so bisy be na moore; — *pleasure in food*
Of preieres and of penaunce my plough shal ben herafter, — *In; consist*
And wepen when I sholde slepe, though whete bred me faille. — *I lack*

(VII, 105—21)

The meaning of this episode is highly debatable, as is evident from the statement by Malcolm Godden:

> Piers' action in tearing up the Pardon sent by Truth is startling; he is the servant and follower of Truth or God, and the Pardon has enshrined his own implicit ideals. Commentators have suggested that Langland means something less startling than appears: that Piers is to be understood as rejecting ordinary pardons by his action rather than Truth's, or that tearing is really an act of acceptance, or that the tearing refers not directly to Truth's Pardon but to the ending of man's damnation by original sin through the Redemption[28].

We seem to have here to do with one of those places where the internal logic of the poem breaks down, and the interpretations given above try, rather desperately, to salvage this logic, to preserve the coherence of the text. Piers, the pious labourer, can no longer reconcile the everyday toil of his humble vocation with the sublime reality his heart is yearning for, the mechanism of translating and re-translating the quotidian into the ideal, and vice versa, can no longer be relied upon. This mechanism is succinctly encapsulated in the contents of the pardon: 'And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting. And they that have done evil into everlasting fire'. The scene in question pictures the founding gesture of the modern sublime, conceived of as an escape from the alienating, material and bodily side of existence. In Burke's times this escape could take the from of 'rediscovering' labour, but in Langland's times, it could only be a movement away from it, though not necessarily against it.

At the same time, it is worth noting that Piers' abandonment of a labourer's way of life is presented in terms that remain strictly bound up with the

[28] M. Godden, *The Making of Piers Plowman* (London and New York: Longman, 1990), p. 55.

agricultural imagery: Piers is talking about replacing his material plough with a spiritual one: "Of preieres and of penaunce my plough shal ben herafter", and the very act of tearing the pardon could be seen as a metaphor of the fundamental agricultural gesture of cutting the soil with a plough or another sharp tool. We can see that the metaphor of cutting and piercing is quite consistently used to express Langland's sublime.

It should not come as a surprise that Langland's and, generally, the medieval sublime grows out of the spirit of prayer. The Benedictine rule *ora et labora* (work and pray) summarizes neatly a certain conceptual universe in which the way of 'labour', i.e. of a strenuous, regular effort is counterbalanced by the relatively easy and direct way of 'oratio'. From an idealistic point of view, the two ways complete and condition each other in the same way as night and day, or a workday and Sunday. Characteristically, for Hilton reaching the highest degree of prayer is associated with the ultimate reward for labour. "This peace our Lord gives to some of his servants as a reward for their labour", while in Langland's view: "ne none sonner saved, ne sadder of bileve than plowmen and pastours and povere commune laborers" "none are sooner saved or are firmer in their faith, than simple ploughmen and shepherds and poor common labourers". It seems that in the minds of such people like Langland and Hilton the potentially sensational efficiency of prayer is dialectically linked with hard physical toil, but the exact nature of his relationship is not so easy to decipher. On the one hand, we may have to do here with what might be called 'inversely mimetic thinking'. 'A poor common labourer' is somebody whose intensity and arduousness of effort is inversely proportional to his social position, it is then a paradoxical or even an absurd creature similar to the mythical Sisyphus. It is then only natural that such a creature should be endowed, by way of compensation, with the gift of 'piercing Heaven with his paternoster', which is an act that constitutes a direct inversion of his ordinary situation and consists in getting a maximal effect, and a maximal elevation, for a minimal effort. Langland's sublime could consequently be described as the opposite to the Sisyphean absurdity.

It is small wonder that it is the Lord's Prayer that proves to be the most efficient of all, it was considered both a prayer to God, and, in a sense. God's own prayer, being the only prayer sanctioned by Jesus Christ himself, and as such it could be thought to control both bridgeheads of the imaginary bridge spanning the space between heaven and earth. The Lord's Prayer contains thus, because of its content and because of its historical context, both the perspective of the son and that of the father, establishing a balance and a sort of 'symbiosis' between the two. It is for this reason that St. Thomas Aquinas calls Paternoster the safest of prayers[29]. This very epithet makes us think of prayer as, potentially,

[29] St. Thomas Aquinas lays great emphasis on the authentic character of Lord's Prayer, and the benefits that result therefrom. Cf. Th. Aquinas, *Wykład pacierza [Exposition of the Lord's Prayer]*, trans. M. Starowieyski (Poznań: „W drodze" Press, 1987), p. 63.

a zone of unsafety and insecurity. Striking in the medieval reflection on prayer is the practice of multiplying the conditions that have to be met if the prayer is to prove efficient and not disappointing. For example, according to Aquinas, a prayer should be "certain, proper, orderly, pious, and humble", and it very hard to discern which things are worthy of being asked for and which are not[30]. It is remarkable that for Aquinas the Lord's Prayer is first of all a list of the things that a Christian can desire and ask for without being impious and committing the sin of greediness[31]. If then man's greediness was considered, as it can easily be seen in Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale*, a 'root of all evil', the Lord's Prayer is endowed by Aquinas with the power to 'civilize' and to Christianize this potentially the most destructive and anarchic of sentiments, and to transform it into a positive force, serving the cause of the Father's Kingdom.

The motif of a special significance of Paternoster appears once again in Passus XIV, where it functions as a miraculous piece of food that is capable of satisfying every desire of the faithful:

But I lokede what liflodde it was that Pacience so preisede;
And thanne was it a pece of the Paternoster — *Fiat voluntas tua.*
piece; Thy will be done
'Have, Haukyn', quod Pacience, 'and et this whan the hungreth,
Or whan thow clomsest for cold or clyngest for drye; *are benumbed; parch; drought*
And shul nevere gyves thee greve ne gret lordes wrathe, *fetters; afflict*
Prison ne peyne — for pacientes vincunt.
By so that thow be sobre of sighte and of tonge, *Provided*
In [ond]lynge and in handlynge and in alle thi fyve wittes, *smelling; touching*
Darstow nevere care for corn ne lynnen cloth ne wollen, *You need; worry about*
Ne for drynke, ne deeth drede, but deye as God liketh,
Or thorugh hunger or thorugh hete — at his wille be it. *Either ... or*
For if thow lyvest after his loore, the shorter lif the bettre:
Si quis amat Christum mundum non diligit istum.

(XIV, 48—59)

The Paternoster then, an invocation of the Father, functions then almost as a true farmakon[32], a medicine and a poison, a means of intensifying and sustaining life, as well as a means of making death easier, a drug a frequent administering of which makes you not only forget about your material needs but also look forward to death in a spirit of equanimity, or even of joyful expectation, awaiting the glory of after-life, though stopping short of harbouring suicidal desires. We can notice quite clearly the necessary link that appears here between the truly sublime disregard for the material and the bodily elements of life, on the one hand, and poverty, spiritual or material, on the other. Such poverty is at the same time a necessary condition for an

[30] Ibid., p. 63.
[31] Ibid., p. 101.
[32] Cf. A. Lexicon abridged from Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. 751, 752.

efficient prayer and a fulfilment of such a prayer, as a cathartic state of sublimated and cleansed desires directed solely towards the unearthly goals. Langland very appropriately chooses as the spiritual and miraculous food the fragment of the Lord's Prayer which contains the words, *Fiat voluntas tua* "Thy will be done". The renunciation of one's own will in favour of another's is a central element in the Western thinking on the subject of the sublime, as is witnessed in the well-known statement by William Blake: "The most sublime act is to set another before you"[33]. God, as a father-figure, is naturally also a figure of the Other, of the radically different, which, for this very reason, is a standing challenge to those who desire to bridge this gap, and who can imagine a satisfaction of this exorbitant desire as achievable only through a denial of all other desires.

It might be useful to remind here St. Augustine's stern warning that "you shall pray for nothing else than God Himself"[34]. St. Augustine turns here against any particularistic or fragmentary use of prayer, other than a full invocation of the Father and His kingdom, with the accompanying mixture of dread and fascination, fear of punishment and expectation of mercy. It is doubtful that Langland would have gone that far, he seems to accept the legitimacy of praying for a specific purpose, like in this case, for the end of a disastrous plague. But he shows the same Augustinian fear of people who have other aims in view than the totality of religious experience. The friars, who are the most common butt of Langland's criticism, are accused here of toadying to rich patrons, of competing unfairly with the lay clergy, of which Langland is a representative, and of neglecting their teaching duties. The latter should include, according to the poet, telling people that they should be prepared to part with their possessions for a charitable purpose, and to regard themselves as primarily responsible for failures of all sorts.

The subject of 'false sublime' involves the problem of mendicant friars exactly because the theoretically embody the desire for the absolute founded upon piety and poverty. In Langland's eyes they are but cheats and impostors. Let us have a closer look at the rationale on which this negative attitude seems to be based:

Whoso hath muche, spende manliche — so meneth Tobye —	*generously*
And whoso litel weldeth, [loke] hym therafter,	*let him behave accordingly*
For we have no lettre of oure lif, how long it shal dure.	*written assurance; last*
Swiche lessons lordes sholde lovye to here,	
And how he myght moost meynee manliche fynde —	*retainers; provide for*
Noght to fare as a fithelere or a frere to seke festes,	*dinner-parties*
Homliche at othere mennes houses, and hatien hir owene.	*At home; hate, shun*

(X, 89—95)

[33] W. Blake, "Proverbs of Hell", in "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell", in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, gen. ed. M.H. Abrams, vol. 2 (New York, London: W.W Norton & Company, 1986), p. 63.

[34] "The Entry Prayer", in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 18 (Chicago, London, Toronto, Geneve, Sydney, Tokyo, Manila: W. Benneton Publisher, 1972), p. 433.

The friars, according to Langland, have confused poverty with rootlessness, their existence is fundamentally frivolous, like that of fiddlers and other itinerant entertainers. The friar is here ontologically connected with the grasping rich man, they both exist outside the principle of 'giving according to what you have received', and they both are entirely bent on 'receiving' rather than 'giving', the main difference being that the rich men abandon the logic of giving and receiving by cutting themselves off the society of ordinary people, whereas 'friars and fiddlers' are ubiquitous, pretending to be everybody's friends, while in fact bringing nobody any good.

Any reader of *Piers, the Plowman*, will notice the insistence with which Langland returns to the problem of mendicant friars, expressing at each time his profound hostility towards them. The following fragment allows us to have a glimpse at probably the deepest root of that hostility, it comes from the part of the poem called "The Confession of the Seven Deadly Sins", and is spoken by a character representing Anger, or Wrath:

'I am Wrathe', quod he, 'I was som tyme a frere,	*friar*
And the coventes gardyner for to graffen impes.	*friary's; graft shoots*
On lymitours and listres lesynges I ymped,	*lectors; grafted*
Til thei bere levels of lowe speche, lordes to plese,	*produced; servile*
And sithen thei blosmede abrood in boure to here shriftes.	*blossomed; bedroom(s)*
And now is fallen therof a fruyt — that folk han wel levere	*i.e. result; much prefer*
Shewen hire shriftes to hem than shryve hem to hir persons.	*parish priests*
And now persons han parceyved that freres part with hem,	*are sharing*
Thise possessioner preche and deprave freres;	*beneficed priests; revile And*
freres fyndeth hem in defaute, as folk bereth witnesse,	*find fault (with)*
That whan thei preche the peple in many places aboute,	
I, Wrathe, walke with hem and wisse hem of my bokes.	*teach (from)*
Thus thei speken of spiritualte, that either despiseth oother,	*spirituality (C); each*
Til thei be bothe beggers and by my spiritualte libben,	*live*
Or ellis al riche and ryden aboute; I, Wrathe, reste nevere	
That I ne moste folwe this wikked folk, for swich is my grace	*fortune*

(V, 135—50)

Another fragment comes from Langland's denunciation of the personified Fortune:

Coveitise of Eighes conforted me ofte	*into (my) thoughts*
And seide, 'Have no conscience how thow come to goode.	*scruples; achieve wealth*
Go confesse thee to som frere and shewe hym this synnes.	
For whiles Fortune is thi frend freres wol thee lovye,	
And festne thee in hir fraternitee and for thee biseke	*secure*
To hir Priour Provincial a pardon for to have,	
And preien for thee pol by pol if thow be pecuniosus'.	*head (C); rich; moneyed*
Pena pecuniaria non sufficit pro spiritualibus delictis	

(XI, 52—58)

The charges levelled against the friars seems to hinge on the supposition that the friars' way of being blurs certain fundamental borders and distinctions. In the first of the above fragments the allegorical figure of Anger owns up to having been a friar, he is above all a gossip and a talebearer, but his job is basically that of a gardener, 'grafting shoots'. A grafted tree used to be considered by many as a violation of the laws of nature, and there was a taboo against eating the fruit of such a tree[35]. It surely was a part of a more general taboo against hybrids of all sorts, or creatures of mixed origin. Anger is a negatively mediating figure whose very status is that of a hybrid. Being a religious person, he flatters the gentry and gentle ladies, naturally by appealing to their vanity and self-love — thus he acts as an intermediary between the zones of the sacred and the profane, but his mediation is clearly weighted in favour of the profane. He also orchestrates a confrontation between friars and lay priests, i.e. their negative coming together, in a similar way as he stirs mutual hate and resentment as a cook in a convent of nuns. Needless to add, the job of a cook has a strongly mediating character and was associated mainly with mixing ingredients. A cook was preparing the vitally important meals, but was also the most obvious person to be accused of poisoning his masters, in this sense, he was a powerful mediator between life and death. His negatively mediating nature is obvious in his calumniating activities which disclose secrets not for the purpose of elucidation, but rather that of darkening and 'casting a shadow'. Finally, there is an element of suspect mediation in the very status of a medicant friar whose 'mode of existence' involves wandering around, without any due respect for the borders, such as the ones between parishes.

One of the most serious of Langland's objections to the friars' behaviour involves their practice of hearing the confessions of people who otherwise would have turned for confession to their parish priests. We may suppose, on the basis of the discussed fragment, that confessors derived some material profit from their job. It has to be realized of course that the medieval religious confession and penance differed quite radically from their modern continuations, penance was often long and hard, and could be connected with great physical exertion, like going on a long and dangerous pilgrimage, moreover, it was usual for the priest to withhold his absolution until the penance was successfully performed. The clergy could count on quite substantial revenues owing to the so-called, 'system of commutation', which allowed the penitent to 'commute' a particularly long and arduous part of penance into the payment of a sum of money. This practice probably lead to the rise of the institution of indulgences[36]. It was then in the material interest of the Church

[35] Cf. *Leksykon symboli*, ed. M. Osterreicher-Moliwo, trans. J. Prokopiuk (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo ROK Corporation SA, 1992), p. 155.

[36] Cf. the entry 'penance', in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christan Church*, ed. F.L. Cross (Oxford, London: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 1059, 1060.

to impose hard penance and to guard jealously its monopoly of hearing confessions. The friars constitute an obvious danger to this quite elaborate system. They were usually people from outside whose knowledge of the parishioners' life was infinitely smaller, they, as 'birds of passage', could not and would not impose any hard and long penance, let alone wait for such penance to be accomplished. They could, however, count on the penitents' gratitude if they made the conditions of absolution less harsh. From Langland's point of view, we seem to have to do here with a religious version of Gresham's law, where bad confessions replace good ones, just as 'bad money drives out good'. Of course the seed of corruption is contained already in the system of commutation, the origin of which lies is purely simoniac, with absolution treated as a saleable commodity. The activity of the friars is naturally comparable to the economic practice of dumping, the effect of which is always detrimental to monopolies of any sort.

Highly telling is the connection that Langland makes, in the second of the discussed fragments, between the friars and the allegorical figure of Fortune. The friars in themselves are meant to be regarded here as 'friends of Fortune', embodiments of mutability and 'commutability', whose other representation is money, or material remuneration — a notion that occupies, also as the famous Lady Meed, a central place in Langland's sociological reflection. The friars' vital connection with the money market begins already at the very moment when they decide to part company with the traditional, hierarchical society, and embark on their fundamentally universalist, 'rootless' venture, which involves wandering about and accepting novices irrespective of their social status and place of origin. This founding gesture is inseparable from the friars' vow of poverty, in accordance with the old proverb: 'a rolling stone gathers no moss'. And yet, paradoxically, we arrive here at the moment when the element of indeterminacy turns out be a link between the Franciscan poverty and the money oriented society of the budding capitalism. The friars' betrayal of poverty would then be related to the very act of embracing it.

Langland is well aware of the complexity of the problem of friars:

'I have yseyen charite also syngen and reden,	(sc. *as a priest*)
Riden, and rennen in ragged wedes;	
Ac biddynge as beggeris biheld I hym nevere.	
Ac in riche robes rathest he once	
Ac it is fern ago, in Seint Fraunceis tyme;	*a long while*
In that secte siththe to selde hath he ben knowen.	*order; since then; seldom*
	(XV, 225—32)

Here Langland seems to come to grips with the friars' peculiar mode of existence. Charity may take various shapes, it is not permanently attached to poverty, at least not to material poverty. Langland even goes to the length

of saying that Charity prefers to 'walk in rich robes', though this certainly should not be understood as meaning that it can be met more often among the rich than among the poor[37]. The embodiment of Charity is here in fact a figure of a regular monk 'with tonsured head, a skull-cap and a fringe of crimped hair'. At any rate, the scandal of the friars seems to be that they are neither rich nor poor in the proper sense of the word, they are 'wheedling like a beggar', which, as Langland seems to suggest, does not go together with their clerical status, and their position of confessors to whom people turn asking for the absolution of sins. It is interesting that the word used in the original for begging is 'bid', which in other contexts is used for praying, which could suggest that friars practise a debased form of prayer, directing their desires downwards rather than upwards. At the same time, Langland does not forget about the idealistic traditions of the movement of mendicant friars, the traditions represented by their founder, St. Francis, although he clearly considers them a thing of the past.

The above examples seem to be enough for showing the consistency of Langland's "metaphysical suspiciousness". He proves himself to be a thinker who inveterately draws parallels between the true and the false sublime, the supreme good, and its disquieting dark shadow or caricature, trying to devise, in a series of not quite successful attempts, a reliable method for distinguishing between the two. His "method" seems largely to consist in trying to unmask all sorts of "mixed beings", while being clearly attached to them — a task that certainly appealed to him much more strongly than the search for the "pure absolute" on which the mystics embarked. What connects, on the other hand, Langland with the mystics is his thinking in terms of an act of faith as means to reach the "instant salvation", when all entanglements with the material world seem too frustrating to cope with.

[37] Cf. the note made by ed. and trans. J.F. Goodridge *Piers the Ploughman* (London: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 300, n. 34,



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The Downmarket Visionary Gleam: Popular Fiction and the Sublime

The image of the locked room, which can have innumerable variants, is at the centre of a wide range of works of Detective and Gothic Fiction. It also figures in many Science Fiction texts, generally counterpointing the expansive, outward, exploratory pull of that genre. When Arthur Conan Doyle published *A Study in Scarlet* in *Beeton's Christmas Annual* in 1887 he made the first turn of a key which was to lock him in a career of considerable material success tied to what he and his Dark Other, Sherlock Holmes, dubbed "The Science of Deduction"[1]. The relentlessly rationalist and materialist Holmes was to become an unwelcome addiction to Doyle, just as public demand demonstrated an addictive readership, which has become a familiar phenomenon in relation to the genre of Detective Fiction. Readers demanded that their literary fix be brought back from the dead after Holmes's fall with his own Dark Other, Professor Moriarty, from the sublime heights of the Reichenbach Falls in "The Final Problem" (1894). In effect, Doyle tries to kill the scientific Holmes with the language of the Romantic Sublime. "It is, indeed, a fearful place", says Watson of Reichenbach:

> The torrent, swollen by the melting snow, plunges into a tremendous abyss, from which the spray rolls up like smoke from a burning house. The shaft into which the river hurls itself is an immense chasm, lined by glistening coal-black rock, and narrowing into a creaming, boiling pit of incalculable depth, which brims over and shoots the stream onward over its jagged lip. The long sweep of green water roaring forever down, and the thick flickering curtain of spray hissing forever upward, turn a man giddy with their constant whirl and clamour. We stood near the edge peering down at the gleam of the breaking water far below us against the blacks rocks, and listening to the half-human shout which came booming up with the spray out of the abyss[2].

[1] The title of Chapter 1 of Doyle, *The Sign of Four* (1890) is "The Art of Deduction". It begins with an account of Sherlock Holmes preparing his hypodermic syringe in order to inject himself with cocaine. See *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 89.

[2] A.C. Doyle, *The Penguin Complete...*, p. 478.

A hundred years earlier such rhetoric might have proved overwhelming, but it would not suffice for Doyle in 1894, any more than the language of conventional Christianity could carry conviction for the former doctor exposed to the scientific theories of Darwin and Huxley. Doyle's characteristically Victorian quest for an equivalent to the Romantic Sublime expressed itself instead in the chivalric dreams of *The White Company* (1891) and in the sadly and unintentionally comical *The Coming of the Fairies* (1922).

Earlier Victorians, on their own versions of that quest, had enjoyed varying degrees of success and failure. John Ruskin, champion of Turner's landscape sublime and of the minute particularity of Pre-Raphaelitism, is still able in the 1850's to reanimate a Thomsonian sublime flight, strengthened rather than destabilised by new geological sciences, when he takes us on an aerial word-journey from the Mediterranean south to the frozen north in "The Nature of Gothic"[3]. The flight is prefaced by a reference to "the charts of the world which have been drawn up by modern science"[4], against which, without denying the claims of scientific method, he asserts the power of his "pictorial" prose. "Then let us pass", he says,

> until we see the orient colours change gradually into a vast belt of rainy green, where the pastures of Switzerland, and the poplar valleys of France, and dark forests of the Danube and Carpathians stretch from the mouths of the Loire to those of the Volga, seen through clefts in grey swirls of rain-cloud and flaky veils of the mist of the brooks, spreading low along the pasturelands: and then, farther north still, to see the earth heave into mighty masses of leaden rock and heathy moor, bordering with a broad waste of gloomy purple that belt of field and wood, and splintering into irregular and grisly islands amid the northern seas, beaten by storm, and chilled by ice-drift, and tormented by furious pulses of contending tide, until the roots of the last forests fail from among the hill ravines, and the hunger of the north wind bites their peaks into barrenness; and, at last, the wall of ice, durable like iron, sets, deathlike, its white teeth against us out of the polar twilight[5].

The language of this passage recalls that of the northward sweep of the last two hundred lines of James Thomson's *Winter* (1726), a central source-book for Turner's landscape sublime, where:

> Projected huge and horrid o'er the surge,
> Alps frown on Alps; or, rushing hideous down,
> As if old Chaos was again returned,
> Wide-rend the deep and shake the solid pole[6].

[3] J. Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, vol. 2, (1853), Chap. 6, in *The Genius of John Ruskin: Selections from his Writings*, ed. J.D. Rosenberg (London: Allen and Unwin, 1964), pp. 170—196.

[4] *The Genius of John Ruskin...*, ed. J.D. Rosenberg, p. 172.

[5] Ibid., pp. 172—173.

[6] J. Thomson, "Winter", II. 909—912, in *James Thomson: Poetical Works*, ed. J.L. Robertson, (London: OUP, 1965), pp. 218—219.

It also recalls the Alpine and polar extremities which draw Mary Shelley's Victor Frankenstein and his creation on their ambiguous quests, both idealistic and despairingly destructive[7], or her husband's contemplation of the landscape sublime in, for example, *Mont Blanc* (1817). The evocation of the exotic world of the south, where lands are "laid like pieces of a golden pavement into the sea-blue"[8], prior to the northern journey, also suggests the influence of Thomson, in particular the aerial surveys of hot regions in *Summer* (11.629ff)[9]; and perhaps there is an echo too of Ann Radcliffe's highly-coloured renderings of the south in Gothic romances which became for Romantic poets, despite their tone of amused condescension when they write of "mother Radcliff"[10], virtual lucky-dips of landscape description.

Edward Lear's search for the Romantic Sublime, in an age of imperial expansion and Thomas Cook-organised tourism, involved him in the almost mass-production of landscape images of the distant, the exotic, the ancient, and the holy, in restless reshapings of the pictorial vocabularies of such as Claude and Turner. And yet these paintings may be said to advertise the impossibility of thus reinvigorating the Romantic Sublime in a Victorian context, an achievement which could only come about for Lear in the marginal, almost accidental work of his nonsense poetry and drawings[11].

William Holman Hunt, once Lear's unofficial tutor though his junior in years, was also obsessively drawn to distant and holy landscapes to the south; but his meticulous rendering of them conveys, in contrast to, for example, Turner's misty and vertiginous images of sublime power, the imperial tourist fixing the earnest certitudes of his northern protestant vision on the exotic otherness of the Holy Land.

Alfred Tennyson, a friend of Lear and Hunt, who both illustrated his work, also found the embodying of a Romantic, Wordsworthian Sublime in his poetry problematic to the point of impossibility, though he appealed to a wide reading public in the nineteenth century partly because of his landscape descriptions. It may be that his closest approach to a Victorian equivalent of the Romantic Sublime is to be found not in, say, the exoticism of *Enoch Arden* (1864), but in one of the shortest lyrics of *In Memoriam* (1850), number CXXIII, where the solid earth, seen from the perspective of evolutionary

[7] M. Shelley, *Frankenstein, OR, The Modern Prometheus*, 3 vols. (1818).

[8] *The Genius of John Ruskin...*, ed. J.D. Rosenberg, p. 173.

[9] *James Thomson...*, ed. J.L. Robertson, pp. 77ff.

[10] This is how Keats refers, with affectionate irony and a misspelling, to Ann Radcliffe in a letter to George and Georgina Keats, 14 Feb—3 May, 1819. See *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. H.E. Rollins, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1958), ii, 62. Keats refers similarly to her as "Damosel Radcliffe" in a letter to J.H. Reynolds, 14 March, 1818. See *Letters*, i, 254.

[11] See, e.g., V. Noakes, *Edward Lear: The Life of a Wanderer* (London: William Collins Sons, 1968), and Th. Byrom, *Nonsense and Wonder: The Poems and Cartoons of Edward Lear* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1977).

stretches of time, deliquesces, suggesting both a scientific and visionary penetration of the material, before it retreats, as often in *In Memoriam*, into the private, the subjective, the frightened and childlike:

> There rolls the deep where grew the tree.
> O earth, what changes hast thou seen!
> There where the long street roars hath been
> The stillness of the central sea.
>
> The hills are shadows, and they flow
> From form to form, and nothing stands;
> They melt like mists, the solid lands,
> Like clouds they shape themselves and go.
>
> But in my spirit will I dwell,
> And dream my dream, and hold it true;
> For though my lips may breathe adieu,
> I cannot think the thing farewell [12].

The Wordsworthian moment of experiencing the Sublime tends to involve some such deliquescence and transformation, but Tennyson's lyric eschews the concomitant Romantic expansive consolation. And in this it seems to me peculiarly modern, a metamorphosis of the Romantic Sublime rather than the illfitting recapitulation which we encounter in Doyle's image of the Reichenbach Falls. Tennyson's vision of the fluid world, threatening as it is to traditional, naive-seeming certainties, has more in common with the haunting account of cosmic entropy near the end of H.G. Wells's *The Time-Machine* (1895) [13], with the images of Bladesover and of London itself as the merest film of evanescence in the face of a wider view of history in *Tono-Bungay* (1908) [14], with Virginia Woolf's almost Science Fiction evocation of the night of inhuman otherness in the central section of *To the Lighthouse* (1927) [15], or with Karl Marx's characterisation of the modern environment as a place where

> All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air... [16].

[12] *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Ch. Ricks (London: Longmans, 1969), p. 973.

[13] H.G. Wells, "The Time Machine", in *Selected Short Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), Chap. 11, pp. 74—78. First published in serial form in *New Review* (1894—1895).

[14] Idem, *Tono-Bungay* (London: Pan, 1972), Bk. 1, Chap. 1, p. 8, and Bk. 4, Chap. 3, pp. 324—328.

[15] V. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (London: Granada, 1980), pp. 115—133.

[16] The translation of this passage from the *Communist Manifesto* is by M. Berman. In it he slightly alters the standard translation made by S. Moore in 1888. See Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London and New York: Penguin, 1988), p. 21; and *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. R.C. Tucker, 2nd edition (New York: Norton, 1978), pp. 475—476.

Marx, of course, brings what he sees as scientific method to the analysis of the mystery of such deliquescence, just as Poe's Dupin[17], Doyle's Holmes or Eco's William of Baskerville[18] bring the so-called "Science of Deduction" (which is really much more like inference) to the seemingly impenetrable mysteries centring on locked rooms or clue-strewn mazes where crimes have been committed. The sleuth appears to promise rationalism in a knowable, material world, closure, and the restoration of order, which probably goes some way towards explaining the addictive appeal of the genre to a popular audience. Yet the detective is always a dual figure, and the dualities, by which he or she is marked derive in large part from a Romantic context. Dupin and Holmes are scientific rationalists who live in an isolation (even in Baker Street) akin to the Gothic enclosure of Roderick Usher. They are creatures of the night whose wanderings are through modern cityscapes rendered in the vocabulary of Gothic romance. They are dreamers able to identify imaginatively with the criminals they pursue, and they show a late-Romantic world-weary contempt for the dull-witted ordinariness of the bourgeois or plebeian world[19]. Holme's violin playing is as disturbingly idiosyncratic and frenetic as Usher's improvisations on the guitar, and Watson's commonsense objections to Holme's repeated recreational use of cocaine and morphine make no impression on one who seems at first to be the rationalist *par excellence*[20]. Such qualities suggest post-Romantic heroes of the Decadence, figures of the *fin-de-siecle* in which the vocabulary of the Romantic Sublime has become exhausted or emptied.

This kind of duality goes back to one of the primal detective stories of Western culture, Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, which gives us a corpse, a detective, a range of suspects, an investigation, and the discovery of a culprit. Oedipus, a logician proud of his powers of deduction, is the prime detective figure; but Tiresias, the ambiguous visionary who, as it were, "dreams" his way to the culprit, arrives at the solution sooner than the would-be rationalist. The figures of Oedipus and Tiresias seem to merge in classic sleuths like Dupin, Holmes, and Baskerville, whose representation involves other forms of doubling too. For example, all are shadowed by admiring, often wondering narrators, or by dull and limited policemen; and it has been remarked that Dupin, in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), moves from one Gothic-inspired enclosure (the detective's own apartment) through two

[17] See E.A. Poe, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), "The Mystery of Marie Roget" (1842—1843), "The Purloined Letter" (1845), in *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), pp. 141—168, 169—207, 208—222.

[18] U. Eco, *The Name of the Rose's* (London: Martin Secker and Warburg, 1983). From the Italian by W. Weaver, trans.

[19] See, e.g., D. Lehman, *The Perfect Murder: A Study in Detection* (London and New York: Collier Macmillan, 1989), pp. 14, 49—53.

[20] E.A. Poe, *The Complete Tales...*, p. 237; A.C. Doyle, *The Penguin Complete...*, p. 22 and p. 89.

comparable settings (the apartments of the victims and the culprit) in pursuit of the solution[21]. The mirroring motifs of Poe's Gothic fiction are equally evident, and influential, in his detective stories.

It may be that even the bluff Dr Watson has more in common with the unnamed narrators of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839) than is generally remarked. "Usher"'s narrator, who is disconcertingly dubbed a "Madman" by the deranged Roderick[22], is suspiciously familiar with the dreary after-effects of opium smoking when he characterises the unrelieved gloom of the House of Usher and its environs[23]; and Watson, even as he assures us that he is "not subject to impressions", uses the language of Poe's Gothicism, suggesting the narrator's own mental state, when he describes London in *The Sign of Four* (1890):

> It was a September evening, and not yet seven o'clock, but the day been a dreary one, and a dense drizzly fog lay low upon the great city. Mud-coloured clouds drooped sadly over the muddy streets. Down the Strand the lamps were but misty splotches of diffused light which threw a feeble circular glimmer upon the slimy pavement. The yellow glare from the shop-windows streamed out into the steamy, vaporous air and threw a murky, shifting radiance across the crowded thoroughfare. There was, to my mind, something eerie and ghostlike in the endless procession of faces which flitted across these narrow bars of light — sad faces and glad, haggard and merry. Like all humankind, they flitted from the gloom into the light and so back into the gloom once more. I am not subject to impressions, but the dull, heavy evening, with the strange business upon which we were engaged, combined to make me nervous and depressed[24].

Such passages are not untypical of Watson's characterisation of the modern metropolis. He describes Lawriston Gardens and Audley Court, in *A Study in Scarlet*, in comparable terms[25]. But, even if we look no further back than Poe, it can be no surprise to observe the co-existence in one text of elements of the Gothic Romance and Detective Fiction; and we shall see that Detective Fiction grows out of the Gothic in the same decade which saw the publication of Ann Radcliffe's romances, just as Science Fiction grew directly out of the Gothic a generation later. What might come as a surprise to modern readers of Conan Doyle is the dislocating shift of narrator and style which occurs at the beginning of Part 2 of *A Study in Scarlet*, "The Country of the Saints". At this point the narrative leaves London, the corpses of Enoch Drebber and Joseph Strangerson, and Holmes's revelation of their murderer, and enters upon an extended flashback concerning events in Utah which led up to the slayings in London. In terms of the historical development of detective

[21] See R. Wilbur, "The Poe Mystery Case", *New York Review of Books*, July 13 (1967), p. 27, and D. Lehman, *The Perfect Murder*..., p. 76.

[22] E.A. Poe, *The Complete Tales*..., p. 245.

[23] Ibid., p. 231.

[24] A.C. Doyle, *The Penguin Complete*..., p. 98.

[25] Ibid., p. 27 and p. 34.

or police procedural fiction this fractured structure is easily explained. Doyle, in his first Sherlock Holmes story, is imitating the two-part construction of the police fiction of Emile Gaboriau, to which, as to the detective stories of Poe, explicit reference is made in *A Study in Scarlet*. The surprise lies in the nature of the description of the location to which the narrative moves:

> In the central portion of the great North American Continent there lies an arid and repulsive desert, which for many a long year served as a barrier against the advance of civilization. From the Sierra Nevada to Nebraska, and from the Yellowstone River in the north to the Colorado upon the south, is a region of desolation and silence. Nor is Nature always in one mood throughout this grim district. It comprises snow-capped and lofty mountains, and dark and gloomy valleys. There are swiftflowing rivers which dash through jagged canons; and there are enormous plains, which in winter are white with snow, and in summer are gray with the saline alkali dust. They all preserve, however, the common characteristics of barrenness, inhospitality, and misery[26].

There are three more paragraphs of this kind of description of unyielding, illimitable landscape, evoked in terms drawn from the English tradition of the landscape sublime, before the "lean and haggard" observer of the scene is introduced[27]. From countless fictions of the American West we recognise the image of, in John Ford's succinct phrase to define the genre of the western film, "little man, big sky". The first five chapters of "The Country of the Saints" give us, in effect, a western — not in the way of the close interweaving of Gothic and Detective conventions with which I have been concerned above, but a discrete and substantial portion of the text which is governed by other generic codes. And the language of the landscape sublime is central among the conventions of the Western, from James Fenimore Cooper's images of forest, mountain, and prairie, through Zane Gray's "wild, austere, and mighty manifestation[s] of nature"[28] in stretches of purple sage or lines of canyons, down to the muddy ironies of Clint Eastwood's film *Unforgiven* (1992).

"The sublimity connected with vastness is familiar to every eye", writes Cooper introducing *The Pathfinder* in 1840[29]:

> The most abstruse, the most far-reaching, perhaps the most chastened of the poet's thoughts crowd on the imagination as he gazes into the illimitable void. The expanse of ocean is seldom seen by the novice with indifference; and the mind, even in the obscurity of night, finds a parallel to that grandeur, which seems inseparable from images that the senses cannot compass[30].

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[26] Ibid., p. 52.

[27] Ibid., p. 53.

[28] Z. Grey, *Riders of the Purple Sage* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 19. First published 1912.

[29] J.F. Cooper, *The Pathfinder* (New York: Modern Library Edition, 1952), p. 3. First published 1840.

[30] Idem, *The Pathfinder*, p. 3.

Andrew Wilton employs these sentences as a starting-point for a discussion of "The Classic Sublime"[31], suggesting that Cooper's appeal to the Sublime encouraged

> his readers to consider the story in the most serious light as a profoundly significant statement about life and the conditions of human existence. Although he begins by speaking of vastness, he quickly progresses to more general ideas, of grandeur, of illimitablity, of obscurity; ideas so abstract, indeed, that we may wonder what exactly they imply[32].

Such expansiveness is characteristic of a wide range of Gothic fiction, and the Western no doubt draws upon the Gothic in this respect. But in Gothic romance there is always a tension between images of the Sublime, the potentially transcendent, and of entrapment and enclosure. Detective fiction ("The Country of the Saints" notwithstanding) tends to be characterised by images of the latter and by its rejection of the vocabulary of the sublime and the transcendent.

Gothic Romance can be both a celebration and a critique, even a rejection, of the Romantic Sublime, and because of this range of possibilities it can be seen as giving birth to a proportional range of post-Romantic popular fictions. The Radcliffean Gothic romance evinces, on a grand scale, a didactic and schematic commitment to the Thomsonian Sublime as a defence against the entrapments which are its opposite. Exposure to the Sublime, in a Radcliffe romance, is often experienced through some kind of safety-giving frame, whether it is the presence of a concerned, pedagogic father in the sublime scenery of the Alps or the literal frame of a Gothic casement through which the variety of the external world is perceived[33]. Such a combination of the Sublime and the rational is, again, characteristically Thomsonian[34]. Published in the same year as Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), William Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, a root-work of Detective Fiction which also employs Gothic conventions, is posited on a virulent rejection of the politics of Edmund Burke in favour of materialist common-sense[35]. Predictably this involves also

[31] A. Wilton, *Turner and the Sublime* (London: British Museum Publications, 1980), p. 9.

[32] A. Wilton, *Turner and...*, p. 9.

[33] See, e.g., A. Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest: Interspersed with some Pieces of Poetry*, 3 vols. (London: 1791), I, ii, pp. 21—22; I, ii, pp. 54—55; iii, xv, p. 29; iii, xvi, pp. 42—43; III, xvii, p. 100; III, xviii, p. 169. See also A. Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho: A Romance, Interspersed with some Pieces of Poetry*, ed. B. Dobree (London: OUP, 1966), I, i, p. 3; I, ii, p. 22; I, xi, pp. 113—114; II, vi, pp. 241—242; III, x, p. 469. First published 1794.

[34] The pervasive influence of the poetry of James Thomson upon the work of Ann Radcliffe is affirmed by the frequency with which she draws epigraphs from his work in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.

[35] W. Godwin, *Caleb Williams: Or, Things as They Are*, ed. D. McCraken (London: OUP, 1970). First published as *Things as They Are: Or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794). The phrase "things as they are" is drawn from the debate in England concerning the French Revolution, to which Godwin refers in the preface of 1794. The literature of the debate is voluminous, and it includes R. Price's *Discourse on the Love of Our Country* (1789), to which E. Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) was written in answer. Price's Discourse refers to "things as they are".

a rejection of the Radcliffean commitment to the Sublime, though at one point Godwin employs her imagery in order to turn her ideological assumptions on their heads[36]. These rejections can be seen to point the way for the development of Detective Fiction when it splits, in the work of such as Poe, Wilkie Collins, and Conan Doyle, to form its own generic branch in which traces of Gothic origins will linger. *Frankenstein* (1818), by Godwin's daughter Mary Shelley, would have been received as a Gothic Romance in its own day, and it is now widely regarded as a root-work of Science Fiction. It is identified thus not in spite of, but because of its peculiarly Romantic and Gothic preoccupations, with particular reference to its treatment of the concept of the Sublime, which intrudes into a range of subsequent Science fiction.

Gothic Fiction characteristically responds to a culture in crisis rising from its inability to reconcile certain key polarities of its own construction, and these polarities are all governed by the contrast between the dizzying enlargement associated with the Sublime and the entombing imprisonment at the core of the conventional Gothic romance. In the eighteenth century it might be the failure to come to terms with the medieval past, the so-called "barbarous Gothic ages"; in the case of Godwin the Gothic mode is used to suggest that the historical threat is disturbingly closer to home. For Ann Radcliffe the crisis might be said to derive from the divided worlds of male and female experience and conditioning, while Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, obsessed with polar extremes, plays off the image of the idealist Romantic hero against the human as mere materialist mechanism. Poe, a writer of seminal Gothic, Detective, and Science Fiction, uses Gothic conventions to shadow the reality of an introverted, myth-obsessed artistocratic culture unable to relate its chivalric ideals to the facts of a slave-based economy in a purportedly expansive democracy; and William Faulkner's Gothicism is the modernist heir to this heritage. Nathaniel Hawthorne, in broodingly voyaging back to the seventeenth century and painfully linking its guilts to the present through ingenious and prolific use of Gothic conventions, personalises an historical crisis. He is preoccupied with the inheritance of guilt on an individual level and in terms of national culture. He is obsessed with the burden of history in a restless, expansive society which might at any moment take off recklessly, like Clifford on the train in *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), for new and vague frontiers, pretending that technology spiritualises travel and that the past can be discounted[37]. Clifford,

[36] Caleb's "imprisonment" in a Gothic ruin inhabited by robbers is is more benign and humane than anything which he experiences at the hands of the official forces of law and order. Godwin represents him as responsive to the charms of a dawn landscape seen through a Gothic casement of the ruin. See *Caleb Williams*, III, ii, p. 214 — III, iv, p. 230.

[37] Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables*, Centenary Edition, vol. 3 (Columbus: University of Ohio Press, 1965), p. 260.

of course, has been crazed by being trapped, a kind of living corpse in a house of corpses, in a Gothic past, peeping uncomprehendingly at a changing nineteenth-century world through one of those symbolic arched windows which proliferate in Gothic fiction because, necessarily, they mediate between two worlds[38].

Corpses may abound in Gothic Romance, the Western, and Science Fiction, but it is, perhaps, only in Detective Fiction that the corpse is a *sine qua non*, a concrete effect from which the sleuth reasons back to a cause. It has been suggested that the corpse in Detective Fiction is always the dead weight of an outworn Romantic faith in transcendence in an unyieldingly material world, rendered all the more unyielding in a post-Darwinian age[39]. Of course the corpse is many things: to the Freudian it may be the dead parent, and the subject of the investigation may be the Primal Scene; to the theologian it may be the echo of the consequences of Original Sin, and the sleuth may map strategies for survival in the fallen world; for the semiotician it may represent a crucial fragment of text in a world of disconcertingly shifting signs. But all these interpretations may be taken as confirming the identity of the corpse as an aspect of the Romantic Sublime.

Just as the corpse-haunted architectural enclosures of Gothic Romance provide a prototype for the locked-room motif of Detective Fiction, so the sleuth's commitment to ratiocination has the same historical origin as Science Fiction's extrapolation based upon scientific method, which has been the key identifying feature of the form for many of its definers. Such definition, however, is limiting in the present context, for it might obscure the contention of Brian Aldiss and others that Science Fiction is a transposition of earlier forms of romance, and most particularly of the Gothic[40]. Darko Suvin has remarked that "cognition" would be a more appropriate word than science in the defining formulation, and he proposes that

> Science Fiction is a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an alternative framework[41].

The emphasis on cognition rather than science undoes the implication that the genre is necessarily concerned with gadgetry or with the so-called "hard"

[38] See my "A Source for Keats's Magic Casements", *Notes and Queries*, vol. 26 (June, 1979), pp. 232—235.

[39] See D. Lehman, *The Perfect Murder...*, p. 14.

[40] B. Aldiss, *Billion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction* (London: Corgi, 1975), pp. 19—22 and 59—60; M. Rose, *Alien Encounters: Anatomy of Science Fiction* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 8—9.

[41] D. Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary* Genre (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 7—8.

sciences; and the concept of estrangement, as well as providing a fruitful direction for the discussion of Science Fiction in terms of relatively recent critical theory, suggests a path back to the genre's roots in Gothic Romance's approach to the Sublime. Science Fiction, which is a product of and a response to an era of rapid scientific and technological development, has often been concerned to promote new ways of seeing appropriate to, for example, the human consequences of industrialisation, the implications of Darwinian evolutionary theory, Einstein's theory of relativity, and the second law of thermodynamics concerning the ultimate entropy of a closed system like the universe. Such world-changing phenomena and concepts, which give rise to a radical fracture of the old world from the new, by definition characteristic of the modern world, are in some ways inaccessible to the dominant conventions of classic realism in nineteenth- and twentieth-century fiction. But Science Fiction, adapting a vocabulary for characterising the Romantic Sublime found in Radcliffean Gothic Romance and in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, finds new contexts, in fantastic voyages and confrontations with the language-defying Other, for Burke's Astonishment and Sublimity rising from "Terror, Obscurity, Power, Privation, Vastness, Infinity, Difficulty, Magnificence, Suddenness, Pain"[42].

The focus on the Sublime which is a distinguishing feature of Gothic Romance is, perhaps, a consequence of this modern perception of a radical break between the old and the new in history; and Radcliffe's Gothicism attempts to bridge that gap, while Godwin's, in pursuit of revolutionary social change, emphasises the fissure. Gothic Fiction is always about the opposition of two worlds, about perhaps mediating between what can appear wholly separate entities. Of the period which, more or less, sees the rise of Gothic Romance in England J.H. Plumb writes:

> Between 1760 and 1790 it was crystal clear that there were two worlds, the old and the new; the new was the product of technological change and certain of success, certain to bring into being a new and strange Britain. Nor could the process be gradual ... compared with the centuries which had gone before, the changes in industry, agriculture, and social life of the second half of the eighteenth century were both violent and revolutionary[43].

In this context Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), and the Gothic form which flows from it, are more than sportive oddities. *Otranto* demonstrates the imaginative possibilities of antiquarianism, dramatising the aesthetic pleasure of rediscovering the medieval past as well as raising some of the darker possibilities of that past still weighing heavily upon the present. It is an urbane and fanciful romance marked by ironic wit, evident in the relation between

[42] E. Burke, "A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful", in *The Works of Burke*, 6 vols. (London: 1906), I, iv, p. 181. First published 1756.

[43] J.H. Plumb, *England in the Eighteenth Century* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 77. First published 1950.

preface and tale, and formed to some extent out of private motivations[44]. Yet it is also a work which responds to a sense of historical crisis, in particular to the eighteenth-century English habit of mind which dislocated past from present in a way that could not augur well for the nation coping adequately with historical changes, in the agrarian and industrial revolutions, more radical than anything since "the neolithic revolution"[45].

Ann Radcliffe's landscape-centred romances represent a comparable response. Even in an early work like *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) the heroine passes not through a "grandiose bit of chiaroscuro"[46] which leaves the heroine unchanged, but through a developing sequence of landscape and architectural experience which gives coherence to her maturing. She is moulded by confronting mortality in a descent of self-discovery at the Gothic core of the romance, by the sublimity of the Alpine encounter, by the dreamlike suspension of watery passages, by the seductiveness of a kind of overripe Palladianism, which her education through previous confrontations gives her the strength to resist, and by the acceptance of a purer Palladianism of the congenial father-figure, La Luc.

Insofar as return to Montalt's abbey, in *The Romance of the Forest*, is unthinkable, as is return to the convent in which Adeline, the heroine, spent her childhood, the Gothic style is rejected in favour of La Luc's safe Palladianism. But Radcliffe arrives at a compromise close to that which Thomas Hardy reaches, in the following century, in his most extensive essay in the Gothic mode, *A Laodicean* (1880—1881), which also confronts problems of relating past and present, feudalism and industrialisation, imagination and reality, romance and novel[47]. From early in *The Romance of the Forest* there have been picturesque and regenerative aspects of the otherwise sinister abbey, and Adeline has been responsive to them. After her escape from the abbey and her strengthening education conveyed through natural scenery, climaxing in the visionary experience of the Sublime, in which the distinction between height and depth is immaterial and where the extremes of winter and spring are contained[48], Adeline can recognise the "romantic simplicity"[49] of young Clara's idle desire to pass her life in a picturesque Gothic ruin. Finally the ruin is distanced, not rejected: rather than enclosing the heroine, it is enclosed in

[44] It may be argued that Walpole's creation of Strawberry Hill and his consequent production of *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* (1764) represent, in part, an attempt to come to terms with his own difficult filial relationship.

[45] J.H. Plumb, *England...*, p. 83.

[46] J.M.S. Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England, 1770–1800* (London: Methuen, 1969), p. 254. First published 1932.

[47] See my "Hawthorne and Hardy as Modern Romancers", in *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, vol. 28 (1974), pp. 458—471.

[48] A. Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest*, III, xvii, p. 100.

[49] Ibid., p. 103.

a picturesque landscape observed by her. This is an historical as well a psychological adjustment; it points to a conservative way of establishing a relationship with the past, or with any unruly elements outside her frame; in a world where tyranny and barbarism in families or in society at large may still threaten and where polite young ladies, without ever leaving their rooms, could make descents into themselves as strange and as terrible as anything that Ann Radcliffe's heroines might undergo.

Behind these heroines who spend so long in the control of unsympathetic guardians, drawn in their isolation to Gothic casements and sublime scenery which are their best tutors, and who, in Gothic ruins, confront mortality, we ought to be able to see the real Catherine Morelands[50] of the late eighteenth century, whose creative and social possibilities were so limited; through them we should also see, perhaps, Catherine's Mills and Boon-addicted heirs in the twentieth century. The room with its view and the picturesque or sublime journey (to Nash's Blaise Castle rather than to the Appenine grandeur of Udolpho) embody suggestions of enlargement, escape, and the possibility of transcendence to set against the reality of a confined life. Radcliffe's work confronts the gap between creative fantasy and her contemporary society; and her Gothicism dramatises a longstanding crisis which involves the inner life of women and their outer social roles.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is also a coded analysis of female experience[51], and, in recasting Gothic Romance as Science Fiction, it offers a critique of the Radcliffean concern with the possibility of transcendence through the encounter with the landscape sublime in a world of scientific rationalism and materialism. The tension between these poles has been evident in Science Fiction ever since. The possibility raised by *Frankenstein* that the human being is a mere mechanism, enclosed in systems within systems, is mirrored in Detective Fiction's central focus on the corpse which cannot be revived; and the exploration of new worlds, involving, for example, confrontation with the alien, apocalypse, and transformation, draw upon the evocations of the Sublime and the potential for transcendence in the Gothic tradition.

The self-evident modernity of Science Fiction and Detective Fiction has been remarked upon repeatedly in criticism of the genres, but less often that it is a modernity which derives from their progenitor, the Gothic Romance. The modernity of Gothic Fiction is embedded in Romanticism, that of Science and Detective fiction (as well as all the later variants of the Gothic mode) in the post-Romantic and post-Darwinian. They are modern forms which are often at variance with the tendencies of Modernism, and they often fill vacuums left

[50] Catherine is the naive heroine of Jane Austen's satire on the Gothic Romance, *Northanger Abbey* (1818).

[51] See E. Moers, *Literary Women* (London: Women's Press, 1986), pp. 91—99. First published 1963.

by "mainstream" literature, be it realist or modernist. Popular fiction deriving from the gothic can be seen to offer, for example, kinds of storytelling abandoned or radically reconstituted by classic realism or modernist experiment. The symbolic vocabulary of Gothic Romance subverts the certitudes of the realist tradition; Science Fiction can confront the definition of human identity and the implications of evolutionary timescales in a way not customarily associated with realist fiction; and Detective Fiction offers the possibility of closures and solutions which are rare in the modernist tradition. Of course, they are all fluid and interactive forms in practice, and these sometimes marginalised fictions have a long history of flowing back into the mainstream and of subverting in themselves simple critical formulations concerning their generic identity. Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1983) contains an historical novel, a Gothic romance, and a detective story among its strands, and all might be said to be deconstructed. And Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris* (1961), with its climactic, Sublime-derived vision of "cruel miracles"[52] out among the stars and deep in the individual psyche, begins with the language of "hard", gadget-oriented Science Fiction, modulates into a Poe-like exploration of haunted spaces, and into the sleuth's pursuit of clues, beginning with a scribbled scrap of paper bearing the one-word answer to the riddle of Oedipus's Sphinx. Whether these forms of fiction find new uses for the language of the Romantic Sublime, as in Science fiction, or rigorously exclude it, as with Detective Fiction, they spring from Gothic evocations and explorations of the Romantic Sublime.

[52] S. Lem, *Solaris*, trans. from the Polish by J. Kilmartin and S. Cox (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), p. 195.



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Multitude of Ecstatic Butterflies: A Glimpse of the Sublime in Kitsch

Preface

You can expect now a subversive essay on butterflies, a text fluttering with glimpses rather than conclusions. Let me start perversely with a question which I may/will probably be unable to answer. Is there an opposition to Sublimity in Art? Is Kitsch the answer? Kitsch Capitalised is no longer kitsch, since it becomes an appropriately holy, architecturally capitalised category. Consider a landscape painting: well-fed, impressive specimens of tawny deer roam freely all over the meadow. Now consider another painting which presents the same lush meadow equipped with yellow butterflies. No, I have not finished my essay yet. I am troubled by Umberto Eco's insight: if only a few of the ready-made formulas are used, the result is simply kitsch. "When the reportoire of stock formulas is used wholesale, then the result is an architecture like Gaudi's Sagrada Familia: the same vertigo, the same stroke of genius"[1]. If one sticks to the butterfly image, one can think of a famous painting by J. E. Millais, *A Blind Girl.* The arithmetics of the sublime will prove that we have here one butterfly only, one bunch of delicate flowers, one puddle, two rainbows, half a dozen birds, six cows, etc. Everything comes in small numbers. But what would happen, if one painting used all existing and extinct specimens of deer and all existing and extinct butterflies plus all the butterflies to come? I am not sure whether it already approaches sublimity, but it does make a difference. There are literary works which implement magnified kitsch successfully: in G.G. Marquez *One Hundred Years of Solitude* the rain of dead birds is coming down (can we say dead birds are raining cats and dogs?), yellow flowers cover up the

[1] U. Eco Casablanca: "Cult Movies and Intertextual Collage", in *Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. D. Lodge (London: Longman, 1988), p. 449.

town after the death of Jose Arcadio Buendia, finally: countless clouds of yellow butterflies accompany Mauricio Babilonia's every step[2]. Clouds of yellow butterflies is not just an image, it is a concept which will reappear conveniently in this essay.

Maybe, if properly magnified, into an obsession, the opposite of a given notion will become the very notion itself (similarily to the notion of *sacrum* where the repulsive becomes the holy and vice versa). In other words, maybe butterflies, like divine wind — *kamikaze* — soar towards the sublime making the inevitably suicidal crash?

Are the butterflies supposed to soar towards the sublime, if one considers their topical genesis? In Greek mythology and art and later, Psyche — Eros's beloved princess — is often presented as a beautiful girl with the wings of a butterfly. Psyche is the Soul, the Breath, the Principle of Life, Sublimity of the Soul. She is a butterfly and she is sexually linked to Eros. Eros and Psyche form a topos that cannot be separated. Eros and Butterfly Image cannot be separated. I shall venture a triad: Eros—Psyche—Butterflies. Butterflies are cliches of erotic obsession. If obsession, according to what we said before, equals magnification/excess, then Erotic Obsession borders the Sublime. Since this ground is rather precarious, I shall start again.

A Different Preface: Collecting Butterflies Is Wrong

> I do not proceed from my principle; for if I did, I would regret it, and if I did not, I would also regret that.
>
> S. Kierkegaard, *Diapsalmata*

The following is a sketch on the morbid preoccupation with insects, notably butterflies, on the menace of being a collector and on a Literary Mystery. The Mystery is multidimensional: firstly, the assumed parallelism between the passion for collecting butterflies and the mental scape of rapists/murderers; secondly — the assumed parallelism between the above parallelism and the mental scape of young aspiring artists.

It is with extreme distrust, yet a great deal of "fatal attraction" that Kobo Abé, a Japanese classic, approaches his own theory, according to which, there is a direct relationship between a potential sexual perversity and a drive for collecting butterflies and insects. He fortifies his assumption with a safety device, stating it is an opinion of an amateur psychoanalyst:

> He claimed that in a grown up man enthusiasm for such a useless pastime as collecting insects was evidence enough of a mental quirk. Even in children, unusual preoccupation with insect collecting frequently indicates an Oedipus complex. In order to compensate

[2] G.G. Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (London: Pan Books, 1986).

> for his unsatisfied desires, the child enjoys sticking pins into insects, which he need never fear will escape. And the fact that he does not leave off once he has grown up is quite definitely a sign that the condition has become worse. Thus it is far from accidental that entomologists frequently have an acute desire for acquisitions and that they are extremely reclusive, kleptomaniac, homosexual[3].

This quotation shall form the new starting point of my considerations. It seems that Kobo Abé need not have worried about lack of exemplification for the above theory, presented in *The Woman In the Dunes* in 1960. Contemporary English prose provides a sufficient amount of examples to illustrate this theory and make it one of the trendy symbols of post-Freudian literature. Suffice it to mention the obvious and the most notorious: John Fowles' canonical *Collector*, Ian McEwan's short story *Butterflies* or Clive Sinclair's story *Uncle Vlad.*

This easy, quasi-gothic symbolism is not limited to literature. Oscar winning *Silence of the Lambs* owes some of its appeal to the same imagery, though in all frankness it must be said that the film is based on the book; also the painting by Yosl Bergner, *Butterfly Eaters*, is a tribute to Kobo Abe's assumption. The painting presents a distant, distorted version of Makowski-like open-air picnic, where the only food to be consumed by five participants consists of seven brightly blue butterflies. They are presented in different stages of "captivity"; from being caught in flight, to being held by their frail wings, lying on the plates and lying on the table. One of the butterflies already has a fork in its body. Two more forks are crossed on the table as if on the altar. The atmosphere, deriving from the gothic convention, is reverential, the lamp is lit in the middle of the table, and the painting evokes sinister atmosphere, suggesting at the same time a certain unhealthy orgiastic union among the people who take part in the feast — presumably four women and one man. Only the man does not touch the butterflies and does not look like he is preparing for the sombre feast. He may be the one who watches how his women devour butterflies. Someone's Women Devouring Butterflies is a concept and it could conveniently reappear.

One More Preface: The Unbearable Deadness of Butterflies

> Since I never start, so can I never stop; my eternal departure is identical with my eternal cessation.
>
> S. Kierkegaard, *Diapsalmata*

If instead of starting from literature one ventured to start from the sphere of intuitive experiences, one could agree, perhaps, that in butterflies' very *self*, or at least in the perception of the self there is already a certain ambivalence. After

[3] Kobo Abé, *A Woman In the Dunes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 5—6.

all, a butterfly appears on the one hand as something frail and over-beautiful and, on the other, an insect retaining its insect-ness and repulsiveness. (Thus *sacrum* in all its complexity). It fascinates and repels, consider moths.

Another, equally crucial aspect of the butterfly topos is the short span of its life. Here the symbol is made more distinct: killing a butterfly is a redundant act, thus more cruel, since a butterfly is almost dead when it is still living. True, this can be said about anything that is alive, as, and this is a cliche, of course: the end is already written in the beginning. Kierkegaard says in *Diapsalmata*, "For I do not stop now, I stopped at the time when I began." Yet, temporality can be measured and compared and the comparison of the physical life span of a crocodile/turtle/elephant and a butterfly does not yield too much for that latter. I will paraphrase here Orwell, if I state for the sake of this essay that although all living creatures are already dead when they live, some creatures, like butterflies, are more dead than others. Ironical Lewis Carroll notices it in *Through the Looking Glass*

> "You may observe a Bread-and-Butterfly ..."
> "And what does it live on?"
> "Weak tea with cream in it."
> A new difficulty came into Alice's head.
> "Supposing it couldn't find any?" she suggested.
> "Then it would die, of course."
> "But that must happen very often," Alice remarked thoughtfully.
> "It always happens" said the Gnat[4].

A Shortened Guide to Prize-Winning Young Artists

Contemporary English literature and its insect-loving critics may well be exhausted with the literature of exhaustion. It has happened every now and then, starting from the sixties, that important literary debuts revolve round one, cathartic theme — at least in the communal understanding — namely, opression. There was theatre of cruelty in drama. There is drama of butterflies and sex in prose. It is quite revealing to notice the sequence of several critically acclaimed debuts:

John Fowles's début, *The Collector* (1963), was immediately acclaimed a masterpiece by many critics. Ian McEvan's début, *First Loves, Last Rites* (1976) becomes the winner of the Somerset Maugham Award for 1976. Clive Sinclair's début, *Hearts of Gold* (1979) becomes the winner of the Somerset Maugham Award for 1981. Reverting to the beginning of our considerations, note that Kobo Abé's *The Woman In the Dunes* (1960), received the prestigious

[4] L. Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass* (Harmondsworth: Puffin Books, 1978), pp. 227—228.

Yomiuri Prize in Japan and three years later Hiroshi Teshigahare's film of *The Woman In the Dunes* won the jury prize at the 1963 Cannes Film Festival. Now, who's obsessed with the blend of sexual violence, oppression and the butterfly-ness? The sublimity of the kitch-magnification makes me more and more suspicious. What about V. Nabokov, *Lollita* and entomology? What about a little known fact of Lewis Carroll's hobby: taking nude photographs, arguably very good photographs of naked girls? Or to use some Polish references: Arkady Fiedler's memoirs in two volumes: *Motyle mego życia* [*Butterflies of My Life*] and *Kobiety mej młodości* [*Women of my Youth*]? What sort of parallelism is that? Numerous pictures of the author stalking butterflies. A cloud of yellow butterflies on one of A. Fiedler's photographs, accompanied by a naked child (Eros?) A woman surrounded by red butterflies and an explanation that there were tens of thousands of them. And for instance the picture of Velomody who "was roaming with me on the edge of the forest and ardently penetrated the mysteries of insectivorous plants"[5]. One more picture: Arkady Fiedler holds a net, a girl nestles to him, they look up as if in rapture and the caption says, "the girl chased the butterflies energetically"[6]. Fiedler himself provides enough material for a whole book on the picturesque and mysterious parallelisms. But let's continue differently.

The Unrivalled Role of the Cataract of Sand

The key concepts for these aberrations can be found not only in Abe Kobo. Any aberration can be traced back to *Moby Dick*. The protagonist of *The Woman In the Dunes* is led to the sea by an invisible, unconscious force. (Freud, of course, knew all the terms for these forces). In the initial chapter he endeavours to reach the end of the land through the dunes. It is this very instinct that is perfectly perceived by Melville in the first chapter of *Moby Dick*. Unconsciously, by loomings, we go to the sea, the place of ultimate peace[7]. The very fact that the protagonist of Abe's novel becomes paradoxically landlocked on the shore, with all the horizon set by sand clearly suggests lack of this ultimate peace. Melville asks in the same chapter, whether anybody would be interested in seeing Niagara Falls, if it were a sand cataract[8]. Once again this is the situation of Abe's collector. He is directly endangered by the very cataract of sand.

[5] A. Fiedler, *Kobiety mej młodości* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie. 1987), insertion, picture 6 [translations mine].

[6] Ibid., picture 12.

[7] H. Melville, *Moby Dick* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), pp. 95—97.

[8] Ibid., p. 95.

In *The Woman In the Dunes* the insect collector becomes a prisoner. He is the insect he was searching for, buried in a sandy hollow — imprisoned — stays with a woman who watches his erratic, insect-like behaviour. Good for him. This is a sanity course — the collector, when collected, is frequently hygienically de-collector-ed, freed of his obsession. The protagonist of Fowles's *Collector* remains the collector to the end, he imprisons the girl, who is but a specimen in his collection of butterflies[9]. He experiences neither the sea nor the cleansing cataract of sand; his is neither peace nor fury of entrapment. He manages only to magnify and multiply his obsession — collecting butterflies/Amanda, cataloguing them and taking their pictures, thus collecting and RE-collecting and then recollecting his collecting in an endless process of re-collecting without redemption. In both novels, the relationship between the victim and the oppressor is not lucidified, although in both cases an erratic/erotic factor plays a decisive role.

A Young Writer's Guide to Perversion

The parallels between Ian McEwan's short story *Butterflies* and Fowles's novel are on a somewhat different level. Similarities, however, are striking. Both present a first-person naration, which results in the impression of heart rendering yet repulsive naivety. Both may provoke a feeling of compassion towards the oppressor and the victim alike.

Both protagonists are mentally unbalanced; they are young men disliked by woman. They are attracted to little girls. In McEwan's story the girl is barely nine years old. The oppressors use clever ARTIFICE — they buy the victims ARTIFACTS of ART. In Fowles's story it is the books on art — a suggestion of the Sublime; in McEwan's story the narrator buys the girl "a small, pink, naked doll" which may be reminiscent of the Cupid image.

Both are attracted by butterflies: Fowles's protagonist consciously, as an experienced collector, McEwan's hero intuitively, as an absolute beginner. (Absolute = Sublime?). (Experience = Sublime?). (Who Is the Tiger; Who Is the Lamb? And Who Made Them? McEwan's protagonist leads the girl to the water — it is not the sea though, but an adequately dirty canal — because there are butterflies there. This reminds me of the justification of Kobo Abe's character. The colours here ring a bell too:

> "What colour butterflies?" (asks the girl)
> "Red ones...yellow ones."[10]

[9] J. Fowles, *The Collector* (London: Pan Books, 1986).

[10] I. McEwan, "Butterflies", in *First Love, Last Rites* (London: Pan Books, 1976), p. 69.

And later:

> "Where are the butterflies?"
> "Not far now and we'll see butterflies. Red ones, yellow ones, sometimes green ones." [11]

Both are impotent molesters, potential rapists, eventual murderers. These regularities seem to form a certain paradigm, followed for instance in *The Silence of the Lambs.*

Finally, allow me a brief look at an even more contrived, even more intertextually conscious Clive Sinclair's *Uncle Vlad.* The first sentence of the first story of the "collection" reads like this:

> A small puff of powder cleared and I saw my aunt touch my uncle on his white cheek with such exquisite precision that she left lip marks like the wings of a ruby butterfly [12].

Exquisite precision must be the equivalent to sublimity in mathematics. Resemblance of the kiss-mark to one ruby butterfly might be of course bad taste. But not necessarily. In the next paragraph we learn that she is not like a butterfly. She *thinks* she *is* a butterfly:

> "I believe that Lupus thinks that Vlad married me on purely scientific principles as the best specimen he could find of a modern butterfly.
> The aesthete laughed. "Well, Countess", he said. "I hope he won't stick pins into you." [13]

Lupus, the Wolf, or rather the Werewolf, Countess and Count in the story lead the reader inevitably to Count Dracula, and Uncle Vlad is naturally a collector of moths. He gathers moths by candlelight. During the parties he prepares *Crêpes aux Papillons* [*Pancakes with Butterflies*]. "Butterfly Eaters" by Yosl Bergner reveals a similar "taste". In some glass jars Uncle Vlad keeps frantic beating moths and in one champagne. That is some sublime taste, indeed. The ancestor of the Family is Vled the Impaler who was fighting against the Turks. In the Great Hall there is a portrait presenting the Impaler "amid the dying Turks who pierced through the middle, and waving their arms and legs, look like a multitude of ecstatic butterflies" [14]. If you remember the beginning of the essay notice that this portrait will not be kitsch just like the story is not kitsch because of two elements: multitude of butterflies and the element of ecstasy. This may serve as a definition of a pervert's sublimity: multitude of ecstatic butterflies.

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[11] Ibid., p. 70.
[12] C. Sinclair, *Uncle Vlad,* in *Hearts of Gold* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983), p. 9.
[13] Ibid., p. 9.
[14] Ibid., p. 10.

The term "Impaler" is interesting in this context of butterfly collecting and sexual excess. There is a sexual preoccupation called "piercism" or "spike--filing", even if one abstracts from the obvious connotations of impaling. Piercers or Spike-files are people who find sexual satisfaction in piercing the partner with pins and needles.

The preoccupation with butterflies in the story does not end here. The narrator, the Nephew of the Draculian Uncle Vlad dances during the party with a Madeleine. They sometimes dance over the bodies of dead butterflies, and after the dance the girl collects up the bruised bodies of the insects. No wonder she collects up the bodies of butterflies. What else can you do with the butterflies but to collect them? The narrator, the nephew, for a change, wants to collect Madeleine. Here comes the intertextual, exhausted topos, a bow to Fowles's *Collector:*

> ... the more I studied that priceless object (her lip)
> the more I was filled with an increasing need to make it mine. ...
> ... I had to possess that mysterious lobe (neck) ...
> Madeleine became in that chance instant of illumination
> a collection of individual treasures and temptations;
> I had never done it before, but I knew then that I had to
> kiss her. My desire was inevitable, as inevitable as
> the flame that burned above the candle [15].

The next sentence runs as follows:

> In the courtyard beyond the keep, in the centre of a thirsty fountain, a small statue of Cupid was slowly falling to pieces [16].

This is of course the triad Eros/Cupid — Psyche — Butterfly. The nephew does not limit himself to the phase of the collector. He reaches the sublime stage, the stage of a certain excess, so he becomes a vampire and drinks the blood from her neck. This is a perfect kiss concluding the story:

> And I leaned back in a chair, well satisfied. As I did so, a rather large *acherontia atropos* flew into a candle flame and fell burning on to Madeleine's cheek. She was too weak to brush it off; her hands fluttered as vainly as the moth's wings.
> "Madeleine", I whispered in her ear as I blew off the ashes, "now you are really one of the familly" [17].

[15] Ibid., p. 20.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., p. 21.

Eco's Echoes

> I have but one friend, Echo; and why is Echo my friend? Because I love my sorrow, and Echo does not take it away from me.
>
> S. Kierkegaard, *Diapsalmata*

There are many butterflies in this essay. I would like to finish this paper attempting a sort of justification. In the beginning I quoted Umberto Eco. I will revert to him yet again. This will still remain within the realm of the theory of numbers:

> When all the archetypes burst out shamelessly, we plumb Homeric profundity. Two cliches make us laugh but a hundred cliches move us because we sense dimly that the cliches are talking among themselves, celebrating a reunion.
> Just as the extreme of pain meets sensual pleasure, and the extreme of perversion borders on mystical energy, so too the extreme of banality allows us to catch a glimpse of the Sublime[18].

And what is a butterfly topos, if not the extreme of banality? The extreme of the extreme of banality will allows us, then, to catch an extreme glimpse of the Sublime.

[18] U. Eco, "Casablanca...", pp. 453—454.



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Towards Unity
Melville's Pictures of Civil War

In 1866, after several years of silence, Herman Melville published a volume of poetry devoted to the events of the Civil War. Though the poems are related to the successive incidents of the war, the author wrote almost all of them after the fall of Richmond[1] which, as he himself admitted, gave him a strong impulse to create the poetic pictures of the "terrible tragedy of our time"[2].

Battle-Pieces begins with a poem recalling John Brown's death and ends with the vision of mother America. It is not difficult to see that the whole of *Battle-Pieces* keeps chronological order. Moreover, reading the poems, one has the feeling that Melville takes special care of the unity of his work and presents consistency of vision. The unity of this collection of war poems reflects itself on several levels of which chronology seems to be one of the basic unifying mechanisms.

"The Portent", a poem focusing on John Brown's death is a natural introduction to the poetic story of the war. The event itself becomes the augury of the war:

> Hidden in the cap
> Is the anguish none can draw
> So *your future* veils its face
> Shenandoah!
> But the streaming beard is shown
> (Weird John Brown),
> The meteor of war[3].
>
> [Italics mine]

[1] H. Melville's "Introduction" to *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of War*, ed. H. Cohen (New York, London, Toronto: 1963), p. 33.

[2] Ibid., p. 202.

[3] In the English literary tradition meteors have been often associated with war and earthly disasters. See the "Notes" to the above edition of *Battle-Pieces...*, p. 205.

The first poem, and the next, "Misgivings" alike, comprise a similar "the future contained in the present" device, which functions here as a motor starting the action rolling event after event.

A child may read the moody brow
Of yon black mountain lone
With shouts the torrents down the gorges go
And storms are formed behind the storm we feel:
The hemlock shakes in the rafter, the oak in the driving keel.

[Italics mine]

The third poem, "The Conflict of Convictions" leads immediately to the next which deals with the beginning of the war. The time device is expressed more openly here.

(The poor old Past,
The future's slave,
She drudged through pain and crime
To bring about the blissful Prime,
Then-perished. There's a grave!)

The "future in the present/in the past" device sets the wheel of events of the Civil War in motion, chronologically, one by one. And consequently, the fourth poem "Apathy and Enthusiasm" announces "the finality of doom" and the following poems draw successively the history of the war: the first Manassas, the Battle of Springfield, Ball's Bluff and so on.

The second part of the volume *Verses Inscriptive and Memorial* expresses the poet's reflections on the war. The last two poems in the collection are devoted to General Lee's appealing to the Reconstruction Commitee for a re-established law and a meditation about North and South, victory and defeat.

Apart from chronology there is another level of unity in *Battle-Pieces* provided by the consistent imagery Melville uses in the collection. In April 1965, the same month that Richmond fell, he attended the annual exhibition of the National Academy of Design. The pictures he saw there rendered battle scenes, slaves, and landscapes. Moreover, he often studied pictures of the Civil War in his favorite illustrated news magazines "Leslie's" and "Harper's".

His sensitivity to painting can be also discovered in his travel journals in which he mentions the battle-pieces seen in European galleries. Thus, that he named his collection of poems *Battle-Pieces*, a name that had been reserved for paintings, should not be surprising. In addition to studying the paintings, he frequently read the picturesque descriptions of war events published in various periodicals, especially in "The Rebellion Record" focusing on the history of the Civil War.

The reader of Melville's poetic pieces can observe the intensive use of color and shade; sometimes the colors are mentioned directly, but more often the poet paints his colorful battle pictures by applying a set of nouns related to nature, the nouns normally associated with colors but being at the same time the elements constituting the landscape: grass, corn, cloud, ice, river, snow, fire, flame, iron, lead. There are also light and darkness, night and day, the contrasts exposing reality of war as well the moral clash between good and evil, the forces of nature and the forces of human cruelty.

In this sequence of colorful shapes, cloud seems to be a dominant image. Often the clouds simply belong to the landscape of war ("Donelson", "The Battle for Mississippi", "Malvern Hill", "Look-out Mountain", "Chattanooga", "The Armies of the Wilderness"). But frequently the image is filled with its organic symbolic load: it becomes an ominous sign of danger, evil, and war. In "Misgivings", the second poem of the cycle, the announcement of the impending arrival of war is expressed by means of the movement of clouds.

> When ocean-clouds over inland hills
> Sweep storming in the late autumn brown
> And horror the sudden valley fills

The image of a cloud of a symbol of danger, evil, and war is consequently exhibited throughout the text. In "Lyon" and "Tameraire" the cloud symbolizes sadness and gloom. In "The Coming Storm" the reader comes across a "demon cloud" to find "storm clouds" in "The Fortitude of the North". In the same way the coming clouds announce the arrival of war in "Lee in the Capitol".

> The clouds of war come rolling home
> [Italics mine]

Melville drawing a picture of ominous and imminent clouds and heaven becomes a spokesman for the Kantian definition of the sublime. For Kant, clouds and war itself belong to the essence of the sublime by the contrast between a safe position of an observer and dangerous and threatening pictures of nature and human conflict he observes[4]. The safe observer is here the reader (listener) of these poetic pictures whose sublimity would not have been achieved without Melville's poetic skill.

The cloudy sky of the time of war gives place to "the clear air" and "sunny light" on the day General Lee pays a visit to the Capitol.

With the same consistency that he draws his picture of the "clouds of war", Melville introduces the image of death as an obvious reality of war, sometimes personified as in "Chattanooga".

[4] I am referring here to the Polish edition of Kant's *Critique of Judgement* [*Krytyka władzy sądzenia*] (Warszawa: 1986), pp. 158, 161.

But some who gained an envied Alp,
And — eager, ardent, earnest there —
Dropped into Death's wide-open arms,

sometimes used for poetic comparison as in the last line of the same poem

Life was to these a dream fulfilled,
And death a starry night.

The range of that "terrible historic tragedy of our time" claimed for the application of some universal symbolism. And here the poet met the demands making, apart from introducing rich cloud and death imagery, interesting use of the Miltonic cosmos. Since Melville saw the war as a conflict between good and evil, as "the war of Wrong and Right" ("Look-out Mountain"), the Miltonic conflict between good and bad angels was a useful comparison.

The characters occupying the Heaven and Hell of *The Paradise Lost* appear in many of Melville's poems. One can come across Satan, Raphael, Christ, Mammon, Lucifer, Beliol, Moloch, and naturally Michael. The knights of good led by Michael, the warrior, fight against the soldiers of Hell. The war is fought and won by

... brave numbers without number, massed,
Plumed the broad way, and pouring passed —
Bannered, beflowered ...
Close of the war and victory's long review
("Lee in the Capitol")

Though the ordinary Northern soldiers are the ones whom Melville saw as the warriors for the Right, he was sensitive to the touch of the tragedy of war on both the soldiers of the North and those of the South

What could they else — North and South?
Each went forth with blessing given
By priests and mothers in the name of Heaven;
And honor in both was chief.
Warred one for Right and one for Wrong?
So be it; but they both were young —

The poet, apart from his consistent treatment of chronology and symbolism, is very cautious about the geographical unity of the cycle. The battles are naturally fought on certain territories. The space of the poems — North and South, land and sea — emphasizes the totality and vastness of the national conflict. The chronological (historical) structure and the spatial (geographical) dimension of the poems compose together an organic wholeness and create a rich, reliable picture of the historical event.

Opposition and reconciliation, the contrast often regarded as the central theme of *Battle-Pieces*[5], is at the same time an element reconstructing the war on its thematic, social, and purely human level. The opposition is North and South, I/we and the enemy; the reconciliation is contained in the humane aspect of war: help by the enemy, the compassion and humanity of individual soldiers. Thus compassion and humanity can be viewed here as a remedy, a solution with which the opposition can be successfully overcome.

Another attempt at finding the unity of *Battle-Pieces* is made by William H. Shurr who searches for a thematic structure of the poems in the co-existence of two cycles of thought: the cycle of law and the cycle of evil[6]. The destruction, bitterness, and pain of the war result from breaking the law. This twofold aspect of the war is intensely accentuated through many of the poems. In the cycle of law, the law is obviously prevailing. Here it is seen as a factor determining the order and harmony of the world. The cycle of law is represented by such poems as "Dupont's Round Fight", "Inscription for Graves at Pea Ridge", "Arkansas", "The Fortitude of the North", "Presentation to the Authorities", and "America".

The cycle of evil, focusing on the other factual, psycho-physical aspect of war, clearly contrasts with the law theme. In "Misgivings", "The Conflict of Convictions", "The March into Virginia", "Commemorative of a Naval Victory", "Rebel Color-bearers at Shiloh", "The Coming Storm", and "The Apparition" the reality of war is more tense, dramatic, more convincing, closer. The last of the poems perhaps more fully expresses Melville's picture of evil as a touchable and visible reality.

Convulsions came; and, where the field
  Long slept in pastoral green
A goblin mountain was upheard
(Sure the scared sense was all deceived),
  Marl-glen and slag-ravine.

The unreserve of ill was there
  The clinkers in her lost retreat;
But, ere the eye could take it in,
Or mind could comprehension win,
  It sunk — and at our feet.

So, then, Solidity's a crust —
  The core of fire below;
All may go well for many a year,
But who can think without a fear
  Of horrors that happen so?

[5] E. g. H. Cohen's "Introduction" to *Battle-Pieces...*, p. II and 18.

[6] Shurr discusses both cycles in his *The Mystery of Iniquity, Melville as Poet, 1857–1891* (Lexington: 1972), pp. 13—43.

Battle-Pieces emmanates the richness of the multi-levelled, yet unified picture of the Civil War. The *ut pictura poesis* quality of the work, the scene of the Manichean battle between good and evil, and the clash between law and the wickedness of human nature reveal the universal dimension of human conflict. And Herman Melville appears here to be a skilful and sensitive poet controling his material with a consistency of vision. Thus *Battle-Pieces* is not only a mere collection of war poems; it shares the features of a poetic narrative, telling the story of the heroic participants of that "terrible tragedy of our times".



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Witkacy's Pure Form and the Concept of the Sublime

> ... The relation of art to an audience understood to be passive, inert, surfeited, can only be assault. Art becomes identical with aggression.
>
> S. Sontag, *Styles of Radical Will*

> Without an element of cruelty at the root of every spectacle, the theatre is not possible...
>
> ... If the theatre is ... bloody and inhuman, it is ... to manifest and unforgettably root within us the idea of a perpetual conflict, a spasm in which life is continually lacerated ...
>
> A. Artand, *The Theatre of Cruelty First Manifesto*

> We must unleash the slumbering Beast and see what it can do. And if it runs mad, there will be always time enough to shoot it
>
> S. I. Witkiewicz, *On a New Type of Play*

Theatre in Pure Form, whose artistic potential Witkacy compares to the latent force of the slumbering beast, was proclaimed by his contemporaries, almost in unison, an apology of nonsense or, at best, an implicit parody of some modes of thinking[1]. However, in the course of its reception Witkacy's idea of Pure Form in theatre has become a dynamic link in the network of post-war avant-garde. It can be related there to the Theatre of the Absurd, the Theatre of Cruelty, Craig's wholistic concept of mise-en-scéne, to name but a few.

[1] Cf. S. I. Witkiewicz, *Czysta forma w teatrze* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1986), pp. 6—8.

In view of the fact that Witkacy himself found only four of his plays the most complete, still not utterly satisfying, realisations of Pure Form in theatre,[2] Witkacy's idea can be considered primarily as a point of direction, an ideal the movement towards which is a value in itself and whose various aspects still can be actualised.

What is to be focused on in our presentation of Pure Form is its relation to the concept of the sublime. We want (1) to show theatre in Pure Form as productive of what Burke calls "the strongest emotion of the mind", i.e. the feeling of the sublime[3] and (2) to consider the process of "sublimation" of the theatrical performance due to which it can be viewed as an instance of Pure Form.

In chemical terminology "to sublimate" means "to convert from a solid state to vapour by heat and allow to solidify again (in order to purify it)"[4] and "sublimate" substance is "refined" substance that is "free from other substances, made pure"[5].

The use of chemical terminology is not based on the similarity of the word-forms constituted by the same root ("sublim-e" and "sublim-ation") and possibly chance convergence of the terms in the dictionary definitions (to sublimate — to purify; sublimate (substance) — pure (substance)). The fact is that the chemical process of sublimation can be viewed as a sort of metaphor for the constitutive processes of the theatrical performance in Pure Form.

The two directions of our presentation reflect, in fact, the co-existence of the terms "esthetic" and "artistic", conventionally referred to the act of perception and creation respectively. The separate uses of the two terms, when a work of art is viewed not as a ready-made object, but a product of the act of perception[6], can point to "the absence of the adequate term designating the two processes taken together"[7]; on the other hand, that can be a conscious move intended to emphasise two modes of existence of a work of art: the effect it evokes in the perceiver (the esthetic aspect) and the way it is constituted in the act of perception (the artistic aspect). Thus, in our presentation, both the esthetic and artistic belong to the art of creation in perception.

The main body of the paper delineated above is followed by a sort of afterthought on the possible overlapping of Pure Form and the concept of the sublime in relation to Peirce's category of Firstness.

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[2] Cf. D. C. Gerould, *The Madman and Other Plays by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1973), pp. 299—300.

[3] Cf. E. Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (London: 1812), p. 58.

[4] *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* [emphasis added].

[5] Ibid. [emphasis added].

[6] Cf. K. Rosner, "Udział semiotyki dwudziestowiecznej w przemianie paradygmatu pojęć estetycznych", *Studia Semiotyczne*, vol. XIV—XV (Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1986), pp. 335, 337, 339.

[7] Cf. J. Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1934), p. 46.

I

Burke calls pain and pleasure positive feelings, which means they are not dependant on each other for their existence. He denies that pain arises from the removal of some pleasure and points to a state of indifference as the neutral sphere between the two extremes[8]. He distinguishes at the same time pleasure that cannot exist without a relation to pain and uses "the term delight to express the sensation which accompanies the removal of pain or danger"[9]. Whatever excites delight is a source of the sublime — "it is productive of the strongest emotion that the mind is capable of feeling"[10]. However, Burke states also that whatever excites the idea of pain and danger is a source of the sublime[11] and "terror is a passion which always produces delight when it does not press too close"[12]. Pain and pleasure, and any modifications of those have as their source the ideas possibly reduced to two heads: self-preservation and society. It is the passions which concern self-preservation, which are conversant about the preservation of the individual, that turn chiefly on pain or danger[13].

In view of Dewey's presentation of life-sustaining mechanisms the theatrical performance in Pure Form can be shown as exciting the idea of threat to man's instinct of self-preservation, and as such, productive of the feeling of the sublime.

As Dewey delineates it the living creature remains in constant interaction with its environment. Life continues and expands overcoming factors of opposition and conflict. Equilibrium is reached out of, and because of, tension. The rhythm of life is the rhythm of loss of integration with environment and recovery of union. The moments of loss of integration are not holes, but places of rest, pauses, which are ultimately overcome[14]. However, the pause when prolonged beyond the safe point at which the recovery of union is still possible, spells death, the ultimate, irreversible break. The time of approaching that point is the time of growing tension that becomes, however, a part of conscious experience only when it is overcome. You cannot experience nothingness, you can only have an idea of it. The phases of loss of integration are present to the consciousness only as ideas of danger, since the moment they are realized the danger is overcome. The fact that the moments which, when prolonged, spell death are inherent to the rhythm of life as a whole can point to Dewey's opposition of pleasure and delight as similar conceptually to that formulated by Burke. Dewey distinguishes pleasure that may come about by chance contact and delight that comes to be through a sort of fulfilment, an adjustment of our whole being with the conditions of existence[15].

[8] Cf. E. Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry...*, p. 44.
[9] Ibid., p. 54.
[10] Ibid., p. 58.
[11] Cf. ibid.
[12] Ibid., p. 73.
[13] Cf. ibid., pp. 57, 58.
[14] Cf. J. Dewey, *Art...*, pp. 14—15.
[15] Ibid., p. 17.

The experience of life as such is, then, the experience of ultimate harmony "coming" out of successive phases of union and disjunction, the experience of unity achieved through interaction of opposed energies, a resultant of suspense between reciprocal resistances.

The "theatrical reality" — the possible world of the theatrical performance (W_{TP})[16] appears as a fictive world due to theatrical and dramatic conventions. As Peirce claims "(t)he real world cannot be distinguished from a fictitious world by any description ... This exemplifies the neccessity of indicating that the real world is meant if it be meant ... and this world like a fictitious world requires an index to distinguish it"[17].

Witkacy insists that the possible world of the theatrical performance in Pure Form (W_{PF}) is to be the world with which "on the realistic level we have no contact"[18]; the possible world of the theatrical performance in Pure Form is the world "free from causality found in real life"; it is "the whole whose meaning would ... not be defined by the demands of consistent psychology and action according to assumptions from real life", in which "the fantastic psychology of characters ... who are ... completely unlike people in real life produce events ... not limited to any logic"[19].

Any kind of reality is constituted by the principles synthesizing its elements. Wittgenstein goes as far as to find the very idea of elements existing out of the system contradictory; since being as such consists in the relations among elements[20].

Theatre does not have its own intrinsic, homogeneous elements like the pure arts: Painting and Music[21]. Kowzan specifies thirteen sign-systems operating in theatre[22]. However, "the theatre without the characters who act, no matter how outrageously and improbably, is inconceivable"[23]. The elements of theatre are not exclusively simple signs of Kowzan's typology, but the compounds of growing complexity that inevitably form the content of human action of which theatre can be independent only in its final result[24]. However, "reality is more

[16] Throughout this paper, for the sake of brievity, the possible world of the theatrical performance and the spectator's actual world are marked (W_{TP}) and (W_O) respectively, cf. K. Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London, New York: Methuen, 1980), p. 103. Consequently, the possible world of the theatrical performance in Pure Form is abbreviated (W_{PF}).

[17] Ch.S. Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, vols. I—VI, ed. Hartshorne and P. Weiss; vols. VII—VIII, ed. W. Burks (Cambridge: Harward University Press, 1931—1958). According the the established practice in Peirce's scholarship, the main body of his published writings — *Collected Papers*, are referred to by volume and paragraph number and abbreviated CP. CP, 2.337.

[18] S.I. Witkiewicz, *Czysta forma...*, p. 91; D.C. Gerould, *The Madman...*, p. 296. While quoting Witkacy, we use Daniel Geroulds's translation of Witkacy's writings and refer particular quotations both to the English translation and the Polish original.

[19] Ibid., pp. 77, 78; 292, 293.

[20] L. Wittgenstein, *Dociekania filozoficzne*, trans. B. Wolniewicz (Warszawa: PWN, 1972), p. 40.

[21] S.I. Witkiewicz, *Czysta forma...*, p. 78; D.C. Gerould, *The Madman...*, p. 293.

[22] See K. Elam, *The Semiotics...*, p. 50.

[23] S.I. Witkiewicz, *Czysta forma...*, p. 78; D.C. Gerould, *The Madman...*, p. 293.

[24] Cf. ibid., p. 76; p. 292.

than the matter of discrete events occurring at given points in space-time. Reality is a matter of relations between them"[25]. Therefore, it is not the mere presence of the stage of fantastic element that makes "the contact on the realistic level" impossible for the audience, but sort of relations between realistic or fantastic elements that violate the norms of everyday life experience[26]. Those norms, which are, in fact, synthesizing principles of the spectator's actual world (Wo) can be depicted as: "cultural, epistemological, ethical principles ... through which we make sense of our lives ... all the logical truths of W_O, its physical and psychological laws, including the laws of cause and effect, necessity and possibility, etc"[27]. If life-principles in the sense specified above are responsible for the synthesizing process of the theatrical performance as a global sign, the possible world of that performance can be viewed as a representation of W_O. That comes as a consequence of the emphasis put on the view of the reality as a matter of relations among its constituent parts.

What happens in Witkacy's theatre is that life-principles do operate there on a limited scale, but they are not responsible for the synthesizing process of the theatrical performance as a global sign. However, the performance, to become an integrated whole, must possess some kind of internal organization, but that happens on the level of so-called "formal necessity"[28]. The theatrical performance in Pure Form is "the whole whose meaning is defined by its purely scenic internal construction", "purely formal complications of sound patterns as well as psychological and decorative ones", it is to be governed by "the logic of the form itself of that performance"[29].

The concept of form is not explicit and a comprehensive approach to it goes beyond the limits of our presentation. Some elementary remarks on the subject precede the discussion of Witkacy's notion: "the logic of the form" in part 2. For the purposes of the following argument we find it sufficient to specify our use of the expressions like "the purely formal level" and "purely formal complications".

Witkacy defines form as the principle through which complex objects and phenomena get united. Unity in Variety and Variety in Unity, comprehended as the unity imposed on the variety of elements and the heterogeneous character of any entity respectively, are inseparable aspects of any existence[30]. Form, as the unifying principle, conditions being,

[25] J. Zeman, "The Esthetic Sign in Peirce's Semiotics", *Semiotica* 19 (1977), pp. 241—258.

[26] Jennings discussing the concept of "the grotesque" states that the fact that in fairy-tales animals talk cannot be called grotesque — as it is conditioned by the conventions of the literary genre. The grotesque hinges upon transgression of the constitutive principles, i.e. logical norms of the reader's world. cf. L.B. Jennings, *The Ludicrous Demon. Aspects of the Grotesque in German Post-Romantic Prose* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963), pp. 358, 359.

[27] K. Elam. *The Semiotics*..., pp. 52, 103, 104.

[28] S.I. Witkiewicz, *Czysta forma*..., p. 79; D.C. Gerould, *The Madman*..., p. 294.

[29] Ibid., pp. 77, 78, 82; 292, 293, 296.

[30] S.I. Witkiewicz, *Czysta forma*..., p. 39.

i.e. anything that exists, exists through and because of its form. It seems that consistency of a sign is the semiotic equivalent of form: "(c)onsistency belongs to every sign so far as it is a sign and, therefore, every sign since it signifies primarily that it is a sign, signifies its own consistency"[31]. However, while each sign signifies primarily that it is a sign, to manifest, in a direct way the principle of Unity in Variety and Variety in Unity is to be the only function of a work of art[32]. In other words, a work of art is defined through its function, that is, as an object or phenomenon which signifies exclusively its own unity. That corresponds largely to Dewey's view, that: "a work of art accentuates its being a whole" and "in a distinctively esthetic experience characteristics that are subdued in other experiences are dominant: those that are subordinate are controlling — namely, the characteristics in virtue of which the experience is an integrated complete experience on its own account"[33].

In view of the above considerations the "purely formal complications" or "the purely formal level of perception" can be related to the distinctively esthetic situation when the dominant aspect of a given object or phenomenon is its unity, and all other meanings are excluded or subdued.

Theatrical performance in Pure Form becomes, then, consistent only on the level that, while following Witkacy, one can call the formal one. However, it can be presumed that because of the suggestive presence on the stage of the elements, agents of Wo there are repeated attempts on the part of the audience to establish some kind of order in terms of life-logic. WP_F still creates an illusion that it can be constituted as a representation of Wo and as such launches the operation of life-principles that cannot be, however, carried on beyond certain point. It is only when the connections governed by life-principles cannot be established that the purely formal connections become the alternative. In other words, the formal relations come to the foreground only when the relations constituted by life-principles are not applicable at a given moment.

The shift to the purely formal level of perception is always a dramatic attempt of overcoming the phase of irreversible disjunction equivalent with death, ultimate annihilation; therefore it brings an idea of extreme danger, which according to Burke always excites delight, and as such, is productive of the feeling of the sublime.

II

The partial answer to the question about the "sublimation" of the theatrical performance is included in the above considerations: life-principles operate

[31] CP, 5.313.
[32] Cf. S.I. Witkiewicz, *Czysta forma...*, pp. 39, 42.
[33] J. Dewey, *Art...*, pp. 55, 195.

in the theatrical performance in Pure Form on a limited scale, and as such, they are not responsible for the constitution of that performance as a global sign. That is a sort of "a negative definition" — the definition based on the elimination of some features or processes. What still requires more attention is the concept of "the logic of the form", which seems essential for the comprehension of the constitutive processes of Pure Form.

As we have already stated the main difficulty about the concepts like "the logic of the form" or "the formal connections" comes from the confusion about the term "form" itself.

Traditionally, form is defined as "an arrangement of the constituents", "the contour" or "what is directly given to the senses"[34]. The concept of "form" usually raises the question about its opposite: matter, substance, content. What Kant says about the formal or material elements depends upon the level of application of the form-matter distinction, namely, if it is the level of judgements, cognitions, intuitions or sensations[35]. However, in each of the four applications "the matter or content consists of certain elements and the form is the manner in which or the structure in terms of which these elements are related to one another"[36]. "Form is always relating the elements in such a way as to give them unity"[37]; still, the unity of elements can be static or dynamic. Dewey's "morphological unity in variety, is static, extraneous, superimposed upon materials that do not actually share in it"[38]. Form, in turn, is a dynamic organization. It takes time to complete it, there is growth, inception, fulfillment. Fulfilling and consummating are "continuous functions, not mere ends located in one place only"[39]. Dewey introduces also the concept of "the esthetic form" and defines it through its function: "the esthetic form is when the material is so arranged ... that it serves immediately the enrichment of the immediate experience"[40]. That corresponds to a larger assumption that the esthetic, implies, in much simplification, the immediate[41]. Whatever the differences, all concepts of form imply ordered relations of constituent parts, based on a sort of agreement among them.

To probe hypothetically the constitutive processes of Pure Form, we want to consider a possible theatrical situation when a high-pitched sound accompanies an act of violence performed against a red-colour background. Peirce

[34] W. Tatarkiewicz, *A History of Six Ideas. An Essay in Aesthetics* (Warszawa: PWN, 1980), p. 220.

[35] D. W. Crawford, *Kant's Esthetics Theory* (The University of Wisconsin Press, 1973), p. 98.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

[38] J. Dewey, *Art...*, p. 117, 161.

[39] Cf. ibid., p. 56.

[40] Ibid., p. 116.

[41] Cf. CP, 2.199; F. Sheriff, *The Fate of Meaning* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 84; J. Dewey, *Art...*, pp. 50, 119, 293.

claims: "we cannot comprehend an agreement of two things except as an agreement in some respect"[42]. The agreement among the signs we discuss can be viewed as the agreement in the intensity of the sound, emotion and colour respectively. More exactly, it is the agreement in the intensity of the sensations the signs produce, where a "sensation" can denote both an impression upon the senses, or a certain emotional quality. Kant, while analysing sensations into matter and form states that "the matter of a sensation is its peculiar quality, while its form is its degree of intensity or magnitude"[43]. "The logic of the form" can be, then, viewed as the relation among qualities of signs in their intensity. It can be said, then, that while "life-logic depends on the agreement of facts", "the logic of the form" consists in the agreement of qualities.

III

That was only a hypothetical insight into the nature of synthesizing processes of Pure Form in theatre, which, as a whole, may not undergo analysis.

Witkacy draws a parallel between theatre in Pure Form and instrumental music, insisting that in theatre we should experience "a metaphysical drama similar to the one which takes place among the notes of a symphony and only among them", or that "the actor, in his own right, should not exist ... he should be the same kind of part within a whole ... as the note C-sharp in a particular musical composition"[44]. Zeman, discussing Peirce's categories of Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness[45], presents the experience one has when enjoying a piece of instrumental music as a first and as such, unanalysable, since "a difficult thing about talking about first is that its firstness when it is grasped as a first, effectively evanesces"[46]. Firstness is a mode of being of what is such as it is without reference to anything else[47]; as a mode of cognition, it can be depicted as immediate consciousness, that is "... whatever of consciousness can be immediately given"[48], "passive consciousness of quality, without recognition or analysis"[49]. The immediate, in turn, implies the unanalysable, the inexplicable, the unintellectual[50].

[42] CP, 1551.

[43] D. W. Crawford, *Kant's Esthetic*..., pp. 97, 98.

[44] S. I. Witkiewicz, *Czysta forma*..., pp. 77, 81; D. C. Gerould, *The Madman*..., p. 293, 296.

[45] Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness, as modes of being can be viewed, in much simplification, as categories of possibility, reality and necessity, respectively, as modes of cognition — as categories of quality, fact and law (cf. CP. 1.23, 1.378, 1.537, 8.328).

[46] J. Zaman, *The Esthetic Sign*..., p. 243.

[47] Cf. CP, 832.

[48] CP, 1.310.

[49] CP, 1.377.

[50] CP, 5.289.

Pure Form can be viewed as a first not only on the account of a possibly chance convergence of the terms in Witkacy's and Zeman's statement. Witkacy insists that experience of Pure Form is the immediate, i.e. free from any analysing, comprehensive strategies, perception of the unity of a work of art[51].

What is more, the effect that Pure Form evokes in the audience is to be the feeling of Unity in Variety and Variety in Unity. The means that it is the emotional aspect of the global interpretant that gets foregrounded[52]. That aspect of Pure Form, namely, its being a first in terms of Peirce's semiotics creates yet another possibility of relating it to the concept of the sublime.

Burke, contrasting the beautiful and the sublime, as the qualities of objects, states: "beauty should not be obscure, the great [i.e. the sublime — M. Z.] ought to be dark and gloomy ... the sublime objects are vast in their dimensions, beautiful ones comparatively small; beauty should be smooth and polished, the great rugged and negligent"[53]. All those attributes of the sublime can be condensed in the statement that the sublime object is beyond grasp, it lacks definite contours, evades cognition. For Kant "the sublime is to be found in a formless object"[54], which may sound contradictory[55], still, he points out that "the totality of the object is present to the thought"[56]. The paradox of "a formless object" can be solved through a distinction drawn between the faculties of a subject: to conceive of something and to "present" something[57]. The imagination may fail to present an object that is present as a "concept" to the mind: "we have the Idea of the World (the totality of what it is), but we do not have the capacity to show an example of it.... We can conceive the infinitely great, the infinitely powerful, but every presentation of an object destined to "make visible" this absolute greatness or power appears to us painfully inadequate"[58].

The point of affinity between Pure Form as unanalysable in its constitutive processes and the sublime object as "a formless object", is, then, indeterminacy

[51] S.I. Witkiewicz, *Czysta forma...*, p. 36.

[52] In the case of complex signs, while considering their significative effect, one has to realize the co-existence of three separate aspects of their interpretant: the emotional, the energetic and the logical one (cf. CP, 5.475) and "(t)he functioning of separate interpretants of constituent signs within a ... macrosyntagm [a compound — M. Z.] brings about ... the foregrounding ... of the interpretants of such composite signs" (W. Kalaga, *The Literary Sign. A Triadic Model* (Katowice: Uniwersytet Śląski Press, 1986), p. 91).

[53] E. Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry...*, pp. 233, 238.

[54] D.W. Crawford, *Kant's Esthetic...*, p. 99.

[55] Ibid., p. 7.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Cf. J-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p 77.

[58] Ibid., p. 78.

of their presence that, however strongly felt, can never be reduced to definite area in space or time. That quality shows Pure Form and the sublime object as overlapping in relation to Peirce's category of Firstness. Most obviously, that parallel between Pure Form and the concept of the sublime requires more detailed discussion, which might be only initiated by our remarks.

* * *

The sublime impression consists in distress, uneasiness, it derives its pleasure from pain, afflicts with horror, enroots continually the ideas of extreme danger. When "art becomes identical with aggression"[59] that happens not necessarily through the images of bloodshed, as an act of violence exerted upon our senses or sensibility. Art can be aggressive when it is haunted with the potential of nothingness, void, affecting not the senses, but the instinct of self-preservation itself, and when the phase of reassuring harmony is achieved due to the processes which in their very nature are "unanalysable, inexplicable, ungraspable".

[59] S. Sontag, *Styles of Radical Will* (New York: Delta Publishing Co., Inc., 1970), p. 121.



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The Look into the Sky: Notes on Sublimity, Film and Gender

I. Masculine/Feminine: Christa Wolf and Krzysztof Kieślowski

Traditionally, the sky has been emblematic of sublime unattainability. The fact that in many languages (including those in which the texts that interest me here originate, German and Polish) the word for the physically visible sky is also that for the unseen heaven only reinforces the association. The word's ambiguity as it were corresponds to the Biblical assertion that there is more than one heaven, the first melting into the second, which is followed by a third apprehensible only momentarily and to men accorded a divine commission (Isaiah, Ezekiel, the apostle Paul). A Jungian might deem the ambiguity the reflection in a collective unconscious — in this case, that unconscious as materialized in language — of an archetypical experience of the numinous.

In Christa Wolf's *Der geteilte Himmel* however, the work of a socialist whose materialism requires that *Himmel* be rendered "sky" rather than "heaven", the unattainable is the other person: for Rita, her female protagonist, it is the Manfred whose deep-seated psychic hurt she is unable to heal. Long before her lovers ever speak of the sky's division, Wolf describes their love's early days thus: "die beiden Hälften der Erde passten ganz genau ineinander, und auf der Nahtstelle spazierten sie, als wäre es nichts" ["the two halves of the earth fitted exactly into one another, and they walked along the stitched place as though there were nothing to it"][1]. Wolf's sentence is itself a *Nahtstelle*, falling into two halves, its first idyllic, its second suggesting a continued separation of the joined halves by the stitches effecting the join. The lovers are strolling obliviously along a tightrope, *als wäre es nichts*. The sutured place of

[1] Ch. Wolf, *Der geteilte Himmel* (Munich: DTV, 1973), p. 16 [translation my own].

their walks is indeed "nothing" (*nichts*), the Utopia that is no-man's-land (*Kein Ort. Nirgends.*, to anticipate a Wolf title). And although the division that scars both earth and sky translates finally into the separation between the West to which Manfred flees and the East, where Rita chooses to remain, this is in a sense a diversion, for the political split is simply one conjugation of a series of raptures whose mutual mirroring renders the origin of the scar ungraspable, and hence poignantly irremediable (splits between experience and innocence, age and youth, male and female, National Socialist and socialist, town and village, for instance).

The sense of irreconcilable difference and sublime unattainability that pervades *Der geteilte Himmel* links it with an otherwise very different and more recent (but also "East European") work that proposes its own sense of the sublime, Krzysztof Kieślowski's *Krótki film o miłości* [*A Short Film About Love*]. Here, in contradistinction to Wolf's novel, the male only seemingly occupies the position of experience: Tomek is the voyeur of Magda, the thirty-year-old weaver who lives opposite his apartment block. His erotic humiliation at her hands causes his suicide attempt. In bed, back from hospital, he is visited by the regretful Magda. Prevented from nearing his bed by that protective Fury, his landlady, Magda looks instead through the lens still pointed at her own window. What she sees is a moment of the sublime: herself, in a scene witnessed earlier by Tomek, spilling a bottle of milk and weeping, though this time Tomek enters to comfort her. Her look is apparently directed outwards but actually plunges inwards, to the space of the imagination. Its real unattainability is the unpalatable sand-grain at the heart of the sublime's pearly moment. Inasmuch as it is a look of the imagination, does it not celebrate the sublime birth of the supreme fiction — art — out of devastating failure? (And if this allows one to discern in it the structure of compensation and rescue that animates Kant's "mathematical sublime", may it not — to anticipate one of this paper's main contentions — permit the widening of his category to encompass imagination as well as reason, art as well as philosophy?) Magda sees herself in art, her window becoming the sublime mirror that transforms experience. There is both the pathos of unattainability (this is fiction) and the Utopian possibility of relationship. For Wolf's Rita, in her hospital bed, the art-work, with its sublime revelation, does not materialize in a window — is not caught in *statu nascendi* — but already exists as a painting. "Am Himmel, der ein sehr natürliches, ausgeblastes Blau hat, ziehen die Wolken, die jeder aus seiner Kindheit kennt und die man später nur noch selten sieht. Die Leute im Bild blicken ja auch nicht hoch, sie verpassen die Gelegenheit, diese Wolken zu sehen, nun ist es zu spät, denn inzwischen sind sie fast hundert Jahre tot. Der Maler auch, aber er hat das alles gesehen." ["Crossing the sky, which has a very natural, washed-out blue, are the clouds everyone knows from his child and one only very rarely sees thereafter. The

people in the picture are not looking up either, they are missing the chance to see these clouds, now it's too late, for in the meantime they have all been dead for almost a hundred years. The painter too, but he saw all this."][2] To be in the picture is, paradoxically, to be out of it. Only from a place outside it, outside life, can one see everything, *alles*. And what really matters is the sky. Is it significant that both here and in Kieślowski's work the look at the unattainable — one of pathos and yearning — is ascribed to women, mirroring their age-old placement "out of the picture"? And does not this feminized sublime problematize the too-hallowed mapping of sublime-beautiful oppositions onto male-female difference?

II. Cinema and the Sublime

Except for a parenthetical reference to Kant, the foregoing remarks employ "the sublime" with the connotations it has in everyday speech: associations of elevation and wonder, present ever since the *Peri Hypsous* of Longinus (*hypsos* meaning height), but complicated in the theorizations of the late eighteenth century.

For Kant, for instance, there are two forms of the sublime, the mathematical and the dynamical. It is the former whose peculiar construction makes it most interesting and demanding of an explanation. It occurs after the mind's encounter with the notion of infinity or absolute greatness has caused "a momentary checking of the vital powers"[3]. Thomas Weiskel has likened this experience to Jakobson's "similarity disorder" and the situation of the reader of an insoluble hermeneutic conundrum[4]. The sensory failure sees the aggrandizement of reason, which is able to conceptualize the totality in the moment of mathematical sublimity.

Kant's construction of the mathematical sublime is optimistic, privileges philosophy, and may be deemed implicitly autobiographical. (The stars above generate the moral law within?) The encounter with absolute greatness may end differently for one lacking his metaphysical mechanism of compensation. Consider, for instance, the trajectory of the following sentence from Büchner's *Lenz*, that extraordinarily empathetic case-study of a Romantic, which both

[2] Ibid., p. 26.

[3] I. Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, translated with an introduction by J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner, 1951), p. 83. — Although Kant employs this phrase in relation to the sublime in general, before proceeding to distinguish between the mathematical sublime and the dynamical, it parallels his description of the former.

[4] Th. Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 30. — The subtlety and rigour of Weiskel' attempt to transcode the structure of the sublime into that of psychoanalysis renders it as important as the better-known theories of Harold Bloom; whence the frequency of my reference to it.

evokes and anatomizes the Romantic project of naturalizing the numinous through the sublime. It is surely relevant that it should be possible to describe Kant's theory as "a fictional structure with an inner logic, an interplay of submerged, personified agencies profoundly congruent to the imaginative logic dramatized in many Romantic poems"[5].

> Nur manchmal, wenn der Sturm das Gewölk in die Täler warf und es den Wald herauf dampfte, und die Stimmen an den Felsen wach wurden, bald wie fern verhallende Donner und dann gewaltig heranbrausten, in Tönen, als wollten sie in ihrem wilden Jubel die Erde besingen, und die Wolken wie wilde, wiehernde Rosse heransprengten, und der Sonnenschein dazwischen durchging und kam und sein blitzendes Schwert an den Schneeflächen zog, so dass ein helles, blendendes Licht über die Gipfel in die Täler schnitt; oder wenn der Sturm das Gewölk abwärts trieb und einem lichtblauen See hineinriss und dann der Wind verhallte und tief unten aus den Schluchten, aus den Wipfeln der Tannen wie ein Wiegenlied und Glockengeläute heraufsummte, und am tiefen Blau ein leises Rot hinaufklomm und kleine Wölkchen auf silbernen Flügeln durchzogen, und alle Berggipfel, scharf und fest, weit über das Land hin glänzten und blitzten — riss es ihm in der Brust, er stand, keuchend, den Leib vorwärts gebogen, Augen und Mund weit offen, er meinte, er müsse den Sturm in sich ziehen, alles in sich fassen, er dehnte sich aus und lag über der Erde, er wühlte sich in das All hinein, es war eine Lust, die ihm wehe tat; oder er stand still und legte das Haupt ins Moos und schloss die Augen halb, und dann zog es weit von ihm, die Erde wich unter ihm, sie wurde klein wie ein wandelnder Stern und tauchte sich in einen brausenden Strom, der seine klare Flut unter ihm zog.
>
> [Only from time to time, when the storm thrust clouds into the valley, and the mist rose in the forest, when the voices near the rocks awoke, now like thunder subsiding far away, now rushing back toward him, as if in their wild rejoicing they desired to sing the praise of earth, and the clouds like wild neighing horses galloped towards him, and the sunbeams pierced in between and came to draw a flashing sword against the snow-covered plains, so that a bright, dazzling light cut across the summit into the valleys; or when the gale drove the clouds downward and hurled them into a pale-blue lake, and then the wind died down and from the depths of the ravines, from the crests of the pine trees drifted upward, with a humming like that of lullabies and pealing bells, and a soft red hue mingled with the deep azure, and little clouds on silver wings passed across, and everywhere the mountain tops, sharp and solid, shone and glittered for miles — then he felt a strain in his chest, he stood struggling for breath, heaving, his body bent forward, his eyes and mouth wide open; he thought that he must draw the storm into himself, contain it all within him, he stretched himself out and lay on the earth, dug his way into the All, it was an ecstasy that hurt him — he rested and laid his head in the moss and half-closed his eyes, and then it withdrew, away, far away from him, the earth receded from him, became small as a wandering star and dipped down into a roaring stream that moved its clear waters beneath him.][6]

Characterized by pleasurable pain, this sublime is perhaps less Kantian than Burkean, though stripped of Burke's connoisseurial detachment. Sublimity

[5] Ibid., p. 85.

[6] G. Büchner, "Lenz", in *Werke und Briefe* (Munich: DTV, 1975), pp. 65—6. (Given in Michael Hamburger's translation, from *Leonce and Lena, Lenz, Woyzeck* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1972), pp. 37—38.

is apparent in the movement from earth as physical soil to earth as planet (in Büchner's earthy, materialist sublime, the duality of *Erde* replaces that of *Himmel*) — and in the recurrent *weit* (distant). Its overwhelming force is underscored by the repeated *zog* (pulled), the significant last verb: Büchner's praise of earth is predicated on awareness of the speed with which it can be pulled away from under one's feet, like a carpet. Nature's overparticularization strains the whole body, not only the eye: the sentence's speaker ends it as short of breath as Lenz, with whom one is thus compelled to identify. Hardly surprisingly, it is the word "everywhere" that triggers the break in the sentence by returning one to the body and its organs' insufficiency to grasp everything. After such moments, Büchner says, Lenz "remembered nothing"[7]: "the All" generates "nothing". Where the former stands outside the self that self is nothing. The passage is a dress rehearsal for Lenz's final madness.

Büchner's sentence is as remorseless as a camera panning round nature. Indeed, it is arguably the prolepsis of a camera's movement. If Kant's argument that the moment of the senses' exhaustion precedes mental exhilaration in the ability to think a totality beyond the senses involves an almost mystical dialectical leap, it becomes less mystical on recollection that one of the repercussions of Romanticism for nineteenth-century culture is just such a leap from the naked eye that signally fails to ingest everything to the camera eye, which succeeds in so doing. The machine's capacity, however, does not automatically become humanity's, and Kant's leap remains open to accusations of utopian wishful thinking. The camera that keeps running when its holder dies yields no guarantees of an after-life for him. The machine sparks no human capacity to absorb the newly-available image of the once-ungraspable multiplicity of the world. Rather, the sublime previously lodged in nature invades a culture become incommensurable with its creator. (Is this why Kant's analytic of the mathematical sublime speaks also of pyramids and St. Peter's?) Perhaps this is why Alan Singer applies the adjective "ironic" to the sublime of the films of Werner Herzog (works in which Büchner is a key presence): the irony resides in the continued technical mediation of nature's awesomeness. Singer realizes that the alternative to dubbing Herzog's Romanticism ironic is to be ironic about its exhumation of Romantic motifs. But an image's technological mediation does not — pace Singer — entail its control[8]. The camera Michael Snow programmed to track and pan all round a single spot in the *Région Centrale* of Quebec sees as no human would; ducking and weaving, it is a merely mechanical approximation of Lenz. Is it surprising that one of the cinema's founding fathers, Thomas Edison, should have filmed the

[7] Ibid.

[8] A. Singer, "Comprehending Appearances: Herzog's Ironic Sublime", in *The Films of Werner Herzog:Between Mirage and History*, ed. T. Corrigan (New York and London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 183—205.

Frankenstein whose creature relates to this creator (or rather bricoleur) rather as the camera does to its wielder? As Adorno notes in another context, "if the object of experience grows out of proportion to the individual, he no longer really experiences it at all, but registers it directly, in concepts divorced from intuitive knowledge"[9]. Whence the perhaps fatal theoreticism of the mathematical sublime?

Where knowledge of the camera's presence ironizes the sublimity of the images it conveys, the truly sublime seeks refuge in the invisible. It is not until Werner Herzog's career is well-advanced, however, that he devises a scenario corresponding to Alan Singer's argument. In *Schrei aus Stein* [*Scream of Stone*] he ironizes the TV crew's desire to film the ascent of Cerro Torre by interposing a blizzard at the crucial moment. Moreover, the film's final scene privileges the invisible, the unrecorderd, in telling fashion. Having focussed throughout on the rivalry between the seasoned alpinist Roccia and the young indoor sport climber — a rivalry both to scale the Patagonian mountain and to win the woman between them, Katarina — Herzog concludes by showing the older man reaching the summit... where another man's ice-axe is already planted. It belongs to a figure marginalized both by the characters in the film and the film itself — the eccentric Mae West enthusiast who sacrificed four fingers to the peak and who terms it "a scream of stone" (the title's emergence from his mouth is a hint of his later privilege). But if the woman really worth winning was cinema itself, it is an innocent, explicitly sexual cinema — a cinema that is innocent precisely because it does not sublimate sexuality. The final conjunction of Wagner's Liebestod with the image of Mae West suggests a redemption of German tradition through the desublimation of sexuality: the mountain-film so closely associated with Leni Riefenstahl can thus slough off the obloquy of the proto-fascism ascribed to it by Kracauer. The eccentric's climb is invisible, no cameras (TV or film ones) having been present when it occurred: its nonexistence for the media is the source of its authenticity. For Herzog, then, film betrays the sublime by imaging it. His film reacts to the fact that even real danger observed by the camera eye now looks and feels fake, commodified. His move here closely resembles Rivette's in his contemporary *La Belle noiseuse*: only the unseen work resists absorption by the art-world or the media. Both Rivette and seem to recognise that their own works cannot: almost unashamedly mainstream, they feed on a suspense regarding the outcome that was signally absent from their own earlier works. As if aware of their own works' infiltration by inauthenticity (the curse of continued filmmaking with nothing new to say?), they emphasize the inauthenticity in endings that indicate the notional possibility of otherness, a position that must exist even though denied to themselves. The eccentric may be the only double

[9] T.W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: New Left Books, 1974), p. 179.

Herzog consciously embraces, but the TV showman Ivan is his double too. A willingness even to hint at this makes *Schrei aus Stein* unprecedented among Herzog's films.

The modern sublime would thus be that of the invisible. The sublime of the period from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth century was surely located in cinema's widening of the realm of the representable, its institutionalization of the sublime's "experiential structure of alienation"[10]. The theory of the sublime in turn suggests a flash-forward to cinematic experience — the transformation of fearsome nature into aesthetic spectacle anticipating the ambiguity of the cinematic sign's indexical linkage to events. When Schiller writes that sublime objects must be fearsome but not arouse real fear[11], we ought perhaps to think of filmed disaster rather than tragedy (for the tragic hero is not fearsome — if he were, he would be monstrous, and even though Girard speaks of the monstrous double in connection with the tragic hero, the doubling complicates the monstrosity, while in any case Girard's term is controversial and requires lengthier consideration than I am able to give it here)[12]. Fear may not necessarily be tempered by pity, but it is never unalloyed. Only in cinema does the explicitly monstrous become pitiable, precisely because it cannot evoke real fear. King Kong may trample New York theatre patrons, but we are safe. If there is a fundamental fear in play in cinema it is rather fear of what film's technology permits it to do to us. A technological product, film is itself in a sense the industrial sublime (of which more later). The first audiences are said to have ducked at the sight of a train approaching, Eisenstein's kino-fist montage literally punched a hole in the screen when 3-D was introduced, Dolby stereo placed us inside the screen space, and rocking seats accompanied "Earthquake". Godard's fable of the cinema whose tip-up seats precipitate spectators into a lime-pit is little more than what we have grown to expect. Our fear is less of the images the technology mediates than of the technology itself and the institution that compels descent into the dark. Filmed disasters are sublime because they do not endanger us, though documented destruction may be more so than the one people have staged, for it also manifests the true power of nature. (Is this why Werner Herzog works so close to the documentary mode?) In each case, though, film is the bunker that screens us from the blast — though fiction film's insistence that the blast is not "real" thickens the walls. Our fear of a slasher film is less of the clawed monster than of the cutter's knife, which permits him to spring unexpectedly, and the soundtrack, which prevents us feeling at ease. Film may be used contemplatively by certain directors, but the general technological tendency — which becomes a stylistic

[10] Th. Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime...*, p. 36.

[11] F. Schiller, "Vom Erhabenen", in. *Sämtliche Werke*, Fünfter Band (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1967), p. 496.

[12] R. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), pp. 143—168 in particular.

one in the horror film, cinema's special effects cutting edge, from which all genres stem and to which they lead — is towards the maximalization of unease (conscious or not). The vampires habit thought were zombies were merely sleeping out the daylight, playing dead. And the real monster is not the one we can see (for after all to see is in a sense to control) but the cinematic machine itself, whose real threat outdoes that of the merely aesthetic spectacle of the cinematic sublime it serves to deliver. The camera may be at eye-level, but the screen that towers above us enforces the low-angle view of the sublime.

III. The Sublime, the Beautiful and Projection

Consideration of cinema and the sublime leads one almost unavoidably to the word "projection", and with it the question of psychoanalysis. Weiskel accordingly describes the "oedipal configuration" of the sublime as a defense against the emotional ambivalence of "a wish to be inundated and a simultaneous anxiety of annihilation"[13]. This ambivalence is pre-sublime and is characterized by passivity. The nature that manifests itself here seems to be Wordsworth's, which in *The Prelude* employs both "fearless visitings" and "severer ministrations"[14]. Thus apprehended, however, nature is not simply the pre-sublime; described more positively, it may be termed "the-sublime-and-the-beautiful". Kant's distinction between a nature that is beautiful and external and a sublimity whose ground lies in ourselves clearly postdates the infantile fusion of inner and outer. If sublimity's pairing with beauty occurs during an initial passivity, the desire to separate out the sublime marks the crystallization of male identity, an attempt to wrest power from the mother whose stature lends her greater strength than the infant, and leave her only with the beautiful.

This is surely the moment of what Kant terms the "dynamical sublime" of impressive natural force. It mounts a transgressive assault on the sky conceived as heaven, the terror Burke associates with the sublime being projected fear of retribution. Indeed, the imaginative use of nature's power as symbol of one's own prospective power is an identification that furnishes an alibi in the event of the attempt's failure: the artist can claim merely to have reflected what lay without, not to have projected something from within (the interdependence of outer and inner indicates the dialectical interrelationship of Romanticism and realism — a dialectic powerfully embodied in Büchner's *Lenz*). The depth of one's realistic fear of suffering from others what one wishes to do to them is apparent in the Romantic projection of terrifying features onto nature. Think of the famous stolen boat episode in *The Prelude*, for instance. Its placement

[13] Th. Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime...*, p. 105.

[14] W. Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, 1850 version, Book, l. 352—2.

after the ambivalent description of nature alluded to above suggests genetic succession to it. Wordsworth looks at the sky, sees the second peak pursuing him, and returns home. The retreat into the ambivalence of "the-sublime-and-the-beautiful" (the conclusion of this episode, whose presentation beforehand indicates the fusion of circularity and linearity found in the upward spiral) is implicit in the peak's sexual ambivalence as phallic mother, both bad breast and father figure. The twin peaks imply a parental dyad, paternal power unexpectedly aiding the mother. Thus the bid for power may be partly motivated by a sense of the mother's vulnerability (a deduction from knowledge of the father's greater power?) and may occur when she is isolated (it is in such isolation that nature's rape is consummated in "Nutting" — of which more below). Defeat's sting can be softened nevertheless by incorporating the double parent into a nature whose aggrandized presence becomes the sign of its absence: the parent is both acknowledged and subjected to subtle revenge. It is buried in Nature, as God was by the Romantics, the mountains becoming divinity's unmarked headstone. Defeat by a double parent is hardly shameful: force of numbers alone overcame one. This is Romanticism in its resigned, Wordsworthian mode. Here the dynamical sublime is transformed into the mathematical one. Mourned, unaccepted defeat — exhibitionistically Byronic or melancholic and Hölderlinian — issues in images of ruined grandeur and Luciferic fall. Here that which is buried in nature is not a God who pervades it entirely but a Titan localized — imprisoned — in one spot. Etna's eruptions are his fits of rage. Where God is defined as nature's author, the Luciferic version of Romanticism posits a culture that displays and displaces divine infinity. Its primal image is the labyrinth, an interiority without any exterior. The fall of the labyrinth's creator is thus far from surprising. Even in ruin, however, it asserts its negative infinity in the Piranesi building or the circularity of the Tower of Babel. Stricken culture ironically reverts into the nature it opposed, as grass begins to sprout on its marred bricks. Where Wordsworth sublimates the sublime, concealing both the wound to the self and the wounding agency, Byron and Hölderlin display the broken stump, the one accusingly, the other in self-accusation.

Where the mathematical sublime involves a resigned willingness simply to view the sky in the mind's eye, or perhaps in the mirror of the language that totalizes its untotalizable totality by encompassing it in a name, the dynamical sublime reaches for it as a reality. But there is a sense in which the mathematical sublime, far from being resigned, forgoes the effort of seizing power because it already possesses it in the subjectivity of its own imagination: conception of the infinite becomes so pleasurable as to allow one to forget one did not generate it. The satisfaction Kant discovers in this operation is related to the removal from the section in question of the name of the possessor of the infinite — God. The mathematical sublime is that of the subject, not the

incomprehensible object. Although there might be a God here (none is mentioned however) He is at most a First Cause — not the personal divinity of the dynamical sublime, His wrath manifest in the power of "rude nature". God's appearance at one point in nature sheds the abstraction of the All-in-All an renders Him open to challenge: the Romantic poet will wrestle with him, like Jacob. For the mathematical sublime is surely neo-classical, its universe depersonalized; the dynamical, Romantic, its cosmos obsessively personal, and after-image of familial configurations rendered uncanny (*Heim* becoming *unheimlich*) through magnification.

Given the compensatory, reactive structure of the mathematical sublime, Magda's yearning look into the space of fiction in *A Short Film About Love* becomes classifiable as mathematically sublime. Tomek's step into her life, which recalls the peasant's step into the cinema screen her window resembles (whence its improbable uncurtained status), is not truly dynamical however. In his heart of hearts he is really a cinemagoer, and fate's cruelty is the accident that brings him face-to-face with Magda, inserting him into an actuality where he does not know what to do (he says he does not wish to make love to her). But to be content with the mathematical sublime is to accept a passivity Western culture codes as both "feminine" and "artistic". Magda, being both, can live with such categorization. Tomek, being neither, must attempt suicide[15].

IV. The Industrial Sublime

For Schiller, the sublime recalls us to our spiritual nature, and the beautiful to our humanity[16]. Burke meanwhile concedes that "the qualities that constitute beauty may possibly be united to things of greater dimensions", adding that "the sublime suffers less, by being united to some of the qualities of beauty, than beauty does by being joined to greatness of quantity, or any other properties of the sublime"[17], but the dualistic separation of terms is barely ruffled. The incompatability of beauty and greatness foreshadows the little

[15] One might consider here the case of the Austrian novelist Robert Musil, whose interest in androgyny is surely linked to his presentation of the Young Törless as fascinated and excited by the mathematical sublimity of infinite numbers. For a male, however, this is an unnatural choice: Musil's men are "men without qualities" (read "without the phallus"?), and Törless' fascination ends in vertigo. This outcome — like that of Büchner *Lenz* — renders it hard to accept Kant's postulate of an unalloyed "emotional satisfaction" in the mathematical sublime's sinking back into itself (it may also give the lie to Musil's mysticism, infecting it with a debilitating theoreticism). The only unalloyed satisfaction is Kant's own in the replacement of the physical by the metaphysical, the triumph of philosophic abstraction.

[16] F. Schiller, "Über das Erhabene", in *Sämtliche Werke*, Fünfter Band, p. 807.

[17] E. Burke, "A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful", in *On Taste: The Sublime and Beautiful; Reflections on the French Revolution: A Letter to a Noble Lord* (New York: P.F. Collier and Son, 1909), p. 132.

woman and child bride of the nineteenth century. The necessary unity of "the-sublime-and-the-beautiful", transferred now from the terms of psychoanalysis to those of cultural history, is that of a nature deemed both threatening and beautiful. (Kant's monstrous "rude nature" and his purposive "nature"). That unity dissolves in the late eighteenth century, as the industrial revolution renders nature increasingly malleable. The stream's power can be tapped. As Schiller puts it, its relative greatness becomes a mirror to the absolute greatness in man. "Fearlessly" and "with awful joy" he approaches a figure of terror redefined as his own imagination's product[18]. In the next step, sublimity and beauty become homologous with the victimizing male and the distressed maiden in the Gothic castle. The sheer pervasiveness of this dualistic ideology is apparent in its presence even in William Wordsworth, nature's reverencer. When in "Nutting" the young Wordsworth devastates a thicket, it is described in feminine terms. The Romantic fascination by wild and deserted places itself romanticizes — and works hand in glove with — the piling up of slag-heaps by the industrialist it nominally opposes. In the nineteenth century the ambiguity of the concept of the sublime — what Freud might have termed a primal word, for its ambivalence preserves infantile attitudes — is split into such dualities as the mathematical sublime and the dynamical, the natural sublime and that of the City of Dreadful Night, real clouds and the factory's force-fed ones. But the two are complicit nevertheless: once the cloud has left the factory chimney, one cannot distinguish it from the natural ones. Indeed, to the outsider's eye, the factory's primary product is clouds; and the identification of the civilizing process with the hegemony of the eye, as described by Norbert Elias, prevents one ever telling the difference between the natural cloud and the artificial one. They simply melt into one another. Only another, more "primitive" sense — that of smell — can make the distinction. It is smell that tells the inhabitants of Christa Wolf's town in *Der geteilte Himmel* which way the wind is blowing. (For Rita, meanwhile, arguably no wind blows. She is like the cloud that rises up from the town's smokestacks in the novel's first paragraph, lacking the strength to move on; and so her story unfolds retrospectively from her hospital bed). Identification with the industrial sublime is masculinist, forceful: Andrzej Wajda's fascination by it in *Ziemia obiecana* [*The Promised Land*], his film of Reymont's novel about industrial rivalry in turn-of-the-century Łódź, is of a piece with the strain of misogyny in his work and the sub-Marxist idolatry of "the dynamic" apparent here and in the strange Huta Katowice scenes in *Man of Marble*. There is none of Wolf's awareness of industry as both utopian imago and nightmare.

[18] F. Schiller, "Über das Erhabene...", p. 800—1.

V. *Assunta*

A different response to industrialized landscape is found in Cyprian Norwid's mid-nineteenth-century love poem *Assunta, or the Look into the Sky.* Here one finds two figures who look towards the sky: the silent girl Assunta herself, and the poet. In each case it is earth's emptiness or devastation that causes the look upwards, the sublime spectacle of terrestrial destruction generating the sublime look heavenwards. The eighth stanza of the first canto describes how the barreness of a humanly-exploited landscape drives the poet upwards, through a dreamlike alley of cypresses (the suggestion of Romantic inner space is reinforced by the trees' echo of Norwid's own Christian name), to a monastery. The last stanza of the poem contrasts his contemporaries' look around with the poet's look upwards. The upward look of Assunta, the lover who embodies the ideal precisely because her gaze is cast heavenward, is in turn linked to death: the flood that killed her parents (and reminds the gardener of Canto two of the primal deluge), and whose trauma rendered her speechless, moved horizontally. Her gaze is now vertical. Her name is Biblically significant (it may recall the disaster-laden names the prophet Hosea was instructed to bestow upon his children): *Nic-potem* [*Nothing after*]. Poet and girl clearly resemble one another, the former spinning internal monologues he never utters to the world, the latter literally voiceless. She is said to speak with her looks instead (IV, v. 10—11), to have the narrowed lips of the ideal (IV, v. 7). After her disappearance or death (surely the latter, for her prototype, Zofia Węgierska, predeceased Norwid), the speaker himself becomes as it were assimilated to her: reading words he has never heard (IV, 18) and concluding "Pomnąc, że gdzie są bezmowne cierpienia,/Są wniebogłosy... bo są — przemilczenia". Even by Norwidian standards, the final couplet is densely significant. It has been translated "Recalling that when sufferings are unspoken / They shriek aloud... for they are bypassed in silence"[19]. Although catching the literal sense, the translation misses the undertones of *wnieboglosy* and *przemilczenia. Wnieboglosy*, shrieks uttered out loud, may not be a neologism, but the context lends it neologistic force, through the parallelism with the "ja w górę patrzę" ["I look upward"] of the same stanza's second line, and through the reminiscence of the poem's subtitle. The implication is that the look upwards is a speaking look, eloquently imploring. The poet sends up words as Assunta did gazes. *Przemilczenie*, meanwhile, is a key term in Norwid's theory of language, which chides grammarians for their failure to categorize silence as a part of language. His essay *Milczenie* [*Silence*] gives

[19] N. Taylor, "Norwid's feminine ideal: 'Assunta', high point of Polish Romantic love poetry", in *Cyprian Norwid: Poet — Thinker-Craftsman*, ed. B. Mazur and George Gömöri (London: Orbis, 1988), p. 114.

przemilczenie a specific meaning: where every sentence involves a speaking out of something passed over in silence in the previous one, that "passing over" is really a "not-yet-speaking"[20]. (And so Norwid's final distinction between himself and his contemporaries involves a recognition that his own passing over stems from birth before his time: his fame was indeed almost entirely posthumous). In the meantime all the poet can do is look upward, out of the crushingly inhospitable present. "Ideał sięgnął bruku" ["The ideal reached the pavement"]. Norwid remarks of the piano's defenestration in *Fortepian Szopena* [*Chopin's Piano*][21]. That pavement is the starting point of *Assunta*, which speaks of feet treading on the innocent face of its slabs. The downtrodden face in the pavement surely belongs both to Assunta, identified with the ideal, for whom her mistress proposed a degrading marriage, and to the poet himself. Their upward gazes focus on the unattainable. Theirs is the religious look Norwid argues first appeared in art after the Ascension of Christ (a lengthy art-historical footnote to the poem expounds the theory[22]). That gaze strains to follow or find him and awaits the Second Coming, the second sentence — the second life — that will speak the poet passed over by the first one and will give an afterlife to the girl known as "Nothing after". In that utopia — the realm of love — all antinomies of masculine and feminine sublimity dissolve.

[20] C.K. Norwid, "Milczenie", in *Pisma wybrane*, Vol. 4, *Proza*, ed. J. Gomulicki (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1968), pp. 360—362.

[21] C.K. Norwid, *Pisma wybrane*..., Vol. I, *Wiersze*, p. 500.

[22] C.K. Norwid, *Pisma wybrane*..., Vol. 2, *Poematy*, pp. 237—239.

„Czyn najwznioślejszy". Eseje o górności

Streszczenie

Nawet jeśli historia pojęcia wzniosłości stanowi, zdaniem Marka Kulisza, historię pewnej translatorskiej pomyłki w przekładzie greckiego *peri hypsous* na jego łaciński odpowiednik, to, tak czy owak, pojęcie to pozostaje pojęciem intrygującym tak z punktu widzenia estetyki, jak i etyki. Już sama możliwość błędnego wyboru nazwy pojęcia świadczy o jego interpretacyjnej produktywności — jeszcze jeden dowód długu filozofii Zachodu zaciągniętego przy budowie wieży Babel, a odsłoniętego przez Heiddegera jako nieuniknione zniekształcenie logosu uwiązanego do rozumu. Z tego też powodu autorzy już od samego początku rezygnują ze ścisłej definicji pojęcia wzniosłości czy też górności (pierwszy polski przekład dzieła Longinusa dokonany przez Józefa Kowalewskiego w 1922 r. nosi tytuł *O górności*). W zamian dokonują oni kilku interpretacyjnych transformacji, spoglądając na użycie tego pojęcia w dyskursach filozofii, literaturoznawstwa, kulturoznawstwa, estetyki i sztuki.

Pracę tę rozpoczynają dwa eseje na temat Kanta i dokonanej przez niego próby przedstawienia tego co wzniosłe jako spektaklu polegającego na dystansowaniu się od tego co potencjalnie wzniosłe, a czego uwieńczeniem jest pewna ślepota siły wyobraźni, paradoks wyobraźni geometrycznej pozbawionej oparcia w geometrycznych znakach. Stąd też jeszcze jeden oksymoroniczny niejako paradoks możliwości istnienia „geometrii nieregularności" ukryty w rozważaniach Kanta na temat skończoności kategorii, w rozważaniach „ślepej wyobraźni", jak ujmuje to w swym artykule Noel Gray, która jest wyobraźnią zamykającą oczy na to co nieskończone i przekłada je na ideę, na teorię, którą rozum ludzki jest w stanie okiełznać, ukształtować na modłę geometryczną. Echa owej ślepoty słyszymy wyraźnie jeszcze dzisiaj w wielu dziedzinach nauki, w geometrii fraktalnej na przykład, która ma jakoby stanowić teorię tego, co widzimy i czujemy.

W filozofii Kanta mamy więc do czynienia z pewnym skamienieniem nieskończoności i nieregularności, unieruchomieniem tego co wzniosłe celem przyjrzenia mu się „na dystans", z przekładem natury na kamienny monument, do którego nie powinniśmy podchodzić zbyt blisko, gdyż grozi to doświadczeniem utraty monumentalności, utraty możliwości ogarnięcia tak percepcyjnego, jak i emocjonalnego gdyż te, u Kanta, „domagają się regulacji i dyscypliny dystansu" (Liliana Barakońska, Małgorzata Nitka). Miast jednak pozostać w bezpiecznej, regularnie uporządkowanej domenie domu piękna (Kant powiada o pięknie, iż stanowi ono siły pokojowe), Kant wyrusza na wojnę celem uniknięcia zniewieścienia na skutek gnuśnienia w owym pokoju oraz celem ukazania światu dystansującej siły i władzy rozumu w obliczu tego co wzniosłe, które, w Kantowskiej retoryce, staje się niejako wrogiem. Bezpieczną sferą rozważań Kanta jest dom, do którego powróciliśmy po wygranej wojnie.

Zdaniem Jerzego Sobieraja, kłopoty z etyczną oceną wojny z punktu widzenia jej wzniosłości ma także Herman Melville. W swych *Szkicach bitewnych* [*Battle Pieces*] określa on wojnę, podobnie jak Kant, jako niemalże wzniosłą, przeraźliwą tragedię naszych czasów, równocześnie odmawiając jej, tak jak i pojęciu wzniosłości, możliwości kategoryzacji etycznej.

Tym, co łączy, choć niejako negatywnie, filozofię Williama Blake'a z filozofią Nietzschego jest twierdzenie, iż piękno i wzniosłość nie stanowią dwóch odrębnych kategorii. Dla Blake'a wzniosłość nie jest skamieniałą całością, lecz czymś, co nie może istnieć bez Drugiego, Innego, Obcego. „Akt najwznioślejszy to przedkładać drugiego" — powiada Blake. Zdaniem Tadeusza Sławka Blake'owska wzniosłość stanowi zdolność unikania tego co nieforemne poprzez „wzniosłą pracę" (termin Blake'a) wykuwania samego siebie, bez obietnicy ukończenia tej pracy, bez obietnicy ostatetcznej konsolidacji w niezmienną całość. Dla Nietzschego problem wzniosłości stanowi problem kategoryzacji tego pojęcia, które w ujęciu klasycznym jest „zbyt przewidywalne i normatywne". Tak jak u Blake'a, wzniosłość jest u Nietzschego pewnym nadmiarem wobec całości, a więc odrzuceniem marzenia o pełni tożsamości, którego możemy dokonać schodząc, jak Zaratustra, w dół, w stronę tego, co Nietzsche nazywa „widzialnością".

Claire Hobbs dokonuje w swym artykule interpretacji Blake'a i Waltera Benjamina jako „zbieraczy drobiazgów", zbieraczy przysłów i cytatów, które nie stanowią powtórzenia czegoś innego, lecz raczej swoiste reprodukcje zawsze już oznaczające coś innego, coś, co nie przechowując przeszłości, umożliwia nam „użycie" jej w teraźniejszości. „Czyn najwznioślejszy" Blake'a i Benjamina to aktywne działanie zawieszające niejako w próżni bezsilne i bezradne uczucie wzniosłości takich filozofów jak Burke czy Kant. Blake i Benjamin, zdaniem autorki, przełamują transcendentalny charakter wzniosłości, której estetyzacja w wieku osiemnastym była krokiem w stronę „estetyzacji polityki zubożenia" charakteryzującej ideologię faszystowską.

Pojęcie „zbieractwa" dominuje w artykule Zbigniewa Białasa, który niejako na odwrót, czy też nawet w sposób parodystyczny, interpretuje „umoralnione" pojęcie wzniosłego ogromu. Wzniosłość zostaje w iście postmodernistyczny sposób odczytana jako pojęcie, w którym nadmiar przedmiotów estetycznych, zbytnie ich nagromadzenie, staje się mechanizmem tworzenia kiczu na gruncie estetycznym, a erotyczną obsesją (jako nadmiar pożądania) na gruncie etycznym.

Poświęcony wzniosłości w sztuce filmowej artykuł Paula Coatesa określa wzniosłość — słowami Thomasa Weiskela — jako: „Edypalną obronę przed ambiwalencją pragnienia samozniszczenia i równoczesnej obawy przed zagładą." Centralne dla teorii Kanta rozdzielenie tego co piękne od tego co wzniosłe stanowi, zdaniem autora, o możliwości (psychoanalitycznej) wyłonienia się tożsamości mężczyzny wyzwolonej spod dominacji matki.

Rozważania Kanta nad wzniosłością stanowią teoretyczny punkt wyjścia rozważań J.-F. Lyotarda nad postmodernizmem. Wzniosłość, jak to co „nieprzedstawialne", nie mogło stanowić przedmiotu poważnych dociekań Kanta, którego zainteresowania koncentrowały się raczej wokół tego, co można określić pewnym zbiorem reguł (jako zbiór reguł określił on także naturę). Postmodernizm stanowi, zdaniem Lyotarda, paradoksalną próbę epistemologicznej eksploracji tego, do czego epistemologia raczej się nie stosuje, czyli „nieprzedstawialnego" właśnie. Artykuł Tadeusza Rachwała poszukuje takich postmodernistycznych prób w tekstach tak z pozoru różnych gatunków jak „horrory" Lovecrafta czy pisma francuskiej feministki Helene Cixous.

U podłoża teoretycznych rozważań o kategorii wzniosłości leży problem transformacji sfery ludzkiego doświadczenia i percepcji na język dostępny osądom intelektualnym. Artykuł Emanuela Prowera analizuje związek pomiędzy „tym, co jest" a „tym, co zostało przedstawione" na podstawie kategorii Pierwszego (Firstness) zaczerpniętą z semiotycznych rozważań C. S. Peirce'a. To, co wzniosłe stanowi o możliwości interpretacji tego, co na pozór wymyka się interpretacji ze względu na brak semiotycznego medium, ze względu na brak zapośredniczenia, i jawi się nam na zasadzie bezpośredniości, działając w sposób podobny do „czystej formy" propagowanej przez Witkacego, której związek z pojęciem wzniosłości analizuje w swym artykule Marta Zając.

Artykuł Andrzeja Wichra poświęcony jest średniowiecznej podejrzliwości wobec tego co wzniosłe. Na podstawie *Wizji Piotra Oracza* [*Piers Plowman*] Langlanda autor stwierdza, iż źródłem tej podejrzliwości była tęsknota za nieskończonością i nieśmiertelnością, która w swych przejawach mogła jednak zawsze zostać posądzona o to, iż pochodzi od Szatana. Stąd też konieczność wyraźnego rozdzielenia wzniosłości prawdziwej i fałszywej; rozdzielenie to było niezwykle istotne jako decydujące o przyszłym zbawieniu lub potępieniu.

Próby teoretycznego ujęcia wzniosłości na gruncie estetycznym w osiemnastym i dziewiętnastym stuleciu znajdują swe odzwierciedlenie w piśmiennictwie skupiającym się na kwestiach krajobrazu oraz, ogólniej, „malarskości"; tematyka ta jest zauważalna także w tradycji gotyckiej i romantycznej, gdzie kategoria wzniosłości odgrywała bardzo istotną rolę. David Jarrett zastanawia się w swym artykule nad powodami niemalże zupełnego odrzucenia tego pojęcia w drugiej połowie dziewiętnastego wieku (na przykładzie powieści detektywistycznej) w kontekście ekspansji kolonialnej Wielkiej Brytanii.

Tadeusz Rachwał i Tadeusz Sławek

„L'acte le plus élevé". Les essais de la sublimité

Résumé

Même si l'histoire de la notion de sublimité est, selon Marek Kulisz, l'histoire d'une faute dans la traduction de l'expression grecque *peri hypsous* en latin, néanmoins, cette expression demeure attrayante, que ce soit du point de vue de l'esthétique ou de l'éthique. La possibilité même d'un choix erronné du nom de cette notion constitue une preuve de sa fécondité d'interprétations possibles — encore une dette de la philosophie de l'Occident contractée à l'occasion de la construction de la tour de Babel, qui fut découverte par Heidegger en tant que déformation inéluctable du logos attaché à la raison. C'est pourquoi, dès le début, les auteurs abandonnent la définition précise de la notion de l'élevé ou bien du sublime (la première traduction polonaise de l'oeuvre de Longinus élaborée par Józef Kowalewski en 1922 est intitulée *De la sublimité*). En échange, ils effectuent quelques transformations d'interprétation, en tenant compte de l'emploi de ce terme dans les discours philosophiquess, les sciences littéraires, les sciences de civilisation, l'esthetique et l'art.

Ce travail commence par deux essais au sujet de Kant et de sa tentative de présentation du sublime en tant que spectacle qui consiste à prendre des distances de ce qui pourrait être sublime et dont le couronnement est un certain aveuglement de la puissance de l'imagination, le paradoxe de l'imagination géometrique, dépourvu de ses fondements dans les signes géometriques. De là, donc, encore un paradoxe, contradictoire en quelque sorte, concernant la posibilité de l'existence de la „géométrie de l'irrégularité", caché dans les réflexions de Kant au sujet du fini de catégorie, dans les réflexions de „l'imagination aveugle", comme le précise Noël Gray dans son article, qui est une imagination fermant les yeux sur tout ce qui est infini et les transpose en une idée, une théorie que la raison humaine peut dompter, former sous une forme géometrique. Les échos de cet aveuglement sont visibles encore aujourd'hui dans plusieurs domaines de science, dans la géométrie fractale par exemple, qui doit, pour ainsi dire, constituer une théorie de ce que noûs percevons et sentons.

Dans la philosophie de Kant, nous avons donc affaire à une certaine pétrification de l'infini et de l'irrégulier, l'immobilisation de ce qui est sublime afin de pouvoir le regarder „à distance", la transformation de la nature en un monument de pierre, dont nous ne devrions pas nous approcher de trop afin de ne pas subir la perte de son caractère monumental, la perte de la possibilité de conception aussi bien perceptive qu'émotionnelle car celles-ci, chez Kant, „exigent une régulation et une discipline de distance" (Liliana Barakońska, Małgorzata Nitka). Pourtant, au lieu de rester dans un domaine prudent, régulièrement ordonné de la maison de beauté (Kant, en parlant de la beauté, constate qu'elle constitue les forces de paix), Kant part à la guerre, dans le but d'éviter

l'efféminations à cause de la fainéantise dans ce paix et dans le but de montrer au monde cette force qui distance et le pouvoir de la raison devant tout ce qui est sublime, ce qui, dans la rhétorique de Kant devient en quelque sorte l'ennemi. La sphère prudente de la réflexion de Kant demeure la maison, à laquelle nous sommes revenus après une guerre gagnée.

Selon Jerzy Sobieraj, les problèmes liés au jugement éthique de la guerre, du point de vue de sa sublimité apparaissent également chez Herman Melville. Dans ses *Esquisses d'une bataille* [*Battle Pieces*] il décrit la guerre, à la façon de Kant, comme une tragédie de notre temps, terrifiante, sublime presque, en lui refusant à la fois, ainsi qu'à la notion de la sublimité, la possibilité de catégorisation éthique.

Ce qui lie, même si c'est négatif en quelque sorte, la philosophie de William Blake et celle de Nietzsche est la constatation que la beauté et la sublimité ne font pas deux catégories à part. Pour Blake, la sublimité n'est pas un ensemble pétrifié mais quelque chose qui ne peut exister sans le Second, l'Autre, l'Etranger. „L'acte le plus sublime est de préférer l'autre" — dit Blake. D'après Tadeusz Sławek, la sublimité de Blake est la capacité d'éviter ce qui est irrégulier, à travers un travail sublime (terme de Blake) sculpter soi même, sans promesse de terminer ce travail, sans promesse de consolider le tout en un ensemble inchangeable. Pour Nietzsche, le problème de la sublimité c'est un problème de catégorisation de cette notion, qui dans une démarche classique est „trop prévisible et normative". Chez Nietzsche, comme chez Blake, la sublimité est est un certain excès vis-a-vis de l'ensemble, alors un rejet du rêve de la pleine identité, que nous pouvons exécuter en descendant, comme Zarathoustra, en bas, vers ce que Nietzsche appelle „la visibilité".

Dans son article, Claire Hobbs fait l'interprétation de Blake et de Walter Benjamin en tant que „chercheurs de détails", chercheurs de proverbes et citations qui ne sont pas une répetition d'autre chose mais plutôt de certaines reproductions qui toujours [illegible]ent déjà une autre chose, quelque chose, qui sans conserver le passé, nous rend possible „son emploi" dans le présent. „L'acte le plus sublime" de Blake et de Benjamin, c'est une démarche active qui suspend, en quelque sorte, le sentiment perplexe et impuissant de la sublimité des philosophes comme Burke out Kant. Blake et Benjamin, à son avis, brisent le caractère transcedental de la sublimité, dont l'esthétisation au XVIII-e siècle était un pas vers „l'esthétisation de la politique de l'appauvrissement", qui caractérisait l'idéologie fasciste.

La notion du „ramassage" domine dans l'article de Zbigniew Białas, qui pour ainsi dire, au contraire, ou même d'une manière parodique, interprète la notion „moralisante" de la grandeur élevée. La sublimité est perçue, à la façon des postmodernistes, comme une notion où l'excès des objets esthétiques, leur surabondance, devient un mécanisme de la création du kitch dans le domaine esthétique et une obssession érotique (comme l'excès du désir) dans le domaine de l'éthique.

L'article de Paul Coates, consacré à la sublimité dans l'art du cinéma, détermine la sublimité — en empruntant la parole à Thomas Weiskel comme: „une défense oedipienne devant une ambivalence du désir de l'autodestruction et en même temps de la crainte de l'anéantissement". Le partage central, dans la théorie de Kant, de ce qui est beau et ce qui est sublime constitue, selon l'auteur, une possibilité (psychanalytique) de l'apparition de l'identité masculine, libérée de la domination maternelle.

Les réflexions de Kant au sujet de la sublimité constituent un point de départ théoretique de la réflexion au sujet du postmodernisme de J.-F. Lyotard. La sublimité comme „quelque chose de non-présentable", ne pouvait pas constituer un sujet d'une réflexion sérieuse de Kant, dont les intérêts étaient concentrés plutôt autor de ce que l'on peut définir par un ensemble de règles (il définit également la nature comme un ensemble de règles). Le postmodernisme constitue, selon Lyotard, une ternative paradoxale de l'exploration épistémologique du champ où, habituelement, l'épistémologie ne s'applique pas, donc justement du „non-présentable". L'article de Tadeusz Rachwał est une recherche de telles tentatives postmodernistes dans les textes qui, apparemment, appartiennent aux genres différents comme les „horreurs" de Lovecraft ou les écrits d'une féministe française Hélène Cixous.

Au fond de ces réflexions théoretiques sur la catégorie de la sublimité se trouve un problème de la transformation de la zone de l'expérience humaine et de la perception en une langue accessible aux jugements intellectuels. L'article d'Emanuel Prower analyse une relation entre „ce qu'il y a" et „ce qui a été présenté", à base de la catégorie du Premier (Firstness), empruntée à la réflexion sémiotique de C.S. Peirce. Ce qui est sublime rend possible l'interprétation de ce qui, apparemment, s'échappe à l'interprétation faute d'un médium sémiotique, d'un intermédiaire, par la voie directe, en intervenant à la façon qui ressemble à la „forme pure", propagée par Witkacy, dont la relation avec la notion de la sublimité analyse Marta Zając dans son article.

L'article d'Andrzej Wicher est consacré à la méfiance du Moyen Age pour tout ce qui a le caractère sublime. Dans sa réflexion sur la *Vision de Pierre le Laboureur* [*Piers Plowman*] de Langland, l'auteur constate que la source de cette méfiance était la nostalgie de l'infini et de l'immortel, qui dans ses symptômes pouvait toujours être soupçonnée de provenir du Satan. De là donc, la nécessité de séparer la vraie sublimité et la fausse sublimité, cette distinction était très importante pour le futur salut ou la damnation.

Les essais théorétiques de la détermination de la sublimité à base de l'esthétique aux XVIII-e et XIX-e siècles se reflètent dans les écrits concentrés sur les questions de paysage et, d'une façon plus générale, sur le „pittoresque", ce sujet est également visible dans les traditions gothique et romantique, où la catégorie de la sublimité jouait un rôle très important. Dans son article, David Jarrett réfléchit quelles étaient les raisons du rejet, quasi total, de cette notion dans la seconde moitié du XIX-e siècle (en prenant comme exemple le roman détectiviste dans le contexte de l'expansion coloniale de la Grande Bretagne).

Tadeusz Rachwał et Tadeusz Sławek

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