The Power of Reason and Imagination in Kant, Emerson and the Romantic Sublime

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In 1764, Immanuel Kant made an attempt to record his description of mental states in *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime,* following the Burkean distinction between the beautiful (which "charms" and arouses joy) and the sublime (which "moves" and arouses awe and admiration).[1] He sees the sublime as great and simple, while the beautiful can be small, ornamented and ephemeral. Dealing with human feelings and conduct, the study discusses three kinds of the sublime: the noble, the splendid, and the terrifying. In Kant's concept of the noble, the sublime "emerges as an important moral component of the person,"[2] being linked, in fact, to the idea of categorical imperative. "True virtue" is "sublime" as it is based on general, universal principles: "Only when one subordinates his one inclination to one so expended can our charitable impulses be used proportionately and bring about the noble bearing that is the beauty of virtue."[3]

As John T. Goldthwait points out, in asserting the correspondence between beauty and virtue, and in connecting the sublime with the dignity of human nature, Kant "joins together aesthetics and ethics" (29). In contrast to Shaftsbury, who, in assigning sublimity (and the highest virtue) to the deity (the Creator), describes sublimity as "unattainable for man," Kant suggests that it is "man himself" who "exhibits the sublime" (Goldthwait 25). In this respect, the "dignity of human nature unifies all mankind," representing the "unity beneath the great diversity," and becomes the ground of the idea that "man himself is sublime" (Goldthwait 25).

In Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790), the concern with the moral and aesthetic aspects of the sublime is grounded less on the principles of conduct than on the nature of reason. Moreover, attention is given to the feelings of fear and pain as important components of the sublime experience. In contrast to Burke's emphasis on powerlessness, the Kantian fear is "outweighed by pleasure that the soul takes in the discovery of the extent of its own powers" (Goldthwait 34). As

[1] Kant, Immanuel, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, transl. by John T. Goldthwait, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2003, 47.

[2] Goldthwait, John T., "Translator's Introduction," *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, 18.

[3] Kant, Immanuel, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, 60.

John T. Goldthwait observes, Kant develops his concept of the terrifying sublime to associate it with the sublime itself. Unlike the Burkean sublime, dependent on senses (it may be observed and felt), the Kantian sublime arises from mental activity: it is "not to be looked for in the things of nature, but only in our own ideas."[4] In connecting the feeling of sublimity with the human ability to represent the sublime in objects, Kant, in fact, supports the ethical dimension of the aesthetic experience of the sublime.

Like Burke's treatise, Kant's analysis of the sublime focuses on the limits of the human experience. Burke, however, refers to the limited (or trapped[5]) physicality of man. Kant reformulates this idea to suggest that sublimity raises us beyond these limits towards spiritual greatness. At the same time, it is the concern with the limits that leads Kant to confirm the difference between the sublime and the beautiful. While the beautiful "consists in limitation" and is derived from the form of an object, the sublime involves and provokes a "representation of *limitlessness.*"[6] In this respect, it defies our "power of judgment," as well as our "faculty of presentation" (Kant §23, 76). As a result, it enlarges our "conceptualizing capacity," which can range "beyond the limitations of our sensible finite nature."[7]

In particular, Kant distinguishes between two forms of the sublime: the mathematical, connected with the faculty of cognition and the experience of vastness, and the dynamical (an "attunement of the imagination"), linked to the faculty of desire and the experience of power (Kant §24, 78). In discussing the mathematical sublime, Kant defines the sublime as something which is "*absolutely*" (i.e. "*beyond all comparison*") great,[8] which arouses a notion of infinity, and which can be experienced due to the "faculty of mind transcending every standard of the senses" (Kant §25, 81). The analysis of the dynamical sublime draws on man's confrontation with higher forces (religious awe, the power of nature, various forms of external violence and threats of destruction), and on the insignificance of his relation to them. As Paul Crowther points out, the "knowledge of our sensible limitations" (and the psychological state of displeasure or privation), which enables us to recognize the object as overwhelming, is "ingrained in us from childhood" (150).

In Kant's interpretation, however, it is the recognition of helplessness that becomes a presupposition of greatness: the emphasis is put on the unhumiliated

[4] Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Judgment*, §25, transl. J.C. Meredith, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 78.

[5] Slocombe, Will, *Nihilism and the Sublime Postmodern*, London & New York: Routledge, 2006, 41.

[6] Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Judgment*, §23, 75. Italics in the original text.

[7] Crowther, Paul, *The Kantian Sublime. From Morality to Art*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991, 147.

[8] Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Judgment*, §25, 78. Italics in the original text.

humanity during the encounter with higher forces, on the possibility of a spiritual transcendence at the moments of powerlessness, on the concept of adversity as a test of virtue. As mentioned above, the inclusion of the moral meaning in the experience of the sublime is closely connected with Kant's concept of imagination. While Burke suggests that terror experienced from a position of safety is mingled with delight brought about by the feeling of relief, Kant, referring to the same position of safety, implies our ability to "imagine ourselves as morally resistant even in the face of destruction" (Crowther 148). Moreover, he continues to connect this resistance with a real menace and to describe the state of mind that is "above the threats of danger" (Kant §28, 93), above the reality of human finitude and physical limitation.

As it is implied in the *Critique of Judgment*, it is the faculty of imagination that produces the unimaginable, which is, for Kant, just another term for the sublime. In other words, it is the recognition of the limits that may inspire the idea of the unlimited. In attaining its maximum and sinking back into itself, imagination, paradoxically, "gains in losing."[9] Paul Crowther speaks about the intensity of this experience and points out that "we feel […] to be both imprisoned and liberated by the very same force" (150). In this respect, Kant modifies Burke's view of pleasure and pain as different and separated kinds of experience. In Kantian play of imagination and reason, there is a mutual dependence of the two emotions: the feeling of momentary checking of the vital powers initiates a "consequent stronger outflow of them"[10] and results in what J.-F. Lyotard describes as an "increase of being."[11]

For an artist, imagination, as a "productive faculty of cognition," is a powerful agent in the process of creation: it can re-model experience in producing the image which can surpass nature (Kant §49, 143). The art of a poet (i.e. his talent of imagination) allows him to give the "sensible form to the invisible" (the ideas of love and death, heaven and hell), to transgress "the limits of experience" in presenting things that "lie beyond the confines" of this experience with the "completeness of which nature affords no parallel" (143). In this respect, the poet, through metaphors, creates a bridge between the visible and the invisible, the finite

[9] Antal, Éva, *Beyond Rhetoric. Rhetorical Figures of Reading*, Eger: Líceum Kiadó, 2009, 36. Éva Antal uses these words to comment on the following passage from Derrida's analysis of Kant in "Parergon," *The Truth in Painting*: "The imagination […] by this violent renunciation […] gains in extension (*Erweiterung*) and in power (*Macht*)."

[10] Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Judgment*, §23, transl. J.H. Bernard, London: Macmillan, 1914, 102. This time I prefer quoting from Bernard's translation here.

[11] Lyotard, J.-F., *The Postmodern Condition*, transl. Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, 75.

and the infinite, the beautiful and the sublime. Sublimity, in the words of Kant, "does not reside in any of the things of nature, but only in our own mind." Due to this fact, we can realize "our superiority over nature within," as well as "over nature without us" (Kant §28, 94). By moral will, man can be freed from passions and desires, he can elevate himself above his natural impulses (e.g. the feeling of fear). As Kant puts it, it is through the sublime that nature within man (and around man) can be defeated by the supremacy of reason. And it is the transcendence of nature through moral law that is the "sole legitimate end of human life."[12]

For John Zammito, the sublime is the aesthetic experience which par excellence symbolizes the "moral dimension of human existence."[13] In Crowther's words, it promotes our existence as moral beings. Paul Crowther further discusses "the potential to comprehend things which far exceed sensible capacities" as a faculty common to all men, involving "a spark of the divine" and inviting "our sense of respect" for every individual person, which is, for him, a crucial aspect of morality. In this respect he finds Kant's main contribution to the development of the theory of the sublime in his ability to see that "the aesthetic experience – and the sublime in particular – has the capacity to humanize" (Crowther 174).

The description of human nature in terms of tension between the natural and the divine as two powerful and opposite forces that can be brought into certain harmony by the faculty of imagination can be found in Chris L. Firestone's analysis of Kant and his concept of the "original image" as an ideal that cannot be reached within the range of possible experience.[14] The concept of this transcendental ideal is linked to the idea of the divine being, a personification of the moral law, a guide and a challenge, which, however, can be only approximated in the effort to overcome the natural limits of human condition. In Paul Crowther's study, this effort is connected with the artists' ability to transform the world through the creation of the original image (158).

[12] Slocombe, Will, *Nihilism and the Sublime Postmodern*, London & New York: Routledge, 2006, 41.

[13] Zammito, John, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, 279.

[14] Firestone, Chris L., *Kant and Theology at the Boundaries of Reason*, Farnham, Barlington: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009, 30-31.

The Kantian idea of the sublime as a bridge joining man (with his desire for transcendence) and nature is developed and modified in the Romantic concept of sublimity. Philip Shaw points out the role of the German Idealist tradition, in particular, of Friedrich Schiller and F.W.J. von Schelling, in the endeavour to overcome the split between ideas and nature, and between the extremes of rationalism and empiricism. For Schelling, the medium through which mind is reunited with nature, and the sensible with the transcendental, can be discovered in art: A great work of art raises "the invisible curtain that separates the real from the ideal world," and to the artist, nature is "merely the imperfect reflection of a world that exists not outside but within him."[15] In this respect, poetry, by its synthesizing power of imagination, can harmonise "the disparate realms of idea and reality, mind and world" (Shaw 92). Responding to Kant's emphasis on the unimaginable, the Romantic poetry "seeks to bring the supersensible back to the realm of sensuous presentation," allowing us, in this way, to "comprehend the sublime" (Shaw 92).

In British Romanticism, the influence of Schelling's revision of Kant is echoed, for example, in the works of William Blake, S.T. Coleridge, William Wordsworth, P.B. Shelley and John Keats, requesting the primacy of imagination. Coleridge, in particular, mentions his being indebted to Kant in *Biographia Literaria* (1817). Considering the role of imagination, however, he tries to overcome the Kantian dualism by suggesting that the unity of mind and world can be not only intuited but also conceived. In Coleridge's view, imagination is a "repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation," (Shaw 93) and is closely related to his theory of the symbol. It is through the symbolic presentation that the distinctions between words and things, subject and object, self and other, man and God may be dissolved. Linked to Coleridge's concept of (Christian) divinity, the symbol is a "literal embodiment" (Shaw 94) of the divine word.

Like Kant, Coleridge distinguishes between the sublime, which is without shape or form, and the beautiful, pointing out, moreover, the specific role of poetry: "Nothing that has a shape can be sublime except by metaphor."[16] In particular, Coleridge refers to the famous example of a circle, which is "a beautiful figure in itself" and which "becomes sublime" when it inspires a contemplation of eternity. In other words, a sensuous object cannot be sublime "in itself," it can evoke the sublime only as a "symbol of some Idea" (Shaw 95). From this point of view, poetry is more sublime than painting as the notion of sublimity arises from the limits of language, i.e. the inability of language to "incarnate meaning in a single

[15] Schelling, F.W.J.,von, as quoted by Philip Shaw, in *The Sublime*, New York: Routledge, 2007, 91-92.
[16] Coleridge, S.T., as quoted by Philip Shaw, in *The Sublime*, 95.

image" (Shaw 98). As Philips Shaw observes, it is only Coleridge's sense of the divine (and the concept of the sublime as a mode of elevation) that distinguishes him from the poststructuralist theories.

According to J.B. Twitchell, whose study *Romantic Horizons* searches for the correspondence between particular Romantic paintings and poems (Blake, Wordsworth and Wright, Coleridge and Turner, Byron and Martin, Keats and Cozens, Shelley and Constable), the Romantic sublime draws on the spatial images and on the line of horizon. He offers an example of a pastoral scene: what can be seen "between the middle ground and the background" can be picturesque, and what can be seen "between the background and the beyond" is the sublime.[17] As "nature up too close" (Twitchell 8) may confine the self, the Romantic attention is fixed at the vastness of the sky and the expanses of the sea, in particular, at the boundary where earth and sky meet, the boundary that points to what lies beyond, inviting and allowing the extension of the self. Thus the distance between the "outer" and the "beyond" reflects a gap between the "inner" and the "outer," man and nature, the subject and the object; the loss of the unity that cannot be resolved but through the mediation of the sublime. As Twitchell points out, the "whole logic" of the (Romantic) sublime is "based on an attempt to join what Locke had rent asunder – to join subject and object, if only for a moment" (40).

Will Slocombe's discussion implies a connection between this separation and the repeated use of abysmal imagery in Romantic poetry to suggest that it is the notion of absence that characterises the threshold experience in the Romantic sublime (Slocombe 47). As Slocombe observes, the feelings of emptiness, solitude and loss are pointed out in Weiskel's linguistic analysis of the sublime: the sublime can be felt at "that moment when the relation between the signifier and signified breaks down and is replaced by an indeterminate relation."[18] For Weiskel, the failure of representation (or, "the disruption of the discourse") may result from an excess of either "the signifier"/"the object" (Kant's mathematical sublime), or "the signified"/"the mind" (the abysmal imagery). The object of fear (e.g. death) may be displaced or projected, for example, into an image of an empty landscape (Weiskel 26-27).

[17] Twitchell, J.B., *Romantic Horizons*, Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1983, 8.

[18] Weiskel, Thomas, *The Romantic Sublime*, Foreword, ix., Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.

Accordingly, the critics dealing with the history of the sublime (for instance, Slocombe) develop the idea that the language of sublimity is concerned with what is beyond words, with the inexplicable, the inexpressible and the unspeakable. In this respect, the "absence of a signified itself assumes the status of a signifier" as it makes absence (i.e. indeterminacy) significant.[19] Paul H. Fry connects this uncertainty with the transformation of the divine into otherness, with the widening gap between self-understanding and the understanding of another.[20]

For Weiskel, a characteristic example of the Romantic sublime (i.e. the experience of perceiving all things as an extension of the self, when the excess of the signified is displaced into a spatial or temporal dimension) can be found in William Wordsworth's sublimity of nature;[21] Weiskel also uses such alternative terms as the egotistical,[22] the positive, or the metonymical sublime. As Adam Pathay observes, Weiskel finds the psychoanalytical equivalent of the Romantic sublime in "primary narcissism."[23] In contrast, Kant's sublime is considered by Weiskel as metaphorical, or negative sublime: it results in the individual losing his unique self, either in reason (the mathematical sublime) or in "attempted empathy with an external object," for instance, in Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" (Pathay 208).

Thomas Weiskel, in his dealing with the psychology of the sublime, refers to identity as an "inverse function of desire" and emphasizes the interrelationship of desire and memory (148, 154). Drawing on Freud's study *The Problem of Anxiety* (1926) and explaining the child's fear of separation, he states that the original anxiety linked by him to the negative sublime springs from the notion of absence, which is, in other words, a "lack of being," urging "the ego to overflow towards objects" (Weiskel 160). When the attachment to objects "exceeds a certain degree," the state of dependence may result in illness or madness; Edmund Burke's idea of "the mind that is so entirely filled with its object that it cannot entertain any other"[24] can be remembered here. On the other hand, the importance of objects consists in their offering the possibility of transcendence through an act of imagination.

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[19] Weiskel 28. In Weiskel, this idea is referred to Kant's regarding "unattainability" as "presentation." In Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, for example, it is this absence that dramatizes the relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff.

[20] Fry, Paul H., "The Possession of the Sublime, *Studies in Romanticism*, 26.2 (1987), 191.

[21] See Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime*, 136-64.

[22] This term was used by John Keats in 1818 as an interpretation of Wordsworth's poetry.

[23] Pathay, Adam, "The British Romantic Sublime," in *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Timothy M. Costelloe, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, 208.

[24] Burke, Edmund, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, ed. Adam Phillips, Oxford: OUP, 1998, 53.

As David Simpson shows, the traditional signatures of excess, overdetermination, and threatened loss of self-identity appear in Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, in particular, in Freud's distinction between the conscious and the unconscious, and in his definition of the unconscious as alien.[25] Philip Shaw observes a connection between the discourse of psychoanalysis and Kant's interest in the transcendence of desire (85). The freedom of the individual, paradoxically, depends on his willingness to submit to a higher authority (the faculty of reason), and, accordingly, individual desires should submit to the categorical imperative. This ethics of disinterest, however, may lead to the devaluation of desire into the point of indifference (Shaw 85-86).

According to Thomas Weiskel, the drama of the sublime is a "direct inheritance from the Oedipus-complex" (93). In particular, Weiskel emphasizes the confrontation with the father-principle (or with its absence) in a passage towards or away from self-identity.[26] As he observes, it is the liminal phase of the passage (the moment of crossing the threshold into the realm of the supersensible, in other words, the moment of encounter with the father-principle) that is filled with terror accompanying the "suppression of the narcissistic self-consciousness associated with perception" (Weiskel 201). The Kantian imagination, in this respect, functions as a rejection of the Oedipus complex.[27]

The Gothic fiction, on the one hand, repeatedly deals with the (Burkean) absence of paternal authority as privation (the death of parents) or as an extreme example of destructive power (the monster father figures), which both complicates and urges the search for identity (the motifs of disguises, the unknown or uncertain origins, an increase of vulnerability in danger), and which is later developed and dramatised in children's and young-adult fantasy. From another point of view, the perverted father-like characters (the Gothic villains) acquire significant demoniac attributes. It was the Byronic hero, however, who (as James Kirwan puts it) "made the sublimity of Satan available to all."[28] In Weiskel's analysis, the absent centre of the self is, in fact, related to the "pattern of overidentification," which is, according

[25] Simpson, David, "Commentary: Updating the Sublime," *Studies in Romanticism*, 26.2 (1987), 246.

[26] Weiskel 164. Drawing on Weiskel's study, Will Slocombe characterises nihilism as a response to the rejection or absence of the authority which may be related to the discussed father-principle; the rejection which is repeatedly echoed in the Romantic poetry.

[27] Weiskel 203. As Weiskel observes, this rejection may be only illusory as it does not mean the disappearance or the dissolution of the Oedipus principle.

[28] Kirwan, James, *Sublimity: The Non-Rational and the Irrational in the History of Aesthetics*, New York and London: Routledge, 2005, 120.

to him, the "psychological source of the daemonic"[29] in Romanticism. Or, as Paul H. Fry puts it, "what we once feared we now are" (196).

Referring to Longinus's reciprocity of possession (the overwhelming power of the speaker results in the listener's illusory internalisation of what he has heard, as if he had produced it himself), Fry discusses the anxiety of influence[30] as an important force that leads the self to seek and assert its origin, i.e., which "makes the self the daemon"[31] (or, an absolute self[32]). An example of a vampire motif is employed to suggest that to repress a daemon the self may take over his role. Considering the Romantic sublimity as a problem of power, James Kirwan, together with Martin Procházka, comes to a conclusion that whatever can threaten to overwhelm, from God to Satan, "can precipitate the sublime" (Kirwan 165).

As James Kirwan observes, it is the notion of power that permeates the idea of greatness in the 19th-century American philosophy of the sublime. In the work of R.W. Emerson, a specific concept of the moral sublime is developed, which is, in a way, connected with the religious tradition of New England. For Emerson (as well as for his followers, Thoreau or Whitman), it is the soul (the self) that is sublime, while the sublimity of landscape[33] is its "appropriate reflection."[34] American transcendentalism, echoing the ideas of Kant, Wordsworth and Coleridge, draws on "the emotion of the sublime" in "an influx of the Divine mind into our mind,"[35] in the feeling of "enthusiasm" accompanying the spiritual state of "awakening" (Emerson 915).

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[29] Weiskel 99. At the beginning of his study, Weiskel refers to Schiller's description of Kant's sublime, in particular, of "reason's disclosure of capacities beyond the understanding's horizon," which has the character of a "pure daemon" (*The Romantic Sublime*, 3).

[30] The term refers to Harold Bloom's study *The Anxiety of Influence*: *A Theory of Poetry* (1973).

[31] Fry, 196-97. Cf. also Thomas Weiskel's treatment of ambition as a desire for originality, i.e. the desire to escape imitation through identification with the object, e.g. nature or a text (*The Romantic Sublime*, 99). Moreover, Weiskel observes that in Burke's *Enquiry* it is a section on "ambition" (following a section on "imitation") where Burke's only reference to Longinus (in particular, Longinus's concern with identification between the speaker and the listener) appears.

[32] The term is used in Will Slocombe's *Nihilism and the Sublime Postmodern*, 47.

[33] Kirwan 128. Kirwan quotes Emerson's reference to the "sublime geography" of the continent, or Montague's depiction of the "magnificent" landscape, leading her to the conclusion that "sublimity is the characteristic of this western world" (*Sublimity*, 128).

[34] Cf. Emerson's description of nature as a "symbol of spirit" ("Nature," in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, Vol.1, New York, London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1979, 911).

[35] Emerson, Ralph Waldo, "The Over-Soul," in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, Vol.1, New York, London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1979, 973-84.

In particular reminiscence to 18th-century Puritanism (Jonathan Edwards and the movement of the Great Awakening as a religious response to the rational spirit of the Enlightenment), Emerson frequently uses the term awakening to describe the emotional and intuitional perception of reality; he points out, however, the individual recognition of one's (instead of God's) "higher powers." In his famous essay "Nature" (1836), the moments of such "delicious awakenings" are considered the best moments in life: the moments of "depth," the moments containing "more reality" than other (everyday) kinds of experience, the moments when the "pictures of time […] fade in the light of their meaning sublime" (Emerson 916).

H.D. Thoreau, who in his *Walden* (1854) describes the way to realise Emerson's ideas by simplifying one's life to the point of harmony with nature, metaphorically expresses the same experience as a "morning" of the mind: "Morning is when I am awake and there is a dawn in me."[36] Like Emerson, Thoreau considers "the unquestionable ability of [every] man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavour," and points out the value of art and poetry as a result of the highest elevation and full awakening ("only one in a hundred millions" is "awake enough" to "a poetic or divine life"[37]). Moreover, in Emerson's *Over-soul* (1841), the emotions of the sublime are connected with the experience of "revelation," in other words, "perceptions of the absolute law" (978).

As James Kirwan sums it up, in American transcendentalism sublimity is made a "standard of truth."[38] In the experience of "the eternal One" (Emerson 978), that is, in the mingling of the individual soul with the great, universal soul), God is not what we can intimate but what we can become. In this respect, Kirwan mentions the democratic character of Emerson's sublime (suggested also in Whitman's poetry, for instance, in "The Song of Myself"), which is available to all: "The simplest person, who in his integrity [that is, the unity with nature] worships God, becomes God" (Emerson 982).

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[36] Thoreau, Henry David, *Walden*, ed. J. Lyndon Shanley, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973, 90.

[37] Thoreau 90. Cf. Emerson's idea that the work of art can help us to reach "Paradise" "by the stairway of surprise," expressed in the poem "Merlin," 1846 (*The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, Vol.1, 1056). In "The Over-Soul," Longinus's concern with the reciprocity of the sublime is echoed in the statement that "the great poet makes us feel our own wealth" (*The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, Vol.1, 981).

[38] Kirwan, James, *Sublimity*, 129. Cf. Emerson's "The Over-Soul," in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, Vol.1, 979.

Considering the power relations in the experience of the sublime, Kirwan draws an interesting parallel between Emerson's "great soul" ("The Over-Soul," "Self-Reliance") and the idea of "the overman" ("the Übermensch") as a goal for humanity in the work of Friedrich Nietzsche. Though Nietzsche (like Emerson) does not develop a particular theory of the sublime, he deserves, according to Kirwan, "a key place in a history of the sublime in the nineteenth century" (131). Frequently alluded to with the adjective "higher," the sublime repeatedly appears in Nietzsche's early work, influenced by Romanticism. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, for example, he contrasts "the terrors of individual existence" (evoked by the reality of inevitable destruction) with a liberating notion (inspired by art, and tragedy in particular), that "everything which exists is a unity."[39]

In Nietzsche's later work, as Kirwan observes, the sublime coincides with greatness and strength, entering also the traditional rhetorical context: "of what is great, one must be silent or speak with greatness."[40] Moreover, Nietzsche's philosophical concepts of "eternal recurrence" or the "will to power" can also be associated with the sublime (Kirwan 132-133). While strength, according to Nietzsche, allows to conquer nature, identification with nature is connected with weakness; and it is "in the enhancement of the feeling of power" that "the criterion of truth" can be found (Nietzsche §534, 290). As Will Slocombe puts it, nihilism draws on the Romantic rejection of "absolute truths," on the absence of authority, and on the "proposition of a 'natural' humanism" and 'divine' scepticism" (49). The "shift of emphasis from rhetoric to psychology to rationality" in the concepts of the sublime, following the shift from religion to secularism and pointing out the problem of identity, anticipates, in fact, the attitudes of existentialism and postmodernism (Slocombe 49).

[39] Nietzsche, Friedrich, as quoted by James Kirwan, in *Sublimity*, 132.

[40] Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Will to Power,* ed. Walter Kaufmann, transl. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, New York, 1967, §1, 3.

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