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A STUDY OF THE SUBLIME IN ENGLISH ROMANTIC AESTHETICS

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of English

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

Derek T. Leuenberger

December 1999

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

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Ronald R. Burke

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A STUDY OF THE SUBLIME IN ENGLISH ROMANTIC AESTHETICS

Derek T. Leuenberger, MA

University of Nebraska, 2000

Advisor: Thomas P. Walsh

The nature and role of the sublime experience has been an enduring topic of discussion in the history of aesthetics, dating back nearly two thousand years to the rhetorical sublime of Longinus. The emergence of English Romanticism at the juncture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries wrought substantial change on conceptions of the sublime, driven primarily by Immanuel Kant's transcendental philosophy. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth, and Percy Bysshe Shelley each develop a theory of sublimity grounded in the expression of unified and universal experience in human consciousness. Naturally, certain philosophical differences arise within the theoretical discourse of these authors—most notably, with Shelley—but the number and strength of the similarities are such that an identifiable and consistent view of Romantic sublimity emerges.

Coleridge's conception of the sublime is most closely related to Kant's. Like Kant, Coleridge characterizes the sublime experience as one in which the "comparing power," or imagination is suspended ("Coleridge Marginalia" 342). The Coleridgean Sublime, however, differs from the Kantian in that it is less a reaction to infinite size and power than it is the highest apprehension of "multeity in unity," the infinitely complex and infinitely unified idea (*Biographia Literaria* 2: 232). Wordsworth's conception of

sublimity is substantially similar, resting on an aesthetic experience that "suspends the comparing power of the mind & possesses it with a feeling or image of intense unity, without a conscious contemplation of parts" ("The Sublime and the Beautiful" 354). Shelley, like Coleridge and Wordsworth, founds his version of sublimity on the poet's perception and communication of "the eternal, the infinite, and the one" (*A Defence of Poetry* 124). These separate but closely comparable accounts of sublimity reveal a Romantic conception of sublimity based in discovering the universal in human experience, a conception that fundamentally differentiates Romanticism from Neo-Classicism as a philosophical and literary movement.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my wife Deniz and my daughter Kelsey
for their immense patience, support, and love.

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I would like to express my gratitude to
Dr. Thomas P. Walsh and Dr. John J. McKenna
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Preface

> . . . the influences of the sublime bring power and irresistible might to bear, and reign supreme over every hearer; . . . sublimity flashing forth at the right moment scatters everything before it like a thunderbolt, and at once displays the power of the orator in all its plenitude. —Longinus, *On the Sublime* (58)

The emergence of Romanticism, first in Germany and then in England, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries brought a fundamental shift in the way nature and human consciousness were viewed in philosophy and art. In many ways, Romanticism developed as a deliberate reaction to the dominance of Neo-Classic aesthetics in the eighteenth century, which emphasized the imitation of classical Greek and Roman art forms. Whereas Neo-Classic critics based their aesthetics primarily upon the theories of Aristotle and Horace, Romantic theorists generally looked to newer philosophical sources, Immanuel Kant foremost among them. Additionally, Romantic poets rejected the didactic tendencies of Neo-Classic poetry, generally preferring a more personal and emotional style of expression.

One of the enduring problems in the study of English Romanticism has been finding a way to integrate the wide variety of early nineteenth-century aesthetic theories into a unified, identifiable concept of "Romanticism." In his seminal work on English Romanticism, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, M.H. Abrams attempts to resolve this problem, suggesting that there is "one essential attribute which most early nineteenth-century theories had in common: the persistent recourse to the poet to explain the nature and criteria of poetry" (7). In the following essay, I take Abrams's assertion for granted, but I suggest that an additional attribute of Romantic criticism exists: a broad concern of

Romantic theorists with discovering the universals of human experience and their modes of expression.

The primary concern of this study is to identify and examine a particular feature of English Romantic aesthetics: the concept of the sublime. While a theory of the sublime is not the unique province of Romanticism, I contend that the sublime holds an especially vital role in both the practical and theoretical aspects of English Romanticism. In this essay, I will examine the aesthetic theories of three of the most prominent Romantic thinkers and poets: Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth, and Percy Bysshe Shelley. This examination will show that, despite some fundamental philosophical differences, these Romantic theorists and poets developed a substantially similar concept of sublimity for substantially similar reasons. Additionally, I will discuss Kant's aesthetic theory—and to a smaller extent, Edmund Burke's—as it relates to those of the English Romantics. As I will show, Kant's concept of the sublime marks the departure from the Longinian and empirical qualities of the Neo-Classic sublime, providing an important philosophical grounding to English Romantic conceptions of the sublime. From this examination, I hope to show, firstly, that the sublime is the method by which Romanticism achieves one of its principal aims—to permit the participation of the human mind in the universals of human experience—and secondly, that the sublime is one of the most important features uniting Romanticism as a literary and philosophical movement.

I have chosen the aesthetic theories of Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Shelley as the subject of this essay not merely because of the prominence of the authors; Keats and Byron, among others, would qualify for examination under that criterion. Rather, my reasons for that choice are, first, that these authors produced three of the primary philosophical documents in Romanticism: Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, Wordsworth's "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*, and Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*. Secondly, these three authors were not only theorists but also poets. Their positions as both artists and philosophers make Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Shelley especially suited to a discussion of general Romantic theories. Therefore, when I refer generically to a Romantic philosophy or to Romantic ideas, I have these three authors primarily in mind. I am, however, making a simultaneous extrapolation to the position that their ideas of the sublime apply to Romanticism as a general movement.

Lastly, the scope of this essay does not include the use of the sublime in practice, i.e., examples of sublimity in Romantic poetry. Rather, its emphasis is solely upon Romantic theories of sublimity. Therefore, although I believe that an examination of their respective bodies of poetry would provide additional evidence to my thesis, I focus almost exclusively on the theoretical discourse of these authors.

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Chapter 1: The Kantian Sublime

The Beautiful

As Samuel Monk observed, no treatment of the Sublime, Romantic or otherwise, is complete without a discussion of Immanuel Kant's philosophy (6). His *Critique of Judgement*, while certainly not the earliest examination of sublimity, was the first to attempt a systematic analysis of the Sublime in terms of its integration into a comprehensive epistemological scheme. While varying conceptions of sublimity have been a preoccupation of critics from Longinus to the present day, Kant presented a version of the Sublime in a philosophical framework that appealed generically to the English Romantics. Coleridge in particular admired Kant's work, remarking that Kant's writings "took possession of me as with a giant's hand. After fifteen years' familiarity with them, I still read these . . . with undiminished delight and increasing admiration" (*Biographia* 1: 99). The possession that Coleridge so keenly felt manifests itself throughout his aesthetic writings, most particularly in the series of essays, "On the Principles of Genial Criticism." With the rejection of the (perceived) didactic tendencies of Neo-Classicism, the Romantics attempted to develop aesthetic theories that fit into a more generalized organic model, turning away from an aesthetic based on classical mimetic theories and predicated on moral instruction.[1] Kant's *Critique*, particularly the "Analytic of the Sublime," provided for the Romantics a philosophical ancestry for an aesthetic of transcendence founded on the primacy of genius and creativity.

Kant's aesthetic theory, as presented in the *Critique of Judgement*, centers on a distinction between two types of aesthetic judgement: the Beautiful and the Sublime. The attempt to differentiate the two aesthetic experiences was not an original move by Kant; Edmund Burke published *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* thirty-three years before Kant published his *Critique*. The similarities between the two works are clear, from the privileging of sublimity over beauty to the distinction between a "mathematical" and a "dynamic" Sublime (to use Kant's terminology). An additional similarity between the two works is the opening discussion of taste.

A clear concept of "Taste" is the foundation of Kant's aesthetics as taste "is the faculty of judging of the beautiful" (Kant 45 note).[2] Kant, however, does not begin with a definition or derivation of a concept of the Beautiful. Rather, he attempts to determine the features of the Beautiful in reference to subjective judgement. Some critics, such as Orsini, have confused the qualities of the judgement of taste with the qualities of the Beautiful. Orsini mistakenly explains that the quality of disinterestedness is "the quality of beauty" (161). The Beautiful, however, exists less in the qualities of the object than in the qualities of the judgement. The judgement of taste is an act of the mind evaluating the effects of a given perception upon itself without any reference to the characteristics of the perceived object. In other words, there are no determining features of a beautiful object absent the act of the judgement of taste.

Kant is quick to point out that "the judgement of taste is . . . not a judgement of cognition, and is consequently not logical but aesthetical" (45). The cognitive judgement involves the employment of concepts (Ideas) by the faculty of Reason to make objects rationally available to the mind of the subject. In other words, some quality of the object-in-itself is referred to or made known to the subject via conformity to those principles we call rational. The aesthetic judgement, on the other hand, is one in which the "determining ground can be *no other than subjective* . . . . by which nothing in the object is signified, but through which there is a feeling in the subject, as it is affected by the representation [of the object]" (Kant 45-6). Further, Kant declares that the aesthetic judgement

> simply refers the representation, by which an Object is given, to the subject; and bring to our notice no characteristic of the object, but only the purposive form in the determination of the representative powers which are occupying themselves therewith. (45)

According to Siebers, "Kant is emphasizing the fact that the mind's engagement with an object determines its aesthetic form" (34). The "representative powers," or the faculty of sense in conjunction with the Imagination, ascertain the aesthetic form in synthetic process without any reference to the qualities of the object beyond their effect upon the subject's mind. In short, the object of sensation requires a subject/perceiver in order to be called beautiful; beauty is not a strictly objective quality for Kant.

In the aesthetic judgement, no quality of the object in question is cognized as beautiful by the Understanding through any implicit interaction of *a priori* or *a posteriori* principles. Rather, an aesthetic judgement reveals a quality of sensation in the subject only, i.e., a feeling of pleasure. According to Kant, the discernment of the Beautiful "requires *Imagination*, for the gathering together the manifold of intuition, and *Understanding* for the unity of the concept uniting the representations," and the resulting harmony, in "free play" between the cognitive powers, produces a feeling of pleasure (64). Kant frequently expresses the complex interaction of intuition and the synthetic powers as "the Manifold in Unity." This idea pervades the *Critique* and became central to both the German Romantics and Coleridge. The "free play" of the Imagination and Understanding, Kant claims, results in a judgement that is reflective, moving from intuition to a potentially infinite series of indeterminate ideas in a compatible and harmonious relationship. The aesthetic judgement is therefore not determinant, as logical judgements are, which move from the rational framework of Ideas to make intuitions discursively available to the Understanding. The object perceived, therefore, is only beautiful in relation to the effect upon the subject's mind; it is not beautiful in and of itself. Thus, Kant flatly states that beauty cannot be independent of the realm of subjectivity: "Beauty, without a reference to the feeling of the subject, is nothing by itself" (65).

Now that Kant has separated aesthetic from cognitive judgements and shown that the determination of the Beautiful is conditioned by a subjective operation, he moves to define the specific qualities of that judgement. His first and perhaps most important claim is that the judgement of taste is disinterested. By interest, Kant means, "the satisfaction which we combine with the representation of the object" (46-7). Interested judgements are those that are dependent upon the real existence of the object. To be interested, then, the derived pleasure is the direct result of the gratification of some need or wish through its actual being. Kant gives us Rousseau's well-known example of the Iroquois in Paris who regards the Parisian "cook-shops" as beautiful (47).[3] While purely subjective, this judgement could not rightfully be called one of taste in Kantian terms because of the physiological or gastronomic interest of the subject. While the example is simplistic and rather offensive, the establishment of disinterestedness as a condition of aesthetic judgement is vital as it extends to ideological interest (noted by Coleridge in "On the Principles of Genial Criticism") and judgements of the Good, which are both "bound up with interest" (Kant 48 passim).

Opposed to interest, a disinterested judgement is one in which the pleasure resides not in the existence of the object but only in the representation itself, or rather, "with that which I make out of this representation in myself" (Kant 47). Lyotard explains that this means the judgement of taste starts out with the determination of quality: "But above all the privileging of form protects thinking from any interest in the 'material' of the object and consequently from any interest in its real presence. Desire or need does not linger over forms" (77-8). Because a judgement of the Beautiful is concerned only with the effect of the intuition of the representation or form of the object, it is purely disinterested. Crowther states, "in the aesthetic judgement . . . we exercise our capacity for cognitive discrimination in a way that is in harmony with the particular sensible manifold. We are led perceptually to deliberate upon it for its own sake" (24). The "harmony," as offered by the Imagination to the Understanding, is enjoyable only as enjoyment, incurring no satisfaction of subjective interest. Further, Monk comments that "the aesthetic experience is therefore disinterested because it seeks to discover no knowledge of the object" (6). In fact, Monk's statement probably does not go far enough: the Kantian aesthetic experience seeks nothing; it simply experiences. This issue will bring a significant point of deviation in the Romantic scheme of sublimity.

By freeing the judgement of taste from individual gratification or momentary need, Kant allows the intuition of beauty to be universal. It is profoundly important for Kant that the intuition of beauty be universal because the process of the aesthetic judgement will eventually lead to Kant's discussion of the freedom of the Will. As far as the judgement of taste is concerned, however, if the aesthetic judgement is to carry "pure intellectual satisfaction in the Object," it should not only be disinterested but universally valid (Kant 41).

The judgement of taste, as we have seen, involves the interaction of the Imagination with the Understanding in a "free play" of the cognitive faculties, which Kant must suppose are the same for everyone, without reliance on definite concepts and without interest (94-5).[4] Because this play of the cognitive faculties is "requisite for *cognition in general*," it must be universally valid and universally communicable (Kant 65). For Kant, the universal relation between subject and object derives from the representation of the object as well as the subject's apprehension of the object's internal purposiveness. Kant gives the example of a flower: we consciously recognize the object's causal purpose (reproduction) and justify its existence in rational terms. The representation of the object, however, alludes to the causal purpose (which is comprehended rationally) as the object must be first sensibly apprehended before the application of concepts (65). The perceived unity in form with the cognized function of the object invokes a harmonious play of the Imagination and Understanding, which is in turn pleasing. This sense of purposiveness, while not comprehensible by means of concept, can be apprehended as "purposiveness without purpose" (66). The perception of unity in form suggests purpose to the cognitive faculties without means of a definite concept (i.e., causality) to justify it.

Thus, we may see how Kant, though his emphasis is primarily on the subject, permits the object to influence intuition through an internal purposiveness made evident in form. Because this apprehensible unity and ungrounded purposiveness, which are suggested by the form of the object, occasion the free play of the commonly configured Imagination and Understanding, we may think of aesthetic judgements as universally valid.

However, Kant's contention naturally raises the question of the evident differences in aesthetic judgements between individuals. Aside from the determining factor of interest in validating a judgement as aesthetic, it may be difficult if not impossible to dispute real (and not hypothetical) differences in individual tastes. Burke takes a slightly different tack on the subject, making a more determined effort to nullify claims of *de gustibus non disputandum*. Burke, like Kant, assumes that the cognitive and sensory faculties are common to all people (Burke 13). Kant stops at this point, apparently assuming that a universal cognitive configuration is sufficient to establish universal validity. Burke, however, anticipates the need to address divergent aesthetic judgements and bases his answer in experience:

> Now as the pleasure of resemblance is that which principally flatters the imagination, all men are nearly equal in this point, as far as their

> knowledge of the things represented or compared extends. The principle of this knowledge is very much accidental , as it depends upon experience and observation, and not on the strength or weakness of any natural faculty; and it is from this difference in knowledge that what we commonly, though with no great exactness, call a difference in Taste proceeds. (18)

Burke states that while our natural cognitive framework is fundamentally the same in all people, the information and experiences applied by those faculties vary infinitely. Under Burke's account, diverse but authentic aesthetic judgements are not only possible but also unavoidable. This seems to be a more satisfying and concrete response to questions of taste than Kant's version.

With establishment of universal validity and the demonstration of disinterested aesthetic judgements, Kant takes the further step of declaring that objects falling under the rubric of the Beautiful will be necessarily and universally pleasing (91-6). Because of the commonality of the cognitive faculties and because the representation of the object incites this play in the faculties, experiencing a beautiful object will have the same effect and entail the same judgement for everyone (all things being equal, which they rarely are). Kant actually makes very little effort to demonstrate this claim, again appealing to the notion of a Common Sense, saying merely, "these questions we have neither the wish nor the power to investigate as yet" (95). Critics and commentators of Kant generally give equally short shrift to the matter, usually glossing the claim in a sentence or two.

This assumption, of course, is necessary for both Kant and Burke, for to assert the contrary would be to open epistemology to the most extreme skepticism.

The Sublime

At this point, Kant makes the transition from the judgement of the Beautiful to the judgement of the Sublime. According to Kant, the Sublime and the Beautiful, "agree in this, that both please in themselves. Further, neither presupposes a judgement of sense nor a judgement logically determined, but a judgement of reflection" (101). The judgement of sense of which Kant speaks significantly refers to a judgement of the Pleasant in sensation, which Kant earlier determined to be an interested judgement, and therefore out of the realm of aesthetic judgements. The Sublime, therefore, is a division within the aesthetic judgement, "not two faculties of judging but two powers that the faculty of judging has of estimating aesthetically, and that proceed in different ways" (Lyotard 50).

With their relationship thus proposed, how does the Sublime differ from the Beautiful? Kant states the essential difference as this:

> The Beautiful in nature is connected with the form of the object, which consists in having boundaries. The Sublime, on the other hand, is to be found in a formless object, so far as in it or by occasion of it *boundlessness* is represented, and yet its totality is also present to thought. (101-02)

The Beautiful, through the Imagination, presents "the manifold in unity," i.e., the object's form, to the Understanding through indeterminate concepts, while the Sublime is reflected upon as boundless immensity. Kant states that the judgements of the Beautiful and the Sublime are substantially similar in that both are disinterested, both retain the relation of subjective purposiveness in the intuition of the object, and both are considered as universally valid and necessary. The Sublime, however, refers the intuition of the object through the Imagination to the faculty of Reason rather than Understanding, as in the Beautiful. The Sublime, says Kant, consists in "that which is *absolutely great* . . . [or] *what is great beyond all comparison*" (106). To illustrate, Kant distinguishes between what is "great" and what is "absolutely great" in terms of comparability.

Cognizing that a given object has magnitude (or "quantum," to use Kant's term) is done without any reference to other magnitudes; the cognition is possible from the object-in-itself. When I see a stone, I apprehend that it displaces space and has mass without reference to other stones; I immediately cognize that this object has substantial being. It is a limited cognition, however, as the stone is not put in the context of other objects and no degree of magnitude is discerned. In the pure cognition of magnitude, no measuring relation is employed. The "*absolutely great*," though, is distinguished from the "*great*" in that to determine "how great" an object is "requires some other magnitude as a measure; . . . [thus] we see that the determination of the magnitude of phenomena can supply no absolute concept whatever of magnitude, but only a comparative one" (Kant 107). The Sublime, then, is the cognition of pure concept, and so "the sublime is not to be sought in the things of nature, but only in our Ideas" (Kant 109). In other words, the intuition of phenomena cannot supply an absolute concept because it is constantly subjected to conscious or unconscious acts of comparison. Absolute magnitude is cognized only as pure concept.

The assertion that the Sublime exists only in the mind of the subject and not in nature is similar to Kant's earlier conditioning of the Beautiful in the quality of judgement rather than in the quality of the object. There is, however, an important difference in the two judgements. The Beautiful, although it reveals nothing directly of the object, attests to a relationship of the object's representation in the Imagination to the subject's Understanding. The judgement may only be concerned with form as permitted by sensation. In contrast, the Sublime incites extremes of feeling in the subject in reference to a "faculty of the mind surpassing every standard of sense" (Kant 110). The Sublime, when reflected upon, "does violence to the internal sense" of the Imagination (Kant 122). The Sublime confounds the imagination by confronting it with something that is beyond the mind's ability to render. The source of this "violence" will differ depending on the situation.

The "absolutely great," or infinite, Kant states, consists of two categories of infinitude: the Mathematically Sublime and the Dynamically Sublime. The two species of the sublimity differ only in what occasions the apprehension of boundlessness in the Imagination. The Mathematically Sublime, according to Kant, "is that in comparison with which everything else is small" (109). This seems an odd statement, considering Kant's express denial that the Sublime is subject to comparability. As a matter of fact, this statement engenders Coleridge's only explicit objection to Kant's theory of the Sublime.

In the Herder marginalia, Coleridge says, "here Kant has layed (sic) himself open to just censure" ("Coleridge Marginalia" 342). Although Kant's wording (or possibly the translation) is certainly suspect, contradiction is easily avoided. Degree of greatness is determined, as Kant says, by comparison. The degree of greatness of a mountain, say, can be measured in the comparative unit of "meters." We may say, by means of brute measurement, that a tree is smaller than a mountain. Comparison, however, is a twofold device. We may equally say or *conceive* that something is bigger than the mountain even if nothing actually is because it admits to being measured in a finite number of units. At the limit of conception, or that point at which we may no longer imagine something larger, i.e., something not infinite, we reach absolute greatness, and everything else is, in fact, smaller. This is something that bothered Herder for analytical reasons. Coleridge's objection, however, is a one of manner and one, we shall see, that has little theoretical bearing on his own conception of sublimity.

Kant says that it is necessary to have an unlimited rational concept of the infinite if we are even to be capable of experiencing the Sublime, as it is the clash between Reason and Imagination that occasions the experience (111). Although there is no limit to our capacity of rationally conceptualizing the infinite, the Imagination cannot apprehend the infinite because of its reliance on relational sense-input to relay a given intuition to the Understanding. Crowther suggests an example: "If we were to explore every part of [a] mountain by foot (or by telescope) our imagination would soon be overwhelmed by the plethora of parts" (27). Comparative understanding requires that the intuited object be "broken down," so to speak, into numerical values or any other unit of measurement, such as yards or even one's own physical form, for example. The Imagination is simply not able to assimilate the practically or actually infinite manifold of representations in the Mathematically Sublime experience. The very mass or multitude of the Mathematically Sublime defies the bounded form required by the Beautiful, moving the sense of the Sublime entirely to the mind of the subject, although the object seems to precipitate the experience. The Mathematically Sublime, because it is based in thought and not nature, "presents magnitude absolutely, so far as the mind can grasp it in an intuition," which is to say, it can't (Kant 111).

The Dynamically Sublime, Kant's second variety, incites the same sort of cognitive "violence" as the prior type, but from a different source of boundlessness. Kant says that the Dynamically Sublime is "Nature considered in an aesthetical judgement as might that has no dominion over us" (123). Might, or power, in nature (Kant suggests volcanoes, hurricanes, or the "boundless ocean in a state of tumult") for which we have no capacity of resistance causes the phenomenon to be regarded as fearful (125). Kant's definition of "fearful" is an important feature as he states that we experience the Sublime "provided only that we are in security" (125). Only when the direct danger of destruction is removed can the intuition be thought of as truly sublime, and then it is "more attractive, the more fearful it is . . . because they raise the energies of the soul above their accustomed height" (125). Genuine terror is therefore excluded from the realm of the Sublime.

Crowther draws a parallel between the two varieties of sublimity, explaining, "If we are dealing with an object of extreme destructive power, we may have to consider possible or actual effects so enormously devastating as to exceed our perceptual and imaginative capacities" (28). The sublime experience, he continues, derives from our ability to conceptualize infinite power even while our representational capacity is in chaos. Like the Mathematically Sublime, the Dynamically Sublime overwhelms our imagination through sheer empirical force.

What, then, is pleasurable about the Sublime? Kant's claim that the pleasure of the Sublime is conditioned partially from the safe separation of the viewer from danger may seem somewhat Aristotelian at first glance. Aristotle held that art (drama, in particular) has a cathartic quality that is morally healthy. The purging of intense emotion—pity and fear—through vicarious interaction with a given scene, usually tragic, is of supposed benefit for the viewer and is at least partially constitutive of the pleasure in an aesthetic experience. The sublime, however, doesn't involve purgation of any sort. The "fear" aroused by nature in its immensity is in some sense overcome by our ability to rationally encompass the absolute concept of infinite size or power, though our imaginative faculty is in disarray. Modiano further explains, "The mere fact that the mind can think at all of nature as a unified whole without contradiction, at the time when the imagination fails to comprehend it, indicates the presence of a faculty which is supersensible" (110). The seeming inability of the two faculties—Reason and Imagination—to harmonize (as Imagination and Understanding would in the Beautiful) is simultaneously intriguing and distressing. The pleasure of the sublime experience is not due to purgation—as that would imply a kind of moral or psychic interest—but rather a paradoxical pleasure in the "pain" of imaginative impotence. Kant in fact says that the experience is harmonious *because* of the contrasting capabilities of the two faculties (121). The experience "bring[s] about a feeling that we possess pure self-subsistent Reason," although it makes no determination as to the actual nature of that faculty, merely that we possess that supersensible power (121).

In the role of terror lies a primary difference between the Sublime of Kant and that of Burke. While Kant asserts that terror is an emotion sometimes accompanying sublimity, it is not the source of the experience. In Burke, on the other hand, terror, or "delightful horror," is the emotion at the root of sublimity (136). Burke, like Kant, notes that in the sublime experience there can be no actual threat of destruction of the person; however, it is not the overwhelming of the Imagination by phenomena and the correlative awareness of the supersensible that bring pleasure to the subject in Burke's version. Rather, Burke illustrates the pleasurable aspect of the Sublime with an analogy to exercise: while "rest and inaction" cause our muscles to weaken, so mental inactivity results in "melancholy, dejection, despair, and often self-murder" (Burke 134-35). The remedy, says Burke, is "exercise or *labour*; and labour is a surmounting of *difficulties*, an exertion of the contracting power of muscles." Just as exercise is necessary for the body, some sort or mental labor or overcoming of difficulty strengthens the mind. For Burke, the difficulties presented to the mind in the experience of vicarious terror bring about a pleasing application of the mental faculties, where "they must be shaken and worked to a proper degree" (135). Terror seems, then, to be a somewhat cathartic experience, more in the vein of Aristotle, though apparently without the moral implications. Clearly, Burke recognizes the imaginative struggle of which Kant speaks, but the ensuing pleasure is due to that struggle alone.

The role of terror is one of the major differences between Burke and Kant in regard to the Sublime, one that marks a shift from a Longinian focus on the pathetic to the more purely philosophical work of Kant; however, Burke's work is important beyond his influence on Kant. The focus on the grotesque and terrible is something that never really leaves the English literary world, emerging in the Romantic love of the picturesque and sublime in nature.

In summation, the Kantian Sublime is that disinterested apprehension of the "absolutely great" that brings about conflict in the Imagination, evidencing the empirical limitations of that faculty. Simultaneously, a feeling of pleasure arises in that a "supersensible," or transcendent, cognitive power is made known to the subject. The Kantian Sublime, therefore, is a state of mind rather than of nature, and the Sublime is thus differentiated from the Beautiful.

Chapter 2: The Coleridgean Sublime

Samuel Taylor Coleridge's debt to the philosophies of Kant and other German thinkers has been well documented throughout the long study of Coleridge's philosophical work. Orsini, for example, furnishes a thorough investigation of the historical and philosophical relationship of Coleridge to Kant. Additionally, a number of researchers have noted that many of the ideas central to Coleridge's aesthetic theory, such as his speculations on taste and the pivotal concept of "Multeity in Unity," echo Kantian aesthetics so nearly that in some cases they seem to have been reprinted directly in Coleridge's works. Of course, the charges that Coleridge had plagiarized writers such as Kant, Schelling, and Schlegel go back far enough in history that Coleridge himself addressed his detractors in the *Biographia Literaria*.[5]

Authorial ethics aside, what is clear through all conjecture is that Kant's theories exerted a great influence on Coleridge.[6] While there can be little doubt of a theoretical kinship between Kant and Coleridge, on the subject of sublimity there are many subtle differences and at least one striking deviation in Coleridge's conception of that type of aesthetic judgement. Further, Kant is not the sole influence on Coleridge's aesthetics: his philosophy exhibits numerous features of the German Romanticism as seen by Walter Benjamin. Coleridge's philosophy, however, is not merely derivative. He synthesizes an account that while unique, is prototypical of a general English Romantic conception of sublimity.

Given the breadth of Kant's presence in Coleridgean aesthctics, it is curious how little attention Coleridge seems to allot to the Kantian Sublime. Although the term is mentioned periodically, no explicit definition of the Sublime appears in the *Biographia Literaria*. In "On the Principles of Genial Criticism," Coleridge enumerates terms popularly used as synonyms: " . . . Agreeable, Beautiful, Picturesque, Grand, Sublime" ("Genial" 226). He goes on to say that it is a task of "indispensable necessity" to differentiate these terms precisely, which he then neglects to do at all.[7] Coleridge does, however, give a spare interpretation of the Kantian Sublime in a margin-note in a copy of Johann Gottfried von Herder's *Kalligone*.[8] While not elaborate, the note gives some important insight into Coleridge's version of the Sublime. Interestingly, Coleridge's abbreviated treatment of the Sublime, while outwardly similar to Kant's, ends with a peculiar example that leads us the to the question of what Coleridge actually means by sublimity. Additionally, Coleridge's discrete division of aesthetic judgement into a hierarchical scheme further separates the Kantian and Coleridgean Sublime. In this fashion, Coleridge places the Sublime distinctly within the framework of the organic view of nature and art, thereby designating the Sublime as the underpinning of aesthetic judgements.

Coleridgean Imagination

In "On the Principles of Genial Criticism," Coleridge sets forth an attempt to discover "the regulative idea of all the Fine Arts" with the understanding that poetry is foremost among them ("Genial" 223). Coleridge proceeds in almost precisely the same manner as Kant in the *Critique of Judgement*: with a demonstration of the "disinterestedness" of the aesthetic judgement. He first defines poetry, which is "the excitement of emotion for the purpose of *immediate* pleasure, through the medium of beauty" ("Genial" 224). Although there is an apparent contradiction in his choice of words, i.e., "immediate" and "medium," Coleridge has not made a terminological mistake: aesthetic pleasure, under this definition, is immediate in the sense that it not dependent upon desire. In other words, the evaluation of the object must be devoid of satisfaction beyond that it is satisfying. Because of the fundamentally subjective character of the aesthetic judgement, the medium of Beauty is the apprehension of harmonious form, and the correlative pleasure is similarly immersed in that restful medium of reflection. This thoroughly Kantian treatment of interest answers questions of taste for Coleridge, which, in a Kantian guise again, he says is universal to all who make an aesthetic judgement (*Biographia* 2: 225). From these Kantian beginnings, Coleridge gradually disengages himself from Kant, leading finally to a fully articulated Romantic conception of the Sublime.

In his short discussion of the "Agreeable" and the "Beautiful," which differs so little in content as to be instantly recognizable as the Coleridgean analog to Kant's distinction between the "Pleasant" and the "Beautiful," Coleridge suggests that the Beautiful can be generally defined as "Multeity in Unity" (*Biographia* 2: 232). Again, one may observe Kant hiding behind the terminology. According to Kant, aesthetic judgement "requires *Imagination*, for gathering together the manifold of intuition, and *Understanding*, for the unity of the concept uniting the representations" (Kant 64). Coleridge gives a more concrete explanation than Kant, using the example of a wheel sitting abandoned in a yard. Although the wheel is old and soiled, the viewer may "regard the *figure* abstractly" and see beauty in the form of the object, the curvature and radiating spokes within the framing background "as forming one whole, in some harmonious relation each and to all" (*Biographia* 2: 233). Like Kant, then, Coleridge holds that the Beautiful resides in the representation of the object insofar as the judgement "subsists only in composition," that is, the representation as synthesized by the Imagination (*Biographia* 2: 233). Coleridge's insistence that beauty exists within the relationships determined by composition, i.e., representation, will help to identify the Coleridgean Sublime.

For Kant, the role and capability of the Imagination are the point of separation between judgements of beauty and sublimity. For Coleridge, Imagination takes on perhaps a more mystical and expressivist role (though it is still the center of aesthetic judgement), which points to an emerging Romantic aesthetic. In the *Biographia*, Coleridge introduces his version of the Imagination in terms of the poet's role:

> The poet, described in *ideal* perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) *fuses*, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power, to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination. (*Biographia* 2: 12)

As far as this definition is concerned, the Coleridgean Imagination seems to be similar to Kant's in its synthetic and communicative capacity. Interesting is the lack of emphasis on a reader in favor of a discussion of the creative mind. More important, perhaps, is

Coleridge's enumeration of that which the poet "fuses." Coleridge, again emphasizing "multeity in unity," says that the power of imagination ". . . reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image" (*Biographia* 2: 12). This compositional unity appeals to the mind on a completely constitutional level: as in Kant, Coleridgean beauty is pleasurable as a result of the mind's ability to create relationships within intuition rather than any from any quality of the object itself.

Muirhead rather unfairly derides Coleridge for his vagueness in the elaboration of exactly what the poet (or the "poetic imagination") synthesizes. He says that the above account of poetic imagination "errs rather by defect than by excess, seeing that it contains no detailed reference to the kind of diction which Coleridge conceived of as essential to poetry ('the best words,' as he elsewhere expresses it, 'in the best order')" (209). There is, however, a clear Kantian case for Coleridge's inexactness.[9]

In Kantian terms, because the judgement of taste requires that the Imagination confer the representation of the object to the Understanding without means of definite concepts, it is not possible to delineate specific attributes of the object and demonstrate their regulated and predictable interaction and still maintain an aesthetic judgement.[10] Coleridge is not listing defining characteristics of beauty. Rather, he merely explains what the ideal poet does, which is to construct an intuitible object/representation—the Coleridgean multeity or Kantian manifold—which the Understanding will comprehend as unified with no rational cognizance or reference to actual qualities of the object. To define "noble diction" or "the best order" would be to delimit how beauty is derived from objective properties. Such a step would condemn the poetic endeavor to an exercise in mechanistic substitution—philosophically repulsive to the Romantics. As these properties would then be presumably subject to determinate and cognizable laws, such a direct statement of quality is unacceptable in any Kantian aesthetic system. As Kant states, "The judgement of taste, by which an object is declared to be beautiful under the condition of a definite concept, is not pure" (81). Therefore, Coleridge is well within the Kantian and Romantic provinces to frame his contention in a way that reflects the organic processes of creativity and judgement, unsatisfying as it may seem to Muirhead.

Appleyard concurs with Muirhead, calling the section on the Imagination (*Biographia* ch. XIII) "a complete disappointment" (197). Apparently this is because Coleridge dedicates a paltry two paragraphs to the definition, holding off for a more thorough treatment in a planned prefatory essay to the "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," which unfortunately was never written. In the brief discussion of the Imagination that does appear in the *Biographia*, Coleridge divides that faculty into two types: the primary and the secondary. The primary imagination is "the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" (*Biographia* 1: 202). The primary imagination is essentially the source of self-consciousness; it is the psychical bridge between the objective and subjective, between the "I" and the "NOT I." As we shall see later, the "infinite I AM" is essential to Coleridge's conception of the Symbol, and therefore the Sublime.

Of equal importance is the secondary imagination, which, according to Coleridge, "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates [intuition] in order to recreate; or when this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead" (*Biographia* 1: 202). The secondary imagination is the faculty able to render the "multeity" of perception into a harmonious configuration. In other words, it is the medium through which the Beautiful is presented. Although the secondary imagination is not a precise analog to Kant's productive imagination, Appleyard suggests that Coleridge obtained his notion of imagination as a mediating faculty originally from Kant (203).

Apart from the Imagination lies what Coleridge terms, "Fancy." Fancy is a mechanical function of the mind, "nothing more than a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space" (*Biographia* 1: 202). Fancy, which is dependant upon "the law of association," simply rearranges objects, events, and concepts by the subject's choice and without concern for the harmony and unification of intuited forms (*Biographia* 1: 202). The distinction between Fancy and Imagination was a source of philosophical conflict between Coleridge and Wordsworth, who saw no significant difference between the two (Abrams 180-82). Coleridge, though, stated that imagination has no "aggregative" or "associative" role in the creative act or judgement (*Biographia* 1: 194). The function of the Coleridge's secondary imagination is not merely to assemble disparate intuitive bits. According to Coleridge, Fancy is unlike the imagination in that it has no true creative capacity; it is "no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space" (*Biographia* 1: 202). Like Kant, Coleridge holds that the apprehension of the Beautiful is both necessary and universal. Because the subject chooses to invoke the Fancy through an act of will, Fancy is not suited to rendering the natural harmony of form in the Beautiful object, although it may (and most likely always does) operate simultaneously with and parallel to the imagination in a creative act. Barth contends, in fact, that Coleridge never dismissed the value of Fancy from art, and in fact could not think of an "imaginative poem" devoid of products of the Fancy (57-9). Despite Coleridge's practical acceptance of Fancy's place in art, he is careful never to retreat from the supremacy of the poetic imagination. He insists that Imagination holds creative dominion as the source of the Symbol. Before discussing Coleridge's Symbol, though, the "organic" origins of the creative act must be addressed.

Organic Aesthetics

The notion that creativity, and therefore art as the product of a creative rather than imitative act, is an organic process as opposed to a mechanical one is central to Romanticism. Mechanistic art, Coleridge pronounces, is "servile imitation, or, more accurately, a blind copying of effects, instead of a true imitation of the essential principles."[11] "True imitation" for Coleridge is clearly not Aristotelian mimesis. In Coleridge's terms, imitation incorporates nature's essence or underlying Ideas in an organic, self-developing and sustaining operation where the representation is not simply a concrete substitute (i.e., allegory) but an integral part of the Idea itself.

Although Kant includes aspects of organistic philosophy in the *Critique of Judgement*, Coleridge takes most of his ideas on organism from A.W. Schlegel and Schelling (Abrams 218).[12] Coleridge's conception of organic growth, says Abrams, whether biological, historical, or aesthetic, "is an open-ended process, nurturing a sense of the promise of the incomplete, and the glory of the imperfect" (220). Along with that "sense of promise"—the "internal purposiveness" of Kant—the Imagination presents the complexity of the sensory manifold as a harmonious "one." Again, says Abrams, "what we find is a complex inter-relation of living, indeterminate, and endlessly changing components" (220). Poetry, demands Coleridge, "must embody in order to reveal itself; but a living body is of necessity an organized one; and what is organization but the connection of parts in and for a whole, so that each part is at once end and means?" ("Shakespeare's" 471) Each intuitible part of a given phenomenal event is distinct yet contributes to the harmonious interaction of all other elements with the ultimate aim of production of the Symbol. How could we define "the best words in the best order" when each instance of beauty is a unique, dynamic interaction of elements as forged in the mind of the subject? The best words are in the best order in relation to themselves and the more general form of the work. Organicism seems to be Coleridge's immediate answer to the rule-bound, imitative aesthetics of Neo-Classicism. Organic art does not exist as a stale, static object, but in living correspondence with itself and the mind.

Coleridge's thoughts on an organic characterization of imagination and art as opposed to a mechanistic one signal a defining moment in the development of Romanticism. The presence of a dynamic imagination allows for a fluid complexity in aesthetic judgements. The organic view not only frees art from the constraints of imitative standards but also permits the development of a meaningful and unified conception of the symbol.

The Symbol and the Sublime

The essential feature of Coleridge's aesthetic imagination is that it is "vital," i.e., organically creative. As previously noted, the end result of that creative process is the Symbol, which Coleridge holds as the highest mode of artistic representation. As opposed to the mechanical substitution of material object for concept in allegory, Coleridge asserts that the symbol "partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible," meaning that the symbol is both representative of concepts while simultaneously existing as a real, "living" part of the unified idea (*Statesman's* 476). The symbol is the tool and the essence of poetry—both "end and means" (again, Kant) of the artistic endeavor. The symbol, as synthesized by the imagination, makes Ideas accessible to the subject, as Coleridge says, by "the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal" (*Biographia* 1: 202). Coleridge's conception of the Symbol is part of the larger concern of English Romanticism to avoid the skeptical traps of empirical philosophy *á la* Hume and Locke and, as Forst explains, to open up the possibility of faith (35). Just as Kant sought to rescue science from empirical skepticism, so the Romantics tried to save poetry from what they perceived as the imitative coercion of Neo-Classicism. One answer to this, thought Coleridge, was the primacy of the symbol in art.

Barth states that the role of the symbol in Coleridge is "to reconcile opposites, or what seems to be opposites, including the secular and religious, the temporal and eternal. All reality is consubstantial with all other reality" (116). Coleridge's symbol is a device of convergence and integration. As Barth further explains,

> The point is not that natural and supernatural are divorced from one another, that divine and human are no longer at one, that God does not reveal himself. Quite the contrary. The point is that God reveals himself even more intimately, more humanly, than man has allowed himself to think. (117)

This reconciliation of natural and supernatural, God and human, object and idea, frees the possibility of faith and "give[s] shape to the metaphysical urge and ground[s] it permanently in the immutable, *a priori* forms of consciousness themselves" (Forst 43). Coleridge's symbol permits the mind to move beyond the merely empirical and participate in the whole of reality by incorporating the objective into the subjective sphere. The potential for convergence of the transcendent and the "temporal" sets the stage for the Coleridgean Sublime.

In contrast to Barth's contention regarding the consummation of the divine and the human in the Coleridgean Symbol, Thomas Weiskel comes to a significantly different conclusion: "[I]n the history of consciousness the sublime revives as God withdraws from an immediate participation in the experience of men" (3). While Weiskel's point may be valid for certain conceptions of the Sublime (and certainly for Shelley as far as the Romantics are concerned), Modiano convincingly demonstrates that a divine withdrawal was not a part of Coleridge's understanding of the Sublime. Rather than conceiving of the Sublime as a purely egotistical experience (as Weiskel calls it, borrowing Keats's appellation), Coleridge's Symbol "rests on the integration of nature in an experience of transcendence tending towards a Christian 'I AM'" (*Concept* 137). Coleridge, far from espousing an intensely personal experience in sublimity, looks to the sublime as a means of participation in the absolute and eternal, i.e., the divine.[13] Most important, however, is Coleridge's clear conceptualization of the symbol as a self-sufficient instrument of unity and integration, which in its most perfect forms leads inevitably to the Sublime.

As noted above, Coleridge states his only explicit definition of the Sublime in the Herder marginalia. Quoted by Shawcross, the note reads as follows:

> We call an object sublime in relation to which the exercise of comparison is suspended: while on the contrary that object is most beautiful, which in its highest perfection sustains while it satisfies the comparing Power. The subjective result is . . . . . when a wheel turns so smoothly and swiftly as to present a stationary image to the eye, or as a fountain (such as either of the two in the Colonnade of St. Peter's at Rome, 'fons omni fonte formosior!'). It is impossible that the same object should be sublime and beautiful at the same moment to the same mind, though a beautiful object may excite and be made the symbol of an Idea that is truly . . . . . Serpent in a wreath of folds bathing in the sun is beautiful to Aspasia, whose attention is confined to the visual impression, but excites an emotion of sublimity in Plato, who contemplates under that symbol the Idea of Eternity. ("Coleridge Marginalia" 341)

According to Shawcross, the page containing the note was damaged, resulting in the loss of two small sections of Coleridge's note (shown above by the ellipses). Shawcross, therefore, suggests that we restore the second hiatus in the passage with " . . . truly (sublime. A) Serpent . . ." If we take this to be true, which seems reasonable, then we see that Coleridge claims that we may consider an experience as either sublime or beautiful (but not simultaneously) under different conditions. Coleridge has not strayed far from Kant—or other writers, for that matter—in separating the Sublime from the Beautiful, but differences between the Coleridgean and Kantian Sublimes do in fact exist.

It has been observed, at least since Shearer, that Coleridge frequently shows little or no interest in fearfulness in the sublime experience (63-99). Kelley claims that this distrust of fear as a condition extends to Wordsworth and perhaps Romanticism in general (131).[14] There is much truth to Kelley's observation, and Coleridge's example of the serpent seems to confirm that he did not require that particular Kantian condition. Modiano ,however, takes the absence of fear as a necessary condition of sublimity to mean that Coleridge does not require the imagination to be overcome by the infinite sensible manifold in order to experience the sublime ("Response" 117).

Modiano, however, extends this judgement to a contention that Coleridge holds the "belief in the continuity between what in Kant's system corresponds to the totally separate faculties of understanding and reason, [therefore] it follows that he saw no need for making the sublime dependent upon . . . an instantaneous leap over the empirical world" ("Response" 118). A closer look, however, reveals that Coleridge does, in fact, seem to require some sort of mental movement past the phenomenal world. Forst attempts to rebut claims of a continuity of the faculties by saying that the Understanding "is frequently depicted by the Romantics in a pejorative sense, as an "inferior" faculty," while Reason is the "'Source of Ideas' as Coleridge called it" (35, 39). Coleridge, however, did not completely dismiss the Understanding as important to the aesthetic judgement. For Coleridge, the Understanding and the Will initiate and gently control the application of the imagination, though the Imagination itself is constitutively suited to presenting the unity of intuitive elements (*Biographia* 2: 12). The Understanding, then, is no less important than Reason for Coleridge, and an appeal to cognitive inferiority is insufficient. Modiano's conception of Understanding and Imagination appears to hold only to apprehension of the Beautiful, however, as additional evidence shows that Coleridge demands the suspension of the Imagination in the sublime experience.

In a separate section of the Herder marginalia, Coleridge states, "Herder mistakes for the *Sublime* sometimes the *Grand*, sometimes the *Majestic*, sometimes the *Intense* . . . or magnificent, but as a whole (a visual whole, I mean) it cannot be sublime" ("Coleridge Marginalia" 342). Furthermore, Coleridge states in the first quote from the Herder marginalia that the serpent is considered beautiful by Aspasia because the attention is "confined to the visual impression" (341). This would suggest that Coleridge adhered to Kant's position that the Sublime does not exist in nature, whose representations are associated only with the Imagination. The quality of the cognitive movement past the Imagination, however, is what essentially separates Coleridge from Kant.

Kant maintains that it is the internal conflict of the Imagination that induces cognitive "pain," which may better understood as an intellectual struggle with the infinite magnitude of intuition (Kant 122). This pain paradoxically induces pleasure as a result of the Reason's revealed ability to grasp the Idea of absolute greatness, and the mind of the subject is thus "elevated." While Kant's transition from intuition to transcendence is explicit, Coleridge's is not. Coleridge's neglect to elucidate this "elevation" from form to Idea threatens to differentiate insufficiently the Sublime from the Beautiful. As seen from the Herder marginalia, Coleridge does not consider the two terms synonymous; far from it, he declares that the two cannot be present simultaneously. Some transition from intuition to idea must occur. Since Coleridge does not explain this transition directly, we will have to examine other evidence.

Modiano cites a passage from Coleridge's notebooks to support her claims that "imaginative defeat" was not one of Coleridge's criteria for this transition, that the sublime and the beautiful were nearly inseparable, and that there is no necessary separation of image and idea. The passage as cited in Modiano's article, in which Coleridge writes of a scene in Malta, reads:

> O that sky that soft blue mighty Arch, resting on the mountains or solid Sea-like plain/ what an aweful adorable omneity in unity. I know of no other perfect union of the sublime with beautiful, that is, so that they should both be felt at the same moment tho' by different faculties yet each faculty predisposed by itself to receive the specific modification from the other. To the eye it is an inverted Goblet, the inside of a sapphire Bason; perfect Beauty [in shape and color]; to the mind [it is] immensity, but even the eye [feels as if it were to] look thro' with dim sense of the non-resistance; . . . the eye itself feels that the limitation is in its own power not in Object. (cited in "Response" 118)

Modiano apparently refers to Coleridge's statement that the scene is the "perfect union of the sublime with the beautiful." The passage seems to contradict Coleridge's earlier statement that an object may not be both sublime and beautiful at the same time to the same mind, yet Coleridge does not equate the two experiences. Coleridge says that the eye "feels that the limitation is in its own power not in the Object." The "eye" is clearly the imaginative faculty, and Coleridge recognizes that the imagination lacks the capacity to encompass all aspects of the experience. Additionally, the faculties of Imagination and Reason compel different experiences at different moments, although it seems that the experiences may be coresponsive. As Coleridge says, the sublimity of the experience exists solely in the mind and "not in the Object." Thus, at some point in cognition, the sensible image is abandoned and the movement to Reason occurs. Further, Modiano omits a line from Coleridge's note. A look into Coleridge's original note reveals that following ". . . dim sense of nonresistance" is a line which reads, "it is not exactly the feeling given to the organ by solid and limited things" (*Notebooks* 2: #2346). Again, the cognitive state that arises from the initial contact with experience exceeds the phenomenal. Coleridge's struggle to describe his state when presented with such a view hints at an internal labor strikingly similar to what Kant describes as the movement to the Sublime. The Beautiful creates no cognitive discord; it is a restful, contemplative act, gently apprehended and accepted. The Sublime is constitutively confounding. The imagination, dealing with the complexity of the scene and attempting the transference of the image to the Understanding, repeatedly slips into Idea. From this account of an authentic rather than hypothetical experience, we see that the organs of sense and, by extension, the imaginative faculty are apparently not the source of Coleridge's feeling of sublimity. Somehow, we have moved beyond the phenomenal realm.

Returning to the Herder marginalia, we discover that Coleridge is more explicit when he demands that the sublime state requires that "the exercise of comparison [be] suspended" (341). The beautiful, on the other hand, "sustains while it satisfies the comparing Power" (341). The comparing power is, of course, the secondary imagination. Clearly, Coleridge feels that the Imagination, given its relationship to form, is not suited to the transcendent situation of the Sublime. Whether the imagination is suspended voluntarily or automatically is yet uncertain, though it seems from the separate examples of Malta and the serpent that both cases are plausible.

The source of the transition from beautiful to sublime lies within Coleridge's organicism. Abrams calls attention to Coleridge's criteria for ranking of objects of nature from Coleridge's *Theory of Life*: "The unity will be more intense in proportion as it constitutes each particular thing a whole of itself; and yet more, again, in proportion to the number and interdependence of the parts which it unites as a whole" (cited in Abrams 220). Abrams equates Coleridge's aesthetic with his biological theory, saying that the "scale of nature may readily be generalized into a comprehensive standard of value, ethical and aesthetic" (221). The value, aesthetic or otherwise, attached to objects of nature and extended to art through representation relies solely on the complexity of form in relation to its degree of unity. In "On Poesy or Art," Coleridge comments that art "will be rich in proportion to the variety of parts which it holds in unity" (255). With a potentially infinite array of "parts" participating in a massive unity, what happens when the weight of perception finally outstrips the imaginative capability of the subject? The answer, for Coleridge, is sublimity.

While he makes no mention of degrees of beauty, Kant states that there may be varying intensities of sublimation, explaining, "the more attractive, the more fearful it is . . . because they raise the energies of the soul above their accustomed height" (125). Clearly, there is a sense of proportional effect in the sublime experience. Sublimity is an emotionally charged experience, suffused with the excitement and awe correspondent with such an encounter with the infinite. For Coleridge, on the other hand, different degrees and combinations of complexity and unity confer a corresponding position on the aesthetic scale. Coleridge sets out his hierarchy of aesthetic judgement in a note published by Allsop (*Letters* 188-19).[15] Starting on the low end, there is "the formal," in which there is some "defect" between form and whole. The formal seems neutral rather than pejorative, i.e., the object is perceived to have form with no aesthetically appealing harmony, as Coleridge does not discuss ugliness. From thence come shapely, beautiful, grand, majestic, picturesque, and finally, sublime in order of perfection of unity. In each of the categories preceding "sublime," Coleridge states some degree of relationship to the form of the object. The sublime, however, is visited as an encounter with pure unity, in which part is indistinguishable from whole. Coleridgean beauty, remember, is the unity of distinct, means- and end-sufficient representations mingling in a single cognitive operation. The sublime, though related through a property of unity, is disconnected from intuitible components and exists finally apart from the imaginative faculty.

The Sublime, according to this division of aesthetic intensities, is "neither whole nor parts, but unity as boundless or endless allness" (*Letters* 119). Again, this sounds quite Kantian, but interestingly, it seems Coleridge does not require the confrontation with power or infinity as a necessary condition of sublimity—although there is no reason that it could not be a sufficient condition, and it certainly seems to be in his relation of the scene in Malta. Rather, the complexity of the image excites the contemplation of the eternal through its infinitely intense unity, which elevates the subject's state to the sublime. Again, though, the image itself is not experienced as part of the sublime state. Plato contemplates eternity (or the raw Idea) "under that symbol" not *in* the symbol. Plato is an apt subject for this example. Coleridge's use of this particular instance suggests a more Neo-Platonic view of art, in which the image is a gateway to the transcendent idea. In the *Biographia*, Coleridge says:

> They and they only can acquire the philosophic imagination, the sacred power of self-intuition, who within themselves can interpret and understand the symbol . . . those only, who feel in their own spirits the same instinct, which impels the chrysalis of the horned fly to leave room in its involucrum for antennae yet to come. They know and feel, that the *potential* works *in* them, even as the *actual* works on them! In short, all the organs of sense are framed for a corresponding world of sense; and we have it. All the organs of spirit are framed for a correspondent world of spirit. (*Biographia* 1: 167)

Coleridge again separates the sensible from the spiritual/intellectual, suggesting that one may, however, lead to the other. It is important to notice that the "potential," the Kantian purposiveness, the apprehension of the infinite is internal to the subject. The "actual" is perhaps capable of engendering the idea, but the perception is not the sublime state. The symbol, for those able to understand, may activate that "philosophic imagination," which renders the Idea.

In Coleridge's symbol, the "eternal" peers through the "temporal;" the Idea asserts itself as unity approaches perfection. The image suggests infinity to the subject, but infiniteness does not need to reside in the object. This is a clear deviation from the Kantian Sublime, in which the object must be either mathematically or dynamically infinite. In this alternate case of Coleridgean sublimity, the image in its perfection of unity seems to strive to the ideal, urging contemplation. The elevation of the subject beyond the materiality demanded of the beautiful occurs as the total unity of the experience no longer concerns itself with form and instead exists as pure Idea. So although the Coleridgean Sublime seems to be a more positive experience than perhaps the Kantian, Coleridge nevertheless requires some passage from the sensible to the ideal, and the transition from Beautiful to Sublime is complete.

Finally, we note another of Coleridge's departures from the Kantian Sublime. Kant claimed that the judgement of Beautiful was of far more import than that of the Sublime. For Coleridge, however, in the Sublime one finds the ultimate degree of aesthetic prowess. As he states in "On Poesy or Art," "The object of art is to give the whole *ad hominem*; hence each step of nature hath its ideal, and hence the possibility of a climax up to the perfect form of a harmonized chaos" (*Biographia* 2: 263). As opposed to Kant's bare awareness of the faculty of Reason, in the Coleridgean Sublime the subject contemplates the Idea directly, which "is above form, and is its essence, the universal in the individual, or the individuality itself,—the glance and the exponent of the indwelling power" (*Biographia* 2: 259). Rather than the passive satisfaction of the Beautiful, the Coleridgean Sublime appears to be far more active in seeking transcendence.

Thus we see that despite the weight of Kant's influence in Coleridge's ideas, he makes a significant departure in the case of the Sublime. Although the "comparing power" is suspended in both versions, the cognitive effects of that suspension are widely separated. For Kant, the suspension is an imaginative failure in reaction to a representation that cannot be fully absorbed, which reflexively reveals to the Reason its ability to grasp what the empirical cannot. Coleridge, on the other hand, seems to allow a peaceful dissociation of the Imagination in certain cases, which allows the mind to reflect solely upon the pure Idea. In the end, the organic philosophy of Coleridge positions the Sublime at the aesthetic apex, retaining the dignity of the experience that the English Romantics thought proper while not straying altogether too far from his Kantian roots.

Chapter 3: The Wordsworthian Sublime

William Wordsworth's conception of sublimity has long been a source of disagreement among scholars of Romanticism. In large part, the discussion focuses on Wordsworth's philosophical influences. The Wordsworthian Sublime, on one hand, has been depicted as primarily Burkean by Monk (230) and Owen ("Sublime in *The Prelude*" 67) or as a combination of Burkean and Longinian by Holland (19). In this view, the confrontation with terrible phenomena produces a state described by Burke as "astonishment" (57). Alternatively, Kelley asserts that Wordsworth's conception of the sublime contains a clear distrust of fear as the arbiter of sublimity (131). Wordsworthian sublimity, by this account, is neither Burkean nor even Kantian in respect to the role of terror. Modiano, as a representative of a third school of thought, characterizes the Wordsworthian Sublime as essentially Kantian (*Concept* 129). Wordsworth's conception, according to Modiano, exceeds even Coleridge's in its affinity to the Kantian Sublime.

All of these critical perspectives are in some measure accurate, and the emphasis on theoretical sources is certainly relevant to placing Wordsworth in the context of English Romantic aesthetics. It is important, however, not to lose sight of what comprises the Wordsworthian Sublime and why Wordsworth chose to accentuate the sublime throughout his writings. By looking at both the rationale for and the characteristics of the Wordsworthian Sublime, I feel it will be possible to locate Wordsworth's role in the development of a Romantic aesthetic.

The primary route to discovering Wordsworth's sublime lies in how he conceives of the purpose and importance of poetry. In the "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* of 1800, Wordsworth states:

> The principal object then which I proposed to myself in these Poems was to make the incidents of common life interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature: chiefly as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement. (123-24)

The purpose of poetry, at least as far as Wordsworth's own is concerned, is to depict the mind's engagement with the external universe. As he states elsewhere, "The appropriate business of poetry (which, nevertheless, if genuine, is as permanent as pure science) . . . is to treat of things not as they *are*, but as they *appear*; not as they exist in themselves, but as they *seem* to exist to the *senses*, and to the *passions*" ("Essay Supplementary" 63). The end of poetry is not to describe the objects of the external universe, but to express their relationship to human experience and emotion. As Abrams notes, "Wordsworth's 'subject' . . . is not merely the particularized object of sense, any more than it is the neo-classic ideal" (53). It is the interaction of subject and object that concerns Wordsworth, and he therefore focuses on the experiences and feelings common to all humans, which are "incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature" ("Preface" of 1815 124). Wordsworth's purpose, then, is to relate the universal qualities of human experience in nature *through* particular instances of perception and emotion. For Wordsworth, the imagination and fancy are the faculties that engage in this exchange between nature and mind and in their highest state fulfill the purpose of poetry in the form of sublimity.

Imagination and Fancy

Like the majority of late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Century aesthetic thinkers, Wordsworth found it necessary to his aesthetics to elaborate conceptions of the imagination and fancy.[16] Wordsworth's purpose, however, for including a discussion of the imagination and fancy in the "Preface" of 1815 was not entirely philosophical. To some extent, Wordsworth provides the definitions in order to justify and explain the division of the 1815 edition of his poetry into "Poems of the Fancy" and "Poems of the Imagination." Nevertheless, as with both Coleridge and Shelley, Wordsworth holds the imagination to be the primary faculty by which the human mind interacts with the external world, and he provides a corresponding discussion of his philosophical positions. As will be seen, however, Wordsworth's conception of the imagination holds a much closer kinship to Coleridge's than to Shelley's. Even so, Wordsworth and Coleridge did not wholly agree upon their respective definitions of imagination, which were a minor point of contention between the two poets. Finally, though, the theoretical consequences of their differences are not so severe, and the conclusions at which each arrives place Coleridge and Wordsworth into a similar philosophical geography.

For Wordsworth, the imagination and fancy take precedence over all other poetic faculties. In the "Preface" of 1815, Wordsworth enumerates six powers requisite for the production of poetry: Description and Observation, Sensibility, Reflection, Invention, Judgement, and Imagination and Fancy (26-7). Though he implies that all are necessary in some measure, Wordsworth states that only poetry of the imagination and fancy "require any particular notice," apparently believing that the other terms are self-explanatory (29). As the imagination and fancy are the faculties able "to modify, *to create*, and to associate," they hold the preeminent position among all of the poetic powers (26 emphasis mine). These faculties are the mediating powers between the mind and the external universe, and Wordsworth's discussion of the imagination and fancy sheds light on his conception of the Sublime.

Although Wordsworth initially appears to treat the imagination and fancy as synonymous—both are able "to modify, to create, and to associate"—they are not precisely identical. That Wordsworth separates the faculties into two categories seems to indicate a difference between them, but a second definition continues to obscure the distinction. Fancy, according to Wordsworth, is characterized as "insinuating herself into the heart of objects with creative activity" (30). Imagination, on the other hand, is "the operations of the mind upon those objects, and processes of creation or of composition" (31). Again, Wordsworth states that both faculties somehow involve themselves with external objects in a creative act, but no clear difference between the two is discernible at this point. The similarity of the definitions, however, is important: just as the separation of the faculties by terminology indicates some difference, the resemblance of their respective definitions suggests that the imagination and fancy are not completely separable and that they may, in fact, work toward similar ends.

As mentioned above, Wordsworth's apparent stance on the similarity of the fancy and the imagination was a point of dispute with Coleridge. Coleridge and Wordsworth were writing respectively *Biographia Literaria* and the "Preface" in 1815, although the *Biographia* was not published until 1817. The two friends were, of course, quite familiar with each other's work, and both Coleridge and Wordsworth note their dispute in those works. When he refers to Coleridge's definition of fancy, in fact, Wordsworth finally develops some measure of distinction between the fancy and the imagination:

> To the mode in which Fancy has already been characterised as the power of evoking and combining, or, as my friend Mr. Coleridge has styled it, the 'aggregative and associative power,' my objection is only that the definition is too general. To aggregate and to associate, to evoke and to combine, belong as well to the Imagination as to the Fancy; but either the materials evoked and combined are different; or they are brought together under a different law, and for a different purpose. Fancy does not require that the materials which she makes use of should be susceptible of change in their constitution, from her touch; and, where they admit of modification, it is enough for her purpose if it be slight, limited, and evanescent. Directly the reverse of these, are the desires and demands of the Imagination. She recoils from every thing but the plastic, the pliant, and the indefinite. (36)[17]

Thus, according to this explanation, the imagination and fancy seem to be different in degree rather than in kind. Rather than existing as fundamentally distinct powers, the two faculties work to produce particular effects with particular materials. Wordsworth contends, however, that imagination and fancy perform their work under different "laws."

Fancy, according to Wordsworth, is the more phenomenally dependent of the two: it operates within "form and feature," and the "casual and outstanding" to produce effects that are "as capricious as the accidents of things" (36). In other words, fancy recognizes and exploits the accidents of similarity that are perceived in objects. "Fancy is given to quicken and to beguile the temporal part of our nature," as Wordsworth argues (37). Fancy centers on the mind's occupation with the momentary and contingent similitude between objects of the external universe.

Imagination, on the other hand, concerns itself with the enduring dialogue of mind and nature. Unlike the transitory fancy, the imagination seeks "to incite and to support the eternal" (37). Imagination is the faculty that synthesizes and reveals the everlasting truths of human existence in and interaction with the world. Like fancy, it evokes and combines, but it does not solicit momentary amusement or passing delight. Rather, imagination "is conscious of an indestructible order" in nature and in consciousness; it is an immanent and immutable actuality of the interplay of the human mind and the universe (36).

Ferguson states that Wordsworth's conception of the imagination is characterized by a cognitive movement that "involves an establishment of correspondences between terms like nature and human consciousness, or at least the temporary forgetting of any sense of discontinuity between these terms" (82-3). This seems to be an accurate description of the Wordsworthian imagination, though the use of "temporary" may warrant some explanation. Although the particular exercise of imagination may be temporary—surely the imagination is not always at the forefront of cognition—the objects of the imagination, i.e., the apprehended relationship of mind and nature, are not temporary, according to Wordsworth, but "everlastingly affect the mind" ("Sublime and Beautiful" 350). The imagination returns again and again to the experiences that excite it; what imagination creates and reflects upon is not transiently pleasurable, as in fancy, but is self-generating and perpetually engaging.

Though Wordsworth separates fancy and imagination in terms of the operative "laws" of their function, Wordsworth is careful not to retreat from his earlier assertion that both imagination and fancy are "aggregative and associative": "Yet is it not the less true that Fancy, as she is an active, is also, under her own laws and in her own spirit, a creative faculty" ("Preface" of 1815 37). Wordsworth does not completely subscribe to Coleridge's conviction that fancy is an entirely mechanical power. In essence, Fancy is creative, though it deals with the phenomenal and temporal. Although he places an aesthetic premium on the expression of emotion, Wordsworth does not discount the importance of the physical world by any means. The purpose of poetry for him is to depict and bring into poetic being the interaction of both mind and nature. Emotions are important in the context of the communication between consciousness and the world, and therefore the mind's engagement with the more superficial and ephemeral characteristics of objects is not unimportant. These characteristics are as much a part of appearance as the deeper, eternal features in which the imagination shows interest, and so the products of the fancy still bring pleasure. Fancy, therefore, is more suited to the immediate effect, playful and pathetic though it may be, than the reflective imagination.

Clearly, Wordsworth's conceptions of the fancy and the imagination hold some similarities both to Coleridge's view of imagination and to his division of the beautiful and the sublime. Fancy, in its concern with limit, form, and pleasure, shows some affinity to Coleridge's notion of the beautiful. The Wordsworthian imagination, furthermore, creates by "consolidating numbers into unity, and dissolving and separating unity into number" ("Preface" of 1815 33), just as Coleridge's Secondary Imagination "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify" (*Biographia* 1: 202). Though Coleridge never assents to Wordsworth's definition of fancy, their conceptions of the imagination are strikingly similar.[18] Moreover, as with Coleridge, Wordsworth uses his view of the imagination as the foundation for an explanation of the sublime.

The Sublime

The sublime of Wordsworth can be traced primarily through "The Sublime and the Beautiful," a fragmentary essay. Additionally, the "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* of 1800 and the "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface" provide important components of Wordsworth's conception of sublimity. Although his poems, such as *The Prelude*, provide important examples of his conception of the sublime, the purpose of this essay is to examine some of the more formal philosophical viewpoints of Romantic aesthetics will correspondingly confine itself to those sources.

"The Sublime and the Beautiful," although fragmentary, contains Wordsworth's most detailed and "philosophical" discussion of the sublime. The qualities of the sublime, as Wordsworth sees them, are divided into individual form, duration, and power (351). Wordsworth requires that these features of the object—though not necessarily all of them simultaneously—be somehow combined in order to produce a sublime effect:

> Prominent individual form must, therefore, be conjoined with duration, in order that Objects of this kind may impress a sense of sublimity; and, in the works of Man, this conjunction is, for obvious reasons, of itself sufficient for the purpose. But in works of Nature it is not so: with these must be combined impressions of power, to a sympathy with & a participation of which the mind must be elevated—or to a dread and awe of which, as existing out of itself, it must be subdued. (351-52)

In this definition, the sublime of Wordsworth is not especially different—with one exception—to the depictions of sublimity presented by previous thinkers. The requirement of power is, of course, both Burkean and Kantian, and it is a common feature of the Eighteenth Century Sublime to demand power and might of the natural sublime.[19] Holland evidently refers to Wordsworth's requirement that "the mind must be elevated" when he compares the Wordsworthian Sublime to the Longinian (19). While it is true that Longinus often speaks of the "elevating" power of the sublime, Longinus is speaking in terms of potent rhetoric rather than of the natural sublime. Secondly, most conceptions of the sublime in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries are considered as generally Longinian in that it was Boileau's translation of Longinus that sparked the revived interest in the sublime during that time. Holland's characterization is therefore not particularly enlightening; "elevation" of the mind or soul is a standard description of Romantic sublimity.

Most striking in Wordsworth's definition, however, is the requirement of individual form in the evocation of the sublime. Coleridge allowed for individual form in his conception of the sublime, as the serpent of the Herder marginalia demonstrates, but he did not require distinct form ("Coleridge Marginalia" 341). Further, the effect of distinct individual form is characteristic of the beautiful rather than the sublime when apprehension is "confined to the visual impression" (341). Likewise, for Kant, physical magnitude (i.e., dimensions or form) must be apprehended as absolute magnitude in order to engender the sublime experience (106). Wordsworth, on the other hand, states that if we "think of it [the natural object] without reference to individual form . . . we shall perceive that it has no power to affect the mind" ("Sublime and Beautiful" 351). Thus, the requirement of a discernable physical form is a unique characteristic of the Wordsworthian Sublime.

Individual form, however, is not sufficient to produce sublimity; it must be combined with duration and power to achieve that effect. Wordsworth uses the familiar example of a mountain to illustrate this conjunction of qualities in the sublime experience, in which "the faint sense of individuality is lost in the general sense of duration belonging to the Earth itself" (351). Further, the perception must be equally accompanied by a sense of power either "abrupt and precipitous, by which danger & sudden change is expressed; or . . . involving in such image a feeling of self-propagation infinitely continuous and without cognizable beginning" (352). As with Burke and Kant, Wordsworth holds that the aspect of danger or physical power can evoke the sublime, and like Coleridge, the feeling (if not the actual presence) of the infinite may do the same. With the combination of these various features, sublimity becomes possible, though not in the objects themselves. Sublimity, in its final apprehension, is intense feeling as a reaction to nature and a re-reaction to the mind's own response.

Wordsworth's conception of poetry is based in the communion of mind and nature, and his view of the sublime does not deviate from this principle. The sublime, according to Wordsworth, acts upon consciousness to produce one of two possible effects: fear/astonishment or exaltation/elevation. Which of these sensations affects the mind seems to be a function of the intellectual and emotional maturity of the perceiver ("Sublime and Beautiful" 353). Modiano suggests that Wordsworth overturns the more typical Romantic privileging of the Sublime over the Beautiful, arguing that for Wordsworth, "the sublime . . . is likely to appeal to the immaturity and natural impressionability of children or newcomers to the mountain country who respond merely to the obtrusive and sensational features of a landscape" (*Concept* 129). Wordsworth, however, makes a normative distinction between the two possible forms of sublimity, and he holds fear to be the less valuable and finally less effective of the two.

Sublimity resulting from physical power is typically the effect of natural landscapes that produce a sensation of danger. Wordsworth points out that repeated exposure to this type of sensation eventually diminishes in effectiveness, stating that

> Familiarity with these objects tends very much to mitigate & to destroy the power which they have to produce the sensation of sublimity as dependent upon personal fear or upon wonder; a comprehensive awe takes the place of one, and a religious admiration of the other, & the condition of the mind is exalted accordingly. (353)

The immature sublimity felt by children or the inexperienced, then, undergoes a change with repeated exposure, and sublimity assumes the characteristics of a reflective repose and an elevation of spirit.

As with the Kantian sublime, the perceiver may not be in any imminent physical danger or in a situation that might produce "a humiliation or a prostration of the mind before some external agency" ("The Sublime and the Beautiful" 354). Rather, the experience must produce a feeling of "sympathy" between mind and nature wherein the experience "suspends the comparing power of the mind & possesses it with a feeling or image of intense unity, without a conscious contemplation of parts, [and] has produced that state of mind which is the consummation of the sublime" (354). Here, Wordsworth elaborates the "exaltation" of which he has so often spoken: the imagination, the esemplastic power of the mind, apprehends a unity that brings it into a communion with nature.

It may be noticed that Wordsworth's characterization of the sublime in this passage bears a striking similarity to that which Coleridge puts forth in the Herder marginalia. There, Coleridge argues that "We call an object sublime in relation to which the exercise of comparison is suspended" ("Coleridge Marginalia" 341). Wordsworth, in the above passage, has come to a conclusion about the sublime that is in obvious accordance with that of his friend. Despite some differences in circumstantial requirements for the sublime experience—especially the condition of individual form—the actual structure of the experience itself is not substantially different. Rather than occurring as an excited, immature response to natural force, as Modiano suggests, the sublime is a reflective state wherein "it may be confidently said that, unless the apprehensions which it [nature] excites terminate in repose, there can be no sublimity, & that this sense of repose is the result of reason & the moral law" (355). As Wordsworth states elsewhere, the sublime emerges "when power is thought of under a mode which we can & do participate, [and] the sublime sensation consists in a manifest aproximation (sic) towards absolute unity" (356). The sublime of Wordsworth, therefore, is the imaginative apprehension of absolute unity, resulting finally in a cognitive repose of rational awareness and moral freedom, i.e., a simultaneous communion with and independence from the external universe. Thought of in this fashion, Wordsworth's sublime is, in its effects, substantially similar to those of Kant and Coleridge. Although Burkean effects occur in respect to power, these states are minimized and altered through repetition and the developing maturity of the perceiver.

As suggested above, an important feature of the Wordsworthian Sublime is the gradual development of the mind away from the sublime of fear and wonder and toward a reflective apprehension of absolute unity. The focus of Wordsworth's discussion of the sublime in "The Sublime and the Beautiful" is primarily on the sublime as experienced in nature. In his initial enumeration of the requirements for sublimity, however, Wordsworth suggests that sublimity may also be a quality of human works (351). Since power is not a requirement for the sublime experience in these objects, how is sublimity produced in the reading of poetry? Wordsworth's theory of poetry offers a potential answer.

In the "Preface" of the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, one of Wordsworth's primary concerns is to justify the form and content of his poetry. To do so, Wordsworth characterizes both the nature of poetry and the role of the poet:

> I have said that Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. (148)[20]

Thus, through reflection, poets produce a sentiment or mental state and a correlative expression approaching that which they had originally experienced of remarkable phenomena. It is important to note that Wordsworth is addressing the *composition* of poetry rather than the reading of it. Nevertheless, Wordsworth clearly holds that the experience of emotion, presumably including sublimity, may be genuinely reproduced in the mind of the poet.

Although his focus is primarily expressivist, Wordsworth occasionally turns his attention to the reader. In a later portion of the "Preface," Wordsworth suggests that the reader has a mixed response to "impassioned poetry":

> [W]hatever passions he [the poet] communicates to his Reader, those passions, if his Reader's mind be sound and vigorous, should always be accompanied by an over-balance of pleasure. Now the music of harmonious metrical language, the sense of difficulty overcome, and the blind association of pleasure which has been previously received from works of rhyme or metre of the same or similar construction, an indistinct perception perpetually renewed by language closely resembling that of real life, and yet, in the circumstance of metre, differing from it so widely, all these imperceptibly make up a complex feeling of delight, which is of the most important use in tempering the painful feeling which will always be found intermingled with powerful descriptions of the deeper passions. (149)

This long passage is a suitable statement of Wordsworth's theory of poetry, in which the reader experiences pleasure through their association of prior experience with poetry, the mixture of the "circumstance" of form, and the opposition of similitude and dissimilitude in language and in thought. These sources of pleasure simultaneously offset painful feelings, which are "intermingled" with descriptions of strong emotion.

Wordsworth evidently contends that the reader will experience emotion during the experience of poetry, though it is not clear whether the reader experiences *the* emotion described by the poet. Additionally, the words "intermingled" and "descriptions" may obscure Wordsworth's meaning. "Intermingled" may suggest that pleasure is derived only from those circumstantial sources mentioned in the passage. At the same time, it is equally possible that "painful feelings" from the depiction of emotion are combined with pleasure from that same depiction. As to the "descriptions of the deeper passions," it is not clear whether Wordsworth means that the reader merely reacts in an indefinitely emotive fashion to the expression of the poet's feelings or that the reader responds with a kindred emotion to that which the poet conveys.

If we are to be able to discern the source of the sublime in aesthetic artifacts, especially poetry in that its physical presence or arrangement is not the source of its power, then the nature of the reader's emotion must be determined. The "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface," which is in some ways an attack by Wordsworth on his critics, may supply an answer. In putting forth his views of criticism, Wordsworth necessarily turns to the act of reading and experiencing poetry. Here, Wordsworth addresses the imagination of the reader rather than that of the poet. Taste, he says, is a passive instrument,

> But the profound and the exquisite in feeling, the lofty and universal in thought and imagination; or, in ordinary language, the pathetic and the sublime;—are neither of them, accurately speaking, objects of a faculty which could ever without a sinking in the spirit of Nations have been designated by the metaphor—*Taste*. And why? Because without the exertion of a co-operating *power* in the mind of the Reader, there can be no adequate sympathy with either of these emotions: without this auxiliary impulse, elevated or profound passion cannot exist. (81)

Imagination in the reader, then, supplies the source of the sublime in the experience of reading poetry. Art in general cannot supply the actual phenomenological power of nature, and poetry can supply empirically none of Wordsworth's three requirements of sublimity: individual form, duration, and power. The actual presence or perception of these qualities does not, however, seem to be necessary for the sublime in poetry. Rather, the imagination supplies a "sympathy" able to generate the elevation of spirit and passion thought of as the sublime experience. As these feelings are "universal in thought and in imagination," Wordsworth must mean that the emotion conveyed by the poet must be successfully reproduced by the reader—assuming the expression of those feelings is adequate.

The sublime of Wordsworth is a creative activity of the imagination in which the interaction of human consciousness with nature is essentially communicative and complementary. As Wordsworth states in the "Preface" of 1800, the poet "considers man and nature as essentially adapted to each other, and the mind of man as naturally the mirror of the fairest and most interesting properties of nature" (140). Through the perception of natural phenomena, the imagination apprehends an "intense unity" between the empirical attributes of the external universe and emotive character and reflective capabilities of the mind:

> . . . a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,

> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things . . . ("Tintern Abbey" ll. 95-102)

Like his friend Coleridge, Wordsworth seeks the absolute and the unified in human experience and thought, most particularly in the communion of mind and nature.

Chapter 4: The Shelleyan Sublime

The aesthetic theories of Percy Bysshe Shelley present some unique problems in the development of a general account of Romantic sublimity. Unlike Coleridge and Wordsworth, Shelley encountered difficulty incorporating a positive conception of the imagination into his philosophical system. For both Coleridge and Wordsworth, the importance of the imagination is never in question: the imagination is the primary faculty of perception and creation, the psychic instrument by which we are conversant with the world. As Coleridge asserts, the imagination is "essentially *vital*" (*Biographia* 1: 202). Shelley, however, is inconsistent in his evaluation of the imagination. As a rational empiricist and philosophical opponent of Christianity, Shelley considers the imagination to be a self-limited faculty that presents the world passively. To Shelley the poet, on the other hand, the imagination is the architect of "the beautiful and the good" and is therefore indispensable to the creative act (*Defence* 152). In learning his place within Romantic aesthetics, one will find it necessary to determine Shelley's conceptualization of the poetic imagination. Despite his early adherence to the empirical philosophies of Locke, Hume, and Godwin, Shelley eventually came to regard the imagination in a manner generally consistent with Coleridgean and Wordsworthian sublimity.

Empiricism and the Imagination

Shelley's early conception of the imagination is primarily an empirical account of knowledge. During this period, in which he composed the essays "On Life" and "Speculations on Metaphysics" (both written in 1815), Shelley viewed the imagination as a passive instrument of sense perception. The empirical view of knowledge, as presented most authoritatively by Locke and Hume, holds that ideas are neither innate nor self-subsisting. Rather, ideas are utterly dependent upon our interaction with the world, particularly in reference to sense experience. This view, of course, is the epistemological scheme that Kant sought to refute by demonstrating the existence of *à priori* ideas—those ideas existing prior to or independent of experience. Since Kantian philosophical perspectives were generally favored by the English Romantics (especially Coleridge and Wordsworth), Shelley's early empiricism initially sets him apart.[21]

The determining feature of Shelley's early account of the imagination lies in his characterization of the relationship between perception and ideas. The first paragraph of "Speculations on Metaphysics" is an apt summary of Shelley's empiricism:

> It is an axiom in mental philosophy, that we can think of nothing which we have not perceived. When I say that we can think of nothing, I mean, we can imagine nothing, we can reason nothing, we can remember nothing, we can foresee nothing. The most astonishing combinations of poetry, the subtlest deductions of logic and mathematics, are no other than combinations which the intellect makes of sensations according to its own laws. A catalogue of all the thoughts of the mind, and of all their possible modifications, is a cyclopedic history of the universe. ("Speculations" 64)

In Shelley's view, ideas are, without exception, dependent upon perception. The result of this is that Shelley relegates the imagination, as the instrument of perception, to a merely aggregative and associative role in the production of art. Significantly, Shelley refers to the "astonishing *combinations* of poetry" (emphasis mine) rather than "creations" or even "products." Coleridge, of course, was in complete disagreement with this view of the imagination. The properties that Shelley attributes to the imagination are those that Coleridge ascribes to Fancy and likewise denies to the imagination (*Biographia* 1: 202). The imagination, as the captive of sense perception, is capable only of assembling combinations and recombinations of existing knowledge.

The empirical characterization of the imagination also has consequences in Shelley's conception of poetic inspiration and creativity. Shelley, for instance, explicitly denies that the mind has any creative capacity: "Mind, as far as we have any experience of its properties, and beyond that experience how vain is argument! cannot create, it can only perceive" ("On Life" 57). This is a rather unhappy assertion coming from a poet, but his staunch adherence to an empirical scheme forces Shelley to declare, "Our words are dead, our thoughts are cold and borrowed" ("Speculations" 67). The imagination is little more than a mirror that mechanically reflects the images of the original light of perception, effectively stifling the creation of ideas new to the universe. Shelley's early estimation of imagination and idea, therefore, is radically different from the accounts of Coleridge and Wordsworth, who assert the synthetic and creative supremacy of the imagination.

Even at this stage in his intellectual development, however, Shelley senses the fundamental tension between his philosophical and poetic sentiments. Leighton points out in his early letters to Thomas Hogg, Elizabeth Hitchener, and William Godwin, that Shelley is "conducting a more difficult debate between his radical empiricism and an aesthetic of poetry" (28-9). Shelley's difficulty in reconciling his two opposing philosophical tendencies stems in part from a simultaneous distrust of and enthusiasm for metaphoric language.

From a rational perspective, Shelley desires a purely discursive language in philosophy, though the medium of language itself may not permit it. He states in "On Life": "How vain is it to think that words can penetrate the mystery of our being! Rightly used they may make evident our ignorance to ourselves, and this much" (53-4). Language has a primarily negative function and is able only to expose gaps in knowledge rather than supply answers. Shelley apparently perceives an inherent inability of language to supply a precise analog to impressions and feelings. In a note to "On Love," Shelley reveals his struggle to clearly express his thoughts: "These words are ineffectual and metaphorical. Most words are so—No help!" (44) For Shelley, language is often a barrier that erroneously seeks to objectify that which can only be subjective, i.e., perception.

The apparent distrust of figurative language seems to be derived from Locke's philosophy. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke declares of metaphorical language:

> [I]f we would speak of Things as they are, we must allow, that all the Art of Rhetorick, besides Order and Clearness, all the artificial and figurative application of Words Eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong *Ideas*, move the Passions, and thereby mislead the Judgment; and so indeed are perfect cheat. (508)

While Locke admits that figurative language can be pleasing, this type of discourse obscures ideas and hampers "Information and Improvement" (508). Clarity is the proper mode of philosophical language, in which personification and metaphor are to be used sparingly. To do otherwise is an "abuse" of language and thought. For Shelley, religion generally and Christianity particularly carry out the most blatant abuses of language. Shelley, for example, cites the Humean scepticism of causality when he says that the religious claim of an omniscient, omnipotent Being is nothing more than a grand personification of a source of ignorance, an empty and obscurist speculation of a first cause (Leighton 27). Thus, language in metaphorical or figurative modes does not reveal but obscures thought and misleads understanding.

As an artist, however, Shelley struggles with his philosophical suspicion of metaphorical language. Leighton cites a letter in which Shelley regretfully tells his mentor Godwin that he "was haunted with a passion for the wildest and most extravagant romances: ancient books of Chemistry and Magic were perused with an enthusiasm of wonder almost amounting to belief" (29). In another letter, Shelley calls himself "the most degraded of deceived enthusiasts" of romantic literature (*Letters* 1: 44, cited in Leighton). Shelley is openly apologetic for the pleasure these works cause him. His Lockean roots demand a preference for plain prose, but the feelings aroused by the metaphorical language of literature command his attention. Shelley at this stage is dedicated to his opposition of Christianity—"eradicating Christianity," as he says—and his corresponding allegiance to the empiricism of Locke and Hume in that radical cause seems to take precedence over the pleasure of poetry (*Letters* 1: 99-101). Even Shelley's poetry, particularly *Queen Mab*, is dedicated to social radicalism and atheism. Despite the forceful influence of his social agenda, however, his letters demonstrate that his love for poetical language cannot be completely extinguished.

The Shelleyan imagination from the perspective of empiricism, it seems, is unlikely to be conducive to a cognitive state resembling the sublime Coleridge or Wordsworth. As ideas are merely reflective products of sense input, transcendental states induced by or residing in ideas are hardly possible. Shelley's social agenda is probably unsuited to transcendentalism as it rests at least in part upon a denial of God, the ultimate expression of the Absolute. Underneath the radicalism, however, an evident love of poetry is present, and the publication of Thomas Love Peacock's *The Four Ages of Poetry* provides the impetus for Shelley to uphold the positive authority of poetry at the risk of undermining his empiricism.

A Defence of Poetry

A Defence of Poetry is the primary document for discovering Shelley's theory of poetry. In response to his friend Peacock's *The Four Ages of Poetry*, Shelley composed the *Defence* in 1821, a year before his death. Peacock's essay is a satirical attack on poetry as a defective moral model as well as a biting criticism of the general quality of contemporary poetry. Peacock's mode of argument in *Four Ages* is essentially Plato's from the *Republic*, in which he attacks poetry on moral grounds for its misleading and corrupting influence. With the *Defence*, Shelley sought to establish poetry as a positive moral force in a vein similar to Sir Philip Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry*.[22] Like Sidney, Shelley responds to a Platonic attack on poetry with a largely Neo-Platonic defense. In this essay Shelley establishes a characterization of poetic imagination that is at odds with his earlier conception of the imagination. He predicates this new characterization on a conception of imagination and language that contains intelligible qualities of the Romantic sublime.

Shelley's initial definition of poetry is superficially consistent with his empirical classification of the imagination. He begins the *Defence* by making a distinction between reason and the imagination, in which "Reason respects the differences, and imagination the similitudes of things" (120). This statement closely approximates one by Burke, who states that "the pleasure of Resemblance is that which principally flatters the imagination" (18). Shelley's imagination in this case is a comparative faculty, not unlike that of Burke and Coleridge, and is a unifying force in that it apprehends similarity and positive relationships. Shelley further states that while reason operates under the principle of analysis, imagination employs the principle of synthesis. Like Coleridge, Shelley holds that the imagination considers thoughts "in their integral unity" (*Defence* 120). This initial definition of the imagination does not stray too far from Shelley's earlier empirical view of that faculty as a passive instrument. That is, until he states that the "imagination is the perception of the value of those quantities [sense input], both separately and as a whole" (*Defence* 120). Up to this point, the Shelleyan imagination has been little more than an organ of sensation. With this assertion of the imagination's evaluative power, however, Shelley presents a more active characterization of the imagination, which leads to his defense of poetry as a positive social and moral power.

Shelley attributes to the imagination a normative capacity in order to refute Peacock's claim of modern (i.e., Romantic) poetry's corrupting influence.[23] The first step in this process is, therefore, to establish a moral authority. Shelley's moral authority is the imagination, which ascribes value or normative worth to ideas. Shelley then extends and externalizes the moral power of imagination in poetry, which Shelley initially defines as "the expression of the imagination" (*Defence* 121). Shelley also distinguishes poetry as art in a general sense from poetry in a more restricted sense: poetry in the general sense includes dance, architecture, sculpture, painting, music, and nearly anything that may be considered under the term "art"—including, not surprisingly for Shelley, as a radical social reformist, the works of the creators of social institutions and founders of civil society (*Defence* 124). This "general sense" of poetry seems to be, as Abrams puts it, "a general annulment of distinction . . . between poems and the products of other arts, and between the arts and all other pursuits of men" (129). Poetry generally, then, may be roughly considered as synonymous with "art" as expressions of the imagination.

Shelley does not primarily intend, however, to defend poetry in the general sense, though he extends his protection to all of the arts through this definition. Poetry in the traditional or restricted sense is his primary subject, and he defines it as

> those arrangements of language, and especially metrical language, which are created by that imperial faculty, whose throne is curtained within the invisible nature of man. And this springs from the nature itself of language, which is a more direct representation of the actions and passions of our internal being. (125)

Shelley believes language to be a production of the imagination, and as such must be a more suitable mode for the expression of the imagination than other artistic mediums (*Defence* 125). As it is an arbitrary construction, language is not subject to the limits of sensation in the scope of its representative capabilities in the way, for example, that sculpture is mitigated by physical qualities or painting by color. Language is a direct, unmediated manifestation of thought. As the "most familiar and most perfect expression of the faculty itself," poetry in the restricted sense may be thought of "highest" poetry in the more general sense of the term (*Defence* 126).

Shelley's emphasis on representation indicates that his theory of poetry is, at least in part, mimetic. Shelley's conception of mimesis is not purely Aristotelian, however, as the term might imply. Certain qualities of Shelleyan mimesis are strongly Aristotelian, though, and Mahoney submits that Shelley's "basic premise is the familiar classical tenet, so closely associated with Aristotle in the *Poetics*, that art should imitate reality, not the merely particular but the wide-ranging and persisting forms that inform the particular" (59). This same tenet may be equally applied to a Neo-Platonic view of art in that the representation would suggest or exemplify the universal of the Platonic ideal in its expression. When Shelley declares that poetical language is the most perfect representation of imagination, i.e., the repository of the idea, then Shelleyan mimesis does indeed accommodate some Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian qualities.

Shelley's definition also develops a clear expressivist quality, which is unrelated to Platonic idealism, when he states that the imagination can be considered "as mind acting upon those thoughts so as to colour them with its own light, and composing from them, as from elements, other thoughts, each containing within itself the principle of its own integrity" (*Defence* 120). Schulze explains this as an idealism "which refers always to a product of man's internal nature, especially products of art, and only sometimes, and tentatively, to other-wordly Forms" (119). In other words, poetry does not merely represent the Platonic idealized perceptions of the imagination in representational expressions. Rather, the expression of the imagination reveals something of the perceiving mind and something of the integral unity of thought therein. As Shelley later states, "Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds" (*Defence* 154). Although his statement is rather optimistic regarding the poet's state of mind, the very fact that Shelley regards poetry as a representation of that state of mind is significant. Poetry is not simply a representation of the world. It is the expression of a perceiving and feeling mind.

The importance of this for Shelley is based in his claim of the positive moral power of poetry. His definition is also at considerable odds with his empiricism. Shelley says that though the existence of things is determined by perception in relation to the percipient, "poetry defeats the curse which binds us to be subjected to the accident of surrounding impressions" (*Defence* 155). Poetry seems to be the one mechanism that allows us to have knowledge of other beings and the universe beyond sense perception. Poetry "creates for us a being within our being" (*Defence* 155-56). Poetry, therefore, is not a psychoanalytic tool by which the author's psyche is vivisected through the aesthetic artifact. Rather, poetry is the apparatus of empathy, in which we are permitted to experience as others experience and thereby escape from empirical restraints. Feeling or sentiment, which Shelley had earlier distrusted as a misleading influence, is now considered a super-empirical source of knowledge. Like Kant and Coleridge, then, Shelley appears to be uncomfortable with the inherent skepticism of empirical philosophy. Though no one would mistake empathic knowledge for *a priori* ideas, neither is Shelley suggesting that the aesthetic experience is the mere perception and understanding of another's perception and feeling. Rather, the encounter with the highest poetry allows the reader to truly experience the feelings of another consciousness.

Shelley ignores the fact that, empirically, no knowledge of others is possible through the perception of an aesthetic artifact. Shelley was well versed enough in Locke and Hume that this could not have escaped him. In order to give his argument moral force, however, Shelley must allow for the possibility of universal and *knowably universal* experience. Empirical utilitarianism, in which necessity is the arbiter of moral judgement, no long seems sufficient to explain moral sentiment. For Shelley, though, poetry does.

Unlike Kant and Coleridge, who felt that they must only assume that the cognitive faculties of all people are similarly constructed and that aesthetic judgements are therefore universal, Shelley maintains that this constitutional similarity is knowable through poetry and not merely through a reasonable and necessary assumption. Shelley also holds that through this knowable universality of experience, knowable universal truths emerge. Shelley states in the famous line that "a poet participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one; as far as relates to his conceptions, time and place and number are not" (*Defence* 124). The poet not only conveys but partakes in the Absolute. Here is where we see the clearest kinship to Coleridgean and Wordsworthian aesthetics. Coleridge, as previously noted, declared that the symbol "partakes in the reality which it renders intelligible" (*Statesman's* 476). Like the Coleridgean symbol, Shelley's poet is in living unity with the absolute idea. Shelley's version, however, is clearly in a more expressivist vein, which suggests more perhaps about poetic inspiration than about the products of art. The fact remains, though, that Shelley's theory not only allows but also demands a conception of a knowable (if not precisely nameable) Absolute.

In his definition of the Absolute in which the poet participates, Shelley states, "The grammatical forms which express the moods of time, and the difference of persons, and the distinction of place, are convertible with respect to the highest poetry without injuring it as poetry" (*Defence* 124-25). Shelley's use of the designation "grammatical forms" in terms of convertibility is potentially confusing, especially given a later admonishment on the "vanity of translation" (*Defence* 126). It is therefore possible that Shelley is referring to mode of substitutibility of forms in the actual grammatical structure of language. Baker, in fact, notes the danger in this kind of reading:

> "the 'grammatical forms' designating time, person, place are translatable into each other; that, in other words, if in such poetry one substituted 'was' for 'is,' 'I' for 'thou,' or even 'this' for 'that,' there would be no harm done to 'highest poetry' as 'poetry.' Such is the case if we take, as I see no alternative to doing, 'convertible' to mean 'inter-convertible' or even 'inter-translatable.' (441)

Such a reading, however, takes into account only substitutions of grammatical forms within a single given work, and it is clear that arbitrary substitutions of grammatical forms would certainly "injure" specific instances of poetry. Therefore, Shelley must mean by "grammatical forms" something other than the syntactic structure of language.

A clarification of the concept of grammatical forms may be traced to Shelley's statements on the history of poetical language. Shelley says language in the infancy of art

> language is vitally metaphorical; that is, it marks the before unapprehended relations of things and perpetuates their apprehension, until the words which represent them become, through time, signs for portions or classes of thoughts instead of pictures of integral thoughts. (*Defence* 123)

Language, as a "picture" of self-unified thought, constitutes and expresses an "indestructible order," or grammar, of experience that is highly communicable (*Defence* 124). Shelley's convertibility, therefore, does not seem to be synonymous with substitutibility. Rather, Shelley specifically states that time, or place, or person does not determine the expression of the imagination. The particulars of grammatical form are relevant only in regard to the universal thoughts that they convey. In other words, "the eternal, the infinite, and the one" are such regardless of the circumstantial characteristics of the work.

As Shelley proposes an "eternal" or universal quality to poetry, certain characteristics of a conception of sublimity begin to emerge in the *Defence*. The communicability of the expression of the imagination is finally a moral act for Shelley. In the central statement of the essay, Shelley proclaims,

> The great secret to morals is love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own. A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. (*Defence* 131)

Poetry, as previously stated, appears to be the instrument by which humanity may transcend the limits of sense perception and truly apprehend the experience of others. Poetry, through expression, has "the power of attracting and assimilating to their [an individual's] own nature all other thoughts" (*Defence* 131). In other words, poetry is at once the apprehension of and the vehicle for infinite unity in reflection. Just as Coleridge's Secondary Imagination engages in "the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" (*Biographia* 1: 202), Shelley's imagination absorbs and assimilates the experience of all humanity into a great unity of apprehension through the medium of poetry. Shelley's claim of an eternal unity of thought that is "at once the centre and circumference of knowledge" bears a striking resemblance to the Coleridgean Sublime of infinite unity, one that is both the end and means of knowledge (*Defence* 152).

The primary difficulty in precisely determining the Shelleyan Sublime lies in the lack of any specific definition of the sublime in Shelley's writing. Additionally, Shelley does not distinguish between the sublime and beautiful as Burke, Kant, Coleridge, and

Wordsworth do. Rather, Shelley equates "the true and the beautiful, in a word, the good," an idea which both Kant and Coleridge denied (*Defence* 123). Shelley's purpose in the *Defence*, however, is specifically to establish a positive moral role for poetry rather than to provide an analytic explanation of aesthetic judgement. The lack of an explicit definition of sublimity, therefore, does not prevent the general characteristics of a Romantic Sublime from being attributed to Shelley's aesthetics.

The sublime for Shelley seems to rest in the qualities of poetry itself rather than in particularly intense instances of poetic or natural experience. Poetry strives to express the "indestructible order" of human experience, to approach the Absolute. As previously mentioned, Shelley's strategy against Peacock is in part Neo-Platonic. As "poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar," the knowledge produced through poetry (in both the general and restricted senses) reveals the integral idea. This disclosure of the immutable, absolute idea is the major connection between Shelley's aesthetics and the Romantic Sublime.

Poetry for Shelley does not merely instruct or solve; it exposes the pure idea and frees it from empirical particulars. As Coleridge declares, the sublime is "the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal" (*Biographia* 1: 202). Likewise, Shelleyan poetry "is the creation of actions according to the unchangeable forms of human nature, as existing in the mind of the Creator, which is itself the image of all other minds" (*Defence* 128). For Shelley, the good in poetry is not bound up in particulars of time and place but in its expression of the absolute idea. As Leighton notes, "Shelley's 'more general view' of poetry is one which raises it above the particular work and presents it instead as the original energy of creativity" (40). Despite some rather apparent differences in Shelley's epistemological scheme as compared to Coleridge's, the Shelleyan Sublime may still be said to be substantially consistent with the Coleridgean and Wordsworthian versions. Shelley's sublime, then, is concerned with the expression and correlative knowledge of the absolute and infinitely unified idea. For Shelley, art is the expression of the form of human experience, an expression which seems to transcend the empirical and is bound up with moral power.

Chapter 5: Conclusion – The Romantic Sublime

Having determined how Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Shelley conceive of the sublime, we have yet to consider fully why the sublime holds such a prominent place in Romantic aesthetics. In the preceding discussion, certain similarities between the three major theories of Romantic sublimity have emerged, not the least of which is an emphasis on the communication of the universal in poetry. How does this emphasis, raised through the various conceptions of sublimity, fit into the more general scheme of Romantic poetics? A potential answer lies in the relationship of Neo-Classic and Romantic aesthetics.

Neo-Classicism and Romanticism

The English Romantic movement, in a very general sense, was a deliberate reaction to the dominance of Neo-Classic aesthetics in the Eighteenth Century. While it is easy to depict Romanticism and Neo-Classicism as polar opposites (see note 1 of this essay), many similarities exist between them. According to Abrams, one of the clearest resemblances between Romanticism and Neo-Classicism is "the assumption that human nature, in its passions and sensibilities no less than its reason, is everywhere fundamentally the same; and it educes the consequence that the shared opinions and feelings of mankind constitute the most reliable norm of aesthetic, as of other values" (104). As we have seen from Burke to Kant to Wordsworth, there is inevitably an underlying belief in the commonality in human cognitive and emotional processes at the root of aesthetic judgements. The primary difference, then, between Romantic and Neo-

Classic conceptions of art lies in how these universal traits of human consciousness are shared. As we shall see, the sublime is the underlying mechanism of the expression of the universal in Romantic aesthetics.

To the Neo-Classic critic, Aristotelian mimesis is the primary pleasure in art. In *Poetics*, Aristotle firstly defines poetry, music, and painting as modes of imitation, differing only in medium, object, or manner of representation (50). Imitation of the objects of life is pleasurable because "the instinct of imitation is implanted in man from childhood . . . and through imitation he learns his earliest lessons; and no less universal is the pleasure felt in things imitated" (51). Art, as the faithful representation of life, is therefore pleasurable in that it instructs.

Neo-Classicists, very generally, look to a mimetic conception of art as the principal mode of expression. Not only should the work be a "truthful" representation of life but it should also instruct, especially in the moral sense. Speaking of Shakespeare, for example, Samuel Johnson states:

> Shakespeare is above all writers, at least above all modern writers, the poet of nature: the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life. His characters are not modified by the customs of particular places . . . or by the accidents of transient fashions or temporary opinions: they are the genuine progeny of common humanity . . . . In the writings of other poets a character is too often an individual; in those of Shakespeare it is commonly a species.

> It is from this wide extension of design that so much instruction is derived. It is this which fills the plays of Shakespeare with practical axioms and domestic wisdom. (321)

Johnson's view of Shakespeare is easily transferable to poetry in general. Shakespeare, after all, was an individual generally representative of the species of "good" poets. It is interesting that Johnson calls Shakespeare the "poet of nature," which is a phrase we may easily associate with Wordsworth. The view of nature in art that Johnson espouses, however, is the key to Neo-Classic aesthetics.

The objects of life—"men in action," as Aristotle puts it (51)—are to be imitated faithfully ("mirrored," as it were) with the purpose of providing practical moral instruction. The emotions evoked by a work of art are relevant only as far as their expediency in supplying moral training. While the universal in human behavior interests Neo-Classicists just as it does the Romantics, the pleasure in art derives from the accuracy of the imitation and the educational value of that representation.

As we have seen, the Romantics found this view of art unacceptably limiting. Wordsworth and Coleridge, especially, could not bring themselves to think of human consciousness as the passive reflector of sense experience. Even Shelley, devoted empiricist that he was, desired a conception of art that accounted for poetic creativity and inspiration. As Abrams notes, the empirical theorist "was committed to looking 'out there,' rather than into the artist, for the subject matter of a work" (35). Neo-Classicism, with a philosophical foundation as entrenched in the empiricism of Locke and Hume as it is in the poetics of Aristotle and Horace, is not able to provide the cognitive and aesthetic framework demanded by Romantic critics.

The imitative and empirical tendencies of Neo-Classicism, then, are not suited to the expressivist theories of Romanticism, including Shelley's. Thus, we see a major shift in aesthetics in the Romantics' general rejection of the supremacy of empiricism in art, despite the common interest in the universals of human experience. An interest in the universal, however, is not the only similarity between Neo-Classicism and Romanticism.

A philosophical fascination with the sublime was certainly not limited to Romanticism; this attraction was also prevalent among eighteenth-century thinkers, who helped renew the study of the sublime centuries after Longinus introduced it. Again, we see that Monk's warning about over-simplifying Neo-Classicism is sensible and that Neo-Classicism is not as alien to Romanticism as is sometimes implied (5). The sublime of the eighteenth century, however, tends to adhere to empirical philosophy as closely as other areas of Neo-Classic poetics. If we consider the sublime of Burke to be typical of Neo-Classic interpretations of that experience, then we may see some important differences between the Neo-Classic and the Romantic Sublimes.

Burke holds the sublime to be an emotional reaction to an encounter with terrible or powerful natural phenomena. Sublimity for Burke, however, is not the transcendent cognitive event that Coleridge, Wordsworth, or even Shelley hold it to be. Rather, sublimity is a merely a more intense form of aesthetic appreciation and retains the instructive function of Neo-Classic aesthetics. As stated previously, Burke's sublimity consists of the overcoming of psychic difficulties; sublimity is a mental trial that exercises the mind in the same way physical activity exercises the muscles (135). The Burkean sublime does not, however, reveal to consciousness its own qualities. Instead, the sublime has a strengthening effect upon the moral sentiments, but the sublime is not a basis of morality for Neo-Classicism as it is for Shelley. The Neo-Classic sublime does not secure a philosophical grounding for morality but simply provides a psychological defense against personal moral collapse. The sublime according to Burke staves off "mental inactivity," which results in "melancholy, dejection, despair, and often self-murder" (134-35). The Burkean sublime is therefore therapeutic rather than revelatory. Burke's view of the sublime, with its empirical focus and restorative moral powers, stays well within the bounds of Neo-Classic ideology.

The Romantic Sublime

The sublime, as seen particularly by Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Shelley, is the key component in Romantic aesthetics in their attempt to overcome the limits of empirical philosophy and mimetic art and to find a place for poetry in philosophy. Eldridge asserts that Romanticism, Wordsworth's especially but not peculiarly,

> is marked by a continuous awareness of the local and temporal situatedness of human thought, so much so that human thought is typically represented as occasioned by specific places and as including an awareness of its own temporal development . . . . Within this form of human sensibility, philosophical reflectiveness about deep necessities that ought to govern human life is understood as neither impotent in the face of

> the onrush of specific practices nor as their complete and perfect master. Philosophical reflectiveness becomes situated as an expression of particular responsiveness to the general human problem of leading a life authentically, in awareness of deep necessities, rather than only conventionally and mechanically. (53-4)

Romanticism is, in essence, a mode of awareness. Romantic awareness recognizes not only the empirical nature of some forms of experience but also the capacity for the transcendent development of the mind itself. In Romanticism, the general in the particular that Neo-Classicism also seeks is found not in the mimetic representation of set answers to philosophical questions but in the struggle with and experience of the questions themselves.

While Neo-Classic aesthetics presupposes one of the primary questions of philosophy, i.e., the universality of human experience, the English Romantics assert that we may partake in that universality through the sublime. Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Shelley are willing to take a philosophical leap that Kant and (certainly) Locke are not. Although the theories of Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Shelley differ in some of the details, at the heart of each account is a fundamental conviction in the ability of the human mind to participate in the universals of human experience.

For Coleridge, the sublime is a method of subverting the mechanistic view of consciousness that he detected in Neo-Classic philosophy. Coleridge denies that the imagination is bound by empirical restrictions to a merely associative role. Instead, the imagination is organically creative, able to produce new and original thoughts and knowledge in a symbolic activity. In its most perfect form, the sublime, the symbol exists as the infinitely complex unity and integration of the external universe and consciousness. In Coleridge's view, the mind does not simply mirror the reality imposed upon it by sense experience but actually participates in all of reality by immersing experience in the philosophical reflection of the "infinite I AM." The sublime, which elevates the mind above the merely empirical, presents a reality in which the eternal peers through the temporal and the universal is present in the particular. Thus, Coleridge views the sublime as the participation in, rather than an explanation of, the universals in human experience.

Wordsworth's view of the sublime, as we have seen, is substantially similar to Coleridge's. Wordsworth advocates a participatory concept of art in which the concern of the poet is not merely to discover and describe the noumenous qualities of the external universe but to express the relationship of consciousness to nature in terms of emotion. Like Coleridge, Wordsworth considers the sublime to be the highest and most deeply *felt* form of unity between the mind and nature. Though he focuses primarily on the psychology of the poet, Wordsworth also asserts that a "co-operating power," i.e., the imagination, in the reader produces a sympathy with the feelings expressed in a poetic work. This sympathy, according to Wordsworth, generates the same "elevated or profound passion" produced by natural phenomena ("Essay, Supplementary" 81). In other words, the sublime of Wordsworth is the apprehension of "the universal in thought and imagination" in nature and in art (81). For Wordsworth, therefore, the sublime is the means to the universal expression of the communion of consciousness and nature.

Lastly, Shelley's account of the sublime corresponds well with those of Coleridge and Wordsworth, despite Shelley's early and rigorous empiricism. Shelley, more so than Coleridge and Wordsworth, attempts to establish a moral role for poetry. Unlike Neo-Classical critics, however, Shelley does not promote poetry as the source of "practical axioms and domestic wisdom." For Shelley, poetry is not merely a didactic implement. Rather, poetry is the sole means of transcending the limits of empirical knowledge; it is the most direct expression of the poetic imagination, which "participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one" (*Defence* 124). The moral force of poetry, according to Shelley, resides in its ability to express and to make knowable the universal experiences of humanity. Poetry frees the "indestructible order" of human experience from empirical constraints and permits a sublime participation in the "unchangeable forms of human nature." Shelley's version of the sublime, like the accounts of Coleridge and Wordsworth, is a transcendent experience, a participation in universal human existence.

In conclusion, we find that the sublime in the theories of Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Shelley is the unifying cognitive force of human experience. The sublime frees reflection and feeling from dependence on the particular empirical circumstances of individual consciousness, and it fuses the disparate activities and impressions of the individual into an awareness of the permanent and universal forms of human experience. The Romantic Sublime is finally the highest form of human sensibility, and we find that the Romantic concern with discovering and expressing the universal in consciousness is both exemplified and fulfilled by the sublime. Thus, the sublime appears not only to be a unifying force in human consciousness but also a unifying element of English Romanticism as a literary and philosophical movement.

Notes

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[1] Monk points out, "Of late years it has been fashionable to set up, as a bogy to be explained away, the older conception of neo-classic art as merely cold and regular and decorous" (5). Although Monk rightly observes that there is often a general tendency to over-simplify Neo-Classicism, this same tendency was significantly prevalent at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century.

[2] All references to Kant are from the *Critique of Judgement.*

[3] Coleridge employs this precise example in "On the Principles of Genial Criticism" to demonstrate disinterestedness (*Biographia* 2: 241-42).

[4] Kant readily admits that the existence of a "common sense" is a sweeping but clearly necessary presupposition.

[5] *Biographia Literaria* 1: 102. Speaking here of A.W. Schlegel, Coleridge says, "In this instance, . . . from the same motive of self-defence against the charge of plagiarism, many of the most striking resemblances, indeed all the main and fundamental ideas, were born and matured in my mind before I had ever seen a single page of the German Philosopher."

[6] Orsini 168-69. Orsini says that the most direct Kantian influence "is to be found mainly in the four 'Aesthetic Essays,'" which he claims are "in an entirely Kantian vein."

[7] Cf. Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, 1. Part of Burke's stated objective of the *Enquiry* is to clarify aesthetic terms that were frequently confused or used synonymously.

[8] Coleridge's note was first published by John Shawcross in "Coleridge Marginalia." *Notes & Queries* 4 (Oct, 1905): 341-42. Because of the accompanying commentary by Shawcross, I will cite this article as the source. Coleridge's note is also available in *Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. 10, 1069-70.

[9] See M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* 72-4 on Longinus and the English Romantics. Longinus stated that those rhetorical qualities were Sublime if they attained "noble diction" and "dignified and elevated composition" (Longinus 67). Unlike Coleridge, however, Longinus is careful to enumerate the criteria for sublime diction.

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[10] *Critique of Judgement* 45-6. Kant explains that the judgement of the Beautiful is "not a judgement of cognition, and is consequently not logical but aesthetical." See Chapter 1 of this paper.

[11] Coleridge, "Shakespeare's Judgement Equal to his Genius." 1816. In *Critical Theory Since Plato*. p. 471.

[12] Abrams points out that this is the primary source of the charges of plagiarism against Coleridge.

[13] See Modiano, *Coleridge's Concept of Nature* 138-206 on Coleridge's *Naturphilosophie.*

[14] Kelley evidently disagrees with Samuel Monk's assessment of the Wordsworthian Sublime, which, according to Monk, "was by such a 'discipline of fear' that nature impressed on him an awareness not only of her own power, but a sense of the soul's infinitude" (230). Monk's appraisal gives Wordsworth a thoroughly Kantian flavor. Cf. Modiano, *Coleridge's Concept of Nature* (128-34).

[15] Also cited with additional commentary by Shawcross in *Biographia* 2: 309. Cf. Shawcross, "Coleridge Marginalia" 342.

[16] I am speaking here not only of Kant, Coleridge, and Shelley, but also of Burke and Richard Payne Knight (*Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste*, 1808) as examples.

[17] Coleridge quotes much of this passage in *Biographia Literaria* (1: 194). He concludes the passage by remarking, "I reply, that if, by the power of evoking and combining, Mr. Wordsworth means the same as, and no more than, I meant by the aggregative and associative, I continue to deny, that it [Fancy] belongs at all to the imagination" (*Biographia* 1: 194). Wordsworth had obviously read a draft of the *Biographia* and was therefore able to quote Coleridge before the *Biographia* was even published. Coleridge evidently worked a reciprocal quote into a revision.

[18] Shawcross suggests that Coleridge's dispute with Wordworth's view of fancy and imagination was less of a genuine argument with Wordsworth than it was an occasion "afforded him of attacking his old bugbear, the mechanical philosophy" (Introduction, *Biographia* 1: lv). Given the substantial similarities between the two theories, it seems likely that Coleridge was more interested in establishing a firm and consistent conception of poetic creativity than invalidating his friend's ideas. See also, Abrams 181-82.

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[19] I refer firstly to Burke 64-70, in which he states, "I know of nothing sublime which is not some modification of power""(64), and secondly to Kant's discussion of the dynamically sublime (*Critique of Judgement* 123-29).

[20] Cf. Shelley's *A Defense of Poetry* (153) on poetic inspiration. Shelley's account is not nearly as optimistic as Wordsworth's.

[21] The Kantian "bias" is not limited to English Romanticism. The German Romantics, Friedrich Schlegel in particular, generally employed Kantian ideas as the basis for their aesthetic theories. See Walter Benjamin, *The Concept of Art Criticism in German Romanticism.*

[22] Like Shelley, Sidney was responding to an attack on the moral status of poetry, in this case by Stephen Gosson, a Puritan. Perhaps coincidentally, the first version of Sidney's essay was titled *Defence of Poesie.*

[23] Peacock makes references to everyone (excluding his friend Shelley) from Coleridge to Wordsworth and Byron in his criticism of Romantic poets for their tendency to glorify common diction and "barbaric" behavior and thereby contribute to the "backward" movement of modern poetry (513).

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