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ROMANTIC LITERARY THEORY AND THE SUBLIME

BY

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THESIS DIRECTOR'S SIGNATURE:

[Signature]

HOUSTON, TEXAS

MAY, 1971
there's not a man
That lives who hath not known his god-like hours

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION ............................................................... Page 1

CHAPTER
ONE PERI HUPSOUS AND THE DOUBLE VIEW ....................... 8
TWO THE CENTRALITY OF DE QUINCEY ............................. 53
THREE WORDSWORTH: SUBLIMITY AND THE KINGDOM OF POWER ......................... 95
FOUR COLERIDGE: SUBLIMITY AND THE PRINCIPIUM VITAE ......................... 141
FIVE BYRON: THE SUBLIMITY OF DEFIANCE ...................... 191
SIX SHELLEY: DIGNITY AND THE SUBLIME ........................... 233
SEVEN KEATS AND THE LONGINIAN HERITAGE ....................... 286

LIST OF WORKS CITED ................................................... 324
INTRODUCTION

Though the sublime may be a subject of some oddity for the modern student of literature, it was hardly so for the theoreticians and aestheticians of the eighteenth century. What we tend to view as an historical curiosity piece was for them a substantial means of defining how one should view the literary, natural, moral, and aesthetic worlds, either separately or in toto. It formed a basis on which speculations could be made about the styles of literature, the effects of objects and ideas on the human mind, the validity of one's "feelings" in the aesthetic response to art, the psychological workings of the viewer's "idea-sequences," the ennoblement and enlargement of the human spirit, and, not least of all, the relation between man and the divine.

The sublime, then, was much more than a "type" or "class" of writing. Though it began primarily as a means of describing the "grand" style of literature, it later became a characteristic of objects and scenes in the natural world, and, later still, a term applicable to thoughts, ideas, concepions, frames of mind, even human passions and emotions. Growing out of Longinus's treatise On the Sublime, it evolved into an eighteenth-century court of appeal for sundry kinds of theories. Adherents of the classical literatures could make Peri Hupsous support the need for literary rules, while more staunch advocates of contemporary
literature sought its aid in the defense of natural genius and "the grace beyond the reach of art." From the very beginning the sublime was astonishingly flexible. Longinus, who devoted much attention to rhetoric, nonetheless gave consideration to genius and its privilege of transcending the rules. Likewise, while enumerating the various means of writing sublime literature, he also looked beyond style and rhetoric to the effect of sublimity on the subject. Indeed, Longinus's treatise provided many of the directions that later evaluations of the sublime were to take.

It demanded an adherence to the rules, yet provided for a legitimate means of transcending them; it outlined thoroughly the use of language in works attempting sublimity, yet focused some attention on "natural sublimity"; in addition to treating the sublime in objects and literary works, it examined the responses of the subject to that quality of grandness; finally, it even demonstrated an attempt to judge works of literature on the basis of a theory of sublimity.

But the most important bifurcation in the treatise was the idea of principle of sublimity as opposed to its rhetorical expression:

The abiding interest of Longinus for the eighteenth century ... lay in his conception of the sublime that underlies sublimity of style and that is an expression of a quality of mind and of experience. To write on the sublime style is to write on rhetoric; to write on sublimity is to write on aesthetic.... It is the latent aesthetic aspect of Peri Hupsous that was Longinus's contribution to eighteenth-century thought....

And it is that same latent aspect of the work that drew later
commentators entirely away from the original treatise, until Wordsworth could say with determination: "One is surprised that it should even have been supposed for a moment, that Longinus writes upon the sublime, even in our vague and popular sense of the word." As the eighteenth century progressed, rhetorical analyses of the sublime became increasingly fewer; instead, there was a more intense interest in sublimity as an aesthetic concept. The differences and similarities between subject and object were more completely analyzed by Coleridge; the separation of the sublime, the beautiful, and the picturesque was a commonplace by the beginning of the Romantic period; interest in sublime ideas and thoughts began to replace the older attraction for raging cataracts and vast mountains; even the sublimity of space as space became, in the hands of Coleridge, sublimity of "space-involving-the-notion-of-substance."

But most important of all was the growing belief that the sublime was not some aspect of a scene or object, but a product of the receptive and creative mind. Kant, of course, unequivocally stated that sublimity "does not reside in anything in nature, but only in our mind," and this crucial idea, supported by Burke, Alison, Reid, and a host of eighteenth-century thinkers, led inevitably to the Romantic concern with "the sublimity of the mind." For Wordsworth and Coleridge, for example, the reaction to artistic or natural grandeur involves contemplation, and for De Quincey and Shelley, power; in both cases the mind experiences the sublimity of its own creative powers. This, of course, is clearly one reason why Romantic critical thought
emphasizes the subject rather than the object he is confronting. Any aspect of life—a poem, an idea, a view from a mountain top, whatever—remains incomplete without a subject to make of it what he will. Wordsworth, for example, recounts seeing a girl with a pitcher on her head which "was, in truth an ordinary sight"; yet Wordsworth the subject, in a moment of later contemplation, feels "A spirit of pleasure" "with radiance more sublime" because of his reaction to this scene and "the power it had left behind." Sublimity, then, is not a property inherent in a work of art, an idea, or a lovely sight, but a bestowal by the subject as he views a scene, by an artist as he creates his work, or the reader as he experiences the poem. This is not to imply, however, that the work is void of its own particular "loftiness." It, too, has a part to play in the final creation of the sublime. The scene must be sufficiently "grand" or an idea "noble" before it can stimulate the subject. "Sublimity," however, results only when the mind reacts to, and creates with, that stimulation. Thus, when these Romantic artists use very traditional expressions like "the sublime Milton" or the "sublimity of one's physiognomy" or even "the sublimity of a Dung-pellet," we must remember that in each case the object, person, or work is sublime in relation to, and because of, the perceiving, reacting mind. Even a particular poem like Paradise Lost is sublime for De Quincey only because it has a power that stirs the mind to an exercise of its own power; the style, language, and poetic construction are certainly of the first order, but the sublimity of the work cannot be realized (in De Quincey's sense of this
term) without a creative sublimity in the mind of the subject.

It should be evident from these few remarks that the Romantic sublime is essentially concerned with the creative imagination, that is, with the mind's power. Thus, if we must seek out a term with which "sublime" is allied, that term is not, properly speaking, "terror" or "passion," but the more encompassing word "power." Of late, Romanticists have become acutely aware of the role that power plays in the critical thought of Wordsworth and his contemporaries, the result being that W.J.B. Owen and James A.W. Heffernan have scrutinized this term with care in their recent studies of Wordsworth, and, at the same time, have related it both to the creative imagination and the sublime. As a consequence, these two critics have opened up a field of inquiry which has been recognized as important but which has received only the most cursory treatment in the past: namely, the centrality of "the sublime" in the critical and aesthetic thought of the Romantic writers.

My intention in this study, then, is to explore this field, and, as my motto suggests, to detail the Romantic sublime as a celebration of man's "God-likeness," his creative and divine energy. For purposes of concision and elucidation I have chosen to work almost solely with the critical writings of the major Romantic authors. There are also two additional reasons for selecting this approach: (a) it is in these works that "the sublime" is generally given the fullest treatment, and (b) it is a vital critical concept in Romantic thought, and so needs to be placed among those other concepts to which we give assent. Economy and
clarity, then, are not the sole motives for choosing this approach, and however tempting it is to turn from theory to poetic practice, that must remain quite another study.
NOTES--INTRODUCTION

1 There is, of course, a controversy regarding the identity of the author of On the Sublime. For the sake of convenience, however, I shall consider him to have been "Longinus."


4 Naturally rhetorical analyses of the sublime did not cease altogether. On the contrary, the sublime grew out of an association with rhetoric, and the bonds were never severed completely. Still, the emphasis shifted noticeably as the eighteenth century proceeded, and gradually the term "sublime" became less applicable to a style of grand writing.

5 The firmest statements regarding sublimity as existing in the mind occur, of course, in the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment. See as well Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime, ed. John Goldthwait (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1965).

CHAPTER ONE

PERI HUPSOUΣ AND THE DOUBLE VIEW

To describe On the Sublime as simply a rhetorical treatise is to do it a remarkable disservice. Longinus's deservedly famous work remains an illuminating study to this day not because of its contributions to rhetorical matters, but, I am sure, because of its concern with literature as compelling experience. For D.A. Russell the treatise reflects a pervading sense that Longinus "loves literature and wants to communicate his love to others,"¹ and perhaps this defines Longinus's special "quality" as neatly as possible. Whatever terms we choose when talking about Longinus—his "love" for literature, his imaginative response to the great works of art, his ability to read with a creative imagination—one fact remains clear: Longinus is talking to Terentianus (and so to us) principally about a certain indefinable quality of art that is not a matter of rules and rhetoric so much as it is "the echo of a great soul."

The treatise incorporates much rhetorical treatment—some of it not especially illuminating—but the primary emphasis lies in treating the effects of sublime writing, in other words, the aesthetics of sublimity. We must remember, as Elder Olson has said, that the several sources of the sublime "stand related to sublimity as means to end."² They are neither ends in themselves nor "sub-
lime" in themselves. Yet at the same time it is clear that Lon-
ginus's treatment of rhetoric is not at all vague. His minute
attention to language, the care with which he draws his examples,
his observations on word order and syllabic change (as in Chapter
XXXIX)—all these instances and more demonstrate an exacting treat-
ment of rhetoric, a real sense of the full effect and potential of
language.

How, then, are we to deal with this double view of the treat-
ise, and can we in all fairness term Peri Hupsous either a rhe-
torical or aesthetic document? Other questions must also be asked:
(a) does the work advocate a very subtle blending of rhetoric and
aesthetic, what one recent commentator, T.E.B. Wood, has described
as a quasi-Langerian symbolic unity of form (intellect) and feel-
ing; (b) does Longinus have in mind an organic view of art, as
T.R. Henn suggests; (c) can we reconcile the obvious practicality
of the work—its intent to teach—with its noticeably abstract
considerations of art; (d) does Longinus entertain the notion
that the process of creativity extends beyond the artist to the
reader, or audience? 3

That most commentators on this treatise are well aware of
its double view is clear enough, but significantly few have made
much of it. Rhys Roberts, for example, says the following of
Longinus's work: "The object of the author ... is to indicate
broadly the essentials of a noble and impressive style." 4 And,
continues Roberts, "the treatise may be regarded as a disquisition
not only on the formation of style, but on literary criticism
generally." 5 However, it is evident that Roberts's analysis of
On the Sublime changes significantly. He realizes that style is clearly not a sufficient focal point for examining the work. While Longinus treats figures, rhythm, and "questions of form generally," he also "breathes the spirit of the Ion rather than of the poetics." "He is subjective rather than objective. He is an enthusiast rather than an analyst. He is better fitted to fire the young than to convince the maturely sceptical. He speaks rather of 'transport' or 'inspiration' than of 'purgation' or 'the universal.'" We find, Roberts says, "an aesthetic rather than purely scientific" aim on the part of Longinus.

Is Roberts arguing, then, that Longinus has an aesthetic aim but a stylistic preoccupation? And what in fact is Longinus's "aim" or "concern"? Is it to produce a "disquisition on style" or a work which is "aesthetic rather than purely scientific"? Roberts is never sufficiently clear on these points; and, as a matter of fact, he seems to sense his own dilemma when he mentions two important problems in Longinus's treatise. First, as he says, we must contend with the word "sublimity," for in its modern acceptance it is "too limited in scope to cover Longinus's meaning." Presumably Roberts means by this that sublimity, for Longinus, involves a way of thinking as much as it does a way of writing, and, if so, I could not agree more. Second, we must appreciate the difference between the grand style and what Roberts terms the "great" style. The former is the traditional high style and it is not Longinus's point of concern. The latter is a certain excellence of expression which transcends all levels of rhetoric, and its characteristic is an inherent brilliance, not
simply a loftiness of diction or language:

Longinus is too sound a verbal critic to overlook the importance of the more technical or scholastic side of composition. But he is also too broad-minded to forget that greatness of style must ultimately rest on a much wider basis than that afforded by technical rules. His double standpoint is worthy of attention because it must have been rare in his own time, and it cannot be said to be common in ours.11

I have singled out Roberts's comments on Peri Hupsous not because they are less satisfactory than others (they are not), but because they best illustrate the problems at hand. Certainly the quandary in which Roberts finds himself is one shared by many other critics. He assumes that the treatise is fundamentally rhetorical, yet he cannot help acknowledging a certain "spirit" in the work which decidedly goes far beyond matters of rhetoric. The only way to escape the dilemma--apart from a lengthy study of the relationships between rhetoric and aesthetic--is to substitute the word "scientific" for "rhetorical." The resulting statement, that Longinus's aim is "an aesthetic rather than purely scientific one" (my italics), is likely to meet with no argument at all. My point is that the conclusion ought not to be put in these terms to begin with.

Of course, I am not suggesting that Roberts's substitution of words is a deliberate deception, only that it is an evasion. Like so many other critics, Roberts establishes an indissoluble dichotomy between rhetoric on the one hand, which is viewed as "mechanical" or "scientific," and aesthetic on the other, which is rather like a subjective, transcendent "quality." The diffi-
culties arise when Longinus must be given one of these provinces as home, for his cogent observations on literature and oratory are too disturbingly modern for the label "rhetorician" to sit well on him, while, on the other hand, he is much too ancient a writer to warrant the name "aesthete in." The result is inevitably a very confused notion of Longinus's "aim" or "concern" and a consequent begging of the question. 

A case in point is Samuel Holt Monk who states unequivocally in chapter one of The Sublime that "Only by stretching the meaning of the term sublime out of all conscience can Longinus's treatise be considered an essay on aesthetic."

Longinus's treatment of his subject "is primarily rhetorical; the essay is a discussion of style, and only incidentally does Longinus allow his deeper perceptions to find expression." Given his claim that "The greater part of the essay is concerned with style and the tricks of rhetoric," it is easy to see why Monk asserts that the aesthetic content of the treatise can be unduly emphasized.

Like Roberts, however, Monk very quickly moves away from a discussion of style. Almost immediately he makes it clear that his focus of attention is not the sublime style at all but the "conception of the sublime that underlies sublimity of style," a conception that is "an expression of a quality of mind and of experience." Furthermore, this "quality" is clearly within the domain of aesthetics: "To write on the sublime style is to write on rhetoric; to write on sublimity is to write on aesthetic. The sublime style is a means to an end; sublimity is an end in itself." Monk's chapter has come full circle. The treatise he
sees as rhetorical, yet its fundamental interest is an aesthetic one. The essay is concerned primarily with style, yet there is a "latent" aspect of *On the Sublime* (p. 12) that is of much greater interest to us.

Monk's continuing discussion of *On the Sublime* shows how significantly he keeps coming back to aesthetic matters. Sublimity as a "greatness of conception" I have already mentioned. He also draws attention to the creative and responsive minds: Monk considers that Longinus "begins that analysis of the effect of sublime objects on the mind,"¹⁷ and that he also treats "the mind that creates a work of art."¹⁸ Finally, with respect to the device of amplification, "Longinus expresses again, and very clearly, his conviction that sublimity in the last analysis is to be found in content rather than in the mode of expression."¹⁹

As admirable a critic as he is, Monk remains confusing in his discussion of *On the Sublime*. There are too many vague qualifying words like "primarily," "latent," "incidentally," "greater." But the principal source of confusion lies in the fact that the double view of the treatise is not encountered but sidestepped. It is not enough to draw attention to rhetorical matters in *Peri Hupsous*, point out the interesting aesthetic concerns of the essay, and then blame the eighteenth century for misreading Longinus. Aesthetic and rhetoric have a common meeting ground in *On the Sublime*, and this treatise needs to be examined with both in mind, especially if one is going to do justice to its critical richness.

The treatise is also a very problematical one. Apart from
textual and authorial difficulties, there is also its confusing, occasionally bewildering, organization to contend with. The Passions, for instance, are cited by Longinus as an important source of the sublime, yet he sets this subject aside, presumably with the intention of taking it up in a separate work. What, then, are we to make of the numerous references to passion and power, especially in the parts of the treatise dealing with oratory and the figures of speech? Furthermore, how do we place the many digressions (and tangential subjects) into context: the relation of art and nature; the relative merits of faulted genius and perfect mediocrity; the paucity of "lofty and transcendent natures" in his own time? And the problem of organization is confounded even more when we try to speak of Longinus's "aim" or "sole consideration" in writing this work. What, indeed, can that aim be when the essay is at once a refutation of Caecilius, an orderly and systematic treatise on rhetoric, an exercise in practical criticism, an appeal for moral improvement, a document of aesthetics, a practical guide for sublime writing, and, not least of all, a responsive delight in experiencing masterful literature? The treatise is all of these, and to neglect any one of them involves an important omission.

I should like to examine the treatise in detail, then, with a view to resolving its double emphasis. In my estimation this can best be done by confronting Longinus's aesthetic—his ideas about the creation of sublime art and our responses to it, as well as its nature and function. We then need to see what rhetoric is intended to do for such art. Finally, it is imperative
that we examine the place of art in man's world, since Longinus assigns it a place and speaks of it frequently. His criticism of art is to a large extent a criticism of life as well; he acknowledges the potential of both, our frequent shortcomings, our misunderstandings—but he also wants to teach man the ways of achieving a sublimity both in art, and, concomitantly, in soul.

Passion and Power

The concept of power plays a crucial role in the history of the sublime as any student of eighteenth-century literature knows. Edmund Burke, who remarked "I know of nothing sublime which is not some modification of power,"\(^20\) perhaps epitomizes this concern with power, and certainly other theorists of the sublime were fascinated not only with the sublime objects of power (mountains, thunderstorms, cataracts) but also with the very idea of power itself.

That same concept is equally important in On the Sublime. Transport, passion, ecstasy—all of these conditions result from some form of power exercised by the author, his work, and even by the reader himself. The truly sublime composition for Longinus may or may not involve passion, but always "the influences of the sublime bring power and irresistible might to bear, and reign supreme over every hearer."\(^21\) Elevated language (I, 4) is intended to transport the audience, and clearly this transporting—if the language is indicative of the "true sublime"—cannot be withstood.

Not infrequently, commentators have confused the term "trans-
port" with "passion" in describing the result of sublime art as Longinus sees it, possibly because the emotive quality of language is a topic so well known in classical antiquity. Monk, for example, says that "The idea that rhetoric is an instrument of emotional transport was dominant among the ancients, and the grand style, the purpose of which was to move, was an integral part of their rhetoric." Likewise, D.A. Russell has commented on emotion or passion in classical literature, with particular regard for the artist himself: "Now the common Greek idea of poetry—if we may talk in such very general terms—involves not only the notion of the skill to produce a performance appropriate to some festival or other special occasion, but also that of composition under strong emotional compulsion or inspiration." Certainly this is all very true, as Plato's Ion so well attests. However, Longinus is talking about something much more involved than "emotional transport" or "emotional inspiration," for the true sublime is pre-eminently concerned with a condition of soul. The greatest performances rest upon an unblemished character in the artist; and, in their consummation, these performances affect far more than the audience's emotions. In fact, "as if instinctively, our soul is uplifted by the true sublime; it takes a proud flight, and is filled with joy and vaunting, as though it had itself produced what it has heard" (VII, 2). In short, it is true that the audience is amazed, awed, enraptured, but, more importantly, it is also elevated and ennobled. Sublimity is a condition of soul from start to finish; it originates in a "great soul" (IX) as Longinus makes perfectly clear, it ends by affecting
the soul and disposing one to high thoughts (VII).

I am suggesting, then, that the term "passion" is not nearly adequate enough for describing (a) the quality in a work which stimulates or moves the audience, and (b) the resulting condition of "transport" which occurs in the presence of sublime art. It is certainly not a term that fully describes those conditions which command Longinus's attention. A much more satisfactory word is power, and it is imperative that we distinguish between "power" and "passion" in Longinus's treatise. The latter is usually an aspect of sublimity; the former is always present. For example, it is the "power of forming great conceptions" (VIII, 1; my italics) that is the first major source of the sublime. And the second—a delineation of the passions—is achieved "in the systematic selection of the most important elements, and in the power of forming, by their mutual combination, what may be called one body" (X, 1; my italics). Power, a condition of natural genius in the artist, is the foremost desideratum for the composition of a genuinely sublime work of art.

Of more interest, however, is the fact that this self-same power does not end with the creative endeavor of the artist. It is transmitted into his completed work so that the artifact itself becomes a kind of power; and, to pursue this idea still further, the viewer's soul is so affected by the work that it is stimulated by its own creative power, "as though it had itself produced what it has heard" (VIII, 2; my italics). A process of power is established which involves the author, his work, and
the viewer, and which results or culminates in the elevation of
one's very soul. Decidedly, this view of artistic creativity
and effect involves far more than simple emotion or passion.

As for the passions, their importance is revealed in the
idea that the author's power "is transmitted into his completed
work," for this transmitting (we might better term it an "infusing")
takes place through the agency of the passions. It is by pro-
ducing "vehement circumstances of passion" that the artist endows
his work with a power similar to, though not identical with, his
own. Passion is producible by language, and so is the nearest
approximation the artist can make to an innate power of genius
which is finally beyond verbal expression. It is a pragmatic
means of coming to grips with an imaginative, "natural" power of
genius that defies definition. Consequently, I think we can see
why Longinus distinguishes between the "natural" sources of sub-
limity and those which are acquired, and further, why these two
kinds of sources are not incompatible with each other. The in-
nate or natural characteristics are powers of genius and imagina-
tive creation existing in a rudimentary, formless state, what
Longinus terms "unstable and unballasted ... left at the mercy
of mere momentum and ignorant audacity" (II, 2). The "acquired"
sources of the sublime, on the other hand, are necessary adjuncts,
for they "define limits and fitting seasons" (II, 2); they pro-
vide not simply a curb for the spur but also "good counsel" (II,
2) and "the guidance of knowledge" (II, 3).

Longinus is elaborating here a very subtle theory of comp-
position. It begins with the assumption that genius (or "natural creativity" of a sublime degree) is a kind of raw m. 'ial, a power the artist is born with and one that he can cultivate by nurturing his soul "to thoughts sublime." By its very nature this lawless power stands in need of restraint and form. Consequently, the artist is faced with an extremely difficult problem: he must make "art" of this nature, yet he must lose none of nature's inherent power in so doing, "For art is perfect when it seems to be nature" (XXII, 1). He can resolve this problem through the resources of language, and especially figurative speech, which "possesses great natural power" (XXXII, 6). The inherent power he wishes to transmit to his work is not lost, then, but given a new form. By means of language the artist can both express and arouse passions; and passion, though it is not identical to the original power of the artist, seems to be such and is, in fact, yet another form of that power. (Hence my insistence that the artist gives his work a power similar to, though not identical with, his own.) The artist's powerful conceptions are transmitted to the work in the form of passion. At one and the same time these conceptions are given shape by language and are also aroused in the audience.

It is small wonder, then, that On the Sublime seems to present so many interpretive problems for the theorist given either to rhetoric or aesthetic, for Longinus treads a delicate line between the force of natural genius and that force given shape and direction through the agency of "the rules." Clearly, Lon-
ginus does celebrate original genius (especially in Chapter XXXVI) in a manner we most often associate with the eighteenth century, even to the point of favoring those flawed works of sublimity over the "correctly cold" compositions of a Bacchylides or Ion. This evident admiration for original or natural genius—and the opposition of this to the mere "rules" of rhetoric—certainly suggests a further affinity between Longinus and the Romantic poets and essayists, especially when we consider that for Longinus, as for Wordsworth, let us say, natural power of genius is one of "these mighty gifts which we may deem heaven-sent (for it would not be right to term them human)" (XXXIV, 4). Yet, it is also clear that Longinus shares still another dilemma with Wordsworth—that of imparting the vision to which the genius has direct access. How can the artist, moved by the ability to envision meaning and sublimity in all its grandeur, impart either that which he has seen or the energy with which he has seen it? Wordsworth would ask how the artist is to awaken the reader's "sensibilities," while Longinus would ask how the artist is to "possess" his audience; the questions would be phrased differently, but at their center lies what we have come to recognize as a particularly "Romantic" problem: namely, how is genius, that divine spark of creativity in man, realized through language, a "gift of nature"?

The "mere" rules of rhetoric, then, become something far greater than compositional shortcuts or dicta. They are more in the nature of observations about those devices and skills which
have proved effective in stirring the reader to a sense of his own creative power. Surely this is the thrust of Wordsworth's critical essays; it is no less the thrust of Longinus's treatise. Language is of enormous importance to Longinus since it is the means by which the artist can preserve his creative power, shape it, transmit it to another, and stimulate the audience's own power. The artist must learn how to make language accomplish these ends, and On the Sublime is partly intended to provide a series of practical observations on such rhetorical matters. Likewise, it is evident why Longinus holds out two very noticeable views of art for us: its indefinable, moving "quality" which transcends language; and our sole means of capturing, shaping, transmitting, and arousing this quality which has its roots very firmly in matters of language. I would once again argue that these are not incompatible views of art any more than the natural sources of the sublime are at odds with the acquired. In both cases we are dealing with the age-old problem of rendering nature in artistic form. Thus, throughout Peri Hupsous we have Longinus on the one hand talking about "the echo of a great soul," "the noble," "the immortal," and, on the other hand, "the sounds of words," "the number of allowable metaphors," "word-choice" and the like. Our mistake lies in isolating one set of concerns from the other. Both are part of a total problem—namely, using language and its rules to express the inexpressible.

For all his delight in matters of the soul, Longinus is a hard-headed critic, and while we might not like the emphasis
given to words when Longinus is so evidently drawn to ideas, I
wonder if his pragmatic bent is really out of place. After all,
the problem he faces is, as I have said, an especially difficult
one. And the artist's problem of transmitting undiminished
power (often reflected in Longinus's own composition) is likewise
difficult. This transmission of power via the passions is one
example of Longinus's pragmatism, for it is a realistic way of
confronting a theoretical problem. In fact, Longinus is essen-
tially arguing that power of genius is generally not transmissable.
Many of us simply do not cultivate this innate creative energy,
or else our souls are not sufficiently noble. Yet we can respond
to human passion and intense emotions, especially when they seem
to be completely "natural." Thus, Longinus insists repeatedly
that the artist must strive for a certain "seeming" quality in
his work. Art must appear to be nature, figures are best when
"the very fact that they are figures escapes our attention" (XVII,
1), moments of bold passion must seem "not to be premeditated but
to be prompted by the necessities of the moment" (XXII, 2). Even
though actual power cannot be transmitted, its semblance can;
hence Longinus shows in his treatise—both realistically and
pragmatically—how language can be used to express on a lower
level that which is inexpressible in its higher state. Or, to
phrase this another way, he shows how language can capture in
crafted form a semblance of natural, raw power. 

In his discussion of the sublime response where language is
absent, Longinus speaks most pointedly about man's greatness of
soul. Occasionally there are moments when sublimity can be realized without the intermediary aid of language, and the example Longinus gives is a common one: the silence of Ajax in the Underworld. Here we realize that language is non-essential because passion is not required. That "greatness of soul" implicit in Ajax's silence touches a common chord in the audience, and so language is simply irrelevant.

The reason why we respond immediately to dignity and grandeur is a fascinating one which Longinus comes back to a number of times in the treatise. He explains that we have a "natural impulse" in us, a "natural law" which responds to precisely these kinds of moments:

forthwith Nature implants in our souls the unconquerable Love of whatever is elevated and more divine than we. 3. Wherefore not even the entire universe suffices for the thought and contemplation within the reach of the human mind, but our imaginations often pass beyond the bounds of space, and if we survey our life on every side and see how much more it everywhere abounds in what is striking, and great, and beautiful, we shall soon discern the purpose of our birth. 4. This is why, by a sort of natural impulse, we admire not the small streams ... but the Nile, the Danube or the Rhine, and still more the Ocean. (XXXV, 2-4)

This criterion of an inner law is also evident in matters of language, as we see in XVII, 1: "It is that, by a sort of natural law, figures bring support to the sublime, and on their part derive support in turn from it in a wonderful degree." Man apparently has an inner principle which predisposes him to "greatness" in every sense of that word. At times the greatness can be ac-
tualized immediately and clearly, as in the instance of Ajax's silence. At other times our "natural impulse" requires the support of language.

The precise nature of this inner law is never described by Longinus. Usually it is loosely termed a "gift of nature" (just like genius and language), a certain dignity ("Nature has appointed us men to be no base or ignoble animals" \( \textit{XXV, 2}\)), or "natural impulse" that is most fully realized in the creation of sublime art. It is worth remarking here that this notion of an inner law is probably the crucial idea in the history of the sublime. That "principle" as Coleridge speaks of it is the principle of creation, the potential in man for bringing order out of chaos in a manner not unlike that of the Supreme Creator. That is, man contains within himself the agency for repeating the act of creation as it manifests itself in God, the I AM. "Sublimity," then, serves to denote that dignity or greatness of soul which separates man from every other creature in the world. In Longinus's \textit{On the Sublime} we can see the beginnings of precisely this same commitment to man's creative energies. For Longinus, man is sublime in himself—that is, predisposed to the recognition and contemplation of true greatness—but he is also petty and given to lowly matters (note the discussion of the \textit{corrupta eloquentia} in Chapter XLIV). Still, his "natural impulse" can be stimulated by contact with "lofty and transcendent natures" and by the continued cultivation of his own dignity.

Truly sublime literature speaks to something unique and
divine within us—this is what Longinus is saying. And by no means should we consider the idea a trite one in Peri Hupsous. It is a central part of Longinus's thought, for it argues that every man is not only capable of possessing a natural creative power, but is also able to recognize the pre-eminence of those works which embody and stimulate that power. As F.R.B. Godolphin has so well pointed out, Longinus's sublime finally involves far more than mere distinction and excellence in expression; it also "demands a worthy conception of the divine power."26 T.E.B. Wood, in his dissertation on the sublime, challenges Godolphin, however, and his remarks are worth recording here: "I do not suppose that anyone would maintain that Godolphin has done violence to Longinus' feelings on matters spiritual, but the question remains as to how pertinent and enlightening Godolphin's stress is for furthering our understanding of the sublime."27 Wood feels that apart from an "interesting" comparison with William Smith (the eighteenth-century translator of Longinus) there is little reason for pursuing this business of a religious element in Peri Hupsous. But in no way is the sublime simply a matter of artistic experience or expression, and the failure to recognize this fact underlies Wood's injustice both to Godolphin and, finally, Longinus. The more we read On the Sublime the more we realize how the sublime in its literary or artistic manifestations is only part of Longinus's total conception. There is a strong ethical and philosophical basis for arguing a creative principle in man, and so the borderline between aesthetics and philosophy is an
extremely tenuous one. We shall continue to see this fusing of ethics and art in the Romantic writers, especially when they, too, address themselves to "the sublime."

This is the appropriate place for commenting more fully on the "natural principle" that Longinus mentions and its description as a God-like creative energy. I have remarked that this "impulse" or "law" is the most crucial concept in the history of the sublime, and I shall return to this point in my subsequent treatment of the Romantic writers. For the moment, however, it is profitable to consider the implications of this principle and to ask ourselves if there is really any basis for Longinus's remarks. In a sense the question is unanswerable, but by no means is it alien to the modern mind. We are still haunted by the notion that man is totally distinct from the other creatures of the world by virtue of a primary "need" or "faculty" singular to him. Furthermore, we usually address this problem through a discussion of art, and especially language. Susanne Langer, for instance, has a most sophisticated vocabulary at her disposal, but in several respects her idea is not unlike that of Longinus. She, too, sets down a creed of sorts, a "heresy" she calls it: "I believe there is a primary need in man, which other creatures probably do not have.... This basic need, which certainly is obvious only in man, is the need of symbolization. The symbol-making function is one of man's primary activities, like eating, looking, or moving about." Noam Chomsky, in arguing for a re-appraisal of "the creative aspect of language use," echoes a most Longinian idea when he turns to a consideration of "the innate organizing prin-
principles and concepts" that are essentially principles of the mind, "a direct gift of Nature" to quote Herbert of Cherbury. We can find still other preoccupations with "forms of the mind" or creative principles in modern structuralist criticism or in works like Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*. Longinus's enunciation of an "inner law" deserves considerably closer, and more serious, attention than it has been given to date, for it is an idea that in one fashion or another still preoccupies theorists of art and aesthetics. Indeed, we can witness its presence even in medieval sign theory—given a different bent, of course, but still at home in the general theory that language is a means of expressing the inexpressible. Marcia Colish has aptly demonstrated the degree to which medieval thinkers saw language as a vehicle of "God-likeness," as a means of "signifying Divine truths accurately though incompletely." Just as Longinus argues that discourse is a sign of our majesty (our being, in a sense, like God), so medieval sign theorists, says Colish, considered human speech as redeemed through the agency of Christ the Word, "and the human faculty of speech could now participate in the Incarnation by helping to spread the Word to the world."

Let us say, then, that the notion of man's possessing a divine and creative "principle" revealed most fully in language and art is by no means fantastic. Longinus's tentative offering of this idea anticipates a profound acceptance of it in later centuries, particularly by the Romanticists, most of whom seek out a like principle in man and argue for its realization in art.
Moreover, these same writers share yet another belief with Longinus: the belief that there is a power of thought, contemplation, and imagination in the audience which responds to a like power in the artist and his work. Occasionally the artist's power comes to us directly and untransformed, but most often he must employ the power of language in order to awaken within us our own proclivity for greatness. Clearly this theory is one based on effect, and, as such, it lends an aesthetic dimension to Longinus's treatise. For him the test of truly sublime art does not lie in its rhetorical and stylistic skill only, but in this skill as it arouses the audience's own natural powers. It is, as I say, an argument we shall see again in the writers of the Romantic period, for they, too, insist upon the criterion of effect. Sublime literature springs from a sublime soul; it speaks to other sublime souls; it originates in power; it is power; and finally, it stimulates power.

**Art and Nature**

The "divine-like" power of man figures most prominently in Longinus's discussions of art and nature. As I have already stated, it is the problem of making art "natural" that Longinus confronts, and presumably he sees this problem as the ultimate test of any craftsman. Its resolution, if successful, makes man nothing short of God-like. As he says very clearly in Chapter XXXVI: "all other qualities prove their possessors to be men, but sublimity raises them near the majesty of God."

There is a fundamental difference, however, between the
terms "art," "nature," and "imitation" as they are used in On the Sublime and as they figure, say, in Aristotle's Poetics. Longinus is not positing a theory where nature is the ultimate desideratum and an imitation or copying of it the artist's task. Rather, to borrow a phrase from Wordsworth, one must "cast the colours of the imagination" over nature, thereby producing a work which is the perfect conjunction of art and nature. It would appear that for Longinus, as for Wordsworth, the artist can conceive and realize an existence which is of a higher order than either art or nature, yet achieved through a perfect union of the two.

Nature is like genius, raw and unformed. And like genius is it a power which must be curbed. Its distinctive, and most admirable, quality is grandeur (XXXVI, 1); and because nature has no obligations but to exist in its own right, it is sometimes "found apart from utility and advantage" (XXXVI, 1). On the other side there is art, not raw and unformed, but polished and shaped. It is to nature, in fact, what language is to genius. In both cases Longinus is pointing out the confrontation between power and that which curbs it. Finally, art is also producible by man, and as such can be judged by its "exactitude" or "freedom from failings" (XXXVI, 3,4).

Sublimity, Longinus goes on to say, results in "excellence," and presumably he means by this a perfect shaping of that which is natural. Sublimity results in a union of genius and language, nature and art, the God-like and the mortal, grandeur and exactness. Man begins with an amazing ability to achieve sublimity,
for he has the gift of speech (or "discourse") given him by
nature (XXXVI, 3). Because of its alliance with nature, it is
only fitting that we demand of speech what we also demand from
nature: a power, a quality of unpredictability and awesomeness,
a grandeur, in short, "that which transcends the human" (XXXVI,
3). Yet language also has a curb or bit of its own, for though
it originates in nature it rests in man. It has its own poten-
tial for shaping and controlling—that is, the ordering of the
words and sounds themselves—with man as the agent for utilizing
this potential.

However, a problem in logic arises here. If language is
both a gift of nature (thereby powerful and transcendent), yet
realizable as art (hence ordered from within), is it not a type
of sublimity—the union of art and nature, order and power?
And if so, is it correct to say that language and genius are
to some extent separate, the former being an "artful" means of
regulating "natural" power? The answers to these questions
have already been suggested earlier in this chapter with regard
to Longinus's conception of language. It is an approximation
or representation of power (hence nature), not an identifica-
tion with it. Thus it is logical that Longinus later terms
language a gift of nature, not an extension of it. Language
serves something of a symbolic function. Apart from its prag-
matic uses, it is a symbol both of nature and sublimity. It
possesses in itself the potential for uniting order and flux,
grandeur and exactness. Thus once again we see reason aplenty
for Longinus's concern with language. It is both a means for achieving sublimity and an exemplum of that very sublimity itself.

We come now to one of the most important parts of On the Sublime: Chapters XXXIX and XL. It is here that Longinus treats fully the state of sublimity as it exists in man and as it is reflected in language. Further, he utilizes an analogy which we shall note again, especially in De Quincey— that of music.

Chapter XXXIX begins rather unpromisingly, for Longinus says that his concern will be the fifth of the elements contributing to the sublime: "the arrangement of the words in a certain order." We soon realize, however, that this unstimulating beginning leads to matters of considerable importance. Word order is likened to a melody line in music—a simple chain of sounds linked to each other in a pleasing manner. The orderly arrangement of these sounds appears to be arbitrary, or at best governed only by our "natural law" (I shall speak more of this in a moment). Somehow we respond to the notes played on a flute or harp. 33 The patterning of sounds brings with it certain emotions (what Longinus also calls "persuasion"), and though they move the audience to frenzy at times, they most often "cast a wonderful spell" which appears to be noticeably less awesome than a "transporting" of the listener. Those who hear a melody (cf notes or words) "move rhythmically therewith" and conform themselves to the music even though they may be ignorant of it (XXXIX, 2).

If we pause here and reflect on Longinus's views of language as I have interpreted them, a few points become apparent. First,
if language is a type or _exemplum_ of sublimity, it is clearly a
source of pleasure and persuasion as well. After all, these are
powers inherent in language, and sublimity can be defined as
power. Second, just as man responds by an inner law to sublime
matters, so he responds to sublimity in language. Third, if
language is not _in fact_ sublimity but only a copy or symbol of
it as I have stated, it stands to reason that its powers are
limited. This, we see, is indeed the case, for while language
creates a spell, or frenzy, or rhythmical movement, it does _not_
transport. Longinus makes this point very clear in the third
section of Chapter XXXIX when he is speaking of the tones of a
harp: "And yet there are mere semblances and spurious copies
of persuasion, not (as I have said) genuine activities of human
nature."

Against the concept of melody Longinus places that of com-
position and harmony, and this is where the analogy of music
proves most fruitful. Section three of Chapter XXXIX initiates
the discussion of composition:

And yet these are mere semblances and spuri-
ous copies of persuasion, not (as I have said)
genuine activities of human nature. Are we
not, then, to hold that composition (being a
harmony of that language which is implanted
by nature in man and which appeals not to the
hearing only but to the soul itself), since
it calls forth manifold shapes of words,
thoughts, deeds, beauty, melody, all of them
born at our birth and growing with our growth,
and since by means of the blending and varia-
tion of its own tones it seeks to introduce
into the minds of those who are present the
emotion which affects the speaker and since
it always brings the audience to share in it
and by the building of phrase upon phrase
raises a sublime and harmonious structure:
are we not, I say, to hold that harmony by
these selfsame means allures us and invari-
able disposes us to stateliness and dignity
and elevation and every emotion which it
contains within itself, gaining absolute
mastery over our minds? But it is folly to
dispute concerning matters which are gener-
ally admitted, since experience is proof
sufficient.\textsuperscript{34}

In this passage we see Longinus's idea of the perfect work:
it is one in which art and nature unite to form a complete har-
mony. Such a work springs from a grand soul, and combines not
only noble thoughts but also brilliant execution of them. What
results is "a sublime and harmonious structure" where every part
fits naturally into the completed whole. In a sense Longinus is
describing here what De Quincey and others are later to term an
organic style. Granted some important differences, it is still
very possible to see Longinus's ideas about style given much con-
sideration (though not acknowledgment) in the nineteenth century.
For Longinus, style is more than using words "artistically"—
that is, free from fault. It is a matter of harmony, involving
the use of inherent nature-given "language"\textsuperscript{35} in its most per-
fected and realized state. Above all, it necessitates a grasping
of grandeur—that quality which, we remember, is the most admir-
able and distinctive in nature.

Longinus uses two metaphors when he speaks of stylistic mat-
ters. One is music, which I have already touched upon, and the
other is that of the house, or structure. The completed work of
art should be an harmonious composition where each part is func-
tionally significant. It should resemble a structure which has
been built piece by piece, and which is nothing until its moment of completion. The result of such a work is stipulated forcefully by Longinus. There is no wonderful spell which moves us to frenzy, but rather a "statelyness, and dignity and elevation" which gains "absolute mastery over our minds" (XXXIX, 3). The work emerges as an organic whole which seems to have grown (and perhaps even has) with our own growth; and by its own internal adjustment and variation of tones "seeks to introduce into the minds of those who are present the emotion which affects the speaker" (XXXIX, 3).

This consummate state of sublimity is most unique, I think we would all agree. Certainly it is a grand state of reconciliation. Here we see art and nature (or "correctness" and "grandeur") come together; likewise language and genius, rhetoric and aesthetic, even the chaotic and confined. In a sense all of these dichotomies are "double views," and certainly all of them are in a fast relationship with each other. Their reconciliation is a matter of some importance for this study, and I shall return to it several times in the next few chapters; suffice it to say that we can spot several similarities between Longinus's views of sublimity/reconciliation and those of Coleridge (as well as other Romantic writers). But more of this later.

I have already shown how the problem of language and genius really involves the same set of terms as art and nature, and the other two dichotomies mentioned above follow in the same path. I wish to finalize this point by turning briefly to one of these dichotomies—the chaotic and confined. My choice here is dic-
tated by two circumstances: (a) Longinus discusses this dichotomy in Chapter XL, which is an extension of the very issue we have been dealing with, and (b) his comments here prove indisputably that he sees art (i.e. language) as a means of giving shape and form to nature (i.e. lawless power).

Longinus begins this chapter by relating composition to an organic structure, and the constituents of composition to the separate members of the human body. Certain elements of grandeur—nature, if you will, or great conceptions—themselves possess sublimity. However, this sublimity exists in distraction (XL, 1). It simply drifts this way and that without any direction or shape. But "when formed into a body by association" (XL, 1) the true sublime becomes a possibility, and presumably Longinus views "association" as the embodiment of conception in language. Still, the process is only half-completed. There remains a further encirclement "in a chain of harmony," and this clearly involves making linear association into circular perfection. (Longinus is using the metaphors of line and circle here, as he does elsewhere in On the Sublime.) Only then can the elements of sublimity "become sonorous by their very rotundity" (XL, 1). This circular or organic structure is achieved by taking worded conceptions and fitting them together, that is, by exercising the power of systematic selection. We remember that Longinus earlier called this selection (and the power of forming one body by mutual combination) "a delineation of the passions" (X, 1). It is the second major source of the sublime, second only to great conception, and it seems to be the supreme test of the artist. It cer-
tainly involves his taking conception and shaping it; taking distracted power, that is, and giving it form through the powers of language and artistic selection. 37 We have, then, three steps in the creation of a sublime work: (a) the power of forming great conceptions, (b) the association of these conceptions with words, and (c) the power of selecting and combining these units into an harmonious whole. The third step, we realize, is most often the same thing as delineating passions and connecting them together.

I have used the word "steps" above with definite misgivings, for it is misleading in its implication of linear progression, and after all, it is the circular, and not the linear, with which we are contending here. Let it be understood, then, that Longinus's view of composition involves not separate steps, but an artistic activity which is a single whole. (This, too, we shall see ad infinitum in the Romantic writers.) Discussing theory, however, necessitates this falsification of organic matters; consequently, I shall have to continue treating the "steps" in this theory.

It is the third of these steps that deserves our attention. I have said that for Longinus it is the measure of a great artist, and this we see in the second section of Chapter XL. Using Euripides as an example, Longinus posits the case of the artist who lacks natural power and uses only common words—that is, where sublimity of conception is lacking, and the natural power of words is seriously limited. Can any kind of meaningful art result from these conditions, he asks? We find that it can, and simply
because what the artist lacks in the first two "steps" he can partly compensate for by the third. He can secure dignity, distinction, "and the appearance of freedom from meanness" "by merely joining and fitting \( \text{words} \) together" (XL, 2). We find that in most cases "Euripides is a poet in virtue of his power of composition rather than of his invention" (XL, 3), and Longinus cites an appropriate example. This is the kind of art that does not belong to the true sublime; it is pleasing and elevated, but not transporting. On the other hand, Euripides can occasionally offer us the best art, as yet another example shows. The distinction of such art is that "the conception itself is a fine one" and the harmony of the whole is beyond dispute (XL, 4).

Without great conception there cannot be truly sublime art. And without controlling that conception the artist is equally defeated. Yet Longinus also realizes the possibilities of other lesser achievements— the overpowering but uncontrolled creation (which De Quincey, for example, later sees in Richter), or, conversely, the controlled work which lacks imagination. These are the kinds of art which result from an inadequate sense of the artistic process, or too great a concern with one aspect of it. The three steps mentioned above are simply not one in the artist's achievement.

The dichotomy of the chaotic and confined reduces itself, as I have shown, to the same set of terms we have seen in other dichotomies. Longinus consistently returns to this problem of reconciling what appear to be polar qualities—art and nature, lan-
guage and genius, etc. And finally we are led to one unavoidable conclusion: there are ultimately no dichotomies in a work which is truly sublime. Rather, such a work reconciles these parts into a completed whole. Or, to be more precise, sublimity is the contribution made by this multitude (XL, 1). Nonetheless, these dichotomies exist outside the sublime work and can be discussed separately. We can talk about imagination versus selection, art versus nature, language versus genius, and the like. Furthermore, we can talk about the properties of each of these items. We can—and Longinus does—speak about the sounds of words, their rhythms and their meanings as quite distinct from their final state in association with conception. In addition, we can comprehend the works which remain fixed within these dichotomies; we can also judge their merits and failures. Finally, and most importantly, we can view the works which transport, where the distinctions exist no more and where reconciliation is achieved.

**Language and Rules**

I have used the phrase "artistic process" in the preceding section of this chapter, and here I wish to take a further look at the nature of this process. Also, it is necessary that we add to the list of conditions necessary for sublime art.

Is the artistic process limited to the poet (or whomever), the world upon which he draws (be it "real" or "imaginary"), and the work which he finally creates? To what extent does the audience determine the form and content of the work in the artist's
mind prior to or simultaneous with creation? To what extent does the audience share in the final result? And further, can it be said that this audience in fact creates the work itself, at least in part? More to the point, do any or all of these questions find answers in On the Sublime? We know that they are questions confronting any theorist of artistic matters, and M.H. Abrams, in The Mirror and the Lamp, has made a point of showing us how easily attention can come to rest in any single part of the author-work-audience triad.

It seems to me that yet another double view or dichotomy—that of language and "the rules"—is Longinus's means of answering these questions. It is certainly his means of confirming a relationship between the artist and his audience. Far from any advocacy of "art for art's sake," Longinus consistently argues that art must reach beyond itself. Its very justification lies in its ability to reach others and be made useful. Surely this is why On the Sublime opens as it does, with disapproval of Caecilius who did not convey to his readers "that practical help which it should be a writer's principal aim to give" (I, 1). And shortly thereafter, Longinus tells his friend (or pupil) Terentianus that this new treatise On the Sublime should be examined to see if it has more worth than mere individual gratification. Do the views in it, he asks, have anything in them of use to public men (I, 2)? In short, Longinus is well aware of the power which language possesses and the consequent uses to which it can be put.

The first fourteen chapters of On the Sublime do not really get down to the business of studying language. Rather, we are
introduced to the bases of the treatise, such matters as (a) language is power, (b) language has enormous effects on the human mind, (c) art must appear to be "natural," (d) only a noble soul can create sublime art. Appropriate examples are cited from many authors, but nowhere does Longinus really begin an intense analysis of rhetoric. However, one important fact is demonstrated repeatedly in these initial fourteen chapters: namely, the human mind is the field of action. Sublimity lies there, and not in the external world. Also—and this point Longinus takes up again in Chapter XX—language is a reflection of states of mind.

Chapter XIV begins with a most important assumption. Longinus determines that "the high standards of sublimity ... are imaged within us" and we might well attain these standards were we to imagine geniuses like Homer undertaking and criticizing our own artistic chores. The crucial point in this passage is its suggestion that sublimity exists in the mind, that the artist has preconceived ideas of what his work ought to be, or, at least, of the standards it should attain. He knows "by a kind of natural law" what direction he should take. This standard of sublimity is what Longinus later terms "greatness of conception" or "power of imagination." It is the first source of sublimity named in Chapter VIII, the great standard with which one's conceptions are ultimately compared.

The second point raised in this passage is the more interesting of the two: how will the work affect minds other than the artist's? Interestingly, Longinus says that such a question provides the artist with even greater incentive, especially if
it is phrased in the following way: "'In what spirit will each succeeding age listen to me who have written thus?'" (XIV, 3). This question does not imply that the artist thrives on fame and shrivels up without it. Rather, Longinus is saying that the artist must be a constant voice in the world. His "futurity of fame" is assured only if what he says bears listening to repeatedly; and, of course, this desire to listen is the important thing, not the futurity of fame.

So we have in Chapter XIV two very important ideas: (a) sublimity has standards which are imaged in the mind, and (b) the artist always has an audience before him, either imaginary (pretending a bard is present), or real (including a future audience as well as the present one), or both. These two ideas lead naturally to Chapter XV, which dwells upon the mind as a field of action. It is here that Longinus makes a firm connection between language and its powers on the mind. That connection, as I have said, has been the subject of much of the preceding fourteen chapters, but here the assertion is made more boldly as we are drawn specifically to the mind of the artist himself. The true "image," Longinus says, is something more than a mental idea which gives birth to speech. Naturally this is one application of the word, but it is predominantly used "in cases where, carried away by enthusiasm and passion, you think you see what you describe, and you place it before the eyes of your hearers" (XV, 1). As one might suppose, Euripides is offered as an example here. Though he is not by nature elevated, he occasionally forces his genius to tragic heights, and,
at times, even to sublimity (XV, 3). Aeschylus, too, is given mention, as well as Sophocles. The examples of such writing, says Longinus, could be multiplied endlessly. What is clear in all these instances is that the writing proceeds from a possessed mind, one which obviously sees mentally that which it strives to depict. This is, perhaps, what we now call poetic inspiration, but in On the Sublime Longinus makes it akin to poetic madness of the kind recorded in Plato’s Ion and Apology. In any case, it can be termed an exceptional power, for such an artist literally enters into the world he creates. In one passage from Euripides, for example, Longinus makes this point evident. After quoting the passage, he remarks: “Would you not say that the soul of the writer enters the chariot at the same moment as Phaethon and shares in his dangers and in the rapid flight of his steeds?” (XV, 4). And again, after citing Euripides, Longinus says: “In these scenes the poet himself saw Furies, and the image in his mind he almost compelled his audience also to behold” (XV, 2).

The chapter then shifts its focus of attention to deal with this imagery after it is put in action, and especially its effect on the audience. A discussion of oratorical imagery follows, and of particular interest is the attention that Longinus devotes to our proclivity for being enslaved. Effective imagery is language in action, and, as such, is power. One simply cannot withstand it. Oratorical imagery "is able in many ways to infuse vehemence and passion into spoken words, while more particularly when it is combined with the argumentative passages it not only persuades
the hearer but actually makes him its slave" (XV, 9). And even when a speaker "at one and the same time follows a train of reasoning and indulges a flight of imagination" (XV, 10) we remain totally enthralled. The reason for this I think we could easily guess, for it is the same reason Longinus has used frequently in his essay--our "natural law." As he states it here, "By a sort of natural law in all such matters we always attend to whatever possesses superior force; whence it is that we are drawn away from demonstration pure and simple to any startling image within whose dazzling brilliancy the argument lies concealed" (XV, 11; my italics).

At this point it should be clear that Longinus sees language as no mean power for affecting the minds of the populace. Consequently, the question which has been lurking throughout the treatise thus far--"how can I write well?"--now becomes "how can I write effectively?" for both questions amount to exactly the same thing. The test of good writing is its effectiveness. It must accomplish exactly what Caecilius, for example, has failed to do. The pressing problem for Longinus, then, involves the word "how." Beyond citing examples from masterful artists, what can the writer do to make his images "appear" in his own mind and in those of his audience? The answers occupy the remainder of the treatise. Into the work-author duo that has occupied much of the space thus far, Longinus introduces the audience; we now have the work-author-audience triad which is familiar to us all. It is fitting, too, that this aspect of writing takes up the bulk of the treatise; after all, one cannot teach another how to have
great conceptions, but one can teach the means of making those conceptions reach others.

The remainder of the treatise cannot be dealt with in great detail, but Chapters XVI through XVIII do deserve special attention. In these chapters it is evident that Longinus is very conscious of the effects of language on the mind. And being the practical man that he is, he explores these effects carefully. Longinus cannot explain why some of these expediencies work, any more than he can "natural law" or "sublimity," but that does not stop him from pointing out the fact that they do work, and that we can make use of them. Apostrophe, for example, seems to answer the need every man has for unshakeable pride. By the use of one carefully timed figure Demosthenes simultaneously gives his listeners "a demonstration that they have done no wrong, an example, the sure evidence of oaths, a eulogy, an exhortation" (XVI, 3). Nor must we assume that this is some kind of flummery. On the contrary, the audience is itself partly responsible for the sublimity that the artist or speaker attains. Our own natural law seizes upon that which is close to it, and all men, we remember, have a sizeable penchant for the sublime. Concerning the manifestations of passion and the sublime in literature, for example, we find Longinus saying: "They lie nearer to our minds through a sort of natural kinship and through their own radiance, and always strike our attention before the figures, whose art they throw into the shade and as it were keep in concealment" (XVII, 3).

Still, some readers of On the Sublime will be disappointed
in these chapters dealing with the "rules" of effective writing, and will maintain that Longinus is really saying nothing new at all. This, I think, is hardly a credible point of view, especially if we consider language as I believe Longinus does. Apart from its being a power, language has two other crucial functions. First, it reflects states of mind by miming, or copying, in its form the subject it is speaking about. This function is of particular use to the orator. Second, the power of mimesis can be so thoroughly applied by the artist that the language itself takes on the identity of a "figure" or symbol. This function, we are told, is evidenced in the greatest artists. (Homer is the example.)

In Chapter XX, Longinus remarks upon the first of these functions when he describes the "powerful effect" which attends the union of figures. He mentions a passage in which there are examples of asyndeton, anaphora, and diatyposis (it is a passage from Demosthenes), and demonstrates the nature of its effectiveness. Chiefly, the success arises because the speaker makes his language reflect a state of mind. Moreover, this same state of mind is thereby instilled in the audience and it, too, is transported into the world of the speaker and his creation: "By these words the orator produces the same effect as the assailant who is part of the speaker's subject—he strikes the mind of the judges by the swift succession of blow on blow" (XX, 2). The words copy that which they speak about; they re-create their own subject, as it were. As a result, that same spirit which has given rise to the words continues on in the audience.
The second crucial function of language is also described in Chapter XX as Longinus shows the symbolic importance of mimesis. The orator uses figures of speech (asynedeta, anaphora, etc.) to effect a "commotion of the soul" in his audience, and he does this having them mime the energetic violence displayed in his subject. But more importantly, he uses language as a complex symbol or figure of the event which has occasioned this emotion. The struggle between order and disorder is symbolized by the continued variation of figures throughout the speech. Finally, the orator does not simply mime an emotion or effect, but maintains the "essential character" (my italics) of "the Repetitions and Asyndeta. In this way, with him, order is disorderly, and on the other hand disorder contains a certain element of order" (XX, 3).

This function of language has its place in oratory, but its particular province is poetry. Longinus has already suggested as much in Chapter X of his treatise where he has compared Aratus and Homer. Aratus fails even at the level of mimesis, for instead of depicting terror and awe in his language, he merely makes his descriptions trivial and neat. "Homer, however," says Longinus, "does not for one moment set a limit to the terror of the scene, but draws a vivid picture of men continually in peril of their lives" (X, 6). Even more interesting, however, is the sudden emergence of a symbolic dimension in the language:

Moreover, he has in the words ἵππον ἀντιπόλεμον, forced into union, by a kind of unnatural compulsion, prepositions not usually compounded. He has thus tortured his line into the similitude of the impending calamity,
and by the constriction of the verse has ex-
cellently figured the disaster, and almost
stamped upon the expression the very form
and pressure of the danger. (X, 6; my italics)

It would be wrong to argue for an intricate symbolic theory of
language in Longinus, for a good deal of his commentary has to do
with the traditional mimetic power of language. Still, it is
not incorrect to see in these remarks a prelude to Romantic con-
cerns with art as a process of symbolization. I shall argue
later in my study that Coleridge, for example, wishes art to mime
not the forms of nature but the principle of energy, of antagonism
between order and chaos, which is fundamental to his conception
of the universe. The created work, then, depicts this energy
in its very form for Coleridge, an idea which is quite at home
in Longinus's treatise.

This business of "order reflecting disorder" deserves one
further comment before leaving it behind. I have mentioned
earlier in this chapter that language is a symbol of sublimity
for Longinus, that it possesses a natural power which takes its
form from its own inner laws. The twentieth chapter of On the
Sublime makes considerably more sense, I believe, if we remember
these early points. Certainly we gain a clearer understanding
of what Longinus means by "order" and "disorder" when we recollect
his comment that language is a "gift of nature" (i.e. a definite
power), yet realizable as ordered art. We can also see how ap-
parently opposite states like "order" and "disorder" in fact
come together in a well-executed work. The dichotomies no
longer exist, for the work is both orderly and disorderly at the
same time.

To the three "steps" necessary for creating a sublime work, I think we must now add a fourth: the power of making art effective. In a sense we could argue that this is nothing more than the successful, and therefore inevitable, culmination of the other three, but I wonder if such an argument really stands up. It might, if Longinus treated the fourth step in these terms, but he does not. Rather, he goes to the other extreme and devotes a substantial part of his treatise to this topic. Sensibly enough, he realizes that effective art necessitates conception, word usage, and organic structuring; but it also demands an awareness of one's audience, and this is what makes the fourth step so extremely important. It can be compensatory if the artist fails elsewhere in his work; it can also be the natural fulfillment of a genuinely sublime work. Definitely it is a facet of artistry which can be taught. There are "rules" we can learn which do not restrict good writing; instead, they are illustrations of the inherent qualities in language which make it effective, and they are guidelines for assuring continued effectiveness.

I shall conclude by saying, then, that the "double view" of *Peri Hupsous* is really not a double view at all; and there is surely no value in pursuing separately its rhetorical or aesthetic concerns. The thrust of the treatise is to explore the rich association of language and mind—that is, to detail the ways in which words lead necessarily to effects. Consequently,
Longinus raises a number of points which have since become preoccupations of aestheticians, psychologists, and philosophers. One of these is the organic nature of art; another is its symbolic status; a third is the suggestion that art reveals certain principles or forms in the human mind. But the most interesting for our purposes here is the idea that the sublime is finally a study of the mind and its powers. Man possesses a sublimity, a creative principle, which must be stimulated if he is to be "God-like." It is this principle to which the sublime artist speaks, and he speaks most vociferously by displaying his own creative energies. The task, then, is to set down the means by which the artist can best achieve his goal, and this is where rhetoric takes its place in *Peri Hupsous*. It is a hand-maiden, an aid for realizing an ideal which exists in the mind of the artist. Above all, it is a means of contending with the problem that besets all great artists: that is, how can language be used most effectively to stimulate not simply the reader's emotions but his creative powers as well? We shall see that in one fashion or another this becomes the dominant problem for the Romantic writers, and they, too, will address it through their remarks on "the sublime."
NOTES--CHAPTER ONE


4 Longinus on the Sublime, trans. W. Rhys Roberts, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 1907), p. 23. My italics. I cannot agree with Roberts that the author's concern is a stylistic one. G.M.A. Grube, after reading this same passage, also disagreed with Roberts: "This is certainly not the author's purpose. Grandeur of conception is for him closely allied to τιμωρία, but it does not require grandeur of expression or a grand style." (Notes on the μετά τιμωρία," American Journal of Philology, 78 (1957), 356.


6 Roberts, p. 29.

7 Roberts, p. 30.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Roberts, p. 32.

11 Roberts, p. 33.

12 The use of terms like "rhetoric" and "aesthetic" is always open to comment, for one can argue that they are finally indistinct in the artistic process. However, as terms for identifying certain differences of intention and delivery they can be most useful. It is apt to point out here that there is likely no problem more central to modern aesthetics and linguistics than that
of reconciling aesthetic and rhetoric.

14 Monk, p. 12.
15 Monk, p. 17.
16 Monk, p. 12.
17 Monk, p. 13.
19 Monk, p. 15.


22 Monk, p. 11. My italics.
23 Russell, p. xxxii.

24 On the moral and social implications of the word ἑυπόσα see D.A. Russell, "Longinus" On The Sublime.

25 Obviously this view of language bears some relation to medieval sign theory (see n. 30).


27 Wood, p. 38.


31 Colish, p. x.

32 I am using the term "genius" here—as often in my study—
with a specific definition in mind. As I have said earlier, it is "natural creativity" of a sublime degree." A careful definition of this word is necessary if we are to attach it to the "gift" which Longinus identifies with the sublime artist.

33 These instruments, of course, themselves suggest melody rather than harmony. G.M.A. Grube, in his translation of *Peri Hupsous* (On Great Writing / New York, 1957), chooses the word "lyre" rather than "harp." In any case, Longinus seems to be talking about an instrument with roughly four to ten strings, used chiefly for accompaniment and restricted in its harmonic possibilities.

Susanne Langer also speaks about the emotional response to music in *Philosophy in a New Key*, specifically in Chapter 8; and it is worthwhile reviewing her remarks here.

34 Cf. *Cartesian Linguistics* for an interesting application of the notion of a "language which is implanted by nature in man."

35 That is, a "language" of thought or conception rather than of words.

36 On the subject of organic structure and Longinus, see T.R. Henn, *Longinus and English Criticism*.

37 Very clearly, this fitting together of worded conceptions is not at all unlike the Secondary Imagination of Coleridge. Essentially, Longinus is addressing the problem of how the artist unites thought and language, content and form into a completed interrelated structure.
CHAPTER TWO

THE CENTRALITY OF DE QUINCEY

In his brief essay entitled "On Milton" De Quincey states exactly what he means by the term "sublime": "Let it be remem-
bered that, of all powers which act upon man through his intel-
lectual nature, the very rarest is that which we moderns call
the sublime."¹ If by the term "rarest" De Quincey means "of
the highest order" (and I believe he does), a suitable paraphrase
would be: the sublime acts upon man through his intellectual
nature and of all powers is the greatest. It is this equation
of power and the sublime that is most noteworthy, for it recurs
with considerable frequency in De Quincey's writings.² We must
not think that the sublime is simply a result of power, or a
quality like it: it is a power, and of the highest possible
degree. Thus, when De Quincey omits the specific word "sublime"
but speaks of Milton in the following manner, we readily under-
stand the import of his message: "Milton is not an author
amongst authors, not a poet amongst poets, but a power amongst
powers; and the 'Paradise Lost' is not a book amongst books, not
a poem amongst poems, but a central force amongst forces" (M, X,
399).

The passages quoted above are misleading, for they seem to
suggest that the sublime is a force external to man, something

53
which merely acts upon him. Hence, if Paradise Lost, like any forceful object (a storm, waterfall, etc.), is power, have we not "the sublime" in the work itself? The answer is that we do not, for although power exists in the work, it must, by definition, "act upon man through his intellectual nature" before it can be considered sublime. De Quincey's definition, then, necessitates not only some object of power, but also a response to that power by a subject. Perhaps this is illustrated best in the part of De Quincey's autobiography which deals with "Infant Literature." In this paper, he turns to Wordsworth's remark "The child is father of the man" and explains his understanding of it. The child is "endowed with a special power of listening for the tones of truth—hidden, struggling, or remote" (M, I, 122; my italics)\(^3\), a power which co-operates with another source of power, "a profound experience of the relations subsisting between ourselves and nature" (M, I, 122). For De Quincey, this cumulative or combined power is a creative one, as we see in his remark on childhood: "There is a dignity to every man in the mere historical assigning, if accurately he can assign, the first dawning upon his mind of any god-like faculty or apprehension, and more especially if that first dawning happened to connect itself with circumstances of individual or incommunicable splendour" (M, I, 125).\(^4\) And he has been careful to insist that this faculty or apprehension—this power, if you will—"is lawful for every man the very humblest to arrogate—viz., an individuality of mental constitution so far applicable to special and excep-
tional cases as to reveal in them a life and power of beauty which others (and sometimes, which all others) had missed" (M, I, 124). In short, the beauty or sublimity of an object may be figuratively termed "in" it, but only because one's "mental constitution" sees it that way. Our "god-like" or creative faculty must of necessity respond to the object's power.

For example, De Quincey describes his "first grand and jubilant sense of the moral sublime" (M, I, 127), a passage from Phaedrus which reads: "A colossal statue did the Athenians raise to Aesop; and a poor parish slave they planted upon an everlasting pedestal." As De Quincey relates his reaction to this as a child, it becomes apparent that the sublimity of the lines rests in the creative power with which the child approaches them: "This sublimity originated in the awful chasm, in the abyss that no eye could bridge, between the pollution of slavery—the being a man, yet without right or lawful power belonging to a man—between this unutterable degredation and the starry altitude of the slave at that moment when ... all the armies of the earth might be conceived as presenting arms to the emancipated man" (M, I, 125-126). As the passage continues, one point is made perfectly clear: it is not what is actually in those lines that impresses De Quincey the child, but what he makes of them. The initial power of the lines (and they are truly powerful), suggest so many ideas and emotions to the "god-like" faculty, that the child is suddenly aware of something "colossal" (M, I, 125) in the sublimity of the moment. This idea is treated again
when De Quincey recalls another such moment in his childhood—
reading a story about Aladdin:

The sublimity which it involved was mysterious and unfathomable, as regarded any key which I possessed for deciphering its law or origin. Made restless by the blind sense which I had of its grandeur, I could not for a moment succeed in finding out why it should be grand. Unable to explain my own impressions in Aladdin, I did not the less obstinately persist in believing a sublimity which I could not understand. (M, I, 128)

The lines from Aladdin are those in which the African magician puts his ear to the ground and discerns Aladdin's particular steps six thousand miles away. De Quincey the man (writing now in his maturity, of course) attempts to recapture what those lines must have meant to De Quincey the boy, and especially what they must have suggested to his imaginative sensibility:

Through this mighty labyrinth of sounds ... one solitary infant's feet are distinctly recognised on the banks of the Tigris, distant by four hundred and forty days' march of an army or a caravan. These feet, these steps, the sorcerer knows, and challenges in his heart, as the feet, as the steps of that innocent boy, through whose hands only he could have a chance of reaching the lamp.

It follows, therefore that the wicked magician exercises two demoniac gifts. First, he has the power to disarm Babel itself of its confusion. Secondly, after having laid aside as useless many billions of earthly sounds, and after having fastened his murderous attention upon one insulated tread, he has the power, still more unsearchable, of reading in that hasty movement an alphabet of new and infinite symbols; for, in order that the sound of the child's feet should be significant and intelligible, that sound must open into a gamut of infinite compass. The pulses of the heart, the motions of the will, the phantoms of the brain, must repeat themselves in secret hieroglyphics
uttered by the flying footsteps. Even the articulate or brutal sounds of the globe must be all so many languages and ciphers that somewhere have their corresponding keys—have their own grammar and syntax; and thus the least things in the universe must be secret mirrors to the greatest....All this, by rude efforts at explanation that mocked my feeble command of words, I communicated to my sister. (M, I, 129)

I have quoted this passage at length to illustrate the degree to which the mind "takes the hint" in De Quincey, and imaginatively creates with the material which has moved it powerfully. Moreover, this creativity is of a very particular kind: the imagination, stimulated by a grand or powerful idea, takes the idea as far as it will go, in other words, to a consideration of the infinite. Thus the child is led to thoughts of the entire universe, and, at the same time, to thoughts concerning the least things in that universe; the telescopic and microscopic are united through the workings of the creative imagination.

This stretching forth of the imagination is certainly no new idea in the history of the sublime, as we have seen in Longinus (Addison, of course, springs to mind as well). In "False Distinctions" (one of the Notes From the Pocket-Book of a Late Opium-Eater, De Quincey defines the creativity of the imagination in like terms: "The imagination seeks the illimitable; dissolves the definite; translates the finite into the infinite" (M, X, 444). And it is exactly this creative activity that we see depicted in the two memorable instances from De Quincey's childhood readings: the child unable to understand, or verbalize, the sublimity he sees in the passages for the simple reason that
it is not there, but in the power of his creative mind. 7

Before beginning a detailed investigation of sublimity, it is necessary that we re-examine the quotation from the essay "On Milton" and clarify an important point: that is the meaning of the term "intellectual nature." De Quincey does not mean by this simply the "understanding" or the rational part of man's mind (what at one point he calls the Logos). Rather, he intends this term to signify man's entire intellectual nature, his understanding and his imagination. This point is stated decisively in the essay "False Distinctions" when De Quincey treats the roles of the imagination and understanding in what he terms our "intellectual system." There is no greater error, he feels, than the common assumption that "the understanding and the imaginative faculty exist in insulation—neither borrowing nor lending; that they are strong at the expense of each other; &c. &c." (M, X, 444). As he goes on to show, our reasoning faculties demand fancy as well as logic. The latter is confined "only to the formal part of reasoning, and is therefore only its negative condition: your reasoning will be bad if it offends against the rules of logic; but it will not be good simply by conforming to them" (M, X, 444). We need, then, powerful and meaningful matter to reason about, and this can only arise from the fancy or imagination. 8

It is through the fancy, and by means of the schemata which that faculty furnishes to the understanding, that reasoning (good or bad) proceeds, as to its positive or material part, on most of the topics which interest mankind: the vis imaginatrix of the mind is the true
fundus from which the understanding draws; and it may be justly said in an axiomatic form that 'tantum habet homo disursus quantum habet phantasiae.' (M, X, 445)

The very highest power, then, which acts upon man through his entire intellectual nature—that is, through both his understanding and imagination—is what De Quincey evidently considers "the sublime."

The meaningfulness of great art, for De Quincey, clearly lies in the reader's response to it. Power must be "communicated!" (to borrow De Quincey's term); there must be a process of power between the author's mind, his created work, and the god-like faculty of his reader. This idea of communication or process of power is a crucial one for the artist, as I have already indicated, and I shall return to De Quincey's concern with it in a moment. But first, another question must be posited: an object (be it a poem or whatever) may possess power and influence the subject, but how does he know that it is power affecting him? Moreover, it is possible that even a majestic work like Paradise Lost may fall upon dull sensibilities? Naturally this is a problem of taste, one which every theorist of the sublime is compelled to address. De Quincey deals with it only indirectly—he is not a theorist of taste in any determined fashion—but his commentary is noteworthy. "On Milton" begins with an ironic view of the reader, a person for whom De Quincey has little tolerance: "The reader indeed—that great idea!—is very often a more important person towards the fortune of an essay than the writer" (M, X, 395). It is the kind of comment we see again in the
"Postscript" to the Milton essay where the reader's "transient caprices" are mentioned. De Quincey's irony and intolerance are dissipated, however, when we realize the aesthetic truth of his comment. "It is clear that the writer exists for the sake of the reader, not the reader for the sake of the writer" (M, X, 397). Again we are back to the notion that art merely for its own sake is unthinkable. In point of fact, the reader is very much an important person towards the fortune of an essay, for until he can cultivate a proper taste of what is and is not power (as opposed to knowledge), any kind of "highest" power (sublimity) is out of the question. This is illustrated in De Quincey's subsequent attack on Johnson and Addison and their failure to recognize the power of Paradise Lost. What they dismiss as pedantry, De Quincey praises as superb power. What they term an unfortunate mixture of Pagan and Christian forms, De Quincey defends as powerful poetic conception. That "great idea" called the reader is shown to be annoyingly weak; thus De Quincey's irony, though it conceals a real truth, has also a certain pointed validity in itself. If Johnson and Addison are any indication of the "great reader," argues De Quincey, the essential worth of any poem is in danger of neglect.

Since art is a process of power, we can well understand why De Quincey treats all three aspects of the aesthetic experience: the mind of the author, the work he creates, and the effect upon the reader. Though I agree with John Jordan that the last is by far the most central to De Quincey, I shall begin
at the beginning—namely, with the artist. 9

In the essay "Style" De Quincey picks up one of his favorite topics—the common distinction between matter and manner in a work—and argues as usual that there is no distinction at all, at least not in the literature of power. 10 When a writer turns to what Cicero calls a quaestio infinita, he is in effect recording himself; that is, he must furnish the work "out of his own peculiar feelings, or his own way of viewing things (in contradistinction to a quaestio finita, where determinate data from without already furnish the main materials)" (M, X, 226). Thus, the writer "soon finds that the manner of treating the question not only transcends the matter, but very often, and in a very great proportion, is the matter" (M, X, 226). As De Quincey continues this discussion, he draws attention to the notion that art originates in the mind of the artist, and is pre-eminently a recording or reflection of that inner, "subjective" state. In fact, De Quincey is actually talking about the imagination here, it seems to me, for we recollect that it is this faculty which deals with matters of infinity (quaestio infinita). By extension, then, the imagination is the source of literature of power; and this literature records the artist's imaginative experiencing of those materials and ideas which have originated in his own imagination.

Thus, Jordan is correct when he states that "to De Quincey ideas were sublime." 11 What Jordan does not sufficiently explain is why this is so. Ideas are sublime for De Quincey because they
are the stuff of the literature of power. Most importantly,
y they are imaginative creations by the artist—the products of
his genius, rather than talent. Perhaps, then, it would be
more accurate to say that "the creation and experiencing of
ideas" was sublime to De Quincey. Sublimity, we cannot forget,
is power—imaginative power. Ideas are sublime, then, only when
there is creative energy and experience at work.

Why else does De Quincey get around to the notion that
poetry is "exercise" and finally "projection" (that is, process)
if not to argue that ideas must be put in motion and made powerful?

In very many subjective exercises of the
mind—as, for instance, in that class of po-
etry which has been formally designated by
this epithet (meditative poetry, we mean, in
opposition to the Homeric, which is intensely
objective), the problem before the writer is
to project his own inner mind; to bring out
consciously what yet lurks by involution in
many unanalysed feelings; in short, to pass
through a prism and radiate into distinct el-
ements what previously had been even to him-
self but dim and confused ideas intermixed
with each other. (M, X, 226-227)

De Quincey is suggesting more than merely clarifying ideas, or
bringing them into consciousness. The word "lurks" is a key one,
implying as it does the possibility of movement and power. The
artist "actualizes" the ideas within himself (we shall see this
word "actualize" again) by giving them power through the agency
of his creative imagination. And it is precisely this lack of
"subjectivity" or mental energy which De Quincey repeatedly
points out in his attacks on Homer. Homer was an "objective"
writer who dealt with things external to himself rather than with his own imaginative creations. He was also no power at all in De Quincey's estimation, a point which follows logically. If Homer was not a "projector," an "actualizer," it was because he had nothing to actualize, being an "objective" writer; hence there was nothing to bestow power upon (or imaginative power to do it with) and Homer had no "grandeur either of thought, image, or situation" (M, X, 308).

It is in "The Nation of London" that De Quincey identifies more clearly the writer of "literature of power." Such a writer must seek to go beyond himself. He is a man of genius rather than talent, one who is "subjective" and thereby finds poetic substance within himself, a man who feels passion intensely ("the spontaneous overflow of real unaffected passion, deep, and at the same time original" (M, X, 194)), but above all a man who must declare that passion publicly "from the necessity which cleaves to all passion alike of seeking external sympathy" (M, X, 194). He is the writer of power who seeks to create literature of power. Such men are few, of course. There are not many "who groan, like prophets, under the burden of a message which they have to deliver, and must deliver, of a mission which they must discharge" (M, X, 194). More often we find the writers of talent, who lack grandeur and simulate passion. Above all, since they are lacking in imagination their work "is a business of talent (sometimes even of great talent) but not of original power, of genius, or authentic inspiration." (M, X, 194). There-
in we have the difference between a Milton and a Homer.

To illustrate how completely De Quincey insists upon a process of power which grows subjectively out of the artist's creative energy, I shall not discuss his remarks on Milton or Shakespeare, but turn instead to his contrast of Samuel Johnson and Edmund Burke. This contrast, which occurs in the important essay "Conversation," is as follows:

one \underline{Burke} an intellect essentially going forward, governed by the very necessity of growth, by the law of motion in advance; the latter essentially an intellect retrogressive, retrospective, and throwing itself back on its own steps.... The result ... is, that Dr. Johnson never, in any instance, grows a truth before your eyes whilst in the act of delivering it or moving towards it. All that he offers up to the end of the chapter he had when he began. But to Burke ... the mere act of movement became the principle of cause of movement. Motion propagated motion, and life threw off life.... In this power, which might be illustrated largely from the writings of Burke, is seen something allied to the powers of a prophetic seer, who is compelled oftentimes into seeing things as unexpected by himself as by others. (M, X, 269-270)

We could not ask for a clearer statement about the nature of artistic creativity than this. The genius goes inward in order finally to go outward. What is lurking by involution is given process, power, motion, GROWTH. Even more importantly, the truth is grown not only for the reader but also the artist. Thus he becomes the visionary, the seer, the prophet; engaged in his "god-like hours" he becomes, in a very real sense, god-like. And sublimity, being the highest of powers, is not in the ideas or in the work, but in the very act of "growing" this final creation—that is, in the mind of the artist.
In his study of De Quincey's literary theory, John Jordan maintains that "despite the great influence of Wordsworth and Coleridge on him, the concept of imagination plays no major part in De Quincey's thought ... for he came to consider emotional experience the core of poetry, but continued to think of the imagination as an intellectual activity." 13 "Since he thought that literature was concerned essentially with the feelings, his notion of the operation of the creative faculty did not, as did Coleridge's, make the imagination central." 14 I find these remarks highly questionable. Very clearly the imagination is central to De Quincey, and, though he does not often speak explicitly about its role and identity, it seems to me that he allows it a central place in his critical ideas. That it is an "intellectual activity" is no doubt true, but this does not make it separate from matters of emotion, nor do I think Jordan ought to segregate and categorize these as firmly as he does so many other aspects of De Quincey's thought and writing. Passion, as well as the understanding, the heart, the imagination, genius, intuition, sensibility, and inspiration collectively define the writer of power for De Quincey as opposed to the talented writer of knowledge; and impassioned literature can only "seek external sympathy" by being a literature of power— that is, a literature which incarnates these many aspects of the writer and demands of the reader precisely the faculties which have given it rise. In short, literature concerns itself with so much besides "the feelings" in De Quincey's scheme of things. Chief among these
is power as evidenced in man's entire intellectual system—his understanding, imagination, and emotions. Above all, great literature is an act of creation and growth. It has to do with process; it is a picture as opposed to a statue, to borrow De Quincey's distinction between Shakespearean and Greek tragedy. As such, the artist experiences the very thing which he is creating, not only emotionally but also intellectually and imaginatively.

Sigmund Proctor also points out the dearth of explicit commentary by De Quincey on the imagination, and frankly confesses that he has to "guess" at its importance. Still, Proctor seems to feel that this is called for if we are to understand De Quincey's thought, and I fully agree. Moreover, Proctor's conclusions strike me as profitable and ingenious.

First, he considers the imagination to be "the active or creative power of thought" in De Quincey's theory, "in harmony with Coleridge's phrase descriptive of the fancy (the sense of which Wordsworth extended to the imagination as well)—'the aggregative and associative power.'" The imagination is not only the active and positive power in discursive thought, but also "the intellectual agency in intuitions that are born of feeling, and ... the active, intellectual, component of genius." The conclusion which Proctor draws from these remarks bears careful examination:

No other relationship at once finds a place for the imagination in the activity of the higher understanding or the understanding heart; without such a relationship the sense
in which feeling is more than mere feeling, in which it is a revelation, remains unreal. And the statement that the imagination seeks the illimitable, dissolves the definite, and translates the finite into the infinite harmonizes perfectly with such an explanation. Mere feeling, however profound, is not illimitable until made so by the abstracting and idealizing power of the intellect. 16

This seems to me a profound appraisal of the imagination in De Quincey's thought. Proctor is in fact arguing that feeling and intuition mean little if they do not finally encroach upon revelation; and this can only be achieved through the coordinating activity of the imagination. What Proctor does not point out is that intuitive, passionate, and imaginative apprehension is a single creative activity in the poet, not a series of "steps." It is also an activity which brings with it the growth and development of an idea, often astonishing to and unforeseen by the poet himself. Moreover, this "revelation"—as I shall argue later—is an extremely complex one, involving not only manifold discoveries about the idea being experienced, but also discoveries about the poet's own self, specifically the infinity within him.

It stands to reason that if the poet of greatness records himself in a work, he is also (if not pre-eminently) recording his activity of creating and experiencing ideas. The work he creates, then, can be described as follows: (1) it is a work which suggests enormous power (force, energy), and motion (agitation), and it appears to be "in flux"; (2) it cannot be understood objectively but must be "experienced"; (3) the experiencing of the work will also be an activity of creation and discovery
for the reader; (4) the work will be a record of the power in
the artist, a power in its own right, and an artifact demanding
power of the reader. The term "experience" is a key one, es-
pecially with regard to "creation" and "discovery," because in
addition to defining more accurately what happens when an artist
makes his work, it also deals with the result of trying to crit-
icize it. Jordan remarks that in De Quincey's own criticism
(that is, when he becomes a reader), he almost inevitably begins
with the work's "effect" on him and then tries to explain it.
That subsequent explanation, argues Jordan, is one of genuine,
though often distorted, re-creation. I could not agree more,
though I would add that in large measure this very activity of
De Quincey defines exactly what he considers literature of power
ought to do to the reader. It must become a power which remains
unfulfilled, and non-revelatory, until the reader "experiences"
it emotionally, imaginatively, and even intellectually. It is
a literature created out of discovery and motion, leading inev-
itably to further discovery and motion. As such, it does not
act upon the reader, but with him. Also, De Quincey's critical
method of responding to the work, then seeking logical explana-
tions for that response—a method described in detail by Jordan—
seems to me exactly what I mean by "experiencing" a work. Jor-
dan is misleading, for he segregates the "dreamer" and "logician"
in De Quincey, thereby implying that they are in conflict with
each other and may, indeed, correspond to distinct "steps" in
a critical sequence. On the contrary, they are perfectly com-
patible with each other, and they reflect not "steps" but a pro-
cess of creation, response and discovery. That "process" may
often fail when De Quincey attempts to practise it (and in fact
it does), but his very method of critical practice sheds enorm-
ous light on his views of what literature of power ought to
stimulate in us.

I shall turn now to the work itself as De Quincey speaks
of it, and note the characteristics he considers important.
These characteristics are many, but four in particular claim
close attention. First, the power of a work is revealed in its
energy and motion. Second, energy and motion depend upon an
antagonism within the work, that is, an antagonism between images
or ideas. Third, the work must be of sufficient length to demon-
strate growth and expansion, and so to show the poet's activity
of discovery and creation. Fourth, the work's own power is
evidenced by its effect on the reader; specifically, the liter-
ature of power exercises and expands the reader's own latent
capacity for the infinite.

The first two characteristics (motion and antagonism) can
be considered together, for the latter is a chief means of pro-
ducing the former, and both together are a large part of a poem's
"power." We recollect that Milton's poetry is repeatedly de-
scribed as a "power" by De Quincey, and particularly Paradise
Lost. In fact, De Quincey solidifies the relationship between
sublimity and power when he goes on to speak of this great epic
work in the following terms: "we may affirm that there is no
human composition which can be challenged as constitutionally sublime,—sublime equally by its conception and by its execution, or as uniformly sublime from first to last,—excepting the 'Paradise Lost'. In Milton only does this great agency blaze and glow as a furnace kept up to a white heat, without suspicion of collapse" (M, X, 401-402). And again: "In other poets,—in Dante, for example,—there may be rays, gleams, sudden coruscations, casual scintillations, of the sublime; but, for any continuous and sustained blaze of the sublime, it is vain to look for it except in Milton, making allowances (as before) for the inspired sublimities of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and of the great Evangelist's Revelations" (M, X, 300). What is interesting about the first of these quotations is the phrase "sublime equally by its conception and by its execution," for De Quincey is remarking not only on the power of the thoughts but also those thoughts as they are set down in the poem. We are back to the problem of how the poet is to reflect his power, how the process is to be kept in motion and evidenced in his work. One such method—that of creating an antagonism in the work—is described by De Quincey is his defense of Milton's "pedantry." He draws attention to the word "amphitheatre" and asks why it is that so many ladies use the phrases "amphitheatre of hills" or "amphitheatre of woods."

Why?...The reason lurks here:—In the word theatre is contained an evanescent image of a great audience, of a populous multitude. Now, this image—half-withdrawn, half-flashed upon the eye, and combined with the word hills or forests—is thrown into powerful collision.
with the silence of hills, with the solitude of forests; each image, from reciprocal contradiction, brightens and vivifies the other. The two images act, and react, by strong repulsion and antagonism. (M, X, 403)

"Out of this one principle of subtle and lurking antagonism may be explained everything which has been denounced under the idea of pedantry in Milton," argues De Quincey (M, X, 403). To enforce his point, he singles out the "regal banquet in the desert" depicted in Paradise Regained:

The shadowy exhibition of a regal banquet in the desert draws out and stimulates the sense of its utter solitude and remoteness from men or cities. The images of architectural splendour suddenly raised in the very center of Paradise, as vanishing shows by the wand of a magician, bring into powerful relief the depth of silence and the unpopulous solitude which possess this sanctuary of man whilst yet happy and innocent. Paradise could not in any other way, or by any artifice less profound, have been made to give up its essential and differential characteristics in a form palpable to the imagination.

(M, X, 403-404; my italics)

"Imagination" is the key word here, for surely De Quincey pursues the subject of antagonism in imagery for precisely one important reason: antagonism not only moves the reader, but also demands imaginative creation and discovery from him. In an image, much is suggested but little stated. How greatly the process of discovery is enhanced, then, when images collide and work reciprocally against each other. It is then that the reader's entire intellectual system is called into play, when the power of a work stimulates—indeed, demands—the reciprocal action of his own power. Milton's grand, creative sublimity (his power) is captured in his work, which, in turn, demands the creative energies of the
reader. This is truly a "process of power" and justifies completely De Quincey's estimation of Milton as a "power amongst powers" and Paradise Lost as a "central force amongst forces."

The subject of imagery would provide a complete study in itself, naturally, and the best I can do is once again emphasize its centrality in the history of the sublime. Milton is always a great favorite when theorists of the sublime address the importance of imagery, Addison, of course, being one such example. Thus, De Quincey is in distinguished company (and in a very old tradition) when he, too, explores the imagery of Paradise Lost. In fact, I think we would expect him to speak about imagery, for it is this trope which most particularly taxes the reader's creative faculty. Indeed, Johnson laments heterogeneous ideas being yoked together by violence in Cowley and the metaphysical poets very largely, I think, because he does not like the onus of creativity being put so forcibly on the reader. This smacks too much of subjectivity and relativism to suit Johnson. De Quincey, on the other hand, though by no means a relativist, makes this experiential nature of great art fundamental to his theory. In large part he does this by translating Johnson's "opposites" as "antagonism," then granting praise rather than blame. The antagonism of image and idea is seen not as a displeasing hindrance to meaning, but an encouragement of it. This is not to say that De Quincey unhesitatingly praises imagery wherever he finds it, only that he does recognize the aesthetic value of well-chosen images, as well as the principle upon which they work.
The subject of antagonism occurs in many other parts of De Quincey's theory, among these his discussions of style, conversation, rhetoric and eloquence, the length of a work, and harmony. Since each of these subjects necessitates the other part of the aesthetic triad—the reader, or subject—I shall move on and make the triad complete.

I have said that for De Quincey the third and fourth characteristics of a great work are: (a) a sufficient length to illustrate the poet's activity of discovery and creation, and (b) its power to exercise and expand the reader's own latent capacity for the infinite. The latter of these ideas is pursued when De Quincey applies his principle of antagonism to King Lear:

When, in King Lear, the height and depth, and breadth of human passion is revealed to us, and, for purposes of a sublime antagonism, is revealed in the weakness of an old man's nature, and in one night two worlds of storm are brought face to face—the human world, and the world of physical nature—mirrors of each other, semichoral antiphonies, strophe and antistrope heaving with rival convulsions, and with the double darkness of night and madness,—when I am thus suddenly startled into a feeling of the infinity of the world within me, is this power, or what may I call it?

(M, X, 49; my italics)

We may call it sublimity, for surely this is an instance of the rarest power, the kind which is found only in the literature of power. It stems from antagonism and motion which demand a reciprocal action by the subject, a creativity of his own which occasions a sublimity within him, a feeling for the infinite. This brief analysis of King Lear should make it evident how completely
antagonism, power, imagination, and sublimity are fused into one, both in the work itself and the reader. The process of cause-power-sublimity is not a step-by-step procedure at all; rather, it is like a sudden, forceful effect that occurs in the object (here a literary work) and almost simultaneously in the mind of the subject (here De Quincey himself). The necessity of having a perceiver is clearly demonstrated, for what is being described is not merely King Lear, but the feeling of the subject as he experiences the play. Nor can we rightly substitute any other word for "experience." The work is not simply acting on De Quincey; it is acting with him. The rival convulsions and sublime antagonism are not merely sources of power within the object, but also sources of "a feeling of infinity" within him. 19

This passage on King Lear presents a problem in understanding what De Quincey means by the "infinite" in man. It is tempting to read this as a sort of "mystical" revelation, no doubt because De Quincey himself often uses the term "revelation." In its relation to De Quincey's theory of the sublime, Jordan even goes so far as to say that De Quincey's sublime is "principally the product of a Christian religious experience," the most spectacular influence on De Quincey's tendency toward "mystical reverie" in his criticism. 20 Certainly a kind of "revelation" takes place when one is moved by a powerful work—this is evident in De Quincey's theories. But what role does imaginative creation and discovery play in this revelation; and, moreover, precisely what does one have a revelation of? Jordan, I think, rather dismisses
the first question, or at least would answer "none." The second he addresses when he says that De Quincey found "ideas" sublime, "ideas steeped in awe and mystery; and their principal source was in profound inscrutabilities of the Christian religion: the dignity of man, the mystery of sin, and the infinity of God." Still, I think De Quincey is much firmer with regard to this second question than Jordan would have us believe. No sooner does the phrase "a feeling of the infinity of the world within me" occur, than De Quincey asks a question: "is this power, or what may I call it?" It is indeed power, but above all one's own power. This is the final, and natural, culmination of a process of power which has begun with the author, continued in the work, and finally been actualized in the mind and soul of the reader. One has not simply a "mystical revelation" of human dignity, the mystery of sin, and the infinity of God, but also a revelation of one's own god-like powers—one's own sublimity. Notice, for example, what De Quincey says when, at one point, he draws his favorite distinction between the literature of power and that of knowledge:

The true antithesis to knowledge ... is not pleasure, but power. All that is literature seeks to communicate power; all that is not literature, to communicate knowledge. Now, if it be asked what is meant by communicating power, I, in my turn, would ask by what name a man would designate the case in which I should be made to feel vividly, and with a vital consciousness, emotions which ordinary life rarely or never supplies occasions for exciting, and which had previously lain unawakened, and hardly within the dawn of consciousness—as myriads of modes of feeling are at this moment in every human mind for
want of a poet to organize them? I say,
when these inert and sleeping forms are
organized, when these possibilities are
actualized, is this conscious and living
possession of mine power, or what is it?
(M, X, 48)

In short, De Quincey is drawing attention here not so much to
the objects of revelation as he is to the fact that one has the
power to see or intuit these things. To phrase this differently:
one has revealed to him not only his relation to the divine and
mysterious, but also his power to seek and realize that revelation.
Indeed, that power is god-like; it is a kind of divinity; it is
that "infinity" within one's self. Surely this is what De Quincey
means, not only in the passages quoted above, but also in the
section from "Infant Literature" (quoted earlier) where he terms
the first dawning of a god-like faculty or apprehension a moment
of great importance. A "living possession of mine power" is
what one finds suddenly revealed to him; and in this rarest of
powers lies man's sublimity. It is, indeed, a power of creation
which has begun in the artist's own creative mind and finally
reached its culmination in the reader's like activity.

The quotations dealing with King Lear and the literature of
power imply the fourth characteristic of a great work: it must
be lengthy. There must be motion and agitation, strophe and
antistrophe—in brief, a full exploration of ideas, intended to
produce a lasting effect on the reader. This is implied in the
very notion of "growth": the work should demonstrate what De
Quincey terms at one point a "development of power." Naturally
this theory has bearings upon De Quincey's own writing style,
especially his incessant ramblings in which "development" of an idea or an exploration of its many facets seems to be an end in itself. Thus, it is no accident that his remarks on length occur chiefly in the essay "Style."

In the essay, De Quincey turns to what he calls "the true philosophy of prose composition" (M, X, 181) by pointing out a reviewer's criticism of Coleridge's "Aphorisms." "It was not a very good-natured opinion in that situation, since it was no more true of Coleridge than it is of every other man who adopts the same aphoristic form of expression for his thoughts; but it was eminently just...the reviewer observed that this detached and insulated form of delivering thoughts was, in effect, an evasion of all the difficulties connected with composition" (M, X, 181). And thus De Quincey declares the supreme difficulty of writing effective, powerful prose: "The labour of composition begins when you have to put your separate threads of thought into a loom; to weave them into a continuous whole; to connect, to introduce them; to blow them out or expand them; to carry them to a close" (M, X, 181). It is suggested here that excellent prose is much like a musical composition, a continuous weaving of themes and ideas in different keys or attitudes. Likewise, we know of De Quincey's fascination with music, as well as his attempts to adapt musical form to his own style; hence, the analogy of music and prose style is not at all inappropriate. One is also reminded of a very early remark in "Style" when De Quincey turns to the English obtuseness with regard to music—"a
"divine art" little appreciated or understood—and scathingly denounces the popular delight in songs:

So little, however, is the grandeur of this divine art suspected amongst us generally that a man will write an essay deliberately for the purpose of putting on record his own preference of a song to the most elaborate music of Mozart....Strange that even the analogy of other arts should not open his eyes to the delusion he is encouraging! A song, an air, a tune,—that is, a short succession of notes revolving rapidly upon itself,—how could that, by possibility, offer a field of compass sufficient for the development of great musical effects? The preparation pregnant with the future; the remote correspondence; the questions, as it were, which to a deep musical sense are asked in one passage and answered in another; the iteration and ingemination of a given effect, moving through subtle variations that sometimes disguise the theme, sometimes fitfully reveal it, sometimes throw it out tumultuously to the blaze of daylight: these and ten thousand forms of self-conflicting musical passion,—what room could they find, what opening, what utterance, in so limited a field as an air or song? (M, X, 136)

Of course, De Quincey realizes that even a brief accomplishment like a repartee "may by accident be practically effective" and accomplish what an oration of Cicero or Burke could only equal; but what judgment, he asks, "would match the two against each other as developments of power?" (M, X, 137). Very obviously there is no contest, and the truly great work is a lengthy one in which ideas are woven and interwoven, seeded and grown.

Antagonism, growth, and length also find a place in De Quincey's remarks on conversation, not only in the essay of that name but also in other places. We find that "the special capacities of conversation" can be seen as "an organ for absolutely creating
another mode of power" (M, X, 268). There can be an "electric kindling of life between two minds" just as there can be interaction between a reader and a poem, a subject and an object. Indeed, the only difference is that in conversation the object is another human mind. This is an idea worth examining closely, for the image of two interacting minds is a fine illustration of my former contention that the total act of perception or "experiencing" involves not cause-effect, but simultaneous action-interaction: "An ignorant person supposes that to an able dis- putant it must be an advantage to have a feeble opponent; whereas, on the contrary, it is ruin to him; for he cannot display his own powers but through something of a corresponding power in the resistance of his antagonist" (M, X, 279). Or, as De Quincey says a few pages later, "To be acted upon forever, but never to react, is fatal to the very powers by which sympathy must grow, or by which intelligent admiration can be evoked" (M, X, 282). This becomes the sum of his complaint against Coleridge's conversation: his was not a colloquium (talking with the company) but an alloquium (talking to them) (M, X, 281; cf. 155-156). It also underlies his praise of the French as "a nation of talkers" ("there are no such people endured or ever heard of in France as alloquial wits" (M, X, 155-157), as well as his hatred of Plato's use of dialogue: "How inevitably the reader feels his fingers itching to take up the cudgels instead of Crito for one ten minutes! Had we been favoured with an interview, we can answer for it that the philosopher should not have had it all his own way"
(M, X, 183). In conversation, the subject and object are not unlike "Great organists" who "find the same effect of inspiration, the same result of power creative and revealing, in the mere movement and velocity of their own voluntaries" (M, X, 269). In conflict or antagonistic struggle, each of the two disputants creates power of the highest kind, and perhaps it is this twofold creation that leads De Quincey to say: "A feeling dawned on me of a secret magic lurking in the peculiar life, velocities, and contagious ardour of conversation, quite separate from any which belonged to books,—arming a man with new forces, and not merely with a new dexterity in wielding the old ones" (M, X, 268). And later: "Books teach by one machinery, conversation by another; and, if these resources were trained into correspondence to their own separate ideals, they might become reciprocally the complements of each other" (M, X, 277). Conversation is an art (M, X, 264-265), subject to the rules of any great art, demanding motion, energy, interaction, and creation. In conversation, a greater fusion between subject and object is possible simply because both are human; in the constant flux and reflux of minds it is possible to act one moment and react the next, to be both active and passive, subject and object, with a flexibility denied the human reader and his non-human book.

De Quincey's discussion of rhetoric also unites the various concerns with power, antagonism, motion, and sublimity. The distinction which he draws in the essay "Rhetoric" is an important one, and warrants close attention: "By Eloquence we understand
the overflow of powerful feelings upon occasions fitted to excite them. But Rhetoric is the art of aggrandizing and bringing out into strong relief by means of various and striking thoughts, some aspect of truth which of itself is supported by no spontaneous feelings, and therefore rests upon no artificial aids" (M, X, 92). Eloquence, in other words, involves the passions, and rhetoric the intellect. The phrase "strong relief" suggests that power and antagonism are somehow associated with rhetoric, and "powerful feelings" certainly implies a kinship between power and eloquence. Given this common core of power, then, is John Jordan correct when he states that "De Quincey considered rhetoric outside the pale of the sublime"? Supposing rhetoric, with all its power, could be associated with eloquence, yet another kind of power—intellect, in other words, with passion—would the result be a power "of the rarest kind"? In fact, this is exactly the case. Because they are opposites, rhetoric and eloquence together provide an ideal basis for antagonism, and antagonism, it will be remembered, is itself a step on the way to the sublime. Sir Thomas Browne's *Urne Buriall* is a "sublime rapture" to De Quincey because at its center is the same "antagonism" of which I have already spoken. In both Browne and Jeremy Taylor "the two opposite forces of eloquent passion and rhetorical fancy are brought into an exquisite equilibrium, approaching, receding, attracting, repelling, blending, separating, chasing and chased, as in a fugue—and again lost in a delightful inter-fusion, so as to create a middle species of composition, more
various and stimulating to the understanding than pure eloquence, more gratifying to the affections than naked rhetoric" (M, X, 104-105). This is especially true of Jeremy Taylor, who is important for "that one remarkable characteristic of his style which we have already noticed, viz. the everlasting strife and fluctuation between his rhetoric and his eloquence which maintain their alternations with force and inevitable recurrence, like the systole and diastole, the contraction and expansion, of some living organ" (M, X, 108).

Taylor, we find, was too much the "man of understanding." Thus his rhetoric was apt to be oppressive, says De Quincey. Happily enough, "this tendency ... was ... checked and balanced by the commanding passion, intensity, and solemnity of his exalted theme, which gave a final unity to the tumultuous motions of his intellect" (M, X, 108). At the other extreme, Milton had not an active or teeming understanding but "a few vast ideas" (M, X, 108). Hence, "there the funds of a varied rhetoric are wanting" (M, X, 108). In each case we find that the author makes attempts to realize that middle form of composition which is neither rhetoric nor eloquence but a union of both—a work in which the two forces succeed each other and thereby interact. Taylor's great ability to realize this attempt we have seen described as "that one remarkable characteristic of his style," and in Paradise Regained "the oratory ... on the part of Satan in the Wilderness, is no longer of a rhetorical cast, but in the grandest style of impassioned eloquence that can be imagined as
the fit expression for the movements of an angelic despair; and in particular the speech, on first being challenged by our Saviour ... is not excelled in sublimity by any passage in the poem" (M, X, 104). Finally, John Donne, the "first very eminent rhetorician in English literature ... combined—what no other man has ever done—the last sublimation of dialectical subtlety and address with the most impassioned majesty" (M, X, 101).

De Quincey clearly favors the kind of composition which combines pure eloquence and naked rhetoric. The terms he uses when speaking of the latter are "keen," "arrowy," "polished," "coolness," "reflection," "fancy," while for the former he chooses "impassioned," "fervent," "rapture," and the like. The distinctions are not always clearly maintained, but I think we can see the general idea De Quincey is trying to establish. A grandly conceived and "aggrandized" idea brings out a striking truth, the conviction of which rests in an eloquent presentation. Opposite forces finally combine to create true literature of power.

To conclude this chapter on De Quincey, I shall concentrate more fully on the reader, or subject, in De Quincey's critical thought, and so draw together these various theoretical threads. The reader, if he responds to power, is affected in an extremely complicated fashion. The great work of art moves him, and this is a given in De Quincey's theory; but he is not moved as a passive agent being acted upon. His emotional response is merely one part of that response which involves his total intellectual system; he reacts upon the work imaginatively and intellectually
as well as emotionally. It is very true, then, that the reader is often an important figure toward the fortune of a work. He may act emotionally with respect to a poem like *Paradise Lost* and yet, like Addison and Johnson, make an error in judgment which renders part of the poem ineffective. Concomitantly, when De Quincey speaks of a "sublime poetic conception" or the "sublime *Paradise Lost*" he is referring not to a quality in the work, but that quality which exists only in the relationship of work to perceiver. If I seem to belabor this point it is for a particularly important reason: an object can be "sublime" for De Quincey only when the total act of perceiving it is completed. For example, when a poem expresses a lofty thought in antagonistic opposites, it produces a definite power which stems from the sublimity of the writer's soul and which in turn forces the reader to exert his own creative power (an exertion implying recognition of the power by the subject)—then, and only then, is the poem "sublime." Moreover, this entire process of power is a matter not of cause and effect but of experiencing, common both to the writer and the reader in their states of discovery and creation.

The distinction between literature of knowledge and power (which I have cited earlier) is perhaps the best illustration in De Quincey's writings of the necessity for having a subject in the aesthetic process, as well as of the relation between the perceiving mind and the object. That relation consists of more than power awakening passion or emotion; it stimulates feeling, or sensibility. The work does not simply move the subject. It
awakens and organizes, thus becoming a part of the subject's reaction. Through his created work the poet "organizes" dormant modes of feeling in the reader. That is, he gives direction and meaning to a host of otherwise chaotic forms. And when this final organization is complete, when these possibilities are "actualized," the reader is made aware of his own power. He strives to emulate the same creation of the poet by exerting his own strength against the very object that has reacted on him. In De Quincey's own language, the power of the object organizes and actualizes sleeping forms, the final "actualization" and recognition being the "conscious and living possession of mine power."

One does not lead to the other; no clear distinction is made between the organization of feeling and the reaction of the mind. The two blend with one another, resulting in a "sublime unity."

The communication of power, then, requires more than a certain energy in the work itself. Without the poet to shape it, give it meaning, direct it, in short, organize it, this power is incomplete. It merely remains an aspect of the work that we find dazzling, admirable, perhaps enjoyable—but its effect on the reader is limited and evanescent. However, when the poet uses his powers to organize and create the power of a literary work, he has already begun to give his reader direction. Confronted with the poem, the reader's "modes of feeling" are in turn organized (more properly, here, "actualized" or brought to completion) and he is made aware of his own power. The writer organizes modes of feeling in the reader not directly, but indirectly
through the created poem; he must first organize the power of
the poem so that it can be actualized by organizing the reader's
power. It is a process that is cyclical and what holds true for
the poet also holds true for the reader. The poet affects and
organizes the poem; the poem affects and organizes the reader
(thereby "actualizing" the modes of feeling within him); finally,
the reader, made aware of his own power, reacts against the work.

The onus of the poet to awaken the reader's dormant sensi-
blities leads to the subject of writing style. It is not just
any power that results in "the sublime," we remember, but by def-
inition only the rarest. Thus John Paul Richter is a "powerful"
writer, but not a "sublime" one: "The rapid but uniform motions
of the heavenly bodies serve well enough to typify the grand and
continuous motions of the Miltonic mind. But the wild, giddy,
fantastic, capricious, incalculable, springing, vaulting, tum-
bling, dancing, waltzing, caprioling, piroetting, sky-rocketing
of ... the monster, John Paul, can be compared to nothing in
heaven or earth, or the waters under the earth, except to the
motions of the same faculty as existing in Shaksper" (M, XI, 266).
Richter is simply too "flashy." His power is not intellectual,
but simply passionate, and for purposes of sublimity this is not
enough. The mind is captured by the enormity of Richter's ex-
pressions, acted upon—at the expense of reaction—by the "fiery,
meteoric, scintillating, coruscating power of John Paul" (M, XI,
268). This is certainly why De Quincey, for all his admiration
of Richter, never uses the term "sublime" to describe him. The
fault, apparently, lies in Richter's poetic execution; no doubt his ideas or thoughts are truly sublime (as the Analects demonstrate), but the execution of them does not organize and actualize. They do not grow before us but simply bombard us; in other words, Richter's works act on the reader instead of with him.

Because the work lacks control, organization of the reader's modes of feelings is impossible. Without the poet's organization the poem remains exciting but directionless; so, too, the reader is excited, but not moved with a sense of his own power. Apparently, then, De Quincey is concerned with some sort of distinction between "sublimity of poetic conception" and "sublimity of poetic execution" despite his remarks that it is impossible to: "value the matter of a book not only as paramount to manner, but even as distinct from it" (M, X, 137). This inconsistency is a difficult one to escape, and it might well lie at the center of what Proctor terms the "crowning paradox" in De Quincey's theory of style: a "simultaneous emphasis upon the value of style as a beautiful thing per se and upon the indissoluble relationship between style and thought."²⁵ Be this as it may, poetic conception can be inadequately incarnated in execution, a fault which is evident in Richter. This is certainly why De Quincey attaches the importance he does to style, however much he may confuse us with inconsistencies. Style is not something tacked on to the grandeur of a thought but in large part is the meaning. If it is not at least equal to the concept in the poet's mind, there is no possibility of a final sublime unity. The poet must,
like Milton, possess a "loftiness of thought" but style, too, plays a significant role in the final expression of power: "Style has two separate functions: first, to brighten the intelligibility of a subject which is obscure to the understanding; secondly, to regenerate the normal power and impressiveness of a subject which has become dormant to the sensibilities" (M, X, 260-261). It relates both to the understanding (one aspect of man's intellectual system) and to power (which incorporates the rest). Working together, style and conception produce not just a pleasure or a momentary sublimity, but a continuous, sustained sublimity such as the "blaze" of Milton.

Sublimity is the rarest power for De Quincey—what I have termed a creative, god-like power. This seems to me a simple enough concept, though very elucidating when we hear De Quincey talking about a "sublime poem" or the "sublime Milton" or a "moral sublime" he has discovered in a work. In each case the sublimity is not merely a quality of the work or person or idea; "sublime" does not define simply what the object is. It also defines what that person, poem, or idea is in relation to the subject or perceiver. It defines its power, its potential for actualizing one's own sublimity. That creative power can be operative in an artist's mind and soul; it can be operative in a poem or even a physical object; but above all it is operative in the reader or perceiver. Consequently, I think both Proctor and Jordan are misleading when they talk about the various "kinds" of sublime in De Quincey's theories: the ethico-physical, the dark,
and the moral. The origin of the sublime is constant, regardless of the nature of the object, hence what we have here is a difference of degree and direction but not of kind. For De Quincey, the object's power awakens the subject to a feeling of, or sensibility to, truth; and this truth can be of almost any kind. It might be the total insensibility of man to God's continual mercies, the striking realization that every person in a crowd is going to die, or even the sudden knowledge that love does not exist—the examples are all De Quincey's. In other words, it is the kind of truth that dictates the direction in which one's mind moves. When De Quincey says, "I never see a vast crowd of faces ... but one thing makes them sublime to me: the fact that all these people have to die," he is not succumbing to a "mystic" or "dark" kind of sublimity, a fascination with a Burkean awe and terror. He is simply reacting to an antagonism (that between a mass of immediate life and a crushing, foreseen, far-off death) which has itself given rise to power—the power of creative insight and discovery—and this reaction (this creation and discovery) is a moment of sublime realization. Certainly there is mystery, awe, and bewilderment, but not because of some "kind" of dark sublime (whatever that is supposed to mean). In an attempt to grasp at truth, the mind exerts its own power (and that is sublime), thereby moving toward a comprehension of man and God (moral), or of the nature of evil (dark), or of the relation between man and nature (ethico-physical). Regardless of the kind of truth presented, the sublime has a fixed origin. However, its
direction, its manifestation in thought, perhaps even its intensity, will be directly influenced by the nature of the truth. The sublime, be it dark, moral, or whatever, is above all power in the creative individual. These other words are only adjectives denoting the directions in which the mind is carried by its own sublimity.

In his discussions of power, style, passion, conception, antagonism, motion, and the like, De Quincey shows clearly how nineteenth-century theories of the sublime involve the topics much debated in the past. The celebration of the creative, intuitive man is fundamental to the Romantic writers, and nowhere is this more evident than in their treatment of the great subject of creativity—the sublime. I have chosen to begin a study of the Romanticists with De Quincey not because he is the best of critics (he is not) nor because he is the most consistent and clear theorist of the sublime (definitely not). Rather, it is because I wish to show how solidly the sublime figures in his critical thinking, involving as it does nearly all his important ideas on critical matters, from style to power. No one, I think, has clearly demonstrated the many things De Quincey means by "power"—possibly because such a task would be almost impossible. But one aspect of this idea has its place in the history of the sublime, and that is the notion of creative power in man, especially this creativity as it demonstrates one's "god-like" energies.
NOTES--CHAPTER TWO

1 The Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey, ed. David Masson, 14 vols. (Edinburgh, 1889-1890), X, 400. All references to De Quincey's writings are from this edition, designated M and enclosed parenthetically in my text.

2 For example, De Quincey distinguishes between the sublime and beautiful in the following way: "It is a great thought, a true thought, a demonstrable thought, that the Sublime, as thus ascertained, and in contraposition to the Beautiful, grew up on the basis on sexual distinctions,--the Sublime corresponding to the male, and the Beautiful, its anti-pole, corresponding to the female. Behold! we show you a mystery!" (M, X, 300-301). The distinction being made here is an obvious one: the sublime corresponds to the powerful and forceful (the "male" principle) while the beautiful corresponds to the delicate and lovely (the "female" principle). No doubt De Quincey owes something here to Kant, whose fourth book of the Observations on our Feelings of the Beautiful and Sublime he translated in 1824.

3 Man's special power for hearing the tones of truth, which, in its highest state, is a "capacity for power" (a sympathy with the infinite), is not restricted to the child. All men have this power, and it is the artist's function to "realize" it. On this point see Judson S. Lyon, Thomas De Quincey (New York, 1969), p. 121.

4 Last four italicized words are mine.

5 First two italicized words are mine.

6 This translation is De Quincey's.

7 The child's non-recognition of his own powers is a point pursued by Geoffrey Hartman in Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787-1814 (New Haven and London, 1964). Though Hartman's remarks refer to Wordsworth, they equally apply to the case at hand. The child, says Hartman, "does not know that what he sees and feels is an effect of the power of his imagination. The impact of the scenes on him is inseparable from overwhelming sense-impressions....The
boy's imagination accepted nature's images so forcefully that he is deceived, not able to dissociate nature's strength from his own, and even blind to all but the latter". (215). Hartman is referring to "spots of time" in youth, and the object the youth confronts is nature. In the case of De Quincey the object is a book rather than the natural world, yet it still seems to me that Hartman's main idea is perfectly applicable here.

8 De Quincey includes the following comment at the end of "False Distinctions": "I have here used the words Fancy, Imagination, and Imaginative Power, as equivalent to each other; because it was not necessary for the present purpose to take notice of them in any other relation than that of contradistinction to the formal understanding or Logos" (M, X, 445). This lumping together of the fancy and imagination has bothered many critics, especially John Jordan. See Jordan's Thomas De Quincey Literary Critic: His Method and Achievement (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1952), p. 33.

9 On the importance of the aesthetic effect in De Quincey's critical thinking, see Chapter V of Jordan.

10 One can make such a distinction with literature of knowledge. De Quincey notes that certain pursuits are favorable to the culture of style. "In fact, they force that culture. A man who has absolute facts to communicate from some branch of study external to himself, as physiology, suppose, or anatomy, or astronomy, is careless of style; or at least he may be so, because he is independent of style, for what he has to communicate neither readily admits, nor much needs, any graces in the mode of communication; the matter transcends and oppresses the manner. The matter tells without any manner at all" (M, X, 226).

11 Jordan, p. 57; my italics.

12 De Quincey distinguishes carefully, and at length, between genius and talent. Both "express modes of intellectual power," however, they are in direct opposition to each other. "Talent is intellectual power of every kind, which acts and manifests itself by and through the will and the active forces. Genius ... is that much rarer species of intellectual power which is derived from the genial nature—-from the spirit of suffering and enjoying—-from the spirit of pleasure and pain, as organized more or less perfectly; and this is independent of the will. It is a function of the passive nature." Talent is also concerned with the adaptation of means to ends, genius only with ends. Talent has no connection with moral nature or temperament; "genius is steeped and saturated with this moral nature" (M, I, 194).

The relation between passivity and genius is a misleading one, for it does not mean that genius is non-creative. Genius
is a power, almost in the sense of a power of intuition. It cannot, however, be willed, and therein lies its great distinction from talent. Genius is also unique with each man; in addition, it does not work by intense resistance to an antagonistic force (as does talent), but "in headlong sympathy and concurrence with spontaneous power ... under a rapture of necessity and spontaneity" (M, I, 195).

Jordan (pp. 34-35) sees genius as "the prime creating faculty" in De Quincey's theory, and therefore dismisses the imagination. Yet even Jordan acknowledges De Quincey's reference to genius as "the language which interprets the synthesis of the human spirit with the human intellect, each acting through the other" (M, XI, 383) which seems to suggest a good deal more than just intuition or insight. Likewise, Jordan points out De Quincey's belief that a poet should have both talent and genius (p. 35). In sensing a "dualistic attitude" in De Quincey (p. 35.), Jordan is, I think, missing the point. Genius implies a way of viewing things and suggests matter is opposed to manner. We know that De Quincey also speaks of the imagination as the fundus of true artistic creation, thus it would appear that genius and imagination have some relationship. Talent, on the other hand, concerns itself with manner, the execution of thoughts, "the adaptation of means to ends." Thus, it is "active" for two reasons: (a) it can, indeed must, be willed, and (b) "adaptation" is an active force. However, even talent is quite evidently creative and not to be considered apart from the imagination. In short, De Quincey is talking about conception and execution, hence his belief that an artist should have both genius and talent. The idea is an old one in the history of the sublime as I have pointed out, and in large measure it can be understood if one considers the imagination as central to both conception and execution. There is really no dualism as Jordan speaks of it so much as there is a muddled attempt on De Quincey's part to speak separately of distinct aspects of the creative process. Adding to the confusion is De Quincey's neglect to detail explicitly the connection between imagination and genius/talent.

13 Jordan, p. 32.

14 Jordan, pp. 33-34.


16 Proctor, p. 163.

17 Jordan, p. 268.
18 For a contemporary discussion of the image and its relation to creativity see Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space (Boston, 1969), especially the introduction.

19 Cf. Proctor's description of the sublime in De Quincey's reference to the fable from Aesop: "The mind is confronted with the idea of the immeasurability of the abyss which lies between an unutterable degradation of spirit and a starry altitude of being. The imagination is asked to grasp at something too large for its capacity....We may say that the mind is exalted through an apprehension of its own moral greatness....The sublime object or idea thus becomes a revelation of 'the infinity of the world within me!'" (p. 81).

20 Jordan, p. 55; p. 57.

21 Jordan, p. 57.


23 "Where conviction begins, the field of Rhetoric ends; that is our opinion: and, as to the passions, we contend that they are not within the province of Rhetoric, but of Eloquence" (M, X, 82).

24 Jordan, p. 65.

CHAPTER THREE

WORDSWORTH: SUBLIMITY AND THE KINGDOM OF POWER

In Letters to a Young Man Whose Education Has Been Neglected (1823) De Quincey remarks on the conversations he had as a young man with Wordsworth, and professes his obligations to the great poet (M, X, 48). He has just distinguished between knowledge and power, and he is careful to add that it was Wordsworth who best enunciated this distinction. De Quincey's obligation is an important one, for, accustomed as we are to credit him with succinct remarks about power, it draws our attention back to the man from whom they originally came. Indeed, we have all but forgotten Wordsworth's concern with this word "power," and it is refreshing to see that two scholars have recently given serious attention to this deficiency. ¹

One of these critics, W.J.B. Owen, remarks that there are some 600-odd occasions when the term "power" is used by Wordsworth, the most unique instance of its usage occurring when there is no context stated or inferred, no description or qualification of the kind of power Wordsworth is talking about. Owen then selects three passages from the "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface" and follows these with an analysis of the term "power":

The passages concerned are two (184.16, 33); a probable third occurs slightly earlier (183.34). In the two certain cases, power is a quality which the great poet "calls forth" from the reader, and which he also "commun-
icates" to, or "bestows" on, the reader. In the third case (183.34), power is a faculty of the reader's mind which he "exerts." Thus power in these passages is an attribute of the mind—the poet's mind, perhaps, and certainly the reader's, and it is also, as we shall see, an attribute of other things; but it is not an attribute of the artifact, which is rather the means by which power is communicated. By the process which Wordsworth calls elsewhere "action from within and from without," the reader, it would appear, achieves the quality of power and, perhaps, the same state of power as that which obtains in the mind of the poet. Power is thus, it seems, at once objective and subjective: the power of the poet is perceived by the reader, but in the act of perception the power of the reader is also felt by himself.²

In light of the "Supplementary Essay" and its argument, I think we must concur with Owen's remarks. In this essay Wordsworth is concerned with the activity of his reader, and especially with "taste" as an active principle. Lamenting the term "taste" in itself ("It is a metaphor, taken from a passive sense of the human body, and transferred to things which are in their essence not passive,—to intellectual acts and operations"³), he goes on to insist repeatedly that a reader cannot comprehend the "spirit" of a work if he remains passive. Such a reader may converse with "proportion" and "congruity," "for in its intercourse with these the mind is passive, and is affected painfully or pleasurably as by an instinct" (LC, 183). But beyond these "parts" of a work the passive reader is completely stymied. He cannot know that "something else," that je ne sais quoi "Which, without passing thro' the Judgment, gains/ The Heart, and all its End at once attains." He cannot, that is, comprehend "the profound and the
exquisite in feeling, the lofty and universal in thought and imagination; or in ordinary language the pathetic and the sublime" (LC, 183). "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" (LC, 183).

It follows, then, that if a writer must create the taste by which he is enjoyed, he must produce poetry of power. He must call forth his own power in such a fashion that his readers will themselves be unable to remain quiescent. He must write poetry that takes origin in the poet's own creative power, that exists itself as a power, so that finally the reader "may exert himself, for he cannot proceed in quiescence, he cannot be carried like a dead weight" (LC, 184). Every great poet, in the highest exercise of his genius, "has to call forth and to communicate power," and as we see "this service, in a still greater degree, falls upon an original Writer, at his first appearance in the world" (LC, 184).

In short, a truly great writer is a power, and his unique concern is to produce work which communicates this power. He must "produce effects hitherto unknown" (LC, 184) which will demand "a corresponding energy" (LC, 185) from the reader. Above all, this power can stem only from a great soul. It is interesting indeed that Wordsworth speaks about the communicating of power in the following manner: "What is all this but an advance, or a conquest, made by the soul of the Poet?" (LC, 184; my italics). And we encounter the same terminology again in Wordsworth's
remark that "the Poet must reconcile himself for a season to few and scattered hearers" (LC, 186) when his mission is "to send the soul into herself, to be admonished of her weakness or to be made conscious of her power" (LC, 186). We remember, too, that the Imagination shapes and creates by innumerable processes which proceed from and are governed by "a sublime consciousness of the soul in her own mighty and almost divine powers" (LC, 149). To create taste, for Wordsworth, is to "call forth and bestow power" (LC, 184); but it is also a spreading-out of the poet's soul not unlike Longinus's notion that a sublime writer creates work which stems from and speaks to great souls. I have argued in my first chapter that the sublime has an inescapable relationship with the "spiritual greatness" of man, and that it celebrates this by emphasizing his creative nature. In perhaps no writer more than Wordsworth does this emphasis become a dominant factor. If taste demands communicating power, it demands as well a greatness of soul, and, further, an extension of this soul outward. Thus, the "sublimity" of a writer actively seeks a corresponding sublimity in the reader, "a sublime consciousness of the soul in her own mighty and almost divine powers." We cannot forget that sublimity, for Wordsworth, is a condition of the human soul, not a quality of "things" outside man. It is not simply identifiable with "great" or "terrible" objects, or with those vast prospects which occasion awe. The "sources of sublimity," we find, are "in the soul of Man" (LC, 185; my italics).^4

We recollect Wordsworth's disenchantment with Longinus, his assertion that "One is surprised that it should even have been
supposed for a moment, that Longinus writes upon the sublime, even in our vague and popular sense of the word."⁵ In fact, Wordsworth's own opinions about the sublime correspond very closely with Longinus's at times. Certainly they do in matters of sublimity and grandeur of soul. A further similarity is revealed when we consider Wordsworth's and Longinus's views of man's general dignity and the place of the poet in this woe-begotten world. As Longinus makes clear in his remarks on corrupta eloquentia (Chapter XLIV of On the Sublime), man is too often given to the lowly instead of the lofty. Consequently, it may be depressingly difficult to awaken one's sense of his own sublimity, but this state of affairs argues even more forcibly for the necessity of there being a poet. The same thought can be seen in Wordsworth's own version of the corrupta eloquentia: "And for the sublime,—if we consider what are the cares that occupy the passing day, and how remote is the practice and the course of life from the sources of sublimity, in the soul of Man, can it be wondered that there is little existing preparation for a Poet charged with a new mission to extend its kingdom, and to augment and spread its enjoyments?" (LC, 185). Yet spread this kingdom he must, argues Wordsworth. The Poet's province "is to send the soul into herself, to be admonished of her weakness or to be made conscious of her power," and so man's failings must be borne with. The language Wordsworth uses here is, I think, unmistakable in its emphasis on the messianic mission of the poet. Like Christ, the Poet is to "go forth" with his "mission," to extend the kingdom of the sublime. His sublimity or power is an "advance, or a
conquest" (LC, 184); and we, his readers, can not ourselves ad-
vance unless "invigorated and inspired by our Leader" (LC, 184; my italics) to the exercise of our own powers. It is when
we become aware of our own divinity—our own "sublimity"—that
we become disciples of the "Poet charged with a new mission" (LC,
185).

The kingdom of power is, then, the kingdom of the sublime
in Wordsworth's "Supplementary Essay." And certainly if one were
to pursue the implications of this Essay he could not excuse away
the incredible egotism at work here. Wordsworth builds up the
place of the poet to such a height and endows the poet with such
an awesome mission—all of this with his own poetry clearly be-
fore us—that we cannot mistake the conclusion: Poems, in Two
Volumes is written by a poet with a mission, a poet with a truly
"religious" calling. Certainly the "sense of self" in Wordsworth's
poetry, the "overwhelming public assertion of the poet's self and
identity" which we have termed the "egotistical sublime," has its
counterpart in Wordsworth's critical writings. But I would argue
that there is considerably more than egotism in Wordsworth's
holding-forth of his poetry; there is also method and intent, a
careful development of the "religious" nature of his poetry that
Wordsworth has anticipated almost from the beginning of the
"Essay." If the tone of the "Essay" strikes us as an egotistic
one, it is because Wordsworth is only too aware of how easily
religious poetry is subject to distortion (LC, 164); hence, he
wishes us to understand clearly and unmistakably that his poetry
will deal not with sectarian tenets but with man's inherent div-
inity, and grandeur of soul.

Wordsworth's rhetoric about the Poet being a "Leader" and being "charged with a new mission to extend \[\text{sublimity's} \, \cup \text{kingdom}\] is no mere puffing of the chest. These remarks hearken back to the earlier part of the "Essay" where Wordsworth insists that poetry "is most just to its own divine origin when it administers the comforts and breathes the spirit of religion" (LC, 162). By "the spirit of religion" in poetry he does not simply mean poetry which contains religious subjects, for this sort of poetry can lead (and has led, says Wordsworth) to many critical fallacies (LC, 162-163). By "religious poetry" Wordsworth means that which provides some definite "commerce between Man and his Maker." One such commerce is achieved by depicting and encouraging "the elevation of \[\text{man's} \, \cup \text{nature},\] for this elevation is "a presumptive evidence of a future state of existence" which gives man "a title to partake of its holiness" (LC, 163). Poetry, as Wordsworth goes on to speak of it early in the "Essay," is basically religious, and I think he means us to see that his poetry, successful or not, displays this characteristic in its mission to extend the kingdom of sublimity. These two volumes of poems are designed for aiding the elevation of man's nature by teaching him to use his own divine, creative, sublime powers. We can say, then, that the "Essay" is a plea for us to re-define our notions of taste; it is both a manifesto of sorts and a lament; it certainly does assume an almost disconcerting egotistic pose. But finally, it is equally insistent (and serious) about the moral value of the poems contained. As Wordsworth says, these are works which, he
believes, have "something of the 'Vision and the Faculty divine'" (LC, 187), and will operate "to extend the domain of sensibility for the delight, the honor, and the benefit of human nature" (LC, 187). Were he not so convinced, he adds, "he would not, if a wish could do it, save them from immediate destruction;-- from becoming at this moment, to the world, as a thing that had never been" (LC, 187). This is not an egotistic sublimity, but an unsparing commitment to furthering man's truly sublime nature.8

Of those 600-odd references to power, perhaps the most important occur in the 1815 Preface. It is in this essay as well that Wordsworth solidifies the relationship between sublimity of soul and creativity of Imagination, this relationship further dependant upon what he terms "The powers requisite for the production of poetry" (LC, 140; my italics). These powers are six in number. First, there is observation and description, "the ability to observe with accuracy things as they are in themselves, and with fidelity to describe them, unmodified by any passion or feeling existing in the mind of the Describer: whether the things depicted be actually present to the senses, or have a place only in the memory" (LC, 140). The second is sensibility, which, if very exquisite, provides a wide range of perceptions for the poet and incites him to observe objects "both as they exist in themselves and as re-acted upon by his own mind" (LC, 140). Third, there is reflection, "which makes the Poet acquainted with the value of actions, images, thoughts, and feelings; and assists the sensibility in perceiving their connection with each other" (LC, 141). Fourth, we have the faculties of imagination and
fancy, which modify, create, and associate. The fifth power is invention, used to create characters or incidents by the poet. These creations are based upon observation either of external materials or materials "of the Poet's own heart and mind" (LC, 141). Last, there is judgment, which (a) determines how, where, and to what degree each of these faculties should be employed, and (b) "what are the laws and appropriate graces of every species of composition" (LC, 141).

It is significant that Wordsworth pays due attention to the "moulds" of poetry, only to push the issue aside and take up the arrangement of his poems "according to the powers of mind, in the Author's conception, predominant in the production of them" (LC, 143). For those six powers he has already mentioned are the sum of the writer's activity, of the process by which he not only records an experience but shapes it, creates it, and gives it meaning. That is, creative power is the central concern of this Preface from start to finish, and so genre quite rightly takes second place.

A poet begins by numbering the streaks on the tulip. Observation is a power "indispensable to a Poet," but it is one which must be regarded with caution. Observation and description are activities of seeing "with" the eye as opposed to seeing "through" it. One must observe and describe only out of necessity and never for a continuance of time, for "its exercise supposes all the higher qualities of the mind to be passive, and in a state of subjection to external objects, much in the same way as the Translator or Engraver ought to be to his Original" (LC, 140). We
might say that observation involves working "on" an object instead of "with" it. Observation provides the stuff of poetry, materials with which the poet can work. And Wordsworth is insistent about one fact: these materials can be found not only in the external world but also in the mind.

In Wordsworth's *Theory of Poetry*, James A.W. Heffernan points out that a fundamental tenet of Wordsworth's "poetic creed" --one on which he never wavered--was that "the creative power of what he called 'imagination' must be firmly and solidly rooted in the soil of common perception." But Heffernan also goes on to point out, quite rightly, that the Essay of 1815 also stresses the fundamental relationship between perception on the one hand and "active feeling," or "sensibility," on the other. Passion, or feeling, is for Wordsworth "inherently creative, modifying and molding the materials of the senses." In short, with the discussion of sensibility, Wordsworth moves closer to the truly creative poet, that man who is "endued with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul" (LC, 48; my italics), that man who remains not in mere passivity but exerts his own creative powers in the very act of receiving powers from without. Heffernan has described this process of power admirably, and has shown convincingly that for Wordsworth the contact between man and nature is a continued exchange of activity and passivity:

As Wordsworth conceives it, creative sensibility enables the poet to receive the impulses of nature, to create in harmony with those impulses, and to distill them--usually
by means of recollection— in the alembic of meditative feeling. Bound together in loving intimacy, man and nature collaborate. The observer brings his feelings to the visible universe, and his impassioned apprehension of that universe heightens its impact upon him. In this "enobling interchange/ Of action from without and from within," feeling is both passive and active, receptive and creative. The capacity to receive is always a part of the ability to create.11

One quality of the poet with creative sensibility is his greater incitement to observe— presumably, now, "through" his eye—and especially objects "as re-acted upon by his own mind" (LG, 140). This is the fashion in which sensibility becomes "creative," for the mind, in continued perception of the object, constantly endows it with even further qualities. Thus, it perceives not merely the object per se but also its own creations. This "re-action" of the mind is a central part of Wordsworth's literary theory, since it breaks down the wall between subject and object. There are no absolute categories of "in here" and "out there" for Wordsworth, but instead a concern with the "unity of mutual modification," to borrow a phrase from Heffernan. Objects may exist in themselves, but the very act of perceiving them through a heightened sensibility creates them anew.

The relationship between perception/sensibility and the higher powers of reflection, imagination, and fancy is not difficult to fathom. Heffernan suggests that if we understand how the concept of creative sensibility establishes the role of feeling in the production of poetry, we understand one other vital point: "Feeling is the crucial link between passive response and imaginative transformation."12 Creative sensibility intensi-
ifies the power of an object by informing it with still further qualities. So "it imparts to imagination the energy which that power needs to operate upon the world of sense; and while it precludes the falsification of impulse by opening the poet's heart to nature, its inherently creative strength begins the work of the imagination, providing the momentum as well as the energy for imaginative transformation. With this momentum, the imagination itself goes into action." 13 Again, it is tempting to view these many powers as temporal "steps" in the creative activity, and once again I would argue the folly of doing so. Like Longinus, Wordsworth occasionally talks of these faculties or powers as though they were distinct or even quantifiable according to the "amount" of each in a given poem. Still, his description of the Imagination makes it clear that the creation of a poem is a process of power in which these many powers act upon each other. For example, it appears that a man "endued with more lively sensibility ... and a more comprehensive soul" cannot avoid contemplating "similar volitions and passions [that is, similar to those in himself] as manifested in the goings-on of the Universe"; he is "habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them" (LC, 48-49; my italics). The Imagination, we are told, creates "By innumerable processes" (LC, 149), "and in none does it more delight than in that of consolidating numbers into unity, and dissolving and separating unity into number,—alternations proceeding from, and governed by, a sublime consciousness of the soul in her own mighty and almost divine powers" (LC, 149). The emphasis on "processes," "alternations," "numbers into unity"
and "unity into numbers" makes it evident that the creative ac-
tivity is one of incredible flux and re-flux, action and inter-
action between the mind and the object, the mind and the way it
sees the object, the mind and the object as it is creatively re-
fashioned, the mind and its host of powers (observation, sensi-
bility, creativity, judgment, and the rest). All of this con-
tinued activity, furthermore, brings both pleasure and conscious-
ness with it as the poet becomes aware of his creative capacity.

This interaction of various powers—which culminates in the
creation of a poem—begins with an interaction between the nat-
ural world and the world of the mind. Heffernan terms it an
"interfusion" and goes on to add that Wordsworth, when he wished
to refer to this "sense of interfusion," would frequently use
the term "sublime": "characterizing not merely the God-reflect-
ing unity of natural objects, but also the power and amplitude
of mind required to embrace that unity."\(^{14}\) I think Heffernan's
point is a well-taken one, for he notes that "sublimity" is not
simply a state or quality of the world external to man, but also
a term applicable to the realization or consciousness that one
can perceive that sublimity. By extension, then, when the poet
recognizes his own creativity or sublimity, he also recognizes
his affinity with the power of the created universe. His power
has its fit place in the "kingdom of power," thus the unity he
sees is not merely "out there" but a corresponding unity between
himself and the world in which he acts.\(^{15}\) To state this idea
yet another way: the poet senses his own divinity, his place in
"the immortal spirit"\(^{16}\) that reconciles all things. Part of his
awareness involves a recognition that he has the power, the grandeur and sublimity, to uncover this vision:

    each man's Mind is to herself
Witness and judge; and I remember well
That in life's every-day appearances
I seemed about this time to gain clear sight
Of a new world—a world, too, that was fit
To be transmitted, and to other eyes
Made visible; as ruled by those fixed laws
Whence spiritual dignity originates,
Which do both give it being and maintain
A balance, an ennobling interchange
Of action from without and from within;
The excellence, pure function, and best power
Both of the object seen, and the eye that sees.
    (Prelude, XIII, 366-378)

The poetic mind begins with a bonus, for it is exquisitely fitted to the material world. More specifically, the mind has its own creative power not at all unlike that of Nature. Indeed, in his moment of recognition the poet cannot avoid seeing the affinity:

    The power, which all
Acknowledge when thus moved, which Nature thus
To bodily sense exhibits, is the express
Resemblance of that glorious faculty
That higher minds bear with them as their own.
This is the very spirit in which they deal
With the whole compass of the universe:
They from their native selves can send abroad
Kindred mutations; for themselves create
A like existence; and, whene'er it dawns
Created for them, catch it, or are caught
By its inevitable mastery.
    (Prelude, XIV, 86-97)

What the mind recognizes, then, is its own power. Furthermore, it recognizes that this power is "God-like": "Such minds are truly from the Deity,/ For they are Powers; and hence the highest bliss/ That flesh can know is theirs" (Prelude, XIV, 112-114). This "bliss" Wordsworth describes in a most interesting way, for
it seems to be above all a consciousness of one's "God-likeness"
and hence a further consciousness of the process of power (or
communal power) which flows between Man and God:

the highest bliss
That flesh can know is theirs—the consciousness
Of Whom they are, habitually infused
Through every image and through every thought,
And all affections by communion raised
From earth to heaven, from human to divine;
(Prelude, XIV, 114-118)

This recognition produces a state of "harmony" in man (the term
is Wordsworth's), a state of "repose," a "calm existence," which
Wordsworth tells us "is mine when I/ Am worthy of myself!" (Pre-
lude, I, 349-350). And surely this is understandable, for the
"God-like" poet has come to recognize his place in the "dark/
Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles/ Discordant elements,
makes them cling together/ In one society" (Prelude, I, 341-344).
Our immortal spirit "grows/ Like harmony in music" (Prelude, I,
340). Sublimity, then, reconciles the discordant man, bringing
with it "that peace/ Which passeth understanding" (Prelude, XIV,
126-127).

This recognition of sublimity—of divinity of God-likeness—is important to our understanding of the egotistical sublime. If
Wordsworth speaks of the self so much in his poetry, and lauds
his presence as a power, it is because "sublimity" is by definition a "recognition of self." And it is not at all merely "ego-
tistic self" that great poets come to a knowledge of, but a "con-
sciousness/ Of Whom they are"; that "Whom" is, of course, their
identity as creative, divine-like agents in an active, spiritual
universe. "Egotistical sublime" is a terribly misleading phrase,
since inevitably we lay emphasis on the first word when speaking of Wordsworth instead of the second, where it belongs. Wordsworth may be "egotistical" in the sense that he celebrates "self" to a great extent, but of far more importance is the fact that for him, man has something to be celebratory about, and that is his "sublime" soul.

I have made this point about recognition of self because it bears heavily on a current critical dispute about Wordsworth. Specifically, the dispute is this: if we can agree that Wordsworth treasures imaginative vision as the index of a great soul, what is it that he says we have a vision of? What, specifically, does the Imagination finally confront? Is it God? Is it infinity? Might it be itself, as Geoffrey Hartman argues? Or is it the recognition of an "interfusion," a "comprehensive sense of a unity realized in and through the perception of multiplicity" which Heffernan says "is fundamental to Wordsworth's use of the sublime"? Might it be unity (in a Coleridgean sense), or, somewhat distinct from this, "significant relation"? These questions naturally suggest a related problem: what role is played by "antagonistic opposites" in the exercise of imaginative vision? Are they reconciled into a "unity" or are they "interfused" so that a relationship exists between them at the same time that they bear their own distinct identities? All of these questions have of course been posed at different times, and many answers have been proffered. But until Heffernan's recent study no one has thought to approach these problems through Wordsworth's theory of the sublime, and I would suggest that this is a most
fruitful method. Wordsworth wrote an essay on the Sublime and Beautiful (as yet unpublished) which W.J.B. Owen discusses in some detail in *Wordsworth as Critic.* That discussion, I think, demonstrates beyond any doubt the important relationship Wordsworth sees between sublimity and power; and even more importantly, it demonstrates how naturally this relationship leads to yet another—that between the power of the mind (its sublimity) and the identity of that which it sees imaginatively in its elevated state.

In the essay fragment, Wordsworth establishes the fact that sublimity is a "sensation" in man, and not a quality of "things." Likewise, he attacks the number of aestheticians who have dealt almost exclusively with natural objects and their powers (i.e. "achievements") instead of the mind itself and the laws by which it is acted upon. As he argues so well, philosophers should not grope about in the external world, but look into the mind.

A "sensation of sublimity," as he tells us, has three component parts: "a sense of individual form or forms; a sense of duration; and a sense of power" (Owen, 204). Of the three, the last is by far the most central, especially in the "works of Nature." Nature must provide "impressions of power, to a sympathy with & 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" (Owen, 204). Owen goes on to describe the "sources of power" as: "potential danger to the observer ('the abrupt and the precipitous'); a type of infinity ('self-propagation infinitely continuous and without cognizable beginning'); great phys-
ical size and energy (torrents, clouds, height); and 'dim anal-
ogies' with a gigantic human or, at any rate, animal body" (Owen,
205). To some extent, Wordsworth's "sources" seem rather pedes-
trian and common, a catalogue of precisely the same "kinds" of
sublime scenes that have been mentioned so frequently in the
eighteenth century. But there is at least one important differ-
ence: Wordsworth does not talk about these "things" being them-
selves sublime, but as being "sources of power." Of interest to
him is the reaction of a perceiving mind to that power, not the
object itself. Moreover, Wordsworth establishes what Burke only
anticipates: that awe, dread, or "potential danger" are not
results of some suggested "terror" in an object but of power it-
self, terror being only one aspect or kind of power. Sublimity,
as critics talk of it, has always had an affinity with the aest-
thetic of terror, and what we tend to forget is that terror is
only one instance of power, albeit perhaps the most striking.
Power is really the more comprehensive term, covering as it does
so many subsidiary concerns like terror, awe, reverence, and the
like. This fact is stated clearly in Wordsworth's fragment on
the Sublime and Beautiful, for he talks of "potential danger"
(the so-called Burkean sublime) as only one "source" of sublimity,
along with infinity and great physical size. This may seem a
minor point, but in fact it is not. Even the most cursory glance
at The Prelude reveals how important a role "fear" plays in the
imaginative growth of the child. Fear is itself aesthetically
pleasurable, of course, but its significance for the child is
that it is the first really significant means of awakening him to
a sense of power. Terror, as I have said, is perhaps the most striking instance of power, and certainly for the child of The Prelude this seems so. There is the boat stealing episode of the first book, for example, where fear is occasioned by the sudden recognition of incredible power, a power which seems akin to moral vengeance. Rowing across the lake, Wordsworth is struck by the "achievements" of the mountain, but more particularly by what those achievements suggest. The mountain suddenly becomes alive and uprears its head, "a huge peak, black and huge,/ As if with voluntary power instinct" (Prelude, I, 378-379; my italics). And the description in the next few lines stresses the motion of the mountain after the boy:

And growing still in stature the grim shape
Towered up between me and the stars, and still,
For so it seemed, with purpose of its own
And measured motion like a living thing,
Strode after me. (Prelude, I, 381-385; my italics)

This emphasis on motion further relates to power when we turn to the fragment on the Sublime and Beautiful where Wordsworth says, that the mind perceives power by "the sense of motion which in the mind accompanies the lines by which the Mountain itself is shaped out. These lines may ... be abrupt and precipitous, by which danger and sudden change is expressed....these outlines also affect us not merely by sensations referable to motion, but by dim analogies which they bear to such parts of organized bodies, as height of stature, head, neck, shoulder, back, breast, &c., which are dignified in our estimation as being the seats & instruments of active force" (Owen, 205; my italics). Hence, motion suggests force or power, and so the boy receives one of his first
lessons from an active universe. In short, Wordsworth is not depicting the old "sublime of terror" in the boat-stealing scenes but the "sublime of power." What the youth receives from Nature is an initiation into the "kingdom of power." He is given a youthful introduction to an "active" universe in which he will stand one day as a creative (therefore active) participant. It is no accident that this scene in *The Prelude* occurs immediately after Wordsworth's reference to the "dark/ Inscrutable workmanship" that reconciles discordant elements into one society. Nor is it any accident that the scene follows the assertion that moments of fear are among the first lessons the active universe gives us, lessons that play "a needful part, in making up/ The calm existence that is mine when I/ Am worthy of myself!" (*Prelude*, I, 348-350).

Nature teaches us that there is power, and its lesson cannot be better imparted than through the agency of fear. Furthermore, the consciousness of power is but a first step in realizing one's own power; this lesson, too, is suggested in the boat-stealing scene. After all, the boy is most moved by what seems to be in front of him ("For so it seemed, with purpose of its own"). When he returns to safety, his imaginative mind continues working on the experience he has had:

```
o'er my thoughts
There hung a darkness, call it solitude
Or blank desertion. No familiar shapes
Remained, no pleasant images of trees,
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;
But huge and mighty forms, that do not live
Like living men, moved slowly through the mind
By day, and were a trouble to my dreams.
(Prelude, I, 393-400)
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Like the child of De Quincey's "Infant Literature," the boy senses a meaningfulness which he cannot fully uncover. Nature's lesson has been one of consciousness of power, not just the power resident in itself but especially that of the creative, imaginative mind. The child has seen both "out there" and "in here" in a single instance; he has felt an incredible force at work and cannot find its locus. The reason for his failure is clear: that force is both inner and outer, both from nature and the self.\textsuperscript{22}

True to his own attack on philosophers, Wordsworth deals with the effects of powerful objects rather than the objects themselves. That is, he explains what happens to the mind when it is in the presence of power. Two reactions have already been indicated: one sympathizes and participates with this power through an elevation of mind, or one is subdued through dread and awe (Owen, 206). There are also two other reactions. One of these involves "resistance," where the mind turns against power, convinced of overcoming it. The other involves observing "passive resistance" "such for example, as the Rock in the middle of the fall of the Rhine at Chafhausen, as opposed for countless ages to that mighty mass of Waters" (Owen, 209). In this latter case, the mind is not involved in resisting natural power; rather, it witnesses a conflict of powers between natural objects.

In each of these mental reactions imaginative power dominates, even in that instance involving the observation of passive resistance. Professor Owen rightly points out as well that "Wordsworth proceeds to derive a feature which he claims as common \textsuperscript{23} to all four reactions_\textsuperscript{23}. The common feature Wordsworth calls 'unity.'"
I shall also add that in all four of these reactions, as Wordsworth describes them, he establishes clearly that "sublimity" or "the sublime" is an elevated state of the mind resulting from a recognition and assertion of power. I shall extend this argument even further by insisting that what he describes is a two-fold recognition of power both in nature and the self. "Unity," then, takes on a very special meaning here, for what one senses is the unifying principle of activity in all of the created universe, including, of course, man.24 One senses "the kingdom of power."

Let me develop this argument by citing the following remarks from Wordsworth's essay fragment:

Power awakens the sublime either when it rouses us to a sympathetic energy & calls upon the mind to grasp at something towards which it can make approaches but which it is incapable of attaining—yet so that it participates force which is acting upon it; or, 2dly, by producing a humiliation or prostration of the mind before some external agency which it presumes not to make an effort to participate, but is absorbed in the contemplation of the might in the external power, & as far as it has any consciousness of itself, its grandeur subsists in the naked fact of being conscious of external Power at once awful and immeasurable; so that, in both cases, the head & the front of the sensation is intense unity. (Owen, 206; my italics)

After posing the necessary question "Unity of what with what?", W.J.B. Owen offers an answer. The unity of the first instance cited above, he says, is clear: "it is a unity, or an approximate unity, of the observing mind with the power of the sublime object."25 The second instance, that of mental prostration, is quite another thing. Owen confesses that "the nature of the unity \[\text{Wordsworth}\] postulates is less clear at first sight:
for here the subject and object appear to be separated to such a degree as to make any concept of unity irrelevant." However, based upon another selection from the fragment, Owen decides that the unity is two-fold: the mind is unified in itself (its whole attention is given to the object), and so, too, is the object (for it is seen as a unity, rather than a conglomerate of parts).

Let us look at each of these instances more closely. In the first case where the mind "participates force" I think we can hardly deny the presence of imagination. As far back as Addison (at least) there is the notion that the mind loves to grasp at something too great for it to comprehend, and throughout the eighteenth century this ambitious grasping is termed an activity of the imagination. Wordsworth, then, is describing a moment when great force stimulates the perceiver to an execution of his own power. In this fashion "Power awakens the sublime," for sublimity is a state of mind in which one answers a beckoning power in kind. But what of this "unity" which the mind senses in its moment of sublimity? It is not, I think, as Owen describes it, a "unity, or an approximate unity, of the observing mind with the power of the sublime object," but a unity, or an approximate unity, of the power of the observing mind with the power of the sublime object. The mind recognizes that its activity is a counterpart to that of Nature; that "The power, which all/ Acknowledge when thus moved, which Nature thus/ To bodily sense exhibits, is the express/ Resemblance of that glorious faculty/ That higher minds bear with them as their own" (Prelude, XIV, 86-90). The mind recognizes a "kingdom of power," a unified world of power in
which it has a place. Is this not also true of the second instance, involving mental prostration? In this case the imagination does not work outward but inward. It does not grasp for the power it sees, but retreats inward to contemplate that power ("... it is absorbed in the contemplation of the might in the external power"). This imaginative activity is, then, an exercising of power which ultimately leads to a "consciousness of exercising" which Wordsworth unequivocally says is sublimity: "its that is, the mind's grandeur i.e., "sublimity" subsists in the naked fact of being conscious of external Power at once awful and immeasurable" (my italics). Once again, the only common denominator is that of power, and because Owen fails to see the significance of this, he cannot be sure what "unity" Wordsworth has in mind. He posits a rather two-fold unity as I have mentioned earlier, but this is hardly satisfactory since it is essentially a paradox. The "unity" Wordsworth talks about here lies not in the perception of two separate unities (and they are separate, despite Owen's valiant attempt), but in the mind's recognition of a kingdom of power in which it occupies a prominent place. The mind feels the power of an external object, and, at the same time, its own power of comprehending such might.

The third instance—that of power awakening resistance—is most interesting:

as power, contemplated as something to be opposed or resisted, implies a twofold agency of which the mind is conscious, this state seems to be irreconcilable to what has been said concerning the consummation of sublimity, which ... exists in the extinction of the comparing power of the mind, & in intense
unity. But the fact is, there is no sublimity excited by the contemplation of power thought of as a thing to be resisted & which the moral law enjoins us to resist, saving only as far as the mind, either by glances or continuously, conceives that that power may be overcome or rendered evanescent, and as far as it feels itself tending toward the unity that exists in security or absolute triumph (when power is thought of under a mode which we can & do participate, the sublime sensation consists in a manifest approximation towards absolute unity. (Owen, 208)

Owen's explanation of this passage is not very helpful, as he simply says, "In this reaction, the 'unity' or 'individual form' of the object is still implicit, and the unity of the mind's effort of attention is stated; but, further, this unity is here specifically defined by the mind's relation to the object: it is a relation of superiority which, for as long as it exists, permits the object to be perceived as sublime." Wordsworth specifically says that this kind of power is not merely one we can resist, but one we are enjoined to resist. It is a hostile power which threatens morality. That is, Wordsworth recognizes clearly that there are powers and powers. There are those we "participate" with, and those we must overcome. In the former case, "unity" is the principle of activity which we envision as the mind's power contemplates, and participates with, Nature's. In the latter case, unity is still the principle of activity or force, but here realized as the mind's own power predominates over every other kind. The "unity," then, is the same in both cases—the recognition that one has his place in the kingdom of power. It is the method of recognition that differs. Owen is
puzzled, of course, because he seeks unity between subject and object, and this is not precisely what Wordsworth is talking about. Rather, Wordsworth posits a unity of power which may be realized through a co-operating power of subject and object (we might call this a secondary kind of unity), but which finally is a universe of activity and energy.

This "immoral power" that Wordsworth describes in the third instance ought to end the notion that "sublimity" exists outside the mind in "things." Because the fact is that this immoral power is not sublime. We recollect that in Book XIII of The Prelude Wordsworth speaks of the restoration of the Imagination, and in part attributes this restoration to "watchful thoughts" (Prelude, XIII, 40) which have been re-established and which "early tutored / him/ To look with feelings of fraternal love/ Upon the unassuming things that hold/ A silent station in this beauteous world" (Prelude, XIII, 44-47). Unassuming things are not without their power. The sight of a splendidly beautiful girl, a flower, any object that holds a "silent station" can be the impulse to create imaginatively, as Wordsworth's poetry makes abundantly clear. There are times when we neglect to seek out these unassuming powers, and devote our powers, instead, to those people and actions commonly considered "great": a Napoleon, a war-like conquest, or whatever. This is a searching after "immoral power" which, for Wordsworth, is a mistaken pursuit. If not, why else does he talk of resuming these "watchful thoughts" largely because he saw "little worthy or sublime/ In what the
Historian's pen so much delights/To blazon—power and energy
detached / From moral purpose" (Prelude, XIII, 41-44; my italics).
This is a power we cannot unify with at all. It is one we must
overcome, and, in doing so, true sublimity is realized in the
mind as we recognize the union between our moral, God-like power
and that of this "beauteous world." If I have emphasized the
quality of "God-likeness" in Wordsworth, it is largely because
he sees "sublime" man not merely as a creative force, but as a
moral, creative force. And this is by no means a matter of
small importance in the history of the sublime.

The final instance, which deals with "passive resistance,"
is described as follows:

If the resistance contemplated be of a
passive nature (such for example, as the
Rock in the middle of the fall of the Rhine
at Chafhausen, as opposed for countless ages
to that mighty mass of Waters), there are
undoubtedly here before us two distinct im-
ages and thoughts....these objects will be
found to have exalted the mind to the high-
est state of sublimity when they are thought
of in that state of opposition & yet recon-
cilement, analogous to parallel lines in
mathematics, which, being infinitely pro-
longed, can never come nearer to each other;
& hence ... the absolute crown of the im-
pression is infinity, which is a modification
of unity. (Owen, 209)

Clearly the imagination is at work in the instance just cited.
The mind is exalted to the highest state of sublimity not simply
by the objects, but also by the thoughts which the imagination
creates from them. The perceiver "sees" before him an "eternal"
struggle, a conflict of forces translatable only in mathematical
terms. Owen calls it a stability or equilibrium which "is the
product of a balance of forces which the observing mind perceives as an eternal balance." Through its own imaginative power the mind conceives a balance of forces as an eternal power, a true "kingdom of power" in which it must occupy a place by the very activity through which it glimpses this eternity.

It is in the mind's reaction to power that Wordsworth finds sublimity. Indeed, the same is true of the picturesque, as Heffernan has pointed out. The fact is that Wordsworth simply could not consider the sublime, beautiful, and picturesque as "qualities" of natural objects: "our business is not so much with objects as with the law under which they are contemplated." With an understanding of this view of power and the sublime, I think we can hazard an answer to the question posited earlier: what does Wordsworth believe a "sublime and comprehensive soul" has a vision of? The answer, to begin with, is that we have a vision of a transcendent unity which can properly be termed a "kingdom of power." There is a unity of power between distinct, yet "non-single" objects which Heffernan has so well described as emblematic of the unifying power of the imagination. That unity between objects may occasion an insight into the kingdom of power, but a discovery of that unity is not always essential to Wordsworth. There are also those moments when the mind is struck by a single, great force which it wishes to conquer, and, in the exercise of itself, gains insight into the kingdom of which it is a part. Finally, there are still other moments when the mind recognizes a unity between objects and the imagination,
when it senses clearly that the outer world is "a mighty mind, an archetype of the human imagination."\(^{34}\)

This is, I think, a fair paraphrase of Wordsworth's notion of unity. It is a notion which also allows a place for objects which are "distinct" but not "defined into absolute independent singleness." Every "thing" in nature—a physical object, a book, or even the mind—is "distinct" in accordance with the kind and amount of power it possesses; yet all of these "things" are unified because they do have power. Hence, Heffernan is absolutely correct when he states that "the capacity to distinguish ... was for Wordsworth an indispensable part of the capacity to relate; for it was only in terms of multiplicity that the pervasive unity of nature emerged....This comprehensive sense of a unity realized in and through the perception of multiplicity is fundamental to Wordsworth's use of the sublime."\(^{35}\) And again:

"To unite presupposes the ability to distinguish. Without unity there can be no comprehension, but without multiplicity there is nothing to unite. Not until we have grasped this paradox firmly can we see what Wordsworth means by the 'one life' in nature."\(^{36}\)

Likewise, Wordsworth's notion of unity allows us to understand the role of "opposites" more clearly. One of the marks of the immature youth (and the man who temporarily "loses" his imaginative vision) is that he cannot "\[\text{\square reconcile} \]\ / Discordant elements, \[\text{\square make} \]\ them clinging together/ In one society" (Prelude, I, 342-344). Wordsworth recounts one such instance for us when his mind ("Strange rendezvous") "was at that time,/ A parti-
coloured show of grave and gay,/ Solid and light, short-sighted and profound;/ Of inconsiderate habits and sedate,/ Consorting in one mansion unreproved" (Prelude, IV, 339-343)—a collection of opposites without reconciliation. The agent of reconciliation is, as Owen tells us, the imagination, and so, by a due attention to the lessons of Nature, the imaginative mind can be "restored" to a vision of unity. From Nature "doth emotion come, and moods/ Of calmness equally" (Prelude, XIII, 1-2). It is the great source of opposition quite like that in man himself, for man struggles between reason and passion, and further, between "interchange/ Of peace and excitation" (Prelude, XIII, 5-6) in his moments of genius. The imaginative vision, then, becomes a vision of that unity of power which binds (Wordsworth might say "weds") all things—not merely object with object but also man with man, and even man with object. This is the vision in which the individual mind and the external world, so well fitted to each other, accomplish a "creation" "(by no lower name/ Can it be called)" in their "blended might." The child, in fact, is capable of sensing this unity since he begins as a power, "An inmate of this active universe" (Prelude, II, 254; my italics), and this emerging power itself reconciles opposites. It is both active and passive, "distinct" yet not "single," for it works with the world around it:

... feeling has to the child imparted power
That through the growing faculties of sense
Doth like an agent of the one great Mind
Create, creator and receiver both,
Working but in alliance with the works
Which it beholds.  (Prelude, II, 255-260)
John Jones has suggested that Wordsworth's search for "universal things" is in part a search for particularity, an idea which in one sense is very true. It seems that the kingdom of power lies about us everywhere and only requires of us that we see it. Often this sight can be realized in the particular people and events we encounter every day. Let us not forget, however, that in the act of seeing, the mind often becomes aware of its own ability to see (what Geoffrey Hartman calls a "consciousness of consciousness"), and to the imaginative mind this is a further illustration of the unity of power which encompasses all things. The problem, then, to which Wordsworth devotes so much of his writing (both poetic and critical) is that of awakening man to a sense of his own creative power—his "God-likeness."

This is the mission: to extend the kingdom of the sublime. We recollect that De Quincey's view of the poet's task is similar to this in that he describes man as having "myriads of modes of feeling" in him which lie dormant for want of a poet to organize. This idea of the messianic poet expressly concerned with awakening his readers' divinity is central to Romantic thought as we shall continue to see. Moreover, it is central to the history of the sublime, for sublimity is consistently defined as precisely this divinity or God-likeness.

Thus far I have defined the poet's task as Wordsworth speaks of it, and his theory of the sublime as he outlines it in his writings, particularly the essay fragment on the Sublime and Beautiful. It only remains for us to relate these remarks to
the literature of power.

Owen, as I have quoted him on the first page of this chapter, insists that the created artifact is not considered a power by Wordsworth. Rather, it is the means by which power is communicated. When a reader approaches a work, then, he perceives the power of the poet, and, at the same time, his own power. Now, there are several loose ends in this argument. First, how does a work "communicate" power without itself being a power? The poet treats his artifact in a careful way, cognizant that it must perform two functions: (a) give embodiment to his personal powers, and (b) affect the reader. Any fashioning or shaping of powerful conceptions by definition modifies them, just as continued, imaginative vision of an object (or contemplation of an idea) makes it something entirely new. Consequently, the completed poem embodies or reflects: (a) the power of whatever subject moved the poet, (b) the changes in that subject (that is, its modifications of power) as the imaginative mind worked with it, (c) the powerful impressions which arose during this activity, and (d) the process of experience of this activity itself. Consequently, the poem can be said to record a multi-faceted experience of perception, subtle change, growth of meaning, and power. More importantly, all of this receives further change when the poet becomes conscious that he is recording an experience (usually after a lapse of time), and so includes not only the many things I have mentioned above but also the many re-appraisals of that initial experience which have gathered with time. We can say,
then, that the poem also records the re-experiencing of an experience. However, during the act of composition the poet might well see anew both the original experience and his re-experiencing of it, for in fashioning these artistically he gains still another set of experiences. What, then, is the final created artifact? Is it a "means" of communicating power, a bridge of some sort between the author's power and the reader's? Indeed it is, but only because it is a power in itself—that is to say, an experience in itself. The finished work is no mere record of power; it is a power.

Heffernan has come to conclusions very like my own; and I rather suspect this is because we begin with the same fundamental assumption: "Wordsworth firmly believed that when a poet transforms the visible universe by the power of his imagination, he imitates the creative action of nature herself." Some kind of creative activity weds together everything in the universe. Just as Nature's creative power fashions objects of enduring power, so the imaginative mind fashions artifacts of enduring power. Let me add as well that this is more than mere speculation. Creating literature of power was a driving concern of Wordsworth.

He was acutely aware that a poem must not only record something great but be itself great, that it must stand as a power in order to be part of a process. Heffernan claims that Wordsworth "thought of this power as the most important element in his poetry—far more valuable than fact or doctrine," and this seems to me exactly the case. We have Wordsworth's lament after completing The
Excursion: "I was dejected on many accounts; when I looked back upon the performance, it seemed to have a dead weight about it,--the reality so far short of the expectation." We have his comments on what a poem can be when it exists as a power: "Creative and enduring,/ ... A power like one of Nature's" (Prelude, XIII, 311-312). And books themselves were never considered by Wordsworth to be anything less than forces, hopefully for moral instruction: "speak of them as Powers/ For ever to be hallowed" (Prelude, V, 218-219). Too, there are the remarks which Heffernan points out: the young Wordsworth in London who "craved for power" rather than knowledge (Prelude, VIII, 754-755); and Wordsworth's insistence to Crabb Robinson that he principally valued his poems as "a new power in the literary world" which he judged by a definite standard--namely, "the powers of mind" they called forth and "the energies" which they presupposed and excited. 45

I would challenge Owen's remark, then, simply on the grounds that Wordsworth himself addresses the necessity of poetry's being a power. My second objection is a more pointed one, involving Owen's final sentence: "Power is thus, it seems, at once objective and subjective: the power of the poet is perceived by the reader, but in the act of perception the power of the reader is also felt by himself." Certainly the reader does perceive the poet's power. At least, he should, for in the first place the poem is a record of the poet's power of conception (to borrow Longinus's sine qua non). Still, one can perceive power without being moved by it, and, as we well remember, "transport" is a
given in sublime literature. Therefore, I should think it more correct to say that the reader perceives the power of the poet's conception and execution because he is moved by the power of the poem. Admittedly, this might be mere bickering with Professor Owen's terms, for possibly we could mean the same thing by the "power" of poetry; furthermore, it is difficult to accept a poem's communicating power without being itself a power. However, if I am unduly insistent about poetry as a power it is because Wordsworth, as indeed all of the Romanticists with whom I deal, is likewise insistent.

The specific problem of how one makes a poem into a power was the problem with which Wordsworth contended throughout his life. It is one thing to say a poem must be powerful, but quite another to show how it can be made so. Ironically, Wordsworth offered one idea after another, never quite realizing that his practical attention to matters of sublimity and power was not unlike Longinus's, the very man he dismissed as not having written on the sublime "even in our vague and popular sense of the word."

One of the major means of imparting power, for Wordsworth, is common enough in the history of the sublime: it is passion. Certainly Wordsworth considered passion to be a power in itself (as did Dennis, for example), capable of encouraging the creative energies of the imagination. Quite simply, passion is like the ruling, or motivating, passion which Pope so often remarks upon: the wind that fills our sails, or, to phrase it in literary terms suitable to the sublime, the force that moves the reader. The province of powerful literature must be "sensations which all men
have felt and feel in some degree daily and hourly" (LC, 117). Thus, in the second Essay upon Epitaphs, Wordsworth attacks the epitaphs of Chiabrera because the poetic imagery does not serve the first, most important, function of poetry: it "does not elevate, deepen, or refine the human passion, which it ought always to do or not to act at all" (LC, 115).

But this passion, as Heffernan says, must be of a meditative sort. It is not enough for a poet merely to feel; he must feel imaginatively and meditatively. Likewise, the reader must be stimulated more than just passionately by the poem. The passions aroused must be modified by contemplative thought, and so must be sufficiently powerful to awaken such thought. Heffernan points out that "passion" for Wordsworth can often mean a good deal more than "emotion," since Wordsworth frequently insists that a poem must have a meditative passion which springs as much from the head as it does from the heart: "This is the kind of feeling that energizes the imagination ... by redoubling the power of creative sensibility, and thereby heightening the impact of natural objects on the observer."47

This "meditative passion," as its name suggests, arises during the contemplation of an idea or precedent emotion. And it is not really an "assumed" passion, but a very real one: "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 be-
fore the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself *actually exist in the mind* (LC, 57-58; my italics). That is, meditative passion springs from an imaginative response to an emotional incident; in a sense it is the index of a man's capacity to create imaginatively. It is interesting that the *subject* of many Wordsworth poems is precisely this activity of meditative reflection. One suspects that Wordsworth is holding out to his reader not only the product of such activity, but also an illustration of how it has been accomplished. Power becomes not merely the quality of the finished work, but very often its subject as well. Nor could we really expect otherwise, for the poem must be to the creative reader exactly what the subject was to the poet. Wordsworth tells Lady Beaumont that "the voice which is the voice of my Poetry without Imagination cannot be heard" (LC, 79), and surely part of the means by which Wordsworth arouses the reader's imagination is by showing him poetry which displays it in subject as well as execution.

If sublimity can be defined as the grandeur of the creative soul, and if the poet's mission is to extend the kingdom of the sublime, it is small wonder that Wordsworth places an enormous creative onus upon his readers. Only by having them exercise their creative powers can he awaken them to a sense of their own participation in the active universe. The vehicle for this awakening is the poem itself, thus in execution and subject it almost inevitably deals with power. I think most readers of Wordsworth have at one time or another sensed the important presence of "energy" in his poems, if not with a clear understanding of its sig-
nificance. John Jones, for example, has commented on Wordsworth's search for the particular, and in addition his "search for the powerful." Here, Wordsworth's resources are heavily taxed, adds Jones. "In order to express essential energy, he is too often led to personify spirit, motion, power itself, in a context of vague declamation." Certainly there is considerable truth to Jones's remarks; one might well add to his list of Wordsworth's failures those more obvious moments when some incident of power, apparently unseen by the casual observer, strikes Wordsworth with incredible force, yet he cannot convey precisely what it is that has moved him. Such failures are many, as contemporary Romantic parodies never allow us to forget. But against these moments are those when Wordsworth portrays with magnificence a world of force and activity, and, concomitantly, a mind equipped to challenge it in kind. Such a moment, it seems to me, is the ascent of Snowdon in the concluding book of The Prelude. In that one episode we find a perfect example of the literature of power speaking about power. The subject itself is power in the natural world as the creative mind confronts it with power of its own, complete with the meditative passion ("in calm thought/Reflected") which leads to further exercises of power, and ultimately to a recognition that the creative mind is truly divine, hence genuinely a part of this unified "kingdom of power." This is the poetry which shows Wordsworth as his best, where his subject and execution not only provide a poetic exemplum of creative activity, but also urge the reader into active participation by forming a poem which is itself a power.
The unity of power in the created universe is really the unity which binds together all living things. There is some "active Principle" which operates in the world, as the Wanderer of The Excursion tells us. It seems to me that this principle of active power is absolutely crucial to our understanding of two aspects of Wordsworth's critical thought: (a) whether he considers art to be "mimetic" or not, and (b) if it is mimetic, the nature of the "thing" which art imitates. Both points have been tentatively explored by Heffernan, and I shall contribute my own supporting remarks. However, two statements are required beforehand: first, these remarks which follow bear heavily upon the presence of "energy" in Wordsworth's poetry—both verbal and thematic; and second, they are remarks which are most fully elucidated in the chapter on Coleridge which follows next.

Heffernan states unequivocally that although Wordsworth did indeed "precipitate the shift from the mimetic to the expressive view of poetry, the concluding book of The Prelude actually defines a new kind of mimesis: the poet's imagination imitates, not the products of nature, but rather her creative action, especially her power to transform and to unify natural objects."49 This remark seems to me a particularly fine one. If imagination is an effective emblem of the "imagination" which exists in creative nature, it is logical that poetry must imitate not those "things" which natural imagination has fashioned, but the very process of imaginative creativity itself. We shall see in the next chapter that this is precisely Coleridge's idea though he
would phrase it differently. Coleridge would say that the poet imitates (not copies) the idea or principle of life (principium vitae), not the life itself ("functional life"). One imitates not the actual forms but the creative principle in those forms. To put it simply: one imitates not nature, but nature's power. This is indeed a subtle view of artistic mimesis; further, it is one which can spring only from a particular conception of nature as a dynamic process, a continued interplay of opposing forces. It is certainly not a conception which sees "life" and "nature" in terms of things—trees, rocks, flowers—each firmly rooted in a distinct and separate identity. Indeed, we may pooh-pooh at the poetry which finally arises from such a conception; just like any poetry it can be bad, and perhaps the risk of writing such poetry is greater than usual. In this case, John Jones does indeed single out the very worst in Wordsworth. But it can also produce "visionary" poetry in the best sense of that word, for the avowed purpose of a Wordsworth or Coleridge is to "teach us or nothing," and when they succeed, they succeed very well. Most importantly, they are challenging our accustomed way of viewing the world around us, our proclivity for seeing in terms of "things" rather than "process." No wonder Wordsworth asserts that a poet must create the taste by which he is to be judged, for he recognizes full well that his poetry is built upon a wholly different view of mimesis. One suspects as well that Wordsworth was more than passingly aware of the difficulty of miming "creative energy." After all, it is hardly an every-day poetic subject. And perhaps
he was right, finally, for both he and Coleridge were not read
in the spirit with which they wrote. Their poetry had to stand
not simply on artistic merit but also on a vision of the world
which saw "a vital current of relations"\(^1\) in a kingdom of living,
creative power.
NOTES -- CHAPTER THREE

1 W.J.B. Owen, Wordsworth as Critic (Toronto, 1969); James A. W. Heffernan, Wordsworth's Theory of Poetry: The Transforming Imagination (Ithaca, 1969). I am very much indebted to these studies, particularly that by Heffernan. My own ideas about Wordsworth and the Sublime were formulated some time before these books appeared; their publication, however, has served to clarify a number of important matters and to convince me even more fully of the crucial relationship between sublimity and power.

2 Wordsworth as Critic, p. 196. The figures used by Owen indicate page and line numbers in Paul Zall's Literary Criticism of William Wordsworth (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1966).

3 All references to Wordsworth's criticism will be from the Zall edition cited in note 2. I shall abbreviate it LC, and enclose references parenthetically in my text.

4 Cf. Heffernan: "For Wordsworth, experience of the sublime was impossible without the exertion of power in the mind; the 'sources of sublimity,' he thought, lay not in nature but rather, deep within 'the soul of Man.' Wordsworth therefore believed that man himself could be 'sublime in power,' as he says in The Prelude (X, 668), sublime in his capacity to feel the living wholeness of the world" (Wordsworth's Theory, p. 157). I shall treat the significance of "living wholeness" later in this chapter in the discussion of Wordsworth's "kingdom of power" (a synonymous expression).


6 I take this definition of the egotistical sublime from Frederick Garber, "Point of View and the Egotistical Sublime," English Studies, 49 (1968), 417. The term itself, of course, comes from Keats.

7 Certainly I do not intend to suggest that this is the sole purpose of the "Essay" or the poems themselves; however, it is an important purpose of which we need to be reminded.
8 Heffernan has also traced the notion of the egotistical sublime to Wordsworth's concern with power. As he points out, both Wordsworth's critical utterances and poetry "show that his interest in his own powers increased with the passage of time"; and "Wordsworth's fascination with power was naturally a vital part of his acute self-consciousness—what Keats once called the 'egotistical sublime'" (Wordsworth's Theory, p. 111).

9 Wordsworth's Theory, pp. 6-7.

10 Wordsworth's Theory, p. 72.

11 Wordsworth's Theory, pp. 93-94.

12 Wordsworth's Theory, p. 94.

13 Ibid.

14 Wordsworth's Theory, p. 156.

15 Heffernan describes this affinity as follows: "As the child matures, he finds 'his image' in the universe; the 'inexhaustible' majesty of nature, abundantly manifest in the beauty, excellence, and sublimity of her countenance, appears before him as a fitting counterpart to the 'insatiate' power, aspiration, and dignity of his own mind. The child discovers much more than a simple harmony of attributes. Nature renders back to him his deepest self, so that what he sees is a vital analogy between the energies within him and the energies without" (Wordsworth's Theory, pp. 96-97).


17 Cf. The Recluse, I, 815-824. Heffernan suggests that "the consonance of mind and universe is founded on a vital correspondence, a profound analogy between their respective powers. In Wordsworth's view, man is the image and likeness of nature" (Wordsworth's Theory, p. 96).


19 "Wordsworth on the Sublime: The Quest for Interfusion," Studies in English Literature, 7 (1967), 612. Although this
article provides some of the material for Wordsworth's Theory of
Poetry, Heffernan does not reproduce this exact phrase in his
book length study. He does, of course, elaborate in the book
on the relationship between unity realized in multiplicity and
its significance to Wordsworth's use of the term "sublime."


21 Since this essay is unpublished, all quotations are taken
from the sections reprinted in Owen. For the sake of clarity
I shall show references to the Essay on the Sublime and Beauti-
ful in my text, signified by "Owen" and followed by page number.
References to Owen's critical commentary will be given in the
notes.

22 Hartman makes much the same point in Wordsworth's Poetry,
1787-1914 when speaking of "spots of time": "It is quite clear
that the child does not know that what he sees and feels is an
effect of the power of his imagination. The impact of the scenes
on him is inseparable from overwhelming sense-impressions. For
the retrospective poet, however, the power that belonged to the
external world is now seen to have belonged to the mind" (p. 215).

23 Owen, p. 206.

24 Cf. Heffernan: "The key to Wordsworth's conception of the
sublime lies in his complex attitude toward the oneness of na-
ture. What he saw in natural objects was not uniformity. It
was a vital current of relations, generated in and through an
infinite variety of living things" (Wordsworth's Theory, p. 160;
"living" my italics). That man is part of this active principle
is also pointed out by Heffernan. He notes that "sublime" ap-
pplies not only to "the God-reflecting unity of natural objects,
but also the power and amplitude of mind required to embrace
that unity" (p. 156).


26 Owen, pp. 206-207.

27 Owen, p. 207.

28 Owen, p. 208.

29 Owen, p. 209.

30 See "Wordsworth on the Picturesque," English Studies, 49
(1968), 489-498; and Wordsworth’s *Theory of Poetry*, pp. 16-29.


32 Cf. "In nature every thing is distinct, yet nothing defined into absolute independent singleness" (*LC*, 178-179).

33 Wordsworth’s *Theory*, pp. 193-194; 202-225. Heffernan feels that the incident at Snowdon, "where objects were mutually modified by virtue of their interchangeable supremacy," became for Wordsworth, "a fitting emblem for the unifying power of the imagination" (p. 169).

34 *Wordsworth’s Theory*, p. 103.


37 Owen, p. 147.

38 *The Recluse*, I, 822-823.

39 *The Recluse*, I, 823.

40 Jones, p. 35.

41 Hartman, p. 391.

42 *Wordsworth’s Theory*, p. 105.

43 *Wordsworth’s Theory*, p. 112.


45 Cited in *Wordsworth’s Theory*, p. 112.

46 *Wordsworth’s Theory*, pp. 81-87.

47 *Wordsworth’s Theory*, p. 85.
48 Jones, p. 35.


50 *Ibid*.

51 I borrow this from Heffernan (*Wordsworth's Theory*, p. 160).
CHAPTER FOUR

COLERIDGE: SUBLIMITY AND THE PRINCIPIAM VITAE

The universe itself,—what but an immense heap of little things?—I can contemplate nothing but parts, & parts are all little!!
—My mind feels as if it ached to behold & know something great—something one & indivisible—and it is only in the faith of this that rocks or waterfalls, mountains or caverns give me the sense of sublimity or majesty.1

The Philosophical Theory of Power

Coleridge's remarks on the sublime are inextricably associated with his theory of power. Just as Wordsworth envisions a "kingdom of power" in which man occupies a prominent place, so Coleridge describes a "vital" or "active" creative principle which is life and which he names power. The philosophical opinions of the twelfth chapter of Biographia Literaria, together with those in "Notes Toward the Formation of a More Comprehensive Theory of Life," provide the kernel of an exhaustive theory which declaims life as act and process—that is, as power.

Coleridge begins by distinguishing the objects of human knowledge: "we may divide all the objects of human knowledge into those on this side, and those on the other side of the spontaneous consciousness."2 The latter objects, he adds, are exclusively the province of pure philosophy, "properly entitled trans-
cendental" (BL, I, 164). This division leads inevitably to Coleridge's assertion that not every man can be a philosopher. "They and they only can acquire the philosophic imagination, the sacred power of self-intuition" who can "know and feel, that the potential works in them, even as the actual works on them!" (BL, I, 167). Just as our organs of sense are framed for a corresponding world of sense, so our "organs of spirit are framed for a correspondent world of spirit" (BL, I, 167). Man possesses a special power (or "ulterior consciousness"), an inner power which is undisciplined and weak in most men. Though Coleridge does not explicitly say so, it seems a power which may be cultivated and improved, though never learned—precisely like genius.

It is clear, then, that Coleridge demands of his reader the powers that he possesses himself. To appreciate his philosophy, one must exercise the gift of "ulterior consciousness" or "intuitive power." One must discard words, for they are but "the shadows of notions" (BL, I, 169), and for that matter, one must excise all concern with "notions" themselves. The intuitive power probably cannot be learned, but it is in every man awaiting a rise into consciousness (BL, I, 168), and upon this power "all the certainty of our knowledge depends" (BL, I, 168).

Coleridge's philosophy of power begins with the idea that all knowledge "rests on the coincidence of an object with a subject" (BL, I, 174). "Objective" he defines as Nature (that which is passive), and "subjective" is comprehended in the terms "self" or "intelligence." Both conceptions "are in necessary antithesis" (BL, I, 174). The act of knowledge requires the reciprocal con-
currence of both, "namely of the conscious being, and of that which is in itself unconscious"; moreover, "During the act of knowledge itself, the objective and subjective are so instantly united, that we cannot determine to which of the two the priority belongs" (BL, I, 174). In fact, Coleridge insists that there is really no "first" or "second" during the act of knowing, that the subjective and objective are cointantaneous and one (BL, I, 174). And even if we were hypothetically to divide the two (as Coleridge does), assuming one is somehow supervened to the other, we would reach the same conclusion: "For if all knowledge has as it were two poles reciprocally required and presupposed, all sciences must proceed from the one or the other, and must tend toward the opposite as far as the equatorial point in which both are reconciled and become identical" (BL, I, 175). It becomes the province of the philosopher, then, to confirm the identity which exists between the objective and subjective. There is some principle or law—some power—which in nature is "identical in essence with that, which in its highest known power exists in man as intelligence and self-consciousness" (BL, I, 176). Thus, the natural philosopher develops his philosophy to its highest perfection when all the laws of nature are "spiritualized" "into laws of intuition and intellect" (BL, I, 175; my italics), just as the transcendental philosopher shows that the world without us "is not only coherent but identical, and one and the same thing with our own immediate self-consciousness" (BL, I, 178).

Coleridge's philosophy both here and in the "Comprehensive Theory" resolves itself into a search for a law or principle,
"some absolute truth capable of communicating to other positions a certainty, which it has not itself borrowed; a truth self-grounded, unconditional and known by its own light" (BL, I, 181). This law is defined variously, but the common denominator in all cases is power. Coleridge considers this principle or law to be an act, "a perpetual self-duplication of one and the same power into object and subject, which presuppose each other, and can exist only as antitheses" (BL, I, 183; my italics). This power, argues Coleridge, is instinctively assented to by man through his imagination. We cannot conceive a cycle of equal truths without contemplating a continuous circle which gives to all these truths "the unity of their common orbit"; likewise, the imagination "supplies, by a sort of subintelligitur, the one central power, which renders the movement harmonious and cyclical" (BL, I, 181). I mention this activity of the imagination because its instinctive\(^5\) supplying of a central power is crucial to our understanding of it, as well as our understanding of artistic creativity and criticism. Coleridge intends these remarks on law and power as an essential prelude to the later discussions of imagination and the fine arts.

The nature of this principle or law demands further attention, especially as it relates to power. For logical reasons it cannot be a thing or object, as Coleridge points out, for an infinite, independent "thing" is a contradiction. Hence, this principle is to be found "neither in object nor subject taken separately \(\_\) or \(\_\) ... exclusively, but \(\_\) in that \(\_\) which is the
identity of both" (BL, I, 182). To be both subject and object this principle must be "a perpetual self-duplication of one and the same power into object and subject" (my italics). It is therefore an act, manifested in the SUM or I AM; it is the self-consciousness of a spirit that is self-representative (BL, I, 183-185). This is a perfectly logical statement on Coleridge's part, for the "self" or "self-consciousness" is both object and subject, being and knowing. By logical extension, then, it is not only the source of all our knowledge, but its principle as well (BL, I, 186) since it is an act, "a kind of knowing / not being/, and that too the highest and farthest that exists for us" (BL, I, 187). The principle of activity or process, then, which Coleridge sees as the principle informing all life can be defined as follows:

an indestructible power with two opposite and counteracting forces, which by a metaphor borrowed from astronomy, we may call the centrifugal and centripetal forces. The intelligence in the one tends to objectize itself, and in the other to know itself in the object. It will be hereafter my business to construct by a series of intuitions the progressive schemes, that must follow from such a power with such forces, till I arrive at the fulness of the human intelligence. (BL, I, 188)

This series of intuitions, based on the principle of self-duplicating power, is what occupies Coleridge in the essay, "Notes Toward the Formation of a More Comprehensive Theory of Life." We might well expect such a title, for Coleridge states in the Biographia that this power of recurrent contradiction, yet reconciliation, provides "the process and mystery of production and life" (BL, I, 185).
Dissatisfied with current definitions of the term "life," Coleridge seeks an explanation of his own. He dismisses theories which define life in terms of common characteristics (the fact that things "breathe" or "reproduce," for example) since these are not "life" itself but merely life's products or results. Rather, it is "the true idea of Life" for which Coleridge searches. The definition of life "must consist ... in the law of the thing, or in such an idea of it, as being admitted, all the properties and functions are admitted by implication." 7 This is a crucial idea, since it involves matters of aesthetics as well as philosophy. Coleridge mentions the fact that for over a century men attempted to deal with the laws of external nature by exerting the mere understanding. 8 They abstracted a class of phenomena from objects and attached some general term to this class. Thus, the properties peculiar to some object (Coleridge uses gold as an example) were given a name (such as "Aureity") and this "essence" was termed the "power" which "caused" the object. Quite obviously, this confusion of cause and effect bears heavily upon the subject of aesthetics, and especially the sublime. As we know, the sublime has in part a history of dependancy upon the "achievements" or properties peculiar to objects (height, mass, outline, etc.); hence the error of using "sublimity" to define the occult quality 9 in the object which causes certain responses like fear and awe. Theorists of the late eighteenth century were not ignorant of this problem, and many of them (in particular, Thomas Reid and Archibald Alison) carefully sorted out cause and effect so that sublimity as some
quality in an object no longer made any sense, and rightfully so. Though Coleridge is not dealing directly with aesthetics in this part of his essay, it is evident that his remarks bear upon this subject and outline a rigid thinking which characterizes his commentary on artistic and aesthetic matters.

Coleridge sets out, then, to explain life, not to account for it. As he tells us, the "sufficient cause" of life cannot be attributed to anything other than God; however, man can attempt to explain the power that is life. Such an explanation can only begin "in the reduction of the idea of Life to its simplest and most comprehensive form or mode of action; that is, to some characteristic instinct or tendency, evident in all its manifestations, and involved in the idea itself" (CW, I, 383). The terms "action," "instinct" and "tendency" make it clear that the idea which Coleridge wants to search out is in fact an act, a power. Furthermore, he defines this process of reduction as a way "To explain a power ... (the power itself being assumed, though not comprehended, ut qui datur, non intelligitur) to unfold or spread it out" (CW, I, 383). This power is "the power of life" (CW, I, 382) which, Coleridge says, is an idea impossible to identify through the use of the understanding, though not the reason.

Coleridge determines that the most comprehensive formula to which life is reducible is the following: "the internal copula of bodies, or (if we may venture to borrow a phrase from the Platonic school) the power which discloses itself from within as a principle of unity in the many" (CW, I, 386). However, this is not an entirely satisfactory definition for Coleridge, since in
essence it argues making one (an "all") out of the many, and Coleridge sees a definite distinction between "all" and "whole." Thus, he qualifies his definition:

I should at the same time have borrowed a scholastic term, and defined life absolutely, as the principle of unity in multeity, as far as the former, the unity to wit, is produced ab intra; but eminently (sensu eminenti), I define life as the principle of individuation, or the power which unites a given all into a whole that is presupposed by all its parts. The link that combines the two, and acts throughout both, will, of course, be defined by the tendency to individuation. (CW, I, 387)

This qualified definition enables Coleridge to establish different classes of life, "an ascending series" with "analogous gradations in each class" (CW, I, 387). The "elementary powers of mechanism" (CW, I, 387), for instance (such as cohesion, elasticity, etc.), are indeed a principle for making unity out of multeity ab intra, but without their being subsumed beneath the power of individuation they form only "alls" and not "wholes." It is when these lesser powers are assimilated ("and assimilation presupposes the homogeneous nature of the thing assimilated" [CW, I, 387]) that the highest degree of life is possible. That, of course, is the formation of a "whole" which can be comprehended by insight into its parts, and forever known.

The problem of a two-fold power ("connecting" force versus "individuating" force) I shall return to in a moment, but first, I wish to comment on Coleridge's notion of power. We must understand that "power" is, in fact, life. It is the eternal principle (the "ultimate" principle, to echo Coleridge) of activity
and creation. Power is most evident (Coleridge would say "manifested") in the sum, or "I am" just as power absolutely is God, or the eternal "I AM." To recognize one's own creative power is, then, two-fold in its implication: (a) it involves a recognition that one is part of the eternal principle of power—like Wordsworth's "kingdom of power," and (b) it involves a recognition of one's divinity, of the affinity between "I am" and "I AM":

if we elevate our conception to the absolute self, the great eternal I AM, then the principle of being, and of knowledge, of idea, and of reality; the ground of existence, and the ground of the knowledge of existence, are absolutely identical, Sum quia sum; I am, because I affirm myself to be; I affirm myself to be, because I am. (BL, I, 183)

sum quia in Deo sum. (BL, I, 183)

By "Life," then, Coleridge means "that most general form under which Life manifests itself to us, which includes all its other forms. This I have stated to be the tendency to individuation, and the degrees or intensities of Life to consist in the progressive realization of this tendency" (CW, I, 391). But this power, as he later calls it, must have as its antithesis a power contrary to it; were this not the case, it would be a principle unable to make itself its own object. There would be no "perpetual self-duplication of one and the same power into object and subject, which presuppose each other, and can exist only as antitheses." Consequently, Coleridge insists that "this tendency to individuate can not be conceived without the opposite tendency to connect, even as the centrifugal power supposes the centripetal,
or as the two opposite poles constitute each other, and are the constituent acts of one and the same power in the magnet" (CW, I, 391). Here we have the philosophical basis of a theory of antagonism or opposition which, understandably, informs matters of art for Coleridge since it is the vital principle of "creation" in every sense of that word. The "highest law" or "most general form" of this tendency to individuate and connect can be defined thus: "polarity, or the essential dualism of Nature, arising out of its productive unity, and still tending to reaffirm it, either as equilibrium, indifference, or identity" (CW, I, 391).

In no way is power a static "thing" or a finite quality. It is by definition an act, and so can "exist" (if that is indeed the correct word) only as a process. We have come to identify this as a "dynamic" theory of life; I would also argue that a necessary correlative of such a theory is the dynamic nature of art. What Coleridge seeks out in all human endeavor is the common principle of power, and he seeks it both in natural and artistic "life." When he wishes to speak of Shakespeare or some other literary giant it is almost always in terms of his "power"; and when he turns to the literature itself and explains the particular excellence of a Shakespeare play, he can define it best as "a single energy modified ab intra in each component part" (CW, IV, 110). Coleridge also points out repeatedly that only a man of imaginative power can uncover that "universal principle" of power which is fundamental to everything. In short, what Wordsworth argues poetically, Coleridge argues philosoph-
ically. What Wordsworth demands from his poetic reader, Coleridge demands from his philosophic counterpart: a liberation from the "passive fancy," a recognition of "inter-penetration, of total intussusception, of the existence of all in each as the condition of Nature's unity and substantiality, and of the latency under the predominance of some one power, wherein subsists her life and its endless variety," and finally, a recognition not of rules, but laws (CW, I: 396). I cannot over-emphasize this concept of a kingdom of power which informs the writings of Wordsworth and Coleridge, for only through such an emphasis can we see that "power" is not simply a mechanical, psychological, or emotional force but a vital--indeed, the vital--principle or law of the universe. In Coleridge's thinking especially, power is a law divine in its origin, and thus shared by all that God has created.

I have been arguing thus far in my study that the sublime is in fact the historical idea of Power, and that "sublimity" properly means "power of a divine, imaginative, and creative" sort revealed in man's creative imagination and likened to God's own order-bringing power. It seems to me that both Biographia Literaria and "Notes Toward the Formation of a More Comprehensive Theory of Life" bear witness to this argument, for they establish the notion that power is no mere curious idea but a revelation of the eternal power of the I AM. To enforce this fact I shall turn from Coleridge's philosophical explanation of power to its application in his critical thinking, and especially to its centrality in his remarks on the sublime.
Critical Theory and the Sublimity of Power

The movement from Coleridge's philosophy to his criticism seems to me a crucial one. J.R. de J. Jackson has recently insisted that a thorough understanding of Coleridge's philosophical method is an absolute necessity if we are to comprehend the literary method. As Jackson points out, Coleridge's search for a philosophical method was contemporaneous with the bulk of his literary criticism (approximately 1807-1819), and to enhance his literary remarks Coleridge drew largely upon his metaphysics. Further, Coleridge did indeed disparage the philosophical sections of Biographia Literaria, but, as Jackson reminds us, by then he was no longer a practising critic: "The later position is interesting if we want to speculate about what sort of critic Coleridge might have become had he continued to concern himself with criticism, but it is of minor importance to a study of the literary criticism we actually have from him."  

Jackson also describes admirably two concerns which present-day scholars tend to isolate from each other: Coleridge's "search for principles on which to ground criticism, and his examination of the nature of creative thought." Part of Jackson's intention is to trace these concerns up to their final statement in Coleridge's essays on Method, "and then to show how an awareness of them is not only necessary for us if we are to understand what he meant by his critical utterances, but was instrumental for Coleridge himself in coming to the conclusions about literature with which we are familiar." In short, Jackson sees, as I do,
a firm connection between Coleridge's theories of creativity and the pronouncements of his practical criticism. I would maintain that an inattention to the principles underlying Coleridge's views of life, process, power, levels of consciousness—that is, "creativity"—can only breed misconceptions about Coleridge's critical thinking. Surely testimony to this can be seen in our confused notions about the famous distinction between Primary and Secondary Imagination. Many interpretations have been offered us, but few of them are satisfactory.

Let me begin by quoting the distinction in full:

The IMAGINATION ... I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be 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. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where 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.

FANCY, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. The Fancy is indeed no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space; and blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word CHOICE. But equally with the ordinary memory it must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association. (BL, I, 202)

The reference to the Imagination as vital, and the opposition of this to fixed or dead objects ("objects as objects") ought to remind us of that universal idea of life which Coleridge has
posed elsewhere. We recollect that this fundamental principle is not an object, but a process; it is nothing fixed or dead, but an act. It is a "perpetual self-duplication of one and the same power into object and subject" manifested in the SUM or I AM, and therefore the fundamental principle of all activity and creation.

We recollect also that this principle of self-duplication is instinctively assented to by the Imagination. The Imagination supplies a central power to a cycle of equal truths, thereby rendering the movement among them harmonious and cyclical. Evidently, then, there is some functional connection between the idea of life (self-duplicating power pre-eminently manifested in God) and the Imagination in man. There is some sense in which the universal law of creation is similar in kind to the God-like which every man possesses. This is quite as we would expect, I think, for Coleridge has insisted in the essay on a Theory of Life that the most comprehensive formula to which life is reducible is "the internal copula of bodies, or ... the power which discloses itself from within as a principle of unity in the many (CW, I, 336). Remembering that the Imagination is also defined as "the power by which one image or feeling is made to modify many others, and by a sort of fusion to force many into one ... tending to produce that ultimate end of all human thought and human feeling, unity, and thereby the reduction of the spirit to its principle and fountain, who is alone truly one" (CW, IV, 48; my italics), we cannot avoid this conclusion: the Imagination in man is the finite repetition (i.e. the human
"principle" of "life") identical in kind with the ultimate Idea of Life in the Divine Imagination.

If Imagination, then, is life (which we can further define as "the power which discloses itself from within as a principle of unity in the many"), there are some crucial distinctions that must be made: (a) we must distinguish between a principle as principle, and a principle given application, (b) between the principle of power and its presence, (c) between the idea of life and functional life itself, and (d) between Imagination as a principle and Imagination as an operative force. In a sense, these four distinctions are really only one, for all involve a fundamental distinction which we have seen even in De Quincey's ponderings, for example, and which I think is perhaps the dominant dilemma of the Romantic writers in general. Basically, it is the distinction suggested by De Quincey's terms "realize" and "actualize": on the one hand to comprehend (or intuit) that there is a principle, and on the other hand to put it into action. To explain this another way: there is a difference between what is in man and what is actualized (or vitalized) in him. We can see, then, why the argument for principles of power is so important to writers like De Quincey, Coleridge, and Wordsworth. What exists in the Infinite I AM also exists in man, for he, too, is God-like; to establish these principles is concomitantly to establish what is in man. But then the problem begins, for how is this principle to be an operative presence? How is an "idea" of life actualized in "life as life" (I borrow Coleridge's own phrase)? How is the imaginative principle made an operational
reality? What I am arguing is that for Coleridge there are automatically two Imaginations, two notions of "Life," two Powers long before we ever get to that puzzling description of the Imagination in *Biographia Literaria*. They are not at all distinct in kind, but they certainly are in degree and mode of operation, just as a principle in theory retains its identity when put into practice, though it then functions quite differently. Perhaps we can best understand this idea by turning to a favorite Coleridgean distinction and applying it to Imagination and Power. The distinction is that between "constitutional" and "functional" life, and my defense for such an extended application is Coleridge's own assertion that life is power (CW, I, 386) and that Imagination is "the living Power" (BL, I, 202):

> IT is a great error in physiology not to distinguish between what may be called the general or fundamental life—the principium vitae, and the functional life—the life in the functions. Organization must presuppose life as anterior to it: without life, there could not be or remain any organization; but then there is also a life in the organs, or functions, distinct from the other. Thus, a flute presupposes,—demands, the existence of a musician as anterior to it, without whom no flute could ever have existed; and yet again without the instrument there can be no music!

(CW, VI, 319)

This passage is a re-casting of Coleridge's attempt in "Notes Toward the Formation of a More Comprehensive Theory of Life" to distinguish between life as it is, and life as a "law" or "idea" (CW, I, 377). And I wonder if just such a distinction does not finally mark his comments on the Primary and Secondary Imagina-
tions. If Imagination is indeed life (in the sense of continuous self-duplicating power) surely it, too, can be seen as both "principle" and "function." If so, the Primary Imagination is the "living Power" or principle which is manifested in God and man. But in man there is also "functional Imagination" or a Secondary Imagination which is to the Primary living Power what "life as life" is to "life as idea." As such, the Primary and Secondary Imaginations certainly do not at all differ in kind, though they do in degree and mode of operation.

We know Coleridge's reluctance to define life in terms of its "functions"—for example, breathing, or reproducing. It appears that he has the same reluctance to define "the Imagination" in like terms. It, too, has its functions: they are those of dissolving, diffusing, dissipating in order to re-create, and also struggling to idealize and unify. But to define Imagination as that "faculty" which does these things is as equally absurd (for Coleridge) as to define "life" in terms of the capacity to reproduce. One is still begging the question by hunting out a "thing" or "occult quality" and making it stand for what is in fact an act, a process, an idea. Notice that the Primary Imagination, in addition to being defined as "living Power," is also defined as a repetition in the finite mind "of the eternal act of creation" in the infinite I AM. It is process, or self-duplicating power; it is not a "faculty" or "quality" of the human mind at all. It cannot be, else we would have an "object as object," something finite, fixed, dead, non-vital.

Approaching the Primary and Secondary Imaginations from a
somewhat different direction, Jackson has advocated a view similar to my own. He does not use the term "living Power" to identify the Primary Imagination, nor the phrase "eternal principle of self-duplicating power." Rather, he chooses "Reason" as the definitive word. Jackson's conclusion is that "Reason" comes to mean "both the Absolute and the faculty which permits us to look at the Absolute."\(^{16}\) And in *Biographia Literaria* "Primary Imagination is Reason itself, while Secondary Imagination is the organ of Reason .... Reason is Reason itself, while Imagination is the organ of Reason."\(^{17}\) Jackson concludes that there is a triple division in Coleridge's view of Reason: "infinite Reason (God); and finite Reason, both as Reason itself (in man) and as the organ of Reason."\(^{18}\) The principle of infinite (or Absolute) Reason is present in man as the Primary Imagination, and the Secondary Imagination is in fact the "faculty" by which man plumbs the "God-given [resources hidden in the unconscious interior of the human mind]" i.e. the Primary Imagination.\(^{19}\) I would quarrel with Jackson's emphasis on the "unconscious," but certainly not with the crucial distinction he is striving to make. It is clear that Jackson sees an important difference between Imagination in the sense of a principle and imagination as a faculty. I have chosen to describe this difference as that between power as principle and power as actualized force; Jackson chooses Reason as Reason vs. Reason as faculty. Given the difference in terminology, the final point seems almost identical in both arguments. Man shares
a "divine" principle with the infinite I AM, and the immediate faculty (Coleridge might say the "functional faculty") which attempts to draw from this principle in order to gain its "mental Initiatives" is, of course, the Secondary Imagination. 20

An important implication of my definition of the Primary Imagination needs attention here. I have tried to show that the sublime has an historical association with the idea of "man's own latent capacity for the infinite"; in Coleridge's theories, this capacity takes a predominant place. The Primary Imagination is this "God-likeness"; the Secondary Imagination is the creative faculty which man exercises in his search to realize the infinity within himself. Traditionally, the sublimity of the human mind had been defined as its "elevation," its ascendancy toward the infinite, its expansion and reaching-out. Given Coleridge's insistence that the Imagination ultimately searches out the infinite, it becomes plain that "the sublime" can only be a quality of the human Imagination in the exercise of its awesome creative powers. A "sense of the sublime," as Coleridge would say, results when the creative Secondary Imagination intuits that principle which is the Primary Imagination. Sublimity is a momentary revelation in which man recognizes the infinite, the principle of power in the I AM. He recognizes this in his own creative activity or power, itself not different in kind, thus he can justifiably say, sum quia in Deo sum.

Dorothy Wordsworth recounts Coleridge's viewing the falls at Clyde with some fellow travellers, and becoming dismayed at a companion's obvious ignorance of the terms "sublime" and "beau-
tiful." Coleridge's version of the incident is recorded in the essay "On the Principles of Genial Criticism Concerning the Fine Arts":

Many years ago, the writer, in company with an accidental party of travellers, was gazing on a cataract of great height, breadth, and impetuosity, the summit of which appeared to blend with the sky and clouds, while the lower part was hidden by rocks and trees; and on his observing, that it was, in the strictest sense of the word, a sublime object, a lady present assented with warmth to the remark, adding—'Yes! and it is not only sublime, but beautiful and absolutely pretty'.

One can well imagine Coleridge's cringing at the lady's faux pas, especially since only the day before he had been endeavoring to settle with Wordsworth the precise meanings of grand, majestic, sublime, etc. "Sublime" was a term which Coleridge used with care, and his insistence that it have a strict meaning carried over to his like insinences on related words:

There are few mental exertions more instructive, or which are capable of being rendered more entertaining, than the attempt to establish and exemplify the distinct meaning of terms, often confounded in common use, and considered as mere synonyms. Such are the words, Agreeable, Beautiful, Picturesque, Grand, Sublime: and to attach a distinct and separate sense to each of these, is a previous step of indispensable necessity to a writer, who would reason intelligibly, either to himself or to his readers, concerning the works of poetic genius, and the sources and the nature of the pleasure derived from them.

This is an important little remark, since it suggests that by understanding the term "sublime" we shall also understand the genius which informs the greatest works of art. Presumably, then, whatever "achievements" occasion a "sense of sublimity"
will be the achievements necessary to produce art of consummate genius.

Coleridge sets down for us at some length the exact meanings of the words noted above:

What can be finer in any poet that that beautiful passage in Milton--

"Onward he moved
And thousands of his saints around."

This is grandeur, but it is grandeur without completeness; but he adds--

"Far off their coming shone";

which is the highest sublime. There is total completeness.

So I would say that the Saviour praying on the Mountain, the Desert on one hand, the Sea on the other, the city at an immense distance below, was sublime. But I should say of the Saviour looking toward the City, his countenance full of pity, that he was majestic, and of the situation that it was grand.

When the whole and the parts are seen at once, as mutually producing and explaining each other, as unity in multitude, there results shapeliness—forma formosa. Where the perfection of form is combined with pleasurableness in the sensations, excited by the matters or substances so formed, there results the beautiful.

Corollary. Hence colour is eminently subservient to beauty, because it is susceptible of forms, i.e. outline, and yet is a sensation. But a rich mass of scarlet clouds, seen without any attention to the form of the mass or of the parts, may be a delightful but not a beautiful object or colour.

When there is a deficiency of unity in the line forming the whole (as angularity, for instance), and of number in the plurality or the parts, there arises the formal.

When the parts are numerous, and impressive and predominate, so as to prevent or greatly lessen the attention to the whole, there results the grand.

Where the impression of the whole, i.e., the sense of unity, predominates, so as to
abstract the mind from the parts— the majestic.

Where the parts by their harmony produce
an effect of a whole, but there is no seen
form of a whole producing or explaining the
parts, i.e., when the parts only are seen and
distinguished, but the whole is felt— the
picturesque.

Where neither whole nor parts, but unity,
boundless or endless allness— the sublime.23

It should be evident why Coleridge was disturbed by the lady's
remark about the falls at Clyde. If we review his description
of the scene we can readily understand why it is sublime for Cole-
ridge. Neither the "whole" of the scene nor its "parts" predomi-
nates; there is no perfect form, neither do the "substances" in
the scene occasion a pleasurable sensation; clearly, we cannot
say there is a deficiency of unity. Rather, there is an expanded
"allness" in front of the travellers, with the summit of the cat-
aract merging into the very sky, the lower part of it blending
likewise into a world of rocks and trees. Further—and this is
a crucial point I shall develop in a moment— there is nothing
with which the scene can be compared. It merely is.

From the lengthy quotation above it might seem that Coleridge
is following in the footsteps of countless eighteenth-century
nature lovers by finding sublimity in the world of physical ob-
jects. I can only reply, however, that this is simply not true.
Some object or prospect is defined as beautiful, sublime, etc. by
Coleridge according to the aesthetic response it occasions.
Truly, it must have its "achievements." Its parts must be united
in some particular fashion. But the "Sublime" finally becomes
applicable not to the objects themselves, but the "sensation" or
"state of mind" in the perceiver. In his marginalia in Herder's
"Kalligone," for example, Coleridge has the following to say:

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 amni 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.24

John Shawcross suggests (and I think rightly) that the second hiatus can be restored by placing "sublime" after "truly" and "A" before "serpent." Doing so certainly clarifies the gist of Cole-
ridge's remark. An object can be either sublime or beautiful at any given moment; so can it be to any individual viewer. But it cannot be both at the same time with the same viewer. In other words, the beauty or sublimity of the object lies not in the object but in the mind of the subject. Our sensation of beauty or sublimity will hinge upon the way we creatively "read" whatever is before us. Coleridge offers us a wreathed serpent by way of example, and a truly excellent example it is. The serpent is one—that is its "wholeness"—and yet the circles of its body seem to function as "parts." To the viewer who delights in form, there is the ready-made opportunity to grasp a unity in multitude, a snake in its coils, so to speak. By the very act of attending
to form, such a viewer exercises the power of comparison. He balances the "wholeness" against the "parts" and further, the creature of the ground with the ball of fire in the sky. But for a Plato, what an immeasurable difference there is in aesthetic response! The entire scene may not strike immediately, but certainly it will in moments of later contemplation. To such a mind the scene becomes a symbol, capable of being read in a thousand different ways, but ultimately leading toward an Idea of Eternity.

In reading this passage, Shawcross explains clearly and convincingly why it is that "comparison" plays no part in the sense of sublimity:

For this operation requires a sensible basis. In Beautiful objects such a basis is supplied by the relative adequacy of the form to its ideal content. Thus in the wheel or the fountain, as instanced by Coleridge, it appears to be motion in rest which is more or less perfectly expressed. And as the beautiful object, or the object as beautiful, is constantly before the consciousness, our sense of its relative perfection coexists with our sense of its beauty. The object as sublime, on the other hand, is lost sight of in the intellectual contemplation which it excites; and the mind, resting in pure ideas, has no stimulus to comparison. 25

The association of sublimity and "pure idea" is a crucial one. We recollect, for example, that Coleridge remarks: "It is the nature of thought to be indefinite;—definiteness belongs to external imagery alone. Hence it is that the sense of sublimity arises, not from the sight of an outward object, but from the beholder's reflection upon it;—not from the sensuous impression, but from the imaginative reflex. Few have seen a celebrated
waterfall without feeling something akin to disappointment: it is only subsequently that the image comes back full into the mind, and brings with it a train of grand or beautiful associations" (CW, IV, 146). A sense of sublimity is an incredibly intellectual, creative activity. As the mind (actually, the "secondary imagination") "reads" the symbol, it turns entirely toward itself, forgetting the object which has occasioned its activity. And the continued contemplation or voyage into pure thought—the continued application of power, if you will—reveals the "faculty divine" which is in principle exactly the same as the eternal act of creation in God, or I AM.

This kind of creative moment is what Coleridge means by the "philosophic imagination, the sacred power of self-intuition." This is the Imagination performing the act of turning itself into both subject and object, making itself part of what it comes to know. Consequently, as Coleridge says, the imaginative activity becomes a kind of knowing, objectizing itself and coming to know itself (self-intuition) as object. The Imagination, that is to say, carries out the universal principle of all creativity: it exercises an eternal self-duplicating power ("a perpetual self-duplication of one and the same power into object and subject"), thus becoming an act identical in kind with the creative SUM. It is this activity which Coleridge comes to call "the Sublime."

There is no doubt that an artistic genius must himself possess the philosophic imagination if he is to produce works which are to the reader what the basking snake is to Plato. Let us assume for a moment that the viewer (or reader) becomes the
"flute" in Coleridge's metaphor and the artist the "musician."

We recollect that the flute is nothing without the musician; yet, of course, the musician is unable to make music without the flute. For Coleridge, "art" takes on enormous dignity, if only because the artist—that is, the truly philosophic artist\(^{26}\) understands the philosophic method and can teach man to find it in his own creative mind. Indeed, this is what distinguished Shakespeare: "he projected his mind out of his own particular being, and felt, and made others feel, on subjects no way connected with himself, except by force of contemplation and that sublime faculty by which a great mind becomes that, on which it meditates" (CW, IV, 46-47; my italics). Here all the terms come together: Shakespeare's distinguishing feature is his ability to transcend the particular (in this case the "self") as Plato transcends the object of the snake, and by the force of contemplation to suspend comparison, exercising the sublime faculty (the Imagination) to the point where the mind abandons sense and takes up pure idea. This is what Schiller, for instance, cannot do in The Robbers. His work is excellent, "undoubtedly very powerful indeed ... quite genuine, and deeply imbued with Schiller's own soul" but it is "a piece which must not be considered with reference to Shakspeare" (CW, VI, 424). It is a work "of the mere material sublime" (CW, VI, 424); in other words, it still retains its contact with the sensual and earthly. Above all, Schiller's work cannot make others feel hitherto unknown subjects. It is Shakespeare pre-eminently who is "Universal and without manner," the reason being
that he gives us at one and the same time a source of knowledge, a principle of knowledge, and an act of knowing. In its composition, Shakespeare's work reflects precisely those principles I have sketched at the beginning of this chapter: opposing forces forming a power (a vis ab intra) "which discloses itself from within as a principle of unity in the many": "in Shakspeare, the play is syngenesia; each character has, indeed, a life of its own, and is an individuum of itself, but yet an organ of the whole, as the heart in the human body. Shakspeare was a great comparative anatomist" (CW, IV, 260). This principle itself becomes one of the things we can know (in this sense it is a source of knowledge), and likewise the substance of the plays themselves, says Coleridge, makes Shakespeare the author "of all others the most calculated to make his readers better as well as wiser" (CW, IV, 66). Finally, the plays themselves are "living" examples of the divine power. They are acts of knowledge. In them we see "Signal adherence to the great law of nature, that all opposites tend to attract and temper each other" (CW, IV, 61); and remembering that this power (itself subsisting in strife between centripetal and centrifugal powers) is "a kind of knowing not being" we can well understand how they are indeed acts of knowledge.

The reader approaches a Shakespeare play as a viewer might a Gothic cathedral, and its "sublimity" is really the sublimity of the subject as he "reads" the symbolic importance it possesses. I have said that this notion in itself bespeaks the dignity which Coleridge accords the place of art; I might also add here that it
places a great onus on the writer. He is to be a "living force" in no metaphoric sense of the word, and his art, as I shall explain later, is to be a "living" power as well. In contrasting the work of ancient and modern writers, Coleridge establishes to his satisfaction the "non-sublimity" of the former. Their work was like statuary while the modern is like painting. Or, to pick another Coleridge metaphor, "In the first there is a predominance of rhythm and melody, in the second of harmony and counterpoint" (CW, IV, 29). The two reflect entirely different human concerns. Where ancient literature set out to reflect a concern with the finite, modern literature chooses the infinite. In these opposing literatures one finds entirely opposing ways of viewing "life": "The Greeks idolized the finite, and therefore were the masters of all grace, elegance, proportion, fancy, dignity, majesty—of whatever, in short, is capable of being definitely conveyed by defined forms or thoughts: the moderns revere the infinite, and affect the indefinite as a vehicle of the infinite;—hence their passions, their obscure hopes and fears, their wandering through the unknown, their grander moral feelings, their more august conception of man as man, their future rather than their past—in a word, their sublimity" (CW, IV, 29). The artist, it would seem, certainly does have the task of "spreading the kingdom of the sublime" as Wordsworth would say. His art is not only a reflection of a way of looking at the universe, but also man's place in it, and especially his dignity. At the same time, the artist's work is itself a power, and thus, a means for expanding the reader's own latent capacity
for the infinite. Notice, for instance, how Coleridge once again takes up the distinction between ancient and modern art—this time architecture—and shows the incredibly different effects these arts have on the viewer:

The contemplation of the works of antique art excites a feeling of elevated beauty, and exalted notions of the human self; but the Gothic architecture impresses the beholder with a sense of self-annihilation; he becomes, as it were, a part of the work contemplated. An endless complexity and variety are united into one whole, the plan of which is not distinct from the execution. (CW, IV, 233)

The Greek art is beautiful. When I enter a Greek Church, my eye is charmed, and my mind elated; I feel exalted, and proud that I am a man. But the Gothic art is sublime. On entering a cathedral, I am filled with devotion and with awe; I am lost to the actualities that surround me, and my whole being expands into the infinite; earth and air, nature and art, all swell up into eternity, and the only sensible impression left, is 'that I am nothing!' (CW, IV, 235)

It is these words which arrest us: "a sense of self-annihilation"; "he becomes ... a part of the work contemplated"; "lost to the actualities that surround me"; "my whole being expands into the infinite." These are the very terms we have seen used to describe the great creative artist—a Shakespeare, for example—or the Plato who contemplates the idea of Eternity in the serpent. These are the terms which have identified the abandonment of the sense and the excursion into pure thought. Sublimity is a real possibility in modern art, for Coleridge. The power is there in works like Shakespeare's plays. A source of knowledge, a principle of knowledge, and an act of knowing exist in front of us. What remains, then, is for the reader or viewer
to actualize within his own creative mind the same sublimity which Coleridge gains in the Gothic cathedral. He must abandon silly modern novels, which only encourage "that love of sloth ... inherent in the human mind" and turn instead to those works which necessitate "reaction": "By reaction I mean an activity of the intellectual faculties, which shows itself in consequent reasoning and observation, and originates action and conduct according to a principle" (CW, IV, 318-319; my italics). And what is that principle?—precisely that which I have described in the opening pages of this chapter. It is the principle of power, power which is defined as a principle of unity in multeity. The reader, or viewer, must learn to use all his essentially opposite (centrifugal and centripetal) powers. He must learn that the very act of thinking "presents two sides for contemplation—that of external causality, in which the train of thought may be considered as the result of outward impressions ... and on the other hand, that of internal causality, or of the energy of the will on the mind itself. Thought, therefore, might thus be regarded as passive or active; and the same faculties may in a popular sense be expressed as perception or observation, fancy or imagination, memory or recollection" (CW, IV, 319; my italics). Only by thus becoming a creative agent can the reader actualize what he is, and so no longer remain a deadened flute, but become a maker of music.

The success of moving the reader rests, evidently enough, in the success of the artistic composition. Specifically, it rests in the degree to which the work becomes a "living" thing—
"living," in Coleridge's sense of the word. I think a careful examination of Coleridge's remarks on Shakespeare, on poetry as power, and on organic form reveal that "life," defined as it is in "Notes Toward the Formation of a More Comprehensive Theory of Life," becomes the distinguishing feature of great art, and especially sublime art. Thus, the "achievements" of such art are precisely those we might expect: (1) a perpetual self-duplication of one and the same power into subject and object, (2) a sense of unity, or infinity, (3) the presence of the artist's imaginative power, (4) great emotion, (5) interaction between the various "parts" of the composition, (6) moral and spiritual elevation. I think it would be false to disconnect these six characteristics from each other, for in fact each has inextricable connections with the others. However, once again I shall discuss them independently in order to point out several important matters.

Coleridge's reference to Shakespeare as a great anatomist is a slightly misleading one, for while "anatomist" suggests one who studies the "parts" of a living whole, Shakespeare is in fact (for Coleridge) a writer who searches out unity and universality. By "anatomist," Coleridge means "student of life," I think. Note, for instance, this quotation I have recorded earlier: "in Shakspere, the play is syngenesia; each character has, indeed, a life of its own, and is an individuum of itself, but yet an organ of the whole, as the heart in the human body. Shakspeare was a great comparative anatomist" (CW, IV, 260). I think the terms of this quotation speak for themselves. The play
is "life" in a very real sense of that word, containing as it
does a vis ab intra or power which is precisely identical in kind
with that existing in God's creativity. Shakespeare's art "fol-
lows Nature" and so accords with a very hackneyed definition of
truly great art, but of course "Nature" means something very
particular for Coleridge. He sees in Shakespeare's plays a
"Natur-geist" as opposed to the forms of nature; that is, he sees
a commitment of the artist to what is constititional rather than
functional. Like the great comparative anatomist to whom life is
more than breathing, reproducing, or blood-pumping, so is Nature
more than trees, rocks, flowers, and sundry outward forms to
Shakespeare. Just as you must go beyond the functions of a liv-
ing thing to the idea which is its constitutional power, so
Shakespeare searches out not the form but "The idea which puts
the form together": "It 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."29 Herein lies
the difference between a copier and an imitator: "If the artist
copies the mere nature, the natura naturata, what idle rivalry!
If he proceeds only from a given form, which is supposed to
answer to the notion of beauty, what an emptiness, what an un-
reality there always is in his productions, as in Cipriani's
pictures! Believe me, you must master the essence, the natura
naturans, which presupposes a bond between nature in the higher
sense and the soul of man."30

The old desiderata of "following Nature" and creating an
"organic" form take on more than metaphorical significance for
Coleridge. If one is to follow Nature then, one is, by definition, to follow "life"; not the life in nature, but the life of nature—this is the crucial distinction. In fact, Coleridge goes on to say that his pursuance of an idea of power is finally the universal principle of all the fine arts:

it is not a copy, but an imitation, of nature. This is the universal principle of the fine arts....one great principle is common to all the fine arts ... I mean that ever-varying balance, or balancing, of images, notions, or feelings, conceived as in opposition to each other;—in short, the perception of identity and contrariety; the least degree of which constitutes likeness, the greatest absolute difference; but the infinite gradations between these two form all the play and all the interest of our intellectual and moral being, till it leads us to a feeling and an object more awful than it seems to me compatible with even the present subject to utter aloud; though I am most desirous to suggest it. (CW, IV, 41)

This great principle, as Coleridge describes it here, is indeed the principle of power as laid down in the "Comprehensive Theory."

The artist strives to portray in his work not the forms of things, but the antagonistic power which is fundamental to nature.

The power of a living work is the direct result of the artist's genius, his imaginative power. And though the work must urge the reader to an exercise of his own creativity, "Yet still the consciousness of the poet's mind must be diffused over that of the reader or spectator....he himself, according to his genius, elevates us, and by being always in keeping, prevents us from perceiving any strangeness, though we feel great exultation" (CW, IV, 43). Genius cannot be a lawless power, and although this point may seem a minor one, it is really of considerable impor-
tance. In the eighteenth century, John Dennis envisioned the genius of a poet as a kind of uncontrolled, raw force in need of discipline; so "the rules" came to have a certain fundamental position in sublime art by constraining, shaping, and using to best advantage the natural power of a first-rate artist. This kind of check and balance view of the mind's creative powers is precisely what Coleridge cannot tolerate, for it presupposes a fundamental non-unity. Indeed, Dennis argues that there is a kind of union effected between energy and restraint, culminating in the quieting of an inner turmoil, but I seriously doubt that Coleridge would have any of this. In Coleridge's view of the universal principle of life, "power" discloses itself as a principle of unity (CW, I, 386). Genius does not conform its energy to a set of static rules existing independently of the mind: "No work of true genius dares want its appropriate form, neither indeed is there any danger of this. As it must not, so genius can not, be lawless; for it is even this that constitutes it genius—the power of acting creatively under laws of its own origination" (CW, IV, 54). The artist's imaginative power (which we can also term "imaginative genius") is in itself a living principle, as Coleridge argues in his remarks on Shakespeare. Consequently, it is also a "unifying principle," for life-power is a principle of unity in multitude (CW, I, 386). It follows, then, that man has within himself some law or principle of unity which is most evidenced in the Imagination of a genius. This kind of man can search out the same principle beneath the forms of outward things, and fashion art which itself has a "Naturgeist" or "spirit," to
borrow a term from Coleridge:

Imagine not that I am about to oppose genius to rules. No! the comparative value of these rules is the very cause to be tried. The spirit of poetry, like all other living powers, must of necessity circumscribe itself by rules, were it only to unite power with beauty. It 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?—This is no discovery of criticism;—it is a necessity of the human mind; and all nations have felt and obeyed it, in the invention of metre, and measured sounds, as the vehicle and involucrum of poetry—itself a fellow-growth from the same life—even as the bark is to the tree! (CW, IV, 54; my italics)

The terms of this remark are "organic" in their emphasis. Like any living form, poetry has a spirit and an outward guise, an inner power and an outer beauty. Together, these parts constitute a unified whole in which we can detect neither ends nor means. Can we not say, then, that such a poem does indeed follow Nature in that it imitates not a form of life but the very principle of organized power which is the idea of life? If so—and further, if the Imagination is such a principle—can we not well understand why "greatness" or "excellence" in art is judged by having us look inward at our own minds? The terms of great art need not be discussed through arbitrary rules for Coleridge.

There is no need for unities of time, place, and action. The quality of great art is its adherence to a principle which is not a critical (one might say "functional") necessity, but a "constitutional" necessity of the human mind. Hence, unities of time and place are external devices, not eternal laws: "mere inconveniences attached to the local peculiarities of the Athe-
nian drama (CW, IV, 110). Unity of action, on the other hand, is in truth another term for describing exactly that "lifeness" or "organicism" which, as we have seen, is Coleridge's principle: "instead of unity of action, I should greatly prefer the more appropriate, though scholastic and uncouth, words homogeneity, proportionateness, and totality of interest,—expressions, which involve the distinction, or rather the essential difference, betwixt the shaping skill of mechanical talent, and the creative, productive, life-power of inspired genius" (CW, IV, 110; my italics).

The assent one gives to life-power is a necessity of the human mind according to Coleridge. Surely it would seem, then, that "taste" is no mere individual, subjective response to art. Also, it would appear that taste must involve a creative response if it is to accord with an inner principle of life-power, power which is itself creative. Coleridge approaches the subject of taste by lamenting the criticism which concerns itself with the association of ideas: "Association in philosophy is like the term stimulus in medicine; explaining every thing, it explains nothing; and above all, leaves itself unexplained." The analogy with the human body is a revealing one, for association truly is to philosophy what stimulus is to physiology. In discussing associationism as a "cause," one is still drifting along on the surface of things, poking away at the functional instead of the constitutional. One is laboring at a physical explanation for an idea or law. To put the problem in precise terms: one has foregone the life of the mind for the life in it.
Coleridge is particularly distressed with works which use associationism to explain "the effects produced on the spectator by such and such impressions." Now we begin to get down to aesthetics and matters of art. Coleridge mentions Archibald Alison at this point, and his complaint with the eighteenth-century theorist is clearly this: Alison simply begs the question by searching out "physical" or "mechanical" causes which themselves need explaining. Thus, Coleridge mentions our need for understanding more precisely the terms Agreeable, Beautiful, Picturesque, Grand, and Sublime (I have quoted the passage earlier), then immediately asks a crucial question about universality of taste:

whether the noblest productions of human genius (such as the Iliad, the works of Shakspere and Milton, the Pantheon, Raphael's Gallery, and Michael Angelo's Sistine Chapel, the Venus de Medici and the Apollo Belvedere, involving, of course, the human forms that approximate to them in actual life) delight us merely by chance, from accidents of local associations ... or whether there exists in the constitution of the human soul a sense, and a regulative principle, which may indeed be stifled and latent in some, and be perverted and denaturalized in others, yet is nevertheless universal in a given state of intellectual and moral culture; which is independent of local and temporary circumstances, and dependent only on the degree in which the faculties of the mind are developed; and which, consequently, it is our duty to cultivate and improve, as soon as the sense of its actual existence dawns upon us.

To echo Longinus, does man have a certain "something" within him that responds intuitively to the noblest productions of human genius? The answer, of course, is that he does. Truly
magnificent works reflect the same principles to which the imagination gives unconscious assent. Taste is "a necessity of the human mind," not a matter of individual caprice. The word "dawns" above suggests De Quincey's reference about the "dawning" of our God-like faculties, and it seems to me that Coleridge is pursuing the same idea here. Our inner principle is essentially the union of all our many faculties, exactly as Coleridge has described it with regard to the creative reader. There must be a union of passivity and activity, or centripetal and centrifugal powers, if man is to recognize and answer in kind the life-power of noble art:

TASTE is the intermediate faculty which connects the active with the passive powers of our nature, the intellect with the senses; and its appointed function is to elevate the images of the latter, while it realizes the ideas of the former. We must therefore have learned what is peculiar to each, before we can understand that 'Third something,' which is formed by a harmony of both.\textsuperscript{33}

It is no accident that Coleridge has raised the problem of defining the Sublime, the Beautiful, etc. \textit{Immediately} before addressing the issue of universal taste. If taste is something existing in the constitution of the human soul, if it is a "sense" and a regulative "principle," then presumably the sublimity or beauty of an object consists in the degree to which our inner "something" finds a like principle in the object. We remember that the discovery of an organization's essential unity ("the connection of parts in and for a whole, so that each part is at once end and means") is not a critical discovery but "a necessity of the human mind." An object possessing this unity answers to
the principle within each of us. If Beauty, then, is ideally a
principle of unity in multeity, our recognition of this beauty
cannot be mere caprice, but an intuition of the very law which
universally binds "nature in the higher sense and the soul of
man":

The BEAUTIFUL, contemplated in its essentials,
that is, in kind and not in degree, is that in
which the many, still seen as many, becomes
one....So far is the Beautiful from depending
wholly on association, that it is frequently
produced by the mere removal of associations....
The most general definition of beauty, there-
fore, is ... Multure in Unity. 34

The Beautiful arises from the perceived harmony
of an object, whether sight or sound, with the
inborn and constitutive rules of the judgment
and imagination: and it is always intuitive.
As light to the eye, even such is beauty to
the mind, which cannot but have complacency
in whatever is perceived as pre-configured
to its living faculties. 35

There is no question that "beauty" applies not to the object
but to the principles in the human mind which the object ad-
dresses. The same is true of sublimity. In both cases, the
principle is that of power, attested to by the Secondary Imagi-
nation, and revealed as unity (Beauty) or infinity (Sublimity).
In the presence of a noble work one intuits the harmony which
binds himself to that object, and, concomitantly, the unity of
power in which both exist (their wholeness); or one intuits the
infinity which is an endless allness and in which neither "parts"
nor "wholes" can be discovered.

Coleridge's remarks on the sublime are many, and certainly
they are scattered throughout his essays, marginalia, and letters
without much organization. There is no sustained work devoted to
a study of the sublime itself, but this should in no way hinder our investigations of the term. These scattered references are surprisingly consistent, or, considering Coleridge's demand for accurate definition, perhaps not surprising. In any case, one could list scores of incidental remarks which utilize this term in no vague fashion.

There has only been one attempt to piece together these scattered remarks. It is an essay, now some thirty years old, by Clarence DeWitt Thorpe. Thorpe finds it very strange that critics have neglected to examine the sublime in Coleridge's thinking, first, because the idea is itself of great value, and second, because it occurs not infrequently in Coleridge's writings. After giving attention to many of the passages I have quoted in this chapter, Thorpe goes on to make the following conclusions:

To Coleridge as to Kant sublimity is entirely in the mind of the observer. It is true that Coleridge also regarded beauty as in the mind; but in the emotion of beauty the process is different. Here the mind goes out to its object, and, finding a definite form which can be grasped and held in its unity, it rests there and takes its pleasure in the sensible image. In the act of reconciliation between the objective and the subjective the objective seems to achieve dominance, the mind projecting itself into the external form, and contemplating it in sympathetic union. In sublimity, this process is reversed. The mind, baffled by inability to grasp the object, yet conscious of a totality that fascinates while it eludes, recoils upon itself, finding its pleasure in elevated ideas that rival the greatness of the object, but which center in itself rather than in the object.

This seems to me precisely the difference between sublimity and
beauty in Coleridge's aesthetic. Sublimity begins with indefiniteness in the object presumably because this is a prelude to the indefiniteness of thought. We recollect Coleridge's remark that "It is the nature of thought to be indefinite;--definiteness belongs to external imagery alone. Hence it is that the sense of sublimity arises, not from the sight of an outward object, but from the beholder's reflection upon it" (CW, IV, 146). Where beauty retains its hold upon the "sensible image," sublimity soars into pure idea, thus making the mind itself the province of discovery. Both beauty and sublimity answer to that "something" which is a principle in man, but where the former rests in a discovered unity between parts and wholes the latter discovers only "allness." Beauty, we can say, intuits that vis ab intra which operates in a given form, and thus intuits as well (though not in a revelatory way) some indefinable, only half-understood, unity which is a principle of power in the universe. Still, beauty retains its hold on the objective; one cannot escape the figure of the spinning wheel try as he might. But sublimity is a revelation. The mind turns toward itself and its energies, recognizing in that awesome power that its life, its "constitutional" power, is one with that of the Deity. By abandoning the world of sense and inhabiting pure idea, the sublime mind has revealed to it the infinite principle of power with which it is one.

Though Thorpe does not pursue the subject of power in detail, he does come to a conclusion very like my own. He suggests that one result of "indefiniteness" is that it supplies the mind with
hints of "infinite forces working in unseen, incomprehensible ways." And similarly in literature, "sublimity appears to lie not in representations of largeness alone, but in great ideas and in suggestions of undefined, unlimited power. To Coleridge, then, sublimity may be said to consist of impressions of infinite greatness or power."\(^{38}\) Thorpe seizes upon the crucial distinction between largeness and power in Coleridge's thinking, thereby bringing attention to one of the essential aspects of Romantic thought: namely, that power can be evidenced in the most seemingly small and inconsequential things. Surely this is evident enough in Wordsworth's poetry, and to some extent it can be applied to nearly all the Romantic poets. Such a thought, however, must be seen in light of the aesthetic basis which lies behind it, hence the importance of that distinction between largeness and power. Almost any object—itself deficient in "achievements" of vastness and the like—can occasion a sublime response "provided it may occur in such a circumstance as to become a symbol for that which is great or eternal."\(^{39}\) The fact is that large objects most frequently serve to impress one with the notion of power, hence they are more easily envisioned as symbols of infinite force. However, largeness is not a priori an absolute necessity for sublimity to occur in the mind. "At times I dwell on man with such reverence, resolve all his follies and superstitions into such grand primary laws of intellect, and in such wise so contemplate them as ever-varying incarnations on the Eternal Life—that the Llama's dung-pellet, or the cowtail which the dying Brahmin clutches convulsively become sanctified and sublime
by the feelings which cluster round them." This remark by Coleridge makes it clear that sublimity has finally lost its firm connection with the "achievements" of external objects, and has come to rest in the power of the creative, imaginative mind as it takes those clustered "feelings" and contemplates their symbolic importance.

I shall conclude this chapter by addressing Thorpe's final point about Coleridge's theory of the sublime: sublimity is firmly united with mystical religious experience, and while Coleridge's "Sublime" "bears a certain likeness to the transcendent sublime of Kant ... it is perhaps nearer to the English tradition of the religious sublime, exemplified in Dennis and James Usher, and to a less extent in Addison." There is much that supports this view in Coleridge's writings: the remarks on Gothic cathedrals, "The Hymn before Sunrise in the Vale of Chamouni," the remark "Could you ever discover anything sublime, in our sense of the term, in the classic Greek literature? I never could, Sublimity is Hebrew by birth" (CW, VI, 406), the evident admiration for Milton's sublimity, and above all the firm spiritual identity that exists between the creative sum and SUM. Some of these examples are noted by Thorpe, along with others, and his argument seems indisputable. My only quarrel is with the terms Thorpe finally chooses to define Coleridge's sublime: a "mystical-religious-psychological English" sublime (Thorpe calls it a "tradition," in fact) as opposed to a Kantian metaphysical sublime. I am not convinced by this supposed distinction, fundamentally because Thorpe's description of Kant's "sublime"
is in many respects precisely that of Coleridge. Admittedly, there are differences, but the majority of them are minor. Finally, I think Thorpe's remark on the distinguishing feature of Kant's explanation of the sublime needs to be read, and challenged, with Jackson's comments on Reason and its laws firmly in mind: "Kant's explanation is metaphysical; he refers the sublime to the supersensible, and finds for it an a priori basis, in universal, authentic, and necessary laws of reason."44

To posit various "traditions" of the sublime seems to me a profitless task. Indeed, I have been arguing precisely the opposite—a more comprehensive study of it as an aesthetic, literary, psychological, and moral term. Likewise, to invent "kinds" of sublime—the Burkean, the Kantian, etc.—is at times dreadfully misleading, certainly if we adhere as firmly as Coleridge does to "kind" and "degree." Remembering that to define "kind" is automatically to define the highest "degree" of that kind, we must be skeptical of categorized "sublimes," for they are really not "kinds" at all. I have tried to demonstrate that this idea called "the Sublime" is most properly associated with the term "Power"; and by attending to this term we can come much closer to an accurate understanding of an historical idea which is so easily adapted to whatever Power concerns the theorist. If it is a religious or moral power, what one comes to recognize is his own creative power alike in kind to that of God. If it is artistic power, one gains insight into his creative capacities, again alike in kind, though this time to the artist's. And if it is terror that claims attention, one recognizes his
power to react imaginatively and creatively with the awesome force opposing him. In all cases, sublimity refers to the mind itself, and above all to the power it possesses and commands.
NOTES—CHAPTER FOUR


2 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. John Shawcross, 2 vols. (London, 1907), I, 164. All references to *Biographia Literaria* are from this edition, designated BL, and enclosed parenthetically in my text. I shall also use this edition for Coleridge’s aesthetic essays. To prevent confusion with the *Biographia*, references to these essays will be given in the notes, identified "S" and followed by volume and page number.

3 My italics for "sacred power."

4 On the subject of "natural poetic genius" and powers of the imagination see BL, II, 14.

5 The word "instinctively" is used by Coleridge to identify this activity of the imagination. See BL, I, 181.

6 My italics for "power."

7 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Complete Works*, ed. W.G.T. Shedd, 7 vols. (New York, 1868), I, 377. All references to this edition are enclosed parenthetically in my text and identified as CW.

8 Coleridge’s insistence on exact definition is particularly evident in his discussions of the "understanding" and the "reason." See, for example, CW, V, 82, 90, 106, 181, 206, 286; VI, 265.

9 The term "occult quality" is Coleridge’s.

10 "There is a great and important difference, both in politics and metaphysics, between all and the whole. The first can never be ascertained as a standing quantity; the second, if comprehended by insight into its parts, remains forever known" (CW, VI, 417).

11 These terms are Coleridge’s. See CW, I, 391.

12 Method and Imagination in Coleridge’s Criticism (Cambridge, Mass., 1969). I am very much indebted to this recent study of
Coleridge's critical thought.

13 Method and Imagination, p. 18.

14 Method and Imagination, p. 19.

15 For a review of these various interpretations, see Jackson, Method and Imagination, pp. 110 ff.

16 Method and Imagination, p. 114.

17 "Reason is Reason itself" makes little sense without Jackson's version of a chart written in Coleridge's hand in a volume of Tennemann's Geschichte der Philosophie. I have given that version below, along with the original.

Coleridge: The simplest yet practically sufficient order of the mental Powers is, beginning from the

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<td>Reason</td>
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Fancy and Imagination are Oscillations, this connecting R and U; that connecting Sense and Understanding.

Jackson:

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<tr>
<td>Fancy</td>
<td>Organ of Reason (Secondary Imagination)</td>
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<td>Understanding</td>
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<td>Organ of Reason (Secondary Imagination)</td>
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<td>Reason (Primary Imagination)</td>
<td>Sense</td>
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Method and Imagination, p. 117.

By "mental initiative" or "original initiative" Jackson means that preconception or initial idea from which all other ideas follow. For a further discussion of this point as well as selected examples from Coleridge's writings see Method and Imagination, pp. 39-42.

S, II, 224-225. My italics. There are, of course, several versions of this story.

S, II, 226.


John Shawcross, "Coleridge Marginalia," Notes and Queries, 10th Ser., 4 (July-December 1905), 341. The wheel is used as an image of beauty in the essay "On the Principles of Genial Criticism Concerning the Fine Arts"; see S, II, 233.

Shawcross, "Coleridge Marginalia," 342.

Examples of the "philosophic artist," of course, would be Wordsworth and Shakespeare.

Cf. CW, IV, 59: "This general characteristic of the ancient and modern drama might be illustrated by a parallel of the ancient and modern music;—the one consisting of melody arising from a succession only of pleasing sounds,—the modern embracing harmony also, the result of combination and the effect of a whole."

Cf. CW, IV, 291: "The two different modes in which the imagination is acted on by the ancient and modern poetry, may be illustrated by the parallel effects caused by the contemplation of the Greek or Roman—Greek architecture, compared with the Gothic. In the Pantheon, the whole is perceived in a perceived harmony with the parts which compose it; and generally you will remember that where the parts preserve any distinct individuality, there simple beauty, or beauty simply, arises; but where the parts melt undistinguished into the whole, there majestic beauty, or majesty, is the result. In York Minster, the parts, the grotesques, are in themselves very sharply distinct and separate, and this distinctness and separation of the parts is counterbalanced only by the multitude and variety of those parts, by which the attention is bewildered;—whilst the whole, or that there is a whole product, is altogether a feeling in which the several thousand
distinct impressions lose themselves as in a universal solvent. Hence in a Gothic cathedral, as in a prospect from a mountain's top, there is indeed a unity, an awful oneness;—but it is, because all distinction evades the eye. And just such is the distinction between the Antigone of Sophocles and the Hamlet of Shakespeare."

29 S, II, 259. My italics. I must confess to quoting out of context here. The quotation comes from "On the Principles of Genial Criticism Concerning the Fine Arts." However, while Coleridge is not referring directly to Shakespeare at this point in his essay, his other remarks surely make it plain that Shakespeare is supreme in grasping the "spirit" of nature rather than its "forms."

30 S, II, 222.

31 Ibid.


33 S, II, 227.

34 S, II, 232.


37 Thorpe, p. 197.

38 Thorpe, p. 200.

39 Ibid.


41 Thorpe, 205-206.

42 "Sublimity is the pre-eminent characteristic of the Paradise Lost. It is not an arithmetical sublime like Klopstock's, whose rule always is to treat what we might think large as contempt-
ibly small. Klopstock mistakes bigness for greatness. There is a greatness arising from images of effort and daring, and also from those of moral endurance: in Milton both are united" (CW, IV, 303–304). And: "In the Paradise Lost the sublimest parts are the revelations of Milton's own mind, producing itself and evolving its own greatness" (CW, IV, 304).

43 Thorpe, p. 213.

44 Ibid.
CHAPTER FIVE

BYRON: THE SUBLIMITY OF DEFIANCE

It is perhaps an irony that the one Romantic poet most deliberate in challenging man's claims to a sublimity of soul is also the poet who most frequently employs "the sublime" in his poetic creations. Perhaps it is a further irony that Byron is also the one Romantic poet who most persistently questions the value and significance of the poet's creative power and its artistic products. Really, it is astonishing that Byron, for all his posturing, all his harping about composition being a habit "like a woman's gallantry," \(^1\) returns with persistence not only to the term "sublime" but also to the re-use of the poet-narrator. Or perhaps it is really not astonishing at all, since the search for value and meaning—which is such a dominant part of Byron's poetry—is concomitantly a search for "the sublime": not in nature, not in language, not perhaps even in art, but in the spirit which compels one to "write on." Very simply, Byron's poetry is a declamation of power the value of which lies not in attaining a goal or advocating the slightest answer to any pressing problem but in the very fact that it has been written. Even the poetry itself as "art" lies beyond the pale of immediate value. Its significance is this: that it has been written, that some man's power has defiantly "risen to truth."

"Sublimity," I have been arguing, is not, for the Romantic
writers, something which one "finds" "out there," but the mark of one's own grandeur of soul. It is a force, an energy that redeems man's "God-likeness" and especially in the poet, who is an order-bringer in the image of God. The necessary question at this point is, then, "how does Byron view the creative process"? The answer, I think, is a complex one. Certainly any number of Byron critics have proffered answers, some emphasizing its cathartic nature for Byron, others its "escape" qualities, still others its more positive values. Ward Pafford, for instance, offers the following: "Poetic composition for Byron is a creative, imaginative engagement providing a qualified refuge from the wretchedness of the fated mortal condition, a masking and protective shield for the preservation of individual entity against an engulfing alien society." \(^2\) John Lauber, in an article dealing with Byron's concept of poetry, strangely omits any significant comment on Byron's view of the creative process except to describe it as an increasing devotion to "poetic truth." \(^3\)

For Robert F. Gleckner, there is a fundamental irony in Byron's vision of the creative act:

The irony of this creation must not be missed, for it is at the core of Byron's aesthetic. To create for him was not, as for Harold (who is more nearly the true Shelleyan Romantic), to people the stars 'with beings bright/ As their own beams' and thus forget all 'earth-born jars,/ And human frailties' (III, xiv); it was to create out of despair a coherent vision of the causes of that despair in history and in himself, and thus to explore and cast light upon the human condition.

In short, Byron critics seem decidedly split on perhaps the most fundamental question of all: did Byron see the activity of writ-
ing poetry as meaningful or not? Is this spark of man's divinity at best a vehicle for momentarily reaffirming man's dignity? Is it more permanently ennobling? Is it merely comforting to Byron; or, as he says at one point, something "to empty my mind" (Q, 550) to keep from going mad?

George M. Ridenour is closer to the truth, I think, when he states that for Byron "Poetry ... is being seen as not merely emotional relief (though it is that) or relief from ennui (though it is that too), but 'A thing to counterbalance human woes,' an agent of civilization in its struggle for 'the diminution of the traces of Original Sin.'" What Ridenour neglects to point out is how poetry manages to do this, or, at least, how Byron sees poetry as a counterbalancing of human woes. Don Juan, as Ridenour reads it, serves a double function: first, it reveals coherently "the melancholy state of man," and second, it "helps him to come to terms with it." "The act of exposing the sad reality exposes the absurdity of the pretense that it is otherwise, while providing through art a means of dealing with it without the hypocrisy and self-deception integral to Love and Glory." But again we must ask the question "how does Byron envision poetry as a means of helping us come to terms with the very state he depicts"? In what sense does art--ideally, or even in Byron's own thinking--provide a means of dealing with chaos?

Ridenour, it seems to me, is split upon the same rock as Robert F. Gleckner. Both see--and rightly so--a coherent vision of a chaos or "ruined Paradise" in Byron's work; however, neither is willing to grant that something positive comes out of this
vision. Still, both want to assert that writing has a value for Byron, that his artistic productivity does more than poignantly, and terrifyingly, record our universe garbed in chaos. Gleckner, in speaking of *Childe Harold*, goes about his assertion this way: "The poem is thus created from the intensity and vitality gained in the act of creation itself....Creation, then, is no mere escape into illusion....It is rather the means to maintain one's sanity in an insane world, to see coherence even if it is nihilistic." Ridenour falls back on the notion that art is for Byron an essential paradox—a "rising" which contains in itself the inevitable "Fall": "And this paradox is based on a still profounder one, a vision of the radically paradoxical nature of 'the way things are'—that is, of nature itself." Both of these comments are provoking, certainly. Both contain elements of truth, Gleckner's perhaps more especially so. But neither is at all satisfying in the final analysis. Both critics are asking us to accept that value does indeed adhere in the creative process, but neither offers an explanation of what that value is. The creative process, if it is anything in Byron's world, is above all a positive force. It is an energy, an active resistance to the hell with which man must live. Certainly it depicts that hell as Gleckner suggests, and clearly the creative act both keeps man sane and so provides a momentary "hope" that all is not wrong with the world. In these limited ways poetic creation does, I suppose, counterbalance human miseries and woes. Still, when we have said this, it seems to me we have said very little. Clearly we have not at all come to grips with one very telling
part of Byron's poetry--his frequent concern with the sublime in art, nature, and man.

Man's tragedy for Byron is, I think, not that he lacks sublimity but that he has it. Man's dilemma is not that "greatness" is beyond his capacity, but that it is not. Perhaps this is merely a new way of pointing out an old idea--that man's "divine" spark plagues Byron because it is housed in "clay"--but if so, it is also a means of taking attention away from the clay and fastening it on the spark, or what the abbot of Manfred calls "the energy which would have made/ A goodly frame of glorious elements,/ Had they been wisely mingled." The fact that these elements are not so mingled does not demean the "energy" which Manfred possesses so much as it forces that energy into prominence. The "clay," the "awful chaos," is allowed Manfred in order that we can turn to the point of proper emphasis: the energy which, however futile in its application to a specific target, proclaims his sublimity.

It is also wise to remember that Manfred, in his full identity, stands as well for the poet. Gleckner is surely correct in suggesting that the poet becomes "Mixed with the spirit of Manfred" and so is his own subject. Seen in this light, Manfred vividly depicts precisely the value to be found in composition. The act of creation, as Byron sees it, is an act of defiance. It is an energy of a Prometheus sort which "makes" something perhaps in itself valueless--something "Romantic" or "Imaginative." But above all it cannot be stopped from making it, and that is where its value lies. There is no "hope" accorded to the exercising of
this energy, no promise that by using it we will be better, or
happier, or more at peace with the forces of darkness and chaos.
But there is significance in the very exercising of this power,
and in the stubborn determination that life will not rid us of
it. To put this another way: the force of creative power is to
the artist what Manfred's mental energy is to him; and the sub-
limity of creative man lies in his defiance of "clay" (or, for
the artist, of life's gruesome reality and chaos): "Thou hast no
power upon me, that I feel; I shall never possess me, that I
know" (III, iv, 125-126). Ward Pafford offers much the same
opinion in his very fine study of Byron:

Knowing from the beginning that the aspiring
reaches of the mind must suffer frustration
and oblivion because of the fragile mortality
of its fleshy seat, the dictates of a malev-
olent necessity, and the innate weakness of
man's moral nature, Manfred glories still in
the struggle of mind and soul and, through his
awesome allegiance to the powers of unquench-
able intelligence within him, achieves at the
end a tragic triumph.

If we consider Manfred a poet-figure, Pafford's remarks take on
even greater significance: the poet knows full well that his
"soarings" or "creations" will bring doubt and disappointment be-
cause the "real world"—fallen and chaotic—stands so firmly
against them just as man's "clay" contends against the "spark"
that makes the creations possible; still, the poet can, and must,
glory in the very exercise of that power, an exercise which, re-
gardless of its products, defies the domination of the ruined
world and its determination to render us nothing but clay. Daily
life, war, the ruins of defeated power—all attest to man's lit-
tleness, and his grandeur lies in a refusal to accept this as the sum of his identity. We can say of Manfred that

the passions, attributes
Of earth and heaven, from which no power, nor being,
Nor breath from the worm upwards is exempt,
Have pierced his heart, (II, iv, 65-67)

but he still possesses "The mind which is immortal," the mind which has its "own desert," and which is genuinely a part of this total creature called "man." The enemy, for Byron, Manfred, and the poet is the figure like Suwarow in Don Juan, the "great philosopher" who lectures "on the noble art of killing,—/ For deeming human clay but common dirt" (VII, lviii). Common clay we are indeed—as Byron everywhere makes evident—but so, too, are we creative and powerful.

I accept wholehearted, then, Pafford's contention that "The shaping creativity of the mind, along with its sensitive resourcefulness, its adamantine power, and its limited fruitfulness, is thus for Byron ... a pervasive theme in Manfred." 13 In every respect it is, to echo Byron, " a mental theatre" (LJ, V, 347).

It is a dramatization of an idea we find in Detached Thoughts:

Matter is eternal, always changing, but reproduced, and, as far as we can comprehend Eternity, Eternal; and why not Mind? Why should not the Mind act with and upon the Universe? as portions of it act upon and with the congregated dust called Mankind? See, how one man acts upon himself and others, or upon multitudes? The same Agency, in a higher and purer degree, may act upon the Stars, etc., ad infinitum. (LJ, V, 458)

Such is the mind of Manfred, a "higher and purer" degree like that of the creative artist. And it is a mind "eternal" not because of what it creates but because it creates: "the act of
creation, rather than the created artifact itself, or its meaning, is what sustains the artist." 14 Without this activity or force there is no basis for Manfred's final contention that the mind "which is immortal" (III, iv, 129) "When stripp'd of this mortality, derives/ No colour from the fleeting things without,/ But is absorb'd in sufferance or in joy,/ Born from the knowledge of its own desert" (III, iv, 133-136).

This is the fit place to raise the subject of nature's sublimity in Manfred, for it is precisely this "knowledge of its own desert" that the hero learns from the natural world. 15 At the beginning of the fourth scene in act three, Manfred comments on the stars, and the moon above the "snow-shining mountains":

Beautiful!
I linger yet with Nature, for the Night
Hath been to me a more familiar face
Than that of man; and in her starry shade
Of dim and solitary loveliness,
I learnt the language of another world.
(III, iv, 2-7)

Pafford remarks of this passage, "That world, he goes on to say--recalling a cherished moment in youth when scenes of the great Roman past, softened by the light of nature's moon, acquired a memorable perfection--was imagination's. So might nature and the creative intelligence combine on occasion to achieve an earthly version of immortality. But such moments are rare, and Manfred rejects them as having no substantiality." 16 The first part of this remark is true; the second is not. That cherished moment in youth is a very particular one, and needs to be examined carefully. Manfred is standing not just among "scenes of the great Roman past" but the very greatest. He is standing "within the
Coliseum's wall, / "Midst the chief relics of almighty Rome" (10-11; my italics). A living greatness, one might say, stands up against the last remains of Rome's greatest days. The next fifteen lines (12-26) follow up with a complex series of juxtapositions of life and death, animals and man, sound and silence: "trees," "watch-dog," "owls," "sentinels," "birds" vs. "rents of ruin," "Caesars' palace," "time-worn breach"; the baying of the dog, the owl's long cry vs. "the fitful song/ Begun and died upon the gentle wind," the "tuneless" birds of night. There is not much "memorable perfection" here so far, but, on the contrary, a sense of desolation and foreboding. Even the vegetation which is growing among the ruins—and might, at first glance, seem to symbolize the promise of stubborn continuing life—is ungraspable, phantasmal: the trees "Waved dark in the blue midnight," the cypresses, though they stand within a bowshot "Appeared to skirt the horizon." Even the ivy "usurps" the laurel's place of growth. There is nothing beautiful or admirable here because there is nothing to get hold of. Everything bespeaks not only decay but also decadence. What Manfred, the perceiver, suddenly seizes upon is what nature truly illuminates for him: a potent symbol of power, of defiance against a surely crushing force. The tone of this passage suddenly changes as Manfred's vision takes in the gladiatorial circus, the ring of combat:

Ivy usurps the laurel's place of growth;
But the gladiators' bloody Circus stands,
A noble wreck in ruinous perfection,
While Caesar's chambers, and the Augustan halls,
Grovel on earth in indistinct decay. (26-30; my italics)

Here all of those juxtapositions I have previously mentioned come
together in two imposing personifications. The Circus takes on the qualities of a living, physically defeated but mentally victorious gladiator; the ring suggests all the attributes of a power which knows it will be crushed by superior force, but takes its dignity in defiance nonetheless. On the other hand, we see the chambers and the halls, both linked with the "tyrant" figure, that "superior force" which would have dropped the thumb to start the combat and which now grovels in its "victory." Tyranny versus freedom; absolute physical power defied by the gladiator's own, a symbol of his greater spiritual defiance—that is what this scene renders vividly for Manfred. What "language of another world" he learns here is genuinely the language of heroic defiance; and it is a language which for the poet is that of "imagination" as Pafford suggests.

Manfred's remark that "'Tis strange that I recall it at this time" (42) does not signal a rejection of the "earthly vision of immortality," however; here I would strongly disagree with Pafford. The lesson Manfred has learned has had to do with himself, and whatever "immortality" he sensed involved a realization that "sceptred sovereigns ... rule/ Our spirits from their urns" (40-41) only insofar as we match them with the same defiant spirit they showed. That is, they "rule" us because we wish them to, by declaiming against a superior force as spiritedly as they did. Manfred may find this recollection strange but surely we do not. His time is fast approaching when he will either be "ruled" or not; his task will be not to put his thoughts "in pensive order"
(45) but to say as a gladiator might, "I stand/ Upon my strength
--I do defy--deny--/ Spurn back, and scorn ye!--" (III, iv, 119-
121). Far from being a moment of "no substantiality" as Pafford
contends, that lesson in the "language of another world" has been
valuable and well-learned, for it is the language of defiance
with which Manfred will exit this life.

To summarize my argument thus far, then, we might say the
following: (1) the value of art for Byron lies not in its pro-
ducts but in its process, (2) this process is a creative one, and
so at odds with the fallen world as we know it, (3) nonetheless,
this process argues that while we are "clay" we are not yet
"dirt"--it is a process which stems from the divine "spark" in
all men, (4) the creative act provides an escape from the "real"
world and a cathartic release of energy, but it is also in itself
a positive force of defiance. These are the major points of my
argument, all of them in need of some qualification, but for the
moment reasonably complete and accurate. Suffice it to say here
that the "how" missing from Ridenour's argument is this: poetry
helps man to come to terms with his chaotic world by providing a
means of defying it, as well as its debilitating suggestion that
man is mere dirt.

I have said that for Byron, man's tragedy is his possession
of "sublimity" or "grandeur of soul," not its absence. Given this
fact, I think it is easy to see why there is such constant postur-
ing in Byron, and why his comments on writing--especially in the
letters and journals--so often depict contempt and disgruntle-
ment. It is as though man is stamped with an energy that demands
the fullest kind of release, and writing somehow falls short as a means of achieving forcefulness. How often do we hear remarks like the following:

the mighty stir made about scribbling and scribes, by themselves and others—a sign of effeminacy, degeneracy, and weakness. Who would write, who had anything better to do? 'Action—action—action'—said Demonthenes: 'Actions—actions', I say, and not writing,—least of all rhyme. Look at the querulous and monotonous lives of the 'genus;'—except Cervantes, Tasso, Dante, Ariosto, Kleist (who were brave and active citizens), Aeschylus, Sophocles, and some other of the antiques also—what a worthless, idle brood it is! (LJ, II, 345; my italics)

I have underscored the words "effeminacy" and "weakness" (one could also include "degeneracy"), for they suggest precisely what it is about writing that bothers Byron—namely, the possibility that its force is not sufficiently "masculine" and powerful. And it is the kind of complaint we often stumble over in the letters, diaries and journals: "What the devil had I to do with scribbling? It is too late to inquire, and all regret is useless.... I shall think better of myself, if I have sense to stop now" (LJ, II, 402). But let us not be swayed too strongly by these remarks, or at least let us place them in a proper perspective. Byron is hardly reliable in his letters and journals as he says himself.17 And besides, it is all too easy to misplace the emphasis in these comments on art. In fact, I would argue that the comments are not really about art so much as they are about the self and its power, its grandeur that seeks some form of expression—specifically, a public, nay a cosmic, expression. That the poet turns to poetry as a release for his energies does, I think, sufficient-
ly argue that composition serves as a vehicle for defiance. In this respect it has value for Byron. But the most thorough-going power demands "Actions" as Byron says. It requires more than a process which symbolically defies chaos (and this is what the act of poetic creation does); it requires a product, something which one can do.

To approach this problem yet another way: there is really nothing intrinsically wrong or debasing about art for Byron. What is "wrong" is that the man of power—especially the artist—can rest content with the half-satisfactory act of composing. He can make it his "profession," as Byron would say.

Did you read [Leigh Hunt's] skimble-skamble about Wordsworth being at the head of his own profession, in the eyes of those who followed it? I thought that poetry was an art, or an attribute, and not a profession;—but be it one, is that at the head of your profession in your eyes? I'll be curst if he is of mine, or ever shall be. (LJ, IV, 238)

Or, as Byron says somewhat prophetically in another letter to Moore:

If I live ten years longer, you will see, however, that it is not over with me—I don't mean in literature, for that is nothing; and it may seem odd enough to say, I do not think it my vocation. But you will see that I shall do something or other—the times and fortune permitting—that, 'like the cosmogony, or creation of the world, will puzzle the philosophers of all ages.' (LJ, IV, 62-63; my italics)

In both of these quotations I think we can see what Byron is trying to argue: namely, that man's dignity, greatness, "sublimity" is real, and is in need of some kind of vehicle for expression, a vehicle in some ways satisfied by the act of writing but only in-
so far as it validates the fact that one does indeed have power of defiance. However, as a force capable of exerting itself on others poetry can, and must, be called in question.

This, I maintain, is a vision of a remarkable, and decidedly modern, tragedy. Man's condition is being talked about here in terms which are applicable as much to twentieth-century man as they are to Byron and the men of his time. The tragedy is that we contain the spark of energy or divinity without the means of actualizing it. We can symbolize our greatness in art—and so dignify ourselves—but we cannot secure a profession in this fallen world that matches our forceful talents. Consequently, the danger is that we fall back on art as valuable in its products rather than its process, thus ridding ourselves of whatever dignity there is in its symbolic defiance. Art then becomes not a force of any kind, but a self-gratification or self-indulgence, totally contrary to what it should be. This is clearly what Byron is maintaining when he describes Keats's poetry as a sexual self-mutilation, "a sort of mental masturbation" (LJ, V, 117), and when he constantly rails at Wordsworth and "the Lakers" for their unintelligibility. In both cases Byron is pointing out a betrayal of poetry's force; Keats, Wordsworth, Southey, Coleridge, and the like write poetry which does not defy, does not "go outward," but merely retreats back upon the self. Byron will have none of this, not because the self is mere "dirt" or "clay" unworthy of attention (he will have none of this either), but because the self has an enormous energy that needs to be actualized publicly in the fallen world. Since there is little chance of
exerting this force in a "professional" way, poetry takes on additional status as at least one way of defying the universe.

In short, let us be wary of Byron's remarks about the value of composition. Very often his sneering tone results not really from a contempt for art but for the self and its inability to impose itself "with and upon the Universe." It seems to me that the consciously exaggerated (and at times bathetically preposterous) tone with which Byron assails art itself signals a flagrant posturing: "the reading or non-reading a book will never keep down a single petticoat" (Q, 493); "As to defining what a poet should be, it is not worth while, for what are they worth? what have they done?" (LJ, V, 196); "I have a famour Bavarian artist taking some views of Athens, etc., etc., for me. This will be better than scribbling, a disease I hope myself cured of" (Q, 91). We must remember and put against these remarks those comments which, in a noticeably less exaggerated fashion, describe the sublimity of art both generally and specifically:

What is Poetry?—The feeling of a Former world and Future. (LJ, V, 187)

the tragedy of Sappho is superb and sublime! There is no denying it. The man has done a great thing in writing that play. And who is he? I know him not; but ages will. 'Tis a high intellect. (LJ, V, 171)

Read Johnson's Vanity of Human Wishes,—all the examples and mode of giving them sublime, as well as the latter part, with the exception of an occasional couplet. (LJ, V, 161)

Moore has a peculiarity of talent, or rather talents,—poetry, music, voice, all his own; and an expression in each, which never was, nor will be, possessed by another. But he is capable of still higher flights in poetry....There is nothing Moore may not do,
if he will but seriously set about it.
(LJ, II, 333)

'Christabel'--I won't have any one sneer at 'Christabel:' it is a fine wild poem.
(LJ, III, 369)

Do you wish for invention, imagination, sublimity, character? seek them in the Rape of the Lock, the Fables of Dryden, the Ode of Saint Cecilia's Day, and Absalom and Achitophel.
(LJ, IV, 489)

And as for the power of poetry to be more than symbolic, we might well attend to one of Byron's more serious moments in his letters when he entertains the notion that art really is a public force:

That crazy forgotten book, the 'Pursuits of Literature', contains one observation insisting notice. 'Literature', says the writer, 'well or ill conducted, is the great engine by which all civilized states must ultimately be supported or overthrown.' It was a difficult point to decide whether religion, education or literature, in the hands of power, would tend most to its stability. It is certain, however, if by any means it could obtain all three, its influence would be unbounded, and a nation so enslaved would enjoy only an automaton existence, following every impulse of its rulers.
(Q, 694)

Art, then, has an important place in Byron's thinking, and we need to view his deprecatory remarks in the same way we do his constant claim that he "is done with writing." The simple fact of the matter is that Byron kept on writing despite all his protesting; and, perhaps more importantly, his poetry increasingly attends to the figure of the poet himself until in Don Juan we have a poet writing a poem about the activity of writing a poem. Nor should we forget that Byron's poses--both in letters and verse--are often the poses of the satirist. This point, it seems to me, needs stressing for two very crucial reasons: first,
"satire" in itself presupposes a certain view of art's meaning and power; and second, it is a type of literature which not only encourages but demands the assumptions of various poses or roles. To finalize my argument about Byron's view of the creative process, I would like to take each of these points about satire in turn, at the same time focusing attention on his great work Don Juan.

I think there are few critics who would disagree that Byron's temperament is fundamentally an Augustan one when it comes to matters of art. His praise of Pope is of course very well known (and I shall discuss it in detail later in my study); Don Juan, as Ridenour points out, is introduced "with an elaborately traditional satire in the Augustan manner"; John Lauber remarks how easy it would be "to create an image of a neo-classic Byron." But I think that Byron's Augustan or neo-classic bent goes much beyond either the technical use of the satiric genre or his feeling that "the main line of English poetry was the line of Dryden and Pope, not that of Spenser and Milton." It goes straight to the problem which dominates the Augustan satirist: what is man—beast or angel—and what can art do to (a) define man, and (b) alter him for the best? Certainly this is a gross over-simplification, but I think it puts us on the right track. Byron's dilemma over man's nature—his double identity as "clay" and "divine spark"—is most decidedly the Augustan dilemma; his haunting desire to comprehend man's complex, and contradictory, nature finds its counterpart in writers like Swift and Pope. And it is out of this dilemma that satire issues forth: satire, which at
one and the same time displays man's ruination (both his world and himself) and the possibility of doing something to change that ruin. In other words, satire develops out of a decided attitude toward man, and part of its province is to strip away the coverings of things in order to dissolve the cant, the hypocrisy, the fatuous complacence that hides the true nature of things.

To this extent Ridenour is perfectly correct when he sees in Don Juan (one might think of Gulliver's Travels as well) "a rather terrifying vision of a personal and cultural dead end." But satire does not stop here, for such a vision—however true it may be—rests solely on a view of man and not at all on a view of itself, except perhaps negatively. Practically, Ridenour points out, "it would be pernicious"; and while Ridenour is not sure that a limited vision of this kind is "an aesthetic disadvantage," I think it is.

Satire, as we all know, strips away the coverings of things in order to expose what is really there. It is a device of moral clarification whether it wants to be or not. This, I am sure, is the sense in which Ridenour sees Don Juan as helpful to man in his fallen state: because of its commitment to depicting that state vividly and forthrightly, the poem irritates us into an awareness of that state, thus "providing ... a means of dealing with it without the hypocrisy and self-deception integral to Love and Glory." Until one knows what is really the case, one cannot alter things for the better. So far I would agree with Ridenour, though I would go on to say that satire for Byron, as for Swift, offers not merely a coherent vision of ruin but also a coherent
vision of how one strives against that ruin. In other words, *Don Juan* is not just a satiric poem, but a moral satiric poem as Byron himself said, however quippingly: "*Don Juan* will be known by and bye, for what it is intended,—a *Satire* on abuses of the present states of Society, and not an eulogy of vice....No girl will ever be seduced by reading D.J." (*LI*, VI, 155-156). Nor is the poem merely a moral exposé; it offers, as I have said, a vision of how one strives against the very evils depicted in the poem, and that vision is intimately bound up in the controlling voice and presence of the poet-narrator.

Byron brings to *Don Juan* a particular vision of man. In fact, Kathleen Williams's remark on Swift applies equally well to Byron: "Swift's writings are shaped, as he was anxious to make his friends understand, by a deliberate and considered attitude towards the nature of man and of the world man has made for himself." Perhaps one can quarrel with the degree to which Byron's attitude is "deliberate" and "considered," but surely not with its being as potently fixed in his mind as it was in Swift's. And also like Swift, we find that vision often revealed in the surface qualities of the persona—especially if he is a writer. The poet-narrator of *Don Juan* is, in some respects, not at all unlike Swift's favorite choice of the hack writer. He is careless, sloppy, a "rhymester," a dealer in words rather than thoughts: "This should be entre nous, for Julia thought/ In French, but then the rhyme would go for nought" (I, lxxxiv); "it would strike you blind/ Could I do justice to the full detail;/ So, luckily for both, my phrases fail" (V, xcvi). One could choose examples by
the score which depict the poet-narrator's off-the-cuff concern for language and poetic endeavor. The point, however, is that the narrative poet is used in *Don Juan* as Swift so frequently uses his hack writer— as a surface *exemplum* of the evils of the age. In one sense at least he is a typical product of his day, content, smugly complacent with the superfices of life since they are all that really matter to a decadent society. Indeed, if the point of writing is to give a "true" picture of one's society (and Ridenour has shown us so very well the full range of meanings inherent in that word "true") what better way than to have the poet-narrator confess that his work, in all its shortcomings, is largely due to a lack of material in the world at large: "I want a hero: an uncommon want;/... But can't find any in the present age/ Fit for my poem (that is, for my new one);/ So, as I said, I'll take my friend Don Juan" (I, i, v).

But the use of the persona in *Don Juan* is by no means a fixed one, and we must attend to this important fact. For Ridenour, the mask we encounter in the Dedication is a "traditional satiric mask. He is a modest man (content with pedestrian muses) who writes 'honest simple verse'—in other words, the plain blunt man we have been taught to recognize in Augustan satire." His nature and function will develop greatly throughout the poem, Ridenour adds, "But the *persona* remains central, and the significance of the speaker of the cantos is largely dependant on values first brought out in terms of the more conventional speaker of the Dedication." Above all, what we notice in the speaker of the Dedication is that he is not above taking up various roles
himself. Ridenour comments, for example, on the contrast between
the narrator as he "prefers to chat quietly as one gentleman to
another" and his readiness "to raise his voice when truth as he
sees it or civilized standards as he has received them seem
threatened."\(^{27}\)

I think, however, that the shifting mask in the
Dedication is a little more complex than Ridenour suggests. What
we find in the Dedication to Don Juan is a very fine example of
the persona of formal satire as described by Maynard Mack.\(^{28}\)

At various times the narrator is the vir bonus, or moral man ("I
would not imitate the petty thought,\(/
Nor coin my self-love to so
base a vice" \(\text{vi}\); at other times he is the naif ("You're
shabby fellows--true--but poets still,\(/
And duly seated on the im-
mortal hill" \(\text{xvi}\); and at yet other times the hero, courageous
and indignant ("Where shall I turn me not to view its bonds,\ /
For
I will never feel them" \(\text{xvi}\). This should prepare us for the
highly shifting persona of the poem proper; and of course it
should also prepare us to take some of what he says seriously,
some of it not.

It seems to me that in Don Juan we have, and are intended to
have, a strong sense of a controlling poetic force behind the
characters and the persona. In this respect, the poem is very
Swiftian. Kathleen Williams, in analyzing Swift's complex per-
sonae, has offered an insight that is immensely profitable when
applied to Don Juan:

more typical of Swift is the character used
not like a mask, to conceal, but like a puppet,
to express openly through its antics the opinions
of its master. He does not hide behind his
mouthpiece, but is constantly in view, manipu-
lating it, laughing at it, keeping us conscious that it exists only as it is created and used by him. In his most important satires the mouthpieces are themselves ironically treated, so that we feel ourselves to be in touch not so much with a convincing creation as with the mind which simultaneously creates and criticizes it. Nor are the mouthpieces developed consistently an important word when talking about Byron as characters, for such a method allows only of comparatively simple satiric effects, and Swift's aims are complex and inclusive.

Here in a nutshell is the clue to confronting Byron's enormously complex shifting persona and the uses to which he puts it. Above all, this is an approach which centers attention right where it belongs—on the activity of composition, its value, and the poetic power which is controlling it. The poem Don Juan really has itself as its subject—that is, the "act" of writing—a subject initiated in the Dedication with its exempla of bad writers and carried in the self-reflexive comments of the poet-narrator. Over all there sounds the voice of the controlling intelligence, the "creator," who sees his work as a moral one.

Don Juan, then, is indeed an Augustan work in many respects, especially in its poses and masks. And like any number of Augustan satires it asks that we penetrate through the maze of red herrings, ribald laughter, carefully crafted bathos, and world-weariness to the truth it is trying to put forward. It is a poem which asks us to see its posings as exempla of all the things wrong in this world, yet also asks us to see the genuine skill of depiction (and moral basis) as an exemplum of what can be achieved by creative man. One method for controlling this double view is to make the poet-narrator as malleable as possible. Another—and
the one I shall deal with here—is to employ a very traditional Augustan device: careful definition of single terms. This is a device we associate with Fielding, of course, who delights in taking a single word—"honor" or "prudence," let us say—and applying it to as many and varied occasions as he can. The result of this technique is delightful: we witness the ways in which the word is bent, twisted, mutilated, and contorted to fit the bias of whoever has grasped hold of it, and so the satire is reolent. But at the same time—with each application of that term—we are watching a gradual restoration of the term back to its "true" meaning. That is, we are seeing a definition by negatives as each application of the word leaves something to be desired.  

This is precisely what Byron does with the term "sublime" and its cognates in Don Juan. As he keeps coming back to the term we see it applied in an astonishingly Fieldian fashion until ultimately we are back to its "true" meaning, and, I might add, the true moral lesson of the poem.

It is impossible here to treat the many applications of the word "sublime" since it occurs often in Don Juan, but we can profitably attend to some of its more important occurrences. "Sublimity," we soon see, can come to mean not "height" in its sense of imaginative truth and clarity but quite the opposite: "Her /'Donna Inez/ serious sayings darken'd to sublimity" (I, xii). The suggestion, of course, is that Donna Inez is so profound, so serious, that she is unintelligible; as such, her "sayings" do not transport us so much as they bewilder us, however "high" they may be. There is the "natural sublime" depicted in Canto
III: "A taste seen in the choice of his abode,/ A love of music, and of scenes sublime" (III, lvi). Donna Inez sees her husband's agonies "with such sublimity" (I, xxix). Juan finds himself with "Longings sublime" (I, xciil). Mistress Julia asks her husband about "that sublime of rascals your attorney" (I, cli). Not even "blest sherbet, sublimed with snow" (II, clxxx), we are told, can match up to hock and soda-water. Then there is the lovely Aurora Raby who "had something of sublime/ In eyes which sadly shone" (XV, xlv). There is the poet-narrator's attempt to achieve a "sublime comparison" in his writing (XV, lix). The sad, or serious, we are told, is "a source of the sublime" (XIII, i); and Bishop Berkeley is said to have made a "sublime discovery" (XI, ii). I have chosen ten instances in which the term "sublime" (or its cognates) is used, and each of them--grossly misapplied--casts a little light on what Byron comes to see as the "true" sublime. What we witness in each case is the poet-narrator's intentional misunderstanding of the term, his proclivity for using it literally (as Swift so often does with his metaphors\(^3\)), or his delight in seeing it applied to a subject which little deserves the term. It is all very comic, of course, but at the same time we can readily see that Byron's purpose is a particularly serious one. He is applying a subtle version of an old satiric trick--blame through praise--by endowing a totally unworthy subject with the highest word at his command. Lambro, for instance, may revel in "scenes sublime," but he finds neither ennoblement nor dignity in them, apparently, since he is a pirate and a serpent in the Garden. Donna Inez's sublimity may provoke
the world to say "What magnanimity!" but the poet-narrator is clearly not about to second the remark, for the point is that Donna Inez is perhaps her husband's greatest ailment. Juan's longings may be "sublime" in the sense they are centred on high (he has become, like Coleridge, a metaphysician, says the narrator), but at the same time they are decidedly "low": "If you think 'twas philosophy that this did, / I can't help thinking puberty assisted" (I, xciii). Mistress Julia may, paradoxically, call a "rascal" sublime, but that is to be expected since she is herself the most accomplished rascal of all, and so is used both to paradox and misapplication of terms. As for sherbet being sublimed with snow, we all know that "snow" sublimes Mont Blanc and every other sort of peak and so, if one has a facile, associative, and careless mind, why not see a dish of sherbet the same way? Aurora, of course, is a "star" and consequently shines "on high," which, to the mind of the poet-narrator, conjures up some half-baked notion of "seraphs"' eyes, hence Aurora's "something of sublime/ In eyes." The joke, of course, is that despite her name Aurora lacks something of brilliance to say the least, hence the association of "sublime" with her eyes sadly shining provides not "transport" but mockery. The poet's sublime comparison in XV, lix deserves the term only because he has indeed gone on high for his literary showing-off, dragging in Aurora (the sun) to show that Aurora (the person) is to Haidee like a flower to a gem (or the true sun to its earthly namesake); it is all very flashy, of course, and so a "sublime," but essentially preposterous, invention. The "sublime" as a kind of serious
writing takes its place at the beginning of Canto XIII, though it is described in such comic terms that the poet-narrator gains his point and does not forfeit comedy after all:

I NOW mean to be serious;--it is time,
   Since laughter now-a-days is deem'd too serious;
A jest at Vice by Virtue's call'd a crime,
   And critically held as deleterious;
Besides, the sad's a source of the sublime,
   Although when long a little apt to weary us;
And therefore shall my lay soar high and solemn,
   As an old temple dwindled to a column. (XIII, i)

Bishop Berkeley's discovery, of course, is "sublime" because it is "metaphysical" (so, literally "high") as well as "revelatory" (a system for understanding the universe of matter); but again the lighthearted joke is that it is so far "above" us that we might as well give up on it.

To explicate fully the many implications of even these ten instances I have offered would take at least as many pages. But I think we can, nonetheless, see the major points Byron is trying to make. In each separate instance of its usage, we learn a little of what the sublime is not, and so, by extension, what it is. We learn that "sublimity" implies perspecuity, moral and spiritual greatness, the highest reachings of the mind, truthfulness, the most worthy objects, good sense, and pertinence; nor is it restricted to any particular kind of writing, sad or comic. Any composition which seeks to reflect these many qualities, or encourage them, can be considered "sublime."

Why else, I might ask, does Byron consider Don Juan "sublime"? And of course he does. He says as much in his typical, mocking fashion when he writes to Kinnaird: "As to 'Don Juan', confess,
confess—you dog and be candid—that it is the sublime of that there sort of writing—it may be bawdy but is it not good English?" (Q, 491). Setting the tone of this letter aside there is truth enough in it. For Byron, Don Juan clearly is sublime, not because it "soars" in the more traditional sense of that term (and Ridenour has shown it does), not because its similes and figures of speech are vivid and imaginative (which, incidentally, they are), not because the subject or conception of his epic is "grand" (which, all levity aside, it is), but above all because its commitment is to truth—not merely truth about depicting the fallen world as we know it, but also truth about the things which are sublime in man and which the artist is not prepared to abandon. Byron may jest about the sublimity of Don Juan frequently in the course of its composition, but in the background we can hear the voice of the controlling creator wishing us to sit up and take notice of the full "truthfulness" of his work. In Canto XIV, for example, the poet-narrator describes his work as a straw which is blown by the wind (i.e. the mind's whims), "a bubble, not blown up for praise,/ But just to play with, as an infant plays" (XIV, viii); and he goes on to say that composition no longer has a purpose for him as it did in his youth: "In youth I wrote because my mind was full,/ And now because I feel it growing dull" (XIV, x). With stanza xii, however, there is a curious shift in tone as the poet-narrator begins to relate his act of composition to its "success":

I think that were I certain of success,  
I hardly could compose another line:  
So long I've battled either more or less,
That no defeat can drive me from the Nine.
This feeling 'tis not easy to express,
And yet, 'tis not affected, I opine.
In play, there are two pleasures for your choosing—
The one is winning, and the other losing.

(XIV, xii)

At first glance, one might assume that "success" here merely means worldly fame, since that has been the subject thus far. But it can also mean success in other terms—enlightening the fallen world, perhaps, or success in making man realize the true worth of poetry and its power. These latter readings are not unduly inventive, I think, for in the stanza immediately following (xiii) the poet-narrator suddenly insists upon the fact that he deals in "truth." Now certainly this can mean something like the following: "because I deal with the truth and reality of your fallen state you accord me no praise or favor." But it can also imply something far more meaningful: "I do deal with truth—heroically—and I will not compromise this for worldly success; if you wish a true instance of sublimity, therefore, look at my writings." What begins as a kind of world-weariness or indifference about fame in stanza xi is predicated upon the same indifference about literature in stanza viii. But by stanza xii the tone has altered considerably, and in stanza xiii that same act of writing which was depicted four stanzas earlier as a mere straw cast on the wind here takes on value as the symbol of a defiant truth-teller. The persona, which hitherto in this section of Canto XIV has posed as an unconcerned purveyor of words, emerges as the hero, still another of the formal masks of satire; and most importantly, we can see in this mask the face of the con-
trolling poet, insisting to us that we look beyond the silly con-
tentions of his world-weary persona and see the distinguishing
feature of this apparently ribald poem: the fact that it "rises"
to truth. To make sure we do not miss this, the creator has his
poet-narrator tell the truth about our "common" world, at the
same time declaring its unfitness as subject matter. Ironically,
the poet-narrator makes this declamation on the basis that "common"
life lacks essential truthfulness and so is not "sublime." Ergo,
he throws into relief, without realizing it, the truth-telling
nature of the poem being written. It emerges as a true illus-
tration of "the sublime" and the controlling poet has scored a vic-
tory.

With much to excite, there's little to exalt;
Nothing that speaks to all men and all times;
A sort of varnish over every fault;
A kind of common-place, even in their crimes;
Factitious passions, wit without much salt,
A want of that true nature which sublimes
Whate'er it shows with truth; a smooth monotony
Of character, in those at least who have got any.
(XIV, xvi)

I think we have here an excellent illustration of the subtlety
with which Byron employs his persona and the final uses to which
it can be put. We have as well a fine example of how one word--
in this case "sublime"--weathers a series of misapplications in
order to be put back in proper perspective. We see it run through
every possible meaning by the poet-narrator ("height," "majesty," etc.), each of these remarkably unsuitable, then suddenly witness
it in its "true" meaning when the poet-narrator comes around to
the subject of larger, more general poetic truth. We ultimately
find that "sublime" and its modifications applies not to rank, or
height, or language, or scenery, but to the dignity of a mind committed to the "highest" ideal: truth.

This all-too-brief discussion of Don Juan has, I trust, made two points clear: for Byron, art does indeed have a value since it teaches truth, and as for the sublime, it is a term properly applicable to the truth-teller—that is, the creative poet. Both of these ideas are enunciated even more clearly in the Byron-Bowles controversy, and I would like to end my discussion of Byron by attending to this. At the same time, it will be helpful to bring in some supporting examples from Childe Harold.

Reverend William Lisle Bowles's Invariable Principles of Poetry (1819) was annoying to Byron by virtue of its title alone: "Away ... with this cant about ... 'invariable principles of poetry'" (LJ, IV, 557). Never a friend to systems of any kind, Byron saw poetry as something quite beyond "invariable" principles: "Why, Man, the Soul of such writing is its licence; at least, the liberty of the licence, if one likes—not that one should abuse it: it is like trial by Jury and Peerage and the Habeas Corpus--a very fine thing, but chiefly in the reversion; because no one wishes to be tried for the mere pleasure of proving his possession of the privilege" (LJ, IV, 342). One is reminded here of the play in Don Juan on Aristotle's rules, "The Vade Mecum of the true sublime" (I, cci), and the threat to write poetical commandments in prose: "I'll call the work 'Longinus o'er a Bottle,' Or, Every Poet his own Aristotle!" (I, cciv). Bowles was apparently oblivious to the colossal contradiction in his work: namely, that there are "invariable principles" for achieving the sublime. Not even
Longinus's observations on rhetoric could be stretched this far. Nonetheless, Bowles sets down his laws, and they are as follows:

1st. Works of Nature, speaking of those more beautiful and sublime, are more sublime and beautiful than works of Art; therefore more poetical.——2d. The passions of the human heart, which are the same in all ages, and which are the causes of the sublime and pathetic in sentiment, are more poetical than artificial manners.——3d. The great poet of human passions is the most consummate master of his art; and the heroic, the lofty, and the pathetic, as belonging to this class, are distinguished.——4th. If these premises be true, the descriptive poet, who paints from an intimate knowledge of external nature, is more poetical, supposing the fidelity and execution equal, not than the painter of human passions, but the painter of external circumstances in artificial life; as COWPER paints a morning walk, and POPE a game of cards! (LJ, IV, 532)

In short, Bowles sees "the sublime" as adherent in a subject, or at least adherent in varying degrees in a subject. There seems no room in his invariable principles for the imagination of the artist. Byron's response to Bowles addresses this problem head-on as Byron brings attention to rest neither on art or nature per se but on man, and specifically the artist with his creative power.

Nature in itself, he maintains, "Nature, exactly, simply, barely, Nature, will make no great artist of any kind, and least of all a poet—the most artificial, perhaps, of all artists in his very essence. With regard to natural imagery, the poets are obliged to take some of their best illustrations from art" (LJ, IV, 550). Art itself, and especially sculpture, occasionally "represents and bodies forth that ideal beauty and sublimity which
is never to be found in actual Nature" (LJ, IV, 549). Therefore, some examples of art—St. Peter's, the Coliseum, the Pantheon, the dying Gladiator, the Laocoön, etc.—"are as poetical as Mont Blanc or Mount Aetna, perhaps still more so, as they are direct manifestations of mind, and presuppose poetry in their conception; and have, moreover, as being such, a something of actual life, which cannot belong to any part of inanimate nature" (LJ, IV, 548). Clearly, Byron's emphasis here is on the mind as an instrument of creative ordering through imagination; that is where sublimity lies and not in the "thing" confronting one. "Away, then, with this cant about nature, and 'invariable principles of poetry!'" says Byron. "A great artist will make a block of stone as sublime as a mountain, and a good poet can imbue a pack of cards with more poetry than inhabits the forests of America. It is the business and the proof of a poet to give the lie to the proverb, and sometimes to 'make a silken purse out of a sow's ear,' and to conclude with another homely proverb, 'A good workman will not find fault with his tools" (LJ, IV, 557). The proverbs are hardly sublime, but Byron makes his point. Poetry is the expression of a man's soul and talents; therefore, whatever sublimity is displayed in his work comes not from the materials he uses but from himself.

Poetry is an act of creative ordering as Byron talks about it here. The imagination of the poet, in its moments of greatest sublimity, can "reconcile poetry with truth" (we can hear something of Don Juan at this point). For Byron, the supreme example is Pope:
Of his power in the passions, in description, in the mock heroic, I leave others to descant. I take him on his strong ground as an ethical poet: in the former, none excel; in the mock heroic and the ethical, none equal him; and, in my mind, the latter is the highest of all poetry, because it does that in verse, which the greatest of men have wished to accomplish in prose. If the essence of poetry must be a lie, throw it to the dogs, or banish it from your republic, as Plato would have done. He who can reconcile poetry with truth and wisdom, is the only true 'poet' in its real sense, 'the maker,' 'the creator,'— (LJ, IV, 559-560)

We notice that Byron is back once again to the idea of truth, and its application to a deserving word. In this case the "true" sense of the word "poet" is described in exactly the terms I have been employing throughout my study of the sublime: the "creator" or "maker" whose use of language is an ethical matter since it is an ordering of our chaotic existence. That Byron should choose Pope as his great example of the ordering, sublime poet—rather than Milton, let us say, or Shakespeare—is surprising only if one understands the word "sublime" in a limited way. And very clearly "sublime" does not mean for Byron high-flying language, or the emotional rushing of deep passion, or the awesome prospect of a mountain. Any of these can be made sublime by the perceiving, ordering mind; but otherwise they are merely the "tools" of "A good workman." Pope, then, is almost a logical choice, I should think, for he seems to lack nothing: imagination, invention, and passion are equally part of his province, says Byron, along with those fine points which denote the true "maker"—sense, harmony, and effect. And let us note here that Byron is not being anti-Romantic or anything like it; he is merely pointing out the vast difference between a poetry which uses unbridled licence (for him,
Keats and "the Lakers") as opposed to a poetry which possesses imagination, invention, and passion, yet still "will stand the test of minute or verbal criticism" (LJ, I, 121). It is the kind of poetry which Byron evidently thought important enough to follow as his model in Don Juan (specifically, The Dunciad) and which, it seems to me, argues in itself that he was attempting to write an ethical poem.

One last point should be mentioned before closing this chapter, and that is the role played by nature in Byron's view of the sublime. Certainly the most complete examination of this subject is that by Ernest J. Lovell, Jr., and while I admire the thoroughness of his study, I have to differ with some of his most fundamental points. First, nature is not a hostile or indifferent force in Byron's poetry. Rather, it is a real and viable symbol of defiant power which teaches not a Wordsworthian unity or "oneness" but the virtue of "self-ness." What nature provides for Byron's heroes is a confirmation of their own power. It occasionally brings with it other satisfactions--peace, or awefulness, or beauty--but preeminently nature's significance is found not in what it gives but what man can realize in himself by responding to it. Second, Byron did not "satirize the entire Return to Nature Movement" because he was "essentially a city dweller" or because "he failed to develop a satisfactory philosophy or religion of nature" or for any other such reason. The fact of the matter is that he simply turned his attention to man (as Lovell himself points out, though for the wrong reasons). If the proper study of mankind is man, that is precisely where Byron follows his master.
I shall take each of these points in order, and quickly summarize the argument. First, nature is often described as a "home" by Byron, a place where his hero can find "friends" (*Childe Harold*, III, xiii), and this terminology is both confusing and misleading. Such words imply a union or spiritual kinship as well as a benevolent quality in the natural world. In point of fact, it is not really the material world that commands attention in *Childe Harold* III so much as it is the figure of the poet who stands in it. Consequently, whether nature is "benevolent," "indifferent," or "hostile" is finally beside the point, since it functions in the poem as a symbol of that same "enduring" power that marks the artist. Nature, to put it simply, is nothing without man. Man, if he wishes to be something, can find in nature not solace, comfort, peace, a "loss" of the self in natural splendor, but a vivid rendering of energy that is endurable and undefeatable. And, of course, he can find in nature the emblem of himself: "the far roll/ Of your departing voices, is the knoll/ Of what in me is sleepless,—if I rest" (III, xcvi).

Byron uses nature chiefly to point out qualities of man, and especially the poet, not to suggest that nature is finally a destructive or indifferent force which thwarts man's attempts to find a harmony with it. There are two reasons for this: first, "sublimity" is a quality of the mind rather than the scene, and second, the power of defiance necessitates an exertion of self-identity, not its extinction in the power of some vast scene. In his journal, for instance, Byron records how nature at one point has no impact upon him, and clearly the fault lies not in
the scenery (i.e. the workman's tools), but in the workman himself:

I am a lover of Nature and an admirer of
Beauty. I can bear fatigue and welcome
privation, and have seen some of the noblest
views in the world. But in all this—the
recollections of bitterness, and more es-
pecially of recent and more home desolation,
which must accompany me through life, have
preyed upon me here; and neither the music
of the Shepherd, the crashing of the Awa-
lanche, nor the torrent, the mountain, the
Glacier, the Forest, nor the Cloud, have
for one moment lightened the weight upon
my heart, nor enabled me to lose my own
wretched identity in the majesty, and the
power, and the Glory, around, above, and
beneath me. (LJ, III, 364)

As Byron details each aspect of the sublime scene—the avalanche, torrent, etc.—we come to realize that for him "sublimity" re-
quires a greeting of the spirit, and here there has simply been
none at all. Nature, then, remains exactly as it has always been,
not hostile or indifferent, merely "enduring" and waiting for a
subject to view it.

As for the second point about Byron's satirizing the Return
to Nature Movement, I cannot for a moment believe it. I have
suggested that Byron finally came to focus his attention on man
rather than his natural world; that is, nature disappears from
Byron's later poetry not because he has come to distrust nature,
as Lovell says, but because the role of the poet—always a pres-
ent part of the earlier poetry—has issued forth as the control-
ling voice and order-bringer. There is a greater poetic confi-
dence in that role for Byron, and no need to pit his hero-poet
against the symbolic natural powers which surround him.

Byron is certainly not a "theorist" of the sublime or of
literary matters in general. He disliked systems far too much to offer any theories about nature or literature or the self. But despite this, as well as the posturing and contradicting, I think we can agree that John Lauber is correct when he says it is "possible, at least, to discover some central and relatively stable principles" in Byron's thinking. What we come up with is the following: (1) Byron sees "the sublime" not as a vague aesthetic of terror or an emotional overflow of passionate feelings, but as a quality of spirit and defiance; (2) this quality is best revealed in the poet, for whom the act of writing counts more than the completed product; (3) man is in part a divine creature possessed of incredible energy and constantly in need of exerting it; (4) the act of creating with this energy brings with it no "hope" in any usual sense of that word; (5) the driving concern of Byron's poetry is the definition of man's complex, fallen nature, and part of that definition centers in the very creation of that poetry; (6) Byron's poetry is distinctly "Romantic" in that the "self" is so obviously a part of it, yet it is also "Augustan" in that the self—by its very presence as a poet—becomes a complex of vir bonus, naïf, and hero; (7) nature finally serves to bring attention back to the subject of man and his power. Certainly there are a number of other points which could be added—for example, the importance of Byron's fondness for the poetry of Pope—but these seven listed above anticipate most of the subsidiary concerns. As I say, they do not constitute a "theory," but they certainly set down a commitment to the sublimity of
power which has a deserving place in any study of the Romantic sublime.
NOTES—CHAPTER FIVE


4 Byron and the Ruins of Paradise (Baltimore, 1967), p. 244.

5 The Style of "Don Juan" (New Haven, 1960), p. 32.

6 Ridenour, pp. 33-34.

7 Ridenour, p. 34.

8 Gleckner, p. 243.

9 Ridenour, p. 34.

10 The Poetical Works of Lord Byron (Oxford, 1904), p. 403, ll. 161-163. All references to Byron's poetry will be taken from the Oxford Standard Authors edition.

11 Gleckner, p. 250.

12 Pafford, 109.

13 Pafford, 110.

14 Gleckner, p. 252.

15 I shall return to the question of nature's sublimity near the
end of this chapter. What is said here about Manfred applies, of course, to other of Byron's poems.

16 Pafford, 114. As evidence for these moments having no substantiality, Pafford goes on to cite III, iv, 43-45: "But I have found our thoughts take wildest flight/ Even at the moment when they should array/ Themselves in pensive order." That this necessarily challenges the substantiality of what Manfred has learned earlier seems to me a very debatable point.

17 "This journal is a relief. When I am tired—as I generally am—out comes this, and down goes every thing. But I can't read it over; and God knows what contradictions it may contain. If I am sincere with myself (but I fear one lies more to one's self than to any one else), every page should confute, refute, and utterly abjure its predecessor" (LJ, II, 366; my italics).

18 Ridenour, p. 16.

19 Lauber, 526. Lauber's final comment is that "Byron was not, and could not be, a neo-classic poet" (530). He offers in support of this Byron's dislike of prescriptive rules, Don Juan's attack on epic poetry, "the genre most admired by neo-classic critics" (530), and the fact that the satire of Don Juan "does not ridicule deviations from a fixed code of morals, manners, and tastes assumed to be in accord with nature and reason" (530). All of these points are in need of considerable qualification, not only with respect to Byron but also in regard to "Neo-classicism." Furthermore, we must grant Byron the freedom to experiment with neo-classic precepts; they were by no means absolute even in the eighteenth century. Surely there is no sense in terming Byron a "neo-classic poet" unless we mean by this that certain basic assumptions—not merely literary, but philosophical, epistemological, and social—are common both to him and his precursors in Augustan literature. It is in these assumptions; I believe, that Byron clearly reveals an acute Augustan temperament.

20 Lauber, 527.

21 Ridenour, p. xiii.

22 Ibid.

23 I choose Swift here with Kathleen Williams's reading in mind. (See Jonathan Swift and the Age of Compromise / Lawrence, Kansas, 1958.) Miss Williams maintains that Swift's satire provides not simply a vivid depiction of man's fallen nature, but also sets forth a standard of compromise between extremes as a means
of organizing and dealing with our complex world. In a more
general sense, Miss Williams—the most forthright of the so-
called "soft" critics of Swift—is addressing some fundamental
problems about the nature of satire and its positive or con-
structive concerns. Her approach can be very profitably used
in treating Byron's satire.

24 Williams, p. 10.

25 Ridenour, pp. 16-17.

26 Ridenour, p. 17.

27 Ibid.


29 Williams, p. 11.

30 For a very fine discussion of this type of negative defini-
tion, see Glenn W. Hatfield, Henry Fielding and the Language of
Irony (Chicago, 1968). Byron's use of this satiric verbal tech-
nique, and his play on "high" and "low" which Ridenour details
so well in his study of Don Juan are two illustrations of his
technical affinities with the Augustan satirists. These are
precisely the kinds of matters which Lauber ignores in his study
of Byron, and they go a long way, I think, toward seeing Byron
as "Augustan" not merely in temperament but also technique.

31 A Concordance to Byron's "Don Juan," ed. Charles W. Hagelman,
Jr. and Robert J. Barnes (Ithaca, N.Y., 1967) lists forty-six
entries for "sublime" and its cognates.

32 Cf. Byron's quip on his Danticles: "for my own part I don't
understand a word of the whole four cantos, and was therefore
lost in admiration of their sublimity" (Q, 516).

33 One thinks immediately of the "Edifices in the Air" of A Tale
of a Tub.

34 Cf. Byron's remark in a letter to Murray after having re-
read Pope: "if I had to begin again, I would model myself ac-
cordingly" (LJ, IV, 169).

35 Byron: The Record of a Quest (1949; rpt. Hamden, Conn.,
1966).
36 Lovell, p. 86.

37 Lauber, 526.
CHAPTER SIX

SHELLEY: DIGNITY AND THE SUBLIME

Every man who lives in this age and desires to write poetry ought, as a preservative against the false and narrow systems of criticism which every poetical empiric vents to impress himself with this sentence, if he would be numbered among those to whom may apply this proud, though sublime, expression of Tasso: non c'è in mondo chi merita nome di creatore, che Dio ed il Poeta.¹

It is difficult to fix a precise meaning for "the sublime" in Shelley's writings, largely because he was never much concerned with defining or explaining his usage of the term. Also, Shelley employs the word "sublime" with a seeming disregard for the old categories of the sublime and beautiful. Indeed, he describes scenes which fulfil all the usual requirements for sublimity, yet we never hear the term; he bypasses those very characteristics of a prospect which one would expect to be sublime only to fix on some particularity in the scene that deserves this description; he deems grand cataracts, ruins, volcanoes and the like "tremendous," "astonishing," or "marvellous" but reserves the word "sublime" for more unlikely objects such as the statue of Bacchus (Letters, II, 63). But certainly the most evident disregard of traditional categories for the sublime and beautiful is seen in Shelley's frequent use of "sublime and lovely" when he is describing some exceptional statue, prospect, or other object which
has captured his attention. There is the following remark, for example: "It seems as if despair and beauty had combined and produced nothing but the sublime loveliness of grief"; and again, from the same description of "The Niobe," we have Shelley pointing out the countenance of the figure, "that clear and tender beauty which is the expression at once of innocence and sublimity of soul, of purity and strength." The statue of Bacchus, we find, has a countenance "sublimely sweet and lovely" (Prose, 347).

Byron is urged to see "this sublime and lovely scene" that Shelley and Mary have just visited (Letters, II, 5). One could enumerate a score of instances in which Shelley juxtaposes the terms "sublime" and "lovely," heretofore distinct in their meaning and carefully reserved for disparate ideas.

There is also a letter to Thomas Love Peacock which depicts precisely this remarkable confusion I have noted above. In the letter Shelley is describing the cataract of Velino, which he terms the second "grandest" spectacle he has even seen (Letters, II, 56). The ensuing description—far too long to quote in full—contains all the stock ideas we traditionally associate with eighteenth-century descriptions of sublime scenes: a massive waterfall of three hundred feet, falling into "a sightless gulf of snow white vapour which bursts up forever & forever from a circle of black crags" (Letters, II, 56), and below this "5 or 6 other cataracts each 50 or 100 feet high" (Letters, II, 56). It is an awesome spectacle which Shelley says is quite unlike anything he has seen before: "The very imagination is bewildered in
it" (Letters, II, 56). So far it would seem that we have a common enough instance of sublimity here, but Shelley undercuts the grandeur of this scene as he picks out the half dozen minor cataracts and describes them as "beautiful and sublime," then goes on to say of the surrounding scenery that it is "the loveliest and most sublime that can be conceived" (Letters, II, 56). It is in this same letter that Shelley records still another "sublime" scene—an aqueduct uniting two rocky mountains, with a torrent below and a castle above—and again isolates one part of it: "I never saw a more impressive picture; in which the shapes of nature are of the grandest order, but over which the creations of man sublime from their antiquity & greatness seem to predominate" (Letters, II, 55).

What are we to make of this extraordinary disregard for the traditional aesthetic categories of the sublime and beautiful? And especially, how do we account for the fact that a scene can be both sublime and beautiful for Shelley at a given moment? Moreover, how can we explain Shelley's fascination for the parts of a scene, be it a physical prospect or a work of art, when sublimity has so long been characteristic of the whole? I think the answer to all these questions involves an idea of fundamental importance in Shelley's thought: sublimity and beauty are synonymous terms which identify the spiritual greatness existing in man and in the universe itself. They are not really aesthetic terms for Shelley even though it often appears as if he considers the "object" itself "sublime." Shelley was particularly insis-
tent that the objects of the physical world have no meaning ex-
cept as they are perceived by man, so by no stretch of the imag-
ination should we assume that "objects" are themselves "sublime"
for Shelley. In the instance of the castle noted above, for ex-
ample, it is not the object per se which is sublime for Shelley,
but the host of ideas which it suggests to the perceiver: its
antiquity, its greatness in having withstood the forces of time
and natural power, its identity as a symbol of man's sublimity
confronting (and surpassing) the grandeur of nature—all of these
ideas and more lend a dignity both to the castle and man himself,
a dignity which is "sublime" in every sense of that word.

We can say, then, that man's sublimity is for Shelley the
degree of inner, spiritual "beauty" that he possesses. This is a
beauty which is pure and which identifies man at his very best;
it is also a beauty rarely found in the world as we know it. On
the one hand, Shelley can refer to his friendship with Elizabeth
Hitchener as "sublime," yet on the other hand he is clearly cog-
nizant that it is "too sublime & too sure" "to be intruded upon
by ... worldly cares" (Letters, I, 274). Likewise, Shelley can
refer to the "sublime interest of poetry" which captured his in-
terest at Oxford (Letters, I, 228), the "sublime speculations on
God" by the most eminent Greek philosophers (Prose, 213), and
Milton's portrayal of the "sublime grandeur of a graceful but
tremendous spirit" (Prose, 268) in Satan, all the time fully
aware that Oxford stifled such interest, that modern Christians
would rob Greek philosophers of their speculations, and that no
one among his contemporaries would accord the Devil "sublimity" in Shelley's sense of the word. "A Philosophical View of Reform" makes it perfectly clear that man's dignity, the "likeness of God in Man" (Prose, 236), is daily threatened by injustice in the courts, impatience and intolerance in the government, and above all by the institution of slavery. A definite moral reform must precede, or at least accompany, those social reforms which will be the record of human dignity. Man cannot propagate institutions of "beauty" until he has privately acknowledged the "grandeur of soul" (Prose, 254) which every man bears with him; one can only affect such an acknowledgment by offering political equality and individual love and sympathy.

It should be clear that Shelley uses the term "sublime" with a keen eye to its most accustomed and traditional meaning: "elevation." But sublimity is elevation of a most particular sort, for it involves the extension and enlargement of the human soul not merely "upward" but also "outward." Sublimity signifies a final state of mind and soul in which man can comprehend a universe of love, purity, and harmony, and above all a universe which is a whole. Let me explain this more particularly by turning to one of Shelley's remorseful moments in A Defence of Poetry. At one point he laments the fact that man is too intent upon accumulating facts and calculating processes. Consequently:

There is no want of knowledge respecting what is wisest and best in morals, government, and political economy, or at least what is wiser and better than what men now practise and endure. But we let "I dare not wait upon I would, like the poor cat i' the adage." We
want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know; we want the generous impulse to act that which we imagine; we want the poetry of life; our calculations have outrun conception; we have eaten more than we can digest. The cultivation of those sciences which have enlarged the limits of the empire of man over the external world has for want of the poetical faculty proportionally circumscribed those of the internal world; and man, having enslaved the elements, remains himself a slave.  

(Prose, 293)

These are indeed prophetic words which, as David Clark suggests, penetrate to the very heart of the world's unrest (Prose, 293, n.66). In his self-imposed state of constriction, man has lost sight of everything that is wise and good, everything that denotes his very grandeur of spirit. He has enlarged his body of knowledge concerning the external world of nature but has, quite ironically, become its physical master only at the expense of becoming its spiritual slave. As he has enlarged the realm of the objective world, he has diminished his own significance in this world. For Shelley, this is the ultimate kind of human "imprisonment," for it involves not a physical constriction, but a mental and spiritual diminution.

Shelley was fond of using "circumferences" and "circles" as a means of depicting both man's physical accomplishments and spiritual suicides. Certainly there is no better passage to place side by side with that of A Defence of Poetry (just cited) than one from "The Colosseum." It is a passage in which an old man, a kind of "blind seer," is discoursing on the relationship between the works which man has built and his spiritual greatness:

The internal nature of each being is sur-
rounded by a circle, not to be surmounted by
his fellows; and it is this repulsion which
constitutes the misfortune of the condition
of life. But there is a circle which com-
prehends, as well as one which mutually ex-
cludes, all things which feel. And, with
respect to man, his public and his private
happiness consists in diminishing the circum-
ference which includes those resembling him-
self, until they become one with him and he
with them. (Prose, 227)

Man has fenced off his "internal nature," and, like Robinson
Crusoe, has pulled in the ladder after him. He has expanded his
knowledge of the universe and so gone outward intellectually and
scientifically; but he has lost sight of that second spiritual
circumference—the one that includes rather than excludes—so he
cannot go outward spiritually in order to diminish that circum-
ference by becoming one with it. This is what the old man of "The
Colosseum" realizes, and his lengthy rhapsody is in fact an in-
stance of this very "going outward" I have just mentioned. He be-
gins by having his daughter describe the ruins to him, then wants
to know about the sky, flowers, grass, weeds, leaves, and birds.
He need not see them first hand, for like any objects they do not
have significance without a mind to create with them, and what is
of final importance is not their sensory existence but the imagi-
native meditations of the old man. What the old man is "seeing"
in his imagination is an entire universe of "oneness" where every-
thing has its fit and proper place. Moreover, he realizes that
this sense of a oneness—a sense dependent upon meditative thought
—is where meaning finally resides. Indeed, he tells his listen-
ers that this meditative going outward is the sign of man's dig-
nity. It is also a sign of his Love, of his ability to be God-like by "eternizing" and unifying. Immediately following the passage I have quoted from Prose, 227, the old seer draws a parallel between man's spiritual elevation (both upward and outward), and the activity of imaginative, meditative thought. It is here that we see the inextricable relationship between subject and object, and particularly between a man of imaginative vision and some object which depicts human power:

It is because we enter into the meditations, designs, and destinies of something beyond ourselves that the contemplation of the ruins of human power excites an elevating sense of awefulness and beauty. It is therefore that the ocean, the glacier, the cataract, the tempest, the volcano have each a spirit which animates the extremeties of our frame with tingling joy...And this is Love. This is the religion of eternity, whose votaries have been exiled from among the multitude of mankind. O Power! ... If the contentions of mankind have been their misery; if to give and seek that happiness which thou art has been their choice and destiny; if, in the contemplation of these majestic records of the power of their kind, they see the shadow and the prophecy of that which thou mayst have decreed that he should become; if the justice, the liberty, the lovelessness, the truth, which are thy footsteps have been sought by them, divide them not! It is thine to unite, to eternize.

(Prose, 227; my italics)

In viewing the works of power, and in imaginative meditation—itself an act of power—one is excited to an elevated sense of awefulness and beauty: that is, to sublimity. And why? Because one has thereby "gone outward"; one has removed that circumference which pens in the spirit, and in so doing has drawn inward that larger circumference which comprehends everything. Through an ex-
ercise of power (itself stimulated by an object of human power) one has sensed his place in a universe of energy or "animation," to use Shelley's word. Such an imaginative viewer has truly become one with "Love," "Author of Good," "God," "King," "Father"—the terms are all Shelley's—that "which interpenetratest all things, and without which this glorious world were a blind and formless chaos" (Prose, 227).

It is perhaps ironic that the author who wrote "The Necessity of Atheism" is here discussed in terms of advocating man's God-likeness, but the irony, if indeed it is there, seems to me an unimportant one. David Clark has cautioned us about Shelley's "atheism" by saying that even in his early life Shelley "cannot be, except in the most provincial use of the word, called an atheist. He merely rejected the idea of an anthropomorphic, personal, creative deity" (Prose, 6). Shelley did indeed believe in a God: "the soul of goodness pervading life; he is the charity men feel in their hearts; he is the principle of harmony throughout nature; he is the music heard in the heart of man; he is Intellectual Beauty. And finally he is not a person or a thing, nor has he a local habitation or a name" (Prose, 10). So Clark describes the nature of Shelley's God. It is as well the nature of a truly "sublime" man—Jesus Christ, for example—for he, too, lives by the principles of harmony, love, and goodness.

The section from "The Colosseum" which I have quoted should make it clear that for Shelley sublimity is most especially a condition of soul. Again we are back to a proper understanding of
this term "sublime" as it figured in Longinus; and once again we can see that however much the Romantic writers railed at Longinus they were perhaps closer to him in spirit than they realized. Just as Longinus pursues the inextricable relationship between greatness of soul and greatness in some object which we confront, so Shelley seeks out not what the object is, but what it says of man's inner dignity. This is true whether the object is a poem or a waterfall as I shall endeavor to show.

First, let me begin with the so-called "natural" sublime: that is, when the object is something not created by man. A natural scene is "sublime" for Shelley not because it presents enormous strength, or excites the feeling of terror, or appears to be illimitable. Rather, it is because of the power that arises in the mind of the perceiver as he views the scene and attempts to incorporate it into the sphere of his own sensibility. I have already cited the instance of the old man and the Roman ruins. One other of note occurs in a letter of 23 November 1811 to Elizabeth Hitchener. Shelley describes having taken a long walk by himself, then goes on to relate not merely what he has seen but also the very activity of how he has seen it. And so, one is impressed not so much with the powers (the "achievements") of the Welsh countryside as with the soaring imagination of the viewer. Truly, Shelley is acting with the scene. It has no significance, no value without a perceiving mind to experience it:

I have taken a long solitary ramble today. These gigantic mountains piled on each other, these waterfalls, these million shaped clouds tinted by the varying colors of innumerable
rainbows hanging between yourself and a lake as smooth and dark as a plain of polished jet,—oh! these are sights admirable to the contemplative. I have been much struck by the grandeur of its imagery, Nature here sports in the awful waywardness of her soli-
tude; the summit of the loftiest of these immense piles of rock seem but to ele-
vate Skiddaw and Helvellyn; Imagination is resistlessly compelled to look back upon the myriad ages whose silent change placed them here, to look back when, perhaps this retire-
ment of peace and mountain simplicity, was the Pandemonium of druidical imposture, the scene of Roman Pollution, the resting place of the savage denizen of these solitudes with the wolf.—Still, still further!—strain thy re-
verted Fancy....Adieu to the dazzling picture.—
I have been thinking of you and of Human Nature....

(Letters, I, 189)

The vocabulary here is that traditionally used to describe a "sublime" scene. There can be no doubt that this "grandeur" and "awful waywardness" are signs of a genuinely sublime prospect. But note what is of importance here: the activity and power of Shalley's mind as it literally transcends time and drives back into the recesses of history. Surely, there are "achievements" in that scene powerful enough to move him, but the act of being "transported"—always the sine qua non of something truly sub-
lime—is here effected not by the scene but by the mind of the perceiver. The "sublimity" lies not in the object, but in the elevated, transported soul of the subject.

Shelley was only too aware of the incredible dependance of object and subject on each other. In fact, the letters to Eliza-
beth Hitchener in late 1811 constantly raise this idea, often with a tone of resignation and sadness. Shelley mentions how in-
evitably our responses to grandeur are colored by inner states
of feeling; and especially he points out something we shall hear
again in the "fading coal" simile of A Defence of Poetry--the way
our responses depend on sudden uncalculated feelings which come un-
sought and which will not bear up under analytical scrutiny.
These letters of 1811--and the 93rd in particular, which I shall
deal with momentarily--keep pointing out how usually "sublime"
scenes lose their impact when the perceiver is himself meddling
with his responses:

Nature is here marked with the most impres-
sive character of loveliness and grandeur,
once I was tremulously alive to tones and
scenes--The habit of analysing feelings I
fear does not agree with this. It is spon-
taneous, & when it becomes subjugated to con-
sideration ceases to exist. But you do right
to indulge feeling where it does not militate
with reason, I wish I could too--This valley
is covered with trees, so are partly the moun-
tains that surround it. Rocks piled upon each
other to an immense height, & clouds inter-
secting them, in other places waterfalls midst
the umbrage of a thousand shadowy trees form
the principle features of the scenery. I am
not wholly uninfluenced by its magic in my
lonely walks, but I long for a thunderstorm.

(Letters, I, 127-128)

I have quoted here from Letter 100. Let us go back to the 93rd,
and set Shelley's remarks next to those cited above. This letter
is also written to Elizabeth Hitchener, and again Shelley laments
our inability to analyze our responses to grandeur. He tells us
that the country of Wales "is excessively grand; rocks piled on
each other to tremendous heights, rivers formed into cataracts by
their projections, & valleys clothed with woods" (Letters, I, 119).
He asks why it is that we respond to such scenes: "why do they
enchant, why is it more affecting than a plain, it cannot be in-
nate, is it acquired?—" (Letters, I, 119). However, the very act of asking these questions serves to destroy the enchantment. Knowledge loses all pleasure "by attempting to arrest th[e] fleeting Phantom as it passes....it flies from all but the slaves of passion & sickly sensibility who will not analyse a feeling" (Letters, I, 119-120). This is the letter in which Shelley has previously described his "short but violent nervous illness" and has unhappily remembered "how mutually dependant on each other are mind & body" (Letters, I, 119). His body has indeed affected his mind, and the mind, meddlesome even in its weakness, has in turn affected Shelley's response to a scene which has all the "achievements" necessary for sublimity. It is as though a man is constantly treading on ice when he is in the presence of grandeur, as though his momentary feeling of something sublime is about to be lost as quickly and surely as one might plunge through the ice into the water. As we shall see, the same is true of the poet; his powers are likewise drained away the moment he begins to compose.

In fact, this tenuous relationship between mind and body, mind and greatness, informs not only matters of aesthetics and art, but also our daily lives. Immediately after his lament about our fading feelings, Shelley says to Elizabeth Hitchener: "I will relate you an anecdote, it is a striking one; the only adventure I have met with here" (Letters, I, 120). He tells of hearing a beggar's cry, giving the poor man something, and then trying in vain to engage him in conversation. "I followed him a mile asking
a thousand questions; at length I quitted him finding by this remarkable observation that perseverance was useless. 'I see by your dress that you are a rich man—they have injured me & mine a million times. You appear to be well intentioned but I have no security of it while you live in such a house as that, or wear such clothes as those. It wd. be charity to quit me!" (Letters, I, 120). The anecdote is offered without comment, presumably because its being juxtaposed against the business of fleeting feeling is comment enough. Certainly the anecdote is open to a host of readings, one of these the notion that our habits of disrespect and intimidation breed only distrust and inhumanity in the men we have humiliated. In this sense it answers an observation Shelley has made earlier in the letter about a "wretch at Tortola" who murdered his slave and remarked to the jury: "'I have a proper sense of religion, & I fear not!'" (Letters, I, 119). Such barbarity—dignified and justified in the name of religion—Shelley was to attack relentlessly throughout his life. But there is something else at work in the anecdote. What hatred and disrespect have done to the beggar is destroy his ability to feel. Far from having to analyze his feelings, there are none there to begin with; certainly there are none even remotely close to those we would term "sublime." There is only distrust, antagonism, and a conviction that any form of "sublimity" or dignity in man is long since buried. Further, that beggar is like a fleeting Phantom or feeling, pleasing for the moment but apt to be lost upon closer examination. In chasing after the beggar, Shelley is showing us
metaphorically what happens when we hunt out the reason (in this case the object) which has awakened our inner feelings; we are greeted only with disappointment and a sudden cessation of that pleasantness which has delighted us.

These letters, then—and one might add to them the 1818 letters to Peacock—show how delicate, yet inextricable, a relationship there is between subject and object, what lies outside the self and what meaning the self makes of it. Above all, it is a relationship which far transcends matters of aesthetics, for it relates to pleasure and pain, which, as we well know, form a basis for Shelley’s ethical thinking. When one approaches any object in the world—a poem, Mont Blanc, another man—the dignity, the pleasure, and the sublimity that one sees therein is a measure of one’s own sublimity. It is a sublimity which brings with it pleasure, but it is also a sublimity that soon fades, presumably because one realizes only too acutely the difference between this "sublime" moment and the general tenor of his life. Indeed, life is very much an "unquiet dream," and man himself has "such a scope/ For love and hate, despondency and hope."7 Those moments of love and hope are not many, but they are testimony to an inner principle of genuine greatness in man—a love and benevolence—which our nature bids us fulfil.

The Universe of Power

The idea of a universal wholeness was to be an integral aspect of Shelley’s thought for the duration of his brief life. He tells Hogg in a letter that "I think Pope's 'all are but parts of
one tremendous whole; something more than Poetry, it has ever been
my favourite theory" (Letters, I, 35). Certainly this was more
than a philosophical or metaphysical idea for Shelley; as we shall
see, it informed his views about the relationships men ought to
bear to each other: "Why are we here? What does man exist for?
surely not for his own happiness, but as a more perfect instrument
of that of others. This even common morality will tell, for this
we do not want any theological system, not even the belief of a
God, the anticipation of his kingdom" (Letters, I, 89). There is
a "wholeness" which unites man and the universe; it is a "wholeness"
the basis of which is the power of love, thus it also unites man
with man.

The letter to Hogg, from which I have just quoted, outlines
the nature of the universe as Shelley sees it, and the identity of
God:

The word "God" has been /and/ will continue
to be the source of numberless errors until
it is erased from the nomenclature of Philos-
ophy.--it does not / this should read: "does
it not" / imply "the Soul of the Universe the
intelligent & necessarily beneficent actuating
principle"--This I believe in; I may not be
able to adduce proofs, but I think that the
leaf of a tree, the meanest insect on wh. we
trample are in themselves arguments more con-
clusive than any which can be adduced that some
vast intellect animates Infinity.

(Letters, I, 35)

A universe of animation, then, is the first step in understanding
the order of existence as Shelley sees it. And I think it correct
to say that this idea is not unlike that "kingdom of power" as I
have discussed it in Wordsworth and Coleridge. Notice, for ex-
ample, that Shelley speaks about God as "power of existence" in a letter of 11 June 1811 to Elizabeth Hitchener; given a slight difference of vocabulary, the idea Shelley presents is fundamentally similar to that of Coleridge:

When we speak of the soul of man, we mean that unknown cause which produces the observable effect evinced by his intelligence & bodily animation which are in their nature conjoined, and as we suppose, as we observe, inseparable. The word God then, in the sense which you take it analogises with the universe, as the soul of man to his body, as the vegetative power to vegetables, the stony power to stones. Yet were each of these adjuncts taken away what would be the remainder—what is man without his soul? he is not man. What are vegetables without their vegetative power? stones without their stony? Each of these, as much constitute the essence of men, stones &c, as much make it to be what it is, as your God does the universe. In this sense I acknowledge a God, but merely as a synonyme for the existing power of existence. I do not in this, nor can you do I think recognize a Being which has created that to which it is confessedly annexed as an essence, as that without which the universe wd. not be what it is, it is therefore the essence of the universe, the universe is the essence of it—it is another word for the essence of the universe. (Letters, I, 100-101)

Here is an active universe of power once again. And as much as Shelley has difficulty searching out the precise words for explaining his idea, the gist of it comes through clearly. God is merely a word, a synonym for the power of life. One cannot say "God" "causes" life, for as Shelley repeats on numerous occasions the cause of life is the one problem man simply cannot answer. To posit some eternal, omniscient agent merely renders the problem more incomprehensible.9 God is what the universe is: animation, energy, existing power. Thus, everything, including man, has its
place in a kingdom of power; we are all, as it were, contained within "a circle which comprehends ... all things which feel."

This idea is contained in still another letter to Elizabeth Hitchener (2 January 1812):

I have lately had some conversation with Southey which has elicited my true opinions of God—he says I ought not to call myself an Atheist, since in reality I believe that the Universe is God.—I tell him I believe that God is another signification for the Universe.—I then explain—"I think reason and analogy seem to countenance the opinion that life is infinite—that as the soul which now animates this frame was once the vivifying principle of the infinitely lowest link in the Chain of existence, so is it ultimately destined to attain the highest—that every thing is animation (as explained in my last letter) and in consequence being infinite we can never arrive at its termination....I, you, & he are constituent parts of this immeasurable whole. (Letters, I, 215)

What we are being offered in these several letters is an idea not at all unlike that of Coleridge—and in a sense, not at all unlike that of An Essay On Man. One can well imagine Shelley's admiration for Pope's poem when we place the following lines next to those I have quoted from the several letters:

God loves from Whole to Parts: but human soul
Must rise from Individual to the Whole.
Self-love but serves the virtuous mind to wake,
As the small pebble stirs the peaceful lake;
The centre mov'd, a circle strait succeeds,
Another still, and still another spreads,
Friend, parent, neighbour, first it will embrace,
His country next, and next all human race,
Wide and more wide, th'o'erflowings of the mind
Take ev'ry creature in, of ev'ry kind;
Earth smiles around, with boundless bounty blest,
And Heav'n beholds its image in his breast.10

The power which includes us all is, for both Pope and Shelley, one of beneficence, of love in a social—as opposed to selfish—
sense. And for both writers, the exercise of the power of love is conducive not only to the promotion of virtue, but also happiness. 11

We can summarize Shelley's remarks thus far, then, by saying: (1) his concept of a God is inextricably caught up in his definition of life, just as it has been for Wordsworth and Coleridge; (2) life can be defined as the principle of animation, and the universe as the unity of animation; (3) if man is, therefore, a part of this whole, he can only realize (and actualize) his part in it by practising the power of love, which is at one and the same time a partaking in the universe of "wholeness" and an establishing of moral virtue and happiness. One might add to these few remarks those which Shelley sets down in his "Essay on Life" (1812-1814 ?), a puzzling but suggestive work. In this essay Shelley draws attention to our feelings as children, when we were so much more readily drawn to the unity and "wholeness" of the universe around us: "We less habitually distinguished all that we saw and felt, from ourselves. They seemed, as it were, to constitute one mass" (Prose, 174). Some men never lose the capacity to feel this way: "Those who are subject to the state called reverie feel as if their nature were dissolved into the surrounding universe, or as if the surrounding universe were absorbed into their being. They are conscious of no distinction. And these are states which precede, or accompany, or follow an unusually intense and vivid apprehension of life" (Prose, 174). One "sees into the life of things" most clearly as a child (we can hear Wordsworth, I think), but this power of perception un-
Fortunately fades as one grows older. Still, one never loses this intimation of unified existence, for finally, "The view of life presented by the most refined deductions of the intellectual philosophy is that of unity" (Prose, 174). Even terms like "I," "you," "they" lose meaning since they "are merely marks employed to denote the different modifications of the one mind" which is Unity (Prose, 174).

The subject of power fascinated Shelley as it did both Wordsworth and Coleridge. Certainly this is evident enough in "Mont Blanc," which I shall examine presently, but there are also his casual remarks in "A Refutation of Deism" and the essay on Necessity (a note from Queen Mab) which provide an important prelude to a study of Shelley's poetry.

In the essay on Necessity, Shelley claims that our idea of liberty, "applied metaphorically to the will, has sprung from a misconception of the meaning of the word power" (Prose, 110-111).

He explains his point as follows:

What is power?—*id quod potest*, that which can produce any given effect. To deny power is to say that nothing can or has the power to be or act. In the only true sense of the word *power*, it applies with equal force to the lode-stone as to the human will / this idea, and the lodestone example, occur in Coleridge's "Comprehensive Theory" / ....The advocates of free-will assert that the will has the power of refusing to be determined by the strongest motive; but the strongest motive is that which, overcoming all others, ultimately prevails; this assertion therefore amounts to a denial of the will being ultimately determined by that motive which does determine it, which is absurd. But it is equally certain that a man cannot resist the strongest motive, as that he cannot overcome a physical impossibility. (Prose, 111)
To state the matter simply: power is the "existing process of existence"—what soul is to body, what God is to the universe. Indeed, that fundamental relationship between God and power is a crucial one, for we shall see that just as the universe has its "God," and vegetables their vegetative power, stones their stony power, so man has imaginative power. It is the "divinity" within himself.

We might add to the passage quoted above still another, this one from "A Refutation of Deism":

If Power be an attribute of existing substance, substance could not have derived its origin from power. One thing cannot be at the same time the cause and the effect of another. The word power expresses the capability of anything to be or act. The human mind never hesitates to annex the idea of power to any object of its experience. To deny that power is the attribute of being is to deny that being can be. If power be an attribute of substance, the hypothesis of a God is a superfluous and unwarrantable assumption. (Prose, 136)

Shelley is essentially chasing the distinction between functional and constitutional life, to borrow Coleridge's terms. "Power" is not, properly speaking, "being" or "existence"; it is that which can produce any given effect (Prose, 111), it is the capability of anything to be or act (Prose, 136). Coleridge would say that our capacity to reproduce, to breathe, to think are instances of life in the functions, or modes of actions. They are laws by which constitutional life (power) is given direction and significance. Shelley makes approximately the same distinction when he states that the "power of association" is in fact not a power at all: "Association is ... rather, a law according to which this
power that of the imagination is exerted than the power itself....Association bears the same relation to imagination as a mode to a source of action" (Prose, 277). In other words, there is a principle of power which informs all existence from a lodestone to Mont Bland to the human imagination. It is that latent capability of a "thing" to be what it is; were the capability removed, that thing would no longer be. The implication of this idea is clear enough: the entire universe possesses a fundamental unity in Power, evident enough if only man were able to see it. For Shelley, it becomes the province of the poet to awaken man to precisely this degree of heightened perception, to strip away that film of familiarity which obscures divine unity.

A unity of Power also bears upon Shelley's remark that the mind "never hesitates to annex the idea of power to any object of its experience." The mind's apprehension of a power in nature, say, is also an apprehension of the universal power which lies behind that of nature, at the same time that it is an apprehension of itself and its own power. The mind annexes the idea of power (a) because everything which is, must, by definition, have power, (b) because a large part of what one "experiences" in perception is his own power, and (c) because what finally is of meaning is neither the object nor the self exclusively, but the relationship between both, and specifically the relationship of power. For an illustration of these several points, let us turn first to the poem "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" and second, to "Mont Blanc."

The "unseen Power" of the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" is
not apprehended directly by man; rather, we are presented with a series of analogies involving summer winds, moonbeams seen through showers, hues, clouds, and the like. These analogies may indeed suggest that "a single spirit of beauty and truth may be glimpsed in phenomenal variety"¹² or that the "shadow" challenges realization yet is "potential in all perception and thought."¹³ Certainly any number of interpretations, fanciful or otherwise, are almost inevitable, given Shelley's very vague analogies. Most interesting, however, is that this Power is made even dearer to us because of its mystery (l. 12). It is "sublime" in a Burkean sense of that word; we have a heightened awareness of its presence—and it "transports" or affects us vividly—specifically because we cannot comprehend it clearly or totally. Dim outline, vagueness, partial obscurity—choose what term we will—is a crucial aspect of the sublime, and that is precisely what Shelley is offering in his hints at this "Power" and its "shadow." In fact, Shelley, it seems to me, is deliberately portraying the "sublimity" of intellectual beauty (in man, the creative imagination) by describing its traditional, sublime characteristics. Note that he selects the term "awful" (in the sense of "awe-full") to describe this unseen "Power"; it is a term customarily applied to something sublime. But note as well how this term is juxtaposed against the fact that this power is unknown by man: "Man were immortal, and omnipotent,/ Didst thou, unknown and awful as thou art ..." (ll. 40-41; my italics).

Significantly, the boy discovers this shadow—or at least,
it "falls" on him—only through an activity of his own mind. He cannot discover it by going outside the self, by searching for "ghosts" or speeding through chambers, caves, ruins, and starlight woods. It is only in reflective musing on life (and we remember that power is the capacity for being) that awareness of this "Power" comes to him, presumably because he suddenly becomes cognizant of powers of his own, powers which he can swear to dedicate to intellectual beauty.

When musing deeply on the lot
Of life, at that sweet time when winds are wooing
All vital things that wake to bring
News of birds and blossoming,—
Sudden, thy shadow fell on me;
I shrieked, and clasped my hands in ecstasy!
(ll. 56-60; my italics)

Indeed, the "Power" is "to human thought ... nourishment,/ Like darkness to a dying flame!" (ll. 44-45) for the simple reason that one discovers in thought the "nourishment"—the incentive and necessity—of there being thought. Only in the activity of using the creative mind can man even begin to approximate that inner divinity which is a type or symbol of the "SPIRIT fair." In terms of his mind, man is too like a "dying flame," unable or unwilling to realize his possibilities of greatness. In the exercise of imaginative thought he finds nourishment for this flame; he sees the power of self which is like that of the Spirit of Beauty, and which commands dedication. In the words of one Shelley critic, the "visionary" is bound "to the mysterious imaginative process of his own mind, which apprehends beauty only by expressing itself."
It is not unexpected that Shelley addresses this power as "Beauty" and then describes it in traditionally "sublime" terms. I have spoken of this collision of terms before, and we see it once again in his address to "awful LOVELINESS" (l. 71). This power is both "lovely" and "sublime" because it is a testimony to beauty which is exalted and divine. Furthermore, its sudden revelation in the mind's imaginative power bespeaks the same exaltation and divinity in man himself: "Man were immortal, and omnipotent,/ Didst thou, unknown and awful as thou art,/ Keep with thy glorious train firm state within his heart" (ll. 39-41). These few lines reveal once and for all the fact that "sublimity" is no longer merely a "quality" in great objects, but a grandeur of the God-like mind--a mind which possesses precisely the same power that informs the entire universe. There is indeed a "sublimer world" (l. 25) for man, Shelley argues in this poem, but it is not that depicted by Christianity ("Demon, Ghost, and Heaven"); it is the universe filled with the Power of Beauty, the discovery of which is inherent in one's own mind.

The relation of the mind's power to that of the natural world is the subject of "Mont Blanc," a companion poem to "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty." In the first stanza the relationship between subject and object is established through the use of "water" imagery. The everlasting universe of things "Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid ways" (l. 2), and is joined by the "source" of human thought which is as a "feeble brook" (l. 7) to the "vast river" of external nature (l. 10). The simile of a
brook offering up its feeble voice amid the awesome power of waterfalls, winds, and river suggests a certain insipidity in the mind's contribution. It is as though the source of human thought is in itself severely, almost drastically, limited in what it can offer. On the one hand this is hardly a promising beginning for a poem which explores the importance of the human imagination. On the other, it is perfectly understandable in terms of the history of the sublime. One aspect of grand scenes is, traditionally, their impact on the mind; that is, they stagger the imagination—almost overpower it. This idea was especially evidenced in seventeenth and eighteenth-century travel diaries, wherein viewers of the Alps recorded their mental prostration before awesome mountains like Mont Blanc. The same idea (more properly, "response") is described by Shelley in a letter to Peacock, dated the same month as the composition of "Mont Blanc" (July, 1816): "After having visited a waterfall which was very fine we turned to the left & still following the valley, or now rather the vast ravine which is the couch and the creation of the terrible Arve, approached Chamounix. We ascended winding between mountains whose immensity staggers the imagination" (Letters, I, 496). The first stanza of "Mont Blanc" does not record the communal interchange between man and nature that one might expect. Instead, it depicts the "achievements" of the external world, and they are clearly incredible. It must also be noted that the first stanza is only a general depiction; there is no specific scene being treated at this point in the poem. In a general way, Shelley is stating a
common enough observation about one's aesthetic responses to grandeur: the mind is in danger of being overpowered by forces in the external world. As the poem continues, specific sets of visual scenes are detailed. Correspondingly, we find that the mind ultimately escapes the danger of being enslaved by turning toward itself and toward poetry, the vehicle of its own creation.

The personification of the Ravine of Arve, and that of Mont Blanc as well, is more than a poetic device. It isolates the living quality of the scene, its power in Shelley's sense of an "existing power of existence." In the letter just cited, Shelley tells Peacock that "One would think that Mont Blanc was a living thing & that the frozen blood forever circulated slowly thro' his stony veins" (Letters, I, 500); thus, it hardly seems speculative to say that this quality of "life-power" was what arrested Shelley most in his view of the mountain and its attendant scenery. Small wonder, then, that the ravine is depicted in "Mont Blanc" as a "ravine-mind" and further, as an "awful scene,/ Where Power in likeness of the Arve comes down" (11. 15-16). It is both Sublime and Powerful because it is "living." Even the pine trees around it are its "brood" (1. 20), its "Children of elder time!" (1. 21).

Granted that the ravine has "power" and that it is indeed a "model of the initial prospect of the mind," two questions yet remain: why does the subject of "Mont Blanc" turn to his own mind; and second, in what exact respects is the ravine a model of the mind? These questions, I trust, are answered at least in part
by the attention I have given to the terms of "life" which Shelley uses is stanza two. The ravine "lies" down, its "children" "cling" around it, the Arve "sits" on a "throne," the winds give their "devotion" to the pines and "drink their odours." In every sense the universe is alive and so possessive of power; this is what the subject sees, and this is the basis for the equation of ravine and mind. Both contain the "existing power of existence" without which they would not be. As for the first question, part of what the subject confronts in his response to the scene is the energy of his own imagination. He becomes aware of his own power, hence aware of the place he holds in a universe of animation. We must not be misled by Shelley's reference to the mind's working "passively" (l. 37); as Earl J. Schulze has so acutely pointed out, Shelley does not mean by this that the mind is "impassive" or "idle," only that its will is suspended and it cannot help "giving." 17 It still "renders and receives fast influencings,/ Holding an unremitting interchange/ With the clear universe of things around" (ll. 38-40).

This state of intense examination of the mind is described as "a trance sublime and strange" (l. 35). It is a state of acute imaginative exercise—an exercise of power—and so is "sublime" because it illustrates the subject in his "god-like hours" creating with the powers he possesses. Notice, however, that the subject retreats into the "cave" of "Poesy" (l. 44) in search of the power which has first moved him. It is an external power, and fittingly enough the subject searches outside the self "among the
shadows that pass by/ Ghosts of all things that are" (ll. 45-46) for its "faint image" (l. 47). Like the boy of the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" this subject, upon the first stirrings of his imaginative power, seeks the "shadow" or "phantom" of power not there (in the mind) where it rightly exists, but in "chambers" or "caves." So he fails until he turns to the self, until the self exercises its power by "recalling" (perhaps in the sense of "meditatively recollecting") the power which has moved it. And in the very act of imaginative recalling "thou are there!" (l. 48).

The concluding lines of the second stanza (ll. 34-48) are indeed puzzling. They culminate with the exclamation "Thou are there!" which would be an intolerable obscurity, says Schulze, "were it not organically connected with the obscurity of the subject-matter."\(^{18}\) Schulze's remark seems unnecessarily fanciful to me, for puzzling and intricate though they are, these lines are hardly obscure. Shelley is essentially addressing a fundamental problem at this point in "Mont Blanc": how does the artist (specifically, the poet) record the power of some scene which has moved him? We have already seen how Wordsworth was troubled by the same problem. It is the problem which all serious artists must address (and theorists as well, as Longinus demonstrates), especially those artists for whom a flower, or a girl with a pitcher on her head, or an oddly shaped tree constitutes a "powerful" scene. Here in "Mont Blanc" the scene is more traditionally sublime with its awesome prospects, its deep ravines
and majestic glaciers, yet still the poet is unsure of the means by which he is to "transport" the reader as he has been transported. Is he merely to "effuse" on paper? Or must he somehow depict poetically not simply the power of the external scene, but also the reciprocity it occasions from him? Finally, is he to discuss the relationship between himself and the object? Shelley had misgivings about "Mont Blanc" as we well know from his deprecatory remark in the History of a Six Weeks' Tour, and Letters from Switzerland. Primarily, they are misgivings about precisely the questions I have asked above. He tells us that the poem was composed under the "immediate" impression "of the deep and powerful feelings excited by the objects which it attempts to describe." There has been no moment of meditative recollection or recalling. Thus, the poem tends to be an effusion, "an undisciplined overflowing of the soul." It relies too much upon imitating what has moved him, that is, the "achievements" of the external scene. Indeed, this power is well displayed, and Shelley is correct in stating that the poem "rests its claim to approbation" here. But it is equally clear that the poem's greatest strength is also a sign of its greatest weakness. Lines 34-48 provide a self-reflexive commentary on Shelley's fear that he has not looked sufficiently into the mind to say "thou art there!" Consequently, he fears that the poem has failed by concentrating too fully on the external world. How, then, is the reader to be "transported"? How is he to view his own creative power?

The third stanza nonetheless turns to the relationship
between the mountain and the perceiver. Attention is given to
the "remoter world" (cf. the "sublimier world" of "Hymn to In-
tellectual Beauty") which "Some say" visits the soul in sleep or
death (itself a slumber) through its "gleams." Where does the
world exist? Can it be found in the "Large codes of fraud and
woe" (l. 81), that is, by turning to revealed religion? For
Shelley, clearly not. "Eternity," or a "remoter, sublimier" world
can best be understood in terms of the seer's remark in "The
Colosseum": one must erase the circle which "includes" the self
in order to "become one" with everything around him. It is only
by entering into "the meditations, designs, and destinies of
something beyond ourselves" that we catch a glimpse of the whole,
the "religion of eternity," as the old man describes it (Prose,
227). "It is therefore that the ocean, the glacier, the cataract,
the tempest, the volcano [one might add "the mountain"] have
each a spirit which animates the extremities of our frame with
tingling joy" (Prose, 227). One sees in the Power of nature, and,
concomitantly, in the Power of self, a universe of animation, a
Popean whole which is eternal. This is what nature (here, Mont
Blanc) "teaches" us with its "mysterious tongue" (cf. the "lan-
guage of another world" in Byron's Manfred [III, iv, 7]). It
is only through a "going outward" that one can glimpse the eternity
of Power in which he has a part. In the very exercise of his
imaginative power he enacts his part in the kingdom of power.

Everything in the universe is subject to birth and death;
there is a life "in the functions," to borrow from Coleridge, an
"existence" which is subject to cessation. But there is also an existing power of existence," or what Coleridge would term "constitutional life" which is eternal: "Power dwells apart in its tranquillity,/ Remote, serene, and inaccessible" (ll. 96–97). It is this power which the subject of "Mont Blanc" "sees" in the mountain during the very process of responding imaginatively to it. Because of its elevation it suggests to his imagination that "the power is there" (l. 127), that there is Power existing apart from the transience of the world. In this way, the external world "teaches" us about the very existence of Power: "And this, the naked countenance of earth,/ On which I gaze, even these primaeval mountains,/ Teach the adverting mind" (ll. 98–100). There is indeed a physical power in the mountain which, to the viewer's imagination, represents the eternal force that withstands flux. He reads in that awesome force a type or symbol of Power which "dwells apart in its tranquillity." We have already seen that this "constitutional" power is defined as "Remote, serene, and inaccessible." So the power of Mont Blanc is described in the final stanza in terms of its inaccessibility (its elevation, the fact that none can "behold" what occurs there), its serenity ("Mont Blanc yet gleams on high:--the power is there,/ The still and solemn power of many sights" /ll. 127–128/), and its remoteness ("these solitudes"). Indeed, the silence and solitude do not constitute vacancy, for they are interpreted by a creative mind which finds in its own exercisings a likeness to "The secret Strength of things/ Which governs thought, and to the infinite
Of Heaven is as a law" (ll. 139-141).

**Sublimity and the Defence of Poetry**

Despite the importance of fear in "Mont Blanc," and despite the very traditional "sublime" scene, I must reiterate that a natural prospect is not sublime for Shelley just because it excites a feeling of terror or appears to be illimitable. Nor is it simply because of immense size: "There is more in all these scenes than mere magnitude of proportion--there is a majesty of outline, there is an awful grace in the very colours which invest these wonderful shapes--a charm which is peculiar to them, quite distinct even from the reality of their unutterable greatness" *(Letters*, I, 497-498; my italics). Rather--and the point bears repeating--the "sublime" is realized because of the power that arises in the perceiver's mind as he views the scene and attempts to incorporate it into his sensibility. Naturally there must be certain qualities in the object (certain "achievements") sufficiently powerful to awaken one to response, but "sublimity" does not reside there. Through their power these achievements affect the perceiver, and, in reaction, he becomes aware of his own creative strength. What is discovered in the aesthetic response to Mont Blanc is the relationship of power which exists between the subject and object; most importantly, one discovers his vital place inside that circumference which encloses all.

The perceiver, then, becomes aware of his "sublimity" of soul, his power to go "outward" imaginatively. And in the very process of imaginative discovery he catches a glimpse of the truly
"sublimier" or "remoter" world which is one of total unity and comprehension. It is a state which is the sum of all that is true and good. As such, it can only be approached and understood by "the wise, and great, and good" ("Mont Blanc," 1. 82).

For Shelley, a poet is not sublime in terms of his "achievements"—his facile use of language, his vivid imagery, his talent for evoking terror. A poet is sublime when he communicates his power so effectively that the reader is likewise awakened to his own creative potential. The sublime poet strips away the coverings of things, or "draws life's dark veil from before the scene of things" (Prose, 295) to make the reader feel more deeply than he ever has before. Poetry speaks to the imagination, that creative force which denotes an expansion of soul and which strives to eliminate the small circle that each man has fashioned to enclose the self.

A poem, just as any object for Shelley, is nothing by itself. Until it has some relationship with the reader it is at best a pleasant, but useless, object. Shelley would assert that the poet cannot avoid writing for others, that in fact it is his duty to do so. Possessed with a "power" that "arises from within," he alone has the ability to create poetry which "redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man" (Prose, 295; my italics). The entire Defence of Poetry is based on this one important idea: that the poet is the sole, the best, the only means of making readers "the inhabitants of a world that "sublimer world" to which the familiar world is a chaos" (Prose,
295). His duty is not to himself or to the physical world, but to those around him who have "sublime souls" without the means of realizing them. We remember Shelley's remark to Janetta Phillips in an 1811 letter: "What does man exist for? surely not for his own happiness, but as a more perfect instrument of that of others" (Letters, I, 89). If man exists for others, how much moreso does the poet, for like the philosopher he is the great herald and petitioner of man's freedom and sublimity. 21

Shelley's admiration for Wordsworth is perfectly understandable, especially when we consider their two cardinal views about the poet's nature: (1) that his imagination is the means of achieving the only true "freedom" possible for man, and (2) that his identity is that of a "reformer," for he awakens men to a realization of their freedom by liberating them from dullness and lack of imaginative vision. We may recollect Wordsworth's celebration of the creative mind in Book XIV of The Prelude where he insists that "Such minds are truly from the Deity, / For they are Powers" (XIV, l. 112-113). This power of man "is the express/ Resemblance of that glorious faculty/ That higher minds bear with them as their own" (XIV, l. 88-90). Being awakened to a sense of this power, and exercising it, liberates one from a meaningless existence; one is truly "raised/ From earth to heaven, from human to divine" (XIV, l. 117-118): "Oh! who is he that hath his whole life long/ Preserved, enlarged, this freedom in himself?/ For this alone is genuine liberty" (XIV, l. 130-132). One is genuinely "free" in his moment of God-
likeness, for he transcends the tiny circle with which each man encloses himself. He liberates his confined self and "goes outward." To extend the kingdom of the sublime, then, is to awaken man to the possibilities of his creativity, and so gain him genuine liberty. Admittedly, it will also aid in creating the taste by which a new poet is judged; but more importantly, it will liberate man as it "redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man."

Man will not live a moral, dignified life until he views himself as a moral, dignified creature. This is what both Wordsworth and Shelley find true; this is the basis of their beliefs that the poet is a moral agent essential to human reform, and that reform is a philosophical matter involving more than practical expediency. The poet teaches man to find in himself the necessary justification for there being reform. He awakens that part of man which opposes slavery, political injustice, and tyranny. He does this by speaking to the imagination and by encouraging all that is creative in man. Thus, to acknowledge the imagination is at once to acknowledge not only one's aesthetic maturing but also one's "God-likeness." This appeal to human dignity, which is so large a part of eighteenth-century theories of genius and the sublime, is given a potent moral dimension by the Romantic writers.22

Perhaps now we can see the burden that Shelley places on the poet when he echoes the "sublime phrase" of Tasso: "non c'è in mondo chi merita nome di creatore, che Dio ed il Poeta." Poetry
is not simply of use to a subject; it is written for a subject. And neither the poet nor the poem has any claim to the "sublime" until the reader becomes creative like the artist. This onus on the poet is best seen in the passage quoted earlier where Shelley notes that man has, "for want of the poetical faculty, proportionally circumscribed those limits of the internal world; and man, having enslaved the elements, remains himself a slave" (my italics). The "want of a poetical faculty" certainly brings to mind De Quincey's "for want of a poet to organize," and well it might. In De Quincey's theory, the poet organizes ideas and thoughts into meaningful relation, so that ultimately the reader finds his own "dormant modes of feeling" actualized or made vital. For Shelley, the "poetical faculty" makes the familiar or chaotic world a "creation anew," so that ultimately we, as readers, can "feel that which we perceive, and ... imagine that which we know" (Works, 295). It is not that the poet implants something entirely new in the reader's mind—this idea is not entertained by any of the writers with whom I deal—but that he is a power able to make his subject feel more completely ("actualize," De Quincey would say) that which has been there all along. We might say that the poet cleanses man's windows of perception, thereby enabling him to "see" more imaginatively than usual.

But how does "sublimity" of soul (that is, "awareness of God-likeness") become a possibility? Is there any connection between elevation and the notion of power? Surely the answers are self-evident at this point. To exercise imagination is to be a power; to be a power is to take a place in a universe of anima-
tion; to take such a part is to become vital in "the existing power of existence" which for Shelley is "God." To be aware of the significance of imaginative power is to be elevated and conscious of the dignity of God-likeness. We might add to those remarks still another by Shelley on the subject of poetic power.

It occurs in an 1817 letter to William Godwin:

I felt that it was in many respects a genuine picture of my own mind. I felt that the sentiments were true, not assumed. And in this I have long believed that my power consists: in sympathy and that part of imagination which relates to sentiment and contemplation.—I am formed,—if for anything not in common with the herd of mankind—to apprehend minute and remote distinctions of feeling whether relative to external nature, or the living beings which surround us, and to communicate the conceptions which result from considering either the moral or the material universe as a whole. Of course I believe these faculties, which perhaps comprehend all that is sublime in man, to exist very imperfectly in my own mind.

(Letters, I, 577)

That Shelley considers himself to have definite poetic powers is indisputable. Moreover, they are not singular to him, since they comprehend all that is sublime in man, not simply the poet. For Shelley, it is also a two-fold power, since it affects how the author perceives what already exists, and how he expresses these perceptions. In addition, it is an unconscious or unpredictable power that arises without consent of the will, and begins to fade as soon as it begins to operate:

Poetry is not like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will. A man cannot say, "I will compose poetry." The greatest poet even cannot say it: for the mind in creation is as a fading coal,
which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness: this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our nature are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure. (Prose, 294)

It appears that the poet must take advantage of these moments while he can, for they fast disappear; also, for the poet—a unique person whose ability to approximate the highest order "exists in excess" (Prose, 278)—there is a responsibility that he do so. After all, if his ability to approximate perfect order is greater than the average man's (a notion not unlike Wordsworth's "more refined organic sensibility"), he must use it in order to aid his fellows.

Given this brief summary of the poet's momentary power, Shelley's discussion of his own power, the fact that the poet is someone slightly different from the ordinary man, and that the faculties of apprehension, sympathy, sentiment, and contemplation "comprehend all that is sublime in man," I would like to draw these several points together and outline Shelley's view of the creative process and the response to art. This is absolutely essential, since the final result of the creative process is the sublime state of the poet. The circumference of his imagination is replenished "with thoughts of ever new delight, which have the power of attracting and assimilating to their own nature all other thoughts, and which form new intervals and interstices whose void forever craves fresh food" (Prose, 283). In the very act of creating, his entire soul is enlarged, extended, and elevated. There
is "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" (Prose, 282-283). And the reader's response to that piece of art involves the same ennoblement or elevation, since what holds true for the poet also holds true for the reader. In every respect the reader is as much a creator as the poet. Poetry acts on the mind and persuades the reader to moral action in a very particular way: "it awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thoughts" (Prose, 282). In the reader as well as the poet there is this same elevation and extension outward, this same attempt to find the "wholeness" of which man is a part.

Let me begin, then, with the creative act. Early in the Defence of Poetry (specifically, in the famous "Aeolian lyre passage") Shelley speaks of man's being an instrument "over which a series of external and internal impressions are driven, like the alternations of an ever-changing wind over an Aeolian lyre, which move it by their motion to ever-changing melody" (Prose, 277). "Melody" suggests a linear strain of some sort, rather than depth, complexity, or great expansion, and the word "instrument" signifies man as a passive agent, being played upon rather than controlling or participating in whatever affects him. Also, it is important that Shelley is speaking of "man" in this passage, not just the poet; his words here indicate that every living being is capable of being manipulated like a musical instrument. "But," he goes on to add, "there is a principle within the human being, and per-
haps within all sentient beings, which acts otherwise than in the
lyre, and produces not melody alone, but harmony, by an internal
adjustment of the sounds or motions thus excited to the impres-
sions which excite them" (Prose, 277). The nature of that "prin-
ciple" as Shelley defines it elsewhere is Love: "This is the bond
and the sanction which connects not only man with man but with
everything which exists. We are born into the world, and there is
something within us which, from the instant that we live, more and
more thirsts after its likeness....We dimly see within our intel-
lectual nature, a miniature as it were of our entire self, yet
deprived of all that we condemn or despise, the ideal prototype of
every "thing excellent or lovely that we are capable of conceiving
as belonging to the nature of man" (Prose, 170). Certainly the
business of man's possessing an "inner principle" which leads in-
evitably to "harmony" is no new idea in the history of the sub-
lime; I have demonstrated both its presence and importance in
Longinus. What is interesting in Shelley's account of principle
and harmony, however, is his definition of the principle as
"Love." One might well ask what this has to do with "Imagination"
and matters of art. The answer is that Imagination is not merely
an "intellectual" or "aesthetic" faculty in man; it is this, of
course, but it is also this faculty in its purest state, "deprived
of all that we condemn or despise." The imagination is a power,
but not a lawless, immoral one. For Shelley, as for Wordsworth,
there are powers and powers, those to be admired and those to be
resisted. There is the power of orthodox, regimented Christian-
ity, for example, as depicted in the Emperor Constantine—brutal and hideous; there is also that of the Imagination which holds forth the promise of redeeming man's divinity. By its very identity as "divine," Imagination is a perfect means to realizing the agency of love that exists in every man. Indeed, it is finally the only means for giving volition and purpose to this inner principle which drives man in his search "after its likeness."

Love finds its most immediate likeness in the creative imagination. Together, love and imagination (we might call them, collectively, the "creative principle of divine goodness") work astonishing effects, for the "instrument" of man is required to act by accommodating itself to melodic impressions. From a purely passive role, man moves to an active one. Likewise, melody suddenly gives way to "harmony"; an expansion, depth, and complexity result from this momentary action of man. As the "internal adjustment" takes place harmony is produced. Instead of simply being played upon, the poet (I use the term "poet" here since I am talking about the act of creating poetry) begins to react from some principle which is probably quite unconscious: "Poetry is not like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will." For some inexplicable reason he is suddenly, and only briefly, possessed with power as this "inner principle" awakens a power within that moves in the direction of unity, total expansiveness, and limitless enlargement. It is, to be exact, an awareness that the soul is capable of elevating itself toward unusual apprehension and complete comprehension—the
sublime. The creative act as Shelley speaks of it here relates to Coleridge's notion that the soul suddenly realizes its own powers and attempts to strive for the unreachable, or De Quincey's belief that the poet exerts his new-found powers in an attempt to stimulate the reader. In Shelley's theory, the state of action-reaction takes place principally within the mind of the poet even while he is creating. And this action-reaction is not simply between subject and object, but between the active and passive parts of the poet's mind. As he is being played upon he suddenly finds himself reacting, producing, creating, expanding, enlarging, sympathizing, and even contemplating. Given his more than usual "imagination," "sensibility," or "excessive ability to approximate the highest order," the poet creates a work that is at once the product and reflection of his own sublime state.

As for the response to art, we should expect the same kind of process to hold true if, as I have suggested, the perceiver is a creator like the poet. After the poet has stripped away the irrelevancies and exposed the true nature of whatever he is dealing with, the perceiver is left with nothing but the work and his own mind. The poem, we should note, acts upon the perceiver's mind just as any natural object would. Like the rest of the natural world it appeals to his senses as it passes over him "like the alternations of an ever-changing wind over an Aeolian lyre."

There is one significant difference, however: this poem has been infused with the artist's power, hence the "internal adjustment" that Shelley speaks of is effected more easily. And certainly no
small part of this ease is attributable to the fact that "Poetry is ever accompanied with pleasure: all spirits upon which it falls open themselves to receive the wisdom which is mingled with its delight" (Prose, 281). Despite this added ease, however, the sudden, inner adjustment takes place as mysteriously as it does in the poet. Perhaps this is because the excellence of poetry is the way "it acts in a divine and unapprehended manner, beyond and above consciousness" (Prose, 281). The poem may be like any other part of the universe passing over the man-instrument, but it has derived added power from the poet. Thus, if it is a poem of the first degree, the reader finds therein a source of all that is truly perfect. Because it is the result of poetic power, the poem is a power in itself that awakens and enlarges the mind of the reader "by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thoughts"; it "enlarges the circumference of the imagination by replenishing it with the thoughts of ever new delight, which have the power of attracting and assimilating to their own nature all other thoughts." The poem stimulates not merely a linear succession of ideas and thoughts (like "melody"), but also a "reception" and assimilation of these ideas (like "harmony").

The word "receptacle" implies containment or possession, as though the thoughts are halted as they pass through the mind and are assimilated into a meaningful form. In this sense the mind is passive, since it collects manifold thoughts (and combinations of thoughts) presented by the artist. But let us note
that Shelley is again using "circumferences" in his description of what happens to the mind. They very act of collecting, or being a receptacle, is also an exercising of the imagination. The imagination "goes outward" and so, (a) diminishes the circumference which includes everything, and (b) effectively destroys the tiny circle enclosing the self. The mind, then, is both active and passive. Indeed, these terms are not really applicable since the very act of passive accumulation is impetus for imaginative activity. There are no firm "steps" in the aesthetic response, but a process of reception and activity, accumulation and discovery.

Shelley is effectively establishing a dialectic between activity and passivity. In many respects it is like Wordsworth's "wise passivity," and, as I shall argue later, it has a counterpart in Keats's thought. For the moment I shall be content with a figurative description of the reader's aesthetic response: it is as if ideas are drawn into the container of the mind by a magnet "attracting all other thoughts," are piled one on top of the other as they grow in depth, threatening, as language does, to burst "the circumference of the hearer's mind, and pour themselves... into the universal element with which they have perpetual sympathy" (Prose, 281). The thoughts which are given form in the poem possess a power to awaken and enlarge the mind of the reader, a power sufficient to make the mind a receptacle of hitherto unknown combinations of thoughts. But to this power is added the reaction of the perceiver, the result of an "inner
principle" of love which seeks to find its likeness in these new combinations of thoughts. The "internal adjustment" is the bringing to bear of imaginative creativity (itself an immediate likeness to love in Shelley's sense of "divine goodness"); so there is a going outward of the soul, an enlarging of the self that is simultaneously a "pulling inward" of that circle which comprehends all. One glimpses the unity, the "wholeness" of the universe (it is a "sublime" state) through the very activity of the mind, and so gains awareness not of "melody"—independent parts in succession—but "harmony." One especially gains an awareness of one's own part in a universe of animation, for the mind is itself a power, an "existing power of existence."

The best way to understand Shelley's view of the aesthetic response and the relation of subject and object is by examining his own activity as a perceiver. Certainly there are scores of examples to choose among—the travels through Italy, for example, as recorded in letters and verse (like "Mont Blanc"); or "The Colosseum," for even though the blind seer is not "Shelley," there is an aesthetic response in that brief work which says much about Shelley's thinking. However, I should like to turn to the "Notes on Sculptures in Rome and Florence" (1819). David Lee Clark has described them as "vigorous, clear-cut observations on the esthetic effects produced on Shelley by these sculptures" (Prose, 343), and for the most part this is true. Some are nothing more than cursory remarks, such as number 44, entitled "A Minerva": "Evidently a production of very great antiquity" (Prose, 351).
Others, such as the "Niobe" (number 60), are extraordinary aesthetic observations and responses.

Let us look, then, at the "Niobe" note, bearing in mind that this is Shelley speaking, and that we are witnessing not the statue per se but the statue through the imaginative eye of Shelley. The first striking fact is that the statue, because it represents a human figure, takes on the qualities of a living being:

It is a colossal figure—the size of a work of art rather adds to its beauty, because it allows the spectator the choice of a greater number of points of view in which to catch a greater number of the infinite modes of expression of which any form approaching ideal beauty is necessarily composed—of a mother in the act of sheltering from some divine and inevitable peril, the last, we will imagine, of her surviving children...The countenance which is the consummation of feminine majesty and loveliness, beyond which the imagination scarcely doubts that it can conceive anything, that master-piece of the poetic harmony of marble, expresses other feelings. There is embodied a sense of the inevitable and rapid destiny which is consummating around her as if it were already over. It seems as if despair and beauty had combined and produced nothing but the sublime loveliness of grief.

(Prose, 352; my italics)

In fact, the statue is simply a statue, an unchangeable, immovable block of marble standing in one spot. Yet for Shelley, the creative perceiver, it is multi-faceted, "living," and, as we shall see, possessed with an inner "power" or "spirit" which occasions harmony because it finds a likeness in the soul of the perceiver. The statue of Niobe is part of a world of infinite feelings and perceptions ("combinations of thoughts") in which the perceiver takes a place as he "imagines" not only the "story" which can be read into the statue but also the "responses" of Niobe and the
last of her surviving children. Not the least of what he "sees" is a loveliness which is "sublime" because it reflects precisely that inner power and dignity of spirit which I have mentioned above.

The "infinite modes of expression" which compose the statue relates to the "thousand unapprehended combinations of thoughts" which are the result of poetic power. And as these combinations "enlarge" the imagination of the reader, so these infinite modes in the statue awaken the imagination of Shelley the perceiver. We are reminded, too, of De Quincey's phrase "myriads of modes of feeling" which exist in every man for want of a poet to organize.

Admittedly, there seems to be a key difference between Shelley and De Quincey here, the former arguing that combinations of thoughts and feelings are in the work, the latter insisting that they are in the man or perceiver. But the difference is more an apparent than a real one. Both writers are addressing the problem of how to make a man realize that which he has the capacity to realize; both locate this "how" in the work itself and its power. In the piece on "Niobe," for example, the work provides not simply the "infinite modes" but also a "greater number of points of view" from which to glimpse these modes. Still the glimpsing can only be done by the perceiver as he actively "experiences" the work. Thus the combinations of thoughts in the work "realize" modes of thoughts and feeling in the man.

As his response to this statue intensifies, it becomes increasingly apparent that Shelley is seeing even more in the marble
form. His own particular powers of sympathy, sentiment, contemplation, and the apprehension of distinctions of feelings continue to increase as the statue acts upon him and he on it. True to his own theory, he accumulates and draws together combinations of thoughts; "all that is sublime in man" is brought to the fore as he moves his gaze from head to neck to hair to face:

The face is altogether broad and the features conceived with the daring harmony of a sense of power. In this respect it resembles the careless majesty which Nature stamps upon those rare masterpieces of her creation, harmonizing them as it were from the harmony of the spirit within. Yet all this not only consists with but is the cause of the subtlest delicacy of that clear and tender beauty which is the expression at once of innocence and sublimity of soul, of purity, and strength, of all that which touches the most removed and divine of the strings of that which shakes with astonishment my most superficial faculties. (Prose, 353)

It is the power (the "spirit within") of the statue that produces its harmony. At the same time, the statue is in harmony with nature, for it is one with "those rare masterpieces" of nature which likewise possess a harmony stemming from an inner spirit. The relation between power and sublimity is also established when Shelley states that harmony and power are together "the cause" of "sublimity of soul" in the statue. Again we see that sublimity is not a term reserved for the "externals" or "achievements" of a work, but a term which expresses the soul or spirit it possesses. "Sublimity" bespeaks the dignity and energy (Shelley would say "purity and "strength") of man when he is most "worthy of himself," to echo Wordsworth. This is indeed what Niobe suggests in her
pure, yet powerful, withstanding of an inevitable, crushing force. Her countenance does not suggest whimpering or capitulation, but a standing fast against her doom. At the same time—and this is strongly implied in the sketch—her standing fast indicates her moral purity as opposed to the immoral depravity of an evil power. Her power is sublime; that of "God" (or "fate") is not.

There is a further harmony between the work and Shelley the perceiver. An "internal adjustment" takes place when the man-instrument's "strings" are struck in sympathy. To put the matter less figuratively: the perceiver, apprehending a sublimity or God-likeness in the statue, becomes aware of precisely the same faculty in the self. The "sublimity of soul" that he detects in the statue is at the same time a reflection of his own sublimity. Likewise, the harmony between form and spirit which is effected in the statue by its "power" finds a counterpart in the harmony of thought and feeling in the perceiver, this, too, occasioned by his power of imagination. The little sketch "Niobe" illustrates admirably Shelley's view of one's aesthetic response to art: a harmony ensues between the form of the statue and its "spirit," between Shelley as man and Shelley as creator, between the object and its viewer. And the basis of this harmony is a "divinity" revealed in the countenance of the figure and "caused" by a "power" within which, in turn, touches the same string in the man-instrument. Through the action of his mind on the object, as it reacts on him, Shelley has created a state of infinity, eternity, harmony, and sublime unity.
NOTES--CHAPTER SIX

1 Percy Bysshe Shelley, The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley, ed. Frederick L. Jones, 2 vols. (London, 1964), II, 29-30. All references to Shelley's letters will be from this edition, abbreviated Letters and enclosed parenthetically in my text. Shelley's spelling has been retained throughout. The reference to Tasso is a favorite of Shelley, one that he repeats frequently, and with variations. See *Prose*, 172 (cited below in n. 2).

2 Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Shelley's Prose: Or, the Trumpet of a Prophecy*, ed. David Lee Clark (Albuquerque, 1954), 352, 353. All references to Shelley's prose will be from this edition, abbreviated Prose and enclosed parenthetically in my text.

3 See Letters, II, 54-57.

4 In addition to the instances already mentioned of "sublime and beautiful" scenery, see the description of the Colosseum in a letter to Peacock: the exterior "is exquisitely light & beautiful...The interior is all ruin. I can scarcely believe that when encrusted with Dorian marble...its effect could have been so sublime and so impressive as in its present state" (Letters, II, 59). To be precise, we must say that the object is not exactly sublime and beautiful here "at a given moment." There is the one object—the colosseum—but different parts display sublimity and beauty. Still, I have selected this example because it is about the most discriminating Shelley ever becomes in his use of sublime and beautiful as aesthetic terms.

5 David Lee Clark points out that for all Shelley's fascination with electricity, light, etc. (*Prose*, 3) he was very much at sea over the nature of reality (*Prose*, 11). Clark goes on to describe Shelley's position as follows: "With Locke and Hume as his inspiration he finally arrived at the notion that reality exists in the mind when apprehending an objective world of things which exist, to be sure, outside the mind, but which indeed have no meaning unperceived by mind" (*Prose*, 11). This seems to me a precise explanation of the problem. On the one hand, Shelley insists upon the "reality" of external nature (see *Prose*, 136, 182), but on the other, he declares the importance of imaginative discovery of meaning. So in this piece entitled "The Colosseum," the daughter must serve as the eyes for the blind man, yet
the meaning of the scene derives from the activity of the imagination as it creates with sensory material (albeit second-hand).

6 See "The sublime human character of Jesus Christ" in Prose, 334-335. It is a favorite contention of Shelley that Christ was a sublime teacher whose true doctrines were barbarized by the immoral power of institutional Christianity. See "Essay on Christianity" (Prose, 196-214).

7 Percy Bysshe Shelley, Shelley: Poetical Works, ed. Thomas Hutchinson (London, 1905), p. 530, ll. 23-24. All references to Shelley's poetry will be from the Oxford Standard Authors edition, the line numbers enclosed parenthetically in my text.

8 Shelley is misquoting An Essay On Man (I, l. 267); it should read "stupendous whole."

9 See, for example, "The Necessity of Atheism": "we admit that the generative power is incomprehensible, but to suppose that the same effect is produced by an eternal, omniscient, Almighty Being, leaves the cause in the obscurity, but renders it more incomprehensible" (Prose, 38). By "generative power" Shelley means the same thing as Coleridge's "functional life."


11 Cf. An Essay on Man, IV, ll. 347-354:

(Nature, whose dictates to no other kind
Are giv'n in vain, but what they seek they find)
Wise is her present; she connects in this
His greatest Virtue with his greatest Bliss,
At once his own bright prospect to be blest,
And strongest motive to assist the rest.
Self-love thus push'd to social, to divine,
Gives thee to make thy neighbour's blessing thine.

Pope goes on to speak of "one close system of Benevolence" in the following lines, an idea which is picked up by Shelley in the "Benevolence" section of "A Treatise on Morals." In this section, Shelley asserts that pain is apprehended as an evil in its own right, so man strives for more than gratification of self. He abandons the "passive" part of the self and "acquires an active power" in his attempts to alleviate the suffering of others (Prose, 188). So the virtuous, benevolent being gives himself happiness in the very act of bringing others happiness.


14 Schulze, p. 82.

15 I borrow this term from Schulze, p. 85. It is, of course, a common enough idea in the interpretation of the poem.

16 Schulze, p. 85.


18 Schulze, p. 87.


21 For a discussion of this point see "A Philosophical View of Reform" (*Prose*, 259).

22 Shelley's "Essay on Christianity" is an extended treatment of man's divinity and imaginative power; it deserves to be read with the greatest care: "Whoever has maintained with his own heart the strictest correspondence of confidence, who dares to examine and to estimate every imagination which suggests itself to his mind, who is that which he designs to become, and only aspires to that which the divinity of his own nature shall consider and approve—he has already seen God" (*Prose*, 202; my italics). One might place against this an eighteenth-century document like Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition*, itself an eloquent plea for man's dignity.

23 Shelley uses the figure of Constantine as a symbol of lawless power on more than one occasion. See *Prose*, 125; 148.
CHAPTER SEVEN
KEATS AND THE LONGINIAN HERITAGE

T.S. Eliot is surely right in cautioning us that "Keats has no theory, and to have formed one was irrelevant to his interests, and alien to his mind."¹ It would be preposterous to suggest that Keats was a theorist of the sublime, or for that matter a theorist at all in the usual sense of the word. His remarks are rarely presented as a sustained argument, but "come in unexpectedly" as Eliot says "between trifle and trifle."² Still, Keats shares at least one thing with his Romantic contemporaries, and that is a core of ideas around which his poetic art and thought center. They are ideas which recur again and again, often in the most suggestive fashion. Collectively, they urge us to attempt some sort of synthesis, some "theory"—if one wishes to use that word—which gives them shape and proper emphasis.

I should like to begin such a synthesis by examining one of those key ideas, "beauty," and its long-attendant term, "sublimity."³ The first of these we always associate with Keats, of course; the second, very rarely. Somehow, it seems almost incongruous to view Keats, with his grapes bursting against palates, as a student of "the sublime"; nor does W.J. Bates's contention that "Keats was altogether receptive to any effort to attain the 'sublime'" fully put us at ease, despite the occasional delight in gothicism and terror which marks Keats, or his conscious "Mil-
tonism" in *Hyperion*. But perhaps our reluctance to view Keats in light of the "sublime" stems from a misconception of the term itself. We seem too frequently attached to the "sublime" as Burke speaks of it; thus to talk about Keats's use of the term à la Burke brings us dangerously near to fancifulness at times. Still a further complication is this: Keats was familiar with the term sublime as Burke used it, and was not above employing it this way at times. However, the later letters make the following points abundantly clear: (a) "sublimity" came to be regarded in his mind as a kind of beauty; (b) his historical affinity in matters of sublimity is more accurately traced to Longinus than Burke; and (c) his developing use of the term parallels his changing, maturing view of the mind's power.

**Natural Sublimity and the Quest for Beauty**

It was in mid-1818 that Keats set out with Charles Brown to experience the "grand" scenery of Scotland and northern England. As we are told in the letters, this was to be a time for learning: "I shall learn poetry here and shall henceforth write more than ever, for the abstract endeavour of being able to add a mite to that mass of beauty which is harvested from these grand materials, by the finest spirits, and put into ethereal existence for the relish of one's fellows." There are some arresting terms here, and some equally arresting problems. These scenes are grand (i.e. "sublime") but one harvests "Beauty" from them; the poetry which ostensibly results from an immersion in nature is a kind of receptacle into which one puts beauty so that others might come to
the art (as Keats has to nature) and "harvest" it. This passage quoted above depicts an astonishingly static view of the artistic process; indeed, there seems to be no "process" of creation here at all. Rather, we are given a series of independent, categorical "things": the prospect "out there" to which the poet, "here," goes in order to "harvest" beauty which he can then "put into" an ethereal existence for the benefit of others. Object, subject, poem, reader: all are identified in glaring separation. This is certainly not the Keats we are used to reading.

I have quoted this passage early in my argument since it isolates all the things wrong with seeking the "sublime" in something external to the self. Furthermore, it anticipates why Keats finds his experiencing of grand scenery so dissatisfying and ultimately alien to his "theory" of the creative process. The very collision of the terms "beauty" and "grand" in that letter entry foreshadows Keats's abandoning of the traditional meanings of the term "sublime," and his incorporation of one term into the other, reminiscent of Shelley. But first, let us begin with mid-1818 and the "grandeur" of the north.

The letters written during the "Scotch tour" and Walks in the North, composed by his travelling companion Charles Brown, show Keats's familiarity with the "sublime" in its traditional sense of the "aweful" or "grand." The north end of Loch Lomond, Keats tells us, is "grand in excess" (Letters, I, 334); elsewhere, one can see the mountains "all round Sublime" (Letters, I, 304). And Walks in the North, with its many references to "the beautiful and the sublime in unison," "a love of the beauty and sublim-
ity of nature," a waterfall which "had nothing sublime about it, however beautiful it deserves to be called," and a "majestic panorama ... suited to render the human mind awestruck," could almost serve as a gloss on Burke's *Enquiry* (Letters, I, 428, 422, 430, 432). But there are signs in the letters that the grand tour has failed as an initiation into the sublime. Scenic beauty becomes entangled with sublimity, as in the description of Kirkudbright County as "very beautiful, very wild with craggy hills" (Letters, I, 317). And although Brown asserts that he and Keats have not been disappointed in their expectations of scenic gratification (Letters, I, 362), Keats's own letters reveal an increasing insensitivity and dullness of response to nature not entirely attributable to growing ill health. Keats finds that nature somehow is not the true locus of sublimity; thus, we are not entirely surprised when he turns from nature to man, and remarks of a highland fling: "there was as fine a row of boys and girls as you ever saw, some beautiful faces, & one exquisite mouth....This is what I like better than scenery" (Letters, I, 307).

The grandeur and beauty of nature which Keats purposely sought out finally proved itself inadequate. So, too, did the usual categorical terms for describing these sights. In a letter of 11, 13 July 1818 to J.H. Reynolds, Keats levels these categories to the ground, describing them as somehow akin to the language of Swift's *Laputa* printing press:

I'll not run over the Ground we have passed, that would be merely as bad as telling a dream—unless perhaps I do it in the manner
of the Laputan printing press—that is I put down Mountains, Rivers, Lakes, dells, glens, Rocks, and Clouds, With beautiful enchanting, gothic picturesque fine, delightful, enchanting, Grand, sublime—a few Blisters &c.

(Letters, I, 322)

At first glance Keats seems to be saying no more than this: "I cannot fully describe our travels thus far unless, perhaps, I choose a shorthand method of categorical description; unfortunately, this would be as ineffective and silly as the Laputan printing press in giving you any accurate knowledge." Still, one wonders if that Swiftian analogy did not spring to mind for even more appropriate reasons. The terms "sublime," "beautiful," etc. seem to Keats merely pasted labels that one uses, just as the academicians in Lagado paste the written papers onto bits of wood they later spin around. It is not so much the ineffective method of description that Keats jokes about to Reynolds as it is the inappropriateness of the labels to begin with. They seem no more adequate for describing scenery than the academician's labels for denoting ideas.

I would suggest, then, that despite his familiarity with the usual applications of "sublime" and "beautiful," Keats did not customarily employ them in like fashion. The letter to Reynolds indicates this. So, too, does Keats's frequent jumbling together of the terms. Finally, it seems to me that his general discontent with natural sublimity—contrasted with his decided preference for the world of man—carries over to his use of the term "sublime" and aids us in understanding his application of it.

The natural sublime, which Keats undertook to experience in
his Scotch tour, has recently been the subject of a study by J. R. Watson. It is his contention that the tour "was a deliberate quest for what Keats was later to describe as 'the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime', an attempt to prove upon his pulses the kind of excitement in nature which had previously been confined to books." Watson goes on to say that Keats parted ways with Wordsworth because: (a) the former found the "eye" an encouragement to the aspiring imagination while the latter found it despotic; (b) Keats, in a very un-Wordsworthian fashion, occasionally admits the "emptiness" of his imagination with regard to sublime landscape; (c) to write of nature as Wordsworth does, requires a posture alien to Keats—namely, that the poet be a spectator ab extra, conscious of his separate identity and not about to "loose his Mind" by participating in the natural scene; (d) where Wordsworth could hold forth on sublimity, Keats had to combine the "mythologising imagination" with the sublime, thereby using the sublime "as part of a more general imaginative vision." What Watson is suggesting is this: that Keats's pursuit of the natural sublime was akin to Wordsworth's concern with power in the external world. The young poet's interest in the sublime, Watson tells us, "began with a reading of Wordsworth, when Keats became aware of a power in Nature"; thus, the Scotch tour was largely intended to help Keats "understand the secret of Wordsworth's power." This is a valuable beginning point for our understanding of Keats's trek as well as its many disappointments. It was a search for the sublime of power. Specifically, it was a search located in the world external to man, and for this very
reason was doomed to fail. The source of grandeur for Keats was always to be man and not nature ("Scenery is fine—but human nature is finer" \( \text{Letters, I, 242} \)); hence, to try and locate meaning in some "thing" was a preordained disaster. Keats's letters throughout the tour reflect an increasing inability to respond to nature's power, to "inform" it in the sense of greeting it with one's spirit. And, as Watson remarks, the attempts to render the sense of Nature's power in verse resulted in some large compositional failures.

A case in point is the poem "Written upon the Top of Ben Nevis" where the mist, according to Watson, becomes a symbol of Keats's own bewilderment about the natural sublime.\(^{10}\) Certainly this is true enough, but the poem is even more pointedly about the failure of "mental might" and "the world of thought";\(^{11}\) that is to say, a failure of power not "out there" but "in here." The poem offers us a stock instance of a "sublime" scene, only to obscure it in a blanket of mist, thereby robbing us of every expectation. The failure of sublimity, it is suggested, must be laid at the doorstep of the mind, not the foot of Ben Nevis. Somehow the imagination is simply not moved any longer by instances of scenic power: "By this time I am comparatively a mountaineer—I have been among wilds and Mountains too much to break out much about the\( i/r \) Grandeur....The first Mountains I saw, though not so large as some I have since seen, weighed very solemnly upon me. The effect is wearing away—yet I like them mainly" (\text{Letters, I, 342}). This letter to Benjamin Bailey was written only two or three weeks before the Ben Nevis poem, and
it states clearly that a separation was fast occurring between nature's power and that of Keats the perceiver.

Keats found that "the sublime" was simply not an aspect of things. The Scotch tour, one might say, is almost a last, futile attempt to seek external grandeur years after theorists, poets, and numerous students of belles lettres had opted for the sublimity of the creative mind. Thus it is no small wonder that the letters and poetry produced by Keats during this tour turn as much to the subject of self and the mind as they do to the scenic prospects of the north country. In fact, if we look at the letters written just before the commencement of Keats's rather heroic trek we see that there seemed little hope of success even at that early point. There is the letter of 13 March 1818 to Bailey, for example, which contains the remark mentioned above—"Scenery is fine—but human nature is finer"—and which goes on to address the specific subject of "pursuit." Bearing in mind the title of Watson's study—"Keats and the Pursuit of the Sublime"—it is particularly interesting to review those comments to Bailey: "As Tradesmen say every thing is worth what it will fetch, so probably every mental pursuit takes its reality and worth from the ardour of the pursuer—being in itself a nothing" (Letters, I, 242). It can be argued that the soon-to-occur tour was a physical rather than mental pursuit, and so one ought not to apply Keats's remarks here with undue emphasis; but surely it is valid to insist that the trek was as much a mental exercise as it was a physical experience. Since it was largely to be a time of learning, or preparation for writing the "great poem," I think it fair
to assume that Keats's "pursuit" in the letter to Bailey bears investigating.

What we find recorded in the letters written during the tour is a gradual lessening of "ardour" on the part of the pursuer, the reason for which is contained in the words immediately following the passage on pursuit:

Ethereal things may at least be thus real, divided under three heads—Things real—things semireal—and no things—Things real—such as existences of Sun Moon & Stars and passages of Shakspeare—Things semireal such as Love, the Clouds &c which require a greeting of the Spirit to make them wholly exist—and Nothings which are made Great and dignified by an ardent pursuit—which by the by stamps the burgundy mark on the bottles of our Minds, insomuch as they are able to "consecrate whatsoever they look upon" I have written a Sonnet here of a somewhat collateral nature—so don't imagine it an a propos des botte. (Letters, I, 242-243)

What the "natural sublime" implies is a state of power in a thing (a "thing real" Keats would say) which merely requires a present subject. It moves us, if we are at all sensitive—indeed, it "ravishes" us, according to the traditional terminology. We do not inform it; it informs us. The danger, of course, is that the mind can be so crushed by this force that it is rendered passive, We recollect that this is the foundation of De Quincey's discontent with Richter, and it also seems to me the danger point in Keats's pursuit of the physical sublime. At first he is delighted to be ravished. There is something in being "possessed" that is aesthetically pleasurable, especially for a neophyte mountaineer. So very early in the tour Keats exclaims: "I cannot think with Hazlitt that these scenes make man appear little. I never forgot
my stature so completely—I live in the eye; and my imagination, surpassed, is at rest." (Letters, I, 301). However, as we have seen throughout this study, harmony is the final product of sublimity; at least, this is the end result for many theorists of the sublime. And let us note that it is not specifically harmony Keats is talking about in this letter. Rather, it is rest, in the sense of the imagination being laid to sleep in a delicious, enticing inactivity when man "hath his autumn ports/ And havens of repose, when his tired wings/ Are folded up, and he content to look/ On mists in idleness." It is an inactivity both pleasurable and frustrating, as "natural" to man as a "human season" but ultimately debilitating to the poet (as the "Ben Nevis" poem reminds us). The greatest poetry results from "harmony," not rest, harmony implying both passivity and activity, a use of the eye and the imagination, an interchange between the pursuer and the pursued. Only then—when power matches power—can one have "a mind self-overaw'd." When the neophyte becomes a real mountaineer the unique pleasure in external power becomes diminished; one is tempted to struggle, then, with violent antagonism and the net product, in a Wordsworth for example, is to fashion oneself as a "Man of Power" rather than a "Man of Genius" by conquering nature instead of participating with it. This total assertion of the conquering self, the "egotistical sublime" as Keats called it, was inimical to his definitions of the poetical character and the man of genius: the former without "self," "every thing and nothing" (Letters, I, 387), the latter "great as certain ethereal Chemicals operating on the Mass of neutral intellect—by [sic]
they have not any individuality, and determined Character" (Letters, I, 184).

Briefly, then, we can say that the Scotch tour is the record of an impasse and its consequent frustration. On the one hand there is tempting passivity which, though originally pleasurable, leads to "mists," moments of idleness, a diminution of mental might. On the other hand, Keats cannot resort to a Wordsworthian assertion of the egotistical, powerful self, since he already envisions himself as a man of Genius rather than Power. He is not content to be dominated by external power or, in turn, to dominate it. The third alternative—that of harmonizing the extremes—seems an unattainable ideal at this point in his poetic development.

The opposing claims of power and passivity naturally fascinated Keats, especially as he steadily examined the mind and its creative faculties. However, a full examination of this problem is best left to the third part of this chapter; in the meantime it is necessary that we examine the Scotch tour and its quest for the locus of beauty.

Keats's confused terminology in describing "beauty" being harvested from "grand" materials is not totally unexpected to a reader of his letters. The idea has already occurred some six months before the beginning of the tour:

In passing however I must say of one thing that has pressed upon me lately and increased my Humility and capability of submission and that is this truth—Men of Genius are great as certain ethereal Chemicals operating on the Mass of neutral intellect—by [for "but" /] they have not any individuality, any determined
Character. I would call the top and head of those who have a proper self Men of Power....

0 I wish I was as certain of the end of all your troubles as that of your momentary start about the authenticity of the Imagination. I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination—What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth—whether it existed before or not—for I have the same Idea of all our Passions as of Love they are all in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty....The Imagination may be compared to Adam's dream—

he awoke and found it truth.

(Letters, I, 184-185)

The term "sublime" is here applied not to some quality or "achievement" of a "thing" in nature but to man himself: and specifically, to that creative divinity which characterizes him.

Love and the Affections in their sublime do not discover beauty or respond to it; they create it. As such, the locus of beauty in its highest degree—"essential" beauty (that is, the "essence" of beauty)—cannot be determined apart from the creative self.

Also, the affections are nothing short of holy. They bespeak a divinity which is attributable to the poet in his role as God-like maker or bringer of order. This idea has already been enunciated by Keats in an earlier letter to Benjamin Haydon (10,11 May 1817), a crucial letter devoted to an analysis of the poet's identity (and by extension Keats himself) in language which is rich in religious implications. This is the letter wherein Keats likens himself to a rebel Angel, shifts from this momentary bravado to another statement which seems precariously close to home ("There is no greater Sin after the 7 deadly than to flatter oneself into an idea of being a great Poet" (Letters, I, 143)), then suddenly erupts in a conscious declaration of the poet as
Creator:

I know no one but you who can be fully sensible of the turmoil and anxiety, the sacrifice of all what is called comfort the readiness to Measure time by what is done and to die in 6 hours could plans be brought to conclusions.—the looking upon the Sun the Moon the Stars, the Earth and its contents as materials to form greater things—that is to say ethereal things —but here I am talking like a Madman greater things than our Creator himself made!!" (Letters, I, 143)

The "sublime," then, is in the service of beauty: it denotes the creative capacity of man as he fashions some expression of the Beautiful. The beautiful and sublime are not qualities "out there" which one comes to and finds. On the contrary, some "greeting of the soul" is required. There must be creative interaction between the subject and whatever constitutes the materials of his creation: there are "innumerable compositions and decompositions which take place between the intellect and its thousand materials before it arrives at that trembling delicate and snail-horn perception of Beauty" (Letters, I, 265). More traditional notions of the sublime, beautiful, and picturesque had always involved treating the passive role of the perceiver because at the heart of these notions was the belief that sublimity, etc. were qualities of the objects. Keats, however, will have none of this. Out the window go the old desirables—space, magnitude, etc.—and in their place he singles out the "tone" of the object, its "quality," or perhaps what Coleridge would call its "idea" of power:

We afterwards moved away a space, and saw nearly the whole /the Ambleside waterfall/ more mild, streaming silverly through the
trees. What astonishes me more than any thing is the tone, the coloring, the slate, the stone, the moss, the rock-weed; or, if I may so say, the intellect, the countenance of such places. The space, the magnitude of mountains and waterfalls are well imagined before one sees them; but this countenance or intellectual tone must surpass every imagination and defy any remembrance.

(Letters, I, 301)

Keats is not saying here that the imagination is rendered inoperative in the act of perceiving, only that it has not been able to "imagine" tone and countenance beforehand as it has space and magnitude. Admittedly, Keats goes on to talk about "these scenes" putting the imagination at rest, but the vague reference seems to be directed to the scenes encountered in the tour at large. This one specific scene—the Ambleside waterfall with its tonal qualities—appears to be in a class by itself, distinguished by its enticing points of suggestiveness. It is like "a certain Page of full Poesy or distilled Prose" that does benefit to "the 'Spirit and pulse of Good' by its mere passive existence" (Letters, I, 231). And this is one singular instance when natural scenery is being discussed not when its powers are awesome, or annihilating, but when Keats has "moved away a space" in order to see it "more mild, streaming silverly through the trees." Free from its overpowering influence, he can work with the scene, fashion these innumerable compositions and decompositions which culminate in a trembling perception of created beauty. The emphasis on "mildness" and "liquid motion" in Keats's description, set purposefully against magnitude and space, suggests the trembling, "delicate" quality of beauty here—an evanescent quality which
surpasses being "imagined" or, later, "remembered." It is almost, one is tempted to say, like a castle in the air: "it appears to me that almost any Man may like the Spider spin from his own inwards his own airy Citadel—the points of leaves and twigs on which the Spider begins her work are few and she fills the Air with a beautiful circuiting: man should be content with as few points to tip with the fine Webb of his Soul and weave a tapestry empyrean—full of Symbols for his spiritual eye, of softness for his spiritual touch, of space for his wandering of distinctness for his Luxury" (Letters, I, 231-232; my italics).

The quest for the beautiful and sublime, then, led back to the figure of John Keats himself, and specifically to his creative power. Whatever else the Scotch tour accomplished, it certainly gave strength to Keats's earlier notions that "sublimity" properly belonged in conjunction with human, rather than natural, power, and that "essential beauty" was the product of this sublimity as one greeted the world with his soul.

The Role of Creative Power

Before turning to Keats's Longinian heritage and its influence on his poetry and critical thought, it is necessary that we examine his remarks on power. They are many, and crucial, and though there will be some repetition when we later turn to the specific idea of artistic power, this is the fit place to initiate the discussion. Keats was of course fascinated by the subject of power as he read Milton, Wordsworth, and Shakespeare; his association with Hazlitt, as M.H. Abrams has pointed out,
also encouraged his concern with "intensity," which is the artistic power I have been speaking of above. As we might expect he was also troubled about the nature and degree of his own creative powers. Specifically, he was concerned with power in regard to the following: (a) the conflict between indolence and energy, (b) the delight of the imagination in power ("Negative Capability"), (c) "Soul-making" and the identity of the Man of Genius, and (d) the role of the Imagination in creating harmony between opposites.

The opposing claims of indolence and energy both fascinated and troubled Keats as many commentators have pointed out. With respect to energy, for example, we have the following remarks: "Lowness of Spirits—anxiety to go on without the Power to do so" (Letters, I, 146); "I hope for the support of a High Power while I clime this little eminence" and "I feel confident I should have been a rebel Angel had the opportunity been mine" and again, "the turmoil and anxiety ... the looking upon the Sun the Moon the Stars, the Earth and its contents as materials to form greater things" (Letters, I, 141, 142); Endymion will be "a trial of my Powers of Imagination" (Letters, I, 169); "the excellence of every Art is its intensity" (Letters, I, 192); Cripps, "a Man of great executing Powers at 20" (Letters, I, 210); "I think a little change has taken place in my intellect lately—I cannot bear to be uninterested or unemployed, I, who for so long a time, have been addicted to passiveness—Nothing is finer for the purposes of great productions, than a very gradual ripening of the intellectual powers" (Letters, I, 214). Here, chosen
almost at random, are a few remarks which so well depict the keen interest Keats had in the subject of power, especially as it related to his own poetic activities. Against these one could easily place a number which address the delights of inactivity. Perhaps the most famous occurs in the letter of 19 February 1818 to Reynolds: "let us not therefore go hurrying about and collecting honey-bee like, buzzing here and there impatiently from a knowledge of what is to be arrived at; but let us open our leaves like a flower and be passive and receptive" (Letters, I, 232). (Let us not, as it were, go hurrying about England and Scotland, harvesting grandeur and beauty bee-like, buzzing here and there impatiently from a knowledge of what is to be gleaned next. One is tempted to read the letter so, and witness therein a prophetic remark about the impending journey.)

Walter Jackson Bate has suggested that this fascination with idleness might well have been a natural reaction to the "re- lentless labor of writing Endymion." Bate also adds that, however much Keats extolled the virtues of a "wise passiveness," "the limitations would suddenly disclose themselves to him. He would begin to feel that this was not what he meant, or wanted, at all. At least it was not enough by itself." We have as well Keats's own remarks detailing his awareness that he was led into these thoughts "by the beauty of the morning operating on a sense of Idleness"; "all this is a mere sophistication, however it may neighbour to any truths, to excuse my own indolence" (Letters, I, 232, 233). Lionel Trilling, on the other hand, feels that "there is no real antagonism between Keats's 'indolence' and
his energy."\textsuperscript{18} The letter to Reynolds is "the exposition of the principle of the power of passivity, of what Keats calls 'diligent Indolence.'"\textsuperscript{19} The use of the female as an example in that letter, argues Trilling, indicates that Keats "had an awareness, rare in our culture, of the female principle as a power, an energy."\textsuperscript{20}

In fact, both Bate and Trilling are correct. Keats was aware of the dangers inherent in passivity—especially for the poet—and the Scotch tour bears this out. One can buzz here and there "collecting" or "harvesting" only to find that one is dissatisfied. But then, this is not \textit{wise} passiveness at all. It is a complete surrender of the physical, emotional, and imaginative self. There is nothing creative or energetic in the passiveness. Nor, I think, is there necessarily a paradox in a term like "creative passiveness"; Trilling suggests as much above and the letters of Keats bear him out. What Keats was gradually learning is this: that the bounds between passivity and activity are hardly fixed, that one can, and should, be both active and passive, that there is nothing \textit{inherently} wrong in cultivating a "diligent Indolence." If we turn back to the passage I have cited from \textit{Letters}, I, 232, and place it in its proper context we can see how the simile of the flower is remarkably apt for describing the poet's state of "creative" sensibility: both flower and poet are givers as well as receivers, energetic as well as passive. The letter to Reynolds stipulates that "it is a false notion that more is gained by receiving than giving....the receiver and the giver are equal in their benefits" (\textit{Letters}, I,
232). Let us not forget, however, that Keats favors our being flower instead of bee because of the falsity of the notion that more is gained by the receiver; thereby he implies (indeed, almost declares) that the flower is the "giver" and the bee the "receiver." As the passage continues, the roles are reversed. Keats next describes the "fair guerdon" received by the flower from the Bee. In short, then, we come full circle: there is no way of establishing which is finally active or passive, bee or flower.

I think we can see that this tentative toying with the locus of power bears heavily upon the notion of "Negative Capability," and in a moment I shall make the connection. But first, one small—though important—thread needs to be picked up. The Scotch tour, and its impasse, could very easily be discussed in terms of the metaphoric bee and flower: during the tour, Keats has been totally confused about his shifting roles as both. He has buzzed about natural objects in search of beauty without a fair guerdon to give; at other moments of incredible passiveness he has assumed the role of flower—totally the receiver, awed by whatever prospect confronts him but again without something to give. The metaphor is by no means a fanciful one. Keats uses it in his letter to confront the idea of power both active and passive. Applied to the Scotch tour it casts the same idea into relief and goes a long way toward explaining (or at least understanding) the disappointment in nature's ready-made energy.

The meaning of "Negative Capability" has teased every student of Keats, no doubt, and occasioned a variety of interpretations.
But among the many differences set down there have emerged at least three points on which most critics seem to agree: (a) that Negative Capability is really a kind of "positive" ability to negate total self, and enter instead into an imaginative union with an object, (b) that this ability leads to harmony or reconciliation of opposites, and (c) that Beauty somehow relates to this entire process. Certainly it would be false to assume that Keats is merely saying one should be aloof from judgment and opinion. As Lionel Trilling has so well countered, this "is not in the least Keats's intention." 21

The letter to the Keatses containing the remark on Negative Capability was written only about seven weeks before the letter to Reynolds on the flower, the bee, and the subject of power. While it is not evidence in itself for making a firm connection between the letters, we should not forget that the letters written during this time have much to do with the ideas of activity, passivity, power and imagination. They form a kind of musical composition in which the theme is being developed and played upon in a variety of ways.

After enunciating his belief that Negative Capability is the quality defining a man of achievement, Keats provides us with an example and a conclusion:

Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetratium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge. This pursued through volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration. (Letters, I, 193-194)
The problem in this comment is the demonstrative pronoun "This" in the second sentence. Does Keats intend us to take "This" as "the subject of Negative Capability"? Or does he mean by "This" "the kind of pursuit typified by Coleridge"? In one sense it would not seem to matter which interpretation we take: the net product is finally an awareness of Beauty's power whether we contemplate the idea of Negative Capability (and so come to awareness) or learn the hard way by seeking after the unattainable. Yet in another sense it does matter when we remember that "probably every mental pursuit takes its reality and worth from the ardour of the pursuer—being in itself a nothing" (Letters, I, 242). When we place this remark next to the one on Negative Capability both are illuminated. Coleridge is an instance of the man who places value not in the self ("one's ardour") but in the act of pursuing. His goal is to become a "Man of Power," hence to know what he can bring under command of the will and rational understanding. He is like the buzzing bee, or Keats the neophyte mountaineer, active in pursuit but passive in intent: wanting to harvest something—in Coleridge's case, knowledge—without understanding that the "fair guerdon" is offered up by oneself. Truly, then, "reality" and "worth" (the synonyms are "Truth" and "Beauty") do reside in the pursuer and his ability to create "essential Beauty."

Keats suggests the real problem with being a Coleridge: though one will eventually recognize that Beauty overcomes all else, one is rendered ineffectual and noncreative in the meantime. Obviously this must follow if one is not cognizant of the creative
self. To be a man of "Achievement," then, involves cultivating one's creative powers: and for Keats this means realizing the full powers both of activity and passivity. Now, every man knows that he is active, that he possesses power, that he is bee-like. Keats echoes this fact in his early letters with their remarks on his "powers," his desire to be a "rebel Angel," and in a later letter with his admiration of the energies displayed by fighting men in the street (Letters, II, 80). However, although the "simple affirmation of the self in its vital energy means much to Keats... it does not mean enough."22 It must be complemented by the ability to surrender as well as conquer; or, to phrase this differently, to enact the female as well as male principle. "Negative Capability" is the term Keats gives to this human capacity. It is not itself creative, but it is fundamental to one who wishes to be a creator, a man of Achievement. The capability of negating the egotistical self is the first step; without it the second--an imaginative union with the object--is impossible.

Such an imaginative union is obviously an act of power, one to which we have given any number of names like "imaginative sympathy" or "imaginative interfusion." However, it is above all an act of reconciliation, for it results in a self-identity which is everything and nothing. A man of Achievement who complements his vital energies by first, negating the self, and second, experiencing imaginatively some object (artistic or natural) is indeed involved in a "fusion of object and mind" as Bate maintains.23 At the same time he cannot assign a specific role to
the self, such as male, female, active, passive. To pick up our earlier metaphor, he is both flower and bee, a complete integration of activity and passivity, subject and object. That this is not some "dream state" or "visionary experience" is the assertion to which Keats adheres in verse and letters. It is real; it is "True." It is "essential Beauty" created by the Affections "in their sublime." And finally, it is not some state or quality that can be "found" in exotic scenery.

If the "essence" of Beauty lies in the dissolution of contraries, and if that dissolution is effected by the "informing" power of the Imagination (itself freed by the ability to negate egotistic self), it must follow that the Imagination is the agent of creative power. It does not follow, however, that harmony and reconciliation will necessarily result simply because one possesses the "Capability of Negation." There is always the danger—and especially in the poet—that the Imagination will usurp the object rather than unify with it. In fact, for the poet there is a double danger since usurpation can occur either in the imaginative act which precedes composition or in creating the work itself. A "genuine Being," for Keats, is one who can be everything and nothing, who possesses Negative Capability enormously and can put it to the service of the Imagination. Thus, a "fine [i.e. sublime] writer is the most genuine Being in the World" (Letters, II, 139) presumably because he performs the doubly difficult task of creating "essential Beauty" both in mind and art. His art, as it were, becomes the record of his life, which "is a continual allegory" if it is "of any worth"; that is, unfathomable, a "Mys-
tery" because it is without self-identity (Letters, II, 67).

Shakespeare was such a man for Keats and such a man he wanted to be himself. Indeed, Keats tells us in his later years that he has learned to control in part the "fire" or "imaginative ardour" characteristic of his youth, and that he is not disappointed except, perhaps, for his inability to control it entirely. It is in this letter that we see Keats more anxious than ever to be a poet of "harmony": not of "rest," or "indolence," or "silence," be it noted, but harmony:

Some think I have lost that poetic ardour and fire 't is said I once had—the fact is perhaps I have: but instead of that I hope I shall substitute a more thoughtful and quiet power. I am more frequently, now, contented to read and think—but now & then, haunted with ambitious thoughts. Quiescence in my pulse, improved in my digestion; exerting myself against vexing speculations—scarcely content to write the best verses for the fever they leave behind. I want to compose without this fever. I hope one day I shall. (Letters, II, 209)

This is something very close to the idea of Soul-making. We hear in these remarks the voice of one who has found his own words to be true: "Nothing ever becomes real till it is experienced" (Letters, II, 81).

The idea of "Soul-making" is inextricably bound up with Keats's ideas about Negative Capability and imaginative sympathy. To negate the egotistic power of self is not at all annihilation of self, but—paradoxically, perhaps—the first step in realizing identity. In fact, the best beginning for us here is to distinguish the words "self" and "identity," since the first of these defines a surety about one's character (as in Wordsworth or Cole-
ridge, for example) that does not incorporate the trials of life so much as it stands fast against them, while the latter term depicts an immersion in "the medium of this world" through identification (imaginatively) with every degree of sorrow and joy. It is suggested that this very immersion involves a process of innumerable compositions and decompositions until one arrives at a trembling beauty that is his own creation, and, at the same time, a revelation of his divine identity. Nor, I think, is "divine" at all the wrong word. The process of "soul-making" as Keats describes it is one of identifying and realizing those "sparks of the divinity in millions" (Letters, II, 102), of fulfilling what might well be "a system of Salvation" (Letters, II, 103).

Central to this "system" is the interchange between Mind (or what Keats calls "Intelligence") and Heart, the former of which must be schooled through the medium of the latter (Letters, II, 103-104). It is the heart which is the seat of our affections or passions, and they, in their sublime, create essential beauty. Is not Keats suggesting, then, that soul-making is tantamount to continued creation and commitment to the essence of beauty? Is he not also suggesting that this pursuit of identity is especially the task of the poet, whose life and work are finally an "allegory" of soul-making? It is true that "The greater part of Men make their way with the same instinctiveness, the same unwandering eye from their purposes, the same animal eagerness as the Hawk" (Letters, II, 79); but then there are heroes as well—a Socrates or Jesus—and among these must surely be numbered the
poet. If nothing else, he teaches us that "we have all one human heart," that "there is an electric fire in human nature tending to purify—so that among these human creatures there is continually some birth of new heroism" (Letters, II, 80).

And surely he teaches us best by putting "self" aside and communing with the "Vale of Soul-making."

It could certainly be argued that these late letters are not an assertion of power, but, on the contrary, a revelation of its absence. Keats's references to his lack of poetic power are many, and they increase as the letters go on, culminating in his agonizing remark, "O what a misery it is to have an intellect in splints!" (Letters, II, 350). Still, I cannot begin to accept such an assertion, nor, I think, would most students of Keats. Soul-making, the process of gathering an identity, the purposeful immersion in life so as to undergo the thousands of compositions and decompositions culminating in a delicate beauty: all of this may smack of "powerlessness" or surrender to a kind of female, passive role but it was clearly not so for Keats even as late as August of 1819, when he states: "I am obliged continually to check myself and strive to be nothing" (Letters, II, 147). On the contrary, such an act is one of determined heroism and discovery. Furthermore, it is a firm testing of one's own sublimity, for it is a kind of self-enforced solitude which excludes everything but the poet and his ideal of beauty: "Notwithstanding your Happiness and your recommendation I hope I shall never marry.... I should not feel—or rather my Happiness would not be so fine
a nd my Solitude is sublime. Then instead of what I have described the most comforting wife and home, there is a sublimity to welcome me home—the roaring of the wind is my wife and the Stars through the window pane are my Children" (Letters, I, 403).

The Longinian Heritage

J.R. Watson, in his study of Keats's sublime, suggests that the six weeks tour was an outstanding event in the poet's short life, for it brought him into direct confrontation with his ideas of the poet's art and it modified them as much as it did "his approach to the sublime." Keats, we might say, found that the "sublime of nature" and the "sublime of self" bore heavily upon each other and upon the final definition of the poetical Character. By studying nature and its sublimity he was, in fact, gaining insight into his own limitations and sublimities; not the least important of his discoveries was that he was a poet very distinct from Wordsworth, a "poetical Character" quite apart from "the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime."

Watson makes a valuable observation on the relationship between this emerging discovery of poetical Character and Keats's poetry:

the Lake District and Scottish tour helped Keats to discover himself and his true role as a poet, in a way which he had not expected. As well as an acquaintance with the sublime, he gained an injection of self-knowledge, and the power of Hyperion is in the combination of Keats's mythologising imagination and the sublime. The memory of his tour can be seen in the terrifying landscape which forms the back-
ground for the colossal figures who move through the poem.²⁵

And, continues Watson,

Keats at last succeeds [sic] in giving poetic expression to his experience of mountainous landscape. The success is no doubt due to the fact that he is no longer attacking the landscape frontally, with a direct apostrophe, but is using it as part of a more general imaginative vision, so that the scene is populated by the tragic shapes of the fallen gods.²⁶

There are terms here with which I would quarrel: "self-knowledge," for example, "injection," and "the sublime" in its limited application to natural grandeur and terror. But Watson's major point is an excellent one, and should not be lost among more minor quibblings. Keats did indeed question his identity as a poet, and at the same time the value of natural sublimity. The tour convinced him more than ever that "sublimity" was a term more properly applicable to the creative mind. That scenery is abandoned in favor of the creative, poetical Character which can negate self and achieve imaginative union is quite as one would expect; Watson points this out by saying, in effect, that scenery and its sublimity take second place in the later ("post-tour") poetry to the poetic imagination and its sublimity. Natural grandeur then functions not as a centrality in the poetry but as a background to greater things.

This is perhaps an involved way of saying something very simple yet very crucial: Keats turns to writing poetry which does not take ready-made "natural energy" found apart from the self, in nature for example. Rather, the poetry reflects a power of
its own—an intensity—to which other kinds of energy are hand-
maidens. One records not what one has seen (the "achievements"
of some grand spectacle), but the process by which one has seen
it. In short, as Keats says in one of the later letters, "you
speak of Lord Byron and me—There is this great difference be-
tween us. He describes what he sees—-I describe what I imagine—
Mine is the hardest task" (Letters, II, 200; my italics). The
soaring imagination in its moment of creative sublimity, then, is
recorded in the intensity of the poem, most often by making the
subject of the work this self-same imaginative sublimity. Re-
membering as we do that Beauty is the thing created by sublime
man, we have come full circle to an appreciation of its place in
Keats's poetry. In the poet, Beauty has been the final resolution
of numerous contraries—those of self and identity, activity and
passivity, sorrow and joy, etc.—because Beauty has been created
by the poet in a state of harmony. Given this, one could hardly
expect poetry which labors at external force and scenic depiction;
rather, the process of imaginative exploration, and the possibil-
ities$^{27}$ of harmony, would seem the poetic ideals. Nor must we
be thrown off balance by the poems which do not demonstrate har-
mony in their plots: it is, after all, not the pursuit which is
"real" and "worthy" (i.e. "True" and "Beautiful") but the ardor
of the pursuer. The most significant subject in Lamia, for in-
stance, is not what Lycius is after but the ardor of his search.

This insistence upon imaginative endeavor as the proper sub-
ject for poetry points up Keats's dislike of the Wordsworthian
sort of poetry "that has a palpable design upon us" (Letters, I, 224). At the same time, it demonstrates how very Longinian Keats can be in his expectations about poetry. His dislike of "Wordsworthian" poetry is that it effectively kills the "poet" in every man; we become distressed at seeing a man do what we all could do ("Many a man can travel to the very bourne of Heaven") but insisting that his way of doing it is the only right and proper one. Setting aside the fairness of this remark, we can see why Keats is hostile to such poetry: it kills the poet in us by alienating us, by putting "its hand in its breeches pocket" "if we do not agree" (Letters, I, 224). Such poetry does not speak to the soul, as Longinus and Keats would insist it must: "Poetry should be great & unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle it or amaze it with itself but with its subject" (Letters, I, 224). It does not ennoble the reader, but angers him.

This letter to Reynolds which contains the remarks quoted above is only one of several that echo Longinus's criteria for great poetry. M.H. Abrams has rightly cautioned us that we do not know whether Keats ever read Longinus or not, but regardless of this Keats "emphasized more than any of his contemporaries the image-and-intensity aspect of the Longinian heritage"; furthermore, "the three poetic axioms he announced to the publisher of his Endymion read like a gloss upon some doctrines of Peri Hupsous."28 Abrams is indeed correct, and I shall go on to point out a number of comments which reflect a kinship of poetic theory between Keats and Longinus. As for direct influence of the Greek
critic on Keats, I think we can set this aside as an interesting, but ultimately profitless, speculation. Longinus's concern, as I have argued in the first chapter, was to isolate the quality of "greatness" in art and to treat of it. And T.R. Henn has shown most convincingly that many of those criteria in On the Sublime are clearly evident—and perhaps best understood—in the writings of the Romantic artists. I should think that the similarities between Keats and Longinus, then, would argue this: that the theoretic ideas and practical criteria of On the Sublime are indeed the enduring concerns about art; and that Keats, hundreds of years later, was remarkably close to one of the greatest literary thinkers we have known, and as tenaciously committed to dealing with the problems of great art.

The first point of similarity between Longinus and Keats has already been noted: their agreement that art should speak to one's soul. In addition, Keats's belief that it should amaze us not by itself but by its subject is close to Longinus's notion that "power of conceiving a great subject" is the first desideratum. There is yet a third related point of agreement: art must, if it is to speak to a great soul, spring from a great soul. I have shown this to be a dominant concern of On the Sublime, and it is an equally dominant part of Keats's thought. "Soul-making" is another way of talking about "grandeur of soul," I should think; at least, Keats's letters reveal that a truly great artist (a "man of Being") is distinguished by this kind of grandeur, and so his art (that of Shakespeare, for example) is an eternal source of new insights, new "points" for one to touch with his own soul.
The artist's need to control raw power is still another common meeting ground between Longinus and Keats. The former posits the artist's genius as a kind of uncontrolled power which must be shaped and ordered by language and art. Surely we witness much the same idea in Keats's writings, and especially in his relentless concern with his own artistic power. "Wise passiveness" is one way of reducing "vital energy" or harmonizing it in a needed fashion. There is also an astonishing difference at times between the great compression and control of language in the later poems, and the erratic linguistic achievements of the earlier. Both in artistic practice with language and in theoretic principle Keats strove to control "poetic ardour and fire" and "substitute a more thoughtful and quiet power."

The attention to language and its compression reveals still further ideas shared by Keats and Longinus. We remember that the latter insists upon the delineation of the passions as the second major source of the sublime, and states that this is achieved "in the systematic selection of the most important elements, and in the power of forming, by their mutual combination, what may be called one body" (On the Sublime, X, 1). Certainly Keats agrees that the passions are a source of the sublime: they are, in their sublime, creative of essential beauty. The problem for the artist is how to render this passion in verse. J.R. Watson has effectively demonstrated one way in which Keats addressed this problem: by learning to select the most important elements. He gave weight to imagination and its power, and subdued the ready-made energy of nature by placing it in the background. He
learned to "combine" elements in any number of ways, but among the most important was what we have come to call synaesthesia, the intricate combination of sensations which gives such a rich density to the greatest of Keats's poetry. Systematic selection and mutual combination lead to the production of "what may be called one body," Longinus tells us. And certainly there are few poets as concerned with this end of poetry as Keats. Richard Harter Fogle has pointed out, for instance, that synaesthesia, the intricate combination of sense-imagery, "is an outward manifestation of Keats's intuitive sense of the Oneness of things, of the relationships between widely separate and dissimilar phenomena, of the intimate kinship of man and nature." It is a means of realizing unity within the work, within the man, and also between man and the world in which he lives. There lies at the heart of Keats's poetry this desire to produce harmony between opposites of many kinds, as Fogle has pointed out elsewhere, and we see this revealed not only in the use of imagery but also in the insistence on intensity, that "excellence of every art" which makes disagreeables evaporate (Letters, I, 192).

Abrams, as I have mentioned, remarks how much Keats's "axioms" are like those set down in On the Sublime. We remember that the first of them is this: "I think Poetry should surprise by a fine excess and not by Singularity—it should strike the Reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a Remembrance" (Letters, I, 238). Surely Abrams is right in drawing a connection between this and Longinus's notion that with the true sublime our soul is elevated "as though it had it-
self produced what it has heard" (On the Sublime, VII, 2). Likewise, the second and third axioms: "Its touches of beauty should never be half way therby making the reader breathless instead of content ... and this leads me on to another axiom. That if Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all" (Letters, I, 238-239). Certainly the first of these criteria is everywhere evident in On the Sublime, especially at the very beginning (VI, VII) when the difference between true and false sublimity is being explained by the reaction of each on the reader: "When ... a thing is heard repeatedly ... and its effect is not to dispose the soul to high thoughts, and it does not leave in the mind more food for reflexion than the words seem to convey ... it cannot rank as true sublimity" (On the Sublime, VIII, 3). As for poetry coming naturally or not at all there is certainly precedence in Longinus. Poetry does not "come naturally" when it is being forced; that is, when the artist is speaking not from the heart but solely from the head. Then one's art does not appear natural—in the sense of "nature-like"—but artificial and contrived. As Longinus says so very succinctly: "art is perfect when it seems to be nature" (On the Sublime, XXI, 1).

One could go on to list a very large number of similarities between Keats and Longinus: (1) the use of figures of speech as a source of power; (2) the admiration of grand conception as the first criterion for great art (witness Keats's attempts to compose an epic); (3) the imagination of the artist "becoming" that which it imagines; (4) the emphasis given to the role of
Genius; (5) imagining the presence of great bards in moments of inspired writing; and (6) the difficulty of recording in language not what one sees but what one imagines. Abrams mentions still another similarity: Keats's application of the term "beauty" which "is in the lineage of Longinus' 'sublime,' in its literal meaning of 'elevation.'" This by no means exhausts the list, but it is sufficient, I think, to bring this study back to the point at which it began: namely, with a confrontation of what constitutes the greatest literature, and, concomitantly, the greatest soul. It is fitting that my study should end with Keats, and that we should see in this youthful writer an attention to what are truly the enduring questions about art. And perhaps there is no more evident object lesson on how to read Longinus, and so the history of the sublime, than that of witnessing Keats's abandonment of "natural sublimity" in favor of man's own.
NOTES--CHAPTER SEVEN


2. Eliot, p. 92.

3. I do not specify sublimity as an "idea" distinct from beauty since I intend to argue that for Keats it was not a separate idea.


8. Watson, 117; 123; 124-125.

9. Watson, 113; 115.

10. Watson, 122.


14. These distinctions are made by Keats in a letter to Benjamin Bailey (22 November 1817): "In passing however I must say of one thing that has pressed upon me lately and encreased my Humility and capability of submission and that is this truth--
Men of Genius are great as certain ethereal Chemicals operating on the Mass of neutral intellect—by [sic] they have not any individuality, and determined Character. I would call the top and head of those who have a proper self Men of Power—" (I, 184).

The Mirror and the Lamp, p. 136.

John Keats, p. 250.

Ibid.

Introduction to The Selected Letters of John Keats (Garden City, N.Y., 1956), p. 22.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Trilling, p. 35.

John Keats, p. 243.

Watson, 123.

Watson, 124.

Watson, 125.

The term "possibilities" is important here. Keats does not necessarily show harmonic resolutions in his poetry. As I have stated earlier, the capacity for self-negation does not automatically assure harmony and reconciliation.

The Mirror and the Lamp, p. 136.

See Longinus and English Criticism (Cambridge, Eng., 1934).

The Imagery of Keats and Shelley (Chapel Hill, 1949),

"Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale,'" PMLA, 68 (1953), 211-222.

The Mirror and the Lamp, p. 136.
33 The Mirror and the Lamp, p. 137.
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