

Original Research Article

A Study of the Sublime Manifestation with Regard to Its Theoretical Foundations in the Works of German and English Painters of the 18th and 19th Centuries

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Abstract

Problem statement: The mathematical and dynamic aspects of sublimity challenge the size and power capabilities of human faculties and it seems that most instances of sublimity can be found in the thinking of the 18th-century intellectuals before Kant. It appears that painters of the 18th and 19th centuries in England and Germany also relied on sublimity as a prominent theme. Based on this, the main research question is: What is the distinct aspect of German and English Romanticism in terms of sublimity?

Research objective: The objective is to study the relationship of sublimity in the ideas of 18th-century intellectuals and the works of Romantic painters in the 18th and 19th centuries in Germany and England to examine the differences between German and British Romanticism in terms of sublimity.

Research method: The research is qualitative in nature. The method involves the descriptive-analytic study of artworks. Data collection was based on documentary and pertinent literature.

Conclusion: Grandeur is the inherent feature of the sublime and the prominent features of sublimity in paintings include greatness, vastness, infinity, ambiguity, boundlessness, and the destruction of natural forces. The study of artworks by Romantic painters of the 18th and 19th centuries such as Friedrich, Achenbach, Turner, Martin, and Danby reveals that German Romanticism has focused on the vastness and greatness of nature and the terrifying aspects of nature, but it has also considered the spiritual and symbolic aspects of nature. In English Romanticism, the dynamic aspect of sublime fear and the terror of destructive and violent forces of nature are emphasized with greater intensity. Therefore, it can be considered to be one of the prominent themes and distinct aspects of English Romanticism.

Keywords: *Romantic painting, Sublimity, Destruction, Vastness, Fear.*

Introduction

Romanticism developed differently in France, Germany, and England. In France, Romanticism emerged as a rebellious and revolutionary movement against Classicism. In Germany, due to the absence of Classicism, it appeared as a

protest against the Enlightenment, Pragmatism, and Materialism of the modern era. German Romanticism is more closely associated with a coherent school or movement. English Romanticism, on the other hand, is characterized by individualism rather than a cohesive movement, with diverse perspectives among artists, including

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poets and painters. English Romantics also reacted to social revolutions and contributed to revolutionary poetry. One prominent component of Romanticism is sublimity, which draws its origins from pre-Romantic discussions. Sublimity, with its various aspects, can be found in the works of many artists, aestheticians, writers, and poets. The idea of sublimity, prevalent in art and literature from the late 1700s to the mid-1800s, often accompanied terrifying or horrific images of nature, expressing supernatural gothic horrors or divine punishments. This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. How does sublimity allocate a spectrum of meanings among 18th-century intellectuals in Britain and Germany?
2. What is the relationship between sublime themes in ideas and the manifestations of sublimity in selected artworks?
3. How is the distinct aspect of sublimity reflected in German and English Romantic painting?

To answer these questions, first, the theoretical foundations of sublimity in the 18th century are discussed. Then, an analysis is conducted based on the types of sublimity in the works of German and English painters of the 18th and 19th centuries, such as Friedrich, Achenbach, Turner, Martin, and Danby. Finally, the present study seeks to determine the distinct aspects of Romanticism in Britain and Germany.

Research Background

After searching through the background, no similar studies with the current study were found. The background includes the following.

1. Homayouni and Afarin in a study titled “The study of nature and perspective of nature in the works of Goethe and the paintings of Friedrich and Ronge”, explored German Romanticism the influence of German painters on Goethe’s view of nature. The present study benefits from the achievements of this study in the discussion of German Romanticism (Homayouni & Afarin, 2023).
2. Noorshahraki, Amin Khandaqi and Arabzadeh

analyzed the representation of the sea in realistic painting based on the concept of the sublime in Kant’s philosophy. This study addresses the point that the sea can be considered as a metaphor that can signify the sublime, and based on this, it examines the sea in the works of artists from the 19th century in Europe and America, according to Kant’s sublime mathematics and dynamic. The present study explores the sublime in a broader context and also studies different painters and their various works (Noorshahraki, Amin Khandaqi & Arabzadeh 2023).

3. Barasch discusses the theories of art from Winckelmann to Baudelaire, focusing on the theories behind the works of several Romantic painters such as Carus, Friedrich, Ronge, Delacroix, and Goethe. The mentioned research provides a deep insight into the theory of painting and the exploration of the Romantic painters (Barasch, 2021).

4. Bariri in his thesis titled “A Study of the Sublime in Landscape Painting of the Romantic Period (Case Study: Works of Caspar David Friedrich)”, discusses the cognitive understanding of sublimity and self-transcendence in relation to the sublime. Although there is a shared case between this thesis and the current study, the theoretical focus, specific case studies, and the manner of analysis differ (Bariri, 2019).

5. Littlejohns explores German Romanticism in the book “The Cambridge Companion to German Romanticism”, focusing on the theories of German painters during the Romantic period, their letters, and the concept of the sublime as a common foundation among writers, poets, and painters. This research will be beneficial for advancing the current study (Littlejohns, 2009).

Among non-Persian sources, the Tate London Gallery website briefly introduces the concept of the sublime. Meyer (2021) in an article titled “The Sublime Through Art’s Historical Movements” discusses the sublime in art history, presenting different selections from the history of art in introducing the sublime, which vary from the ones of this study.

Research Method

The study is qualitatively oriented. Data collection was conducted through library research and document analysis. The method of study is descriptive-analytic. The meaning and concept of sublimity in the views of some 18th-century thinkers, with an emphasis on Kant, have been examined, and it has been investigated in selected works of British and German painters, particularly the Romantics, from the 18th and 19th centuries.

Theoretical Foundations

The following sections discuss the history of the sublime, the sublime in 18th-century Europe, and Kant's sublime.

• The sublime

"The word 'sublime' is derived from the Latin 'sublimis,' which combines 'sub' meaning 'related to' and 'limen' meaning 'threshold' or 'limes' meaning 'border' and signifies the elevated and exalted. Sublimity is characterized by greatness or power... The fundamental point is that our ability to perceive or comprehend it is temporarily halted" (Morley, 2010, 14). Aristophanes and Plato used the term 'hupsous/sublime' to mean the elevation of the soul and elevation in poetry (Ritter, Gründler & Gabriel, 2010, 193-204). Contemplation of the sublime became associated with the treatise "Peri Hupsous" (On the Sublime). It was attributed to the Roman writer Cassius Longinus¹. In this treatise, he specifically considers the five sources of sublimity in discourse: "1. Mastery of powerful and noble thoughts, 2. Having a source of inspiration from fervent emotions, 3. Suitable formal structure in mental images and expressions, 4. Veracity of speech, 5. The general effect of grandeur and exaltation" (Longinus, 2000, 26). Longinus acknowledges that the introduction of penetrating and astonishing expressive forms is not merely about convincing the listener but about arousing enthusiasm (ibid., 14). He believed that the success of an artistic work lies in the quality of the sublime. He considered true authenticity in life and

art to be confronting the unknown and threatening factors. Therefore, sublimity can even be a way of life for an artist, manifested in their works.

• The Concept of the Sublime in 18th Century Europe

The concept of the sublime finds its particular resonance in the aesthetics of 18th-century England and Germany. The writings of German thinkers in the 18th century were revisited in England and, once again, reinterpreted in Germany under the reading of Kant. Therefore, a brief reference to its German and English roots would not be devoid of usefulness. In Germany, Moses Mendelssohn published an article titled "On the Sublime and Naive in the Fine Sciences" in 1758. Mendelssohn believed that the emotion arising from the perception of something vast and powerful, whether extended or unbounded, is composite and can arise initially through perception or thought in sublimity. However, this distinction predates Kant's mathematical and dynamic sublime. Mendelssohn believed that the encounter with the non-extended sublime passes through the fabric of our being and allows the imagination to give wings to movement and progress without interruption. It blends all these matters in the self or soul and gives rise to a phenomenon that combines fear with respect. Thus, in the face of sublimity, not only does fear accompany respect, but also admiration for supreme excellence. This sublimity perceived by the beholder may be a product of divine artistry or the result of human artistic existence (Guyer, 2015, 99-101).

Edmund Burke's² work on the sublime was presented in Dublin, Britain, in the year following Mendelssohn's article. However, Burke emerges in a context and background where the concept of the sublime had already been cultivated by Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, John Dennis, and especially in the works of Joseph Addison. The first two thinkers, inspired by their travels to the Alps, considered the sublime as a quality that combines both harmony and terror, distinct from the quality of beauty. Particularly,

Shaftesbury considered the sublime as a quality beyond and greater than beauty. Finally, Addison, emphasizing the imagination, considered three characteristics of greatness, extraordinariness, and beauty resulting from external objects as related to the sublime (Table 1) (Shelley, 2014). He accurately expressed the distinction between the beautiful and the sublime (Ritter et al., 2010, 195-196).

Given this background, Burke “was the first to distinguish between the pleasure of aesthetic beauty and the particular psychological dynamism of the sublime” (Guter, 2016, 222). According to Burke, “the origin of the sublime lies in things that are stimuli of pain, astonishment, and danger, as well as anything terrifying and dreadful” (Burke, 1958, 36). Thus, the sublime was associated with the emergence of various emotions, ranging from fear and surprise to the feeling of encountering the cries of animals and the awe-inspiring wonders of nature and artifice (Ahmadi, 2003, 78). Ambiguity, death, and illness are also factors that evoke the sense of the sublime. “Death is obscure, uncertain, and complex, so it is the highest of things and reaches the utmost sublimity” (ibid.). Burke believed that the sublime is dominated by terror and dread (Table 1). “The sublime feeling is based on the instinct of self-preservation and fear, which, as long as it does not lead to actual disintegration of bodily organs, generates movements that clear the delicate or constricted vessels from dangerous or painful obstructions and thus give rise to impressive sensations, not pleasure but a kind of mixed apprehension and fear” (Kant cited in Burke, 2014, 202). Pleasure and pain, according to Burke, seem to be intertwined physiologically and psychologically.

• Kant’s mathematical sublime and unexpected greatness

This thinker has introduced two types of sublimity: mathematical sublimity and dynamic sublimity. It seems that these two types of sublimity often encompass the examples aforementioned by thinkers. Mathematical sublimity pertains to the greatness of nature and the vastness of spatial or

temporal dimensions, while dynamic sublimity relates to the power of nature and its defiance. Mathematical sublimity arises solely from the loss of the measure and proportions of objects and entities to our senses and bodies. In section 28, Kant explains that the aesthetic and approximated measure for evaluating sublimity is not found through bodily proportionality, and our mind transforms the infinity of nature into a non-sensuous standard. “That infinity is converted into a unit (absolutely great) according to which everything in nature is small, and thus the mind feels superiority in relation to the infinitude of nature” (Kant, 1987, 28, 120). Reason combines the perception of this boundlessness and the perceptible grandeur of the world into a single whole, and the transcendence of reason over nature becomes an act of imagination. “Great sublimity can enter into proportions that can bring the idea of the infinite under the control of reason as a unit (absolutely great)” (Afarin, 2021, 208-209). The concept of mathematical sublimity surpasses any measure, which is why it challenges reason from the perspective of cognitive faculty. “The reason for this challenge is the failures that the faculty of imagination encounters in terms of sensory aspects; once in the imagination of unitary measurement, and another time in the imagination of a unitary multiplication corresponding to the real” (Burnham, 2019, 145). Mathematical sublimity must encompass an absolutely great sensory magnitude. The general idea of reason, in relation to any sensible entity, is absolutely great (Table 1). During the experience of the absolutely great, an unexpected purposiveness emerges within the failure of sensory knowledge. According to Kant’s remarks after section 29, in general, this failed representation is mistakenly perceived as having a purposive function and thus becomes pleasurable.

• Kant: dynamic sublimity and power, defiance and fear

Nature, as a source of power, and therefore as dynamic sublimity, induces fear. Dynamic sublimity challenges reason from the perspective of the faculty

Table 1. The positions of British and German intellectuals regarding the sublime. Source: Author.

British thinkers	Sublimity	German thinkers	Sublimity
1- Anthony Ashley Cooper, 2-Third Earl of Shaftesbury, 3-Edison	1- He considered the harmony and simultaneous terror induced by traveling around the Alpine mountains as sublime. 2- Shaftesbury considers sublimity as a quality that surpasses and is greater than beauty. 3- Emphasizing imagination, he considers the three qualities of greatness, extraordinariness, and beauty resulting from external objects as related to sublimity.	Moses Mendelssohn	The feeling that arises from perceiving or contemplating an extended or boundless magnitude of something very large and powerful is complex. It can arise initially through perception or thought in the experience of sublimity.
Edmund Burke	The source of sublimity includes things like illness and death, which are stimuli for pain, astonishment, and peril, as well as anything terrifying and dreadful.	Immanuel Kant	The mathematical sublime and unexpected greatness. The dynamic sublime and powerful defiance and fear.

of desire. The dimensions of dynamic sublimity go beyond the ability of the embodied human will to withstand it. Nature, in its wildest and most chaotic forms of threat and devastation, such as daring and intertwined rocks, massive clouds in the sky, dazzling lightning and thunderous strikes in motion, volcanoes, destructive power of whirlwinds, tumultuous oceans, waterfall cascades of river water falling from rocks; these are the things that evoke a sense of fear in us because our ability to confront them is insignificant compared to their power, and they inspire ideas of dynamic sublimity (Kant, 1987, 23, 100). Dynamic power, by invoking the faculty of desire, challenges our embodied and sensory will. Our will and determination feel their insignificance in this confrontation.

The mind, in dynamic sublimity, takes a step towards discovering something like a rational idea, which is the inner freedom that finds sublimity in everything, and its realization is expected in the actions of the will. “True freedom is escaping or becoming independent from natural law in a way that rational obedience is possible with moral law” (Burnham, 2019, 155). The idea of freedom is negative in the sublime. It means that it is an activity without natural determination, directly related to defiance. We are helpless in the face of this sublime, but our reason, relying on the idea of freedom, finds a role in finding an activity free from all internal and external determinations, which is a super-sensible role. Therefore, sublimity belongs to

human freedom, which, by definition, is safe against the forces of nature. Perhaps during the translation of Kant’s ideas about painting, one can say that the geometric or mathematic sublimity is related to lines, while dynamic sublimity is related to colors.³ The absence of form, which Kant speaks of, is a possible power for the presentation of the unrepresentable or the sublime (Harrison & Wood, 2007, 1134). In the Romantic period, art was no longer considered merely as a means of entertainment, construction, or even aesthetic satisfaction (Littlejohns, 2009, 227), but rather as an expression of the natural-born tragedies, which were dramatized by its anger against humanity. Therefore, in art as well, one can speak of sublime dimensions. Theorists have spoken about the sublime in artistic works. Edison said that artworks can evoke a sense of sublime ecstasy in the viewer. Theorists like Jonathan Richardson considered sublimity as a criterion for evaluating the superiority of thought, delicacy, and status in painting (Barasch, 2021, 105-106).

Analysis of works

In this section, the works of Friedrich, Achenbach, Turner, Martin, and Danby are analyzed from the perspective of the sublime.

• Dynamic sublimity and the perception of nature in friedrich’s works

Caspar David Friedrich, the famous German Romantic painter, focuses on nature and its optimistic aspects such as growth, vitality, and the cyclical nature as a constant life force. He also considers

the mysterious, ambiguous, and destructive aspects of nature. The cycles and seasons of nature are of great importance to him, symbolizing the continuous and endless vitality of nature. Towards the end of his life, he depicted human life as seasons of the year. He painted the seasons of spring, summer, autumn, and winter. Winters are associated with the end of his life. "It is clear that in his mind, winter symbolized his declining energy and power" (Siegel, Rewald & Monrad, 2019, 130).

To explore the mysterious, ambiguous, and even terrifying aspects, one can refer to his paintings such as *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818), *The Tree of Crows* (1822), *Cemetery in the Snow* (1827), *Rocky Landscape in the Elbe Sandstone Mountains* (1826), *Owl on a Grave*, *Owl by the Window of a Castle*, *Owl by the Moon* (after 1830). He accompanies the fate of humans with uncertain coastal landscapes like *Monk by the Sea* (1810), a ruined monastery in the winter landscape, in a graveyard in the snow (1827) with a cold and melancholic silence. Friedrich's concern is the transition from the physical realm of the earth to the spiritual realm of eternity. Sometimes he portrays uncontrollable forces and the wrath of nature, as seen in works like *The Sea of Ice* (1821). His landscapes mainly reflect the unity of existence (the presence of God in nature). Friedrich had a mental, internal, spiritual, and symbolist perception of nature (ibid., 37).

Monk by the Sea, painted in 1810 (Fig. 1) is a work that, according to Heinrich von Kleist, will truly have an oceanic impact (Barasch, 2021, 308). The monk stands alone on a shore, gazing at the darkness of the clouds and the sea. The dark mist, pregnant with significance, stands above the black sea as if pouring its darkness into the water. At times, the force of existence, like an ungraspable otherness, becomes apparent, striking a sublime aspect through its ambiguity. "In this work, the monk turns his back to the viewer to absorb a sublime and awe-inspiring landscape within himself" (Wilder, 2016, 261). In a similar work, *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* (Fig. 2), there is a reference to the viewer and the

understanding of limitless greatness. The *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* can also be the artist himself due to their visual resemblance (Fig. 3), looking at the fog as a part of God's creation and comprehending its covering aspect. In most of Friedrich's paintings, a person stands before nature, seemingly linking their self-awareness to their perception of nature. Friedrich believed that a painter must depict what is before their eyes and what is within them. If they find nothing within themselves, they must close their eyes to what is before them (Barasch, 2021, 308). Therefore, this belief suggests that artistic work springs not from nature but from within the artist. The sublime transcendence towards nature originates from within the artist.

More precisely, the absence and its closely associated meanings, such as darkness, opacity, and ambiguity, are mentioned. The prevailing emptiness in this image indicates an ambiguous phenomenon. The void and absence allow the viewer to confront the sea with their own roles and imaginings. They become companions to the monk, absorbing the sea within themselves or pouring themselves into the sea. On the other hand, they perceive a sense of reverence for a sublime and awe-inspiring landscape. The artist intends to go beyond familiar and recognizable images of the sky and the ocean, grasping the deepest and most ambiguous corners of the realm of nature (Siegel et al., 2019, 146). This signifies a continuous connection between the mind and the physical world. The sublime aspect penetrates the darkness of the black sea and the clouds, drawing the boundary lines of the artwork within itself and generating fear in the ambiguity of boundaries. In this work, limitlessness encompasses the monk involuntarily, and he, in turn, projects the sublime from within himself. He confronts something boundless and uncontrollable, where the power of agency and action has been deprived of him, as the dynamic sublime challenges reason from the perspective of the faculty of desire. In addition to the ambiguity stemming from Edmund Burke's concept of the sublime, nature can be



Fig. 1. Monk by the Sea, Caspar David Friedrich, 1810, oil on canvas, Old National Gallery. Source: <https://smarthistory.org/friedrich-monk-by-the-sea/>



Fig. 2. Wanderer above the Sea of Fog, Caspar David Friedrich, 1818, oil on canvas, Hamburger Kunsthalle. Source: https://www.artble.com/artists/caspar_david_friedrich/paintings/wanderer_above_the_sea_of_fog



Fig. 3. Self-Portrait by Caspar David Friedrich, 1810, Hamburger Kunsthalle. Source: <https://useum.org/artwork/Self-portrait-Caspar-David-Friedrich-1810>

considered a catalyst for the dynamic sublime due to its astonishing, rebellious, wild, negative, uncontrollable, and indeterminate forces.

The Sea of Ice (Fig. 4), also known as The Wreck of Hope, is considered one of the most emblematic works of the painter. This landscape painting, created around 1823-1824, depicts the wreckage of a ship colliding with ice and rocks along the coast. This dark image appeared extraordinary in its time and reflected Friedrich's interest in the power of the sublime and the unpredictable nature of forces. Although Friedrich had never visited this area, he drew inspiration from the explorations of William Edward Parry in the North Pole to a great extent. This pervasive inclination towards the sublime can be seen as an expression of the tragic losses Friedrich experienced at the ages of seven, thirteen, and seventeen when his mother, brother, and sister died (Wilder, 2016, 262), especially considering that his brother drowned as a child due to the breaking of ice⁴.

In the face of the rebellious forces of nature, the endurance of the human mind and spirit grows, and it is as if the viewer can experience the sublimity of the artwork through this silence. The sublime in The Sea of Ice possesses threat, fear, and a resemblance to Burke's sublime. Furthermore, from Kant's perspective, it also encompasses the mathematical sublime. The mathematical sublime relates to the vastness of the sea of ice, while the dynamic sublime is associated with its shattering.

• Achenbach: The sublime and serenity after the storm

Andreas Achenbach was born in Kassel, and he began his art education in 1827 in Düsseldorf under the supervision of Friedrich Wilhelm Schadow at the Düsseldorf Academy of Fine Arts.⁵ After being influenced by the works of Louis Gurlitt, his talent took a different direction, and he became the founder of the German Realism school. Although this artist is not a romanticist, in some of his realistic works, he comes close to romantic imagery, such as the painting "Sunset after the Storm".

Sunset After the Storm on the Coast of Sicily (Fig. 5) depicts the aftermath of a harrowing experience where people have safely brought their boat ashore, but their strenuous efforts have left them drained. Achenbach has worked on other paintings depicting flood events, but ultimately, he is renowned as an artist in the maritime genre. The sublime in his works is intense and calamitous, but as much as there is the possibility of danger, there is also the possibility of salvation. In the examined piece, the prevailing fear and terror experienced by people caught in the merciless and pounding waves of the vast sea are depicted with meticulous realism. The vastness and magnitude of the sea are showcased. Consequently, in these artworks, the mathematical sublime, associated with the vastness and expansiveness of natural elements, is predominantly emphasized by the painter.



Fig. 4. The Sea of Ice (also known as The Wreck of Hope), 1821, Caspar David Friedrich. Source: https://www.wga.hu/support/viewer_m/z.html

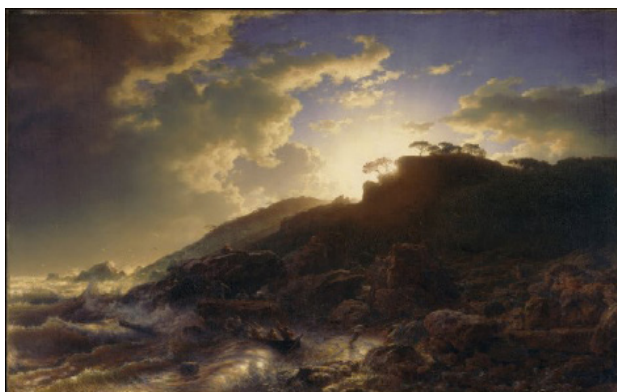


Fig. 5. Sunset After the Storm on the Coast of Sicily, 1853. Source: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Andreas-Achenbach>

• Britain: Turner and the dynamic wild sublime

One of the great English Romantic artists is Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851). After joining the Royal Academy in 1802, he embarked on extensive studies of specific rural scenes in pursuit of capturing the grandeur and sublimity of artistic expression. Turner had no intention of reproducing landscapes, although his paintings were based on studies he conducted in natural settings. It was around 1830 that the brushwork of this painter became increasingly free and expressive, as he employed not only brushes but also palette knives and fabric. Turner first applied bright colors and then added subsequent layers to his canvas surface (Hodge, 2021, 145). Concurrent with the technical and artistic changes, he distanced himself from associating sublimity with historical subjects and focused more on the representation of the sublime.

In the painting Morning after the Storm (Fig. 6), we are confronted with the pair of “Shadow and Darkness - Evening of the Deluge”. This explosion of light utilizes the warm spectrum of colors radiantly. In this image, a celebration takes place after the storm, symbolizing the covenant between God and humanity. A serpent in the center of the painting rises upward, resembling a rebellious staff with a knotted head, poised at the center of the composition. This creature alludes to the serpent that Moses lifted in the desert as a remedy for the great plague. It also represents the salvation of Christ from the entanglement of Adam in the New Testament. Turner’s verses, emphasizing the transient nature of natural phenomena resulting from the “return of the sun”, subtly diminish the optimism of religious messages. Apparently, the painter’s main focus is not on the subject matter concerning Moses’ writing, the anti-plague serpent, or the figures seemingly in the process of creation emerging from the separation of light and darkness and sitting on the waves of sunlight on the sea. Rather, the center of attention is directed towards the play of color and light based on Goethe’s theory of color.⁶ It seems that the



Fig. 6. Light and Color (Goethe's Theory) - Morning after the Storm, 1843 - Moses Writing the Book of Genesis: Light and Color (Goethe's Theory) - Oil on Canvas - Location: Tate Gallery, London. Source: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-light-and-colour-goethes-theory-the-morning-after-the-deluge-moseswriting-the-book-n00532>

painter has deliberately abandoned the conventional representations of Moses' writing or other clichés and has shown more audacity in employing implicit forms and unstable situations than one could imagine. In this artwork, the power of color is harmonized with the tumultuous force of natural elements. The vastness of the landscape evokes, more than panic and fear, a sense of mathematical sublimity or something beyond the power of sensory perception.

Turner immersed the indomitable force of nature in the cycle of color and shaped the core of his paintings. The main core of these artworks takes form in the eruption of emotions, the vapor of existence, above the fireworks of the world. It seems that his subject matter is "steam fountains and bullets of fire", which is why the integrity of forms is not preserved in his works (Deleuze, 1981). The tragedy of breaking representational clichés on Turner's canvas began, and instead of escaping towards absolute abstraction, he allowed his painting to pass through the fire and depicts his distinctive figurative elements emerging from the heart of abstraction in the morning after the fire. Apparently, in the works of this painter, there is no manifestation of objective reality because he claimed that he only depicted what

he saw. This is how he saw things. He looked at the elements of nature and extracted the forces of nature. The sublime is a transformative and disintegrating power. In most of the artist's works, this aspect of the sublime is showcased. Here, the sublime arises from the ambiguity of the boundaries of the internal motifs of the artwork from its background. The sublime arises from the grandeur and vastness of nature, which, on the other hand, brings humans to their knees with its formidable forces. Here, the sublime seems to reflect forces such as creation, birth, destruction, and devastation.

Romantics had a fear of humans turning into machines, devoid of emotions, love, and freedom, and criticized machines and the mechanical nature of a world lacking spirituality. Humans were transformed into mere cogs and gears in the machinery of production, governance, and militarism according to mechanical principles (Wanslev, 2019, 142-143). In *Rain, Steam, and Speed – The Great Western Railway*, Turner depicted the fear of machinery or a kind of romantic or gothic fear of emanating smoke (Fig. 7). Even in this artwork, there is a sense of Burke-ian fear towards industrial landscapes. Truly, we are amazed and captivated by the ambiguity of boundaries and the indescribable nature of his works, as the turbulent elements of the figurative motifs are engulfed by the ambiguous fountains of smoke. The display of the sublime in his works leaves us in awe.

- John Martin and the Dynamic and Thunderous Sublime

John Martin was an English Romantic painter and illustrator, born in 1789 and died in 1854.⁷ He created imaginative and enigmatic artworks, influenced by French Romantic painters. His works were exhibited concurrently with those of Danby. He painted lofty religious subjects that, with their striking depths, deep chasms, and numerous figures (up to a hundred bodies), took on a nightmarish quality (Pakbāz, 2002, 497). He had an exceptional skill in depicting architectural structures and ancient buildings, showcasing the unparalleled grandeur of ancient Egypt and Babylon



Fig. 7. Rain, Steam, and Speed– The Great Western Railway, J. M. W. Turner; oil on canvas, 1844. Source: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/art-joseph-mallordwilliam-turner-rain-steam-spead-1>

in works such as “The Seventh Plague of Egypt” and “Belshazzar’s Feast” at the highest level.

A notable characteristic of John Martin’s works is his remarkable skill in executing the perspective of tunnels, which leads to excessive complexity in the depths of his artworks and serves as a means to portray the formidable forces of nature. Nature’s wrath often disrupts the order of nature, destroys life, and rebels against humanity. The magnitude of these calamities is such that the individuals caught in their midst can do nothing but perish, without any understanding of why. Consequently, they appear insignificant, passive, and victimized. In these works, both the vastness of nature in the form of mathematical sublime and the anger and fury of nature as dynamic sublimity are observed.

The grand and detailed painting by John Martin (Fig. 8), depicts the depth of a catastrophe that occurred during the eruption of Mount Vesuvius on August 24, 79 AD. It is known that the volcanic eruption engulfed the twin cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum. The artwork creates a strong thematic focus by creating opposites and powerful contrasts. According to Joseph Jean Pichot, “The painter did not have much inclination to depict the gestures, terrifying expressions, and dramatic effects on the faces in representing the eruption of Vesuvius. Instead, his goal was to create powerful contrasts with each reflection of light on the groups and landscape” (Pichot, 1825, 123).

On the opposite side of the Gulf of Naples in the

image, a mass of survivors can be seen fleeing and struggling on land. Herculaneum is submerged in the distance to the left. Pompeii is intricately painted with great details, allowing specific structures like its circular theater to be identified. Mount Vesuvius is shown in the early stages of the eruption, emitting a bright red glow from the volcanic crater, while the sky is obscured by gray ash clouds and illuminated by lightning. A lightning bolt, like a healed wound, rests upon the majority of John Martin’s paintings. All these elements evoke a sense of confrontation with a threatening and astonishing phenomenon, signifying sublimity. The encounter with something vast, monstrous, and immensely powerful is experienced through the perspective of a deep tunnel. As a result, the mathematical sublime on one hand and Kant’s dynamic sublime, namely the interplay of lightning and volcanic fluidity, make the colors dance in this painting.

In the Deluge (Fig. 9), a twisting tunnel of darkness is depicted, with dark, brown, and gray colors blending together. At the end of this tunnel, behind the mass of buildings, a reddish sun shines through the thick mass of compressed air. Its light is diminished by the moisture-laden atmosphere. The faint light at the edge of the image and the darkness that dances over the waves of the flood prevent a brown-colored ship from sailing, carrying small humans who are in a state of struggle. Darkness pervades the entire image of the flood, except for the background where a lightning bolt has emerged from the outer shell and illuminates the depth



Fig. 8. The Destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum (circa 1821). Oil on canvas, 161.6 x 253 centimeters. Tate Britain, London. Source: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/martin-the-destruction-of-pompeii-and-herculaneum-n00793>



Fig. 9. The Deluge, John Martin, 1834, oil on canvas, 168.3 x 258.4 cm. Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut. Source: <https://interactive.britishart.yale.edu/critique-ofreason/363/the-deluge>

and clarity of the tunnel. The deeper and more colorful the depth of the twisted tunnel, the more destructive its sublimity becomes. The sublimity in this painting evokes a sense of threat, ambiguity, and fear, thus inducing a greater sense of Burke's sublime. In this piece, the dynamic sublimity has more significance than mathematical sublimity, as this apocalyptic flood renders humans powerless in the face of impending death. Martin portrays an ambiguous view of Ezekiel's prophetic warning of the destruction of the city of Tyre. The waves crash, surge, and overturn towers and buildings (Fig. 10). Thunder and lightning, sinking boats, and a lone woman adorned in expensive clothing seated on the chest of a boat with her hands raised toward the sky are the most prominent elements of the artwork. In Ezekiel 26, Tyre, a wealthy seaport on the coast of Lebanon, is described as facing God's wrath. However, the city was not destroyed by catastrophic storms but rather by the armies of the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar. Nevertheless, verse 19 inspired Martin: "When I make you a ruined city, like cities empty of inhabitants; when I bring the deep over you, and its mighty waters cover you..." (Torah, Ezekiel, 741-745). In his works depicting the destruction of various ancient and historical cities such as Tyre, Pompeii, and Herculaneum, Martin emphasizes the destructive forces of nature and focuses on their sublime devastation. He portrays the vastness and grandeur of nature, including the immense whirlwind and massive eruptions. The apocalyptic scene by John Martin, situated between

the supernatural and the thrilling, embodies the concept of "sublime terror." Consequently, in this painting, Burke's sublime reflects the terror and fear present in every manifestation of nature's wrath and divine punishment with the message of death.

Martin was an artist whose works were often mocked and dismissed by many institutions and critics with descriptions such as "grand, strange, and bizarre". After his death, for nearly a century, he was almost a forgotten painter. However, today, the theatricality and apocalyptic vision of John Martin seem fascinating because they resonate with modern concerns about impending global disasters.

John Martin's painting depicts the biblical story of the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Fig. 11), where the people were punished by God for their immoral behavior. Only Lot and his daughters were saved. Lot's wife disobeyed God's command not to look back and turned into a pillar of salt. The fiery red color is a characteristic feature of the dramatic and devastating scenes in John Martin's works. In this painting, a swirling tunnel is seen in the inner layer of yellow and the outer layer of red, engulfing the city in black and gray smoke. The city is portrayed with collapsing and crumbling buildings in the background. In the foreground, a large rock resembling the claw of the Sphinx is tearing the ground apart, and the escape route for Lot and his daughters is being engulfed by destruction. Martin depicts a molten tunnel vortex symbolizing the divine wrath in nature, encompassing Sodom and



Fig. 10. The Destruction of Tyre, 1840. John Martin, oil on canvas, 83.8 x 109.5 cm. Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio. Source: <https://www.toledomuseum.org/art/artminute/apr-11-artminute-john-martin-destruction-tyre-0>



Fig. 11. The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, 1852, John Martin, 136.3 x 212.3 cm, The Leng Gallery. Source: <https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/the-destructionof-sodom-and-gomorrah-37049>

Gomorrah. As a result of Burke's sublimity, the overwhelming presence of fear and death dominates the image. The mathematical sublime is evident on one hand due to the vastness of nature and the elements of nature, and on the other hand, due to the subjugation of hidden forces of nature, the dynamic sublime of Kant is also present in both aspects.

• **Francis Danby and the devastating sublime**

Francis Danby, A.R.A. (16 November 1793 - 9 February 1861), was an Irish painter of the Romantic era (Adams, 1973, 4)⁸. His imaginative and dramatic landscapes have been compared to the landscapes of John Martin. Danby initially developed his own imaginative style and was a prominent member of a group of artists known as the Bristol School. His greatest success came in London in the 1820s. After producing small-scale landscapes, such as "Bells Castle Woods", he came under the influence of J.M.W. Turner and incorporated Romantic tendencies into his works (Pakbāz, 2002, 227).

Among Francis Danby's works, "The Deluge" (1840) Fig. 12 is an exemplary representation of the sublime. This artwork was exhibited in the same room where John Martin's works were displayed at the Tate Britain. Danby was a contemporary of Martin, although he was not particularly interested in this subject matter. However, his apocalyptic perspectives independently gained popularity.

His human figures are believable as they are depicted with tangible actions. His painting of The Deluge (Fig. 12) portrays the famous scene from the

biblical story of Noah and his family. The ark can be seen in the background illuminated by moonlight, offering hope. The foreground depicts the despair of the people and the imposing and wild power of the engulfing waves. The red sunrise is positioned just above the horizon line, almost parallel to the ark, behind a dark rock. The red color of the sun is barely visible, but because it is precisely behind the dark rock Fig. 13 from which people ascend, the color contrast enhances its effect. The thin high horizon line is one of the elements that allows the artist to depict deep scenes. The value of shading, meaning the darkness and brightness, is achieved through the contrast of the illuminated water, the dark rock, and the gray color of the clouds.

The exceptional and mesmerizing details of this painting intensify the fear, horror, and threatening nature of the horrifying event depicted, with naked bodies piled upon each other (Fig. 13). In the bottom right corner of the painting, an angel is placed amidst the deluge, next to a large drowned figure. The angel looks down at the face of a submerged woman, positioned in reverse on the massive body (Fig. 14). The details and descriptions can convince any viewer who is invited to witness the sublime, evoking contemplation. Danby, with this painting and the connection between the background and foreground of the image, presents a narrative of temporal coherence. The future of humanity is depicted in the background, with the ark-like ship in progress, and the past is portrayed in the foreground with the destiny of the submerged figures denying



Fig. 12. "The Deluge", 1840, by Francis Danby. Source: <https://www.johncoulthart.com/feuilleton/2011/09/12/danbys-deluge/>



Fig. 13. A part of The Deluge, in the middle. Source: <https://www.johncoulthart.com/feuilleton/2011/09/12/danbys-deluge/>



Fig. 14. A part of The Deluge, on the lower right side. Source: <https://www.johncoulthart.com/feuilleton/2011/09/12/danbys-deluge/>

God’s existence (Fig. 15). The sublime in this artwork represents the phenomenon of fear, surprise, and threat resulting from the destructive power of nature, which combines immense terror and profound respect due to the bright future anticipated by the hopeful and faithful. In this artwork, Burke’s sublimity is observed. The focus on actions and the horrifying details of the overwhelming deluge demonstrates a dynamic sublime of Kant, which goes beyond the mathematical sublime.

Conclusion

The characteristics and meanings of the sublime in the theoretical foundations of the 18th century According to Table 1, are phenomena that encompass a blend of fear and reverence, a complex emotional experience derived from the sight of an extended or infinite magnitude of something vast and powerful. The sublime is a remarkable phenomenon that evokes feelings of fear, terror, surprise, ambiguity, awe, and reverence. Kant’s mathematical and dynamic sublime challenges human capabilities in the face of the size and power of nature, and it seems to encompass the faculties and emotions of previous thinkers.

In the paintings of 18th and 19th century Germany and England, humans are depicted as trapped, engaged, and struggling against the wild forces of nature. Sometimes, in the face of the magnitude and grandeur of the sublime, humans appear very small. A study of selected artists’ works generally reveals

that subjects related to the manifestation of the sublime mostly involve destructive and devastating forces such as floods, volcanic eruptions, the descent of avalanches, the roar of storms, the rebellion of industrial machinery against nature, destruction, the melting of sea ice, the forces of nature as divine wrath, and more. These subjects reflect a phenomenon that instills fear, surprise, and ambiguity and evokes a complex emotional experience derived from the sight of an extended or infinite magnitude of something vast and powerful. The sublime also inspires reverence.

According to Table 2, the depiction of the terror and anger of nature in English Romanticism has been emphasized more explicitly. Burke’s sublime, which encompasses terror, fear, ambiguity, and awe, as well as Kant’s dynamic sublime, is portrayed more vividly compared to the mathematical sublime. Furthermore, a more imaginative and anti-



Fig. 15. A part of The Deluge. Source: <https://www.johncoulthart.com/feuilleton/2011/09/12/danbys-deluge/>

Table 2. Comparison of German and English Romanticism through selected works. Source: Author.

British Romantics	Selected work	Description of the Sublime	Type of the Sublime	German Romantics	Selected work	Description of the Sublime	Type of the Sublime
J.M.W. Turner	Light and Color (Goethe's Theory) - Morning after the Storm	The power of color is equated with the powerful force of nature's elements. The vastness of the landscape, more than panic and fear, inspires the mathematical sublime or something beyond the measuring power of the senses.	The mathematical sublime	Caspar David Friedrich	Monk by the Sea	In this work, limitlessness encompasses the monk involuntarily, and he, in turn, projects the sublime from within himself. In addition to the ambiguity stemming from Edmund Burke's concept of the sublime, nature can be considered a catalyst for the dynamic sublime due to its astonishing, rebellious, wild, negative, uncontrollable, and indeterminate forces.	Burke's Sublimity Kant's Dynamic Sublimity
	Rain, Steam, and Speed – The Great Western Railway	Fear of machinery or a kind of romantic or gothic fear of emanating smoke is depicted. Even in this artwork, a form of fear of industrial landscapes is signified, in Burke's senses. Truly, we are amazed and captivated by the ambiguity of boundaries and the indescribable nature of the work as it transitions through the engulfing presence of figural elements by ambiguous smoke fumes. The representation of the sublime in his works leaves us in awe.	Burke's Sublimity Kant's Dynamic Sublimity		The Sea of Ice	The sublime in The Sea of Ice embodies a sense of threat and fear, similar to the sublime of Burke. It also has a geometric and mathematical sublime from Kant's perspective. The mathematical sublime relates to the vastness of the ice sea, while the dynamic sublime pertains to its shattering and destruction.	Burke's Sublimity Kant's Dynamic and Mathematical Sublimity
John Martin	The Deluge	The sublime in this artwork encompasses elements of threat, ambiguity, and fear.	Burke's Sublimity	Achenbach	Sunset After the Storm on the Coast of Sicily	The prevailing terror and horror afflicting the people trapped in merciless and crashing waves are depicted with realistic precision in the vastness of the great sea.	Kant's Dynamic and Mathematical Sublimity
	The Destruction of Tyre	In this painting, the sublime signifies the terror and fear experienced in every manifestation of nature's wrath and divine anger.	Burke's Sublimity Kant's Dynamic Sublimity	-	-	-	-
	The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah	The mathematical sublime of the grandeur of nature's elements and the dynamic sublime of Kant, which involves harnessing hidden forces of nature, can both be observed.	Kant's Dynamic and Mathematical Sublimity	-	-	-	-
Francis Danby	The Deluge	The pervasive horror and threat of the flood, the sublime of Burke's, and the dynamic sublime of Kant.	Burke's Sublimity Kant's Dynamic Sublimity	-	-	-	-

stereotypical representation of the sublime is evident in British paintings than in German ones. Comparing the works in terms of sublimity shows that Turner portrayed more creative sublime imagery than others, in a way that the sublime in his works mixed all tangible realities and gave birth to a new creation from within this turmoil. In the later decades of his life, John Martin painted a more magnificent sublime. German Romanticism has delved into the terrifying aspects of nature, but alongside that, it has also considered the spiritual, mysterious, and symbolic aspects of nature. Therefore, the sublime in the sense of the vastness and grandeur of nature and the fear and terror of destructive and mighty forces of nature have received more emphasis and intensity in English Romanticism. Hence, it can be considered to be one of the prominent themes of English Romanticism.

When viewing the works of Romantic painters or those inclined towards Romantic themes, although we may experience fear and terror due to the grandeur of nature or the painter's depiction of destructive forces of nature, we ultimately feel safe due to the distance. Artistic works, based on the perspectives of Aristotle, Burke, Boileau, and Kant, have the power to portray the unpleasantness of war, ugliness, and disease beautifully⁹. This means that the impact and intensity of the destructive forces of nature can also be captured in artworks and evoke a sense of awe or sublime pleasure.

Endnotes

1. Longinus was an unknown writer from the Roman period whose treatise *On the Sublime* was found in a Greek text. Its first French translation was made into French in 1674 by Nicolas Boileau, and its use has been widely spread since the 17th century. Boileau, the French translator of this treatise, said: Sublimity happens when the greatest thought is expressed in the simplest language (quoted in Kant, 2013, 30).
2. The philosopher born in Dublin (1729-1797) published an essay titled "Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful" in 1757. This essay had a significant impact, especially on Kant, in the aesthetics of the 18th century, where beauty and sublimity often intertwine.
3. Jean-François Lyotard, one of the contemporary French philosophers, has expanded on Kant's concept of dynamic sublimity and analyzed it in the works of the American painter Barnett Newman.
4. The hypothetical horizon line in this painting extends to the upper border of the image and makes the surface of the sky appear narrower (Pakbāz, 2002, 33). His interest in landscape painting continued to drive him towards technical skills. He received the title of Knight of

the Legion of Honor from France. 5. He is known as the father of 19th-century German landscape painting. He passed away in Düsseldorf. His brother was also a painter.

5. He began his studies in St. Petersburg and traveled to Italy, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia. At the beginning of his career, he followed the path of quasi-idealism, a branch of the German Romanticism movement.

6. Turner was drawn to Goethe's theory of light and darkness and depicted their relationship in some of his paintings. According to this theory, the creation of color depends on the distribution of light and darkness, which is reflected through a transparent body.

7. Martin was born in Hexham, Northumberland. He began his career by painting ceremonial carriages in Newcastle, but after moving to London in 1806, he gained fame by creating fantastical scenes of ruined cities and apocalyptic disasters inspired by the Bible and works such as John Milton's "Paradise Lost" (Wikiquote).

8. He was born in southeastern Ireland. His father, James Danby, was a farmer who owned a small estate near Wexford, but after his father's death in 1807, the family moved to Dublin. He quickly began studying drawing at the Royal Dublin Society schools and started painting landscapes under the guidance of a young and eccentric artist named James Arthur O'Connor (Adams, 1973, 4). In 1813, Danby, along with O'Connor (his landscape master) and Petrie, went to London. The trip, which was undertaken with insufficient funds, remained unfinished, and they were forced to return home on foot. They stopped in Bristol, where Danby realized that he could earn small sums of money through watercolor paintings. He decided to stay there and worked diligently, sending important images for London exhibitions. His large oil paintings quickly gained attention there (Chisholm, 1911, 794).

9. Kant, 2014, § 48, 248.

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