論文名稱：崇高美與渥滋華斯的美學：理論與詩歌

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論文摘要：崇高一辭，本為朗吉努斯所創，用以描述作者對讀者強烈的感染力，藉著作者高超的修辭技巧所創作的偉大詩歌，以感發讀者內心的情感。毫無疑問地，崇高是個文學觀念。然而，在柏克與康德相繼於1757年及1790年分別發表《崇高與柔美兩種觀念的根源之哲學研究》與《判斷力批判》後，崇高就喪失其原本含意，變成柔美的對照。此後，崇高便落入美學主題的範疇。不過，當我們在研讀朗吉努斯、柏克、康德理論的同時，是很可能陷入理論的矛盾裡。比方說，康德主張『我們必不能將崇高指向藝術作品』（見《判斷力批判》第100頁）。這句話也暗示著崇高是不能指向文學的。若是這樣，我們便不能稱米爾頓的史詩《失樂園》或者是艾蜜莉·伯朗特的小說《咆哮山莊》為崇高作品。相反地，若文學能被包含在崇高裡，那麼康德在審美判斷中所說的『無利害關係的愉悅』就無法自圓其說。正是這些理論上的衝突引起了我的研究興趣。因此，本論文的目的除了探討崇高的意義外，還嘗試著去解答理論衝突的兩個問題：『文學能否被包含在崇高裡』以及『崇高是否含有道德』。

本文共分四章。第一章為導論，簡述崇高的基本觀念與所研究的問題。第二章為崇高的理論基礎，探討幾個崇高的重要理論，並試著去解答兩個理論衝突的問題。第三章為浪漫式的崇高，依次探討渥滋華斯的美學與衛斯科爾的崇高的心理分析。而後，第四章則為本文之結論。從本文中，我們可以瞭解崇高觀念的演變，以及渥滋華斯整合這些文學、美學理論所做的努力。
The Sublime and Wordsworth’s Aesthetics: Theory and Poetry

Abstract

Sublimity is a term originally coined by Longinus to deal with an author’s strong influence upon the reader by using his excellent rhetorical techniques to compose a great poem that stirs up the reader’s innermost emotions. Undoubtedly it is a literary concept. But, after Burke released his A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful in 1757 and Kant published his Critique of Judgement in 1790, the sublime lost its original meaning, turning out to be a counterpart of the beautiful. Since then, the sublime fell into a rubric of aesthetics. However, when we study Longinus’s, Burke’s, and Kant’s theories, we are likely to run into the contradictions between them. For instance, Kant insists that “we must not point to the sublime in works of art” (Critique 100). His words imply that the sublime cannot refer to literature either. If so, then we could not call Milton’s Paradise Lost or Emily Bronte’s Wuthering Heights sublime. On the contrary, if literature can be included in the sublime, then Kant’s “disinterested delight” in the judgment of taste will fail to make a good case for itself. It is the conflicts between theories that cause my research interest. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to discuss the meanings of the sublime, and try to solve the two problems: “whether literature can be included in the sublime” and “whether the sublime contains morality.”

This thesis contains four chapters. Chapter I is “Introduction,” which briefly states the basic concepts of the sublime and the questions of research. Chapter II is “The Theoretical Foundation of the Sublime,” which discusses several important theories of the sublime, and attempts to solve the conflicts between different theories. Chapter III is “The Romantic Sublime,” which discusses respectively Wordsworth’s aesthetics and Weiskel’s psychoanalysis of the sublime. And, Chapter IV is conclusion. In this thesis, we can see the evolution of the sublime and Wordsworth’s endeavors to integrate these theories.
Chapter One

Introduction

By setting out from and terminating in an appeal to the facts, any good aesthetic theory is, indeed, empirical in method. Its aim, however, is not to establish correlations between facts which will enable us to predict the future by reference to the past, but to establish principles enabling us to justify, order, and clarify our interpretation and appraisal of the aesthetic facts themselves.


*Sublimity* is a term originally coined by Longinus to deal with an author’s strong influence upon the reader by using his excellent rhetorical techniques to compose a great poem that stirs up the reader’s innermost emotions. Undoubtedly it is a literary concept, but at the same time it also falls under the rubric of aesthetics. Following Longinus’s perspectives, many writers, especially eighteenth-century critics such as Joseph Addison, Alexander Pope, and Samuel Johnson, were interested in discussing the sublime in literature. However, when Edmund Burke released his *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* in 1757, the sublime lost its original meaning, turning out to be a counterpart of the beautiful. Since then, the direction of the discussion on the sublime was largely changed from its literary aspects to its philosophical and aesthetic aspects. In his book, based on an empirical approach, Burke pays much attention not only to the physiological and psychological reaction of taste, but also to the social factors of the sublime, hardly treating literary aspects at all. In the light of physiology and psychology, he supposes taste to be universally consistent, for human organs and mental responses are almost the same: “All men are agreed to call vinegar sour, honey sweet, and aloes bitter [. . .] They all concur in calling sweetness pleasant, and sourness and bitterness unpleasant” (14). Under this hypothesis, he further defines the psychological reaction of the sublime as terror: “Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever
is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling” (36). Thirty years later, reading Burke’s aesthetic viewpoints for reference, Immanuel Kant proposed a more complete aesthetic theory in his *Critique of Judgement*. But, diverging from Burke’s point of view of taste as objective, he regards the judgment of taste as subjective:

[..] The judgement of taste, therefore, is not a cognitive judgement, and so not logical, but is aesthetic—which means that it is one whose determining ground *cannot be other than subjective*. Every reference of representations is capable of being objective, even that of sensations (in which case it signifies the real in an empirical representation). The one exception to this is the feeling of pleasure or displeasure. This denotes nothing in the object, but is a feeling which the Subject has of itself and of the manner in which it is affected by the representation. (41-42)

In spite of holding different opinions about the judgment of taste—one sees objectivity where the other sees subjectivity—Burke and Kant establish significant theories in aesthetics and philosophy. Their theories, strictly speaking, almost completely ignore the literary realm.

Nevertheless, as far as the meaning of the sublime is concerned, there seems to be a large contradiction between literary sublimity and aesthetic sublimity. If we start with the definition of classical sublimity since Longinus, and then contrast it with Burke’s and Kant’s theories, we are sure to run into contradictions in the definition of the sublime. At first, we may question the idea of classical sublimity, i.e. the sublime as referring to literature, if we endorse the Kantian sublime: “[..] if the aesthetic judgement is to be pure (unmixed with any teleological judgement which, as such, belongs to reason,) and if we are to give a suitable example of it for the Critique of aesthetic judgement, we must not point to the sublime in
works of art, e.g. buildings, statues, and the like” (Critique 100). On the contrary, if literature indeed can be included in the sublime, then Kant’s “disinterested delight” in the judgment of taste will fail to make a good case for itself. The assertion that “literature can be included in the sublime” directly rebuts Kant’s argument that the sublime should be limited to nature. If we recognize the validity of the assertion, though, we will by all means draw a parallel between the judgment of taste and literary criticism. However, the judgment of the sublime usually involves only appreciation, whereas literature involves not only appreciation but also criticism. Once we regard the judgment of taste as identical to literary criticism, we will take it for granted that any judgment of taste for nature can be interpreted as a critical judgment. Actually, such an interpretation is difficult to maintain, as George Santayana points out in The Sense of Beauty:

Many writers of the last century called the philosophy of beauty Criticism, and the word is still retained as the title for the reasoned appreciation of works of art. We could hardly speak, however, of delight in nature as criticism. A sunset is not criticized; it is felt and enjoyed. The word “criticism,” used on such an occasion, would emphasize too much the element of deliberate judgement and of comparison with standards. (11)

Therefore, in this thesis, the first question that we have to discuss is whether literature can be included in the sublime or not.

In essence, our sense of beauty follows our human nature, as Santayana remarks: “The appreciation of beauty and its embodiment in the arts are activities which belong to our holiday life, when we are redeemed for the moment from the shadow of evil and the slavery to fear, and are following the bent of our nature where it chooses to lead us” (17). Likewise, our sense of sublimity is also based on our human nature, and Kant interprets it as a native capacity for moral feeling:
But the fact that culture is requisite for the judgement upon the sublime in nature (more than for that upon the beautiful) does not involve its being an original product of culture and something introduced in a more or less conventional way into society. Rather is it in human nature that its foundations are laid, and, in fact, in that which, at once with common understanding, we may expect every one to possess and may require of him, namely, a native capacity for the feeling for (practical) ideas, i.e. for moral feeling. (Critique 116)

Since human nature is the foundation of the sublime and the beautiful, anything that violates human nature cannot be beautiful or sublime. For a coercive power forced upon us, whether it is a might of nature or a political authority, our direct response is resistance if we follow our human nature. Such a resistance, according to Kant, is our courage and self-respect for survival. Obviously, Kant’s viewpoint of the sublime is established on the basis of Rousseau’s idea that “man is born free” (85). However, the concept of freedom in the sublime does not derive from Kant but from Longinus. In his “On the sublime,” Longinus stresses that freedom is “the fairest and most productive source of eloquence” (ch. XLIV; 101). Losing freedom, no matter how excellent a man’s natural gift is, he still cannot give full play to his genius in composition. “This is the reason why no slave ever becomes an orator, although all other faculties may belong to menials” (ch. XLIV; 101). From Longinus’s words, we can summarize a significant concept—freedom is the basic principle of literary and artistic composition. Under the premise of freedom, a writer or an artist should not be limited by any principle and any authority in his creation of art and literature. For this reason, Wordsworth daringly conducted an epoch-making revolution of literature, refusing to be restricted by the rules that neoclassicism emphasized. He pronounced that the poet should adopt “incidents and situations from common life” and “a selection of language
really used by men” to write poems, transferring the center of literature from the aristocracy to general people (Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* 446-7). From the angle of freedom, his literary revolution can be seen as sublime as a political revolution. With regard to the element of the sublime—freedom, and the phenomena of the sublime—revolution and rebellion, we will respectively discuss them from political and literary aspects.

In *The Mirror and the Lamp*, M. H. Abrams indicates: “By setting out from and terminating in an appeal to the facts, any good aesthetic theory is, indeed, empirical in method” (4). Although it is true that most good aesthetic theories are developed from aesthetic facts, yet their developed results cannot completely insure themselves against contradicting aesthetic facts. In the history of aesthetics, because of their outstanding contributions to the meanings of the sublime and the beautiful, Burke and Kant deserve to be named as great respected masters. Nevertheless, they still fail to prevent their theories from violating aesthetic facts or contradicting themselves. In Burke’s theory, the characteristics of the sublime and the beautiful are defined as exactly opposite: “They are indeed ideas of a very different nature, one being founded on pain, the other on pleasure, and however they may vary afterwards from the direct nature of their causes, yet these causes keep up an eternal distinction between them, a distinction never to be forgotten by any whose business it is to affect the passions” (*A Philosophical Enquiry* 113-14). With opposite characteristics, Burke tries to illustrate several sources of the sublime and the beautiful, such as vastness, obscurity, power, privation, infinity, magnitude and suddenness for the sublime, and smallness, smoothness, gradual variation, and delicacy for the beautiful. Likewise, in *Of the Distinct Objects of the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, Kant tries to distinguish the objects of the sublime from that of the beautiful, and gives some examples:

Finer feeling, which we now wish to consider, is chiefly of two kinds: the feeling of the sublime and that of the beautiful. The stirring of each is
pleasant, but in different ways. [. . .] In order that the former impression could occur to us in due strength, we must have a feeling of the sublime, and, in order to enjoy the latter well, a feeling of the beautiful. Tall oaks and lonely shadows in a sacred grove are sublime; flower beds, low hedges and trees trimmed in figures are beautiful. Night is sublime, day is beautiful. (46-7)

Such a definite and fixed classification indeed makes us realize the difference between sublimity and beauty more easily, but it sometimes conflicts with our actual judgment of taste. For instance, the ocean, according to Burke’s classification, is a source of the sublime because of its vastness, but in the meantime it also can be a source of the beautiful. If we see an ocean with roaring waves during a violent storm, undoubtedly, we will judge it sublime. But, if we see a peaceful ocean reflecting blue sky and golden sunlight in a sunny day, then we may call it beautiful, rather than sublime. Similarly, Kant’s classification “Night is sublime, day is beautiful” is arbitrary, because “sublime” and “beautiful” can co-exist in the same object, according to William Wordsworth’s perspective in his unpublished essay “The Sublime and the Beautiful:”

I need not observe to persons at all conversant in these speculations that I take for granted that the same object may be both sublime & beautiful; or, speaking more accurately, that it may have the power of affecting us both with the sense of beauty & the sense of sublimity; tho’ (as for such Readers I need not add) the mind cannot be affected by both these sensations at the same time, for they are not only different from, but opposite to, each other. (349)

In the light of aesthetic facts, Wordsworth’s viewpoint is more consistent with our actual judgment of taste. Therefore, in order to seek an appropriate meaning of sublimity, we have to use some practical aesthetic facts to reconsider Burke’s and Kant’s theories, and further
discuss some perspectives that they miss.

In general, Burke’s sublimity is commonly considered as regardless of morality, while Kant’s is seen regardful of morality. In Burke’s theory, the pleasure of the sublime is a pleasure of self-preservation. It is a feeling of “swelling and triumph,” which comes from recognizing our superiority, greatness, and value by others’ misfortune or failure (Burke 46). It reflects the egotism and selfishness of human nature, as Burke states: “I am convinced we have a degree of delight, and that no small one, in the real misfortunes and pains of others [...]” (42). For such a pleasure, Burke gives an example as an illustration:

Our delight in cases of this kind, is very greatly heightened, if the sufferer be some excellent person who sinks under an unworthy fortune. Scipio and Cato are both virtuous characters; but we are more deeply affected by the violent death of the one, and the ruin of the great cause he adhered to, than with the deserved triumphs and uninterrupted prosperity of the other; […] .

(A Philosophical Enquiry 42)

By contrast, Kant agrees with Burke’s argument that the pleasure of the sublime is a pleasure of self-preservation, but he makes a different explanation for self-preservation:

Now in just the same way the irresistibility of the might of nature forces upon us the recognition of our physical helplessness as being of nature, but at the same time reveals a faculty of estimating ourselves as independent of nature, and discovers a pre-eminence above nature that is the foundation of a self-preservation of quite another kind from that which may be assailed and brought into danger by external nature. (Critique 111)

Kant’s “self-preservation” represents the courage of survival against the irresistibility of the might of nature, instead of the survival competition between animals as Burke emphasizes. The feeling of the sublime, according to Kant, provokes our power of resistance against
nature and our self-respect rooted in our human nature: “Therefore, the feeling of the sublime in nature is respect for our own vocation, which we attribute to an Object of nature by a certain subreption (substitution of a respect for the Object in place of one for the idea of humanity in our own self—the Subject) [. . .]” (Critique 106). The “respect” is exactly a moral idea. Apparently, Burke and Kant make quite opposite interpretations for self-preservation in the sublime, but both of their interpretations seem to make sense in some way. Hence, when we dissect the essence of the sublime, we still have to discuss whether the sublime contains morality or not.

As far as our actual experience of the judgment of taste is concerned, no matter whether the feeling of the sublime is Burke’s “swelling and triumph” or Kant’s “respect,” they are not by all means produced in every actual judgment of the sublime. The feelings of “swelling and triumph” and “respect” come about only when we face real danger, pain, or the oppression of external power, but in a situation that also shields us from immediate danger. For instance, when we are standing on a very steep cliff to overlook the deep valley, the feeling of fear to fall over the cliff immediately springs up in our mind. But, in a safe position, our fear is instantly transformed into “swelling and triumph” or “respect,” because our victory over the real danger of the might of nature makes us feel as if we conquered it. However, such a feeling does not inevitably occur in every judgment of the sublime. Logically, the objects of taste can be divided into two kinds—concrete and fictitious ones. A concrete object is any visible thing in the real world; a fictitious object is an image in our mind formed by our imagination, according to the connotations transmitted by languages, characters, signs, pictures, or sound. The two kinds of objects both need imagination to help make a judgment. For a concrete object, imagination is used to help our organs of sense grasp a whole view of an infinite or a great mighty sublime object; for a fictitious object, imagination is used to form a picture in our mind, according to the meaning delivered by
languages, characters, signs, pictures, or sounds. In his essay in *The Spectator*, Joseph Addison names the delights of taste caused by the two kinds of objects respectively “the Primary Pleasure of the Imagination” and “the Secondary Pleasure of the Imagination:” “I at first divided the Pleasures of the Imagination, into such as arise from Objects that are actually before our Eyes, or that once entered in at our Eyes, and are afterwards called up into the Mind, either barely by its own Operations, or on occasion of something without us, as Statues or Descriptions” (558). In “the Primary Pleasure of the Imagination,” the object of the sublime is real and visible, so the mental transformation from fear to Burke’s “swelling and triumph” or Kant’s “respect” is probably produced. But, in “the Secondary Pleasure of the Imagination,” the object of the sublime is merely a fictitious picture in our mind, that is, a danger that does not actually exist, so naturally the feeling of fear, “swelling and triumph,” or “respect” must be largely reduced as well, or even vanish. In other words, in “the Secondary Pleasure of the Imagination,” the mental transformation from fear to “swelling and triumph” or “respect” does not certainly occur. Since the mental transformation from fear to “swelling and triumph” or “respect” is not bound to happen in every judgment of the sublime, we cannot help suspecting Burke’s definition of the sublime—fear. If Burke’s definition of the sublime—a feeling caused by fear—is indeed disputable, then we will obtain a surprising study result when we discuss Wordsworth aesthetics and Weiskel’s psychoanalysis of the sublime based on Burke’s definition. This is a very interesting issue of the sublime, and we will discuss it in this thesis.

The aim of this thesis is to explore what the meaning of the sublime is. Chapter I is “Introduction,” which briefly states the basic concepts of the sublime, the questions of research, and several important features of the sublime. Chapter II is “The Theoretical Foundation of the Sublime,” which discusses several important theories of the sublime, and attempts to solve the conflicts between different theories. According to the different realms
of literature and aesthetics, this chapter is further subdivided into two sections with the following subtitles: “The Classical Sublime” and “Burke’s and Kant’s Theories of the Sublime.” In the first section, we will start with the classical sublime since Longinus to deal with the ideas of the sublime, and further probe into the question whether literature can be included in the sublime. Meanwhile, we will discuss another element of the sublime—freedom, and the phenomena of the sublime—rebellion and revolution. In the second section, in the light of aesthetic facts, we will reconsider Burke’s and Kant’s theories, and further discuss some perspectives that they miss. Moreover, for the question whether the sublime contains morality or not, we will make a thorough inquiry. Chapter III is “The Romantic Sublime,” which discusses respectively Wordsworth’s aesthetics and Weiskel’s psychoanalysis of the sublime. In the part on Wordsworth’s aesthetics, we will deal with Wordsworth’s aesthetic viewpoints, mental growth, and literary theories. After we have delineated Wordsworth’s aesthetics, we will enter the part on Weiskel’s psychoanalysis of the sublime to discuss his applications of aesthetic theories and Wordsworth’s poetry. Finally, in Chapter IV, the study results will be summarized as conclusion.
Chapter Two

The Theoretical Foundation of the Sublime

Nor was the sublime more within their reach than the pathetic; for they never attempted that comprehension and expanse of thought which at once fills the whole mind, and of which the first effect is sudden astonishment, and the second rational admiration.

Samuel Johnson,
“Prefaces, Biographical and Critical, to the Works of the English Poets: Cowley” (678)

2.1 The Classical Sublime

2.1.1 Whether Literature Can Be Included in the Sublime

The idea of the sublime can be initially traced to Longinus’s “On the Sublime,” a treatise whose arguments mainly focus upon the literary aspects of the sublime. In his “On the Sublime,” Longinus attributes the sublime to “a certain distinction and excellence in expression, and that it is from no other source than this that the greatest poets and writers have derived their eminence and gained an immortality of renown” (ch. I; 77). Although his concept of the sublime originally deals with rhetorical technique, actually it has already touched some of the characteristics of the aesthetic sublime. His notion of sublimity essentially has two connotations: (1) the soul’s sublimity—the author’s great soul, because sublimity is the “echo of a great soul,” and (2) the literary sublimity—the excellent rhetorical technique that the author’s great soul reflects in his works (ch. IX; 81). The first connotation almost predicts the modern aesthetic viewpoint—the essence of sublimity lies in the Subject, according to Kant: “true sublimity must be sought only in the mind of the judging Subject” (Critique 104). The object of the sublime, according to Longinus, primarily comes from anything that is great and extraordinary. Subjectively, human beings have a great soul to seek sublimity: “Nature has appointed us men to be no base or ignoble animals; but when she ushers us into life and into the vast universe as into some great
assembly, to be as it were spectators of the mighty whole and the keenest aspirants for honor, forthwith she implants in our souls the unconquerable love of whatever is elevated and more divine than we” (Longinus ch. XXXV; 97). Objectively, sublimity exists in nature, such as mountains, stars, oceans and the like:

This is why, by a sort of natural impulse, we admire not the small streams, useful and pellucid through they be, but the Nile, the Danube or the Rhine, and still more the ocean. Nor do we view the tiny flame of our own kindling (guarded in lasting purity as its light ever is) with greater awe than the celestial fires though they are often shrouded in darkness; nor do we deem it a greater marvel than the craters of Etna, whose eruptions throw up stones from its depths and great masses of rock, and at times pour forth rivers of that pure and unmixed subterranean fire. (Longinus ch. XXXV; 97)

Longinus recognizes the greatness of nature, but he thinks more highly of the dignity of human beings. Sublimity points to not only the vast and infinite nature, but also the great thoughts of human beings that can compete with the immortality of nature:

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. (Longinus ch. XXXV; 97)

On this point, Longinus’s tone is quite similar to Kant’s in his discussion of “respect:” “In fact, without the development of moral ideas, that which, thanks to preparatory culture, we call sublime, merely strikes the untutored man as terrifying” (Critique 115). The sublime gives us courage to be able to measure ourselves against the seeming omnipotence of nature,
otherwise we would give in to the tremendous might of nature without establishing any civilization, like an untutored barbarian. The power of resistance is courage and respect. It is the courage for survival and respect that achieve the dignity of human beings.

Nevertheless, from Longinus’s emphasis that human thoughts, contemplation, and imagination can transcend the bounds of space and the entire universe, we can observe that there seems to be something wrong in Kant’s definition of “the form” for the beautiful and the sublime: “The beautiful in nature is a question of the form of the object, and this consists in limitation, whereas the sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else by its presence provokes, a representation of limitlessness, yet with a super-added thought of its totality” (Critique 90). According to Kant’s definition, the object of the beautiful involves in the form, while the object of the sublime does not, but both of them are still regarded as a whole. For instance, an object of the beautiful, for instance, a rose, has a form of limitation, which can be concretely grasped by our senses and hence causes our delight. But, an object of the sublime, for instance, a vast expanse of ocean, is too huge to be fully grasped by our senses; in other words, its form cannot totally be grasped by our senses, because our eyes see only a small part of it instead of its whole. Thus, Kant thinks that the object of the sublime is devoid of form, so the feeling of the sublime must be found only in the mind. As a matter of fact, Kant’s definition is not exactly right, because the object of the beautiful can be devoid of a concrete form too, for example, a sunset or a rainbow, and the object of the sublime can possess a concrete form, for instance, a steep cliff. Even though the object of the sublime is too huge or infinite to be grasped by our senses, we will use our imagination to show its full view in our mind, as if we flew in the air to overlook its complete picture. Consequently, Longinus’s “our imaginations often pass beyond the bounds of space” seems to imply the unimportance of form (ch. XXXV; 97).

As we mentioned in the Introduction, the objects of taste can be approximately
divided into two kinds: concrete and fictitious. The concrete object, which refers to anything that we can actually see, mostly has an embodied form. The fictitious object, which refers to an imaginary picture in our mind made up by our imagination in accordance with the message delivered by languages, characters, signs, pictures, or sounds, does not have an empirically available form. If the object of taste is fictitious, say, the phrase “the Sahara Desert” written on a piece of paper, our imagination will immediately show a picture of a bleak desert with flying sand and rolling pebbles in our mind, and then we may give a judgment “sublime.” In fact, we neither actually see the Sahara Desert, nor grasp any part of its form. Its form is nothing but a piece of paper with three words on it, “the Sahara Desert.” It is the connotation of “the Sahara Desert,” not the paper itself, that triggers our imagination to form a sublime picture of desert in our mind. Despite failing to actually see the Sahara Desert itself, we can make a judgment of the sublime and hence obtain a delight through our imagination. The delight caused by such an imagination belongs to Addison’s “the Secondary Pleasure of the Imagination.” In “the Secondary Pleasure of the Imagination,” the object of the sublime is usually fake nature that we made up by a description of language or words. Anyway, it is simply fictitious nature in our mind, not real one. Unless we limit the judgment of taste to “the Primary Pleasure of the Imagination,” or rather, unless we cannot make a judgment until we see the actual object in person, the form itself is not important at all. In “the Secondary Pleasure of the Imagination,” the content of our imagination [the Sahara Desert] has nearly nothing to do with the empirically available form [a piece of paper]. Therefore, the key point of the beautiful and the sublime does not lie in whether the object involves form or not, but in whether it brings the Subject a mental response to generate a delight. If Kant excludes a work of art or a literary work with a concrete form from the sublime just because it violates his principle that “the sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form,” objectively
speaking, this is not a good reason.

From the viewpoint of Longinus’s soul’s sublimity to ponder over the question whether literature can be included in the sublime, the answer is absolutely “yes.” Longinus’s emphasis on the soul’s sublimity means that the status of human beings is as high as that of the Creator. The Creator exhibits the sublime in nature; man displays the sublime in works of art. Man’s soul perfectly reflects the divinity that the Creator endows, so man creates literature and art as the Creator creates all the living things. Both of them are creators. Hence, according to Longinus’s perspective, the sublimity of literature is not at all second to the sublimity of nature. The two kinds of sublimity both bring us pleasure and mental exaltation. However, in order to justify his philosophy of taste, Kant insists that the object of the sublime should merely point to nature. He directly excludes works of art from the sublime, primarily because they violate two of his principles of the sublime—the formlessness and the purposelessness, as he explains:

[. . .] we must not point to the sublime in works of art, e.g. buildings, statues and the like, where a human end determines the form as well as the magnitude, nor yet in things of nature, that in their very concept import a definite end, e.g. animals of a recognized natural order, but in rude nature merely as involving magnitude (and only in this so far as it does not convey any charm or any emotion arising from actual danger). (Critique 100)

Firstly, most works of art generally have embodied forms, so they violate Kant’s principle—the formlessness of the sublime. Secondly, the works of art themselves are the results of human behavioral fulfillments, that is, they have purposes, so that they contradict another Kant’s principle—the purposelessness of the judgment of the taste. The first principle, as remarked in the previous paragraph, is not a good enough reason to exclude the works of art from the sublime.
For the second principle, its validity should be discussed through tracing the essence of the sublime. Kant supposes that the essence of sublimity lies in our mind, namely “the mind of the judging Subject,” and he remarks: “For the beautiful in nature we must seek a ground external to ourselves, but for the sublime one merely in ourselves and the attitude of mind that introduces sublimity into the representation of nature” (Critique 93). Sublimity is the judgment of projecting our mental response upon the representation of nature, and the judgment itself does not have an end, but has finality, as Kant concludes in Analytic of the Beautiful:

We are thus left with the subjective finality in the representation of an object, exclusive of any end (objective or subjective)—consequently the bare form of finality in the representation whereby an object is given to us, so far as we are conscious of it—as that which is alone capable of constituting the delight which, apart from any concept, we estimate as universally communicable, and so of forming the determining ground of the judgement of taste. (62-3)

The subjective finality is the causality of an object based on Kant’s premise of human cognition. For instance, the idea of a rose is concretely exhibited by the appearance of a rose. The so-called “end” includes two meanings: (1) the subjective purpose for pleasure, which has an intention, and (2) the objective purpose for cognition, which has no intention. In general, we make a judgment of taste neither for obtaining pleasure (because a judgment has been made before obtaining pleasure) nor for recognizing whether an object’s representation is perfect or not, so that the judgment of taste is of purposelessness. The purposelessness refers to the Subject’s purposelessness, instead of the Object’s. Indeed, a work of art, being the Object of the sublime, has an end (it is the result of a fulfillment of human will), but whether there is an end in the judgment of taste still depends on the Subject. In a nutshell, the purpose of the Object is not the point in the judgment of taste. When we
appreciate an object of the sublime, we hardly consider the purpose of the Object. For instance, when we see the boundless expanse of the Pacific Ocean and then give a judgment of the taste, we just wonder at its vastness without thinking that it was established for fish to live by the Creator. Similarly, when we see a skyscraper, we are merely astonished at its height without thinking further that it was built as a block of offices or apartments. Therefore, Kant’s removing works of art from the sublime because they have an objective finality is unreasonable. It is the Subject, not the Object, that determines the end.

However, unavoidably, the Object is likely to change the Subject’s attitude from purposelessness\(^1\) to purposiveness\(^2\) in the judgment of the taste. When the Object is a literary work, for example, a novel, we always read it for pleasure, for killing time, or for any other reason. Unlike the attitude of the purposelessness for nature in the judgment of the taste, our mind has an obvious purpose or intention. Of course, such a situation violates not only the purposelessness but also the disinterestedness of Kant’s principles, especially when we use some standard to estimate a literary work, like Samuel Johnson evaluating Shakespeare’s plays in the light of moral instruction: “He sacrifices virtue to convenience, and is so much more careful to please than to instruct that he seems to write without any moral purpose” (427). Understandably, this is the reason why Kant excludes works of art from the sublime. Nevertheless, if works of art are excluded from the sublime because of human purposiveness and interest, then human dignity and value will be blotted out as well. If so, human beings, not at all differing from general animals, would not possess “culture” and “moral feeling” (Critique 116). Hence, Kant’s emphasis on the purposelessness and the “respect” of sublimity seems to be an unintentional contradiction. On the other hand, in order to justify his philosophy, he removes from the sublime works of art—the embodiments which

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1 German: Zwecklosigkeit (purposelessness / finality away from an end)
2 German: Zweck (purpose / end)
display human dignity and spirit; on the other hand, returning to the essence of the sublime, he recognizes human dignity by proposing “respect,” like Longinus’s perspective. To explore further his contradiction, we have to trace what the research object of philosophy is. In essence, philosophy is a science of the humanities, whose research object lies in man himself. Without man’s will and purpose for survival, philosophy would be meaningless. Accordingly, in *Analytic of the Sublime*, Kant returns to his starting point—human beings themselves. He again recognizes human dignity—“respect”—by remarking: “War itself, provided it is conducted with order and a sacred respect for the rights of civilians, has something sublime about it, and gives nations that carry it on in such a manner a stamp of mind only the more sublime the more numerous the dangers to which they are exposed, and which they are able to meet with fortitude” (*Critique* 113). Compared with human dignity, the purposelessness and the disinterestedness in Kant’s theory seem to be less important. Consequently, we can obtain a conclusion: literature can be included in the sublime.

2.1.2 Freedom

The emphasis on human dignity in Longinus’s sublimity not only has a great influence on Kant’s “respect” but also on the Romantic rebellious spirit and desire for a return to nature. Due to the emphasis on human dignity, Longinus’s sublimity has another significant meaning: freedom. Without freedom, great souls and sublime works could not be generated, because it is the basis of sublimity, as Longinus indicates:

For freedom, it is said, has power to feed the imaginations of the lofty-minded and to inspire hope, and where it prevails there spreads abroad the eagerness of mutual rivalry and the emulous pursuit of the foremost place. Moreover, owing to the prizes which are open to all under popular government, the mental excellences of the orator are continually exercised and sharpened, and
as it were rubbed bright, and shine forth (as it is natural they should) with all the freedom which inspires the doings of the state. (ch. XLIV; 101)

In a poet’s composition and an orator’s eloquence, freedom plays a decisive role and hence is indispensable. A poet or an orator can develop his genius in composition and eloquence only under a completely free and democratic system. Once he loses his freedom, or rather, once he is oppressed by tyranny, he dares not speak out what he really feels and develop his talent to compose sincere works. In order to avoid being persecuted or killed for his true words, what he speaks and writes is no longer sincere words from his heart, but flattering remarks to curry favor with his king, emperor, or government. Without freedom of speech, no matter how excellent a poet’s natural gift is, he still cannot give full play to his genius in composition. So, Longinus thinks that a poet’s literary talent and an orator’s eloquence are based on free and democratic politics, because freedom is “the fairest and most productive source of eloquence” (ch. XLIV; 101). As for the social system of his time, he severely criticizes slavery:

This is the reason, he maintained, why no slave ever becomes an orator, although all other faculties may belong to menials. In the slave there immediately burst out signs of fettered liberty of speech, of the dungeon as it were, of a man habituated to buffetings. “For the day of slavery,” as Homer has it, “takes away half our manhood.3” “Just as,” he proceeded, “the cages (if what I hear is true) in which are kept the pygmies, commonly called nani, not only hinder the growth of the creatures confined within them, but actually attenuate them through the bonds which beset their bodies, so one has aptly termed all servitude (though it be most righteous) the cage of the soul and a

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3 This sentence derives from Homer’s *Odyssey*, XVII 322-3. Its original text is “And broad-seeing Zeus takes away half the excellence / Of a man, from the time the day of slavery comes upon him.”
His stance against slavery and oppression happens to coincide with Kant’s “respect.” Essentially, their starting points of sublimity are the same; both depart from human rights for living. On the basis of this starting point, man is supposed to be born free, like Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s viewpoint of human rights in *On Social Contract*: “This common liberty is a consequence of man’s nature. His first law is to see to his own preservation; his first concerns are those he owes to himself, and, as soon as he reaches the age of reason, being then the sole judge of the proper means of preserving himself, he thereby becomes his own master” (86). In the process of human living, man has to face all the danger around his living environment. The danger primarily comes from nature and human society. But, no matter how dangerous the environment is, in order to live on, man never submits to it. The courage of refusing to be cowed and submit is the sublimity that Longinus and Kant emphasize. About the inhumanity of slavery Rousseau remarks, “[i]f there are, therefore, slaves by nature, it is because there have been slaves against nature. Force created the first slaves; their cowardice has perpetuated their condition” (87). Rousseau’s pronouncement pinpoints the spirits of modern democratic politics—freedom and equality, but Longinus proposed this point of view much earlier than Rousseau. The freedom that Longinus claimed means not only political freedom but also creative freedom. This concept offers Wordsworth a good reason to perform a literary revolution. If it is true that man is born free, then poets and writers should not be forced to abide by any authority and any rule. In conclusion, considering its roots in the notion of human freedom, we can define sublimity as follows: under the premise of human dignity, for human living, any action of resistance against the oppression of an external power, whether it is a great might of nature or a political authority, can be regarded as sublime.
2.1.3 Revolution and Rebellion

As to the influence of Longinus’s “freedom” on the Romantic rebellious spirit and the return to nature, a good place to start with is several Romantic poets’ comments on Milton’s Satan in *Paradise Lost*. In Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Satan is a controversial character who at the same time attracts and repels Romantic poets. The controversy concerning Satan can be analyzed from Milton’s political stance and the political situation in the Romantic period. Politically, Milton is a revolutionary and an advocate of regicide, devoting himself to extreme democratic and egalitarian ideals. He denounces most forms of authority—kings, bishops and magistrates in particular. He attacks censorship, and campaigns for legal divorce. Naturally, his tone tends toward sympathizing with rebellion, anger, and revolution. Accordingly, he unconsciously reveals his democratic and egalitarian ideals in *Paradise Lost*, by portraying Satan as a rebellious hero who directly resists God’s sacred and inviolable authority. In this epic, God is no longer the kindhearted and merciful lord of the Bible, but a tyrant who relentlessly punishes all the rebels, whereas Satan looks like the oppressed who endures all pains to resist God’s authority. In politics, the action of resistance against a regime is usually named either revolution or rebellion. In the Chinese language, the meanings of revolution and rebellion are quite different. Revolution [革命], which literally does not imply any duty of loyalty to someone, is to overthrow an old system or regime. Rebellion [叛變], which has a connotation of a dereliction of a duty of loyalty to king or government, is to resist a regime and to replace it if successful. Based on “man is born free,” we do not have any obligation of loyalty to anyone or any regime, unless we willingly accept it for the sake of our benefit (Rousseau 85). Consequently, from the angle of freedom, how can we say that Satan’s action of resistance against God is rebellion rather than revolution? If it is true that “man is born free,” then Satan cannot have a duty of loyalty to God. To further distinguish revolution from rebellion, we have to consider another
factor—a regime’s good and evil. This factor is always taken into account by historians to evaluate a ruler’s historical position. If the regime performs despotic rule and deprives the people of their interest and freedom, the action of resistance against it will be named revolution. By contrast, if the regime performs benevolent rule and takes good care of the public interest, the action of resistance against it will be named rebellion. Hence, before we have proved that Milton’s God is a good ruler and that he governs his people benevolently and impartially, how can we name Satan’s action of resistance against him rebellion?

Seemingly, in *Paradise Lost*, many descriptions of God suggest that he uses strong force, not justice, virtue, and morality, to make his people his subjects, such as: “He with his thunder: and till then who knew / the force of those dire arms?” (I. 93-4), “To bow and sue for grace / With suppliant knee, and deify his power / Who from the terror of this arm so late / Doubted his empire, that were low indeed” (I. 111-4), “Farthest from him is best / Whom reason hath equaled, force hath made supreme / Above his equals” (I. 247-9), and “And what I should be, all but less than he / Whom thunder hath made greater” (I. 257-8). For force, Rousseau explicates: “Force is a physical power; I do not see what kind of morality can result from its effects. Yielding to force is an act of necessity, not of will; it is, at most, an act of prudence. In what sense could this be a duty?” (87). No one can use force to sustain his regime forever, including God. Force just makes people submit to a regime temporarily, rather than accept it willingly with good grace forever. If God’s crown has to be sustained by force, then it means that his regime is replaceable. Once anyone has force greater than God, he is able to replace God’s regime. If God can be a king by force, why can’t Satan? From the view of Longinus’s “freedom,” Satan’s resistance against God’s oppression should not be regarded as rebellion. Instead, it should be regarded as revolution, because God, like a tyrant, is so narrow-minded and autocratic that he does not allow anyone to oppose his will. Based on his strong force, God puts himself on the top of all classes, and all the living things
have to subordinate themselves to him and submit to his rule. Yielding to him will receive rewards; rebelling against him will receive severe punishments. Good and evil are totally recognized by him. For such an autocratic dictator, how can his authority not be questioned? Therefore, many critics feel much sympathy and compassion for Satan, especially the Romantic poets who are influenced by Rousseau’s democratic thoughts. Shelley expresses pity for Satan: “[. . .] he is like a man compelled by a tyrant to set fire to his own possessions, and to appear as witness against, and the accuser of his dearest friends and most intimate connexions; and then to be their executioner, and to inflict the most subtle and protracted torments upon them” (55-6). If God is a tyrant, Satan’s action of resistance against him is the sublime that Longinus and Kant pronounce.

Satan’s “rebellion” indeed arouses much controversy. It attracts many Romantic poets in the light of pursuing freedom and equality, but at the same time it repels them for Satan’s indulgence in egotism. Coleridge indicates the key point that makes them abominate Satan—Satan’s alcohol of egotism:

Milton has carefully marked in his Satan the intense selfishness, the alcohol of egotism, which would rather reign in hell than serve in heaven. To place his lust of self in opposition to denial of self or duty, and to show what exertions it would make, and what pains endure to accomplish its end, is Milton’s particular object in the character of Satan. But around this character he has thrown a singularity of daring, a grandeur of sufferance, and a ruined splendour, which constitute the very height of poetic sublimity. (Fourteen Lectures 51)

As to the Romantic poets’ aversion to “the alcohol of egotism,” we have to discuss it by associating Satan’s “rebellion” with the French Revolution. Originally, the French Revolution, by issuing the Declaration of the Rights of Man, had a very high ideal, that of
establishing a democratic republic with freedom and equality. It was the great ideal that evoked enthusiastic support from many English poets, such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley. But, later, the revolution did not bring the freedom and equality that the Romantic poets expected, but social chaos, bloody massacres, and the reign of terror. In particular, when Napoleon’s invasion had swept the whole continental Europe in the name of revolution, these English poets were thoroughly disappointed with the French Revolution. Wordsworth wrote his disappointment in his *The Prelude*:

> But now, become Oppressors in their turn,
> Frenchmen had changed a war of self-defence
> For one of Conquest, losing sight of all
> Which they had struggled for: and mounted up,
> Openly in the eye of Earth and Heaven,
> The scale of Liberty. (XI. 206-9)

Napoleon, like Satan who would rather reign in hell than serve in heaven, had the huge ambition of becoming the emperor of France, of Europe, even of the world. In the name of liberating the other peoples, he began to fulfill his ambition by force. All the original ideals of the French Revolution, such as freedom, equality, and fraternity, became his best excuses for invasion. Accordingly, when some contemporary critics read Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, they naturally associated Satan with Napoleon. Undoubtedly, their comments on Satan’s “rebellion,” more or less influenced by Napoleon, must be severe and repugnant, especially for Satan’s pride, rebellious self-idolatry, and large ambition. For instance, Coleridge remarked:

> This is the character which Milton has so philosophically as well as sublimely embodied in the Satan of his *Paradise Lost*. Alas! Too often has it been embodied in *real* life! Too often has it given a dark and savage grandeur to
the historic page! [. . .] [T]hese are the Marks that have characterized the Masters of Mischief, the Liberticides, and mighty Hunters of Mankind, from NIMROD to NAPOLEON. And from inattention to the possibility of such character as well as from ignorance of its elements, even men of honest intentions too frequently become fascinated. Nay, whole nations have been so far duped by this want of insight and reflection as to regard with palliative admiration, instead of wonder and abhorrence, the Molocks of human nature, who are indebted, for the far larger portion of their meteoric success, to their total want of principle, and who surpass the generality of their fellow creatures in one act of courage only, that of daring to say with their whole heart, “Evil, be thou my good!” [. . .]. (The Satanic Hero 411-2)

Although the French Revolution disappointed many Romantic poets, its sublimity is above suspicion. Without the oppression of absolute monarchy to lead the people to living on the edge of starvation, people would not rise up in arms. The starting point of the Revolution also lies in human living. However, in the process of a revolution, it is hard to avoid armed conflict, social anarchy, environmental destruction and ambitious schemers’ taking advantage of the revolution to fulfill their personal desire. So, after a revolution, it is a common sight that the revolutionized society is in turbulence and unrest, and people seem to live a worse life than before. Because the revolution brings people a chaotic and miserable situation, instead of a better life or freedom and equality that we immediately can see, little by little, some critics cannot help cherishing the old social traditions. Burke is one of them, eager to recover the ancient chivalry, the tradition, and the past social order. In his Reflections on the Revolution in France, he praises highly the ancient chivalry by writing:

This mixed system of opinion and sentiment had its origin in the ancient chivalry [. . .] If it should ever be totally extinguished, the loss I fear will be
great. It is this which has given its character to modern Europe. It is this which has distinguished it under all its forms of government, and distinguished it to its advantage, from the states of Asia, and possibly from those states which flourished in the most brilliant periods of the antique world. It was this, which, without confounding ranks, had produced a noble equality, and handed it down through all the gradations of social life. It was this opinion which mitigated kings into companions, and raised private men to be fellows with kings. Without force, or opposition, it subdued the fierceness of pride and power; it obliged sovereigns to submit to the soft collar of social esteem, compelled stern authority to submit to elegance, and gave a domination vanquisher of laws, to be subdued by manners. (170-1)

However, he seems to beautify the ancient chivalry too much. Chivalry is a product of the feudal system of the Middle Ages. Since it derives from the feudal system, the social classes are strictly regulated by the lord who uses force to conquer a place, rather than naturally formed by the endeavors of many of various walks of life. In such a system, a vassal has to be loyal to his lord and serve for him, and a serf has to share most of his harvest with his landowner. No matter how hard the vassal and the serf work, they never can exceed the position of their “masters.” How can chivalry produce “a noble equality” without overthrowing feudal classes? To consider further the so-called excellent traditions of the past society that Burke mentions, e.g. “generous loyalty to rank and sex,” “proud permission,” “dignified obedience,” “sensibility of principle” and “chastity of honor,” these spirits more or less emit the smell of enslavement (Reflections 170). How can they bring real freedom and equality? As a matter of fact, Burke cherishes chivalry not because it is so perfect, but because the social anarchy that the Revolution brings repels him extremely. He disagrees with the French Revolution primarily for its bloody violence. Hence, he supposes
that the best reform is the English Revolution, because it is performed in a peaceful way. In the English Revolution, without using any force, no classes were overthrown, and no one died in violence, but people acquired freedom and equality as well.

Nevertheless, Burke seems to misconceive the emperors of the other countries as comparable to Britain’s James II, who was willing to give up his supreme power and interest, and to accept the constitution that his people made. Although Burke is an empiricist, he ignores two facts. Firstly, unlike James II, most autocratic kings wield military force, and they never set up a congress or a parliament to restrain their power on their own initiative. Secondly, all the kings are usually selfish, even God (at least as he is depicted by Milton). While we are condemning Satan’s selfishness, have we ever thought of God’s selfishness? Milton’s God endows angels with reason and free will, but he is unwilling to give them equality. Because he clings to the supreme power, he never allows anyone to challenge his authority. In order to legalize his regime and to idolize his sacred and inviolable image, he inculcates his people with many ideas, such as people should absolutely respect him and be loyal to him, he is a merciful king who loves them very much, or what he does is good for them. In order to protect his family’s interest from being shared by others and to perpetuate his blood lineage, he assigns his son, rather than his subordinates, to perform his duty of judgment, just as a king of man’s world hands down his crown to his son. His selfishness and means of ruling his country are hardly different from an earthly king’s. If human nature is selfish, then some critics’ blaming Satan and Napoleon for their selfishness and self-idolatry seems to be unfair. In fact, Satan would be another God, if his rebellion were successful; Napoleon would be another Louis XVI. The only difference lies in that God and Louis XVI, by inculcating in people the idea of patriotism and loyalty to their thrones, have legalized their authorities. Then, if people asked God and Louis XVI to give up their power, would they be willing to freely hand their state power back to their people? No, they
absolutely would not. Otherwise, God would not have used force to hurl the rebellious angels into hell, and Louis XVI would not have cast political offenders into the Bastille. Now since most emperors are selfish and wield military power, when people ask them for a return of freedom and power, or for establishing a parliament which consists of them to supervise his administration, they are always either imprisoned or executed because of their “rebellion.” Therefore, Burke’s insistence upon peaceful revolution is indeed a very good idea, but it is very difficult to achieve, especially for the countries that centralize state power completely in the emperor.

Besides, another reason why a peaceful revolution is hard to accomplish is the factor of the environment. The factor of the environment has something to do with contemporary system of politics and people’s democratic attainments. For example, a peaceful political reform, like the English Revolution, is very difficult to achieve in the traditional Chinese system of politics. In Chinese history, autocratic monarchy has been practiced for more than two thousand years. The question of who was the emperor of China entirely hinged upon military force. Thus, the emperor of China could be a Han, a Mongolian, or a Manchurian, as long as his military force was strong enough to conquer the whole of China. After every founder established his dynasty, he began to legitimize his authority and idolize himself. On the one hand, he adopted a policy of mollification to employ the adherents of the former dynasty to serve in the government and to implant in the people the false impression that he loved the people as much as he loved his son. On the other hand, he used high-handed measures to uproot the dissidents. So that he and his descendants would be able to enjoy the supreme power and interest alone and perpetually, he made his brothers and relatives feudal princes, and handed down his crown only to his son. All the populace was naturally enslaved to his family. Under his rule, if the society were prosperous and stable, and people lived a better life than before, his authority would be recognized by the people from then on,
and hence his descendants would receive the people’s loyalty. On the contrary, if he or his lineal descendants were tyrants, he would be overthrown soon and replaced by another new emperor who rebelled successfully against him for his tyranny. Influenced by such a tradition of autocratic monarchy for thousands of years, Chinese people had been used to “the emperor,” and taken it for granted that the rebellious hero who successfully overthrew the tyrant’s regime was qualified as the new emperor. Consequently, from the view of Chinese history to see Satan and Napoleon, indeed, they have the qualification to be the new emperor, if the traditional system of monarchy remains.

However, it is the influence of such a tradition of autocratic monarchy that makes Western democratic thoughts quite strange to Chinese people. From the end of the nineteenth century, via Chinese students abroad, Western democratic thoughts were introduced to China. At that time, China was in domestic trouble and suffering from foreign invasion. The domestic trouble referred to the political corruption and incompetence of the Ch’ing government; the foreign invasion referred to Western imperialistic countries’ invasion for commercial benefits. Because of the Ch’ing’s failure in several wars against foreign invaders, China had to cede territory and pay a huge sum of indemnity to the victorious nations, which nearly took the Chinese people into the abyss of suffering. In order to save the country at stake and the suffering people, many Chinese intellectuals actively devoted themselves to constitutional reform and modernization. Originally, they hoped to practice constitutional monarchy by setting up a congress to restrain the emperor’s power, and expected the emperor and the empress dowager to hand the state power back to the people of their own will, like in the English Revolution. But, these intellectuals’ hopes were thoroughly shattered. The Ch’ing’s empress dowager, who at that time actually held state power in her hands, did not adopt their suggestion, and instead, gave orders to imprison or execute them. So, they had no option but to appeal to armed revolution. Under the
suppression of the Ch’ing’s force, almost each revolt was defeated, until the eleventh revolt in 1911, when Dr. Sun Yat-sen successfully overthrew the Ch’ing dynasty, establishing the first republic of Asia—the Republic of China. Similarly, like the French Revolution, Dr. Sun Yat-sen’s revolution did not bring actual freedom and equality right away, but a series of civil wars initially for the leadership—who should be the president—and later for ideology—communism and capitalism—and finally the separation of China in Mainland China and Taiwan. At that extraordinary period of regime change, most people knew nothing about democratic politics, except a small number of intellectuals. Because this was a brand-new political system for China, the Chinese people (like the French after their revolution) had not completely gotten rid of the influence of monarchy and been accustomed to the new system. Accordingly, some careerists seized this opportunity to fulfill their personal desires—proclaiming themselves to be emperor or inciting the restoration of the Ch’ing’s last emperor and the like. Nevertheless, as time went by, after people had been gradually used to the new system, they did not allow the restoration of autocratic monarchy. Even though society was still in turmoil, “the emperor” has not reappeared in modern Chinese history. If we impute social anarchy and the rise of careerists to the revolution itself, we capture only part of their cause. The main cause of social anarchy and careerists’ rise lies in contemporary people’s deficiency of democratic attainments, not in the essence of the revolution. From a historical perspective, human intellectual faculties and social systems are continually making progress as time goes by. When we find that democratic politics is indeed better than autocratic monarchy, we certainly choose democratic politics and abandon autocratic monarchy. Undoubtedly, the French Revolution brought quite a few instances of social anarchy and unrest, but it set up a good example in changing the rules of political governance from autocracy to democracy. Its aim is to establish a free and equal country governed by all the people rather than by an emperor or a king. Without the
example of the French Revolution, perhaps, Dr. Sun Yat-sen’s revolution or the revolutions of the other countries would have established yet another dynasty rather than a republic. Therefore, the French Revolution should be crowned with eternal glory in human history for its fight for freedom and equality. Its sublimity should not be blotted out because of social anarchy and the rise of careerists.

However, the contemporary Romantic poets failed to see the whole historical evolution of democratic politics, so they were still disappointed in the French Revolution. Because the French Revolution did not immediately bring the freedom they expected, they turned to find it in nature, withdrawing themselves from the dirty world of politics. Affected by Rousseau’s “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains,” they regarded civilized society, or rather, autocracy, as the chains of freedom, and yearned for returning to the carefree life of country people (85). They thought that the only place where they could find freedom was nature, as Coleridge wrote:

Yes, while I stood and gazed, my temples bare,
And shot my being through earth, sea, and air,
Possessing all things with intensest love,
O Liberty! My spirit felt thee there. (France 102-5)

Although they moved far away from politics to seek real freedom, their hearts were still full of rebellious passion, and they unconsciously revealed it in their poems or articles. With such passion, in his “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads,*” Wordsworth boldly conducted an epoch-making revolution of literature, handing over the literary “regime” from the aristocracy to the ordinary people, by pronouncing:

The principal object, then, proposed in these Poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men, and at the
same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect; [...]. (446-7)

Based on the spirits of freedom and equality, he brought in literature the plebeian culture that past literary generations disparaged, adopting “incidents and situations from common life” and “a selection of language really used by men” to write poems. Like Satan’s rebellion, he no longer submitted to the authority of neo-classicism with its emphasis on imitation, rules, decorum, or art for humanity’s sake. Instead, he made every effort to seek originality and individuality in style, and applied imagination to composition to make a common thing extraordinary. By seeking closeness to nature, he tried to solace his discontent and indignation for politics, and to find out the sublimity of humanity. Many of his poems describe the sufferings of the lower classes, such as a beggar, a poor old man, a mad woman, or an idiot boy. These sufferings result either from natural destiny or from social persecution. Under the oppression of these sufferings, in order to live on, these people bravely face the pain and the danger of their lives. For instance, in “Resolution and Independence,” when Wordsworth worries about the toils of the old man who earns his living by gathering leeches, the old man chats with him in a cheerful and easy demeanor as if he did not live in hardships:

And soon with this he other matter blended,
Cheerfully uttered, with demeanour kind,
But stately in the main; and when he ended,
I could have laughed myself to scorn to find
In that decrepit Man so firm a mind.
“God,” said I, “be my help and stay secure;
I’ll think of the Leech-gatherer on the lonely moor!” (134-40)
The old leech-gatherer’s courage of never yielding to the adverse circumstances is just like Kant’s “respect.” From an ordinary old man, the poet captures an extraordinary characteristic by his pen—man’s sublimity in a conflict between human living and dangerous nature.
2.2 Burke’s and Kant’s Theories of the Sublime

Longinus literally endowed the term *sublimity* with an extensive meaning, which can denote an author’s great soul, a poem’s high vigor and lofty diction, or freedom and equality; aesthetically, Burke was the first person who gave the sublime a specific definition, separating the sublime from beauty and making a clear distinction between the beautiful and the sublime. In order to objectively define the sublime and the beautiful, Burke starts with the experience of the human senses. Based on psychology and physiology, he assumes that the physical structure of all human beings is practically the same, and that so is the feeling of taste: “We do and we must suppose, that as the conformation of their organs are nearly, or altogether the same in all men, so the manner of perceiving external objects is in all men the same, or with little difference” (*A Philosophical Enquiry* 13). He adds: “I believe no man thinks a goose to be more beautiful than a swan, or imagines that what they call a Friezland hen excels a peacock” (*A Philosophical Enquiry* 15). Based on this hypothesis, he boldly deduces the sources of the beautiful and the sublime: the ideas of beauty derive from society—namely the multiplication of the species and herd instinct, whereas the ideas of the sublime derive from self-preservation—namely the instinct of maintaining individual life. In essence, the traits of the beautiful and the sublime are opposite. The beautiful involves love and joy, whereas the sublime involves terror and pain. Thus, according to Burke, anything which can cause terror is a source of the sublime: “Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling” (*A Philosophical Enquiry* 36). However, “when danger or pain press too nearly they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful, as we every day experience”
Hence, another element of the sublime is safety, that is, keeping oneself from danger at certain distances.

Furthermore, Burke associates the sublime with ambition, while he is analyzing three sorts of principal links in the chain of society for the beautiful—sympathy, imitation, and ambition:

Now whatever on good or upon bad grounds tends to raise a man in his own opinion, produces a sort of swelling and triumph that is extremely grateful to the human mind and this swelling is never more perceived, nor operates with more force, than when without danger we are conversant with terrible objects, the mind always claiming which it contemplates. Hence proceeds what Longinus has observed of that glorying and sense of inward greatness, that always fills the reader of such passages in poets and orators as are sublime; it is what every man must have felt in himself upon such occasions. (A Philosophical Enquiry 46)

The “swelling and triumph” can be clearly felt particularly when we are facing a horrible object without immediate danger. If the feeling of the sublime is “swelling and triumph,” then the delight of the sublime will not be a moral pleasure, but a pleasure of self-preservation. Such a pleasure primarily comes from gloat­ing over others’ misfortune. For example, when we see a grand scene of bloody and violent war in a film, in addition to fear or astonishment, we usually produce “a sort of swelling and triumph that is extremely grateful to the human mind.” By the character’s misfortune or tragic death in the film, we unconsciously feel our superiority, at least we are alive, and hence generate a delight. Such a delight derives from the egotism of human nature, and Burke emphasizes it in the sublime, by saying “I am convinced we have a degree of delight, and that no small one, in the real misfortunes and pains of others […]” (A Philosophical Enquiry 42). The egotism of human
nature is usually revealed in the instinct of self-preservation. Self-preservation, according to Burke, refers to the brutal struggle for existence between animals. Consequently, Burke’s delight of the sublime is commonly regarded as unrelated to morality.

In fact, as far as the feeling of the sublime is concerned, Burke’s “swelling and triumph” is close to Kant’s “respect” in the dynamically sublime. In his *Analytic of the Sublime*, Kant divides the sublime into two kinds—the mathematically sublime and the dynamically sublime. The characteristic of the former is the infinitude of an object’s magnitude, and that of the latter lies in the great might that can cause fear and respect. The great might in nature Kant illustrates as follows:

[. . .] the boundless ocean rising with rebellious force, the high waterfall of some mighty river, and the like, make our power of resistance of trifling moment in comparison with their might. But, provided our own position is secure, their aspect is all the more attractive for its fearfulness; we readily call these objects sublime, because they raise the forces of the soul above the height of vulgar commonplace, and discover within us a power of resistance of quite another kind, which gives us courage to be able to measure ourselves against the seeming omnipotence of nature. (*Critique* 110-11)

Basically, Kant quite agrees with Burke’s argument that safety is an indispensable element of the sublime. A great might can become a fearful object. But, if it really makes us scared, we will escape from it and will not get any pleasure. Thus, “provided our own position is secure,” the more fearful it is, the more attractive it is. In addition to fear, it also gives us the “courage to be able to measure ourselves against the seeming omnipotence of nature.” The courage of resistance, according to Kant, is respect. To sum up, Kant’s pleasure of the sublime comes from overcoming fear and turning it into resistant courage. In other words, the feeling of Kant’s sublimity is the feeling of respect. However, from the view of
aesthetic facts to consider the feeling of the sublime, Kant’s “respect” can be the same as Burke’s “swelling and triumph.” Before discussing the similarity between Kant’s “respect” and Burke’s “swelling and triumph,” at first, we have to make a premise that we do not limit the sublime to nature, that is, nature and man-made art both can be a source of the sublime. Under this premise, now, let’s assume the object of the sublime to be nature, for instance, Mt. Everest. Many mountain climbers like to challenge Mt. Everest, just because they need the “swelling and triumph” to recognize their excellent climbing technique, strength, and feeling of stamina. Once they have successfully climbed to its top without immediate danger, the “swelling and triumph” feeling will spring up in their mind as if they conquered nature. Such a feeling is similar to Kant’s respect. On this occasion, the “swelling and triumph” feeling is a feeling of victory over the danger of nature.

On the contrary, if we assume the object of the sublime to be a work of art, for example, a scene of cruel combat in the film Saving Private Ryan, Burke’s “swelling and triumph” and Kant’s “respect” will be quite different. Burke’s “swelling and triumph” will exhibit the selfishness and brutality of human nature, while we are watching this scene in Saving Private Ryan:

[. . .] the D-day landing on Omaha: seasick soldiers slaughtered the minute the ramps on their landing boats are lowered; other men clambering over the sides trying to avoid the fire, only to drown under the weight of their packs; the surf turning red with the blood of the slaughtered; some who make it to the narrow beach huddling immobilized yet pathetically vulnerable behind what little cover they can find. A few inch forward, hoping perhaps that being a moving target is safer than being a stationary one. (Schickel 46)

From these soldiers’ miserable death or the field of battle scattered with bodies, we witness the terror of war and meanwhile acquire a delight, partly for our secure position and partly for
the effects of entertainment. On this occasion, our pleasure of the sublime is almost cruel, for it comes from gloating over others’ misfortune, rather than from overcoming fear and turning it into resistant courage. In this example, certainly, Burke’s “swelling and triumph” is not the same as Kant’s “respect.” The reason why Burke’s “swelling and triumph” differs from Kant’s “respect” mainly lies in Burke’s and Kant’s interpretations of self-preservation. Kant’s self-preservation represents the courage of survival in the face of the might of nature; Burke’s represents the survival competition between animals. That is, Kant considers only the danger of nature, and Burke thinks of only the danger between human beings. Actually, man’s self-preservation must face the two sorts of danger, but Burke and Kant both ignore one of them. Consequently, while we are considering the question whether the sublime contains morality or not, we have to take the two sorts of self-preservation into account at the same time.

Owing to their different explanations of self-preservation, Burke’s sublimity is usually considered as regardless of morality, while Kant’s is seen regardful of morality. In fact, both of them unconsciously mention morality. Burke explains self-preservation as the survival competition between animals, so that his “swelling and triumph” has nothing to do with morality. On this point, he almost suggests the disinterestedness of art’s appreciation. In other words, when we are appreciating a work of art, we can get rid of morality and any other purpose to judge it. Even if the work itself is extremely inhumane, horrible, and violent, for example, the film *Hannibal*, we can judge it sublime in a disinterested attitude. However, because man is a sentimental being, it is impossible for him to shake off the influence of sentiments when making a judgment of taste. It is because of sentiments that we can be moved to shed tears by the plot and to feel a sense of sublimity. As Burke points out, the appreciation of arts is based on sympathy:

It is by the first of these passions that we enter into the concerns of others; that
we are moved as they are moved, and are never suffered to be indifferent spectators of almost any thing which men can do or suffer. For sympathy must be considered as a sort of substitution, by which we are put into the place of another man, and affected in many respects as he is affected, so that this passion may either partake of the nature of those which regard self-preservation, and turning upon pain may be a source of the sublime; or it may turn upon ideas of pleasure [...]. (A Philosophical Enquiry 41)

Since we “are never suffered to be indifferent spectators of almost any thing which men can do or suffer,” we are not bound to experience “swelling and triumph” for the suffering characters. For instance, when we watch the film *Saving Private Ryan*, we may have two different responses. Seeing the beach scattered with bodies and the surf turning red with the blood of the slaughtered, we may feel sorry for the soldiers’ death or unable to bear seeing the miserable scene due to our sympathy, instead of feeling “swelling and triumph.” Such a response is tinged by our compassion, i.e. moral quality. On the other hand, from the grand sight of bloody war in this film, we may feel lucky that we are not in the field of battle (Teeuwen, Thesis 38). Or rather, we feel Burke’s “swelling and triumph” and obtain a delight of entertainment. The delight does not directly result from our sympathy, but from our safety—we know that we are in the cinema, not in the field of battle. From this example, we know that sympathy more or less shades into moral quality, but Burke just highlights the delight caused by safety in his sublimity.

Furthermore, Burke mentions the element of morality in the sublime without knowing it, namely the inferior effects of the sublime—admiration, reverence and respect:

The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully, is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. [...]

Hence arises the great power of the sublime, that far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force. Astonishment, as I have said, is the effect of the sublime in its highest degree; the inferior effects are admiration, reverence and respect. (A Philosophical Enquiry 53)

He defines the sublime as terror, so the major effect of the sublime is certainly astonishment. As to the inferior effects, he does not specify whether they coexist with astonishment or exist independently from astonishment, while a beholder sees an object of the sublime. If the beholder generates only astonishment without admiration, reverence, and respect, then Burke’s sublimity can be disinterested. But, if the beholder experiences astonishment as well as admiration, reverence, and respect at the same time, then Burke’s sublimity will shade into morality. As far as the actual judgment of taste is concerned, both of the two situations are within the range of possibility. For instance, when we are watching the film Hannibal, we will be astonished at Dr. Hannibal’s eating the victim’s brain without any admiration, reverence, and respect. Unconsciously, our abhorrence of his behavior is tinged by morality, so we do not feel admiration, reverence, and respect (Teeuwen, Chapter III 35). But, on the other hand, we also can use a disinterested attitude to look at him, and hence feel a delight of entertainment. In this case, our delight of sublimity can exclude moral responsibility, as Santayana remarks:

The truth is that morality is not mainly concerned with attainment of pleasure; it is rather concerned, in all its deeper and more authoritative maxims, with the prevention of suffering. There is something artificial in the deliberate pursuit of pleasure; there is something absurd in the obligation to enjoy oneself. We feel no duty in that direction; we take to enjoyment naturally enough after the work of life is done, and the freedom and spontaneity of our pleasure is what is
most essential to them. (16-7)

In another situation, if the film we appreciate is *Saving Private Ryan*, in addition to astonishment for the horrible scene of war, we will feel admiration, reverence, and respect for Private Ryan who refuses to be rescued and fights beside his would-be saviors. Of course, in this case, our delight of sublimity definitely has a moral quality. From the above situations, we can make a conclusion for Burke’s sublimity. Burke’s sublimity actually involves the element of morality, but morality is optional or can be removed when we make a judgment of the sublime, as Jean-Francois Lyotard puts to it:

Nature as artist and/or work of art in providing occasions for pure aesthetic pleasure (of taste) for the mind thus attests that a disinterested judgment or activity that is merely possible can be actualized. Thus it shows itself favorable to the demand to actualize the possible in general, the “facultary” or the optional. In particular to the demand to actualize the faculty of acting in a disinterested way, i.e., rational will. (171-2)

Although Burke touches on the disinterestedness of art’s appreciation and mentions some elements of morality in the sublime, he does not speak of the “rational will,” by which one can choose to make a disinterested judgment or an ethical judgment. The theorist who emphasizes reason in the sublime is Kant.

Likewise, in order to take morality into account in the sublime, Kant falls into a theoretical contradiction between “disinterestedness” and “respect.” In his *Analytic of the Beautiful*, at first, he sets up a philosophical system of the judgment of taste. Affected by David Hume’s perspective: “Beauty is no quality in things themselves: it exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty,” he supposes the judgment of taste to be subjective (315). Based on this hypothesis, he further establishes the principles of the judgment of taste: (1) the judgment of taste, apart from interest and desire, is
not an activity of fulfillment, but it has a delight similar to that generated by an activity of fulfillment; (2) the judgment of taste, apart from concept, is not a cognitive activity, but it needs a free play of imagination and understanding; (3) the judgment of taste has not an end, but it has subjective purposiveness; (4) the judgment of taste is individual and subjective, but it has universality and necessity; and (5) the judgment of taste is an experience of feeling, but it has the basis of reason. Among his principles, the “subjective” and the “disinterestedness” have been having a great influence on literature. The “disinterestedness” inspires some writers to assume the viewpoint that art exists only for art’s sake. For example, in “Poetry for Poetry’s Sake,” A. C. Bradley indicates that poetry’s value lies in its intrinsic worth, namely the imaginative experience in the process of reading, not in its ulterior value such as moral instruction:

[. . .] Next, its poetic value is this intrinsic worth alone. Poetry may have also an ulterior value as a means to culture or religion; because it conveys instruction, or softens the passions, or further a good cause [. . .] But its ulterior worth neither is nor can directly determine its poetic worth as a satisfying imaginative experience [. . .] The consideration of ulterior ends, whether by the poet in the act of composing or by the reader in the act of experiencing, tends to lower poetic value. [. . .] For its nature is to be not a part, nor yet a copy, of the real world (as we commonly understand that phrase), but to be a world by itself, independent, complete, autonomous; and to possess it fully you must enter that world, conform to its laws, and ignore for the time the beliefs, aims, and particular conditions which belong to you in the other world of reality. (737)

On the other hand, the “subjective” is further developed into transcendentalism. The starting point of transcendentalism is the subjective mind. When a poet’s subjective mind is
deeply indulging in the beauty of Nature, his mind will be in the state of forgetting himself, as Emerson describes:

    In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life,—no disgrace, no calamity, (leaving me my eyes,) which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball. I am nothing. I see all. The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God. (442)

By means of imagination, the poet enters the world of beauty, separating himself from the world of reality. It is because the subjective mind has the ability of transcendence that Wordsworth proposes that the same object may be both sublime and beautiful, without considering the opposite characteristics of the sublime and the beautiful. Now that beauty lies in the mind of the judging Subject, the classification between sublimity and beauty according to the characteristics of the Object, such as Burke’s classification or Kant’s in his early work *Of the Distinct Objects of the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, cannot be fully consistent with practical aesthetic facts. Therefore, while seeking the meaning of the sublime, in addition to the characteristics of the Object, we have to take the attributes of the Subject into account.

After Kant completes his philosophical system of the judgment of taste, later in *Analytic of the Sublime*, his emphasis on “respect” in the dynamically sublime contradicts his previous principle “disinterestedness.” Basically, Kant’s emphasis on “respect” means that his sublimity involves morality and interest, which contradicts “disinterestedness.” From such a contradiction, we cannot help suspecting that there must be something wrong in either “respect” or “disinterestedness.” In effect, Kant’s “respect” and “disinterestedness” are neither erroneous nor mutually contradicting if “respect” is an optional, not compulsory,
characteristic of the sublime. As to the question whether “respect” is optional, we can analyze it from the mind of the judging Subject. In general, the mind of the judging Subject fails to make a judgment of the sublime in a state of extremely fear, for the real danger threatens him and deprives him of delight, as Kant says:

One who is in a state of fear can no more play the part of a judge of the sublime of nature than one captivated by inclination and appetite can of the beautiful. He flees from the sight of an object filling him with dread; and it is impossible to take delight in terror that is seriously entertained. Hence the agreeableness arising from the cessation of an uneasiness is a state of joy. But this, depending upon deliverance from a danger, is a rejoicing accompanied with a resolve never again to put oneself in the way of the danger [. . .] . (Critique 110)

In other words, the Subject must be in a safe position and then he can make a judgment of the sublime. Safety denotes the disappearance of danger. It may come from avoiding directly encountering danger, e.g. staying at home to appreciate thunder and lightning, or from overcoming danger, e.g. mountain climbing. Since danger disappears, the inner resistant power of self-preservation caused by the danger of nature will vanish as well. Because the Subject makes a judgment of the sublime after his inner resistant power of self-preservation vanishes, certainly, such a judgment can remove “respect.” For example, while we are appreciating a large waterfall in a safe position, it will not occur to us to want to compete with the power of nature, so our judgment of the sublime is surely disinterested. Moreover, Kant limits the sublime object to visible nature before our eyes, namely “the Primary Imagination of Pleasure,” by writing:

Now if the given representation occasioning the judgement of taste were a concept which united understanding and imagination in the estimate of the
object so as to give a cognition of the Object, the consciousness of this relation would be intellectual (as in the objective schematism of judgement dealt with in the Critique). But, then, in that case the judgement would not be laid down with respect to pleasure and displeasure, and so would not be a judgement of taste. But, now, the judgement of taste determines the Object, independently of concepts, in respect of delight and of the predicate of beauty. There is, therefore, no other way for the subjective unity of the relation in question to make itself known than by sensation. (Critique 59-60)

In other words, Kant does not suppose fictitious nature made up of languages or pictures to be an object of taste, for it, which involves concept, belongs to intellectual cognition, rather than the pleasure or displeasure of feeling. However, he seems to underestimate the Subject’s ability. The mind of the judging Subject can feel not only visible nature before our eyes but also fictitious nature made up of languages or pictures and hence produce pleasure, by operating his imagination, understanding, reason and sympathy. If the sublime object is visible nature before our eyes, for example, a typhoon, our delight of the sublime may arise from “the cessation of an uneasiness.” But, if the sublime is fictitious nature made up of words, for example, the horrible scene of war in the film Saving Private Ryan described by words, we also can feel terror, but the terror or the danger is much smaller than that in visible nature. Consequently, we can summarize a definition of Kant’s sublimity: Kant’s sublimity also contains morality in essence, but morality is optional when we actually make a judgment of taste.
Chapter Three

The Romantic Sublime: Wordsworth’s Aesthetics and Thomas Weiskel’s Psychoanalysis

But all the meditations of mankind,
Yea, all the adamantine holds of truth
By reason built, or passion, which itself
Is the highest reason in a soul sublime;
The consecrated works of Bard and Sage,
Sensuous or intellectual, wrought by men,
Twin labourers and heirs of the same hopes;
Where would they be? Oh! why hath not the Mind
Some element to stamp her image on
In nature somewhat nearer to her own?
Why, gifted with such powers to send abroad
Her spirit, must it lodge in shrines so frail?

William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (V. 38-49)

3.1 Wordsworth’s Aesthetics

3.1.1 The Wordsworthian Sublime

The sublime, through the developments of Longinus, Burke, and Kant, has become a mature aesthetic concept. In literature, Wordsworth tries to bring it into his poetry and his poetic theory. Although Wordsworth develops his aesthetic viewpoints primarily based on Longinus’s, Burke’s, and Kant’s theories, he still proposes some unique arguments that these great theorists miss. In his unpublished essay “The Sublime and the Beautiful,” he insists that the same object can be both sublime and beautiful:

[. . .] But it may be confidently affirmed that, where the beautiful & the sublime co-exist in the same object, if that object be new to us, the sublime
always precedes the beautiful in making us conscious of its presence [. . .] But as I am persuaded that it is of infinite importance to the noblest feelings of the Mind & to its very highest powers that the forms of Nature should be accurately contemplated, &, if described, described in language that shall prove that we understand the several grand constitutional laws under which it has been ordained that these objects should everlastingly affect the mind, I shall deem myself justified in calling the Reader, upon the present humble occasion, to attend to a few words which shall be said upon two of these principle laws: the law of sublimity and that of beauty. (350)

His argument directly points out the imperfection of Burke’s and early Kant’s classification of the sublime and the beautiful according to the opposite characteristics of the Object. Basically, he adopts Kant’s viewpoint that “true sublimity must be sought only in the mind of the judging Subject” to develop his aesthetics (Critique 104). So, in his aesthetics, the sublime and the beautiful do not hinge upon the characteristics of the Object, but upon the phase of the mind of the judging Subject. For the same object, e.g. the sea, we may judge it beautiful from the angle of its peaceful surface mirroring the glorious sunset, or we may judge it sublime from the angle of its vastness. In accordance with different states of our subjective mind, for an object of beauty, we depend on our direct feeling to choose “sublime” or “beautiful.” From Wordsworth’s argument, we can obtain a new relationship between the sublime and the beautiful. Theoretically, the sublime and the beautiful are two opposite concepts; however, when we are making a judgment of taste, the antagonistic relationship between the sublime and the beautiful in the Object is gone.

Furthermore, Wordsworth mentions that our sense of sublimity initially derives from our impressions in childhood for nature:

[. . .] for a native of a mountainous country, looking back upon his childhood,
will remember how frequently he has been impressed by a sensation of sublimity from a precipice, in which awe or personal apprehension were the predominant feelings of his mind, & from which the milder influence of duration seemed to be excluded. And it is true that the relative proportions in which we are affected by the qualities of these objects are different at different periods of our lives; yet there cannot be a doubt upon all ages they act conjointly. (The Sublime and the Beautiful 353)

From his words, we can extract a significant concept that Burke and Kant never consider: that the impressions in our mind have a great influence on our judgment of taste. In our daily life, we frequently use the impressions in our mind to make a judgment of taste on something, especially on an object that we have never experienced in person. For instance, when we read Wordsworth’s description of English mountains in *The Prelude*, we can immediately make a judgment of taste. In fact, perhaps, we have never been there, but we depend on our impressions collected from TV news, travel programs or pictures to judge it sublime or beautiful. Or perhaps, we have once been there, but now we use our impressions of it to make a judgment of taste. It is the impressions in our mind that help us make a judgment, without the need of actual experience. Thus, if it is true that the impressions in our mind have a great influence on our judgment of taste, then we have a sufficient reason to question Kant’s argument that the judgment combining understanding with imagination to estimate an object is not a judgment of taste but an intellectual cognition of the Object:

Now if the given representation occasioning the judgment of taste were a concept which united understanding and imagination in the estimate of the object so as to give a cognition of the Object, the consciousness of this relation would be intellectual (as in the objective schematism of judgement dealt with in the Critique). But, then, in that case the judgment would not be laid down
with respect to pleasure and displeasure, and so would not be a judgement of
taste. But, now, the judgement of taste determines the Object, independently
of concepts, in respect of delight and of the predicate of beauty. There is,
therefore, no other way for the subjective unity of the relation in question to
make itself known than by sensation. (Critique 59-60)

From Kant’s words, we can summarize three points. Firstly, according to Kant’s logical
concept, a judgment combining understanding and imagination in the estimate of the object
so as to give a cognition of the Object belongs to an intellectual cognition rather than taste,
because it is not made on the basis of pleasure and displeasure. Secondly, in respect of
delight and of the predicate of beauty, the judgment of taste is apart from concept. Thirdly,
our subjective judgment of taste must be expressed by our sensation. But, from the angle of
literature, Kant’s logical concept seems to be arbitrary. As we know, literature, say, a poem,
is usually written by words. When we read it, we have to use our understanding and
imagination to comprehend it. At first, we have to use our understanding to give a cognition
of the Objects that the poem describes, and then use our imagination to picture them.
According to Kant’s first point, such a relation belongs to an intellectual cognition. Yes,
Kant’s logical concept has a point here. But, as far as literature is concerned, without an
intellectual cognition, we cannot feel and estimate a poem or a novel, and then generate the
delight of taste. Literature, being an object of taste, can meet two of Kant’s requirements:
depending on sensation to make a judgment, and generating the delight of taste, but cannot
meet the requirement of being apart from concepts and intellect cognition. If Kant’s logical
concept were completely right, literature would be excluded from the judgment of taste,
because it involves concepts and intellectual cognition.

As a matter of fact, Kant’s logical concept is not completely right. According to
Kant’s first point, a judgment combining understanding and imagination in the estimate of the
object so as to give a cognition of the Object is not made on the basis of pleasure and displeasure. In other words, in the process of reading a poem, our intellectual cognition of the objects that this poem describes does not involve pleasure and displeasure. On this point, Kant is right. However, the time that we make a judgment of taste for a poem is after we finish intellectual cognition [i.e. after we finish reading], not when we are engaging in intellectual cognition [i.e. while we are reading]. If a judgment is made when we are engaging in intellectual cognition, of course, as Kant indicates, our judgment will have nothing to do with pleasure or displeasure. But, the truth is that a judgment of taste for a poem is made after we finish intellectual cognition. In this case, our judgment is certainly made on the basis of pleasure and displeasure. For instance, after we read Wordsworth’s comparison of “a host of daffodils” to “continuous as stars that shine and twinkle on the milky way” in his “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud,” we may have a feeling of infinity from his ingenious comparison of “continuous stars” (7-8). Such a feeling, or rather, any feeling itself, must involve pleasure or displeasure. For this reason, Kant’s logical concept is not completely right, because our judgment of taste for this poem has arrived at the step of feeling, instead of remaining in the step of intellectual cognition. At this moment, we depend on our sensation, rather than on concepts, to make a judgment of taste. And, our past experience plays a great role in our sensation. For example, for stars, we surely have had an experience of seeing them in the sky. So, after we read Wordsworth’s comparison of “a host of daffodils” to “continuous as stars that shine and twinkle on the milky way,” we may recall our impression and feeling of stars, and then feel them once again. Such a situation is somewhat like Wordsworth’s statement: “[. . .] for a native of a mountainous country, looking back upon his childhood, will remember how frequently he has been impressed by a sensation of sublimity from a precipice, in which awe or personal apprehension were the predominant feelings of his mind [. . .]” (The Sublime and the
Beautiful 350). In this situation, even though we do not actually see “stars,” we can make a judgment of taste for Wordsworth’s description. If we had to abide by Kant’s logical concept, then literature, as well as Wordsworth’s aesthetics of imagination, would be excluded from the judgment of taste.

Wordsworth follows Kant’s and Burke’s theoretical modes to develop his aesthetics, but in his own sublimity he does not take into account the definition of the sublime as an experience of terror, as Burke and Kant regard it. In “The Sublime and the Beautiful,” he divides the sublime into two kinds. One is similar to the Burkean sublime, which objectively hinges upon an individual form’s qualities and powers, “without a conscious contemplation” (354). This sort of sublimity entirely depends upon a direct response of our sense. The other is similar to the Longinian sublime, which stresses the elevation of the mind through contemplation, by associating nature with its “duration” which Wordsworth serves it as an element of the sublime (351). When the qualities and powers of an individual form are strong enough to cause our fear, according to Wordsworth, the influence of “duration” will be excluded. In such a situation, our mental response is fear. In other words, this kind of sublimity is hardly different from the Burkean sublime. On the contrary, when we think of “duration,” we will not be influenced by an individual form’s qualities and powers. In such a situation, we feel no fear. This kind of sublimity, which has Wordsworth’s unique features, is the Wordsworthian sublime. In the Wordsworthian sublime, an individual form’s qualities and powers must be combined with “duration,” and fear is not taken into account, because Wordsworth supposes that we cannot contemplate nature under the threat of danger: “no sublimity can be raised by the contemplation of such power when it presses upon us with pain and individual fear to a degree which takes precedence in our thoughts [over] the power itself” (The Sublime and the Beautiful 354). In a nutshell, to Wordsworth, the sublime is the mental transformation from beauty to sublimity.
through contemplation, instead of Kant’s mental transformation from fear to delight due to safety:

[...]

Thus, the Wordsworthian sublime is quite different from the Burkean and the Kantian sublime, despite extending some of their viewpoints. Although Wordsworth does not approve of the operation of the Burkean fear in his mental transformation from beauty to sublimity, he agrees with Burke’s argument that “astonishment is the effect of the sublime in its highest degree,” for he says that “if that object be new to us, the sublime always precedes the beautiful in making us conscious of its presence” (The Sublime and the Beautiful 350). The effect of the sublime, astonishment or wonder, mainly results from terror and originality. Burke stresses terror, whereas Wordsworth emphasizes originality and novelty.

Wordsworth’s emphasis on originality is quite consistent with his literary insistence on the importance of imagination. In *Conjectures on Original Composition*, Edward Young deals with the issue of “originality.” He defines originality as imitation of nature by writing: “Of that spring, originals are the fairest flowers: imitations are of quicker growth, but fainter bloom. Imitations are of two kinds; one of nature, one of authors: the first we call originals,
and confine the term imitation to the second” (339). However, Wordsworth’s originality is completely different from Young’s. His originality is neither imitation of nature nor simply description of landscape. He draws materials from daily life, and uses his imagination to color them to generate his originality, as he claims in his “Preface to Lyrical Ballads:”

The principal object, then, proposed in these Poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect [. . .] . (446-7)

In short, his originality is to make an ordinary thing novel and extraordinary by using imagination, with the aim of arousing the reader’s surprise and wonder, i.e. the highest effect of the sublime. Hence, we can say the basic trait of Wordsworth’s aesthetics is novelty and strangeness. Moreover, like Burke who regards the effect of sublimity—astonishment—as a source of the appreciator’s pleasure, Wordsworth attempts to bring the reader pleasure by the poetry’s originality and novelty. He indicates that the aim of poetry is to bring the reader pleasure: “The Poet writes under one restriction only, namely, the necessity of giving immediate pleasure to a human Being possessed of that information which may be expected from him, not as a lawyer, a physician, a mariner, an astronomer, or a natural philosopher, but as a Man” (Preface 454).

As for Wordsworth’s mental transformation from beauty to sublimity through contemplation, we will talk about it by analyzing his poem “My Heart Leaps up.” In his poem “My Heart Leaps up,” Wordsworth writes: “My heart leaps up when I behold / A rainbow in the sky” (1-2). At the sight of a rainbow, he uses a heartbeat to express his aesthetic response—mental movement. Such an aesthetic response, according to Kant,
belongs to the sublime: “For the feeling of the sublime involves as its characteristic feature a mental movement combined with the estimate of the object, whereas taste in respect of the beautiful presupposes that the mind is in restful contemplation, and preserves it in this state” (Critique 94). Originally, as far as the characteristics of the Object are concerned, the rainbow should be attributed to the beautiful, for its color and shape, and for the absence of the horrible might of nature to damage man’s life. But Wordsworth transforms it into the sublime through his subjective contemplation. He associates the rainbow with perpetuity of nature by his contemplation, and hence he writes:

So was it when my life began;
So is it now I am a man;
So be it when I shall grow old,
Or let me die! (3-6)

From his lines, we can observe a strong contrast between man’s variation from an infant, to an adult, and finally to an old man, and nature’s invariance: the rainbow is always there whenever we look at it. The poet expects himself to keep the childlike feeling to capture the perpetuity of nature in his three periods of life. If he lost such a feeling, he would rather die. In the light of immortality, man cannot compete with nature, because man is mortal whereas nature is immortal. It is the comparison between man and nature that produces the sense of sublimity in man’s mind. Kant focuses on the comparison of three-dimensional space, but Wordsworth highlights the comparison of time. Consequently, similar to the dynamically sublime that Kant proposes—nature’s tremendous might to make us feel our physical helplessness or to provoke our respect, Wordsworth in his “The Sublime and the Beautiful” supplements an element to the sublime—duration—nature’s everlastingness to make us feel our momentariness: “I first enumerated individuality of form; this individual form was then invested with qualities and powers, ending with duration. Duration is evidently an element
of the sublime; but think of it without reference to individual form, and we shall perceive that it has no power to affect the mind” (351). Considering Wordsworth’s “duration,” man is mortal, but he can achieve immortality by maintaining a child-like quality throughout his life. So, according to Wordsworth, “The Child is father of the Man” (7). He attaches great importance to the child, for the child reflects perpetuity and carefree happiness. Since the poet’s mind perceives nature’s and the child’s eternity, he wishes that he could always preserve the child’s purity and simplicity of heart to feel the sublime of nature: “And I could wish my days to be / Bound each to each by natural piety” (8-9).

John W. Elliott indicates that “if the reader assumes that Wordsworth has a ‘message’ in this poem, he would probably conclude that the poem tries to teach man to remain as much like the child as he can in the child’s purity and simplicity of heart, that he try to retain the vivid imaginative perception of the world that belongs to the child” (69). In the process of a little boy’s growth, his mind is always filled with curiosity and imagination to realize the world. Owing to his curiosity, he is much interested in everything that is strange or new. Naturally, he exhibits Wordsworth’s aesthetic response “my heart leaps up,” or the excitement of sense organ, as long as he sees something new or beautiful. Such an aesthetic response is purely a sensuous feeling, without containing any rational contemplation. In other words, a child cannot feel the sense of sublimity as deeply as an adult. It is impossible for a child to understand what eternity is, what God is, or what the purpose of life is. A child can gradually understand many hows and whys, and further deeply ponder the relationship between man and nature or God, only when it grows up. From this angle, the Wordsworthian sublime, i.e. Wordsworth’s mental transformation from beauty to sublimity through contemplation, rarely happens to a child, for it is felt by learning, rather than purely by sensation. Hence, for “So was it when my life began,” the aesthetic response should refer to purely a sensuous feeling of a child, without concerning rational contemplation; for
“So is it now I am a man” and “So be it when I shall grow old,” the aesthetic response really involves an adult’s rational contemplation (3-6). For a child, “my heart leaps up” is a direct response of being surprised at something new. But, such a response does not certainly belong to the sublime. It is likely to be a visual and learning excitement. A child, in its process of learning, usually learns the concept of the beautiful earlier than that of the sublime. If we ask children “Is a rainbow beautiful or sublime?” we are sure that they rarely answer “sublime.” Thus, when a child looks at a rainbow, its aesthetic response should be to call it beautiful. On the other hand, for an adult or an old man, “my heart leaps up” is a response of combining sensation and reason, which is deeply moved by the power and the eternality of nature through contemplation. Such a response can belong to the sublime.

As far as the influence of poetry is concerned, the Wordsworthian sublime endows poetry with ethical meanings and mental inspiration. But, in the light of actual judgment of taste, there is a confusion of the sublime and the beautiful in Wordsworth’s mental transformation from beauty to sublimity through contemplation. According to Wordsworth’s definition in “The Sublime and the Beautiful,” an individual form of nature must be combined together with duration through contemplation to form a sense of sublimity in the mind of the judging Subject:

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

If so, all the things of nature, no matter whether they actually belong to the beautiful or the
sublime, will be attributed to the sublime because of their eternity. Once any object of
nature finally appeals to duration through contemplation, there is no distinction between the
beautiful and the sublime. Even though an object of nature, say, a daffodil, is beautiful in
our actual judgment of taste, it is finally attributed to the sublime by associating it with
perpetuity of nature. Such a confusion of the sublime and the beautiful appears very
frequently in Wordsworth’s poems. For instance, in his “Lines Composed a Few Miles
above Tintern Abbey,” Wordsworth lists several sources that cause his sense of sublimity:

And I have felt

A Presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling place is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man; (93-9)

“The light of setting suns,” “the round ocean,” “the living air” and “the blue sky,” which may
be judged “beautiful” from objective and subjective characteristics such as exerting no
dangerous power and offering mental peace, are all turned into the sublime. The poet’s
reason is that they lead him to the contemplation of God. If we look at nature completely
according to Wordsworth’s element—duration—we hardly can tell the sublime from the
beautiful, because the judgment of taste for nature must be “sublime” in the long run. In
Wordsworth’s eyes, all the things of nature are spiritually sublime, because they are the
embodiments of God and the symbols of perpetuity. As to nature in his poems, no matter
whether it is a rainbow or a daffodil, he always makes a fixed judgment of taste—sublime.

We almost can conclude that the Wordsworthian sublime at last appeals to his worship
of nature. He believes that nature is full of the eternal spirits of the universe. God reveals
his mystery and truth everywhere in nature. Even from a small object of nature, we can perceive the revelation of God and hence obtain a mental delight, as Wordsworth writes in “Intimations of Immortality:” “To me the meanest flower that blows can give / Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears” (202-3). But, the delight is not Burke’s or Kant’s pleasure in the judgment of taste, but a pleasure of contemplation. Addison provides an explanation for the pleasure of contemplation in his essay of The Spectator no. 413:

One of the Final Causes of our delight, in any thing that is great, may be this. The Supreme Author of our Being has so formed the Soul of Man, that nothing but himself can be its last, adequate, and proper Happiness. Because, therefore, a great Part of our Happiness must arise from the Contemplation of his Being, that he might give our souls a just Relish of such a Contemplation, he has made them naturally delight in the Apprehension of what is Great or Unlimited. Our Admiration, which is a very pleasing Motion of the Mind, immediately rises at the Consideration of any Object that takes up a great deal of room in the Fancy, and, by consequence, will improve into the highest pitch of Astonishment and Devotion when we contemplate his Nature, that is neither circumscribed by Time nor Place, nor to be comprehended by the largest Capacity of a Created Being. (545)

He points out that when we contemplate God from nature, our astonishment and devotion for God will arrive at the highest degree. Nevertheless, the astonishment and the devotion through contemplation mostly belong to the author, not the reader, even though the reader is infected by the author’s sentiments in the process of reading. In other words, the objects that the author and the reader contemplate are not necessarily the same. The object at which Wordsworth is astonished is God’s miracle, whereas the objects at which the reader is astonished can be God’s miracle, the author’s elegant diction, or the author’s imagination and
novelty. Of course, infected by Wordsworth’s vehement passions, the reader can have the same feeling as Wordsworth’s, but in the meantime he also can make his own judgment of taste. Maybe, to Wordsworth, “the light of setting suns,” “the round ocean,” “the living air” and “the blue sky” are sublime, but to some readers, they are beautiful (Tintern Abbey 97-9). Therefore, we can say that the Wordsworthian sublime does not possess Kant’s “subjective universality;” that is, I feel an object beautiful and so will other people: “The judgement of taste, with its attendant consciousness of detachment from all interest, must involve a claim to validity for all men, and must do so apart from universality attached to Objects, i.e. there must be coupled with it a claim to subjective universality” (Critique 51). In general, no matter whether the object of taste is nature or a work of art, the judgment of taste is always reader-oriented. It is the reader or the appreciator that decides a work’s value, “sublime” or “beautiful,” as Raman Selden remarks: “the poem has no real existence until it is read; its meaning can only be discussed by its readers. We differ about interpretations only because our ways of reading differ” (47). Without the reader’s reading or the beholder’s appreciation, the meaning of the sublime cannot exist. “It is as if authorship, to Wordsworth, is itself an act of reading: a reading of nature, and a finding of good in it” (Teeuwen, Chapter III; 13).

Furthermore, because of its stress on contemplation, the Wordsworthian sublime fails to satisfy the conditions of the judgment of taste that Kant claims, such as immediacy and disinterestedness. Of Kant’s “the judgment of taste” Lyotard further paraphrases: “The feeling of the beautiful is a reflective judgment, singular with claims to the universal: immediate, disinterested. It only involves a faculty of the soul, that of pleasure and displeasure” (160). The Wordsworthian sublime through contemplation, which may seek the truth behind nature or explore “the great moving spirit of things,” has an interest in mental inspiration (Letter to John Wilson 106). Also, due to contemplation, the judgment of
the sublime and the pleasure of taste are neither immediate nor entirely sensuous. They are deeply influenced by emotion and reason. Because Wordsworth is the spokesman of Romanticism, we are always convinced that his poetry just expresses passion and absolutely excludes reason, for he declares in his “Preface to Lyrical Ballad:” “poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility” (460). Actually, such a concept is not completely right, if we reconsider it in the light of his stress on contemplation. In his declaration, the “emotion recollected in tranquillity” has touched reason, because “recollected in tranquillity” implies meditation or contemplation. Moreover, as we remarked above, the Wordsworthian sublime, unlike the Kantian sublime or the Burkean sublime, is a mental transformation from beauty to sublimity through contemplation. Since contemplation is an indispensable element for Wordsworth’s composition and for his sublimity, reason must be dragged in, for contemplation is built by reason, as Wordsworth writes in his The Prelude:

But all the meditations of mankind,

Yea, all the adamantine holds of truth

By reason built, or passion, which itself

Is the highest reason in a soul sublime;

The consecrated works of Bard and Sage,

Sensuous or intellectual, wrought by men,

Twin labourers and heirs of the same hopes;

Where would they be? Oh! why hath not the Mind

Some element to stamp her image on

In nature somewhat nearer to her own?

Why, gifted with such powers to send abroad

Her spirit, must it lodge in shrines so frail? (V. 38-49)
Consequently, we can conclude that although Wordsworth thinks very highly of passion, he does not absolutely exclude reason from his poetry.

3.1.2 Wordsworth’s Aesthetic Growth

Wordsworth allows that reason takes up a considerable position in meditations and truth, but he still regards passion as his highest principle, because passion is “the highest reason in a soul sublime.” From his definition of passion, we can trace two of Longinus’s viewpoints: (1) sublimity is the “echo of a great soul,” and (2) passion contributes to sublimity (ch. IX; 81). In this section, we will discuss Wordsworth’s mental growth as contrasted with Longinus’s first viewpoint. As to Longinus’s second viewpoint, we will discuss it along with Wordsworth’s literary theory in the next section.

In “On the Sublime,” Longinus points out that Nature “implants in our souls the unconquerable love of whatever is elevated and more divine than we,” so that “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” (ch. XXXVI; 97). Many of Wordsworth’s poems, such as “My Heart Leaps up,” “Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey,” and “The Prelude,” are coincidentally the embodiments of this viewpoint. For instance, in his “Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey,” he depicts his different sensibility to nature from his childhood, to the present, and to the future. When he was a child, his sensibility to nature derived purely from sense organ:

when like a roe

I bounded o’er the mountains, by the sides

Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,

Wherever nature led: more like a man

Flying from something that he dreads, than one
Who sought the thing he loved.  

These lines can be read as contrasted with the Stolen Boat episode in *The Prelude*. In the Stolen Boat episode, Wordsworth describes his past event of stealing a boat in his childhood. He remembers clearly the situation that one time he stole a little boat from a rocky cave:

I dipped my oars into the silent lake,
And, as I rose upon the stroke, my boat
Went heaving through the water like a swan;
When, from behind that craggy steep still then
The horizon’s bound, a huge peak, black and huge,
As if with voluntary power instinct
Upreared its head.  I struck and struck again,
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.  \(I. 374-85\)

Partly from his sense of guilt for stealing a boat, and partly from his unfamiliarity with the mountain, the huge peak behind the craggy steep makes him conscious of danger and fear. When he hurries to escape from this place by rowing the boat, he imagines the huge peak as a huge and black monster that chases after him. Right then, the feeling that nature gives him is merely fear, rather than comprehensive awe or religious admiration. Thus, in “Tintern Abbey,” he depicts himself in childhood as “more like a man flying from something that he dreads than one who sought the thing he loved,” because his mind has not matured enough to understand what the sublime is \(70-72\). As far as a growing child is concerned, if an object is beyond its comprehension, it will try to define it by its imagination. For instance, when a
child listens to its mother telling a ghost story, it is a common sight that the child is too scared to sleep, for its mind is filled with the horrible images of ghosts made up by its imagination. Actually the child’s fear does not result from real danger, but from its imaginative danger. Perhaps it imagines how horrible the ghost looks, or the situation that the ghost chases after it. According to this perspective, we can affirm that Wordsworth’s horrible impression for the mountain in his childhood entirely derives from his imaginative danger. In other words, the mountain is beyond a child’s comprehension. In this case, the child’s fear cannot be regarded as the sense of the sublime, because it neither feels any delight of taste from the imaginative monster, nor acquires any mental exaltation. For this reason, Wordsworth’s statement in “The Sublime and the Beautiful” that “for a native of a mountainous country, looking back upon his childhood, will remember how frequently he has been impressed by a sensation of sublimity from a precipice, in which awe or personal apprehension were the predominant feelings of his mind, & from which the milder influence of duration seemed to be excluded” is questionable (353). To a child, the feeling that the mountain gives it should be merely fear, not the sense of sublimity.

After Wordsworth grows up, his sensibility to nature turns into the contemplation of nature:

of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear,—both what they half create,
And what perceive; well pleased to recognize
In nature and the language of the sense,
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being. (Tintern Abbey 105-11)
Due to his intellectual maturity, Wordsworth’s dread for nature in his childhood has been replaced by his love for nature. Also, due to his familiarity with many objects that he did not understand before, his fear and wonder in his childhood are destroyed by his comprehension. Subsequently, a comprehensive awe or a religious admiration takes the place of his fear or his wonder. In “The Sublime and the Beautiful,” he also mentions such an aesthetic progress:

[. . .] Familiarity with these objects tends very much to mitigate & to destroy the power which they have to produce the sensation of sublimity as dependent upon personal fear or upon wonder; a comprehensive awe takes the place of the one, and a religious admiration of the other, & the condition of the mind is exalted accordingly.—Yet it cannot be doubted that a child or an unpracticed person whose mind is possessed by the sight of a lofty precipice, with its attire of hanging rocks & starting trees, & c., has been carried beyond certain bounds.

(353)

In this period, Wordsworth perceives the beautiful and the sublime of nature and hence tries to meditate on the spirits and truth behind nature, as Longinus indicates, “we shall soon discern the purpose of our birth” (ch. XXXVI; 97). In Wordsworth’s eyes, nature provides not only spiritual solace but also behavioral principle. Whenever he returns to nature, he can make a quick recovery from sadness, trouble, or disappointment. Whenever he suffers from the loss of sensibility, love, and happiness, nature always encourages him to brace up. Nature is like a great mother, who always comforts the poet in his distress and leads him to goodness. In this respect, Wordsworth associates the laws of nature with moral rules. In “Ode to Duty,” he describes such a relationship:

To humbler functions, awful power!

I call thee: I myself commend
Unto thy guidance from this hour;  
Oh, let my weakness have an end!  
Give unto me, made slowly wise,  
The spirit of self-sacrifice;  
The confidence of reason give;  
And in the light of truth thy Bondman let me live! (49-56)

Unlike the Kantian sublime which focuses on man’s resistance against the might of nature, in Wordsworth’s perspective, all man has to do is to obey the laws of nature, instead of resisting them, because man is so small and weak that he cannot compete with the awful power of nature. For nature, the poet offers three levels of feelings: fear, apprehensive awe, and religious reverence. In the three kinds of feelings, considering the indispensable element of the Wordsworthian sublime—contemplation, only the religious reverence is the highest effect of the Wordsworthian sublime. In other words, the Wordsworthian sublime through contemplation finally appeals to religion and morality, namely mental exaltation.

From the above discussion, we know that Wordsworth supposes that our taste of the sublime will be getting better and better as our age increases. The taste of the sublime, like a man’s intellectual growth, needs continuous learning and training. In “Of the Standard of Taste,” Hume also holds the same viewpoint: “But though there be naturally a wide difference in point of delicacy between one person and another, nothing tends further to increase and improve this talent, than practice in a particular art, and the frequent survey or contemplation of a particular species of beauty” (318). Likewise, in A Philosophical Enquiry, Burke proposes a similar opinion for taste: “It is known that the Taste (whatever it is) is improved exactly as we improve our judgment, by extending our knowledge, by a steady attention to our object, and by frequent exercise” (25). However, in “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood,” Wordsworth’s stress upon the
degeneration of man’s soul is inconsistent with his mental and aesthetic progress. In this poem, he supposes man’s life to be a process of degeneration. Man is born good and innocent, but the secular custom makes him lose his original goodness and innocence, as the poem describes: “Full soon thy Soul shall have her earthly freight, / And custom lie upon thee with a weight, / Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life” (126-8). In his infancy, he trails the cloud of glory from heaven, so he can see the light when he is happy. In his youth, he still preserves splendid vision. But, when he is an adult, he gradually loses vision, hope, and belief. So, in his life, the best time is childhood. In his childhood, he is carefree and happy, like Adam living in Eden, for he still preserves the glory of heaven. Wordsworth praises such a child’s soul in these words:

Thou, whose exterior semblance doth belie
Thy Soul’s immensity;
Though best Philosopher, who yet dost keep
Thy heritage, thou Eye among the blind,
That, deaf and silent, read’st the eternal deep,
Haunted for ever by the eternal mind,—

Mighty Prophet! Seer blest! (107-13)

Nevertheless, actually, a child hardly can “read the eternal deep” without learning. If a little baby is by nature endowed with eternality because of his continuing man’s life and spirits, such an explanation is reasonable. Otherwise, even though “haunted for ever by the eternal mind,” an infant cannot express the thought of eternality by itself. In the light of the actual experience of a child’s growth, every child is born helpless and ignorant. What is worse, in the light of Freud’s psychoanalysis, a child is supposed to be “anarchic, sadistic, aggressive, self-involved, and remorselessly pleasure-seeking” (Eagleton 154). He is completely dominated by the libidinal. If he is to succeed in life, he must be taken good
care of by his parents, and experience Freud’s *Oedipus complex*, that is, he must accept education. In this poem, Wordsworth mentions that the child is always happy: “Thou Child of Joy, / Shout round me, let me hear thy shouts, thou happy Shepherd-boy” (34-5), but he loses such a feeling:

And O, ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves,
Forebode not any severing of our loves!
Yet in my heart of hearts I feel your might;
I only have relinquished one delight
To live beneath your more habitual sway. (187-91)

If we explain the child’s happiness from the angle of Freud’s psychoanalysis, then the child’s soul will not be so lovely, and the poet’s loss of childlike happiness will not be his soul’s degeneration. From the angle of Freud’s psychoanalysis, the child is always happy just because it is dominated by the pleasure-seeking principle. It is self-centered, without concerning others’ feeling. When it feels uncomfortable, its direct response is crying. When it is in high spirits, it laughs, plays, and shouts as loudly as it likes. If no adult stops it from disturbing the peace of other people, it will never know that its behavior is disturbing other people. Yes, it is free and happy. But it builds its freedom and happiness on the sufferings of other people. By contrast, the adult loses childlike happiness just because he has learned how to restrain himself from disturbing others. Indeed, he loses happiness and parts of freedom, but he has already understood how to concern others and public benefits. From this angle, the poet’s loss of childlike happiness is not his soul’s degeneration; instead, it is a mental and behavioral progress from selfishness to unselfishness.

Apparently, Wordsworth’s praise of the child’s soul is not based on the actual experience of a child’s growth, but on his own religious viewpoints. Religiously, he thinks that we can perceive God’s revelations directly from nature, though we are gradually losing
the glory of heaven after the Fall of Man. Nature is created by God, so certainly it reveals God’s divinity. The closer we approach nature, the nearer we come to God. Urban civilization, on the contrary, corrupts our mind by means of material desires. Living far away from the city is living far away from the evil and corruption. Obviously, Wordsworth’s religious viewpoints are prejudiced against urban civilization and social custom. Indeed, urban civilization is likely to bring us corruption or make us indulge in material enjoyment, but it is also likely to nurture us to be moral beings by good education. A well-educated city man surely can understand poetry and poetic language much better than a rustic man. For the taste of art, we are also sure that a well-educated city man can feel deeper than a rustic man. This is the reason why Coleridge does not agree with Wordsworth’s use of the language of men in low and rustic life in poetry:

Here let me be permitted to remind the reader that the positions which I controvert are contained in the sentences—“a selection of the REAL language;” “the language of these men (i.e. men in low and rustic life)” I propose to myself to imitate, and as far as possible to adopt the very language of men. “Between the language of prose and that of metrical composition there neither is, nor can be any essential difference.” It is against exclusively that my opposition is directed. (Biographia Literaria 404)

Coleridge thinks that “every man’s language varies according to the extent of his knowledge, the activity of his faculties, and the depth and quickness of his feelings” (Biographia Literaria 404). It is education that has a great influence on everyone’s utterance, thoughts, and taste. Without education, a child is likely to spoil if it is allowed to behave freely according to his instinct. Strictly speaking, Wordsworth seems to overstress freedom and to overpraise a child’s nature.
3.1.3 Wordsworth’s Creative Theory: “Emotion Recollected in Tranquillity”

In the previous section, we traced two of Longinus’s viewpoints from Wordsworth’s definition that passion is “the highest reason in a soul sublime” (*The Prelude*, V. 41). Now, let’s consider Wordsworth’s creative theory by starting with Longinus’s second viewpoint that passion contributes to sublimity. In “On the Sublime,” Longinus points out Caecilius’s incorrect concept that passion never contributes at all to sublimity by saying:

> If, on the other hand, Caecilius thought that passion never contributes at all to sublimity, and if it was for this reason that he did not deem it worthy of mention, he is altogether deluded. I would affirm with confidence that there is no tone so lofty as that of genuine passion, in its right place, when it bursts out in a wild gust of mad enthusiasm and as it were fills the speaker’s words with frenzy. (ch. VIII; 81)

As far as aesthetic response is concerned, passion is an indispensable element, which reflects the feeling and the phase of our mind while we are appreciating nature or a work of art. But, with respect to passion, Longinus holds an opinion different from Burke’s and Kant’s. To Burke and Kant, the passion that they stress is fear; however, to Longinus, the passion is not fear, but the vehement passion of the author’s great soul. Longinus’s sublimity emphasizes the elevation of the mind, so he supposes fear to be far removed from sublimity, as he remarks when he expounds one of five principal sources of sublimity—passions: “For some passions are found which are far removed from sublimity and are of a low order, such as pity, grief and fear [. . .]” (ch. VIII; 80). His passion refers to the author’s reasonable and proper passion, which has a great influence on the hearers or the readers and hence arouses in them a sense of triumph. For this reason, his passion is not “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” that Wordsworth pronounces, but sincere emotion with proper decorum (Preface 448). He indicates that the author should properly exert his passion rather than abuse it,
when he illustrates three faults of the authors in the composition of sublimity:

A third, and closely allied, kind of defect in matters of passion is that which Theodorus used to call “parenthyrsys.” By this is meant unreasonable and empty passion, where no passion is required, or immoderate, where moderation is needed. For men are often carried away, as if intoxication, into displays of emotion which are not caused by the nature of the subject, but are purely personal and wearisome. (ch. III; 78)

Consequently, Longinus’s passion and sublimity still abides by the principles of Classicism.

Although Longinus’s passion diverges from Wordsworth’s, Wordsworth gives free reign to Longinus’s viewpoint that passion contributes to sublimity in his theory and his poetry. Looking upon passion as his creative foundation of poetry, in his “Preface to Lyrical Ballads,” he proposes his creative viewpoints, and we summarize several key points as follows: (1) “poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility” (460), (2) the poet should choose “incidents and situation from common life” as the materials of poetry (446), (3) the poet transforms these incidents and situation by his imagination and presents them in a brand-new way to make ordinary things extraordinary, (4) the poet should compose the poems in “language really used by men” (446), and (5) poetry should exhibit the essence of humanity in humble incidents. From his creative viewpoints, we know that Wordsworth’s “powerful feelings” possess freedom, without the need of following any rule or principle like Longinus’s passion. His creative approach is contemplation and reminiscence. His material of poetry is the memory of daily life. His skill is his rich imagination and emotion. In this section, we will discuss Wordsworth’s creative viewpoints by analyzing his poem “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” as a practical demonstration, and look at this poem from the angle of aesthetics.

The poem “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” tells the anecdote, which Wordsworth’s
sister Dorothy Wordsworth records in her Journal on 15 April 1802, of Wordsworth’s coming across a lot of daffodils when walking in the vicinity of Ullswater. It describes Wordsworth’s recollection in tranquillity. Wordsworth wrote it two years after his original experience when he and his sister roamed around a park and saw daffodils in a lake. Thus, this poem is the best illustration of Wordsworth’s creative theory. In this poem, Wordsworth imagines himself to be a cloud wandering in a state of loneliness and passivity: “I wandered lonely as a cloud / That floats on high o’er vales and hills” (1-2). By comparing himself to a cloud, a natural object, he merges himself into Nature. This sense of separation from the original experience is strengthened by the description of the cloud which “floats on high.” The simile of the cloud does not point to loneliness, but, rather to aloneness and liberty. All of a sudden, the mood of detachment is interrupted by the appearance of the daffodils:

When all at once I saw a crowd,

A host, of golden daffodils;

Beside the lake, beneath the trees,

Fluttering and dancing in the breeze. (3-6)

The response at the sight of the daffodils is like that in the poem “My Heart Leaps Up:” wonder. Moved by the grand sight of the daffodils, the poet is in excited and surprised spirits, like a child’s excitement and wonder when he finds something new and fresh. At first, the daffodils are seen as “a crowd,” but suddenly the poet uses another phrase “a host” to describe the daffodils. David Joplin supposes that “the comma after ‘host’ serves as emphasis, making us reconsider how Wordsworth intends its meaning” (68). He thinks that the word “host” is a pun, which means “one who entertains guests, a master of ceremonies” and “a great company; a multitude; a large number” (68). According to Joplin’s explanation of “host,” a host of daffodils are fluttering and dancing in the breeze in order to entertain guests. To extend the pun “host” further, the “host”—the golden daffodils—refers to a
multitude of “angels” in Paradise Lost (Durrant 21). Although Wordsworth claims that poetry should be written in “language really used by men,” actually his poetic language and diction are not only rich and varied but also significant.

In general, a poet is good at the use of poetic language and diction, but this has something to do with his knowledge and attainments. Wordsworth likes the simplicity and spontaneity of the “language really used by men,” but he unconsciously adds his elegant diction and his connotation in the language. He ignores that he is so well-educated a poet that he can write subtle poetry. He reveals his attainments of city culture in his poetry without knowing it. If he were an illiterate living in deep country or a man who has never been nurtured by civilization, how could he write poetry? For this reason, in his “Resolution and Independence,” it is doubtful in his describing the old leech-gatherer’s utterance:

His words came feebly, from a feeble chest,
But each in solemn order followed each,
With something of a lofty utterance drest—
Choice word and measured phrase, above reach
Of ordinary men; a stately speech;
Such as grave Livers do in Scotland use,
Religious men, who give to God and man their dues. (92-8)

As this poem states, the old man has experienced a lot of suffering in life. In order to earn his living, he has to wander everywhere to find leeches. Under adverse circumstances, his unbending attitude to life shows the sublimity of humanity. But, in his arduous journey for life, how can he use “choice word and measured phrase?” He hardly can do this unless he is a retired scholar or a well-educated person. “To an English ear, Scottish dialects can sound graceful and archaic” (Teeuwen, Thesis 70). However, using “choice word and measured
phrase” needs attainments. Perhaps, the old man is a native Scot, so he can use “a stately speech.” But, this does not represent that he can use “choice word and measured phrase.” From Wordsworth’s description of the old man, we can deduce that Wordsworth is moved and inspired by the old man. It is the old man’s sublimity, not language itself, that touches the poet’s heart to ponder the meaning that the old man brings him. If the poet had grown up in the country and lived a poor life, perhaps he would have longed for rich city life and would not have despised it so much. Although Wordsworth does not completely use “language really used by men,” he makes a good job in exhibiting the essence of humanity by his “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.”

In Europe, daffodils are common and ordinary flowers, which usually grow beside a lake or a river, but Wordsworth chooses them as his material of poetry, and further transforms their magnificence into infinite stars by his imagination:

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance. (7-12)

He successfully applies his creative viewpoints to this poem: “[. . .] to throw over them [incidents and situations chosen] a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way” (Preface 446-47). Matthew C. Brennan points out that this stanza shows Wordsworth’s sublime consciousness in his comparing the daffodils growing on earth to the continuous stars that shine and twinkle in the milky way. According to his explanation, daffodils and stars are attributed to the Burkean sublime, because “by stretching in a ‘never-ending line’ the daffodils embody the sublime idea of
vastness, in particular ‘vastness of extent’ or length,” and stars exhibit infinity (141). However, as we discussed in the previous chapter, the Burkean sublime based on the characteristics of the Object is likely to contradict aesthetic facts, since the judgment of taste hinges on the mind of the judging Subject. How can we say that the poet reveals his sublime consciousness in daffodils and stars, only because they satisfy Burke’s “vastness” and “infinity?” From this angle, Brennan’s explanation seems to be arbitrary. As far as the judging Subject is concerned, according to Kant, the response of sublimity is mental movement, while that of beauty is mental peace. For the author, we can feel his mental movement, i.e. wonder, for a host of daffodils in the first stanza from his diction “all at once;” however, in the second stanza, we find that the poet is not so surprised as his response in the first stanza from his comparison of daffodils to stars. The major reason lies in that the first stanza offers a visual picture and the second stanza an imaginative one, from the angle of the author’s description. If we deduce the poet’s judgment of taste for daffodils and stars from Kant’s subjective characteristics, daffodils will be sublime, and stars will be beautiful. But, the judgment of taste still hinges on the mind of the judging Subject. Since the judging Subject, the poet himself, does not make any judgment on daffodils and stars in this poem, we cannot conclude whether his aesthetic consciousness is “sublime” or “beautiful,” according to objective and subjective characteristics of sublimity and beauty. More precisely, we may say that Wordsworth’s descriptions of daffodils and stars make us feel sublime [or beautiful], we [the readers] suppose.

After the poet sees a host of daffodils and associates them with infinite stars, the poet’s previous loneliness and passivity are entirely replaced by his joy of appreciating them:

The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:  (13-8)

But, the joy is not the mood of when he saw the daffodils at the first time with his sister, but
the mood of a trance.  For this stanza Brennan explicates: “During the moment itself he does
not think; he is ‘without a conscious contemplation’ of the elements unified by his sublime
perception” (142). Actually, Brennan’s explanation is not completely right. It is true that
the poet does not contemplate at this moment. But, he does not contemplate, not because he
is sensuously infected by the sublime—the individual form’s qualities and powers which
Wordsworth proposes in “The Sublime and the Beautiful.”  He falls into his past memory,
when he did not contemplate the meaning that the daffodils brought him. Moreover, at that
time, his sensuous response did not certainly belong to the sublime, like Brennan’s
explanation. The real sublime response of the poet happens perhaps in the next stanza, if we
have to provide an explanation for the poet’s subjective response according to some aesthetic
characteristics:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.  (19-24)

In the final stanza, the poet pulls himself out of his past memory and imaginative pictures.
In the real world, whenever he is in vacant or in pensive mood, the daffodils will flash upon
his “inward eye” to comfort and inspire him.  The “inward eye” implies contemplation and
imagination. Through contemplation and imagination, the poet obtains a delight, so he
serves it as “the bliss of solitude.” According to these characteristics, such as the daffodils’ objective traits, contemplation, and delight, we can confidently affirm that this is typical of the Wordsworthian sublime. Objectively a daffodil belongs to beauty. When it was placed in the poet’s memory, it possessed the element of “duration.” Whenever the poet thinks of it, it will show up in his mind. Combining the daffodil’s quality and power with duration, the poet transforms the daffodil’s beauty into sublimity through his contemplation. As for whether the poet really judges his imaginative daffodils “sublime,” to be honest, we do not know.

Wordsworth emphasizes that he uses “emotion recollected in tranquillity” to compose his poetry, but this emotion is not his true feelings at the moment when something happens to him. It is the emotion of contemplation when he is imagining and writing. He supposes that when an incident happens to us, our mind is in an excited state and cannot further think over the meaning of this incident. Such a state is not good for writing. He thinks that we have to make our excited mind calm down for some time, and then we can focus our attention and emotion on writing poetry. Just for this reason, Wordsworth rarely writes impromptu poems. He rarely writes impromptu poems not because he objects to spur-of-the-moment compositions, but because he disagrees with the abuse of emotion and language in spur-of-the-moment compositions, as he remarks in his “Appendix to the Preface (1802):”

The earliest poets of all nations generally wrote from passion excited by real events; they wrote naturally, and as men: feeling powerfully as they did, their language was daring, and figurative. In succeeding times, Poets, and Men ambitious of the fame of Poets, perceiving the influence of such language, and desirous of producing the same effect without being animated by the same passion, set themselves to a mechanical adoption of these figures of speech, and made use of them, sometimes with propriety, but much more frequently
applied them to feelings and thought with which they had no natural connection whatsoever. A language was thus insensibly produced, differing materially from the real language of men in any situation. (465)

Actually, his worrying about the abuse of emotion and language seems to be an unnecessary anxiety. If a poet has real genius, he rarely abuses his emotion and language. Even if he carelessly abuses his emotion and language, the readers and the hearers surely have the ability to perceive his abuse, and hence devalue his poem. After all, the readers’ taste is not so poor that they cannot tell true emotion from false one. On the other hand, the language with a strong influence on people does not simply refer to “language really used by men” (446). Unless Wordsworth pronounces in advance that the aim of using “language really used by men” to write poems is to let rustic people understand, the poet’s using what kind of language to write poems is not so important. Therefore, creative approach has nothing to do with the abuse of emotion and language. Whether or not a poet abuses emotion and language hinges upon his talent, not his creative approach. If a poet has no genius, even though he uses “emotion recollected in tranquility,” he cannot write a good poem.

Wordsworth declares that “all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings,” and it is composed by “emotion recollected in tranquillity;” however, from the viewpoints of Chinese poets’ composition, good poems are written not only by “emotion recollected in tranquillity” but also by the passion of extemporization (Preface 448). In Chinese creative methods, in addition to the way of using “emotion recollected in tranquillity,” the spur-of-the-moment composition is also popular. In ancient China, poetry played a very important role in people’s daily life. Most of ancient poets composed poetry as a way to voice personal feelings. By writing and singing poetry, they expressed feelings, stated their own ambitions, depicted the sublimity of landscape, and proposed unique arguments for politics or literature. Ancient Chinese poets regarded the language of poetry
almost as their language of daily life. Since childhood, they learned how to be gentlemen
and discharge their duty from Shi Su [四書] and Wu Chin [五經]. They learned how to
compose poetry from Shih Ching [詩經] and Chu Tzu [楚詞]. Moreover, they had to learn
by rote so as to sease to recite whole passages from the canon, partly for the imperial
competitive examination, and partly for applications in daily life. Thus, it is not surprising
at all that they acquired the virtuosity for the spur-of-the-moment composition. When the
great poet of Soong dynasty, Su Dongpo [蘇東坡], traveled to Red Cliff [赤壁], an ancient
field of battle, and faced the Yangtze River, he sang with high vigor:

How eastward goes on the great river, 大江東去
Sweeping away the heroes of the past! 浪淘盡、千古風流人物
West of the forlorn fort is, they say, 故壘西邊人道是
The Red Cliff of Chou Yu of the Three Kingdoms. […]. 三國周郎赤壁

What he thought and sighed about was the heroes of the past who passed away like the great
river sweeping away. Reading this in Chinese, the feeling is quite sublime. When the
great poet Tsao Chih [曹植] of the Three Kingdoms faced the crisis in which his brother, the
Emperor of Wei, intended to kill him, for he was the only possible person to compete with his
brother for the throne, he sadly composed a famous stanza after taking only seven steps:

A fine dish of beans had been placed in the pot 煮豆持作羹
With a view to a good mess of pottage all hot.漉鼓以為汁
The beanstalks, aflame, a fierce heat were begetting, 其向釜下燃
The beans in the pot were all fuming and fretting.豆在釜中泣
Yet the beans and the stalks were not born to be foes; 本是同根生
Oh, why should these hurry to finish off those? （Giles 124）相煎何太急
Under such a threat, Tsao Chih used metaphors to compare his brother to the beanstalks and himself to the beans. “The beanstalks, aflame, a fierce heat were begetting” symbolizes his brother burning to kill him. “The beans in the pot were all fuming and fretting” suggests Tsao Chih’s sadness and anxiety in the face of crisis. At this moment, he expressed all his powerful feelings and outstanding poetic talent to awaken his brother’s conscience. From the two examples, we can feel that the emotion of the spur-of-the-moment composition is usually sincere and from inner heart. If a poet has real genius, he rarely abuses emotion and language, no matter whether he writes his poems by “emotion recollected in tranquillity” or by the passion of extemporization. In a nutshell, creative approach has nothing to do with the abuse of emotion and language. Therefore, Wordsworth’s “poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity” is somewhat arbitrary (460).
3.2 Thomas Weiskel’s Psychoanalysis of the Sublime

In his *The Romantic Sublime*, based on Burke’s theory, Thomas Weiskel applies empirical Freud’s psychoanalysis to the mental reaction of the sublime—terror—and uses the Stolen Boat episode in Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* as an illustration. Freud’s hypothesis of psychoanalysis has a premise similar to Burke’s theory—physiologically and mentally, human beings are very much alike. According to this premise, everyone’s mind is presupposed to have three aspects in the unconscious—the *id*, the *superego*, and the *ego*, three periods of mental development during the process of a baby’s growth—the oral stage, the anal stage, and the phallic stage, and *Oedipus complex*. Under this premise, the fear in the sublime experience, according to Weiskel, is interpreted as castration anxiety:

The power of anything is ultimately “its ability to hurt.” The fear of injury points genetically and synechdochically to castration anxiety. We know that the castration fear of the young boy is not realistic; nevertheless it operates subjectively as a real fear. A fantasy of aggression or resistance toward a superior power is played out in the imagination, and the boy sees at once that he would lose. (So in Kant’s dynamical sublime we “picture to ourselves” the possibility of resistance and recognize its futility.) The fantasized character of castration anxiety seems related to the mediated conditionality of the sublime moment: on the one hand, the “ability to hurt” must be objective and obvious; on the other hand, it must not be actually directed against oneself, or the fantasy dissolves into genuine panic and the objective defense of fight.

(93)

However, such an interpretation is not completely reasonable, if we consider it in accordance with Burke’s theory. In the Burkean sublime, unlike Kant who limits the object of the sublime to nature, Burke allows both nature and art to be the objects of the sublime. If the
object is a work of art, then the fear caused by danger actually does not exist. In other
words, the fear is not aroused by real danger, but by sympathy—we merge ourselves into the
horrible plot of a novel or a poem. In this case, how can the fear be explained as “castration
anxiety,” or “the fear of injury?” On the other hand, if the object is nature, i.e. Kant’s
dynamical sublime, then Weiskel’s interpretation seems to be convincing, but actually is not.
When we face the danger of nature, our safety comes from either escaping from it or
overcoming it. In the case of escaping from it [e.g. we see a typhoon through the window of
our house], like Weiskel’s interpretation, we see at once that we would lose. But, in the case
of overcoming it [e.g. mountain climbing], Weiskel’s interpretation does not make sense.
We praise the huge might of nature, but we admire more ourselves for our overcoming it. In
this case, the situation that “we picture to ourselves the possibility of resistance and recognize
its futility” hardly can happen to us. Therefore, Weiskel’s interpretation of psychoanalysis
based on the Burkean sublime is questionable.

Although Weiskel clearly declares that his psychoanalysis of fear in the sublime
experience is based on Burke’s theory, actually he combines Burke’s theory with Kant’s to
perform his psychoanalysis. He adopts Burke’s definition of the sublime—terror—but
what he explains is Kant’s aesthetic conflict between the Subject’s mind and nature, i.e. the
mental transformation from fear to delight due to safety. The major reason why he must
declare that he adopts the Burkean sublime rather than the Kantian sublime lies in universal
consistency and objectivity. Firstly, considering universal consistency, Burke’s theory is
more appropriate than Kant’s for psychoanalysis, because Freud’s hypothesis of
psychoanalysis has a premise similar to Burke’s theory—physiologically and mentally,
humans all respond in the same way. With this premise, the psychologist can give the
patient a diagnosis according to some specific symptoms, and the medical cure can be used in
those who have these symptoms. Secondly, considering objectivity, the Burkean sublime
which hinges on the objective characteristics of an object is more suitable for psychoanalysis than the Kantian sublime which emphasizes subjectivity. With objectivity, while we explain a mental response, our explanation can possess scientific and theoretical evidence. Accordingly, Weiskel uses the Burkean sublime for psychoanalysis instead of the Kantian sublime, because adopting the Kantian sublime may cause some problems. For instance, the subjectivity in the judgment of taste that Kant proposes in his theory will destroy the universal consistency of the judgment of taste, even though Kant’s theory is still established on the basis of taste’s universal consistency. Since the judgment of taste is subjective, perhaps, you feel a sunset sublime, but I feel it beautiful. For the same object, our judgments of taste can be inconsistent. It is because of the subjectivity in the judgment of taste that reinforces the validity of Santayana’s aesthetic argument that there is not a standard of taste: “Beauty, although often so described, is seldom so perceived, and all the greatest excellences of nature and art are so far from being approved of by a rule that they themselves furnish the standard and ideal by which critics measure inferior effects” (11). If Weiskel adopts the Kantian sublime for psychoanalysis, then we can use Santayana’s viewpoint that there is not a standard of taste to question his interpretations of psychoanalysis. It is because of Kant’s stress on subjectivity that Weiskel does not adopt the Kantian sublime for psychoanalysis.

In addition, another reason why Weiskel does not adopt the Kantian sublime for psychoanalysis is the question of our reasoning faculty in the judgment of taste. If our reasoning faculty in the judgment of taste is taken into account for psychoanalysis, then the psychoanalysis of the sublime will become so complicated that it cannot justify itself. At first, under the operation of our reason, our judgment of taste is likely to become a reasoning judgment between good and evil, not a sensual judgment between the sublime and the beautiful. Secondly, owing to our reasoning faculty, when we make a judgment of the
sublime, we are likely to feel no fear. For example, when we look at a tornado sweeping away many trees, cars, and houses on a movie, we may not have a fear, for we sometimes rationally ponder that this scene is composed by the special techniques of computers, or for we know that we are in the cinema not in the place where the tornado sweeps away. Without the feeling of fear, using Burke’s definition of the sublime—terror—for psychoanalysis will be meaningless. So, before Weiskel performs his psychoanalysis of the sublime, he declares that we have to remove the element of the sublime in advance, that of our reasoning faculty: “If we are to proceed to a genuine psychology of the negative sublime, we must be prepared for reduction, so that that ‘conclusions of the reasoning faculty’ become derivatives and not explanations of ‘an instinct that works us to its own purposes, without our concurrence.’ These terms are not Freud’s but Burke’s” (85).

However, Weiskel’s removal of “the reasoning faculty” is inadequate, because this may make his interpretations of psychoanalysis become absurd and ridiculous. For instance, some people are quite scared of snakes and cockroaches. Then, according to Burke’s definition of the sublime—the fear without “the reasoning faculty”—snakes and cockroaches can be regarded as objects of the sublime. If so, according to Weiskel’s interpretation, the fear of snakes or cockroaches is castration anxiety. In the conflict between our mind and snakes or cockroaches, we picture to ourselves the possibility of resistance and recognize its futility in the unconscious. But isn’t such an interpretation rather ridiculous? Actually, snakes or cockroaches can be excluded from the sublime, if we exert our reasoning faculty to help us make a judgment of the sublime. From this example, we can conclude that “the reasoning faculty” is an indispensable element of the sublime. If one eliminates “the reasoning faculty,” fear is not necessarily the fear of the sublime. Just for this reason, Kant especially emphasizes the importance of reason in the sublime to improve Burke’s theoretical imperfection. In his example of explaining the distinction between religion’s awe and
superstition’s dread, we can find that the reasoning faculty is the decisive key point in the judgment of the sublime: “In this way religion is intrinsically distinguished from superstition, which latter rears in the mind, not reverence for the sublime, but dread and apprehension of the all-powerful Being to whose will terror-stricken man sees himself subjected, yet without according Him due honour” (Critique 114). With the reasoning faculty, the distinction between religion’s awe and superstition’s dread is very clear. Superstition’s dread is certainly not the fear of the sublime, because we do not accord any honor to superstition.

Understandably, in order to satisfy the requirements of universal consistency and objectivity of psychoanalysis, Weiskel must adopt the Burkean sublime; however, from an academic perspective, using a questionable definition of the sublime as a basis for psychoanalysis will lead to questionable results of such psychoanalysis. We cannot responsibly reduce or distort the real meaning of the sublime to meet the requirements of psychoanalysis. Of course, we cannot say that Burke’s definition of the sublime—terror—is wrong. Theoretically, Burke’s definition is valid, but it must be combined with several indispensable elements—reason, safety, and delight—to form a correct sense of the sublime. And then, Burke’s definition can be consistent with aesthetic facts and hence be meaningful. Eliminating these elements, Burke’s definition—terror—does not necessarily belong to the mental response of the sublime. That is to say, regarding the mental response of fear as equal as that of the sublime is not a correct definition. Adopting such a definition to perform psychoanalysis, how can Weiskel’s interpretations of psychoanalysis be persuasive? Obviously, before Weiskel performs his psychoanalysis of the sublime, he does not consider in advance the validity of Burke’s definition of the sublime—terror. He does not carefully consider whether the mental response of fear is surely produced, when we make a judgment of the sublime. This is the crucial reason why the aesthetic response of fear causes some controversy:
For some eighteenth-century poets and theorists, fear insured the mind’s subservience to God as the highest illustration of the sublime; for others, fear had no essential role in sublime experience, however, it was defined. This debate is singular not because its speakers always responded to opposing arguments convincingly, which for the most part they did not, but because its irresolution for more than a century signals a persistent uneasiness about the presence or absence of fear in aesthetic response. (Kelley 27)

When we make a judgment of the sublime and hence produce a sense of the sublime, sometimes we may have a fear, but sometimes we may not. The presence or absence of our fear depends on the actual situation and the phases of our mind. When we stand on a cliff to look downward to the bottom of the valley, we may have a strong fear. But, when we stand on a lower position to look at this cliff, we may not experience any fear. Therefore, the fear in the sublime experience indeed is disputable. Burke, Kant, and Wordsworth disagree about role of fear in the sublime experience. To the Burkean and the Kantian sublimes, fear is indispensable, but to the Wordsworthian sublime, fear is not taken into account, because Wordsworth says: “no sublimity can be raised by the contemplation of such power when it presses upon us with pain and individual fear to a degree which takes precedence in our thoughts [over] the power itself” (The Sublime and the Beautiful 354).

Since Wordsworth does not take fear into account in his sublimity, when he is feeling the sublime of nature through contemplation, his mental response is surely devoid of fear. Without fear, he can contemplate the meanings behind nature. Considering this point, we cannot help having doubts about Weiskel’s using the Stolen Boat episode in Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* as an illustration of psychoanalysis of the sublime. In Weiskel’s psychoanalysis, the object that Weiskel studies is Wordsworth’s mind and concept for nature, so that Weiskel should consider Wordsworth’s viewpoints of the sublime, instead of merely following
Burke’s definition to explain Wordsworth’s mental response, while performing psychoanalysis. In the Stolen Boat episode, Wordsworth mentions pain and fear for nature in his childhood, but he does not remark in this poem that the pain and fear causes his sense of sublimity. Since Wordsworth does not judge the huge peak in this poem “sublime”, how can Weiskel affirm that the boy’s fear is the mental response of the sublime? Wordsworth just says that pain and fear must be sanctified, and then we can recognize “a grandeur in the beatings of the heart:”

not in vain,

By day or star-light, thus from my first dawn
Of Childhood didst thou intertwine for me
The passions that build up our human Soul
Not with the mean and vulgar works of man,
But with high objects, with enduring things,
With life and nature, purifying thus
The elements of feelings and of thought,
And sanctifying, by such discipline,
Both pain and fear; until we recognize

A grandeur in the beatings of the heart. (I. 404-14)

In other words, after pain and fear are sanctified, we can feel the sense of the sublime. Without the process of sanctifying, we cannot feel “a grandeur in the beatings of the heart.” The process of sanctifying refers to our mental growth. Thus, Wordsworth uses the word “until” to stress the time that we can recognize “a grandeur in the beatings of the heart.” The “until” refers to until we grow up, not the time of childhood. When our mind is mature enough to sanctify pain and fear for nature, naturally pain and fear are both gone. Our comprehension for nature takes the place of our fear for nature through our contemplation.
From these lines, we can deduce that Wordsworth’s fear is absent when he perceives the sublime of nature. Now that Wordsworth himself does not consider fear in his sublimity, Weiskel’s supposing the young Wordsworth’s fear for nature to be the mental response of the sublime is certainly incorrect. After all, the sublime still hinges upon the mind of the judging Subject. Moreover, in Wordsworth’s poems, he rarely emphasizes the fear in his sublime experience. The sublime that he emphasizes is still mental exaltation rather than fear. In the Stolen Boat episode, the boy’s fear is obviously not the mental response of the Wordsworthian sublime, because he is too young to comprehend the meanings behind nature or to obtain mental exaltation.

On the other hand, since Weiskel declares that he adopts Burke’s theory for psychoanalysis, let’s use the elements of the Burkean sublime—terror, safety, and delight—to check out whether the boy’s fear is the mental response of the Burkean sublime. In this poem, when the boy sees the huge peak, he is quite scared, because he imagines the huge peak as a living monster that chases after him. His fear satisfies the requirement of terror. Next, the boy always keeps a distance to see this mountain, which meets the requirement of safety. At last, the mountain just brings the boy terror instead of delight, because Wordsworth writes that “huge and mighty Forms were a trouble to my dreams:”

but after I had seen

That spectacle, for many days, my brain
Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
Of unknown modes of being; o’er my thoughts
There hung a darkness, call it solitude
Or blank desertion. No familiar Shapes
Remained, no pleasant images of trees,
Or 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.  (I. 390-400)

Apparently, the boy does not obtain any delight of taste from the imaginative monster, and hence this fails to meet the requirement of delight. Therefore, we can conclude that the boy’s fear is not the mental response of the Burkean sublime, either. Although Wordsworth mentions that he has “troubled pleasure” after he steals the boat, the “troubled pleasure” is not the delight of taste, for it results from stealing the boat rather than appreciating the huge peak (I. 362). Since the boy’s fear is not the mental response of the sublime, Weiskel’s using the Stolen Boat episode as an illustration of psychoanalysis of the sublime is inadequate. In addition, another reason that Weiskel should not use the Stolen Boat episode as an example of psychoanalysis of the sublime is his pronouncement that he uses Burke’s theory. In Burke’s theory, owing to its stress on universal consistency, the fear that Burke explains is the audience’s response, not the character’s in a drama or in a poem. However, in Weiskel’s psychoanalysis, the fear is the character’s response in a poem, not the audience’s. In other words, what Weiskel psychoanalyzes is the meaning behind the text, not the general mental response of the sublime.
Chapter Four

Conclusion

A good critical theory nevertheless, has its own kind of validity. The criterion is not the scientific verifiability of its single propositions, but the scope, precision, and coherence of the insights that it yields into the properties of single works of art and the adequacy with which it accounts for diverse kinds of art.

M. H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp (4-5)

In this thesis, we dealt with the meanings of four kinds of the sublime, discussed two questions about the conflict between these aesthetic theories, analyzed a few of Wordsworth’s poems and theoretical convictions from the perspective of aesthetics, and evaluated the validity of Weiskel’s psychoanalysis of the sublime. The study results are summarized as follows:

1. The Longinian sublime refers to an author’s strong influence upon readers by using his excellent rhetorical techniques to compose a great poem that stirs up readers’ innermost emotions. It has two connotations: (1) the soul’s sublimity—the author’s great soul, and (2) the literary sublimity—the excellent rhetorical technique that the author’s great soul reflects in his works. Moreover, it emphasizes human dignity, freedom, and passion, and hence it has a great influence on the Kantian sublime, Romantic rebellious spirits, and Wordsworth’s literary theories.

2. The Burkean sublime, which emphasizes objectivity and excludes the reasoning faculty, is defined as terror. Its basic elements are terror, safety, and delight. However, the Burkean sublime without the reasoning faculty sometimes contradicts with aesthetic facts. Furthermore, Burke’s definition—terror—is controversial, because sometimes our fear is absent when we make a judgment of taste.

3. The Kantian sublime, which hinges upon the mind of the judging Subject and stresses reason, is divided into two kinds: the mathematically sublime and the dynamically...
sublime. The characteristic of the former is the infinitude of an object’s magnitude, and that of the latter lies in the great might that can cause fear and respect. The dynamically sublime is the mental transformation from fear to delight due to safety, i.e. the conflict between our mind and nature’s power. To extend its meaning further, under the premise of human dignity, for human living, any action of resistance against the oppression of an external power, whether it is a great might of nature or a political authority, can be regarded as sublime.

4. The Wordsworthian sublime, which hinges upon the mind of the Subject and ignores fear, is a mental transformation from beauty to sublimity through contemplation. It emphasizes mental exaltation, and that an individual form and power must be combined with “duration.” Because Wordsworth supposes that the same object can be both sublime and beautiful, the antagonistic relationship between the sublime and the beautiful in the Object that Burke proposes is broken. However, in the Wordsworthian sublime, owing to its stress upon “duration,” we hardly can tell the sublime from the beautiful.

5. Regarding the question whether literature can be included in the sublime or not, our answer is “Yes, it can.” Kant excludes works of art from the sublime, primarily because they violate the formlessness of the sublime and the purposelessness of the judgment of taste in his theory. As we discussed in chapter II, our imagination can transcend time and space, so that form itself is not important at all. Moreover, the object of sublimity is not necessarily devoid of form, and that of beauty does not certainly possess concrete form. Considering the purposelessness of the judgment of taste, works of art are excluded from the sublime just because of their purposiveness—they are the results of human behavioral fulfillments. However, when we appreciate an object of the sublime, we hardly consider the purpose of the Object. It is the judging Subject, not the Object, that determines the end. If Kant excludes works of art for their purposiveness, then his philosophy will be meaningless, because what he studies is man’s thoughts, behaviors, and will. Without man’s thoughts,
will, and behavioral fulfillments, man would be hardly different from general animals. Therefore, our conclusion is that literature can be included in the sublime.

6. As to another question whether the sublime contains morality or not, our answer is “Yes, the sublime indeed contains morality, but morality is an optional, not compulsory, characteristic of the sublime.” Owing to their different explanations of self-preservation, the Burkean sublime is usually considered as regardless of morality, while the Kantian sublime is seen regardful of morality. In fact, both of them involve morality. In the Burkean sublime, the inferior effects of the sublime—admiration, reverence and respect involve morality; in the Kantian sublime, the “respect” caused by the great might of nature certainly refers to morality. However, in order to take morality into account in the sublime, Kant’s “respect” seems to contradict his “disinterestedness.” In effect, Kant’s “respect” and “disinterestedness” are neither erroneous nor mutually contradictory, because “respect” is an optional, not compulsory, characteristic of the sublime. In our judgment of taste, we can freely remove “respect,” because our judgment is made after we are safe. Consequently, our answer is “Yes, the sublime indeed contains morality, but morality is an optional, not compulsory, characteristic of the sublime.”

7. Weiskel’s psychoanalysis of the sublime based on Burke’s definition—terror—is unconvincing, because Burke’s definition is disputable. In addition, Weiskel’s using the Stolen Boat episode in Wordsworth’s The Prelude as an illustration of psychoanalysis of the sublime is inadequate, because the boy’s fear is not the mental response of the sublime. In this example, what Weiskel psychoanalyzes is the meaning behind the text, not the general mental response of the sublime.
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