

William Wordsworth, 'Yew Trees' and the Menace of the Sublime

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The Sublime in Wordsworth, or the 'Wordsworthian Sublime' referred to by scholars researching the fundamentals of Romanticism, is a tough nut to crack. A historical survey of the subject would not yield those results that I intend to convey through this essay, since disinterested participation in the question on how Wordsworth frames the *nature-power- imagination* syllogism does not transport us any further from a traditional understanding of the method as an imaginative manifestation of power. This is one conclusion that I wish to avoid. I wish to avoid it for the generalizations and oversimplifications inherent in the content itself. Nor do I think that the premise is correct. It is impossible to find a perfect dialectical balance between two similar, ideological forms of thought, let alone finding it in contradictions among two antithetical ideas such as Nature, say, on one hand, and Imagination on the other. If the framework leading to the equation within the Wordsworthian Sublime had to be reformulated, it could be done in an ambitious but plausible manner:

Ab-Nature – Nature – Nature-all– Super-nature-all – Preter-nature-all –un-nature-all – Post-Nature – Anti-Nature – Apocalypse (also known as imagination)

At this stage, my proposition as well as these neologisms sound absurd as they must, and it must be confessed that I cannot justify the symbolic reasoning that leads to this projection of Nature as being completely contradictory to imagination. I can vouchsafe for the fact that each of these neologisms can be imbued with meaning which is divergent from what the dictionary offers, but meaningful nevertheless. For the readers of this essay, I proffer that far from answering why this formulation *is* or *must be*, it had rather be taken-for-granted in order to make any sense. If the sublime in Wordsworth had to be discovered, it must be sought in a dialectic between *Pre-Nature*, *Nature*, *Post-Nature* and *After-Nature*, which Geoffrey Hartman would go on to call 'apocalypse'. I do not wish to cite his views without adequate theorizing at this point, although it is important to quote his opinions on the subject. If the implications are adapted to this afore-mentioned hypothesis, I shall explicate upon two questions (and their sub-questions) which form the backbone of my discussion regarding the so-called 'Wordsworthian Sublime', or the sublime, characteristic in the poetry of Wordsworth:

- a) Can the ethical question in Wordsworth be expressed by positing a dialectic balance between practical nature on one hand and theoretical/moral nature on the other? If yes, how transient, or how permanent is the dialectic? If not, does it then imply that a stable dialectic cannot be reached at because theoretical or moral nature is much more than a modification of all possible and variable tenets of nature?
- b) Assuming that this theoretical nature is a stable isotope of nature, how is it that the creation of a stable dialectic in Wordsworth's poetry is nearly impossible? Is it because

Nature is resistant to imagination which is a manifestation of this apocalyptic *anti-nature* and vice-versa? Is it probable that this Sublime 'menace' is the paranoia of nature collapsing into infinite non-nature whilst the dialectic tries to keep dialogue open between the two forms that Wordsworth was engaged with throughout his poetic career?

This task can be accomplished in two ways. After providing a very basic definition of what a 'Dialectic' is, I argue through two post-Kantian philosophers, Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche, the position of the dialectic with respect to concrete and speculative ethical forms. Through William Wordsworth's sonnet 'Toussaint! The most unhappy Man of Men!' (Composed 1802, published 1803) I apply the inferences to the first section, elaborating how the stability of the dialectic created through the implicit and established ethic in the poem disorganizes previous opinions on the poem, thus answering the first question. The second section close-reads the blank verse in 'Yew-Trees' (Composed 1803, published 1815) in the hope of establishing the presence-absence phenomena within the dialectical framework between Wordsworth's nature and nature's anti-imaginative resistance, thus attempting to answer the second question on the situational paradox of the Sublime.

I. Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and the form of the Dialectic

Arthur Schopenhauer's *The Basis of Morality*, first published in 1903, is rife with questions on the inconsistency of moral worth. It begins with a critical study of Kantian Ethics, discussing Fichte along the way while critiquing the validity of an 'ego-less' action – one of the first original disquisitions of its ilk. In 'The Founding of Ethics' section, Schopenhauer makes a point which is difficult to refute on the moral turf, assuming that a common understanding between just and un-just action is possible:

The possibility always remains that an *egoistic motive* may have had weight in determining a just or good deed... there are persons in whom the principle of giving others their due seems to be innate, who neither intentionally injure anyone, nor unconditionally seek their own advantage, but in considering themselves show regard also for the rights of their neighbours... not only see that the other party does his duty, but also that he gets his own, because it is really against *their will* that any one, with whom they have to do, should be shabbily treated. (*TBM*, tr. Arthur Brodrick Bullock, III: IV, pp. 81, italics mine)

Close-reading Schopenhauer creates the possibility that whereas a theoretical elimination of the "egoistic motive" might be priceless, it had better remain for the purposes of meaningful practical existence. What it suggests is, the charitable character in humankind, and among individuals in specific, does not arise from an absence of the ego, or a desire to endorse a motive that is disagreeable to the ego. It would also be a deleterious misreading if absolute absence of the ego is thought to be proof of idealistic existence, since the assumption that one's suspension of his ego does not mechanically guarantee the suspension of others' is fairly elementary. Nor is the suspension of all egoistic motives a readymade formula for the ideal will-less universe that Schopenhauer's philosophy stands upon. What Schopenhauer means, if I understand correctly, is that the presence of this egoistic motive can be moderated in such a manner that it can act with unselfish neutrality. The mitigation of an 'egoistic excess' determines the true character of the 'egoistic motive', as Schopenhauer himself offers:

The moral value of an act is lowered by the disclosure of an accessory selfish incentive; while it is entirely destroyed, if that incentive stood alone. The absence of all egoistic motives in thus the **Criterion** of an action of moral value. (*ibid*, pp.82)

The presence of a "selfish incentive" implies the absence of neutrality within egoistic motives. These incentives create an imbalance that cannot escape judgment, and the lack of it fails to disclose the proper moderation of the "egoistic motive". In the words of Dale Jacquette, "All worldly motivated action is undertaken for the sake of egoistic satisfaction, even when the agents in question do not recognize the fact and even if they would positively deny that they were acting to promote their own personal self-interests" (216). If one tweaks Schopenhauer's words accordingly, the authoritative moderation combined with neutrality of all egoistic motives is the criteria for an action of moral value. It is this execution that creates altruism's true intentions – moderation of competition between individuals of the same species and preservation of the moral health of the hierarchy – what Jacquette calls "transcendental intuition" (217) in her book. This initiates a modification of the categorical imperative through Schopenhauer's reinterpretations:

- 2) No action can be left undone, when, given the character of the doer, a sufficient motive is present; unless a stronger counter motive necessarily prevents it.
- 4) Every action stands in relation to, and has as its ultimate object, a being susceptible of weal and woe.
- 6) Every action, which has to do, as its ultimate object, with the weal and woe of the agent himself, is egoistic. (*TBM*, Part III: V, pp. 83)

I interpret Schopenhauer's "sufficient motive" as a dialectical teleology, mediating what he calls "weal and woe". This dialectic necessity, while arguing for an absolute will-lessness, succeeds in synthesizing them in an absolute fashion.¹ Since an egoistic motive never ceases to be, its neutral presence creates an elusive absence, participating in what can be called *absolute relativity* (unlike Kant's absolute absolutism vis-à-vis the categorical imperative. I am not referring to his transcendental idealism) with regards to the dialectic involved, which is the true state of things as opposed to a biased *relative relativism* which Schopenhauer vehemently opposed.² Jacquette is right when she correctly assesses that "The slightest taint of self-interest does not morally invalidate an action in Schopenhauer's moral philosophy, as in Kant's. Rather, an action is altogether lacking in moral value if it is undertaken entirely and exclusively for egoistic motives" (220). The immanent non-presence exhibits a tolerable mean between the afore-mentioned characteristics, the slightest volatility in which could deteriorate the fragile dialectic created despite being subsumed by an egoistic motive sufficiently restrained in the process. Schopenhauer's positive criticism of Kant does not terminate here. He goes on to elucidate how "Duty... necessarily means, a **debt** which is owing, being thus an action, by the simple omission of which another suffers harm, that is, a wrong comes about" (*TLM*, 95, author's emphasis). Briefly, Schopenhauer's dialectic does not call for an absolute synthesis between weal and woe. Nor does it argue that the dialectic arrived at requires the complete absence of an egoistic motive. The dialectic in Schopenhauer is an unadulterated version of the ego that regulates the content of both virtues, the synthesis of which it refuses to take active credit of, thus maintaining a presence-absence phenomena so long as the dialectic itself does not immoderate its own moderations.

With Nietzsche, the dialectic, at its initial and in its basic premise, runs parallel with Schopenhauer; what Schopenhauer calls an 'egoistic motive', Nietzsche calls an "inclination"; what Schopenhauer calls "weal and woe", both being virtue signals within an embodied individual, Nietzsche mashes the inevitable differences in the functioning character of the individual itself:

Is it not clear that in all these instances man loves *something of himself*, an idea, a desire, an offspring, more than *something else of himself*, that he thus *divides* his nature and sacrifices one part of it to the other?... The *inclination* for something (wish, impulse, desire) is present in all the above-mentioned instances; (*A Nietzsche Reader*, tr. R.J. Hollingdale, excerpt from *Human, All too Human*46:57, pp. 74, italics in original)

This inclination, similar in tenor with Schopenhauer's claims on the same subject, is similar to it in purpose as well. The very presence of an inclination necessitates an opposition between the two extremes of an individual's nature. This "something" towards which the inclination seems to tend could also include resemblances with and manifestations of the ideologies and illusions of other super-human virtues that is consistent with higher nature. A dialectic is possible when this inclination is restrained in a progressive manner (progressive in the sense that it is never retrogressive or auto-immune, which would mean the deconstruction of any dialectic even before it is established), if it can be ascertained that a dialectic is possible at all. That there is no connate dialectic present within the two extremes of the subject initiates a sacrifice, which can be propagated in instalments once the dialectical middle-path is abstractly determined without making the inclination obsolete. The reason why Nietzsche does not want inclination to run dry can be stated in two ways: first, inclination assumes the presence of a conscious human/super-human entity that is capable of propagating its choice through an emphasis on the will upon the physical world – a psycho-sexual conscience that aims to fertilize it, where fertilization itself is an acceptable inclination. Secondly, this inclination to fertilize assumes an imaginary duty to propel the most enlightening character in the individual as opposed to the lesser ones, while maintaining a degree of disinterestedness or detachment. What it helps concretise is the literal reduction of the footprint of the dialectic, which otherwise would become all too evident and aesthetically unpleasing. In *The Wanderer and his Shadow*, Nietzsche elucidates in detail the nature of this 'inclination' I have argued for:

Habit of *seeing opposites*. – The general imprecise way of observing sees everywhere in nature opposites where there are, not opposites, but differences of degree. This bad habit has led us into wanting to comprehend and analyse the inner world, too, the spiritual-moral world, in terms of such opposites. An unspeakable amount of painfulness, arrogance, harshness, estrangement, frigidity has entered into human feelings because we think we see opposites instead of transitions. (WS 60:67, *ibid.*, pp. 86)

The situation of a dialectic can be within two subjects of the same kind, or between two dissimilar degrees of the same subject. Nietzsche suggests that the dialectic can *only* be in the latter. The difference between the corruptions of everyday world and that of the so-called "spiritual-moral" world is the dichotomy of intensities, not of substitutive apparatuses. The recognition of the absence of a dialectic between two dissimilar aspects of the same world is a misconception; it is what gives rise to negativity, in so far as human attitudes to failures are concerned. The purgation of this negativity is possible when the dialectician realizes the human "inclination" for the abstract ascetic character of the world and generates a dialectic by synthesizing the pedagogical aspects of a crippling virtue-starved practical world which, in its state of restrained progressiveness, balances the inclination in favour of synthesis – something that shall never be a perfect dialectic but fragile yet sustainable version nevertheless, as Nietzsche himself illuminates upon in *Will to Power* and *Beyond Good and Evil*.³ In his 'First Essay' in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, the author emphasizes the opposition of extreme virtues, but this time with

reference to aristocratic and slave morality, which, critically speaking, continue to be of more philosophical interest if the reader imagines the entire activity taking place within the same individual:

As I said, the pathos of nobility and distance, the enduring, dominating, and fundamental overall feeling of a higher ruling kind in relation to a lower kind, to a 'below' – *that* is the origin of the opposition between 'good' and 'bad'. (*GM* I:2, p. 13, tr. Douglas Smith)

As Mark Migotti explains in his essay on Nietzsche's *Genealogy*, "the claim that the origin of the opposition of "good" and "bad" is found in "the pathos of distance" presupposes that the self-exaltation of the masters has a significant basis in fact rather than fiction or delusion" (751). It has a significant basis in fact because administrative necessity, whether acquired through habit, reflective tendencies of mind or exigencies of character, is a fact. If an individual pertaining to an inclination towards a particular virtue declares it rudimentary for "higher ruling" (i.e. nobility), his preference of this virtue over others comes alongside the non-preference of many essential 'non-virtues' or 'lower-virtues', which at all times participate subconsciously in a steady opposition to an administrative factuality supervised by nobility. Both this and the opposition actually allowing an action to evolve through dialogue makes the dialectic in the form of administrative action both practical and philosophical – not fictional or illusionary. What is the form of friction provided by these essential "non-virtues" or "lower-virtues" towards the making of this dialectic? As Nietzsche correctly avers,

Human history would be a much too stupid affair were it not for the intelligence introduced by the powerless. (*ibid.* I:7, p. 19)

What nobility produces through its virtue-hierarchy is power; what virtues lower in the same virtue-hierarchy did was to give birth to the critique that would eventually arrest the *inclination* towards excessive power in the form of factual and theoretical intelligence. This temporal but functioning dialectic solves the "dialectically incompetent" (754) actions that Migotti charts in the second essay. The incompetence does not vanish with the dialectic taking shape; it is merely arrested to a tolerably progressive degree, forcing nobility to accept neutrality through disinterest or detachment, allowing intelligence in the form of critical ideologies to preserve judgment and moral relevance within the other half.

As this section terminates, the Schopenhauerian and Nietzschean form of the dialectic emphasizes assimilating two extremes of the same proposition through progressive restraint of the "egoistic motive" and "inclination". This dialectical precision would later be adopted by analytical psychologists like Jung in the twentieth century.⁴What Jung furthers is an inquisition not from without but from within – something that both post-Kantian philosophers had chosen to neglect while moulding their dialectic. This within operates autonomously *in* and *through* the psyche, as opposed to ethical objectivity with respect to virtue-hierarchy or class distributions in society. In fact, the dialectic, under all circumstances, is sourced in, functions from and is never terminated from within unless the two opposites disappear for not being a component of the same species. What could prevent the making of a dialectic in nature? To put it more concretely, what adversity of and beyond nature could limit nature by nullifying its linearity through an acceptable time frame? One outrageous but not entirely dismissible idea would be a movement away from nature; if Nature and *Nature-all* are two variations of the same component, then *un-nature-all* is at once a deconstruction of both nature and its chronological

hierarchies. *Super-Nature-all* and *preter-nature-all* are critical departures from nature to the extent that it involves the absolute theoretical destruction of time and nature. If a dialectic is impossible between nature/time and post-anti-nature/timelessness, there must be evoked an episode that is symbolic of time being frozen in action, also known as the 'Sublime'.⁵The Sublime, after executing this function, arouses the sphere of *timelessness*, being referred to as the 'Unconscious'.⁶The natural course of the Unconscious leads timelessness to its theoretical extreme which, in layman's terms, is defined as 'Apocalypse'.⁷Does this apocalypse represent the same character in Wordsworth's imagination? Does one see any signs of a dialectic in Wordsworth's ethical foundations?

I.I. Wordsworth's 'Toussaint' and the Dialectical Fallacy

In a dissertation submitted by P.P.S. Chauhan to Aligarh Muslim University, the author delineates that Wordsworth's sonnet is a dedication to Toussaint's resistance against Napoleonic tyranny (26).It is unlikely the case despite all persuasion leading towards this apparent factuality, for the simple reason that Wordsworth resistance is never directed towards an individual, but at a symbolic being which forces itself upon the nascency of another. As Joshua Stanley points out with further acuity, "Considering what poem Wordsworth could have written is less interesting than considering what he chose not to write or what kind of writing he resisted" (191). I disentangle the first cord in this complex comment: What did Wordsworth suggest without actually writing it into the sonnet? As a secondary question, one could also ask why the suggestion would have deterred the sonnet in its apparently linear course of arguments. Wordsworth says,

O miserable Chieftain! Where and when
Wilt thou find patience! Yet die not; do thy
Wear rather in thy bonds a cheerful brow: (CP, Antonia Till ed. 8: pp. 363-64, ll.5-7)

Wordsworth begins by suggesting misery in Toussaint being almost akin to abjection;⁸ in philosophical terms, I shall call it *un-nature-all*, signifying a condition where nature, in its universal manifestation of "all", cannot legitimize an action, declaring it to be outside its own repertoire. The 'un' directs the reader to a state where nature does not lay suspended; it is atomized to what could rightly be called universal 'trace'. In other words, the *nature-all* is all those universal variations which with some modifications could be assimilated within nature, and continues to be prominent in trace amounts when the *un-nature-all* is properly evoked. The rhetoric implies that his misery is timeless, attempting to incorporate its unconscious. This succeeds in pushing the poem into its extreme theoretical extent of the proposition (i.e. apocalypse), but the poet backtracks his path almost immediately through the word "die", symbolizing that the purpose of the poem is to operate within linear time, hence in retrospect, function within nature. The poem's purpose is to retrace its way from pseudo-time (or minimal timelessness - pseudo, since its absolute evocation would invite both the unconscious which cannot happen unless the poem is frozen in time, i.e. the sublime is evoked, thus aiding the pending transition in the sonnet) into concrete time, or linear time:

Live and take comfort. Thou hast left behind
Powers that will work for thee; air, earth and skies (ibid. p. 364, ll. 9-10)

The sonnet relapses into linear time by invoking time first through "die" and then through "live"; the 'pseudo-timeless' restores time but, despite the efforts on the part of

Wordsworth, he resists sublimating the subject 'Toussaint', instead suggesting that other natural forces shall perform the task on his behalf. The reason why I extrapolate this meaning is to cite the permanency of a fragile dialectic which could only sustain if time and timeless could be distinctly visualized on either sides without the sublime arrest of time separating them. Since the sublime is a subjective elevation of ideas in the mind, the subtle lack of interpolation of the sublime within Toussaint is Wordsworth's resistance to the invocation of it which guarantees that neither time nor timelessness can be clearly distinguished from each other. In the words of Mary Kelly Persyn, "it created the *tendency* to sublimate material or physical slavery into transcendental liberty" (5, italics mine). This tendency to sublimate results in incomplete sublimation but succeeds in digging into an elevated ethic that acts as a dialectical synthesis between pseudo-timelessness on one hand, time briefly in the middle and pseudo-timelessness towards the end, not having been separated from each other absolutely:

Thou hast great allies;
Thy friends are exultations, agonies,
And love, and man's unconquerable mind. (ibid ll. 12-14)

The poem, in its true sense, is not directed at the resistance or the salvation of Toussaint.⁹ It would be a weak misreading of both Wordsworth's argument and the form in which it is presented. As the *preter-nature-all* is brought forward as a moral player, it could be understood as employed between the normal and excesses of nature, generally in the latter but never beyond its domain, i.e. never beyond non-time, if I may use this phrase. Everything that functions within the higher extremes of nature without transgressing nature is preternatural. It helps the sonnet generate an argument that operates among 'un-nature', nature, and 'preter-nature' without evoking the sublime in its absolute sense, characterized by Kristen Mahlis as "A Poetics of detour" (333). This detour in reality involves a deflection from and a disinclination towards either situating the poem in absolute time or absolute non-time. Despite the inclinations of the sonnet for timelessness, the unevoked sublime helps the sonnet stay in check, generating a fragile yet visible dialectic in the line "Live and take Comfort" which somehow sustains till the end of the sonnet. The fallacy in the dialectic, a question I have avoided so far, lies in its fragility, the poet's wilful restraint through his form and deliberate resistance to an outwardly personalized 'egoistic motive', either of which being unable to deconstruct the dialectic in the sonnet. Its fallacy is conscious half-performance on either aspects of the scale.

I.II. Wordsworth's 'Yew-Trees', the failure of the Dialectic and the Menace of the Sublime

In studying this blank verse poem that was a philosophical product of Wordsworth's middle phase,¹⁰ I propose that timelessness indicates a signification of the unconscious, while conscious sublimity marks its incipience. The unconscious in remission and the unconscious in action are two different subjects that I cannot address within the scope of this essay. Here, my interest resides in the conscious expression of the unconscious and the manner in which it expresses itself in the poem. The poem begins with a massive comprehension of the Sublime, which is witness to Wordsworth's grasp of this form of poetic objectivity:

Which [the yew-tree] to this day stands *single*, in the midst
Of its own darkness, as it stood of yore (Till ed. 215, 2-3)

Compare this bold exposition with Wordsworth's melodramatic yet lanky exposition in his other 'Yew Trees' poem, published in 1798:

This lonely yew tree stands
Far from all human dwelling; (ibid. 25, ll. 1-2)

The difference is not characterized by the indwelling of sublimity in one and the potential in the other; the difference, to a prominent degree, lies in the intrepidly Saturnine nature of the former poem, whose monologue reeks of dominance compared to the "lonely" and pathetic presence of the yew tree in the latter poem whose half-hearted attempt at sublimity comes to nothingness. The tree stands as it did in the infinite "yore", endorsing the view that time comes to an infinite stillness (cf. ll. 11-12) with the proper invocation of the sublime. It does not mention the after-present; one can speculate that it is because, with the annihilation of linear time, infinity remains without being recognized as such, except being identified as having its only conscious origin understood through the Unconscious and propelled by the Sublime. This infinite stillness stands at daytime in "darkness"; the 'why' to which can be researched in its loosely allusive answer in Immanuel Kant's 'Observations on the feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime':

Grand, sizeable persons must observe simplicity or at most splendour in their dress, while small ones can be decorated and adorned. Darker colours and uniformity in costume are fitting for age, while youth radiates through brighter clothing with lively contrasts. (2:213, pp. 20)

What Kant reiterates, in other words, is that the dominance of sublimity progresses not in daintiness, partially because beauty, by its very definition, assumes or fits itself into a comprehensible physiological dimension. On the contrary, the "grand" or the great, by its virtue of outsurpassing everything in magnitude, maintains its forceful asceticism in order to communicate both inaccessibility and moral dominance and incorruptibility, here condensed into "simplicity" by Kant.¹¹ Darkness finds its share of physiological expression in Burke *Inquiry* as does the question of solitude,¹² but it is Kant I recall for an exposition of sublimity in the personalized 'Yew-Tree' and why it is equated with supreme isolation which defers and deconstructs nature:

The proper mental mood for a feeling of the sublime postulates the mind's susceptibility for ideas, since it is precisely in *the failure of nature* to attain to these – and consequently only under presupposition of this susceptibility and of the straining of the imagination. (CJ, Analytic of the Sublime §29:265, p. 115, emphasis mine)

Kant's reference to a particular mind's susceptibility proposes the dictum that subjectivity, comprising an abstraction and originality pertaining to the faculty of conceiving an idea inscribes isolation upon it. This failure, in numerous ways, pushes the poem into the realm of the timeless by invoking the sublime and pursuing it to its theoretical extreme, here represented by imagination but which, as argued earlier, is an unconscious reference to an apocalyptic post-nature:

This solitary Tree! A living thing
Produced too slowly ever to decay;
Of form and aspect too magnificent
To be destroyed. (ll. 10-13)

Whereas these lines bring life to the fore, it is at most a frame of reference from which the timeless must be viewed. Unconsciously, Wordsworth argues for both limitlessness

and timelessness – the first symbolizing concrete consecration of the Sublime and the second positing a withdrawal from all natural associations, which is a strong misreading of the presence of an apocalyptic anti-nature. What both of them suggest together is a transference of nature from its naturally occurring forms into cosmic transpirations. In between this, Wordsworth does not hesitate to describe nature and its handmaiden time, while arguing for both sublimity and timelessness:

Not loth to furnish weapons for the bands
Of Umfraville or Percy ere they marched
To Scotland's heaths, or those that crossed the sea
And drew their sounding bows at Azincour (ll. 4-7)

Observe Wordsworth's use of "marched", "crossed" and "drew" which helps situate the poem in the past. It contributes at once to situate the action, the nature of the activity and the ends to which they were practised at a particular location *in* time. These triple up to imaginatively contrive the nature of Wordsworth's past in the poem. This, circumvented by the Sublime at the very beginning of the poem, pursues it to the ends of apocalyptic imagination:

Ghostly Shapes
May meet at noontide; Fear and trembling Hope,
Silence and Foresight; Death the Skeleton
And Time the Shadow (ll. 25-28, capitalizations not mine, italics mine)

To sum up, what is the menace of the Sublime? The dialectic in a poem can be tentatively established in subjective variations of the same species – if time and time, timelessness and timelessness were to coexist on the same plane or across different planes, provided they can be measured. With the introduction of the sublime, nature experiences failure and time is arrested. This arrest extracts elements that operate beyond the projection of linear time to the extent that at its theoretical extreme, it becomes apocalyptic, timeless (through the annihilation of time) and imaginative (through incantation of the cosmic of which nature is a weak illusion). The failure of a dialectic to exist in theoretical extremes of such situations is the menace of the sublime.

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Notes

¹I use for my definition of the dialectic a paper by Karl R. Popper, entitled "What is a Dialectic?": "Dialectic is a theory which maintains that something – for instance, human thought – develops in a way characterized by the so-called dialectic triad: thesis, anti-thesis, synthesis... the struggle between the thesis and the antithesis goes on until some solution develops which will, in a *certain* sense, go beyond both... by recognizing the *relative* merit of both" (404, my italics). The sufficient egoistic motive helps create the dialectic in Schopenhauer's "weal and woe" because they are elements of the same ethical species. His dialectic, in its absolute state of moderation, creates a tolerably high degree of relativity which could be deemed absolute. Published in *Mind*,

New Series, Vol. 49, No. 196 (Oct., 1940), pp. 403-426. *JSTOR*. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2250841>.

- ² “If an act have an egoistic object as its motive, then no moral value can be attached to it; if an act is to have moral value, then no egoistic object, direct or indirect, near or remote, may be its motive” (*TLM*, pp. 83) “In every ascetic morality man worships a part of himself as God and for that he needs to diabolize the other part” (HA 137:188, *ibid*, pp. 215).
- ³ “What is essential and invaluable in every system of morals, is that it is a long constraint” (*BGE*, tr. R.J. Hollingdale, 5:188, pp. 101, Fingerprint Classics, 2018 reprint).
- ⁴ Although several examples could be cited from Jung’s *Dreams, On the Nature of the Psyche, Modern Man in Search of a Soul* and *Aspects of the Feminine*, I cite mine from Jung’s ‘Self-Knowledge’ section in *The Undiscovered Self*: “Nature, as we know, is not so lavish with her boons that she joins to a high intelligence the gifts of the heart also. As a rule, where one is present the other is lacking, and where one capacity is present in perfection it is generally at the cost of all the others. The discrepancy between intellect and feeling, which get in each other’s way at the best of times, is a particularly painful chapter in the history of the human psyche” (Routledge, 2012, Indian reprint, pp. 66).
- ⁵ “It [the sublime] gives on the whole no indication of anything final in nature itself, but only in the possible *employment* of our intuitions of it in inducing a feeling in our own selves of a finality quite independent of nature” (Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, Book Two, *Analytic of the Sublime* §23:246, pp. 93, translated by James Creed Meredith, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1973 (Reprint).
- ⁶ “The process of the unconscious are not ‘ordered temporally’, are ‘not altered by the passage of time’ ... in fact have no reference to time at all” (*cf.* Anthony Easthope, *The Unconscious*. Routledge, 1999 pp. 36)
- ⁷ “Yet, if it describes what Hartman calls “a sin against time,” in its anticipation of futurity, the passage [in *The Prelude*] also prompts him to distinguish between two different stances towards time: one, the apocalyptic, which involves “an anticipatory, proleptic relation to time, intensified to the point where there is at once desire for and dread of the end being hastened,” and in which “there is a potential inner turning against time, and against nature insofar as it participates in the temporal order” ... “The aftermath points to something unconscious in the first instance but manifest and punishing now”” (526). See Frances Ferguson, “Romantic Memory”. *Studies in Romanticism*, Vo. 35 No. 4, 1996, pp. 509-533. *JSTOR*. 10.2307/25601195.
- ⁸ I do not mean abject in the sense of an unclean or filthy un-philosophical treatment of the subject. I mean abjection in the sense of treating an individual in such a manner that all philosophical, intellectual and spiritual meaning of life is lost, courtesy an excessive exploitation of the physical self, resulting in the destruction of the mental/moral self. As Julia Kristeva puts it forth in *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, “What is abject, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me towards the place where meaning collapses” (247). See Robert R. Clewis’s *The Sublime Reader*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2019.
- ⁹ As Kristen Mahlis puts it, “Whether Toussaint lives or dies and how he suffers are irrelevant to the poem’s logic” (333). Citations at the end of the paper.
- ¹⁰ Mary Moorman would disagree. In *William Wordsworth: A Biography: Later Years 1803-1850* (Oxford University Press, 1968), she comments that Wordsworth admired his own poem a lot. “At the end of it the purely natural imagery is disturbed by the appearance of six ‘ghostly shapes’ – Fear and Hope, Silence and Foresight, Death and Time. This is the first sign of a change in Wordsworth’s handling of natural themes – the introduction of mythical or allegorical figures into the natural landscape” (273). When I call it his middle phase, I mean his maturity of philosophical disquisitions and the ability to form a finality in poetical theory, something that would not come into its mature shape until *The Prelude* was published.
- ¹¹ See Sections XI (‘Society and Solitude’) of Part I, Sections XV (‘Darkness Terrible in its own Nature’) and XVI (‘Why Darkness is Terrible’) in Part IV of Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Oxford University Press, 2008 reissue)

¹² Etymologically, the words "great" and "grand" are not dissimilar in meaning. The German *grautaz* essentially means 'massive' in presence and impression, while the Latin *grandis* means, considering most variations, something great. See these links: https://www.etymonline.com/word/grand#etymonline_v_11897 and https://www.etymonline.com/word/great#etymonline_v_11945

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