The Nature of the Sublime

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Abstract

The origins of the Sublime are traced from Longinus to Kant, and the principles they set forth are applied to art from the late eighteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. With the Sublime defined as the emotional evocation of profound awe, delight and terror, the catalogue and comparative illustrations are employed to address the questions "What is Sublime?" and "What makes art Sublime?" The relationship of art from Turner, Blake, Friedrich and Cole to the Sublime is examined within the framework of religion, nature and the human element. The use of the landscape as a means to the Sublime is highlit for all four artists. The effects of the Romantic Period on the twentieth century Abstract Expressionists is discussed through Newman and Rothko.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The *Sublime*. What does this entail? Where is its origin? What makes an artist Sublime? While the Sublime, as a school of thought, came to full force in the mid eighteenth century, the ideas had been present since the Greek Empire and the writings of Longinus. The Sublime was that way of thinking which was uplifting and inspiring, to move one to the feeling of exultation. Many authors have attempted to quantify the nature of the Sublime, a difficult undertaking since, for the most part, the Sublime is a personal feeling. Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant are the two philosophers who brought the idea of the Sublime to the forefront of knowledge in the 1750s, both of whom strove to enumerate that which was or was not Sublime. The theories which Burke presented in 1757 became the basis for what is known as the Romantic Movement. Burke considered poetry the supreme example of the Sublime, as it had the ability to express emotions and a state of mind, however within the Romantic movement the theory extended to include art, music, and literature. Burke enumerated those literary figures whom he determined had best expressed the Sublime in their works, such as the Classical authors Lucretius and Virgil, with Milton and Shakespeare as his contemporary sources. For the most part however, he held the Bible as the supreme source of the Sublime, most specifically, the Old Testament Book of Job, and the descriptions of the Apocalypse from the New Testament.

The main artists of this exhibition were all approximate contemporaries, and were all considered to be, at one point, painters of the Romantic tradition. Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851), William Blake (1757-1827), Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840), and Thomas Cole (1801-1848) in one way or another all possess characteristics of romanticism and the Sublime. Each painter was motivated to paint for different reasons and their individual style developed through the traditions in which they were taught. Turner and Friedrich both received formal artistic instruction at academic institutions, while Cole, who began as an apprentice to an engraver when his family moved from England to America, was largely self-taught. Blake was also effectively self-taught after he withdrew from the Royal Academy, having rejecting the rigid style of Sir Joshua Reynolds, the current head of the Academy. The four painters were moved by different forces to paint and to depict specific subjects, yet each had an inner desire to express emotions. Turner wanted to raise the status of the landscape to the same level that historical and portrait paintings enjoyed. Intrigued by light and its many properties, he strove to render light accurately through

color, while exploring the emotions associated with the sights of nature.[1] Friedrich was a private and deeply religious man, and was motivated to produce his paintings to share his feelings about God's glory and greatness with a wide audience. He wished to endow his pictures with the emotions he knew existed when man looked at the creations of God.[2] Cole was also a religious man, but his motivation was twofold. He was very much concerned with creating a style of painting that was purely American, using the resources that were exclusively available there, namely the landscape. He was also influenced by the European Romantic tradition, and the desire that his paintings should move his viewers as well as instruct them on some higher moral level.[3] The majority of Blake's work was prompted by some sort of moral outcry toward society. His illuminated book *The Songs of Innocence and Experience*, for example, was in direct response to the French Revolution, while some of his work has religious tone to it as well.

The Sublime manifests itself in many different ways and in many different forms. This exhibition examines the idea of the Sublime in art, and focuses on the roles which Religion, Nature, and the Human Element played in the inspiration of late-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century Sublime painting. Although independent components, all three are omnipresent, and inextricably related to the evocation of the profound emotion which is the Sublime. The last section of the exhibition examines how the Sublime continued to be a source of inspiration for artists in the later half of the twentieth century. Abstract Expressionists, such as Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko, followed a style quite different from that of the Romantics, yet employed the idea of the Sublime in their interest in emotion and how emotions translate into art. To paint as they did and for their works to serve the purposes intended, each artist was motivated by a different facet of the Sublime. Although stylistically and visually distinct, all six artists are thematically and theoretically closely related.

Chapter 2

Origins 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 capable of producing the strongest emotions which the mind is capable of feeling.*
>
> – *Edmund Burke*[4]

The idea of the Sublime dates back as far as the philosophical theories of Longinus. He wrote, "Sublimity is the note which rings from a great mind," and "the soul is raised by true sublimity, it gains a proud step upwards, it is filled with joy and exultation, as though itself had produced what it hears."[5] The ideas expressed in Longinus's essay *On the Sublime* from the third century BC, were carried through time to the eighteenth century where the Sublime had its most important effects.

The two philosophers most associated with the ideas of the Sublime are Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant. Many prior philosophers had written essays on the ideas expressed by Longinus, but it was Burke followed by Kant who took these ideas to their logical conclusions. Consequently, the ideas expressed by Burke in his essay *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* in 1757, and by Kant in his essay *Observations on the Feelings of the Beautiful and Sublime* in 1764 were considered as the foundations of the Romantic movements of art, literature, and music.

Prior to Burke, the Sublime was essentially a style of writing, which he expanded into an aesthetic experience, applied not only to literature but well beyond it. Early investigations of the object of Sublime emotions, or "the Sublime object," were performed by John Dennis, who examined the Sublime object and its effect on the mind of the readers. Dennis was interested primarily in the place of emotions in poetry, and not the Sublime *per se*, yet many of his ideas cross over into the area of the Sublime and become forerunners to Burke's theories. The objects of religious ideas, since they are the most powerful, provide the sources of the greatest enthusiastic terror. Further preludes to Burke's theory are found in Dennis's interest in the power of God, coupled with the obscurity surrounding the limits of His power and His capacity to inflict pain.[6] It was thought from the beginning that the extremes of emotions, especially terror and pain, were definite expressions of the Sublime. But it was John Baillie's *Essay on the Sublime* written in 1747 which bears the closest resemblance to Burke's theory of aesthetics. Baillie takes a sensationalist approach, in other words, he

is concerned with the kind of sensory experience stimulated by the Sublime object. He further believed that vastness and uniformity were qualities which produced the Sublime.[7] The idea of vastness was first introduced by Longinus, but its combination with uniformity most likely inspired Burke's idea of the "artificial infinite."

While Burke took inspiration from Longinus, Addison, Hume, Du Bos, Dennis, and Baillie, among others, he was the first to attempt a physiological explanation. Whatever ideas he took from previous thinkers, he developed in his own original way, and used only in so far as they proved the fundamental aspect of his theory: that "whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger...is a source of the Sublime." It is this theory which is uniquely Burke's and has no precedent in history.[8] The notion of a link between sublimity and terror had been suggested by the poet James Thompson in his poem *Seasons* from 1726, and many artists, including Turner, looked to this poem for inspiration. Beyond terror however, delight is also closely related to the production of the Sublime. In his *Enquiry,* Burke also concerned himself with the distinction between the Sublime and the beautiful, and imposed a rigid structure to his argument. Convinced that the idea of pleasure is the key to unraveling the mystery between the two, Burke designated two types of pleasure: that of a "positive and independent nature," as opposed to pleasure resulting from a diminution of pain. The former, Burke considered to be "pleasure" and the latter "delight," and since delight stems from the idea of self-preservation, whatever arouses this delight is Sublime. On the other hand, pleasure is related to society and produces ideas which Burke classified as Beauty.

Immanuel Kant's essay, written seven years after Burke's *Enquiry*, elucidates the notions of delight into what is specifically Sublime versus Beautiful. The predominant difference lies in the degree of emotion which one experiences. Kant describes the Sublime as something which arouses enjoyment but with horror, while Beautiful is a pleasant sensation, making one joyous and smiling. Night, according to Kant, is Sublime while day is Beautiful; tall oaks and lonely shadows are Sublime while flower beds, low hedges, and shaped trees are Beautiful.[9] Kant further distinguishes between three types of Sublime: the *terrifying Sublime*, accompanied by dread or melancholy; the *noble Sublime*, a feeling of quiet wonder; and the *splendid*, a beauty completely pervaded by a Sublime plan. In essence, the Sublime must always be great but simple, something which *moves*, like the sight of a mountain whose snow-covered peak rises above the clouds. The Beautiful, however, is small but can be adorned or ornamented, that which *charms*, a flower-strewn meadow with a winding brook, covered by grazing flocks. The Sublime, in other words, is that which is great, which moves a person with feelings of elation, terror and delight, that which inspires awe.

Chapter 3

Religion and the Sublime

> *Despite what even many artists may appear to believe, art is not and should not merely be a skill. It should be completely and utterly the language of our feelings, our frame of mind; indeed, even of our devotion and our prayers.*
>
> – *Caspar David Friedrich*[10]

Religion is inherently linked to the Sublime since it is the immense power and aura of God which invokes those emotions associated with it: terror, wonder, amazement, awe, etc. Many artists of the Romantic movement desired to render the power of God's creation in painting. This power is twofold. The Earth and the universe were God's creation, and in depicting nature (e.g. through landscapes), the artist captured the power of creation, while also stirring the deep emotions felt by those who viewed it.

While the artists in this exhibition had different motivations behind their religiously-based paintings, one can argue that every landscape has a religious basis since the landscape depicts the created world. Friedrich and Blake had much more intent to paint religiously-based pictures than Cole or Turner, however at some point, each painted Biblical scenes, following in Burke's belief that the Bible is one of the most Sublime sources.

Although not regarded as such during his lifetime, William Blake is one of the most renowned English painters from this time period. His innovation lay in his work with illuminated manuscripts, the combining of word and image. Just as Burke had believed that the poet was the most Sublime of all writers, William Blake was a poet who expressed himself through the word and the image. Blake followed Burke's belief that the Bible was the most Sublime piece of writing, and among Blake's images of Biblical subjects, some of his most famous are his *Book of Job*, *Paradise Lost*, and his Apocalyptic Images. The idea of the creation can be considered one of the most Sublime ideas in the Bible. The power of God to create man and the universe conjures feelings of awe and amazement. *Elohim Creating Adam* from 1795 (Plate 1) is Blake's version of this event. This image is full of the radiance and beauty which Blake creates in all of his images. His use of strong outlines and detailed lines remind us that

Figure 3.1: William Blake, *Nebuchadnezzar*, 1795, print with watercolor and ink, 446×620 mm, Tate Gallery, London

he was trained as an engraver. This image is part of a group which represent the culmination, both artistic and technical, of Blake's development of color-printing in the first half of the 1790s. The series of which this image is part contains twelve different subjects, ranging from the Old Testament to the life of Christ, and illustrations of works by Shakespeare and Milton. These images have been considered to be some of Blake's best work. While three pulls were taken of each image, all are unique since Blake hand-painted on the printing plate and on the printed image.[11]

The range of Blake's technical ability can be seen clearly in the difference between the images of *Nebuchadnezzar* (figure 3.1) and *Jacob's Dream* (figure 3.2). Thomas Butts bought a number of the prints from this series, and then in 1799 commissioned Blake to create for him images from the Bible. Some of the best known from that series are the pictures of the apocalypse, one of the most famous among these is *Death on a Pale Horse* (Plate 2). This image has strong bold lines and fills the page with a sense of terror and power. The apocalypse is one of the most terrifying parts of the New Testament, and one which many artists have painted because the power of the created image can have such a great impact on the viewer. John Martin's painting *The Great Day of His Wrath* (figure 3.3) was his version of an apocalyptic image which also fills the reader with the sense of fear associated with the Sublime.

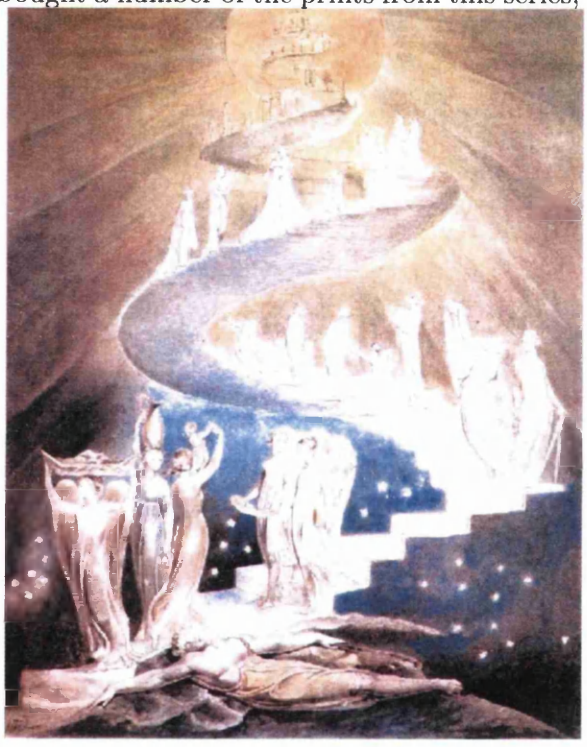


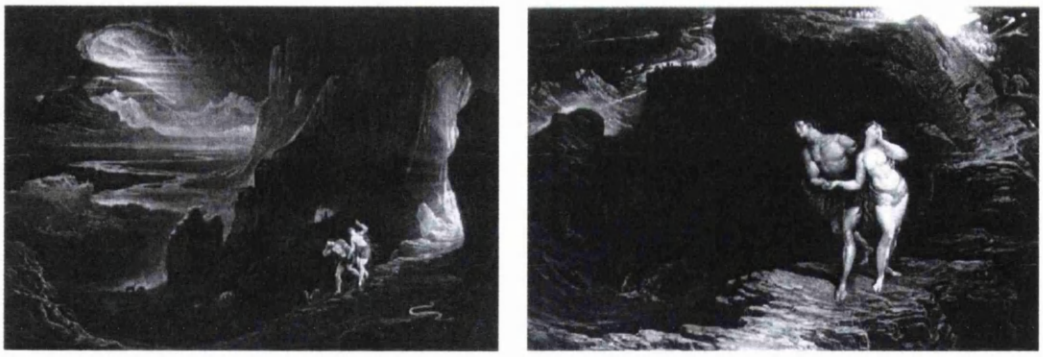
Figure 3.2: William Blake, *Jacob's Dream*, c.1805, color print with watercolor, 370×292 mm, British Museum, London

The most religiously explicit painting which Thomas Cole finished (many paintings remained unfinished at his death, among these some religious in content) was of the *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* (Plate 3) in 1827, a topic which is widely depicted in art and literature. Cole's painting was originally part of a pair; its partner, *Garden of Eden*, is now lost. Many of Cole's paintings combined landscapes and religious themes, and he often alluded to the perception of God through observations of nature. Cole believed that, "the subject [of art] should be pure and lofty," and that "an impressive lesson must be taught, an important scene illustrated – a moral, religious, or poetic effect produced on the mind."[12] Cole was doubly motived to paint landscapes, from a nationalistic interest in American scenery, and

Figure 3.3: John Martin, *The Great Day of His Wrath*, 1852, $75\frac{1}{2} \times 118$ inches

a sense of deep religious awe. Cole's early landscapes simultaneously communicate feelings of wonder and fear, while also containing a look and feel of raw nature indifferent to man's presence. Cole did not encounter a good European landscape painting until after 1827, hence he was able to create paintings tied directly to the American scenery. Cole, like Turner, wanted to elevate the status of the landscape to that of the history painting, but Cole was also influenced by the doctrine of Associationism. It was believed that picturesque objects, that is objects which were rough, tactile, and wild, were to be the most capable of developing a series of associations which would lead to a form of spiritual union with the almighty.[13]

Cole's *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* was one of his first paintings of epic proportions dealing with the combination of nature and God. Unfortunately, it was not well received by the public. Cole built his reputation on his depictions of the Catskill Mountains and the Hudson River Valley, and while the American public were just warming to the idea of appreciating their own landscape, they were not yet ready to contemplate an imaginative Romantic composition. As such, it received harsh criticism both for its lack of originality in the depiction of Adam and Eve, and since the landscape appeared to be more fanciful than naturalistic.[14] The central section of his composition was taken from the well-known English painter and printer, John Martin. Martin had created a cycle of mezzotints for Milton's *Paradise Lost* which had been released in 1827 and gained great popularity in



(a) (b)

Figure 3.4: a. John Martin Book XII, Line 641 (*The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden*) 1825. Engraving from: John Martin, *The Paradise Lost of Milton*, London, Septimus Prowett, February 28, 1827. b. John Martin, *The Expulsion*, 1828, Engraving from: John Martin, The Bible, London, Charles Tilt, 1828.

Figure 3.5: Thomas Cole, Study for: *The Cross and the World: The Pilgrim of the Cross at the End of His Journey*, c.1846-48, oil on canvas, 12×18 inches, National Museum of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

both England and America. In Cole's version of the expulsion, the figures of Adam and Eve closely resemble the way Martin has printed them (figures 3.4a&b). Martin was famous for creating pictorial visions of vast scale in which he used theatrical chiaroscuro effects to show his definition of the Sublime. Whether or not Cole took influences from other painters for this piece of art, this marked the pivotal point in his career. He shifted his focus from the purely wild landscapes to those with moral and/or religious content. His mature belief was that "the object of painting was not to please merely, but by pleasing, to exalt, refine, ennoble, and instruct."[15] The culmination of Cole's combination of landscape and religion was to be a series of paintings entitled *The Cross and The World* (figure 3.5), which remained unfinished at his death. It was to depict a pilgrim traveling on his journey, a series prompted for Cole by his personal desire to express his religious beliefs.

Figure 3.6: Caspar David Friedrich, *The Cross in the Mountains (Tetschen Altarpiece)*, 1807-08, Oil on canvas, $45\frac{1}{4} \times 43\frac{1}{2}$ inches, Dresden, Gemädegalerie Neue Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden

Caspar David Friedrich is the Romantic painter most naturally associated with religion and the Sublime. Friedrich came from the school of thought that one should endeavor to render what one saw as faithfully as possible, but he also felt that an encounter with nature was an allegory for a religious experience in which the certainty of death and the hope of eternal life to come were interwoven.[16] For the most part, Friedrich's intended meaning in his paintings was cryptic. This was not only the fault of the public, since Friedrich was strongly against revealing his most intimate feelings to the casual observer. Friedrich had attended the academy in Copenhagen but soon realized that he could not adopt someone else's style or thoughts on style, and that he would have to create his own form of expression.

In many of Friedrich's landscapes there is a sense of a religious presence, even if it is not explicitly depicted. Friedrich's first oil painting to be displayed in public, *The Cross in the Mountains*, now known as *The Tetschen Altarpiece*, (figure 3.6) is a simple painting in theme. It depicts the top of a mountain covered in fir trees and rising from this cluster is a single, tall crucifix. While not intended to be a religious painting, its original purpose was never met and Friedrich eventually sold it to a count with a castle in Tetschen who wanted it for

his private chapel. This is not a conventional landscape and shows Friedrich's indifference to classical perspective as well as almost every other rule of traditional landscape painting. Uninterested in following the "rules" of landscape painting, he painted at a time of great political upheaval, and as such, much of his symbolism has to do with the German spirit and faith. Many of his paintings are a combination of the landscape of Germany and a religious symbol, such as a cross on a mountain top or by the sea. *Winter Landscape* (figure 3.7) and *The Cross on the Baltic* (figure 3.8) are two examples of Friedrich's desire to combine religious content with landscape. Religion could have been seen as a source of consolation at a time when there was much change in the world. Religious and patriotic sentiments could be combined at this period in history, and an essentially secular painting could take on metaphysical dimensions. As Friedrich's pictures were uncomplicated, sufficing with a minimum of symbols, the range of possible interpretations was extremely wide.[17]

Friedrich's most Sublime religious painting, and considered by some to be his most radical, is *The Monk by the Sea*, painted in 1809-10 (Plate 4). Based upon the theory that the inclusion of God adds to the sublimity of a painting, this work is also filled with a sense of vastness, boundlessness and, according to one critic, an apocalyptic impression.[18] In this painting, Friedrich's lack of interest in the established rules of landscape painting is taken to a new level. It is devoid of any sense of depth or perspective. The large expanse of the sky takes up the majority of the picture plane, and the small solitary figure of the monk seems even smaller when see against the vast world. The Monk, with whom Friedrich expected his viewers to identify, feels infinitely small as he contemplates the immensity of the universe, or as Heinrich von Kleist described, he is the "sole spark of life in the great realm of death, the solitary center of an empty circle."[19]

Unlike Cole and Friedrich, Joseph Mallord William Turner was not predisposed to painting with a religious theme, but was much more interested in the interplay of light and color. Some critics would argue that there *is* a spiritual quality present in Turner's work even if the subject is not religious in theme. Turner believed that, "the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are unseen are eternal," and his art reminds us that visible nature, however dear to us, however glorious or beautiful, is still just a veil over an unseen universe.[20]

Two of Turner's paintings which embody a religious theme are tributes to Goethe's theories on color. Color theory, as it is known today, was developed in the 1780s and became the standard in 1800; Turner was one of the first painters to understand the importance of light in relation to color. Before the new theories, many people believed that light only made the world visible to the human eye and had no effect on the color they saw.

Figure 3.7: Caspar David Friedrich, *Winter Landscape with Church*, 1811, oil in canvas, $13 \times 18\frac{1}{4}$ inches, National Gallery, London

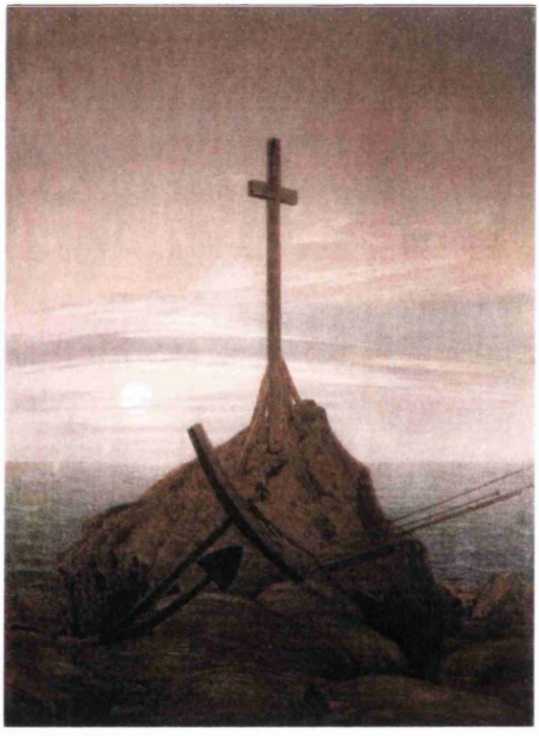


Figure 3.8: Caspar David Friedrich, *Cross on the Baltic*, 1815, oil on canvas, 18×14 inches, Schloss Charlottenburg, Berlin (Galerie der Romantik)

Figure 3.9: John Martin, *The Deluge*, 1828, mezzotint, $18\frac{1}{2} \times 27$ inches, dedicated to Tsar Nicholas I of Russia

Around the time of these paintings, Turner had become familiar with Goethe's *Farbenlehre* (Theory of Colours), who based his analysis not on Newton's spectrum, but on a chromatic circle containing "plus" and "minus" colors. Reds, yellows, and greens were pluses (and warm colors), associated with happiness, gaiety, and joy. Blue, a cold color, is associated with darkness, hence blue and all of its derivatives, purples, violets, etc., suggest sorrow and dejection.[21] Turner paid homage to Goethe's theories and incorporated them into a biblical theme. The story of the Deluge or the Flood with Noah's Ark is full of the majesty and power of God. It is a subject which has been painted many times before, and while Turner's interpretation of the subject is uniquely proprietary, there exist bases for some of his ideas. The two paintings, *Shade and Darkness – The Evening of the Deluge*, 1843 (Plate 5), and *Light and Colour Goethe's Theory – The Morning after the Deluge – Moses Writing the Book of Genesis*, 1843 (Plate 6) are very much alike in shape, size and the compositional structure of the square shape of the canvas with a swirling circular center. In both *Evening* and *Morning* a large central circle, glowing with color and light, suggests a natural process raging out of control. This compositional structure had been used previously by John Martin in *The Deluge* (figure 3.9). *Evening* is full of darkness, doom, and foreboding, while *Morning* has light, warmth, and happiness. The central themes of these paintings show the power of God, the idea of transience, and the Sublime nature of the universe.

Chapter 4

Nature and the Sublime

> *The scenery is not grand, but it has a wild sort of beauty that approaches it: quietness – solitude – the untamed – the unchanged aspect of nature – an aspect which the scene has worn thousands of years, affected only by the seasons, the sunshine and the tempest. We stand on the border of a cultivated plain, and look into the heart of nature.*[22]
>
> – *Thomas Cole*

While Religion is an expression of the Sublime, the vehicle through which it is expressed is God's greatest creation, the Universe. Nature is the natural outlet for the expression of the emotions of the Sublime, since the latter is evoked through the amazement one feels when experiencing nature. All of the artists felt some attraction to the use of nature as the voice through which they expressed their amazement at what we see around us every day, God's great power, or some human struggle. Cole believed that art should be used as a method to instruct, Friedrich's serene portrayal of the world was comforting while still showing the power of God's creation, and Turner was moved by the idea of Hope. They all believed that the artist should depict the world that he or she could see as a way to access the inner meanings within oneself, or as Friedrich felt, "The artist should paint not only what he sees before him; but also what he sees within him."[23] The artist's struggle to achieve this goal resulted in the creation of some of the best paintings in history. Within this group of artists, the paintings which history has chosen as examples of their greatest works were those which attempted to fulfill this goal.

What makes a painting of nature Sublime? The feelings of sublimity emanate from the emotions the viewer experiences when faced with an image, or a sound or a word. Both Burke and Kant agreed that the feelings known as Sublime are aroused when something great and awe inspiring occurs. A quaint field with pretty pastel flowers does not produce the intense feelings of the Sublime, but at most something akin to warm and serene. The Sublime is an extreme. Paintings such as Cole's *Tornado* (figure 4.1) or Turner's *Snowstorm* (figure 4.2) are examples of extremes in nature which inspire extreme feelings in the viewer. But paintings of a great view, like Cole's *The Clove* (figure 4.3) or Friedrich's *Morning Mist in the Mountains* (figure 4.4) can also bring about those feelings of awe or wonder. If a painting evokes these feelings, then it is considered Sublime. Turner is probably best known for his seascapes, like *Sunrise, with a Boat between Headlands* (figure 4.5), but he also painted quite a number of landscapes which have the same intense impact. One of

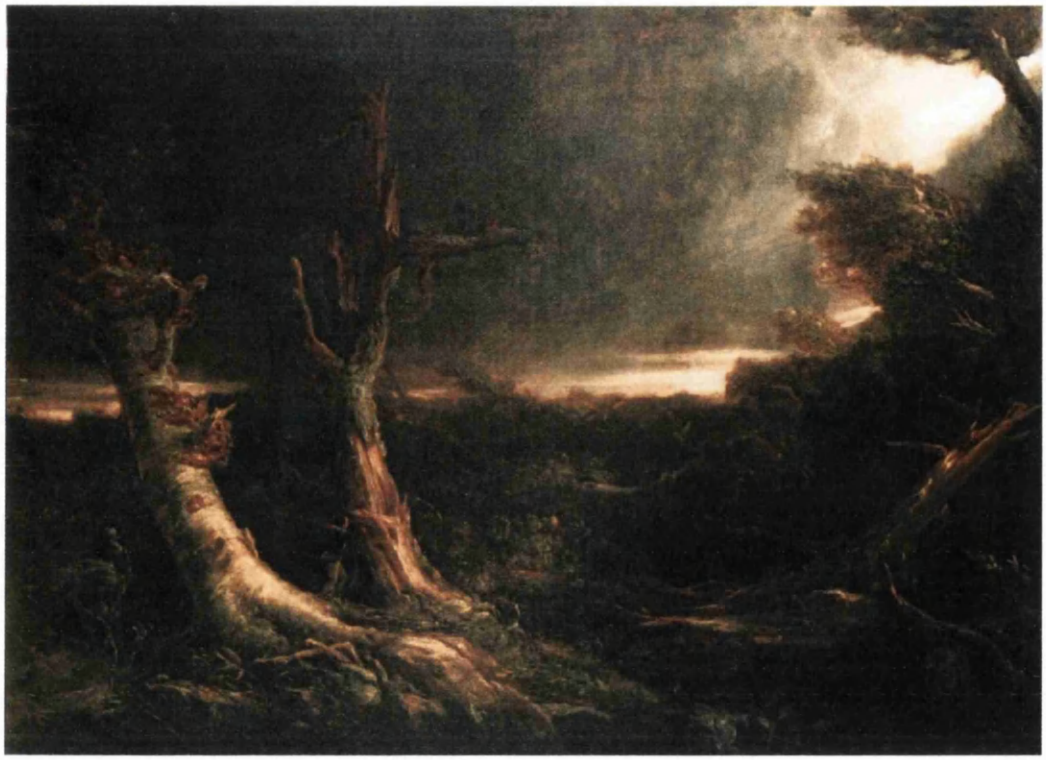


Figure 4.1: Thomas Cole, *Tornado*, 1835, oil on canvas, $46\frac{3}{8} \times 64\frac{5}{8}$ inches, The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

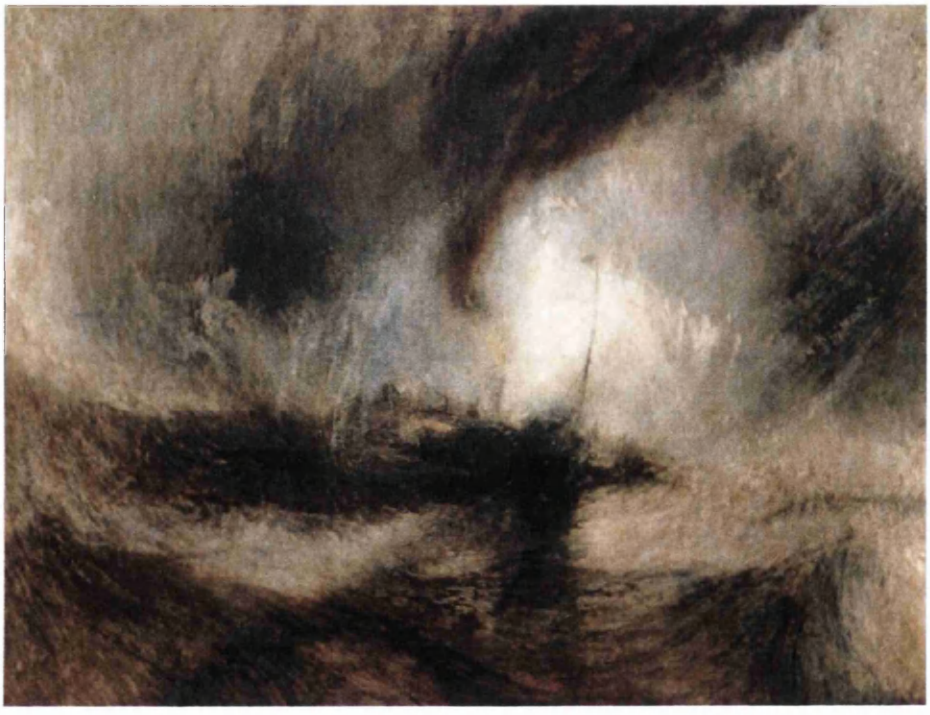


Figure 4.2: Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Snowstorm*, 1842, oil on canvas, 36 × 48 inches, Tate Britain, Clore Gallery for the Turner Collection, London

Figure 4.3: Thomas Cole, *The Clove*, Catskills, 1827, oil on canvas, 25 × 36 inches, Collection of the New Britain Museum of American Art, New Britian, Connecticut

Figure 4.4: Caspar David Friedrich, *Morning Mist in the Mountains*, 1808, oil on canvas, $28 \times 41\frac{1}{2}$ inches, Staatliches Museum, Schloss Heidecksburg, Rudolstadt

Figure 4.5: Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Sunrise, with a Boat between Headlands*, c. 1835-40, oil on canvas, $36 \times 48\frac{1}{4}$ inches, Tate Britain, Clore Gallery for the Turner Collection, London

Turner's most infamous landscapes is *Snowstorm: Hannibal and his Army Crossing the Alps*, 1910-12 (Plate 7). This painting came at the early point in Turner's career when the break-down of form was giving way to his experiments with color. The snowstorm, which moves in from the right side of the painting, takes over the entire mood of the scene, bringing with it a sense of apocalyptic doom. Turner's tribute to a historical event was also meant to be a warning to Britain, then involved in the Napoleonic wars. Turner's innovative landscape and use of format was constantly redeveloped in his later pictures with the focus ever more increasingly on the color and less on forms.

Contrary to Turner, Friedrich's landscapes are entirely about form. One of his major landscapes is actually the seascape *Arctic Shipwreck* from 1823 (Plate 8), which can be understood as a symbol of epochal disaster, encompassing both the futility of human effort and the human capacity to hope against all odds.[24] The image of ice, cracked and disturbed as if a monumental earthquake had just occurred, the small ship barely visible beneath the sea of ice, leaves the viewer with a prevailing sense of doom and foreboding, yet the background is calm and peaceful. Once again, Friedrich uses landscape as a way to convey human emotions, but always with an allusion to the awesome power of God's creation.

Figure 4.6: Caspar David Friedrich, *Winter Landscape*, 1811, oil on canvas, $13 \times 18\frac{1}{4}$ inches, Staatliche Museen, Schwerin

Perhaps his most famous landscape serves as the companion piece to *The Monk by the Sea* (Plate 4). *Abbey in the Oak Wood* (Plate 9) is also a landscape primarily about form and only secondarily about religion. The ruins of an old Gothic Cathedral, based on the ruins of the Cistercian monastery at Eldena in Pomerania, are at the center of this painting's composition. Some consider this was intended as an allusion to the pre-Christian period of natural religion.[25] However, what truly captures the viewer's attention is not the building ruins nor the procession of monks into the open doorway, but rather the light-flooded heavens which offer a promise of the world to come. One of Friedrich's friends, Carl Gustav Carus, described it as "the most profound, poetical work of art in all recent landscape painting."[26] Friedrich's depiction of landscape, whether the only aspect of the painting, as in *Winter Landscape* (figure 4.6), or one of many, as in many of his other works, is always very precise. He is very concerned with details and making the scene as true to life as possible. In this way he is quite distinct from Turner while very much akin to Cole.

Cole's treatment of the landscape is very much like Friedrich, in his fine attention to detail. However, Cole painted some landscapes which were pure nature, without any religious undertones, and others were painted with a dominant social message. *Landscape with Dead Tree* was painted in 1827 (Plate 10), about the time that Cole started to shift

Figure 4.7: Thomas Cole, *The Course of Empire: The Savage State*, 1836, oil on canvas, $39\frac{1}{4} \times 63\frac{1}{4}$ inches, New-York Historical Society, New York City

his subject matter to include a moral or a religious message, yet this painting is a pure celebration of landscape. Although there is no underlying meaning in this painting, it is replete with emotional content. The perspective chosen is from the valley floor looking up to the far distant mountain crests. This choice of perspective heightens the emotional reaction to the painting as the viewer is greeted with this amazing view. The viewer is also faced with a storm-blasted tree, twisted and bare, openly exposing its wounds for all to see. It was this type of work, usually classified as Cole's early work, which was so popular among his clients, and the public was lax to adjust to his works with deeper meanings. In 1836, Cole began his first major series of paintings, *The Course of Empire*. It is a five painting series which charts the rise and fall of an Empire. Starting at the savage state, it shows the path taken from barbarism to civilization to destruction and desolation. *The Savage State* (figure 4.7) is a tribute to Cole's landscape ability. The painting is a pure landscape, complete with expansive views and has a moving effect on the viewer.

Cole's first biblical painting, *The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden*, was not well received by the public, due more to lack of originality than content. His next landscape which had a religious theme was also hard for his public to appreciate, this time mainly because of the landscape. *Saint John in the Wilderness* (Plate 11), also painted in 1827, was a landscape with vast proportions. Saint John is perched high on a cliff which juts out over a deep gorge. There are mountains all around and an abundance of foliage, however the audience criticized the landscape for not resembling the pure American landscape for which he was renowned. Cole creates an imaginary landscape, in part to heighten the sublimity of

the image, and also since he was depicting an image from the Bible for which he had no genuine model. This feeling was common among many artists. A good example is *Sadak in Search of the Waters of Oblivion* (figure 4.8) by John Martin. He too, creates an imaginary landscape to heighten the impact of his piece. Cole's patrons had just recently accepted images of their own country, shortly after which he confused them with ficticious ones. Even so, his imaginary landscapes did gain popularity. *The Course of Empire: Destruction* (figure 4.9) was one of Cole's most elaborately-imagined paintings, and belongs to one of his most popular series. Cole's landscapes, whether imaginary or naturalistic, are full of an intensity which invoke the feelings of the Sublime, filling the viewer with a vast sense of wonder and delight in God's creation, as well as reminding them of the infinite abilities of His powers.

Figure 4.8: John Martin, *Sadak in search of the Waters of Oblivion*, 1812, oil on canvas, 30×25 inches

Figure 4.9: Thomas Cole, *The Course of Empire: Destruction*, 1836, oil on canvas, $39\frac{1}{4}\times63\frac{1}{4}$ inches, New-York Historical Society, New York City

Chapter 5

The Human Element in the Sublime

And at length they announced
that the Gods had ordered such things.
Thus men forgot that
All deities reside in the human breast.[27]

– *William Blake*

As we have seen, the Sublime is a very complicated idea which, when simply stated, is multifaceted, and it is very difficult to separate the idea of nature from religion since the two intimately allude to each other. The final element in the exploration of the Sublime is the presence of human existence. While this theme is easily isolated in paintings of this exhibit, it finds itself continually intertwined with nature or religion since the Sublime is that which *acts on* the human audience. As such, it is not the presence of a human which is Sublime, lest all pictures with human subjects fall into this category. Rather, it is the action of the figure and the context in which the person is placed which creates the Sublime.

Thomas Cole strongly believed that paintings should not only be beautiful but they should also instruct. Most of his late paintings fall into this category since he was much more conscious of his desire to have some moral impact on society. William Blake is another artist who fits very easily into this category. Many of his illuminated books were created to serve as political statements which spoke about the evils he saw in society. Blake, like all of these artists, lived through one of the most turbulent times in history. He saw the American Revolutionary war, the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and was greatly influenced by the changes he witnessed around him. Blake supported the beginnings of the French Revolution with its promise of bringing about a positive change, and was quite disheartened when the reign of terror took over. He was strongly opposed to the Industrial revolution, of which he only saw the beginning, but felt passionately that mechanization would destroy the soul. He thus became convinced that the artist had a new role in society, to be the guardian of the spirit and the imagination.[28]

Turner and Friedrich were much less inclined to include moral or social lessons in their paintings, however both were moved to create pieces of humanistic and humanitarian element. Friedrich's *Stages of Life* from 1835 (plate 12) is full of symbolism and alludes to his own life. This painting, finished five years before his death, was painted the year he suffered a mild stroke. On the beach are figures representing the artist and other members of his family. The old man leaning on the stick is presumed to be Friedrich himself, and is

Figure 5.1: Thomas Cole, *The Voyage of Life: Childhood*, 1839-40, oil on canvas, 52×78 inches, The Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, New York

the only figure looking out to sea, symbolizing the sea of life. The five boats also represent the five figures on the shore. The painting points towards a rich and fulfilled life, with the knowledge that the end is approaching and salvation is at hand.

Thomas Cole's most famous series of paintings also touches on the same themes which exist in Friedrich's piece. *The Voyage of Life* series (Plate 13, figures 5.1, 5.2 & 5.3) consists of a group of four equally-sized paintings depicting the progression of time in the life of one man. The two main figures are the the man, who grows from infant to old man, and that of his guardian angel. The scenery changes in every painting while the man is always on a boat floating down the river of his life. This series offered a simple, straightforward, and conventional Christian allegorical message depicting the "pilgrim's" path through life, concluding in the final work with the promise of eternal salvation.[29] The series was created for contemplation and presents an introspective and melancholy mood, while the series of pictures move from the Beautiful to the Sublime. The first two, *Childhood* (figure 5.1) and *Youth* (figure 5.2), are full of wonder and beauty. The colors are mainly pastel, the landscape is serene and danger does not seem to exist. The figure of the guardian angel guides the young child along the river. The Sublime paintings are the last two, *Manhood* (plate 13) and *Old Age* (figure 5.3). The colors are much more intense and the image is filled with a sense of dread and foreboding. In *Manhood* the figure looks imploringly towards

Figure 5.2: Thomas Cole, *The Voyage of Life: Youth*, 1839-40, oil on canvas, $52\frac{1}{2} \times 78\frac{1}{2}$ inches, The Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, New York

Figure 5.3: Thomas Cole, *The Voyage of Life: Old Age*, 1839-40, oil on canvas, $51\frac{3}{4} \times 78\frac{1}{4}$ inches, The Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, New York

heaven, as if heaven's aid alone could save him from the perils which surround him. The turbulent waters and the demon figures in the clouds of Suicide, Intemperance and Murder act as the temptations one feels when in danger. Cole was a poet as well as a painter and wrote a long poem to accompany and explain his series of paintings. The following is from the third section, corresponding to *Manhood:*

> No more youth's sunshine like a halo spread
> Around the Voyager's high imperial brow;
> But Care's wan shadow settled on his head
> As clouds their gloom upon the mountain throw.
> His now the middle age when human thought
> Ascends her highest tower with rich experience fraught....
>
> "What now can save?" I cried. O ever blind
> But to the present and the mask of things
> Was quick replied: "Doubter! Thou yet mayest find
> That what appears the greatest evil brings
> Supremest good as blackest storms and rain
> Brings freshness, beauty, glory in their passing train....
>
> "This is the crisis – this the decisive hour
> In life's swift fever – balance Life and Death.
> Adversity's cold storm and Sorrow's power
> Temptation desperate with changeful breath
> Bleak with unmitigated fury on the Man,
> And Pleasure once so fair is sicklied o'er and wan....
>
> The Guardian watches yet the weltering bark
> O'er the vexed floods adown the dizzy steep
> Through rock-ribbed channels hideous and dark
> Safely to guide him towards yon Ocean deep
> Whose darkly boundless waves eternal silences keep.[30]

Cole's series ends with the figure, now an old man, finally shown the light of heaven and eternal salvation. Cole's message was one of faith. If one continues to have faith and live life accordingly, then redemption will be the reward.

Unlike Cole and Friedrich, whose religious tone filled even their humanistic works, Turner and Blake explored a human element prompted more by social and historical events, and their messages had more of a moral context. In 1840, Turner painted what was considered to be the most "outstanding work of that year's R.A. show,"[31] *Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying - Typhoon Coming On* otherwise known as *The Slave Ship* (Plate 14). It is one of Turner's most vividly colored and expressive pictures, although the coloration of the sky is very reminiscent of *The Fighting Temeraire* (figure 5.4). Although replete with brilliant and intense crimson reds, the most eye-catching aspects of the painting are the dark black outlines representing the slaves in the water. Turner was

Figure 5.4: Joseph Mallord William Turner, *The Fighting Temeraire Tugged to her Last Berth to be Broken Up*, 1839, oil on canvas, 35 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 48 inches, National Gallery, London

a supporter of the abolition of slavery, and knew William Wilberforce of the Anti-Slavery Society, at whose suggestion he had read Thomas Clarkson's *History of the Abolition of the Slave Trade*. He learned that it was common practice that the sea captains would throw dead or dying slaves overboard while at sea, since the traders could claim insurance for the loss of slaves at sea, while they could not receive any compensation if they died from disease (since far too many were lost that way). These factors may have inspired this picture, or at least the title, since the picture is a Sublime seascape in its own right. John Ruskin was a great admirer of Turner, and an avid collector of his work, and was so moved by this painting that he acquired it. Seeing this picture at the Academy show, he described the sea as "the noblest ever painted."[32] In his book *Modern Painters*, Ruskin wrote one of the most glorious passages describing this painting and the qualities of the sea.

> Between these two ridges the fire of the sunset falls along the trough of the sea, dyeing it with an awful but glorious light, the intense and lurid splendour which burns like gold, and bathes like blood. Along this fiery path and valley, the tossing waves by which the swell of the sea is restlessly divided, lift themselves in dark, indefinite, fantastic forms, each casting a faint and ghastly shadow behind it on the illuminated foam.... Purple and blue, the lurid shadows of the hollow breakers are cast upon the mist of the night, which gathers cold and low, advancing like he shadow of death upon the guilty ship as it labours amidst the lightning sea, its thin masts written upon the sky in lines of blood, girded with condemnation in that fearful hue which signs the sky with horror, and mixes its flaming flood with the sunlight, and, cast far along the desolate heave of the

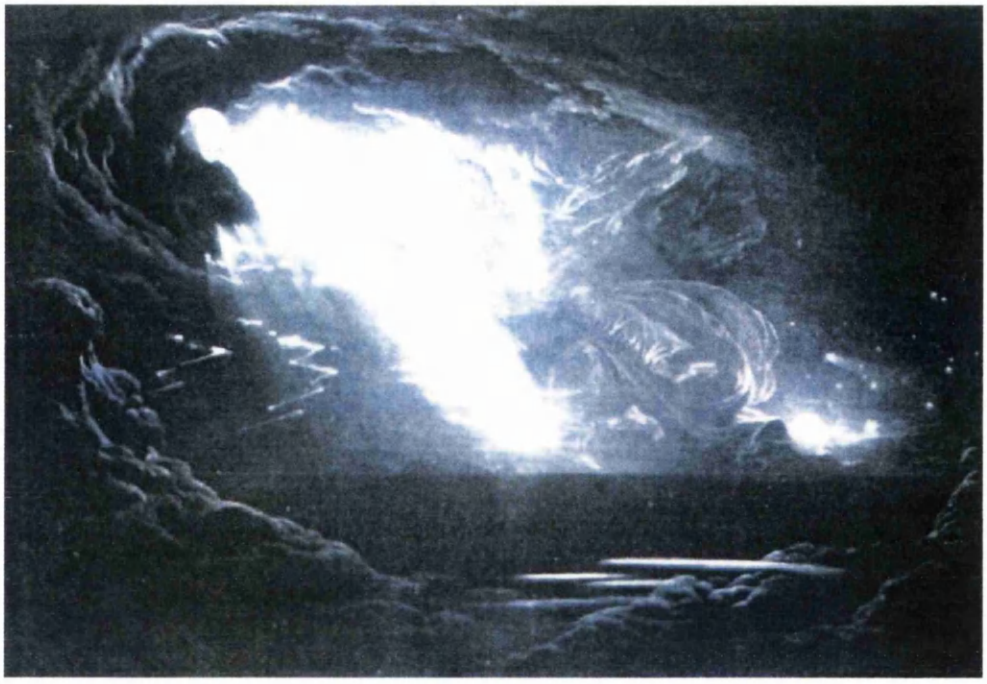


Figure 5.5: John Martin, *The Creation of Light*, mezzotint, $7\frac{1}{2} \times 11$ inches (190×280 mm), from *Paradise Lost*, Book 7, line 339 (first series)

> sepulchral waves, incarnadines (sic.) the multitudinous sea.[33]

Turner's painting, political or not, is a good example of the humanistic Sublime. The best examples, however, can be found in the work of William Blake.

William Blake created many illuminated books over the course of his lifetime, many of which were inspired by current social and political events. His book, *Europe, A Prophecy* is part of his complex mythological cycle relating the history of mankind from creation to the resurrection, paralleled with contemporary events. The poems and the plates of *Europe* discuss the spread of the French Revolution, to which he alludes as the apocalypse of open revolution preceding the resurrection.[34] The text considers the treatment of tyranny and ideological war, while the images depict the misfortunes endured by continental Europe, and also display Blake's awareness of the miseries resulting from war. The frontispiece of *Europe*, commonly known as *The Ancient of Days* (Plate 15), depicts the figure of Urizen kneeling, contained within a circle, using his compass to circumscribe the earth, thereby changing the infinite to finite. This creates an interesting visual and ideological contrast between the creator of a universe and the element of destruction within that same space. This idea was also explored in Martin's mezzotint of *The Creation of Light* (figure 5.5) from his illustrations of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Also inspired by the French Revolution are Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (Plate 16). Two separate works which he later combined, this book represents two contrary states of the human soul, Innocence and

(a) *The Echoing Green* (b) *The Sick Rose*

Figure 5.6: William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, 1804, color print with watercolor, approx. $4\frac{3}{4} \times 2\frac{7}{8}$ inches (120×64 mm)

Experience, and directs attention to dualities at the heart of the Christian tradition.[35]

The text of the two books does not tell a story, rather it is a collection of poems of a certain mindset. *Innocence* was written as a children's book, "And I made a rural pen/ And I stain'd the waters clear/ And I wrote my happy songs,/ Every child may joy to hear."[36] The poems of *Innocence* focus on joyful and protective relationships, on the sense of common identity between individuals. The notion of God enters as an intrinsic presence, visible through the human form. The images in this text are somewhat idyllic, with pastoral fields, greenery and flora (e.g. *The Echoing Green*, figure 5.6a). In contrast to the faith of *Innocence*, *Experience* is a state of disillusionment in which distress breeds anger and a new kind of hope. *Experience* was written to the child, now grown, who has discovered the world is not as idyllic as it once seemed. The poems of *Experience* emphasize the fearful selfishness of the human heart, and the confusion and tyranny which grows from attempts to rationalize this selfishness. The images which accompany these poems are darker in color and in idea. Whereas everything was alive and blossoming in *Innocence*, in *Experience* it is sick, lost or dying (e.g. *The Sick Rose*, figure 5.6b). The combination of the two works results in a message full of the Sublime. It looks at the world and shows the power of God, yet reminds its readers to be mindful lest they bring upon themselves the evils awaiting us all on our voyage of life.

Chapter 6

The Twentieth Century Sublime

The self, terrible and constant, is for me the subject matter of painting.[37]

– *Barnett Newman*

The Sublime, as we have now experienced it, is an all encompassing idea which applies itself to all elements of life. While religion is the context through which most artists connected to the Sublime, the beginning of the nineteenth century saw artists no longer wishing to depict their religious feelings through typical iconography as the world became increasingly secularized. Instead, they chose to use landscape and nature to evoke and achieve the same feelings of religious belief and experiences. They blurred the distinction between the natural world they represented and the supernatural world to which they were alluding.

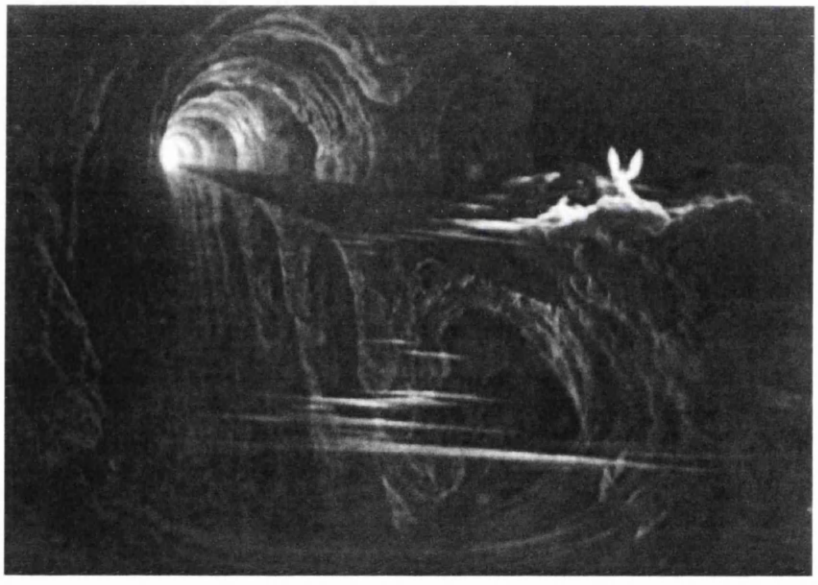


Figure 6.1: John Martin, *The Bridge over Chaos*, mezzotint, $7\frac{1}{2} \times 10\frac{2}{3}$ inches (190×271 mm), from Paradise Lost, Book 10, lines 312, 347 (first series)

The reemergence of these impulses occurred again in the twentieth century after another historical event of apocalyptic dimensions and implications, the Second World War. Many of these artist are classified as "Abstract Expressionists," their work containing the Romantic search for an art that could convey a sensation of overpowering mystery, and in the case of Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman, also explicit religious associations. Artists of this period all looked for inspiration to the painters from the Northern Romantic landscape

tradition, especially John Martin and Turner, who were haunted by apocalyptic visions which turned matter and the works of man into swirling, cosmic upheavals.[38] For example, Martin's *The Bridge over Chaos* (figure 6.1) is full of the apocalyptic images of epic proportion for which the Romantic movement was famous. Jackson Pollock was Turner's most natural descendent. Both were successful in transforming palpable paint into shimmering whirlwinds of impalpable energy. William Hazlett once described Turner's painting as "pictures of the elements of air, earth, and water. The artist delights to go back to the first chaos of the world...All is without form and void. Some one said of his landscapes that they were *pictures of nothing and very like.*"[39] This description could equally well be applied to a Pollock, Newman, or Rothko.

The style of thinking employed by Turner, Blake, Friedrich and Cole in relation to the world and how to depict and evoke emotion saw a resurgence with Barnett Newman around 1946 (in the aftermath of Hiroshima). Newman however painted with a complete lack of pictorial representation, everything instead in abstraction with the ideas suggested by the titles. In a work like *The Covenant* (figure 6.2) from 1946 the intrusion of a divine shaping force is introduced by the shaft of piercing white light which divides the two sides of the canvas, the elements water from earth, or air from fire. This image is very much like Blake's

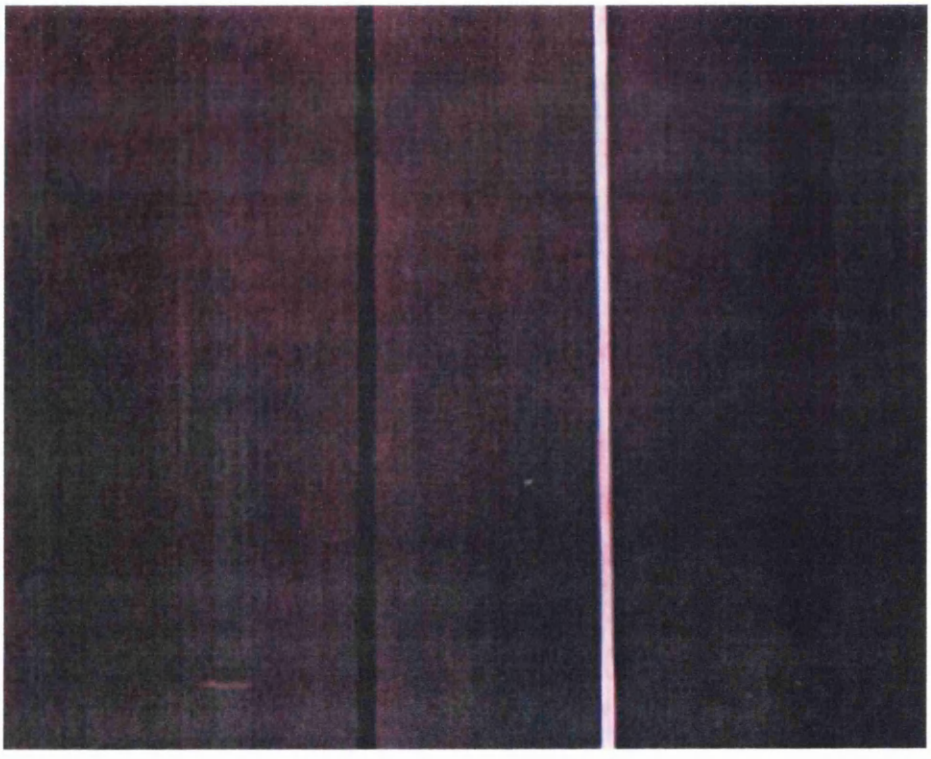


Figure 6.2: Barnett Newman, *Covenant*, 1949, oil on canvas, 48×60 inches, Hirshhirn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C.

Ancient of Days (Plate 15) who also emerges from the background chaos to impose a shape upon the universe's beginnings. In 1948, Newman completed *Onement I* (plate 17) which marked the beginning of the transition of the Abstract Expressionist movement. It has been suggested that the painting is again representing the idea of creation, and there have been references made to Kabbalistic texts which describe the first creation of man. The stripe of color which neatly bisects the painting in half, Newman named a 'zip' which represents an image of indivisible strength, a single line of energy, something which unifies as it divides.[40] Newman sought mystical inspiration from a variety of religious sources from many different sects, since any one religion was too limiting in thought to fit his idea of reaching many people. But within all of the religions that he looked at, he always pursued the Sublime and the visionary, dealing with the ultimate mysteries of creation, of divinity, of death and resurrection, as is seen in many of his titles.[41]

Mark Rothko, like Newman, also believed in the annihilation of form, a whittling down of ideas to color and shapelessness until all that is left is an emotion. Rothko's format of bands of color, placed in translucent layers on top of each other, very much like Friedrich's painting *Evening* (figure 6.3) or Turner's *Pink Sky* (figure 6.4), sometimes employed as little as two to as many as five different colors, and was the format he explored for the last two decades of his life, e.g. *Untitled* 1955 (figure 6.5). The source of this basic configuration can be found in Turner's work, who achieved a disintegration of all matter into a luminous field of light and color as in his painting *Angel Standing in the Sun* (figure 6.6); and in Friedrich who also, on more than one occasion, placed the spectator before an abyss which made them question traditional faith and imagery, such as in *The Traveler overlooking the Sea of Fog* (figure 6.7). Although the ideas illustrated by these two artists were the backbone for Rothko's work, he was not at all interested in representation. He once explained,

> I am not interested in relationship of color or form or anything else... I am interested only in expressing the basic human emotions – tragedy, ecstasy, doom, and so on – and the fact that a lot of people break down and cry when confronted with my pictures shows that I *communicate* with those basic human emotions. The people who weep before my pictures are having the same religious experience I had when I painted them. And if you, as you say, are moved only by their color relationships, then you miss the point.[42]

The painting *Green on Blue* from 1956 (Plate 18) is very reminiscent in format to Friedrich's *Monk by the Sea.* The large expanse of color leaves us with a sense of calm, and the ability to contemplate the universe, much like the lone monk staring out to sea. The ability of Rothko's paintings to conjure an emotional and religious response lead to the creation of the Rothko Chapel (Figure 6.8) in Houston, Texas where persons of any faith may go to try and find meaning. Of the eight walls, three contain triptychs, four have single

Figure 6.3: Caspar David Friedrich, *Evening*, 1824, oil on cardboard, 8 × 10 inches, Kunsthalle, Mannheim

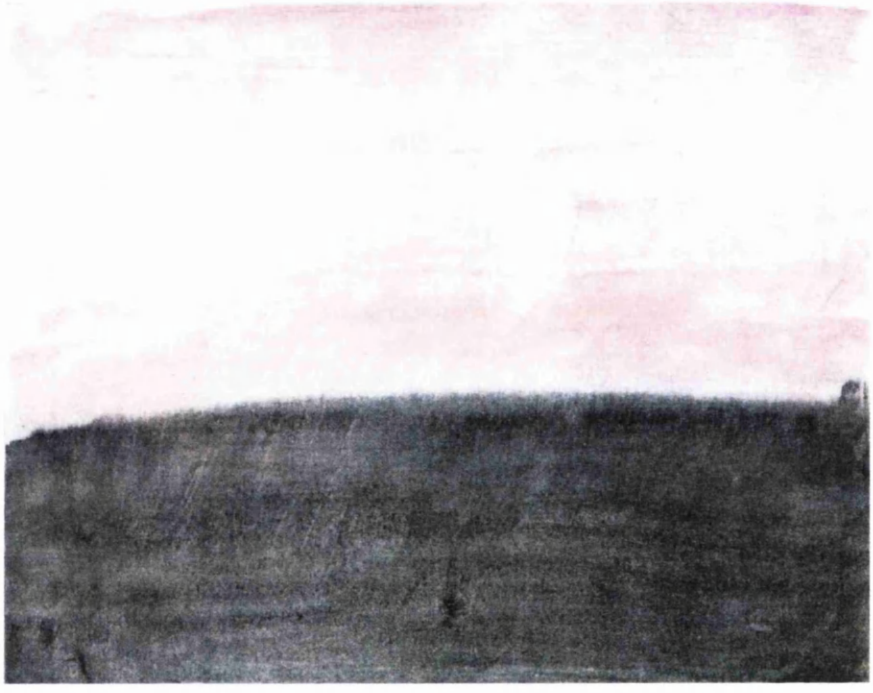


Figure 6.4: Joseph Mallord William Turner, *The Pink Sky*, after 1820, watercolor, $7\frac{1}{4} \times 8\frac{7}{8}$ inches, British Museum, London

Figure 6.5: Mark Rothko, *Untitled*, 1955, oil on canvas, $81\frac{1}{2} \times 59\frac{5}{8}$ inches, collection of Kate Rothko Prizel

panels with the entrance in the remaining wall. The paintings create their own hierarchy of mood, shape, and sequence, of uniqueness and duplication, of increasingly dark and somber variations of plum, maroon, and black, suggesting some new religious ritual of indefinable yet universal dimension. It is in these abstractions of artists such as Rothko and Newman that we see the most exposed purpose of the Sublime, that which evokes profound emotion through its intimate relationship with the viewers and their world experience.

Figure 6.6: Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Angel Standing in the Sun*, 1846, oil on canvas, $30\frac{3}{4} \times 30\frac{3}{4}$ inches, Tate Gallery, Clore Gallery for the Turner Collection, London

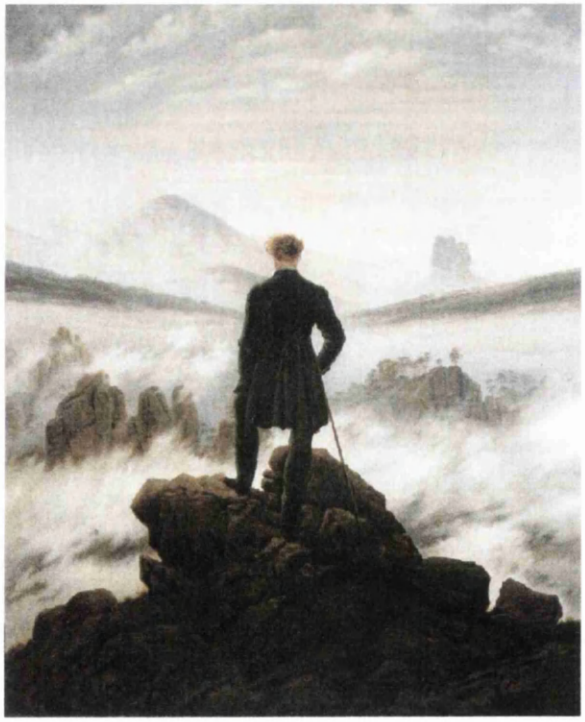


Figure 6.7: Caspar David Friedrich, *Traveler looking over a Sea of Fog*, c. 1818, oil on canvas, $37\frac{1}{3} \times 29\frac{1}{4}$ inches, Kunsthalle, Hamburg

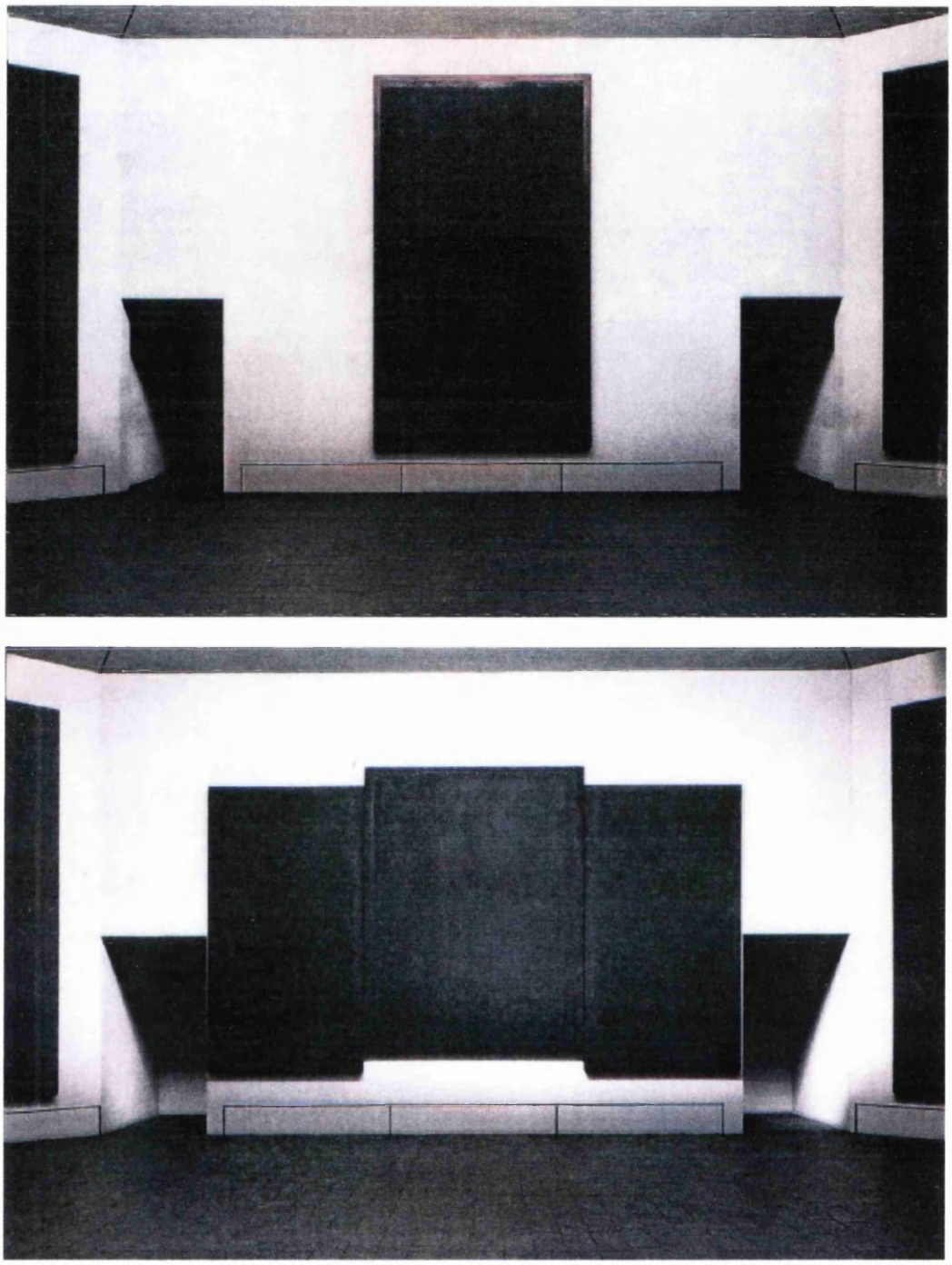


Figure 6.8: *top:* Installation view, south wall: south entrance-wall painting flanked by southeast and southwest angle-wall paintings *bottom:* Installation view, west wall: west black-figure triptych flanked by southwest and northwest angle wall paintings, Rothko Chapel, Houston, Texas, 1991

Chapter 7

Conclusion

This exhibit begins with the simple question, "What is Sublime?" Through everyday analogy, artists and imagery, we have explored a rich tapestry in which religion, nature and the human element evoke profound emotions of awe, terror and delight. We feel the amazing and often dreadful power of God in nature, experience the grandeur of the world around us, propagate through the journey of life, face our mortality and glimpse the eternal.

In our journey, we now reach the final question with which we began our inquiry, "What makes an artist Sublime?" The common link between the art and artists in this exhibition is not the theme, colour, or style of depiction, but rather that each artist was searching for his own way to access the sacred and religious in a world that becomes increasingly secularized and profane through time. With the onset of massive wars and revolutions over religion, place in and later progress of society, it is no surprise that the people of these times were forced to find new ways to access sources of divinity, since it could no longer be seen in the daily routines of life. A. Codd explained in reference to Turner

> All Art is necessarily incomplete without Religion. The Art which can only express the hopes and fears, the joys and grief, the vain thoughts and imaginations of mortal men, must needs fall short of finality and fail to satisfy out inherent sense of infinite...But by the manifestation of infinite light, it should properly lead our thoughts onward to the eternal life which is clothed therein.[43]

All the artists in this exhibition tried, in their own way, to access the eternal. Pious or not, they all deeply felt that which is most Sublime in the universe is God and his ability to create. The Sublime is the manifestation of feelings from encountering the supreme power of God. As such, Sublime art is that which invokes this experience. And since each of us must experience this for ourselves, that which is Sublime is intimately dependent on the world-experience of the viewer. It is not a rational question of subjectivity, but a visceral apprehension of our emotional state, a reaction to the most profound and powerful emotional connections. As with Rothko's chapel, the Sublime transcends the formal boundaries of culture, geography and sectarian religion and offers us a universal glimpse at ourselves and the eternal.

Part II

Catalogue of Works

Plate 1

William Blake (English)
Elohim Creating Adam, 1795
color print finished in ink and watercolor
$17 \times 21\frac{1}{4}$ inches (43.1×53.6 cm)

Tate Gallery, London
Presented by W. Graham Robertson

Elohim is one of the Hebrew names for God, the creator in the Book of Genesis and representing God in his aspect as Justice; the name can also be translated as "judges." This image depicts the creation of Adam by God. The two figures fill the majority of the image space, and behind God's magnificent wings is the hint of the rising sun, indicating a new dawn. This image is one in a series which are tied together by their individuality; there is no definite thematic continuity in this series, its topics ranging from the Bible to Shakespeare. Yet all the images possess a delicate quality which reminds us of Blake's formal training as an engraver. Even if the image is a plate, no two are identical. Blake treated each image as if it were a fresh canvas, and subsequently, each image has a unique quality about it.

In this design, Blake stresses the negative aspect of the Creation: Man's enslavement to the material world is symbolized by the worm, emblem of mortality, that entwines Adam. There is pain expressed on the face of Adam, as if he knows that all too soon he must face the pain of life and the Universe. God is shown as the concerned, benevolent father who places his hand on Adam's head in a gesture of blessing. Many artists of Blake's generation depicted the ideas of creation, as the basis in the exploration of their feelings rooted in God. There are no other known versions of this specific image, however one other copy may exist since a complete set of prints was offered to a client in 1818, while this version had been sold in 1805 to Thomas Butts.

Plate 1: William Blake, *Elohim Creating Adam*

Plate 2

William Blake (English)
Death on a Pale Horse, c. 1800
pen, Indian ink, grey wash and watercolor
$15\frac{1}{2} \times 12\frac{1}{4}$ inches (39.5×31.1 cm)

Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

This subject is taken from Revelation verse 8: "And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat upon him was Death, and Hell followed with him." This drawing comes from a series of illustrations of the Bible, commissioned by Thomas Butts over a ten-year period from 1799 to 1809. At the time of this commision, Blake was already well known for creating moving biblical images. A few years prior he had finshed a series of prints ranging in subject matter from the Bible to Shakespeare (e.g. Plate 1).

In this image, Death is depicted as a king in armor, the type of Urizen in the prophetic books of the Lambeth period. Death is seen, therefore, as a warlike, destructive tyrant. A possible source which Blake may have used can be found in the engraving of the same subject by John Hamilton Mortimer, in which Death appears as a crowned skeleton. The Apocalypse and the apocalyptic visions, occuring at the end of time, were a very popular topic among artists of Blake's time period. Many artists created images from these ideas because the emotions of terror and amazement were easily evoked in the minds of the viewers. The fear of "the end of days" was a subject which many took very seriously, and images created on this topic were also treated with reverence and trepidation.

Plate 2: William Blake, *Death on a Pale Horse*

Plate 3

Thomas Cole (American)
Expulsion from the Garden of Eden, 1827-28
oil on canvas
39×54 inches (99×137 cm)

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
M. and M. Karolik Collection

Cole painted this picture at the time in his life when he was becoming more religious and wanted to incorporate moral messages into the landscapes which he loved. When first presented to the public, this piece was not well received for two reasons. First, the public considered the composition to lack originality; Cole had most likely taken his inspiration from the mezzotint by John Martin of the same subject (figure 3.4). Secondly, this piece arrived at a time when the public was just beginning to appreciate realistic and naturalistic paintings, and its landscape was harshly criticized for not resembling any American landscape. When the painting was exhibited at Cole's memorial exhibition in 1848 at the American Art-Union, the last lines of Milton's *Paradise Lost* describing the sad departure of Adam and Eve from Paradise were appended onto the title:

> The brandished sword of God before them blazed,
> Fierce as a comet; which with torrid heat,
> And vapour as the Libyan air adjust,
> Began to parch that temperate clime[44]

Cole used the description from these lines to help him in painting the left side of the composition, the barren desert land where they were expelled, after God had cursed the ground when he discovered their sin. Although Adam and Eve appear to be suffering for their misdeeds, the right side of the composition, the Garden of Eden, dominates the picture and greatly contrasts with the bleak landscape on the left.

This painting was originally part of a pair; the other painting of the Garden of Eden is now lost. Cole felt that he was attempting a "higher style of landscape" and gave each painting a distinctive quality. In *Garden of Eden* he stressed tranquility, indicating the Beautiful; while in *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* he showed the difference between the two worlds, indicating the Sublime.

The idea of Religion is closely linked with the Sublime and Cole, like the other artists in this show, used nature as a setting for a religious event or experience, and as a means to attain the Sublime feelings of awe and exaltation.

Plate 3: Thomas Cole, *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden*

Plate 4

Caspar David Friedrich (German)
Monk by the Sea, 1809-10
oil on canvas
$43\frac{1}{4} \times 67\frac{1}{2}$ inches (110×171.5 cm)

Nationalgalerie, Berlin
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (Galerie der Romantik)

This painting is one of the most radical of Friedrich's works. In no other work did he break so completely with the traditional notions of landscape painting. Part of a pair, the other piece, *Abbey in the Oakwood* (Plate 9), has a very different feeling and message. When *The Monk* was first seen in Friedrich's studio, it did not appeal to many of the visitors, and they mainly commented on the vastness and loneliness of the scene. The calm sky and the wide expanse of sea seemed unsettling to many, with one visitor commenting "even a thunderstorm would be a consolation and a pleasure."[45]

When examining what was written about this picture during its two years in Friedrich's studio, it becomes clear that Friedrich made changes to the initial composition. Originally, he was to include two boats on the horizon line, and the sky would have been stormier to match. All of the changes he made while working on the picture served to simplify its subject and sharpen its impact. The tiny figure of the monk is the only vertical element in the painting, and it gives one the feeling of being at the mercy of space, of helplessness in the face of an incomprehensible nature. The monk draws us into the picture and forces us to identify with his situation; the viewer becomes him, and he is each of us.

The mood of the picture was described accurately by Werner Hofmann,

> The unusual compositional device that gives the picture its solemnity is... monotony. Its horizontality is monotonous. Its space, divided into planes, has immense depth, but no yearning for the distant, originating in man and flowing back to him. The depth is withheld from man, he is not equal to it; it no longer soars above him like the space pictures heretofore, infinite yet controlled by perspective. This infiniaty is threatening to man; he is at its mercy but incapable of adopting it. The narrow base on which he stands shrinks to nothingness when compared to the all-encompassing magnitude of space.[46]

It is the emptiness of space which fills the viewer with a sense of fear, awe, and the knowledge that there is a divine power which created such views. Every aspect of this picture is calculated, and it makes us stand still. There is no place for the viewer to enter into the picture except for the narrow part of the shore line where the monk stands. Nor does the painting really end at the borders of its frame, but seems to extend onwards to infinity.

Plate 4: Caspar David Friedrich, *Monk by the Sea*

Plate 5

Joseph Mallord William Turner (English)
Shade and Darkness - The Evening of the Deluge, 1843
oil on canvas
$31 \times 30\frac{3}{4}$ inches (78.5×78 cm)

Tate Britain, Clore Gallery for the Turner Collection, London

This painting, one of a pair (see Plate 6), was considered one of the oddest yet most enthralling Turner had ever exhibited. The painting is supposed to depict the night of the flood, and some animals can be faintly seen in the foreground. The painting is also based in part on Goethe's *Theory of Color*, with which he was familiar. Goethe's theories based on experience rather than mathematics appealed to Turner, since as an artist he was skeptical of many of Goethe's ideas.

Most interesting to Turner was Goethe's theory on the analysis of colors. Goethe based this on a chromatic circle of color, now the method adopted by modern artists, where he considered "plus" and "minus" colors. Reds, Yellows, and Greens were pluses, and also identified with the emotions of happiness, gaiety, joy – also all associated with warmth. Blue and all of its derivatives, purples and violets, are considered cold colors and suggest sorrow and dejection.

Turner intended to test these theories in this pair of paintings, in which *Shade and Darkness* is a very dark and gloomy painting. Turner wrote a poem to accompany the picture, filled with foreboding:

> The moon put forth her sign of woe unheeded;
> But disobedience slept; the dark'ning Deluge closed around
> And the last token came: the giant framework floated,
> The roused birds forsook their nightly shelters screaming,
> And the beasts waded to the ark.
> – *The Fallacies of Hope*[47]

The dark, swirling composition focuses our attention on the intensity of the storm, and hence God's power. Most of the painting is filled with the energy of the swirling center, while on the bottom are some of the animals about the enter the ark. The structure of this painting, in its nearly pure abstraction, helps us understand why Turner was so influential on many of the abstract art movements to follow in the twentieth century.

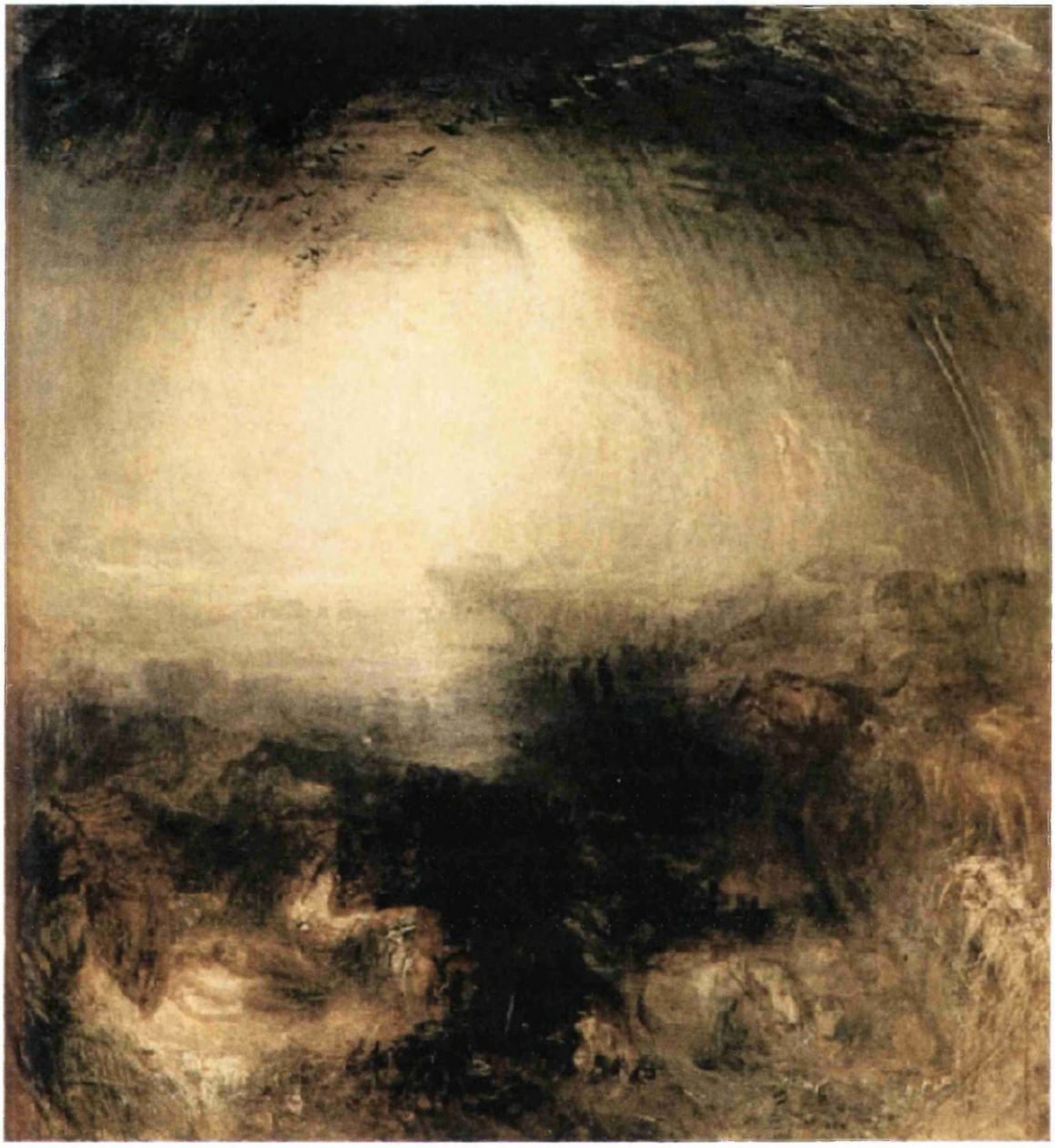


Plate 5: Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Shade and Darkness – The Evening of the Deluge*

Plate 6

Joseph Mallord William Turner (English)
Light and Colour (Goethe's Theory) – The Morning after the Deluge – Moses Writing the Book of Genesis, 1843
oil on canvas
31×31 inches (78.5×78.5 cm)

Tate Britain, Clore Gallery for the Turner Collection, London

This painting has a much lighter feel than its partner (plate 5). The atmosphere of doom has been lifted partially, because of Turner's use of the "plus" color palette. Both paintings have a central whirlpool of color, swirling and pulling the viewer in toward the center. In this painting, the center is the figure of Moses, considered to be a foreboding figure. The "earth-bubbles" have been given human faces by Turner, which is related to Goethe's idea that the origin of prismatic colors can be seen in the surface of a bubble. Turner also placed them in the painting to indicate the transience of nature. This idea is further supported by the verse which Turner attached to the painting as the Royal Academy catalogue entry:

> The ark stood firm on Ararat; th' returning sun
> Exhaled earth's humid bubbles, and emulous of light,
> Reflected her lost forms, each in prismatic guise
> Hope's harbinger, ephemeral as the summer fly
> Which rises, flits, expands, and dies.
> – The Fallacies of Hope[48]

These two paintings, interpreted through the poems Turner attached, take on qualities of apocalyptic dreams. Rather than merely recording a disaster, the two canvases concentrate on elemental events happening in the paint itself, vortices in which the figures of the story, human and animal, are caught up and divested of all individual presence and the ability to influence their fate. Turner's interpretation poeticized the landscape, but always employed light and color as the central focus.

Plate 6: Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Light and Colour (Goethe's Theory) – The Morning after the Deluge – Moses Writing the Book of Genesis*

Plate 7

Joseph William Mallord Turner (English)
Snowstorm: Hannibal and his Army Crossing the Alps, 1910-12
oil on canvas
58×94 inches (144.7×236 cm)

Tate Britain, Clore Gallery for the Turner Collection, London

This work is the first example of Turner's extraordinary innovation in composition, the design not based on traditional horizontals, verticals and diagonals but on irregular intersecting arcs. The storm enters the painting from the right side in a wave of dark clouds moving across the painting like a hand, about to engulf the people on the bottom of the painting, like an apocalyptic omen. The dull orange disk of the sun breaking through the dense black cloud is an unexpected constance in the midst of all of this chaos.

The inspiration for this work may have originated in John Robert Cozens's painting of the same subject, but the storm was based on actual observations made by Turner in 1810 while staying with Walter Fawkes in Yorkshire. Turner watched the beginning of a storm roll in and then turned to Fawkes's son and said that in two years time he would produce a painting with that storm in it and would name it *Hannibal Crossing the Alps.*[49]

Few who came to see the picture at the Royal Academy in 1812 realized that Turner considered his canvas to be a warning to Britain, not to suffer the same fate by Napoleon that the Italians did from Hannibal. While Turner may have wanted this painting to act as a message of warning, it is nonetheless one of his first landscapes where the landscape takes second stage to the importance placed on light and color. This painting represents the critical starting point for the rest of Turner's career.

Plate 7: Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Snowstorm: Hannibal and his Army Crossing the Alps*

Plate 8

Caspar David Friedrich (German)
Arctic Shipwreck, 1823
oil on canvas
38×50 inches (96.7×126.9 cm)

Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg

This painting has long been confused with another of Friedrich's pieces, *The Wreck of the "Hoffnung,"* from 1822, now lost. This lost piece served as the pattern for *Arctic Shipwreck.* The former was a commission from the collector J.G. von Quandt, who wanted Friedrich to paint a scene of the North, with the companion piece of the South given to a different artist. Friedrich's inspiration came from stories circulating in newspapers about disasters which had occurred in the Polar Sea.

This painting, though the second version of a fictitious event, still conjures in the viewer the feeling of witnessing a great and horrifying disaster. Friedrich chose the unusual motif largely as a symbol of the inaccessible majesty of God. The persistent existence of ice in the Polar Sea signifies God's eternal being, while the wrecked ship denotes man's impotence and mortality. The composition and color scheme seem to express the solemnity, and Sublime qualities of the scene, making it all the more religious in feeling.

Many people have seen this painting as a political statement. In 1931, Georg Schmidt thought it might have been produced out of the aftermath of the wars of liberation from Napoleon.[50] It has also been compared to Théodore Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa* for political reasons, but also as a way to differentiate between Romanticism in Germany and in France – one focuses on high drama and the preservation of mankind, the other on solemnity and the triumph of nature.

Plate 8: Caspar David Friedrich, *Arctic Shipwreck*

Plate 9

Caspar David Friedrich (German)
Abbey in the Oak Wood, 1809-10
oil on canvas
$43\frac{1}{2} \times 67\frac{1}{4}$ inches (110.4×171 cm)

Nationalgalerie, Berlin
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (Galerie der Romantik)

The companion piece to *Monk by the Sea* (Plate 4), *Abbey in the Oakwood* has been called "perhaps the most profoundly poetic work in all of modern landscape painting."[51] In the years after his death, this painting was referred to as Friedrich's masterpiece. It was first conceived as a companion piece to the *Monk,* and it is not uncommon in Friedrich's work to find paintings paired together despite different subject matter, coloring and composition.

Upon closer inspection, one finds these two to be less distinct than they superficially appear. The gloomy sea with the monk meditating on life and its boundaries, about death and what follows, is not dissimilar from the dark and dismal scenery in this piece, clouds of mist rising, the open doorway to death (the open grave) and the procession of the monks through the portal of the abbey to the shining light of eternity. This painting is most definitely rooted in this world, pointing to (in *Monk*) the world to come.

Some consider these two paintings are autobiographical. Friedrich had been known to have drawn his own funeral procession, and it is not difficult to interpret this painting as the funeral procession of the monk in the companion picture. If the viewer requires a narrative sequence to understand the meaning of this pair, the interpretation is open to the order of the pieces. Nonetheless, both paintings possess the spiritual quality for which Friedrich was famous, and it is the combination of his interest in depicting nature (because of its relation to God) with a Christian approach to life which helps us understand the meaning for which Friedrich was striving.

Plate 9: Caspar David Friedrich, *Abbey in the Oak Wood*

Plate 10

Thomas Cole (American)
Landscape with Dead Tree, 1827-28
oil on canvas
$26\frac{1}{2} \times 32\frac{1}{2}$ inches (67×83 cm)

Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence

This picture is one of Cole's most-famous pure landscapes. It shows his adherence to the ideas of picturesque composition with the massing of light and dark forms with somewhat exaggerated foreground effects. Even though the formal layout belongs to the picturesque school, the ideas depicted very much follow Sublime thought. This painting is the bridge of transition between Cole painting in the picturesque and the Romantic/Sublime style. Although the picturesque would have continuing interest for Cole, as he would employ some of its principles in his outdoor landscapes, the Sublime began to dominate the foreground of his compositions through the light and drama of scenes.

Cole, and other artists of his time, were inspired by the wilderness, and sought to communicate their ideas by employing the associationist philosophy of Archibald Alison. Associationist doctrine acknowledged the presence of God in the landscape and insisted that this symbolic presence could be seen and experienced particularly in the American landscape because it was untamed. Alison's theories complimented feelings of the beautiful and Sublime by associating those feelings of awe, reverence and fear with aspects of the natural landscape. Cole's fusion of the doctrine of associationism with the picturesque enabled him to produce landscapes which were in a class of their own.

Plate 10: Thomas Cole, *Landscape with Dead Tree*

Plate 11

Thomas Cole (American)
Saint John in the Wilderness, 1827
oil on canvas
36×28 be inches (91×73 cm)

Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut

This painting was originally painted for Robert Gilmor, one of Cole's most generous patrons, and is almost an autobiographical work since Cole had developed a deep sympathy for the biblical prophets. Cole identified with them in his own attempts to gain access to a higher spiritual level, through the experiences and interpretation of the American landscape. This painting was executed during the time Cole was making his transition from the picturesque to the Sublime.[52]

The imaginary landscape inhabited by the tiny people does not possess the flavor of the Catskill mountains (Cole's defining American subject matter). Rather, the scale of the landscape indicates a more imaginative composition than the picturesque principles allowed, and the palm trees on the left side clearly place it outside the experience of American landscape in a literal sense. The grandeur of the landscape had to equal the grandeur of the religious association. In scale the picture is bordering on the Sublime. It is not too farfetched to consider that for Cole, religious figures such as St. John could serve as intermediaries between the solitary wanderer in the wilderness and God. Aware and overwhelmed by the immensity of nature and its total indifference to the individual, Cole may have needed to personify aspects of nature in order to bring it into some kind of relationship with himself; perhaps Cole used the figure of St. John to personify religious impulses he himself felt when in nature.[53]

Plate 11: Thomas Cole, *Saint John in the Wilderness*

Plate 12

Caspar David Friedrich (German)
Stages of Life, c.1835
oil on canvas
$28\frac{1}{2} \times 37$ inches (72.5×94 cm)

Museum der bildenden Künste, Leipzig

This painting has been referred to as one of Friedrich's most profound pictures, in part because its meaning is, for the most part, still a mystery. The painting contains a group of five people sitting on the shore in front of the sea, with five boats in the sea returning from a voyage. The center boat is not far from shore and they have already begun to take down the sails. Of the five people present, the old man in the foreground is the only one looking out to sea. The woman and the two children are engaged with each other, and the other man is facing the viewers, inviting them into the painting. If the ships correspond, in some unusual way, to the figures on the shore, is there meaning in the number of ship and their placement on the sea?

Most scholars agree that the collection of people in this picture is Friedrich's family, and that Friedrich is the figure of the old man with the walking stick. This was painted the year Friedrich suffered from a stroke, from which he would never full recover and which would end his life five years later. Friedrich might have known that he had few years left to live, and it has been suggested that the male figure facing the viewers is Friedrich's nephew Heinrich, whose gesture may be considered a promise to care for the artist's family after his death.[54]

It could have been that Friedrich had meant this painting as a last self-portrait, the earliest one disguised in *Monk by the Sea* twenty-eight years prior. The rich harmonies of the evening light are at their most vivid near the shore and symbolize the intensity of religious experience toward the end of one's life.

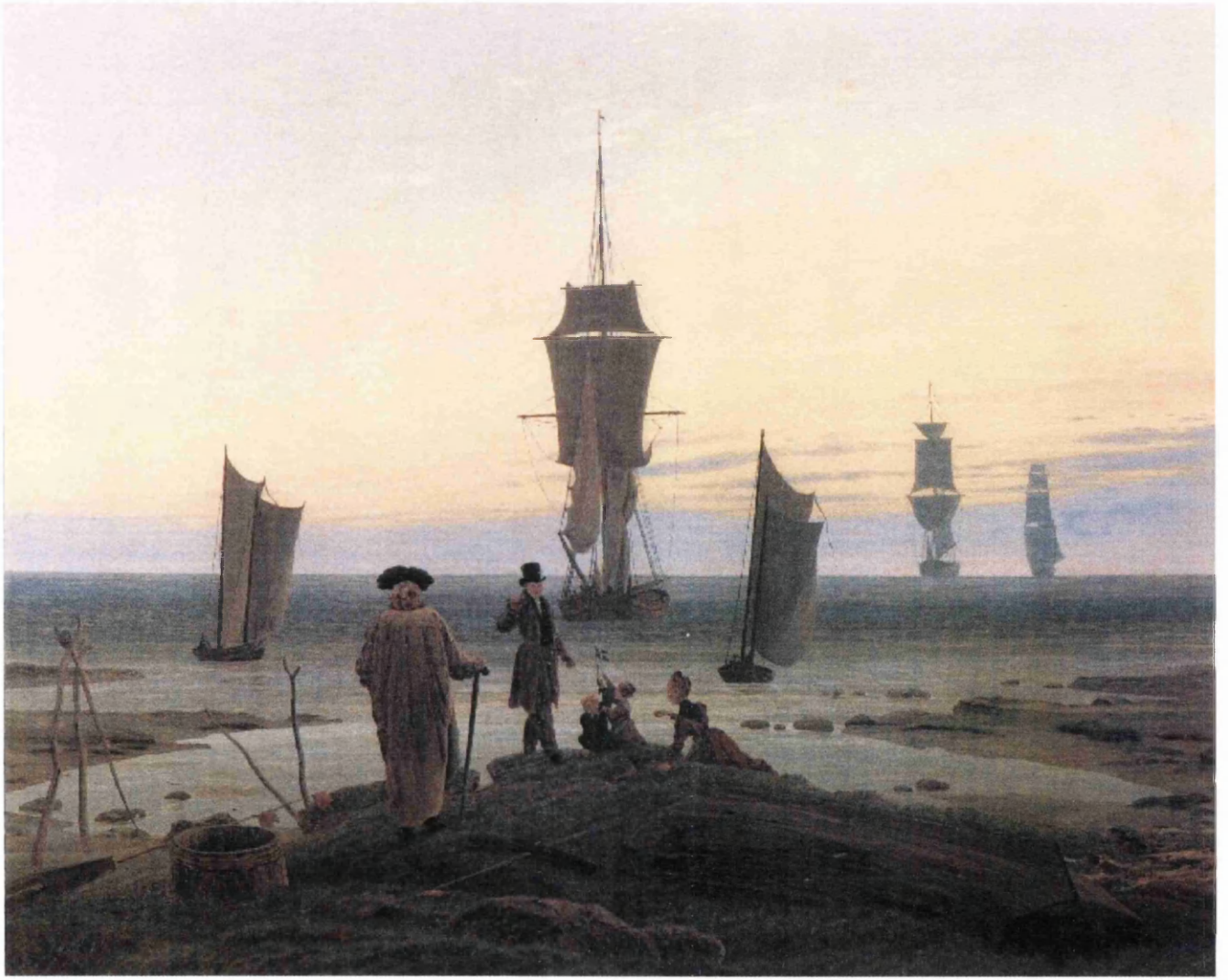


Plate 12: Caspar David Friedrich, *Stages of Life*

Plate 13

Thomas Cole (American)
The Voyage of Life: Manhood, 1840
oil on canvas
52×78 inches (130×195 cm)

The Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, New York

Cole's most famous series, *The Voyage of Life*, was commissioned by Samuel Ward, who ironically, did not live to see it completed. The four paintings – *Childhood, Youth, Manhood*, and *Old Age* (see figures 5.1, 5.2 & 5.3) – are concerned with the stages of life, the passage of time, and personal salvation through religion. In the set, the colors change symbolically from greens and flowery pastels in the first two works, to the dramatic colors of *Manhood*, to the unearthly, translucent shimmer of the heavens in *Old Age*. Foliage also varies in each panel until it disappears completely in the final piece.

Manhood is the most Sublime of the four paintings. It is filled with a sense of doom and dread as we see the voyager, alone in his boat, heading for the dark and unfriendly waters ahead. The helm of his boat is gone and he is stuck on the path that was chosen while he could still steer. He looks imploringly towards the heavens, as if heaven's aid alone could save him from the perils that surround him. It is his dependence on a Superior Power and faith that ultimately saves him in the next stage of life.

The lesson which Cole tries to teach through this series is a simple, straightforward Christian allegorical message: eternal salvation is the reward for constant faith throughout the entirety of one's life. The scenery and emotions involved in this specific painting, as well as the entire series, is one of Cole's best examples of how the Sublime is used effectively in art, and also how the many facets of the Sublime come together.

Plate 13: Thomas Cole, *The Voyage of Life: Manhood*

Plate 14

Joseph Mallord William Turner (English)
Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying – Typhoon Coming On (The Slave Ship), 1840
oil on canvas
35 $\frac{3}{4}$×48 inches (91×122 cm)

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Henry Lillie Pierce Fund

While this painting suggests that Turner was interested in politics and current events (i.e. the slave trade), it is more likely that this type of tragic event offered him a great opportunity to paint a magnificent seascape. This painting was considered by many to be the highlight of the Royal Academy show of 1840, which John Ruskin called "the noblest sea ever painted."

The painting depicts a very turbulent sea, with rocking waves and large, mythically sized fish coming to eat the unfortunate victims in the water on the right hand side. The most eye-catching aspect of the painting is Turner's use of the red palate from the top left of the painting down into the center, creating the magnificent sunset. The lines of poetry Turner attached to this painting for the Royal Academy were:

> Aloft all hands, strike the top-masts and belay;
> you angry setting sun and fierce-edged clouds
> Declare the Typhoon's coming.
> Before it sweeps your decks, throw overboard
> The dead and dying ne'er heed their chains
> Hope, Hope, Fallacious Hope! Where is thy market now?

Turner's ability to form color and light through the use of swirling, energetic brush work is what sets him apart from his peers. Some think that he was a logical precursor to the French Impressionists through his interest in light and how it should and can be depicted.

Plate 14: Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying – Typhoon Coming On (The Slave Ship)*

Plate 15

William Blake (English)
"Europe", Plate i: Frontispiece, "The Ancient of Days", 1824(?)
relief etching in yellow and red, finished in pen and watercolor
$9\frac{5}{16} \times 6\frac{11}{16}$ inches (23.7×17 cm)

Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester, England

Europe, the second of Blake's "Continental Prophecies," the first one being *America*, presents in poetic form the fundamental philosophical positions in conflict during his lifetime. Blake takes historical events and reconfigures them to fit his own cast of imaginary characters including Enitharmon, the female personification of fallen nature and history, Orc, the spirit of revolt, and Los and Urizen, the "Eternals." *Europe* contains some magnificent Sublime verses as well as depressive descriptions of the cowed nature of existence under government which keeps all of its citizens as hostages.

The frontispiece of this illuminated book, entitled the "*Ancient of Days*," is supposed to represent the figure of Urizen who, with his compass, draws boundaries on the universe to impose order in a chaotic system. It was one of Blake's most popular designs during his lifetime and has remained so through to the present day.

Blake introduces *Europe* with a pair of contrasting images, the title page and the frontispiece are marked with meaningful opposition, creating one of Blake's most striking visual juxtapositions. The figure of Urizen, a distant god acting as creator, crouching inside some stellar globe leans down towards the blackish and amorphous void below and begins to animate the physical world. This image is caught at the moment of animation, when clouds start to move, and a wind blows the man's beard. The viewer has to imagine what comes next: the shaping of the black void into our world. The area around the figure is highly colored and the clouds are very strongly modeled. As a picture of a cosmic dimension it thematizes the relationship between humanity, whether "eternal" or "created," and the universe.

Plate 15: William Blake, *"Europe", Plate i: Frontispiece, "The Ancient of Days"*

Plate 16

William Blake (English)
Songs of Innocence and of Experience, Title pages, 1804
color print with watercolor
approx. all plates $4\frac{3}{4} \times 2\frac{7}{8}$ inches (120×64 mm)

Collection of the Trustees of King's College, Cambridge, England

The books *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience* (see also figure 5.6) were combined around 1804 to better show the two contrary states of the human soul. There is no definitive text to the *Songs*, rather a collection of poems, some of which Blake has transferred from one book to the other.

Innocence focuses on joyful and protective relationships, and on the sense of common identity between individuals. *Experience*, on the other hand, is a state of disillusionment in which distress breeds anger. While the *Innocence* poems dwell on pleasure and consolation, the poems of *Experience* emphasize the fearful selfishness of the human heart. The divinity of *Innocence* becomes "an infant small" in order to bring comfort and joy to the world, while the divinity of *Experience* is usually a figure of dread, a distant father who presides over repressive institutions and ideologies.

Songs of Innocence were first printed in 1789. The introduction announces it as a book for children, "So I wrote/ Every child may joy to hear." The poems refer to shepherds, lambs, and "the maker" who comforts the distressed. There is no mention of sin and divine punishment.

As a sequel to *Innocence*, the *Songs of Experience* were first published in 1793, and they greatly differ in mood. Some of the poems are bitterly ironic and show that Blake's outlook on the world had changed considerably in the span of four years. There was a new drive on Blake's part to expose the social consequences of error, which was no doubt prompted by the course of events in revolutionary France, and by the political turmoil in England.

Plate 16: William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*

Plate 17

Barnett Newman (American)
Onement I, 1948
oil on canvas
27×16 inches (68.6×40 cm)

Museum of Modern Art, New York
Gift of Annalee Newman

When first exhibited, Newman's paintings were denigrated as "empty canvases with a stripe down the middle." Today, Newman's innovations are credited as the source of several art movements of the late twentieth century.

The ancient term "Sublime," which he helped to reintroduce into the vernacular of contemporary art, is invoked to supply him with precedents in the art and thought of the past. His divided canvases have been compared to illustrations of medieval ideas of the cosmos. Newman's modernism came into being against the background of *world* thought. It was nurtured on the economic, social, and cultural crises of the 1930s and World War II, and on the conviction that all problems called for radical solutions. Newman saw that the question of *what* to paint was being continually set aside over concern with *how* to paint, that is, with form. For Newman, painting was a way of practicing the Sublime, not of finding symbols for it – in this respect he differed from emblem makers such as Gottlieb and Reinhardt.

In multiple shifts of feeling and reference, Newman's art must always remain partly inaccessible. Standing before a painting by Newman, the spectator may experience exaltation. Or he may be charged by a flood of sensations. The shifting effect between sublimity and cold visual fact is evidence of the ritual effectiveness of Newman's canvases. The potency of ceremonial objects of all creeds is at once both real and unreal.

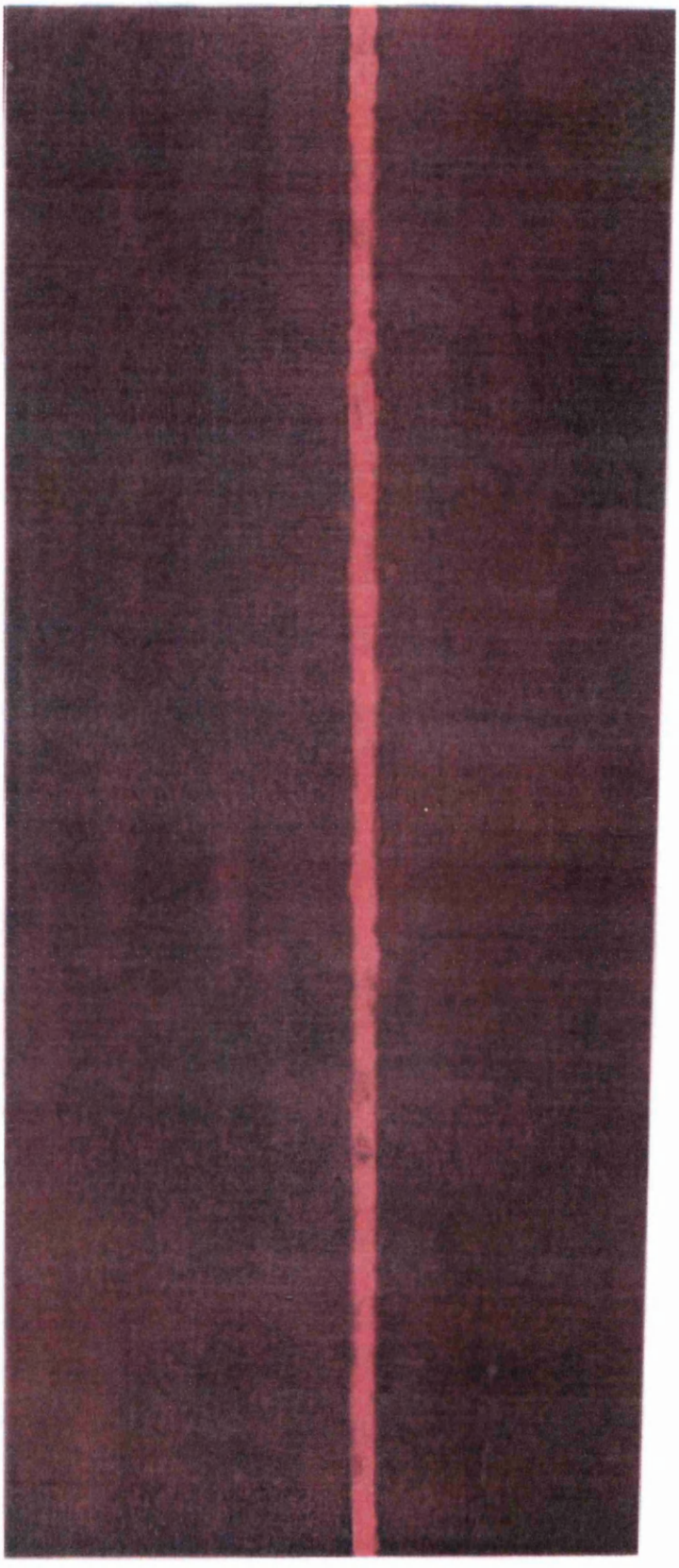


Plate 17: Barnett Newman, *Onement I*

Plate 18

Mark Rothko (American)
Green on Blue, 1956
oil on canvas
$90 \times 63\frac{1}{2}$ inches (228×161.3 cm)

University of Arizona Museum of Art
Gift of Edward J. Gallagher Jr.

Among the radical American artists of the postwar years, Rothko, along with Jackson Pollock and Barnett Newman, had pioneered an art that fundamentally reoriented pictorial dynamics in such a way that paintings turned outwards, directly addressing and implicating the spectator.

Surfacing from an almost blank facade from which two or three colors materialize from nowhere and instill themselves in our sight, Rothko's paintings have a very solid presence. Rothko's signature "image" has the ability to manipulate simple components for complex ends. By combining opposites – the lucid and the obscure, serenity and disquiet, order and dissolution – Rothko formulated a paradoxical visual unity that could feed a multitude of interpretations. He refused to speak about specific images, saying that they were all personal experiences, but they were not solely about color. Rothko was primarily concerned with the representation of emotions, and he felt that the best way to access emotion was not to confuse the viewer with symbols or images, but rather to let them experience the emotion when confronted with one of his large canvases.

Plate 18: Mark Rothko, *Green on Blue*

Plate 19

Mark Rothko (American)
Untitled (South Entrance-Wall Painting), 1965
oil on canvas
180×105 inches (457.2×266.7 cm)

Rothko Chapel, Houston, Texas
Courtesy of the Menil Collection

The Rothko Chapel is a modern sanctuary open to all traditions. The Chapel was donated as a gift from Dominique and John de Menil, who were principal benefactors of the University of St. Thomas in Houston, Tx. They recruited Philip Johnson, one of the luminaries of American architecture of the postwar period, as the architect and suggested that Mark Rothko execute a set of paintings for the interior (see figure 6.8). The project would become one of the century's most ambitious ventures in the integration of architecture and painting.

Most of the obvious features through which paintings have traditionally excited the imaginations and interest of the viewer are absent. Not only is there no recognizable imagery of the conventionally representational sort, but few of the devices that even in "abstract" painting familiarly serve to involve the viewer are present. The work seems to afford no point of imaginative entry; instead the frustrated viewer is thrown back upon him or herself. But neither is there any easy retreat. The layout of the Chapel was carefully designed, and on every wall there is either an imposing triptych or a single panel (e.g. this Plate) in the solid dark purple Rothko favored as the overall color of this commission. The imposing scale and somber, ceremonial gravity of the paintings seem to demand an appropriate response. Surrounded by them, the viewer is the target of their relentless frontality of address, confronted wherever he or she may turn, so that there is no hope of evasion. He made the dark painting of the chapel into vehicles of light, a way to access God in one's own way, through silence.

Plate 19: Mark Rothko, *Untitled*

Glossary of Terms

Abstract Expressionism: An art style of imageless and anti-formal paintings, improvisatory, dynamic, energetic, and free in technique, centered in New York in the post World War II era. It was mainly used to describe non-geometric abstractions, and first came into use as a description of Kandinsky's paintings from 1910-14, but it applied more accurately to the work of Gorky and Pollock, and later Newman and Rothko.

Beautiful: a calm feeling felt in the presence of something pretty or charming, but which does not move one to a state of awe or exaltation. Beauty is a lower state of emotional being and is generally reserved for more common objects and occurrences.

Edmund Burke: (1729-1797) Paved the road to an aesthetics of awesome and pleasurable terrors. In attempting to discern the Sublime from the Beautiful he also based the visual arts on a theory of human passions and the categories of the grand and Sublime.

Doctrine of Associationism: A theory propagated by Archibald Alison in his *Essay on the Nature and Principles of Taste* from the early nineteenth century, suggesting that every object in the natural world has the capacity to evoke trains of thought which eventually lead to a spiritual union with the almighty.

Illuminated Manuscript: Hand-written books adorned with paintings.

Immanuel Kant: (1724-1804) Arguably one of the foremost philosopher/mathematicians of the modern period. His *Observations on the Feelings of the Beautiful and the Sublime* is the epitome of his pre-critical (i.e. prior to his *Critiques* in 1782) thinking, clarifying Burke's ideas on the Sublime and Beautiful.

Mezzotint: A method of engraving in tone much used in the 17th, 18th and early 19th centuries for the reproduction of paintings, characterized by soft and hazy gradations of tone and richness in the dark areas.

Romantic Movement: Early 19th century movement in philosophy, literature, and art that nature was informed with the divine spirit and that the individual human imagination could immerse itself in the universal fabric; while the creative mind, being profoundly solitary, would yearn for harmony between man and nature. The Romantic ideals developed largely in opposition to the formalism of neoclassicism.

Sublime: Emotions accompanied by feelings of dread or melancholy, quiet wonder, or that evoke the ideas of pain, danger, or terror, and moves one to a state of awe or exaltation. Burke considered the Sublime to be the strongest emotion the mind is capable of producing.

Artist Biographies

William Blake: (1757-1827) came from modest backgrounds, yet had visionary experiences in childhood which foretold the prophetic character of his singular combination of visual art and poetry. At the age of ten, he began to receive engraving experience from James Basire, for whom he later produced medievalist pictures. His early works were influenced especially by Michelangelo, whose monumental human figures were to have a lasting effect on Blake's style. Throughout his lifetime, Blake rejected the conformist ideas of the Royal Academy. His entire œvre shows his disinclination to use color for effect, opting instead for line. In his writings, the traditional relations between picture and text was abandoned, and a symbolic unity of word and image was achieved which would not be accepted until decades after his death.

Thomas Cole: (1801-1848) Cole came from an Anglo-American family who left England in 1818 to return to America. Having been trained as a wood engraver in England, he entered the Philadelphia Academy of Art in 1823. Later he became a co-founder and key representative of the Hudson River School, which established Romantic landscape painting in America. Twice Cole went to Europe to study the landscapes of Nicholas Poussin, Claude Lorrain, Salvator Rosa, and Jacob van Ruisdael. On his return from his first trip in 1829, having also absorbed philosophical and literary ideas, Cole introduced a new type of painting to America: the symbolic, moral landscape. These fantastic symbolic scenes, found in his series *The Voyage of Life* and *The Course of Empire*, are full of allegorical and symbolic references. Some argue these are not as finely executed as his pure landscape painting from earlier in his career, while others maintain they are some of the best American art from that time period.

Caspar David Friedrich: (1774-1840) Friedrich also came from modest background, the son of a soapmaker, but studied at the Academy of Copenhagen for four years at the end of the 1790s. He spent the rest of his life in Dresden, making journeys to other areas of Germany for short periods of time. Friedrich was the founder of

the German Romantic landscape painting. His style combined an unprecedented faithfulness to reality, based on his travel experiences, combined with a metaphysical illumination inspired by the Christian religion. The origins of his landscape art lay in the eighteenth century idea of the view, *veduta.* The foreground contains the viewer's standpoint, set against an interesting landscape background; in some cases this was the same grand natural scenery which in the nineteenth century would be termed the Sublime – lonely mountain ranges or ocean vastness aroused in the sensitive viewer the feelings of religious awe and insight. Friedrich's contrast of boundless distance with the bounded position of the onlooker evokes the two sides of human existence – body and soul, the earth-bound and the divine – which from ancient times have comprised the dichotomy of Christian and Neoplatonistic thinking.

John Martin: (1789-1854) Martin came from an eccentric English background. He received his first artistic training at Newcastle, and then in 1806 moved to London and earned his living as a glass painter. Seeing the works of Turner proved to be crucial to his development. By the 1820s he was painting series which had scenes of disaster, set in infinite, visionary spaces and full of theatrical, nightmarish lighting effects. Their basic mood largely derived from the artist's involvement with John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost* and with the Biblical Apocalypse. Unfortunately, many critics found fault with his works during his lifetime, but when the paintings were reproduced as large format engravings, very few could find anything to criticize.

Barnett Newman: (1905-1970) Newman was born to Russian immigrants in New York. He attended classes at the Art Student's League and also worked as a substitute teacher. In 1940 he ceased painting and destroyed his existing work. His post-war works, for which he is best know, are simplified compositions, where each canvas is filled with a single, modulated color, split by bands he called "zips," running from one edge of the painting to the other. The "zip" as a compositional element was a source of movement, energy, division, and measurement, and often a carrier of metaphysical meaning as well. Newman had a special feeling for scale, proportion, and the absolute quality of each particular hue, and used these elements in large paintings to express his feelings about the tragic condition of modern human life and the human struggle to survive. He said, "The artist's problem is the idea complex that makes contact with mystery – of life, of men, of nature, of the hard black chaos that is tragedy."

Mark Rothko: (1903-1970) Rothko was born in Dvinsk, Russia and emigrated to America in 1913. He used the painting technique of color-field rather than pictorial images to

represent the Sublime, feeling that any references to specifics in the physical world conflicted with the Sublime idea of the universal, supernatural "spirit of myth," which he saw as the core of meaning in art. Rothko simplified his compositions to two or three large rectangles composed of layers of color with hazily brushed contours, spreading almost to the edges of the canvas. The uncomplicated appearance and instant recognition of the works from his classic period, however, disguise the complex nature of the œvre and the development within his pictorial form. Within an unfolding of compositional formats, the artist implemented elements such as color, structure, measure, luminosity, and the definition of shape. Rothko preferred to think of his work in content rather than form, referring to grand themes such as tragedy, ecstasy, and death. But the commanding yet vulnerable presence for which his mature paintings are best known reveals Rothko's commitment to creating a physical and emotional relationship between the canvas and the observer. This goal is clearly realized in Rothko's murals for the Chapel in Houston where the dark colors pervade the viewer with a sense of calm, taking them to a higher spiritual ground and truly leaving them with a sense of peace.

Joseph M.W. Turner: (1775-1851) Turner was fourteen when he was admitted to the Royal Academy, and he started his career painting watercolors and producing mezzotints under the influence of John Robert Cozen's work. In 1796 he first started to paint in oil, working in the neoclassical manner of Poussin. These paintings met with wide acclaim. In 1802, he first began to travel extensively around England, and also to France, Switzerland, and Italy. It was these trips which first influenced his use of atmospheric light. In his highly atmospheric paintings, reality and fantasy merge, and color metaphorically evokes the power of the natural phenomenon. By abandoning form, Turner lent color autonomy and endowed it with a strength of its own. This achievement would prove especially influential on twentieth century art.

List of References

[1]Wilton 18.

[2]Börsch-Supan 12.

[3]Baigell 10.

[4]Burke 39.

[5]Dorsch 100-108.

[6]Boulton xlviii.

[7]Boulton li.

[8]Boulton lvi.

[9]Kant 47.

[10]Vaughan (1972) 104.

[11]Butlin (1918) 156.

[12]Baigell 10.

[13]Powell 39.

[14]*Ibid. 44.*

[15]Merritt 15.

[16]Börsch-Supan 9.

[17]Schmied, 58.

[18]Schmeid 63.

[19]*Ibid. 62.*

[20]Codd 135.

[21]J. Walker 114.

[22]Powell 35.

[23]Börsch-Supan 10.

[24]Wolf 43.

[25]*Ibid. 39.*

[26]*Ibid. 39.*

[27]Blake Plate 18.

[28]Vaughan (1999) 10.

[29]Powell 84.

[30]Tymn 155-156.

[31]Lindsay 144.

[32]J. Walker 110.

[33]*Ibid.*

[34]C. Walker 34.

[35]Blake 9.

[36]Blake plate 4.

[37]Rosenberg 4.

[38]R. Rosenblum 204.

[39]*Ibid. 205.*

[40]Strick 18.

[41]R. Rosenblum 211.

[42]*Ibid. 215.*

[43]Codd 138.

[44]Baigell 40.

[45]Börsch-Suppan 82.

[46]Schmied 63.

[47]J. Walker 114.

[48]J. Walker 116

[49]Walker 70.

[50]Schmied, 109.

[51]Schmied 64.

[52]Powell 39

[53]Baigell 42.

[54]Borsch-Suppan 172.

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