

The Sublime and Wordsworth's Boat

That more discerning feeling that we're now trying to consider is mainly of two kinds: the feeling for the sublime and the feeling for the beautiful. Being moved by either is pleasant but in very different ways. The **sight of a mountain range** whose snowy peaks rise above the clouds, the description of a raging storm or the account of the realm of hell in Milton arouse pleasure, **but with a certain horror**; in contrast a view over flowering fields, valleys with winding streams covered with pasturing flocks, the description of Elysium or Homer's depiction of the girdle of Venus – all these also yield a pleasant sensation, but one that is joyful and smiling. In order for the former to make an impression on us in the appropriate strength, we need to have a feeling for the sublime, and to enjoy the latter correctly, a feeling for the beautiful.

Lofty oaks and solitary shadows in a sacred grove are sublime. Flowerbeds, low hedges and trees, trimmed into shapes are beautiful. **Night is sublime**. Day is beautiful.

Sensibilities possessing a feeling for the sublime, through **the peaceful stillness of a summer evening** as the **trembling light of the stars** breaks through the **brown shadows of night** and the **lonely moon stands on the horizon**, will slowly be drawn into higher feelings of friendship, of scorn for the world, of eternity.

The shining day brings a flood of **busy enthusiasm and sense of happiness**. The sublime moves us, beauty charms us.

The appearance of the person who finds themselves fully wrapped in the feeling for the sublime, is **serious, perhaps immobile, awestruck**. In contrast the lively sense of beauty makes itself known by a bright cheerfulness in the eyes, and traces of smiling, and often simply humour.

The sublime is one again of a different kind. **The feeling here is sometimes accompanied with a measure of horror or melancholy**, in some cases simply with a peaceful admiration and in still others with a beauty that encompasses a sublime enterprise.

I want to call the first of these the '**terrifying-sublime**', the second 'the noble' and the third 'the glorious'. **Deep solitude is sublime but of a terrifying kind. That is why the great far-flung wastelands like the huge deserts of Shamo in Tartary in every age have prompted people to populate them with fearful shadows, goblins and ghosts...**

One **summer evening** (led by her) I found
A little boat tied to a willow tree
Within a rocky cove, its usual home.
Straight I unloosed her chain, and stepping in

Pushed from the shore. It was an act **of stealth**
And troubled pleasure, nor without the voice
Of mountain-echoes did my boat move on;
Leaving behind her **still**, on either side,
Small **circles glittering idly in the moon**,
Until they melted all into one track
Of **sparkling light**. But now, like one who rows,
Proud of his skill, to reach a chosen point
With an unswerving line, I fixed my view
Upon the **summit of a craggy ridge**,
The horizon's utmost boundary; far above
Was nothing but the **stars and the grey sky**.
She was an elfin **pinnacle**; lustily
I dipped my oars into the silent lake,
And, as I rose upon the stroke, my boat
Went heaving through the water like a swan;
When, from behind that craggy steep till then
The horizon's bound, a huge peak, black and huge,
As if with voluntary power instinct,
Upreared its head. I struck and struck again,
And growing still in stature the **grim shape**
Towered up between me and the stars, and still,
For so it seemed, **with purpose of its own**
And **measured** motion like a living thing,
Strode after me. With trembling oars I turned,
And **through the silent** water stole my way
Back to the covert of the willow tree;
There in her mooring-place I left my **bark**, -
And through the meadows homeward went, **in grave**
And serious mood; but after I had seen
That spectacle, for many days, my brain
Worked with **a dim and undetermined sense**
Of unknown modes of being; o'er my thoughts
There hung a darkness, call it solitude
Or blank desertion. No familiar shapes
Remained, no pleasant images of trees,
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;
But **huge and mighty forms**, that do not live
Like living men, moved slowly **through the mind**
By day, **and were a trouble to my dreams**.