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THE REFLECTIONS OF INFINITY AND ETERNITY IN THE POETICS OF LEOPARDI AND PERCY SHELLEY IN THE LIGHT OF ROMANTICISM

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ABSTRACT

THE REFLECTIONS OF INFINITY AND ETERNITY IN THE POETICS OF LEOPARDI AND PERCY SHELLEY IN THE LIGHT OF ROMANTICISM

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This thesis posits that the themes of infinity and eternity play a pivotal role in comprehending Romanticism in its entirety. Infinity as spatial, and eternity as temporal transcendence become the characteristic tropes of Romanticism, portrayed as the remote, the primitive, nostalgia, homelessness, the consecrated nature, and the exaltation of the individual and the imagination. These impressions underline not only an escape from the spatially and temporally limited reality but also a rejection against it. The study situates these impressions within the philosophical, poetical, historical, religious, and social contexts of Romanticism. Additionally, it investigates how infinity and eternity were normalized in the light of religious and scientific developments that occurred during the 17th and 18th centuries. Despite their shared basis in boundlessness and acting together in creating such Romantic notions, infinity is also extensively discussed in the discourse of the sublime and of Romanticism, while eternity is mostly excluded and manifested as a sense of timelessness.

To substantiate the aforementioned arguments, this thesis examines and compares Shelley's **Alastor** and Leopardi's **L'Infinito** for their congruences and divergences in addressing these two concepts and finds traces of these romantic impressions.

Key Words: infinity, eternity, romanticism, Shelley, Leopardi

ÖZ

PERCY SHELLEY VE LEOPARDI'NİN POETİKALARINDA ROMANTİZMİN IŞIĞINDA SONSUZLUK VE EBEDİYETİN İZDÜŞÜMLERİ

SELİN GÜL MUTLUCAN

Bu tez, uzamsal sınırsızlık olarak sonsuzluk ve zamansal sınırsızlık olarak ebediyet temalarının Romantizmi bütünüyle kavramada çok önemli bir rol oynadığını ileri sürer. Hayal gücünün ve içsel dünyanın sınırsızlığına adım atmaya izin veren bireyselliğin yüceltilmesi ile önce gerçekliğin sınırlılığından kaçan Romantik sanatçı, sonrasında uzama ait "uzak olan", "yurtsuzluk" ve "kutsanmış doğa" ile zamana ait olan "zamanda uzak" ve "ilken olan" ile "nostalji" izlekleriyle kendi alternatif gerçekliğini yaratır. Bu çalışma dolayısıyla sadece ebediyet ve sonsuzluk kavramlarını değil, bu kavramlara öykünen bahse konu izlekleri de tarihsel bağlamda konumlandırır. Ayrıca, 17. ve 18. yüzyıllarda meydana gelen dini ve bilimsel gelişmeler ışığında sonsuzluğun ve ebediyetin nasıl normalleştirildiğini de araştırır. Sınırsız olma durumundaki ortak temellendirmelerine ve bu tür Romantik kavramların yaratılmasında birlikte hareket etmelerine rağmen, sonsuzluk, yüce ve Romantizm söyleminde kapsamlı bir şekilde tartışılsa da, ebediyet bu söylemden çoğunlukla dışlanmış ve zamansızlık duygusu olarak tezahür etmiştir.

İlgili argümanları desteklemek için, bu tez Shelley'nin *Alastor* ve Leopardi'nin *L'Infinito* eserlerini bu iki kavramı ele alışlarındaki uyum ve farklılıkları açısından inceler ve bu romantik izleklerin izlerini bulur.

Anahtar kelimeler: sonsuzluk, ebediyet, romantizm, Shelley, Leopardi

PREFACE

The decision to pursue research at the master's level was triggered by Leopardi's call, inviting me to return to the academic world a decade after my graduation. His poem **L'Infinito** played a significant role in my life, igniting my passion for poetry and the beauty of the indefinite, as well as altering the idea of "the end" that humans dread so much. The delightful shipwrecking in the sea aided my understanding of uniting with the transcendental power that pervades the universe, and I experienced a sense of the infinite as beautifully penned by Leopardi in the poem.

During my master's studies, another poet joined my exploration, not from Italy but from Britain, who, despite spending his last four years in Italy, unfortunately never crossed paths with Leopardi. I am delighted to introduce two eminent Romantic figures, Shelley and Leopardi who did not meet in person but in their most beloved and sacred realm, the world of words.

The vast area that my research covers hardly reached its end thanks to infinity and eternity, which are concepts without borders. Like Leopardi, I shipwrecked many times in the sea of thoughts, but my supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Barbara Dell'Abate Çelebi, guided me with her light from her lighthouse, helping me not to lose sight of the land and orienting my way so that I could still sail in the ocean of infinity and eternity. I am infinitely grateful for her support and valuable time that she dedicated to me.

During this arduous intellectual journey, an infinite number of people across the seas aided me, to whom my gratitude cannot be expressed in words. My professors from the Italian Language and Literature Department, Prof. Esin Gören, Assoc. Prof. Sadriye Güneş, and Assist. Prof. Cristiano Bedin, encouraged me to pursue my dream and provided invaluable advice for my research. The staff of Istituto Italiano di Cultura, Tanju Şahan, and Elisabetta Lemma were incredibly patient and kind, providing me with all the assistance I needed in their library. The director of the Institute, Salvatore Schirmo, kindly opened the doors of the Institute so that I could

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Finally, the emotional support from my family and friends enabled me to complete my studies on time and with the least amount of stress. I am forever grateful to my mother, Hacer Evirgen, for showing her blessings. My friends, Murat Paluli, Andrew Cong, Paisarn Likhitpreechakul and Belkıs Aydın always kept my spirits high, offering me their precious time to comment on my writing.

Selin Gül Mutlucan

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Tr. by : Translator

Trans. **:** Translation

Ed. by : Editor

a cura di : Editor

et. al : And others

No. : Number

Vol. **:** Volume

p. : Page

pp. : Pages

qtd. : Quoted

w. page **:** Without a page

w. date : Without a date

w. place : Without a place

Zib. : Zibaldone

INTRODUCTION

Romantics sought to liberate themselves fundamentally from the limited reality composed of space and time, using the power of imagination and exalted subjective individuality as a means to escape and create alternative realities. Therefore, the explicit discussions of infinity, as referenced by the Romantics and later examined by critics, are evident—not to mention its inclusion in the aesthetics of the sublime. Yet, infinity overshadows another concept, which is time, and which intricately intertwines with space: the concept of eternity. After exploring the reasons and origins of the Romantic tropes, such as the remote, the primitive, nostalgia, homelessness, and the consecrated nature, within their historical and contextual occurrences, the subsequent exploration will reveal how these tropes are fundamentally connected to spatial and temporal escapements from present reality.

The first chapter starts with a dissension over the definition of Romanticism, which naturally defies easy definitions due to its rejection of conventional boundaries. To navigate the multifaceted landscape of this artistic and intellectual movement, I further delve into a historical overview of Romanticism's inception in late 18th-century Germany. The movement, emerging in the wake of revolutionary changes in religion, politics, and social and intellectual reforms, challenged authority and exalted the individual subject, who recognized no other authority than the self. This chapter also delves into the impact of significant societal breakthroughs and events, such as the Industrial and Intellectual Revolution, the Enclosure Acts, and marine explorations, setting the stage for a more profound exploration of Romantic themes that subtly address infinity and eternity. Furthermore, the Romantic movement expanded, taking root in both Italy and Britain, undergoing unique transformations and adaptations in each cultural context.

The second chapter then delves into the philosophical underpinnings of infinity and eternity. Here, the distinctions between these two concepts are clarified, and their historical development is traced from the 17th-century normalization of infinity and eternity to its recurring presence in the works of Romantic artists. The discussion extends to the sublime, drawing on the perspectives of Kant and Burke, illuminating

how Romanticism finds inspiration in the illimitable and indefinite nature of infinity. Though the mention of eternity is scarcely found in the discussion of the sublime, I consolidate its importance with eminent critics in the field, such as Thomas Weiskel and Georges Poulet.

In the third chapter, the focus narrows to the lives and creative output of Leopardi and Shelley. Leopardi, oscillating between classical and romantic elements, explores infinity in various forms, considering it the source of all human desire. A thorough research is conducted by addressing other works by Leopardi, such as **Zibaldone, Pensieri** and **Operette Morali**. Shelley, influenced by Augustine, Boethius, and Plato, contemplates eternity, positioning life and poetry as infinite. A comparative reading of Leopardi's **L'Infinito** (1825) and Shelley's **Alastor** (1816) is presented, emphasizing the shared Romantic motifs discussed in the first chapter. Both poets embark on quests for the ungraspable, a theme often quoted and labeled as the infinite not only by numerous Romantics but also by critics. Their poetic quest culminates in their demise which they experience with delight.

This thesis not only aims to contribute to the understanding of Romanticism, its indefinability, and its plurality across Europe but also intends to shed light on how the Romantic themes emerging from certain events in history underpin boundlessness in time and space. A comparative study of the poetics of the two influential figures in the Romantic literary landscape, Shelley and Leopardi, will aid me to validate and exemplify my findings.

CHAPTER ONE

THEMES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF ROMANTICISM

Like the Infinite it so often sought, the Romantic movement may slip through our fingers.
David Blayney Brown

To say the word Romanticism is to say modern art - that is, intimacy, spirituality, color, aspiration towards the infinite, expressed by every means available to the arts.
Charles Baudelaire

Hence the infinity is a good poem, the eternity.
Novalis

1.1. Plurality of Definitions

The essence of Romanticism had a profound impact on the literary creations of Leopardi and Percy Shelley. In order to grasp this essence together with its inherent ties to the boundless notions of eternity and infinity, which arise from its indefinable nature, it is imperative to initially delve into the sundry definitions of Romanticism proposed by scholars and intellectuals across the course of history. The tight connection between the eternity-infinity couple and the undefinable nature of Romanticism is highlighted in **The Oxford Companion to English Literature**:

> "To define the general character or basic principle of this momentous shift, which later historians have called Romanticism, though, is notoriously difficult, partly because the Romantic temperament itself resisted the very impulse of definition, **favouring the indefinite and the boundless**." (Drabble, 2000: 872) (Emphasis mine)

While many have attempted to define Romanticism, the sheer complexity and nuance of the movement have made it difficult to arrive at a consensus. For example, Friedrich Schlegel expressed the difficulty of defining Romanticism in a letter to his brother, ultimately rejecting the notion of an all-encompassing definition due to its

potential for oversimplification (Ferber, 2010: 1). Similarly, A.O. Lovejoy argued that the word 'romantic' has lost its meaning over time due to its overuse and broad application (Cuddon, 1999: 767). Meanwhile, F.L. Lucas reported in 1948 that there were over 11,000 definitions of Romanticism (1999: 767).

Despite these conflicting viewpoints, it is important to note that the subjective nature of Romanticism lends itself well to individual interpretation. This approach is reflected in Isaiah Berlin's belief that it is best to define Romanticism based on one's own understanding (Berlin, 2000: 1). By avoiding a conclusive definition, Berlin's subjective approach aligns well with the elusive and constantly evolving nature of Romanticism. This concept of elusiveness is also reflected in Brown's assertion that, "Like the Infinite it so often sought, the Romantic movement may slip through our fingers" (2006: 16).

If I begin the discussion by comparing the archenemies "classical" and "romantic", the famous Romantic, Heinrich Heine, uses “infinity” while propounding the difference between them:

> “Classic art had only to represent the finite, and its figures could be identical with the idea of the artist. Romantic art had to represent, or rather, suggest the infinite and purely spiritual relationships and had recourse to a system of traditional symbols.” (2002: 9)

Yet another striking and perhaps simplistic difference between them can be found in an imaginary dialogue created by Lefcadio Hearn. A classicist warns a romantic, advising that they can do nothing new as they cannot do anything better than before. However, a romantic, determined in their individual course for freshness and originality, objects, saying "All you wish is to stop the development. I know I can do better, and I will do it my own way" (Hearn, 2020: 59).

The keyword in this phrase is “my own way,” and it is this individuality that serves as the threshold before the door that opens to Romanticism. M. H. Abrams defines the Romantic as a lamp that emits its own light, rather than a classicist’s mirror that solely reflects (Löwy et al., 2001: 4). This transformation from imitation to

individuality is also visible in Romantic visual arts. When one hears the word "romantic," the name that immediately comes to mind for many is Caspar David Friedrich:

> "The sort of landscape in which Friedrich was chiefly interested, however was never a simple imitation of nature, but the result of a complicated interplay of visual impression and mental and emotional reflection." (Wolf, 2022: 8)

An objection to the idea that Romanticism is a rebellion against Neoclassicism and the Enlightenment is presented by Honor and Fleming, who argue that Romanticism only diverged from Neoclassicism through individual stylistic choices rather than a complete rejection (2016: 642). However, despite their differing views, Curran suggests that the tension between the two movements is a defining feature of Romanticism, as evidenced by the fact that prominent Romantic poets such as Leopardi and Hölderlin were deeply knowledgeable and appreciative of classical Greek poetry and mythology (2004: 170, 171).

To clarify, Romanticism emerged roughly at the same time in Germany, England, and France, but it manifested itself differently depending on the country, incorporating distinct cultural and historical characteristics (Löwy et al., 2001: 49). As a result, it is appropriate to refer to Romanticism**s** in the plural form (Ferber, 2010: 1), much like the multifaceted and often conflicting identities of Europe in the first half of the 19th century[1] (Boer qtd. in Osterhammel, 2009: 87, 88). Lilian Furst holds that this multifaceted Romanticisms can be best described with a phrase Coleridge uttered in characterizing beauty 'Multeity in Unity' (Damrosch, 2020: 305). It is important to note that the Romantic movement was not a homogenous entity and there were variations in the emphasis of different artists and writers. For instance, while some emphasized individuality and subjective experience, others focused on nature, the sublime, or even nationalism. Nonetheless, the idea of individuality and the rejection of the Enlightenment's emphasis on rationality and reason can be seen as a common

[1] Osterhammel reports the diverse Europe conceptions "of Napoleonic Imperialism, the Europe of Christiana of postrevolutionary Romanticism, of western European liberals, of the democrats" et. al.

thread in Romanticism. In addition, the idea of the romantic hero or martyr can be seen as another prevalent trait in Romanticism (Berlin, 2000: 9). The romantic hero was often depicted as an outsider or rebel, who lived according to one's own beliefs and values, even if it meant defying society's conventions (2000: 9). This hero was often portrayed as a tragic figure, who suffered for their ideals, but their suffering elevated them to a higher level of existence. For instance, Byron's commitment to the Greek cause and his belief in the ideals of freedom and individuality are quintessentially Romantic. In his poetry and writings, he championed the cause of the oppressed and the marginalized, and his own life was marked by a restless spirit of adventure and a desire to break free from the constraints of society. His death in Greece while fighting for the cause of Greek independence was a fitting end to a life that embodied the Romantic ideal of living up to one's beliefs and ideals, even if it meant sacrificing one's own life.

Returning to the task of defining Romanticism through common traits, Wellek boldly identifies three key elements: imagination as a view of poetry, nature as a view of the world, and symbol and myth as a poetic style. Ferber supports this approach and notes that these characteristics are prevalent in European literature, with those who embrace one trait often utilizing the other two as well (Ferber, 2010: 9).

He defines Romanticism as follows:

> "Romanticism was a European cultural movement (…) which found in a symbolic and internalized romance plot a vehicle for exploring one's self and its relationship to others and to nature, which privileged the imagination as a faculty higher and more inclusive than reason, which sought solace in or reconciliation with the natural world, which 'detranscendentalized' religion by taking God or the divine as inherent in nature or in the soul and replaced theological doctrine with metaphor and feeling, which honored poetry and all the arts as the highest human creations, and which rebelled against the established canons of neoclassical aesthetics and against both aristocratic and bourgeois social and political norms in favor of values more individual, inward, and emotional." (2010: 10, 11)

Although Ferber's definition covers a great deal of romantic traits, he lacks two primary patterns, as stated by A. O. Lovejoy, that cannot be denied: "primitivism and eccentricity/dandyism." Berlin on the other hand adds emotionalism and the remote, being spatial and temporal:

> "… there was a great turning towards emotionalism, that there was a sudden interest in the primitive and the remote-the remote in time, and the remote in place-that there was an outbreak of craving for the infinite." (2000: 14)

Northrop Frye, dovetailing Berlin's account of romantic traits on the spatial ground, proposes that "a profound change, not primarily in belief, but in the spatial projection of reality" occurred (Ferber, 2005: 6).

Ferber provides a list of specific themes that are commonly found in Romanticism:

> "The fragment as privileged form, lyricization of literature, the uniqueness of the childhood; the dignity of primitives, solitaries, noble savages, outcast poets; night as the setting for deepest imaginative truth; incest as ideal; ruins, especially by moonlight; etc." (2005: 6)

Before I conclude this discussion by acknowledging that defining Romanticism is an elusive process in the field of humanities, as it lacks precise formulas, I must consider that Romanticism is a movement that seeks to be boundless and acknowledges the inexhaustible nature of the infinite. Therefore, any attempt to define and limit it would contradict its core principle of individuality. As Baudelaire puts it, "Romanticism is not precisely located in the choice of subject or in exact truth, but in a way of feeling" (Honour, 1979: 14). Honor adds that this "way of feeling" can only be subjectively detected (1979: 14), and as Curran explains, "what Romanticism as a whole wanted to embrace was the challenge of defining from the inside out, in life as in art" (Curran, 2004: 178).

1.2. Historical Context of the Birth of Romanticism

After discussing the attempts to define Romanticism, it is important to consider the historical context in which the movement is primarily accepted to have emerged in Germany as a school in the 18th century, centered around the Schlegel brothers who

famously published **Athenäum**, the Romantic Bible, with its fragments as passages between 1798 and 1800. Whistler distinguishes two periods in the publication of the **Athenäum**, marking Autumn 1799 onwards as a religious turn that profoundly influenced all the Romantics, thanks to the pietist Schleiermacher's book **On Religion: Speeches to its Cultural Despisers** (2023: 240, 241). The German Romantics aimed to substitute the "scientific, empirical world with a poetical one" in order to connect contemporary society to the divine; they believed that the society lacked an appropriate mythology because it was too rational to comprehend the divine, which can only be captured through symbols (Wolf, 1999: 17). Only through this shift, according to Wolf, could "the creative self be capable of measuring the infinite" (1999: 17).

18th century Germany was a decentralized and fragmented country, ruled by 300 princes and 1200 sub-princes, recovering from the devastating Thirty Years' War, in which the number of Germans killed had not been seen since the time of Genghis Khan (Berlin, 2000: 34, 35). Berlin further argues that German culture became provincial and stagnant without any growth, vitality, or dynamism, and Pietism, a branch of Protestantism that emphasized the personal relationship between man and God, dominated the desolate and desperate German culture (2000: 36).

We cannot overlook how the personal relationship of men with God, influenced by Pietism, might have strongly contributed to the Romantic precept of individuality. Smith concurs that the Pietist movement, which he acknowledges as having "opened up an inner spiritual realm of infinite depth", initiated practices aimed at engaging with it both "subjectively and collectively", thereby identifying Pietism as an instance wherein individuals can experience a new sense of the infinite (Smith, 2019: 92, 99). Hugh McLeod, a comparative religion specialist, identifies "personal faith" as one of six ways of secularization, most notably in France, Germany, and England, which alludes to the individualistic pattern of Romanticism (Osterhammel, 2009: 880).

With the Reformation came the practice of Christian belief without intermediaries, emphasizing a more private account of an individual's own faith. By dismantling the established religion, Luther initiated a new path for mankind, in which

bans and obligations were not expected to be peremptorily followed and obeyed. Instead, the individual was set free to fashion their own spiritual journey. Additionally, Pietism brought about a new way of experiencing God, "within the interiority of the individual subject, producing the most intense expression of emotions" (Smith, 2019: 99).

The Enlightenment, which followed the success of Copernican astronomy and Newtonian physics, further contributed to this individualistic mindset dethroning God from the position of an entity to be revered (Ferber, 2010: 65). It also confirmed that answers cannot be obtained by revelation, dogma, or tradition as dictated by the Church, but by "the correct use of reason, deductively as in the mathematical sciences, inductively as in the sciences of nature" (Smith, 2019: 22). While the Enlightenment's rationalism paved the way for the infinite potential of the human mind to roam freely without the limits imposed by the Church, Pietism introduced a profound way of experiencing the divine (2019: 99). The exclusion of God as inculcated by the Church from the quotidian life was also due to the "public spheres"[2] such as "salons, coffeehouses, booksellers' shops and taverns" formed in the 17th and 18th century where the exchange of ideas consolidated and disseminated the ideals of Enlightenment, creating also what is now called "public opinion" (Wiesner-Hanks, 2013: 367, 368, 372). While the public opinion raised its voice more and more, the Church started losing power. Finally intellectual and cultural life were liberated from religion as opposed to the past when they were to be developed in churches and monasteries (2013: 35).

In conclusion, the Reformation, which bloomed as Pietism in Germany, liberated believers from the shackles of intermediaries that meddled with their personal beliefs emphasizing a new emerging figure: the subjective individual. The Enlightenment cleared the dogmatic thorns and lifted the blinkers of those who had previously accepted the Church's truth. When one's inner world weighs more after the power collapse of the outer world, limits are not acknowledged. All of these events paved the way for Romanticism, with all its elements sprouting from the individual's

[2] The term "Public sphere" was coined by Jürgen Habermas.

unappeased longing for whatever is without limits and boundaries, that is infinite and eternal.

1.3. Romantic Themes Within Historical Context

Romantic motifs such as the exaltation of imagination, the subjective individuality, the remote, the consecrated nature, the primitive, homelessness, and nostalgia suggest a spatial and a temporal escapement from the limited present reality. This notion of escapism is further supported by Norbert Wolf, who contends, "(…) Romantic art includes not only an escapement from reality but a fearless confrontation with it" (2007: 7). Wolf then continues by referencing Jean Paul (1763-1825) to elucidate why various elements were nurtured with some of the Romantic themes outlined above, such as longing and memory, aligning with nostalgia. He suggests that "everything remote, dead, unknown" possessed the power to transform and trigger the "power of imagination, helping to soar into infinity" (2007: 7). The Romantic artists are liberated from the confines of the present space and time through these tropes which transcend reality. Berlin highlights a yearning that stems from the inexpressible relation of the Romantic to the universe, as "the infinite cannot be exhausted":

> "(…) this is the reason why we must go to distant countries, (…) see exotic examples, (…) travel in the East and write novels about the past, (…) indulge in all manner of fantasies." (2000: 104, 105)

According to Berlin, the utilization of the power of imagination is imperative, extending beyond physical travel to distant lands. It involves engaging in the art of writing novels that delve into historical narratives and embracing a spectrum of fantasies.

Laniel-Musitelli and Sabiron observe that Romanticism is "the product of its time" and it can "reflect history" (2021: ix). Therefore, under this section I will examine respectively how each of the abovementioned themes permeated the world of

arts and literature and emerged based on the events leading up to the 19th century and those occurring within it.

Although George Steiner remarks “literature is by essence thematic”, rhetorical and formalist analyses focus more on the “how”, rather than a thematic analysis (Domínguez et al., 2015: 68). Yet Domínguez, Saussy and Villanueva in **Introducing Comparative Literature** warn that thematic units—identified as “topic, myth, leitmotiv, symbol, image, mirage, or device” are integral to the coherence of a literary work, forging connections with other pieces of literature, and their recognition is indispensable for any reading (2015: 69). However, it is crucial also to note that these connections are intricately linked within the contexts of the then-present reality, adding depth to any comprehensive reading.

> “If meaning is contextual, a thoughtful comparison will not be about things or texts, but about the relation of things to their contexts that makes their meaning possible. Even when we seem to be comparing A to B, we are really trying to work out the relation of object A to its context, A’, in relation to the relation of object B to its context, B’.” (2015: 74)

Therefore, instead of solely conducting a thematic analysis, this section will unveil the relations between these themes and the forces that gave birth to them. Given the topic’s magnitude and complexity, a concise summary will follow in the next section “Infinity and Eternity Unveiled Through Romantic Themes”.

The primary driving force among these tropes is imagination, enabling the flow of other themes. It should come as no surprise that the 19th century gave rise to “the modern sense of literature”, since prior to that period, literature was mainly regarded as an assortment of "fine examples of the use of language and rhetoric"(Culler, 2000: 21). Thanks to the German Romantic theorists, the modern Western concept of literature as imaginative writing did not start to emerge until the late 1700s (2000: 21). Percy Bysshe Shelley, in **A Defence of Poetry**, compares reason and imagination, asserting that the former serves to contemplate “the relations borne by one thought to another”, while imagination colors the thoughts “with its own light”, concluding that

"reason is to imagination (…) as the shadow to the substance" (Enright et al., 1962: 225). Shelley then continues and affirms that "the greatest instrument of moral good is the imagination" (1962: 234). It is evident how he favours imagination and even goes so far as to declare it is the greatest instrument of moral good. Shifting to the broader movement, one popular perception of Romanticism as agreed by the critics in the post-war period was that "the imaginative faculty allowed the poet to transcend the material world" (Casaliggi et al., 2016: 4). If we look at the importance of imagination within literature itself, Eagleton holds that "only with… the Romantic period that our definitions of literature began to develop", for "by the time of the Romantic period, the literature was becoming virtually synonymous with the 'imaginative' (2008: 13). As such, Eagleton also states that thanks to "the transcendental nature of the imagination" the writer could turn comfortably to an "absolute alternative history", by which we see a detachment from the temporal reality of the Romantic writers (2008: 13).

In addition to this temporal breakthrough from the present reality, we also observe a spatial breakthrough where the Romantics travelled a lot, not only in real life but in their compositions, too. A sense of nostalgia and homelessness accompanies both their literary and real-life excursions. The fruits of these voyages were then composed as travelogues by the eminent men of letters: William Wordsworth's **Descriptive Sketches, in Verse**, Mary Wollstonecraft's **Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark**, Mary Shelley and Percy Shelley's **History of a Six Weeks' Tour Through a Part of France, Switzerland, Germany, and Holland** (Butler, 1999: 394, 394). Other literary figures stand out with their travelogues: Dickens's **Pictures from Italy**, Heine's **Briefe auf einer Reise nach dem Gotthard** (Letters on a Journey to the Gotthard, 1779), Goethe's **Italienische Reise** (Italian Journey, 1816–17), Friedrich Schlegel's **Reise nach Frankreich** ('Journey to France', 1803), E.T.A. Hoffmann's **Briefe aus den Bergen** (Letters from the Mountains, 1820) (Thompson, 2015: 270, 272).

In order to understand these tropes we need to delve into the context of the society, culture, and philosophy of the time, not only during the Romantic era but also in previous centuries. The discoveries of uncharted lands, revolutions such as the

Industrial, Agrarian, French, and Intellectual Revolutions, and advancements in science and philosophy all contributed to the emergence of Romanticism.

In the 17th century an eminent figure in philosophy, Descartes asserted the supreme power of the subject. According to Albayrak, Descartes' "**Meditations** is the birth certificate of the modern subject" since he acknowledges his existence through the act of thinking, and doubt, his main approach, can never successfully refute this conclusion: "This introverted approach gives us the Subject, which modernity sought as its foundation" (2021: 20, 21)[3]. In addition to "paving the way for liberation," the subject's knowledge that he creates his own reality through his acts and that even "God is proved through his relation to Him" would strip the sanctity of things, "reducing them to the object of criticism" (2021: 20, 21). The Subject would continue to grow in power to the point of Absolute Subject with Kant's Transcendentalism only to become equal to the world he constructs with "Fichte's I=I formula" whereby the individual is both the subject and the object (2021: 21). And in this approach that absolutizes the Subject and elevates it to the position of the maker of the world lies the bedrock of Romanticism: The Artist supersedes Nature and ceases to imitate it, as opposed to the past when the artist would be inspired by something superior to himself (2021: 22). Descartes paved the way for the Romantic individuality to manifest itself.

Again, in France, a century later, the French Revolution held a prominent place, serving as "a central experience" for the Romantics due to its promise to "emancipate the individual" (Wright, 1970: xiv). With Descartes' modern Subject and French Revolution's promise, the Romantic exalted individual was ready to emerge.

When reality seems incongruous with human nature, sensitive artists often seek refuge in the chimerical realm beyond the mundane happenings of life. There, they can ignore the ticking clock, a symbol of mechanization and standardization that hinders their ability to hear their inner voice. The Romantic artist is infused with individuality, which invites introspection and a persistent inner voice. According to M. H. Abrams, the Romantic is endowed with subjectivity that prompts him to reflect on himself because he "is a lamp giving off its own light, not a mirror reflecting the World" (Löwy

[3] All the translations from Turkish to English of Albayrak's citations are mine.

et al., 2001: 4). In fact, with the advent of Romanticism, the metaphor of the mirror was supplanted by the preference for the lamp or fountain (Ferber, 2005: 7). The contrast between the mirror and lamp symbolizes a central sentiment of Romanticism, which involves the rejection of core Enlightenment principles such as "universality, objectivity, rationality" (Löwy et al., 2001: 8). The lamp metaphor stands in stark contrast to these principles, embodying individuality, subjectivity, and irrationality, or more precisely, the elevated realm of imagination, as it emits its own light. Romanticism places emphasis on "subjective individualism," a concept analyzed by Georg Simmel, leading him to the conclusion, as conveyed by Löwy and Sayre, that "Romantic individualism stresses the unique and incomparable character of each personality" (2001: 25). The strong emphasis on individuality incited Romantics to turn inward, looking within themselves. Instead of merely reflecting God's work on nature like a mirror, they transformed into lamps, emitting their own light. A shift in "the spatial projection of reality," according to Frye, took place: the Romantic began reflecting horizontally, "outward towards the depths of nature," as well as internally, "towards the depths of the soul" (Ferber, 2010: 65). At this point, it is important to remember how the Reformation, Copernican astronomy, and Newtonian physics untrammeled the individual from the shackles of a vertical perspective towards God. This liberation allowed an open space in front of the individual, enabling the expression of one's inner world in all directions ad infinitum. With the rejection of rules and objective truths, the individual stands alone, left to interpret infinitely. The reflection of this social change is to be found also on the power struggles between Rhetoric and Hermeneutics. While both disciplines involve the transmission of meaning, Rhetoric focuses on conveying meaning convincingly, whereas Hermeneutics, known simply as the art of interpretation, strives solely to discern the intended meaning without the need for persuasion (Grondin, 2017: 8). Around 1750, however, the dominance of Rhetoric diminished, and Hermeneutics reemerged prominently (2017: 10). The catalyst for this resurgence was the weariness of the neutral objectivity of Enlightenment and a growing preference for interpretation by the individual.

Berlin discusses this detachment from objective and universal truths, noting a shift towards the remote in both time and space:

> "Clearly something occurred to have shifted consciousness to this degree, away from the notion that there are universal truths, universal canons of art … we are told that there was a great turning towards emotionalism, that there was a sudden interest in the primitive and the remote - the remote in time, and the remote in place - that there was an **outbreak of craving for the infinite**." (Berlin, 2000: 14) (Emphasis mine)

The emphasis on subjectivity destroyed objective values in all fields, as Berlin notes, from universal truths to the arts, as individuals sought to stand out without any limitations, aspiring to the infinite and the unlimited.

It is widely recognized that the 19th century was the final era of discovery which led the explorers as Berlin remarks, to the remote places, beginning in 1768 with "James Cook's first circumnavigation" to far-off and uncharted regions like Tahiti, New Zealand, and Australia. Other discoverers then headed to "sub-Saharan Africa beyond long-familiar coastal strips," "the whole west of the North American continent," "the interior of Australia," and "large parts of Central Asia"—though known to Chinese geographers (Osterhammel, 2009: 79). Osterhammel reveals how overseas enterprise addressed remote areas:

> "The geographical exploration of Europe paralleled these overseas enterprises; it did not necessarily precede them. In September 1799, a few months after Alexander von Humboldt boarded a ship for Havana, his elder brother Wilhelm set off for Spain. He was breaking new ground there almost as much as Alexander did in the New World. Seen from Berlin or Paris, Spain's Basque provinces were no less exotic than its American empire, and the same was true of other peripheral areas of Europe. Throughout the nineteenth century there continued to be individual travelers driven by a lust for adventure and scientific curiosity." (2009: 80)

The important keyword Osterhammel points out in the passage above, apart from yet another Romantic theme remote, is the emergence of individual travelers. A third significant group of individuals with a thirst for curiosity, not mentioned above belonged to the arts. Berlin asserts that for Romantics, to live is to express one's

relation to the universe, yet this expression cannot be done, and this is precisely the problem of the Romantics, whose solution imperatively incites the Romantic, as cited earlier, “to go to distant countries, (…) see exotic examples, (…) travel in the East…” (2000: 105). In this light, Romantic artists travelled across Europe, even at times to Istanbul in the East. Among the literary figures, we can cite Madame de Stäel who toured and wrote relentlessly, even criticizing Italians for maintaining a dull literature by repeating the works of dead poets. Goethe traveled to Italy. German Romanticism served as an inspiration for Coleridge while he was in Germany. After spending some time in Switzerland, Mary and Percy Shelley and Lord Byron made their way to Italy where they lived until Percy Shelley passed away there in 1822. Lord Byron subsequently journeyed to Greece, following his residence in Italy, with the noble aim of supporting the Greek cause against the Ottomans. However, his endeavors were tragically cut short by an untimely death. It is noteworthy that he had also visited Istanbul before undertaking this mission. Beyond Byron, several other Romantic figures explored Istanbul, among them Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Flaubert, Nerval, and Puškin (Ronchey et al., 2010: 930, 931, 932, 950). The aspect of the individual travelers incessantly moving from one place to another gives us hints of homelessness and the remote.

Spatial remoteness aside, it is essential to explore the factors contributing to the growing fascination with temporal remoteness.

> “But no generation … had had so decidedly the desire simply to repeat and to awaken to new life a past age and a lost culture. The romantics are constantly searching for reminiscences and analogies in history and they derive their greatest inspiration from ideals which they believe have already been realized in the past” (Hauser, 2005: 154)

In Tanilli’s book, the title **Romanticism Oriented Towards the Past** commences with the following statement “The meaning of history has set in motion in a way that connects the present to the past” (2013: 53). Butler notes that up until the mid-18th century, poets believed that "the metropolitan centers, the courts, the worlds of learning held all the keys to written historical records" (Butler, 1988: 42). However, a shift occurred with figures like Hames Thomson, Thomas Gray, and Oliver

Goldsmith, who bestowed upon the countryside "a new historical past, extending backward into pre-history" (1988: 42). The interest in remote history intensified with the archaeological and philological discoveries of the 18th and 19th centuries. Excavations of Herculaneum, Pompeii, and the temples of Paestum not only contributed to a growing fascination with antiquity but also fostered an appreciation for ruins—common Romantic themes (Claudon, 1980: 35). Excavated artifacts, including "statues, reliefs, and amulets" were curated and brought to the museum, contributing to the creation of a "renaissance orientale", which was also influenced by philological discoveries (Calasso, 2001: 13). Several nineteenth-century figures were at work for making these discoveries: Champollion deciphered Egyptian hieroglyphs, the deciphering of cuneiform owes much to Georg Friedrich Grotefend, Rasmus C. N. Rask, Eugène Burnouf, Christian Lassen, and Henry Rawlinson (Jean, 2010: 119, 122). Rawlinson also decoded Semitic Akkadian, while Edwin Norris deciphered the Elamite language (2010: 122).

The conventional perception of linear time was disrupted as the Romantics, spurred by a desire to transcend temporal boundaries, sought direct engagement with a past predating the Greeks. Previously accessible only through the Greeks, this more ancient past now became a subject of direct exploration. The artifacts unearthed through archaeological endeavors assumed a central role, adorning museum exhibits and offering a tangible link to epochs once shrouded in oblivion.

The incognito past, once relegated to obscurity, experienced a revival in the present. This resurrection was facilitated by the materialization of abstract historical concepts into concrete entities, a consequence of the revelations brought forth by archaeological discoveries. Furthermore, the intrinsic value of this abstract past was augmented through the deciphering of ancient languages — a contribution of philological breakthroughs. The unknown past thus gained sense and meaning.

In essence, the remote attained tangible essence substance through archaeological endeavors and acquired meaning through philological pursuits during the 19th century. The Romantics' journey into the remote realms of history, achieved through the combined forces of archaeological and philological discoveries, and

empowered by imagination and elevated subjective individuality not only enriched their understanding of the past but also provided a means of transcending the spatial and temporal limitations of their immediate reality. Leopardi's early tragedies, composed by 1813, such as **Pompeo in Egitto** (Pompeo in Egypt) and **La Virtù Indiana** (Indian Virtue), showcase his fascination with the remote, spanning both time and space (Brose, 2005: 265). In a similar vein, Shelley, inspired by the contemporary fascination with Egypt following philological discoveries, notably crafted the poem **Ozymandias**.

The Romantic theme of the consecration of nature can be attributed, in large part, to the repercussions of the Industrial Revolution. This transformative era not only led to the alienation of individuals from both nature and their intrinsic essence but to the view that nature was solely a source to exploit for materials. Conversely, the Enlightenment, which preceded the Industrial Revolution and inspired its inventors, championed science over religion, advocating for the elimination of religious dogmas in favor of knowledge. Fichte and Descartes played key roles in emphasizing the Subject, a concept that would pave the way for scientific progress.

However, the Romantics displayed hostility toward both movements. They abhorred the scientific knowledge championed by the Enlightenment, as it not only facilitated the Industrial Revolution but also unveiled mysteries that, in their view, activated the imagination. Additionally, the Romantics despised the alienation and mechanization imposed on the individual by the Industrial Revolution.

Romanticism slowly bloomed after a period that witnessed the effects of the emancipations of the 18th century around the world with the American Independence, the independence of the South American states from Spain in the 19th century, and the French Revolution, as well as the powerful Industrial Revolution, which transformed cities into large, smoky, loud, and fast-paced places more suitable for machines to function than human abodes. Britain saw a panoply of physical, social, and moral changes throughout the Industrial Revolution, as well as changes to its landscape. Due to the privatization of the land brought about by the Enclosure Acts, the then-landless working class moved from towns to cities along with the agrarian and industrial

revolutions. The rise of the new urban middle class partly decreased the potent role of aristocracy whose stratum was determined by birth, and thus established a new standard of gentlemanly conduct based on behavior (Casaliggi et al., 2016: 41).

> "The industrial revolution seemed to prove to Europeans the underlying assumption of the Scientific Revolution of the 17th century—that human beings were capable of dominating nature. By rationally manipulating the material environment for human benefit, people could create new levels of material prosperity and produce machines not dreamed of in their wildest imaginings. Lost in the excitement of the Industrial Revolution were the voices that pointed to the **dehumanization of the workforce and the alienation from one's work, one's associates, oneself, and the natural world**." (Spielvogel, 2011: 438) (Emphasis mine)

Spielvogel draws an amazing parallel between the alienation from oneself, as well as from the natural world, which results in the consecrated view of nature. Two components of the natural world may come to be identified, one literally and the other as social life. When people moved from rural areas to cities to work in factories, nature was lost in the first sense because, unlike in the past, they were partnering with man-made machines that appeared to defy and overcome both human and natural power. It is easy to discover everything that Romantics despise in factories, since "Romantics often manifested a deep hostility to everything mechanical, artificial or constructed" (Löwy et al., 2001: 38). A similar comment is expressed by Butler as well that a commonality shared by the Romantic poets was "a hostile reaction to modern urban life" (1988: 40). However, mechanization was not limited to factories; it also affected people's minds and hearts, as Thomas Carlyle states in **Sign of the Times** "Men are grown mechanical in head and in heart as well as in hand," and as the German Romantic Clemens Brentano observes in Paris in response to that mechanization:

> "All those I saw were walking in the same street, side by side, and yet each seemed to be going his own lonely way; no one greeted anyone else, everyone pursued his own personal interest. All this coming and going struck me as the very image of egoism." (Brentano qtd. in Träger, 1830, qtd. in Löwy et al., 2001: 42)

> "Indeed, the Romantics are painfully aware of the alienation of human relationships, the destruction of the old organic and communitarian forms of social life…" (2001: 42)

Industrial Revolution destroyed the economic unit, which was the family, transforming “the working individual into an impersonal labour force” which led to the loss of identity in a mass society where nobody knew each other, as opposed to the old days when people had known each other in small towns (Wright, 1970: xiii).

It may also be argued that because of the Industrial Revolution's demand for raw materials, nature lost its deistic and sublime traits to serve humanity, and instead transformed into a resource, like a gold mine, to extract materials abundantly (Löwy et al., 2001: 37). Nature turned into a commodity to be exploited. One of the central themes of the Romantic argument in this context is the exploitation and pollution of nature, with demonic smokes coming from factories full of such machinery that, when combined with the surroundings, it resembled Hell. The Romantics did not, however, solely blame the Industrial Revolution. The dazzling intellectual revolution known as the Enlightenment may have also sparked the inventions that led to and sparked the Industrial Revolution, such as James Watt's improvements to the steam engine that increased the productivity of coal mines, textile mills, and other industries, James Hargreaves' spinning jenny, Eli Whitney's cotton gin, and Richard Arkwright's water frame for the cotton-spinning wheel that ameliorated "large industrial buildings and infrastructure" (Casaliggi et al., 2016: 26). To illustrate the extraordinary improvements brought about by these machines, consider the cotton industry: the introduction of machines allowed for the weaving of cotton seven times more compared to traditional handmade weaving (Tanilli, 2013: 30). Watt's improvements to the steam engine paved the way for an almost unimaginable acceleration in commercial transatlantic voyages between Europe and America, reducing the duration from 3 weeks to 15 days. In 1838, the arrival of the first steamship in New York was heralded with the headline “Annihilation of Space and Time” (Paine, 2023: 499). This headline serves as a compelling example of how technological advancements profoundly influenced the perception of spatial and temporal reality.

And if I look for the essence of the "dominating nature" dictum, I discover an example from the Age of Enlightenment in Francis Bacon, who was teaching the next generation to utilize science to rule nature:

> "The true and lawful goal of the sciences is none other than this: that human life be endowed with new discoveries and power… I am labouring to lay the foundation, not of any sect or doctrine, but of human utility and power. And how would this "human power" be used? To "conquer nature in action." (Spielvogel, 2011: 352)

Bacon's fiat for the exploitation of nature was empowered thanks to Descartes, contemporaneous of Bacon and an epochal philosopher, who is credited with bringing the Subject to the fore and thereby exerting Bacon's "human power". Wright further expounds on the dominated nature and states that up to the 17th century the relationship between man and nature was "a balanced partnership" until the time when he "became the exploiter of nature and eventually its destroyer" (1970: xv).

Descartes's Subject starts ruling the world and with the power he holds he crushes old beliefs and asserts that answers cannot be obtained by revelation, dogma or by tradition but by reason and science (Berlin, 2000: 22). Although the belief in progress and science heralded an improvement in living conditions and proved it to be true, it came at an irreparable cost. The principles of the Enlightenment proved to be unacceptable for the Romantics who foresaw their consequences for all. The belief in progress, supported by science, prompted humans to create machines, which then began to dominate them without warning. William Godwin, Percy Shelley's father-in-law, alluded to the ominous consequences of the Enlightenment's emphasis on intellectual pursuits at the expense of "collective responsibility":

> "Knowledge, and the enlargement of intellect, are poor, when unmixed with sentiments of benevolence and sympathy… and science and abstraction will soon become cold, unless they derive new attractions from the ideas of society." **(**Godwin, 1985, qtd. in Hindle, 2003: xxxiii)

When the dauntless Subject came to possess such strength and rose in the hierarchy of power to even determine God through his relationship with Him, he was

ready to realize his potential using his reason. The Age of Enlightenment was poised to bloom and cast its illuminating light. However, the brilliance of this era faced criticism from the Romantics. Chateaubriand and Madame de Staël found mathematics repulsive, with Lamartine deeming it as a constraint on the human mind (Tanilli, 2013: 25). Thoreau in **The Notebooks** protests "What is science that enriches knowledge yet impoverishes imagination?" (qtd. in Pretor-Pinney, 2010: 150). Leopardi accuses science of lifting the veil of the mystery in nature:

> "But the nature, and the inanimate things have always been the same. They do not talk to the man as before: the science and the experience cover their voices." (qtd. in Arqués, 2017: 121)

And Keats in the poem **Lamia** is ailed by how the mysteries effaced due to philosophy:

> Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,
> Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,
> Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine—
> Unweave a rainbow, as it erewhile made (Pretor-Pinney, 2010: 151)

The evident conflict between the concept of nature in the Enlightenment and in the Romantic period is further discussed by James C. McKusick who expresses that while the rationalist philosophers and scientist conceived nature as a "well-regulated machine, best studied through direct observation and experience", the Romantics saw it as "inscrutable, a dynamic flux of vital energies, best engaged by an intuitive process of … sympathetic definition" (2005: 414). Nature was regarded mechanically and thus stripped off of its mysteries. The disappearance of these mysteries were argued by the Romantic writers.

> "**To romanticize the world is to make us** aware of the magic, mystery and wonder of the world; it is to educate the senses to **see** the ordinary as extraordinary, the familiar as strange,

> the mundane as sacred, **the finite as infinite**." (Novalis qtd. in Safranski, 2013: 11) (Emphasis mine)

In response to modern science, which alienated humanity from nature, the Romantics shared Novalis' call for re-enchantment, which was not only their individual objective but also a collective Romantic aspiration (Gorodeisky, 2016: w. page). Given Novalis' awareness of the most significant discoveries of his time, thanks to the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment, I interpret his statement as reflecting a certain estrangement from reality. This alienation arises from an inability to grasp the essence of life, attributed to the lack of mystery, consequently resulting in perpetual boredom. "As the light of the Enlightenment dimmed, the mystery returned together with the shadows that appeared in the twilight," writes Albayrak in reference to this absence of mystery (2021: 19).

However, with each new discovery, the more humanity (or the Subject) conquered the mysteries of nature, the apparent decline in its value became evident. Nature once considered an ideal and pure sanctuary, as well as a symbol of overarching ideals, withered in the relentless pursuit of capitalistic progress and more. Yet, the Romantics perceived it "to be consoling and morally uplifting; a kind of spiritual healer" invested with personality, reflecting human moods and moral impulses (Wright, 1970: xv). Wordsworth, in **Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey** avows to be "A Worshipper of Nature". The idea of nature was also radically transformed:

> "by the many voyages of discovery and exploration in the Americas, Africa and the Pacific Ocean. The use of word *nature* is indelibly altered by the European awareness of remote and "primitive" peoples who dwell far from conventional society." (McKusick, 2005: 414)

It is evident with MsKusick's remarks how the Romantic tropes also interact with each other: remote and primitive come into play to alter the use of nature. While Leopardi divides the three eras of men into primitive, antiquity, and modern, he exhibits the same glorification of the primitive. The primitive man is the most similar

to the essence of humanity since he lives in a broader society with more leisure, liberty, and freedom for himself. The modern man is confined and constrained by egoism in its absolute form, despite his attempts to thrive in even larger societies and environments (Arqués, 2017: 116, 118). A conflicting voice is heard in Shelley's thoughts in this viewpoint since he thinks that freedom was first established "in ancient Greece: “Let there be light! Said Liberty, And… Athens arose!” (Shelley qtd. in Löwy et al., 2001: 77). According to Berlin, a shift occurs in consciousness with Romanticism, moving away from universal truths and canons, and "there was a sudden interest in the primitive and the remote" (2000: 14). Berlin further elaborates on the concept of the primitive and cites A. O. Lovejoy, who affirmed that primitivism is one of the two specimens of Romanticism, suggesting that it was addressed even before Romanticism for it “celebrates noble savage, the simple life, the irregular patterns of spontaneous action” (2000: 19). Primitivism was in the end a demonstration that “there is a natural law which can be discovered best in the untutored heart of the native” (2000: 19). The primitive man lives in the heart of nature and is ruled by it, in contrast to the modern man of the age who has authority over nature and lives outside of it.

In addition to the exaltation of nature and the celebration of the primitive, another Romantic trope, homelessness, comes into play to explain the state of man in Romanticism: “Whenever the romantics describe their outlook on art and the world, (…) the idea of homelessness creeps into their sentences” (Hauser, 2005: 161).

As for the feeling of homelessness, one might immediately wonder if it could be related to the Enclosure Acts as well, which had been taking place since the 12th century, but rapidly intensified between 1760 and 1820 due to the Industrial and Agricultural Revolution (Casaliggi et al., 2016: 28; UK Parliament). As the name suggests, the Enclosure Acts involved enclosing open land with hedges and fences in order to improve agriculture. The open land eventually became privately owned, and traditional rights such as mowing meadows for hay or grazing livestock on common land in an open-field system were terminated (2016: 28). In his poem **Remembrances**, John Clare vividly depicts the impact of the Enclosure Acts on nature, describing how it stripped away its beauty and natural inhabitants, leaving behind a desolate scene:

> By Langley Bush I roam, but the bush hath left its hill,
> On Cowper Green I stray, 'tis a desert strange and chill,
> And spreading Lea Close Oak, ere decay had penned its will,
> To the axe of the spoiler and self-interest fell a prey,
> And Cross Berry Way and old Round Oak's narrow lane
> With its hollow trees like pulpits I shall never see again,
> Enclosure like a Buonaparte let not a thing remain,
> It levelled every bush and tree and levelled every hill
> And hung the moles for traitors - though the brook is running still
> It runs a naked brook cold and chill. (61-70) (Wright, 1970: 257, 258)

However, these changes not only brought improvements, but also alterations such as changes in the local landscape and the creation of a landless working class that can work in the factories of the Industrial Revolution, leading to a demographic shift from the countryside to towns or to cities (Casaliggi et al., 2016: 28). Those whose town or village served as their primary residence lost their homes and emigrated with a prevailing sense of homelessness. Due to the changes in their environment, from living in the heart of nature to cramped living conditions in flats, they experienced a spatial constraint imposed by the daily routine that required them to commute from home to the factories in harsh conditions. On the other side of the coin, there were those who were relatively luckier, generally possessing better economic means. These men of letters left their countries either in pursuit of new spatial discoveries or by voluntary choice, often as a form of self-imposed exile.

> "Novalis defines philosophy as 'home-sickness', as the 'urge to be at home in all places', and the fairy tale as a dream of 'that homeland which is everywhere and nowhere'. He praises in Schiller all 'that is not of this earth' and Schiller himself calls the romantics 'exiles pining for a homeland'. That is why they speak so much of wandering, wandering aimlessly and endlessly…" (Hauser, 2005: 161)

The most famous among them included the Shelley couple, Percy and Mary Shelley, as well as Lord Byron. Others who undertook extensive travels were Goethe, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Mary Shelley's mother Mary Wollstonecraft, Madame de Staël, and Schlegel. From Italy, Foscolo moved to England. Conversely, Leopardi desired to leave his hometown, Recanati, with such fervor that after a few attempts, he finally departed and extensively traveled around Italy. Romantic poets, too, though

unlike the displaced individuals affected by Enclosure Acts, felt the urge to leave home. Wright suggests that they, with their "intuitive prescience," sought harmony in the face of an imbalanced world (1970: xiv). The extensive travels undertaken by these individuals hint at a prevailing sense of homelessness that seemed to pursue them.

I should not overlook the fact that, as was already mentioned, the Romantics shared a strong sense of nostalgia, which perfectly describes the pursuit of ideals in the past, when they were in their most unadulterated state and had not yet been tainted by modernity, because the past offered "a less complicated way of life that which the present offered or the future promised" (Wright, 1970: xvii).

> "The romantics are constantly searching for reminiscences and analogies in history and they derive their greatest inspiration from ideals which they believe have already been realized in the past." (Hauser, 2005: 154)

One might wonder, pursuant to the feeling of homelessness, if the etymology of nostalgia, stemming from "nostos," meaning "homecoming," and "algos," meaning "pain" aptly explains the Romantic notion of the impossibility of returning to a home, whether as an exile or a traveler, giving rise to a constant sense of pain, the "algos".

> "Throughout Europe, writers were rediscovering the simple pleasures of a life far from urban areas, amid placid rural landscapes. The eternal human desire to return to the garden of Eden is expressed in this historical moment as a longing or nostalgia for a state of nature that (according to Rousseau) may never have existed, but which still proves to be necessary as a myth, or enabling fiction, to get the work of imagination done." (McKusick, 2005: 431)

> "A poetry that had insisted "if not now, when?" became a study of nostalgias, of the lost childhood of each creator." (Kermode et al., 1973: 6)

The nostalgia might as well be taken allegorically, signifying a return not to a physical home but to the home of ideals.

Another explanation is proposed for the desire to return to an earlier era of ideals, to the "distant, chivalric past" due to the disillusionments of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars (Casaliggi et al., 2016: 50). Consequently, the pursuit of these ideals was reignited in Romanticism. The mysterious was rekindled, much like the word "romantic," derived from the Latin "romauns," was associated with a specific genre of literature— "romances" that narrated "tales of chivalry, magic, and love, especially Arthurian stories" (Ferber, 2005: 1, 2). The very quest for ideals belonging to the past not only emerged as a trope but also lent its name to the movement.

> "A rejection of contemporary society, an experience of loss, a melancholic nostalgia, and a quest for the lost object: such are the chief components of the Romantic vision." (Löwy et al., 2001: 24)

> "Nostalgia for a lost paradise is generally accompanied by a quest for what has been lost." (2011: 22)

Berlin, on the other hand, remarks that the unembraceability of infinity leads to nostalgia, "since the infinite cannot be exhausted (…) nothing that we do will ever satisfy us" (2000: 104). He further interprets in the light of Novalis, that all that is done outside the frame of the quotidian life, such as writing of fantastic, mystical and esoteric stories, hint at going home to "what is pulling and drawing him, the famous infinite **Sensucht** of the Romantics", which is "an attempt to absorb the infinite", "make myself one with it", or "dissolve myself into it" (2000: 104).

1.3.1. Infinity and Eternity Unveiled Through Romantic Themes

In every instance, as elucidated for each Romantic trope, a yearning to free oneself from the constraints of present reality is apparent. According to Kant, this present reality is comparable to a matrix, or a net woven by time and space together

(Magee, 1995: 135). It is through this matrix that our senses perceive what we subsequently label as intelligible. In this manner, the inseparable relationship of space and time shaping our reality becomes a limited reality, as they cannot be transcended unless aided by external factors. This limitation is why the Romantics craved boundlessness to transcend and utilized anything possible to free themselves from the spatial and temporal constraints of present reality.

Imagination is exalted and acknowledged as a prevailing perception of Romanticism that bestows transcendence upon the poets, liberating them from the material world. The poet can be anyone, anywhere and at any time. It is the supreme power that allows the working of other Romantic motifs.

The Romantics accentuated individuality, emerging at least two centuries after Descartes ignited the flame of subjectivity with his "Cogito ergo sum." Descartes gave rise to a new individual who was no longer bound by peremptory adherence to religious dogmas or traditions. With the subjective path paved, the Romantics were no longer portrayed as mere mirrors reflecting; instead, they were depicted as lamps emitting their own light. They moved away from the objective principles of Enlightenment philosophy towards subjective values. This shift is also reflected in the reemergence of the art of interpretation, Hermeneutics, as the power of Rhetoric waned around the 1750s. There was no longer a need to convince with scientific facts; rather, there emerged a desire to interpret, granting them a realm of infinite interpretations in their art. Fueled by the power of imagination and an inward introspection into the depths of their souls, the Romantics found new avenues for creative expression. Individuality recognized no external and objective rules other than the subjective ones, enabling interpretation ad infinitum.

The stress on individuality fueled the curiosity of both the Romantics, who set off individually to distant lands, and the explorers, who focused on terra incognita on their maps, venturing into the remote. Spatial remoteness was traversed through numerous voyages across the world. Simultaneously, temporal remoteness yielded discoveries in two social sciences: archaeology and philology. In both fields, the remote past, previously unknown or scantily known through the Greeks, emerged in

concrete forms displayed in museums, facilitating direct confrontation, and in more abstract forms, imbued with meaning. The unknown remote past gained significance through language and artifacts extracted from archaeological sites, transforming it into a meaningful narrative. The remote in time and space facilitated an escapement from the constraints of reality, as the mind expands when contemplating them.

The primitive trope, celebrated by Leopardi, encapsulates the essence of humanity, attributed to the freer living conditions within nature as opposed to modern individuals who exist outside of this natural setting. The concept of the primitive serves as an effort to illustrate that only primitive men carry the natural law in their hearts. Untouched by the principles of the modern age, they inhabit a world where nature still retains its sacredness. The time period of the Romantics, marked by a sense of the remote in time, extends widely to encompass the primitive man, who is glorified.

The Intellectual Revolution led to discoveries that played a crucial role in laying the foundation for the subsequent Industrial Revolution. Despite improvements in living conditions, the Industrial Revolution brought unrecoverable costs both on nature and on the natural essence of men. Men became increasingly alienated from both themselves and others in their new society, losing their organic human essence as a consequence. The compulsory migration to cities, a result of the Enclosure Acts, forced them to engage in factory work, where they were reduced to mere impersonal labor forces. The Industrial Revolution brought about not just a demographic shift to urban areas but also profound psychological, social, and moral changes. It transformed the landscape in conjunction with the Enclosure Acts, contributing to the erosion of the sense of the divine in nature.

Despite these shifts, the Romantics continued to exalt nature, viewing it as a refuge from the challenges of modern urban life. They harbored hostility not only towards the urban environment but also towards everything mechanical, as they observed a growing mechanization of people in these modern cities. Thus, nature provided them with a sanctuary where everything remained untainted by machines. In this context, the trope of the consecrated nature is elevated alongside primitivism, as both embody the genuine, untutored, and natural essence of everything. "Especially

striking is the magnitude of the new Nature, as the canvas stretches indefinitely, almost to infinity" (Hope, 1959: 16).

Nature, once revered, was diminished to a mere resource for extracting materials due to the impact of the Industrial Revolution. The loss of divinity in nature was exacerbated by the Enclosure Acts, which uprooted people from their villages in the heart of nature. The men of letters who were not ripped out from their homes, still felt the vocation to leave home with their intuition and prescience to seek the balance. The Intellectual Revolution discovered abundant facts about nature, leaving no mystery to inspire them. Enclosure Acts sealed a feeling of homelessness into the hearts of men and artists. Those who moved to cities to work in factories, the most efficient products of the Industrial Revolution, lived in an estranged environment, while the self-imposed exiles of Romanticism incessantly traveled.

A sense of homelessness always pursued them. Many of them, including Keats, Lord Byron, Percy Shelley, and Leopardi, even died far from their provenances. Novalis encapsulated this sentiment, defining philosophy as a form of homesickness and an instinct to feel at home everywhere. Consequently, the Romantics embarked on endless journeys, driven by an insatiable desire for a place that felt like home, because their instinct was to feel at home everywhere. Their spatial reality stretched infinitely to offer them many homes.

As implied by the etymology of the word itself — "pain on the way back home" — nostalgia symbolizes not only the yearning to return to one's physical home but also to the home of lost ideals, a sentiment exacerbated by the Industrial and Intellectual Revolutions. The term Romanticism, rooted in the etymology, also refers to a specific genre of literature, namely romances that delve into chivalric, magical, and love stories of the remote past, particularly the Middle Ages. This literary connection provides a poignant representation of the lost ideals keenly felt by the Romantics, representing an era untainted by the profound changes brought upon by the said revolutions. Their temporal reality consistently existed beyond the present, reminiscing about a past that did not even belong to their own lives. A temporal escapement is evident.

Treating concepts out of the constraints of the spatial and temporal present reality, Jean Paul (1763-1825) elucidates why everything was imbued with "longing and memory," alluding to nostalgia, and "everything remote, dead," and "unknown" (Wolf, 2007:7). Because these elements possessed "the charm of transfiguration," serving to stimulate the magical imaginative power and "helped it soar into infinity."

Another explanation proposed by Berlin suggests that the unembraceability of the infinite leads to nostalgia simply because it cannot be exhausted.

The belief that the end is meaningless, given the inexhaustibility of the infinite, challenges the temporal positioning of actions. In this perspective, the end loses significance. However, our inherent nature rebels against this notion. An unreachable end disrupts the chronological quality of actions, contradicting the intrinsic human inclination toward purpose and culmination. This disruption shatters deeply the reality and creates fragments of these Romantic tropes which always hint at that which cannot be contained in the constraints of reality.

1.4. Romanticisms Across Europe

I have previously mentioned that Ferber preferred to talk about Romanticisms rather than Romanticism itself because the movement tended to take on different characteristics depending on the nation in which it blossomed.

The movement began in Germany in the 1790s. But then it branched out and entered European discussion thanks to Mme de Staël's **De l'Allemagne** (On Germany) (1813) (Ferber, 2005: 3). Romanticism made a leap to Italy and Britain in the 1810s, and then "resuscitated" in France in the 1820s and '30s, according to Curran, while some critics argue that it began in all of the aforementioned nations at the same time (Curran, 2004: 170). German romanticism developed from its initially revolutionary attitude to a reactionary standpoint, whereas Western Romanticism developed from a monarchist-conservative point of view to liberalism: after its birth, it took different courses in Germany and Western Europe (Hauser, 2005: 151). Curran travels to the 1750s to make the case that the common ground of European literature, whose territory

was controlled collectively by Britain, France, and Germany leaving out Italy and Spain since they preserved their primary inheritance, can be found as an augur for Romanticism (2005: 173).

The blooming of Romanticism halted in Britain in 1824 with the death of Byron, according to Curran, as Keats and Shelley had died even before him. However, French Romanticism continued for a longer period, with the central figure of Victor Hugo who died in 1885 (Curran, 2004: 170).

Romanticism in Italy and Britain share some commonalities in their return to older literary traditions as well as the political undertone. The said traits characteristics are not shared by all Romantic writers, but we should keep in mind that the **Risorgimento**, Italy's period of reunification during which the country attempted to expel foreign powers like Austria and France, is the reason for the weak popularity of the Romantic movement in Italy that will be explicated in the section "Romanticism in Italy".

1.4.1. Romanticism in Britain

According to its etymology, the word **romantic** derives from **romauns**: As well as meaning "vernacular form of Latin (that is, "French"), it also means "anything written in Gallo-Roman Old French" that are **romances** composed with themes such as "tales of chivalry, magic, and love, especially Arthurian stories" (Ferber, 2005: 2). As its etymology suggests, Romanticism is the pursuit of these chivalric quest romances. Due to the shift in cultural norms brought on by the Enlightenment, it has been noted that English Romanticism is actually a Renaissance of the English Renaissance, a revisitation of Spencer, Shakespeare, and Milton (Kermode et al., 1973: 3; Curran, 2004: 165). When the term Romanticism temporally eludes us by taking us to the time of Arthurian stories, and presents itself as a rebirth of older literature, it is stated that Romanticism is "an ageless and recurrent phenomenon" and it is then called High Romantic Age which starts with the American Rebellion (1783) and stretches to the first Reform Bill (1832) (Kermode et al., 1973: 5). High Romantic Age, which

begins with the American Rebellion (1783) and lasts until the first Reform Bill (1832), is the term used and manifests itself as a rebirth of older literature (1973: 5).

Butler, however, makes no mention of "High" and claims that Romanticism began at a different time due to the emergence of a new readership that enjoyed imaginative writing (1988: 38, 39). She concludes the period around the middle of the 1820s, pointing out that these writings shared recurrent themes such as an emphasis on "feeling and life experience" (1988: 38, 39).

It is interesting to note that, unlike the Germans, the English did not identify as Romantics; rather, they were divided by "literary precept and by ideology," and it was not until the 1850s that notable poets like Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, and Keats were unified under the banner of "English Romantics" (1988: 37). However, the said poets can still be divided into three categories according to how they appropriate common topics (1988: 40, 41):

- “The first group expresses a challenge from the still disenfranchised middle and provincial classes in the half century before the French Revolution” with Blake, and early Wordsworth and Coleridge,

- The second group (1790-1815, during the war between France and Britain) goes on to employ the same rural settings and approachable conversational tone, but fundamentally changes the oppositional message in favor of one that is politically and religiously orthodox, with matured Wordsworth and Coleridge,

- The third group (1812-1824) uses a lot less rural settings and it is democratic. Yet, though Byron and Shelley were of aristocratical background, they nonetheless denounced the state’s policies more gallantly than any other Romantic.

The English word "country," which refers to both the nation and a rural environment, is where provincialism was first glorified. Thomas Gray, William Blake, and William Wordsworth were among the poets of the eighteenth century who "replace the 'court' or London aristocratic discourse of Dryden, Pope, Swift and Gay with a

symbolic language exalting provincialism," and as a result, "country" came to be a metaphor to evoke feeling, idealism, and loyalty (1988: 41, 42). Butler states baldly "the term in use at the time for the sentiments I am describing, and for those who upheld them, was Patriot" (1988: 41, 42.). English Romanticism was to begin by building on that foundation in light of the strong national sentiments that were emerging within the romantic movement; however, it was only to be destroyed by the second generation of English Romantics, which includes poets like Byron, Keats, and Shelley. This is clearly demonstrated by Byron and Shelley's ardent support for the liberation of Greece from the Ottoman Empire. Their national interest did not lie in Britain but in Greece. In truth, Byron died in that conflict, not fighting but because of an illness soon before the conflict. William Wordsworth, Jane Austen, John Clare, George Crabbe, and a select few others chose to set their works in England, and this decision may be seen as deliberate at a time when "Englishness" and "Britishness" were under scrutiny (Casaliggi et al., 2016: 107). Based on that setting, which for the aforementioned authors is the south of England, "nationalist romance of green England" was a defining characteristic of English or Anglo-British character (Clara Tuite qtd. in Casaliggi et al., 2016: 107). They praised the lush meadows while decrying the new urban culture (2016: 107).

After distancing from mechanical and soulless cities, English Romantics sought a second separation, which on this occasion was from "time". As a result, there are three main categories of nostalgia that apply to English Romanticism: "the Middle Ages and the English Renaissance", "barbarian" societies (Nordic, Gaelic, Scottish and so on)" and "primitive Greco-Roman antiquity or traditional peasant society" (Löwy et al., 2001: 52).

Finally, there are only two ways to avoid reality: one spatial and the other temporal. While the exaltation of provincialism, as well as the excursions of the romantic poets provided the spatial escapement, the nostalgia granted the temporal avoidance from reality.

Because of "their indistinctiveness," which enables the imagination to fill in the blanks, distant prospects (or views), according to English critic and former painter

William Hazlitt, are appealing. He figured that such fancies were preferable to the situation as it was and that the Romantic instinct, escapism encompassed a trip into the past as well as remote or "primitive societies, religion, dreams and fantasies, or meditations on infinity and death, nothingness, and the afterlife" (Brown, 2006: 13, 14). In his essay **Why Distant Prospects [Views] Please** William Hazlitt claimed that distant prospects (or views) are gratifying because they free the imagination from restraint (2006: 13, 14).

1.4.2. Romanticism in Italy

Prior to the 19th century, Italian literature donated prominent authors to the literary canon such as Dante, Petrarca, Ariosto, Boccaccio and Tasso. Even though the 19th century Italian Literature contributed to Romantic literature with Leopardi, Manzoni and Foscolo, it was not as prolific as the Romantic literature of other nations. The reason behind this is the struggle for a revival of a nation, that since the fall of the Roman Empire in the 5th century, the country had been dominated not only by scattered states but also by invaders. Italy lacked unified governance as a nation. The **Risorgimento**, which means "revival" is the political and the national Renaissance of Italy, which finally achieved the sought-after unification in 1871. A few decades earlier, in 1847 the Austrian Chancellor Prince Metternich highlighted in a rather condescending way that Italy was not a nation, saying 'une expression géographique' (a geographical expression) (F. Venturi qtd. in Duggan, 2008: 74). Italy needed to liberate itself first from France and then from Austria to which Italy was given in the Congress of Vienna as a compensation for the loss of territories in Germany and Belgium. As Duggan suggests, the movement had further interests other than seeking an independent nation such as eradicating

> "the vices that centuries of depotism and clerical rule had allegedly engendered-for example-subservience, indiscipline, excessive materialism and a lack of martial ardour." (2008: xvii)

While the dawn of Italian Romanticism concurs with the fall of Napoleon (1814), the pre-romantic sentiments had already been hovering in Italian Literature in the works of Vittorio Alfieri and Ugo Foscolo (Casaliggi et al., 2016: 157). Since "romantic" was synonymous with patriotism and, interestingly, "classical" implied siding with the Austrians, Pietro Garofalo proposed that Italian Romanticism had "a symbiotic relationship with the Risorgimento," whose echoes could be found in the works of Foscolo, Manzoni, and Leopardi (qtd. in 2016: 158). Giuseppe Montani, a Romantic scholar, made a remark that supports the Romantics' anti-Austrian sentiment

> "In Italy books have started to appear in which it is asserted that a Romantic cannot help but to be a wrongdoer and an enemy to the proper social order" (Montani qtd. in Camilletti, 2013: 2)

At a time when the sentiments of such grandeur were required for the spirit of the **Risorgimento**, the revival of nationalistic elements that were disseminated by Romanticism in a nation whose cultural legacy was devoid of the glorious days of the Roman Empire further stoked the desire for the classical. Moreover, again due to the Risorgimento, in the heat of such patriotic environment, literary debates were not as interesting (Brose, 2005: 256). And it follows that the existence of Italian Romanticism is a topic of frequent discussion. In fact, Joseph Luzzi wrote **Did Italian Romanticism Exist?** in 2004. However, if I turn to the Romantic era, travel enthusiast Goethe remarked:

> "Romantic! this term, a strange one to the Italian ear, thus far unknown in Naples and in happy Campania, and used in Rome for the most part by German artists, raises since quite a while much clamour in Lombardy, and particularly in Milan." (Goethe qtd. in Camilletti, 2013: 1)

As was already established, Curran had contended that Italy and Spain were not influenced by the same Romantic playground as Britain, France, and Germany since their classical cultural legacy ruled over them (2004: 173). Even M.me de Staël

publicly chastised Italians in 1816 for lingering on their venerable classical legacy for too long and asked them to translate contemporary European Literature to revivify their literature. I must also add at this point that the literary value of her article aside, de Staël also suggested that arts in Italy did not satisfy the civic mission of educating the public (Duggan, 2008: 80). Brose expresses that de Staël's article essay served as the inspiration for the establishment of a new journal called the **Conciliatore** (1818-19) that endorsed her principles (2005: 256). Though it was published posthumously in 1906, Leopardi, whom De Sanctis calls "the Italian Byron," responded to Mme de Staël's critique in the article **Discourse of an Italian Regarding Romantic Poetry** (Singh, 1964: 239; Camilletti, 2013: 2). Leopardi's article, which portrays itself as a creative manifesto for the restoration of Italian culture through a critical engagement with ancient antiquity, of which Italian literature is considered as the most privileged descendant, concurrently strives to support the claims of Classicism (2013: 7).

Casaliggi and Fermanis can clearly see Leopardi's "fascination with simple country life" in his poems **Saturday Night in the Village** and **The Calm After the Storm** which link him to some British Romantics and also asserts that Leopardi's Romanticism is more comparable to the British Romanticism (2013: 163, 164). Similar to Wordsworth, Leopardi extols the concept of "emotions recollected in tranquility," which is reflected in his poems such as **Memories, The Solitary Bird,** and **To Silvia** (2013: 163).

As stated earlier, unlike Germans, English Romantics did not identify as such. On the other side, individuals living in Milan, a region of the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia, were the Italians who did not object to this label (2013: 1, 2). However, many of those Milan-based Romantics had either dispersed or passed away during the last two decades of the 1800s, and some even faced exile or imprisonment, including Mme. de Staël, Ludovico di Breme, Silvio Pellico, Federico Confalonieri, and Pietro Borsieri. As a result, I am unable to see a Romantic environment as vibrant as that of its European equivalents, and when one speaks about Italian Romanticism, only Leopardi, Manzoni, and Foscolo come to mind.

Famous writers like Goethe, Stendhal, Mme de Staël, Lord Byron, Percy Shelley, his wife Mary Shelley, and John Keats brought a European Romantic spirit to Italy. The Peninsula was given the labels "the world's university" (Goethe via Winckelmann), "mother" of European art and religion (Byron), "terrain of dreaming souls and female imagination" (de Staël), and "land of the dead" (Shelley) because these poets and writers dwell on their own Italian reception while failing to see Italy with its own time and its contemporary writers and rather see Italy as a "mausoleum" (Luzzi, 2004: 185). The marginalization of Italy served well to these Romantics insofar as its ruins and fragments are the tenets of Romanticism (Brose, 2005: 256, 257). Because ruins are the concrete materials to call upon the remote past, the temporal abode of the ideal and the glorious days according to Romantics, after which their imagination can be triggered. On the other hand, fragment means an incompleteness and points out to different contexts, one of which symbolizes the abrupt, unexpected end when the Romantics comprehend the ungraspable and thus leave the composition. The other context, as posited by D.F. Rauber, is that it invites for more interpretation by readers (qtd. in Casaliggi et al.: 53).

In his letter to his friend Peacock, Shelley vividly illustrates the discrepancy between his envisioned Italy and the accounts of the actual Italy:

> "There are two Italies—one composed of the green earth and transparent sea, and the mighty ruins of ancient time, and aërial mountains, and the warm and radiant atmosphere which is interfused through all things. The other consists of the Italians of the present day, their works and ways. The one is the most sublime and lovely contemplation that can be conceived by the imagination of man; the other is the most degraded, disgusting, and odious.'' (Luzzi, 2008: 78)

There were other travelers than the mentioned Europeans. Foscolo spent his eleven years of self-exile quiet productively penning articles about Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio while Manzoni relocated to Paris (2008: 22). Manzoni's Romantic identity may also be questioned, along with Leopardi's. He simultaneously celebrates the elimination of the term "Romantic" from the literary scene and lays the philosophical and creative foundation for Italian Romantic theatre in his plays **Il Conte di Carmagnola** (1820) and **Adelchi** (1822) (2008: 22, 23; Garofalo, 2005: 240).

In conclusion, Garofalo acknowledges the existence of Italian Romanticism and outlines its major tenets:

> "Romanticism achieves theoretical and artistic expression in Italy. With respect to the main branches of European Romanticism, Italian Romanticism is a moderate and cautious offshoot whose aspirations and characteristics tend to be culturally specific. The preponderance of the classical tradition, the boon and burden of Italian intellectual development, inhibits the grafting of the more radical outgrowths exhibited by much of European Romantic culture. Nationalism and historicism characterize Italian Romanticism as do the privileging of affinities with the Enlightenment (…), and the imbuing of a civil, political, and moral purpose in art." (2005: 253)

CHAPTER TWO
INFINITY AND ETERNITY

The essential nature of all lyric poetry is the portrayal of the infinite in the finite.
Schelling

According to Kant, time and space function collaboratively to shape our sensibility, akin to a net through which "we catch whatever we perceive, and those categories of understanding are the frameworks within which we make intelligible" that which is picked up by our senses (Magee, 1998: 135). Hence, time, alluding to eternity, and infinity, alluding to space, assume significance. Time possesses an incorporeal nature, while space appeals to our senses of sight and touch, serving as the backdrop for all life events. For humanity, two fundamental concepts both constrain and enable our existence: a time to be born and die, and a space to grow. What if one could explore concepts that provide liberation from the confines of spatial and temporal reality? Eternity is defined as time without a beginning or an end, stripped of its mobility, while infinity represents limitless space and quantity.

The question "Why did Romantic thinkers hold infinity and eternity in such high regard?" finds an answer: They esteemed these concepts for their representation of transcending the limitations imposed by the spatial and temporal boundaries of reality. This notion was further inspired by the workings of imagination, reflected in their poetics vested as different tropes. Berlin may give a presentiment to the Romantic obsession with these concepts:

> "(…) there was a great turning towards emotionalism, that there was a sudden interest in the primitive and the remote-the remote in time, and the remote in place-that **there was an outbreak of craving for the infinite**." (2000:14) (Emphasis mine)

> "**Friedrich Schlegel**, the greatest harbinger, the greatest herald and prophet of Romanticism that ever lived, **says there is in man a terrible unsatisfied desire to soar into infinity**, a feverish longing to break through the narrow bonds of individuality. Sentiments not altogether unlike this can be found in Coleridge and indeed in Shelley too." (2000: 15) (Emphasis mine)

Nature on Earth has been transformed into the seat of the divine, contrasting with the past when the divine was solely perceived to reside in celestial heaven. This shift is attributed, in part, to scientific discoveries, especially in astronomy, and partly to the adverse effects brought about by the Industrial Revolution—such as alienation from oneself and social life, and the increasing mechanization of the individual's mindset. Seeking refuge in nature, the individual yearned for a space where purity prevailed, offering a stark contrast to the growing mechanical aspects of life. Thus, on terrestrial grounds, infinity spread in all directions. The previous vertical awe towards God then extended horizontally and inwardly. "Especially striking is the magnitude of the new nature, as the canvas stretches indefinitely, almost to infinity", comments Nicolson on the new infinite view of nature (1959: 16).

Concerning eternity, the perception of a time without a beginning was generally discarded due to its inconsistency with the Bible. However, in the realm of geology, strides were being made to extend the short-time perception, pushing it further back, a notion that was initially regarded as absurd. Consequently, the conception of time gradually expanded, encompassing longer and longer durations. On the other hand, eternity also gave a sense of timelessness, unshackling the Romantic from the bounds of time. This emancipation is reflected in the fresh union of the past with the present, emerging at times as nostalgia. Poulet dilates upon eternity:

> "The present moment, then, is so intensely experienced that it seems as if its transience gives way to everlastingness, as if time stands still and becomes eternity. This feeling is quite concurrent in all Romantic poetry." (1954: 6)

Poulet's observations will be comprehensively addressed in the subsequent section where I delve into the concept of eternity. The idea of the present is bifurcated

into two categories, both referred to as “now”: one is a still and divine "now" known as sempiternity, giving rise to eternity, and the other is a dynamic "now" that engenders time. The divine sempiternity possesses a timeless essence, as it remains still and unchanging.

In this manner, the divine concepts once attributed to God, were now brought down to earth, transforming the infinite into the divine nature and the eternal into a divine now, with a sense of timelessness. Simultaneously, scientific advancements enlarged both the space and the time span of the Universe.

2.1. Defining Infinity and Eternity

Eternity and infinity fascinated the Romantics, for they both discuss boundlessness, and are resistant to any form of framing. Romantics coveted that interminable ground because they required a limitless space to contain their effusions, a space that should be immune to any limitations life may impose. In his poem **I Feel I am**, John Clare (1793–1864) expresses this very desire of the Romantic poet to be untrammeled from the chains. He pens that he was born among those who abhor the “bounds of place and time”, in other words, those who crave infinity and eternity, and after experiencing the meaning of his existence, he yearns for “a spirit that could travel o’er the space of earth and heaven, – like a thought sublime” and he longs for the eternal, free soul of his creator who is once more unencumbered by the shackles of time.

I feel I am; – I only know I am,
And plod upon the earth, as dull and void:
Earth’s prison chilled my body with its dram
Of dullness, and my soaring thoughts destroyed,
I fled to solitudes from passions dream,
But strife persued – I only know, I am.
I was a being created in the race
Of men disdaining bounds of place and time: –
A spirit that could travel o’er the space
Of earth and heaven, – like a thought sublime,
Tracing creation, like my maker, free, –

A soul unshackled – like eternity,
Spurning earth's vain and soul debasing thrall
But now I only know I am, – that's all. (1-14) (Rothenberg et al., 2009: 259)

Both infinity and eternity are used to denote endlessness in everyday discourse; however, whereas eternity is associated with a temporal reality, infinity is associated with a spatial reality as well as the limitlessness of quantification. However, Yale professor Carlos Eire points out that eternity is also a place in literature, with "the empyrean heaven" being the highest heaven above the stars (2010: 2). The idea of eternity is occasionally confused with or related to the idea of infinity, according to Eire, who continues to explain the confusion of the terms in terms of the endlessness they both refer to (2010: 24). They are both credited to God in Western history, but only eternity acquired a human component because it was thought to shape men's afterlives, including "heaven, hell, apocalyptic millennia, the New Jerusalem, and whatever else might follow earthly existence" (2010: 24).

The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy presents two definitions of eternity:

"Aeviternity: Eternity, thought of as an infinite past and future totality, in which events are contained in a matrix, like flies in amber." (Blackburn, 2005: 8)

"Eternity: The totality of time, conceived of as having no beginning and no end. The central philosophical dispute is whether eternity should be contrasted with time, not to be thought of as an especially long quantity of time, but as instead involving a kind of timelessness. Thus eternal objects, such as numbers, enjoy a timeless existence. *Plotinus and the *Neoplatonist tradition insist on a non- temporal interpretation of God's existence. *Boethius makes the distinction between sempiternity (everlastingness) and eternity: 'For our "now", as if running, creates time and sempiternity, whereas the Divine "now" stays not moving, but standing still, and creates eternity' (De Trinitate, 4. II). Such timelessness is beyond description, but its apprehension is the goal of mystical contemplation." (Blackburn, 2005: 121)

Infinity: "The unlimited; that which goes beyond any fixed bound" (Blackburn, 2005: 8).

The explicit temporal reference of eternity can be construed, yet infinity escapes without presenting a specific characteristic as to its inherent temporal or spatial

nature. Even though eternity is defined as having neither an end nor a beginning, it still generates a lot of debate and gives rise to two opposing perceptions: one is that it is timeless, enjoyed by God and impersonal objects like numbers that are unaffected by time, and the other is that the elusive present moment we call "now" that perpetually copies itself and thereby generates time, becoming sempiternity, much like how pearls become a necklace when strung together on a line.

We may look up to Huemer to resolve the ambiguity of infinity. While he endeavors to respond, "What is infinity?" in his book **Approaching Infinity**, he first compares it in its noun and adverb form and informs us the adverb 'infinitely' is used to describe an unlimited, boundless state of a notion which is superior to anything else that exists (Huemer, 2016: 3). However, for the noun 'infinity' he adds:

> "Infinity is commonly thought of as a very large number – a number larger than all the other numbers; or a number so large that if you add one to it, the result is no larger than you started with." (Huemer, 2016: 3)

The description alludes to the limitless principle of infinity, which cannot become larger no matter how much more is added. Huemer, however, calls the description into question and says that it creates "an intuitive conception of infinity and the infinite" (2016: 3, 4).

However, in the **Dizionario di Filosofia** (Dictionary of Philosophy) of Nicola Abbagnano, I find erudite explanations of infinity:

> **Infinity:** The term has the following primary meanings that are connected to each other in various ways: **1.** Mathematical i. which is the position/arrangement or the quality of size; **2.** Theological i. which is the unlimitedness of power; **3.** Metaphysical i. which is the absence of completeness. (my trans.)[4]

[4] **Infinito: "**Il termine ha i seguenti significati principali che sono tra loro variamente imparentati: 1. l'I. matematico che è la disposizione o la qualità di una grandezza; 2 l'I. teologico che è l'illimitatezza di potenza; 3 l'I. metafisico che è l'assenza di compiutezza." (1971: 487)

1. The mathematical infinity: The summary of the term is then expanded by Aristotle's two significations in his **Physics**:

> "that which by nature cannot be covered"- "that which can be covered, but not all, because it is without end"[5] (1971: 487) (my trans.)

The last definition is of a mathematical nature that elucidates infinity as an inexhaustible notion that each time what is covered is something **new, finite** but always **different** according to Aristotle (1971: 487). This nature of infinity was adopted and utilized by Lucretius to contend Epicurus' spatial infinity, for which doctrine an arrow always travels a part of the space which stretches infinitely, and the said part is always **new, finite, and different** (1971: 488). Yet the inexhaustible character of infinity brings about a negative connotation as affirmed by Abbagnano and he is not alone in doing so. Two centuries before him, William Rider wrote the following entry for infinity in 1759 in his **A New Universal English Dictionary**:

> **"Infinity**: This word is taken in two senses intirely different, i e. in a positive and a negative one. Positive infinity, is a quality of being perfect in itself, or capable of receiving no addition, and is properly applied to the divine attributes or effence. Negative infinity, is the quality of being boundless, unlimited or endless." (w. page)

If I return to Abbagnano, he acknowledges the inexhaustibility of infinity by quoting Plotinus and Kant. For Plotinus the infinite cannot be exhausted neither in numbers nor in size, and Kant observes, following Plotinus' perspective that:

> "The real (transcendental) concept of infinity is that the successive synthesis of unity in the measurement of a quantum can never be accomplished." (Abbagnano, 1971: 488)[6]

[5] "(...) ciò che per natura non può essere percorso (...)" and "(...) ciò che si può percorrere, ma non tutto, perché è senza fine (...)"

[6] "Il vero (transcendentale) concetto dell'infinità è che la sintesi successiva dell'unità nella misurazione d'un quantum non può essere mai compiuta."

2. Theological infinity: The theological characteristic of infinity was put forward in the last period of Greek philosophy with Plotinus and Philo who, however, distinguished the inexhaustible mathematical infinity from the infinity of the One (God)-"the unlimitedness of power" in **The Enneads** (1971: 489). The omnipotence of infinity was maintained and frequently expressed in Scholastic philosophy as well (1971: 489).

3. Metaphysical infinity: If I reminiscence Aristotle's infinity, he held the inexhaustibility of infinity, "thus it can never be a whole" (my trans.) (1971: 490). Plato on the other hand retained in **Philebus** that:

> "infinity is that which is devoid of number or measurement, and that is susceptible to both, excluding order and determination thereof." (my trans.) (1971: 490)

Eternity addresses time, and infinity addresses space and in relation to that also to quantity, though in common speech both concepts might substitute one another. While sempiternity born out of eternity subsists under eternity as its moving image producing time from the running "now", the "now" this time does not move, stays still and creates eternity. Whereas infinity has three aspects; one is mathematical in which the infinitely stretched space that is covered by movement is measured, recall the arrow, and it cannot be exhausted in number or size according to Plotinus, in the second place it is theological which regards infinite power of Plotinus' God. I may ask how the power of God is measured? Huemer mentioned if you add one to infinity it is still the same number because the concept inherently bears the ultimate amount. The third and the last one is the metaphysical level where Plato raised infinity from the plains of reality to the beyond and affirmed that infinity is free from numbers or measurements and thus it cannot be determined.

2.2. A Brief Development of Infinity in Philosophy

Anaximander is the first philosopher who comes to mind when the word "infinity" is uttered because of his cosmogony, which holds that the infinite, or **apeiron**, is where everything originated. He did not select the arche as an element, in contrast to other modern thinkers of the time, but rather a concept whose definition is illusive. **Aperion** is not a fixed idea in light of this. It alludes to an eternal motion in which the polar opposites, like hot and cold, separate (Rovelli, 2020: 52, 86).

Greeks were terrified by the limitless and unbounded character of infinity and tended to see it negatively (Russ, 2011: 401). While Eudoxus of Cnidus (4th century BC) was the first to investigate it mathematically at length even before Zeno of Elea (circa 495–about 430 BC), he was the first to explore this notion and conclude it with a paradox known as Zeno's paradox (Blackburn, 2005: 186). The positive connotation of the infinite was to be reversed and brightly altered by mathematical discoveries and, most importantly, by Christianity, which identified infinity as God's omnipotence (Russ, 2011: 401).

The early 19th century witnessed a curious preoccupation with infinity in philosophical, mathematical, and religious debates after a long silence on the subject (Feder, 2014: 169). While discussing matters in the realm of religion, George Berkeley (1685-1753) questioned the possibility of talking about infinity (2014: 170). In contrast, Newton (1643-1727), besides inventing infinitesimals, viewed infinity as "the limit of what can be said or talked about" in calculus (2014: 190). While John Locke (1632-1704) maintained that by counting, the idea of infinity comes forth, as numbers never end, also proposing that the incomprehensibility of infinity makes us believe in it (2014: 179, 182).

2.2.1. The Normalization of Infinity

Giordano Bruno was burned at the stake in 1600 for his belief that there was an endless universe made up of infinitely numerous worlds (Smith, 2019: 86).

Giordano Bruno did not have the same luck as Galileo or Henry More in positing theories that would contradict the Church's dogmas.

Smith claims that "religion, literature, and mathematical sciences were engaged in reconceiving of infinity" (2019: 87). The startling concepts of infinity became commonplace with the invention of telescope and microscope, when the "infinitely small" was brought to the very sight of the eye expanding to "infinitely large," and when the "infinitely numerous" entities of the universe were examined (2019: 86). Additionally, the contentious simultaneous "infinitesimal calculus" proposed by Newton and Leibniz in the 17th century aided an understanding of "infinity" in terms of an unimpeachable mathematical approach (2019: 86). In the same way that Thomas Kuhn suggests that a scientific topic undergoes a paradigm shift in public through the medium of a non-scientific medium, such as literature, scientific findings hovered over the mountains and were brought to the terrestrial ground by the literature to make them more accessible and understandable to the public, especially between 1700 and 1770 (2019: 89). Wiesner-Hanks, too, informs that in the aftermath of the developments in science and philosophy in the 17th century, writers in literature included more scientific terms in their prose work (2013: 380). While the telescope allowed gazing at the celestial spheres, which were regarded divine, and brought them right before the eye, the infinite distances became unbelievably shorter to a rather small tool considering the shortcut it provides. The infinite became included in the quotidian life because nature according to Smith was infinitized and thus became the seat of the Divine. Recall the Romantic theme of “consecrated nature”.

> “The religious notion of a transcendent infinite is not simply reduced to the finite but, rather, made an active part of a newly conceived nature. Beyond this process, what interests me is the way that over some hundred years the shock of the anomalous infinite, which was masterable at first by a limited number of intellectuals, came to be dramatically and widely experienced as a fact of the finite world. In the deeply religious poetry of the eighteenth century, the (divinely) infinite was drawn into nature as part of a dialectic that now could celebrate this infinitely rich natural world as divine. The normalization of the scientific, mathematical and religious infinite in the literature of this period shows that secularization is not a one-way process but a dialectic that transforms nature itself by infinitizing it.” (Smith, 2019: 86)

Our understanding of the finiteness was outmoded in light of the scientific discoveries made by Copernic, Galileo, and Kepler regarding celestial entities, and this new perspective was first presented in literature in 1686 by a French "playwright, journalist, philosopher, and mathematician" Fontenelle in his book **Entretiens Sur La Pluralité des Mondes** (Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds):

> 'But', she replied, 'here's a universe so large that I'm lost, I no longer know where I am, I'm nothing. (…) All this immense space which holds our Sun, and our plants will be merely a small piece of the universe? As many spaces as there are fixed stars? This confounds me – troubles me – terrifies me.''And as for me', I answered, 'this puts me at my ease. When the sky was only this blue vault, with the stars nailed to it, the universe seemed small and narrow to me; I felt oppressed by it. Now that they've given infinitely greater breadth and depth to this vault (…), it seems to me that I breathe more freely, that I'm in a larger air, and certainly the universe has a completely different magnificence. (…) 'You offer me', she said, 'a kind of perspective so long that my eyes can't reach the end of it (…) I'm beginning to see the Earth so frighteningly small that I believe hereafter I'll never be impressed by another thing.'" (Fontenelle qtd. in 2019: 90)

I clearly see a new personality emerging from Fontenelle, one who delights in the greater space that infinity allows him to reflect rather than being at odds with it. In England, John Milton is praised for being "the first English poet to practice the "Aesthetics of the Infinite", as he transferred the "vastness from God to interstellar space, then to terrestrial mountains" (Nicolson, 1959: 273).

I discussed in the first chapter how Pietism, a branch of Lutheranism prioritized experiencing God individually without addressing to an intermediary, a process which incites intense expressions. Smith, then goes on to explain that "Pietism internalizes and emotionalizes the perspective of Fontenelle's plurality of world, drawing the infinite divine into the infinite depths of the self", also discussing that "the religious notion of a transcendent infinite being is not simply reduced to the finite but, rather, made an active part of a newly conceived nature" (2019: 88, 89, 100). God's infinity evoked within the individual, giving rise to another Romantic theme "the subjective individuality". This is why Northrop Frye suggested that in the Romantic era, a shift took place in the spatial projection of reality, from the vertical projection towards God to a horizontal and inward one.

In the 1770s, Germany experienced "the emergence of a new form of lyric poetry," which Wellbery claims Goethe used to make the traditional idyl's public concerns more personal "for subjective reflection" (Wellbery qtd. in 2019: 91). This development was in line with subjective individuality of Romanticism. Other significant individuals in religious literature who understood this shift include Friedrich von Hagedorn, Abrecht von Haller, Andreas Gryphius, Barthold Heinrich Brockes, Johann Wilhelm Ludwig Gleim, and Friedrich Klopstock (2019: 91). This change illuminates everything, according to Smith, who also claims that it:

> "transformed the basic concepts of the divine, transcendence, nature, and the soul in such a way that the infinite gets normalized into and transforms the finite".

and changed the scientific perspective to "an aesthetic view of nature" (Parerga qtd. 2019: 91). Because only then, in the words of the Romantics, "insofar as it brings out a different conception of nature as organic rather than mechanical," can nature be (re)enchanted in the face of contemporary science (Gorodeisky, 2016). This change in aesthetics was represented in both literature and painting, with Caspar David Friedrich being a major Romantic devotee:

> “Thus, man’s absolute goal is not man, but the divine, the infinite. It is towards art, not the artist he should strive! Art is infinite, finite all artists’ knowledge and ability.” (Wolf, 2022: 21)

Recall how Greeks were terrified by the unlimitedness of infinity. Christianity brought about a new horizon to the perception of infinity, attributing it to God’s unlimited power, but by Pietism, the infinite was summoned inwardly by the individuals.

In the 17th century, England was marked by the presence of a remarkable figure whose perennial inspiration and influence resonated more with his pupils, including prominent figures such as Leibniz and Newton. This individual, concurrently a poet

and a philosopher, a Cambridge Platonist, Henry More (1614–1687) was the first English to teach "the infinite space and an infinity of worlds":

> "'Roused up," he said, "by a new Philosophick furie," he denied "the Hypothesis of either thee world or time being infinite; defending the infinitude of both. He broke the bonds of finite time and space." (Nicolson, 1959: 134)

The significance of More is revealed in his statement, wherein he does not dismiss the concept of time as infinite. Instead, he embraces both time and space, attributing to them an infinite nature. Following this period of unity, More published in 1646 a significant book of poems titled **Democritus Platonissans; or, an Essay upon the Infinity of Worlds Out of Platonick Principles** wherein his greatest contribution lies in introducing the concept of absolute time and space, a concept further developed through his correspondence with Descartes and culminating in the the **Enchiridion Metaphysicum** and **Divine Dialogues** (1959: 135). Space was "the sensorium of Deity", the conduit through which finite humanity could draw nearer to understanding the genuine Infinite, which is God (1959: 135, 136). In Nicolson's statement, "More felt the "psychology of infinity," the insatiability of man," who strives for the ungraspable, "yet feeling not failure but delight in the effort", I discern a revealed and compelling Romantic doctrine (1959: 135, 136). More exhibits a Romantic trait by enjoying the inexpressible nature of the infinite. Referencing Schlegel's assertion that the sacred can never be seized and any attempt to impose a form upon it results in distortion, Berlin concludes that this inexhaustibility leads to nostalgia:

> "Since the infinite cannot be exhausted (…) nothing that we will do will ever satisfy us. (…) the famous infinite Sehnsucht of the Romantics, the search for the blue flower, as Novalis called it. The search for the blue flower is an attempt either to absorb the infinite into myself, to make myself one with it, or to dissolve myself into it." (2000: 104)

> "Your relation to the Universe is inexpressible, but you must nevertheless express it. This is the unending Sehnsucht, this is the yearning, this is why we travel in the East and write novels about the past, this is why we indulge in all manner of fantasies." (2000: 105)

That the infinite is ungraspable and inexpressible, led the Romantics to alternative endeavors for its expression, including venturing to distant lands and revisiting the past in their writings. These pursuits, coupled with More's depiction of space as the sensorium of Deity, provide various Romantic themes, encompassing the remote, nostalgia, the consecrated nature, and, finally, the exalted imagination through which More composed his poems.

> The Centre of each severall world's a Sunne …
> About whose radiant crown the Planets runne,
> Like reeling moths around a candle light;
> These all together, one world I conceit,
> And that even infinite such worlds there be,
> That inexhausted Good that God is hight,
> A full sufficient reason is to me,
> Who simple Goodness make the highest Deity[7] (More qtd. in Nicolson, 1959: 134)

In contrast to Giordano Bruno, who faced execution by burning at the stake in 1600 for advocating the plurality of worlds, the Englishman, Henry More, in the same century, could impart teachings on infinity, eternity and an infinity of worlds to pupils such as Newton and Leibniz. Remarkably, in the 1700s, the public exhibited delight in embracing these ideas thanks to the literature who preoccupied infinity. The inventions of this era, including the telescope, microscope, and mathematical advancements which substantiated these findings, rendered the cravings for boundless concepts, particularly the infinite, permissible to yearn for later on for the Romantics.

2.3. A Brief Development of Eternity in Philosophy

I have previously noted that eternity was predominantly conceived within temporal frameworks. Therefore, before delving into the philosophical exploration of eternity, I will briefly address the concept of time. Plato and Aristotle were tempted to base their theories on such a cosmogonical view since the creation myths of Ancient Greece suggested that chaos, an infinite emptiness, was the origin of the cosmos and

[7] From **Democritus Platonissans; or, An Essay upon the Infinity of Worlds Out of Platonick Principles**

that it was to be followed by the development of time (Arslan, 2016: 4). Turetzky in his book **Time** recounts the following:

> "Apart from the representation of time as the deity Kronos, known for devouring his offspring, another significant myth involves mutilation, wherein Kronos castrates his father Ouranos (the Sky) while Ouranos mates with his mother Gaia (the Earth). This act results in the tearing apart of the sky and the earth, creating a gap from which the children and spirits of vengeance emerged. Additionally, Aphrodite is said to have been born from the genitalia of Ouranos." (2000: 6).

It is interesting to note Turetzky's observation that "Earth and sky were commonly used as images of the boundary between the human world and the divine" in relation to the generative and destructive nature of the myth of time (2000: 6). In this case time seems to be born between two boundaries and particularly when these two boundaries are merging.

As stated by Bardon, "although there can be a first moment of a particular process of change, there can be no ultimate beginning or end to change itself," Aristotle maintained that the sense of change was retained because all changes would always require a prior change. For him, time is merely the calculation tool for change, concluding that "both time and the changing universe that it measures are eternal," for any given time, for Aristotle can be a bridge between an earlier and a later time" (2013: 153, 154).

In Plato's **Timaeus**, Demiurge, the divine creator imposes "order and proportion on chaotic matter" in order to create the visible universe: When proportion (or ratio in Greek) is applied to matter, it acquires "form, rationality, and intelligibility," and as a result, "matter and appearances become intelligible and real to the degree they embody form" (Turetzky, 2000: 14). So that the newly created cosmos would match its eternal blueprint as precisely as possible. The Demiurge then creates time as a reflection of eternity. Time moves forward in accordance with numbers, according to Plato, and is a "moving image of eternity." Therefore, Time is different from the eternal forms in two ways:

> " it moves, i.e. it partakes of change; and it moves according to number, its movement is rationally ordered. Time is an image of eternity because, while time moves and changes, its

> movement is the movement of the sphere of the universe. This is circular motion, in which after each complete cycle the sphere returns to its original position. We are told that “was” and “will be” apply only to processes of becoming which are in time. Time itself encompasses all such processes; it follows that time as a whole does not change and thus resembles eternity.” (2000: 15)

As a moving object that cannot be a part of ultimate reality, which is the Good, time exists in the world of appearances, but it "does not itself become" (2000: 12, 15, 17). According to Plato, the structure of existence is hierarchical, with eternity being seen as a "higher" or "superior" realm that exists outside of time and contains the timeless forms or ideas that serve as the foundations of the physical universe, the world of diversity and changeability (Eire, 2010: 43). In light of this, I may see that while time is the "moving image" of eternity, eternity itself is a "timeless duration" (2010: 43).

Although Plato differentiated Time and Eternity, he was not straightforward as to the nature of eternity (2010: 46). That gap was filled by Plotinus (ca. 185–254), the creator of Neoplatonism. Along with Platonic figures like "the mythology of Love and the One on high," they serve as inspiration for Shelley as well (Quinney, 2011: 418). While Plotinus suggests that time emerges from eternity, namely, eternity descends into time without losing any aspect of its existence, Plato views time as the moving image of eternity. Not only does Plotinus, alongside Philo (ca. 15 BCE–50 CE), unify the concept of time, but they also converge on a singular source of creation—an entity positioned outside the realm of time (Eire, 2010: 45). Philo, a Jew, naturally attributes this timeless quality to his God, Yahweh, while Plotinus conceptualizes a 'divine triad': 'the One' (an eternal transcendent being), 'the Nous' (mind), and 'the Psyche' (soul)" (2010: 44). Similar to Plato, Plotinus delineates a hierarchical order of realms:

> “Plotinus thinks of the eternal realm, which, for Plato, was occupied by the forms, as multiplying and expressing itself in stages. Each stage is a hypostasis, a substantial expression-form, or, rather, hypostases are substantial forms that express themselves through the emanation of additional substantial forms. In emanation, each hypostasis overflows it own bounds and produces another lesser hypostasis, weaker and containing less reality.” (Turetzky, 2000: 46)

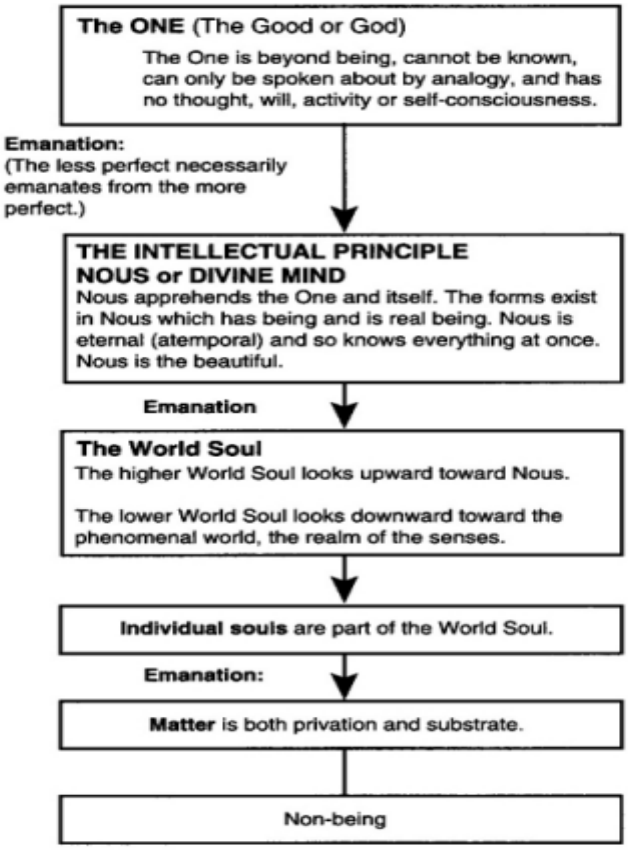

Figure 1: Plotinus' Hierarchal Order of Realms.[8]

Time, in Aristoteles' view, is a sign of impending change. On the other hand, Plato depicts time as having been created when the chaos is brought under control. At this point, I can perceive chaos, which is infinite, existing within the immeasurable nothingness. Once infinity had been shaped, decided, and spread out as space, it was time's turn to be processed as the image of eternity. While Plato's philosophy introduces a division between the realm of appearances and the ultimate reality, Plotinus' philosophy emphasizes the omnipotence of the Good, or in other words, the God emanating throughout.

[8] (Turetzky, 2001: 47)

2.3.1. The Normalization of Eternity

While Aristotelian spatial concept of a Geocentric cosmos was widely accepted, his Eternalism failed to find an audience, on the grounds that it was not consistent with the “Christian (and Jewish) conception of the created status of the world and everything in it” (Rudwick, 2005: 117, 118). While Christians dismissed eternalism, deists and atheists favored it. For deists, a timeless "Supreme Being" seemed fitting, while atheists embraced the idea of an eternal cosmos without a creator in the 18th century (2005: 118).

In the 17th century geology was gradually emerging as a science, owing much to "the interest in the possibility of indefinite time for the development of the earth" (Nicolson, 1959: 184, 250). Geology, providing empirical evidence, brought about causal explanations with ties to the temporal dimension. According to Rudwick, the traditional short timescale “had been derived from calculations made” either in the 17th or 16th century “by practitioners of the historical science of chronology”, “based on the analysis of textual records of all kinds”, such as the Bible (2005: 116). In the 18th century, assertions about the inconceivably vast age of the Earth, measured by standards beyond human comprehension, were frequently associated with explicit adherence to the doctrine of an eternal universe, which did not allow a nonhuman world, asserting that “there had never been a time when the world was without human or at least rational life” (2005: 118).

Volcanoes offered the most compelling evidence for the longer timescale that the Earth could afford. While Hamilton came to the conclusion that Vesuvius had been a geologically active volcanic area long before any recorded historical accounts, Recupero's estimation of a soil layer forming on lava surfaces on Etna, requiring over two thousand years, and the resulting antiquity of at least 14,000 years, posed a significant challenge to the traditional short timescale for the world's geological history (2005: 120, 121). A French naturalist Jean-Louis Giraud-Soulavie conducted his research on Vivarais and calculated privately that “some six million years must have elapsed since the lavas were erupted” (2005: 122, 123). With geology, the calculated amount of time transcended the prevailing opinions of that era significantly. Yet,

Rudwick suggests that even before the calculations, human imagination needed to be stretched "even among savants, before talk of vast amounts of time could begin", and notes that Kant's previously established hypothesis, proposing that the universe has undergone a series of millions of years and centuries to reach its current state, was widely acknowledged and accepted by cosmological theorists (2005: 124, 125).

In the 18th century Buffon conducted experiments with small spheres to prove his theory that "the earth and other planets had all originated simultaneously from a plume of intensely hot material torn from the sun" and then they "condensed into discrete bodies" (2005: 127). He estimated the age of Earth to be 74,832 years. Later in his new drafts, he confidently noted "a figure of about three million years on the whole sequence" (2005: 128, 129).

Rudwick concludes that in the 18th century the savants recognized the mounting evidence indicating the significant inadequacy of the conventional short timescale, yet, their incapacity to provide precise quantitative measurements for the actual timescale of the Earth did not diminish their qualitative certainty that its magnitude was truly beyond imagination:

> "In contrast both to the short and finite timescale of traditional chronology and to the infinitely long perspective of traditional eternalism, they were beginning to open up the conceptual space for a third (and modern) option: the timescale might be unimaginably lengthy, yet not infinite." (2005: 131)

Earth's remote past did not become eternal, but it became evident and far much older thanks to two elements: empirical evidence the Earth offered and a transcendent imagination.

In the 18th century, another eminent figure from Scotland, recognized as the father of modern geology, is James Hutton. He adopted the idea that time is like an abyss from Buffon, and his concept of time as a dimension stretched without limits was a prevalent view among Enlightenment savants (2005: 169). Hutton argued that the vastness of time and space transcends human comprehension and, therefore, cannot be observed directly. It should be noted that in his assumption of eternalism, Hutton's

system implicitly argued an enduring human presence (2005: 170). For Hutton, fossils directly reveal an indefinite extension of time into the past, indirectly indicating the existence of human life. Yet, no matter how distant he could go through his observations, his eternalism was limited by human knowledge, as he notes "with respect to human observation, this world has neither a beginning nor an end". Rudwick states that Hutton's eternalism was not controverted by the vastness of time but by asserting implicitly yet another claim that the cosmos "had had no origin and would have no end", and proposing "that there had been 'a regular succession of earths from all eternity! and that the succession will be repeated for ever!!' " (2005: 170, 171).

2.4. The Sublime: From the Origins to Burke and to Kant

The concept of sublime is vital both to the understanding of Romanticism and its obsession with infinity and eternity. The sublime's relation to the unbounded conceptions, infinity and eternity is aptly highlighted by Balfour, who, in quoting Kant, notes that "the sublime as an aesthetic experience or even an event is understood by Kant to be a matter of the unbounded, **Unbegrenztheit**, that which is without limits" (2011: 504). In establishing its connection to Romanticism, I reference Cian Duffy, who views the sublime as the emblem and the archetype of Romanticism:

> "Canons of national Romantcisms consistently foreground engagements with the sublime, whether it be Victor Frankenstein's encounter with his creature on the Mer de Glace; Thomas Cole's painting of the American wilderness; the Gothic forests and mountains of Ann Radcliffe's novels and the plays and poems of Frederich Schiller and Gottfried Bürger."(2023: 2)

Duffy then continues his discussion by citing the works of Wordsworth, Madame de Staël, Ugo Foscolo, Giacomo Leopardi, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Adam Mickiewicz, Mary Wollestonecraft, Knud Baade, J. C. Dahl, Franz Liszt, Ludwig Van Beethoven, John Martin, J. M. W. Turner and Joseph Wright. With the said names it becomes evident to understand the versatile grounding of the sublime in all art forms.

The core idea which aids the comprehension of the Romantic fascination of infinity and eternity lies also in the claim of the sublime “that a man can in feeling and in speech, transcend the human” as succinctly articulated by Thomas Weiskel (2023: 5). Weiskel's assertion operates on two fronts: feeling pertains to the inward, and speech to the outward. The sublime is the culmination of the desire to transcend human boundaries, both spatial and temporal. While much of the discussion of the sublime is limited to the spatial boundlessness (infinity), the temporal boundlessness (eternity) is reflected as timelessness which again will be expounded later in the chapter.

The historical context, as articulated by Wright, unveils that with the onset of the Industrial Revolution, the equilibrium in the partnership between man and nature was disrupted. Man began to dominate nature, and as a consequence, "when nature is no longer to be feared by man he can afford to see mountains and wilderness as sublime or picturesque" (1970: xvi).

The sublime was first explained by Longinus, or rather, that explanation was credited to him, in the treatise **Perì Hỳpsous** (On the Sublime), in the first century A.D. Longinus attributes five principles to the sublime that the first two have deeper meanings in natural settings, while the other three is assisted by art (Buck, 1940: 1115):

- “Grandeur of thought”
- “Vigorous and spirited treatment of the passions”
- “A certain artifice in the employment of figures, that are thought and speech”
- “Dignified expression (…) the proper choice of words and use of metaphors”
- “Majesty and elevation of structure”

It was only through Boileau's French translation that it was introduced to Europe. The ability of oratory, poetry, and rhetoric, as well as the sensation of "a sudden elevation" and an overwhelming moment in speaking that results in an ecstasy in the mind mixed with delight and dread, are all components of what Longinus

defined as sublimity (Tınmaz, 2020: 4). Longinus in **Perì Hỳpsous** gives some instances of the sublime in nature:

> "the Nile, the Ister, the Rhine, or still much more, the ocean… Nor do we reckon any thing in nature more wonderful than the boiling furnaces of Etna, which cast up stones, and sometimes whole rocks, from their labouring abyss, and pour out whole rivers of liquid and unmingled flame." (2020: 4)

Shelley, whose poem **Mont Blanc** gives a sense of the sublime, defined the sublime as "the tempestuous loveliness of terror" (Rothernberg et al., 2009: 11). It is clear to see how Shelley's description of Mont Blanc, the tallest mountain in Europe, illustrates the notion of the sublime as the sensation of "a sudden elevation" and an overwhelming moment in speech that generates an ecstasy in the mind combined with delight and fear:

> "Dizzy Ravine! and when I gaze on thee
> I seem as in a trance sublime and strange
> To muse on my own separate fantasy,
> My own, my human mind, which passively
> Now renders and receives fast influencings,
> Holding an unremitting interchange
> With the clear universe of things around; (34-40) (Shelley, 2009: 121)

Continuing with the very topos of the sublime, the Alps, which was "the field of experience" in the Grand Tours among the young upper class of the 18th century and from which they all came away with discourses of experience that were comparable, we should also mention John Dennis (1658-1734) who was the first to regard sublime within a favorable context (Tınmaz, 2020: 4, 9). He wrote after his excursion to the Alps:

> "In the very same place Nature was seen Severe and Wanton. In the mean time we walk'd upon the very brink, in a literal sense, of Destruction; one Stumble, and both Life and Carcass had been at once destroy'd. The sense of all this produc'd different motions in me, viz. a delightful Horror, a terrible Joy, and at the same time, I was infinitely pleas'd, I trembled." (2020: 5)

Dennis experiences a sense of "delightful horror" as he contemplates the cliff, the boundary (sublime: sub: under, limen: threshold) between life and death. For Dennis, the sublime can be contemplated in nature whenever the power of God is apparent (2020: 5). His other observation on the sublime is related to poetry, but only when it is religious, and only then does it awaken a secret force of the world while enchanting us with a "divine presence" (2020: 5, 6).

Another important figure to be mentioned for the sublime is Joseph Addison (1672-1719). He also visits the Alps and is overcome by amazement at the realization that "that they fill the Mind with an agreeable kind of Horror, and form one of the most irregular misshapen Scenes in the World" (qtd. in Tınmaz, 2022: 8). On the premise that they are great, Addison replicates the magnificent sense of a natural landscape and a natural object:

> "a vast uncultivated desert, of huge heaps of mountains, high rocks precipices, or a wide expanse of waters, where we are not struck with the novelty or beauty of the sight, but with that rude kind of magnificence which appears in many of these stupendous works of nature." (qtd. in Tınmaz, 2020: 7)

His next concern after the greatness is the tendency of the imagination to ruminate on things that are unfathomable by the human mind because the imagination is born out of the sublime, and it is in human nature to abhor anything that restricts him (2020: 7).

2.4.1. Burkean sublime

One of the most outstanding figures to write on the sublime was Edmund Burke (1729-1797) in **A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful** (1757). He paves the way for the Romantic art to supersede the formal classicism of the Enlightenment thought. In this Enlightenment paradigm, clarity is considered the fundamental element for great art, however, according to

Burke, great art cannot be easily defined or confined, as it "strives after the infinite, and the infinite, having no bounds, can never be clear or distinct" (Magee: 1998, 119). This is why he also believes that we are more influenced by suggestions, which are indefinite in nature, rather than clear statements. This principle lies at the core of Burkean sublime.

It is asserted that Burke draws influence not only from Longinus but also significantly from Locke's **An Essay Concerning Human Understanding** (1690). Evidently, Burke seeks to ground his discussions on beauty and sublimity in an empirical-psychological exploration of the experiences of pleasure and pain (Doran, 2015: 147). For Burke there are "three elemental states-pleasure, pain and indifference" ; pleasure and pain both emerge from a default state of the mind, which is indifference, and delight, a Burkean term for relative pleasure, is felt only when the pain ceases (2015: 147).

Like Addison before him Burke also links vastness and greatness to the sublime. In his treatise he distinguishes the sublime and the beautiful in the following way:

	The Sublime	The Beautiful
Dimension	Vast, infinite	Small
Aesthetics	Great, rugged, negligent	Smooth, polished
Colour	Dark and gloomy	Not obscure
Form	Solid and massive	Light and delicate

Figure 2: Comparing the Sublime and the Beautiful: A Descriptive Exploration of Burke's Concepts. (Tınmaz, 2020: 12, 13, 14, 15; Balfour, 2011: 505, 507) [9]

[9] The schema is my original design, representing a compilation of adjectives derived from the aforementioned sources.

Some Romantic characteristics among the requirements of the sublime, such as "night as the setting for deepest imaginative truth" for the **dark and gloomy** color, and "ruins" for the **negligent** aesthetics are evident, as laid out in the figure above (Ferber, 2005: 6).

After elucidating the distinctions between the beautiful and the sublime, Burke asserts the existence of a universal principle in aesthetics that guides humanity's perception of the sublime. According to Burke, the sublime is universally evoked in individuals, representing a fixed principle in taste triggered by objects possessing sublime qualities (Tınmaz, 2020: 13). Burke's perspective places the sublime initially as an inherent characteristic of an object. This concept holds significance as it diverges from Kant's interpretation of the sublime, according to which the sublime is subject-dependent. Kant suggests that the sublime can only be evoked within the individual, and the object 'lends itself' to the sublime (Balfour, 2011: 504).

As Marchese and Grillini point out, for Burke, the sublime does not originate from harmonious pleasure, as it does for the beautiful, but from the unorthodox— “the vague and the indefinite sense of fear and terror in front of the excess and the immeasurable” (1994: 426). An interplay exists between two conflicting emotions, namely astonishment and terror, and the sublime is elicited, particularly when the object exhibits qualities such as vastness, greatness, and obscurity (Quinton, 1961: 72). While the pleasure of the beautiful eases the nerves, the terror of the sublime causes the nerves to tense up in an unnatural way (Tınmaz, 2020: 14). This diversity is crucial for understanding the sublime away from the beautiful, as the sublime is based on “the excitement of the ideas of pain and danger” that tense up the nerves, and pain, being the strongest emotion, exerts influence on the body and mind, producing astonishment only if felt at a safe distance (2020: 14).

For Burke, astonishment transforms into the sublime, capturing the mind in complete absorption with the object. This entails the dismissal of other familiar states, such as admiration, reverence, and respect, deemed less significant:

> "Hence arises the great power of the sublime, that, far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force. Astonishment, as I have said, is the effect of the sublime in its highest degree; the inferior effects are admiration, reverence, and respect." (Burke qtd. in Feder, 2014: 177)

In a "state of sensory overload" the individual's cognitive functions suspend not permitting any other thought or feeling (Tınmaz, 2020: 14). Such a feeling is aroused when you are before the threshold of a danger, such as the edge of a cliff or watching a natural phenomenon of grandeur, like a storm (2020: 14). Yet the timing as to when the danger would come in is decisive for evoking the sublime; if it is too early, the mind cannot spare space for the delight as it is already overwhelmed by terror (2020: 14). Once the sublime is experienced, its representation according to Burke cannot be reflected in painting (2020: 14). He advocates poetry over other kinds of art because, insofar as they are not as obvious and straightforward as painting, only words have the majestic impact over emotions (2020: 14). Words do not directly include a meaning whereas the visual sense, being the strongest among the others, have the most direct influence.

Recall Burke's designation of the dark, gloomy color for the sublime as opposed to the light, bright color for the beautiful. The obscurity, that you cannot fully grasp influences you to experience the sublime. Because the obvious would be completely comprehended and would not allow for any mystery to settle in. Balfour cites a poem by John Clare, **Obscurity**, as Clare chooses one of the Burkean sublime's predicates, which is obscurity as the subject and the title (2011: 507, 508).

Obscurity
Old tree oblivion doth thy life condemn
Blank & recordless as that summer wind
That fanned the first few leaves on thy young stem
When thou wert one years shoot – & who can find
Their homes of rest or paths of wandering now
So seems thy history to a thinking mind
As now I gaze upon thy sheltering bough
Thou grew unnoticed up to flourish now
& leave thy past as nothing all behind
Where many years & doubtless centurys lie
That ewe beneath thy shadow – nay that flie

Just settled on a leaf – can know with time
Almost as much of thy blank past as I
Thus blank oblivion reigns as earths sublime

Clare recounts the transience of life brought upon by time. The oblivion is the obscurity of the tree together with its past and the unknown future beyond its demise. Yet, that uncharted territory, the afterlife is the destiny of all the beings, the final bourn the life on earth offers us. We fear it but at the same time we are in awe with its majestic power over us. The terror we feel from our inevitable end and the delightful obscurity as to what it might be evokes the sublime.

Before I examine the Kantian sublime at length, let me pass on briefly to visual arts and give instances from a painting to have a better grip of infinity together with the sublime in its topos, the mountains. As I stated initially at the beginning of the title that Kant's **Unbegrenztheit**, which signified not only that which is unbounded but also it was the matter for the sublime as an aesthetic experience. The key word here is unbounded which is used also for the definition of infinity. The eminent Romantic painter, Caspar David Friedrich expresses:

> "thus man's absolute goal is not man, but the divine, the infinite. It is towards art, not the artist he should strive! Art is infinite, finite all artists' knowledge and ability." (Wolf, 2022: 21)

Wolf affirms this idea by citing Friedrich's "Morning Mist in the Mountains" as the pinnacle of German Romanticism and as the flawless allegory for the infinite possibilities of art that Friedrich made above (2022: 23). Wolf captures the infinity, the boundless sensation structurally, and he adduces:

> "no more use of perspective to develop pictorial space, no internal framework, no deployment of genre motifs for variety and no naturalistic local color."

and thus the artwork has nothing to offer for admiration to an 18th century art connoisseur (2022: 23). Because as I have initially stated the 18th century belief was that clarity was a vital quality for great art.



Figure 3: Caspar David Friedrich, "Morning Mist in the Mountains", 1808. [10]

In this painting we are looking at a mountain peak, the perfect spot for the sublime. The sensation of danger might be provoked by the mist insofar as it prevents us from differentiating the spatial understanding of the view. The hazy mist highlights the absence of lines. Kant marks that nature becomes sublime when the infinite is perceived within.

2.4.2. Kantian sublime

Kant is the second eminent figure in the treatment of the sublime. His **Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime** was published in 1764, seven years later than Burke's **Enquiry**.

[10] Caspar David Friedrich, "Morning Mist in the Mountains", (accessed), https://www.wikiart.org/en/caspar-david-friedrich/morning-mist-in-the-mountains-1808, 25.01.2023.

Kant's driving principle in his philosophy is that all that is apprehended in the world is a product created by our five senses, brain and nervous system. Consequently, everything that exists in the human mind is a product of "the human apparatus that produces them" and they, the objects, independently cannot be known to us (Magee, 1998: 133, 134). And the transcendent, the noumenal world, where objects are what they are, cannot be accessed by us because they are beyond the empirical experience. It should be remembered that Kant determines time and space as the boundaries of the empirical experience (Albayrak, 2022: 13).

For Kant beauty and pleasure are experienced subjectively insofar as it is our own personal inclinations that conduct us to the feelings of joy and displeasure (Varner, 2015: 281). Whereas for Burke, the sublime is a quality that certain objects possess. In light of this Kant also observes that the sublime is not an inherent quality an object possesses but it is a judgment made by the human mind (Tınmaz, 2020: 18). And therefore, it is subjective. How does an object come to be deemed sublime? While the beautiful is related to quality, the sublime is related to quantity (2020: 18). The fact that through quantification the sublime is represented lies, in truth, in its inability to measure, because:

> "The feeling of the sublime arises in nature, with the presentation of an indeterminate concept of reason, formlessness, limitlessness, but at the same time as a totality." (2020: 18)

I can find traces of the infinite insofar as the expression of the sublime hints at **limitlessness**. Kant observes that "[n]ature ... is sublime in such of its phenomena as in their intuition convey the idea of their infinity" (qtd. in Feder, 2014: 182). This is **the Mathematically Sublime** Kant proposes that it occurs when one experiences something enormous and is overwhelmed while endeavoring to comprehend its greatness simply because "the infinite is absolutely (not merely comparatively) great" and thus "the mere ability even to think it as a whole indicates a faculty of mind transcending every standard of the senses" (Kant qtd. in Feder, 2014: 182).

> "Just because there is in our imagination a striving to advance to the infinite, while in our reason there lies a claim to absolute totality, as to a real idea, the very inadequacy of our faculty for estimating the magnitude of the things in the sensible world [viz., imagination] awakens the feeling of a supersensible faculty in us." (Kant qtd. in Ginsborg, 2022: w. page)

The key word here is the supersensible mind which is beyond perception by senses. Because for Kant all that we perceive is a product of our bodily apparatus, what we cannot perceive, where even the imagination fails to grasp, reason becomes victorious against imagination. As Ginsborg notes "the feeling of reason's superiority over nature takes the form (…) of a feeling of reason's superiority to imagination" (2022: w. page). Although the object of our thinking is unattainable, we can at least project it, estimating at the same time its unembraceability. This concludes with the notion of the sublime:

> ""Where the size of a natural object is such that the imagination spends its whole faculty of comprehension upon it in vain . . . instead of the object, it is rather the disposition of the mind in estimating it that we have to judge as sublime."(Kant). As opposed to seeing something as if it were infinite and thereby experiencing the powerful emotion that is the sublime, as in Burke's formulation, here one sees something, tries to imagine it as infinite, cannot, and is left, sublimely, with both the ungraspable concept of infinity and an awareness of one's own working mind… For Kant, the impossibility of comprehending infinity creates a moment of self-reflexivity at which we can locate the Mathematical Sublime." (Feder, 2014: 182, 183)

When the grandeur and the infinity of the perceived object cannot be contained in our imagination, reason interferes and judges it as sublime.

The second form is **the Dynamically Sublime** and the reason's superiority to nature is more direct than the other, and it is felt when nature engenders fear, but at a safe distance:

> "the irresistibility of [nature's] power certainly makes us, considered as natural beings, recognize our physical powerlessness, but at the same time it reveals a capacity for judging ourselves as independent of nature and a superiority over nature…whereby the humanity in our person remains undemeaned even though the human being must submit to that dominion." (Ginsborg, 2022: w. page)

A fearsome sight, as quoted from Kant, includes examples such as “overhanging cliffs, thunderclouds, volcanoes, and hurricanes” (Ginsborg, 2022: w. page). For instance, when confronted with a storm, we experience the sublime at a distance, ensuring that we are not immediately affected and are thus safe from danger. This distance is crucial, as it prevents the overwhelming terror that would result from direct exposure. Through contemplation, our capacity to judge and understand our spatial and temporal reality reinforces our superiority over nature, allowing us to acknowledge that we are far enough away to be unaffected by the fearsome events of nature.

Costelloe succinctly distinguishes the mathematically and the dynamically sublime. The mathematically sublime is the sense of “incomprehension in the face of magnitude that is ‘absolutely great’, whereas the dynamically sublime is the “feeling overwhelmed by the power of nature (2023: 83).

In the chapter **The Absolute and the Relative** of his book **On the Shoulder of Giants**, Umberto Eco delves into a discussion of the sublime. Eco begins by asserting that the impossible cannot be adequately represented; any attempt to do so would merely serve as a frustrating invitation to dream (2019: 78). Moreover, we can observe that Eco in a way provides examples of both Kantian and Burkean sublime, among other concepts. To illustrate the sense of powerlessness, that I have recently touched upon in Kant, associated with the sublime, Eco turns to Dante's final canto from **Paradiso**. Dante, after encountering the Divine, attempts to express his sentiments but finds himself unable to do so. Instead, he resorts to writing about it and concludes with “the intriguing metaphor of a book with an infinite number of pages” (2019: 78). Eco's exploration of these examples sheds light on his nuanced understanding of the sublime and its representation. What Dante felt was the mathematical sublime insofar as he was overwhelmed by the infinite ‘quantity’ of the Divine light, but his reason was superior to it that he still came up with something. He grasped the infinity of it with his reason.

Leopardi's **L'Infinito** is the second example Eco uses to illustrate the sublime: “thus my mind sinks into this immensity / and sweet it is to founder in this sea”. The

poem's final lines, he notes, are reminiscent of Caspar David Friedrich's painting "Wanderer above the Sea of Fog" (2019: 79). Unable to comprehend the immensity—which Leopardi had originally written as infinity rather than immensity—he is delightedly shipwrecked in the sea, which alludes to the Burkean sublime insofar as Leopardi's reason cannot reveal a superiority to nature, as required by the Kantian sublime and also because the infinite cannot be imagined, as in Burke's formulation, that when one sees something, tries to imagine it as infinite, cannot, is left, sublimely, with both the ungraspable concept of infinity and an awareness of one's own working mind. Leopardi also has two sentiments that are essential for the sublime that are delight and fear, as few lines prior to the last one he utters "Il cor non si spaura"[11].



Figure 4: Caspar David Friedrich, "Wanderer above the Sea of Fog" 1818. [12]

Kant expands on his discussion of the beautiful and sublime by discussing which countries are more associated with the two feelings. Italy and France are closely associated with the beautiful because the beautiful is "either fascinating and moving,

[11] "my heart almost becomes dismayed" (R. C. Trevelyan's translation in Natale, 2012: 68)
[12] Caspar David Friedrich, "Wanderer above the Sea of Fog", (accessed), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wanderer_above_the_Sea_of_Fog#/media/File:Caspar_David_Friedrich_-_Wanderer_above_the_sea_of_fog.jpg, 27.01.2023.

or laughing and delightful." He believes Italy is peopled with those who resemble the fascinating and moving, while France's citizens are laughing and delightful. Germany, England, and Spain, on the other hand, are closely associated with the sublime because the sublime is more inclined to be "terrifying," "adventurous," "noble," and "splendid" (Varner, 2015: 281).

2.5. The Romantic Infinity: The Sublime

Feder states that the Romantic sublime was "the crux and the emblem" of the debates on infinity when it was sought after in philosophical, mathematical and religious plains in the early 19th century after which it transformed and sometimes even borrowed "enlightenment formulations of infinity in terms of number, selfhood, divinity, and sensory experience", because the Romantic era marked the discourse's growth into the aesthetic field and, consequently, literary history (2014: 169, 171).

And if we attempt to define the sublime in the Romantic context we can cite Thomas Weiskel who defines the sublime in his **The Romantic Sublime** as that which "transcends the human" insofar as it is beyond our comprehension:

> "**Marked by infinity and eternity**, larger and longer than human measurements can fathom, such a sense of "more" requires, as Weiskel argues, a god-term." (Banta, 2001: 86) (Emphasis mine)

And earlier than Weiskel, in 1959 Marjorie Hope Nicolson in her monograph **Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite** defines sublime as "the perfect expression of the aesthetics of the infinite" referring to Wordsworth's Book IV of **The Prelude** (Duffy, 2023: 5).

In the Treccani online dictionary of philosophy, the entry for sublime is:

> "From the Latin *sublimis*, composition of *sub* «*under*» and *limen* «*threshold*»: in the correct sense « that which reaches to the point under the highest threshold» (in a spiritual, intellectual and aesthetical sense) «the noblest, exalted», « the manifestation of the beautiful and of the great, in its highest grade». In aesthetics, the concept was developed in a neoplatonical setting between the first and the second century B.C. (The oldest treatise of the first century A.C. is included in the work of that which is known as Anonymous of the Sublime or as pseudo-Longinus) with the aim of defining the characteristic of art to induce, for its mysterious and ineffable connotations to a state of ecstasy, and it was picked up again in the 18° and 19° centuries to highlight, with various interpretations, the capacity of art, in conflict with rationality, to give **emotional consciousness of infinity** and that of the irresistible power of nature." (my translation)[13] (Emphasis mine)

The definition of the sublime is packed with adjectives of the highest grade referring to a state of ecstasy whereby verbal articulation cannot be realized due to its ineffable and enigmatic traits caused by the overflowing of feelings in conflict with rationality. This very mood serves as a reminder of the range of emotions that characterize Romantic art. The sublime was viewed as both an experience in nature and an ideal in art because Romanticism exalted emotions and imagination in place of the discursive reason since it despised its limitations (Brown, 2006: 426). The key word here is "**limit**" which the sublime does not acknowledge because it is "the capacity of art, (…) to give **emotional consciousness of infinity"**. That boundlessness pertaining to infinity originates from its characteristic which recognizes the disproportion between the finite and the infinite (Treccani). In light of this, when we use the notion of the sublime to refer to a work of art or a natural object, we address that which is indeterminate, ungraspable for "it can only be thought" (Treccani). That unembraceability of infinity in the finite is also a Romantic tenet that was proposed by Isaiah Berlin:

[13] "Dal lat. *sublimis*, comp. di *sub* «sotto» e *limen* «soglia»: propr. «che giunge fin sotto la soglia più alta», quindi (in senso spirituale, intellettuale, estetico) «nobilissimo, eccelso», «la manifestazione del bello e del grande, nel suo più alto grado». In estetica, concetto elaborato in ambiente neoplatonico tra il 1° e il 2° sec. a.C. (la trattazione più antica è contenuta nell'opera, del 1° sec. d.C., *Περὶ ὕψους*, nota anche come *Anonimo del Sublime*, o come *pseudo-Longino*), allo scopo di definire la proprietà dell'arte di indurre, per le sue connotazioni di mistero e di ineffabilità, a uno stato di estasi, e poi **ripreso nei secc. 18° e 19°** per sottolineare, con varie interpretazioni, la capacità dell'arte, in conflitto con la razionalità, di dare **consapevolezza emotiva dell'infinità** e della potenza irresistibile della natura." (Treccani) (Emphasis mine)

> "The Romantic doctrine was that (…) there is something which is infinite, something which is inexhaustible, of which finite attempts to be the symbol but of course cannot." (2000: 101)

Edmund Burke in his **Enquiry** postulates that infinity is one of the causes of the experience of the sublime and even theorizes that one may experience the sublime even by thinking about infinity:

> "Infinity has a tendency to fill the mind with that sort of delightful horror, which is the most genuine effect, and truest test of the sublime. There are scarce any things which can become the objects of our senses that are really, and in their own nature infinite. But the eye not being able to perceive the bounds of many things, they seem to be infinite, and they produce the same effects as if they were really so. We are deceived in the like manner, if the parts of some large object are so continued to any indefinite number, that the imagination meets no check which may hinder its extending them at pleasure." (Burke qtd. in Feder, 2014: 176)

Feder suggests that Burke oscillates between "the irrational and the hyper-rational" on which he locates infinity and the sublime right next to each other,

> "They depend on one's ability to trick oneself into perceiving what both is and is not there and then to be shocked by **what one does and does not find.**" (2014: 178) (Emphasis mine)

Take the feeling of standing at the summit of a high mountain. The sensation that a step forward would take one on an unpleasant journey to death exists only in thought, it is not there, yet only its possibility, not being there evokes the danger, and then it becomes to astonishment. In the end, what you find is the presence of a majestic view and what you do not find is the realization of that potential danger.

It is evident that the idea of the sublime permeates the Romantic atmosphere because both Romanticism and the sublime aim at the infinite. Wordsworth describes the sublime in his **Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey** (1798), a poem of memory where he reinvigorates past in the present:

> "…And I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with joy
> Of elevated thought; a sense **sublime**
> Of something far more deeply interfused,

> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean, and the living air,
> And the blue sky, in the mind of man,
> A motion and a spirit, that impels,
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things. (94–103) (qtd. in Kermode et al., 1973: 149)

As Treccani expounds sublime, it goes back to the origin of its first documented treatise by pseudo-Longinus and conveys that sublime means "the movement upward" and "the necessity to **transcend the emotional conditions of our ordinary experience"**. Thus, just as the notion of sublime requires Wordsworth to ascend, makes a movement upward because he mentions of a certain "elevated thought". And as the sublime demands once more, it brings with it two opposing emotions: unease and joy. In the aftermath of that delightful disturbance he senses something that pervades and penetrates all things from the light of the sun to the living air, from the ocean to sky. Wordsworth **transcends the emotional conditions of his ordinary experience** and feels the sublime thereof. Yet there was another Romantic writer, Novalis who felt that necessity to transcend. His romanticization is observed by Sturma to be influenced by Kant's Copernican Revolution and Fichte's Science of Knowledge:

> "The subject's activities, and in particular its productive imagination, express the whole of the **subject's infinity**, which encompasses both itself and the seemingly independent world." (2017: 323) (Emphasis mine)

The transcendence starts within the individual. Not abiding by the rules of the outside world, he is free to transform the life through his infinitely large interpretations.

> "The world must be romanticized. Then one will again find the original sense… When I give the commonplace a higher meaning, the customary a mysterious appearance, the known the dignity of the unknown, **the finite the illusion of the infinite**, I romanticize it. The operation is the converse for the higher, unknown, mystical and **infinite**; through this connection it becomes romanticized." (Novalis qtd. in Sturma, 2017: 321) (Emphasis mine)

The daily events of life, according to Novalis, are vapid and do not thrill the emotions. Life must be romanticized-transformed so that by rising above the emotional limitations of everyday experience, one might find the original sense similar to the chivalric romances that are the inspiration for the word "romantic," the person must become a chevalier and transform his or her life into a journey fit for a knight in which they valiantly elevate their experiences. One will be able to romanticize life and discover its original meaning if one can live like the knight in a love story. How Romanticism differs from the romances lies in the end. Romanticism is not about obtaining a reward but about the quest itself, the movement, because infinity cannot be exhausted, it is unseizable. The perpetual movement is also noted by David Morse in his book with the chapter **Romanticism and the Infinite** where he opens the chapter with three names of the Romantic period "Casanova, Napoleon, and Paganini" (1981: 213). Albeit the differences between the names, he remarks that the uniting force was their "drive to transcend all boundaries and limits" as well as "their **constant movement**, their ceaseless activity, their restlessness and impatience" which:

> "identified them as the exiled and the uprooted- reckless gamblers in some universal casino rather than obedient functionaries of some stable state. **The quest for the infinite begins in displacement**." (1981: 213) (Emphasis mine)

These three figures went beyond the ordinary events of life, and they constantly pursued that transcendence. Schlegel, another Romantic, makes the following observations about the unceasing movement:

> "The Romantic art is (…) a perpetual becoming without ever attaining to perfection. Nothing can plumb its depths (…) It alone is infinite (…)" (qtd. in Bernofsky, 2005: 92)

Romanticism was obsessed with occasions that promised alienation from the limits of reality and the reason in order to seek the limitless infinity. Escapements were

cherished and realized by the state of ecstasy of the sublime. Claudon also observes this escapement:

> "No external or superior law may govern him; his dignity is embodied in his rational freedom to want things for their own objective qualities, in other words, in submission to the categorical imperative." (1980: 21)

2.6. The Romantic Eternity: The Sublime

In the first treatment of the sublime Longinus referred to rhetoric and to the feeling of a transcendence. Thomas Weiskel in his seminal work **The Romantic Sublime** informs that Longinus' sublime is also an inherent quality of great works "which refers us to eternity (aion)" thanks to their ability to address anyone notwithstanding the centuries of separation (2019: 12). Therefore, the sublime has a touch of eternity as it transcends the limits of time to carry the inspiration of great works.

In his article **Timelessness and Romanticism,** Georges Poulet reflects on the transcendent and timeless nature of eternity. He first proposes the organic and intertwined relation of the past and present, as felt by the Romantics. Laniel-Musitelli and Sabiron also emphasize Romantic writers who, in their view, usher in "a new distribution of the transient and the timeless", because for them Romantic writing is "an art of time, creating new representations of temporal phenomena and generating new modes of time consciousness" (2021: ix, xiii, xiv). Poulet then goes on to explore the sublime in the timelessness of Romanticism. As a reminder, in the sublime, due to sensory overload, the mind enters an ecstatic state, which suspends the cognitive functions of the mind. This suspension brings about stillness and detachment from reality, both spatial and temporal. Eternity is the time that stands still. Rousseau's sublime experience creates timelessness where 'duration is not successive but permanent':

> "There is a state in which the soul finds a solid enough foundation to rest in and gather its whole being there, without needing to recall the past or to step over the future; where time is

> nothing to it, where the present lasts forever without nevertheless marking its duration and without any trace of succession." (Poulet, 1954: 6) (Translation: Deepl)[14]

Rousseau actually remains in the moment, which is the manifestation of eternity. He is contained in the totality of time that the unlimitedness of eternity offers him. Such satisfaction that he does not need to move on to the future. Recall that eternity is the still totality of the moving 'nows' that move and, in doing so, creates time. Rousseau stays still and rests in the present.

Poulet then warns that eternity revealing itself as timelessness has no ties with the eternity of God for what the Romantics wanted to express was simply their individual, "human timelessness": "They took of the idea of eternity but they removed it from its empyrean world into their own. In brief, they brought Eternity into Time" (1956: 7).

Just as eternity was brought into time, infinity was also brought into terrestrial space and nature, which the Romantics regarded as the temple of the Divine for the wandering fell walker.

Although infinity and the sublime are often linked in the Romantic discourse, eternity was often left out and undervalued. However, Banta describes a rare occasion when Weiskel interwove infinity and eternity to define the sublime as "**marked by infinity and eternity, larger and longer than human measurements can fathom"** (2001: 86) (emphasis mine). The reason why eternity was abandoned in this discussion is due to its incorporeal nature within its terrestrial manifestation as time, as well as its vested religious meaning that eternity is a realm pertaining to God, which was brought down to earth as a spatial realm.

The fundamental concept of infinity is space, which is addressed by our strongest senses of sight and touch, allowing us to make sense of concrete reality. It is

[14] "Il est un état où l'âme trouve une assiette assez solide pour s'y reposer tout entière et rassembler là tout son être, sans avoir besoin de rappeler le passé ni d'enjamber sur l'avenir ; où le temps ne soit rien pour elle, où le présent dure toujours sans néanmoins marquer sa durée et sans aucune trace de succession."

self-evident and present in the events of life that happen within it. On the other hand, the core concept of eternity is time, which eludes us. It cannot be seen but manifests itself as change, such as the changing of seasons, the position of the sun and moon, and the weariness that time brings to everything. Aristotle defined time as change, and indeed, time depends on change. The concealed nature of time, together with the change it brings, can be explained by a word in Neo-Latin languages that bears two incorporeal meanings: weather and time. In Spanish, the word is 'tiempo'; in French, it is 'temps'; and in Italian, it is 'tempo'. In the light of these words, time executes itself, exposing a change that is most revealing with the weather.

The divine nature of eternity was reserved only for God, and men were only allowed to participate in it in the afterlife. As a result, eternity was considered untouchable. Eire previously suggested that eternity sometimes referred to a location, such as the highest heaven of God, which was often confused with infinity (2010: 24). This confusion persisted in the Romantic Age but was transformed into an earthly paradise in nature. For the Romantics, nature was the temple regardless of their religious beliefs, and some disliked the divine image attributed to eternity as most of them were not Christians. According to Northrop Frye the Romantic Age saw a radical change in the spatial projection of reality, rather than primarily in belief:

> "Instead of directing one's emotional fervour vertically to a transcendent God, the Romantic typically directed it horizontally- either outward towards the depths of nature or inward towards the depths of the soul (…) as if the soul and nature, the earthly corners of Christian triangle, are the legatees of God: God is dead, but his divinity is bequeathed downward along with the feelings it inspired." (Ferber, 2010: 66)

2.7. The Romantic Obsession of Infinity and Eternity

The normalization of infinity owed much to religion, literature, and mathematical sciences. The profound concept of spatial boundlessness found common ground among the public, eliciting even a sense of delight. In Germany, Pietism, a religious movement in Lutheranism, played a pivotal role in shaping the Romantic movement's early figures, with Schleiermacher's publication of **On Religion** and the

subsequent religious orientation of the Romantic bible **Athenäum**. Consequently, the exploration of religion assumes a significant role in the discourse on infinity in Romanticism. Russ underscores this connection in the chapter titled **Belief as the Trace of the Infinite in the Finite**:

> "Romantic thought emphasizes the finite-infinite relationship and the dialogue between human reality and divine transcendence. Here, there is a significant effort towards the resurgence of the idea of infinity, which bears the trace of divine transcendence in human finitude." (Russ, 2011: 283)[15]

The religious inclinations of the Romantics extended beyond Christianity. Bloom posits that certain Romantic poets, including Shelley, Victor Hugo, William Butler Yeats, and Rainer Maria Rilke, forged their own religion through poetry, adopting Gnostic beliefs (2002: xviii). Leopardi, identified by Bloom as an "Epicurean materialist who rejected Christianity", is portrayed as finding solace for his ennui only in the infinite (2002: 406). The perception of the Divine, and consequently the infinite, varied for each Romantic based on their individual religious orientations.

> "In the realm of Romanticism, there are other hidden doors that open into infinity. The apprehension of the absolute is a kind of transcendental state; this is the intended objective. In this context**, dreams serve as one of the pathways to reaching beyond and into infinity**." (Russ, 2011: 276, 277) (Emphasis mine)

Dreams not only are the portals into infinity but also to the depths of existence according to Russ. A brief revision of the social contexts[16] that paved the way for Romanticism, its chief theme of individuality and the privileged state of imagination, which recognizes no limits and rules except those that are subjective, would aid in interpreting the fascination with infinity and eternity.

[15] All the citations from Russ are translated from Turkish to English by ChatGPT.
[16] The said social context were dilated in the first chapter.

Religion: According to Jacqueline Russ, the Christian God was abandoned during the Renaissance in favor of the Greco-Latin gods and was favored again in literature only in the Romantic era (2011: 280).

In the 16th century, Martin Luther's revolutionary act swept the Church's dogmas, opening up a new mode in the practice of faith in which the individual could read the Bible and make sense of it without having to turn to an intermediary such as a priest. Here one can see the first glimpse of the valorization of the individual, the subjective approach that gives birth to the Protestant branch called Pietism in the importance stance. As the German thinker Jakobi (1743-1819) reveals the belief is such an inspiration to elevate one to "eternal truths and to the level of infinity" (2011: 282). Though Romanticism spread across Europe, it should be noted that it blossomed under the heavy influence of Pietism in Germany. Some famous fathers of Romanticism include Kant, Herder and Haman (Berlin, 2000: 68).

Philosophy: A century later, Descartes added more value to the subject, rendering it as the sole principle by which the existence of the individual could be proven merely through thinking. Thus, the starting point of everything was the subject itself. Yet, Descartes, famous for his doubts, asserted that revelation, dogma, or tradition could not assist us in revealing the truth, but only reason and science, further weakening the power of the Church, even though he was a devout Christian himself. Undoubtedly, once again in the 17th century, we witness the emergence of subjective individuality in Germany, laying the groundwork for the consolidation of Romantic subjectivity with Baumgarten. His **Aesthetica** defined beauty in a new way, placing a dominant emphasis on the perception through senses, which underlined "subjective sense activity" (Williams, 1983: 31).

Science: With the new cosmological view of the Universe, thanks to Kepler, Galileo, and Copernicus, as well as Newton, the previously stable cosmological views (geocentrical and geostatical) were replaced by an expanding universe without humans in the middle. They were "pushed to the periphery of an illimitable (…) universe" (Wright, 1970: xiv).

The power of the Church faltered even more when it the Bible lost its credibility on its cosmological views. As a result of the accomplishments of these scientists, the spirit of the 17th century can be well-read in Fontenelle's **Entretiens Sur La Pluralité des Mondes** (Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds)[17]. In this dialogue, two people discuss the newly conceived infinite space. One fails to cherish this infinity, while the other says that he can even breathe more freely. I should remind, as I have stated earlier, that the invention of the microscope, telescope, and infinitesimal calculus made the normalization of infinity thanks to literature acting as the agent, which, in turn, offered a pervasive sense of overcoming the limitations of reality. As Nicolson discusses as well, the said scientific advancements transferred the celestial God to the sublime in nature (Duffy, 2023: 4). When the unreachable God was finally to be found on earth as the sublime, the limits were desired to be transcended. However, as more and more scientific advancements occurred, providing rigid and irrefutable explanations, Romantics felt that the mystery started to fade away.

> "But the nature, and the inanimate things have always been the same. They do not talk to the man as before: the science and the experience cover their voices." (Leopardi's entry in Zibaldone dated 23 August 1821, qtd. in Arqués, 2017: 121)

Hinting at Romanticism Albayrak remarks: "As the light of the Enlightenment dimmed, the mystery returned together with the shadows that appeared in the twilight" (2021: 19). Mystery was everything to the Romantics, for without it there would not be any space for their own subjective interpretations created by imagination. At this point, in a world of facts and findings where they were not allowed to develop any more ideas because the previous mysteries were solved and it was over, Romantics were making full sense of life. What was there to live for? They sought their own truth in the unattainable infinite rendering it then as an experience with the sublime. That the infinite is unfathomable and can never be grasped granted the Romantics a journey without an end where the emphasis was on the action itself. The quest was never over, and it can thus be enjoyed forever with their heightened emotions which cannot be

[17] See p. 49 for the excerpt.

tamed and justified by reason. Curran affirms, citing the names of Byron, Keats and Shelley, that “the art that results is (…) likely to have no purpose beyond that of exploration” (2004: 68). Exploration, in other words, the process was regarded as the art itself. The idea that the infinite is inexhaustible and the Romantic’s relation to the universe must still be established, Berlin suggests that the Romantics found alternative ways to reify this desire by traveling to distant countries, writing about the past, and exalting the imaginative power within (2000: 104, 105). In all instances, it is observed that because there is no way to grasp the infinite that they seek, Romantics sought and grasped other ways to glorify their act of exploration, valuing it above all else.

The discourse tied to eternity in the Romantic school is connected to timelessness. Eternity is understood as the immobile "now" that cannot move because doing so would require a prior moment, which would necessitate a beginning and an ending. Grosseteste explains that time is "the privation of the at-once of eternity from the totality of being" (Dales qtd. in Neil, 2021). This means that because eternity cannot move, it only manifests itself as time with the moving "now"s. Georges Poulet suggested the stillness of time, alluding to eternity, in his article **Timelessness and Romanticism** which is connected to the idea of a fresh union of the past and present as if they are not separated from each other by time. The past and nostalgia were cherished by the Romantics because they provided an escape from the harsh reality of radical social changes and shifts in values that occurred after intellectual and scientific advancements. The lack of belief in progress also turned their focus from the future to the past.

> “To find *no contradiction in the union of the old and new,* to contemplate the Ancient Days with feelings as fresh as if they then sprang forth as His own Fiat, this characterizes the minds that feel riddle of the world," Coleridge said. We may add, " that feel also the riddle of time." Ordinarily the past for us is past, i.e., perpetually pushed into unreality by an ever-new present which means for us the only reality. Paramnesia seems to bring forth before our eyes a past which is still real, still alive. It is as if, abruptly, we were projected into a timeless world or into a world where **time does not flow but stands still.** The incredible idea that all the past we thought we had left for ever, continues to stay here, at our very feet, invisible but intact, and in all its forgotten freshness, shoots forth in our minds. The time, indeed, is out of joint.” (Poulet, 1954: 4) (Emphasis mine)

With this remark, Poulet unites the past and the present in one entity, the now, which by serendipity construes the entry of eternity in **The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy**:

> "(…) the Divine "now" stays not moving, but standing still, and creates eternity' (De Trinitate, 4. II). Such timelessness is beyond description, but its apprehension is the goal of mystical contemplation." (Blackburn, 2005: 121)

If I turn to the sublime, I ask: What was the relation of the sublime to the discourse of the Romantic fascination with infinity and eternity? In 1846, "Come, and I show you what is sublime!"- exclaimed Thomas De Quincey, who addressed the readers of **Tait's Edinburgh Magazin***e* to gaze at "the famous nebula in the constellation of Orion" with the most powerful telescope of the time (Duffy, 2023: 1). Sublime stood ready to entrance the gazer before the infinite spaces of the Universe that the human mind cannot fathom. Duffy holds that De Quincey's invitation actually reveals the vital role of the sublime in:

> "extraordinarily diverse range of areas of inquiry and genres of cultural productivity in Europe and America, from philosophical aesthetics to Gothic novels, and a key motivator of emergent cultural practices like commercial tourism." (2023: 1)

The Romantic sublime served as the means to apprehend infinity and eternity, given its central characteristic of transcendence. With this transcendental experience the individual self that is experienced felt that it "cannot be contained by the worldly home it ordinarily inhabits" and that the true happiness lies "beyond empirical objects" (Costelloe, 2023: 82).

Recall how Thomas Kuhn suggested that a paradigm shift occurs through a non-scientific medium such as literature. In arts, literature, and philosophy sublime became the medium to identify the feeling when faced with the incomprehensible. That is why the disquisition of the sublime in arts and philosophy therefore aligns with the ample treatment of infinity and eternity in literature. Christian Friedrich Michaelis,

who adapted Kantian aesthetics to music, proposed that the sublime could be triggered in music through "wild" musical compositions:

> "that resembled an 'downward-rushing, foaming waterwall' or 'flooding seas': such sounds 'tear the imagination along with such violence [Gewalt] that it cannot grasp any totality, but instead driven to and fro… floats in the infinite, and it raises reason to the thought of eternity.'" (Stanyon, 2023: 145)

Michaelis gives a very clear denouement of the narrative of the sublime with relation to infinity and eternity. As being concepts without an end, they render reaching a conclusion impossible, and therefore one is forced to swing to and fro like a pendulum only to enjoy the process. And that is the very reason why Leopardi founders and Shelley falls to his grave, when they both face with the fact that there is no end in the infinity that they seek, and also that they cannot grasp it.

CHAPTER THREE

INFINITY AND ETERNITY IN LEOPARDI AND SHELLEY

A poet participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one; as far as relates to his conceptions, time and place and number are not.
Percy Bysshe Shelley

All high poetry is infinite; it is as the first acorn which contained all oaks potentially.
Percy Bysshe Shelley

Although Percy Shelley (1792-1822) and Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1837) both lived in Italy during the same period, they never had the opportunity to meet in person. While there are no written documents suggesting that Shelley and Leopardi were aware of each other's existence, Leopardi's entry in his 4,525-page philosophical journal, **Zibaldone**, indicates that he was at least familiar with another British Romantic, Lord Byron. In 1826, Leopardi wrote to Francesco Puccinotti, "He [Byron] really is one of the few poets worthy of the age" and went on to compare him with Monti, saying "Lord Byron takes out the images from his mind while Monti does so from the others" (Shaw, 2017: w. page; Butler, 2013:12).

They both lived in voluntary exile. Shelley, discontented with his life in England, was persuaded by Byron to move to Italy. Similarly, Leopardi was also dissatisfied with his life in his hometown of Recanati, a narrow-minded papal state, and was discouraged by his parents from leaving. It was not until Shelley's boat was shipwrecked off the coast of Livorno in 1822 that Leopardi finally left Recanati. During his adventurous journey, he met prominent literary figures such as Manzoni, and remained away from Recanati until his death in 1837 in Naples.

Leopardi and Shelley both lived in Italy during a crucial period that included both the end of Napoleon's reign and its aftermath. This sparked patriotic sentiments

among Italians, which eventually gave rise to the Risorgimento, or reunification movement, which began in 1831 and was formally established in 1871.

The two poets thus were introduced to each other only in written texts. Yet comparative studies between Shelley and Leopardi are only but a few: Daniela Cerimonia's **Leopardi and Shelley Discovery, Translation and Reception** (2020), Andrea Mariani's **Leopardi e Shelley: Appunti Per Un'Analisi Contrastiva** (1987), Giacomo Zanella's **Paralelli Letterari Percy Bysshe Shelley e Giacomo Leopardi** (1883), Gino Benvenuti's **Poeti a Pisa: Byron, Shelley, Leopardi, Carducci, D'Annunzio** (1966), Stephen Rogers' **Classical Greece and the Poetry of Chenier, Shelley, and Leopardi** (1974), Domenico Cirulli's **Il Passero Solitario del Leopardi e A Un'Allodola dello Shelley: Raffronto** (1908), Alessandro Chiappelli's **Shelley e Leopardi a Napoli** (1900), Niobe Chiarelli's **Il Sentimento Del Dolore in Giacomo Leopardi e in Percy Bysshe Shelley** (1909). Another brief comparison was also made by Harold Bloom in his **Genius**, where he dovetails them: "Leopardi, like Lucretius, is a poet of the sky, and again like Shelley, an acolyte of the moon" (2002: 405).

I will first examine their poetics in this chapter, which contains verses related to eternity and infinity. While all the ideas of infinity, eternity, and the sublime are written down in Leopardi's **L'Infinito,** Shelley scattered their seeds throughout several poems. However, I will focus only on **Alastor; or, The Spirit of Solitude**, which shares many parallels with Leopardi's work, particularly in terms of the concept of annihilation that culminates inevitably in the end. The poets are both solitary explorers in the human quest for the unattainable which reflect the inherent complexities and contradictions of the human soul in its inexorable pursuit of transcendence. Leopardi succintly titles his poem after the unattainable as **L'Infinito**, which means the infinite, while Shelley using a Greek deity, prefers to reflect his forlorn journey, naming the poem **Alastor; or, The Spirit of Solitude**. Yet, Shelley drafts a pithy preface where he informs the reader of the state of the quester who is a "youth of uncorrupted feelings and adventurous genius led forth by an imagination inflamed" and who, despite drinking "deep of the fountains of knowledge (…) is still insatiate". Shelley, much like Leopardi sinks in **L'Infinito**, states "the magnificence and beauty of the external world sinks profoundly into the frame of his conceptions".

After analyzing the said works individually through the lens of Romanticism, I will compare Shelley's and Leopardi's cited poems and their respective interpretations of infinity and eternity through the romantic tropes that highlight them.

3.1. Leopardi

Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1837) is often mentioned alongside some of the most renowned names in Italian literature, including Dante and Petrarca. W. M. Rossetti even goes so far as to claim that he is "the most finished master of style in Italian letters since the date of Petrarca", while Pietro Giordani, the co-director of the Italian literary magazine **Biblioteca Italiana** raves about Leopardi to his friend in 1819 in a letter "If you saw, if you only saw, the letters I'm getting. Only Dante could write them […]" (1900: 55, Shaw, 1998: w. page). Even Nietzsche praises him as "the greatest stylist of the century" (Di Piero, 1981: 1). Benedetto Croce, a distinguished historian, philosopher, and politician, regarded Leopardi as the greatest Italian poet following Dante. Though he was actually misunderstood and conceived narrow-mindedly, such that Croce overlooked Leopardi's philosophical plantation permeating all of his poetry, asserting, on the basis of his philosophy "distinti" (distinct) whereby intellect and imagination operate separately, that only his idylls merited to be called poetry and the rest was doomed to be philosophical, thus non-poetry (Bini, 2007: 1018). In the 1950s "Walter Binni's **La Nuova Poetica Leopardiana** (1947), Cesare Luporini's **Leopardi Progressivo** (1947), and Natalino Sapegno's **Leopardi** (1948)" contended Croce's reception of Leopardi and brought about a wider understanding (2007: 1018). Firstly, he was not merely a poet but an embodiment of a trinity consisting of an erudite translator and a philosopher as his epitaph indicates:

FILOLOGO AMMIRATO FUORI D'ITALIA	ADMIRED PHILOLOGIST OUTSIDE ITALY
SCRITTORE DI FILOSOFIA E DI POESIE ALTISSIMO	WRITER OF PHILOSOPHY AND OF HIGHEST POETRY
DA PARAGONARE SOLAMENTE COI GRECI	TO BE COMPARED ONLY WITH THE GREEKS

Figure 5: Leopardi's epitaph (my translation).[18]

He studied Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French, Spanish, English and German (Rossetti, 1990: 60). Between the ages of 13 and 17, he wrote an essay entitled **On the Popular Errors of the Ancients**, translations of Moschus, plays, verse, philosophical "dissertations," and at the age of only 15 he compiled **Storia dell'Astronomia** (History of Astronomy*)* thanks to the immense library of his father Count Monaldo where he spent "seven years of mad and utterly desperate studying"[19] in his own words after which he had a brief period of eyesight loss together with some additional disfigurement on his scoliosis (Di Piero, 1981: 11, 12). Due to these troubles in his health, he was forced to be deprived of the 'mad studying' and instead he turned to contemplating as he was unable to read in 1819, during which time he composed **L'Infinito** (Shaw, 1998: w. page). Between 1816 and 1817, he also translated and published several articles in the Milanese journal **Spettatore**, as well as some philological articles in the **Roman Effemeridi** in 1822 (1998: w. page). Leopardi yearned for freedom away from his paternal house, as he did not wish to live according to his father's will (Di Piero, 1981: 13). Leaving Casa Leopardi meant the realization of himself, and he finally fulfilled his wish with his father's blessing. At the age of twenty-four in 1822, he visited some relatives in Rome, but he felt even more lonely there due to the ignorance among the citizens of big cities. He wrote to his brother:

[18] Leopardi, 2016: 13
[19] "Sette anni di studio matto e disperatissimo"

> "Small-town life may be boring, but at least men there feel some connection to one another and to the things around them. Human indifference, which is a horrible feeling or rather an absence of feeling, must inevitably be concentrated in big cities." (1981:14)

He applied for a position as a writer in Latin under Angelo Mai at the Vatican Library, but the failure to obtain the position led him back to Recanati, where he felt oppressed by his reliance on his father. As soon as he received a job offer from a publisher in Milan, he left Recanati once again in 1824 (Galassi, 2013: 376, Di Piero, 1981: 15). However, he could not find the welcome he had initially anticipated in Milan and therefore traveled to Bologna, where he did find it, as he was sought after for his beautiful verses (1981: 15, 16). Before returning to Recanati again, he stayed briefly in Pisa and Florence. In 1830, when fate smiled on him and an affluent Florentine patron offered to support him, he left Recanati for good, where he would meet an old friend, Antonio Ranieri, who would become his protector and also his closest friend for the last seven years of his life (1981: 16). But with time, his condition declined even more, and in 1833 he followed his doctor's advice to relocate with Ranieri to a warmer place (1981: 17). The destination was Naples, where he would pass away in 1837. His last years, in which he could not even read, saw his "finest poems of the century": **A Se Stesso** (To Himself), **La Ginestra** (Broom), and **Il Tramonto della Luna** (The Setting of the Moon) (1981: 17).

Notwithstanding the fascination the public has over his contemporaries such as Manzoni with **I Promessi Sposi**, Foscolo with **Ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis**, and Pellico with **Le Mie Prigioni**, Leopardi catches the eye with his "intellectual frontiers" (Di Piero; 1981: 2). This intellectual blooming is evident in his journal **Zibaldone** that he started writing in 1817. In 4,525 pages he speaks about a range of subjects:

> "philological notes; etymologies; lengthy attempts to formulate a working aesthetic; reflections on society, authors (classical and modern), metaphysics, and morality; aphorisms on women, tobacco, liquor, clothing, politics, - public relations, biology, genetics, psychology, and a variety of other topics, including autobiographical reminiscences." (1981: 17, 18)

His poetical skills were reflected in **Canti** (The Songs) consisting of a series of 41 poems with historical backdrops ranging from ancient Greece to nineteenth-century Italy that were written between 1817 and 1837 (Moss, 2005: 81). The **Canti** contains both canzoni, which are larger poems with historical or social topics, and idylls, which are brief, reflective poems that focus on the author's more intimate feelings, recollections, and experiences (2005: 83).

> "The Canti celebrate love, virtue, youthful hope, and the beauty of nature, but always with a sense of the essential transience and fragility that modern, adult reason cannot help but perceive in them." (Hainsworth et al., 2012: 51)

Pensieri (Thoughts) published posthumously includes passages from Zibaldone chosen by Leopardi himself and some new passages he composed Zibaldone aside. The highlighted theme is mankind, their temperament, and conduct in society (Adelphi).

Operette Morali (Short Moral Writings), a satirical prose, is yet another of Leopardi's works, which was criticized for its negative content despite being praised for its elegance at the time of its publication in the 1800s (Bini, 2007: 1026). The basis of the prose works on the continual conflict between illusions and reason, which is highlighted in the opening part, ''Storia del genere umano'' (History of the Human Race). In an effort to keep people happy, Jove sends Love, the mightiest illusion, but when people realize that their hopes cannot be fulfilled and that they can no longer experience pleasure because all of their activities have become routines, they wander off until they realize that everyone and everything is almost identical. (2007: 1026, Leopardi, 2019: 357). Jove sends them Love because they cannot defeat it or remove it from the face of the Earth when people choose death over the pleasures of existence. (Leopardi, 2015: 43).

In **Operette Morali**, one can read the dialogues between Nature and a Soul, the Earth and the Moon, a Natural Philosopher and a Metaphysician, Tasso and His Familiar Spirit, Nature and an Icelander, Frederic Ruysch and his Mummies,

Christopher Columbus and Pietro Gutierrez, Tiamandro and Eleandro, an Almanac Seller and a Passer-by, Plotinus and Porphyrius, Tristiano and a Friend.

3.1.1. Leopardi's Romanticism

Can one truly consider Leopardi as a complete adherent to Romanticism when he actively spoke out against it? In 1818, he wrote **Discorso Di Un Italiano Intorno Alla Poesia Romantica** (Discourse of an Italian on Romantic poetry) as a response to Madame de Staël's critique that Italian intellectuals fixated on ancient and Italian authors while neglecting contemporary works by English and German poets. Leopardi wrote this discourse while he was still drafting his poem **L'Infinito**, which embodies many Romantic qualities. However, some parts of his discourse that criticized Romantics were factually incorrect, such as his claim that Romantics lamented the primitive elements when in reality, Romanticism celebrated them. He wrote:

> "The romanticists are wrong to strive against these natural (primitive elements) feelings by an appeal to reason. Reason destroys imagination ; as a man grows in intellect his fancy becomes weak. Hence the poet should try not to follow the principles of science, but to release fancy from the bonds of reason." (Horne, 1916: 5)

Leopardi's dilemma is obvious in a way that while he puts forward his critiques of Romanticism, he also glorifies its elements, such as the degradation of intellect and science for their power to weaken the imagination. In another passage, the same kind of dilemma appears to us again when Leopardi attempts to distinguish the romantic poets from his poets:

> "(…) our poets sing of nature and of the eternal and changeless matters and shapes and things of beauty, in short, of the works of God, while the romanticists treat of civilization, of what is transitory and mutable—of the works of men." (1916: 5, 6)

The claim that Romantics did not appreciate nature is false. In fact, they deified nature and attributed divine qualities to it. Furthermore, Leopardi wrongly accuses Romantics of "the province of poetry is imagination and not the intellect", when in fact, Romantics emphasized this very idea (1916: 6). Horne suggests that Leopardi's distorted view of Romanticism may be due to his lack of exposure to contemporary works in his father's library and his limited social interactions with literary figures (1916: 7, 8).

Heath-Stubbs notes that Leopardi had a dual character, with both Romantic and Classicist tendencies, and points out similarities between Wordsworth's **Tintern Abbey** and Leopardi's **Memories** (1966: iix). According to Horne, Leopardi's poetry is Classicist in form, but influenced by Romanticism, and his Romantic sentiments were overshadowed by his Classicism (1916: 4). Despite his ideological attachment to the rational philosophy of the 18th century, particularly the philosophes of 1700, Leopardi rejected their optimistic concept of nature and faith in progress, aligning more closely with Romanticism (Di Benedetto, 2016: 497). This duality is exemplified in an entry dated October 5-6, 1821 (no. 1857) in Leopardi's **Zibaldone**, where he praises the power of imagination while criticizing German Romanticism:

> "Through their profound speculations regarding the general theory of the arts, the Germans have recently given us the romance of Romanticism, a system utterly false in theory, in practice, in nature, in reason, in metaphysics, in dialectics, as shown in several of these thoughts." (Zibaldone, 2013, 1857[20])[21]

In his previous entry, number 1856, Leopardi argues that imagination is essential to uncovering lofty truths, as only imagination can ignite one's enthusiasm and enable the true lyric poet to bring those truths to light.

[20] Although there are numerous editions and translations of **Zibaldone**, published by various publishing houses, the universality of the work lies in its numbering system, which Leopardi himself established. Therefore, in the thesis I will be referencing the entries by their assigned numbers.
[21] «Speculando profondamente sulla teoria generale delle arti, i tedeschi ci hanno dato ultimamente il romanzo del romanticismo, sistema falsíssimo in teoria, in pratica, in natura, in ragione, in metafisica, in dialettica, come si mostra in parecchi di questi pensieri» (Leopardi qtd. in Rigoni, 1996: 312)

Rigoni contends that several of Leopardi's themes in his poetry and thought, such as infinity and antiquity, are inherently Romantic, and notes that the term "romantic" was traditionally used in a positive sense (1996: 313, 314).

> "The ancient is a crucial ingredient in sublime sensations, be they physical, like a prospect, a Romantic view, etc. etc., or merely spiritual and interior. Why is that? It is on account of man's propensity for the infinite." (Zibaldone, 2013: 1429[22])

> "(…) sometimes the soul might desire, and actually does desire, a view that is restricted or confined in some way, as in Romantic situations. The reason is the same, a desire for the infinite, because then, instead of sight, the imagination is at work and the fantastic takes over from the real." (Zibaldone, 2013: 171)[23]

Considering Leopardi's distorted view of Romanticism and his simultaneous adherence to Classicism, it is difficult to entirely categorize him under one label. However, since our focus is on Leopardi's conception of infinity and eternity, and specifically on his poem **L'Infinito**, we can interpret it through the lens of Romanticism, as it possesses many traits associated with the movement. These include the spatial projection of reality that transforms into an internal experience, the natural setting, the collapse of reason in the face of the infinite and eternal, and a touch of melancholy and subtle nostalgia in the beginning.

[22] "«L'antico è un principalissimo ingrediente delle sublimi sensazioni, sieno materiali, come una prospettiva, una veduta romantica ecc. ecc o solamente spirituali ed interiori. Perché ciò? Per la tendenza dell'uomo all'infinito» (Zibaldone: 1429) (The passage was first seen in **Giacomo Leopardi Selected Prose and Poetry**, 1996: 314, and then extracted from Zibaldone)

[23] "«(...) alle volte l'anima desidererà ed effettivamente desidera una veduta ristretta e confinata in certi modi, come nelle situazioni romantiche. La cagione è (...) il desiderio dell'infinito, perché allora in luogo della vista, lavora l'immaginazione e il fantastico sottenetra al reale» (Zib. 171)" (Leopardi qtd. in 1996: 314) (The passage was first seen in **Giacomo Leopardi Selected Prose and Poetry**, 1996: 314, and then extracted from Zibaldone)

3.1.2. Leopardi's Infinity and Eternity

This section elucidates the concepts of infinity and eternity according to Leopardi's thought, drawing on sources such as **Storia Del Genere Umano** (History of the Human Race) from **Operette Morali** (The Moral Essays) and some selected passages from **Zibaldone**. The central theme in Leopardi's thought is that the desire for the infinite is inherent in men and it is insatiable. Children have tendency for the infinite as they experience everything when things are unfamiliar, so that the imagination can be stirred due to the lack of knowledge arising from the unfamiliarity of things. Concerning eternity, Leopardi reflects on how remote history evokes an indefinite sensation, wherein one experiences ecstasy for being unable to trace the confines of time. I should note that the sensation of the indefinite has strong ties with the infinite for Leopardi. The same inability to discern bounds in space also represents, for him, the most sublime feeling. Lastly, eternity, according to Leopardi, signifies the future. As the present is limited, the soul finds delight either in the past with memories or in the future with hopes to imagine. Since imagination knows no confines or limits, it strives towards eternity.

Leopardi argues that the human longing for the infinite can be traced back to the origins of the human race. In his work **Operette Morali** (The Moral Essays) he presents a fictional narrative called **Storia Del Genere Umano** (History of the Human Race), which delves into this idea extensively.

When the initial residents of the earth emerged simultaneously in all locations:

> "The earth was much smaller than it is at present and devoid of mountains and hills. The sky was starless. There was no sea; and the world as a whole was far less varied and beautiful than it now is.
>
> Yet men were never weary of looking at the sky and the earth which exited within them feelings of wonder and admiration. They considered them both to be of infinite extent, majesty, and magnificence. Their souls were filled with joyous hopes." (Leopardi, 2019: 357)

Leopardi's conception of the infinite can be traced back to the first humans, who were awed vertically and horizontally, meaning the sky and the earth, by the vast

expanse of the prosaic world they inhabited. Without the enrichment of mountains or hills, and with a sky that did not have decoration, they were drawn to the boundless spaces that lay beyond.

However, as humanity progressed from childhood to adulthood, a sense of hopelessness and disillusionment set in as aspirations failed to materialize. In addition, the events of nature and life no longer held the same fascination, as familiarity bred a sense of ordinariness.

To escape this ennui, humans began to travel to remote places, unencumbered by mountains or seas that might impede their wanderings.

> "After a few years, most men had proved the finite nature of the earth, the boundaries of which were by no means so remote as to be unattainable." (2019: 357)

Recall that one of the romantic traits was "remote" both in time and place according to Isaiah Berlin (1999: 14, 19). The narrative up to this point possesses a distinct romantic essence, further accentuated by the utilization of another romantic trope, namely "primitive," through the retelling of the origins of the human race. There is a journey humans undertake which is equal to a quest in Romanticism, when they cease to revel in the events of life and nature because they became too ordinary. Recall also that both in their poetics and in their lives, many a romantic author set off for trips such as Goethe, Mary and Percy Shelley, Lord Byron, Wordsworth, and Coleridge.

Continuing Leopardi's tale, humans also observed the striking similarity of mankind with only minor differences in all parts of the world. The initial fascination they had for the world they were living in gradually faded. Weariness had already pervaded their hearts even before they reached manhood. As time passed and they aged, their disdain for the monotony of life increased to such a point that they began to abhor existence itself. Some even went as far as to take their own lives. The gods were appalled by the fact that humans preferred death over life and disregarded the gifts bestowed upon them. Fearing the extinction of mankind, Jove stepped forward to

ameliorate their conditions. Humans were only happy in their infancy, and even in youth or adulthood, childhood memories were the only ones that gave them delight and joy. Therefore, they asked Jove to make their childhood perpetual. However, Jove could not meet their expectations as he could not violate the natural laws of creation.

> "Neither could he communicate his own infinity to mortal creatures, nor the world itself, any more than he could bestow infinite happiness and perfection on men and things. It seemed best to him to extend the limits of creation, at the same time increasing the world's diversity and beauty. In fulfillment of this intention, he enlarged the earth on all sides; and make the sea to flow as a separation between inhabited places, so that it might vary the aspect of things, and by severing their roads, prevent men from easily discovering the confines of the world. **He also designed the sea to serve as a vivid representation of the infinity which they desired**." (2019: 358) (Emphasis mine)

I now have further insight into Leopardi's concept of infinity. As humans traveled to the remote corners of the world and realized that their world was not infinite, Jove not only expanded it but also diversified its contents for one chief purpose. Variety provides new potential discoveries which only briefly postpones the ennui the humans would inevitably face once they exhaust the finitude. Again the addition of the sea serves to set boundaries to the finitude. When the world was exhausted, new elements were added, and ultimately, the sea was included to prevent mankind from reaching the end of the world. The sea served as a symbol of infinity, acting as a barrier between the known and the unknown, or the yet-to-be-known. In **Zibaldone**, Leopardi wrote the following passage about the impact of seeing the sea:

> "Ideas relating to the sea are vast, and for this reason pleasurable, but not enduringly so, because they lack two properties, variety, and being characteristic of and near to our everyday existence, to the objects around us, to our habituations, memories, etc. (…) and also to our practical knowledge." (Leopardi, 2013: 1827)

This explains why, when humanity had experienced all of life's experiences and had become tired of life, Leopardi had his deity Jove create the sea and add it to Earth.

Jove also blended the age groups of people in a way that made individuals from different generations exist at the same time, with the elderly from one generation being present alongside the young children of another. Yet his ultimate goal was to "**multiply resemblance of that infinity for which men so eagerly craved"** (2019: 358) (emphasis mine). Jove, unable to fully satisfy mankind's desire for infinity, produced echoes in valleys and caverns and gave forests a mysterious wind to inspire their imagination. It is noteworthy that Leopardi associates natural sounds such as echoes and winds with the idea of infinity. This connection can be seen in his poem **L'Infinito** where he writes about the sound of the wind and the infinite nature of the universe:

> But as I sit and gaze, my thought conceives
> Interminable vastnesses of space
> Beyond it, and unearthly silences,
> And profoundest calm; whereat my heart almost
> Becomes dismayed. And as I hear the wind
> Blustering through these branches, I find myself
> Comparing with this sound that infinite silence;
> And then I call to mind eternity[24] (Natale, 2002: 68)

Leopardi's concept of infinity is portrayed as vast, boundless spaces where silence reigns, but in his tale, he includes the sounds of echo and wind as a resemblance to infinity. In contrast, the poem equates infinity with silence.

Despite Jove's efforts to create a new and exciting world, mankind grows weary of it once again. Jove then sends Mercury to redesign their world and send phantoms such as Love, Justice, Virtue, Glory, Patriotism, and Wisdom. However, mankind is still not satisfied and demands the phantom of Truth for a while, initially promised to them by Wisdom, yet Jove decides to send Truth permanently to prevent them from ever achieving true happiness.

> "And," said Jove, "**all those representations of infinity** which I designedly placed in the world to deceive and satisfy men, and all the wake thoughts suggestive of happiness, which I infused into their minds, **will yield to the doctrines of Truth**. The earth, which formerly displeased them for its insignificance, will do so increasedly when its true dimensions are known, and

[24] Translated by R.C. Trevelyan, 1941

> when all the secrets of nature are made manifest to them." (Leopardi, 2019: 364) (emphasis mine)

Although Jove was displeased with the human race, he let Love remain among them and made it so that Truth, despite its omnipotence would never dominate it. As one would naturally surmise, Truth was not loved and revered only by constraint.

Leopardi finishes his tale by sending not the phantom but the God of Love among humans and recounts that the God of Love visits only the most noble hearts to realize their wish to return to their sweet childhood and invoke further limitless hopes. The desire to return to childhood invokes "nostalgia", yet another Romantic trope.

Leopardi narrates the illusion and the exhaustibility of the world and that mankind by habit grows weary of life and ceases to appreciate its beauty. Yet he terminates the story with the God of Love who, as opposed to the other gods not descending on earth, loves mankind and visits at times to bless them with love. And those who are not favored by the God of Love, those whose hearts are vile are not to be punished but only to be kept outside of the divine favors.

In Leopardi's first tale in **Operette Morali**, he presents a world where contemplating the infinite sky and earth filled humans with hopes and joys. However, when this infinite extent failed to inspire them, Jove created the sea as a representation of infinity to prevent them from discovering the finiteness of the world. It is noteworthy that instead of granting eternal childhood to humanity, as humans were only able to revel in delight in childhood memories, Jove gave them the sea. But for Leopardi children actually hold "the inclination for the infinite" (Origo, 1966: 22). At first, infinity served as a source of hope and joy, but when that became exhausted, Leopardi turned to the sea as a barrier between the known and the unknown. Infinity had to remain at bay to allow the workings of imagination seeking to grasp it. It is worth noting that the arrival of Truth also brought knowledge, which served as fuel for reason, ultimately limiting human imagination. Rather than reflecting on the infinite beyond the sea, humans were trapped by their newfound knowledge. However, Jove had designed it so that Love remained exempt from Truth's grasp. In essence, the

central theme of the tale revolves around mankind's insatiable desire for infinity, which Jove attempts to appease through various tricks that only make the finite accessible and the infinite unattainable.

If I go back to the desire to remain perpetually children by Leopardi's first humans, Leopardi elaborates on **the tendency for the infinite** that children possess:

> "(…) when the colours of things and light and the stars and fire and the flight of insects, the song of birds, the transparency of water**, all was new and unfamiliar**; **when no incident seemed commonplace**, **nor did we know the cause of anything**, **but made it up for ourselves**; when tears were daily events, and all passions still vivid and unruled and never forcibly suppressed. **How easily at that time one's imagination took fire,** how it enlarged small things and adorned bare ones and lit up darkness; (…) I myself remember hearing in fancy in my childhood strains sweeter than can be heard in our real world." (Leopardi, 1966: 21, 22) (emphasis mine)

Before discussing any further the crucial points of this entry, let's recall the summary of Romanticism and romanticizing as asserted by Novalis:

> "The world must be romanticized. Then one will again find the original sense (…) When I give the commonplace a higher meaning, the customary a mysterious appearance, the known the dignity of the unknown, the finite the illusion of the infinite, I romanticize it." (Struma, 2017: 321)

The Romantic manifesto is evident in Leopardi's passage, too. Like Novalis Leopardi pursued the thought of 'not yet exhausted'-"**all was new and unfamiliar**; **when no incident seemed commonplace"**, as well as 'not yet discovered'- "**nor did we know the cause of anything**, **but made it up for ourselves**". Leopardi put forward the very subjectivity on the ground of which Romanticism was built. As a child facing an unknown, he used his own thoughts to inform a concept. He had his imagination at hand granting him infinite spaces to make up things, not his mind restrained by the information already learnt. In the light of this Leopardi disclosed:

"**Children**, he affirmed, like the poets of classical antiquity, naturally possess 'an **inclination for the infinite**', and a capacity to perceive what he called 'il bello aereo'-an airy, unearthly beauty." (Origo, 1966: 22) (emphasis mine)

"If, **as a child**, a view, a landscape, picture, sound, tale, description, fable, **poetic image, or dream please or delight us**, that **pleasure and delight is always vague and indefinite**; **the idea that it awakens in us is always undefined and unbounded** ; **every comfort, pleasure, expectation, plan, illusion** (and almost every idea) **at that age is always directed towards infinity**, and they nourish and fill our soul, to an indescribable degree, even in very little things (…). Indeed, we may perhaps remark that the greater part of the vague images and sensations that come to us, even after childhood is over, and in the rest of our life, are nothing but a memory of that time-a recollection, a repetition, an echo, or a reflection of that ancient image" (Leopardi, 1966: 22-23) (emphasis mine)

Leopardi presented a significant idea in this entry: that all the pleasures we experience as adults are mere echoes of the joys we experienced in childhood. He also explained the reason behind children's inclination toward infinity. For children, infinity represents the indefinite and boundless. Everything in life is new and unfamiliar, and they do not yet understand the causes of things. Although Leopardi did not explicitly connect this concept to childhood in his later works, **the idea of the indefinite remained central to his thinking**.

"[1429]… **The ancient is a crucial ingredient in sublime sensations**, be they physical, like a prospect, **a Romantic view,** etc. etc., or merely spiritual and interior. Why is that? **It is on account of man's propensity for the infinite**. **The ancient is not eternal, and hence it is not infinite, but the soul's conceiving of a span of many centuries produces an indefinite sensation, the idea of an indeterminate time, in which the soul loses itself, and even though it knows that there are bounds to it, it does not discern them, and does not know what kind they may be.** Not so with modern things, because the soul cannot lose itself in them, and clearly sees the full extent of time, and gets at once to the era, the term, etc. Indeed, it is noteworthy that **the soul in one of [1430] these ecstasies, seeing**, e.g., **a modern tower, but not knowing when it was built, and another ancient one whose precise era it knows, is nonetheless far more deeply moved by the latter than by the former. Because the indefinite aspect of the former is too small, and the span of time, although the bounds are not discernible, is so narrow that the soul manages to comprehend all of it**. But in the other case, although the bounds may be seen, and there is nothing indefinite about them, there is, however, indefiniteness in the fact that **the span of time is so broad that the soul cannot embrace it, and is lost in it**, and even though it distinguishes the extremes, it can only distinguish confusedly the space stretching out between them. As when we see a vast expanse of countryside, whose horizon is yet apparent on every side. (1 August 1821.)

Regarding **the sensations that please on account of indefiniteness alone**, see my idyll on the infinite, and recall the idea of a steeply sloping countryside where the view at a certain distance does not reach as far as the valley, and that of a row of trees, **whose end is lost from sight,**

> either [1431] because of the length of the row, or because it is situated in the dip, etc. etc. etc. A building, a tower, etc., seen in a way that it seems to rise up alone above the horizon, and where the horizon cannot be seen**, produces a most sublime and effective contrast between the finite and the indefinite,** etc. etc. etc." (1 August 1821) (Zibaldone, 2013: 1429-1431) (emphasis mine)

Leopardi's entry not only explicates his insight on the sublime but also the equality between the infinite and the indefinite. His perception of the sublime is not confined to a spatial dimension, as Burke posited with vastness and greatness, but operates also on a temporal level. For him, while spatial boundaries may be discerned, temporal constraints remain elusive. Leopardi believed that even though the ancients were not eternal and thus not infinite, the time between them and him was so vast a part of his own short lifespan that he could not reason that far back in history and felt lost. Yet this sensation of losing oneself is pleasant; the fact that reason is not capable of formulating a definite sensation brings delight to Leopardi. On the contrary, the spatial sublime is invoked when the endpoint of the objects in sight cannot be detected. Thus, while the temporal sublime operates on the remote, the spatial sublime calls upon the infinite.

Before clarifying Leopardi's inception of time, I should state that the progress of time is relative for Leopardi "(…) the length of the selfsame amount of time is truly longer to some and shorter to others" (2013: 3510). Yet when it comes to the three main periods of time, in **Zibaldone**'s 18 August 1821 entry he demeans the present while exalting the past and the future:

> "The past, in our remembering of it, is more beautiful than the present, as is the future in our imagining of it. Why? Because the present alone has its true form in human conception. It's the only image of the truth and everything true is ugly." (Leopardi, 2013: 1521, 1522)

> "…for the present is in fact but an instant, and apart from this one single instant, time is always and entirely either past or future." (2013: 3265)

Leopardi considered the present to be the entirety of reality and despised it since it lacked the capacity to satiate individuals. He perceives the present merely as a

fleeting moment, akin to dots forming a line on a timeline. All the pleasure experienced in the present, according to Leopardi, is a reference to the past, particularly childhood memories. He elaborates on his preference for the future, suggesting that it maintains the emptiness of present sensations, allowing them to be filled with imagination. Moreover, he implies a connection between the future and eternity:

> "The imagination always drives us toward what does not fall within reach of our senses. Therefore, towards the future and posterity, for the present is limited and cannot give satisfaction to the imagination; it is wretched and arid, and the imagination feeds itself on hope, and lives by always making promises to itself. But for a strong imagination the future can have no limits, otherwise it does not satisfy it. **Hence the imagination looks and strives toward eternity."** (2013: 3437) (emphasis mine)

Before the section above, Leopardi explains how the ancients built monuments to honor their ancestors that would endure for generations and outlast them. All the ancient memories carried by objects are extended to the future and "whatever effect may have ensued from this work, it had to be eternal (…), it had never to end" (2013: 3436, 3437). Instead of considering the totality of time, whose beginning and end are unknowable to philosophers, one may think of Leopardi's concept of eternity as time that never ends. However, he claims in another article that he later wrote that ideas like eternity and time are hypothesized by how we think about them rather than how they actually exist. The only endless idea one can describe without mentioning its beginning and conclusion is time itself since both time and matter succumb to it, starting with the everlasting matter that never came into being as it continually evolves into different things. However, Leopardi finally demonstrates that not even time exists because it only exists in our minds:

> "The hypothesis of the eternity of matter would not be an objection to these propositions. **Eternity, time**, (…) , like space, **only the expression of our idea of them**, **as to how things are, and not things or beings**, (…). Matter would be eternal, and so there would be nothing infinite. That would only mean that matter, a finite thing, would never have begun to be, neither would it stop being, that the finite has always been and always will be. **Then the only infinite thing would be time…**" (2013: 4181) (emphasis mine)

The fundamental query is still open. Why does humanity yearn for infinity? Bonadeo responds through Leopardi. As demonstrated in **Operette Morali**'s **Storia Del Genere Umano** (History of the Human Race), one of the causes has to do with the essence of humankind, which cannot be fulfilled (1976: 364). Leopardi's remedy for the unsatisfaction is the faculty of imagination which is "the only force capable of pleasing that "infinite pleasure" to which man tends, but he "cannot find in reality" because nature did not provide him "real and infinite pleasures"[25] (1976: 364).

More insight was gained into Leopardi's thoughts on eternity and infinity through his journal **Zibaldone** and the first tale in his **Operette Morali**, **Storia Del Genere Umano** (History of the Human Race). Leopardi incorporated various Romantic themes in his work. The tale explores the primitive, delving into the origins of humanity. It also engages with the theme of the remote, depicting the distant lands that the first humans explored upon exhausting the limits of the finite world. The remote in time, on the other hand, evokes a sense of sublimity due to its unfathomable expanse of time. In attempting to grasp it, the soul experiences a delightful sense of disorientation. Additionally, Leopardi exalts nature, highlighting its ability to evoke wonder and admiration in individuals. In his **Zibaldone**, Leopardi emphasizes the significance of nostalgia, asserting that childhood memories are more delightful and have tendency to the infinite as they were experienced in an unfamiliar world.

In the tale, infinity appeared to us as the desire of the human race that the God Jove was trying to appease by many tricks that kept infinity at bay each time, once it was exhausted. At first the infinite was the extent of sky and earth which gave the occasion to mankind to project their hopes and joys. However, Jove introduced the sea as a barrier between the finite and the infinite, aiming to prevent mankind from venturing into uncharted territories and potentially exhausting the seemingly infinite. The central theme here is hope: "The infinite pleasure that cannot be found in reality can thus be found in the imagination, from which derive hope, illusions, etc." (2013: 167). As per Leopardi's perspective, imagination thrives on hope, and since the future

[25] "l'unica forza capace di appagare quel " piacere infinito " a cui l'uomo tende, ma che egli " non... può trovare nella realtà " poiché la natura non l'ha fornito di " piaceri reali infiniti.""

is boundless, the trajectory of imagination is consistently directed towards eternity. Here, for Leopardi, the concept of the future transforms into eternity.

> "Neither the faculty of knowledge, nor that of love, nor even that of the imagination is capable of infinity, (…) , but only of the indefinite, (…) . Something delights us because our soul, unable to see any limits, receive the impression of a kind of infinity, and confuses the indefinite with the infinite…" (2013: 472)

Leopardi asserts that infinity is conceived when one attempts to cognitively apprehend and traverse a span of centuries while contemplating upon ancient objects. This prolonged temporal journey compels one to feel lost, struggling to find its bounds, its time. Again, the indefiniteness gives rise to the infinity within us that has temporal ties. In Leopardi's view, it can be said that the infinite is the indefinite, the incognito.

In Leopardi, we are thus always reading under the cloak of eternity and infinity the reflections of the indefinite whose existence cannot be pinned down.

> "Posteri [descendants], posterità [posterity] (and the latter still more so because more general), futuro [future], passato [past], **eterno** [eternal], lungo [long] as regards time, morte [death], mortale [mortal], immortale [immortal], and a hundred other such, are words whose **sense and signication are as poetic and noble as they are indefinite**, and therefore impart nobility, beauty, etc., to every style" (16 Oct. 1821) (2013: 1930) (Emphasis mine)

3.1.3. Reading L'Infinito

I will be using R. C. Trevelyan's 1941 English translation (Natale, 2012: 68). Naturally, there are some changes and potential loss of meanings in English. For instance, in Italian, the past tense, passato remoto, as the name suggests, is used to refer to actions that happened and concluded remotely in the past. In the first verse, the verb "was" is translated from "fu," which is used in passato remoto.

The Infinite	**L'infinito**
Dear to me always was this lonely hill, And this hedge that excludes so large a part Of the ultimate horizon from my view. But as I sit and gaze, my thought conceives Interminable vastnesses of space Beyond it, and unearthly silences, And profoundest calm; whereat my heart almost Becomes dismayed. And as I hear the wind Blustering through these branches, I find myself Comparing with this sound that infinite silence; And then I call to mind eternity, And the ages that are dead, and this that now Is living, and the noise of it. And so In this immensity my thought sinks drowned: And sweet it seems to shipwreck in this sea.	Sempre caro mi **fu** quest'ermo colle, E questa siepe, che da tanta parte Dell'ultimo orizzonte il guardo esclude. Ma sedendo e mirando, interminati Spazi di là da quella, e sovrumani Silenzi, e profondissima quiete Io nel pensier mi fingo; ove per poco Il cor non si spaura. E come il vento Odo stormir tra queste piante, io quello Infinito silenzio a questa voce Vo comparando: e mi sovvien l'eterno, E le morte stagioni, e la presente E viva, e il suon di lei. Così tra questa Immensità s'annega il pensier mio: E il naufragar m'è dolce in questo mare.

Figure 6: The Infinite and L'Infinito.

Blasucci notes that the verb "fu" is the only past tense verb used in the poem, as the rest are in the present tense, and "always" indicates a repeated action of going to the hill (1985: 97). This is consistent with Leopardi's philosophy, in which he cherishes childhood memories and sees them as the source of pleasures that persist into adulthood. It is no surprise that the hill is dear to him, having visited it many times before. Prete argues that **L'Infinito** lacks a clear beginning and end, as "always" in the first verse denotes a "temporality lacking limits", and the "sea" that is mentioned in the final verse represents limitlessness, announcing the silence (2021: 314). Thus, the entire poem conveys a sense of indefiniteness. The solitary hill is also an indefinite element, as Leopardi illustrates in **Zibaldone**:

> "…about the words ermo [solitary], eremo, (…) and similar words are all poetic because of the infiniteness or vastness of the idea, etc. etc. Likewise the deserted night, and similar images of solitude, silence, etc. (2013: 2629)

The second verse of the poem introduces the concept of hindrance through the use of the word "hedge," which redirects Leopardi's gaze inwardly. According to Blasucci the hedge represents the boundary of the finite world, beyond which lies the infinite (1986: 102). Leopardi reflects on the consequences and aftermath of having a limited view, which arouses a desire to attain infinity. By acknowledging this limitation through the use of the word "hedge," Leopardi's imagination is activated, and he begins to see wonders beyond the restricted view:

> "Sometimes the soul might desire, and actually does desire, a view that is restricted or confined in some way, as in romantic situations. The reason is the same a desire for the infinite because then instead of sight, the imagination is at work and the fantastic takes over from the real. The soul imagines what it cannot see, whatever is hidden by that tree, that hedge, that tower, and wonders in an imaginary space and pictures things in a way that would be impossible if its view could extend in all directions, because the real would exclude the imaginary." (Leopardi, 2013: 171)

The hedge impedes the view of the horizon which links the sky with the earth and "brings together all the reverberations of the visible bordering it with the invisible" (Prete, 2021: 315). The impediment instigates the "view" of Leopardi toward an inward journey while "the space between the hill and the horizon transforms into a boundless space" (Blasucci: 1985: 102).

In the third verse, Leopardi uses the conjunction "but" to contrast the hedge as an obstacle with its potential as a stimulus for imagination. The English translation, however, loses an important aspect of the original text, as Leopardi separates "interminable" and "spaces", placing the latter in the next verse. The silence that follows represents the ineffability of the boundless spaces beyond. This structural silence is expressed through words becoming "unearthly silences" and "profoundest calm". Then the poet allows himself to indulge in his thoughts, as he says "Io nel pensier mi fingo" or "I in thought fantasize". It is important to note that this part was

not translated in English. Until this point, Leopardi does not use the personal pronoun "I" and even then, the subject "I" remains powerless. As he takes a step into the world of imagination, he is almost frightened, which Leopardi indicates with a grammatical trick, "il cor non si spaura" or "the heart is not scared". Sound finally enters the silent spatial ground with the wind. According to Leopardi, the sound of the wind is “the symbol of all that is living, even of nature”, as he noted in **Zibaldone** by paraphrasing Dante: "(...)nature speaks in him and through his mouth" (Zib. 4372, 10 September 1828) (Prete, 2021: 317). In **Operette Morali**, Leopardi recounted how Jove created the wind to stir human imagination. However, in the poem, the wind reminds him of time, leading him to recollect first eternity, then the past, and finally the present. It is essential to note that, for Leopardi, eternity is identified with the future. Therefore, in these three lines, with the comparison between silence and sound, he reflects on the concept of time. The demonstrative adjectives "this sound" and "that infinite silence" highlight the proximity of nature to the poet, which could refer to the real nature around him or the nature that speaks through his mouth. Through the comparison of the silence of the other world and the sound of reality, Leopardi is reminded of eternity. He is not an active subject here because “mi sovvien” means “mi viene alla mente” (comes to my mind) (Blasucci, 1985: 104). Recall that here eternity for Leopardi is the movement forward, the future. He compares the past with the future. Once again, Leopardi's thoughts drown between the imagined and the reality, as he compares “the ages that are dead, and this that now is living”, and his mind is overwhelmed. He does not actively stand out in the poem as the subject "I", but refers to his thoughts. As I stated earlier, Leopardi then shipwrecks in the stream of thoughts which is symbolized by the sea. Leopardi debases the powerless state of thought and the reason that cannot grasp infinity. However, according to Prete sea symbolizes the figure of infinity which is inherently not representable (2021: 313). Recall in **Operette Morali**’s first tale that Leopardi added sea on earth by the hands of Jove when the human kind exhausted all the earth had to offer and the sea was the barrier between the known and the unknown. The mental journey in the poem ends with shipwrecking, which Leopardi considers a pleasant end, connecting the poem to its beginning with the phrase "dear to me" (Prete, 2021: 314).

One could discover the cause of Leopardi's enjoyment of sinking. In **Zibaldone** when he revealed the causes of sorrow and melancholy, he linked it to the end of things.

> "The reason for these feelings is that infinite which contains in itself the idea of a thing that is finished, in other words, beyond which there is nothing, a thing that has ended, and will never again return." (2013: 2243) (10 Dec. 1821)

Yet the termination of a thing invokes also a delightful sensation because:

> "Everything that is ended, everything that is last, naturally awakens in man a feeling of sorrow and melancholy. At the same time, it excites a pleasurable feeling, pleasurable in that very sorrow, and that is because of the infiniteness of the idea that is contained in the words finito (ended), ultimo (last), etc." (2013: 2251).

Leopardi seems obsessively addicted to infinity for even the end hinted by "finito" to him was pleasant because its thought alludes to infinity. Thus, sinking in the sea (of thoughts) is pleasant for he sinks into infinity.

The adjective infinite is used for the silence which in fact portrays the imaginative plains where time does not dominate. A sense of timelessness, or better a sense of **oblivion of time** pervades Leopardi's mind, as only when the wind touches the leaves and makes the sound which is the symbol of the present and thus the reality, **eternity is remembered**.

(Interminated spaces)+Silence+Sound= Eternity

Imagination+Reality= Eternity

Once the eternity is summoned inside, he renders possible not only endless spaces but also endless time. Because we, human beings are trapped in a limited universe of time and space, Leopardi transcends those limits by lifting the borders of time and space.

A Romantic reading of **L'Infinito** reveals to us the quest that starts in nature and transforms into an inner one thanks to the sublime, which instigates an inner journey when reality is blocked: "And this hedge that excludes so large a part", "Of the ultimate horizon from my view." As Casaliggi and Fermanis affirm the sublime:

> "is not the power of nature itself, but rather the feeling of intellectual mastery over the blockage or fear such phenomena produced. Sublime therefore does not reside in anything of nature, but only in our mind (…)" (2016: 73)

Another sublime element in the poem is the dimension of vast and infinite, which according to Burke, is a prevalent characteristic: "interminable vastnesses of space". Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, infinity is the only concept included in the discussion of the sublime for the spatial resonance it invests. However, the inclusion of eternity into the sublime was treated by Poulet, where eternity became a timeless sensation where the past and the present united. In **L'Infinito**, the poet compares eternity and the present but is unable to comprehend the boundlessness spatially and temporally. He only apprehends its ungraspability and shipwrecks in the sea of thoughts. Leopardi also feels the ecstasy of the sublime in the suspension of time and space simultaneously. His spatial and temporal detachment begins when the hedge blocks his view, lasting until he hears the sound of the leaves, and senses the present time.

While analyzing Leopardi's **L'Infinito**, Balfour holds that "The poet's self is subject and object of the sublime," and "the poem effortlessly modulates from the spatial to the temporal sublime, from the 'interminable spaces' to the eternal silence that he 'hears'" (2002: 192). The poet's self feels insignificant and annihilates in awe or delightfully in the face of the incomprehensible.

Another Romantic reading with the themes that defy spatial and temporal constraints may include nostalgia, the remote in time and in space, the exalted imagination and the consecrated nature**.**

Nostalgia is evoked in the first verse with "Dear to me always was this lonely hill," where the use of the past tense, passato remoto, signifies a remote past being recalled. Leopardi then transcends reality through his imaginative power, embarking on a mental journey to remote and limitless lands. This reflects the prevalent escapism among Romantics, as they detach themselves from reality and delve into dreams and visions (Casaliggi et al., 2016: 3). He reminisces about the remote in time with "the ages that are dead." Despite his acknowledgment of the past, Leopardi remains intimately connected to nature, both commencing and concluding within its realm, always experiencing a sense of pleasure.

3.2. Shelley

"Shrine of the dawning speech and thought
Of Shelley, sacred be, To all who bow where Time has brought
Gifts to Eternity."

In the chamber where Shelley was born, the aforementioned quatrain by Mr. R. Garnett can be discovered on a plate above the fireplace (Dowden, 1886: 7). Similar to other poets, Shelley's enduring influence extends beyond his mortality. Furthermore, as detailed in the second chapter, within the title "The Romantic Eternity: The Sublime," Thomas Weiskel observes that Longinus' sublime is an inherent quality found in great works, "which refers us to eternity (aion)". Weiskel emphasizes their capacity to resonate across centuries, addressing a broad audience (2019: 12). The influence of Shelley continues to reverberate, thanks to his significant works.

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) was a controversial figure in his time due to his political and moral views. He was expelled from Eton College in 1811 for boldly asserting his inimical views against the existence of God in the pamphlet **The Necessity of Atheism**, after which his defiant acts against any constraint on the individual did not cease. In **The Necessity of Atheism**, he states that "belief is a passion of the mind" and because "reason is founded on the evidence of our senses," the human mind is inclined to accept the most comprehensible idea. Thus, instead of

surmising a Universe with a beginning, the mind accepts a Universe that "existed from all eternity" (University of Pennsylvania). He then continues:

> "If the mind sinks beneath the weight of one, is it an alleviation to increase the intolerability of the burthen? -- The other argument which is founded upon a man's knowledge of his own existence, stands thus. -- A man knows not only that he now is, but that there was a time when he did not exist; consequently there must have been a cause. But what does this prove? We can only infer from effects causes exactly adequate to those effects; -- But there certainly is a generative power which is effected by certain instruments; we cannot prove that it is inherent in these instruments, nor is the contrary hypothesis capable of demonstration: we admit that the **generative power is incomprehensible**, but to suppose that the same effect is produced by an eternal, omniscient, Almighty Being, leaves the cause in the [same] obscurity, but renders it more incomprehensible." (University of Pennsylvania) (emphasis mine)

Shelley's reasoning about the limited temporal existence of the self leads him to accept the supreme power that generates everything, but he acknowledges that he is far from comprehending it. In his Oxford letters, Shelley expounds his belief in a Deity other than the Christian God, calling it 'the Spirit of Love, the harmonized intelligence of infinite Creation' (Bodleian Library, 2011). According to Shelley, the generative power responsible for infinite creation has existed from all eternity.

Yet his first attempt at writing was not **The Necessity of Atheism**. In the same year, 1811, he had his Gothic novels **Zastrozzi** and **St. Irvine** published. The next year, his ardent and rebellious nature took him to Ireland to write another pamphlet, **Address to the Irish People**, to defend the rights of Catholic Irish who could not take up positions as MPs (British Library). Shelley firmly upholds that it is foolish and tyrannical to impose opposite beliefs on people, as everyone should be free to exercise whatever belief they hold (British Library). We can plainly see Shelley's repugnance for any act that imposes an orthodox view regardless of its fundamental thought. Shelley was a momentous character ahead of his time. Not only did he have a compassionate and respectful approach to individual beliefs, but he was also a vegetarian. Such an unconventional mind was naturally known as "mad Shelley" throughout his life. But if we approach the derogatory adjective from a philosophical perspective, specifically from Plato's perspective, "Madness is superior to temperance [sophrosýnē], because the latter has a merely human origin while the former belongs

to the divine," we can better understand Shelley's acts (Calasso, 2001: 62). A year later, he published his first major work, **Queen Mab: A Philosophical Poem with Notes**. Although he printed it anonymously and only distributed it among friends, he feared persecution for including his radical ideas, which were inspired by writers such as Paine, Holbach, and Rousseau (Shelley, 2009: 706). In the poem, the fairy queen Mab takes Ianthe on a journey to show her examples of human pride (Garrett, 2013: 204).

In 1814, Percy Shelley made a crucial decision that led him down a diverging pathway in life: he abandoned his first wife and eloped with Mary Wollestronecraft, the famous daughter of William Godwin and Mary Wollestonecraft, without Godwin's blessing. This elopement brought him and his companions, Mary and his half-sister, to Byron's house in Lake Geneva in 1816, where Mary would begin writing **Frankenstein**. In the same year, Shelley published his poem **Alastor; or, the Spirit of Solitude** (Shelley, 2009: xxvi). The title of **Alastor**, which was suggested by his friend, comes from the Greek term for 'evil genius.' The peregrine poet-protagonist seeks to delve into the mysteries of nature, meets an Arab maiden, wanders many lands, hears the echo of his unrequited love, embarks on a journey on the ocean, but eventually ends up being received by a cavern before being washed ashore later and passing away (Garrett, 2013: 6). In the following year, Shelley composed two poems: **Mont Blanc** and **Laon and Cythna*;* Or, The Revolution of the Golden City: A Vision of the Nineteenth Century**. In the Stanza of Spenser, the protagonist is again a poet who has a vision of an eagle and a snake in eternal struggle, which is explained by a female guide (Shelley, 2009: xxvi). She then takes him to the Temple of the Great along with the siblings Laon and Cynthia (Garrett, 2013: 120). Shelley was not only active in poetic composition that year; he also translated Plato's **Symposium**, wrote his prose **On Love**, and finally arrived in Italy (Shelley, 2009: xxvi). In 1819, Shelley had a prolific year. He published **The Cenci**, a family tragedy in which the father rapes his daughter and the whole family is condemned to death after the murder of the father. He also wrote **The Mask of Anarchy** in response to the Peterloo Massacre, and **Ode to the West Wind**, in which he invokes the wind's strength and transforming power. In this poem, Shelley examines the points of contact and separation between the

speaker and the object addressed and expresses his frustration at the failure of his work to reach its intended audience (Garrett, 2013: 31, 142, 163; Shelley, 2009: xxvi-xxvii). As we approach Shelley's demise in 1822, we see a fruitful increase in his poetic compositions. In 1820, he writes other works such as **The Sensitive Plant**, **To a Skylark**, and **The Witch of Atlas**, yet the most widely known is **Prometheus Unbound: A Lyrical Drama in Four Acts**, which includes various levels of political, scientific, and mythical allusion and reference, including images of transformation, coalescence, correspondence, and other aspects of a universe where it seems conceivable to become what one thinks (Shelley, 2009: xxvii; Garrett, 2013: 195). In the same year, Shelley invites Keats to his house in Italy, but Keats dies seven months later. Shelley was enraged by the unjust reviews that Keats' **Hyperion** received, and he genuinely believed that Keats' deteriorated health condition, which led to his death, owed much to these poor comments. He held Keats so dear that when Shelley was found after the shipwreck, his body could be identified only by the paper pieces of Keats' poem found in his pocket. In 1821, Shelley composed **Adonais**, an elegy on the death of Keats. In a letter, Shelley commented on **Adonais**, stating that "It is a highly-wrought piece of art, perhaps better, in point of composition, than anything I have written" and "I have dipped my pen in consuming fire for his destroyers; otherwise, the style is calm and solemn." (Shelley, 1852: 237, 239). **Epipsychidion** was also composed the same year and, in Shelley's own words, is "an idealized history of my life and feelings" addressed to Emilia Viviani. Together with **A Defence of Poetry**, his renowned prose work, Shelley's statement that "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" was often cited (Garrett, 2013: 61).

Although T. S. Eliot only praised Shelley's better poetry style in his unfinished and final poem **The Triumph of Life**, Shelley was detested by Eliot for being "humorless, pedantic, and self-guard" and was compared to another adolescent for his zeal (1961: 80, 81). He was not only a poet but like Leopardi, a diligent translator, too. By the end of his life, he had translated numerous works from Latin, Greek, Italian, Spanish, German, and even some Arabic (Holmes, 2005: xiii). Watson, on the other hand, asserts that the exciting nature of his poetry owes much to his knowledge in these fields, which is reflected in it as well as the many tones and registers that enrich it,

alluding to his extensive reading in philosophy, science, mythology, religion, and politics (1992: 299, 300).

Shelley's 30-year life was quite short, yet it was full of travel and experience that inspired his poetry up until his boat capsized in July 1822 while he was returning from Livorno. Only a month later, in August, his body was discovered and recognized thanks to some Keats poem fragments discovered in his pocket. He was burned in accordance with ancient Greek customs with frankincense and a wine libation. His remains were interred in the Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome, next to his son William and the poet John Keats, whom he adored. On his gravestone a stanza from Shakespeare's **The Tempest** is engraved:

> "Nothing of him doth fade
> But doth suffer a sea-change
> Into something rich and strange"

Indeed, nothing of him has faded but only underwent a huge transformation posthumously to render him an acknowledged legislator of the world, as his famous quote from **A Defence of Poetry**, "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" suggests, inspiring many against the imposed conventional ideas for a refined and a more individual stance.

3.2.1. Shelley's infinity and eternity

In contrast to Leopardi's extensive discussion of eternity and infinity in his journal **Zibaldone**, Shelley's works do not have the same weighty references. Our only sources of guidance will be his letters, prose works, comments he made about **Queen Mab**, and a few critics who were also interested in these concepts. Shelley dispersed them in different poems, whereas Leopardi condensed infinity and eternity into a single poem of the same name, **L'Infinito**. However, **Alastor; or, The Spirit of**

Solitude will serve as our model poem because they both center on a poetic quest that ends in their annihilation.

Shelley aligns himself with Christian theologians in contemplating eternity, resonating particularly with the philosophical understanding of eternity, as elucidated by Boethius. According to this perspective, sempiternity represents the divine and unchanging "now" that gives rise to eternity. In contrast, eternity is conceived as the dynamic and moving "now," where the succession and accumulation of moments result in the experience of time. On one hand, he observes the totality of time—past, present, and future—while on the other, he recognizes the moving moments. Regarding infinity, he perceives it as synonymous with life itself, emphasizing that death does not serve as its boundary. Ultimately, eternity and infinity emerge as defining attributes of poets, granting them immunity against the constraints of reality, whether in terms of space or time.

To start, with a general outlook on Shelley's prevalent sense of boundlessness, which is common to both eternity and infinity, Watson asserts that Shelley seeks to describe the incomprehensible - that which is beyond description. The key word here is 'beyond', as Watson notes, “a depth beyond depth, a height beyond height, a timelessness beyond time”, and “a boundless space” (1992: 299). This key word 'beyond' is also evident in Shelley's letter to Thomas Love Peacock, where he notes his subtle aspiration towards infinity and eternity: “You know I always seek in what I see the manifestation of something beyond the present & tangible object” (Coffey, 2021: 11). Like Leopardi's concept of 'beyond', through which his mind conceives “interminable vastness of space”, Shelley seeks the echoes that traverse from beyond the present reality.

Shelley's avowal of atheism, which is proved by the pamphlet **The Necessity of Atheism**, he wrote in his Eton College days and caused him to be expelled, did not render him a prejudiced mind; rather, he was always desirous and studious in his quest for knowledge. In light of his curiosity, Shelley perused Christian theologians such as Boethius, Augustine, and Aquinas and was naturally influenced by their views on eternity, particularly by their distinction between sempiternity (everlastingness), by

which eternity manifests itself in this world as a moving 'moment' of the present, and eternity, which is the totality of time (Callaghan, 2018: 308). According to Callaghan, both Augustine and Shelley craved for eternity, but Shelley did so without a Christian God (2018: 309):

> "All that natural reason enables us to discover, is that we now are, that there was a time when we were not, that the moment even when now we are reasoning, is a point before & after which is eternity." (Shelley, 2004: 594)

I can see Shelley's reception of eternity as the totality of time, leaving out the past, present, and future as nothing but points we use to determine time. This is how eternity realizes itself in every moment. In one of the notes to his poem **Queen Mab**, Shelley expounds on the meaning of time and eternity:

> "Time is our consciousness of the succession of ideas in our mind (…) If, therefore, the human mind, by any future improvement of its sensibility should become conscious of an infinite number of ideas in a minute, that minute would be eternity." (Murphy, 1996: 138)

In a letter written in 1814, Shelley reveals his reception of eternity not just in his poetic mind, but also in his perception of reality:

> "The remembrance and expectation of such sweet moments as we experienced last night consoles, strengthens, and redeems me from despondency; there is eternity in these moments; they contain the true elixir of immortal life. My best love, adieu." (Dowden, 1886: 500)

Shelley encapsulates eternity as the totality of past, present, and future, bringing the past as remembrance and the future as expectation when both are ruminated upon, as it is often expressed in philosophy. The transient present joins the past and the potential of the future, which can only be expected in the present. This is

the incorporeal nature of time: it eludes us and ever survives, finding its nest unlit and stark. Time remains still, rendering the rest in awe.

Along with these theologians, Shelley also studied Greek philosophy, with Plato having the greatest influence on him. In a letter, he writes, "Fortunately Plato is of my opinion: and I had rather err with Plato than be right with Horace" (1852: 155). For Shelley and Plato, eternal life entails "a return to an elsewhere, whereby becoming a part of eternity, earth's corruption is banished from the soul" (Callaghan, 2019: 313). Callaghan cites a letter that Shelley wrote to Elizabeth Hitchener in order to discuss his viewpoint on immortality:

> "I have considered it in every possible light & reason tells me that death is the boundary of the life of man. Yet I feel, I believe the direct contrary. The senses are the only inlets of knowledge, & there is an inward sense that has persuaded me of this." (2019: 313)

As the only sources of knowledge, Shelley bases his belief in an afterlife on his senses. This manner of conceiving reality is asserted in his essay **On Life**: "(…) nothing exists but as it is perceived" (2009: 634).

In a subsequent letter written to Hitchener in 1812, Shelley reveals his philosophy of life and his meaning of God:

> "I tell him I believe that God is another signification for the Universe.—I then explain—'I think reason and analogy seem to countenance the opinion that **life is infinite**— (. . .) and in consequence of being infinite we can never arrive at its termination. How, on this hypothesis are we to arrive at a first cause?—' " (Shelley, 2004: 571) (emphasis mine)

Shelley elaborates on his perspective on life from a year earlier. He begins the brief conversation with his friend Hogg in 1811 by bringing up the tiny creatures, like tree leaves or the insects we step on, and comes to the conclusion that "some vast intellect animates Infinity" (2004: 531).

Upon acknowledging the prospect of life after death through his senses, Shelley articulates a pantheistic perspective wherein the omnipotent being is identified with the Universe. Shelley's concept of God penetrates into life and space, emerging as synonymous with the entirety of the Universe. Consequently, in his understanding, the infinite equates to life itself, thereby indirectly suggesting a connection to the divine or God.

Shelley notes the atemporal nature of a poet, suggesting that a poet cannot be confined to his own period. The creations and ideas of a poet will continue to resonate through time. This concept is also supported by Thomas Weiskel, who argues that great works possess a sublime quality when they transcend their time and resonate with other periods. The poet who not only intensely observes the present time with the laws of order but also foresees, feeling a glimpse of the future in a section of **A Defence of Poetry** where he disputes other titles that are attributed to poets from earlier times such as legislator and prophet: "A poet participates in the **eternal, the infinite**, and the one; as far as relates to his conceptions, time and place and number are not" (Shelley, 2009: 677) (emphasis mine). Despite Shelley's exclusion of the past in his perception of time when addressing eternity as the totality of time, he still determined the role of a poet to transcend the limits of time, place, and number. In another passage, Shelley compared poetry and story, revealing the power of poetry to render time eternal. He wrote:

> "Time, which destroys the beauty and the use of the story of particular facts, stripped of the poetry which should invest them, augments that of poetry, and forever develops new and wonderful applications of the eternal truth which it contains." (2009: 680)

The potency of poetry lies in its universality. Unlike the historical narration of events, poetry transcends specific periods and events, making it timeless and universally relevant (2009: 680). The dual power of poet and poetry works in correspondence with each other. Later on, while defining the epic poets, naming them as Homer, Dante, and Milton, Shelley remarks, "All high poetry is infinite; it is the

first acorn which contained all oaks potentially", meaning that all majestic poems influence people from all ages that come after them (2009: 693). Once again, Thomas Weiskel's argument regarding the sublime quality of great works becomes evident in Shelley's perspective. I observe the power of poetry and poet cooperating to surpass the limits of time and place.

3.2.2. Reading Alastor; or, The Spirit of Solitude

Gurney remarks that **Alastor** underlines Shelley's siding with Plato's philosophy and his fondness for Dante's **Paradiso** as "a hymn of everlasting love" (2004: 304). Quoting George Santayana, Gurney comments that Shelley:

> "was also removed from any ordinary atheism by his truly speculative sense for eternity." It is the speculative sense for eternity that impels the visionary in *Alastor* to abandon all human comforts in the search for an absolute that is ultimately sacred." (2004: 304)

As mentioned in the previous section, Shelley's perception of eternity was the fleeting moments, whose manifestations of eternity in each present moment become time when they accumulate. Hence, to defy the evanescence of time and to become an active subject against the dominion of time, he tries, though in vain, to seek a dream vision.

Shelley's sense of eternity, igniting his visionary stance aside, the power of poetry becomes one of the departure points of **Alastor; or, The Spirit of Solitude**, written prior to **A Defence of Poetry**. Jean Hall in her book **A Mind That Feeds Upon Infinity** affirms:

> "The young Shelley of Alastor experiences the inspirational power of poetry as the capacity to cast oneself into the depths, whereas an imaginative isolate one dies in the fruitless search for meaning. […] he turns from the depths outward toward surface […] he tries to convert surface into a transformed version of depth by linking the evolution of the self's meaning to the gathering coherence of the world." (1991: 22, 23)

Because Shelley wants to harness the power of poetry, he envisions a young and enthusiastic poet as the protagonist and describes him at length in the Preface to the poem, who is desirous of meditating about the wonders of the universe and who:

> "[…] drinks deep of the fountains of knowledge, and is still insatiate. The magnificence and beauty of the external world sinks profoundly into the frame of his conceptions, and affords to their modifications a variety not to be exhausted. **So long as it is possible for his desires to point towards objects thus infinite and unmeasured he is joyous**, and tranquil, and self-possessed. But the period arrives when these objects cease to suffice. His mind is at length suddenly awakened and thirsts for intercourse with an intelligence similar to itself. He images to himself the Being whom he loves. Conversant with speculations of the sublimest and most perfect natures, the vision in which he embodies his own imaginations unites all of wonderful, or wise, or beautiful, which the poet, the philosopher, or the lover could depicture. The intellectual faculties, the imagination, the functions of sense, have their respective requisitions on the sympathy of corresponding powers in other human beings. The Poet is represented as uniting these requisitions, and attaching them to a single image. He seeks in vain for a prototype of his conception. **Blasted by his disappointment, he descends to an untimely grave**." (Shelley, 2009: 92) (emphasis mine)

Shelley then continues the Preface with a second paragraph, explaining the reasons for the poet's early demise and attributes it to his detachment from society in pursuit of his ideals, "a prototype of his own conception". His moral lesson is that one should not lead a secluded life chasing dreams and should maintain a bond with society through love.

In the tale, this ideal image is portrayed as a veiled Arab maiden whose indefiniteness is emphasized by the veil. It is also important to note that while we are unaware of the poet's origin, the first stop mentioned in the tale is Athens. Thus, it can be inferred that the poet is from Europe, and he leaves home when he exhausts his finite life in early youth to "seek strange truth in undiscovered lands" (77). After passing through present-day Lebanon and Israel, he arrives in Egypt, where he discovers the secrets of the birth of time through the Zodiac engraved on the ceiling and the hieroglyphs on the wall. After this discovery, the maiden brings him food, prepares his tent, and watches over him as he sleeps. The poet, unaware of her existence, meets her in his dream. Charmed by her poetic skills and kindred soul, after an erotic event, he wakes up desperate to find that vision in real life. Led by her, he dissociates himself from life and pursues only that vision. In the end, after voyaging

even to far more distant lands, he grows weary. Beaten by his failures, he meets his untimely death in nature through many adventures, including a boat ride that involves a whirlpool and a storm.

Haines does an allegorical reading of the poem:

> "The storm of passion, the boat which is the body, its navigator the self, the mountain which seems to be matter or physical energy, the cove and its narcissi representing the self-enclosed mind, the stream of life, the lone pine looking out over space as the lonely mind contemplates eternity." (Haines, 1997: 116)

Shelley remarks that the pursuit of dreams is a desire found in all of us. We do not revel in the act of realizing them but in the act of chasing them. Furthermore, our capacity to generate desire leads to wishes that often exceed our limits and abilities. I can subtly read a yearning for infinity in these desires.

> "Yet who is there that will not pursue phantoms, spend his choicest hours in hunting after dreams, and wake only to perceive his error and regret that death is so near? (…) Even the men who hold dominion over nations fatigue themselves by the interminable pursuit of emptiest visions; the honour and power which they seek is enjoyed neither in acquirement, possession or: retrospect; for what is the fame that attends the most skillful deceiver or destroyer? What the power which awakens not in its progression more wants than it can supply." (Shelley, 2012: 351, 352)

Callaghan, in her article **Shelley in Eternity** notes that "The animating force of Alastor is its exploration of the Poet's quest to become one with that which lies beyond humanity," yet that force becomes "life-negating" when the poet aspires to experience the eternal (2018: 309, 310). The quest in **Alastor** is the "mobility" of the poet, for in Hall's words, "mobility and infinity are crucially related; his aspiration is directed towards the world, which in its magnificence opens outward into visions of the infinite" (1991: 132). Hall also reminds us of a few words from Shelley's essay **On Life**, where Shelley describes man as "a being of high aspirations," citing from Milton's **Paradise Lost**, whose "thoughts that wander through eternity" (1991: 132;

Shelley, 2009: 822). **I can infer from Hall's analysis that mobility represents a fundamental existential quest for humanity, driven by our innate desire for transcendence and high aspirations.** And it is precisely this search that drives the gaze of the *Alastor* poet beyond, as expressed in the Preface:

> "But the period arrives when these objects cease to suffice. His mind is at length suddenly awakened and thirsts for intercourse with an intelligence similar to itself. He images to himself the Being whom he loves." (Shelley, 2009: 92)

Shelley begins his narrative by praising nature in two stanzas. He then takes us to the tomb of the poet who "lived, died, and sang in solitude" (60) and then proceeds to recount his life chronologically from infancy to youth when he decides to leave home "to seek strange truths in undiscovered lands" (77) (2009: 95, 96). The poet travels to Athens, Tyre, Baalbek, Jerusalem, Memphis, and Thebes, partly to the past, seeing the ruins of those once-majestic places.

> Dark Æthiopia in her desert hills
> Conceals. Among the ruined temples there,
> Stupendous columns, and wild images
> Of more than man, where marble daemons watch
> The Zodiac's brazen mystery, and dead men
> Hang their mute thoughts on the mute walls around,
> He lingered, poring on memorials
> Of the world's youth, through the long burning day
> Gazed on those speechless shapes, nor, when the moon
> Filled the mysterious halls with floating shades
> Suspended he that task, but ever gazed
> And gazed, till meaning on his vacant mind
> Flashed like strong inspiration, and he saw
> The thrilling secrets of the birth of time. (115-128)

According to Hall, the poet's contemplation of the secrets of the birth of time in Dark Æthiopia can be seen as a form of "poetic mobility (…) as a species of attention that has the power to transform things" (1991: 133). This contemplation enlarges the poet's world by opening his mind toward infinity, making the past experienced in the present and giving meaning to the objects of his contemplation, which then becomes a

part of the poet himself. The silence that allows him to engage fully in his contemplation is a crucial element in this process, enabling him to understand the birth of time. Note that after much travelling, covering infinite spaces from his home to the temple, the poet's mind discovers the secret of the birth of time. Commentaries in various books allude to C. F. Volney's **The Ruins**, which was studied carefully by both Mary and Percy Shelley. It is evident that Shelley was influenced by this book in his reference to the temple and his discovery related to the birth of time. Because Volney positions Ethiopia in Thebes, where science, mythology, and religion were born by "a Nation of Blacks":

> "There, a people now forgotten, discovered, while others were yet barbarians, the elements of the arts and sciences; a race of men now rejected from society for their sable skin and frizzled hair founded on the study of the laws of nature, those civil and religious systems which still govern the universe." (Shelley, 2012: 363)

The Volney reference helps to understand that the poet did not discover the nature of Time, but rather the beginnings of civilizations in a forgotten realm that is now in ruins. However, this very discovery also offers him a chance to contemplate the evanescence of time. Five years later, in 1821, Shelley would compose another poem entitled **Time,** in which the symbol of time is described as an "Unfathomable sea, whose waves are years!" (Shelley, w. date: 495).

The poet is then visited by an Arab maiden who watches him all night in his sleep, but too weak to confess her love, she returns her home lost in her feelings and thoughts. The poet continues his journey through Arabie, Persia, Carmanian waste, Indus, Oxus and Cashmire where he dreams of the veiled maiden, a poet, who sits next to him to watch him while he is asleep:

> Her voice was like the voice of his own soul
> Heard in the calm of thought; its music long,
> Knowledge and truth and virtue were her theme,
> And lofty hopes of divine liberty,
> Thoughts the most dear to him, and poesy,
> Herself a poet. Soon the solemn mood (153-161)

Meeting a kindred spirit, they consummate this connaissance, but only in a dream. The poet then awakens, shocked and determined to find the maiden. The maiden is, in fact Shelley's "prototype of his conceptions" and in a letter to John Gisborne in 1822 he writes:

> "I think one is always in love with something or other; the error, and I confess it is not easy for spirits cased in flesh and blood to avoid it, consists in seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is perhaps eternal." (Shelley, 2012: 351)

> A vision to the sleep of him who spurned
> Her choicest gifts. He eagerly pursues
> Beyond the realms of dream that fleeting shade;
> He overleaps the bounds. Alas! Alas! (204-7)

He continues his adventure in search of her to Petra and then to the Chorasmian shore (modern day Russia) (Shelley, 2009: 718). On the shore, he watches a swan and envies that it has a home to return to, asking himself "And what am I that should linger here" (285). Upset that he has not yet found a similar companion, he embarks on a shallop that he sees nearby on a fine day, but only to "(...) meet lone death on the dreary ocean's waste" (305). At first, the sea does not seem to fulfill his desire, for it is calm. But slowly the sea rushes to show its power, but still unwilling to grant his wish. His boat escapes the storm, reaches the Caucasus, and is driven into a cave.

> "With unrelaxing speed.—"Vision and Love!"
> The Poet cried aloud, "I have beheld
> The path of thy departure. Sleep and death
> Shall not divide us long!"" (358-65)

The poet uttered this prescience when he was in the cave and when the cave was being swallowed by the raging sea. The boat takes its course at high speed. As if in a trance, the poet calls out to his maiden, assuring that they will be reunited either in sleep or in death. I can observe another desire for death on the part of the poet, who is anxious to reunite with his maiden. Harold Bloom takes a different view of the above

verses. Bloom, quoting from **A Defence of Poetry** that the poets "have been washed in the blood of the mediator and redeemer, Time", claims that the poet of **Alastor** is Shelley's Orpheus, who cries out "Vision and Love!" (1997: 130). It is no wonder that Orpheus is mentioned, for the **Alastor** poet is also in search of his beloved maiden, but it is nothing but vision and love, just as for Orpheus Eurydice becomes vision and love when she disappears from sight.

The poet's bark resumes the course:

> The boat pursued
> The windings of the cavern. Daylight shone
> At length upon that gloomy river's flow;
> Now, where the fiercest war among the waves
> Is calm, on the unfathomable stream
> The boat moved slowly. (369-74)

Coffey informs that, according to Christian Neo-Platonic metaphysics, this moment is sufficient for the perpetuation of spirits after death and "marks a vehicular transition" as Shelley's boat still advances (2021: 112).

Back on the calm stream that flows through the cave's twists and turns, the poet finds himself in a whirlpool that he is about to ascend.

> A pool of treacherous and tremendous calm.
> (…)
> The waters overflow, and a smooth spot
> Of glassy quiet mid those battling tides
> Is left, the boat paused shuddering.—Shall it sink
> Down the abyss? Shall the reverting stress
> Of that resistless gulf embosom it? (386, 392-296)

Shelley's oxymoronic movement, in which he suggests sinking as he rises with the whirlpool, is particularly striking when his boat is finally in a safe place. I can see the poet's desire to end his existence.

> Now shall it fall?—A wandering stream of wind,
> Breathed from the west, has caught the expanded sail,
> And, lo! with gentle motion, between banks

Of mossy slope, and on a placid stream,
Beneath a woven grove it sails, and, hark!
The ghastly torrent mingles its far roar,
With the breeze murmuring in the musical woods. (397- 403)

Shelley finally reaches the land on which he can tread and walk again. It is such a wood that "the wave of the boat's motion disturbed" the contemplative task of the trees and the yellow flowers. Isolated and intact forests:

Which nought but vagrant bird, or wanton wind,
Or falling spear-grass, or their own decay
Had e'er disturbed before. The Poet longed
To deck with their bright hues his withered hair,
But on his heart its solitude returned,
And he forbore. Not the strong impulse hid
In those flushed cheeks, bent eyes, and shadowy frame
Had yet performed its ministry: it hung (409-416)

I observe for the first time a glimpse of a positive desire in the poet when he wants to deck. Nevertheless, as positive as it is, the poet wants to return to his solitude in the secluded woods. The colours of the flowers distract him only for a minute. Remembering his true mission, to follow his maiden, he renounces this wish. In the next stanza, however, he is found wandering in the woods.

The noonday sun
Now shone upon the forest, one vast mass
Of mingling shade, whose brown magnificence
A narrow vale embosoms. There, huge caves
Scooped in the dark base of their aëry rocks (420- 424)
…
The meeting boughs and implicated leaves
Wove twilight o'er the Poet's path, as led
By love, or dream, or god, or mightier Death,
He sought in Nature's dearest haunt, some bank
Her cradle, and his sepulchre. More dark (426-430)

It becomes clearer as to why Shelley enters the forest. He wants to reunite with his beloved, and so he seeks his end, for no matter how hard he sought, he could not find her. He seeks his grave, which is the cradle of nature. He is so happy to find his

eternal resting place that he considers it the cradle of nature, as if he were her child. His path is guided by love, by a dream, by god or by Death, and is touched by the twilight as his life comes to an end.

Twilight is mentioned again as the poet walks on but this time it becomes the sister of silence.

> To some more lovely mystery. Through the dell,
> Silence and Twilight here, twin-sisters, keep
> Their noonday watch, and sail among the shades, (454-56)

Death is now even closer, as Silence is represented as Death, and its sibling, Twilight, is the symbol of life about to end.

In the next verse, the poet sees a fountain in which he sees his own reflection, weakened and melancholic:

> Hither the Poet came. His eyes beheld
> Their own wan light through the reflected lines
> Of his thin hair, distinct in the dark depth
> Of that still fountain; as the human heart,
> Gazing in dreams over the gloomy grave,
> Sees its own treacherous likeness there. He heard (469-474)

Then he hears the moving leaves and grass and feels “an unaccustomed presence” (477) and the sweet sound of a dark well. The Spirit is right beside the poet. I should note that this is no dream. The poet is awake:

> Held commune with him, as if he and it
> Were all that was,—only... when his regard
> Was raised by intense pensiveness,... two eyes,
> Two starry eyes, hung in the gloom of thought, (487-490)

Here, Shelley describes his genuine search for his prototype. This time, when the poet is awake and is able to accept her presence in his reality as well, the vision of

the veiled girl is all about him. When the poet first wakes up from his dream of the maiden, he does not question her existence or nature; instead, he is only concerned with discovering her location. However, this time, when the maiden appears to tempt him once more, "the ontological uncertainty of the apparition" is present (Murphy, 1996: 148):

> Obedient to the light
> That shone within his soul, he went, pursuing
> The windings of the dell.—The rivulet (493-95)

The poet's journey earlier began "obedient to high thoughts" (107), but this time after experiencing a vision, he continues it "obedient to the light" "within his soul." After his thoughts first lead him on a trip, he is now led by the light of his soul after becoming the father of his first child. It is clear to see the differences between the pursuit of knowledge with the mind and the pursuit of desire with the imagination.

Shelley rejoices his wandering in the dell and asks the stream:

> "… "O stream!
> Whose source is inaccessibly profound,
> Whither do thy mysterious waters tend?
> Thou imagest my life. Thy darksome stillness,
> Thy dazzling waves, thy loud and hollow gulfs,
> Thy searchless fountain, and invisible course
> Have each their type in me: and the wide sky,
> And measureless ocean may declare as soon
> What oozy cavern or what wandering cloud
> Contains thy waters, as the universe
> Tell where these living thoughts reside, when stretched
> Upon thy flowers my bloodless limbs shall waste
> I' the passing wind!" (502-14)

The poet sees in the stream his likeness. Like him, it is sometimes peaceful and sometimes angry. What is the force that drives the river is invisible, as is the life force had been given to it. Then the river is not enough for him, and he brings into play the sky and the infinite ocean.

Branchless and blasted, clenched with grasping roots
The unwilling soil. A gradual change was here,
Yet ghastly. For, as fast years flow away,
The smooth brow gathers, and the hair grows thin
And white, and where irradiate dewy eyes (531-5)

In the next stanza, I observe that the poet has aged a little, for his limbs are burning and trembling. The nature around him also seems unpleasant, reflecting his age.

The dim and hornèd moon hung low, and poured
…
(…) Yellow mist
Filled the unbounded atmosphere, and drank
Wan moonlight even to fulness: not a star
Shone, not a sound was heard; the very winds,
Danger's grim playmates, on that precipice
Slept, clasped in his embrace.—O, storm of death!
…
A mighty voice invokes thee. Ruin calls
His brother Death. A rare and regal prey
He hath prepared, prowling around the world; (602, 604-9, 618-20)

As the moon appears low and horned, it is understood that the poet has little energy left to bear more life. The mist obscures the view, the atmosphere through which he will ascend is boundless, but not adorned with a single star. The sky is simple and naked. Not even the wind howls. Shelley's deathbed is unadorned and solemn. Finally, Death is called to take the life of his rare prey.

When on the threshold of the green recess
The wanderer's footsteps fell, he knew that death
Was on him. Yet a little, ere it fled,
Did he resign his high and holy soul
To images of the majestic past,
That paused within his passive being now, (625-30)

The poet, notwithstanding his earlier expressed wish to meet his end and thus unite with his maiden, does not come to terms with his death until he falls into his grave. I observe that Shelley glorifies the poet with adjectives such as 'rare, high and

holy soul'. Before his soul flees his body, he wants to recall the majestic past, which shows no remorse for his futile search for the maiden.

> At peace, and faintly smiling:—his last sight
> Was the great moon, which o'er the western line
> Of the wide world her mighty horn suspended, (645-7)

Just as in the previous stanza, before Death was called, the horned and the low moon was the poet's first sight, so now with the poet's death approaching, the moon was his last sight. The poet's body too was suspended like the moon in the sky.

> No sense, no motion, no divinity—
> A fragile lute, on whose harmonious strings
> The breath of heaven did wander—a bright stream
> Once fed with many-voicèd waves—a dream
> Of youth, which night and time have quenched for ever,
> Still, dark, and dry, and unremembered now. (666-671)

The fragile lute represents the poet as the Eolian lyre (Shelley, 2012: 426). In fact, the Eolian lyre represents all Romantic poets. Because it is played by the wind and not by human intervention, the lyre symbolizes the poet's soul, and the wind, as one of the softest elements of nature, represents its influence and inspiration on the poet. Here Shelley refers to and praises his poet, but now, after his death, his once sublime compositions are only forgotten.

The final stanza is an elegy to the poet with the striking final two lines, which Murphy describes as 'birth and grave', are the mystery of time in the story; birth is 'stationary' while death is 'unsurpassed' (1996: 154).

> Nature's vast frame, the web of human things,
> Birth and the grave, that are not as they were. (719-20)

Nabokov remarks that “our existence is but a brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness” (Edwards, 2018: 29). Murphy goes on to say that between life and death, we are all about what life will bring us (1996: 154). Shelley here shows the mostly forgotten fact, that life is vast but limited.

Now that I have reached the conclusion, it is clear how the Preface and the poem conflict with one another. While Coffey confirms the same contradiction, stating that the poet is "condemned" in the Preface yet "glorified" in the poem and that in the tale "the Poet is most alive in those moments of self-seclusion," Shelley warns the readers about the foreboding tale of the young poet and that his untimely death should warn all not to pursue the dreams in a way to neglect life (2021: 100).

The poet in Shelley leaves this world relatively quickly because he has become weary of his relentless search for the maiden. His passion to pursue his ideas is what drives him, or more accurately, what causes him to plummet to his death. His quest to achieve what is beyond him serves as a reminder of what Romanticism is all about:

> “The Romantic doctrine was that there is an infinite striving forward on the part of reality, of the universe around us, that there is something which is infinite, something which is inexhaustible of which the finite attempts to be the symbol but of course cannot.” (Berlin, 2000: 101)

The poem is replete with Romantic images. The poem's title, "solitude," already gives away a personal experience, exalting the subjective individuality. The poet's journey, which begins as a quest for knowledge but quickly transforms into a quest of his desire, the hunt for the poet's ideal companion who is also a poet after his dream and triggered once more his ensuing vision, is a clear example of the exaltation of emotions over knowledge. The poet's never-ending journeys across the continents also allude to the sentiments of homelessness and the remote space that Romantics were generally preoccupied with. The poet roams like a vagabond in remote lands: “In lonesome vales making the wild his home” (99). When encountered by a swan, he cannot help but envy the bird’s home:

(…) "Thou hast a home,
Beautiful bird; thou voyagest to thine home,
(…)
And what am I that I should linger here, (280, 281, 285)

The remote in time can be interpreted when the poet contemplates upon the ancients and discovers the birth of time through the hieroglyphs.

With huge or limitless skies, oceans, rocky caves, slopes, paths, vast earth, mountains, main, and atmosphere, as well as dark flood, courses, waterways, fountains, earth, ruins, and glens, it becomes clear the majesty and the wild beauty that evoke the Burkean sublime throughout. Consider how Burke distinguished between the sublime and the lovely by using specific adjectives to describe each. Consider that, as Shelley admits in the Preface, "the magnificence and beauty of the external world sinks profoundly into the frame of his conceptions," and that for him, the "speculations of the sublimest and most perfect natures" that he engages in with his maiden in the dream are more important than the sublime sensation of the natural surroundings in which he travels.

3.3. A Comparative Reading of Infinity and Eternity in the Poetics of Shelley and Leopardi

Along with the Romantic tropes highlighted in the first chapter, Leopardi's and Shelley's conceptions of infinity and eternity will be employed in explaining their escapement from spatial and temporal constraints.

Nicolson remarks that Romantic poets such as Coleridge, Byron, Wordsworth, and Shelley "grew up with conceptions of time and space that had once startled or captivated their ancestors" (1959: 377). I have expounded in detail in the first two chapters the events in a historical context that enlarged the spatial and the temporal reality. Even Leopardi affirmed that time is not infinite or eternal but, even thinking through centuries to the remote past evokes in him a sense of infinity, because the boundaries of time cannot be discerned. Hence it would be more adaptable to not to

consider infinity and eternity, merely as concepts without an end, but rather to explore how they were conceptualized according to Shelley and Leopardi. A quick reminder would aid in recalling their thoughts. While for Shelley, the infinite is life itself because death is not the end, for Leopardi, infinity has an array of interpretations. Leopardi notes that infinity is, first and foremost, an insatiable and innate desire in humans. The sea represents a vivid symbol of the infinite, aside, children also have a tendency for the infinite, as the unfamiliarity of things inflames their imagination to interpret things ad infinitum. Eternity, on the other hand, is recognized by Shelley precisely as it was interpreted by philosophers, both as the totality of time and as the fleeting moments we call "now." Leopardi, however, has a more distinct conception and regards eternity in the span of the future, as the future holds the potential and is endless for the infinite imaginative power to project upon.

Both poems' pursuit of the transcendental, the one which is beyond their reality forms their central theme:

> "Thus Romanticism became a form of escapism into a world beyond its own. Reality was so well disguised that it is not clear whether the poet was searching for himself through his characters or whether, through their adventures, he was offering his own soul to the reader. The Romantic artists all had a sense of belonging to two worlds: the external, visible world, and the internal world of the soul and of dreams." (Claudon, 1980: 25)

In **Alastor**, considering Shelley's remarks in his letters, it becomes more evident to read his poet protagonist as a reflection of himself. **L'Infinito** has no other than Leopardi himself. Given the length of the poems, **Alastor**'s poet encounters only the Arab maiden; the rest of his journey is undertaken in solitude. In contrast, Leopardi is entirely alone. However, in both poems, the sense of belonging to external and internal worlds, of the soul and dreams, is palpable.

What prompts both poets to embark on a journey, both literally and figuratively, is in a sense a blockage. In Leopardi's case, the obstacle is a hedge that largely blocks his view of the distant horizon. While Shelley, in keeping with Leopardi's dictum that man's desire for infinity is contained in childhood, when life is

fresh and not exhausted, as soon as he passes through early youth he leaves home in search of more knowledge:

> …early youth had passed, he left
> His cold fireside and alienated home
> To seek strange truths in undiscovered lands. (75-77)

David Morse, in the chapter titled **Romanticism and the Infinite** from his book, expresses "The quest for the infinite begins in displacement" (1981: 214). While the displacement of Shelley occurs when he ceases to satiate himself with experience and knowledge, Leopardi's displacement occurs over a hedge which blocks the view and allows the imagination to take over. Their transcendental journey commences for different reasons: Shelley embarks with familiarity in pursuit of more knowledge, whereas Leopardi begins fantasizing when his view is obstructed in reality: "The romantic hero, turning away from a narrow and constrained world that fails to fulfill the infinite desire of the self, seeks his inner kingdom" (Russ, 2011: 278). When they both realize that there is something more beyond their reality, mobility occurs, igniting their imaginative power:

> "In the realm of Romanticism, there are other hidden doors that open into infinity. The apprehension of the absolute is a kind of transcendental state; this is the intended objective. In this context, dreams serve as one of the pathways to reaching beyond and into infinity." (Russ, 2011: 276, 277)

Shelley also reveals in the Preface of **Alastor**:

> "So long as it is possible for his desires to point towards objects thus infinite and unmeasured, he is joyous, and tranquil, and self-possessed. But the period arrives when these objects cease to suffice." (Shelley, 2009: 92)

In this sense, Shelley's block is the realization of the finite, that he has exhausted all there is to learn and experience. Both Shelley and Leopardi arrive at a finitude that blocks their infinity, and so displacement ensues.

While Leopardi is immobile, just sitting and looking at "infinite vastness of space", Shelley is infinitely mobile, traversing vast spaces, wandering through Athens, Tyre, Baalbec, Jerusalem, Babylon, Memphis, Thebes and Dark Ethiopia. There comes a point where Shelley looks at the silent walls, at silence in a way, just like Leopardi in solitude and silence. It is also important to note that both poets are preoccupied with vast spaces. Shelley literally advances vast spaces, whereas Leopardi does so in his imagination. As Leopardi continues to look, the hedge obstructs his view of the horizon; as a result, he turns his pleasurable gaze inside. The supernatural quiet, which exists in the realm of eternity where it is immobile and hence lacks a voice, is imagined existing in infinite areas beyond the horizon, beyond the range of the human eye. On the other hand, Shelley directs his eyes to the Zodiac engraved in the temple and then thinks of the dead men:

> Stupendous columns, and wild images
> Of more than man, where marble daemons watch
> The Zodiac's brazen mystery, and dead men (117-119)

Shelley journeys to the past, to the ancient era of the temple, which is now simply a ruin, from the concrete Zodiac carving. After an engaged contemplation where he does not even notice the passing hours, he fills the silence, the vacant mind with meaning, discovering the secrets of the birth of time. It is interesting to note that both Leopardi and Shelley arrive at a state of silence that transcends the present. The absence of the past is depicted as "mute walls" for Shelley and as "dead seasons" for Leopardi. Furthermore, both Leopardi and Shelley explore the concept of boundlessness in spatial and temporal terms. Leopardi contemplates the vastness of space, while Shelley actively travels to distant lands. And after these literal and figurative journeys, both poets reflect on the nature of time.

Leopardi	Shelley
Ma sedendo e mirando, interminati Spazi di là da quella, e sovrumani Silenzi, e profondissima quiete But sitting and gazing, interminated Spaces beyond, and superhuman Silences and a profoundest quietness	Hang their mute thoughts on the mute walls around, Gazed on those speechless shapes, nor, when the moon And gazed, till meaning on his vacant mind Flashed like strong inspiration, and he saw The thrilling secrets of the birth of time.

Figure 7: A Comparison: **Alastor and L'Infinito.**

Leopardi's contemplation is accompanied by the wind, which prompts him to compare silence and sound and to reflect on eternity. He does not discover eternity, as he already knows it. This is why he says "mi sovvien l'eterno" (eternity comes to my mind). He likely made this discovery during his previous visits to that solitary hill. While Leopardi's search ends with the unfathomable dialogue between infinity and eternity, Shelley continues his travels, delighted by his discovery of the birth of time. An Arab maiden, who is a poet like Shelley, enters the scene, symbolizing Shelley's ideal companion and his desire to converse about the wonders of the universe. She departs from his side without arousing any notice or awareness in him. Interestingly, when the poet arrives in Cashmire, he dreams about her and embarks on a relentless journey to find her, but to no avail, and ultimately meets his death. Both journeys end with the realization that what they seek is unattainable. And in this realization lies the core of Romanticism: "The Romantic doctrine was that there is an infinite striving forward on the part of reality, (…) there is something" infinite and it is inexhaustible (Berlin, 2000: 101). Because the end, the culmination is out of discussion, Romantics were constantly in action:

> "(…) self is something of which we are aware only in effort. Effort is action, action is movement, movement is unfinishable-perpetual. That is the fundamental Romantic image." (2000: 106)

In terms of the poems' endings, Leopardi is overwhelmed by the realization that eternity and infinity are beyond human comprehension, and he ultimately succumbs to this realization. On the other hand, Shelley is so driven to attain the infinite and his transcendent vision that he becomes weakened to the point where his

physical strength cannot save him from falling into a pit while walking in the woods. He is already too weak and thus slowly succumbs to his untimely death. However, nothing from mortal life disturbs or terrifies his repose.

Although both poems use concrete elements to depict the sublime in natural settings, there is another sublime at work internally. In **The Oxford Anthology of English Literature**, High Romanticism is associated with the internalization of the quest romance, in which the poet is the quester driven by an "excessive self-consciousness" as a manifestation of selfhood and joined by the muse figure as the purpose of the quest (Kermode et al., 1973: 6). In this playground:

> "The goal of this quest […] is sublimity. This sublimity unlike the 18th-century sublime is not a Sublime of great conceptions, before which the self feels small, but rather of a hoped-for potential, in which the private self turns upon infinitude, and so is found by its own greatness." (1973: 6)

This remark highlights the principle of selfhood as the manifestation of excessive self-consciousness. However, **Alastor** departs from **L'Infinito** in terms of the purpose of the quest, which is first his satiated knowledge in pursuit of the infinite, then the Arab maiden as his muse serving as the prototype of the poet. The Kantian sublime, where one awakens to their own sublimity in the aftermath of a sublime sensation in nature, is not projected in **Alastor**. Instead, there is "a hoped-for potential, in which the private self turns towards infinitude."

There are several romantic traits that Alastor and **L'Infinito** have in common. **L'Infinito**, according to Balfour, begins in the natural world, on the hill where he is urged to reflect and daydream while his vision is obscured by a hedge, and ultimately ends "with the negation of all thought" (2002: 192). What Balfour said about **L'Infinito** can also be applied to **Alastor**. For instance, the poets in both poems begin a quest in nature that eventually develops into an inward journey in solitude. While this shift can be implicitly read in Leopardi, Shelley's journey is maintained in both his outward and interior worlds. The two poems begin with references to enjoying nature. Shelley dedicates two stanzas praising the nature:

Earth, ocean, air, belovèd brotherhood!
If our great Mother has imbued my soul
With aught of natural piety to feel
Your love, and recompense the boon with mine;
(…)
Her first sweet kisses, have been dear to me;
(…)
Mother of this unfathomable world!
Favour my solemn song, for I have loved
Thee ever, and thee only; I have watched
(1-4, 12, 18-20)

And Leopardi begins: "Dear to me always was this lonely hill". Shelley describes a touching sense with "kisses", while Leopardi prefers the sense of sight to the delightful sense of nature.

Lastly, Leopardi and Shelley employed several Romantic tropes in their works. The escapism from reality, though driven by different reasons, was made possible thanks to the imaginative power exalted by Romanticism. Subjective individuality was engaged as a means of non-conformity to external reality. Leopardi delightfully foundered in the sea; an act contrary to common sense. Similarly, Shelley abandoned the comforts of his house in pursuit of knowledge and later for a woman he encountered in his dream.

The theme of the remote in time allowed for temporal escapism. Leopardi ruminated on the past when contemplating eternity, aiming to conceive the totality of time. Shelley, reflecting on the past, discovered the birth of time as a metaphor for civilizations. Another prevalent Romantic trope, the exaltation of nature, is evident, as both poets are completely immersed in nature and praise it.

While these Romantic tropes are evident in their poetics, each poet complements the others with unique elements. Shelley, traversing remote parts of the world without settling anywhere, evokes the theme of the remote in space and homelessness. In contrast, Leopardi begins his poem by reminiscing about the delight of the hill where he starts his view, introducing a sense of nostalgia.

CONCLUSION

Umberto Eco argues that when we seek to understand philosophical concepts, we need to rely on the common sense of words by consulting dictionaries (2002: 26). In light of this, he consults **Roget's Thesaurus** and sees that the antonym of "unreasonableness" is "moderateness": "Being moderate means being within the modus - that is, within limits and within measure" (2002: 26). It is evident how Romanticism also operated without limits and measure in opposition to the glorification of reason, instead siding with unreasonableness and, in doing so, yearning for the limitless conceptions, infinity and eternity.

The first chapter embarked on defining Romanticism, challenging its elusive nature. Even in endeavoring to define it, critics avowed its resistance to being framed in definition, emphasizing its inclination towards the boundless, much like the concepts of infinity and eternity. After exploring sundry attempts at its definition, I briefly delved into the historical context in Germany, the birthplace of Romanticism, where the country was weary and dominated by Pietism—a movement in Lutheranism prioritizing a more individual relationship with God, without having to turn to any intermediary. I also revealed how Pietism also influenced the founding fathers of Romanticism, acting on the Romantic Bible, **Athenäum**, with Schleiermacher's book, **On Religion**. The subjectivity inspired by Pietism provides insights into the elevated individualism in Romanticism, along with the emphasis on an experience of the infinite by the believer. To substantiate the central argument of the thesis, I elucidated how the Romantic tropes— the remote, the primitive, nostalgia, homelessness, the consecrated nature, the exaltation of the individual, and the imagination— effectively serve as a means to emancipate oneself from the spatial and temporal constraints of present reality. This liberation from the immediate confines of space and time aligns with Kant's profound insight that our perception of reality are intricately woven with space and time, revealing their critical role in shaping our subjective experience. Each of these tropes exists outside the confines of the present moment. The Romantics, by embracing these themes, defied the conventional rules of time through the exploration of the remote, the primitive, and nostalgia, while challenging spatial limitations

through the remote, the exalted nature, and the concept of homelessness. These motifs were brought to life thanks to two other key Romantic themes: subjective individuality, which rejected conventional norms and was symbolized by a lamp emitting its own light (as opposed to the classicist mirror that only reflects), and exalted imagination, which drove the movement forward. It is no surprise that modern literature has its roots in the 19th century, as before that time, literature was primarily seen as a collection of "fine examples of the use of language and rhetoric" (Culler, 2000: 21). Only in the late 1700s did the modern Western concept of literature as imaginative writing begin to emerge, thanks to the German Romantic theorists (2000: 21). Similar to its multitude of definitions, Romanticism displayed diverse traits in each country where it flourished. Since the thesis focuses on Leopardi and Shelley, I addressed Italian and British Romanticism.

The second chapter initially delved into philosophy and mythology to trace the origins of infinity and eternity. I revealed how both concepts became normalized and accepted in the aftermath of scientific advancements, contrasting with the past when they were either rejected due to inconsistency with religion or feared simply for being beyond human understanding. As Thomas Kuhn suggested, a paradigm shift occurs with a non-scientific medium, and literature played a role in helping these concepts be accepted and even cherished on common ground by the public.

The normalization of infinity owed much to religion, science and literature. The invention of the telescope and microscope brought the possibility of spatial vastness or infinitely small, which had transcended human apprehension, to the very eye. This was complemented by the development of infinitesimal calculus put forward by Newton and Leibniz. Pietism, a branch of Lutheranism, similarly invoked the notion of infinity within the individual, free from an external intermediary such as a priest. I have also referenced Northrop Frye, who commented on the shift in the spatial projection of reality. Initially, this projection was exclusively vertical, directed towards God, but it underwent a transformation, acquiring a horizontal dimension—towards the depths of nature—and an inward direction—into the depths of the soul.

Eternity, on the other hand, underwent normalization through the field of geology. As an increasing number of individuals turned their attention to observing soil and fossils, the previously unaccepted age of the Earth expanded from tens of thousands to millions of years. All these assumptions were intricately linked to the doctrine of an eternal universe, which had been dismissed earlier due to its inconsistency with religious beliefs. Yet, as nature gradually revealed empirical evidence regarding its far more remote history, Enlightenment scholars began to challenge prevailing dogmas. However, preceding any discourse on eternity, as Rudwick suggested, the primary step was to stretch the bounds of imagination. I observed a similar deployment of imagination in the pursuit of the boundless concept of eternity, reminiscent of the Romantic tropes.

This shift in perspective, the normalization of infinity and eternity enlarged the idea of both the spatial and temporal dimensions of the Earth, allowing for contemplation of infinity and eternity.

I continued the second chapter with a discussion of the sublime and validated another argument: while infinity is extensively included in the explication of the sublime, eternity was often cast aside. However, time is an indispensable element that constitutes our reality along with space; hence, they cannot be conceived separately from experience. Thomas Weiskel was the only critic to include eternity in the discussion of the sublime.

The concept of the sublime, an aesthetic idea, was initially addressed in Ancient Greece but experienced a revival in later years, notably through the works of Edmund Burke and Kant. Both thinkers incorporate elements of terror and awe in their respective treatments of the sublime when it transcends human understanding. However, a key distinction emerges in their interpretations. For Kant, the sublime is evoked within the human mind, while for Burke, it inheres in the objects themselves.

Eternity, also, manifested itself as the timelessness in Romanticism, much like the sempiternity, with which the Divine “now” does not move but stays still. This stillness recalls the mind the suspension of intellectual activities when the sublime is

sensed. As Kant propounds the intertwined space and time forming our reality, time cannot be excluded in the discussion of the sublime.

The final chapter focused on Shelley and Leopardi and their poetics interwoven with infinity, eternity, and Romantic tropes. Leopardi explored infinity extensively, delving into children's inclination for the infinite, ignited imaginative power reigning over the lack of knowledge due to the unfamiliarity of things, the inherent and insatiable desire found in men, and the sea as a vivid representation of the infinite. Eternity lacked popularity for him, and he conceived it not as a temporal concept without an end but as a time period toward the future, holding the potential of imaginative power to manifest itself.

Shelley, on the other hand, thought of eternity in light of philosophers before him, agreeing that eternity is the totality of time, and the present "now" is the mobile image of eternity. Lastly, life was the only force that held the infinite for him. In their poems, both poets employed several Romantic tropes, such as the exalted imagination for their metaphorical voyages, subjective individuality for their solitude and non-conformity to the external world, the remote in time for contemplation of the distant past, and the consecrated nature for its exaltation.

Solely Shelley explicitly evoked the remote in space during his travels into the distant parts of the world and experienced homelessness when moving from one place to another, even encountering a swan and envying its stable home. Lastly, Leopardi, in contrast with Shelley, engaged in nostalgia in the very first line of his poem, giving a sense to the reader of the hill he used to visit for a very long time.

Both with Romantic tropes and their own conceptions of infinity and eternity, I traced their escapism from the limitations of reality.

On the temporal level, if one remains in the present moment, time may feel elusive and fleeting, on which men have no power. Hence, we are all dominated by its rule, as suggested by the philosophical concept of time and eternity. The Romantics were preoccupied with liberating themselves from the irresistible current of time. Eternity, as a concept devoid of a beginning or an end, cannot manifest its

boundlessness in the limited reality. The ungraspable nature of endlessness, being infinite, deprives an action of a definite temporal placement, rendering the end insignificant and distorting the sense of chronology and beginning. The Romantic not yearning for the achievement or for the culmination, is trapped in the process. The core Romantic doctrine posits that Romantics are infused with a desire for the ungraspable infinite, which triggers another longing—to relentlessly seek it. The infinite they yearn for also instills in them a desire to escape the spatial and temporal constraints of reality. Since they cannot attain what they seek, it is not the culmination but the action that gains importance. Hence, they become perpetual questers, lending the very name, derived from the quest romances of the medieval age to Romanticism, just as Bloom remarked, "romance in the Romantic period becomes an internalized quest, having as its hero the poet himself" (Casaliggi et al., 2016: 54).

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