JOHN MUIR AND THE NATURAL SUBLIME IN THE YOSEMITE

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ABSTRACT

An ecological thinker, Romantic prose writer, mountaineer, conservationist, and a man of diverse personas, John Muir is first and foremost remembered for his ardent love of the Yosemite Valley, his vigorous attempts at establishing Yosemite National Park and founding the renowned Sierra Club, and finally for his battle against damming the most precious Hetch Hetchy Valley. In the guidebook he wrote for travellers and walkers, The Yosemite (1912), Muir fashions a narrative in the mode of a Romantic ode on the sublime features of the wild scenery in his most beloved natural surrounding. While rigorously describing and cataloguing the diverse peculiarities of the Valley, such as the streams, waterfalls, rock formations, glaciers and the flora, he at the same time glorifies nature out of a profound reverence for the divine harmony which marks the landscape. However, his particular approach and use of metaphors demonstrate that he undermines the classical opposition between 'the beautiful' and 'the sublime' that lies at the core of the aesthetic philosophy of the eighteenth century. Hence, mainly informed by Immanuel Kant's transcendental inquiries of the concept of the sublime, this paper aims to highlight Muir's style of hiding the natural sublime beneath the beautiful and to analyze his way of invalidating the binary towards a neo-Platonic/Christian notion of natural sublimity.

Keywords: John Muir, Immanuel Kant, Yosemite Valley, Ecology, The Beautiful, The Sublime, Purposiveness

JOHN MUIR VE THE YOSEMITE ADLI ESERİNDE DOĞADAKİ 'YÜCE' KAVRAMI

ÖZET

Bir ekoloji düşünürü, Romantik nesir yazarı, dağcı, çevreci ve kendinde farklı kimlikler barındıran bir şahsiyet olan John Muir, bugün öncelikle Yosemite Vadisi'ne beslediği coşkun sevgi, Yosemite Ulusal Parkı ile ünlü Sierra Klübü'nün kurulması yönünde sarf ettiği yoğun çaba ve bunun yanı sıra çok kıymet verdiği Hetch Hetchy Vadisi'ne yapılmak istenen baraj projesine karşı yürüttüğü mücadele ile anılmaktadır. Muir, gezginler ve yürüyüşçülere yönelik olarak kaleme aldığı The Yosemite (1912) adlı rehber kitapta, en sevdiği doğal çevre olan vadinin yabani manzarasındaki yüceliğin unsurları üzerine, Romantik bir güzelleme biçemine sahip bir anlatı oluşturur. Akarsular, şelaleler, kaya oluşumları, dağ buzulları ve bitki örtüsü gibi Yosemite Vadisi'nin kendine has özelliklerini betimleyip sınıflandırırken, Muir aynı zamanda bu doğa parçasına damga vuran ilahi uyuma duyduğu derin saygıdan dolayı doğayı yüceltir. Ne var ki Muir'un bu yaklaşımı ve

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kullandığı eğretilemeli ifadeler aslında onun on sekizinci yüzyıl estetik felsefesinin merkezinde yer alan 'güzel' ve 'yüce' kavramları arasındaki klasik karşıtlığı zayıflattığını göstermektedir. Bu nedenle, Immanuel Kant'ın 'yüce' kavramına yönelik transandantal sorgulamalarını temele alan bu çalışma, Muir'un doğadaki 'yüce'yi 'güzel'in ardına gizleme tarzını aydınlatmayı ve doğanın yüceliğini neo-Platonik/Hristiyanca bir anlayışla kavrama doğrultusunda güzel-yüce ikili karşıtlığını geçersiz kılma biçimini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: John Muir, Immanuel Kant, Yosemite Vadisi, Ekoloji, Güzel, Yüce, Ereklilik

INTRODUCTION

This study intends to clarify John Muir's employment of the terms 'the beautiful' and 'the sublime' loosely and interchangeably in his nature writing. Such a clarification of Muir's use of these terms will illuminate his overall view of nature, which borders on the idea of nature as the purposeful creation of a transcendent God. In this attempt, the German idealist Immanuel Kant's views are acknowledged as the most adequate historical and intellectual source to elaborate on Muir's views. Kant's treatment of the beautiful as a positive aesthetic experience and his treatment of the sublime as a negative experience of the aesthetic judgment that strain the mental capabilities of human understanding underlie the basic distinction between these two concepts. The sublime is always associated with the uncanny in nature, with the grandeur of natural objects and with awe evoked by the forces of nature in contrast to the experience of proportion and harmony in the beautiful. Furthermore, Kant's connection of the natural sublime with a sense of morality will also serve as a stepping stone to comprehend Muir's conception of divine harmony and his understanding of the purposiveness of natural objects for the perceiver. The idea of purpose in nature can both be found in the traditional monotheistic outlook on nature as the purposeful creation of God and similarly in the sacred harmony of nature-as-God. Muir's fluctuating convictions between these two poles is obvious in his writing; however, it will finally be contended that Muir is neither bounded by the ideology of traditional Christian orthodoxy nor should he be regarded as a full-fledged Romantic pantheist. His writing style is functional in this attempt of critical reading to find clues about his perception of the sublime and the source of sacrality in nature.

Born in 1838, in Scotland to a Calvinist family, John Muir left his homeland in 1849 for the Wisconsin frontier, which introduced him to the charm and grandeur of wild nature as well as to a world of strenuous farm labor (Holmes, 1999, pp. 39, 43). He enrolled at the University of Wisconsin in 1860 to have a career in natural sciences and chemistry; however, as a side benefit, this made him closely familiar with the world of ideas,

especially those of English Romantics and American Transcendentalists (Nash, 2001, pp. 123-124). After he left university, he settled in Indianapolis in 1866; and in the following year he undertook a thousand-mile hiking trip from Indiana to the Gulf of Mexico with the intention of witnessing the 'divine harmony' reflected in the book of nature (Holmes, 1999, p. 162). His reflections on his walk later appeared under the title A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf. Heavily infected with malaria, he had to quit his plan and head to California. After his arrival in California in 1868, he was mesmerized by the beauty of the Yosemite Valley where he spent about six years for the study of the flora, rock formations, waterfalls and the other features of the landscape. His sketches and journals about the valley, dating back to his stay in 1869, came out as My First Summer in the Sierra (1911). After years of work in various states, he travelled back to California in 1880 and made it his permanent home. Spending year after year in the appreciation and the study of the land, he was busy with mountaineering, hiking, and field journaling about the streams, peaks, big trees and natural history of the glaciers in and around Yosemite Valley. He was also an ardent advocate of the creation of Yosemite National Park, which came into being in 1890, and was the founder of the Sierra Club in 1892 (Nash, 1989, p. 40).

The Yosemite, published two years before Muir's death in 1914, is the account of a naturalist's amazement before nature's wonders and, as he saw it, the manifestation of God's glory in natural objects. As a continuation of the journaling and romantic prose writing about the Sierras, which he first undertook in My First Summer, The Yosemite consists of the story of his approach to the Valley for the first time in 1868, and of the mighty windstorms and floods that sweep the valley basin, as well as accounts of snow banners, ground-forming earthquakes, glaciers, streams and the races of the big trees in the Yosemite forests. Muir also included in his volume numerous pages of excursion tips for hiking enthusiasts and of the natural history of the valley's formation, along with stories from the lives of earlier Yosemite settlers and mountaineers, such as Lamon and Galen Clark. Last but not least was the final section of the book, which he spared for his advocacy against the damming of the Toulumne River in Hetch Hetchy Valley within Yosemite National Park. Therefore, over the course of the book, the readers encounter an amalgamation of scientific information, ecological meditation, lyrical musings and ethical defense of the rights of nature. In other words, in Muir's style, as McKusick (2000) notes, "[r]ational inquiry and aesthetic appreciation are complementary, not mutually exclusive" (p. 179); and hence his rigor of cataloguing natural formations and plants never turns into a pure, scientific enterprise, but mainly goes together with an intuitive appreciation of the natural richness that leaves ample space for the aesthetic experience of natural beauty and the sublime. In an emphatic reception of all nature as animated being and as an

autonomous entity that is exempt from the utilitarian interests of human beings, Muir employs a number of rhetorical devices and figures of speech such as metaphors and personifications that can be exemplified by his figuration of streams as "chanting" hymns (1962, p. 40), rock boulders and taluses as "groaning and whispering" (1962, p. 60), and yellow pines "singing in worship in windstorms," with the needles of their leaves "thrilling and shining with religious ecstasy" (1962, p. 66). Muir's diverse personas, including the scientist, the romantic traveler, the mountaineer and the environment activist, enhance his project to express the value of nature as an object in-itself, an object quite different from a mere bed of resources to be conserved for wise use.

John Muir's Ecological Thought and Style of Writing

The variety and range found in Muir's style can partly be explained by the richness of the influences which shaped his thought. His thought was widely informed and enriched by masters such as John Milton, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Muir's unique style of Romantic prose, blending wide-ranging influences, marks the distinction of his writing from those of other Transcendentalists. None of these influences on his thought can individually bring an adequate clarification for Muir's idea of the sublime in nature. However, the conceptual guidance should be taken from Kant's distinct treatment of the concepts of the beautiful and the sublime in his Critique of Judgment because his clear schematic explanation of these concepts provide the most adequate framework to apprehend Muir's treatment of them. Kant's structural explication of the two types of cognitive experiences, labeled by these two concepts of aesthetic judgment, supplies the standards by which Muir's own treatment of these concepts and his deviation from a standard understanding of them can be appreciated. What is more, the influence of the English Romantics on Muir are not going to be elaborated in what follows so as to leave more space for the direct contact Muir had with Emerson and Thoreau.

As Stoll (2008) notes, Milton's paradise, rather than the exact Biblical imagery, was a main influence in Muir's prose and depiction of Yosemite as the Garden of Eden. Miltonic Eden was largely acknowledged as a shared cultural heritage for his readership, which was made up of "Reformed Protestants (Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Unitarians) with Calvinist roots in Puritan New England, Scotland, and England" and their descendants (Stoll, 2008, p. 238). Muir was also a life-long admirer of Emerson and his ideas although he was disappointed when Emerson, upon his visit to Muir's cottage in Yosemite, kindly refused his offer to go on camping together. Independent of his deep reverence for Emerson, Muir's

thought was philosophically different from his Transcendentalism and from Thoreau's thought as well (Nash, 2001, pp. 126-127). Metaphorically, Muir's bearing as a man of the earth was a dominant feature whereas Emerson's and Thoreau's inclinations were heavenward. In other words, while these Transcendentalist thinkers had a firm belief in a transcendent God and approached His manifestations in nature with such an established belief, Muir seemingly reaches the idea of God through the gradual encounter with the divinity inherent in wild nature. That is, out of his natural style of prose and empirically oriented mindset, he developed a distinctive appreciation of God's divine being and His work in nature, which means to say, as Max Oelschlaeger (1991) suggests, that Muir could overcome the subjectivist idealism of Transcendentalists and their scripture-based philosophizing (pp. 179-180). Nature, in his perception, is never merely a mirror to reflect abstract ideas or a transcendental subjectivity; rather, his direct encounter with nature as an Other allows him to focus on his practical intuitions, which were not imposed on him either by universal categories or by moral-religious thought. Indeed, his appreciation of the beautiful in nature and his experience of the natural sublime is principally based on his empirical approach to nature. "One must labor for beauty as for bread, here as elsewhere," (1962, p. 20) says Muir during one of his many ascents to the mouth of a waterfall, indicating his arduous willingness to establish his own personal connection with the beautiful in nature and work his way up to an understanding of the sacrality of the beautiful. As it will be explained later on, Kant can be shown to serve as the main intellectual support for appreciating Muir's aesthetic experiences of the beautiful and the sublime since he was the major influence as much on the British and German Romantics as on American transcendentalists, especially on Emerson. And it is Kant who elaborates the idea of purpose in connection with the aesthetic judgment of the beautiful and the sublime in nature.

From the moment Muir enters the valley, following countless times of sauntering on plain meadows, of climbing upward on taluses and of descents down to the bottom of the valley, he experiences innumerable instances of perceiving the colossal size of rock walls, monstrous heights of giant sequoia trees, the excessive power of waterfalls forcefully striking and spraying the granite rocks, the scary depths of precipices, roaring gales, "the sublime darkness of storm-nights" (1962, p. 33) and "sublime assemblage of ice-born rocks and mountains" (1962, p. 136), and feels grateful for being able to enjoy the majestic repose of stern but softly adorned rocks, floods of water and light (1962, p. 4), the natural music of thundering waves, the tunes and poetry of rock avalanches (1962, p. 65), the attractively "polished glacier pavements" (1962, p. 133) and so on. In other words, the moment he comes across the sublime features of the landscape on the grandest scale and "gaz[es] overwhelmed with the multitude of grand objects" about him (Muir,

1962, p. 6), he is also at once aware that this sublimity bears in itself the soothing caress and harmony of God's creation. Beauty and grandeur are intertwined in his perception of the landscape. That which appears as uncanny and solemnly powerful in the first place is merrily clad with numerous subtle peculiarities that add up to a calming effect and hint at the harmonious whole of which sublimity is only a part. Muir's ruminations on the ancient history of the formation of the landscape and its primeval forms of life simultaneously help him comprehend the impersonal forces of nature independent of human perception and at the same time its evolutionary welcoming of the human existence. Thus, it is never out of place to claim that natural beauty and the sublime are not totally dissociable and more often than not overlap in the impressions they bring about in Muir's prose on the Yosemite. That's why Muir's manner in expressing his first encounter with the canyons in the early pages of the book indicates the convergence of these two sources of aesthetic pleasure in nature, namely the beautiful and the sublime:

> Though of such stupendous depth, these canyons are not gloomy gorges, savage and inaccessible. With rough passages here and there they are flowery pathways conducting to the snowy, icy fountains; mountain streets full of life and light, graded and sculptured by ancient glaciers, and presenting throughout all their courses a rich variety of novel and attractive scenery – the most attractive that has yet been discovered in the mountain ranges of the world (Muir, 1962, p. 3).

In the excerpt above, Muir is far from ignoring the magnitude of natural objects or the terrifying forces of nature. Yet, he deliberately aims to embed the sublime aspects of nature within his perception of the beautiful and to resolve the terror that nature may arouse into the natural harmony that is created by the same divine will that also allowed for the violent ways of nature. Consequently, one should also consider Muir's use of the word 'sublime' loosely in that it refers at times to the immensely destructive and immeasurable forces of nature and at other times bears a close affinity to what is beautifully designed on purpose for human perception. His way of envisioning the "sublime rock scenery" around the Nevada Falls (1962, p. 12), the respectful way he listens to the "sublime psalm" of The Yosemite Fall (1962, p. 16), the sight of the "sublime surroundings" of the Sentinel Cascades (1962, p. 27), and the "terribly sublime spectacle" of a rock storm that swept down the south wall of the Sentinel Rock with a tremendously deep sound (1962, p. 59) are among the many instances where Muir employs the adjective true to its core definition, namely with reference to any natural object or force that does violence to the ability of human cognition or understanding to measure it adequately. Yet, there are also quite many

instances where Muir apparently connotes 'the beautiful' while ostensibly depicting some sublime scenery. For instance, just a couple of lines after his account of the terrifying but impressive downpour of boulders from the Sentinel Rock, Muir further writes about what comes out of this spectacle as "an arc of glowing, passionate fire, fifteen hundred feet span, as true, in form and as serene in beauty as a rainbow in the midst of the stupendous, roaring-rockstorm" (1962, p. 60). So, the sublime is mostly enmeshed with what is beautiful in effect for Muir. Another significant case where he almost uses both terms interchangeably is in his depiction of Hetch Hetchy Valley.

> It appears, therefore, that Hetch Hetchy Valley, far from being a plain, common, rock-bound meadow, as many who have not seen it seem to suppose, is a grand landscape garden, one of Nature's rarest and most precious mountain temples. As in Yosemite, the sublime rocks of its walls seem to glow with life, whether leaning back in repose or standing erect in thoughtful attitude, giving welcome to storms and calms alike, their brows in the sky, their feet set in groves and gay flowery meadows, while birds, bees and butterflies help the river and the waterfalls to stir all the air into music [. . .]
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> Sad to say, this most precious and sublime feature of the Yosemite National Park, one of the greatest of all our natural resources for the uplifting joy and peace and health of the people is in danger of being dammed [. . .] (Muir, 1962, p. 197; emphasis added).

As far as it's been revealed in the extracts and quotations, Muir's reception of the sublime is definitely attached to a sort of positive pleasure or joy and, thus, it is deeply entangled with the beautiful.

Immanuel Kant on the Beautiful and the Sublime

Immanuel Kant, however, as the major philosopher that influenced both German Idealism and American Transcendentalism, has a very clear schematization of these two terms, which is missing in Muir. But, what is interesting is that Kant's explanation of these two terms is further relevant to an understanding of a natural teleology and could be connected to a higher order of morality, which is also affirmed in Muir's writing. In The Critique of Judgment, Kant treated the concepts of the beautiful and the sublime as two distinct types of aesthetic judgment and quite strictly demarcated the sort of pleasures they give the perceiving subject. Kant's transcendental

account goes far beyond the previous empirical explanations, such as Edmund Burke's, of the sense of sublime found in natural or artificial objects, for it claims that these concepts are only rooted in the subject's cognition, not in any external object. In § 23 of 'Analytic of the Sublime', Kant (1790/1987) posits that the beautiful and the sublime agree in giving specific types of pleasure, albeit of different types. Both depend on 'reflective judgment', in which case the particular aesthetic experience is given and the subject aims to reach its universal concept, contrary to 'determinative judgment' which subsumes the particular experience under a given universal principle. Neither in the beautiful nor in the sublime does pleasure depend on mere sensation or on a pre-given universal concept. Apart from these common features, Kant sees significant differences between them. Whereas the beautiful in nature is bound by a definite form, the sublime is evoked by the formlessness and unboundedness of the object of experience. Hence the difference of what they exhibit. Whereas the beautiful is an exhibition of an indeterminate concept of 'understanding' (the cognitive faculty working on the categories that characterize the appearing object and provide the structures of experience), it is an indeterminate concept of 'reason' (the source of moral law) that is exhibited in the experience of the sublime. Imagination gives pleasure in judging the beautiful in harmony with understanding; and it gives pleasure in the judgment of the sublime that simultaneously harmonizes and conflicts with reason. As Kant puts it, while the beautiful is compatible with charms and imagination at play and causes a feeling of the elevation of the subject's life, the sublime "is a pleasure that arises only indirectly," that is, it is produced "by the feeling of a momentary inhibition of the vital forces followed immediately by an outpouring of them that is all the stronger" (1790/1987, p. 98). Kant, therefore, insists that sublime is the source of a 'negative pleasure' due to the seriousness in imagination whereby the subject's mind is repelled by the object unlike the 'positive pleasure' of the beautiful where imagination is far from serious emotions and the human mind is playfully attracted by the object.

Another major source of difference derives from Kant's insistence on the idea of 'purpose' in nature. For him, natural beauty bears a sense of purposiveness in relation to the form of the object by which it seems 'as if' it is determined for the subject's judgment and designed by an external power (God or Nature) for his taste. It is as if a divine mind beyond our own bestowed these forms on us. And hence, according to Kant, though such purposiveness cannot be purely attributed to nature, the idea of purpose is a presupposed a priori concept that is manifest when we are inclined to handle the manifold of empirical natural laws within a higher level of harmony. In contrast, what arouses the feeling of the sublime in us never bears a trace of purposiveness for our power of judgment and is incompatible with our

imagination due to lack of objective principles or forms. Thus, the sublime in nature indicates a relation to the chaotic, the disordered and the ravaging power. So long as the human mind cannot reach any purpose in nature itself through the experience of the sublime, the mind seeks this purpose only in the way it makes use of this experience to comprehend and appreciate its own powers of imagination, though negatively, through blockage and incapability. Kant notes: "For the beautiful in nature we must seek a basis outside ourselves, but for the sublime a basis merely within ourselves and in the way of thinking that introduces sublimity into our presentation of nature" (1790/1987, p. 100). Hence, the objects that arouse the feeling of sublime in us, by doing violence on our understanding and straining our imagination, necessitate our consultation of a higher power in ourselves capable of comprehending the infinitely grand objects and the devastating forces in nature. In that sense, sublimity exists in the subject when he feels empowered in his confrontation, for instance, with boundless oceans, giant rocks or thundering waterfalls. To the extent these objects raise the mental strength and emotional endurance in us by allowing us to discover the ability in ourselves to resist the overwhelming displeasure inflicted on us and to transcend nature's omnipotence, we call them sublime (Kant, 1790/1987, p. 120). In fact, the sublime is closely related to the elevation of the idea of humanity in us and its capabilities which is the actual source of respect and the ultimate destination of purposiveness. Therefore, the negative pleasure of the sublime, in Kant's understanding, is associated with the feeling of respect for 'reason' and with the consequent recognition of moral law. As Kant explains, "what we call sublime in nature outside us, or for that matter in nature within us (e.g., certain affects), becomes interesting only because we present it as a might of the mind to rise above certain obstacles of sensibility by means of moral principles" (1790/1987, p. 132; emphasis in the original). The power we find in ourselves to judge things of infinite magnitude in external nature is eventually the source of reverence for the idea of humanity inherent in the particular human subject. And this idea is almost always accompanied with a moral feeling (whereby reason exerts dominance over sensibility) that liberates one's judgment from simple sense experience and asserts one's superiority over natural influences.

Muir's Use of the Beautiful and the Sublime

What is quite interesting in Muir's writing is that his imagination is never totally inhibited or his understanding nullified, as Kant would say, facing natural objects of great magnitude or natural forces of great might. The depiction of his rarest experiences of the sublime is mainly that of stating his contentment with what at first sight appears to be exasperating. He is always at peace with whatever he sees so long as he perceives it in

harmony with nature and God's master plan. That's the reason underlying his willful stylistic selection of words and expressions that very smoothly convey supposedly harsh physical conditions and nerve-racking situations. As Corey Lee Lewis (2005) notes, for instance, Muir refers to the most challenging hardships of mountaineering not with a severe but rather with a soothing vocabulary; and he writes of the steepest ascents as if they are enjoyable strolls, using verbs such as 'to saunter' and 'to ramble' (p. 93). In one case, when Muir ambitiously desires to enjoy the night views of the rainbows of miscellaneous sizes appearing with the effect of the moonlight on the sprays of water, he "saunter[s] along the edge of the gorge" that is "on the plateau between the Upper and Lower [Yosemite] Walls" (1962, p. 28). Arriving at the spot called Fern Ledge after moonrise, he creeps further behind the roaring waterfall just to see the moon and the dimly colored arcs through thundering masses of wind-swayed waters. Standing over a slippery block of ice along the gorge, he is abruptly drenched by the swaying fall at midnight and benumbed by the cold. And still he is able to build a fire to dry himself, to get back to his cabin and be ready again for another midnight venture the next day just after a couple of hours of sleep. Again in a similar case, he traces a stream to its mouth at the back of Mount Hoffman to reach its extreme verge and to have the best view he can of the stream flying through the air. He descends down a rock-shelf that is "about three inches wide, just wide enough for a safe rest for one's heels" (Muir, 1962, p. 15); and afterwards he has to chew some wild leaves so that the bitter taste could keep him from giddiness caused by such a "terribly impressive" moment and a "glorious display of pure wildness" (Muir, 1962, p. 16). Therefore, no matter how deeply is the aesthetic perception of nature embedded within life-threatening or nerve-trying situations for Muir, he moderates his reception of the moment and mitigates the severity of such instances of the sublime, leaving no room for any expression of fright or terror.

Indeed, for Kant, the spectator's "amazement bordering on terror" or the "sacred thrill" that he feels is not "actual fear" but a feeling of agitation connected with "the mind's state of rest" (1790/1987, p. 129). In other words, the spectator of the sublime scenery should be safe and distant from an actual situation of danger for there to arise the feeling of the sublime; otherwise, the instincts to survive would leave no opportunity for any kind of aesthetic perception to occur. Therefore, the writer's expression of the sublime in nature is naturally supposed to be different from a statement of actual fear of death in the face of a life-threatening force. In Muir's case, his being at peace with what he goes through seems quite in accord with Kant's explanations conceptualizing the distance between the spectator and the source of danger. Even in more extreme cases where he is in the middle of actual hazard or perilous situations, he still avoids perceiving them as calamitous. His linguistic mannerism reaches a peak in his account of his

ride on an avalanche down a steep ridge in a canyon as a most "spiritualized travel" (Muir, 1962, p. 50), which he compares to Elijah's flight in a chariot of fire. Furthermore, he writes that his climb up the giant yellow pines, eight feet wide and spiraling up to two hundred and twenty meters in height, "is a glorious experience," bearing no single trace of fear even during gales that are so strong to tilt the trees with a sharp sway and "when they are waving and singing in worship in windstorms" (Muir, 1962, p. 66). Despite the fact that the feeling of fear is not the correct focus for the one to go through a sublime elevation of emotions and mental states, Muir's encounter with such solemn experiences bears even no residue of serious distress or sense of alienation on him in the first place. His experiences, then, are quite different from those of the Romantics and Transcendentalists as they express in ample bewilderment and strain in the face of the dangers posed by nature. Suffice it to say that the difference is readily revealed by a comparison of his experiences to Thoreau's existential anguish during his journey to the summit of Mount Kataadn (Oelschlaeger, 1991, p. 145), as narrated in his book Maine Woods, or to Wordsworth's apocalyptic insights in The Prelude upon the sight of the Gondo Gorge during his travel in the Alps (Shaw, 2007, pp. 99-100). Briefly, the natural sublime for Muir is basically oriented toward the beautiful, and his positive stylistic fashioning of it makes it quite the contrary to what can be called the 'negative sublime' in Thoreau's and Wordsworth's abovementioned pieces.

The idea of interconnectedness of beings in nature lies behind Muir's reverence for natural harmony and epitomizes for him the glory of God's work in creation. This idea inclines his perception of both the beautiful and the sublime toward purposiveness in nature and the sacredness of nature as a harmonious unity. As Nash (2001) points out, "Muir also valued wilderness as an environment in which the totality of creation existed in undisturbed harmony" (p. 128). It is the idea of the interwoven nature of organic and inorganic beings alike that underscores Muir's belief that all natural processes serve deliberately for the well-being of all forms of life, including that of the human being's. Thus, no natural outcome of any seemingly hazardous process like earthquakes or storms is ultimately harmful for humans and leaves Muir in no case awe-stricken. This is also closely related to Muir's gradual rejection of "the catastrophist theory of geology" upon personally figuring out the fact that it was the glacial erosion and not a catastrophe that gave form to the Yosemite Valley (Oelschlaeger, 1991, p. 193). This sort of creative force in inorganic nature also has a certain effect on organic nature as well. Thus, it also amounts to saying that in Muir's writing nature is alive in all its animate and inanimate forms. In that sense, Oelschlaeger (1991) accurately emphasizes that it is the harmony in nature, rather than Bible, that serves as the main source of Muir's epiphanies or his 'wilderness theology' (pp. 176-177). This is most apparent

when Muir appreciates all the water beetles, the fish, the rotten tree roots, and all the hues of the valley floor together with the rock formations: "Even the rocks seem strangely soft and mellow, as if they, too, had ripened" (1962, p. 118). In addition, once the whole universe is envisioned as an interwoven entity and beautifully crafted in sacred harmony, no living organism in nature is deemed purposeless or harmful in itself by Muir. Neither poison oaks nor snakes work against human beings, once it is recognized that they have just an independent being in nature apart from human existence, and they function in many ways other than being merely good for human use. Hence, the idea of interconnectedness among natural beings in Muir's writing is not only secured by his ecological insights on nature's evolutionary and processual formation but also the idea of God's purposeful creation, an idea deriving from his Calvinistic upbringing.

Muir's Ecological Theology

The Yosemite is a book that abounds in references to God as the creator, infiltrating both in Muir's rational inquiries on wild nature and in his aesthetic recognition of the landscape. Both his geological explanations and lyrical mannerisms are full of theological terminology. However, it must be overtly stated that Muir was critically aware of the economic usurpation and industrial exploitation of the wild that was rooted in the Protestant work ethic. This was also most obvious in his campaign against the damming of Hetch Hetchy whereby he compares the sanctity of the traditional Judeo-Christian values to the sacredness of nature: "Dam Hetch Hetchy! As well dam for water tanks the people's cathedrals and churches, for no holier temple has ever been consecrated by the heart of man" (Muir, 1962, p. 202). The inclination in his thought toward an organismic worldview that venerated every single living being and wild nature in general was on the opposite pole of mechanistic explanations of the world and nature. In this case, it can be quite assuredly asserted that he was on a threshold of shifting from an utterly anthropocentric worldview to a biocentric orientation. Muir's attitude was a sort of passage from conservationism to a more ecologically driven idea of wilderness. Muir's biocentrism eventually influenced Aldo Leopold's 'land ethic' and his conception of the 'biotic rights' of non-human species (Nash, 1989, pp. 67, 70). Additionally, it could also be asserted that Muir's biocentric environmentalism, in the long run, paved the way for the rise of new environmental paradigms, such as 'ecological egalitarianism' and 'deep ecology', as defined and advocated by naturalists and eco-philosophers like Arne Naess and George Sessions (Nash,1989, p. 146).

However, it should also be clearly underlined that his idea of interconnectedness among beings in nature does not truly necessitate calling him a pantheist either. Since Muir's idea of a God almighty is not simply

immanent within natural manifestations, his creed cannot be labeled as a 'natural religion'. In other words, God for Muir is both immanent in nature as revealed through nature's purposeful processes and at the same time transcends his creation as an omnipotent creator. In this respect, I agree with Oelschlaeger's privileging of the term 'proto-ecologist' for Muir over the 'nature-mystic' since "Muir never organized the elements of his biocentric philosophy into a comprehensive treatise" (1991, pp. 197, 200). In other words, his philosophy of nature is not based on the ground of an established philosophical enterprise, for instance, as in Spinoza's philosophical pantheism, or solely on the premises of the far eastern religious mysticism. His is at best an unorthodox view of Christianity that embodies naturalistic sensibilities that respect the rights of nature as an autonomous entity independent of man. His stylistic approach in his prose to all natural beings as animate entities, including rocks as well as streams and trees, is based on his organismic and biocentric view of nature. These are not adequate clues in their own right to call Muir a pantheist; yet they serve as rhetorical and tropological devices to disclose the ethical implications of his ecological perspective. The hymning streams, chanting waterfalls or singing trees may at most be acknowledged as Muir's tropes approaching the Romantic use of symbols that help the poet breach the gap between the spheres of the real and the ideal in the Kantian sense; or in other words, they indicate Muir's quasi-Romantic effort "to bring the supersensible back into the realm of sensuous representation" (Shaw, 2007, p. 92). His rhetoric on nature and insights on the sublime insinuates the idea of teleology in nature, either as in the form of 'objective' or 'subjective' purposiveness in Kant, which appeals to the human subject by the alleged design in nature as an end in itself. As far as the Kantian sublime derives from a refined sense of communal culture and is finally linked to moral feeling, so is Muir's sense of sublime still connected to an understanding of a divine creator. His biocentrism does not reject de facto the idea of God as a transcendent maker in connection with his creation, at least within the context of The Yosemite. For this reason, Muir's prose on nature is not ultimately representative of an adequately justified pantheistic philosophy. Biocentrism as Muir's wilderness paradigm brings together a blend of scientific, aesthetic and religious discourses in his writing. This discursive mélange, however, does not point at a mixture of inconsistent values devoid of a core belief system in Muir's prose on the beautiful and the sublime in nature.

CONCLUSION

Briefly, Muir's depiction of the sublime force in nature does not bear an ultimate shocking effect on human understanding and does not reduce Muir's 'I' into a void of blurred apprehension. Rather, his ego is diminished

into the harmonious totality of nature as God's purposeful creation where man is kin to other natural beings. The harmony and sacredness in nature is guaranteed by God's willed design. In Muir's writing, sublimity is not caused by the chaotic and purposeless character of what apparently seems large and unlimited beyond any measurement in nature. Rather, what is majestic and grand in nature is subsumed under the harmony and purposiveness of God's creation. Therefore, Muir is always at home with what is otherwise brutal in wild nature, and treats sublime emotions in connection with a subjective response to nature as objectively designed. This may amount to claiming that he hides the sublime under the beautiful or re-fashions it as part of a purposeful totality. Sublime, in this case, never stands out as a negative source of pleasure in Muir but a positive feeling of contentment due to the underlying Christian apprehension of nature as the work of God.

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