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Abstract/Resumen

This paper studies the relationship between 18th century Enlightenment philosophy and 19th century Romantic expression by relating the Burkean and Kantian conceptualizations of the sublime to Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer's *leyenda*, "El monte de las ánimas." Although Burke opts for an empirical approach while Kant takes a transcendental approach, both theories highlight the contradictory philosophical platform of the Enlightenment: individual>society. The shift in focus from the social to the individual is evidenced in 19th century literary production through Bécquer's treatment of the relationship between the subject and the empirical and metaphysical worlds. In this paper, this relationship is studied through the representations of objects and sounds that are all used to inspire one sensation: terror. These representations convey the menacing aspects of nature, break the boundaries of time and space, and juxtapose reality and unreality. In this way, the analysis suggests that the narrative and descriptive techniques used to represent the terror experienced by the characters aim to inspire a similar effect on the reader, while also indicating that the philosophy of the Enlightenment provides the theoretical underpinnings for Romantic expression in the 19th century.

Keywords/Palabras clave

Bécquer, Burke, Kant, Sublime, Terror, Enlightenment, Romantic expression.

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Cover Page Footnote

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The Sublime as a Response to Terror: A Study of Empiricism and Transcendence in Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer's "El monte de las ánimas"

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The 19th century was a period in European history marked by scientific advancement and the rejection of religious ideology. The emergence of the bourgeoisie in the 18th century, with its values based on materialism, the nuclear family, and the individual, demanded a new perspective on social thought and structure that carried through to the following century. In this way, the social, ideological, and industrial changes of the 19th century were grounded on an 18th century foundation. These changes were a concern in socio-political discourse, and also a source of inspiration for many literary authors. Although by the middle of the 19th century Realist tendencies begin to displace Romantic approaches to representation, some aesthetic traits of the latter survive in a number of authors. As evidenced in *Leyendas*, Spanish author Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer approaches new ideas on life, death, humanity, and human limits through a projection of the clash between reality and unreality. Juan Manuel Real Espinosa suggests that through his texts, Bécquer clearly searched for “algo más perfecto” (60), which Realism’s approach to reality could not provide. The search for the truth can at times, however, result in an overwhelming feeling of inadequacy, anxiety, and fear, for what is beyond human limits is unexplainable and indescribable, partly due to the restrictions of human language.¹ The search for the Absolute, and the failure of such a search, is evoked throughout *Leyendas* by means of representations that convey the menacing and terrifying aspects of nature, such as nocturnal landscapes and howling animals, as well as the descriptions of objects, sounds, the absence of both, death, apparitions, eternity, and infinity. These representations are all used to inspire one sensation: terror. The intent of this paper is to relate Kantian and Burkean theory on the sublime to Bécquer’s *leyenda*, “El monte de las ánimas,” in order to suggest that the narrative techniques used to represent the terror experienced by the characters are intended to generate a similar effect on the reader.

Edmund Burke (1729-1797) and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) were both philosophers of the Age of the Enlightenment who played an important part in shaping and supporting modern values, joining the fields of literary and social criticism with philosophy, and playing an active role in the politics of their time (Cassirer 275-85). However, their approaches to defining the sublime varied according to their differentiating philosophies on the individual and society. William R. Musgrave observes, “Whereas Kant’s intention is to liberate the subject from pathological influences (if at the expense of difference and history), Burke’s thought ultimately subjugates any notion of agency by predicating it upon some historically sanctified extrasubjective authority”. And these “authorities,” according to Musgrave, take “the form of monarch, nature, second nature, and social custom passed off as nature” (285). In other words, while Kant takes a transcendental approach to the human experience, where the subject operates as the center of his universe, Burke takes an empirical approach by suggesting that nature and society play an important role in the formation

of the universe that the individual lives in and perceives. Therefore, it can be observed that Kant's approach to the sublime places more importance on the mind of the subject, whereas Burke's approach, while acknowledging that the sublime is a mental state, places more importance on the objects (the empirical world) that trigger the sublime experience.

While the philosophy of the 18th century shifted the focus from the external to the internal, or in other words, from the social to the individual (Cassirer 5), the idea of universality was prevalent among Enlightenment era philosophers such as Kant and Burke. While Kant proposes the universality of aesthetic value (Pillow 167), Burke takes an empirical approach to universality through his philosophy on sensory experience (most noted in his postulations on taste, but also prevalent in his conceptualization of the sublime). These theories relating to universality highlight the contradictory philosophical platform of the Enlightenment: individual>society. Where does the individual fit in to the universality of perception, sensory experience, and aesthetic value? When and why does the individual become the subject and not the object? Although Kant and Burke differ in terms of their approaches to the sublime, these questions are a key component of the conceptualization of both the Kantian and Burkean sublime.

For many reasons, including the shift in concern from lineage to the individual and the search for truth through reason, the philosophy of the Enlightenment provides the theoretical underpinnings for Romantic expression in the 19th century. Although the actual beginning and end of Romanticism in Europe is disputable and being constantly reevaluated, Romantic expression can be evidenced as early as the late 18th century up until the mid to late 19th century, as is the case with Bécquer and Rosalía de Castro in Spain. Romantic authors, like neoclassical authors of the 18th century, tend to treat the individual as the center of his universe, therefore displacing earlier notions of power, authority, destiny, and social structure. In this way, the individual, his feelings, and how he perceives the world takes precedence over monarchical values and authority and religious doctrine. The literary world that surrounds Romantic characters is one that connects the individual with nature as a means of attempting to understand human nature in itself and the limits of human logic. This is evidenced in the representation of nature as a reflection of the feelings of the characters (Naves-Ruiz 31) in such a way that it becomes an overwhelming, ineffable, and threatening force. Such terrible and menacing representations of nature are clearly evidenced in Gothic and horror literature and are particular to Romantic expression. However, these representations that induce terror are greatly influenced by philosophical writings of the 18th century, particularly Burke's postulations on the sublime, which explore the negative effects of the representations of natural phenomena and other awe-inspiring images on the reader.

One of the main concerns of Romantic authors is the difficulty in expressing the illogical and the ineffable, or what is beyond words. Bécquer, although not a Romantic in chronological terms, writes as though he were by creating literary worlds where the environment seems to mimic the emotions of the characters and where nature is an unexplainable force that the human mind cannot discern. The author creates a temporal environment reminiscent of earlier times, dark and magical, where events occur that cannot be explained through human logic.² His struggle with the ineffable is manifested

in his literary works through many ways, one being, paradoxically, through language. According to Edmund Burke, words “affect us in a manner very different from that in which we are affected by natural objects, or by painting or architecture; yet words have as considerable a share in exciting ideas of beauty and of the sublime as any of those” (119). In this way, Bécquer uses descriptions and representations of objects, such as an old, abandoned church, corpses, and ghosts, to evoke excitement and terror in the reader. Upon contemplation of such objects, one becomes aggravated by the inability to rationalize them, and thus, is forced to accept the idea that there are limits to human logic. Another way in which Bécquer manifests his struggle with the ineffable is through contrast. According to Real Espinosa, “Bécquer soluciona este problema a base de descripciones en las que el contraste entre luces y sombras, entre movimiento y estatismo, el uso de la metáfora y la profusión de adjetivos, crean el ambiente que el poeta ve en su interior” (63). Although Real Espinosa refers to Bécquer’s poetry, the same idea can be applied to his narrative, especially when the prose used in *Leyendas* is rich with poetic devices. By means of these literary devices, Bécquer is able to exteriorize his interior struggle with the indescribable and the inconceivable. In other words, the exterior becomes a projection of the struggle with the ineffable, suggesting that nature is paradoxical and contrastive, being that it is deceiving while also illuminating.

The most important contrast Bécquer portrays in the natural world, however, is that between reality and unreality. His strategy for dealing with the ineffable by describing unrealistic events in a natural setting has been suggested as an expression of the literary mode known as the *Fantastic*.³ According to Luis Fernández Cifuentes, “El mundo fantástico [de Bécquer]—a la vez íntimo y remoto—no es así más que otra figuración de la interioridad” (463), being that Bécquer’s literary world is an inverted, mirrored projection of the world he *can* rationalize, thus making it an irrational world. The characters in *Leyendas* have encounters with beings that come from beyond this world, with objects that seem to be both beautiful and diabolical, and with indescribable forces that provoke sensations of uneasiness and terror, therefore causing them harm. (In the most extreme cases, the fear and harm they experience cause their deaths.) In this manner, the narrative techniques that the author uses to create a world that seems beyond human logic may inspire the questioning of the limits of reason and “reality,” thus possibly promoting terror in the reader.

According to Burke, the sublime arises as a response to terror: “Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime” (27). The sublime, therefore, is a mental state produced by the terror that arises upon contemplation of objects that are beyond human logic.⁴ An object, however, can never in itself be considered sublime, being that the sublime experience is a response to the terror produced by the encounter *with* an object. Immanuel Kant also shares this theory with respect to sublime objects: “Consequently, it is the disposition of soul evoked by a particular representation engaging the attention of the reflective judgment, and not the Object, that is to be called sublime” (207).⁵ Sublimity, therefore, is a state of mind that is reached as a response to the terror produced by the encounter with and the contemplation of an object.

It is important to note that the sublime is both pleasurable and painful, in that for Burke, it constitutes a feeling of delight, or the “removal of pain or danger” (25-6), while for Kant, it constitutes a similar feeling in which pleasure and displeasure are juxtaposed (214). According to Thomas Weiskel, “Burke’s delight requires wonder (‘a sense of awe’) as the positive expression of one’s feeling on release from terror” (90). For example, a storm at sea, a volcano eruption, or a seemingly endless waterfall, may all inspire fear, but at a distance, they can provoke the sense of “awe,” “delight,” and “pleasure” that Burke and Kant suggest. In this way, the sublime frustrates judgment, being that it alternates between repulsion and attraction, and the attraction experienced is thus always marked by negativity.

It is interesting to note that Kantian theory on the sublime differentiates between two categories: the dynamical sublime and the mathematical sublime. The dynamical sublime refers to “overwhelming forces of nature” (Pillow 167), such as an earthquake or a volcano eruption. In terms of the mathematical sublime, by contrast, reason is trumped by imagination, which in turn cannot prevail because it “is frustrated by magnitudes that overwhelm its grasp.” This idea refers to the state of sublimity reached upon the contemplation of vastness, darkness, and limitlessness. The mathematical sublime, therefore, is the category that is more aligned with Bécquer’s representations and that which also demonstrates the emphasis on logic and reason (in terms of mathematical dimensions) so prevalent in 18th century philosophy. This idea highlights, as noted earlier, the fact that the 18th century provided the theoretical foundation for literary expression in the 19th century.

Now that a definition of the sublime has been proposed, it is possible to relate the concept to Bécquer’s “El monte de las ánimas.” This particular *leyenda* is a perfect example of a text that aims to produce the sensation of the sublime due to the dark and menacing aspects of nature that are represented. Through the representations of savage animals, corpses, darkness, and apparitions, and also through the descriptions of strange noises and their proceeding absences, this text offers a terrifying glimpse into the experiences of the characters, which may result in a similar experience in the reader. The scenery shifts in the *leyenda* from day to night, with the idea of nightfall causing a stir in the two main characters, Beatriz and Alonso. This particular night is especially terrifying because it is “la noche de difuntos” (Bécquer, *Leyendas* 115; emphasis mine). The idea of death can shift the connotation of any concept or image to one that is terrifying. Burke gives an example of this by stating, “[r]ocks, caves, lakes, dens, bogs, fens, and shades, [...] would lose the greatest part of the effect, if they were not the Rocks, caves, lakes, dens, bogs, fens, and shades –of Death” (128). Therefore, the fact that the story takes place on the night of the return of the dead sets the tone for the story and also creates the anticipatory feeling that something horrific will occur.

The nocturnal environment in the story provides a constant, terrifying backdrop for the strange events that unfold. According to Burke, “night increases our terror, more perhaps than anything else” (61). But can nighttime in itself be considered a sublime object? For the purposes of this paper, it can be. For one, the dimensions of darkness are seemingly endless, and two, darkness makes visibility and the accurate depictions of objects difficult. If night is considered a vast object, then with respect to both Burkean and Kantian theory, it is sublime because it incites terror. Burke argues that anything of

great dimension, “vastness of extent or quantity, has the most striking effect” (52), while Kant suggests: “Through the encounter with the vast in nature the mind discovers within itself a faculty that transcends the realm of sensible intuition” (82). Kant’s transcendental approach therefore implies that the sublime is a result of the mind’s realization that it cannot make sense of something that the eye cannot discern. Thus, nighttime itself can be a trigger of the sublime experience.

Darkness is also related to another aesthetic quality of the sublime: infinity. According to Burke, the concept of infinity “has the tendency to fill the mind with that sort of delightful horror,” being that “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” (53). The inability of the human eye to identify the limits of an object provokes the sensations of inadequacy and fragility that lead to terror, the source of the sublime: “When we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes” (Burke 42). Kant argues that objects of great magnitude provoke the sensation of the sublime because one is forced to recognize the inadequacy of the faculty of reason and logic. This sensation is both pleasing and displeasing, in such that it consists of a “pleasure that is only possible through the mediation of displeasure” (217).

The story of Beatriz and Alonso not only takes place on the night of the return of the dead, but on the same uncultivated, woodland terrain in which years before had occurred a bloody massacre. According to Alonso’s character, the area was named “el monte de las ánimas” because there had been a battle between “los caballeros de la nueva y poderosa orden y los hidalgos de la ciudad [después de la cual] el monte quedó sembrado de cadáveres” (Bécquer, *Leyendas* 117). The description of the terrain covered in corpses projects an image of death and terror, and thus as a compensatory reaction, the mind moves into a state of sublimity. Faced with death, both Kant and Burke argue that the mind is forced to contemplate the idea of pain and suffering, a threatening idea that incites the sensation of the sublime. Like the corpses, the representation of savage animals may also be considered a threat. Bécquer writes that after the battle, “Los lobos, a quienes se quiso exterminar, tuvieron un sangriento festín” (*Leyendas* 117). The image of wolves tearing apart human flesh is an unsettling one that leads to terror, and according to Burke, savage animals can be considered sublime objects for that reason. Kant, however, takes a different approach by stating that “animals of a recognized natural order,” and other products of nature, cannot be considered sublime objects because “their very concept import[s] a definite end” (209-10). It can be suggested, however, that the wolves Bécquer describes are sublime objects based on the fact that they incite terror. Their representation is that of something capable of devouring a human body and thus has the potential to provoke the human mind to attempt to make sense of death, which will always end in failure.

The bodies that were not eaten by the wolves the night of the battle were buried in the cemetery of an old church, which by authority of the King, was later abandoned. Bécquer’s description of the church is that it began to “arruinarse” (*Leyendas* 117), projecting an image of emptiness and decay. Although, with respect to Kantian theory, an abandoned church cannot be a sublime object because it has observable and conceivable limits, with respect to Burkean theory it can be, being that whatever “is

terrible, with regard to sight, is sublime too, whether this cause of terror be endued with greatness of dimensions or not” (41). The representation of the church, although not great or vast in terms of size, can be considered great in the sense that it arouses terror, and can therefore also be considered a representation whose purpose is to produce the sublime effect.

In a seemingly paradoxical argument, Burke suggests that the sublime “always dwells on great objects, and terrible; [the beautiful] on small ones, and pleasing” (83).⁶ As mentioned above, it is possible to relate this theory to smaller objects when those objects are great in terms of the feelings they provoke. This is the case especially when their unexpected appearance is both unsettling and beyond all logical explanation. One of the most unsettling objects that appear in “El monte de las ánimas” is the blue band that Beatriz loses and which she asks Alonso to retrieve for her. At first, Alonso’s response to the request is fear: “¿a qué ocultártelo?, tengo miedo” (*Leyendas* 120); but once he recovers his characteristically courageous behavior, he leaves for the mountain, never to be seen again. Alonso does however, as the reader is led to believe, reappear in the story in the form of a ghost that haunts Beatriz.⁷

Before analyzing the sounds that are possibly produced by Alonso in the form of an apparition, it is important to focus attention on the reappearance of the blue band and the effect it has on Beatriz’s character, and similarly, on the reader. Beatriz finally falls back asleep after being in a mental state of terror due to unexplainable sounds during the night, only to wake in the morning to find the blue band bloodied and laying on her prie-dieu.⁸ The description of her encounter with the object is one that inspires terror because the reader is at first unaware of what causes Beatriz’s reaction: “un sudor frío cubrió su cuerpo, sus ojos se desencajaron y una palidez mortal descoloró sus mejillas: sobre el reclinatorio había visto, sangrienta y desgarrada, la banda azul que perdiera en el monte, la banda azul que fue a buscar Alonso” (*Leyendas* 123). The blue band, therefore, can be considered a sublime object not because of the terror that it causes Beatriz to experience, but because the description of her terror inspired by the object aims to produce a similar effect on the reader. Beatriz’s character is so troubled by the finding of the sublime object that she dies from fright. Later that morning, her servants find her body, “inmóvil, crispada, asida con ambas manos a una de las columnas de ébano del lecho, desencajados los ojos, entreabierta la boca, blancos los labios, rígidos los miembros, muerta, muerta de horror” (*Leyendas* 123). The image of Beatriz’s body is one that also incites terror, not just because the mind is forced to recognize death, but also because of the horrific description of her stiff and repulsive body.⁹

The deaths of all the characters, Alonso, Beatriz, and the hunter that witnesses Beatriz’s ghost, provoke a sensation of terror whose purpose is to inspire the sublime experience. Beatriz’s dead body has already been suggested as one that provokes sublimity, and the image of her ghost is just as terrifying of a sight: “una mujer hermosa, pálida y desmelenada que, con los pies desnudos y sangrientos, y arrojando gritos de horror, daba vueltas alrededor de la tumba de Alonso” (*Leyendas* 124).¹⁰ A hunter gives this description of Beatriz just before he dies of causes related to being outside all night, but of which remain unspecified.¹¹ The fact that he dies from unknown causes is significant because it provokes a sense of terror due to what is unsaid and unseen. In this way, his death also inspires sublimity. As for Alonso, it is inferred

through the events leading up to his disappearance that he has been killed, but the exact reason as to how remains unclear. What is certain is that Alonso died at some point during the night, established through the fact that Beatriz's servants were going to inform her of his death the morning they discover her body: "[A] la mañana había aparecido devorado por los lobos" (*Leyendas* 123). The fact that Alonso's body is devoured by the wolves not only ties together neatly with the story he told Beatriz about the battle, but it also allows for the image of these savage animals to reappear. Once again, they appear to incite terror and can thus be considered sublime objects in terms of Burkean theory.

As this paper has presented, death in itself is terrifying and a source of the sublime, given that it suggests that human life has its limits. According to Philip Shaw, "our ideas about death or the nature of existence, for example, [are] terrifying and therefore sublime precisely because it cannot be presented to the mind in the form of a clear and distinct idea" (51). Although terror is a sensation related to the sublime that arises from the contemplation of death and suffering, the sensation of pleasure is also experienced, being that the mind recognizes that death is not an imminent threat. This, however, is not to be understood as pleasure in a positive sense, since "the sublime is an idea belonging to self-preservation; [...] that its strongest emotion is an emotion of distress; and that no pleasure from a positive cause belongs to it" (Burke 64). Therefore, the images of the characters' dead bodies in "El monte de las ánimas" cause *negative pleasure* in Kantian terms, and *delight* in Burkean terms, because they are perceived from a distance. In this manner, although the deaths of Beatriz and Alonso are particularly terrifying, the reader recognizes no real danger and is thus left in a state of awe that lies at the heart of the sublime experience.

While Burke takes an empirical approach to the sublime, Kant suggests that the sublime is "the mere capacity of thinking which evidences a faculty of mind transcending every standard of sense" (207). As previously mentioned, Kant's transcendental approach suggests that sublimity resides in the mind and is not a product of nature, while Burke's empirical approach suggests that awe is produced "by the great and the sublime in nature" (40). When considering the experience of the sublime as an effect of the descriptions of images and sounds in "El monte de las ánimas," it seems that Kant's approach allows for a deeper analysis of the text than does Burke's. Kant suggests, "the sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else by its presence provokes, a representation of *limitlessness*, yet with a super-added thought of its totality" (201). Infinity, darkness, vastness, these are all examples of objects devoid of form that are indiscernible to the eye, but in addition to these, there are also objects devoid of form that are indiscernible to the ear. In this sense, the sublime not only refers to the inability to make sense of an object in terms of physicality, but also in terms of audibility: "[T]he mere ability even to think it as a *whole* indicates a faculty of mind transcending every standard of sense" (Kant 211). Sounds, therefore, can be considered limitless and can produce terror when their source is indiscernible and/or when their presence implies danger.

The descriptions of the characters' terror in "El monte de las ánimas" that result from their encounters with either unfamiliar sounds or sounds that distinctly imply danger may inspire a similar effect on the reader. In the introduction to the *leyenda* and

in the *leyenda* itself, many sounds reappear in order to provoke terror.¹² As the narrator provides a context for the story he is about to write, a story to which he claims is simply a retelling of a “tradición que oí hace poco,” he describes that he hears church bells ringing from the abandoned church; given that it is “la noche de difuntos,” the ringing implies that the ghosts have returned for that one night (*Leyendas* 115). The sound of the bells not only inspire the narrator to write the story, they are also the first of many sounds that he describes that provoke the sensation of terror. While writing the story, he states, “algunas veces [volví] la cabeza con miedo, cuando sentía crujir los cristales de mi balcón” (*Leyendas* 115). Similarly, as Alonso leaves to retrieve the blue band for Beatriz, “el aire zumbaba en los vidrios del balcón, y las campanas de la ciudad doblaban a lo lejos” (*Leyendas* 121). Both the ringing of the bells by the ghosts and the rustling of the wind on the glass produce a sense of terror, but for different reasons. The idea that ghosts are ringing the bells implies that danger is near, while the rustling of the wind, a sound whose source is indiscernible, also produces a sense of terror because the mind begins to imagine what may be the cause.¹³

The descriptions of the sounds in the *leyenda* encourage the mind to produce images of threatening figures, which lead to a state of sublimity as a response to the terror they provoke. In Alonso’s description of the annual return of the dead, “los lobos aúllan, las culebras dan horrorosos silbidos” (*Leyendas* 117). According to Burke, “the angry tones of wild beasts” (62) can lead the mind to create terrifying images. In this case, the terrifying images are not only produced by the sounds of the wolves howling, but also by the descriptions Alonso gives of the wolves devouring the corpses. These sounds, therefore, lead the mind to imagine the wolves and snakes, animals that present a great threat to human survival upon their close encounter. Given the terror produced, but also the recognition that death is not a real threat, a state of sublimity is reached. Although not a sound that comes directly from menacing figures, the women that Beatriz and Alonso hear talking also incite feelings of terror that produce the sublime: “[Y] volvi6se a oír la cascada voz de las viejas que hablaban de brujas y de trasgos” (*Leyendas* 119). Although this example does not provide descriptions of the representations of witches and goblins, it can be argued that they are not needed because the mere mentioning of such figures leads the mind to create the images on its own. In this sense, the women’s voices lead to the conflict between reason and imagination that Kant describes as part of the experience of the sublime.

The notion of infinity has already been explored through the concepts of vastness and darkness, which according to Kant and Burke are sources of sublimity based on the fact that they have no discernible limits. In a similar manner, the notion of eternity is also a source of the sublime because the idea of limitlessness can produce anxiety and terror. A human being’s life is obviously not eternal; however, certain situations and events can foment the feeling of eternity in the sense that time has suddenly come to a halt. When this is the case, a state of sublimity can be reached if the response to the situation is terror. When Beatriz retires to her room after waiting a while for Alonso to return, she quickly falls into a nervous sleep, only to be awakened as the clock strikes midnight.¹⁴ According to Burke, “Few things are more awful than the striking of a great clock” (61). This particular sound, therefore, can lead to a state of sublimity as a response to the terror it inspires.

In addition to the rustling sounds, the clock, and the bells, many other sounds are described with the purpose of producing terror. As Beatriz lies awake during the night, she begins to hear sounds that she cannot discern and that prevent her from falling back asleep. As Kantian and Burkean theories suggest, “Ignorance is a crucial component of the sublime” (Shaw 51), in the sense that the inability to determine or rationally explain sounds can excite feelings of inadequacy and extreme fear or panic. At first Beatriz only hears the bells again, but then, “creía haber oído, a par de ellas, pronunciar su nombre; pero lejos, muy lejos, y por una voz ahogada y doliente” (*Leyendas* 122). Although uncertain, the voice she hears may be interpreted as that of Alonso calling out her name in pain. Burke suggests: “Such sounds that imitate the natural inarticulate voices of men, or any animals in pain or danger, are capable of conveying great ideas” (62). In this way, the description of the sounds that Beatriz hears leads the mind to imagine what it can not rationalize, thus inciting the feeling of terror that is at the source of the sublime.

The voice “ahogada y doliente” is only the beginning of the string of sounds that Beatriz hears that begin to scare her character. Her terror is expressed through the descriptions of her heart beating violently as she hears doors around her opening: “ésta con un ruido sordo y grave, aquéllas con un lamento largo y crispador” (*Leyendas* 122). Loud, distinct sounds such as these, according to Burke, have the ability to “overpower the soul [...] and awake a great and awful sensation in the mind” (60). On the other hand, however, so do the sudden cessation of sounds. In this sense, the descriptions of sudden silence in the text have the ability to provoke the same terrifying images and sensations as do the descriptions of strange, loud sounds and strange, barely audible sounds. After Beatriz hears the voice and the doors opening there is sudden silence, only to be followed by “[un] eco de pasos que van y vienen, crujir de ropas que se arrastran, suspiros que se ahogan, respiraciones fatigosas que casi se sienten, estremecimientos involuntarios que anuncian la presencia de algo que no se ve” (*Leyendas* 122). The descriptions of these sounds give rise to the idea that someone or something else is in the room with her, while its form is unintelligible.¹⁵ After this string of sounds, “nada, silencio, [...] oscuridad” (*Leyendas* 122). In this manner, the descriptions of the sudden beginning and cessation of sounds is a narrative technique used to inspire sublimity as a response to the sense of terror they produce.

Up until the point of the last silence, the mind is lead to believe that there is some kind of presence approaching Beatriz, but the source can still have some logical explanation, such as the wind. However, right as Beatriz is intending to fall asleep again, she hears “pisadas lentas [que] sonaban sobre la alfombra [...] y a su compás se oía crujir una cosa madera o hueso” (*Leyendas* 122). This description suggests that the presence in Beatriz’s room is a skeleton, an image that calls for imagination to dominate reason. In this way, it can be suggested that the representations used to describe the terror experienced by Beatriz, who hides her head under her clothes and holds her breath, may inspire a similar effect on the reader. Therefore, all of the sounds described above can be considered sublime in the same sense that objects can be: they inspire a state of sublimity due to the idea that their source is something that is beyond human logic and understanding and is both terrifying and exciting.

In conclusion, the purpose of this paper was to relate Kantian and Burkean theories on the sublime to the *leyenda* “El monte de las ánimas” in order to suggest that the narrative techniques used to represent the terror experienced by the characters are intended to generate a similar effect on the reader. In the introduction, it was presented that Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer utilizes the aesthetic of the sublime as a means of exteriorizing his interior struggle with the ineffable. The ineffable, therefore, is paradoxically manifested in the text through language in the representation of objects such as ghosts and skeletons, corpses, wolves, darkness, etc., and in sounds such as rustling, doors slamming, and silence. These objects and sounds are sublime in the sense that they function as the sources of the feeling of terror that is soon calmed through the realization that danger is not an imminent threat. In this manner, the perception of sublime sounds, like the perception of sublime objects, produces both pain and pleasure. The sublime experience in the form of pain and pleasure, or “awe” in Burkean terms, is therefore a means of coping with what is beyond human limits in terms of reason or description. In this sense, the experience can also be considered a projection of the author’s struggle to communicate the indescribable through language, being that he, like other authors that preferred a Romantic approach to representation, searched for a way to project an image of reality that was beyond the scope of human logic.

Notas

¹ Bécquer has expressed his concern for the inadequacy of language in his writing. This can be evidenced in *Rimas*: “Yo quisiera escribirlo, del hombre/ [...] Pero en vano es luchar; que no hay cifra/ capaz de encerrarlo” (1). In this sense, Bécquer suggests that words merely serve as metaphors, allegories, and projections, and that essentially, they cannot fully capture the essence of human thought and feeling.

² It is common for authors of Romantic expression to turn to the past, specifically the Middle Ages and the Golden Age, as a means of recognizing and appreciating historical influences on modernity. However, the representations of historical and legendary figures and events are intended to reflect upon the state of the modern individual and not the society at large: “La aparición de figuras de tipo mitológico no presupone una relación entre ellas y la sociedad, sino entre ellas y el individuo” (Real Espinosa 59). Therefore, philosophy of the Enlightenment grounded on liberalism and individualism can be suggested as influencing Romantic expression through the treatment of history and legend/myth, which can be evidenced in “El monte de las ánimas” in the description “las ojivas del salón” (118), a reference to the Middle Ages.

³ Although this paper is not a study of the *Fantastic*, it is important to recognize this literary mode, (along with the Gothic), because it is a product of the aesthetic of the sublime. In this way, both *Fantastic* literature and literature that evokes the sensation of the sublime have many elements in common, such as ghosts, the portrayal of nature as menacing and threatening, strange sounds, unexplainable deaths, etc. In *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, Tzvetan Todorov states that for a work to be considered fantastic, there must occur an event or a series of events that cannot be explained by the laws of nature according to reality, thus causing the sensation of uncertainty by part of the reader (25). Reality and unreality therefore come together, resulting in ambiguity, confusion, and sometimes terror (though the latter is not a requirement according to Todorov). The sublime can be an effect produced by reading a fantastic text (as is the case in *Leyendas*), but it is important to recognize that this effect does not always occur.

⁴ In theory, however, the sublime experience did not always presuppose a sensation of terror. According to Francisco Cruz, before Burke, the term referred to an aesthetic concept that produced pleasure in the

reader (4). Burke, however, shifted the connotation of the sublime to an aesthetic concept that, paradoxically, also produced suffering in the reader as a response to the experience of terror.

⁵ Kant and Burke both agree that the object itself is not sublime; it only inspires sublimity. This is the approach that will be taken during the analysis of “El monte de las ánimas.” Therefore, when an object is referred to as sublime, it is meant in the sense that the object provokes the sensation of the sublime, not that the object in itself is sublime.

⁶ Although this paper is not a study of the *beautiful*, it is important to define the concept, if only to better understand its counterpart, the *sublime*. If the beautiful were everything charming, feminine, and small (Shaw 9), it would seem that certain objects could pertain to both realms, an interesting idea to consider in terms of the objects analyzed in this paper. According to Burke, even though the sublime and the beautiful are founded on different sensations (the beautiful founded on pleasure while the sublime is founded on pain), “we must expect to find the qualities of things the most remote imaginable from each other united in the same object” (92). In this sense, what may appear to be beautiful may actually be sublime, being that it is founded on pain instead of pleasure. Philip Shaw makes an interesting argument with respect to this paradox: “unlike the beautiful [the sublime] at least has the virtue of not pretending to be anything other than what it is” (61). In this way, the return of daylight and the image of a beautiful woman, for example, may seem to be objects pertaining to the beautiful but in actuality are founded on the sensation of pain.

⁷ While one interpretation of the sounds and objects that appear later in the story is that Alonso’s ghost has returned, there may be other interpretations of the events. The fantastic, as defined by Todorov, is evidently at play here due to the possibility of more than one interpretation of the events. The fact that such a possibility exists may arouse feelings of uncertainty on behalf of the reader.

⁸ The fact that Beatriz has made it through the night leads the reader to believe that she is safe, being that daylight is both beautiful and comforting. Now that she is able to discern the objects around her, it would seem that she is no longer in danger. However, the ability to discern the physical limits of an object does not mean that that object is beautiful; instead, it can be considered sublime if it is founded on pain instead of pleasure.

⁹ Ugliness, as defined by Burke, is a concept linked with the sublime when it is “united with such qualities that excite a strong terror” (88). Therefore, in addition to the fact that Beatriz’s body is now dead, the description of her ugliness adds another dimension to the consideration of her body as a sublime object.

¹⁰ For the purposes of this paper, this particular image is determined to be Beatriz’s ghost (again, the fantastic is at play). This interpretation is based on the description of her as “hermosa,” of which she had been characterized throughout the story (“hermosa prima”, *Leyendas* 116; “la hermosa”, *Leyendas* 121), and also by her bloody and bare feet, which is in accordance with the fact that she had just awakened from her sleep when she died and was therefore not properly dressed. Beatriz, however, is also described as diabolical: “iluminada por un pensamiento diabólico” (Bécquer, *Leyendas* 119). It is interesting to note that Bécquer’s portrayal of women as both beautiful and diabolical represent the juxtaposition of repulsion and attraction at the heart of the sublime experience. In a study of the representation of women in Bécquer’s works, with an emphasis on the “The Green-Eyed Woman,” Emron Esplin observes: “[S]he offers negative pleasure to those who visit her, and pleasurable pain is a significant qualifier for a sublime object” (40). In this manner, Beatriz can be considered a sublime object because she offers Alonso pleasurable pain in the sense that she is beautiful to look at while also being diabolical, for she is the reason he returned to “el monte” that night and is therefore indirectly responsible for his death.

¹¹ The hunter, like Beatriz, dies from unknown causes. However, the fact that they both come in close contact with a supernatural event should be considered when analyzing their deaths. In fantastic literature, curiosity of and/or proximity to a supernatural event are often punished in some way, usually with the death of the character.

¹² It is curious to note that the sounds that incite terror in the introduction are some of the same sounds that appear in all three parts of the proceeding legend of Beatriz and Alonso. The objective of these recurrences is for the narrator to sustain credibility on his part in order to make it difficult for the reader to differentiate reality from unreality. According to Todorov, “A character can lie, the narrator must not” (85). In this sense, the fact that the narrator describes the sounds in his environment as the same sounds that surround the characters, he is attempting to establish credibility for his retelling of the story. This

particular narrative device is often observed in fantastic texts as a way to ensure the crash between reality and unreality, thus fomenting the questioning of reality by part of the reader. In a similar way, the fact that objects and sounds reappear throughout the text evidences how the author (distinct from the narrator) tries to question and break the limits that separate distinct spaces and times. The objective of the recurrence of representations is to include the reader by challenging the reader's perception of reality in terms of space and time.

¹³ Kant explores the relationship between reason and imagination, stating that it is one of conflict. According to Cruz, Kant's idea of imagination "[e]s más bien una exigencia de sentido de la razón frente a eso que se muestra como en falta" (10). In other words, the imagination comes into play when the mind cannot reason with the sounds or objects that it encounters. In this sense, indiscernible sounds lead to a feeling of inadequacy and result in fear of what is beyond explanation through logic. For this reason, they are a source of the sublime.

¹⁴ In Gothic and fantastic literature, midnight is the time when reality and unreality come together through the occurrence of strange events that are beyond reasonable explanation. It is also the hour when time appears to come to a halt, enabling the sensation of eternity.

¹⁵ It is important to note that this is a presence that Beatriz cannot capture visually, which, as mentioned above, is a significant quality of sublime objects because their obscurity implies greatness in terms of limitlessness.

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