

## AN ASSERTION OF INDIVIDUALITY: READING GUSTAVO ADOLFO BÉCQUER'S GREEN-EYED WOMAN AS A SUBLIME OBJECT

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In her study on the female side of Romanticism, *Las románticas*, Susan Kirkpatrick connects Romantic authors from several countries by claiming that regardless of their many differences all male Romantic authors desired to assert their subjectivity by portraying themselves as individuals (9). Anne K. Mellor explains that the British Romantics pushed for individuality by making an object of woman. The Romantic, she states, "ignores her human otherness" in hopes of obtaining "absolute possession of the beloved" (27). Mellor's complaint and Kirkpatrick's observation appear especially intriguing when studying the work of the Spanish poet Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer. Even a casual study of Bécquer shows that women are essential to his work because they are his work. Indeed, woman serves as Bécquer's driving metaphor throughout his poetry, prose, and theory.

Bécquer continually establishes his selfhood by transforming woman into a beautiful object. Specifically, in *Cartas literarias a una mujer*, he objectifies woman by claiming that she is poetry. He states "poesía,... poesía eres tú!" (*Obras completas II* 349). With this statement, Bécquer creates a barrier between himself and the woman who serves as his inspiration. He is the human individual who can be inspired by beauty, but the woman he admires is merely an object that motivates him by stirring his emotions. James Mandrell describes Bécquer's famous decree in a slightly different manner by claiming that his words "relegate women to the role of muse and helpmeet" (70). *Muse* has a more positive connotation than *object*, but it is still negative and degrading for the woman because it does not recognize her existence as a subjective being. Bécquer repeats his claim that woman is poetry in his "Rima XXI," and in "Rima IV" he states, "mientras exista una mujer hermosa/ ¡habrá poesía!" (*Rimas, Leyendas, Cartas desde mi celda* 11, 22). Clearly, Mellor's complaint that British male Romantics deny female subjectivity can also be

applied to Bécquer for his repeated objectification of women.

The fact that Bécquer objectifies woman seems undebatable, but focusing on his use of woman as a beautiful object can be reductive because this approach ignores another recurrent theme in Bécquer's work—the sublime. Bécquer does not always deal with the small and controllable, and although he does not directly claim to be delving into the sublime, several of his pieces deal with issues of vastness and the inability to use words to capture experience. Bécquer's writing frequently reveals the frustration he suffers due to his inability to encompass the vast and infinite.

I find the strongest example of Bécquer's use of the sublime in his short story "Los ojos verdes."<sup>1</sup> Manuela Cubero Sanz claims that all of Bécquer's women are beautiful (370), but the woman Bécquer creates in "Los ojos verdes" is more than a beautiful object; she becomes an object of the sublime through which Bécquer seeks to control the sublime nature of his own mind. Reading the green-eyed woman as a sublime object provides greater insight into why Bécquer constantly objectifies women. This interpretation also creates an interesting double reading which empowers the green-eyed woman, according to Edmund Burke's version of the humbling sublime experience, and simultaneously degrades her, paralleling Immanuel Kant's version of sublime transcendence. Ultimately, this reading is important because it adds depth and understanding to Bécquer's use of women as both beautiful and sublime objects by showing how he, like other Romantic authors, creates these women to establish his individuality as a subject and a poet.

### **Examples of Bécquer's Use of the Beautiful Woman to Control the Sublime**

Before focusing on the green-eyed woman, it is necessary to note Bécquer's preoccupation with vastness and show how a beautiful woman can begin to relieve, but not completely alleviate, his fixation. In his famous theoretical piece "Introducción sinfónica," Bécquer provides a clear example of his frustration with the sublime by comparing his thoughts to children who are never born or seeds that never sprout (*Obras* 475). Here, the sublime is found within the vastness of Bécquer's own mind. He is tormented by his thoughts

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<sup>1</sup> Bécquer's stories "El rayo de luna" and "El Miserere" provide similar evidence of Bécquer's preoccupation with the sublime, but I choose to focus on "Los ojos verdes" because it is the most poignant example.

because he cannot bring them into physical reality. He laments, “¡ay!, ¡que entre el mundo de la idea y el de la forma existe un abismo que sólo puede salvar la palabra y la palabra tímida y perezosa se niega a secundar sus esfuerzos!” (475). In the terms of Immanuel Kant, Bécquer’s frustration between thought and word can be described as an effect of the sublime. Kant claims that an important element of the sublime is that it “cannot be contained in any sensuous form, but rather concerns ideas of reason, which, although no adequate presentation of them is possible, may be excited and called into the mind by that very inadequacy itself which does admit of sensuous presentation” (202-203). In “Introducción sinfónica,” Bécquer suggests that his ideas are so immense that he is inadequate to reproduce them in written language, the medium of a poet. His inability to express his thoughts as words grieves him because he realizes his lack of control as an individual subject. When Bécquer admits he lacks control, he recognizes, even as a poet, that he cannot deal with the sublime nature of his thoughts by himself, and through this confession, he acknowledges the deterioration of his subject.

In his renowned poem “Rima I,” Bécquer faces the same gulf of separation between thought and word that he describes in “Introducción sinfónica.” The poem begins, “yo sé un himno gigante y extraño.” The second stanza shows his desire to write the hymn, and in the third stanza he mourns “[p]ero en vano es luchar; que no hay cifra/ capaz de encerrarle” (*Rimas* 6). Again, Bécquer is unable to write down what flourishes in his mind. He is unable to transform his thoughts into characters that convey meaning in the real world. Bécquer’s frustrations grow when he tries to control the sublime by himself through written figures, and as an individual, he cannot do so because he cannot write his thoughts. Still, he never claims that *spoken* words fail him—but to speak, he needs an audience. He needs another person, one who will listen rather than reply, to whom he can prove his subjectivity by verbally sharing his vast thoughts.

“Introducción sinfónica” ends as a fragment where Bécquer is still fighting the infinite alone, but in the last stanza of “Rima I,” Bécquer finds an audience that helps him overcome the sublime. The person Bécquer finds to help him cross the chasm between the sublimity in his head and the rigid reality of the physical world is a woman. “Rima I” triumphantly concludes when Bécquer claims that if he were alone with the beautiful woman, holding her hands in his, he could sing the hymn in her ear (6). Through the beautiful woman, Bécquer is finally able to share the vast thoughts which have churned

within his head. The woman does not reply when Bécquer sings her the marvelous song. She does not show her selfhood by explaining how the hymn effects her. Instead, she receives Bécquer's words in silence. Bécquer only identifies her by calling her "beautiful," so her identity does not seem important to him. She is only valuable to Bécquer because she allows him to release his tormenting emotions by listening to the sublime thoughts he converts into spoken words. The woman becomes an object because her value is based upon the fact that she hears the poet and, thus, gives him a way to express his subjectivity. With her help, Bécquer can control the vastness of his own mind; he can restrict what seemed to be infinite and sublime.

"Rima I" and "Introducción sinfónica" introduce Bécquer's frustration with the vastness of the mind. He does not overtly claim that the sublime torments him, but his fear of not being able to communicate because of the infinite nature of his thoughts resembles descriptions of the sublime experience as described by both Kant and Burke. It is interesting that Bécquer finds control of the infinite through physical communication with the finite. In other words, he controls the sublime by communicating with the beautiful. He uses a beautiful woman as inspiration, and only through a physical touch of her hand can he explain the immense thoughts and emotions of his imagination. His use of a woman as a beautiful object is similar to that of other Romantics throughout Europe, but Bécquer goes one step further in his quest to control the sublime and prove his subjectivity. In "Los ojos verdes," Bécquer creates a woman who encompasses the sublime. This woman controls the male character who comes in contact with her, but she is also a narrative object that Bécquer controls.

In his seminal book *The Romantic Sublime*, Thomas Weiskel claims that "[i]t would be hard to overestimate the presence of the Romantic sublime in the nineteenth century" (5). Weiskel's statement suggests that a fascination with the sublime was an important part of several countries' versions of Romanticism, but in his analysis of the sublime in Romantic literature, he specifically examines the British Romantics through the lenses of Longinus, Burke, and primarily, Kant. Like Weiskel, John Rosenberg employs Burke and Kant's explanations of the sublime, but he does so in order to discuss Romanticism in Spain. In the third chapter of *The Black Butterfly: Concepts of Spanish Romanticism*, Rosenberg traces the history of the idea of the sublime in Spain. Following his chronology, Longinus' work "was well known in Spain" by the middle of the seventeenth century, Burke's study had been published four times in Spain between 1801 and 1842, and Kant's name, if not his work, was known

by the Spaniards as early as 1799 (82-83). Spanish Romanticism did not reach its apogee until the 1830s, but Bécquer's work came even later. He was the last of the Spanish Romantics and did not begin to publish until 1857. By this time, Burke's interpretation of the sublime had been circulating Spain for over fifty years, and almost sixty years had passed since the Spaniards began to hear about Kant. While we might assume that a well-read artist like Bécquer would have analyzed and discussed the popular aesthetics of the time, the point is not that Bécquer could have read Burke and Kant, but that he used his poetry and his fiction to deal with similar issues of infinity and transcendence even though he did not specifically label them as sublime.

In my double reading of "Los ojos verdes," I rely on the terminology of Burke and Kant to conduct my literary analysis. I use Kant and Burke as my primary experts on the sublime rather than Longinus for two reasons. First, the differences between Kant and Burke's explanations of the sublime create an interesting contrast that allows me to read the green-eyed woman as a sublime object in two distinct ways. Second, although Longinus appears to be the originator of the term, his description of the sublime was vague at best. James B. Twitchell states that "Longinus was supposedly the first to discuss the sublime, but in fact he said precious little about what was to be considered sublimity" (13). By juxtaposing Burke's version of the sublime with Kant's explanation, I can analyze both the positive and negative effects that creating a sublime object has on the green-eyed woman and Fernando, the man who seeks after her affection. Finally, I can use both Burke and Kant to discuss how Bécquer creates the green-eyed woman as a sublime object to affirm his power as an acting subject.

### **The Green-eyed Woman as an Empowered Sublime Object**

In his treatise *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Edmund Burke contrasts the characteristics of the sublime with those of the beautiful. One important distinction is that sublime objects are huge while beautiful objects are small (124). This definition causes a problem when reading Bécquer's green-eyed woman as a sublime object because all humans are small when compared to the vastness of nature. Although she is physically small, the green-eyed woman's sphere of power, a mystical fountain called los Álamos, is vast. She still qualifies as a sublime object because an encounter with her requires her visitor to

enter her realm which is large enough to compensate for her size. Even more importantly, she offers negative pleasure to those who visit her, and pleasurable pain is a significant qualifier for a sublime object. Another problem arises with the sublime reading of the green-eyed woman—she is extremely beautiful (*Rimas* 64). Can a woman be both beautiful and sublime at the same time? Burke argues that beauty and sublimity are so different that he finds it nearly impossible for them to exist in the same object “without considerably lessening the effect of the one or the other of the passions” (114). Still, his claim does not deny that an object can have both sublime and beautiful characteristics if one trait outweighs the other. Such is the case with the woman in “Los ojos verdes.” Although she is beautiful, her beauty is outweighed by her sublime characteristics.

The green-eyed woman’s fountain home masks her small size and begins to qualify her as a sublime object. In the opening scene of “Los ojos verdes,” Íñigo, the master hunter, tries to dissuade his lord, Fernando, from following a wounded deer to the mouth of the fountain. All of the local hunters and peasants fear to approach los Álamos, and Íñigo claims that anyone who approaches the “fuente misteriosa” will be cursed. Along with the other hunters, he refuses to follow Fernando to the spring (*Rimas* 60). Although they have never been to the fountain themselves, the hunters are willing to offend their master, thus risking their lives to his anger, to avoid the fountain. Their terror of the fountain’s supernatural power outweighs their fear of the physical punishment their lord could inflict upon them. The fountain of los Álamos, then, can be described as a sublime setting according to Burke because it causes tension and terror (134). The hunters’ terror can be blamed on their superstitious nature, but if they are willing to accept possible censure and punishment from Fernando—something they have probably experienced and know to be real—in order to avoid a fountain they have never seen, their superstition itself takes on sublime attributes. Whether the actual fountain or the hunters’ superstitious beliefs about the fountain cause them to fear it, their fear resembles the type of terror caused by the sublime.

Fernando is not initially affected by his servants’ fear. He ignores Íñigo’s counsel and follows the wounded prey to los Álamos (*Rimas* 61), and by doing so, he experiences the sublimity of the scene first hand. For Fernando, one of the fountain’s sublime elements is its size. Days after his first journey to los Álamos, he describes the area to Íñigo by saying “todo allí es grande” (62). The size of the fountain area makes it sublime because Fernando cannot take in the whole

scene at once. Burke explains that large areas or “visual objects” have a sublime effect because the human eye cannot capture the entire area at the same time. The eye must move rapidly over the object and focus on several disparate points. This rapid movement causes small repeated amounts of pain that lead to great pain and “produce an idea of the sublime” (137). Following Burke’s reasoning, Fernando is filled with feelings of “soledad” and “melancolía” because of the vast nature of los Álamos (Rimas 62). The fountain’s size overwhelms him and pains him in the form of deep sadness, and he cannot overcome this gloom, even when he is away from the fountain.

The green-eyed woman’s fountain appears even more sublime as Fernando explains the confusion the fountain causes. He claims that he does not know what he has heard while sitting at the fountain’s edge even though it sounded like “lamentos, palabras, nombres, cantares” (62) all at once. The multiple sounds of the fountain overpower Fernando the same way the fountain’s size affects him. His senses are burdened to an extreme, and he cannot take in all of the sounds at the same time. Burke claims that such an array of sounds creates a sublime effect. He states, “[t]he noise of vast cataracts, raging storms, thunder, or artillery” can produce the sublime, while “[t]he shouting of multitudes has a similar effect” (82). The mixture of sounds the fountain produces overwhelms Fernando and leaves him confused. His confusion can be labeled as a lack of understanding that is similar to what Burke calls “vacuity” or a mindless, vacuum-like state. For Burke, vacuity is terrible, and like other privations, it can be linked to the sublime (71). The noises from the fountain add to the already immense effect of its size to produce a setting that confuses Fernando because it is visually and audibly sublime.

The green-eyed woman controls the sublime fountain, but *she* is also sublime because she creates negative pleasure. The term “negative pleasure” comes from Kant’s ideas on the sublime (202), but Burke says essentially the same thing in different words. He claims, “that the sublime is an idea belonging to self-preservation [...] and that no pleasure from a positive cause belongs to it” (86). A sublime object or event, then, produces a negative delight because the person who encounters the sublime feels threatened but somehow knows that he<sup>2</sup> will not die. The emotional rush caused by the danger

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<sup>2</sup> I repeatedly refer to the person who experiences the sublime as male because both Kant and Burke limit the possibility of encountering the sublime to men.

excites the individual, and this excitement is enjoyable because the person still feels the shelter of distance. Up close, the sublime loses its pleasurable capability because the person feels uncontrolled terror instead of terrible excitement. Thus, from a distance, an individual receives pleasure from something that could destroy him.

In "Los ojos verdes," the green-eyed woman provides negative pleasure for Fernando in two ways. First, she creates a desire in Fernando that threatens to separate him from everyone he knows and loves. Fernando tells Íñigo that he adores the strange woman's eyes more than anything and that he would gladly give up the love of his parents and the love of all the women in the world for a single glance at her eyes (*Rimas* 64). This desire is negative because Fernando is willing to renounce the attention of all other humans and cut the bonds between himself and his parents just to see the woman's green eyes. Fernando's desire is also pleasurable because he is experiencing it from a distance. He is not at the fountain when he tells Íñigo of his wish. The distance between himself and the sublime woman at that moment makes an encounter with her seem exciting. From this distance, Fernando feels threatened but knows that for the moment he is safe and will not actually lose all contact with other people. Íñigo sees the negative side of Fernando's desire in Fernando's serious and sad countenance, but Fernando feels both the negative and pleasurable sides of his wish to see the woman's eyes when he mourns, "¡cómo podré yo dejar de buscarlos!" (64). The threat of separation from others is not fatal, but the risk of going through a complete world shift is definitely negative for Fernando unless it is experienced from a distance.

The green-eyed woman also provides negative pleasure in a more dramatic fashion by threatening Fernando's life. The final time that Íñigo speaks with Fernando, he again warns Fernando that his continued visits to the fountain will lead to his death. Fernando still ignores the hunter's advice and returns to the fountain where he sits by its edge and speaks to the woman who stands on top of the water (63-65). Even at the fantastic fountain's edge, enough distance remains between Fernando and the green-eyed woman to create negative pleasure. Fernando has been warned that contact with the woman will be lethal, but the distance between her floating figure and the rock where he sits makes the threat of death enticing. He is close enough to her to fear her power but far enough away to still deny the fact that she will destroy him.

Fernando tries to increase his negative pleasure by speaking to the woman and begging her to respond. He tells her that he will



always love her even if she is a demon rather than a woman (65). Fernando's promise increases the negative and pleasurable aspects of his current situation by fusing two opposites, a demon and love, into one desire. The idea of the woman actually being a demon is inherently negative, but Fernando hides this negative feature by claiming that he will share his most positive emotion, his love, with her. Fernando's effort to increase his excitement works, and the woman responds to his plea by speaking to him for the first time. She tells Fernando she will reward him for visiting her fountain by sharing her "cariño extraño y misterioso" with him (65). At this moment, the negative pleasure culminates to a point where Fernando can no longer resist the woman. He ignores the danger and concentrates only on the pleasure the woman offers him.

Finally, the green-eyed woman's sublime nature comes forth in true force when she destroys Fernando just as Íñigo prophesied. She invites Fernando toward her watery abyss, wraps her arms around his neck, kisses his lips, and then sucks him below the fountain's surface (65). This deadly kiss can be read in the same way we read the capital punishment a siren pronounces on an enchanted sailor, but the green-eyed woman is more than a *femme fatale*. Like other sublime objects, her fountain creates visual and audible terror. She offers negative pleasure or pleasurable pain, and she finally destroys those who ignore distance and get too close to her. She may appear to be small and beautiful, but the pleasurable terror she causes outweighs her human characteristics, and thus, she embodies the sublime.

Fernando's inability to grasp the fountain's physical size, understand its multiple sounds, and comprehend the power of its principal resident—the green-eyed woman—is comparable to Bécquer's difficulty in writing down his immense thoughts. Both men confront situations where their finite humanity is overwhelmed by infinity. The author and his character want to connect with the sublime, and they both do so through physical contact with a woman. In "Rima I," Bécquer takes a woman by the hands and whispers his sublime thoughts in her ear. Fernando also embraces a woman, but by doing so, he literally touches the sublime and dies as a result. Although Bécquer's experience has a positive effect while Fernando's encounter ends in tragedy, both experiences require the men to humble themselves before the sublime and, thus, humble themselves before the women who provide their access to the sublime.

Burke claims that power and the sublime are so deeply connected that "nothing [is] sublime which is not some modification of

power” (64). Bécquer’s quandary in “Introducción sinfónica” and “Rima I” and Fernando’s sublime experience with the woman of the fountain support Burke’s claim. The green-eyed woman has the power to destroy Fernando just as Bécquer’s thoughts have the power to constantly torment him. Burke uses God as the ultimate example of sublime power. Following his logic, we know that God is good and just, but if we approach Him in thought, we focus on His power and “shrink into the minuteness of our own nature, and are, in a manner, annihilated before him” (68). Thus, from Burke’s viewpoint, a sublime experience is a humbling one. The individual who confronts the sublime recognizes his own insignificance and submits himself to the sublime’s infinite power. The individual leaves the sublime encounter, not empowered by it, but awed and humbled by the vastness of his recent experience.

Such an understanding of the sublime experience empowers the women of “Rima I” and “Los ojos verdes” even if they are regarded as objects. The woman in “Rima I” is a beautiful object, but she offers Bécquer a way to communicate his vast thoughts. She releases Bécquer from his pain, which, in turn, empowers him. Still, she maintains the real power. Without her presence and the touch of her hand, Bécquer is overwhelmed by his thoughts and cannot communicate anything. Bécquer must humble himself and admit that he, alone, cannot express infinity. He shows his humility by admitting that he cannot write the sublime hymn and by claiming that with her help, he can finally reveal the infinite thoughts within his brain. The green-eyed woman is a sublime object and is much more powerful than her beautiful counterpart from “Rima I.” Her sublimity empowers her by giving her control over all those who approach her. Being in her presence is like sailing in a violent storm on the ocean or running from an avalanche or forest fire. Such an experience is exhilarating, but it shows man how small and weak he truly is. Fernando willingly and eagerly accepts the green-eyed woman’s lethal invitation because she awes him into submission. The visual and audible greatness of her fountain and the negative pleasure that she provides ultimately humble Fernando to the point where he will do whatever the woman desires. Much like Burke’s explanation of how man humbles himself before God’s power, Fernando accepts his own nothingness, obeys the woman’s wish, and is annihilated by her. Following Burke’s explanation of the sublime, reading the green-eyed woman as a sublime object gives her godlike power.

## The Green-eyed Woman as a Transcended/Controlled Sublime Object

In his *Critique of Judgement*, Immanuel Kant also analyzes the sublime and the beautiful. His version of the sublime is much like Burke's, but his analysis breaks away from Burke's on several key issues. Kant claims that the sublime experience happens when the human mind or imagination cannot grasp something in nature, and he calls the sublime encounter "an outrage on the mind" (202). This explanation of the sublime is similar to Burke's, but Kant believes that the cause of the sublime moment is the human mind or imagination, not the object nor the natural event that the mind fails to understand. He states, "the sublime is not to be looked for in the things of nature, but only in our own ideas" (207). For Kant, the importance shifts from the object to the subject, and the subject's inability to comprehend the object becomes the real cause of the sublime experience. He suggests that the mind causes the sublime experience because it finds no "finality" in nature, but it eventually creates a feeling of "finality" within the self (203). Kant's shift of focus from the object to the imagination of the subject creates a different kind of sublime encounter than the humbling experience that Burke describes. Kant's sublime experience is one of transcendence through which the individual proves that he is greater than nature. Kant declares, "[s]ublimity, therefore, does not reside in any of the things of nature, but only in our own mind, in so far as we may become conscious of our superiority over nature within, and thus also over nature without us" (221). Kant's sublime experience exalts the individual instead of humbling him.

Kant's version of the sublime creates three problems for reading the green-eyed woman as a sublime object. The first problem is a question of limits and form similar to Burke's focus on the vastness of the sublime. Kant claims that the sublime "is devoid of form" and "a representation of *limitlessness*" (201 his italics). Again, it is impossible to claim that the green-eyed woman has no form or limits, but she overcomes form and limits by controlling her enchanted fountain and exercising her own immense power. She literally has a form, but her power defies definition. Kant also says that the sublime creates "negative pleasure" because "the mind is not simply attracted by the object, but is also alternately repelled thereby" (202). The green-eyed woman's power clearly mirrors Kant's definition of negative pleasure. When she convinces Fernando to come to her, he hopes to join her even though he has been told that she will kill him. Her deadly invitation is attractive and repulsive at the same time. Her

capacity to convince Fernando to willingly sacrifice his life to be with her shows both the negative pleasure she offers and the limitlessness of her power. Her power and the pleasurable pain it produces mask her form and make her seem limitless and sublime.

The fact that the green-eyed woman is a literary creation produces the second problem that Kant's version of the sublime brings to the surface. Kant states that "we must not point to the sublime in works of art, e.g. buildings, statues and the like, where a human determines the form as well as the magnitude" (209). This statement makes reading the woman as a sublime object difficult because she is Bécquer's creation. Bécquer constructs her shape by making her a woman, and he defines her magnitude by giving her extensive power. Thus, she is limited because she is the creation of a human who has decided what form she will take. Kant's argument about the lack of sublimity in art makes some sense because a product of human invention should not challenge the imagination to the point where a sublime experience takes place. For example, while reading "Los ojos verdes," it would be difficult for me to receive such a shock to the mind that I would be baffled by the infinite power of the green-eyed woman but finally overcome the negatively pleasing sensation of my confusion by saying, "Ah, yes, I now comprehend her. I have transcended her." This will not happen because, from my perspective, she is a fictional character. I cannot overcome my constructed reality and really feel threatened by her, nor can I transcend her. This example of Kant's point, however, ignores an important factor. For Fernando, the green-eyed woman is not a fictional character. She lives and breathes in his world and is just as real to Fernando as his own existence. So while it might be difficult for the reader to have a true sublime experience when reading "Los ojos verdes," the green-eyed woman is the cause of Fernando's sublime experience. Within the story, her power is limitless, and only she can control it.

Finally, Kant's version of the sublime creates a causality problem. If the sublime is found within the mind, how can the green-eyed woman be called a sublime object? How can she cause a sublime experience? According to Kant, she should not be called sublime because Fernando's imagination, not her power, makes their encounter sublime. He claims "that true sublimity must be sought only in the mind of the judging Subject, and not in the Object of nature that occasions this attitude" (213). Here, Kant restates that the sublime resides in the mind, but he admits that the mind cannot be pushed toward its sublime capabilities without the presence of an object whose power brings about the sublime attitude by denying

the imagination's initial comprehension. The object does not cause the sublime experience, but it is an indispensable part of the encounter. Kant also acknowledges that "we readily call these objects sublime, because they raise the forces of the soul above the height of vulgar commonplace" (218). Thus, Kant believes that the sublime is found within the imagination, but he realizes that the objects which spur the mind to reach the sublime are often labeled, even by himself at times, as sublime. The green-eyed woman, then, can still be called sublime because she is the object that pushes Fernando's mind into its sublime state.

Now the woman in "Los ojos verdes" can be read as a sublime object even in Kantian terms, but Kant's version of the sublime provides a reading that turns the first reading of the sublime, green-eyed woman on its head. Kant's sublime is not a humbling experience for the subject, but an aggrandizing one where the subject places himself above the object by finally grasping and understanding it in his mind. This experience can be considered positive for the subject and neutral for the object if the object is merely a part of nature. However, when the sublime object is a person, the green-eyed woman in this case, the subject's transcendence over the object is negative. Both Fernando and Bécquer transcend the sublime through their contact with and creation of the green-eyed woman.

Fernando's experience with the woman of the fountain can be seen as negative for her from the beginning because he continually approaches the fountain in search of pleasure. Fernando first visits the fountain while trying to catch the deer he has shot (*Rimas* 60-61). He is a Spanish nobleman for whom the hunt provides sport and diversion rather than needed food. When he nears the fountain, his goal is to take the life of the deer for pleasure. He wants to possess the animal to show his superiority over it and his supremacy over other hunters as well. After meeting the woman at the fountain, he returns to the fountain various times, hoping to do the same thing to her. He does not want to kill her, but he wants to place her in terms that he comprehends, and thus, understand and possess her. In a phrase, he wants to love her. He says, "[h]áblame; yo quiero saber si me amas; yo quiero saber si puedo amarte" (65). Ultimately, Fernando fails to comprehend the woman, not only because of her large and boisterous fountain, and not only because he has heard that she has the power to kill him, but also because he does not know whether she can be loved. He does not know if he can possess her the way he possessed the deer. His mind is outraged, in Kantian terms, because he does not know if the powerful, green-eyed woman will become his object by accepting his love.

The sublime woman finally comforts Fernando's mind by answering his questions. She tells Fernando, "yo te amo más aún que tú me amas; yo, que desciendo hasta un mortal siendo un espíritu puro. No soy una mujer como las que existen en la tierra; soy una mujer digna de ti, que eres superior a los demás hombres" (65). She verbally praises Fernando and empowers him mentally. Now he understands her. His mind is no longer shocked and confused, and he knows that he can possess her because he believes that she loves him. Fernando steps forward to claim his prize, and feels "unos brazos delgados y flexibles que se liaban a su cuello, y una sensación fría en sus labios ardorosos, un beso de nieve" (66). The long anticipated contact that Fernando finally receives from the green-eyed woman is literally a kiss of death, but according to the Kantian sublime, this ultimate negative pleasure is not the real cause of this sublime moment. Instead, the experience is sublime for Fernando because his mind finally understands the woman. She kills his physical body, but not before his imagination grasps her words and makes him feel that he comprehends her. Following Kant's version of the sublime, Fernando mentally transcends the woman and places himself over her as her superior. Even in death, Fernando is able to place himself above the woman because he understands, and for a moment, possesses her. His transcendence reaffirms that he is an acting subject, and by possessing her for only a moment, Fernando objectifies the green-eyed woman as his gratifying possession.

Reading the green-eyed woman as a sublime object continues to be degrading for her when we look past the fictional world of the fountain and consider Bécquer as the woman's creator and master. The woman in "Los ojos verdes" has the power to control a massive fountain and to destroy Fernando, but she is actually a puppet in the hands of Bécquer. All of her power revolves around his desires and the choices he makes for her. Within the story she is omnipotent, but in reality, she is just a fictional character. Her existence follows Kant's idea that the sublime cannot be found in art (209) because nothing she does can harm or help anyone outside her fictional frame. Her unlimited power is limited by Bécquer's decisions and biases.

Bécquer's authority over the green-eyed woman takes any real power away from her because he can manipulate her actions to form a story to his liking and to establish his power and subjectivity. The green-eyed woman is different from the beautiful woman in "Rima I" although both women exist as objects of relief for Bécquer. He requires a physical touch from his beautiful object to be able to express to her the sublime thoughts that torment his mind, but the mere

creation of a sublime object in “Los ojos verdes” allows him to express his unborn ideas *through* her. By giving the woman unlimited power, Bécquer, in a sense, gives himself infinite power and authority because he creates and oversees her sublimity. She is the physical and written expression of Bécquer’s mind.

On his own, Bécquer is incapable of expressing the sublime, so he creates female characters that he uses as objects to help him transcend the sublime. “In Rima I,” he creates a beautiful object that listens while he verbally expresses the gigantic hymn that afflicts his mind. In “Los ojos verdes,” he gives shape to the sublime by forming an all-powerful female. Bécquer does not necessarily transcend the green-eyed woman—as her creator he already controls her—but he uses her to transcend the vast confusion he finds within himself. Through her character, he is finally able to express his mind’s vastness in written words. The sublime, green-eyed woman is Bécquer’s creation, but she is also the proof of his existence. Through her, Bécquer controls his own mind and shows that he is an individual subject, a poet and author with the power to ponder infinity, seek to understand it, and strive to recreate it in his writing.

Whether negative or positive, the green-eyed woman’s fountain, her immense power, and the negative pleasure she offers Fernando qualify her as a sublime object in both Kantian and Burkean terms. Following Burke’s ideas, this woman is a terrible object with omnipotent power that produces both fear and pleasure in her admirer. She makes her encounter with Fernando a sublime experience. In Kantian terms, she is an extraordinary object that causes Fernando’s mind to plummet into a state of shock and then rebound and soar above her. She is the object that helps Fernando’s mind reach its sublime potential. Putting the views of these critics aside, the woman of “Los ojos verdes” represents Bécquer’s ultimate attempt to deal with the tormenting vastness of his thoughts in written language. To verbally combat the void between his mind and reality, Bécquer looks to the beautiful, but to be capable of writing his infinite thoughts as words, he seeks to contain the sublime within the body of a female character. If he can compartmentalize the power of the sublime within a human form, perhaps he can capture his thoughts in the form of written language.

Bécquer is disturbed by what Burke and Kant would term the sublime, but like other Romantic authors, he uses his vexation with the sublime to assert his individuality. In *Romantic Horizons*, Twitchell claims that the Romantics looked to the sublime to understand their existence: “To the romantic artist the sublime was a way to span the

abyss between inner and outer, and outer and 'the Beyond.' It was in part a way to resolve the most pressing epistemological dilemma of the time—the disjunction between subject and object. In fact, the sublime experience itself is an attempt at the farthest perceptual extreme to reconcile subject and object” (11). Bécquer’s main frustration lies in his inability to express his thoughts, and this inability leads him to question reality and his existence as an acting subject. In “Introducción sinfónica” he laments, “[m]e cuesta trabajo saber qué cosas he soñado y cuáles me han sucedido” (*Obras* 477). Instead of looking to nature for a sublime experience to combat the confusion within his mind, Bécquer creates the woman of “Los ojos verdes” as the bridge “between inner and outer” or the link between his mind and the written word. By capturing the sublime in written language and enclosing sublime traits within a human body, the body of the green-eyed woman, Bécquer connects the sublimity of his mind to his world of written forms. Bécquer asserts his individuality by creating the green-eyed woman as an omnipotent character, and then, controlling her. She is a representation of the infinite thoughts that torment his brain, and by controlling her, Bécquer better comprehends infinity and accomplishes his ‘Romantic’ goal; he proves to himself that he is a creator, an individual subject.

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