

Reliance and Confinement: Washington Allston's Dual Attitudes Towards European Ideals in His Paintings

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Abstract. The paper examines the dual attitudes reflected in the artistic work of Washington Allston. Born in 1779 and died in 1843, Allston is a famous American painter and poet whose artworks are greatly shaped by European philosophical concepts and artistic traditions. Allston's inheritance of such traditions could be mainly reflected by the deliberate representation of the concept of sublimity and divinity in his artistic creation. This could be readily seen from Allston's artistic techniques, by which he better instills his aesthetics into his religious paintings while arousing greater empathy among the audience. However, against the background of American Romanticism, Allston was faced with the conflict between conforming to the European aesthetic standards in terms of "general air" and tradition, and the dramatic departure of objects from their "proper place". As a result, Allston resorted to the institutional liberation, thus forming his distinct artistic style with an evident feature of dual attitudes.

Keywords: American Art; Romanticism; Sublimity; Dual Identity.

1. Introduction

The mid-eighteenth century is a burgeoning age for the fledgling world of art in America. The market experienced tremendous growth, with the art, deemed as a vessel for physical representation and spiritual contemplation, gradually becoming an indispensable part of people's life in the case where their basic needs had been securely met. Those who had safely settled down in the new continent showcased a booming crave for art, especially for portraiture paintings, a dominant genre of the era that enlivened a great number of local artists. With their lives often featured by cross-cultural crash and fusion, the artists' styles display enduring traces shaped by the European philosophical ideas as well as artistic traditions, while a shared identity for American artists had barely been established. The development of a primary and tentative identity of art had been becoming a primal goal for early artists in their probation process of artistic existence. This process of identity creation could be noticed from early creations of art, most noticeably from portraiture, landscape, and religious paintings by American artists in the colonial or post-colonial period. Under this very timeframe, the intellectual pathways of probation of individual artists are worth reexamining, for they could be regarded as epitomes of the collective construction of a shared way of existence for the nation.

The paper mainly focuses on the artistic creation of Washington Allston (1779-1843), an artist whose artworks are greatly shaped by European philosophical concepts and artistic traditions, based on which, he, nevertheless, developed his distinct way of artistic existence. As mentioned in the previous research, Washington Allston often appears as an artist who readily expresses the evangelical spirit [1]. While this idea is plausibly undisputed, a connection between evangelical representation and Allston's artistic techniques could be made clearer by how the artist integrates the philosophical concept of sublimity and express divinity into his works of art. First proposed by Edmund Burke, the concept of sublimity offers an innovative way of connecting the realm of intangibility and magnificence to the beauty visible and appreciable by humans [2]. Allston's deliberate representation of the concept of sublimity, in artistic means, could be readily seen from Allston's artistic techniques, by which he better instills his aesthetics into his religious paintings while arousing greater empathy among the audience. There are generally two kinds of manifestations of such sublimity. The first type is "The General Air", which is a canonic aesthetic taste that dominated the judging criteria of paintings in the eighteenth century, especially the genre of portraiture [3]. "The

General Air” is regarded as the only way to ensure the timelessness of the artwork [3]. Another kind of manifestation of sublimity is a sense of painfulness and dangerous feelings, which is rooted in Edmund Burke’s philosophical discourse [4]. What’s more, Allston’s compliance with the European philosophical concepts and artistic traditions is also shown through how he represented God’s voice by using the prophetic voice as well as the musical harmony of tertiary colors, both as the mediums of Logos [5].

However, it is worth noting that Allston’s artistic works were also greatly influenced by the specific context of the age when the prelude of American Romanticism had been unfolded. Ralph Waldo Emerson published his famous essay *Nature*, in which he boldly asked, “Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion of revelation to us and not the history of theirs?” This essay officially marked the attempts of the American romantics to dispel the borrowed institution never really belonging to them after successfully displacing revolutionary violence with the Enlightenment ideals that they shared with European romanticism [6]. Against such a backdrop, Allston innovatively integrated an institutional liberation in his artistic creation, which is featured by the exploration of self-identity and the relationship between humans and nature. Furthermore, Washington Allston used departures from the concept of sublimity to convey his desire for emancipation from the institutional shackle that confined his artistic and philosophical existence and contemplation in his landscape paintings. Sublimity, along with other identical European aesthetical and philosophical ideals, has greatly shaped the style of Washington Allston’s paintings.

Based on the aforementioned arguments, a research question is proposed in this paper: How did Allston deal with the relationship between his works of art and the European institutional ideas against the background of American Romanticism? A hypothesis is raised in this paper: Allston held dual attitudes regarding the European institution, which are shown in the imagery featured by the juxtaposition of sublimity and reflectivity in his religious and landscape paintings. Such dual attitudes towards European ideals—reliance on it and desire to shake off from it—provide a lens of observing the probation process of the shared identity of American artists, from which we could see how American artists are describing a new way of understanding other than traditional religious path shaped by Europeans during the beginning era of art in America.

To answer the research question raised above, this paper dwells on previous literature on Washington Allston and the time of American Romanticism, and also relies on the primary sources of both text and paintings by the artist as well as contemporary thinkers on the issues discussed by the paper. Combined with Edmund Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beauty* [4], Washington Allston’s *Lectures on Art and Poems* as well as his *Fragments on Religion* are used to illustrate the artist’s authentic minds on European standards of beauty and his understanding of it from the evangelical perspective [7]. Another primary source used is Joshua Reynolds’s “A Discourse Delivered to the Students of the Royal Academy on the Distribution of the Prizes,” which vividly displays the European artistic ideals that greatly shape American art world [3]. Papers by scholars on the topic of early American evangelical spirits are to provide a more holistic understanding of the American art world under the impact of European ideals, despite some innovations, and to lead to the later arguments of this paper on institutional liberation [8]. When dealing with visual evidence, prominently drawings by Allston and his contemporaries, formal analysis of image is relied on to be a main component of analysis for this paper, as it helps convey the visual language in a textual way. The techniques and style of the drawings are particularly analyzed to display the corresponding mainstream ideas in the history they represent.

2. Following European Ideals: Sublimity and Divinity

2.1 Manifestations of Sublimity

Under the influence of the European philosophical concepts and artistic traditions, Allston integrates the philosophical concept of sublimity into his works of art, which could be manifested by “The General Air” and “The Sense of Painfulness” in his paintings.

2.1.1 “The General Air” and the “Sublime”

Among the European institutions, there are two of them that have cast the greatest impact on fledgling American art world—artistic technique and philosophical thinking—the former beautifies the superficial profile of the paintings, the latter provides spiritual guidance. From the beginning of the era, the idea of “general air” was proposed and praised by a majority of artists in European academy. This authoritative taste is characterized by the “perfect form” that is “produced by leaving out particularities, and retaining only general ideas”, which, as proponents’ belief, is the only way to ensure the “timelessness” of the artwork [3]. In this way, the artists have successfully left out their works from the “temporary fashion” that degenerates the dignity of the general nature of the works. Such discourse promoting the “generality” aims to critique a fledgling American taste of portraiture paintings. A majority of American artists, at the initial stage of the painstaking probing process of artistic beauty, tended to reproduce the physical appearance and clothing habits of the sitters, and both of the aforementioned conventions were denied by their European counterparts. John Singleton Copley’s *Boy with a Flying Squirrel* (1765) is regarded as a subject of the critique, as this painting, according to the discourse, suites the figure in a contemporary outfit with redundant details. In fact, Copley’s drawing style fails to make the painting “timeless” despite its great authenticity, as the painting, by capturing the ongoing scene of the sitter, merely constitutes the aesthetics of the present rather than the generality. Specifically, taste is ever-changing through the time, and present-day aesthetics, in the case of this painting, the clothes and details, could hardly stay on the high shrine of art in every frame of time. In this sense, what could be deemed “timeless” is the taste deriving from the early times of Roman and Greeks, which has already undergone the scrutiny of history. Aside from the religious meaning granted by the artist and context, Washington Allston’s figural paintings are generally American imitations of such judging criteria of pieces of art. In his painting *Beatrice* (1819), the influence of the discourse could be explored from the usage of relatively dim and plain color, small ornamental elements, and drapery. Dressed in dark brown, the female figure largely blended into the background rendered in a proximate color. While gazing at her side and displaying a three-quartered view, her hand climbed around the necklace, one of the only few ornamental elements, adding touches of tension to the overall ambiance. The drapery unconcealed by the outskirt is rendered naturally as complementary imagery, casting the figure in an ancient atmosphere. Furthermore, the plainness of color and ornament, as well as the cross-timing imagery, renders the painting to be universally appreciable for audience throughout the time span, thus granting it the “timeless” attribute.

2.1.2 “The Sense of Painfulness” and the “Sublime”

The concept of sublimity in Allston’s works of art can also be demonstrated through the presentation of the sense of painfulness. In Edmund Burke’s philosophical discourse, he categorizes human emotions into a type of painfulness and a type of joyfulness, which is also a kind of institutional legacy from Europe. He further defines those which could arouse a sense of painfulness and dangerous feelings in some ways as “sublime” [4]. He firmly believes that the painfulness brought by the sublimity is much mightier than the joyfulness sprout in daily lives, as “astonishment” would be caused as a passion when the great and sublime in nature operate on humans most powerfully [4]. Under the state of astonishment, the motions of human soul would be suspended, and one’s reason could be entirely filled and employed with the object of sublime that is “far from being produced” by the reason and could “anticipates our reasonings [4].” The second section of the book starts to enumerate the possible representations of the sense of sublime from each attribute of the object, which helps connect the powerful passion caused by the nature to some ways that mortal humans could describe and stay empathetic. It also fosters artistic creation on this subject, as humans are, according to Burke, inclined to grant transcendental objects some meanings under the realm of human reason [4].

The concept of sublime has always maintained an inextricable link to the Christian doctrines even in Europe. The logic behind such a bond could be attributed to Burke’s assertion of the Sublime as a

“modification of power [4].” According to Burke, although seemingly power could trigger either pain and pleasure at one time, the idea of pain elicited by the power tends to dominate, as pain “preserves the same superiority through all the subordinate gradations [4],” even though there are the same chances for power to trigger equal degrees of suffering and enjoyment. The aforementioned superiority of painfulness comes from the “terror” in the face of imminent death, brought by the power which is superior to our own (rather than those we could harness) and is inflicted on us. In *Jobs*, the wild ass could bring the audience no small sublimity despite its limited power, merely because of its defiance to humankind for freedom; otherwise, the description of such an animal could have had nothing sublime in it. Similarly, the description of unicorn and leviathan is filled with the same heightening sublimity as the book coldly questions, “Will the unicorn be willing to serve thee?” The sublimity of the two cases both come from power hardly harnessed by mankind.

The concept of the Almighty could comply with the two aforementioned sources of sublimity brought by power. According to the conventional metaphysics theory, the Divinity is above the realm of reasonable imagination of humans; meanwhile, as humans are bound, by the condition of nature, we could hardly ascend to these pure and intellectual ideas through the medium of sensible images, and to judge the divine qualities by their evident acts and exertions. However, the “attributes” of Deity and their operation could form a series of sensible images, which are relatively capable of affecting human imagination [4]. In the scripture, wherever God is represented as appearing or speaking, everything terrible in nature is called up to heighten the awe and solemnity of the divine preference, as “the earth shook” and “the heavens also dropped at the preference of Lord [4].” The formation of dread itself must necessarily follow the idea of a great power, which appears in people’s mind and elicits the terror of sublimity. In this way, the concept of Divinity is thus connected to the intellectual and sensible feelings of mortals, through the sublimity appreciable to humankind.

The “represented space” in America is a similar way to express the evangelical spirit of their European counterparts, whereas the two ways of narration in the pamphlets showcase a surprising similarity to the ways of representation of sublimity proposed by Burke. In America, people started to craft the concept of the “evangelical space,” an imaginary space that emerged at the tumultuous confluence of the popular visual culture. As a constructed concept, evangelical space was the trinity of interaction of the “material space” of churches, art galleries, and mountaintops, the “represented space” evoked in religious practices and their visualization in paintings, as well as the “lived space” of believers preaching Christ’s doctrines that became the narratives of such discourse themselves [9]. Despite the interdependence between the above integral elements, the “represented space” emerged as the most loyal recorder of the development of the evangelical spirit, as it granted the material space spiritual meanings while visualizing the intangible narratives of Christian believers. Still, Conservative Federalists like Washington Allston believed that Americans had to be clearly aware of the sin of pride, as described in the Old Testament, and stay aware that the ultimate antitype in redemptive history was not the American republic, but Jesus Christ, the Word, or Logos incarnate, and Logos is often embedded within the immersive “represented space” to transform people into the living types for Christ [10]. Therefore, the Christian pamphlets have become a typical vessel that links the spiritual experiences created by the textual pattern to the visual perceptions of the natural scenery or human activities. It is worth mentioning that both of the above elements are juxtaposed with descriptive texts. Specifically, illustrative pictures of a grand landscape, which is referred to as the “millennial landscape”, express the expansive scope of omniscient divinity from a panoramic sweep; images of humanistic figural contemplation or pilgrimage, which is called the “homiletic” approach, retrospect the individual religious spirit from a more inward dimension yet pose the God in more detached angle from the world in the very end of the homiletic journeys [11].

Similar to Burke’s representation of sublimity, in the represented space created by the pamphlets, the image of God is infinitely heightened through an immersive panorama of landscape, whereas humankind shows as a microcosm observed from a detached perspective. Such contrast of greatness and smallness coincides with Burke’s way of expression.

2.2 Representation of God's Voice

The divinity in Allston's works of art, which specifically refers to the representation of God's voice, also manifests his inheritance of the European institutional ideas of artistic creation. Impacted by the idea of represented space, Washington Allston is also dedicated to the elucidation of the two ways of expression of Divinity adopted by the pamphlets, which is also an important manifestation of how he complied with the European philosophical concepts and artistic traditions in his artistic creation. In his works, the homiletic experience is expressed through the medium of "prophetic voice," while the immersive power of God is showcased by the ultimate musical and harmonious ambiance. Allston's paintings also display the dual characteristics of the Christian pamphlets, as he demonstrated the Logos from a prophetic voice of individuals as well as from the ultimate musical and harmonious ambiance that is created in his later paintings. As Allston wrote in his *Lectures on Art*, the power of "unsubstantial forms of paintings, and the mysterious harmonies of music" proved that all human beings were really "creatures of the air," immortal spirits whose true home lay beyond the darkened world full of material desire [7]. His paintings are created not only to be viewed but also to be heard, as Allston inputs the prophetic voice as the transparent medium for the voice of God, thus communicating the spirit of the Logos to the audience and activating their internal voices [5]. Since voice could hardly be visualized through images or prints, Allston believes in the power of imagination of the faithful audience of this prophetic voice from the God, who proclaimed that the faithful should "know me by the powers I have given thee." The imagination was then regulated by the indwelling yet transcendent Logos embedded within the image, enabling the individual to perceive the ideal within the "physical assimilates" while discerning the actual existence of "spiritual assimilants," thus becoming capable of possessing the "self-affirming" idea of God [5]. As a proxy of the God's presence, the prophetic voice is often expressed in Allston's paintings through the deliberate gestures and facial expressions of figures, particularly those of God's prophets or apostles, which are epitomized in *Belshazzar's Feast* (1636). Although the prophet is posed in a formidable gesture, with his left arm arisen and face in a didactic expression, the artist chose not to reproduce all the details of the story: the actual script in the "handwriting on the wall" is omitted to emphasize the immediate oral transmission of God through the medium of the prophet. Such arrangement coincides with Jacques Derrida's argument of the speech as a "transparent" medium of meaning, with spoken words possessing the aura of "first symbols" and the written words being "one step removed" for they are "opaque signs of spoken words." In the painting, writing is truly opaque, while God's word, which is manifested in the voice of the prophet, is transparent, just like the light that radiates downward from the upper right corner of the painting [12].

Apart from figural biblical pictures in which Allston conveys the "voice" through the human figures, the artist also used color as a medium for the Logos. While his glazing techniques are praised by contemporary artists Asher B. Durand (1796-1886), as glazing elicits a "concealment of pigment", by which the artist's work would more directly "appeal to the understanding and the feelings [13]." Meanwhile, Allston's adoption of tertiary colors and his mingling of all three primaries are meant to create the Unity as the center of Harmony "of which these three components of light, when joined, may be considered the perfection in the physical world [13]." With color, resembling the light, appearing as an appropriate analog for the Logos, such color is also, due to their transparent immateriality and harmonic unity, analogs to music, which, according to Allston, held dominion over "that region... of the imagination" teeming with visions that "lap the soul in Elysium [13]." Such characteristics reach the apex in Allston's non-biblical landscape paintings. While resembling the millennium landscape in which God's voice is embedded within the universe and nature omnisciently, such atmospheric landscapes convey the Logos in a more implicit yet expressive way primarily through color or light.

3. Denaturing from European Ideals: Washington Allston's Institutional Liberation

3.1 Conflicting Ideals in a Specific Context

There are a variety of conflicts underlying Allston's painting, and one of the most prominent is the conflict between conforming to the European aesthetic standards in term of "general air" and tradition, and the dramatic departure of objects from their "proper place". All these conflicts help establish one of the fundamental principles of Allston's paintings--institutional liberation. It suffices to say that Allston's paintings are featured by dual attitudes toward the very institution of European ideals. While his techniques are highly institutionalized under the influence of traditions, there exists a desire of him to escape from such confinement, which encouraged him to add objects in his *Moonlit Landscape* (1809) at grotesque places.

Moreover, the historical context of Allston's time is worth considering when examining this question: soon after Allston had produced this painting, Ralph Waldo Emerson published his famous essay *Nature*, in which he boldly asked, "Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion of revelation to us and not the history of theirs [14]?" This essay officially marked the attempts of the American romantics to dispel the borrowed institution never really belonging to them after successfully displacing revolutionary violence with the Enlightenment ideals that they shared with European romanticism [15].

3.2 Creation of Identity

By denying the European tradition while promoting an "original relation to the universe," American romantics have embarked on an arduous way in search of their original identity comparable with the European counterparts in the world. Such culture featured by comparable collectiveness is regarded as a cloud gathering all of the self-consciousness of individuals constructed by refusing to abide by any principle of association other than the singularity of the private sphere [15].

In this regard, the search of a collective identity is tantamount to the sum of self-reflection of individuals' own originality, which serves as a perfect explanation for the conflicting nature of Allston's painting as he appears as a middle-ground figure of the era of "conforming" and later American romantic era of identity creation. Admittedly, while European institutions have shaped his painting styles, the aforementioned departure from the proper place, or the "grotesqueness" of placement of objects in his paintings, presents the trace of the artist's self-probation and the evidence of his desire of being liberated from the institutional determination.

With this layer of meaning granted to his paintings, some details of the paintings are worth reexamining, as it would be plausible to grant them more symbolic meanings. In *Moonlit Landscape* (1809), with the lake serving as a receiver of nature while at the same time displaying the most authentic feature of it by reflecting the natural scenes, the natural objects surround the lake and form a circular shape, which creates the impression of a mirror with a round shape and reflective feature. In other words, the lake acts as the mirror of the natural world: the clouds are fleeting and showcasing their ever-changing charm of light and shadow, the trees are swaying in the wind, the lake always loyally rewrites outside happening in nature, regardless of the cycle of clouds coming and leaving, as well as trees growing and withering. Simultaneously, upon the meditative nature of the lake as a mirror, the appearance of human figures is still worth examining: humans appear in a diminished scale on the scene, yet they are not de-centered, as they remain at the focal point of the painting, which suggests that human appears to be in the cycle while still stays independent from the cycle as a witness. In this way, Allston conveys his own contemplation of the universe outside the conventional lens of European ideologies, while showcasing his understandings of humans and their relationship with the nature on the canvas. In Allston's landscape paintings, it seems to be a shared scheme that the lake serving as a mirror that reflects the natural scenes; the dead tree is also imagery that frequently shows up in his works, which is mainly posed aside sprinkled living trees. In Allston's *Italian Landscape* (1814), while the lake still serving as a mirror reflecting the surrounding scenes,

the artist more explicitly visualizes the cycle of life and death, as well as the circular nature of history. The contrast between the dilapidated remnants of architecture in the foreground and the lively town in the back, along with the juxtaposition of living and dead trees, together imply the Romantic thoughts concerning the cycle of history and time. As for humans in this painting, they appear as figures encompassed by the nature while being occupied by their own affairs, are thus granted the symbolic meaning as careless observers of the aforementioned cycle: the history has completed a cycle without an attentive glimpse, while the humans dually stay as subordinate subjects and independent observers of the time centrifuge. In the painting, the woman at the focal point casually stands on the ground, gazing forward, with the light opportunely shed on her body, which suggests the reflective selves of humans: despite its diminished scale, it is still the center (in opposed to being de-centered) of the contemplative universe.

3.3 The Relationship between Humans and Nature

Additionally, the aforementioned relationship between humans and the universe composed by Allston roots from the European conventions. Such contemplation could be dated back to Northern Renaissance (late 15th to early 16th century) when Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1525-1569) portrayed human figures in a diminished scale in his series paintings of four seasons. In his paintings, he depicted such relationship as reciprocal, yet humans still take a subordinate role under the sway of the formidable nature: while humans enjoy the fruits and crops offered by the nature in *The Harvest* (1565), the carefully crafted sea-sailing vessel is so easily pushed to the shore by the waves and tempest in *The Gloomy Day* (1565). Slightly differently, *The Hunters in the Snow* (1565) provides a perspective for the dual relationship between humans and nature: in the snowy village, a hole has been opened in the ice, but people who are enjoying skating fail to predict the imminent peril [16]. In later England, the contemplation over the relationship between men and the nature focused on the very issue of land and “land improvement.” Although the enclosure of the wasteland became a significant part of the entire plan of improvement in that era, thoughts casting critique on this very action came to their emergence. While William Wordsworth called for an ameliorative version of improvement, since humans were thought to be dislocated into a vocabulary of natural waste with the original sublimity of the nature becoming deteriorated [17], William Blake, based on communitarian traditions and artisanal conceptions of human labor, poetically revealed the human labor being an indispensable part of nature. As he boldly claims, “Where Man is Not, Nature is Barren.” Allston’s version of the human relationship with nature could still be believed to be derived from its European precedents as he posed human figures as independent observers of nature when practicing self-retrospection. Although different generation’s conceptions of the Land appear to be in constant changes as humans are continuously developing new ways of coexistence with nature with the advancement of technologies and the maturation of people’s understandings of natural science, nature has always remained as a major source of meditation for thinkers. Indeed, people’s focus has been shifting from the way of coexistence with the sublime and formidable nature to the perception regarding the nature as a mirror for self-contemplation and self-reflection when viewing the nature. As people gradually unveil the enigmatic mist over the nature with their exploration going in-depth, they begin to value “self” increasingly in a higher position, especially when it is juxtaposed with nature. After all, the self as an independent observer of the historical cycle in Allston paintings proves to be not only the contingent consequence of the transition to American Romanticism but also an inevitable result of the structural trend and progressive historical development.

3.4 Departure from Sublimity

Although Allston has expressed Logos in a way in compliance with the European probation of sublimity and divinity, the artistic had made innovations in his expression by differing it from the conventional representation of the very concept proposed by Burke. As mentioned above, Burke’s customary way to heighten the sense of sublimity is through contrast, under which humans always maintain an inferior role. In terms of voice, such contrast is always employed through the amplified

voice and the sense of terror superior to the enjoyment brought by such voice. However, in Allston's paintings, the voice is deemed as a direct expression of the Divinity rather than a representation of it that humankind themselves need to construe with their reasons or sensible feelings. In other words, the Divinity could be construed through humans' direct interaction to the God established by a prophet as a proxy, rather than through an active transcoding process entirely operated by humans to translate the Logos to some appreciable information. Meanwhile, Allston's usage of color also displays an attitude differing to European conventional representation of sublimity, as Allston is inclined to employ colors deemed to stimulate enjoyment rather than terror regarded by Burke. However, the impact of European ideals could be still manifested from Allston's paintings, especially from his *Miriam the Prophetess Sing Her Song of Triumph on the Destruction of Pharaoh and His Host in the Red Sea* (1821). While Burke proposed that those colors that are "soft or cheerful are unfit to produce grand images" and praised the usage of "dark and gloomy" color to produce the sublime and solemnity, a lineage to Burke's ways of representation, despite visible departure, could be witnessed from Allston's paintings, as he mixed dark blue and black and bright yellow to convey a sense of cheerfulness under the gloomy solemnity [4]. The lighting effect rendered by such a juxtaposition of colors is deliberately shed on the Prophetess's face, the proxy of God's voice. While such coloring effect represents Allston's understanding of sublime during God's presence, the details of the figure are also worth reexamining, as they showcase a direct lineage to the aforementioned "general air". The costume of the Prophetess is rendered in the taste of great "generality" as it clearly displays Roman and Greek lineage. Despite its neoclassical sense compared to the costume in Allston's *Beatrice* (1816-1819), the former still displays a water drapery effect as the clothes flow in the air. The S-curve formed by the cloak also reminds the audience of the time of ancient.

Allston's departure from Burke's representation of sublimity could come from the subtle change of the relative position of, and the relationship between humankind and God (and the sublime related to it). In Allston and his contemporaries' representation and understanding, humankind are becoming no longer a subject that could easily be swayed by "terror" in the face of God and sublime due to its insignificance; rather, it is gradually becoming able to maintain a status independent from the sublime. This point would be made clearer in later paragraphs.

4. Conclusion

Washington Allston appears as a middle ground figure in the very timeframe in the American art history during the transition from subject to European ideals to the establishment of self-consciousness during the American Romanticism. Due to the special era he lived in, his artworks showcase dual attitudes towards the European institutions: although his paintings maintain a strong reliance on European artistic techniques and philosophical enquiry, he has always been obtaining a desire for emancipation from the institutional confinements and probing for innovations of new ways of viewing the world, both as God's proxy and the world itself. In his works, humans no longer stay as an insignificant subject to the God who is easily manipulated by the sublimity brought by humans' tininess but becomes an independent observer of the world with higher status in the face of solemnity. Such dual attitudes of Washington Allston also provide a lens for us to understand the special era of identity probation for American artists individually as well as for the entire American nation collectively.

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