

Language and poetics of space: political aspects of the sublime in Nikolaj Karamzin's texts

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Abstract:

The sublime in Nikolaj Karamzin's texts was regarded by most scientists mainly from an aesthetical point of view. However, this article shows the relation between the sublime and the political dimension in Karamzin's short texts. The sublime is understood in the sense of the aesthetics of Edmund Burke but also refers to the tradition of the «imperial sublime» in Russian poetry conceptualized by Harsha Ram. Karamzin's odes relate to this tradition. The problematic of the sublime in Karamzin's writings is regarded in relation to the poetics of space, interrelations of subjects (countries), language and time. Specific attention is paid to its links with the Russian Empire. The article argues that the sublime concerns not only landscapes, but is connected with ideas about government, history and tradition. It demonstrates that the sublime in Karamzin's texts has both positive and negative potential that is expressed on various levels, including nature, time, government and acting on the political stage.

Key words: the sublime, language, politics, poetics of space, nature, Russia, Empire, nation, subject, power, time, history, N. Karamzin

The category of the sublime in Nikolaj Karamzin's texts has already been an object of interest for scientists, preeminently, from the aesthetical point of view and concerning his literary landscapes¹. However, this article aims to show the sublime is also related to a political dimension, that is, the category of the sublime is present in his ideas about government, history, time, language or the actors (countries) on the political stage. The presence (or absence, which is also meaningful) of the sublime in the depictions of landscapes is related to subject-power relations. What is more, the sublime may have a positive or negative potential. Thus, in this article the problematics of the sublime in Karamzin's writings will be regarded in relation to the poetics of space, interrelations of subjects (countries) and time, which, finally, is related to the «national» question, or more exactly, to «imagining» some aspects of the Russian nation that are very intimately connected to the Empire. This link with the Empire will be specifically accentuated. The article will focus on Karamzin's short opuses: the odes, *Historical Eulogy to Catherine II* [*Istoričeskoe poxval'noe slovo Ekaterine II*] (1801) and small prosaic works, – leaving aside the *History of the Russian State* [*Istorija gosudarstva Rossijskogo*] (1816-1826) and touching only one aspect in the *Letters of a Russian Traveler*.

The sublime and its role in imagining the nation in one way or another overlaps with the question of language. Thus, Karamzin's literary language in the first half of the 19th century was at the centre of discussions of its «cosmopolitan» vs «national» nature. The šiškovists who put the sign of equality between the national and the Church Slavonic blamed Karamzin's language for not being national, though later it was his «cosmopolitan» language that was perceived as the national language². Con-

¹ Even though she does not problematize the category, Natal'ja Kočetkova connects it with the emergence of pre-romantic aesthetics in Russian literature, which is expressed in literary landscapes in Ossian or Jung like style with such aspects as «wild cliffs, violent streams» (Kočetkova 1986, p. 89), etc. As an example of a non-idyllic landscape she comments Karamzin's episode from the *Letters of a Russian Traveler* [*Pis'ma russkogo putešestvennika*] (1791-1792) about Grindelwald Glacier (*ibid.*, p. 90). Vadim Vacuro analyzes the depiction of nature and plot peculiarities in Karamzin's *Island of the Bornholm* [*Ostrov Borngol'm*] (1793) and traces its links with European «gothic literature» or the novel of «mysteries and horrors» that, in turn, was influenced by Burke's aesthetics and his concept of the sublime where «suffering and its premonition – fear and horror are the stimulus and source of aesthetic feeling» (Vacuro 1969, p. 193). The sublime is problematized by Vladimir Bilenkin, who explores «Karamzin's relation to the aesthetics of the sublime by investigating its application to literary landscape in his *Letters of a Russian Traveler*» (Bilenkin 1998, p. 606). He states closeness of the sublime in depiction of some natural scenes in Switzerland (for example, Wengernalp mountain scene) to Kant's conception of the sublime noting the triumph of human reason and of «transcendental self» (*ibid.*, p. 613). However Andreas Schönle doesn't agree with this interpretation stating, on the contrary, that in the interpreted passage the traveler doesn't «reach autonomy», but fully submits himself to the power of impressions and, what is more, the sublime here is underpinned with religious overtones, which brings it closer to Burke and not to Kant (Schönle 2007, p. 230).

² Lotman, Uspenskij 1997, p. 541-564 et Uspenskij 1985, p. 3-70.

tributing to this discussion was Karamzin's refusal or neutrallisation of the hierarchy of the three styles and by the same token – of the opposition of the high and the low³. In particular, in his poetry Karamzin abandons the high «soaring» style⁴ that is sublime by its nature. Regarding Karamzin's sentimental prose, the fact that all characters use the same neutral middle style language is interpreted by Jean Breuillard not only as a linguistic matter. He makes an observation that behind it lays the whole complex of ideas of the Enlightenment, e.g. about equality of all people in spite of their social conditions; faith in free exchange, commerce and dialogue, which, in turn, are fleshed out in the image of the sentimentalist faubourg⁵. Developing Breuillard's thought we can say that the correlation between this set of ideas and the middle style can be related to some extent to the idea of what we now call a modern nation. However the sublime lexis that is present in all Karamzin's works is also not only the simple stylistic marker, as it seems, but indicates some other aspects of imagining the nation as well.

In the article the sublime will be understood in the sense Edmund Burke used it in his aesthetics. The sources of the sublime are not only objects in nature that fall into the categories of «greatness», «infinity», and «uniformity» and cause reactions varying from astonishment to less powerful emotions such as «admiration», «reverence», and «respect», and are based on the ideas of «strength, violence, pain, and terror»⁶. Human virtues, institutions, governments, political authority can be endowed with sublimity and be an important source of «strengthening» for the community, because they are based on a salutary «reverential fear»⁷. Anyway, as Burke says: «I know of nothing sublime which is not some modification of power», – and that experience of the sublime «robs the mind of all its power»⁸. Thus, the most characteristic trait of the sublime is that it is always related to power. In Karamzin's writings the Burkean sublime is important when it concerns the character of government, tradition, history, and nature in relation to people and its effects on society⁹.

On the other hand, it is important to note that Karamzin's texts may be looked at through the lens of an already existing tradition of the Russian «imperial sublime» that was an inseparable part of the genre of the 18th century ode. Karamzin himself composed a few odes; *Historical Eulogy to Catherine II*, in turn, approximates odes in its composition and

³ Lotman 1966, p. 28-29.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Breuillard 1999, p. 28-31.

⁶ Burke 1844, p. 81.

⁷ Wood 2009, p. 184.

⁸ Burke 1844, p. 72.

⁹ The question of direct influence won't be considered here. Burke will be used rather as an important theoretical base. For a discussion of different theories of the sublime cf. Schönle 1998 and Laku-Labart 2009.

stylistics, where he deals with imperial power / lyrical subject / space relationships. More exactly, as it will be shown, the tradition of the «imperial sublime» weakens in his odes. *Imperial sublime* is a term offered by Harsha Ram to name the tradition of relating the theme of the Empire in Russian poetry with questions of «language, genre, style, and lyric subjectivity» and their «connection, within an autocratic state, between authority and authorship»¹⁰. The sublime in Ram's work is a linking element between lyrical subjectivity and the imperial power of the state. The sublime is mainly conceptualized as a mixed emotion of horror and delight in the lyrical subject's response to the «meeting» with the Empire which is manifested in its military and political power, or as a figure of the monarch, etc. Thus, it appears to be not only as an aesthetic category but is also intrinsically linked to power. Although the category of the sublime was never conceptualized in Russia as in the West, however, to his opinion, it occupied «a constitutive place in Russian culture»¹¹.

THE SUBLIME AND IMPERIAL SPACE

Ram observes, that specific poetics of odic space makes the experience of the sublime possible: a vertical axis associated with both lyrical and imperial power, which is stronger than the poet, is always balanced by a horizontal axis of a vast imperial space¹². In the Russian odic tradition the hugeness of Empire's space was depicted as sublime. For example, in the odes of Mixail Lomonosov space functions as a horizontal axis balancing the vertical one – that is lyrical afflatus or «vertigo» of a poet – and presents a «geographical, political and cosmic panorama»¹³. If in his odes space is constructed as a «vast geography, political and cosmic, to be surveyed» and the images were «fundamentally spectacular»¹⁴, in Karamzin's odes the imperial space is presented quite modestly. One cannot find vast elaborate panorama; instead, short indications of the Empire's boundaries are present. The lyrical subject in the ode «On the Loyalty Oath to Paul I» [*Oda na slučaj prisjagi moskovskix žitelej Pavlu Pervomu*] (1796) invites the monarch to «come through Russian areas / From the beautiful shores of the Neva / Until Ket and distant Obi», where he will see «among Siberian ice / Meadows covered with flowers»¹⁵. In the ode «On the Solemn Coronation of Alexander I» [*Na toržestvennoe koronovanie ego imperatorskogo veličestva Aleksandra I*] (1801) the lyrical

¹⁰ Ram 2003, p. 4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Karamzin 1966, p. 188. If not indicated otherwise, the translation hereinafter is mine.

subject exclaims seeing that with the coming of Alexander I, Russia «[f]rom the gates of winter, ices of Kamchatka, / Till the beautiful shores of the Neva, / Till the countries of Colchis and of the Black see, / In all its vastness / Shines... with happiness of people!»¹⁶. Here delight or astonishment at the vastness and greatness of the space of the Empire is absent. Instead, the poet is delighted seeing happiness of people contained in vast space.

Further, the sublimity of nature gives place to its beauty. Karamzin describes the beautiful nature of the Empire, the coming of spring and compares the reign of Alexander I with the coming of Astraea. Vera Proskurina notices that Karamzin is one of the last poets of the 18th century to use traditional myth of the coming of the age of Astraea, or paradise, to describe the ascendance of the monarch to the throne. She states that Karamzin depicted not the abstract paradise but paradise, colored in sentimental-melancholic tones¹⁷. To describe the Empire, Karamzin uses the image of a nice garden planted by the monarch, a representation that was also a traditional utopist motive in the 18th century Russia¹⁸.

It is important to note that the monarchs, Paul I and Alexander I, are not endowed with characteristics of «dread majesty»¹⁹ that is the expression of the sublimity; the mind of the lyrical subject viewing them is not robbed of its powers. The monarch is «dreadful only to the wicked ones» («On the Loyalty Oath to Paul I»)²⁰, or «keeps thunders»²¹ for his enemies («On Ascendance to the Throne of Alexander I» [*Ego imperatorskomu veličestvu Aleksandru I*], 1801). Contrary to the odes of Lomonosov, where the poet's submission to «lyrical afflatus» is homologous to submission to autocratic power²², here the poet is relatively free from autocratic power and obeys only his «heart», which is his «Apollonius» («On the Solemn Coronation of Alexander I»)²³. It is up to him, whether he will praise the monarch or not. And it is not fear that is accentuated, but the topos of love between the monarch and his subjects; hence the sublime qualities of the emperors are diminished.

In *Historical Eulogy to Catherine II*, which due to its genre resembles an ode, though it is written in prose, one can find the usual characteristic relation of the lyrical subject to the space of the Empire, which marks the space of the Empire as the source of the sublime. Karamzin states that the «hugeness» of the Empire is difficult to conceive: «I can hardly imag-

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

¹⁷ Proskurina 2006, p. 102.

¹⁸ Baehr 1991, p. 65.

¹⁹ Burke 1844, p. 85.

²⁰ Karamzin 1966, p. 185.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

²² Ram 2003, p. 68.

²³ Karamzin 1966, p. 269.

ine this almost unimaginable space»²⁴. In the first paragraph of the *Eulogy* he marks distant geographical «coordinates» of the imperial space that are covered, in turn, by a metaphorical presence of the Empress. The author says that everybody adored Catherine,

«[...] and those who hide in the darkness of the distance – under the shadow of the snowy Caucasus, or beyond eternal ices of deserted Siberia – who have never seen a salutary image of the Immortal [...]; and even for them She was a God, though invisible, but beneficial»²⁵.

The vertical axis of the Caucasus is balanced by the horizontal axis of deserted Siberia. «Darkness of distance» and the «shadow» symbolize the uncertainty of boundaries, their tendency to expand because «distance» [*otdalenie*] enters the same associative line as the receding line of the horizon that moves away while the gaze of the observer tries to seize it. The whole space is marked with the invisible presence of Catherine II, the «goddess»²⁶. Thus, the metaphorically expanding boundaries of space homologous to the presence of the «goddess» construct its sublimity.

However Karamzin again prefers to see the space of the sublime and the «unimaginable» Empire as being «structured»:

«The monarchess ordered, and Russia hitherto incommensurable in its parts similar to a wild work of Nature or a blind accident, took the shape of harmonic measure, like a perfect work of art; parts became equal to one another, and each “Gubernia” was limited to its own most convenient space»²⁷.

«Harmonic measure» correlates with the image of the Empire as a garden in his odes. Thus, structured space and beautiful nature is preferable to sublime nature and to the «unimaginable» space of the Empire.

Nature in the *Eulogy* appears to have a correlation with the types of government. This way, the sublime and wild nature correlates with the republican government or, in Karamzin's words, with «wild republican independence»²⁸. Karamzin says that this type of government is perfectly suited to places such as «snowy Alpine giant mountains, where between sharp granites and deep precipices, because of the eternal horrors of nature, passions keep silence in the cold soul of the people»²⁹. The sublimity of «icy» and «deserted» Siberia also corresponds to its wild peoples. Here we see the common aspect of sublimity pertaining both to «wild independence» and «wild people» expressed in sublime nature. And contrary to the

²⁴ Karamzin 1820, p. 85.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

horrors of nature the prosperous and harmonious society under autocratic rule is compared to a «picture pleasant to the eye with its various plays of colors» («On the Solemn Coronation of Alexander I»)³⁰.

VOLGA AS THE IMPERIAL RIVER

The symbol of Imperial Russia is the Volga in a cognominal poem. It has already been noted that the river was a widespread element of landscape in the odes of the 18th century and was «a necessary part of odic imperial discourse that mythologized activity of the Russian monarchs and the space entrusted to them»³¹. Christopher Ely marks that the Volga in poems by Karamzin, Sumarokov and Dmitriev devoted to this river is placed «on the global stage as a geographical monument of international importance»³². Being a symbol of imperial space, it is depicted as a sublime object. The lyrical subject addresses the Volga as a monarch: «[...] shall I dear on a week lira / To praise You, oh Volga»³³. The river is compared to a «divinity»; its imperial international character is underscored by the fact that various nations live peacefully [*v tišine*] on its banks³⁴. The parallel can be found in *Eulogy* and in other odes where different nations peacefully live under the rule of the monarch. Apart from the quiet and calm aspects of the river, its greatness and hence sublimity is stated preeminently in the image of the tempest: «terrible noise, rampant roar», «vortices»³⁵. The lyrical hero had narrowly escaped death in the waters of the furious river in his childhood. The river is depicted as both great and destructive. This twofold quality of the sublime can be seen clearly in *Poor Liza* [*Bednaja Liza*] (1792), in greatness («golden cupolas»³⁶) and at the same time, the destructive force of Moscow (the ruins of Simonov monastery).

³⁰ Karamzin 1966, p. 266.

³¹ Petrov 2003, p. 31.

³² Ely 2002, p. 35.

³³ Karamzin 1966, p. 118.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

³⁶ Karamzin 1964, vol. 1, p. 366.

SUBLIMITY AS A LINK UNITING MOSCOW, PARIS AND LONDON

The parallel between the imperial dimension of Russia and the sublime depiction of Moscow in *Poor Liza* was noticed by A. Schönle. Imperial Moscow and the enlightened politics of Catherine II, as he observes, is the reason of the Simonov monastery's decay and hence of its ruins that symbolize the national past that falls into the aesthetics of the picturesque. Ruins are interpreted by him as a sign of modernity and rupture with the past. Sublimity refers to the problem of conceiving wholeness and pertains to the field of reactions of the subject. In his opinion, when experiencing the sublime, the storyteller cannot make «axiological judgments»³⁷ and that means that finally the storyteller cannot decide whose side he should take, the «Ancient» or the «New» Russia's, which constitutes the core of the problem of modernity³⁸. However, if sublimity were taken out of the context of modernity, interesting correlations would appear in the depiction of Moscow, on the one hand, and Paris and London, on the other hand, which also appear to be imperial and sublime cities in the *Letters of a Russian Traveler*.

Such aspects of Moscow as its «hugeness» –

«[...] the terrible mass of houses [*užasnaja gromada domov*] and churches which strike one's eyes in the form of a *majestic amphitheater*: a marvelous picture, especially when the sun is shining on [...] the countless golden cupolas, on the countless crosses rising up to the sky!»³⁹,

– and avarice:

«[...] beyond [meadows], over yellow sands flows the clear river [...] gurgling under the rudders of heavily-laden barges which sail from the most bountiful areas of the Russian Empire and supply ravenous Moscow with grain»⁴⁰,

find parallels in the depiction of London and Paris.

When Karamzin with his fellow travelers come closer to Paris, he sees a city and stares at its «immense mass of houses» [*neobozrimaja gromada zdaniij*], and their gaze «is lost in their [houses] dense shadows»⁴¹. Later when the traveler enters Paris he is overwhelmed with various im-

³⁷ Schönle 2003, p. 129.

³⁸ A different interpretation of the ruin in Karamzin's works is offered by Andrew Kahn, who, contrary to Schönle, underscores similarities in understanding ruins by Karamzin and Burke, in whose opinion they are the source of the sublime, and states that ruins in their texts function in a positive way, that is, they are associated «with human agency at work in religious and political causes» and are important to history (cf. Kahn 2003, p. 541-543).

³⁹ Proffer (ed.), 1969, p. 53.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Karamzin 1964, vol. 1, p. 366.

pressions: «This indescribable noise, this wonderful variety of things [...], this exceptional liveliness in people led [him] to a kind of amazement», and for this reason he felt like he was a «tiny grain of sand» in the «terrible abyss» [*užasna pučina*]⁴². Approaching London, the traveler sees a vast panorama of the city with its «countless ship masts»⁴³ on the Thames. He is so perplexed by the view of «the majestic city, its surroundings and big road» that he «forgets everything» and if not for his friends he «would have stayed alone on the hill and would have gone to London on foot»⁴⁴. In both cases, Karamzin perceives the city as a sublime phenomenon that overwhelms him by its «hugeness», «grandeur» and acoustic and visual impressions. The «immense mass of houses», «countless ship masts» may have a «striking effect» because of the «greatness of dimension», vastness or quantity⁴⁵. Karamzin perceives both cities as a sublime phenomenon not only from an aesthetical point of view. The political element is also present: Karamzin is excited by the idea of London as «the center of a world trade» and that Paris «for many ages was an example for the whole of Europe» and its name «is pronounced with awe» in the whole world⁴⁶, both being among the most influential cities of that time in a cultural and political sense. Their «majesty», «grandeur», the feeling of being lost in them correspond to the «terrible mass of houses» in Moscow.

The sublime «terribleness» of Moscow through the «golden cupolas» is semantically connected to Moscow's supply in grain from «the most bountiful areas» of the Empire. Shining «golden cupolas», in turn, appear to have a correlation with the shine of the enormous wealth, «diamonds», etc., of Palais Royal which were brought from India and America and «dazzled» the traveler so that at one moment the traveler even «feels dizzy»⁴⁷. Still, if in the case of London and Paris their sublime outlook is connected mainly with surprise, delight and they do not threaten the traveler, in the case of Moscow, the sublime, further connected with melancholy, contains a destructive potential that is emblemized in ruins and is expressed in tears of the storyteller crying over the past times and death of Liza. Thus, semantically, the sublimity of Moscow, London and Paris conveys similar intertextual characteristics, due to their link with the Empire.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 367.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 520.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 519.

⁴⁵ Burke 1844, p. 91.

⁴⁶ Karamzin 1964, vol. 1, p. 366.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 369.

THE SUBLIME ON THE POLITICAL AREA

In Karamzin's political and publicist writings, Russia, Great Britain and France are also endowed with sublimity which is closely connected with their imperial outlook on the worldwide political arena. The sublime aspect of Russia is expressed mainly in characteristics such as «terrible» [*užasnyj*], marking its ability to cause terror to other countries thus keeping others in their «place», or metaphorically subjugating them. For example, in the political world the proximity or neighborhood of Russia to other countries is perceived by these other countries as «terrifying» [*užasnoe*]: «The Italian war has proved to the world that Colossus of Russia is awful not only to its neighbors, but that its hand can reach and smash enemies far off»⁴⁸. Awfulness is directly tied to greatness: «[...] never before its greatness has been felt so vividly in all the countries» («Pleasing Prospects, Hopes and Desires of Our Time» [*Prijatnye vidy, nadeždy i želaniya nynješnego vremeni*], 1802)⁴⁹. Vladimir Dal' defines greatness [*velikij*] as «an exceeding common measure; in comparison with others vast, big»⁵⁰. So that Russia, metaphorically «exceeding» its frontiers, does not «semantically» fit its own boundaries. The word *colossus*, usually related to Empires, implicates their greatness and, hence, a reaction of fear in the subjects who «meet» them.

There is one interesting intertextual parallel between the sublime «awfulness» of Russia and that of France. As the presence of Russia might be felt as menacing to Europe, so is the proximity of France in relation to England, which is perceived by England as «awful». Karamzin cites William Windham, who says that «Colossus of France is awful»⁵¹. Windham also compares France to a «horrible ghost» that appears «everywhere» to Englishmen with its «horrors» and he expresses regret over the fact that England gave to France its «distant asylums: the Cape of Good Hope, Essequibo, Demerara, Curacao», to such a degree that he «resigns in the feeling of [their] impuissance»⁵². As in the case of Russia's proximity to its neighbors, France's «ghost» is felt equally «horrible» and, because of its supernatural power, the «ghost» can take more colonies away from Britain. Thus, the category of the sublime here is closely related to imperial aspects of both Russia and France. Metaphorically, their «presence» can be felt in the entire world: the French «ghost» is «everywhere», including in distant colonies; Russia's greatness is felt in all «lands». Similarly to the odes, where the lyric hero might be rendered «powerless» at the sight of imperial authority, in this case the country, upon facing the greatness of

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 271.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Dal' 1862-1866 [1989, vol. 1, p. 175].

⁵¹ *Vestnik Evropy*, 1803, № 13, p. 77.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 1802, № 12, p. 350.

the other and feeling fearful of it, shares a common reaction to the object of great dimensions as seen in Burke's aesthetics.

It seems that the sublime aspect of Russia expressed as «awfulness» in Karamzin's political articles is widely borrowed from Russian odes, where Russia's «awfulness» is always a positive aspect when it refers to its political might. For example, in the ode of Lomonosov it may be observed: «A Hero told to Hero: / "Not in vain did we toil, [...] so that all the world fears of Rossians. / We broadened our frontiers" [...]» («On the Taking of Khotin» [*Oda na vzjatje Xotina*], 1739)⁵³.

However, in some cases sublimity may draw closer to the negative pole in characteristics of Russia. In *Marfa the Mayoress, or the Subjugation of Novgorod* [*Marfa-Posadnica, ili pokorenje Novgoroda*] (1802), in the speech of Xolmskij, the messenger of Ioann, Novgorodians are credited with «awfulness» that pertains to the category of the sublime twice. In one instant, «awfulness» is associated with the republican government, «wildness» and love of freedom. In another instant, it is paralleled to «wise people» and the «salutary power of the one»⁵⁴. It resembles the link made between the republic government and sublime (wild and horrific) nature in the *Eulogy*. The only difference being that in *Marfa the Mayoress* there is no reference to nature. Appealing to Novgorodians, Xolmskij says that previously, ancestors of Novgorodians, because of their love of freedom, were victims of their «fierce [*ljutyj*] neighbors» and «even more fierce internecine war» [*ešče ljutejšaja meždusobica*], and were «awful only to themselves and unhappy in the eyes of neighbors», but «under the sovereign hand of the Varangian hero they became the horror and envy of other people [...] and hardly believed in their greatness»⁵⁵. Here clearly «awfulness» and, hence, the sublime, is endowed with radically opposite meanings. Awful sublimity characterizes the government of «sovereign hand» that is based on order and, hence, is great. However, «awful freedom» is semantically close to «wild people»⁵⁶ and to animality – one of the closest synonyms of «fierce» [*ljutyj*], as it is indicated in the dictionary composed by Dal', is «beastly» [*zverskij*]⁵⁷. As Burke says, animals that can cause harm are also a source of sublime⁵⁸. Thus, the autocratic power for Russia appears to be necessarily sublime, because «salutary fear»⁵⁹ caused by it, has a potential to keep order, while the «internecine war» caused by the state of freedom approaches to negative sublime.

⁵³ Lomonosov 1986, p. 65.

⁵⁴ Karamzin 1964, vol. 1, p. 683.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Dal' 1862-1866 [1989, vol. 2, p. 285].

⁵⁸ Burke 1844, p. 82.

⁵⁹ Karamzin 1811 [1991, p. 102].

SUBLIMITY OF TIME

Sublimity in Karamzin's writings is also connected with time. In the poem «Volga» (1793), the river, though it is great, in turn, submits itself to the destroying effect of time flow. The lyrical subject encourages the river to flow, but warns of the «sad fate», stating that it won't be able to escape: «a hand of time» will «exhaust its gulf», but before this would happen, many people on its banks «will have turned to dust»⁶⁰. This melancholic note sounds very similar to Deržavin's motif of the power and sublimity of time to which even monarchs and empires submit⁶¹. On the one hand, time is destructive but on the other hand, when time is understood as history or an age-long governmental tradition acquiring sublimity due to the rush of times and infinity, it has the capacity of uniting or keeping order in a nation.

In the *Eulogy* history appears as a sublime force during which an age-old order is established. In Russia's case such order is, of course, autocracy. Submission (and respect towards it) becomes a part of patriotic education in Karamzin's understanding. The fact that, according to Karamazin, this order is best suited to Russia and traditions must be fully respected, was noticed by scientists many times⁶². But in the *Eulogy*, autocracy is an order related directly with sublimity. By noting this point, Karamzin is very close to Burke. Neal Wood writes that though Burke did not mention it directly the sublime is also connected with the political in the following way: «a long continuity of hereditary monarchs: institutions and procedures that have survived from time immemorial, the age-old existence of a particular form of government»⁶³. It constitutes an example of the «artificial infinity»⁶⁴ which causes reverence and respect in citizens⁶⁵. For example, the senate established by Alexander I, is called the «supreme place of the Empire» that «a Russian venerates in his soul»⁶⁶.

Karamzin writes that history, «a mirror of ages [...], presents us a play of mysterious Fate: diverse and sublime sight!»⁶⁷. Mostly he is attracted by the «appearance of great souls, half-gods of the mankind» that «make a chain in immensity [*nebozrimest'*] of ages, give hand to each other, and their life is a History of nations»⁶⁸. Namely, Peter I and Catherine II are a part of this chain. Their sublimity is also stressed by their analogy with Roman heroes and divinities. The institution of autocracy is

⁶⁰ Karamzin 1966, p. 120.

⁶¹ Ram 2003, p. 89.

⁶² Black 1975, p. 15.

⁶³ Wood 2009, p. 186.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁶⁶ *Vestnik Evropy*, 1802, № 19, p. 234.

⁶⁷ Karamzin 1820, p. 6.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

sublime because the «immeasurable Empire» should be governed with its help, and such an enterprise is compared to the «[c]reative will that governs the universe»⁶⁹. Therefore, the monarch is conceptualized as a «divinity», whose activity is difficult to understand and is mysterious in its attempt «to embrace the whole» [*celoe*]⁷⁰.

CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

To sum up, it has been shown that the category of the sublime in Karamzin's short opuses is not only an aesthetical category; it is closely related to a political dimension, that is, to accentuating the imperial «side» of Russia. The sublime carries an ambivalent meaning: it may have both a positive and negative (destructive) potential. Sublimity is expressed as greatness and the «awfulness» of Russia on the political arena is endowed with a positive meaning. However, the sublimity of Moscow as an imperial city in *Poor Liza*, which is similar to London and Paris, threatens Russia's «most bountiful areas». The Volga is a majestic imperial river; however, a lyrical hero just escapes death in its waves. The sublime flow of time is destructive in regard of the Volga itself, yet perceived as history, providence and the time sanction the institute of autocracy formed by tradition. Being sublime and causing «reverential fear» it strengthens the unity of nation. Further, the «negative» sublimity of the republican government underscored by wild and sublime nature is opposed to sublime greatness of autocracy. However, in the odes the preference is clearly given to beautiful nature and the image of the Empire as a garden instead of using more traditional images of sublime nature for the odes; and the lyrical subject is to a great degree free from the autocratic power.

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⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

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