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The child and the sublime.

In the 19th century, The Sublime was a universally known and important concept, often linked to the desire for the infinite, which manifests itself in experiencing the sublime nature. This is widely known through western romantic literature. The concept is ancient: its originator, Longinus, used it chiefly as a concept for oratory. The origin of the word (sublime) is said to be: latin: sub (up under) limen: upper part of a door frame. The semantics are obvious. There is a danger of hitting one's head.

Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson has written extensively on The Sublime. Svein's article makes the significant point that in texts dealing with the sublime a certain discourse or significant way of expression may be found. To this I wish to add the hypothesis that a growing emphasis on emotional life and increasing individualism might be added to the increased momentum of The Sublime in the 19th century. An added problem is that we do no longer belong solely in our own sphere of experience when we feel we can think outside its borders. The celebration inherent in expanding beyond that sphere corresponds with the melancholy of no longer belonging to the tangible world.

In the 19th century the child is in many ways given the role of a genius who has access to the divine and nature. Examples of this will be given. Nina Christensen's writing on the subject will also be discussed. As access to the divine and nature is also the domain of the poet, or the creative spirit wherever it may appear, a wide selection of 19th century text can show a link between the child and the poet. A clear example of that can be found in Icelander Grímur Thomsen's review of H.C. Andersen. He published an article in Danish on H.C.Andersen's work in 1855 and Andersen praised Grímur's review in his biography. Andersen's response to Grímur's review show how much he appreciated Grímur's opinion that Andersen had a childish genius. Andersen undoubtedly saw an advantage in maintaining and publicizing the opinion that he had a childish intuition and genius. Furthermore, there is no doubt that Grímur was also conscious of how valuable it would have been for the poet to be compared to a child. This is because children and poets alone have access to another world. This makes it hard to fool them, and they have access to The Sublime. Various texts of Andersen and other poets will be referred to emphasise the 19th century understanding of child and poet.

The connection between the child and The Sublime partially place the child outside the tangible world. Childhood is thus defined as something other than us; something which we lose and will never return. Does this understanding of child and childhood trace its origin to the connection between the child and The Sublime determined in the 19th century when the history of science urged people to find a new place for divinity? My lecture will seek to solidify and validate this question.

The lecture will be in Norwegian and will be supported by power point.