# THE SUBLIME READER

*Edited by Robert R. Clewis*

BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC
LONDON • NEW YORK • OXFORD • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

The Sublime Reader.indb 3 24-09-2018 17:34:47

BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK
1385 Broadway, New York, NY 10018, USA

BLOOMSBURY, BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC and the Diana logo are trademarks of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

First published in Great Britain 2019

Copyright to the collection © Robert R. Clewis and Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2019

Robert R. Clewis has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as Editor of this work.

For legal purposes the Sources on pages ix–x constitute an extension of this copyright page.

Cover design by Irene Martinez Costa
Cover Image © Guo Xi, Early Spring © The Picture Art Collection / Alamy Stock Photo

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

Bloomsbury Publishing Plc does not have any control over, or responsibility for, any third-party websites referred to or in this book. All internet addresses given in this book were correct at the time of going to press. The author and publisher regret any inconvenience caused if addresses have changed or sites have ceased to exist, but can accept no responsibility for any such changes.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN: HB: 978-1-3500-3015-2
PB: 978-1-3500-3016-9
ePDF: 978-1-3500-3014-5
eBook: 978-1-3500-3017-6

Typeset by Deanta Global Publishing Services, Chennai, India
Printed and bound in Great Britain

To find out more about our authors and books visit www.bloomsbury.com and sign up for our newsletters.

# CONTENTS

List of Illustrations vii
Preface viii
Sources ix
Acknowledgments xi
Note on the Texts xii

**Editor's Introduction 1**

PART I ANCIENT

1 **Longinus, from *On Sublimity* 17**
2 **Bharata-Muni, from *Nāṭyaśāstra* 31**

PART II POSTCLASSICAL

3 **Guo Xi, from *The Interest of Lofty Forests and Springs* 41**
4 **Zeami Motokiyo, "Notes on the Nine Levels" 44**
5 **Francesco Petrarca, "The Ascent of Mont Ventoux" 49**

PART III MODERN

6 **Nicolas Boileau Despréaux, from "Preface to his Translation of Longinus on the Sublime" 57**
7 **John Dennis, from *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* 62**
8 **Giambattista Vico, "On the Heroic Mind" 69**
9 **Edmund Burke, from *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* 78**
10 **Moses Mendelssohn, from "On the Sublime and Naive in the Fine Sciences" 91**
11 **Elizabeth Carter, from *Letters from Mrs. Elizabeth Carter to Mrs. Montagu* 102**
12 **Immanuel Kant, from *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* 105**
13 **Anna Aikin, "On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror" 114**
14 **Mary Wollstonecraft, from *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* 118**
15 **Immanuel Kant, from *Critique of the Power of Judgment* and *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* 122**
16 **Friedrich Schiller, "On the Sublime (Toward the Further Development of Some Kantian Ideas)" 149**
17 **Anna Seward, Letter to Rev. Dr. Gregory 162**

**18 Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho: A Romance*** **166**
**19 Helen Maria Williams, from *A Tour in Switzerland*** **170**

## PART IV LATE MODERN

**20 William Wordsworth, "The Sublime and the Beautiful"** **177**
**21 Mary Shelley, from *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*** **184**
**22 Arthur Schopenhauer, from *The World as Will and Representation*** **194**
**23 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "Symbolism of the Sublime"** **200**
**24 Richard Wagner, from "Beethoven"** **212**
**25 Friedrich Nietzsche, from *The Birth of Tragedy*, *Joyful Wisdom*, and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*** **222**
**26 Rudolf Otto, from *The Idea of the Holy*** **233**

## PART V CONTEMPORARY

**27 Barnett Newman, "The Sublime is Now"** **243**
**28 Julia Kristeva, from *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*** **246**
**29 Fredric Jameson, from "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism"** **254**
**30 Jean-François Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde"** **259**
**31 Meg Armstrong, from "'The Effects of Blackness': Gender, Race, and the Sublime in Aesthetic Theories of Burke and Kant"** **271**
**32 Cynthia A. Freeland, "The Sublime in Cinema"** **280**
**33 Arthur Danto, "Beauty and Sublimity"** **292**
**34 Vladimir J. Konečni, "The Aesthetic Trinity: Awe, Being Moved, Thrills"** **304**
**35 Jane Forsey, "Is a Theory of the Sublime Possible?"** **319**
**36 Sandra Shapshay, "A Theory of Sublime Responses, the Thin and the Thick"** **329**
**37 Robert R. Clewis, "Towards A Theory of the Sublime and Aesthetic Awe"** **340**
**38 Emily Brady, "The Environmental Sublime"** **355**

Chapter Summaries 367
Notes 372
Bibliography 410
Index 427



The Sublime Reader.indb 6 24-09-2018 17:34:47

# PREFACE

In the years in which I was preparing my book, *The Kantian Sublime and the Revelation of Freedom* (2009), I realized that, although there were anthologies on aesthetics, beauty, or collections of eighteenth-century texts on the sublime, there were no anthologies explicitly devoted to reprinting texts from the extensive history of the sublime. True, excerpts on the sublime were occasionally included in anthologies on aesthetics, art, or the history of philosophy, but the excerpts were included as if in passing (that is, the sublime was not the focus of the anthology), or the anthologies were limited in period (for example, to the eighteenth century) or in scope (for instance, to contemporary art). This absence of an anthology on the sublime surprised me, since the sublime was one of the central concepts in the history of aesthetics—especially during the modern period, when aesthetics came into its own as an academic discipline—and since in the western tradition the sublime has roots going back to ancient Greek thought. In twentieth-century francophone philosophy, the sublime was of utmost significance; in addition, the possibility of the sublime has been the subject of debate in recent anglophone aesthetics. Since the time of my initial surprise (more than a decade ago), no anthology in the English language has appeared.

We sometimes hear that the sublime is dated and outmoded—an historic relic, a concept of little use today. This judgment has rarely struck me as fitting. This volume's contemporary selections from various academic disciplines and intellectual traditions provide ample evidence to the contrary. Psychologists are carrying out more and more studies of the sublime (using the term "awe"), creating a body of empirical research that could be of interest to theoretically inclined scholars and writers; the latter, in turn, might be able to guide and collaborate in future studies. The sublime has been criticized for being "gendered"—with the sublime supposedly associated with masculinity and domination, beauty with femininity, and so on. While some authors such as Edmund Burke unquestionably present their theories by drawing on concepts of gender (and race), the women voices represented in this volume would seem to indicate that the situation is more complex than a preoccupation with writers like Burke would initially suggest. The sublime has been accused of being "western" and even "anti-environmental." This volume's texts from India, China, and Japan, and the discussions of the sublime and the natural environment, respectively, suggest that these charges are at the very least questionable.

In short, it is my humble hope that this volume will grant the sublime the focused attention it deserves, revise our understanding of it, and invigorate and sustain interest in the sublime.

The Sublime Reader.indb 8 24-09-2018 17:34:47

# EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

*Robert R. Clewis*

This anthology is the first comprehensive, historical reader in English on the sublime. It includes selections from Longinus to today, presenting texts from the Greek, Indian, Chinese, and Japanese traditions and including authors from the ancient, postclassical, modern, late modern, and contemporary periods.[1]

## The sublime

But first, what is the sublime? The sublime (or sublimity) is difficult to define, and its meaning has changed over time. While eluding precise definition, the sublime can be described as a complex feeling of intense satisfaction, uplift, or elevation, felt before an object or event that is considered to be awe-inspiring. Although the sublime is sometimes characterized as a complex combination of satisfying and discomforting elements, it is on the whole a positive and pleasant experience: perceivers typically desire the experience to continue. Related concepts are elevation, wonder, reverence, awe, and admiration—perhaps one could think of the sublime as a kind of "aesthetic" awe. An example of the feeling of the sublime would be the exaltation or excitement felt before a vast or powerful object, a natural wonder like the Grand Canyon, or a work of architecture such as the Great Pyramid of Giza. Contemporary psychologists have sometimes studied the sublime under another name, "awe." (They have identified some of the bodily or physiological changes that take place in people experiencing this emotion: goose bumps, dropped jaw, raised inner eyebrows, and widened eyes.[2] It is an exciting time for research in this area of positive psychology, and there may be potentially beneficial results.) In contrast, philosophers, theologians, and other theoretically oriented authors typically prefer the words "sublime" and "sublimity." But I take them to be writing about nearly the same experience or concept, even if the details of awe–sublimity relation need to be worked out (and some of the contributors to this volume may even disagree on those details). If so, scholars and students of the humanities and social sciences may very well profit from reading each other's work on this topic.[3]

There is, however, an ambiguity in theories of the sublime, an ambiguity that may well be unavoidable. The sublime can refer to a person's or subject's feelings and experiences, and it can be applied to the *object* that elicits those responses. Typical examples of such objects include waterfalls, icebergs, raging storms, deep ravines, the starry sky, mountain ranges, and some artworks or artifacts, including cathedrals, dams, and ancient ruins.

The object has properties (e.g., vastness, power) that can awaken fear. In fact, if one were not experiencing the sublime, these features might very well elicit fear. But one cannot actually be afraid of the powerful storm or volcano, when one is having a positive "aesthetic" experience of it. Thus, a viewer feeling the sublime is typically in a position of safety or at some distance from the vast or powerful object. (Whether or not this condition is met is an empirical matter—it depends on the person experiencing it.) If the sublime is an "aesthetic" experience, it can be more easily switched off than can the other fundamental emotions, which differentiates the sublime from plain, uncontrollable fear.

Perhaps it would be useful to offer more examples of what is considered sublime. Here is a short list (many more examples are found throughout this anthology): Haydn's *Creation*, Beethoven's Ninth symphony, and Wagner's *Lohengrin*; the poetry of Homer, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Leopardi, Baudelaire,

Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman, or Nikki Giovanni; natural wonders such as the Grand Canyon; the starry sky unaffected by light pollution; an image of a black hole or a photo of the Milky Way; the Himalayas or Alps; the sculptures of Richard Serra; the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich, J. M. W. Turner, and Barnett Newman; the tragedies of Sophocles or Schiller; Werner Herzog's film *Aguirre: The Wrath of God* and many a scene from natural disaster and doomsday films; St. Peter's in Rome, and the churches at Chartres, Milan, or Ulm.

To say these are considered "sublime" is not to use the term as an epithet for "excellent" but is to indicate that the objects are likely or disposed to elicit a sublime response (or at least a response lying on that continuum). Some on the aforementioned list are large objects viewed from the right distance (pyramids, mountains, cathedrals). Some speakers and writers, following Longinus, use the word to describe speech, rhetoric, and poetry. Sometimes the word refers to a work of painting or music. (I think it is best not to be too restrictive about using the word.) The term might even be applied to *small* things if they are perceived in a certain way—such as through a microscope—just as it can be applied to vast things that appear small to the unaided eye (e.g., stars in the sky). If the sublime is an aesthetic experience, whether or not something is considered sublime in part depends on the observer, on factors such as the perceiver's perspective and mood, and on the circumstances in which the object or event is perceived (imagined, remembered).

I have suggested that the sublime can be considered an "aesthetic" experience. (We need not insist that it is *only* an aesthetic experience, of course.) To understand what this means, it would be useful to know more about aesthetics. Viewed as a scholarly discipline, aesthetics is the study of the nature and value of properties (or experiences) such as beauty, ugliness, grandeur, and sublimity (among other states and qualities), and the investigation of how we enjoy, interpret, appraise, or use art. Aesthetics investigates humor, irony, satire, style, metaphor, and the features and role of genres (e.g., horror, comedy, tragedy). It explores the characteristics and merits of the various fine arts (poetry, music, dance, etc.), works of fiction, film, comic books, and folk art and crafts. In addition to making use of conceptual analysis, the methods of aesthetics can sometimes make use of work in empirical fields such as psychology, neuroscience, and the cognitive sciences. After all, the word is etymologically related to the Greek *aisthēsis*, which means perception, sensation. Understood as the philosophy of art, the discipline called aesthetics raises questions about how to understand, recognize, interpret, judge, and evaluate artworks. Since aesthetics examines aesthetic value(s), it is sometimes thought of as a kind of "value theory"—a broader field that would also include the study of ethical value, namely, ethics. Aesthetics is neither art history nor art criticism, but it can pose questions about these. It can also ask questions about the relation between the beautiful and the good or between aesthetic and moral values. The field can be understood widely so as to include environmental aesthetics and even the aesthetics of everyday life. So, where does the sublime fit in? The sublime is certainly not the central topic studied in aesthetics, but it is still an important one and it has been studied across the centuries. The sublime can be examined by aesthetics in at least one of its large branches—that is, in the more psychologically oriented branch, or in the philosophy of art branch (both of which can make use of conceptual analysis). (In the present anthology, Burke provides a good instance of the psychological approach, and Danto of the philosophy of art perspective.) To say that the experience of the sublime is an "aesthetic" one is first and foremost to say what it is *not*. An aesthetic experience is neither an ordinary, day-to-day experience nor a moral one. In an aesthetic experience, the world (or object) strikes us as unfamiliar yet interesting—peculiar and novel, but worthy of careful attention. But the sublime differs from curiosity, since the latter aims at learning, knowing, and the formation or confirmation of beliefs, while the sublime contains an intense affective or sensory element, an emotional punch. Due to its unique emotional intensity, the sublime can be distinguished from more intellectual subjective states such as wonder and curiosity, although the relation between wonder and sublimity merits



The Sublime Reader.indb 2 24-09-2018 17:34:48

more study and discussion. Aesthetic experiences, at least on one view, necessarily involve and engage our capacity for pleasure or displeasure. The pleasure-displeasure element in an aesthetic experience lies somewhere on a spectrum containing exuberance, exhilaration, enjoyment, satisfaction, contentedness, disquiet, discomfort, and pain. In any case, an aesthetic experience has to *feel* a certain way. The sublime is a mixed experience, containing both elements of exhilaration and elements of discomfort.

The line between sublime responses and religious feelings is sometimes fuzzy. John Dennis, Hegel, and other writers consider God to be the best source of the sublime. Some eighteenth-century British writers likewise interpreted the experience of sublimity as evidence of the power of a divine creator. Writers as diverse as Augustine,[4] William James,[5] and Rudolf Otto[6] examine a religious feeling, which, even if not identical to the sublime, can be considered to be an allied subjective state. In the end, however, it seems best not to identify the sublime and religious feeling. If, like Otto (1917), we follow the Kantian framework, then the aesthetic and the religious experience lie in different spheres. Indeed, more than 125 years after the publication of Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790), Otto drew parallels between the numinous religious feeling and the sublime. In the end, however, the sublime remained an *analogy* of the religious feeling.[7]

Insofar as the sublime is conceived as aesthetic, it is not a kind of moral feeling, either. Yet the line between the moral and the sublime (aesthetic) is not always so clear, or at least needs to be described carefully. We can feel sublimity in response to a great, extraordinary moral act, such as a person's noble demonstration of self-sacrifice. (Cato's suicide upon learning of the victory of Julius Caesar and the consequent loss of the Roman republic has been a traditional example of such an admirable act. Cato's act was supposedly virtuous, and we onlookers or readers are the ones feeling the sublime or awe.) Moral content (symbols, exemplars, illustrations of virtue) can certainly be represented in paintings and in other forms and works of art. In principle, such artworks could elicit the sublime: a vast (or somehow great) work of art could represent moral content in a striking, stirring way that has the negative-positive structure of the sublime response. In short, a key part of the distinction between the morality and sublimity has to do not simply with differences in how they feel (their phenomenology), but also with the characteristics and features of the persons experiencing them, that is, with what they are trying to do or accomplish, their ability to switch off attention from the matter at hand, the extent to which they have something at stake, and so on. In addition, the kind of object eliciting the experience (vast object, versus duty) is also relevant, even if some overlap is possible.

In any case, as mentioned, one need not insist that the sublime is only or exclusively an "aesthetic" experience. The concept of the sublime (or "sublimes") could be examined relative to political, moral, or religious contexts as well. The relation of sublimity to these other spheres is perhaps best left open here, allowing readers to pursue this topic for themselves.

Finally, the sublime can be called an "aesthetic quality" or aesthetic predicate. Other aesthetic qualities include the beautiful, picturesque, ugly, disgusting, and the grotesque. Theorists handle the relation between the sublime and related aesthetic qualities in different ways. The relation between sublimity and beauty merits special attention. Some theorists (Plotinus, Shaftesbury, Hegel, Ruskin, Croce, A. C. Bradley, Konečni, and many more) understand the sublime as a form of beauty. Characterizing sublimity as a mode of beauty (albeit of a stirring, intense sort and elicited by a vast or powerful object) may have its merits. However, in organizing this anthology, I have followed the Burkean and Kantian line, which separates and distinguishes beauty and sublimity. I have been motivated chiefly by practical reasons, since including beauty would have excessively broadened this anthology's size and scope. (There may also be compelling conceptual reasons for distinguishing beauty and sublimity, but I cannot defend these here.)



The Sublime Reader.indb 3 24-09-2018 17:34:48

## Inclusions and exclusions

This anthology includes texts from the Chinese, Indian, Japanese, and Greco-Roman-based traditions, and a range of periods from the ancient or classical to the contemporary. It presents a range of representative texts while, as much as possible, revising the canon and introducing the reader to some lesser known texts and arguments. Naturally, this is quite a balancing act.

Not everyone who uses the term "sublime" has *the* sublime in mind. It is often used as a term of praise. Food vendors have extolled their espresso and brownies in such glorious terms. There was an American ska punk band called Sublime. The food vendors and band members hardly employ the term in a Longinian or Kantian sense. Even within the sublime's own long and complicated history (or histories), it has been used in various contexts, for instance, to discuss rhetorical devices, the natural environment, art, even alchemy.[8] In addition, not all writers who use the word have the same concept in mind. The term has been applied to rhetorical style, natural wonders, works of art, subjective states, the mind or reason itself, ideas of reason, and even the Ideal or Absolute (Hegel). This volume showcases the plurality of uses and meanings of the sublime.[9] To complicate matters further, some philosophical texts touch on what falls under (at least one strand of) the sublime, though they do so without being explicit about it. Consider the conclusion of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent."[10]

In selecting texts, I have adopted the principle that an author need not use the word "sublime" in order to be in this collection.[11] Samuel Monk's comment on his analysis of Ann Seward's letters is apt here. "These statements are made on the assumption that when Miss Seward speaks of 'the terrible graces' she is referring to the sublime, an assumption that is amply borne out by the most casual reading of her letters."[12] As Sandra Shapshay points out in her contribution to this volume, an author can describe a sublime response without explicitly utilizing the term. Some theorists of what I would consider the sublime never use the word "sublime" (nor *Erhabene, il sublime, lo sublime, le sublime, hypsous*, Возвышенное), but related terms such as the Latin *admiratio*. (In English, words that have been used to indicate or refer to the "sublime" include "awe," "admiration," "ecstasy," and "transport.") The experience of sublime, I submit, can also be discussed using words from languages such as Sanskrit, Chinese, and Japanese (e.g., *yūgen*, or mysterious profundity). Writers in these traditions describe the sublime, or at least something like it, such as the *rasa* associated with astonishment, terror, and the marvelous. (Guo Xi discusses getting into the appropriate position to view, and even paint, mountain scenery so as to elicit aesthetic effects and responses reminiscent of the sublime.) The sublime is arguably not just a word, but a whole range of ideas, meanings, and experiences that are embedded in conceptual and experiential patterns.[13] If that is correct, and if a conceptual and experiential pattern hospitable to the sublime is in place, then a person can write and talk about the sublime without using that exact term. The writings by Bharata, Zeami, and Guo Xi reveal that something similar to the sublime (astonishment, mysterious profundity, the impression of towering heights) was theorized by several intellectual traditions around the globe.

In selecting texts, I aimed to show that our canon could be different. I wished to move beyond reprinting only the well-studied and familiar texts such as Longinus's *Peri Hypsous*, Burke's *Enquiry*, or Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (although each of these texts deserves and receives a place in this volume). Significantly, I wished to include many more women writers than are usually represented in historical anthologies.

The following readings were selected with the following aims or criteria in mind. Very few selections meet all of these, and some readings meet some criteria better than other criteria. Not necessarily in order of importance, the main selection criteria are the following:

1. The reading will have primarily conceptual or theoretical content (rather than poetic–literary). Readings should tend to be more discourses *on* the sublime than discourses *of* the sublime



The Sublime Reader.indb 4 24-09-2018 17:34:48

(literary-poetic responses to the sublime experience).[14] (Thankfully, some of the readings, by quoting from literary-poetic and religious texts, partially make up for omissions resulting from the application of this criterion.)

2. Possibly in tension with the first aim, the selections should (collectively) cover various disciplinary perspectives and not be restricted to philosophy and philosophical aesthetics. After all, the discipline of aesthetics has a complicated history, and the boundaries between aesthetics, philosophy, psychology, theology, history, rhetoric, and criticism have not always been as delineated as they seem today.
3. The selections should highlight new or previously excluded or underrepresented voices—a purposely revisionary aim. One outcome of this aim is that a text or author already known or widely anthologized may not be found in the present anthology, in order to make room for underrepresented theories or authors.[15]
4. Ideally, the theories (to the extent that they achieve the first aim above) would be insightful, viable, and plausible. Likewise, a reading should not be a mere rehashing of previous ideas or tropes.
5. The selection should have historical significance and influence. To be sure, this can come into tension with the two previous goals. (If a tradition or group has been traditionally underrepresented, it makes it harder for it to be influential; moreover, not all of the influential theories are insightful and plausible.) The reading should make (or be of sufficient quality to make) a contribution to our understanding of the sublime.
6. It is an exemplary representative of an approach or method. For instance, an entire volume devoted exclusively to the postmodern sublime in francophone philosophy is possible (and in fact, already exists).[16] Yet, space allows for only one or two readings from this tradition to be reprinted.
7. The reading should lend itself to study, learning, and teaching: it should be readable and accessible (as much as possible), though without sacrificing rigor. In some cases, of course, readability may be hard to achieve (Hegel).
8. The reading can be seen to have relevance today or connected to current debates and questions. I hope that the sublime shows itself to be, not an outmoded and dated category suited for only a particular period in art history (e.g., Romanticism), but a topic of interest to contemporary scholars across the humanities and social sciences.

It would no doubt be tiresome to run through how each of the selections fares in terms of these criteria; readers are certainly invited to come up with their own assessments if they so choose. As noted in 5, tension between selection criteria is possible. For instance, revising the canon to make room for underrepresented voices can come into conflict with making a lasting or significant influence on the history and reception of the sublime. For it is precisely because the underrepresented writers have been overlooked that they have not made the lasting influence they deserve.

Feminist writers have tended to be suspicious of the sublime. For instance, Judy Lochhead warns against letting "such terms as the sublime, the ineffable, the unpresentable . . . mask sedimented gender binaries that will keep the feminine in the ground."[17] In a similar vein, Barbara Claire Freeman argues that the eighteenth-century sublime is a masculine discourse aiming at articulating and ultimately controlling the experience of otherness in the sovereign subject.[18] The approach I propose in my own chapter may be more conducive to the goals of feminism, however. If we do not conceive of the sublime as a response to the ineffable or unpresentable (or completely other), then perhaps such criticisms can be avoided. Bonnie Mann raises a related but slightly different objection. She notices work touching on the sublime written by Luce Irigaray, Barbara Claire Freeman, Sheila Lintott, Christine Battersby, and Carolyn Korsmeyer, and comments, "This is

to say that while male philosophers have been explicitly writing about sublime experience for well over three hundred years, women seem to have entered this discussion only when feminist interest in the sublime emerged explicitly three decades ago!"[19] But the texts here anthologized—including seven women authors from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—suggest that this conclusion may be too hasty. For instance, Anna Aikin advanced a compelling explanation of the pleasures in the sublime, emphasizing the activity and stretching of the imagination.

I would like to return for a moment to an issue mentioned under criterion 2 (i.e., on the porous boundaries between aesthetics and allied fields), which is admittedly in some tension with criterion 1. The distinction between the various arts-related disciplines is artificial in those cases where neither philosophy nor literary theory (etc.) had been segregated into discrete academic fields.[20] However, the distinction between philosophy (or theory) on the one hand and, on the other, literature (poetry, fiction, etc.) and sacred texts, provides a rough-and-ready distinction that justifies excluding the poetry of Li Po,[21] or Milton, Wordsworth, Coleridge, P. B. Shelley, H. D. Thoreau, Leopardi, and Nikki Giovanni ("Ego Tripping"), as well as religious writings and sacred texts (e.g., *Psalms* 8, 90, 104; *Bhagavad Gita*; *Upanishads*, the writings of Rumi or Meister Eckhart), which might otherwise have been considered for this anthology. This anthology could well have emphasized texts such as this from the *Tao te Ching*:

> Look, and it can't be seen. / Listen, and it can't be heard. / Reach, and it can't be grasped. / Above, it isn't bright. / Below, it isn't dark. / Seamless, unnamable, / it returns to the realm of nothing. / Form that includes all forms, / image without an image, / subtle, beyond all conception. / Approach it and there is no beginning; / follow it and there is no end. / You can't know it, but you can be it, / at ease in your own life. / Just realize where you come from: / this is the essence of wisdom.[22]

Or this passage from another Taoist text, *Zhuangzi*:

> The earl of the Ho said, "Whether the subject be what is external or internal in things, how do we come to make a distinction between them as noble and mean, and as great or small?" Zo of the Northern Sea replied, "When we look at them in the light of the Tao, they are neither noble nor mean. Looking at them in themselves, each thinks itself noble, and despises others. Looking at them in the light of common opinion, their being noble or mean does not depend on themselves. Looking at them in their differences from one another, if we call those great which are greater than others, there is nothing that is not great, and in the same way there is nothing that is not small. We shall thus know that heaven and earth is but as a grain of the smallest rice, and that the point of a hair is as a mound or a mountain;—such is the view given of them by their relative size."[23]

In addition, the aforementioned distinction allows me to leave out and redact some of the many literary examples cited by theorists such as Longinus, Dennis, and Mendelssohn. In this anthology, I have not tried to include representative poetry or literary responses to the sublime experience. In similar fashion, I have not aimed to include texts written in order to *evoke* the sublime.

Selections are generally long enough to give readers a sense of the reading's content, method, and style, but (I hope) not so long as to scare readers away or to prevent the inclusion of other deserving texts and authors. In choosing and editing this collection, I have been guided by the thought of what would be most useful to the student of the sublime or to the scholar desiring a reasonably comprehensive introduction and overview of the subject. Some of the texts, for instance Burke's *Enquiry* or Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime" are readily available in inexpensive editions, and serious students probably have easy access to them. But omitting Burke and Kant



The Sublime Reader.indb 6 24-09-2018 17:34:49

here would have given an unbalanced picture of the history and reception of the sublime. Alongside Longinus, in my estimation, Burke and Kant offer what have (hitherto) been the most influential theories of the sublime.

It would likewise be a mistake (if one applies my criteria) to omit John Dennis and Jean-François Lyotard, even though their texts have already been anthologized.[24] I have, however, had to omit some worthwhile texts on the sublime such as those of Joseph Priestley, John Baillie, David Hume, Alexander Gerard, Joseph Addison, Archibald Alison, Frances Reynolds, Thomas Reid, and Shaftesbury (and many others), in order to make room for other worthy authors and texts from other periods; thankfully, these writings can be readily found elsewhere. There are a number of texts such as the correspondence and notes (e.g., by British men and women from the 1700s and 1800s, including Coleridge's drafts on the sublime) that would have added literary, cultural, or historical perspective to this volume.[25] In the end, however, such writings contribute relatively little in terms of theory or philosophical content, or are too provisional and insufficiently developed. Finally, one could plausibly argue that the sublime is found in and discussed by pre-Longinian Greek thinkers such as Plato (who discusses *hupsos* as well as the *kalon*)[26] and even Aristotle, and thus that this anthology should begin with them. Although this view is reasonable enough, it is at least just as reasonable to expect an anthology on the sublime to begin (as this one does) with the author of the first significant, extant treatise on the topic: Longinus.

Due to the aforementioned constraints and limited space and resources, several relatively recent texts could not be included, and I owe these authors at least a mention. Here I have in mind writings employing a psychoanalytic or literary approach (Paul de Man, Neil Hertz, Jacques Lacan, Thomas Weiskel, Slavoj Žižek), or influenced by the French and German continental philosophical traditions (Theodor Adorno, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Richard Kearney, Jean-Luc Nancy, Jacques Rancière, Marc Richir), or taking up ecological or environmental themes (Christopher Hitt, Ronald Hepburn) or matters concerning technology (David Nye, Mario Costa, Leo Marx), or works which discuss or employ psychological or cognitivist methods (Dacher Keltner and Jonathan Haidt, John Onians, Alan Richardson) or which adopt feminist perspectives (Christine Battersby, Barbara Freeman, Sheila Lintott, Bonnie Mann, Patricia Yaeger, Joanna Zylinska). To offset these omissions, this anthology includes texts written by authors exemplary of the foregoing approaches or traditions: Julia Kristeva (psychoanalytic), Jean-François Lyotard (francophone continental), Emily Brady (environmental), Fredric Jameson (technological-postmodern), Vladimir Konečni (pscyhological), and Meg Armstrong (postcolonial-feminist). This is not to reduce the value of these contributions to their membership in a certain "category," but simply to say that (in light of this book's aims) they stand among the best exemplars of their tradition, method, or approach.[27]

## Organization of this book

Texts are placed into one of five groups: ancient, postclassical, modern, late modern, and contemporary. To be sure, the book could have been organized in another way (e.g., according to themes or geographical regions), but the chronological organization has the advantage of bringing out the developmental history of the sublime. Within one of the five groups, moreover, the selections appear in (approximately) chronological order.

All but one of the terms ("postclassical") should be fairly self-explanatory. I prefer the former to "medieval" or "Renaissance" since it allows room for the texts from India, China, and Japan. (Today, of course, authors and scholars from these geographical regions may very well be influenced by the Burkean, Kantian, and contemporary interpretations of the sublime.)[28]

Not all the texts gathered herein are currently part of the "canon" of the history of the sublime. Some of the texts were written in epistolary form (e.g., Petrarch, Seward, Carter) or speeches (Vico) or are unpublished



The Sublime Reader.indb 7 24-09-2018 17:34:49

literary remains (e.g., Wordsworth), and as noted, this anthology highlights the work of modern women writers. And even if Kant deserves to be amply represented in such an anthology due to his undeniable influence on later accounts of the sublime, this volume avoids an "all-roads-lead-to-Kant" approach. The editors of an anthology of eighteenth-century British texts on the sublime, Ashfield and de Bolla, justifiably criticize Monk's otherwise excellent study (*The Sublime*) on just these grounds.[29]

## Using this book

This collection presents perspectives of the sublime (or sublimes) from various fields and traditions. It brings together a number of texts dealing with the sublime in aesthetics and the philosophy of art, literary theory, psychology, philosophy of education, political theory, environmental studies, theology, and allied fields. The selections should be of interest to a wide range of users—students, teachers, and scholars of art history, film and visual studies, architecture, music, theater, religion and theology, classics, literature, feminist studies, gender and cultural studies, to name a few. It is also intended for readers and students (of various levels) who wish to pursue an interest in the sublime. They may find it useful in giving an overview of the sublime, perhaps finding a selection that they desire to examine or study more closely.

Readers can jump in and read a selection as they please. To facilitate such reading at will, brief introductory material has been placed just before a selection rather than tucked away in an Afterword or in this Introduction. Readers looking for basic insight into the topic of the book and descriptions of the experience of the (natural) sublime would do well to begin with the accessible excerpts written by Elizabeth Carter, Helen Maria Williams, or Francesco Petrarca.

The book may be read with certain themes in mind, such as global traditions or female voices, the natural environment, the arts, or politics.

- The seventeenth- and eighteenth-century women contributors to this volume are Carter, Aikin, Wollstonecraft, Seward, Radcliffe, Williams, and Shelley.
- Authors who discuss (in varying degrees) the natural environment include Guo Xi, Petrarch, Mendelssohn, Carter, Williams, Kant (1790), Schiller, Radcliffe, Wordsworth, Schopenhauer, Mary Shelley, Konečni, Shapshay, Brady, and Clewis.
- Authors who consider or discuss the arts include Longinus, Bharata, Guo Xi, Zeami, Boileau, Vico, Dennis, Mendelssohn, Kant (1764), Aikin, Seward, Schiller, Radcliffe, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Shelley, Wagner, Nietzsche, Otto, Newman, Lyotard, Jameson, Danto, Konečni, Clewis, and Freeland. In terms of art forms and media, one could group them roughly as follows, allowing for some overlap and different degrees of emphasis: poetry (Longinus, Boileau, Vico, Dennis, Kant [1764], Seward, Hegel), fiction (Aikin, Radcliffe, Shelley), theater or dance (Bharata, Zeami, Mendelssohn, Schiller, Nietzsche), music or opera (Mendelssohn, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Wagner, Otto, Konečni), painting (Guo Xi, Newman, Lyotard, Danto), architecture (Otto, Jameson), and film (Freeland, Clewis).
- Political themes are raised by Wollstonecraft, Williams, Jameson, and the chapter headnotes to Burke and Kant (1790).

Each selection is preceded by the editor's headnotes containing background information and by a "Note on the text" containing bibliographic information and editorial remarks. The selection is followed by "Further reading" and "Questions" to promote and assist study, discussion, and reflection. (Most of the recommended studies for "Further reading" will be works written in English.)



The Sublime Reader.indb 8 24-09-2018 17:34:49

## Overview

I cannot pretend to cover the venerable history of the concept of the sublime in this brief Introduction. Moreover, I refrain from giving a chapter-by-chapter summary here, since one is found at the end of this book. *Readers unfamiliar with the sublime may prefer to skip this Overview and to read the chapter summaries at the end of the book and/or any background information found in a chapter's headnote.*

Although I prefer to let readers construct their own histories of the sublime, an Introduction should nonetheless contain a few words about the general trajectory of the sublime. Many, but not all, of the following authors or texts are covered in this volume.*

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* ("treatise on drama") is an ancient (ca. 200 BCE–200 CE) Sanskrit manual in stagecraft, a canonical text in the Indian aesthetic tradition. It describes—though without philosophical analysis—various emotional flavors or *rasa* ("sentiments") represented on a theatrical stage. For the purposes of this anthology, the handbook's (brief) remarks on the terrible, marvelous, and the heroic sentiments are the most relevant. The treatise also describes "dominant" states such as "terror" and "astonishment"—passions or emotions readily associated with (even if not identical to) the sublime.

In his treatise, Guo Xi (ca. 1000–1090) discusses three perspectives that can be taken when viewing mountains; they are different modes of perception that can prompt the viewer to have an experience bordering on the sublime. The experience can be attained through positioning oneself at a particular level or distance with respect to large objects (mountains), as well as through using very specific painting techniques to convey these levels or distances on a flat surface. Guo Xi examines not so much the rhetorical aspect of the sublime as natural sublimity and its depiction in scenic art. His painting, *Early Spring* (detail on this book's front cover), also takes up a distinct strand of the sublime—the transcendent. The latter is represented by blank spots or absences, specifically, mists amid the mountains.

Zeami Motokiyo (1363–1443) characterizes nine different levels of mastering the Japanese theatrical art of nō. The highest level ("the art of the flower of peerless charm") can be associated with the strand of the sublime that emphasizes unknowability and transcendence. Zeami's conception of "peerless charm" is intended to bring to mind the experience of enjoying the unique grace of the greatest nō theater performers. In describing the second highest level ("the art of the flower of profundity"), he draws attention to our perception and interaction with a vast and striking object: a mountain (Mount Fuji).

The remainder of this overview proceeds (roughly) chronologically and, given the foregoing discussion, is limited to the western tradition rooted in Greco-Roman thought.[30]

It was through the reception of Longinus's first-century CE (or perhaps third-century CE) work of rhetoric, *On the Sublime*, and modern translations of that treatise, that the concept became influential in rhetoric, aesthetics, philosophy, and related fields.[31] For Longinus, the sublime referred to that inspiring or overwhelming quality in great literary works or rhetoric. It was what made "elevated" speech elevated, or "lofty" speech lofty. His examples of what elicits the sublime tended to come from poetry (though he mentioned Mount Etna; the Nile, Danube, and Rhine rivers; and "above all the Ocean"). The treatise by Longinus remained largely unknown until translations of *On the Sublime* appeared in the mid-1500s. Boileau's French translation (1674) is perhaps the most well-known translation in modernity; however, it was by no means the first translation into a European vernacular language, being preceded by (among others) Italian and English translations.

*For the sake of readability and space, I have not given bibliographic references for every author mentioned in this Introduction, which is not intended to be exhaustive. References for many of these authors can be found in the bibliography at the end of this book.



The Sublime Reader.indb 9 24-09-2018 17:34:49

In fact, consideration of the sublime predates even the rediscovery of Longinus. As noted, Augustine's experience of the divine can be seen as an analogue of the sublime and a feeling of (religious) awe:

> When first I knew you, you raised me up [*assumpsisti*] so that I could see that there was something to be seen, but also that I was not yet able to see it. I gazed on you with eyes too weak to resist the dazzle of your splendor. Your light shone upon me in its brilliance, and I thrilled with love [*amore*] and dread [*horrore*] alike.[32]

One finds the sublime addressed more explicitly in the writings of medieval authors such as St. Bonaventure and St. Thomas. In his work of theology, *The Journey of the Mind to God*, the Franciscan theologian Bonaventure writes: "Man therefore, who is called a microcosm, has five senses that serve as five doors, through which the cognition [*cognitio*] of all things existing in the sensible world enters his soul. For through vision enter bodies sublime [*sublimia*] and luminous and the other colored things, but through touch enter solid and terrestrial bodies."[33] Perhaps one should not dwell too much on *sublimia* in this passage, since the word in classical Latin was also used for the air—a usage which persists in the English verb "to sublimate" (i.e., to vaporize). In another passage, however, Saint Bonaventure's theory undoubtedly discusses the transcendent or ineffable strand of the sublime, that is, the one concerned not so much with aesthetic play and emotion as with the failure to capture a truth or to be adequate to a reality, above all, God. Bonaventure cites a passage from Dionysius the Areopagite that does not shy away from paradoxical formulations.

> O Trinity super-essential and super-divine and super-excellent guardian of the divine wisdom of the Christians, direct us into the super-unknown and super-luminous [*superincognitum et superlucentem*] and most sublime [*et sublimissimum*] height of mystical speech [*eloquiorum*]; where the new and absolute and unspeakable [*inconversibilia*] mysteries of theology are, according to the super-luminous darkness of an instructing silence, secretly hidden in the most obscure [*in obscurissimo*].[34]

Writing around the same time, Aquinas uses the word *admiratio* to describe a mode of fear resulting from the apprehension of the sublime truth (ultimately, for him, God). "Admiration is a species of fear following upon the apprehension of something exceeding our faculty. Hence, admiration is an act following the contemplation of the sublime truth [*sublimis veritatis*]. It has been said that contemplation is terminated in affection."[35] Admiration involves the intellect's contemplation of the "sublime truth" lying beyond the intellectual faculty. But an ambiguity lies in the claim that in admiration we apprehend a truth that exceeds us. Although Aquinas is clearly among theorists who interpret the sublime in terms of contemplation and truth, it is not clear how much he thinks the intellect falls short and fails, or instead how much that truth is embraced and comprehended. Nor is he very clear about the roles of the will ("affection") and the intellect in such "contemplation" and embracing.

In Petrarch's "The Ascent of Mont Ventoux" (1336), too, we find accounts of what one could consider the sublime. The text is structured as a "letter" and was written during the Renaissance, before the Latin and vernacular translations appearing in the middle of the sixteenth century inaugurated a new epoch in the sublime's history. Incidentally, it is also one of the first essays in alpinism and mountaineering. In his letter recounting his (spiritual and physical) ascent, Petrarch quotes from a mixture of sources—the Christian Bible, Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, and Latin poets.

During the modern period, literary, artistic, intellectual, and cultural phenomena influenced theorization of the sublime.[36] For writers from the British tradition in particular, the King James Bible[37] and Milton's *Paradise Lost* provided literary and theological sources of texts thought likely to exhibit or elicit the sublime.

In the period after Boileau's French translation (1674), there was (broadly speaking) a growing tendency in the anglophone world to adopt psychological perspectives and to focus on nature rather than on rhetoric or style (as Longinus and Boileau had done). In British writings, the sublime became (in general) associated more with a response to natural marvels than to texts and speech. One can discern a transitional phase in the work of John Dennis (1704): his examples of the sublime come from poetry, and he locates the paradigmatic source of the sublime in religion and, ultimately, God. On the continent, however, this transition took place more slowly. The Italian humanist Vico (1732) considers the sublime in terms of the liberating ascent of the soul made possible by a formation in grammar, rhetoric, philosophy, and history, a study which is intended to draw students and scholars closer to God.

The European Enlightenment was a particularly fruitful time for theories of the sublime.[38] Burke's empirical account and Kant's transcendental theory were among the most influential of all. According to Burke (1757), the sublime is a delightful terror induced by a vast or powerful object. He also gives physiological and psychological descriptions of this experience, drawing from his understanding of the science of his day. Mendelssohn (1761), who was familiar with Burke's empirical account, draws from his own German scholastic philosophical tradition to discuss the admiration felt before an object or person exhibiting a kind of "perfection." Something that is intensively (rather than extensively) immense is said to be "strong," and when that strength is a matter of a perfection, it is said to be "sublime." He defines the sublime in art as a "sensuously perfect representation" of something immense, capable of inspiring awe, which is a debt we owe to the extraordinary spirit or genius creating the work. Toward the beginning of his academic career, Kant wrote a popular treatise on the sublime (1764) in which he mingled aesthetic claims with non-aesthetic ones—claims we might say today belong to the sphere of social science, and which have been widely criticized for propagating gender, ethnic, and racial stereotypes. Kant is thus better known for his analysis of the sublime in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790), where he maintains that the feeling of the sublime is based on one's power of reason, and, on one reading, involves reflection on and awareness of one's rational faculties.[39] In a relatively neglected work, *Kalligone* (1800), Johann Gottfried Herder unfavorably responds to Kant's aesthetics while offering a theory of the sublime in the form of a naive naturalism that combines aspects of theories of Burke and Kant.[40] In her contribution to this volume, Meg Armstrong (1996) analyzes Burke's and Kant's reliance on alleged gender and racial differences. She criticizes their use of bodies of color and gender in establishing their theories of the sublime. Armstrong pays particular attention to Burke's reference to the purported, and supposedly natural and immediate, "effects of blackness."

A letter by Elizabeth Carter (1762) to Elizabeth Montagu offers a noteworthy yet overlooked instance of writing on the sublime in nature. Anna Aikin (1773) addresses the question of why we would take pleasure in something that is unpleasant—as we appear to do in the experience of the sublime. The contributions by Mary Wollstonecraft, Anne Seward, Helen Maria Williams, and Ann Radcliffe were written during the turbulent 1790s, which witnessed the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror. Wollstonecraft (1790) identifies weaknesses in Burke's theory of the sublime (and beautiful). In a 1792 letter, the Romantic author Seward maintains that the poetry of "Ossian," the purported author of epic poetry published by James Macpherson beginning in 1760, evokes experiences of the sublime. Like Carter (and many other writers), Seward thinks that the intense experience of the sublime can be endured only briefly. British author Helen Maria Williams (1798), an avid supporter of the French Revolution, describes the "swelling" of the imagination in response to "sublime objects" of nature, and draws connections between the aesthetic, moral, and political spheres. Ann Radcliffe's descriptions of the sublime in nature reveal how the sublime was employed in an influential early work of Gothic literature (1794).

Developing this trend, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818)—written by the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft—showcases a blending of philosophy and literature in a text that became exemplary of the



The Sublime Reader.indb 11 24-09-2018 17:34:49

Gothic sublime. Her descriptions of the creation of the monster, and of the confrontation between the creator and the monster, are paradigmatic descriptions of sublimity on many fronts—psychological, theological, natural, and technological. Based on Wordsworth's poetry, John Keats referred to Wordsworth's version of the sublime as the "egotistical sublime." But in a prose piece reprinted here—an unfinished essay presumably written around 1810—Wordsworth presents a theory that may call into question Keat's characterization. The sublime feeling, Wordsworth thinks, is found more in natural landscape than in artificial gardens. Wordsworth locates the sublime in the play between variety and intense unity, emphasizes the repetition of "individual form," and (unlike Kant) attributes a key role to color in eliciting the experience of the sublime.

Schiller (1793), a poet, tragedian, and philosopher, offers a Kant-inspired theory, but he departs from Kant by considering artworks and applying the sublime to dramatic tragedy. Hegel (1835) criticizes theorists (like Kant—though one might add Schiller and Wordsworth) who view the sublime as a merely subjective state or emotion. Hegel views the sublime as a stage on the way to beauty, which he considers the more important aesthetic category. Given Hegel's enormous influence on nineteenth-century thought, this view would have significant consequences for the sublime. After Hegel, the sublime had a diminished role in aesthetics and the philosophy of art.

Schopenhauer (1818), like Schiller, examines the sublime in both nature and art, in particular tragic drama. Schopenhauer's philosophy influenced the ideas and writings of the composer and author Richard Wagner (1870), who discusses the sublime in the music of Beethoven. Like some of Beethoven's music, Wagner's works (e.g., the "Rheingold" Prelude) are sometimes mentioned in discussions of the musical sublime.[41] In various writings (1872, 1882, 1883–85), Nietzsche, a onetime devotee of Wagner, resists Kantian versions of the sublime. Commenting on Greek tragedy, Nietzsche characterizes the sublime as a form of inspired enthusiasm: the sublime can be found in the shared, ecstatic Dionysian element in Greek culture. Remarkably, Nietzsche also develops the concept of the sublime into that of sublimation (*Sublimisierung*), introducing a noteworthy shift in the history of the sublime. Sublimation is a socially accepted expression of otherwise hidden psychological drives and forces. Thus, instead of the higher or elevated (the sublime), Nietzsche analyzes the hidden and lower (the sublimated).

It is perhaps above all in work of Freud, however, that we recognize the concept of sublimation as the socially acceptable expression of hidden drives. Through the process of sublimation, we adjust and redirect desires that might be socially alarming or harmful if acted upon. (Since some uses of the term "sublimation" do not directly pertain to the aesthetic experience of the sublime, the reader might wonder what connections, beyond etymological links, exist between sublimation and the sublime. Here is one attempt at an answer. Sublimation contains an uplifting or elevating element. By taming and rechanneling impulses, an individual is uplifted or raised into civilized society—which can be ennobling.) In another context, Freud discusses a feeling of something "unbounded" or oceanic; he refers to it as the "oceanic feeling."[42] Since it is a feeling of something limitless and of oneness with the universe, the quasi-mystical feeling bears some similarities with the feeling of the sublime, despite their differences. In any case, Freud explains this experience of oneness as a remnant of an earlier psychic stage of the ego. As noted, Otto (1917) also draws an analogy between the feeling of (religious) awe and the aesthetic experience of the sublime, though with aims quite different from Freud's.

A Freud-inspired concept of the sublime and sublimation can be found in the work of Lacan, Žižek,[43] and (reprinted here) Julia Kristeva (1980). The Marx-inspired cultural critic Jameson (1984) describes what can be called the technological sublime, that is, the sublime in response to various (increasingly more powerful) forms of modern technology—today, one thinks of the expansiveness and ever-growing reach of the internet and social media. Jameson's view has affinities with that of Lyotard, a member of a francophone tradition that devoted much attention to the sublime in the 1980s and 1990s. The sublime, for Lyotard (1985), suggests or gestures at the limits of representation in its attempt to represent what cannot be represented (i.e., the



The Sublime Reader.indb 12 24-09-2018 17:34:49

"unrepresentable"). According to Lyotard, the (contemporary) sublime does not hint at the unrepresentable in a "nostalgic" way, as if it were a kind of longing for a world out of reach. Rather, the limits of representation are shown or indicated by abstract works of art such as the paintings of Barnett Newman, author of an influential yet brief essay, "The Sublime is Now" (1948). The art critic and philosopher Arthur Danto (2003) also draws on Newman's work in his discussion of the sublime in artworks—from the Getty spiral to abstract expressionist paintings and the Sistine Chapel. In her Kant-inspired contribution, Freeland (1999) discusses the relevance of the sublime to understanding and appreciating film. Konečni (2005) introduces the notion of an "aesthetic trinity" in order to account for peak aesthetic responses lying on a spectrum ranging from thrills and chills to the "aesthetic awe" typically induced by a sublime natural object or work of art.

More than a century ago, British philosopher and aesthetician E. F. Carritt wrote an essay critical of a contemporary theory of the sublime (though not necessarily of the sublime generally).[44] The Scottish philosopher Ronald Hepburn took an interest in the sublime as early as the 1980s. However, it was not until an article by Guy Sircello that analytic anglophone aesthetics began to give more sustained and careful attention to the sublime.[45] Jane Forsey (2007) probed Sircello's answers to his questions about the possibility of the sublime. Forsey deserves credit for renewing a recent debate about the very possibility of a theory of the sublime. Her article drew various responses, some of which are gathered here (Shapshay, Clewis, Brady). In short, recent work on the sublime discusses themes ranging from (e.g.) the environmental and political, to the cognitive and psychological, to the more theological, literary-artistic, and philosophical.

## Conclusion

I therefore hope that this historical anthology awakens and sustains an interest in the sublime and related emotions; reduces distances between cultural, philosophical, or intellectual traditions; and shapes our understanding of the sublime's history while guiding its future.



The Sublime Reader.indb 13 24-09-2018 17:34:49