

INTRODUCTION

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The sublime combines conflicting emotions: fear and awe, horror and fascination. It sweeps the public off its feet in an overwhelming experience of beauty mixed with terror and admiration, caused by stupendous works of art, terrifying natural events such as earthquakes, or actions that are so shocking they can hardly be put into words. Originally a rhetorical concept, its main classical source is (ps.-)Longinus' treatise *Peri hupsous* or *On the Sublime*, probably written in the 1st century AD. Contrary to widely held assumptions, its early modern revival did not begin with the adaptation published by Boileau in 1674; it was not connected solely with the early Greek editions that began to appear from 1554; nor was its impact limited to rhetoric and literature.¹ Manuscript copies began to circulate in Quattrocento Italy and from there spread to France and Britain, but very few have been studied.² Neither have the ways the sublime was used, in rhetoric and

¹ For a recent and authoritative statement of that view see Üding G. – Kalivoda G. – Robling H.-F. (eds.), *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik* (Tübingen: 1992), s.v. 'Das Erhabene': 'Die moderne Geschichte der Kategorie des Erhabenen beginnt 1674 [...]. On the history of the sublime see Saint-Girons B., *Fiat Lux: Une Philosophie du Sublime* (Paris: 1993) and *Le Sublime de l'Antiquité à nos jours* (Paris: 2005); Matelli E. (ed.), *Il sublime. Fortuna di un testo e di un'idea* (Milan: 2007), and Pries C. (ed.), *Das Erhabene. Zwischen Grenzerfahrung und Größenwahn* (Weinheim: 1989), which even though it concentrates mainly on the period after Burke and Kant, is an important document for the revival of interest in the sublime inspired by Postmodern thinkers such as Lyotard.

² The contributions by Goyet, Refini, Gründler and Till give more detailed overviews of the historiography of Longinus; here we only list the major studies: Weinberg B., "Translations and commentaries of Longinus' *On the Sublime* to 1600: a Bibliography", *Modern Philology* 47, 3 (1950) 145–51; idem, 'ps. Longinus, Dionysius Cassius', in Kristeller P.O. – Kranz F.E. (eds.), *Catalogus Translationum et Commentariorum: Mediaeval and Renaissance Latin Translations and Commentaries* (Washington D.C.: 1971) 193–8; Costa G., "The Latin Translations of Longinus's *Peri hupsous* in Renaissance Italy", in *Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Bononiensis. Proceedings of the Fourth International Congress of Neo-Latin Studies* (Binghampton: 1985) 225–38; Brody J., *Boileau and Longinus* (Geneva: 1958) 9–13; Fumaroli M., "Rhétorique d'école et rhétorique adulte", *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* 86 (1986) 35–36 and 39–40, and idem, *L'Ecole du silence. Le sentiment des images au XVII^e siècle* (Paris: 1988) 126–9.

Allacci Leone, *De erroribus magnorum virorum in dicendo* (Rome, Mascardi: 1635); manuscript versions of his Longinus translation survive in the Biblioteca Vallicelliana in Rome. On Allacci see Fumaroli M., "Crépuscule de l'enthousiasme au XVII^e siècle", in *III^e*

literature, but also in the arts, architecture and the theatre been studied in any systematic way. The present volume is a first attempt to chart the early modern translations of *Peri hupsous*, both in the literal sense of the history of its dissemination by means of editions, versions and translations in Latin and vernacular languages, but also in the figurative sense of its uses and transformations in the visual arts in the period from the first early modern editions of Longinus until its popularization by Boileau.

At first sight, to write such a history of what we might call the prehistory of the sublime may seem a straightforward task, merely a matter of identifying editions and documenting uses of *Peri hupsous* or the concept of the sublime. But by its very nature, Longinus' text and its subject elude the easy, clear-cut classification that would indeed make writing its early history relatively easy. In *Peri Hupsous* Longinus described the experience of the sublime as one which sweeps readers or viewers along, robs them of rational control over their feelings, and opens hitherto unknown vistas of the infinite, the horrendous, or the incomprehensible. Longinus' description continues to raise many questions, not the least what kind of experience this is: amazement or wonder, artistic enjoyment, religious or mystical rapture; and how exactly did this complex notion function in the period before its codification, with which meanings was it endowed, and what is its relationship to the 'neighbouring' experiences that we just mentioned? After the codification of the sublime by Burke and Kant the term came to stand for an aesthetic concept, defining a particular kind of experience of art, nature and the self; but before 1750, it escaped easy

Congrès International d'Etudes Néolatines (Tours 1976) (Paris: 1980) vol. XI, 1279–1305; idem, "Rhétorique d'école et rhétorique adulte"; Nau C. (ed.), *Le temps du sublime. Longin et le paysage Poussinien* (Rennes: 2005) 32 ff. For the French manuscript translation see Weinberg B., "Une traduction française du 'Sublime' de Longin vers 1645", *Modern Philology* 59, 3 (1962) 159–203, and most recently Gilby E., *Pseudo-Longin. De la sublimité du discours. Traduction inédite du XVII^e siècle introduite, éditée & annotée* (Paris: 2007), who has questioned the degree of certainty with which Weinberg attributed this version to Mazarin or his entourage, but without proposing an alternative. The drawings of ground plans in the manuscript do suggest some proximity to Mazarin.

For France see Litman T., *Le sublime en France (1660–1714)* (Paris: 1971); Hache S., *La langue du ciel. Le sublime en France au XVII^e siècle* (Paris: 2000), which includes a selection of sublime writing before Boileau; Nau (ed.), *Le temps du sublime* and Gilby E., *Sublime Worlds. Early Modern French Literature* (London: 2006). For Germany see Zelle C., "Angenehmes Grauen". *Literaturhistorische Beiträge zur Ästhetik des Schrecklichen im achtzehnten Jahrhundert* [= Phil. Diss., Marburg 1985]. Hamburg: Meiner 1987 (= Studien zum achtzehnten Jahrhundert, Bd. 10), and *Ästhetik des Erhabenen: Von Longin bis Lyotard* (Hagen: 1999). For the Dutch Republic there exist no comparable studies, although the Dutch edition by W. Krul of Burke's *Enquiry* and C. Madelein's *Bilderdijk, Kinker en Van Hemert: als van hooger aart en bestemming* (Groningen: 2008) pay attention to the early history of the sublime.

disciplinary classification. The discipline that wrote the history of the sublime after 1750 is that of aesthetics; but that discipline itself evolved only in the course of the 18th century. As a result, aesthetics imposed a conceptual grid on the sublime as described by Longinus and his early modern translators, editors or adaptors that makes it very difficult to reconstruct its pre-modern genealogy. To study the history of the sublime before 1750, therefore, raises two problems: on the one hand, its meaning cannot be located in a monodisciplinary way (e.g. as an aesthetic concept, on a par with the beautiful or the ugly); on the other hand, in early modern Europe experiences that after 1750 would be characterized as 'sublime' *did* occur, but were labelled differently: as experiences of wonder and amazement, as mystical experiences of rapture, as horror or fear. As a consequence, any investigation into the pre-history of the sublime has to be multi-disciplinary, drawing on rhetoric, art and architectural history, the history of philosophy and religion, literary and theatre studies, and anthropology.

The research programme from which this volume of essays results started at the origins of such a prehistory. Its aim was to investigate early editions of Longinus, not in order to establish a stemma of editions or a *fortuna critica* of his treatise, but as a process of translation: from one language into others, and from one intellectual and artistic domain to another. Therefore this volume is divided into two parts: in the first, the early modern reception and dissemination of *Peri hupsous* is charted in the essays by Goyet, Refini and Till, who each look at a key feature of the sublime and its early modern transformations in and through editions and adaptations.

Alfred Rosenberg and Bernard Weinberg are the pioneers in this field.³ Weinberg's work on the history of the sublime is well known, and has been much used by subsequent scholars, but he was preceded in reconstructing the early history of the sublime by Rosenberg's in which he showed that a series of editions and translations, both into Latin and English, were produced in England before the publication of Boileau's *Du sublime ou le merveilleux* in 1674; he also showed that some of the English editions that were published after 1674 were hybrids, incorporating elements from Boileau into versions of Longinus, and leaning heavily on the Frenchman's translation of the Greek. Here we find a first illustration of an important characteristic of the history of the early modern development of the sublime: Boileau's book did not supersede Longinus' treatise, nor did it cut short the ongoing *Nachleben*, but the latter remained relevant. As we shall see, even after Burke's *Inquiry* saw the light, despite its wide success and

³ Rosenberg A., *Longinus in England bis zum Ende des 18. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: 1917).

transformation of the sublime from a rhetorical into an aesthetic concept, other and older versions of the sublime continued to be used and developed.

Bernard Weinberg discovered a series of versions of *Peri hupsous* produced in 16th-century Italy; his work was continued in the 1960s and 70s for Italy by Gustavo Costa, for France by Jean Brody and Théodore Litman, and for Germany by Karsten Zelle. In these early stages of the study of Longinus' early modern reception, the focus was very much on the text and its impact in rhetorical and literary circles. The work of Marc Fumarioli, Clélia Nau and Sophie Hache on the use of the sublime as an instrument of visual persuasion, and that of Sophie Ploeg, David Norbrook and Lydia Hamlett on its use in the arts and architecture of Great Britain, have made clear that the use of the sublime as a category of visual persuasion is a major part of that reception. But they have all shown as well, that this role of the sublime is not simply one of a rhetorical concept being adopted in a different sphere. In these transformations and translations new versions of the sublime were developed. To give two examples: the architectural sublime, in the London city churches of Hawksmoor or in reactions to the ancient Doric temples of Paestum allows for an expression of space that had not been possible in traditional, Vitruvian architectural thought. Defenders of the royal images made of Louis XIV by Bernini or Martin Desjardins against charges of idolatry and presumption argue that the King himself is the supreme embodiment of the sublime; in these works of art and the reactions they excite, we can observe a change from allegorical representation to direct, almost unmediated embodiment which uses the rhetoric and poetics of the sublime as its instrument.

The essays by Francis Goyet and Eugenio Refini that open this volume, show the foundations of this process of dissemination, translation and transformation. The first author closely traces the meaning of a key aspect of the sublime, the figure of *apostrophè*. The figure of *apostrophè*, turning away or introducing a new subject, to give it its simplest meaning, is in a wider sense characteristic of the impact of the sublime, because it moves the audience out of its normal state into one of elevated wonder or amazement. Francis Goyet illuminates through his analysis of this *pars pro toto* the complex process of early modern transformations of the sublime.

Apostrophè is also one of the figures of speech that lends itself most easily to a transference into the visual arts. The examples of the figure standing on the edge of a painting and looking out of the pictorial space at the spectator are numerous in the work of Rubens or Venetian Renaissance painters. They epitomize the rhetorical conception of painting in early modern Europe, alert us to the adaptation of figures of speech to

the visual arts, but also make us aware that such use is never a matter of simple borrowing. Bellini or Rubens' saints beckon us indeed into the pictorial world on whose threshold they stand; but they also make the viewer aware that their persuasive force works with pictorial not verbal means, such as the manipulation of linear perspective or the architectural framework of the painting. *Apostrophè*, we might thus say, is both an epitome of the sublime, as Goyet shows, but also of the translations of the sublime into other domains of human culture.

The essay by Eugenio Refini analyses the development of another key aspect of the sublime, that of imagination in the sense of the mental representation of sensations, ideas or images derived from the senses or *phantasia*, by means of a new survey of the early editions, both published and in manuscript, of Longinus in 15th- and 16th-century Italy.⁴ More in particular, he shows the development of that notion in the version attributed to the Roman humanist Fulvio Orsini. It has several times been suggested that Michelangelo was acquainted with this text. Refini returns to this assumption, not to offer a new argument for or against it, but to articulate the issues involved in such a hypothesis.

Dietmar Till concentrates on how the *Peri Hupsous*, next to other treatises of Hellenistic literary criticism, such as (ps.-)Demetrius' *Peri hermeneias* and Hermogenes' *Peri ideon*, were used to legitimate the style used in the Bible. He clarifies how from the 16th century on Longinus obtained a central position in discussions about Biblical style because of his *fiat lux*-quotation. Certainly protestant theologians used it to show that the Bible could be seen as superior to the norms of Ciceronianism, as its style was sublime and simple in Longinus's terms. Not only Biblical philology and hermeneutics heavily relied on Hellenistic rhetorical categories as the sublime; protestant 'dogmatics' also stated that the Bible is simple and sublime at the same time, thus acclaiming its status of 'sola scripture' for theology.

Transformation, often accompanied by a revision of the tradition, is a conspicuous feature of early modern developments of the sublime. The contribution by Paul Smith on Jean de la Bruyère's comparison between Corneille and Racine in the fourth edition of his *Caractères* (1689) illustrates this particularly well. At first sight the comparison is simply another instalment in the well-established genre of the parallel between authors, statesmen, temperaments and so on of which Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* is

⁴ Cf. Lemma 'phantasia' in Liddell H.G. – Scott S., *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: 1968) 1915.

the best-known classical case. But La Bruyère's comparison, in which Corneille is praised as sublime, original, inimitable but unequal, and Racine as just, regular and touching, is in fact an extremely subtle and ambiguous exercise in defining the sublime: what it is, what kind of figure of speech, and where it enters into a tragedy. La Bruyère accomplishes this not by reacting explicitly to two recent statements on the sublime, Boileau's *Traité du sublime* and Dominique Bouhours' *Manière de bien penser* (1687), but by showing implicitly how one can write in a sublime way about the sublime. At the same time, by alluding to the observations by Longinus on Greek tragedians and poets, and changing the genre of the parallel from a comparison with a clear winner into a literally ambivalent assessment, he transforms an important aspect of the tradition of literary criticism of which the sublime was part.

Part Two brings together a series of translations of the sublime into the visual arts, architecture and the theatre. Based on our present knowledge, this process may be said to have started in Vasari's descriptions of Raphael's Fire in the Borgo fresco in the Vatican, Palma Vecchio's Tempest and Giulio Romano's Sala dei Giganti in Mantua. As Hanna Gründler shows in her essay, Vasari's account of the terrible scene shows the combination of fear and admiration, fear of the fire itself and admiration for these painters' artistic powers to represent the force of the elements, nature's disasters or humans' fear of death, so vividly that the viewer believes he or she is looking at the event itself, not a fresco. Evocative powers, both in Raphael's fresco and in Vasari's ekphrasis are heightened by a use of sublime ambiguity, drawing on the terrible, the awesome, the beautiful and the superhuman qualities of art. The *terribilità* Vasari here evokes, usually connected with the work of Michelangelo, shows clear similarities to the *deinotès* associated with the sublime in Longinus. We do not have any direct, primary evidence that Vasari had actually read Longinus; in fact it is highly unlikely that he was able to read Greek. But Gründler makes a very plausible case that the Florentine intellectuals who advised him, and cooperated on the Introductions to the *Vite*, were well aware of the discussions on rhetoric and poetics, including the sublime, that were held in the 1550s and 1560s, sparked off by Bembo's *Prose* and Robortello's *editio princeps* of Longinus.

With the essays by Maarten Delbeke on Bernini, Stijn Bussels and Bram Van Oostveldt on the sublime and marvellous in 17th-century French performing arts, and Helen Langdon on Salvator Rosa we move to 17th-century translations of the sublime in the visual arts and the theatre. In the course of the 17th century, the sublime becomes an increasingly

common notion in art literature. Far from eroding its relevance, this dissemination of the sublime engenders new interactions between different discourses, a development that runs parallel with the increasing attention for the sublime from theorists across a range of disciplines, including art and literature but also ethics and politics. Exactly this development, Delbeke argues, allows Bernini's biographers to identify his artistic genius not just with important artists like Michelangelo but also with extra-artistic models of greatness, such as heroes, kings and rulers. In Bernini's case, the sublime model of choice is Louis XIV, and the works of art that bear witness of their historical relation are read as marker's of Bernini's grasp of, and entitlement to, true greatness. The fact that these works also belong to an important episode in Franco-Italian artistic exchange only raises the stakes in defining Bernini's sublimeness. After all, the sublime emerges as a crucial critical category in the context of literary controversies that pit French literary critics against their Italian counterparts. As the notion that binds these different discussions together, the sublime brings out the intricate connections between views on art, style and identity.

Bram Van Oostveldt en Stijn Bussels discuss ideas on the impact of stage machinery in French 17th- en 18th-century treatises on the performing arts. Many critics emphasise the intensive responses which the machinery could elicit urging the ideal onlooker to get totally immersed in the supernatural marvel and horror displayed. However, paradoxically, that onlooker also needed to evaluate the machinery as a technical *tour de force*. In his *Pratique du théâtre* (1657), the Abbé d'Aubignac was the first to name this powerful combination of marvel, horror and aesthetic pleasure with the term *le merveilleux*. Only two decennia later Nicolas Boileau used the same term as a synonym for the sublime. Inspired by Boileau the term also received a new definition in the discourse on the performing arts, most clearly in the defence of the *tragédie lyrique*, as it came to be used to indicate astonishment and great emotional transport without putting the emphasis on the rational distance.

Both Rosa's work and his character were often seen as typically sublime by later commentators such as Horace Walpole, who described a journey across the Alps in 1739 as 'Precipices, mountains, torrents, wolves, rumblings – Salvator Rosa'. In such statements we see an announcement of the 18th-century development in which the sublime would become an aesthetic concept, similar to the picturesque in playing a double role: that of a guide to both the design and the appreciation of art and/or nature in artistic terms. But the development of the sublime in the circles which contributed to Rosa's intellectual formation, that of the Accademia degli

Umoristi and the Barberini court, was much wider and more heterogeneous. For poets, especially those influenced by Marino, the sublime had become associated with the stupendous and the marvellous, with *meraviglia*; for the *letterati* associated with the Barberini circles such as Leone Allacci, the sublime was used to transcend in mystical experiences the boundaries of the natural world; and for natural scientists the sublime was used to speak about the aesthetic of the infinite. For them, as for Rosa, nature was a theatre of marvels, that fills the mind with *stupore* and *ebrezza*. Langdon teases out these various strands in Rosa's landscapes, scenes of witchcraft and portraits of criminals. The foundation for his sublime art is genius, and the two come together in his last works, *Empedocles leaping into Etna* and *Pan and Pindar*, which announce the 18th-century glorification of genius, but also draw on fascination for the vast, the infinite and terrifying aspects of nature that is so characteristic for 17th-century Italian interest in the sublime, which transformed Longinian topoi such as the eruptions of the Etna, but also incorporated other classical versions of the sublime, such as Ovid's description of the four ages of man or Lucretius' passages on earthquakes, storms at sea or the infinity of the universe.

Lucretius was also an important source for English versions of the sublime. Britain was in fact the country where the largest and most varied group of editions, translations and adaptations were produced in the 17th century, well before Boileau's came out in 1674. In our present state of knowledge the first vernacular edition of Longinus was published in London in 1652: John Hall's *Peri hupsous, Or, Dionysius Longinus on the Height of Eloquence*. Before that, Longinus was also quoted by George Chapman, the translator of Homer, in his *On Translating and Defending Homer* of 1611, and included in the ideal curriculum devised by Milton for the Christian poet in 1641–44. But as David Norbrook has recently shown, the English were also interested in Lucretius' version of the sublime: many translations of *De rerum natura* were produced as well, although the majority circulated only in manuscript form.⁵ Many of these versions were produced in highly politicized contexts. Hall for instance was a pamphlet writer for Cromwell, and the poet Andrew Marvell drew on the sublime to write about the execution of King Charles I.

Uses of the sublime in the arts also occurred in very public places: as Lydia Hamlett and Caroline van Eck argue in their essays, both the development of an Anglican church architecture and of history painting drew

⁵ Norbrook D., *Writing the English Republic* (Cambridge – New York: 1999); Porter J., "Lucretius and the Sublime", in Gillespie S. – Hardie P. (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius* (Cambridge: 2007) 167–85.

very much on a sublime poetics. In its secular variety, in the ceilings at Greenwich for instance glorifying the deeds of King William III, it was an attempt to emulate the court art of Louis XIV at Versailles with its use of the sublime to represent the King's greatness. The religious architecture of Hawksmoor, Wren and Vanbrugh, and the paintings for the interior of Saint Paul's dome reflect a Longinian way of thinking about architectural and pictorial composition in terms of difficulty or conflict, the union of opposing elements, and an awareness of the impact of vast spaces on the spectator. They also illustrate the complexity of the routes early modern translations of the sublime took. Behind many sublime ideas in the English arts and architecture we find Longinus, for instance in William Sanderson's *Graphice* of 1658, one of the earliest English treatises on painting; the version Boileau made, and subsequently introduced into artistic discourse by Roger de Piles was adapted for English readers and English art by Jonathan Richardson in his *Essay on the Theory of Painting* (1715). There are political versions of the sublime inspired by Lucretius and Seneca, for instance in political tracts dealing with the Commonwealth or the execution of Charles I. But we also find echoes of Leone Allacci's version of the sublime, originally produced at the Barberini court to take part in Roman discussions about primitive eloquence and pre-Babylonian architecture, and transmitted by means of his book on church architecture into Anglican circles that shared his interest in the origins of Christianity.

The final essay in this book, Sigrid de Jong's analysis of the use of the sublime in reactions to the early Greek Doric temples in Paestum near Naples from 1750 onwards, adds yet another facet to the complexity and ambivalence of the development of the sublime before its codification as an aesthetic concept by Burke and Kant. Viewers were baffled by the primitive, uncouth, rough and forbidding aspect of the temples, which did not conform at all to their expectations formed by the treatises of Vitruvius or Palladio and images of Greek and Roman architecture. At the same time, visitors were fascinated by the ruins and their age, the scenery and handling of space. To give words to their paradoxical experiences they often appealed to the sublime, both to the Longinian poetics of a union of opposing elements, and the effects of awe and terror, admiration and disappointment bordering on terror. But they also did so in the aesthetic sense of Burke and Kant, that is as a way of putting into words the conflicting experience of visiting these ruins. At the same time, invoking the sublime also helped visitors to put into words aspects of ancient architecture – the handling and experience of space above all – that had not been articulated in Vitruvian theory; and it helped them to appreciate those aspects of Paestum – its primitivism, its roughness and lack of ornament

and harmony – that made it almost the opposite of classical ideals of beauty. Its appreciation was thus very much based on the sublime, a concept derived from classical rhetoric; but ultimately that contributed to the erosion of classical ideals of architectural beauty.

This volume therefore traces a few aspects of the dissemination, translations and transformations of the Longinian sublime in Early Modern Europe. It shows how after a first stage of philological reconstruction and edition, translations and adaptations began to appear in the later 16th and early 17th century, soon to be followed by migrations of the sublime into other spheres of human culture, chief among them the visual arts, the theatre and architecture. Thereby we have made a first start in showing the importance of the sublime not just in rhetoric or literature, but in the arts as well.

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