EXPLORING SUBLIME RHETORIC IN BIBLICAL LITERATURE

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Edited by

Roy R. Jeal

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Foreword

Erika Mae Olbricht

My father, Tom Olbricht, loved a mountain range—from the Ozarks, where he grew up, to the Rockies, which he loved to visit. Every summer when I was growing up, we lived in our travel trailer in New England, but we frequently traveled there from Texas on a wide detour through Yosemite, the Grand Tetons, or the Badlands. He was a hiker and loved chugging up the side of a mountain to take in the view. His particular favorite in New England was Mount Monadnock in southern New Hampshire, with its smooth bluffs of granite outcrops and blueberry bushes and vistas from the summit stretching forever. For him that enormous slice of the natural world was an encounter with the divine. I can hear his clear tenor singing hymns like "Let Every Heart Rejoice and Sing," which captured such moments, as in the chorus:

> While the rocks and the rills, while the vales and the hills,
> A glorious anthem raise,
> Let each prolong their grateful song,
> And the God of our fathers praise.

I'm sure he sang it on a mountaintop once or twice.

Of course, people have treasured the sheer grandeur of these majestic and sublime places for centuries; a deep appreciation for such landscapes instigated the creation of the US National Parks System (NPS) for their preservation as part of the national heritage. The NPS is the legacy of John Muir (and others) who famously championed preserving the wild, sublime landscapes of the American West. My father's love of these same

I thank John Wiehl and Steve Pinkerton for reading earlier versions of this foreword and Sarah Gridley for ruminating on etymology with me.

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landscapes eventually led me to study landscape conservation, a decision also fostered by my love of gardens that I share especially with my mother. This range of landscapes, both the breathtaking and the intimate varieties, inform the visual rhetoric framework I explore here for understanding the response to and impact of actual places.

This collection explores a range of ideas about how the sublime works on the soul and the actions of the individual. While each author has a different description of the force of the sublime, in the words of Roy R. Jeal, "what is clear is that the sublime affects mind and body in ways not immediately, probably not ever, understood in completely systematic, rational ways."[2] This element particularly interests me in terms of how people experience landscapes. It is no peculiarity that art historians and landscape studies scholars, philosophers, and literary critics talk the most about the sublime, because those fields analyze objects that record and present, in various media, experiences that the authors and artists considered sublime, which is often understood as one impetus for artistic expression: the need to record an overwhelming experience or emotion. We inherit this idea from William Wordsworth's preface to his *Lyrical Ballads*: "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility."[3] But we rarely attend to the rest of the sentence, where Wordsworth insists that the original emotion returns upon further contemplation and writing: "the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquility gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on."[4] The effect of a successful record, then, is to capture and transmit the original passion, or something "kindred" to it, that occurred in the moment, which occurred in a particular physical place, often—particularly in the case of Wordsworth—in reference to nature or a landscape.

Landscape has its etymological origins in art: a *landskip* was a Dutch painting meant to show the view as a composed piece of art, and indeed, some landscapes were created for the explicit purpose of posing as subject matter for painters; many scholars have written about Lancelot "Capability"

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2. See Roy R. Jeal's introduction to this volume.

3. William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads: With Pastoral and Other Poems* (London: Longman & Rees, 1798), l.

4. Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads*, l–li.

Brown's park landscapes along these lines or about William Gilpin's designs and paintings or Humphry Repton's Red Books, which were created for his clients in order to explain visually the before and after of his proposed landscape changes.[5] These landscape design records are used to manage the historic landscapes themselves as well as the views they created for the visitor who then might recreate it through drawing or painting for both contemporary and future viewers. The visual representation can give access to profound emotions and insights, even if they are not the exact ones experienced by the painter or writer.

But these genteel and curated views are categorically not *sublime* views, which by definition exceed human activity in the landscape and privilege the force of nature. For example, the vast scene of apocalyptic mountains in John Martin's *The Great Day of His Wrath* (1851–1853) shows tiny people helpless against the raging landscape.[6] Caspar David Friedrich's *The Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1817–1818) invites us to see the same landscape and feel what the viewer in the image also sees, standing proud atop a misty mountain, looking out over an obscured but enormous landscape. The landscape is the subject of the painting rather than the figure of the man, who, positioned in the foreground but shown from the back—a composition device the German Romantics called *Rückenfigur*—is gazing along with us at the sublime landscape before him. But the size of the figure, his dominance in the very middle of the painting, moderates any sense that nature is overwhelming or that humans are subjected to it in any way. The figure contemplates nature from a place equal to it. On the other hand, Thomas Cole's *Kaaterskill Falls* (1826), like other Hudson River school paintings, presents the human as completely dwarfed by the enormity of mountain, sky, river—the ideal content of the imagined (and in some locations, real) American landscape. A viewer will likely miss the very tiny human figure in the center of the painting, insignificant in scale and at the whim of the giant landscape around it.

5. See, e.g., Peter De Bolla, *The Education of the Eye: Painting, Landscape, and Architecture in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); John Phibbs, *Place-Making: The Art of Capability Brown* (Swindon: Historic England, 2017); Stephen Daniels and Lucy Veale, "Revealing Repton: Bringing Landscape to Life at Sheringham," *Landscape Research* 40 (2005): 5–22; and Andre Rogger, *Landscapes of Taste: The Art of Humphry Repton's Red Books*, Classical Tradition in Architecture (London: Routledge, 2008).

6. See Alan P. R. Gregory's essay in this volume.

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But they will not miss the waterfall that dominates the foreground of the painting. A staple of the sublime landscape, the waterfall signals a powerful and potentially devastating rush of water. Its force can perhaps be signaled more effectively through the term *cataract*, though we rarely use it in that context any longer, as we mostly think of a cataract as an eye condition that hampers vision. According to the *OED*, both meanings overlap in time and are likely explained in part by the prefix *cata-*, which generally means down or downward, sometimes having the sense of reduction or waste (perhaps as in a reduction of eyesight). The earliest meaning of *cataract*, however, comes from the Latin and refers to heaven's floodgates ("cataract" def. 1) that *hold back* a devastating gush of water, in reference to Gen 7:11 and 8:2. These floodgates, these cataracts, are opened to allow the flood and closed to end it. They hold back or suppress the flood waters. Yet, cataract can also indicate a "violent downpour or rush of water" (def. 2b), either sudden or consistent, as in a waterfall, "one of considerable size, and falling headlong over a precipice" (note to def. 2a). In short, a cataract can indicate either the gate that holds back water or the violent cascade of water itself.

The connection between the gate, the cascade, and the eye condition is in the downward motion captured by the prefix, but also in the sense of a cataract as a portcullis (def. 3), something that comes down and gates the vision, though the *OED* notes that "the sense-development in Greek, Latin, and French-English, is not in all respects clear" ("cataract" etymology note). Definition 3 defines cataract as a "portcullis; also the grating of a window," and definition 4—the first that refers to the eye—notes that the pathological designation seems to be "a figurative use of the sense portcullis," or "'a web in the eye', the notion being that even when the eye is open, the cataract obstructs vision, as the portcullis does a gateway" (def. 4 note). Therefore, connected through the idea of downward movement, the cataract indicates a motion and movement visible in the landscape of those who see clearly, and at the same time an obfuscation of the visual as an access point.

This overdetermined confluence of visual meanings is linked with the sublime: The cataract in a landscape is meant to be looked at (though certainly its roar is also a sensory factor) and can even be the overwhelming natural aspect of a landscape that exceeds the human scale of apprehension—its scale and impact are what render it sublime. In 1826, Cole painted Kaaterskill Falls, in the Catskills (New York), from multiple perspectives, and the contrasting viewpoints are instructive. The more traditional

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view, captured in *The Falls of the Kaaterskill*, depicts the waterfall from a distance and centers it on the canvas as the subject of the painting. In contrast, *Kaaterskill Falls* is painted from the vantage point inside the cave over which the waterfall cascades, looking out over the river where the tumbling water rolls away from the viewer. In fact, the painting depicts a sort of eye, since the mouth of the cave frames the upper part of the canvas as though it were an eyelid, not just giving us an image, but dramatizing the act of seeing and apprehending the landscape. Rather than looking at the water, the viewer of the painting is placed within the cave looking out beyond the waterfall to the river valley. It's not that Cole created a painting that accounts for each of the meanings of the word *cataract* that I've presented here. After all, the waterfall is placed to the side—the landscape is not actually obscured by it. However, it is hard to discount the unusual vantage point as making a statement about the act of viewing itself. The subject of the painting is not (only) the waterfall, but what the viewer sees beyond. Writing about the painting in *Art History*, Michael Gaudio notes that "the entrance of the cataract disrupts the view and initiates a shift into an aural experience of nature."[7] Gaudio himself (even though he is most interested in the noise of the cataract) falls prey to the visual impediment implied in Cole's painting; he writes that the cataract "interrupts my visual progress through the painting, clouding my vision so to speak."[8] The visual pun on the clouded eye present in both the painting and the historian's explication of it shows that we are being asked intentionally to understand the landscape from the viewpoint of the artist; and while the same could be true of any painting, the framing and the pun on cataract in this particular painting makes the visual obviously central to the sublime experience, encapsulated—or perhaps negated—by the word *cataract*'s different meanings.

The cataract makes an appearance in "Lines Composed above Tintern Abbey" as well—one of Wordsworth's most frequently quoted poems and one my father explicates in this collection.[9] For my purposes here, I want to follow the trajectory Wordsworth traces from viewing the original place to recalling the view later in life (five years later, as he tells us in the first line of the poem), as he reflects on the role played by nature in his earlier

7. Michael Gaudio, "At the Mouth of the Cave: Listening to Thomas Cole's *Kaaterskill Falls*," *Art History* 33 (2010): 457.

8. Gaudio "At the Mouth of the Cave," 457.

9. See Thomas H. Olbricht's essay in this volume.

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years and on the maturation process he has since undergone. This passage begins with a waterfall:

> The sounding cataract
> Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
> The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
> Their colours and their forms, were then to me
> An appetite; a feeling and a love,
> That had no need of a remoter charm,
> By thought supplied, nor any interest
> Unborrowed from the eye. (78–85)

His original vision of the place was through sound, color, and form—the last two insights borrowed "from the eye." But now he has changed, and "I cannot paint / What then I was" (77–78). The mature poet has instead "learned / To look on nature, not as in the hour / Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes / The still sad music of humanity" (90–93). Therefore, he has felt

> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things. (96–104)

The moral movement in this passage, spurred by nature, takes the poet from himself—"me" in the first quoted line—to "all things." My father quotes these exact lines in his essay in this volume, to point out that "The sublime occurs in the natural world when the invisible intellectual forms penetrate the realm of sense … [and] creates wholeness at a transcendental level in a living soul resulting in harmony and joy."[10] In both the painting and the poem, visiting a place results in sensitive connection with nature, with the divine, with "all thinking things, all objects of all thoughts."

10. See the essay by Thomas H. Olbricht in this volume.

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A physical place like Tintern Abbey is something to be experienced and something that works on the self when one is attuned to it; it can be interpreted and processed into text or image in the same way as other experiences, with more or less recognition of the ineffableness of the moment. A landscape painting (or poem or diary entry) is a way of taming and containing the ferocity of the actual place—to frame it and hang it on a wall rather than cling to a tree in a storm, as John Muir famously claimed to do in California.[11] The text, the painting, lives to be reencountered, perhaps to work on readers or viewers in the same way the original physical place had worked in that moment, in that weather, on that day with a particular slant of sun or rain, never to be recreated in physical actuality but approximated in text or image.

For many experiences, that recounting of the moment then becomes an object of analysis—a task undertaken by the contributors to this volume, for example. Particularly persuasive in this collection is the concern with where the experience of the sublime leads the viewer: Are they incited to moral fortitude? To spiritual ecstasy? (Are those mutually exclusive?) While the conclusions reached in the collection along those lines are not univocal, the contributors nevertheless insist on the possibility that the sublime pushes us toward good things—in the spirit of Longinus. What does one *do* with a sublime experience? For a reader of Scripture, perhaps one possible answer is obvious: the experience of the sublime is as close to the divine as one (conceivably) could get and thus an action (repentance, conversion, etc.) befitting a moral life could be warranted.

Wordsworth's poem demonstrates the same motion. In recounting through poetry the importance of the place to him, the poet finds nostalgia and yet moral maturity: in "nature and the language of the sense" the poet locates "the anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse, / The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul / Of all my moral being" (110–113). While I did not go to Tintern Abbey with my parents, I have been there twice, each time aware of the history of the abbey and the extent to which the immortalization of it in Wordsworth's poem has guaranteed its conservation status because of that connection. (Such were the things I learned in my conservation degree.) But the setting (my father calls it *numinous* in his essay) in its shallow river valley and the peaceful drift of mist from the tops of the hills, dimming the shafts of sunlight on the grass floor of the

11. See "A Wind-Storm in the Forest," in Muir, *The Mountains of California* (New York: Century, 1894), 244–57.

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nave, obscuring the changing leaves of a Welsh autumn: these images stay with me and connect me to the place, to my mother and father, and provide space for contemplation and respite as well as a sense of all that has passed and a hope for what will come.

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Abbreviations

1 En.	1 Enoch (Ethiopic Apocalypse)
2 Bar.	2 Baruch (Syriac Apocalypse)
AB	Anchor (Yale) Bible
ABRL	Anchor (Yale) Bible Reference Library
A.J.	Josephus, *Antiquitates judaicae*
AJP	*American Journal of Philology*
Ann.	Tacitus, *Annales*
Ant. rom.	Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Antiquitates romanae*
Apol.	Apuleius, *Apologia* (*Pro se de magia*)
BDAG	Danker, Frederick W., Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
B.J.	Josephus, *Bellum judaicum*
BNPSup	Brill's New Pauly Supplements
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
ClAnt	*Classical Antiquity*
Claud.	Suetonius, *Divus Claudius*
ClQ	*Classical Quarterly*
ConBNT	Coniectanea Biblica: New Testament Series
CP	*Classical Philology*
CR	*The Classical Review*
Cyr.	Xenophon, *Cyropedia*
def.	definition
Dem.	Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *De Demosthene*
De or.	Cicero, *De oratore*
Deus	Philo, *Quod Deus sit immutabilis*
Dial.	Tacitus, *Dialogus ad oratoribus*
Eloc.	Demetrius, *De elocutione*

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Eph.	Ignatius, *To the Ephesians*
Epict. diss.	Arrian, *Epicteti dissertationes*
ESEC	Emory Studies in Early Christianity
ESV	English Standard Version
Evag.	Isocrates, *Evagoras* (Or. 9)
ExpTim	*Expository Times*
GBS	Guides to Biblical Scholarship
Hist.	Herodotus, *Histories*
Hist. eccl.	Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica*
HSCP	*Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*
HvTSt	*Hervormde teologiese Studies*
ICB	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
ICC	International Critical Commentary
Il.	Homer, *Iliad*
Inst.	Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*
Ios.	Philo, *De Iosepho*
IVBS	International Voices in Biblical Studies
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JCH	*Journal for Cognitive Historiography*
JHI	*Journal of the History of Ideas*
JJMJS	*Journal of the Jesus Movement in Its Jewish Setting*
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
LCC	Library of Christian Classics
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LD	Lectio divina
Leg.	Philo, *Legum allegoriae*
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LSJ	Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. 9th ed. with revised supplement. Oxford: Clarendon, 1996.
Magn.	Ignatius, *To the Magnesians*
Mart. Pol.	Martyrdom of Polycarp
Mid.	Demosthenes, *In Midiam*
NA[28]	Aland, Barbara, et al., eds. *Novum Testamentum Graece*. 28th ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012.
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament

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NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NS	new series
NTL	New Testament Library
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
OED	*Oxford English Dictionary*
Opif.	Philo, *De opificio mundi*
OM	*Opus Maximum*
PatSt	Patristic Studies (Lang)
PCPS	*Proceedings from the Cambridge Philological Society*
Phaedr.	Plato, *Phaedrus*
Phld.	Ignatius, *To the Philadelphians*
Prog.	Theon, *Progymnasmata*
QJS	*Quarterly Journal of Speech*
Rhet.	Apsines, *Ars rhetorica*; Aristotle, *Rhetorica*
Rhet. Alex.	Anaximenes, *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum*
Rhet. Her.	Rhetorica ad Herennium
Rom.	Ignatius, *To the Romans*
RRA	Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity
RSQ	*Rhetorical Society Quarterly*
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SCJud	Studies in Christianity and Judaism/Études sur le christianisme et le judaïsme
Sib. Or.	Sibylline Oracles
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
Somn.	Philo, *De somniis*
SRI	sociorhetorical interpretation
STAC	Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum
StPatr	*Studia Patristica*
StPT	Studies in Philosophical Theology
Subl.	Longinus, *De sublimitate*
SymS	Symposium Series
TAPA	*Transactions of the American Philological Association*
TU	*Texte und Untersuchungen*
TynBul	*Tyndale Bulletin*
VCSup	Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZAC	*Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum/Journal of Ancient Christianity*

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Introduction

Roy R. Jeal

The sublime is usually overlooked by biblical scholars. Interpreters of the rhetoric of the Bible in earlier times considered the sublime carefully, but only a few of more recent days (e.g., Wilhelm Wuellner; J. David Hester; Christopher T. Holmes; the contributors to this volume) have given it careful attention.[1] This volume addresses the need to study the sublime in the documents of religious antiquity. The essays together offer an introduction to the sublime and provide careful description, analysis, and commentary on passages in the Gospel according to Luke, Romans, Ephesians, Hebrews, Revelation, Ignatius to the Romans, and 1 Enoch. To this is added a discussion of how the sublime was employed in ways that obscured the Bible by the eighteenth century. Response essays discuss how Samuel Taylor Coleridge's analysis of the sublime is relevant to New Testament interpretation, particularly to sociorhetorical interpretation, and the implications of the contributions on sublime terror. The point is to demonstrate that it is important to recognize, analyze, and evaluate the force of sublime rhetoric in the texts we study and to encourage interpreters to take it into account.

Sociorhetorical interpretation (SRI) explores the "textures of texts" that interweave to produce *rhetography* (graphic rhetorical imagery evoked in readers and listeners minds), *rhetorolects* (rhetorical dialects), *rhetology* (rhetorical argumentation), and *rhetorical force* (the texts *do* things to audiences in their contexts).[2] In the explorations it has become clear

1. For those who studied it earlier, see the essays in this volume by Thomas H. Olbricht, Murray J. Evans, and Alan P. R. Gregory.

2. See the glossary and the introduction in Vernon K. Robbins, Robert H. von Thaden Jr., and Bart B. Bruehler, eds., *Foundations for Sociorhetorical Exploration: A Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity Reader*, RRA 4 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), xv–xxv, 1–26.

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that the rhetoric of the sublime is an important texture to be identified and analyzed in biblical and related documents. The sublime is powerful. It moves people toward deep, internalized emotion and understanding. Two sessions of the Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity (RRA) Seminar at the Annual Meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature in Denver (2018) and San Diego (2019) investigated the rhetoric of the sublime in a range of New Testament, early Christian, and pseudepigraphal texts. Participants in the seminar sessions were requested to consider the nature, contexts, and effects of sublime rhetoric and describe where and how it functions in texts in our purview. The essays in this collection stem from the work done for those sessions.

Part 1, "Foundations: The Beautiful Sublime," takes on the difficult task of explaining what the sublime is and how it works in selected New Testament texts. Roy R. Jeal in his essay "The Rhetoric of the Sublime in the Narrative of Mary the Mother of Jesus (Luke 1–2)" describes the sublime by drawing on the work attributed to Longinus, *On the Sublime* (Περὶ Ὕψους; *De sublimate*), the ancient text closely contemporaneous with the New Testament, and on more recent descriptions and discussions. Defining the sublime depends more on informed and experienced good judgment than Longinus's descriptions and examples. Understanding of sublime rhetoric occurs when one is prompted to grasp the force of language and metaphor, of images, of amazing things, apart from a high level of mental analysis. The sublime cultivates the human spirit, hence has a spiritual component. The difficulty of coming to a clear and straightforward definition reaches some resolution, Jeal suggests, in understanding the sublime as "a rhetoric of the moment" when there is an immediate effect where a text communicates beyond itself. The essay examines "Mary's moments" in Luke 1–2 employing the SRI analytics of rhetography, argumentative texture, sublime texture, and rhetorical force. Mary's moments are the Annunciation (Luke 1:26–38); Mary, Elizabeth, and the Magnificat (1:39–56); the visit of the shepherds (2:15–20); Simeon (2:25–35); and the time in the temple (2:41–51). The sublime moments described seem not humanly reasonable,

See also Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1996); Robbins, *Exploring the Textures of Texts: A Guide to Socio-rhetorical Interpretation* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996); Robbins, *The Invention of Christian Discourse*, vol. 1, RRA 1 (Dorset: Deo, 2009); Robbins and Roy R. Jeal, eds., *Welcoming the Nations: International Sociorhetorical Explorations*, IVBS 13 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2020).

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yet Mary is herself a believer who righteously follows up on what she was told and what she observed. The sublime textures reveal information that otherwise is impossible to know. For Mary the cause must be God and so must be true. Audiences are drawn in with Mary, moved to accept the truth of the things visualized and heard, apart from rational analysis. The sublime effect is difficult to resist. It is rhetoric on the edge that moves people to certainty that God has done a wonderful thing in Mary, that there is an intersection of the human and the divine.

With classicist Jonathan Thiessen's "The Sublime and Subliminal in Romans 2–3," we continue to consider Longinus but from a much different perspective. Thiessen addresses the apparent contradictory statements regarding advantages of Jews in Rom 2–3. Despite the contradictions, lack of proofs, and even incoherence in the chapters, Thiessen indicates that Paul's argument succeeds in an indirect way by means of its use of the rhetoric of the sublime. He introduces Longinus's sublime as a literary phenomenon, pointing out that "for Longinus, the sublime resides in the *words* used to describe overwhelming phenomena more than in the phenomena themselves." Longinus imagined the sublime as *elevated* (ὕψος) language produced by skilled use of rhetorical figures. Thiessen analyzes six sublime rhetorical figures described by Longinus (pathos; change of person; question and answer; asyndeton and anaphora; disorder; concealment and calculated omission) and demonstrates that they occur as features of Rom 2–3 that allow Paul to hide aspects of his message subliminally (noting that sublimity and subliminal have differing etymologies so are not synonyms) to make his point without causing major offense. By overwhelming his audiences in Rome with sublime figures and without real proof of his point, Paul gives the impression that he has made a convincing argument. The point is made indirectly and succeeds by its effects, not by rational argumentation. It functions at a level beneath full consciousness. The sublime in Rom 2–3 thus functions in a subliminal way. Thiessen helpfully points out that the sublime rhetoric "operates primarily through sensory and aesthetic mechanism," so in SRI terms forms a sensory-aesthetic texture.

In "Divine Speech, Hebrews, and Sublime Rhetoric," Christopher T. Holmes also draws on Longinus's *On the Sublime*, relying on it as foundational for his analysis of Heb 12:18–29. Holmes points out that sublime rhetoric steps beyond the usual goals of ancient rhetorical theory. It is distinguished by "nonrational or suprarational effects" that aim to lead audiences to ἔκστασις, to being transported, and mentally and emotionally resituated.

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The sublime uplifts the soul. Holmes looks particularly at God's speech in Hebrews, showing how this rhetoric has the sublime effect of moving audiences to view their life-situation in a new way. His chapter is laid out in three parts. The first section provides an orientation to *On the Sublime*. According to Longinus, sublime rhetoric is designed to have striking effects so that its audiences are reoriented to good things. The second part examines Longinus's discussion of the creation story in Genesis. Perhaps surprisingly, Longinus viewed the creation account as an impressive example of sublime rhetoric. Holmes uses the discussion of Genesis to shape a framework for interpreting the description of God's speech in Hebrews. Part 3 examines the sublime speech in Heb 12:18–29. In this passage God's speech is immediate, effective, and powerful. It aligns neatly with Longinus's description of the nature of sublime language and sound. The graphic language describing the presence of God who speaks fearfully—in fire, darkness, storm, the sound of a trumpet—whose voice "shook the earth," has the sublime, dislocating, and relocating effect that Longinus described. Such divine speech is preeminently sublime.

Thomas H. Olbricht's "Rhetorical Criticism of the Sublime" strikes out in a different direction by examining the views of eighteenth century Scottish rhetorician Hugh Blair, Romantic era poet William Wordsworth, and twentieth century New Testament scholar Wilhelm Wuellner. Olbricht offers some personal history of his own education where he was introduced to Longinus but eventually became acquainted with Wordsworth and several Scottish rhetoricians. Later he interacted with Wuellner's views of sublime rhetoric. In his essay, Olbricht considers the ideas of Blair, Wordsworth, and Wuellner and from them proposes a rhetorical criticism of the sublime that he applies to the letter to the Ephesians. Blair believed that "the ultimate sublimity pertains to God." The sublime therefore must be found in religious discourse. Wordsworth imagined that the sublime was grasped by the human spirit in ecstatic moments, not by conscious thought. The sublime moment provides a sense of "peace, fulfillment, and wholeness." Wuellner believed that analysis of the sublime builds on conventional rhetorical analysis based in classical rhetoric. He was interested in how "the power of the sublime integrates the esoteric with the exoteric," when a "spiritual component" provides a sense of balance. For all three rhetoricians, as with Longinus, the sublime produces a powerful ecstatic moment when people are "elevated … to a transcendental, mystical reality." Olbricht's analysis of the sublime in Ephesians follows where, among other things recognizable to rhetorical critics, he

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considers the transcendental intentions of the discourse, the macrocosm sublime aspects, the sublime moments, sublime terror, and the effects of sublime discourse. He concludes that there is a "rapprochement of the divine and the human" where humans are raised to a sublime reality.

Murray J. Evans, a scholar in English literary studies strongly grounded in rhetoric, the sublime, the Bible, and theology, interacted with the essays presented in Denver in 2018. His work brings a wonderfully helpful interdisciplinary perspective to the work of biblical scholars who are interested in rhetoric and in the sublime. In his article "Coleridge's Sublime and Rhetorical Interpretation of New Testament Texts," Evans brings to the foreground of our work in biblical studies the thought and writing of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In his essay, Evans does four things: (1) presents aspects of Coleridge's biography, his influential ideas, and understanding of the sublime; (2) discusses hermeneutical concerns regarding using Coleridge's sublime for the analysis of ancient texts; (3) discusses ideological implications for sublime rhetoric in theology and issues of power; and (4) provides a sample and analysis of one of Coleridge's "devices of sublime rhetoric." Along the way, Evans interacts with essays in part 1 of this volume. Coleridge described the sublime by distinguishing it from other figures. He imagined the sublime, Evans points out, not by a clear and concise definition, not by imagery or wording that has clear boundaries, but by the vaguer language of "a 'hazy apprehension' of 'boundless or endless *allness*'" with which vagueness observers or readers engage intensely. Evans views Coleridge's sublime as useful for biblical interpreters and Christian theologians because Coleridge always had the Bible and theology in sight. He had a view toward transcendence where language means more than it says. Evans points out that Coleridge had in sight what in SRI are called *textures* in texts. So Coleridge's sublime "is not so much a strange country somewhere else, but instead, something close by, perhaps next door."

Part 2, "Development: The Terrifying Sublime," probes the sublime language in our range of texts that prompts the inherent emotion and experience of terror. Terror is evoked by threatening and fearsome religious experiences, by words, ideas, and visions that shock, dismay, and horrify, sometimes causing panic and other emotional and physical responses. In his article, "Terror and the Logic of the Sublime in Revelation," Christopher T. Holmes draws again on Longinus to analyze the nature and force of terror in Revelation. Holmes's aim is to explore the logic of the sublime in Revelation and to show how terror is evoked in a number of scenes in Revelation. The essay argues that the effects of sublime terror support the

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hortatory goals of Revelation. This is more than persuasion; it is ἔκστασις, dislocation. What Longinus describes as “impressive ideas” and “vehement emotion” are presented in words that function as symbolic images of superhuman creatures and catastrophic judgments that strike terror in people and create an “overwhelming experience” meant to move audiences away from fear of merely temporal Roman demands for obedience to trust in God who judges empires. Holmes points out that the deep emotions of terror provoked by the visions of Revelation dislocate audiences from the pressures of inevitable suffering as Christ-believers to continuing trust and obedience. Sublime rhetoric points them toward awe and respect for Christ (Rev 1), for God seated in the throne room (Rev 4), for terror at scenes of judgment (Rev 6–16), and for the terror aroused by the beasts (Rev 12–13). The terrible things stretch thinking to disturbing heights. Yet the displacing terror pushes audiences to recognize the similarly overwhelming power of God for their own good and the security they have in the assurance of faith. Hence, the sublime effect of terror.

Vernon K. Robbins's “Sublime Terror in 1 Enoch” shifts our attention away from the Longinian sublime to Immanuel Kant's philosophy, particularly as it is presented and interpreted by Robbins's colleague, philosopher Rudolf Makkreel. Kant carries us deeply into thinking about the sublime. Kant described the human mind engaging in “pure and practical reason” when it makes “determinant judgments” in understandable, linear ways. He described “reflective judgment” as what occurs when the mind “experiences nature imaginatively.” Pure and practical reasoning is deductive while reflective judgment is inductive. Pure and practical reasoning *erases* emotions and understands while reflective judgment *assesses* emotions and interprets aesthetically. The sublime leads to aesthetic comprehension. Kant defines the sublime as a “state of mind,” which means that it is interpretation that is sublime, not physical objects or things. Robbins proceeds to analyze 1 En. 21.1–10 and 62.1–14, employing Kant's descriptions of the mathematical sublime and the dynamical sublime. The mathematical sublime interprets according to magnitude while the dynamical sublime interprets according to power. First Enoch 21.1–10 presents the mathematical sublime in its sense of immeasurable time and spaces. First Enoch 62.1–14 presents the dynamical sublime of the powerful chosen son of man. Both of these texts evoke sublime terror with the fearsome senses of deep cosmic space-time and the judgment of God. Robbins goes on to consider how the sublime empowers or builds up people by presenting Kant's *Bildungsvermögen*, which Makkreel translates and analyzes as “the

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formative faculty in the imagination." Robbins points out that Kant's view of the effect of the sublime is what SRI describes as the *rhetorical force* of texts. He considers how the rhetorical force of sublime terror might energize the moral resources of agapeic communities for good in the world. In the end, he wonders how well it will work in self-interested societies.

Harry O. Maier, in "The Sublime Terror of Ignatius of Antioch," takes us to the bizarre horror of the letter of Ignatius to the Romans. Ignatius longs for his own martyrdom, for being attacked, mutilated, and killed by wild beasts in the arena in Rome. He adjures the Christ-believers in Rome not to intervene for him. Maier's analysis of the rhetoric of the letter demonstrates that it is "designed to transport listeners from their everyday experiences to the arena, to invoke in them an experience of sublime terror." This is the sublime force. Ignatius wants his audience in Rome to feel the emotion of his suffering and death, thereby being shocked into silence by the sense of being dragged along with him into the arena to watch and hear the tearing of his flesh and the crushing of his bones. Ignatius is crazy, a madman, pushing people to imagine that such horrid suffering is good and desirable, that the gruesome mutilation and death will bring him to Christ. Maier explains that this strange sublime rhetoric sparks fear but simultaneously agreement. This, of course, is what Ignatius wants, drawing his listeners into silence and awe. The effect is to transport audience members to a terrifying mental location, to bring about the silent ἔκστασις. The sublime produces the silence that prevents the Roman believers from intervening so that Ignatius himself can be a "word of God." Allegiance is to Christ, not to saving Ignatius and avoiding the horrors. Usually expected good judgment is lost. Ignatius looks forward to the pain.

In "Subliming the Sublime: The Bible and the Sublime in Eighteenth-Century Britain," Alan P. R. Gregory takes us on a journey through an era of developed interest in the sublime. The Bible was imagined by eighteenth-century critics to have within it the most sublime of all texts. This led to "an account of how the Bible … worked, how it affected readers in ways that were religiously formative, even salvific." The Bible was imagined to contain the greatest examples of the sublime because it addresses the most sublime object, God. The critics also believed that the Bible employed a range of sublime topoi including terror, which was seen as a powerful motivator for order. Gregory considers how the sublime was accorded religious authority; how it influenced the reading and interpretation of the Bible; how it was connected with notions of biblical authority; and how the sublime affected the popular religious imagination. He discusses the

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sublime particularly as it was understood by Edward Young, John Dennis, and Edmund Burke. Dennis considered terror to be so "irresistible" that it forces out all other passions and drives people to God. It is such an "invincible force" that it leads to the renovation of minds and hearts. Burke saw terror as one of the "passions that serve 'self-preservation.'" Sublime texts, including those that evoke terror, were argued to be "religiously formative." Gregory suggests that eighteenth-century critics "sublimed the sublime" so as to have salvific power, to have the ability to restore humans to their "paradisal origins." Frightening people with a little horror was viewed as one of the sublime functions. God is known as a fearsome force not to be opposed. This does, as Gregory points out, obscure the complexities of scripture and skews understandings of God, a rhetorical force that continues in the language and thinking of some popular traditions.

The volume closes with Jeal's "Sublime Terror in Context: A Response," a commentary on the articles in part 2. This essay begins by reminding us that terrifying rhetography causes dislocation. The language and imagery of terror touches minds and bodies, transporting them to the emotional realm of fear and anxiety. Terror draws people in—it can move them to feel that they are participants in the terrifying places and pains. Jeal goes on to explain that, in terms of SRI, this is the *rhetorical force* of the sublime terror in texts. Thinking, belief, and behavior are shaped by the dynamics of terror. While the rhetorical force of sublime terror is, ostensibly, meant to move people toward good things, it can be used both to thrill them and to brutalize them into a fearful submission. It can be a friend or an enemy. It closes with consideration of sublime terror texture as one of many "arrangement[s] … of threads" that interweave with others to form "network[s] of meaning and meaning effects" that can be explored and analyzed.

The essays in this volume point toward the approach to interpretation that SRI has in sight. They offer views of a *texture* that is evident in texts and deserves recognition and analysis. To identify and analyze sublime textures is to study and learn about a fascinating aspect of the rhetorical, social, and cognitive nature of texts that reveals much about how they function to influence thinking and behavior. It is an important feature of a full-bodied interpretation. These essays expand the scope of what SRI examines, explores, and discovers. What is clear is that the sublime has what SRI calls *rhetorical force*. The sublime textures are effective. They function, as the essays point out, to transport minds and bodies to trust, to act, and, in most if not all situations, to thrive. While not all of the

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essays employ SRI explicitly or implicitly, they demonstrate that the sublime has rhetorical, religious, and moral power. There is a modest amount of overlap in discussions of Longinus's *On the Sublime* as a starting point for analysis, but this is not a distraction. Longinus provides an important contextual frame from which to garner ideas and figures and a grasp of the power of elevated, ὕψος language. The essays by Olbricht, Evans, Robbins, and Gregory draw in the deep thinking of others who have described and analyzed the sublime and its effects from the eighteenth to twenty-first centuries. There are differing explanations of the sublime. What is clear is that the sublime affects mind and body in ways not immediately, probably not ever, understood in completely systematic, rational ways.

Perhaps in some ways there is a mystical aspect of the sublime, a kind of illumination. Certainly the texts in our purview imagine, indeed anticipate, unmediated contacts with God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, angels, and a range of apocalyptic creatures and events. The sublime insists that readers of the texts think about the sacred and the sacred realm. Still, it does not call us to abandon the intellect. It is just that human intellect does not always get it, does not quite know how it works. Some things are known apart from intellectual understanding. Perhaps, for example, the value and force of "speaking to each other in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and praising in your hearts to the Lord" (Eph 5:19) does not need more rationality than what the sublime notions convey. Humans can become convinced by the actual practice.

Sincere thanks to the contributors for their essays and the scholarly work. Special thanks to Dr. Erika Olbricht, Thomas H. Olbricht's daughter, who kindly worked through her late father's essay and, later, prepared the foreword to this volume. The essays are offered in the hope that readers and interpreters of the texts will notice, study, and analyze the *sublime verses* as a piece of what we do to understand meanings. They are also offered with memories of two rhetoricians, scholars of the Bible and rhetoric who were good friends and supporters: Tom Olbricht and David Hester. Tom and David were persons who loved their work, made major contributions, and loved and cared for their colleagues among whom we may count ourselves. We have learned and inherited much from them and are grateful.[3]

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3. See now Lauri Thurén, ed., *Rhetoric and Scripture: Collected Essays of Thomas H. Olbricht*, ESEC 23 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2021).