

COSTELLOE, TIMOTHY M., ed. *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present*. Cambridge University Press, 2012, xiii + 304 pp., 36 b&w illus., \$35.95 paper.

In this volume, Timothy Costelloe has put together a wide-ranging collection of articles on the sublime. The volume is divided into two sections, with eight chapters on the philosophical history and seven chapters on thematic concerns such as the religious sublime and the sublime in architecture.

The full sweep of philosophical positions is presented in the first half of the book, ranging from Longinus, through eighteenth- and nineteenth-century aesthetics, to postmodernist approaches. The most celebrated accounts—those of Burke and Kant—are given their due here. An in-depth discussion of Longinus's ur-text *Peri Hupsous* by Malcolm Heath is also much appreciated (including a renewal of the claim that third-century critic Cassius Longinus should be credited with authorship of the famous treatise). Lesser known figures such as the "Scottish Enlightenment" contemporaries of Burke (Alexander Gerard, Lord Kames, Dugald Stewart, and Archibald Alison) are given consideration as well. Overall, while there are one or two philosophers who do not receive much attention (for example, Hume, Herder), these are not major omissions, and the reader will find a fairly comprehensive collection of different approaches here.

It should be noted that the authors do not set out simply to survey the options, but usually have a particular interpretative point to make about the philosopher's work under discussion or seek to draw out some narrative connection between several thinkers (Paul Guyer's chapter, "The German Sublime after Kant," is a good example of the latter). This volume is not then a textbook. On the other hand, we do not find the different authors debating with each other, particularly concerning what, in fact, the sublime *is*, since they are each concerned to present their patch of the historical landscape as sympathetically as possible. As a reviewer reading through the book from start to finish, this could at times make the overall reading experience rather dry (a minor quibble, I was also not able to discern any logic to the way the chapters were ordered—one would have thought the historical chapters at least would have been ordered by chronology). But this is a volume that is probably most useful when seeking guidance on a particular historical figure's view or particular thematic approach; it is left to the reader to synthesize the wide variety of viewpoints presented.

As a reader less driven by historical concerns, the best chapters in the first section to my mind are ones where the historical information is explicitly put in service of an argument about how the sublime can be understood or where the continuing relevance of

the view under discussion is made clear. A good example is Rachel Zuckert's chapter on the Scottish Enlightenment philosophers. Zuckert argues that by appealing to imaginative associations in making sense of the impact of the sublime upon the spectator (for instance, that great magnitude is impressive due to associated thoughts of power or God), the Scottish philosophers had the capacity to admit artistic sources of the sublime as equal, if not superior, to natural sources. At the same time, however, the ever-increasing class of objects admitted by associative accounts undermined the attempt to discern any unifying features to the sublime. Imaginative associations certainly seem apt to lend richer significance to objects like mountains and storms, helping to account for the intuitive profundity of the experience. Yet if one is to avoid diluting the concept of the sublime too much, one must constrain some aspect of the experience. Burke was able to achieve this with his appeal to the necessary presence of fear, but as Zuckert notes, his contemporaries did not make use of this claim.

Turning to the second half of the book, we again find a commendable range of traditions represented, with explorations of the sublime in certain national traditions (Holland and America) as well as fine art, religion, the environment, British Romantic poetry, and architecture. Perhaps the biggest omission is the lack of a chapter on the musical sublime. Music is given some attention in the chapter by Theodore Gracyk, but the discussion here is aimed at a fairly high level regarding the concept of "fine art" and the difficulties of accommodating the sublime (and its musical exemplification) within the traditional definitions of fine art as pleasing semblance.

Two of the chapters that I found most interesting in this section were Emily Brady's chapter on the environmental sublime and Andrew Chignell and Matthew C. Halteman's chapter on religion and the sublime. Chignell and Halteman's chapter presents a number of passages from different religious traditions that convey some of the most astonishing imagery conceivable. To account for the strong connection between the sublime and religious thinking, the authors draw on the common idea found in Kant and others that the sublime experience involves some form of cognitive failure, followed by intellectual reconstruction: "a eureka stage at which the subject's affections or beliefs are changed, existing states are in some way strengthened, or familiar commitments are transformed" (p. 185). However, the authors convincingly argue that the sublime experience can be, and has been, co-opted for all kinds of religious or spiritual interpretations, including the disillusionment with religious worldviews entirely (in the face of phenomena such as the Holocaust). Given the mutually conflicting nature of the revelations reported,

the sublime cannot usefully be treated as evidence for any metaphysical truths.

One point I would make about Chignell and Halteman's argument here is that it does not seem that the revelatory move they describe is essential to the sublime, even when restricted to the more technical eighteenth-century usages of the term (p. 184). Perhaps at a minimum one's existence is put into some kind of perspective—one sees how tiny or vulnerable one is in the face of a larger universe. But understanding this need not require the sense of anything outstripping one's conceptual or imaginative capacities. Again, when one is presented with various hyperbolic descriptions of sublime experiences, one is led to wonder if one has ever really experienced the sublime at all. I imagine this is quite a common problem for anyone writing on this subject. But the kind of humbling and wondrous experience that can quite easily be triggered by the contemplation of mountain scenery seems no less a legitimate case of the sublime, though lacking in any nontrivial form of cognitive reconstruction. The description of the eureka stage quoted above is also rather too broad to usefully delineate a subset of the sublime, though I certainly agree that there is a variety of the sublime experience involving intellectual reconstruction that is worth examining for its epistemological implications.

Emily Brady's chapter on the environmental sublime, meanwhile, is noteworthy for staking its ground as a contemporary account of the sublime (p. 171). Brady argues that the sublime remains particularly relevant to our attitudes toward the environment, and that artistic sources of the sublime are secondary—deriving their sublimity from the metaphorical possession of qualities that are literally possessed by environmental cases. Brady further maintains that despite certain considerations for supposing that modern technological civilization makes us less susceptible to encounters with the sublime, people are still drawn to natural landscapes for the stimulation of the “metaphysical imagination.” This is a term derived from Ronald Hepburn, who defines it as a way of experiencing nature that reveals “metaphysical insights: insights about things such as the meaning of life, the human condition, or our place in the cosmos” (p. 176). Clearly then, this is relevant to the considerations raised by Chignell and Halteman in their chapter on the religious sublime—but Brady wants to avoid off-putting associations with “religious or mystical experiences” (p. 175) in preference to a metaphysical account that is compatible with more contemporary aesthetic attitudes toward nature.

Brady seems largely in favor of Kant's approach to the sublime, though she wants to emphasize that the natural world is not merely an opportunity to

realize the sublimity of the subject's own moral vocation or capacities of pure reason. Brady believes that Kant does not have such a purely egotistical or anthropocentric view on the sublime, though I do not see how this can be reconciled with Kant's statement that the sublime “does not reside in any of the things of nature, but only in our own mind, in so far as we may become conscious of our superiority over nature within, and thus also over nature without us” (*Critique of Judgment*, §28). At any rate, Brady argues that the sublime involves an appreciation of the resistant and mysterious qualities of nature for its own sake. In some places, she speaks of a regard for nature's independence and “otherness” (p. 180), though at other points, we should recognize ourselves as *part* of nature: “We become a mere ingredient in the landscape, but we are at the same time aware of ourselves as overwhelmed, humbled by particular qualities in nature” (p. 181). I am sympathetic to the idea that sublime experience affords us a sense of being just one tiny part of a much vaster universe. I defended a compatible account in a recent article (“The Emotional Experience of the Sublime,” *The Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 42 [2012]: 125–148). But I think Brady is somewhat hamstrung by her appeal to the Kantian model of self-realization here, which emphasizes our *independence* from nature. Her commitment to a “metaphysical” interpretation notwithstanding, the relationship with nature that Brady wants to draw from the sublime experience seems far more compatible with the empiricist perspective developed by Johann Herder and defended by Rachel Zuckert in “Awe or Envy: Herder contra Kant on the Sublime” (*The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 61 [2003]: 217–232). Brady briefly references this view, but rejects it for neglecting the awareness of pure reason and freedom that Kant describes (p. 175, fn. 12). As far as I am concerned, these Kantian bugbears have roughly the same epistemic status as the religious revelations examined by Chignell and Halteman.

Overall, I am in agreement with Brady that the sublime is a concept that remains relevant to contemporary life. Even if the traditional philosophical concept is one that ultimately should be discharged, this hardly signals the end of the human experience it aims to capture, as Costelloe notes in his introduction (p. 1). How could we fail to be concerned with an experience in which we confront our attitudes toward the wider universe—an attitude crucially bound up with the awareness of our own mortality? Still, given that nearly all recent articles on the sublime, including the chapters in this volume, are dominated by reflections on historical treatises, it is clear that the sublime has gone out of intellectual fashion. It would be unfortunate if only the postmodernist philosophers felt able to present new accounts of the sublime. As

presented in David Johnson's chapter, at least one of the postmodernist philosophers, Jean-François Lyotard, had a genuinely fresh (if rather confusing) perspective on the sublime; where it is understood as a distinctive compulsion to conceive the absolute that must necessarily fail. I was not convinced that the other postmodernist thinkers discussed in that chapter had much that was worth recommending, however. I would hope to see more philosophers working within the analytic tradition interested in formulating new accounts of the sublime. This volume should help to renew interest and provide numerous launching pads for further explorations.

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ALWARD, PETER. *Empty Revelations: An Essay on Talk about, and Attitudes toward, Fiction*. McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012, x + 206 pp., \$95.00 cloth.

Peter Alward has written an excellent essay on the nature of literary fiction. One goal of primary importance in *Empty Revelations* is to defend the "theatrical model" of fiction in which storytellers are like actors onstage and readers are like the audience. Fictive composition, on this model, is distinguished from fictive storytelling, and the failure to appreciate this distinction has led to a host of inadequate theories in the past, thinks Alward. The theatrical model is thus put to use to provide a robust account of the central types of fictional discourse and how readers and listeners engage with works of fiction.

His view is motivated by a fundamental desire to explain substantive, meaningful discourse about the nonexistent. (One finds in the introduction the briefest of motivations for Alward's antirealist approach regarding fictional individuals. He does, I think, say enough here to get the project off the ground, but in the end, I am not sure that he is left with a view that is overall better off in virtue of eschewing realism; more on this later.) The essay is divided into three parts, the first part negative, the latter two positive. He begins by presenting arguments against prominent "act/attitude" analyses of fictional composition and reader engagement with fiction before developing his own positive accounts of these activities as well as a novel account of truth in fiction. He ends the essay with a defense of a neo-Fregean theory of fictional proper names and a discussion of some of the broader applications of his views.

The topic Alward first addresses is this: What sort of speech acts do authors of fiction perform when

composing a fiction? His main claim is that previous answers to this question are inadequate, and the diagnosis is that the accounts on offer are guilty of running together the compositional activities of an author with the activity of storytelling. John R. Searle ("The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse," *New Literary History* 6 [1975]: 319–332) (who takes authors to be pretending to perform illocutionary speech acts when composing fictions), Gregory Currie (*The Nature of Fiction* [Cambridge University Press, 1990]) (who holds that authors perform *sui generis* fictive illocutionary acts), and Monroe C. Beardsley ("Fiction as Representation," *Synthese* 46 [1981]: 291–313) (who takes fictional composition to just be the representation of illocutionary action) are the targets here.

Alward next offers a host of compelling arguments for thinking that rival accounts also carry unacceptable consequences regarding reader or listener engagement with fiction. One may favor a view on which the attitudes of the reader or listener engaged with a fictional work are either doxastic or imaginative. Among the views of the former sort, those of Colin Radford ("How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina," *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 49 [1975]: 67–80) and Eva Schaper ("Fiction and the Suspension of Disbelief," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 18 [1978]: 31–44) seem to wrongly take our emotions and attitudes toward fiction to ultimately be explained by beliefs (for example) we bear to fictional worlds and their inhabitants. After rejecting these theories as well as some "intra-actual-world" doxastic views, Alward settles on the claim that the relation engaged readers must bear to fictions is an imaginative one. However, some of the prominent views of this sort, for example, Kendall Walton's (*Mimesis as Make-Believe* [Harvard University Press, 1990]) and Derek Matravers's ("The Paradox of Fiction," in *Emotion and the Arts*, eds. Mette Hjort and Sue Laver [Oxford University Press, 1997], pp. 78–92), fail in virtue of their reliance on *de se* imagining. Such theories usually entail that our engagement with fiction is best understood in terms of simulations of genuine emotions; as Alward notes, however, if this is correct, one would expect a simulated frustration at our lack of an ability to intervene on behalf of the characters we are involved with. But engaged readers typically feel no such thing. Alward thus registers his intention to argue for a fundamentally different sort of imaginative account, one that has the engaged reader imagining *de re* of a fictional text that it is a report provided by a fictional narrator.

Throughout Part I of *Empty Revelations*, one is struck by Alward's thoroughness and attention to detail. The arguments are subtle and careful, and one does not feel rushed through the tangle of complex issues.