



Reinventing the Sublime: Post-Romantic Literature and Theory

Steven Vine

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Reinventing the Sublime looks at the return of the sublime in postmodernity, and at intimations of a ‘post-Romantic’ sublime in Romanticism itself. The sublime is explored as a discourse of ‘invention’ – taking the Latin meaning of to ‘come upon’, ‘find’, ‘discover’ – that involves an encounter with the new, the unregulated and the surprising. Lyotard and Žižek, among others, have reconfigured the sublime for postmodernity by exceeding the subject-centred discourse of Romantic aesthetics, and promoting not a sublime of the subject, but of the unrepresentable, the ‘Real’, the unknown, the other. *Reinventing the Sublime* examines 18th-century, Romantic, modernist and postmodern ‘inventions’ of the sublime alongside contemporary critical accounts of the relationship of sublimity to subjectivity, aesthetics, politics and history, including ‘9/11’. It reads Burke and Kant alongside postmodern discourses on the sublime, and Wordsworth, De Quincey and Mary Shelley in relation to temporality and materiality in Romanticism, and considers ‘modernist’ inflections of the sublime in T.S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf and Djuna Barnes in relation to the themes of disjunction and excess in modernity. The author examines the postmodern revisiting of the sublime in Thomas Pynchon, D.M. Thomas and Toni Morrison, and draws on Lyotard’s reading of the sublime as an aesthetic of the avant-garde and as a singular and disruptive ‘event’, to argue that the sublime in its postmodern and contemporary forms encodes an anxious but affirmative relationship to the ironies of temporality and history. Reinventing the Sublime focuses on the endurance of the sublime in contemporary thinking, and on the way that the sublime can be read as a figure of the relationship of representation to temporality itself.



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