

EDMUND BURKE (1729–1797)

A PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY INTO THE ORIGIN OF OUR IDEAS OF THE SUBLIME AND BEAUTIFUL (1757)

Of The Sublime

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. I say the strongest emotion, because I am satisfied the ideas of pain are much more powerful than those which enter on the part of pleasure. Without all doubt, the torments which we may be made to suffer, are much greater in their effect on the body and mind, than any pleasures which are most learned voluptuary could suggest, or than the liveliest imagination, and the most sound and exquisitely sensible body, could enjoy. Nay, I am in great doubt whether any man could be found who would earn a life of the most perfect satisfaction, at the price of ending it in the torments, which justice inflicted in a few hours on the late unfortunate regicide in France. But as pain is stronger in its operation than pleasure, so death is in general a much more affecting idea than pain; because there are very few pains, however exquisite, which are not preferred to death; nay, what generally makes pain itself, if I may say so, more painful, is, that it is considered as an emissary of this king of terrors. When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful, as we every day experience.

Of Beauty

But man, who is a creature adapted to a greater variety and intricacy of relation, connects with the general passion, the idea of some social qualities, which direct and heighten the appetite which he has in common with all other animals; and as he is not deigned like them to live at large, it is fit that he should have something to create a preference, and fix his choice; and this in general should be some sensible quality; as no other can so quickly, so powerfully or so surely produce its effect. The object therefore of this mixed passion, which we call love, is the beauty of the sex. Men are carried to the sex in general, as it is the sex, and by the common law of nature; but they are attached to particulars by personal beauty. I call beauty a social quality; for where women and men, and not only they, but when other animals give us a sense of joy and pleasure in beholding them (and there are many that do so), they inspire us with sentiments of tenderness and affection towards their persons; we like to have them near to us, and we enter willingly into a kind of relation with them, unless we should have strong reasons to the contrary.

The Sublime and Beautiful Compared

On closing this general view of beauty, it naturally occurs, that we should compare it with the sublime; and in this comparison there appears a remarkable contrast. For sublime objects are vast in their dimensions, beautiful ones comparatively small: beauty should be smooth and polished; the great, rugged and negligent; beauty should not be obscure; the great ought to be dark and gloomy: beauty should be light and delicate;

the great ought to be solid, and even massive. They are indeed ideas of a very different nature, one being founded on pain, the other on pleasure; and however they may vary afterwards from the direct nature of their causes, yet these causes keep up an eternal distinction between them, a distinction never to be forgotten by any whose business it is to affect the passions.

Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Basil: J. J. Tourneisen, 1792), 47–48, 53–54, 202–203.

GIOVANNI BATTISTA BELZONI (1778–1823)
NARRATIVE OF THE OPERATIONS AND RECENT DISCOVERIES
WITHIN THE PYRAMIDS, TEMPLES, TOMBS, AND EXCAVATIONS
IN EGYPT (1820)

My constant occupation was searching after their antiquities . . . we embarked for Egypt, where we remained from 1815 to 1819. Here I had the good fortune to be the discoverer of many remains of antiquity of that primitive nation. I succeeded in opening one of the two famous Pyramids of Ghizeh, as well as several of the tombs of the Kings at Thebes. . . . The celebrated bust of young Memnon, which I brought from Thebes, is now in the British Museum; and the alabaster sarcophagus, found in the tombs of the kings, is on its way to England.

When I ascended the Nile, the first and second time, I had no other idea in my mind, but that I was making researches for antiquities, which were to be placed in the British Museum. . . . I am happy, however, to state, that I succeeded in putting all the articles of my discovery on their way to the British Museum, though not in the same manner in which I thought they were to be entered in that place at first, as was the case with the young Memnon head.

The indecision, whether I should go up or down the Nile, came at last to a point. I know not what to call it, whether curiosity, or that enthusiasm for antiquities, which I can trace from my younger days while in Rome, that spurred me on to decide to ascend the Nile.

The first ruins we arrived at were those of Shak Abade Here is the first Egyptian architecture that travellers meet with on the Nile above the pyramids; and I must say, that it has made a great impression on my mind, though it is only a portico of two rows of columns. The solitary place on which it stands, in the midst of the ruins of Hermopolis, and the majestic appearance of the columns, of a form so uncommon to a European, cannot fail to inspire veneration for the people that erected such edifices.

. . . my curiosity was at a high pitch, the noted temple of Tentyra being the only thought I had in my head. . . . On arriving before it, I was for some time at a loss to know where I should begin my examination. The numerous objects before me, all equally attractive, left me for a while in a state of astonishment. The enormous masses of stone employed in the edifice are so well disposed, that the eye discovers the most just proportion everywhere. The majestic appearance of its construction, the variety of its ornaments, and, above all, the singularity of its preservation, had such an effect on me, that I seated myself on the ground, and for a considerable time was lost in admiration. It

is the first Egyptian temple the traveller sees on ascending the Nile, and it is certainly the most magnificent.

As I entered these ruins, my first thought was to examine the colossal bust [Memnon head] I had to take away. I found it near the remains of its body and chair, with its face upwards, and apparently smiling on me, at the thought of being taken to England. I must say, that my expectations were exceeded by its beauty, but not by its size.

Taken from Giovanni Battista Belzoni, *Narrative of the Operations and Recent Discoveries within the Pyramids, Temples, Tombs, and Excavations in Egypt* (London: John Murray, 1820), 1:vii–ix, 25–26, 33, 39.