Spring 2020
ITAL-GA 2155
The Sublime: History and Geography of a Rhetorical, Aesthetic and Ethical Idea from the Middle Ages to Modernity
Professor Maria Luisa Ardizzone

3:30-6:10 Tuesdays; Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò, Library (Room 203)

Same as EURO-GA 2162.004 and MEDI-GA 2300.001 and COLIT-GA 3918

The history of the sublime in the West began with Francesco Robortello publication of the Pseudo Longinus treatise On the Sublime (Basel 1554). The French translation of Boileau (1674) starts the fortune of the treatise and its dissemination through Europe between the 18th and the 20th centuries. Rather than concentrating on the fortune of the sublime, most recent studies have focused on the origin of this idea by showing that its roots are part of the ancient Greek and Latin Culture, and that although the word itself was not used before the first century BC, the concept existed long before. A basic assumption is that the pseudo Longinus treatise, dated between the second and third century, was not an original work and that it was a product of the Platonism of the time. The course considers the sources of the sublime in the Greek and Latin rhetoric of grand style. It evaluates the importance of this notion in the biblical theological tradition, as well as in the Neoplatonic and Neoplatonic Christian authors such as Plotinus, the pseudo Dionysius, Augustine, Gregory the Great, Richard of Saint Victor, and others. Classes will be devoted to reading and discussing texts in the vernacular Italian tradition in both prose and poetry, tracing the making of this idea and its evolution from the first lyric poetry of the 13th century to authors such as Dante, Petrarch, the Platonic school of Florence, Leonardo, Michelangelo, Vittoria Colonna, Galileo, Vico, Leopardi, and Montale. In this perspective, the course also offers a kind of introduction to the theory of the sublime, as it develops from the 16th century to today, as in the work of Burke, Vico, Kant, Hegel, and Lyotard.

The course will be given in English. Open to advanced undergraduates with a GPA or 3.5 or higher. Contact italian.dept@nyu.edu for more information.