

BREATHING IN THE OTHER: ENTHUSIASM AND THE SUBLIME IN
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN

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ABSTRACT

This project assesses enthusiasm and the sublime as important eighteenth-century phenomena for establishing the limits and bases of reason and polite discourse. My research focuses eighteenth-century and current sources to try to recover what has been lost in the often heated rhetoric on enthusiasm and the sublime. In looking at eighteenth-century philosophy, criticism, and literature, this project re-imagines possibilities of the sublime beyond ideological repression and ethical kindness. It also recasts enthusiasm as more than mere madness or a matter of emotion and takes the problem of inspiration seriously. The method applied here is largely psychoanalytic. Jacques Lacan's concepts of the subject and the Other inform this dissertation's return to enthusiasm and his idea of logical time informs its reassessment of the sublime. This approach sheds new light on non-canonical critics such as John Dennis, long-misunderstood poets such as William Collins, and newly canonized novelists such as Charlotte Lennox.