

Literary Theory and Literary Criticism
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Classical Theory
Lec 5 Part C

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Welcome. So, we continue our lecture on classical literary criticism. We will be talking about the Hellenistic age, particularly between 323 to 31 BC. The key names here are Horace, Longinus, and also to certain degree, we will be referring to Callimachus Philetas, Theocritus and Philostratus. However, the focus of this lecture, this particular lecture is on Horace and Longinus. The key texts would be Ars Poetica, odes, epistles and satires, all by Horace and Longinus on the sublime and his notion of sublimity.

So, what was the Hellenistic age? This age begins with the death of Alexander the Great. As we know, Alexander the Great and his conquest made the eastern world a centre of political, cultural and commercial activity. It became a major centre of attraction, a major focus for people around the world. Some major poets of this age were Callimachus, Philetas, who created Allegis and Epigrams and Theocritus to whom we give credit for writing pastoral, for creating pastoral poetry.

This was also the time when the rift between rhetoric and grammar became more prominent, more pronounced. In general, in general terms, a rhetorical critic on how work expresses or shapes values and behavior. So, this is what the period was all about. It is made, marked by a great technical approach to literature.

The increasing technical character of criticism is evident in stoicism, which is a philosophy founded by Zeno of Citium whose essential teaching was, that true happiness was the result of moral and intellectual perfection. The stoics developed the theory of grammar in which we ascend through six stages from reading aloud to the criticism of poetry. So, six stages given to us by the stoics although the stoics, be it poetry as a form of initiation, they were also aware of its part of imagination.

So, Philostratus, the Greek stoic referring to stoic philosophy in his life of a Apollonius of Tyana, which was written in AD 215 distinguished between copying what is seen and creating what is not seen for which he uses the term phantasia, p, h, a, n, t, a, s, i, a. So, soon we will see how the English romantics were influenced by these idea's fantasy.

So, let us talk about the great Horace whose life is between 65 or who lived between 65 to 8 BC. Horace was the son of a former slave turned auctioneer. Horace received very good education in Rome and Athens. He was a student of Plato's at the academy. Following that he held a high position, a high military rank under Brutus. So, when Brutus was defeated, Horace fled back to Rome, which was then controlled by Octavian who later, who later styled himself as Augustus, Emperor Augustus.

Horace was the foremost lyric poet of Emperor Augustus's reign and was commissioned by the emperor to write the hymn, calm and secular. While Plato and Aristotle regarded poetry as a form of ethical training or emotional management, Horace extended its scope to promoting eloquence and also placating the Gods. So, poetry was much stronger tool in the hands of Horace. So, this diverts, this diversity of purpose, such diversity of purpose reflects, that poetry plays an integral part in the life of society, but equally it indicates a desire to compensate for the fact, that it may not have a clearly defined role to play in the empire. So, what was a poet supposed to do?

Horace is also composer of Odes, Satires and Epistles. In the domain of literary criticism he is known for his sayings and we will soon come to that, those sayings, which have come to form an integral part in literature and literary criticism. Horace's greatest works

are *Ars Poetica*, *Epistles*, ((Refer Time: 06:16)) odes and satires and the poet calls his satires, he also uses another term, that is, sermons or conversations. Essentially, Horace's satires is a defense of satires and the second book of epistles contains a literary letter to Emperor Augustus. So, extending the scope of poetry, this is what we witness in Horace. *Ars Poetica*, of course, is his most important work. Interestingly, Horace despises playgoers and calls them stupid and illiterate.

Another great poet of the time was Ovid. You may recall his *metamorphosis* and who too complained about the Roman stage. So, in this way there is some kind of a similarity between Plato and Horace and Ovid. The idea is, that theatre corrupts.

Now, let us go on to *Ars Poetica* and what is this great work all about. So, this was composed sometime between 19 to 18 BC. Literally, it means, the art of poetry. The work was originally known as epistle to the Pisos. The work is an urbane discussion, very modern for those times, discussion of Aristotle's, discussion of literary genres. As we may recall, Aristotle had talked about epic, comedy and tragedy by Horace's time genres also included lyrics ((Refer Time: 08:10)) and epigrams. *Ars Poetica* comprises 476 lines containing almost 30 magazines for young poets. As I was just talking about these, the sayings of *Ars Poetica*, the work was immensely valued by Neo Classes of the 17th and 19th centuries for its rules and also its humor, common sense and appeal to educate a literary taste.

Horace's work, as I have already told you, is written in the form of an epistle, an informal letter from a well-known poet giving advice to the would be poets of the wealthy piece of family in Rome. Technically, *Ars Poetica* is a work of literary and critical theory. It is written in the form of a poem, a mode that was later imitated by the likes of ((Refer Time: 09:18)), Alexander Pope and Lord Byron. *Ars Poetica* belongs to the tradition of prescriptive criticism established by Aristotle that what a poetry should be, what is the function of poetry. So, these issues are discussed at length in *Ars Poetica*. It suggests, most importantly, that the aspiring writer must aim at nature and this will give his work unity and simplicity. In addition to imitating nature the young writer must adhere to decorum, that is, he must use the right meter for the right genre. For example, he gives the ((Refer Time: 10:07)) at the right kind of meter for writing drama because it is suitable for dialogue and intended by nature for a life of action. So, ((Refer Time: 10:17)) for drama.

The next section of *Ars Poetica* deals with how the poet can achieve perfection. However, he positions himself between two extremes for Horace poets should admire their predecessors, that is the true, but also that is important is never to exceed and never, this admiration should never be in excess. ((Refer Time: 10:49)), if the Greeks had hated novelty as much as we, what would exist now to be ranked as old. So, it is important to be impressed, influenced by, by your predecessors, but it is also important to be original, novel. To sum up Horace's literary criticism, the first is, as we already discussed, the prescriptive character of *Ars Poetica*, the advice on how to write and its view on tradition. And another way of, sorry, another feature of *Ars Poetica* is his contempt for the crowd, the sweaty mob, as he calls them.

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Horatian Ode

Let me give you some understanding of what is the Horatian Ode. Let us try to understand what is the Horatian Ode. The Horatian Ode is a short lyric poem written in a stanzas of 2 or 4 lines. In contrast to the lofty heroic odes of the Greek poet Pindar, most of Horace's Odes are intimate and reflective. Horace introduced early Greek lyrics into Latin by adapting Greek meters regularizing them and writing his Romanized versions with a discipline, that caused some loss of spontaneity and a sense of detachment, but that also produced elegance and dignity. His *Carmina* written in a stanzas of two or four lines are now called Odes.

Horace's tone is generally serious, often touched with irony, melancholy and gentle humor. In later periods, particularly during the age of sensibility and the new classical period, Horace's Odes were prized and celebrated and often imitated because of their technical strength and technical superiority.

Horatian satire is yet another legacy of Horace. Horace developed the art of satire. His satires, which appeared in several forms, they are urbane and seek to correct by gentle laughter and humor rather than by bitter condemnation. His satire on Roman society was suffused with charm and warm humanity. In three of his satires, Horace discusses the tone appropriate to the satirists who out of moral concern attacks the wise and folly he sees around him as opposed to the harshness of earlier satirists such as Lucario's. Horace opts for mild mocker and playful wit. This type of satire was later used in poetry to some extent by Pope and Dryden in England and by Nicholas Boileau in France.

In drama, this was used in forms such as the Comedy of Manners and in prose fiction, in the novels of such authors as Miguel de Cervantes, the author of Don Quixote and also Jane Austen. Now, at this point I would like you to pay attention to these lines and to this particular excerpt from Ars Poetica and consider Horace's idea on literary criticism, what a poem should be all about.

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Ars Poetica

"The aim of the poet is to inform or delight, or to combine together, in what he says, both pleasure and applicability to life. In instructing, be brief in what you say in order that your readers may grasp it quickly and retain it faithfully. Superfluous words simply spill out when the mind is already full. Fiction invented in order to please should remain close to reality."

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Ars Poetica

- He who combines the useful and the pleasing wins out by both instructing and delighting the reader.
- It is not enough for poems to be beautiful; they must be affecting, and must lead the heart of the hearer as they will.

He continues, he who combines the useful and the pleasing wins out by both instructing and delighting the reader. It is not enough for poems to be beautiful. They must be affecting, and must lead the heart of the hearers as they will. So, these are the roles of a poet, the writer and also what a poem should be all about. As an influence on literary criticism, Horace is second only to Aristotle. He has been sighted by eminent poets such as Dante.

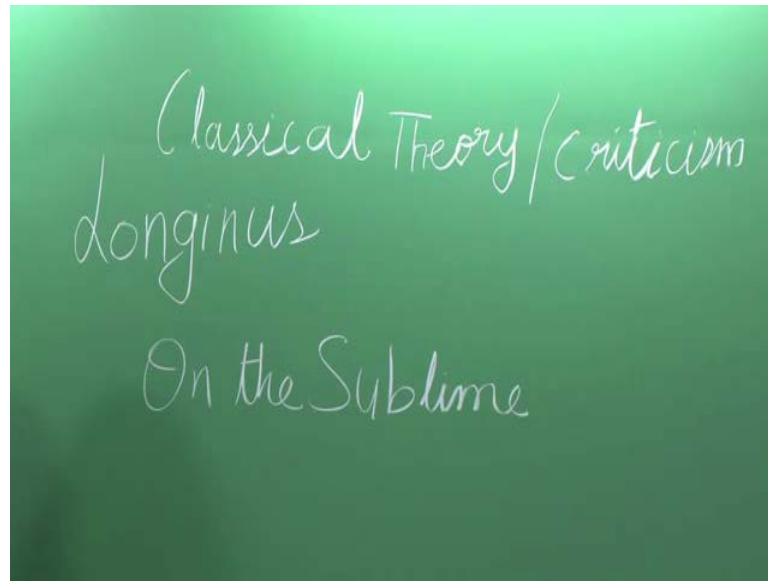
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Longinus

So, from Horace we move on to Longinus who is, you see, we are talking about Longinus and his *On the Sublime*. However, the authorship is not very well established here. So, the possible dates that we are given are 1st century AD. Now, because the idea is, what I am trying to tell you is, that the dates and the authorship of *On the Sublime* is not very well established.

So, after the period of the early Roman Empire, two major intellectual strengths emerged during the first four centuries. The first of these, the second sophistic and this was between 27 BC to 410 AD. So, second sophistic period and they took their models at the classical language and style of categories.

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The second was the philosophy of neoplatonism whose most influential exponent was Plotinus. I will write it here, Plotinus. The neoplatonist held the classical authors in the highest esteem and attempted to reconcile discrepancies between various classical authors. For example, Plato and Aristotle. In particular, they attempted to reconcile Plato's theories of poetry with the poetic practice of poets such as Homer, the writer of Iliad and the Odyssey. Basically, they tried to achieve this through allegorical and symbolic modes of interpretation. The major rhetorical treatise of this period was on the sublime written in Greek by Longinus and has, as I have already told you, the authorship is not extremely well established.

So, what is sublime? Talking about Longinus and his On the Sublime. So, how would we define sublime? The Oxford English dictionary defines it as something of very great quality, beauty or excellence. For example, we generally say, the sublime quality of Mozart music, the sublime beauty of the Himalayas, you know, to suggest a sense of grandeur. Mozart's excellent music, Himalaya's grandeur, some beauty, that transcends the normal definition of that abstract concept.

Now, going to sublime, according to Longinus what does it mean? So, Longinus offers an initial definition where the sublime consists in a consummate excellence. So, excellence is a keyword here and distinction of language, the effect of genius is not to persuade the audience, but rather to transport them out of themselves. So, almost like

they go beyond themselves. It is a sort of transcendence because this is, when the reader, when the audience are transported out of themselves. So, this is that kind of quality, that is indescribable and then that is the point where you reach the sublime. There are several ways of achieving the sublime. First is, great thoughts and strong and inspired emotions and figures. Now, here we mean figure of speech such as the use of conjunctions to connect a series of clauses.

Longinus gives us this word polysyndeton to use conjunctions in order to connect a series of clauses. The purpose of such figures and other figures also is to make style more emotional and exciting because you see, emotion is an integral part of sublimity. And this is Longinus talking to you, that emotions and overwhelming emotions are at the heart of his concept of sublimity. The other ways of achieving sublimity are noble diction and dignified and elevated word arrangement. Soon, we will be moving on to the English romanticism and perhaps you can compare and contrast what the romantist say about poetic diction and how, how much it is similar or different from Longinus's notion of a diction.

Longinus also talks about something else, that is, metaphors and regarding metaphors Longinus states, that they should be used with a certain degree of caution, not more than two or three at a time. For Longinus, one of the faults a writer may commit in striving for sublime is to create immoderate emotion. You see, sometime people go over the top. There is a difference between overwhelming emotions and immoderate emotions.

Longinus maintains, that the sublime is the highest form of literature. Those that approach the sublime are preferable to those who merely conform to the correct standards. And we have been talking about Horace and his concept of and his ideas of correctness, correct meter drama should have ((Refer Time: 22:54)). If you may recall all those things, so the idea is the sublime goes beyond mere conformity and correctness.

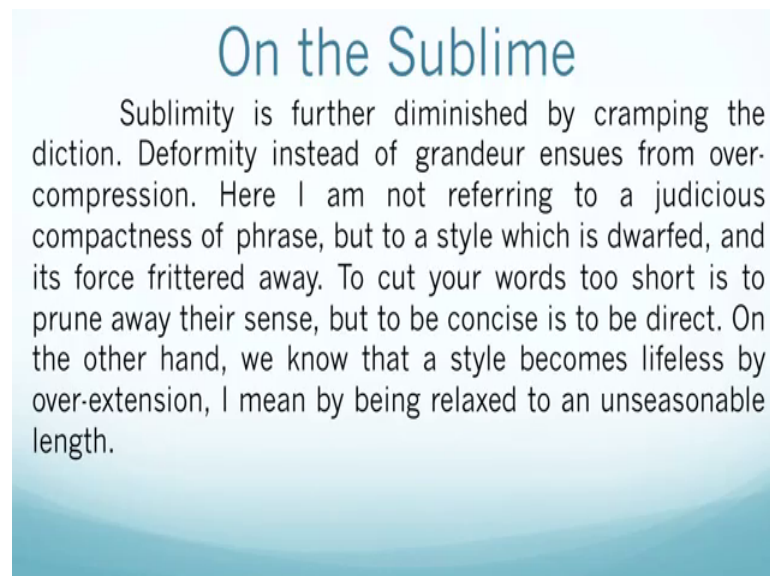
Longinus writes, it is our nature to be alleviated and exalted by true sublimity. He further says, that Pindar and Sofoklis are poets who sometimes set the world on fire with their excellence. So, that is the touchstone for Longinus. He also stresses on the quality of realism apart from sublimity. For instance, he compares Homer's Iliad and the Odyssey feels, that Iliad had abundance of imagery taken from life, but in the Odyssey, Homer is

lost in the realm of the fabulous and the incredible. So, what is more important? It is realism, that is, that it is preferable.

To sum up Longinus's ideas, he places great premium on great thoughts and powerful emotions. He compares the outpouring of powerful emotions to the eruption of Etna, Mount Etna and its famous volcanoes, I am sure all of you know your geography. While Aristotle sees literary form as organizing emotion, Longinus considers it as overpowered by strong feeling while Horace's concern is about getting poetry right, conforming, getting conforming to their standard. Longinus, on the other hand, stresses on great thoughts and powerful emotion.

So, remember, emotions overpowering strong feelings coupled with a strong touch of realism that is the key features in Longinus's *On the Sublime*. He declares the useful and the necessary are readily available to man. It is the unusual, that always excites our wonder.. Longinus also laments, that truly great or sublime literature is no longer being produced because of the love of money and the love of pleasure. This is a sort of indictment of his contemporaries and this marks a similarity between Longinus's world view and those of the romantics. I will quote a passage from *On the Sublime*.

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Sublimity is further diminished by cramping the diction. Deformity instead of grandeur ensues from over compression. Here, I am not referring to a judicious compactness of phrase, but to a style, which is dwarfed and its force frittered away. To cut your words

too short is to prune away their sense, but to be concise is to be direct. On the other hand, we know, that a style becomes lifeless by over-extension, I mean by being relaxed to an unseasonable length.

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The use of mean words has also a strong tendency to degrade a lofty passage. Thus in that description of the storm in Herodotus the matter is admirable, but some of the words admitted are beneath the dignity of the subject; such, perhaps, as "the seas having seethed" because the ill-sounding phrase "having seethed" detracts much from its impressiveness: or when he says "the wind wore away," and "those who clung round the wreck met with an unwelcome end." "Wore away" is ignoble and vulgar, and "unwelcome" inadequate to the extent of the disaster.

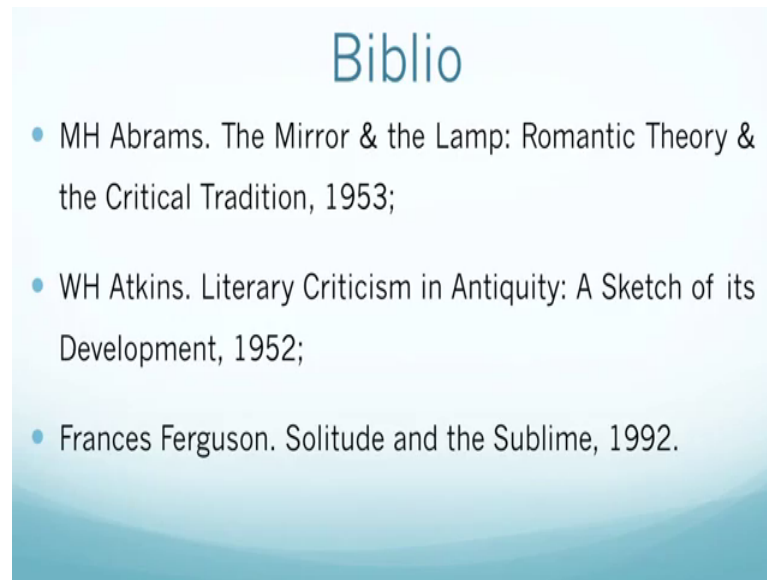
The use of mean words has also a strong tendency to degrade a lofty passage. Thus, in that description of the storm in Herodotus, the matter is admirable, but some of the words admitted are beneath the dignity of the subject, such perhaps as the seas having seethed because the ill-sounding phrase having seethed detracts much from its impressiveness, or when he says, the wind wore away and those who clung round the wreck met with an unwelcome end. Wore away, is ignoble and vulgar, and unwelcome, inadequate to the extent of the disaster.

So, this is your takeaway from Longinus's *On the Sublime*. Powerful emotions expressed in noble diction and shunning vulgarity of expressions. So, he has very strong ideas about the quality of phrases. You have to choose your words extremely carefully.

So, at this point I would also like to just bring something to your attention that we are already into our course, well into our course. However, if you have any queries or questions regarding any aspect, that is, the academic content, please do feel free to write directly to me, my, my email id is freely available and accessible. Some of you have already started sending me mails, so I welcome all your suggestions.

So, I will, I will also like to bring to your attention, that due to copyright we are not able to show you video clippings and also photographs, that would actually enhance learning. However, during the course I would be giving you several links where you can access these very valuable resources.

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Biblio

- MH Abrams. *The Mirror & the Lamp: Romantic Theory & the Critical Tradition*, 1953;
- WH Atkins. *Literary Criticism in Antiquity: A Sketch of its Development*, 1952;
- Frances Ferguson. *Solitude and the Sublime*, 1992.

Now, let me draw your attention to bibliography. Some of the books, which you may find useful are, MH Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*; WH Atkins, *Literary Criticism in Antiquity: A Sketch of its Development*. Now, both these books are quite old, but still extremely relevant. So, just because they were published in 1950s, it does not mean, that they are irrelevant. So, these are like very important resources. It is extremely important text, that should be considered and then relatively more recent text is by Frances Ferguson, *Solitude and the Sublime*.

Thank you very much. We meet for our next lecture.