

Literary Criticism
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Lecture 6
Longinus' On the Sublime (Session 2)

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The slide content includes the following text and notes:

Longinus: On the Sublime

meaner who can teach it. The vigorous products of nature" such as their views "are evaluated and in every respect defined, when refined of their flesh and blood by flight and elevation." But I maintain that the truth can be shown to stand otherwise in this matter. Let us look at the case in this way. Nature in her father and more potentest speech, while showing all appearance of restraint, is not wont to show herself strictly regulated and confined, and though at all times the truest and most vigorous in her nature, she can to depress the right degree and the right moment, and to correct the process of nature and perfection. In the great privacy of a public assembly. The great passion, when left to their own kind and left unimpeded without the control of reason, are in the same danger as a ship to drive or rudder without helms. When they need the spur, but sometimes also the curb. The result of Democritus with regard to human life is general, — that the greatest of all blessings is to be fortunate, but next to that and equal in importance is to be well advised. — the good fortune is wisely earned by the absence of great restraint, — may be applied to literature. If we substitute genius for fortune and art for counsel. Then, again, and this is the most important point of all, a writer can truly learn from art when he is to abandon himself to the direction of his genius.

These are the considerations which I submit to the respectable circle of such world's readers. Perhaps they may refuse to allow his opinion as to the variety and abundance of our present investigations.

III

...And let them check the poet's long tongues of fire:
For if I see one instant of the earth,
I'll dance within one cooling summer breeze,
And bring that rest to ashes in the ground.
But now not yet in using my words I see
Which phrases come to be vague, and I've heard
"And expressing them as a paper, and so on. Such expressions, and such images, produce an effect of confusion and obscurity, use of energy; and if each separately be examined under the light of criticism, what natural words probably will not stand. Since then, even in images, when the natural dignity of the subject makes a swelling diction allowable, we cannot permit a truce to grandiloquence, how much more necessary must it be in a certain case, when we have the height of fiction, the words of Longinus, such as "Xerxes the Persian King" and "Volters, those brave words," and at certain moments of Callisthenes which are high flows rather than softening, and in case of Callisthenes some passages with no other value than to inspire us to recovery. Sophocles and say, "He throws a little paper, and shows it all." The same faults may be observed in Amphitruon and Hesperus and Maris, who in their frequent moments on their heads of suspension, instead of playing the games are empty playing the ball.

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Hello and welcome to today's session, where we continue the discussion on Longinus' Sublime. So when we come to the third section of *Longinus On the Sublime*, we realize that Longinus begins to talk about the kind of language that needs to be avoided in order to reach the Sublime effect. So, right at the outset we saw, how from the beginning of the treatise, Longinus is focusing on the quality of the Sublime, he does not give too many prefatory remarks before stating at the outset that this discussion is entirely about the quality of the Sublime, the quality of reaching sublimity in literature.

And he is also addressing other similar-minded, like-minded people who also have a kind of familiarity, a kind of sensibility which he can also relate with. And there is a common ground that he begins with in that sense in terms of approaches to literature, approaches to criticism and the kind of scholarship which surrounds that. Having said that, in the third section, it makes perfect sense when he begins to talk about the kind of language that needs to be avoided if one is targeting to reach Sublime effect in literature.

So, he gives an example and then he also states right after that, just in the way he began his work without too many prefatory remarks, without too much of ornamentation, he directly mentions that such phrases cease to be tragic, and what do they become instead of that, they become burlesque.

This short section, the third section is also entirely about what will hamper the quality of the Sublime. What could be a threat to the kind of language that will take the reader to a Sublime effect, the kind of language which would transport the reader out of himself or herself. And he also gives a series of examples, “some expressions, images which produce an effect of confusion, obscurity, not of energy; and if each separately be examined under the light of criticism, which seemed terrible, gradually sinks into absurdity.”

So, look at the kind of words that he is using, they are low-level energy words, they are absurd and they do not produce any effect which would even take you anywhere closer to the idea of Sublime. And he continues, “Since then even in tragedy, when the natural dignity of the subject makes a swelling diction allowable, we cannot pardon a tasteless grandiloquence, how much more incongruous must it seem in sober prose!”

And he talks about how we laugh at certain kinds of such similar expressions where it is only burlesque, it is just grandeur, there is a grandiloquent expression of a series of meaningless phrases which does not create any Sublime effect on the reader. Instead it becomes a laughing stock. And, he also gives examples from the contemporary culture, from the contemporary Greek poetry, and he says some words also become, some expressions also become high-flown rather than Sublime, and some become ludicrous. He talks about a frothy style which does not produce any Sublime, any noble quality, any noble effect. On the contrary, it is very base and it is also frothy which has little content, it is just frivolous and it is just superfluous. And he says these sort of faults may be observed in many of those contemporary poets, such as Amphicrates, Hegesias and Matris “who in their frequent moments (as they think) of inspiration, instead of playing the genius are simply playing the fool.”

Look at the very clear attitude, the opinion and the observation that Longinus has about true genius and the other superfluous things which are passed off as inspiration or as genius. And he is very clear in using this yardstick, he is very clear in stating what he feels about those qualities

which are not Sublime enough and it is also goes without saying that, like many others of his times, he is also looking down upon those sorts of writing and those kinds of poets.

And in this sense, we can say that he is a true classicist. There is a certain kind of quality or certain kind of elatedness that he expects from a work of literature. And he is not willing to compromise on that at any point.

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Longinus: On the Sublime

Speaking generally, it would seem that bombast is one of the basest things to avoid in writing. For all those writers who are criticized of being inflated through display of being covered in bombast and poverty of language, which by a natural gradation run to the opposite extreme. "Who fails in great endeavor, fails high," is their creed. Now high, when failure and effort, is a grave objectionable, whether in language bodies or in writings, and in danger of producing in us an impression of "effortful writing," as it is said, "to differ than a man with the drops."

The characteristic, then, of bombast is that it overreaches the feeling, but that it neither fails themselves nor appears to produce that in itself. And in the falling of bombast and nature itself, indeed, the most genuine of all cases in writing. It is possible to write a perfect style of prose, which by its grandeur and its display, signs of this sort are made to those who, among all brilliant, public, and especially attractive, are looked on as persons and self-affection. Clearly connected with this is a third sort of case, in dealing with the masses, which, "Thoughtless would be called for, without meaning by that as if tired and empty" display of emotion, where no emotion is called for, or of greater emotion than the ordinary person. These writers are, in a manner, to be the result of the mind into getting display of more personal feeling which has no connection with the subject. Yet how justly different! said as with regard, where more rather oversteps here to make quite self-interest. I will discuss this subject, as I intend to discuss a separate work to the treatment of the public in writing.

IV

The last of the faults which I mentioned is frequently observed in Terence — I mean the fault of (1) being in other respects he is an able writer, and sometimes not "immaculate" in the latter style, a man of wide knowledge, and full of sagacity, a most lively wit, of the foliage of others. We naturally think to be sure, in his eagerness to be always making out new things he frequently falls into the most childish absurdities. I will only remark on a few passages, as most of them have been pointed out by Cicero. Writing to me something very fine about Alexander the Great he speaks of him as a man "who assumed the whole of Asia in forty years" than because open in writing the passage in which he says the Greeks to make out as Perses. How strange is the comparison of the "great knowledge competitor" with an African divination! By this mode of reasoning it is plain that the language even very inferior to Terence in courage, since it took them thirty years to conquer Miletus, while he finished the conquest of this language in six. Observe, too, his language on the African taken in Italy. "They paid the penalty for their expense on Miletus in conquering his nation, and the chief agent in their destruction was one who was descended on his father's side from the royal stock — Heracles, son of Heracles." I wonder my dear Terence, how he could be so silly of the great Hercules that for his empire towards Asia and Hellenes he was deprived of his power by Zeus and Heracles. Yet why speak of Terence, when even such the Xenophon and Plato — the very deep gods of literature — through

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And he now makes a very profound statement about what exactly to avoid.

And look at the pointedness in Longinus' writing throughout. And this is where we find him coming closer to Aristotle in terms of this scientific approach, the clarity with which he puts things across and the clinical detachment with which he is able to state what needs to go in and what needs to be avoided. And particularly in this third section, we find his approach to criticism, very prescriptive as well.

There are other emotional aesthetic things that he talks about in the first two sections about the quality of writing which elevates the reader which transports the reader out of himself or herself, but at the same time, he says there are certain technicalities that need to be observed, certain technicalities which also determine whether this kind of writing can produce the kind of aesthetic appeal and those sorts of levels that he is talking about.

So speaking generally he says, it would seem that bombast is one of the hardest things to avoid in writing for all those writers who are ambitious of a lofty style. So, these are different things he is clarifying to us. It is not just about ornamented writing, it is not just about decorative style that will create sublimity, it is deeper than that.

It is nothing superfluous, it is not about the kind of language and how one would feel impressed with the use of language. But on the other hand as abstract as it may sound, at various levels in this writing he is talking about a profound sense of genius, combined with good craft, good skill, good technicality that would have an effect on the reader. And this is not something which can be dealt at the level of any kind of superficial play of language.

So “through dread of being convicted of feebleness and poverty of language, slide by a natural gradation to the opposite extreme. ‘Who fails in great endeavor, nobly fails,’ is their creed. Now bulk, when hollow and affected, is always objectionable, whether in material bodies or in writings, and in danger of producing on us an impression of littleness: ‘nothing,’ it is said, ‘is drier than a man with the dropsy.’”

So he is very clear about his judgement about the kind of writing that is expected out of a good writer, from a good artist. And particularly in this section, we are also being introduced to the kind of value judgements that prevail in terms of identifying the author with the writing and what kind of character and what kind of man is capable of producing this lofty and this noble and sublime kind of literature.

And in the next paragraph, in the next passage, he is also introducing us to another kind of fault, another kind of flaw that a good writing must always stay away from, that is puerility. “The characteristic then of bombast is that it transcends the Sublime; but there is another fault diametrically opposed to grandeur: this is called puerility, and it is the failing of feeble and narrow minds, indeed, the most ignoble of all vices in writing.”

So puerility, according to Longinus, is the most ignoble of all vices in writing. And here also we find this connection between the mind which produces certain kinds of work, the lofty mind which is capable of producing a lofty kind of work. So, this connection between the moral character within the writer and the kind of writing that he or she produces is a very classical trait.

We find Longinus almost treading the same path as that of Aristotle in this. By puerility we mean a pedantic habit of mind which by overelaboration ends in frigidity. So, here is where we find Longinus drawing a fine balance between following technicalities and having a pedantic mind. Of course, he says in the previous section that, though there is genius and unless it is directed well, it is like a ship which has lost direction, the results could be fatal, far from appealing.

But at the same time, if one pushes these things, if one pushes the technicalities to beyond a certain point it will just become pedantic and that will not serve the purpose either. And he talks about how that can result in frigidity in writing, that can result in frigidity in terms of creating, generating an emotional and aesthetic appeal.

“Slips of this sort are made by those who, aiming at brilliancy, polish, and especially attractiveness, are landed in paltriness and silly affectation.” These are the things that he also wants a prospective writer to avoid. Closely associated with this is a third sort of a vice in dealing with the passions which Theodorus used to call false sentiment. So, there are three things that he suggests over here, that a good writer in order to achieve sublimity, the quality of the sublime should avoid. One is bombast, the second is puerility and the third is false sentiment.

And what is false sentiment? “Meaning by that an ill-timed and empty display of emotion, where no emotion is called for, or of greater emotion than the situation wants.” So he is clearly sending out a warning against an overt display of anything and this is also a way a way in which Longinus is telling the reader, telling the critic that, when he talks about the quality of being Sublime, it is not about overdoing things, it is not about writing in a way that would be immediately seen as impressive. It is about something more profound, something deeper than just a play with language, just play with the various kinds of emotions which are at work within any work of literature.

Thus, we often see an author hurried by the tumult of his mind into tedious displays of mere personal feeling. So, that is another thing which is in connection to this writer, if he is displaying mere personal feelings, that does not bring out any Sublime quality. It is on the contrary, as Longinus would say, it is seen as something very trivial, something which is far from lofty. And if this emotion, if this feeling does not have any connect with the subject that is being discussed, it will not produce a desired result at all.

“Yet how justly ridiculous must an author appear, whose most violent transports leave his readers quite cold!” Here Longinus is also being very sarcastic about some writers who try really hard to convey their personal emotions, to convey the emotions of the characters in such passionate terms.

But at the same time it does not have any desired result on the reader. On the contrary, it just leaves the reader cold, and it is a very pathetic situation to be in, as Longinus is warning us. And he is also saying now that he will move on from this subject, “I will dismiss this subject, as I intend to devote a separate work to the treatment of the pathetic in writing.”

And from this he moves on to Section 4 where he is observing one of the faults in detail- the fault of frigidity. In other respects, he is particularly talking about Timaeus, one of the writers. “In other respects he is an able writer, and sometimes not unsuccessful in the loftier style; a man of wide knowledge, full of ingenuity; a most bitter critic of the failings of others but unhappily blind to his own.”

And this example is very important, because he is giving the example of another contemporary writer with whom the other writers and the other critics are familiar with, the other readers are also familiar with. And this sort of helps us to read Longinus’ criticism in a more grounded fashion where he is giving out real life examples and he is also making comparison in a very relatable term.

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The slide contains the following text from Longinus' *On the Sublime*:

they had set at the feet of Socrates, sometimes forgot themselves in the pursuit of such petty conceits. The former, in his account of the Spartan Policy, has these words: "They raise you rounder men here than if they were of marble; their gaze is as insensible as if they were cast in brass; you would think these men more noble than the very statues in their eyes." To speak of the pupils of the eye as "marble statues" was a piece of absolute heinous impudenceness; other than Socrates. And then what a strange delusion to suppose that modesty is always without exception expressed in the eye! whereas it is commonly said that there is nothing by which so exquisite a virtue brings his character gloriously to the expression of his eyes. Thus Achilles addresses Agamemnon in the *Iliad* at "drunkard, with eye of dog." Timon, however, with that sort of judgment which characterizes philosophers, could not know to exempt the possession of even this piece of ingenuity. In relating how Agamemnon carried off his concubine, who was wedded to another man, from the breast of the walling, he asks, "Who could have done such a deed, unless he had had his eyes instead of his ears?" And Plautus himself, elsewhere to express a manner of style, meaning to describe certain scolding ladies, says, "They shall write, and depict in the temples monuments of cyprus wretches?" and again, "Thus concerning walls, Mylades. I give my eye with Socrates that we should let them be asleep within the ground, and not awake them." And Herodotus falls pretty much under the same censure, when he speaks of beautiful women as "tortures to the eye." "Though here there is some excuse, as the speakers in this passage are drunken barbarians. Still, even from dramatic motives, such errors in taste should not be permitted to deface the pages of an immortal book."

Now all these glaring imperfections of language only he traces to one common cause - the peculiar structure of thought. If it be true that the frame of every all the learned world of so die. Human thoughts and human life commonly flow from all some words, and so apply this principle to literature, these streams of style, these cultivated and delightful images, which contribute to recreate, as the foundation and the origin, not only of excellence, but also of failure. It is thus with the figures, called metaphors, and tropes, and the use of phrases for metaphors. I shall there present the images which have been so much. Our next task, therefore, must be to propose, and to write the question how we may avoid the faults of style related to sublimity.

VI

Our best hope of doing this will be first of all to group some definite theory and contents of the style. Nevertheless this is a hard matter. For a fair judgment of style is the fruit first of long experience; still, I believe that the way I shall indicate will enable you to distinguish between the true and false Sublime, so far as it can be done by rule.

And in Section 4, he continues to give a series of examples. We shall quickly skim through those. And towards the end of the Section 4, there is this stellar example that he gives from Herodotus and how he falls in certain respect. "And Herodotus falls pretty much under the same censure when he speaks of beautiful women as "tortures to the eye," though here there is still some excuse, as the speakers in this passage are drunken barbarians. Still, even from dramatic motives, such errors in taste should not be permitted to deface the pages of an immortal work." So, there are certain kinds of expectations that a critic like Longinus has from a work, from a work that is perceived to be immortal. And there are many examples that he gives from well-known works, renowned works which have already attained immortality, from *Iliad* for instance.

He gives this example from *Iliad* where Achilles addresses Agamemnon as the "drunkard, with eye of dog". And these sort of expressions are not something which Longinus entirely approves of, and he says towards the end, how even someone like Herodotus falls pretty much under the same sort of judgement. He entirely disapproves of certain kinds of language which thinks will take away the charm from a work which otherwise has the potential to become immortal.

And having drawn our attention to these various kinds of errors in taste, in Section 5, he tries to engage us with this discussion where we can also focus on the source of these improprieties of

language. Look at the way in which he talks about this. “These glaring improprieties of language, may be traced to one common root—the pursuit of novelty in thought.”

Again, we can find some similarities with Aristotle over here about the lofty mind being capable of producing lofty thoughts, about certain kinds of requirements that are being mentioned in terms of the moral fabric or the kind of stature that the character or the author is supposed to have. “It is this that has turned the brain of nearly all the learned world of today. Human blessings and human ills commonly flow from the same source and this source is the mind. To apply this principle to literature, those ornaments of style, those Sublime and delightful images, which contribute to success are the foundation and the origin, not only of excellence but also of failure.”

So just the way a certain kind of language can contribute to the success of a particular work of literature, in the same way, it can fatally lead to its failure as well. So, language here which is also the extension of the thought that the writer has, becomes extremely determinant, extremely important in showing whether the work is going to be a success or a failure. “It is thus with the figures called transitions, and hyperboles and the use of plurals for singulars. I shall show presently the dangers which they seem to involve.”

And what is the next task: having said that, having drawn our attention to the root of all these glaring improprieties which is thought, which is the mind itself now he wants us to be alert to the ways in which one may avoid faults of style related to sublimity. And here, I also want you to particularly notice how this treatise never loses its focus, it began with the idea of the Sublime and it continues to focus on the quality of the Sublime and everything that Longinus talks about, there is a way in which he brings back all these discussions to the idea of the Sublime. It is anchored on the quality of the Sublime about how to achieve sublimity in literature.

And whether he is discussing the emotional appeal or aesthetic appeal, whether he is discussing the quality of language or the source of all these different kinds of writings, he is always anchored on this idea of the Sublime.

In Section 5, he is also inviting us to be alert to the distinction between true and false Sublime. And here by now we begin to realize that there is a very serious way in which Longinus engages with the idea of the Sublime.

Again, to reiterate a point made in the previous section itself, it is not important for us to know whether Longinus was the first one to talk about Sublime or not. But clearly he is the first one, whether he was the first one to mention it within a treatise or whether he was the first one to engage with it and pay attention to it, that is a different thing altogether. But what is important when we are looking at Longinus' writing on the Sublime is that, he is the first one to theoretically engage with it. He is the first one to look at it with which such clinical precision and do some dissection of the word, the emotion and the many surrounding things which produce the Sublime effect.

And in Section 6, the very first statement clarifies this notion. "Our best hope of doing this will be first of all to grasp some definite theory and criterion of the true Sublime." And this is one of the reasons why these earlier texts, some of these earliest writings from Greek criticism and philosophy continue to be important for our understanding of western philosophies, western literary criticism. Because there is a sense of definite theory and criteria that we get from most of these discussions.

The pointedness of this discussion and the way in which the details are being spelt out with such clarity also works at a very foundational and fundamental level. "Nevertheless, this is a hard matter, for a just judgment of style is the final fruit of long experience. Still I believe that the way I shall indicate will enable us to distinguish between the true and false Sublime, so far as it can be done by rule."

And look at these fine clarifications that Longinus brings in at every point, he is never claiming to be able to do that, he is never claiming that one will be able to do this in a very foolproof way. On the other hand, he is saying, he is giving us a roadmap, he is giving us some theoretical frameworks and he is giving us some kind of criteria to distinguish between the true and the false Sublime, as far as it can be done by rule. There would always be certain spillovers and certain things which cannot be judged by any of these criteria, but he is saying, one shall try one's best through these roadmaps.

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Longinus: On the Sublime <http://studydrive.net/301496/1018/longinus.html>

VII

It is proper to observe that in human life nothing is truly great which is despised by all elevated minds. For example, no man of sense can regard wealth, honor, glory, and power, or any of those things which are surrounded by a great external parade of pomp and circumstance, as the highest blessings, seeing that merely to despise such things is a blessing of no common order, certainly those who possess them are admitted much less than those who, having the opportunity to acquire them, through greatness of soul neglect to have for us apply this principle to the sublime in poetry or in prose; for as in all cases, so it mainly a species of sublimity is to this passage, exercise a more labor and chosen passage, which if laid open will be found to contain nothing but emptiness; but if a writer would well occupy himself of adorning it, it is natural to us to feel our souls filled up by the true Sublime, and concerning a sort of generous exultation to be filled with joy and pride, as though we had ourselves acquired the things which we read. If then any work, on being repeatedly submitted to the judgment of an acute and cultivated critic, fails to dispose his mind to lofty ideas, if the thoughts which it suggests do not extend beyond what is actually expressed, and if he longer you read it, the less you think of it, there can be but one true sublimity, when the effect is not wearied beyond the mere act of perusal. But when a passage is pregnant in suggestion, when it is hard, say, to explain, to discuss the attention fixes it, and when it does a strong and lasting hold on the memory, then we may be sure that we have lighted on the true Sublime. In general, we may assign three words as traits and outlines which give a glimpse, and direct all readers. For a while the same book shows produce the same impressions on all who read it, whatever be the difference in their persons, their manner of life, their opinions, their aims, or their language, such a brevity of expression gives accessible substance to these four essential words.

VIII

I shall now proceed to comment on the five principal sources, as we may call them, from which almost all sublimity is derived, assuming, of course, the preliminary gift on which all these five sources depend, namely, command of language. The first and the most important is (1) grandeur of thought, as I have pointed out elsewhere in my work on Xenophon. The second is (2) a vigorous and spirited treatment of the passions. These two conditions of sublimity depend mainly on natural endowment, whereas those which follow derive assistance from Art. The third is (3) a certain facility in the employment of figures, which are of two kinds, figures of thought and figures of speech. The fourth is (4) dignified expression, which is subdivided into (a) the proper choice of words, and (b) the use of metaphors and other ornaments of diction. The fifth cause of sublimity, which embraces all those preceding, is (5) energy and elevation of structure. Let us consider what is involved in each of these five items separately.

I must first, however, remark that some of these five divisions are united by

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From that short section, he moves on to Section 7 where he says, it is proper to observe that in human life nothing is truly great which is despised by all elevated minds. Here is where we find another principal that he shares with Aristotle, which is universality. And this is one of the things that at a later point most critics, theoreticians and writers, they also depart from the classical writers because of this quality of universality. Because there are a number of other theories and frameworks which also show us at a later point that not everything is universal.

Now coming back to this point which Longinus puts forward, he says it is proper to observe that in human life nothing is truly great which is despised by all elevated minds. On the other hand he is trying to persuade us through this argument that, if all elevated minds agree on one thing being good, being Sublime or being flawed or being a failure; then that has to be right.

Here, there is there are a lot of presuppositions which govern this sort of a yardstick. And before we come to that, we will look at the details of this discussion in Section 7. “For example, no man of sense can regard wealth, honor, glory and power or any of those things which are surrounded by a great external parade of pomp and circumstance, as the highest blessings. Seeing that, merely to despise such things is a blessing of no common order, certainly those who possess

them are admired much less than those who, having the opportunity to acquire them, through greatness of soul neglect it.”

So, there is a certain moral quotient which also determines the way in which elevated minds are being qualified, elevated minds are been defined over here. He says, if one takes the case of how wealth, honor, glory and power, how these qualities are looked upon, and if we try and judge the response in connection with how these things are being prioritized in various human lives, human minds; that will also tell us something about the kind of person that he or she is.

He looks at these things as something very universal. He engages with these examples as something that almost everyone in the universe, the learned minds, the elevated minds will perhaps share. And this assumption that all elevated minds, all lofty minds will have similar kinds of thoughts, similar kinds of taste, similar kinds of priorities, this is perhaps flawed in a certain way to begin with, but there is also a certain kind of scientific clarity and distance that Longinus brings into this discussion.

He is trying to apply this principle to the Sublime in poetry or in prose and he says, he is giving us some questions, some lead questions as examples. “Let us ask in all cases, is it merely a specious sublimity? Is this gorgeous exterior a mere false and clumsy pageant which if laid open will be found to conceal nothing but emptiness? For if so, a noble mind will scorn instead of admiring it.” So, how to identify this noble mind and who decides what this noble mind looks like and how this noble mind functions, that is a different question all together. And this is where perhaps some of the flaws of classical theories can also be located. “It is natural to us to feel our souls lifted up by the true Sublime, and conceiving a sort of generous exultation to be filled with joy and pride, as though we had ourselves originated the ideas which we read.

If then any work, on being repeatedly submitted to the judgment of an acute and cultivated critic, fails to dispose his mind to lofty ideas; if the thoughts which it suggests, do not extend beyond what is actually expressed; and if, the longer you read it, the less you think of it, there can be here no true sublimity.”

And here he is telling us again, he is reiterating the point that, if elevated lofty minds, if they feel similar about if they have similar opinions, similar critical judgement about a certain work of art,

they cannot go wrong. And he ends this section by saying, “in general we may regard those works as truly noble and Sublime, which always please and please all readers.” And this is also seen as a great test of good literature.

“For when the same book always produces a same impression on all who read it, whatever be the difference in their pursuits, their manner of life, their aspirations, their ages, or their language, such a harmony of opposites gives irresistible authority to their favorable verdict.” So, this he says is the test of great literature.

And if lofty minds, it is again I am reiterating, it is a different question, how you would judge and determine a noble mind or a lofty mind, but if an elevated mind, if a group of such people, they find that there is a text which always pleases and pleases all readers and this is the phrase he uses, “which always please and please all readers.” If all those elevated minds feel the same about a text, they cannot be wrong.

What is being seen as universal over here, we realize that it is also personal at various levels. It is also determined by a lot of other external factors which of course like most other classical thinkers, most other classical critics, Longinus also does not take that into account. But here, what we need to focus at this point is the kind of division and the kind of theoretical framework that Longinus is trying to put forward and Longinus is trying to generate this during a time and space, where such yardsticks were not in place at all.

So when we look at it from that perspective, this certainly is one of the foundational ways in which the field of criticism within this larger canvas begins to talk about yardsticks, criteria, about judging literature from a critical distance. And whether this critical distance has merit today or not, that is a totally irrelevant question, one needs to focus on the time and the space during which this text was generated and the kind of impact that it had in formulating and also in determining the many later principles which also have become very fundamental and phenomenal in the field of literary criticism.

So, in Section 8 which we shall focus on tomorrow, he talks about the five principle sources of sublimity.

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Longinus: On the Sublime

http://studydrive.net/2016/09/07/01/longinus.html

Cicero, for instance, he says nothing about the passions. Now if he made this mistake from a belief that the Sublime and the Pathetic are one and the same thing, holding them to be almost coextensive and inseparable, he is in error. Some passions are found which, so far from being lofty, are actually low, such as pity, grief, fear, and concern; sublimity is often seen in the least affecting, as we may see among innumerable other instances in those bold expressions of our great poet in the case of Abdiel—

"Highly they sung
To pile huge Ossa on the Olympian peak,
And Parnus with all his swelling trees
On Ossa's crest to raise, and dash the sky;"
and the yet more tremendous climax—
"And soon had they accomplished it."

And in scenes, in all passages dealing with pagans, and in all the more imposing and declamatory places, dignity and sublimity play an indispensable part, but pathos is nearly absent. Hence the more pathetic scenes have usually had little skill in pagans, and conversely those who are powerful in pagans generally fail in pathos. If, on the other hand, Cicero supposed that pathos never contributes to sublimity, and that is why he thought it alien to the subject, he is entirely mistaken. For I would confidently pronounce that nothing is so conducive to sublimity as an appropriate display of genuine passion, which borrows even with a kind of "theatricalness" and forced expression, and falls in our ears like the voice of a god.

IX

I have already said that of all these five conditions of the Sublime the most important is the fact that it is a certain loftiness of mind. Therefore, although this is a faculty which cannot be acquired, nevertheless it will be worth for us in this instance also to train up our minds to sublimity, and make them as it were ever big with noble thoughts. How, it may be asked, is this to be done? I have hinted elsewhere in my writings that sublimity is, in its own nature, the image of greatness of soul. Hence a thought is in itself exalted, even though unuttered, or unexpressed, whenever it is the effect of an exalted mind. For instance, the silence of Ajax in the eleventh *Odysses*¹ is great, and grander than anything he could have said. It is doubtless essential, then, first of all to settle the question whether this grandeur of conception arises, and the secret in that case eloquence can be found only in those whose spirit is greatness and exalted. For those whose whole lives are spent in petty and trifling thoughts and habits cannot possibly produce any work worthy of the being exalted of mind. It is only natural that their words should be full of sublimity whose thoughts are full of exaltation. Hence sublimity depends before anything else on the loftiness of mind. Such was the reply of Alexander to his general Perseus, when the latter had observed, "When I Alexander, I should have been satisfied." "And I, were I Perseus?"

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In the next discussion we will also focus on how Longinus is seen as the first Romantic critic, we shall also be taking a quick look at one of the commentaries by Scott James, where he locates Longinus as the first romantic critic. So, I encourage you to read through these sections that we just discussed and also be familiar with the text in original so that you get a hang of how these things were put forward in the earliest centuries. Thank you for listening and I look forward to seeing you in the next session.