to blame our author for what he has left out as to commend him for his originality and enthusiasm…You have urged me to set down a few notes on sublimity for your own use. Let us then consider whether there is anything in my observations, which may be thought useful to public men. You must help me, my friend, by giving your honest opinion in detail, as both your natural candour and your friendship with *me require*. It was well said that what man has in common with the; gods is "doing good and telling the truth."

Soon you will find that Longinus's "On the Sublime" is a critical document of immense worth and significance, as he cites **Sublimity** to be a kind of eminence or excellence of discourse. It is the source of the distinction of the very greatest poets and prose writers and the means by which they have given eternal life to their own fame. Here he discusses those vices of style, which constitute contemporary oratory, which Longinus calls a 'false sublime'. Then, he points out some defects of style, which tends to spoil the loftiness of language. **The first fault** is "turgidity" when the artist or poet aims too high and, instead of achieving ecstasy, merely lapses into folly, producing effects, which are overblown or bombastic**. The second fault** is "puerility". The use of puerility spoils the sublimity. It is a pedantic type of conceit adding to a pompous and frigid style. **The third fault** is "parenthyrson". To Longinus, this term refers to 'emotion misplaced and pointless where none is needed or unrestrained where restraint is required'. Thus, the false sublime consists merely of a gorgeous exterior where pompous language is used to clothe thoughts, which are essentially trivial or puerile. The poet can avoid these faults by having a clear knowledge and appreciation of what is truly sublime. At this stage, Longinus tells his friend about the marks of true sublimity: "At this stage, the question we must put to ourselves for discussion is how to avoid the faults which are so much tied up with sublimity. The answer, my friend, is: by first of all achieving a genuine understanding and appreciation of true sublimity. This is difficult; literary judgement comes only as the final product of long experience. However, for the purposes of instruction, I think we can say that an understanding



Homer: Ancient Greek epic poet.

Aeschylus: Greek tragedian.

Plato: Classical Greek philosopher, mathematician and student of Socrates.

Sappho: Ancient Greek lyric poet.

Demosthenes: prominent Greek statesman and orator of ancient Athens.

Herodotus: Ancient Greek historian.

of all this can be acquaint." For Longinus, the true sublime uplifts our soul. He also opines that the "truly beautiful and sublime . . . pleases all people at all times", for it expresses thoughts of universal validity and a language which instinctively uplifts our souls. It produces a lasting effect on the part of the reader.

Longinus then points out to the sources of the sublime, which lie in the capacities of the speaker or writer. He cites five most productive sources of the sublime: **'grandeur of thought', 'strong and inspired passion', 'use of figurative language', 'nobility of expression'** and **'elevated composition'**. Three of these capacities—the 'use of figurative language', 'nobility of expression' and 'elevated composition'—are matters of art that can be acquired by practice; but two others, and more important, capacities, are largely innate: 'loftiness or grandeur of thought' and 'strong and inspired passion'. Longinus's examples of sublime passages in poems range from the epics of Homer through the tragedies of Aeschylus to a love-lyric by Sappho; his examples in prose are taken from the writings of the philosopher Plato, the orator Demosthenes, and the historian Herodotus. Especially notable is his quotation, as a prime instance of sublimity, of the passage in the Book of Genesis written by the "law-giver of the Jews": "And God said, 'Let there be light', and there was light, 'Let there be land', and there was land". Longinus does not treat emotion or passion, but the other four sources receive substantial discussion. He discusses digression on the question of how great but flawed writing can and should be recognised as superior to flawless yet moderate or humble writing.

Longinus adds another factor to his notion of sublimity: the power of combining certain elements appropriately into an organic whole. Closely connected with this is the device of 'amplification' i.e., the accumulation of relevant details of a subject. Sublimity, he suggests, "lies in elevation" and is found "in a single idea", whereas amplification lies in quantity and redundancy. Longinus suggests another way to attain sublimity: the path of imitation. The imitation of great historians and poets of the past can pave the way in achieving sublimity since these great masters of antiquity are the standards of excellence. He sees the

process of influence not as passive and static but as an active endeavour of the contemporary writer to vie with the ancient poets. His vision is comprehensive, and everywhere he stresses the emotional and imaginative appeal of great literature. It is the creative imagination, which modifies and transforms, and produces works of beauty. The appropriate use of imagination in rhetoric, says Longinus, 'is to introduce a great deal of vigour and emotion into one's speeches, but when combined with argumentative treatment it not only convinces the audience, it positively masters them'. In such cases, the imaginative conceptions of the speaker far surpass "mere persuasion".

The essay then proceeds to discuss the use of figures. Longinus holds the view that the use of figure allows the speaker "to carry the audience away with him". However, he recommends that a figure is most effective when it is unnoticed. Figures should be used in a natural manner. He cites a number of important figures. One of these is the figure of **rhetorical question and answer**, which involves the audience emotionally. Another figure is 'Asyndeton', which consists in the removal of connecting particles. The effect produced is one of rush and torrent (heavy uncontrolled outpouring) of passion. The union of certain figures imparts strength, beauty and persuasiveness to the language. In order to produce a powerful emotional effect, figures such as 'Anaphora' (repetition of words) and 'Diatyposis' (vivid description) may be combined together. 'Hyperbaton' is a figure, which consists in the inversion of the natural order of words or thoughts. It carries the very effect of violent, mental agitation and thus, gives a touch of reality to speech and produces the natural effect of emotion. 'Polyptoton' consists in the interchange of one case for another, of one number for another, of one tense for another, and of one person for another. It contributes to sublimity and enlivens exposition. 'Periphrasis' contributes much to the sublime and adds much to the beauty of language.

Longinus then examines the importance of diction. The choice of correct and magnificent words is a source of immense power to entice and charm the reader. Metaphors, Hyperboles and Similes contribute a great deal to the sublime. Vulgar idioms should be avoided because low



Often cited as a peak moment in "On the Sublime is the digression on Plato and the orator Lysias near the end of the treatise, following the discussion of metaphors. The digression on genius, as it is known, is important because it provides a detailed and eloquent account of sublimity through a series of concise comparisons in which Homer, Plato, and Demosthenes.

and undignified vocabulary degrades sublimity. He points out that a genius with some faults is better than a flawless mediocre. The harmonious arrangement of words is a great source of persuasion and pleasure. It is the sense of harmony that gives organic unity to a work of art.

As with many of the preceding sections, Longinus addresses the last section to Terentianus, relating to him the problem of the decline of eloquence in literature of his age. To him, the cause is the moral decline of the people of his age. They attach more importance to the materialistic values of life. But according to Longinus, the facts that great literature springs from great and lofty souls. Thus, the essay "On the Sublime" examines the work of several ancient writers under the lens of the sublime, which Longinus defines as man's ability, through feeling and words, to reach beyond the realm of the human condition into greater mystery.

"On the Sublime" differs fundamentally from Platonic doctrine, which distrusted the frenzied and irrational flights of poetic inspiration and banned poetry from the ideal republic. Cleverly, Longinus points out that Plato does not practice what he preaches. In citing Plato in an example of sublime writer, Longinus reinterprets the philosopher, highlighting the unconscious ways in which he too is "carried away by a sort of literary madness." "On the Sublime" also differs from Horace, who in the *Ars Poetica* stresses rhetorical strategies rather than the erratic genius of authors. Horace would have felt comfortable with the last three sources of the sublime, cantered as they are on rhetoric, but probably not with the first two, which depend on the mind and heart of the author. In some respects, Longinus's treatise is more like Aristotle's *Poetics,* for they both take note of the formal techniques and psychological effects of literature, Aristotle famously focusing on the emotional "catharsis" that an audience experiences during the performance of a tragedy. An important distinction between them is that Longinus considers the emotional psychology of the author as well as that of the audience. Longinus' text appears not to have been read during ancient or Mediaeval times perhaps because it was lost. It re-emerged as an important text first during the Renaissance, with the Italian translation of Niccolo da Falgano in 1560, but especially

in Nicolas Boileau's 1674 French rendering. The latter made "On the Sublime" a central text in European criticism throughout the 18th century, and set the stage for many discussions of the sublime, including those by Joseph Addison, Edmund Burke, and, most notably, Immanuel Kant. With Kant's Critique of Judgement (1790), the theory of the sublime reached a level of analytical rigor considerably beyond Longinus, who, by comparison is content merely to enact the sublime and work intuitively. Still, Longinus manages to anticipate many of Kant's major themes, especially his fascination with the uplifting sense of the "supersensible" (the transcendent). He also anticipates Romantic theories of literature, which focus on the creative genius of the author.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 2: In what ways, is Longinus's "On the Sublime" a reaction to Caecilius' monograph *On Sublimity?*

Q 3: What do you mean by Sublimity? Mention the three faults, which tend to spoil Sublimity?

Q 4: Mention the sources of the sublime as available in the text of Longinus. Which ancient writers does Longinus quote as examples of Sublimity?

Q 5: What is the nature of Sublimity, according to Longinus?

Q 6: What direct or indirect connections does Longinus's text have with Plato, Horace and Aristotle?

4.5 IMPORTANT CONCEPTS OF THE TEXT

The following are some of the most important concepts of "On the Sublime".

Sublime :

The concept was introduced into the criticism of literature and art by a Greek treatise **Peri Hupsous** or "On the Sublime" by Longinus. It is a quality whose effect is to "transport" (ekstasis) the reader out of

themselves. The concept of the sublime is generally accepted to refer to a style of writing that elevates itself "above the ordinary". Longinus critically applauds and condemns certain literary works as examples of good or bad styles of writing. He ultimately promotes an "elevation of style" and an essence of "simplicity". The Sublime is a mechanism of recognition (arising from the impact of the work of art) of the greatness of a spirit, of the depth of an idea, of the power of speech. The ability to achieve sublimity is in itself enough to establish the transcendent genius of a writer. The sublime produces a lasting and repeated effect on "a man of sense, well-versed in literature". The sublime pleases all people at all times. Sublimity is a certain distinction and excellence in expression. The "elevated language" of the sublime aims to cast a spell over the audience, not merely persuading but transporting the audience in an enthralling and delightful manner to the conclusion desired by the writer. As defined by Longinus, the sublime is a quality that can occur in any type of discourse, whether poetry or prose. According to him, the sublime consists "in a consummate excellence and distinction of language, and . . . this alone gave to the greatest poets and historians their pre-eminence . . . For the effect of genius is not to persuade the audience but rather to transport them out of themselves." Thus, sublimity means a certain loftiness and excellence in language. It expresses itself in a single phrase, like a flash of lightning.

The Sources of the Sublime:

Longinus cites 'five' genuine sources of the sublime in his essay "On the Sublime". They are as follows:

Grandeur of Thought :

This source actually reflects the classicism of Longinus. Nobody can produce a work of pure sublime unless his thoughts are sublime. Longinus refers to this faculty as "natural genius", affirming that it is a gift of nature rather than something acquired. Lofty and natural expression is possible when there are noble and lofty thoughts. Such elevating thoughts that remain as the "echo of great soul" are possible only when the author has power of forming great conceptions. Hence, it is

impossible for people having mean ideas and habits, to produce anything that is admirable and worthy. It is also because; great thoughts come from the imagination of a great creative genius and from a sound interpretation of the imitation of nature and of the great predecessors. Those who would attain distinction of style must feel the greatness of the masters such as Homer, Plato and Demosthenes, and capture from them some of their greatness.

Capacity for Strong Emotion :

The second source of the sublime is forceful and inspired emotion. The emotion should be strong and natural and it is to be expressed in lofty and elevated language so that it can move the readers with pleasure and persuasion. Longinus asserts that nothing contributes to loftiness of tone in writing than genuine emotion.

Appropriate Use of Figures :

The third source of attaining excellence of style is the use of figures of speech, which he considers very important. Longinus devotes nearly one third of his essay to it. Figures of speech should not be used mechanically. They must be ingrained in genuine emotion. They help in the elevated style. The grandeur of any figure will depend upon its being employed in an effective manner. The figures cited by Longinus are Rhetorical questions, asyndeton, anaphora, polysyndeton, hyperbaton and periphrasis. Other figures include accumulation, variation and climax ranging over changes of case, tense, person, number, and gender.

Nobility of Diction :

The forth source of the sublime is nobility of diction, thought and metaphor. It is fine diction, which gives the style “grandeur, beauty, a classical flavour . . . and endues the facts as it were with a living voice”. Metaphors are used in treating commonplace descriptions. However, majestic diction should be used in important situations. The discussion of diction however is incomplete because it is believed that some parts of the book are unfortunately lost.

Dignity of Composition :

The fifth source of the sublime is the dignity of composition which relates to the arrangement of words in a certain order and various

elements of a particular passage into a unified whole. A harmonious composition alone sometimes makes up for the deficiency of the other elements. Words must be harmoniously arranged for both persuasion and pleasure.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: Define the term 'Sublimity'.

Q 8: In what ways, does the use of Figures of speech enhance Sublimity?

Q 9: Which two sources, according to Longinus, are gifts of nature?

4.6 RECEPTION OF LONGINUS AS A CRITIC

As a critic, Longinus displays a rare breadth of outlook and a mind free from prejudice. His estimates are just and have been upheld by posterity. He is a pioneer in the field of literary appreciation. "On the Sublime" is the first and a unique treatise on style. His prescriptions for sublimity are universal. R.A. Scott James calls him the 'first romantic critic' because of his insistence on passion, ecstasy, transport, imagination, intensity and exaltation. He attaches importance to emotion, imagination and beauty of words. He is a romanticist in his theory of Sublimity as he recommends judging a work of art based on its power to carry away, transport and moving to ecstasy by its grandeur and passion. His stress on emotion as a vital element of the sublime, however, does not rest on a simple appeal to the heart over abstract reasoning but is an intrinsic expression of his view of the purpose of humankind. We should be cautious in observing that he was not a thorough romantic critic because he fused romanticism and classicism together. Throughout, he is concerned mainly with ancient Greek models. The classical qualities of Longinus as a critic are quite obvious. He shows a great reverence for the ancient Greek models, for tradition. He is a classicist in curbing the license of the artist; in his emphasis on order and grandeur of thought and language; he likes inspiration but does not ignore perspiration. He is also a classicist in his balance between genius and unimpassioned hard work. He stands for fitness, correctness,

selection and balance. He believes in rules and regulations. He stands for the use of a refined and cultivated poetic style.

"On the Sublime" was largely unknown prior to its rediscovery during the Italian Renaissance. Following Boileau's popular translation of 1674, however, the treatise became a standard object of study for literary critics from Dryden onwards. In the 18th century an important phenomenon was the shift in the location of the sublime from a quality of linguistic discourse that originates in the powers of a writer's mind, to a quality inherent in external objects, and above all in the scenes and occurrences of the natural world. Thus, Edmund Burke's highly influential *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, published in 1757, attributes the source of the sublime to whatever things are 'in any sort terrible'—that is, to whatever is "fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger"—provided that the observer is in a situation of safety from danger, and so is able to experience what would otherwise be a painful terror as a 'delightful horror.' The qualities of objects conducive to sublime horror that Burke stresses are obscurity, immense power, and vastness in dimension or quantity. His examples include vast architectural structures and natural phenomena.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, neoclassical critics, primarily in England, frequently cited the text. The domain of aesthetics was influenced by the sublime in the work of thinkers such as Immanuel Kant, whose *Critique of Judgment* (1790) is an extended analysis of the sublime. Kant made division of the sublime objects specified by Burke into two types: the mathematical sublime and the dynamic sublime. The mathematical sublime includes in its scope the sublime of magnitude, of vastness in size or infinitude in number. Whereas the dynamic sublime encompasses the objects that tend to bring terror, provided that the terror is rendered pleasurably by the safe situation of the observer. He takes as examples of sublimity the scenes and events in the natural world. According to him, sublimity resides not in the object of nature itself, but only in the mind of the judging subject who contemplates the object. In his view, the ability to experience the sublime exemplifies the limitations of finite humanity on the one hand, but on the other hand its pre-

eminence over nature. Longinus also anticipates Arnold's "touchstone" theory of tradition whereby we measure contemporary works against a set of acknowledged critics. Arnold urged modern poets to look to the ancients and their great characters and themes for guidance and inspiration. Classical literature, in his view, possess pathos, moral profundity and noble simplicity, while modern themes, arising from an age of spiritual weakness, are suitable for only comic and lighter kinds of poetry, and don't possess the loftiness to support epic or heroic poetry.

Sublimity became a central concern not only in 18th century criticism, but also in 18th century literature, especially in the works of the so-called pre-Romantic poets — Thomas Gray, William Collins, and in the works of Gothic novelists — Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Lewis. Thomas Gray, and William Collins, the writers of the sublime ode, sought to achieve effects of wildness and obscurity in their descriptive style and abrupt transitions. Their sublime odes also rendered the wildness, vastness and obscurity of the sublime objects they described. Authors of the gothic novels exploited the sublimity of delightful horror both in the natural and architectural settings of their narratives and in the actions and events that they narrated.

Longinus' treatise exerted a persistent influence on literary criticism. He makes use of both the historical and comparative method. He is also a pioneer in the field of analytical criticism. He analysis passages from particular works to estimate the aptness of the words, images, epithets, etc. It helped establish both the expressive theory of poetry and the critical method of impressionism. Longinus illustrates the Rhetorical practice of close textual reading. Such close attention to the text was the monopoly of modern formalists and new critics. In a broad sense, Longinus' ideas anticipate various consensual theories ranging from those of Edmund Burke to reader-response critics. Despite its relative anonymity prior to the 17th and 18th centuries, modern critics have found "On the Sublime" to prefigure their own literary perspectives and to be as relevant and insightful as other standard ancient texts. From Longinus's author-centred perspective, writers and orators achieve greatness not just by Rhetorical techniques but also by deep feelings, profound thoughts, and natural genius: "Sublimity is the echo of a noble

mind." Often the experience of reading a great author or listening to a great speech leads us to a feeling of ecstasy or transport (ekstasis), which is distinct from the more rational effects of persuasion, the goal of Rhetoric. For Longinus, sublimity uplifts the spirit of the reader, filling him or her with unexpected astonishment and pride, arousing noble thoughts, and suggesting more than words can convey.

From a contemporary perspective, Longinus's view of the sublime has limitations. It focuses mainly on the profound feelings and thoughts of geniuses and audiences, without attending to the ways in which they are structured or determined by language. Longinus does discuss figurative language, Rhetoric, and composition, but the ideas and emotions of the genius precede such linguistic "ornamentation". The audience's experience, moreover, is said to transcend words.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: State the importance of Longinus' criticism.

Q 11: From your reading of the essay, what ideas do you get of Longinus as a romantic?



4.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have made yourself familiar with Longinus one of the greatest critics of antiquity. The decline of literature in his age made Longinus talk about Rhetoric. In this connection, he points out Caecilius' monograph "On Sublimity" which, he felt, had failed to touch the essential points. His "On the Sublime" is written in order to make correction of what Caecilius has written. He distinguishes between other compositional skills and the sublime. Through a composition, inventive skill and appropriate use of facts are expressed. However, the sublime reveals the power of the speaker 'at a single stroke'. The sublime appears like a bolt of lightning. The different sections of this unit must have helped you to understand what the essay is all about. By now, you must have also realised the features that might effect sublimity—bad and affected rhythm; the

'chopped up' style (phrases too closely knit); excessive brevity; and undignified vocabulary. Thus, with a single essay, Longinus has been able to leave his mark in the history of literary criticism.



4.8 FURTHER READING

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Wimsatt, William K, JR. & Brooks, Cleanth. (1970). *Literary Criticism: A Short History*. Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Web Resources :

www.wikipedia.org

www.archive.org



4.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q No 1: When "On the Sublime" was first published the volume was attributed to Dionysius Longinus ... ... then to Cassius Longinus ... thus, the authorship of the text still remains uncertain.

Ans to Q No 2: Longinus considered Caecilius' monograph *On Sublimity,* to be inadequate to its high subject and failed to touch the essential points… …nor did it appear to offer the reader much practical help… …Caecilius unnecessarily tried to think about the question of how we can develop our nature to some degree of greatness.

Ans to Q No 3: According to Longinus, Sublimity is the source of the distinction of the very greatest poets and prose writers… …The first defect is "turgidity" when the artist or poet aims too high and, instead of achieving ecstasy, merely lapses into folly… …the second fault is "puerility" meaning a pedantic type of conceit adding to a pompous and frigid style… …the third fault is "parenthyrson" which refers to 'emotion misplaced'.

And to Q No 4: Longinus cites five sources of the sublime: 'grandeur of thought', 'strong and inspired passion', 'use of figurative language', 'nobility of expression' and 'elevated composition'… …while discussing sublimity he cites the epics of Homer, the tragedies of Aeschylus, the love-lyrics of Sappho, the writings of Plato, the orator Demosthenes, and the historian Herodotus.

Ans to Q No 5: Sublimity lies in the capacities of the speaker or writer . . .it can be acquired by the power of combining certain elements appropriately into an organic whole . . .it is the path of imitation . . .it suggests the appropriate use of imagination in Rhetoric.

Ans to Q No 6: Longinus points out that Plato does not practice what he preaches… …Longinus reinterprets Plato, highlighting the unconscious ways he is "carried away by a sort of literary madness."… …he differs from Horace, who in the *Ars Poetica* stresses Rhetorical strategies rather than the erratic genius of authors… …Longinus' treatise is more like Aristotle's *Poetics,* for they both take note of the formal techniques and psychological effects of literature.

Ans to Q No 7: Its a quality whose effect is to transport the reader out of themselves… …style of writing that elevates itself above the ordinary… …mechanism of recognition of the greatness of a spirit, of the depth of an idea, of the power of speech… …a certain distinction and excellence in expression… …it expresses itself in a single phrase, like a flash of lightning.

Ans to Q No 8: The use of figures allows the speaker to carry the audience away with him… … figure of Rhetorical question and answer involves the audience emotionally… …use of Asyndeton imparts strength, beauty and persuasiveness to the language… …Anaphora and Diatyposis may be combined together…

…Hyperbaton consists in the inversion of the natural order of words or thoughts… …figures give a touch of reality to speech and produces the natural effect of emotion… …Polyptoton and Periphrasis contribute to sublimity and enlivens exposition.

Ans to Q No 9: Among the five sources, loftiness or grandeur of thought is the gift of nature… …such elevating thoughts remain as the "echo of great soul" and are possible only when the author has power of forming great conceptions.

Ans to Q No 10: Longinus displays a rare breadth of outlook… …his prescriptions for sublimity is universal… …he fuses romanticism and classicism together… …great reverence for the ancient Greek models… …refined and cultivated poetic style…. …makes use of both the historical and comparative methods… …the treatise became a standard object of study for literary critics.

Ans to Q No 11: R.A. Scott James calls him the 'first romantic critic'… …his insistence on passion, ecstasy, transport, imagination, intensity and exaltation… …he recommends judging a work of art on the basis of its power to transport… … moving to ecstasy by its grandeur and passion… …attaches importance to emotion and imagination.



4.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What is the importance of the treatise "On the Sublime" by Longinus in the context of modern literary criticism?

Q 2: Do you agree that "On the Sublime" can be called a romantic aesthetic document. Give reasons for your answer by reflecting on the Romantic elements of Longinus as a critic.

Q 3: 'Sublimity is the echo of a great soul'. Substantiate your answer with reference to the sources as well as the defects of sublimity.

Q 4: How has the concept of the sublime been exploited by other writers? Illustrate your answer.

Q 5: Discuss Longinus as a literary critic. What are the features of his writing as evident in his essay "On the Sublime"?

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