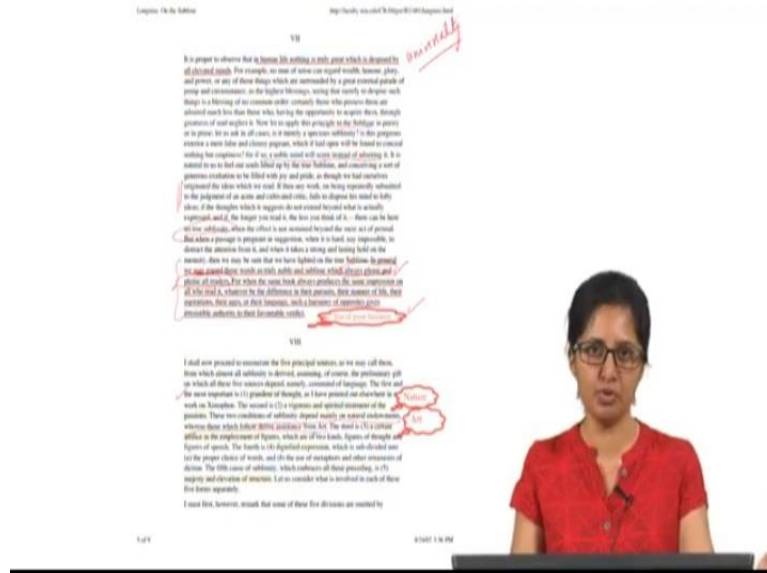


**Literary Criticism (From Plato to Leavis)**  
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**Longinus' On the Sublime (Session 3)**

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Hello and welcome to yet another session of the course literary criticism. Today, we are continuing to discuss *Longinus On the Sublime*. In the 8<sup>th</sup> section, having told us about the test of literature and how he thinks universality and if a set of elevated minds, a set of lofty minds agree upon the quality, the loftiness and the sublimity of a certain kind of literature, then it is bound to be great.

And having said that, Longinus takes us to the next set of discussions in Part 8, and there he states, at the outset, that he proceeds to enumerate the 5 principle sources of sublimity. And the clarity with which he continues to speak over here, the clarity with which he continues to write over here, it is really amazing, given that it is one of the earliest manuscripts to be discovered about literary criticism, giving a lot of foundational mileage to what would later become western literary criticism.

These are the 5 principle sources that he identifies with regards to sublimity. The first one is grandeur of thought. Second is a vigorous and spirited treatment, as you can see here. The third, a certain artifice in the employment of figures. Fourth is dignified expression which is again subdivided into proper choice of words and the use of

metaphors and other ornaments. And the fifth one is majesty and elevation of structure.

And look at these 5 forms, and there is a way in which he also further compartmentalizes these five different things and the first two are part of nature and the next set, the third, fourth and fifth, they are part of art. Recall the earliest discussion that we had at the beginning of *Longinus On the Sublime*, about how he believes that just genius will not produce any kind of great art. Along with genius, you also need a sense of direction, this technicality is equally important.

So, this is where by identifying the five sources which also constitute elements from nature as well art, the inherent genius as well as the technical training that one gets, he combines all these things in these five sources. And he keeps giving examples too like he gives first in grandeur of thoughts, as I have pointed out elsewhere on his work on Xenophon.

And after having mentioned the second one, he states very clearly, “these two conditions of sublimity depend mainly on natural endowments. Whereas, those which follow derive assistance from art”. So, here he continues to emphasize on the importance of the natural endowments and how the natural endowment can have a proper sense of direction, it can reach a proper fruition only if it also receives, only if those qualities also receive adequate training.

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And in the rest of the section, in Section 8, he continues to give examples and continues to tell us about the things that that need to be omitted in terms of language.

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The slide shows text from a lecture on the sublime, with handwritten annotations in red. The text is divided into sections VII and VIII. Section VII discusses the nature of the sublime, mentioning that it is a power to observe that is human but nothing in itself, and that it is a power to observe that is human but nothing in itself, and that it is a power to observe that is human but nothing in itself. Section VIII discusses the nature of the sublime, mentioning that it is a power to observe that is human but nothing in itself, and that it is a power to observe that is human but nothing in itself. The woman is pointing to the text on the slide.

And here, there is another thing that we need to notice, when he is identifying these five sources which are from nature as well as from art, it is largely about language. It is language which produces this loftiness. Of course, there are a lot of technical elements which can perhaps fine-tune these aspects, but fundamentally it is about language which also has the ability to transport the reader out of himself or herself.

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The slide shows text from a lecture on the sublime, with handwritten annotations in red. The text is divided into sections IX and X. Section IX discusses the nature of the sublime, mentioning that it is a power to observe that is human but nothing in itself, and that it is a power to observe that is human but nothing in itself. Section X discusses the nature of the sublime, mentioning that it is a power to observe that is human but nothing in itself, and that it is a power to observe that is human but nothing in itself. The woman is pointing to the text on the slide.

And in Section 9, this is how he begins, “I’ve already said that of all these five conditions of the sublime, the most important is the first, that is a certain lofty cast of

mind. Therefore, although this is a faculty rather natural than acquired, nevertheless it would be well for us in this instance also to train up our souls to sublimity.” This is a very useful phrase, “to train up our souls to sublimity.”

While Longinus is talking about something very profound, something which is also very abstract, something which operates at a very different level altogether. Rather than something which operates at a very different level altogether, he continues to focus on the need for good training. And how without appropriate training, without good training, the lofty mind perhaps cannot do anything much even if the lofty mind is endowed with a sense of the gift of sublimity, unless it is coupled with a proper training, it may not bear much fruition.

And moving down, there is also this Platonian notion that he subscribes to, “I have hinted elsewhere in my writings that sublimity is, so to say, the image of greatness of soul”. And, we find the perfect synergy of Plato’s as well as Aristotle’s ideas in *Longinus On the Sublime*. At some level we find him being very platonic, very Platonian, when he talks about how good writing can only come from a lofty mind.

On the other hand, there are also these technicalities and the practical aspects that he focuses on just the way Aristotle had. There are these beautiful examples that he continues to give from contemporary art forms, “the silence of Ajax in the eleventh *Odyssey* is great and grander than anything he ever could have said.”

And look at the way in which, he is giving this poignant example to talk about sublimity. It is not always about the use of ornamented language, it is not always about the use of language itself, here he talks about how in a particular section where the silence of Ajax is more sublime, it has more grandeur than anything he could have ever said. And here he also make a further distinction that this eloquence that he talks about, this grandeur that he talks about in terms of language, it is not always about the spoken words.

Let us read down further to get a hang of what Longinus is mentioning. “It is absolutely essential then first of all to settle the question, whence this grandeur of conception arises.” And the answer is that truer eloquence can be found only in those whose spirit is generous and aspiring. We continue to see a very Platonian sense of this identification between lofty thoughts and lofty minds, and how only a noble soul can produce great literature.

And he also makes this statement towards the end, “Hence, sublime thoughts belong properly to the loftiest minds”. We find here, a lot of similarities between Longinus and other classical thinkers about this identification between lofty mind and lofty thinking, about lofty writing and the lofty souls.

Here we also find that even when we are focusing on technical aspects, there is a sense of a universality that they all subscribe to. There is a sense of a set of universal virtues, a set of universal ideals that they all subscribe to and they also expect that the other critical minds, the other well-read, elevated minds will also be able to appreciate this.

And look at the way in which he further clarifies this, “For those whose lives are wasted in paltry and illiberal thoughts and habits cannot possibly produce any work worthy of the lasting reverence of mankind, it is only natural that their words should be full of sublimity whose thoughts are full of majesty”.

And this equation is very clear in Plato, in Aristotle as well as in Longinus. So, we also find these overarching similarities over here, where the universality of human character continues to be underscored, continues to be reiterated.

And in that sense we will also begin to realize when we talk more about Aristotelian humanism later on, that there is an underlying principle of humanism that brought together almost all kinds of literary criticism of the earliest centuries.

And we also find that, which is why there is a need at a later point to depart from the humanistic principles, which is why there is also a need to reconfigure the various ways in which humanism had been understood and talked about, and how that had manifested itself in different kinds of literature, and more importantly in different kinds of literary critical approaches.

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The distance between heaven and earth? ... a measure, one might say, with less comparison to Homer's greater than to the nature of the divine, than different to that touch of Homer's in his description of action -- of the world's really one of his works: "Homer lives for words Homer!" -- an image we would, but depicting how consider how Homer gives dignity to the divine person: --

"So far as his his airy kin, who sits  
On some tall cone, and waxes the wain-dark air  
So far reaches the heavenly company: words!"

We measure their speed by the extent of the whole world -- a great comparison, which might reasonably lead us to remark that if the divine world were to take two such leaps in succession, they would find no room in the world for another Sublime also are the images in the "Bards of the Gods" --

"A strange sound  
Rang through the air, and shook the Olympian height,  
Then some wined the murmurs of the dead,  
And springing from his throne he cried aloud  
With hoarsest voice, but the earth, soon smothered  
By Neptune's wailing sea, forthwith ceased  
To rattle and rattle on their beds  
So dense and dark, which 'in the path abate!"

Earth was from its foundation? "Taurus wall had been!" The whole world was under and turned upside down? Why, my dear friend, this is a perfect fancy itself, as which the whole universe, heaven and hell, mortals and immortals, stars the conflict and the path. A simple picture, certainly, but unless perhaps it is to be taken allegorically through images, and oversteering the bounds of decency. It seems now that the strange number of words, phrases, images, words, and other ways which make up the Homeric tradition of the path was designed by its author to depict his ideas, as far as possible, one way, and not his own own ideas -- or rather, his path are some of them his human characters, other, as, when we are unhappy, have a horror than die in death, while the path, according to him, not only for the eye, but for the ear in nature. For to be preferred to the description of the Battle of the Clouds on these passages which within the divine nature in its own light, as something specific, great, and pure, as, for instance, a passage which has often been handled by my predecessors, the lines on Providence: --

"Whom we and word and victory seek,  
The deep advance, and the towers of Troy,  
Tossing beneath the god's assumed face,  
Over the waves he rode, and moved him played,  
I said from the deep, the storm's tremendous head,  
With seventh gusts welcoming their land  
The charmed waters parted, as they flew!"

And thus also the language of the lines, so ordinary men, having formed an adequate conception of the Supreme Being, gave it adequate expression in the opening words.

And to prove these points with concrete examples, he continues to give a lot of instances from contemporary Greek art and literature. And there are a lot of examples that Longinus gives, also to showcase what to avoid and he clearly is not a big fan of any kind of ornamented language. In fact, he even warns the potential critic and potential writer against the use of too many metaphors and too ornamented kind of language.

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of his "Lovers" "that self" -- what? -- "So there he lights, and there was light for them to feel, and there was!"

I trust you will not think me tedious if I quote yet one more passage from our great, great referring this time to human characters in illustration of the manner in which he deals with the divine heights. A subtle and wondrous definition of light has accompanied the words of his wailing Clouds. Thus again is not perfectly clear about --

"Alighting first,  
Only from darkness ever where a man:  
No more I ask, but give us back the day,  
Clear but not right, and the air, if there will!"

The language we just read we should look for in Agas. He does not, even otherwise, ask for his life -- such a request would have been unworthy of his heroic soul -- but, feeling himself partly set by darkness, and produced from employing his value in any noble action, he calls heaven to come on the side, and gives the speech more of light. "As he says," he thinks, "I shall find a woman's grace, even though Zeus himself should light upon me." In such passages the mind of the poet is caught up in the childhood of the simple, and he can create his --

"Like the fates our god, stars, or waiting fate  
Through the deep shadows on a mountain-side,  
His life deep flows!"

But there is another and a very interesting aspect of Homer's mind. When we turn to the Illiads we find occasion to observe that a great personal power in the choice of person which comes with old age naturally leads towards the Iliads. For it is evident that this work was composed after the Iliad, in proof of which we may mention, among many other indications, the introduction in the Iliad of the sequel to the story of his former adventures of Troy, as in some additional speeches in the Trojan war, and especially the return of action and returning which is part in that poem to depend heavily, as if a influence of some previous design. The Illiads is, in fact, a sort of sequel to the Iliad --

"There was one Agas too, Achilles' friend,  
And then Patroclus, perhaps remember:  
There lies my own dear son!"

And in the same manner I imagine, within the Iliad, which was written when his genius was in its prime, the whole structure of the poem is founded on action and images, in the Iliads he generally prefers the heroic style, which is proper to old age. Hence Homer in the Illiads used to compare to the setting sun, he is still so great as ever, but he has lost his former heat. The main is now put into a better key than in the "Iliad of Troy, Greece" -- he begins to enter the high and quiet, and naturally lighter style, or at least, that a continuous current of meaning, making, "that" rigid sentences, but there of elegance, but splendour of images which is over now for Homer. (For the sun when it rises upon itself and leaves its steps were

And something which is extremely significant over here is this reference to the law giver of Jews and the images of Christianity which are used over here and there is an excerpt from the book of Genesis, from the Bible: "God said"- what?- "Let there be

light and there was light, let there be land and there was.” This was considered as one of the hints to show the kind of learnedness, and the kind of exposure that not just Longinus but also the Greek learned society at large had at that point of time, and this quotation from the Bible, from the book of Genesis, considered extremely significant, in situating the text in terms of these inter-textual references and the manner in which different kinds of examples are being used to illustrate something which is predominantly part of literary criticism now. And there is a way in which he continues to quote from the great poet by referring to the examples again from *Odyssey*, and he talks about various instances where he can locate these examples from within the text of *Odyssey* to show what needs to be done or what needs to be avoided.

And there is something interesting that he remarks about Homer’s mind, that is a great poet that he continues to refer to, but there is another and a very interesting aspect of Homer’s mind, when we turn to the *Odyssey*. We find occasion to observe that “a great poetical genius in the decline of power which comes with old age naturally leans towards the fabulous.”

And this leaning towards the fabulous is not something that Longinus entirely approves of, that is also seen as a degradation, as a decay of true genius. “For it is evident that this work was composed after the *Iliad*, in proof of which we may mention among many other indications the introduction in the *Odyssey* of the sequel to the story of his hero’s adventure at Troy. As so many additional episodes in the Trojan War and especially the tribute of sorrow and moaning which is paid in that form to departed heroes, as if in fulfilment of some previous design, the *Odyssey* is in fact a sort of epilogue to the *Iliad*. And for the same reason, I imagine, whereas in the *Iliad* which was written when his genius was in its prime.” And that is another important thing which he illustrates with this example of Homer, the transition in Homer’s mind from the time he wrote *Iliad* and towards what Longinus sees as a kind of a decay or a degradation of his genius, and he says *Iliad* was written when his genius was in its prime.

This is also Longinus’ way of telling us that genius is not something which is permanent and genius is not something which one can take for granted. Genius needs direction, genius needs technical training and it is also not something which will stay permanently. There are phases, and what other best way to illustrate this, rather than

talking about Homer's mind and how his mind worked and how his genius was manifested in the composition of *Iliad* as well as *Odyssey*.

The whole structure of the poem is founded on action and struggle. In the *Odyssey*, he generally prefers the narrative style which is proper to old age. And look at the way in which these equations are made between the personality of the writer and the kind of writings that he or she produces between the age, between the exposure and the kind of productions that at different age they are capable of.

And here we also find Longinus moving a little bit away from the principles of universality, from the principles of universal virtue and universal way of looking at genius. We find that all these three masters play to Aristotle as well as Longinus, even when they subscribe to the ideals of universality, even when they subscribe to the ideals of humanism, we find that there is a way in which they also make these fine distinctions about what to expect at various points of time.

And perhaps, it would be appropriate and it would also be fair to say that maybe humanism was also a framework which was most handy when literary criticism was in its initial infant stages, and it also gave a lot of clarity and foundational mileage to what would later become the western literary critical forte.

We continue to engage with these example that he gives about Homer's mind. Hence, "Homer in his *Odyssey* may be compared to the setting sun. He is still as great as ever but he has lost his fervent heat. The strain is now pitched to a lower key than in "The tale of Troy divine". We begin to miss that high and equable sublimity which never flags or sinks, that continuous current of moving incidents, those rapid transitions, that force of eloquence, that opulence of imagery which is ever true to nature."

And, I want you to connect this to the definition of sublime that he gives at the outset of the discussion. Longinus talks about sublimity as the lofty language which has the power to transport the reader out of himself or herself. And how does this happen? How does this language manifest itself? It is in the "continuous current moving incidents, those rapid transitions, the force of eloquence, the opulence of imagery and it is all true to nature."

And this nature which is also the inherent genius in the writer is combined and it is perhaps taken towards appropriate directions with good training. And that is a kind of



sublimity which he says, never flags or sinks. There are no ups and downs in that kind of sublimity. It maintains a consistent level of elevated state, a consistent state of sublimity.

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As we move towards the end, there are various ways in which he brings in a lot of other imagery also to talk about what this quality of the sublime is. "Like the sea when it retires upon itself and leaves its shores, waste and bare, henceforth the tide of sublimity begins to ebb and cross away into the dim region of myth and legend. In saying this I am not forgetting the fine storm pieces in the *Odyssey*, the story of the Cyclops and other striking passages. It is Homer grown old I am discussing, but still it is Homer."

Yet in every one of these passages, the mythical predominates over the real. And he talks about certain other things related to content as well, how he and moves from *Iliad* to *Odyssey*. We find that there are striking passages of course, but there is also a predomination of the mythical over the real.

In the later stage and in Longinus's own words, "Homer grown old", and older Homer is talking about the mythical more than the real and older Homer is also using more fabulous passages, and there is a certain kind of steam that he loses out on.

Homer continues to be Homer, but if Longinus were to compare *Iliad* with *Odyssey*, he would always say that *Iliad* was more sublime than *Odyssey* ever was, and in all of these examples, more than judging and evaluating Homer, Longinus is also giving us

some practical examples of how to identify sublimity and how to use this in a practical sense in the context of literary criticism.

And in this final passage with which he wraps up, he continues to talk about *Odyssey*, he continues to talk about the examples, and this is how he wishes to wrap up this discussion on the sublime. And he is also aware that, it is a digression that he makes towards the end. If you look at the succession of events from the first section onwards, he begins by talking about sublimity.

He talks about the various things that would make a work sublime, and what are the sources of this sublimity, and what are the different ways in which they can be achieved or not achieved, and what could hamper your journey toward sublimity, and what is the role of the reader.

When he is talking about all of this, he is also conscious that towards the end, he is evidently making a digression when he begins to talk about Homer's mind. "My purpose in making this digression, as I said, is to point out what trifles the second childhood of genius is too apt to be betrayed." And there are different stages of genius and this, he wants the reader the critic to be aware of, so that one does not make that mistake of judging the same writer's different works in the same way.

It is not that if the writer remains the same, all works will have the same level of sublimity. That is the profound point that Longinus is also trying to make towards the end of this discussion, to draw home, to drive home the point, to draw our attention to the point that even this same writer, even a writer like Homer who is the greatest poet, who is like the sun, even when he is setting, he remains as great as ever.

Even a poet like Homer, he is capable of producing two different kinds of works which are at the level of sublimity in two different levels. That is what Longinus is trying to argue out. And this is what he wraps up with.

Another reason for these remarks on the *Odyssey* is that, "I wished to make you understand that great poets and prose writers after they have lost their power of depicting the passions turn naturally to the delineation of character." So, look at another fine distinction that he makes in this transition of different forms of genius and he also talks about the second childhood of genius.

And in the first stage when Homer was writing *Iliad*, he was focusing on the passions and then he turns naturally to the delineation of character, because that is another stage of his genius. That is a setting sun, that is Homer grown old who is focusing more on the character, who is focusing more on the fabulous language, who is moved away from depicting powerful emotions.

And the other things that he also noticed was that, he has also moved away towards mythical characters than real ones. Such for instance is the life-like and characteristic picture of the palace of Odysseus which may be called a sort of comedy of manners. And look at these different kinds of interventions that Longinus is also capable of bringing in.

And the other thing that needs to be mentioned about the structure of this manuscript is that it is a retrieved manuscript and it has been translated over and again. So, there could be perhaps a chance that there was another conclusion which went missing, or there were parts which were missing in between but nevertheless the points that we need to keep in mind, that one needs to reiterate is that, Longinus talks about sublimity.

He gives a theoretical framework to talk about sublimity and he also shows us how technical training is equally important in nurturing genius and how that and those aspects and those sources that he identifies, they all can be collectively used to talk about literature using critical yardsticks.

So with this we begin to wrap up our discussion on *Longinus On the Sublime*, and we will also come back to some of these points at a later point, especially when we discuss how Scott James identified Longinus as the first Romantic poet. And here is where we also begin to see the connections between the early century Greek text and how literary criticism was dealt with then, and how to make this connection across towards the Romantic period, and to see how it becomes possible to situate Longinus within a different framework altogether. Within the 18<sup>th</sup> century and 19<sup>th</sup> century framework, when the discussion is predominantly about Romanticism.

With this we wrap up today's discussion, I thank you for listening and I look forward to seeing you in the next session.

