**Sublime Method: Longinus on Language and Imitation**

The author of *On the Sublime* writes with an unsteady brilliance, fitfully mimicking the grandeur he admires, at one moment rising to passion, at another collapsing in self-parody. Implicitly, his style claims a kind of “height.” He claims height in another way when he tells us that his treatise will outdistance a competing handbook, which was “too low” (*tapeinoteron*)—in style, science, perhaps even dignity—to command its topic. But elevation is not something we expect from a book of rules. A teacher of method would lack the genius for it, or genius (the genius for sublimity, at any rate) would disqualify him as a teacher, from whom we chiefly expect reason and discrimination. As a sublime technician, Longinus evidently approaches his job in a different way, and faces different problems, from other teachers of method—Aristotle, for example, or Demetrius.

What kind of height does Longinus claim? The low technician gave only examples, Longinus says; his treatise was low because it stopped short of covering those key points that would permit others to “possess” the subject matter. Rather, by endlessly quoting sublime authors, the low technician and his readers merely borrowed sublimity without hope of ownership, whereas Longinus, by

1. For Longinus’s sublimity as an eighteenth-century theme, see Neil Hertz, “A Reading of Longinus,” *Critical Inquiry* 9 (1983) 579. Longinus becomes playful and parodic precisely where he writes in a quasi-sublime style: when he describes how emotion disrupts normal word order. Here, for example, the word “placement” (τάξις) is displaced in hyperbaton (τηδε κάκει σε ἀγχιστρόφως ἀντιστάμενοι... τὴν ἐκ τοῦ κατὰ φόσιν εἴμωι παντοίος πρὸς μνήμα τραφάς ἐναλλάττουσι τάξιν, 22.1). For an explanation of Longinus’s changeable style quite different from the one I propose, see D. A. Russell, *Longinus* *On the Sublime* (Oxford 1964) xl.

2. πας ἄν ἡμίν αὐτὸ τοῦτο [sc. τὸ τῆς τεχνολογίας ὑποκείμενον] καὶ δι’ ἀν τινῶν μεθόδων κτητον γένοιτο;
providing a method, would achieve the height that his competitor lacked. Longinus’s *tekno\(\)logia, his discourse on method, has something potent about it, and this potency, he wants us to believe, somehow resembles Homer’s or Plato’s. If he “owns” his subject matter, he must share their vigor, and a good deal of what he tells us about them applies also to himself. For example, if sublime writers are “more than mortal and . . . sublimity raises them until they approach the magnanimity of god” (36.1), Longinus’s method should likewise confer a kind of divinity. *Tekhn\(\)ē (method) will enable men to imitate the spiritual life of gods.

But what is sublime about method? Longinus must fight hard for an apparently modest claim, that his system works—his pupils will write sublimely. Others believe (is the low technician among them?) that only nature endows men with such power (2.1), and that method actually weakens natural gifts. Longinus admits that nature’s role is primary: method performs its most important function by acknowledging that only talent can supply one or another kind of rhetorical power (2.3); sublime thought is “likely” to produce sublime speech without guidance from anyone, and the capacity for thought is “mostly” innate. Thus, method remains cautiously alert for an improbable opportunity. Longinus defends his methods by remarking that nature too follows a method (2.2)—she wastes no effort—but here again he retreats into modesty, for the argument implies that even on his own ground as a technical writer he is an imitator, mimicking nature’s own self-rationalizing faculty. Nature remains the “archetypal ingredient of generation,” and everything else depends upon this.

Longinus’s treatise, then, describes a very small territory in which he points out those few places where method can do what nature has left undone. But the journey is long because it is not straight: something about the job of writing a sublime book of method causes Longinus to drift—for example, into seductive analogies and brilliant figures. He resists this tendency by correcting himself, constantly changing direction in an effort to find his target. This essay looks at the way Longinus argues in the light of what he argues. It accounts for his expository style in several steps, according to his views of error, imagery, language, and imitation.

3. In fact, Caecilius must have done more than quote examples. He seems at least to have enumerated the sources of sublimity, since Longinus complains that he did not name *pathos among these (8.1). It is not clear precisely how Longinus claims ownership of sublimity: he could teach fine writing, for example, by means of the rules he has contrived, or because he knows how to distinguish good from bad models of imitation, whereas Caecilius did not (Caecilius, we know, favored Lysias and other models of plain style, which Longinus contemned). Rule-making and imitation are the standard complements to nature in rhetorical teaching from the time of Aristotle onward: see G. Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece* (Princeton 1963) 232f. For discrimination among the objects of imitation as key to good writing, cf. Quint. *Inst.* 10.2.14.

4. At 9.3; cf. 30.1, where language and thought are “mostly discovered through each other,” τὰ πλέον δ’ ἐκατέρων διέπεσεν.


6. *πρῶτον τι καὶ ἀρχέτυπον γενέσεως στοιχείων ἐπὶ πάντων* (2.2).
TROPE AND ANTITROPE

Here is an example of error, a tiny error, that Longinus was bound to make and then bound to correct—a bit of figurative language that falsifies as it advances his argument. To justify as a source of sublimity the euphonious “composition” (synthesis) of speech-sounds, Longinus points at first to the emotional effects of instrumental music.\(^7\) Surely, he reasons a fortiori, verbal “harmony” must likewise powerfully touch the soul.\(^8\) But this proof entails something undesirable, for if we take too seriously the analogy that legitimates synthesis, we may confuse sensual with spiritual things, likeness with essence. Therefore, although he claimed some sort of sublimity for verbal “music,” Longinus now insists that the sound of lyres and flutes has nothing sublime about it. Nonverbal music, he says, is not spiritual, although it “implants certain pathē into listeners,”\(^9\) it is scarcely human at all. It may be true that sensation “naturally” affects us, but it cannot properly belong to our nature, because our proper nature is not sensual.

To explain how music that inspires feeling can be divorced from spirit, where feelings dwell, Longinus invokes an image of paternity: music is an “illegitimate” (nothon) imitation of verbal persuasion, not a “legitimate activity of human nature.”\(^10\) Although illegitimate children certainly resemble their fathers, nothing comes from such resemblance—no wealth or power or prestige; it may be real but it does not count.\(^11\) Real (that is, instrumental) music wrongly evokes spiritual feelings by imitating words illegitimately; verbal “music” rightly evokes them, because it is only figuratively musical. Thus, one trope (“legitimacy”) cancels another (“music”).\(^12\) Apparently, then, since speech-sounds are accompanied by meaning, no technique that knows only about sensation can encompass them.\(^13\) Music and speech differ fundamentally, on precisely the point that

8. For ἀμοιβα as the tonal, melodic component of music, cf. Arist. Poet. 1.1447a26; as the tonal component of speech, Rhet. 3.1.1403b31 (but cf. 1408b33); as a feature of words (prosodically?) ordered for singing, Plato Theaet. 175E. In our passage, ἀμοιβα means “music” first (39.1), and then a musical virtue in language (ἀμοιβαν...λόγον, 39.3). Linguistic ἀμοιβα becomes abstract, for Longinus, when it qualifies not only the audible shape (ἴδεα) of spoken words but also the inaudible “shape” of thoughts (νοημα), but this use is rooted in Aristotle’s notion that there is “music” in speech.
9. Pathos does not guarantee sublimity in any case, for there are low pathē: see 44.6 (on greed and pleasure-seeking as the scourge of Longinus’s age).
10. For the “legitimacy” of persuasion, cf. Plato Phaedrus 278A.
11. ταύτα εἰδώλα καὶ μμήματα νόθα ἐστι πείθομεν...οὕτω τῆς ἀνθρωπεῖας φύσεως...ἐνεργήματα γνώσεως (39.3). We do not learn in this passage whether there can be legitimate imitations, or whether human nature produces imitations (cf. Arist. Poet. 1448b4–9), only that speech is natural and original, while other sounds such as music are somehow derivative. For imitation, and the sort of legitimacy that it might claim, see below.
12. There is a paradox here: music, literally named, turns out to be an imitation of “music,” figuratively named, in speech. The usual relation of figurative and literal senses has been inverted.
13. It may help to account for Longinus’s shyness about synthesis as a source of sublimity to recall the ancient controversy about verbal music. One side was represented by Philodemus, the other by a group known as “the critics” (ὁ κριτικοῖ). Although Philodemus conceded that music
grounds their similarity: they are more or less accessible to technical method. Verbal "music" is a turn in the argument that, having done its job, can be forgotten. Its job was to open the topic of sublimity to method without compromising sublimity.

Thus, method’s efficacy in arousing sublime feeling seems to depend upon a likeness that cannot be fully acknowledged—really, we discover, a kind of mistake. Here, then, Longinus’s argument circles back upon itself, confesses error, and denies likeness. It takes a turn characteristic of sublime method, in which, I suggest, likeness usually invites discrimination and (conversely) divisions frequently become blurred. The decisive gesture in this instance—distinction-making, error-correcting—belongs properly to method as it strives to counterbalance and refine sublime enthusiasm. "Absence of error is mostly a benefit of tekhnē," Longinus says, and method complementing nature might conceivably produce "perfection." The technical writer claims most for the virtues of method as distinct from nature in the realm of quantity and proportion, setting a limit on the use of figures, for example. Thus, when Longinus on second thought disclaims verbal "music," he follows his own precepts, applying method to method’s defense.

But there is a counterturn to this one. Errors do not always require correction, since "one [piece of] sublimity buys off all the errors" found in a great work (36.2). Flawlessness is unnecessary to sublime writing. While the virtues produced by rhetorical method (virtues of invention and arrangement, for example) are embodied in the work as a whole, one moment of sublimity is enough to prove an author's power, and sublimity drives out, or replaces, all

might be naturally soothing (De poet. 2.47 Hausrath [ = F. Sbordone, Philodemi de poematis Tractatus alter fr. 25, col. III] and De musica 1, fr. 32.37–45, p. 20 Kemke, cited by W. D. Anderson, Ethos and Education in Greek Music [Cambridge, Mass. 1966] 284 n.54), he was skeptical about the aesthetics of euphony in speech, and he distinguished sharply between the intellectual content of language and its irrational, quasi-musical sounds. For his views about euphony, see the passages discussed by D. M. Schenkeveld, "OI KΠΙΤIKΟΙ in Philodemos," Mnem. 21 (1968) 176–214; F. Sbordone, "Eufonia e synthesis nella Poetica di Filodemo," MPhL 2 (1977) 255–83; and Annemarie Neubecker, Philodemus: Über die Musik IV. Buch (Naples 1986) 170–73, commenting on De musica book 4, chap. 14 (P. Herc. 1497, cols. 22–23). The “critics” believed that an author could distinguish himself not by appealing to the mind, but only with synthesis and euphony. Longinus shows the influence of both sides of this controversy when he finds sublimity in synthesis but spurns music as an “illegitimate” means of persuasion. Cf. Quint. Inst. 9.4.9–16. See also Hermann Mutschmann, Tendenz, Aufbau und Quellen der Schrift vom Erhabenen (Berlin 1913) 102–4 on Longinus’s aim.

14. For distinction-denying, cf. Hertz (supra n.1) 579.
15. τοῦ μὲν ἀδιάπαττον ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ τέχνης ἐστὶ κατάθρομα. (36.4).
16. τὸ τέλειον (36.4). For method as a means to perfection and completion, cf. 22.1. Cf. Quint. Inst. 10.2.28, for the need to purify even the best writing of error before imitating it; one who does this becomes perfectus orator. For the perfection of method as knowledge of occasion, cf. Phaedrus 272A.

17. Typically, as when discussing the figure hyperbole, Longinus insists that “it is necessary to prescribe how far each thing should go” (38.1). For limits in Longinus, see James A. Coulter, “Περὶ Ὑψους 3.3–4 and Aristotle’s Theory of the Mean,” GRBS 5 (1964) 197–213.
other considerations—thunderstruck, we will not notice whether virtues embodied in the work as a whole are present or not. We have seen how Longinus circumscribes method’s contribution to musicality in speech by stigmatizing music as a medium alien to human spirit in its truest nature. In a similar way, method enhances the accuracy of speech, but accuracy too belongs properly to an alien, despiritualized medium. Accuracy is the job of visual representation, of sculpture—statues must be “like” their models (that is, human beings), but speech has to do something better than achieve such a likeness (36.3). Language differs from visual art only a little less profoundly than it does from music: music falls short of language because it is (at best) merely sensible—it seems to address our feelings directly but it has no meaning and does not represent anything; visual art falls short of language because it is merely accurate—the statue arouses us only by representing, as convincingly as possible, something else to which our feelings are drawn. Longinus, clearly, does not want us to overvalue the accuracy achieved by method. We are asked to remain enthused admirers of true sublimity, unspoiled by pedantry.

Should we invoke this rule when judging Longinus’s own writing? If so, we could accept more readily the “erroneous” figures that pass rapidly in and out of view in this treatise. For example, the metaphor of verbal “music” makes better sense, during its brief period of service to the argument, if we grant Longinus “height,” an exaltation that escapes methodical correction. But the struggle between method and enthusiasm produces another involution here. It was the technician’s attempt to control feeling that made him speak of verbal “music” in the first place, and so the figure is an artefact of method; Longinus’s capacity to correct this method-building error presumably rests, not upon another step in the construction of method, but upon feeling—he can only know that music is not really sublime because he feels in himself the wider expanse of spirit addressed by speech. His error did not arise from enthusiasm, and enthused readers will not condone it. Thus, there is more than pedantry at stake when Longinus worries over the notion of verbal music. He objects not simply to mistaken terminology (the misnaming of verbal sounds as “music”) but to a misconstruction of spiritual experience: the feelings induced by music are illegitimate, never properly sublime and so never really like the feelings induced by speech. Our feelings, then, may be wrong, or wrongly understood. And just as we are wrong

18. διόσκορος σχηματιζό μαντα διεφόρησεν (1.4).
19. These comparisons (music, sculpture) seem to define two qualities of language: its quasi-sensual presence to the soul, like an object palpable to the hand, and its ability to represent or make known. The work of art, as described in a story told by Aelian about the painter Theon of Samos (VH 2.44), aims at both qualities. Wishing to enhance the vividness of a painting in which he had pictured a trumpeter, Theon had a trumpet blown nearby; thus, the phantasias became more vivid (enargestera). Longinus offers no comparable emblem of fully realized verbal tekhnē, no example of speech both accurate and sublime.
20. Music “imitates” language, as Longinus told us, but not by representing language or by representing anything else.
to believe that music exalts us, we can be misled by verbal stimulants; in such a case, Longinus wants to restore our sobriety and reveal how speech deceives.

I suggest that Longinus’s difficult account of verbal music indicates a wider problem of sublime method: his argument wanders where it seems most strenuously, precisely articulated. We find his errors hard to assess, moreover, because sublime method speaks with more than one voice about just such assessments. We need a better account of error: how much does it matter, how can it be cured? A higher method—method informed by spirit that knows the difference between “legitimate” and “illegitimate” feelings—evidently might practice a higher form of error-correction. But since sublime speech can obliterate in an instant all the errors that method uncovers, there is evidently a limit to method’s usefulness. What is the most that method can do? It is reasonable to suppose that method practices the highest sort of error-correction when addressing deceptions worked by sublimity itself.

ALLEGORY AND IMAGE

We have such a case in the Iliad’s theomachy, Longinus tells us (9.6–7). The battle inspires him; Homer’s images are awesome and impressive; Homer’s feelings and the reader’s are sublime. But these images are also theologically wrong—they misrepresent the real behavior and nature of gods—and we are permitted to call them sublime only if we allegorize. (Are we constrained in our enthusiasm by divine law, or rhetorical method?) What is striking about Longinus’s response is the coincidence of enthusiasm and critical caution: he worries about the falseness of just those images that stir his feelings most deeply, just as he found worrisome music’s emotive power.21 He does not seem to be saying that Homer’s errors here are small defects in a splendid whole, as if a magnanimous critic should ignore them.22 Nor does he explicitly claim that allegorical interpretation distinguishes a positive element to be imitated (an underlying sense, ἔπος οὐκόνα)23 from other features of the model author (such as figurative language) that are best avoided. Somehow, though, the critic’s exegetical method is necessary to justify and confirm Homer’s sublimity; without Longinus’s allegorical reading Homer’s triumphant verses would lose their grandeur. (Was the text allegorical and sublime at its origin, or does it become so at the critic’s hands?) But to read allegorically and still feel something sublime, the methodical interpreter must pretend that Homer’s language means something different from what it says,24 and sublimity consists in this, so sublimity will persist even when

21. For a more casual approach to allegorical imagery, see below.
22. This is the posture taken by Lucilius (401–10 Warmington = 338–47 Marx), who distinguishes Homer’s admirable poesis from occasional defects of diction or thought (verbum, enthymema); cf. Hor. Ars P. 347–60.
23. ὑπόνοα means “suspicion” in Longinus: see 17.1–2.
24. Longinus comes closest to positing a meaning independent of speech in discussing Ajax’s silent response to Odysseus in the underworld, which he says is “higher than any logos” (9.2).
interpretation has explained imagery away. If method can extract a sublime essence from Homer's imagery, Homer's error—a human being's failure to grasp the divine in its own terms—can be made to seem a failure of method rather than of nature.\(^\text{25}\) Presumably, if Homer's method had been greater and his conception of the gods more thoroughly realized, Longinus's exegesis would have been unnecessary.

We are entitled to allegorize, to pretend that we can rescue sublimity from language, because sublime imagery is always inadequate to sublime thought; we can say they are different because one is inferior. The difference between thought and imagery can be detected even in cases of successful imagery, for example, in the passage Longinus quotes from Homer describing the stride of divine horses (Iliad 5.770, quoted by Longinus 9.5):

\[
\text{όςον δ' ἠμοειδὲς ἀνήρ ἱδεν ὄφθαλμοίσιν,} \\
\text{ήμενος ἐν σκοπίῃ, λεύσον ἐπὶ οἴνοπα πόντον·} \\
\text{τόσον ἐπιθρόσουσι θεῶν ὑψηχές ὑποί.}
\]

As far as a man's eyes penetrate through misty air when he sits at lookout, scanning the darkened sea, so far with a high whinny the gods' horses leap.

Longinus wants us to count the physical scale of the pictured movement as sublime—it achieves "an extravagant [rhetorically exaggerated?] magnitude."\(^\text{26}\) (Since he has just been insisting that thought is the essence of sublimity, he might say that Homer's sublime thought consists in his seeing sublimity in that distant horizon, making thought a kind of vision.) But Longinus also wants us to notice that the horses' movement is not completely contained within the pictured scene. The picture evokes sublimity at least partly because it invites the reader to expand it, to imagine that since the first step of the horses takes them out of his sight, a second step will take them out of the cosmos. The first, physical movement, therefore—a movement from one visible place to another—leads, in the reader's mind, to something beyond human experience, a movement beyond "place" (topos).

Method (allegorical interpretation, for example) is necessary, therefore, not because great writers now and again make small mistakes, but because sublime writing—all sublime writing, even the kind that emanates directly from magnami-

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\(^\text{25}\) Presumably there were no more words in Ajax's mind than on his lips—there was grandeur in his refusal to speak, because words would have trivialized or failed in some other way to express his emotion. For an attempt to describe, perhaps too precisely, the relationship between the various terms in Longinus's discussion of silence, see Rudolf Weber, "De Begriffe μέγεθος und ἡψος in der Schrift vom Erhabenen," diss. Marburg, 1935, 21.

25. An image-making method enables thought to embody itself in a mental picture (15), and so complements allegorical interpretation, which recovers thought from its pictorial emblem.

26. ὑπεξοβλη τοῦ μεγέθους.
mous natures—pursues something unattainable, a transcription of superhuman reality into human language. Sublime writing can only suggest, by way of resemblances, what lies beyond the experience of men; sometimes we can accept such pictures, sometimes not, but we can call Homer sublime in either case, because we find his imagery admirable chiefly for the feeling it inspires, not for the picture that it draws. In this respect, at least, sublime writing and Longinus's sublime method work the same way, for Longinus too depends upon tropes, which he seems to abandon once they have done their job. On the other hand, there is real sublimity in Homer's imagery, even if based upon false resemblances, and so the pictures equivocally persist when interpreted by an allegorizer. Their appeal to human feelings cannot be dismissed as merely sensual, like the appeal exercised by instrumental music. The ambivalence of violent imagery—perverted in its theology, yet truly sublime—matches that of verbal "music," a subversive figure that Longinus nevertheless did not excise from his own argument.

**EXPRESSION AND REPRESENTATION**

Thus, Longinus's equivocal appreciation of other writers parallels his equivocal kind of self-correction. Both features of his argument are rooted, as we have seen, in his self-conscious ambition, his wish to speak methodically about things high or deep—gods and human souls. But Longinus's way of correcting errors and reducing images also seems to depend upon some sort of linguistic theory. The figures that embody sublimity inadequately but still authentically suggest that language does and does not invite methodical improvement, needs and yet eludes correction. Here, then, is another way of summarizing what we have just observed: Longinus's ambition for sublime method fosters an equivocal view of language. In fact, Longinus entertains two opposed views of language, and this division in his views helps to explain what we have seen in his method-building discourse (on *synthesis*) and his criticism (of Homeric allegory).

According to one view, language is an expressive medium that embodies the speaker's spirit, or at least emanates from it directly. The possession of language defines human nature. Since human beings own their language, it submits to use without resistance. According to the other view, language is a medium of reference and description, unlike and separate from the spiritual experiences it is sometimes asked to represent. Language seems alien and resistant to human use, requiring the speaker to exert force or to apply a method before shaping itself to his thoughts. Even when Longinus talks about language most distinctly in one way he leaves open the possibility of another account. His program, to construct a method of sublimity, requires both accounts of language, for literary method presupposes a verbal medium distinct from the speaker or writer, whereas sublimity denies all differences and erases every symptom of resistance: sublime speech is feeling, and the auditor of sublime speech not only feels what the speaker feels, he feels himself to be the speaker (7.2). Longinus treats the
connection between thought and speech as elastic: they move closer together or farther apart as the argument demands.

The theory of language that dominates On the Sublime may be called “expressive.” It presumes a likeness, even a sharing of substance, between expression and its source. The harmony of speech is also, by an extension that Longinus feels no need to justify, spiritual harmony. Speech and spirit are bound together, and their affinity is especially clear when speech is sublime, for sublimity subsists in both. Thus, Longinus defines sublimity on the one hand as a quality of logoi (1.3) and on the other hand as an “echo” (apēkhēma) of “high spirit” (megalophrosynēs, 9.2). It follows that (sublime) logoi “echo” the (high) spirit, that is, express its magnitude better than any other medium, virtually with the spirit’s own words. If sublimity is an echo, it must echo something audible, so that the soul itself, according to Longinus’s figure, speaks. Regarded as a literal account of sublimity, this formula suggests that speech directly expresses what the speaker thinks or feels; there is no gap between thought and expression, no medium distinct from thought, because speech is spirit. The same principle explains how linguistic “harmony” may be regarded as indistinguishable from spiritual “harmony.”

The psychological “presence” of language as a primary datum of experience makes speaking and writing potent forms of behavior and so denies the classical distinction between words and action. Potent speech is what Longinus thinks of first when he wants to show us what a really sublime conception of God looks like: according to the Jewish lawmaker, when God said “Let there be light,” there was light (9.9). Even human speech has a little of this power, for sublimity, we are told, sheds a light that is blinding (17.3). When the orator describes fists striking a face, his words too make an “impact” (20.2). Since writing sublimely is a kind of action, frequently violent, the writer requires courage: if he fears immortality, his “soul’s conceptions will be aborted, in a state unfinished and blind.” To write sublimely about heroic adventure, he must endure the dangers that heroes endure: Euripides, for example, joins Phaethon in his chariot, and Homer rages on the battlefield of Troy. There is “danger” even at the level of syntax (22.3), and hyperbaton inspires “fear” about the outcome of sentences (22.4).

If speech is real—an embodiment of thought and a potent form of behavior—


28. ἀμονίαν τινά άυλαν λόγον ἀνθρώπως ἐμφανον καὶ τῆς ψυχῆς αὐτῆς (39.3).

29. For related notions, see G. B. Walsh, The Varieties of Enchantment (Chapel Hill 1984), chaps. 4 and 5, on the linguistics of Aeschylus and Gorgias.

30. τά συλλαμβανόμενα ὑπὸ τῆς τούτου ψυχῆς ἀτελή καὶ τυφλά ὠπερ ἀμβλουχότατα (14.3). For fear of posterity, see Phaedrus 257D.

31. At 15.4. For the dynamics of this imaginative identification, see Hertz (supra n.1) 586, who finds that the poet shares not only the hero’s flight but his inevitable descent as well.
it is hard to see what verbal method can offer. If speech grows from thought organically, questions of error and accuracy recede from prominence; if it leaves little room for error, method’s chief justification, expressive speech leaves little room for method. Sublime souls should always, eo ipso, generate sublime speech. (To rationalize this claim, Longinus would say [39.3] that linguistic competence is given to human speakers by nature.) Therefore, when he turns most emphatically to the task of rhetorical instruction, Longinus seems to abandon expressive theory with its claim of spiritual presence in favor of another, which holds that the phenomena of speech are only that; errors can be mended easily, by purely verbal means. Allegory, for example, which we meet first under the heading of “images” as a remedy for impiety, reappears later as a way of putting together words. In its second guise, allegory consists in extended metaphor (32.7), and metaphor falls under the heading of diction, or verbal description (to phrastikon, 30.1). The metaphor misapplies name to object, and so when Plato uses too many metaphors—extends allegory to excess—he commits an error of naming. His words do not fit the objects represented. (“Sober god” is not a good way to describe water [32.7], although the figure represents Plato’s thought accurately enough.)

The isolation of language from its source in human feeling means that it is also isolated from human nature. This view of language, therefore, requires a second kind of nature: beyond nature in thought and feeling (discussed in the first section of the treatise), there must be a natural order in language (discussed in the second section). Here, as when Longinus draws the line between music and speech, we see method circumscribing its territory and multiplying distinctions. Method that serves the expression of sublime thought violates the nature of language. For example, it violates nature by changing the normal order of words, or by applying a name to the wrong object. Longinus once praises Homer for “forcing” two distinct words (the prepositions ὑπὸ and ἐκ), against their nature, into a single word. In the realm of language, at least, Longinus can justify forceful violation of nature—the mistreatment merely of words—as a
way of serving another, greater kind of nature in the human spirit; method
remains authentic if it perverts language to express thought.

What is linguistically unnatural (but natural to the spirit) is an elevated,
sublime style. “Beautiful words,” according to Longinus, “are the proper light
of the mind” (30.1). Elevated diction, that is to say, most effectively discloses what
occurs inside the speaker; its illumination offers insight. This is the standard
ancient view.36 On the other hand, ordinary, vulgar words have a different virtue:
they are more “demonstrative” or “clarifying” (emphanistikōteron, 31.1; cf. em-
phasis, 19.2) than the elevated kind,37 and they have a greater “semantic” capacity
(to sēmantikōs, 31.2).38 With ordinary words, the speaker sheds light upon people
and things around him rather than upon his own inner experience. Thus, ordinary
words, like visible pictures (cf. 36.3), count as successful only when they assert
some truth about the world.39 For example, it is most “vivid” to say (in prostyle)
that a man “forces himself to digest” unpleasant things because a “similarity” (to
analogon, 31.1) underlies the metaphor: enduring disgrace and eating unpalatable
food are truly similar actions.40 Beautiful words, on the other hand, have a special
capacity for expressing the speaker’s inner state. Human minds differ funda-
mentally from everything else, for they pass by nature beyond the “boundaries of the
surrounding [cosmos]” (35.3), and the techniques that adequately represent mun-
dane things will not adequately disclose what lies within minds, which belong to a
different ontological order. While things are properly described with ordinary
language, minds—all minds—require an abnormal language to the extent that they
contain something more.41 It seems, then, that language in its natural state—
orinary diction, for example—falls short of thought because it naturally repre-
sents not thought or feeling (which tend toward sublimity) but things (which are

36. See Fritz Wehrli, “Der erhabene und der schlichte Stil in der poetisch-rhetorischen Theorie
der Antike,” Phyllobolia für Peter von der Mühll (Basel 1946) 12, 22. It is possible that Longinus’s
phrase ψωζε... τοῦ νοῆ (“light of the mind”) puns on ψωνή (“voice”): see Russell (supra n.1) 149 ad loc.,
citing schol. Dion. Thrax, p. 181.33 Hilgard.

37. Demetrius Eloc. 209 associates enargeia especially with the plain style, a style composed of
ordinary words literally applied (190). For enargeia as leading away from or falling short of (sublime,
207, 246.

38. This resembles Abrams’s now familiar dichotomy: see The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic
Theory and the Critical Tradition (Oxford 1953) passim. For the “semantic” quality of tropes, cf. 32.5
(kataσεμαντικόν), 32.6 on phrastikoi passages; and Aríst. Rhet. 3.2.1405a8 (τὸ ῥαιφέζο), 3.10–11 (esp.
1410b10–13) on metaphors as vivid, clear, instructive. According to Cic. De or. 3.157, metaphors are
only useful when they “make the thing clearer.” Quintilian justifies the use of metaphor significandi
gratia, Inst. 8.6.7.

39. Presumably, when Plato becomes drunk with words he speaks too beautifully to represent
things (32.7).

40. On metaphors and similarity, see Aríst. Rhet. 3.2.1405a11 (τὸ ἀνάλογον), Poetics 1457a7–8
(τὸ διομονον). But note that in On the Sublime 31.1 Longinus appeals to “similarity” as a way of
justifying vulgarity, not metaphor.

41. For a divine component in all human minds, see C. P. Segal, “ΤΨΟΣ and the Problem of
Cultural Decline in the De Sublimitate,” HSCP 63 (1959) 133–35 with n.25.
ordinary, unless they figure sublimity). The first and most immediate use of language, as of statues, is representation of the world. Although language has an extra-mundane dimension that sculpture lacks, it is not language in general that rises above the task of representing things, but sublime language, which emanates from human nature and expresses human feelings but is not a natural kind of language. 42

Longinus could argue that the patterns of normal language are merely conventional if he wished to avoid the conclusion that linguistic nature and human nature are opposed, but he does not say this; he quite clearly assigns such patterns their own kind of naturalness. Or he could assimilate ordinary language to human nature by invoking a distinction commonly drawn between *ethos* and *pathos* as aspects of the person. The natural form of language would represent *ethos*, a person's normal, everyday way of being, 43 while distorted language would express *pathos*, an abnormal but not unnatural state of being. 44 Longinus does not make this claim, however; because his argument requires that *pathos* (and consequently sublime inspiration) should be elevated over *ethos* as the definitive feature of human nature, 45 he keeps relatively quiet about the normal, earthbound part of human nature. *Ethos* is merely the remnant that is left when Homer's great *pathos* subsides with age (9.15), or (as a feature of writing) it is a means to mere pleasure (29.2). 46

We have now seen how the equivocality of figurative speech—in model texts and in Longinus's own treatise—can be referred to a divided understanding of language, as a medium of expression and of representation. The truth of sublimity is an expressive sort of truth; to express feelings, one speaks with figures and tropes and elevated diction. Such language appears false when measured against the criterion of representation: the Battle of the Gods in the *Iliad*, for example,

42. This is a distinction that Longinus sometimes finds it convenient to ignore: see, for example, 32.6, where he refers to the utility of metaphors—that is, unnatural language—in both "pathetic" and *phrastikoi* (descriptive, circumstantial) passages.

43. Helmut Flashar, "Die klassizistische Theorie der Mimesis," *Fondation Hardt Entretiens 25: Le Classicisme à Rome aux 1er siècles avant et après J.-C.* (Geneva 1979) 100, suggests that Longinus assumes, even if he does not argue explicitly for, an equation of normal language and a human being's normal state.

44. Quintilian refers to authorities who divide the field between "μετάφορα παθήσεως, παθήσεως χρήμα" (*Inst. 6.2.10*). Cf. Cic. *Orat. 37,128*. Christopher Gill, "The *Éthos/Pathos* Distinction in Rhetorical and Literary Criticism," *CQ* 34 (1984) 159 n.54, compares *Arist. EN 2.5, EE 2.2*. See also G. B. Walsh, "Seeing and Feeling: Representation in Two Poems of Theocritus," *CP* 80 (1985) 1–19. "Παθήσεως" by a small extension of meaning names the changes suffered by speech itself (LSJ s.v. IV): see Blank (supra n.34) on "pathology" in Apollonius Dyscolus.

45. Longinus distinguishes himself from Caecilius in naming *pathos* as a source of the greatest sublimity (8.4). See also Coulter (supra n.17) 212 n.28 on the different approach taken by Dionysius of Halicarnassus.

46. For Longinus's disparagement of pleasure, cf. 44.6 (on ψυχήσσοντα); as a feature of style, ἓρωτικόν are ambivalent (5.1). For a reading of Longinus that assimilates pleasure among the components of good writing, see Coulter (supra n.17) 208–12. For the place of *éthos* in Longinus's treatise, cf. Gill (supra n.44) 160–65.
expresses Homer's piety but misrepresents the gods. Thus, one might say that sublime images seem inadequate, and Longinus habitually corrects himself, because language has been asked to do two things at once, express and represent, when it can do one only at the other's expense. The two ways of using language arise in turn from two kinds of nature: the nature of language makes it represent; the nature of souls renders language expressive.

IMITATION

Longinus's linguistic theory rationalizes the way he writes, but it is clearly not a fundamental explanation. After all, why should anyone entertain two opposed views of language? Longinus's motive for this comes, of course, from his initial problem, the use of tekhnē as a means to sublimity. He needs two kinds of language and two kinds of nature so as to make room for method: wherever human nature departs from ordinary language, method may follow, presiding over linguistic abnormality, classifying and prescribing as expressiveness requires. And method can justify its (linguistically) unnatural treatment of mere words by appealing to a larger, more potent nature in human minds. We should not be surprised to find, however, that on this point too Longinus argues equivocally.

When method follows nature in associating elevated language with high feeling, it practices mimēsis or "imitation," and the nature that it imitates is the way people generally behave. Since we regard phenomena as natural when they are often repeated, mimēsis of nature is rooted in the ordinary—it imitates common things: the imitator, as Aristotle recommends, looks to probabilities.47 In Longinus's example, an abnormal arrangement of words or ideas (hyperbaton) serves as the "truest impression of active feeling," because the speech of most men is disturbed by such feeling.48 It is in this sense that when using hyperbaton, "mimēsis moves toward the works of nature."49 "Moving toward" nature's work would mean disturbing normal speech in virtually the same way that natural feeling changes it. One represents pathos by copying its behavioral symptoms. Thus, Longinus recommends a kind of representation that uses natural signs, rather than arbitrary ones.


48. The figure "impression" (χαρακτήρ) extends the idea of expression. Since expressive language bears a physical likeness to feelings and thoughts, there must be a mechanism through which likeness is transmitted; this mechanism is usually figured as a sort of "stamping" or "impressing" in Greek sources. See Walsh (supra n.29) 83 with n.5.

49. ἡ μίμησις ἐπὶ τὸ τῆς φύσεως ἐργα γέρεται (22.1). Russell (supra n.1) 138 ad loc. remarks on the passage that "the mimēsis here meant is the imitation of things, not that of literary models." It might be better to say "of normal human behavior." Longinus is concerned here not with representing objects (an "imitation of things") but with mimicking behavior (and so with representing the feelings from which behavior arises).
This kind of *mimēsis* is really “mimicry,” a species of deception—method *pretends* to be nature—and it epitomizes the deceptiveness of all successful method: “For *tekhnē* is perfect, whenever it *seems to be nature*” (22.1). *Mimēsis* also epitomizes method because it depends upon detached observation and repetitive, systematic action: having calculated the probability that a given feeling will produce one behavior or another, the imitator writes or speaks by the numbers. Presumably he feels nothing himself, since his own feelings might interfere with calculation. This sort of method, mechanical and despiritualized, would enable Longinus’s pupil to pretend that he uses language expressively, even if he has nothing to express. In other words, what method produces is representation masquerading as expression, and so it elides the difference between the two ways of using language.

But Longinus’s argument obeys a law of conservation: wherever one distinction fades, another must appear; wherever Longinus asserts likeness, he corrects himself, retreating into discrimination. Thus, if *mimēsis* conflates two ways of using language, the argument will require two kinds of *mimēsis*. It requires another kind of *mimēsis* specifically because mimicry without feeling—the sober speaker’s calculated behavior—seems “illegitimate” in the sense that Longinus uses this term elsewhere: music, we recall, pretends to be sublime, but it is an “illegitimate *mimēma*” of language, with no real spiritual substance, because it excites feeling by way of sensation, not (like language) within the soul. An artful speaker’s mime of feeling does better—his behavior speaks to our true, inner nature—but it still depends upon a deceptive likeness and masks an emptiness in himself. Therefore, like verbal “music,” Longinus’s method of mimicry requires correction.

The second kind of imitation—call it “literary”—aims at an identity rather than just a likeness. Literary *mimēsis* (chapter 13) enlists the imitator’s soul in an act of imagination, “shaping with his spirit” an image of Homer or Plato or

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51. τότε γάρ ἡ τέχνη τέλειος , ἢνιόν ἂν φός εἶναι δοκή. For the general principle that method works best when concealed see also 17.1, 38.3. Method relies upon nature’s connivance as a means to concealment: sublimity, because of an innate quirk of human psychology, acts like a blinding light, making its origin in method invisible (17.2–3).

52. It has been suggested that Longinus’s remarks in section 22.1 bring two kinds of *mimēsis* together in a meaningful way: see Flashar (supra n.43) 93. In any case, the global economy of the treatise needs two kinds. For the distance that normally separates one *mimēsis* from another, cf. D. A. Russell, *Criticism in Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1981) 113; the same author elsewhere emphasizes their similarity, “De imitatione,” in *Creative Imitation and Latin Literature*, ed. David West and Tony Woodman (Cambridge 1979) 4f. For the two kinds counterposed, see Pliny *NH* 34.61 quoting Lysippus.

53. See 39.3, quoted supra n.11.

54. It is also called “rhetorical” imitation: see Eduard Stemplinger, “Mimesis im philosophischen und rhetorischen Sinne,” *Neue Jahrbücher für das klassischen Altertum* 31 (1913) 28.
Demosthenes and imagining their sublime speech. In this mysterious methodical production of feeling, the technician's medium is himself; he is both active and passive, a recipient and also a maker of the sublime. The sublime model that his soul forms in imagination will form his soul in turn: mimēsis means "taking an impression" from something (apotypōsis), as if the soul of the imitator were shapeless matter, upon which the model author (or his conjured image) might impose his more distinct shape. The imitator's dual role as shaper and shaped generates another series of self-correcting metaphorical turns.

Longinus pictures imitation as a passive, feminine process, something like conception. The Pythian priestess, for example, makes her soul "pregnant" with the god's influence (13.2); the influence of great writers upon their emulators comes in the form of "outflowings" from a sacred "aperture." But when Longinus cites Plato's success as proof that imitation is not stealing, the figure changes: Plato begins as material to be shaped, but he becomes a striving, masculine "antagonist" who fights against Homer "as if with spear against spear." In offering this defense of mimēsis, Longinus corrects his first metaphor and changes the terms of his argument, for the spear-carrying Plato seems to be engaged in an eristic sort of emulation, rather than in mimēsis proper. The movement from feminine to masculine recurs in the next chapter. Here, Longi-

55. ἀναπλάτεθα ταῖς ψυχαῖς (14.1). All sublime authors rely upon imagination; they identify with heroes and share their experiences (15.2, 4). For Longinus's view of imagination, see Rosenmeyer (supra n.37) 199–248, esp. 199–212, 246–48.

56. Quintilian, who believes as Longinus does that one must feel something in order to express it, presents his discussion of phantasia as a revelation of secrets that he could have discovered only by looking into himself. He promises, he says, "to bring forth what is hidden, and open up the innermost parts of the area [topic, locus], telling . . . what I learned by experience with nature itself as my guide" (Inst. 6.2.25). It is striking that Quintilian, an unthinking student of handbooks and treatises, should find no other guide than introspection here. The topic of the self must be alien to ordinary technical description.

57. Apotypōsis is a standard term for the influence of parents upon children: see Plato Leg. 681B5, Plutarch De educandis liberis 33F. For apotypōsis as a hypothetical model for cognition, cf. Plato Theaet. 191C–196D; cf. Arist. De an. 424a17–23. For Democritus's theory that apotypōsis in the air and the perceiving eye is caused by aporroiai from the object perceived, see Theophrastus De sensibus 50.

58. Sometimes the imitating "mother" is superior to the model "father": for example, Demosthenes takes a "seed" (σαρώμα) from Eupolis (16.3). Elsewhere, however, this figure is agricultural rather than sexual: cf. [Heraclit.] Quaest. Hom. 22; see W. Bühler, Beiträge zur Erklärung der Schrift vom Erhabenen (Göttingen 1964) 118.


60. ἀπόρροια. Compare the outflowing (ἀπόρροια) that Plato describes as embodying the influence of beauty (Phaedrus 251B2). This term also appears in Plutarch's excited description of Isis, the female principle, who "receives forms and images" (μόρφας δέχοντα καὶ θεωρεῖν) and allows the male principle "to sow outpourings and likenesses in her" (κατασκεύαιν εἰς ἑαυτὴν ἀπόρροιάς [i.e. ἀπόρροιάς καὶ ὀμοιότητας]; Isis takes pleasure in her pregnancy (κυνοκομήν) because "the thing engendered is an imitatio [μίμημα] of what exists" (Isis and Osiris 372ε–f). Cf. also [Clement of Alexandria] Excerpta ex scriptis Theodoti 2.1 (ix.654 Migne = iii.105–6 Stählin), on the στέμα ἄφροσιν, ὀπλατόν ἀπόρροια τοῦ ἄγγελου. (The gender of the στέμα does not concern us, but cf. the passages cited by F. Sagnard, Extraits de Théodote [Paris 1970] 154 ad loc.)

61. Longinus does not distinguish systematically between mimēsis and zélōsis; however, they are linked in 13.2 as if both terms named the Pythia's passive sort of inspiration, described in the
nus suggests at first that one can achieve sublimity by thinking about the way a sublime author might have spoken; the sublime author, or an imagined image of him, serves as a model to be internalized (14.1). Then he seems to correct himself. It is better, we are told, that an aspiring author should figure Homer and Demosthenes as judges before whom he must perform (14.2), thus retaining his distinct identity rather than merging with a model. Finally, having made his point about the integrity of imitative authors, Longinus can turn back to his first, biological metaphor, describing their creative process again as a sort of pregnancy, the danger to be avoided as abortion (14.3).

Literary mimēsis stands as the privileged counterpart—spiritual, authentic, exalted—to the more mechanical mimēsis of “nature,” which imitates ordinary behavior. Whereas mimēsis of nature relies upon deceit, the power of literary mimēsis is figured in its violence, which mimics the force with which sublime speech characteristically overwhelms its audience. In its deceptiveness, mimēsis...
of nature seems bound to fall short of its model (even a model so familiar as quotidian life); it epitomizes method, which is always pretending to be something that it is not. Paradoxically, literary *mimēsis* does better, repairs the short-fall, although it has farther to reach: the model author’s own sublimity helps his imitator to leap the space between them. It is clear why Longinus wants two species of *mimēsis*: then, at least one can seem admirable.65 And it is clear that he does not distinguish between them sharply or systematically because he cannot dispense entirely with the weaker species, to which his notion of method is tied.

Longinus’s fitful exaltation, the phenomenon with which we began, can now be described according to Longinus’s own categories, the principles of sublime method. When he writes in an elevated style about sublimity—as if he could explain and excite in the same breath—he seems to be using language in both of its capacities. On the one hand, he represents the sublime indicatively, by pointing and naming: this technique, or that passage, we are told, is “high.” On the other hand, he expresses sublimity by embodying it in his own words. Since one way of using language should properly exclude the other, Longinus more often practices them in alternation; hence, his style rises and falls. But *mimēsis* enables us to equivocate about the way we use language: we can mimic the effects of strong feeling in our own speech, but in such a case we do not express our own feeling; at best, we represent another person’s. *Mimēsis* produces an inexpressive kind of elevation, and this seems to be the best that Longinus can achieve purely as a technician. Because it is inexpressive and insincere, the technician’s *mimēsis* often seems playful and parodic. There is another kind of *mimēsis*, however, and this kind enables us to imitate not merely the form but the essence of sublimity, to elevate spirit first and then, by expressing spirit, to elevate speech. I suggest that when Longinus claims to have written a treatise adequate to its subject matter, he means not only technically adequate but spiritually too. His elevation is not all parodic. If the first kind of *mimēsis* is a paradigm of technical method, the second kind is a paradigm of sublime method: it is a path by which the technician rises above the rules.

In *mimēsis* and its changing forms, we can feel the dizziness of Longinus’s argument, which seems repeatedly to fragment and then, in a crazyquilt of metaphor, to coalesce again. Although Longinus never says so, he surely knows, and often enjoys, his own equivocality, the “disordered order” he teaches.66 His pleasure in this marks his difference from the crabbled partisans of Caecilius, and it suggests his confidence in himself, his feeling of writing “high.” Longinus

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65. Compare Quintilian’s less sanguine view of imitation, which he does not divide into kinds: *quidquid alteri simile est, necesse est minus sit eo, quod imitatur, ut umbra corpore et imago facie et actus histrionum veris affectibus* (Inst. 10.2.11).

66. καὶ ἡ τάξις ἀτακτον... καὶ ἑξισθαλὴν ἡ ἀταξία ποιῶν περιλαμβάνει τάξιν (20.3). This passage explains how one may combine various stylistic devices methodically to suggest strong emotion.
speaks as well with a voice of fussiness and uncertainty, the voice of a system-builder who has measured anxiously the height he wants to scale. The system-builder invigilates his other self, rationalizing paradox and resolving equivocality. Those multiplying categories that we found in Longinus’s system (two kinds of language, two kinds of nature, two kinds of mimesis) arise from collusion between Longinus’s two selves—each pair of categories stands for an equivocality imperfectly rationalized, the method-builder deferring to the enthusiast. In correcting himself, Longinus elaborates but does not excise; tropes remain; the system he erects is never purified of errant intuition.67

University of Chicago

67. I am grateful to Robert Kaster, Michael Murrin, Richard Strier, and two anonymous referees for standing guard against my own errant intuition.