

*On the Sublime* by Longinus is a work of literary criticism thought to date back to 1st century Rome. While the author is not definitively known, Longinus or Pseudo-Longinus is typically credited for the work. *On the Sublime* centers on aesthetics and the benefits of strong writing. Longinus does this by analyzing both strong and weak writing from works written over the previous thousand years. The goal, according to Longinus, is to achieve the sublime. In philosophy, the sublime is a quality of greatness. It can be physical, intellectual, moral, aesthetic, spiritual, artistic, or metaphysical. Another quality of the sublime is that it can't be calculated, imitated, or measured.

*On the Sublime* is written in epistolary form. An epistolary work is usually written through letters, journal entries, or a combination of the two. There is a missing part to this treatise—the final part—which reportedly handles the topic of public speaking. Longinus dedicated the work to one Posthumius Terentianus, a public figure in Ancient Rome known for being cultured. *On the Sublime* includes works by roughly fifty authors including Homer, the famed blind poet of Ancient Greek culture. Longinus also mentions Genesis, a book in Hebrew Bible. Because of this, many have assumed that Longinus was either knowledgeable about Jewish culture, or possibly even a Hellenized (Greek) Jew.

One of Longinus' assertions is that in order for one's writing to reach the sublime, the writer must possess and exhibit what he refers to as "moral excellence." Theories abound that Longinus avoided publishing his writings in order to preserve his modesty and therefore moral excellence. This might be another reason why the authorship of *On the Sublime* is uncertain. Another main point that Longinus makes is that a writer who transgresses social mores may not necessarily be a fool or shameless. For Longinus, social subjectivity is also important. He writes that in order to support spirit and hope, freedom is necessary. That said, too much freedom can lead to a decline in eloquence, which according to Longinus, which can hamper one's ability to write in the sublime.

To go into sublimity in more depth, Longinus provides five sources that can lead to this goal: great thoughts, noble diction, dignified word arrangement strong emotions and particular figures of speech or thoughts. The sublime also has a number of specific effects, for which Longinus calls upon readers to search: the loss of rationality, deep emotion combined with pleasure, and alienation. That alienation should lead to identifying the creative process in order to be considered sublime. Longinus simplifies these effects by stating that a strong writer will not focus on his own emotions, or trying to convey emotions, but rather to cause the reader to feel those emotions.

In addition, Longinus admires genius in writing. He mentions specific writers in addition to Homer, including Sappho, Plato, and Aristophanes. Longinus talks about these writers' ability to create the sublime by causing readers to feel pleasure. Other writers on his list are Apollonius of Rhodes and Theocritus for their sophisticated poetry; however, Longinus says they fail to measure up to classic writers like Homer because they lack the

bravery. Bravery is necessary to take risks, and taking risks is necessary to reach the sublime. After making his points about the sublime, Longinus laments the decline of the oratory arts. The reason for this is two-fold: it comes from the absence of freedom as well as moral corruption. These two phenomena, Longinus reminds readers, damages the high spirit which creates the sublime.

It's important to note that the use of the English word "sublime" and all its philosophical associations that accompany arise from multiple translations, but the word truly means "the essentials of a noble and impressive style." Longinus' own writing is rarely described as perfect or even sublime in part because of his overzealous enthusiasm. This leads to an overuse of hyperbole, or overstatement, on his part. Longinus is also criticized for writing tediously in *On the Sublime*.

By the 10th century, *On the Sublime* was copied into a medieval manuscript where it was incorrectly attributed to Dionysius or Longinus, which was misread or mistranslated as Dionysius Longinus, and therefore confused with Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who also lived during the first century. The work was also attributed to Cassius Longinus, but as he lived from 213-273 C.E., he cannot be the same Longinus who wrote *On the Sublime*. Three hundred years later, references were made by a Byzantine rhetorician to text that might be *On the Sublime*. In the 16th century, the treatise was published by Francis Robortello in Basel, and six years later by Niccolò da Falgano. In the 1600s, the concept of reaching the sublime becomes a major goal of Baroque literature, and the treatise is rediscovered. Since then, *On the Sublime* has received more attention with each passing century.