

On the Sublime is a work on Literature by Longinus that falls into the category of Literary Criticism of modern world. This work is actually in the form of a letter written by Longinus to Terentian. (his friend)

I

In the first chapter, he holds the opinion that Caecilius's attempt to define/interpret/explicate what 'Sublime is' was in vain. So, now he (Longinus) is going to define and discuss some important features of Sublimity through this letter to the friend we mentioned before.

Sublime consists of a certain loftiness and excellence of language. But sometimes a lofty passage confounds and eclipses (covers) reason....Sublime thought is an important thing that makes a work Sublime.

II

There is a common notion that the gift of genius is in accordance with the fortune. But Longinus has a slightly opposing view. He does not think that good literature is the product of genius alone. To substantiate this he tries to substitute fortune for genius and counsel for art. Which means, if good counsel is absent even the most gifted soul will go to gutters.

III

He criticizes high flown ornamentation: "We cannot pardon a **tasteless grandiloquence** (High-flown style; excessive use of verbal ornamentation); how much more must it seem in sober prose". He mocks this situation by saying: "Who fails in great endeavor, nobly fails". This is an **impediment** to attain Sublimity. Another impediment to attain Sublimity is **puerility** (Displaying or suggesting a lack of maturity; childishness). It is a pedantic (Marked by a narrow focus on or display of learning especially its trivial aspects) habit of mind. This over elaboration ends in **frigidity** (A lack of affection or enthusiasm).

IV

Now he observes the fault frigidity in Timaeus when he talks about Alexander: "Who annexed the whole Asia in a fewer years than Isocrates spent in writing his panegyric (Formally expressing praise) oration in which he urges the Greeks to make war on Persia". The same fault frigidity can also be observed in Plato.

V

Longinus observes that "human ills and blessings flow from the same source (Genius; the faculty; brain).

VI

In this chapter he wants to discuss how faults of style can be avoided. So he finds the need to define what true Sublime is.

VII

When does a work become Sublime?: "When it is hard, nay (and also) impossible to distract the attention from it (a work in Literature) and when it takes a strong and lasting hold on the memory, then we may be sure that we have lighted the true Sublime".

Irrespective of the profession, age, aspirations and language (Even in a translated form)., a good work can be enjoyed equally by everyone.

VIII

In this chapter he discusses **5 Principal Sources of Sublimity**.

In his opinion the preliminary gift on which all these sources (yet to come) depend is **the command of language**.

5 Sources of Sublimity

1. "Grandeur (greatness) of thought"
2. "a vigorous and spirited treatment of passion"
3. Artifice in the employment of figures. (They are of 2 kinds)
 - i) figures of thought.
 - ii) figures of speech.
4. Dignified expression (Further divided into 2)
 - i) proper choice of words
 - ii) the use of metaphors and other ornaments of fiction.
5. Majesty and Elevation of structure.

...He then observes that most pathetic orators have little skill in panegyric (Formally expressing praise) and conversely those who are powerful in panegyric, generally fail in pathos (A quality that arouses emotions (especially pity or sorrow)).

...Passion is absent in Caecilius's poetry which is very crucial to attain Sublimity.

IX

Of all the sources of Sublimity the first one is the **most important** which is **Great thought**.

A definition for sublimity is that 'Sublimity is the image of greatness of soul'.

...A person with "majestic thoughts" will have the same caliber to arrange words that can attain sublimity.

Now he shows some works that attained Sublimity. To that purpose he takes Homer.

He (Longinus) quotes Ajax's cry (imploring to God) (From Homer's Iliad):

"Almighty sire,
Only from darkness save Achaia's sons;
No more I ask, but give us back the day;
Grant but our sight, and slay us, if thou wilt"

But later Longinus also observes that this preservation of Sublimity in Iliad by Homer cannot be seen in his "Odeyssey" since it is composed during the decline of Homer's poetic genius.