

# From a Context-bound to an Essentializing Conception: A Study of Longinus's Treatise *On the Sublime*

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## Abstract

The treatise titled *Peri Hypsous* by Cassius Longinus and its various translations as *On the Sublime* is well-known for the rhetorical analysis on what is at the centre of 'greatness' in a writing. By highlighting the dual-transcendence structure and the notion of unrepresentable, this paper deals with the immense possibilities of the concept of the sublime to mark a journey beyond aesthetics. Critical interpretations of the terms associated with sublimity have provided ample scopes for the readers to identify the trajectory of a shift from the context-bound ideas to the essentializing conception of the sublime towards developing a cultural and political understanding of the concept in the spheres of human existence.

*Keywords:* Sublime, aesthetics, cultural, *megalophrosyn*

The existence of a definite discourse named the theory of the sublime, although not as a concrete theoretical framework but as a notion, can be traced back to the history of the use of some words associated with the sublime: "height" or "elevation", grandeur, terror, wonder, astonishment, awe, admiration and so on. Unlike science which explains, categorizes and defines, the sublime focuses on transcendence. The identification of an event leads itself to the discourse of experience which only after transcending some fixed barriers or boundaries, can introduce the discourse of sublimity. Robert Doran, in his book *The Theory of Sublime from Longinus to Kant* (2015) exposes the connection between the notion of transcendence and the power of mind which experiences it and he views that this connection plays a constitutive role in identifying the discourses related to the development of modern subjectivity. He puts that Sublime "is the tension between a literary-aesthetic concept and an experience with mystical religious resonances that motivates the critical concept of sublimity, creating multilayered nexuses between religion, art, nature and society" (Doran 1). Cassius Longinus's fundamental text *Peri Hypsous* is a marker of the beginning of the discourse of the sublime. The interpretation of the text has been based on rhetorical analysis in search of the key-elements of greatness in the texts of the great classical authors. But apart from rhetorical analyses, Longinus also introduces the existence of subjective elements and affect/effect dialectics into the concept of the sublime. His treatise had triggered many 18<sup>th</sup> century thinkers to think about the sublime, which despite being opposite to beautiful, is considered aesthetic. If we probe into the linguistic analyses of Longinus's treatise, especially by focusing on the words describing the effect of sublimity for example, wonder, admiration, awe, astonishment and so on, we will experience these words echoed by theories covering a wide range of

studies from empirical psychology (Edmund Burke), Literary Criticism (Nicholas Boileau, John Dennis), transcendental philosophy (Immanuel Kant) or some postmodern theories of the sublime namely Frederick Jameson, Jean Francois Lyotard and Slavoj Zizek.

This article articulates the sublime as a notion which covers a journey from a context-bound concept to an essentializing conception as exposed in the treatise of Cassius Longinus. The operative forces through which this concept functions in the spheres of human existences are indeterminacy, transcendence and the unrepresentable. Thus, the experience of the sublime becomes a cultural phenomenon. The objective of this writing is also to show the anthropological dimensions associated with the concept of transcendence. This emphasis on the notion of transcendence and unrepresentable opens endless possibilities for the concept of sublime to mark a shift from some context-bound identities to essentializing conceptions that places the concept of sublime as a common sense to read the aesthetic, cultural, religious and political levels of existences. Thus, the experience of the sublime induces a common concern for applying the concepts of transcendence and the unrepresentable in the context of the secularization of modern culture. This possibility of transcending the set barriers in the experience of the sublime is evident in the treatises of Longinus and Burke.

The significance of the contradictory notions, on one hand *thaumasion* and *ekplexis* and *ekstasis* on the other has been explained by Doran in his text:

The sublime exerts an "invincible power and force (1.4), tears everything up like a whirlwind, and exhibits the orator's whole power (*dynamis*) at a single blow (1.4), and holds complete domination over our minds (39.3); but also it is our nature to be elevated and exalted by true sublimity [*hypsos*] (7.2). This dual structure of sublimity is also paradoxical: on the one hand, being over-whelmed/ dominated by the encounter with the transcendent in art or nature induces a feeling of inferiority or submission; on the other, it is precisely by being overpowered that a high-minded feeling of superiority or nobility of soul (mental expansiveness, heroic sensibility) is attained. The tension between these two poles of a single experience – of being at once below and above, inferior and superior, humbled and exalted – produces the special dynamism of the sublime, creating nexuses with diverse areas of human reality (the religious, the political, the social, the anthropological). (*The Theory of Sublime* 10-11)

Nicholas Boileau in his work on Longinus' sublime *Traité du sublime ou du merveilleux dans le discours* (1674) shows the differences between Longinus's sublimity as focusing on rhetoric in the Aristotelian sense and the theory of sublime developed in modern culture. Boileau shows a deeper anthropological meaning of the rhetoric, not from an ethnographical perspective but from a philosophical perspective. Unlike other Greek critics, Longinus deals with the affect, the nature of the imagination (*phantasia*), and the moral and spiritual development of the individual as the core aspects of rhetorical analysis. Many critics throughout the centuries have shown the inherent transhistorical essence in the concept of sublimity under his apparent illustration of sublimity in terms of a specific rhetorical technique of discourse.

### **Glorifying Bourgeois Hero: *Megalophrosyn*: A Marker of Movement?**

The dual transcendence-structure of sublime is to a large extent, determines the attitude toward the great social revolution of modernity. The historical discourse of sublimity witnesses a significant shifting point from the decline of the feudal nobility to the emergence of a middle class. This shift denotes a shift from a culture promoting

aristocratic-warrior ethos to another reflecting bourgeois-mercantile values. The intricate connection with affect and the possibilities for a secularized existence enable the experience of the sublime to speak about an evolving democratizing society. Doran views, "In effect what thinkers such as Boileau, Burke and Kant achieve through the sublime is a bourgeois appropriation of aristocratic subjectivity (the heroic cast of mind)." (*The Theory of Sublime* 20)

Aristotle mentions the concept of "*megalopsuchos*", the man of great soul as a key element in the Book IV, section 3 of *Nicomachean Ethics*. Longinus used "*megethos*" (grandeur) as synonymous with *hypsous*. *Megalo* encompasses both the talent or ability of the writer and his or her moral superiority (nobility of mind). Curtius in *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* views: "the Greeks did not know the concept of the creative imagination. They had no word for it. What the poet produced was a fabrication. Aristotle praises Homer for having taught poets 'to lie properly'. For him, as we know, poetry was mimesis... But is Aristotle really the last word of antique literary criticism? Fortunately, we have the treatise *On the Sublime*." (398)

The concept of *megalophrosyn* thus marks a movement, a shift from the context-based concept of a hero to the essentializing concept of a hero. In "The Morality of the Sublime: To John Dennis", Jeffrey Barnouw shows that through the notion of *megalophrosyn*, Longinus did not indicate anything other-worldly; rather, the ideas associated with 'greatness in mind' are interrelated with political oratory and "touches the concerns of reputation and interest in civic life" ("The Morality of the Sublime: To John Dennis" 32). Longinus' treatise unfolds a tension between the mystical-religious and the secular poetic.

Doran exposes the explicit relationship between the social change/revolution occurred from the Fronde of 1650 – 1653 (French civil war paving the way for concomitant destruction of the feudal order) to the French Revolution (1789-99) which consolidated the power of the bourgeois as the dominant social class; and, the peak period holding interest in the theory of sublimity from Boileau's translation of 1674 to Kant's third critique published in 1790 (Doran 20). Boileau extols the heroic nature of Cassius Longinus, the 3<sup>rd</sup> century philosopher and critic. He associates the qualities of the 17<sup>th</sup> century figure of the *honnête homme* (a man possessing high sensibility, refinement, and probity) with the mental elevation of Longinus. It might sound appropriate if we correlate this term with an evolving social category (by and large associated with the middle class, though not necessarily) with a progressing mental disposition.

***Ekstasis* (ecstasy), *Ekplexis* (astonishment, amazement) and *Thaumasion* (wonder, awe): Sublime in Experiencing the Shift from Aesthetic to Cultural**

The history associated with the word *thaumazein* bears much significance in this context. Since Aristotle, this word bears a sense closer to the verb "to wonder". Aristotle had used this verb "to wonder" (*thaumazien*) in *Metaphysics*, to describe the starting point of philosophy: "For from wonder (*thaumazein*) men, both now and at the first, began to philosophize, having felt astonishment (*thaumazein*) at things which were more obvious, indeed, amongst those that were doubtful" (982b). Socrates' dictum in Plato's *Theaetetus* also echoes the same: "This is an experience which is characteristic of a philosopher, this wondering (*thaumazein*): this is where philosophy begins and nowhere else" (155d). Later Edmund Burke cited this idea as "confused images" (images that excite by their lack of clarity) in his *Enquiry* to describe Milton's portrayal of Satan in *Paradise Lost* as being productive of the sublime (E 62).

The notion of *ekstasis* is interrelated with the effect of *hypsos* which is deeply rooted in the history of Greek culture. M.A Screech in *Ecstasy and the Praise of Folly*, discusses the etymological nature of the term:

In classical Greek *ekstasis* means a displacement or a casting down of a thing from its normal place or state. From this literal meaning it took on the sense of a form of acute distraction, brought on by a strong emotion such as terror or astonishment. Under the influence of such an ecstasy a man or woman might be vouchsafed visions from God or the gods. The verb *existemi* – to put something out of its place – similarly acquired the meaning of “to astonish” or “to amaze”. (48-49)

Nicholas Boileau emphasizes on two verbs, *ravir* (ravish, enrapture) and *transporter* (carry away with emotion) (*TS* 74) which symbolizes that the concept of sublime, by the dint of its intensity indicates an extraordinary state of mind and is displaced from everyday state. Screech in his work refers to Philo's interpretation of Old Testament in which the latter used the term *ekstasis* in a different way (*Ecstasy* 48-49).

*Ekplexis* (astonishment, amazement) is also used to describe the aesthetic effect of *anagnorisis* (recognition) by portraying the experience of recognition as thrilling. In Longinus, *Ekplexis* is associated with the concept of *Kairos*. *Kairos* indicates the concept of “well-timed flash” or “suddenly” which is experienced in a subjective realization and is intricately associated with the concept of *Ekplexis*.

### **Concept of Aesthetic Temporality: *Kairos***

Doran unfolds the contradiction embedded within the concept of “*kairos*”: *Kairos* as non-relational and *Kairos* as relative. This debate presents the concept of the sublime to be transhistorical (*The Theory of Sublime* 47-48). Besides, the concepts of “*energeia*” and “*phantasia*” present *hypsos* as a transgeneric concept. Nietzsche's aesthetic thoughts reflect on the influence of Longinus on modernism. German critic Karl Heinz Bohrer in “Suddenness: on the Moment of Aesthetic Appearance” exposes the connection between Longinian Sublimity and modernist aesthetics. In order to explain the German terms *Augenblick* (the moment) and *Plotzlichkeit* (suddenness) in his text Bohrer argues: “The specific elements that we found in Nietzsche's aesthetic epiphany are already contained in Longinus's discussion of the metaphorical repertory of sublime discourse...[Longinus's metaphor of ‘lightning’ and the ‘all-at-once’, the momentum, that characterize the emphatic language of Nietzsche is repeated often in longinus]” (“Suddenness” 129).

### **True and False Sublimity: Sublime as a Methodology to Essentialize the Truth in Aesthetics and Culture**

According to Longinus, the pre-requisite for true sublimity is intersubjective agreement or universality. Longinus views a false sublimity as turgidity (bombast), puerility (the overelaboration of an inferior idea), frigidity (expressions unworthy of the thought; and *parenthyrsos* (excessive, artificial or untimely *akairos* emotion). Doran argues, “Surefire proof of literary value lies in the universal and transhistorical appeal of a text, in its ability to connect readers who are temporally and culturally dispersed (people of different trainings, ways of life, tastes and ages)”. (Doran 54)

Stephen Halliwell in *Between Ecstasy and Truth* views the sublime “moment of truth” in Longinus as a noncognitive awareness of the mind's true vocation stretches the concept of truth beyond the Platonic conception, perhaps toward a protoexistentialist one

(authenticity) (332). Doran indicates how Longinus conceives sublimity “in terms of an intersubjective structure of experience (author-reader), which is distinct from intra-subjective agreement (reader-reader)” (*The Theory of Sublime* 55). He points out at the moral dimension of Longinus’s distinction between true and false sublimity. He argues that Longinus, by associating sublimity with high-mindedness, indicates at the presumption that the false sublime is a kind of moral corruption, in the sense of *corruption optima pessima*. Doran here finds a similarity between Longinus’ sublimity and Plato’s concept of truth beyond all appearances. (*The Theory of Sublime* 55-57)

### Sublimity in Essentializing Affect as a Core Aspect of Human Existence

The intrinsic connection between the idea of the nobility of mind and the experience of sublimity as an emotional response exposes the nexus between affect and sublimity. The nexus between emotion (pathos) and sublimity is felt when we see it intrinsically connected to the idea of nobility of mind, on one side and on the other, to the experience of sublimity as an emotional response. Doran presents how Longinus conceives antagonistic or oppositional relation between nature and rhetorical artifice, which also reinforces the primacy of the natural sources in *Peri hypsous*.

We can observe a two-fold project of Longinus’s elaboration:

- To show how each contributes to the production of *hypsous*
- To show how each contributes to the effect of *hypsous*

These two aims – pedagogical (creatively oriented) and analytic (receptively oriented) – sometimes become fused. *Noesis* originated from the noun *nous* (mind/intellect) and the verb *noein* (to think) connotes the intellectual part of the mind (*noetikos* means “intellectual”) and survives as an adjective “*noetic*” in modern English. Longinus refers to Plato’s idea of “*noesis*” denoting the direct apprehension of transcendent entities associated with wisdom in contrast to *dianoia* which is scientific, mathematical or logical knowledge. Longinus conceives “thought” in the sublime as *noesis*, a notion suggesting transcendence and creativity as opposed to the more pedestrian *dianoia*, which in Demetrius’s *On Style*, refers to the subject matter of a discourse. Longinus explains grandeur of conception into three aspects: *megalophrosyne*, *zelosis-mimesis* and *phantasia*. Although Longinus adds one short section on “amplification” to these aspects, he considers it an intensifying rather than an essential factor.

Robert Doran, in his book, pointed at the three aspects of Longinus’s treatment. He shows *Megalophrosyne* indicating nobility of spirit in the light of its social, moral and Universalist implications. *Zelosis-mimesis* is the emulation of transcendental models which Doran examines in terms of an agonistic relation with tradition and *Phantasia* is imagination or visualization. Doran explained this as “the verbal poetic analog of the idea of transcendence in nature” which is mind’s creative capacity to transcend the sensible world. (*The Theory of Sublime* 58-81)

Here, one may refer to the autonomy of “*noesis*” which is emblematically expressed in the following passage on the “Silence of Ajax”: “Thus even without being spoken, a simple idea will of its own accord excite admiration by reason of the greatness of mind that it expresses; for example, the silence of Ajax in ‘The Summoning of the Spirits’ is grand, more sublime than any speech!” (9.2).

Doran clarifies that although it is evident that the silence of Ajax could not have been indicated without discourse, Longinus, through this, wanted to establish that sublimity

is principally a manifestation of the mental qualities of the writer, not a property of language per se. M. H. Abrams, in his *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (1953), contends that Longinus can be considered the first theorist who inspires the Romantic concept of the self-expressive ego and the concomitant exaltation of the artist. I mention a passage from Longinus's text here:

The first source, natural greatness [*megalophues*], is the most important. Even it is a matter of endowment rather than acquisition, we must, so far as is possible, develop our minds in the direction of greatness and make them always pregnant with noble thoughts. You ask how this can be done. I wrote elsewhere something like this. "Sublimity [*hypsos*] is the echo of a noble mind [*megalophrosyne*]" ...First then we must state here where sublimity [*hypsos*] comes from: the orator must not have low or ignoble thoughts. Those whose thoughts and habits are small and servile all their lives cannot possibly produce anything admirable or worthy of eternity. Words [*logoi*] will be great if thoughts are weighty. (9.1-3)

This passage brings to the mind the "expressive" or "author-centered" theory of art where it clarifies that *hypsos* is not simply a matter of a momentary state of mind, a mental event, but of a pattern of thinking. One's expressive capacity is conditioned by having certain kinds of thoughts or a particular nature. Longinus thus establishes a direct causal link between the particular moral/mental disposition of the genius and his/her products.

### **Sublime-in-Nostalgia vs. Reformatory Sublimity**

A sociological dimension of the conception of *hypsos* as nobility of mind (*megalophrosyne*) seems to be indicative of a specific class ethos. Although Longinus uses a person with high social status as an example of high-mindedness, people whom he called "heroes" are the poets, the philosophers, the orators, the historians whose social backgrounds are incidental to their nobility of spirit. He focuses on a hierarchy of mentalities and not on any class-based hierarchy.

The idea of *zelosis-mimesis*, literally "zealous imitation" was a commonplace of the circle of rhetorical theorists around Caecilius of Calacte, Longinus's interlocutor. Dionysius, in his *On Imitation*, describes *mimesis* as an action receiving an imprint of a model through examination of it and *Zelosis* as an act of the soul moved toward admiration of what seems fine. This coupling of *mimesis* with the *zelosis* gets an anthropological dimension in Longinus's theory, especially through some narrators who render this coupling with the single term "emulation". The veneration for past models seems to devalorize the creative potential of the present, subordinating it to an assumed superiority of the past. But there is an underlying paradox in the dialectical import of *zelosis-mimesis* in Longinus's creation aesthetics. On the one hand there is respect for tradition, on the other hand it reflects an urge for the subversion of tradition. This paradoxical pattern produces a constant threat of deviation from the extant cultural and aesthetic norms.

### **Imagination dissociated from memory – Non-relational or Relative?**

*Phantasia*, in Longinus's rhetoric, reflects the orator's ability to influence an addressee through the conjuring of images. It presents what mind cannot perceive in actuality. Longinus clearly distinguishes between the philosophical conception of *phantasia* and the linguistic use of this notion in order to denote a possibility of a new discourse of imagination. In *Sophist*, Plato conceives *phantasia* as a combination of perception (aesthesia) and belief (*doxa*). Aristotle, on the other hand, defines it as an aptitude that negotiates

between *aesthesis* (sensation) and *nous* (intellect/thinking). The idea of “productive imagination” hints at the modern notion of imagination that is associated with the ideas of originality, creativity, and genius. In *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of view* Kant distinguishes the “reproductive imagination” and the “productive imagination”. Kant defines “reproductive imagination” as a force which functions as a relation to the world and the “productive imagination” as something which operates “in an original way (not imitatively)” (*APP* 7:246). According to Kant, the concept of *phantasy* must not be mixed with memory, because “memory would be unfaithful” (*APP* 7:182). It is, in fact, connected with creativity: “Fantasy, that is, the creative power of imagination” (*APP* 7:182). Doran views: “Indeed for Longinus, images of the greatest extent and power are to be found not in the external world but in the visionary capacity of the mind; *phantasia* is thus an essential part of *hypsous* precisely because it transcends sensibility.” (*The Theory of Sublime* 25)

### **Communicability of *Hypsous* as an Essentializing Conception in Aesthetics and Culture**

This discussion focuses on the significance of both the creative (theory of genius) and receptive (affect, influence) standpoints in Longinus’s theory which set the notions associated with sublimity free of all context-bound restrictions of aesthetic discussion. This analysis further indicates at the intersubjective dimension, the communicability of *hypsous* as mental disposition of high-mindedness. Stephen Halliwell in *Between Ecstasy and Truth: Interpretations of Greek Poetics from Homer to Longinus* points out at Longinus’s vast critical intelligence by mentioning that “the only major document in the history of Western literary criticism and theory whose frame of reference extends all the way from sensitivity to the individual words, even individual syllables, of text to a sense of the infinite spaces that lie (in thought) ‘outside the cosmos’” (327). Chapter 35 and chapter 44 in *Pery Hypsous* deal with the idea of infinity and the cultural significance of the concept of sublime in detail. Longinus’s discussion of the grandeur of nature is understood through the further development of his concept of sublime rivalry (*zelosis-mimesis*) which is associated with the anthropological significance of *hypsous* – of how sublimity exposes humankind’s natural vocation for transcendence which Robert Doran identifies as “the constant striving beyond the limits of the sensible world or toward the divine” (*The Theory of Sublime* 82). Longinus’s critique of cultural decline is strongly rooted in his earlier discussion of high-mindedness (*megalophrosyne*).

The true sources of greatness/sublimity depend on the disposition of the writer i.e the subjective conditions of transcendence. Longinus argues that “other literary qualities prove their users to be human; sublimity raises us towards the spiritual greatness of God” (36.1) Malcolm Heath adds here “assimilation to the divine was identified as the goal of human life by a strong philosophical tradition” (*Ancient Philosophical Poetics* 179). But Doran identifies the unique aesthetic valence that Longinus added to the idea of sublimity. The following passage from Longinus can be mentioned to show the anthropological origins of sublimity:

What then was the vision which inspired those divine writers who disdained exactness of detail and aimed at the greatest prizes in literature? Above all else it was the understanding that nature made man to be no humble or lowly creature but brought him into life and into the universe as into a great festival, to be both a spectator and an enthusiastic contestant in its competitions. She implanted in our minds from the start an irresistible desire for anything which is great and, in relation to ourselves, supernatural/divine. The universe therefore is

not wide enough for the range of human speculation and intellect [*theoria*]. Our thoughts often travel beyond the boundaries of our surroundings. If anyone wants to know what we were born for, let him look round at life and contemplate the splendor, grandeur and beauty in which it everywhere abounds. It is a natural inclination that leads us to admire not the little streams, however pellucid and however useful, but the Nile, the Danube, the Rhine, and above all the ocean. Nor do we feel so much awe before the little flame we kindle, because it keeps its light clear and pure, as before the fires of heaven, though they are often obscured. We do not think our flame more worthy of admiration than the craters of Etna, whose eruptions bring up rocks and whole hills out of depths, and sometimes pour forth rivers of earth-born spontaneous fire. A single comment fits all these examples: the useful are readily available to man, it is the unusual that excites our wonder. (35.2-5)

Longinus claims that an attraction to natural grandeur reveals an innate desire for transcendence and this desire induces the possibility of sublimity in verbal arts. Apart from the critic's attempt to focus on external nature, chapter 35 speaks about a limitless expansion of the mind even without mentioning the term "infinity". Grandeur of conception (*noesis*), thus, claims that the range of human speculation and intellect is wider than the universe. Malcolm Heath views that "assimilation to the divine was identified as the goal of human life by a strong philosophical tradition" (*Ancient Philosophical Poetics* 179).

The concept of *zēlosis-mimesis* (emulation) stresses on the language of competition: "Nature made man to be no humble or lowly creature but brought him into life and into the universe as into a great festival, to be both a spectator and an enthusiastic contestant in his competitions" (*Ancient Philosophical Poetics* 179). These two ideas of being both "spectator" and "contestant" in the context of the theory of the sublime is very significant. This point was perhaps taken into consideration by Immanuel Kant when he speaks about the superiority of the human mind over natural determination.

It is Thomas Burnet, the British theologian and cosmogonist, who in *The Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1681/1684), identifies the dual overwhelming-exulting structure of sublimity as complex pleasure (pleasure mixed with pain) which paves ways for many new theories in modernity. He also identifies the idea of being challenged to strive beyond limits: "too big for our comprehension". Burnet's interpretation of mitigating a negative emotion, such as fear, is considered to be a source of inspiration for John Dennis's concept of "delightful horror". Burnet by referring Genesis focuses on Longinus's explanation in chapter 35:

The greatest objects of Nature are, methinks, the most pleasing to behold; and next to the great concave of the Heavens, and those boundless Regions where the Stars inhabit, there is nothing that I look upon with more pleasure than the wide Sea and the mountains of the Earth. There is something august and stately in the air of these things, that inspires the mind with great thoughts and passions. We do naturally, upon such occasions, think of God and his greatness: and whatsoever hath but the shadow and appearances of INFINITE, as all things have that are too big for our comprehension, they fill and overbear the mind with their Excess, and cast it into a pleasing kind of stupor and admiration. (*The Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1681/1684) 158)

Burnet implies that the secular aspect of the concept of sublimity rests on its nature associated with the notion of unrepresentable. Burnet speaks about an aesthetic and secular dimension to the concept of divine in terms of all that is too big for our comprehension. Charles Taylor also in *A secular Age* (2007), mentions Burnett as an instance



of a shift away from how “contemporary apologetics” conceived of a “human-centered way of discovering God’s presence in nature,” namely as “comprehensible, orderly, and human-friendly” to what Burnet shows how nature “discloses Him in another way” (334), namely in overwhelming nature. Longinus’s stress on *megalophrosyne* and his explanation of mental expansiveness in terms of boundlessness in chapter 35 establishes the anthropological basis of sublimity. Marjorie Hope Nicolson in *Mountain Gloom, Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite*, shows how, the revival of Longinus in Burnet is significant in retrieving the secular and artistic dimensions of natural grandeur (especially mountains) which, prior to that was considered ugly and utterly irreligious. This aesthetic reflection on natural grandeur bears two-fold purposes; on one hand, it valorizes and divinizes certain objects of nature and on the other, it secularizes a type of religious experience. Thus, the notion of sublime induces an experience which through the motifs of indeterminacy, transcendence and the unrepresentable marks several kinds of movements in the process of forming the conception. It widens the idea of rationality by going beyond the fixed understanding of certain categories. These movements shift the concept of sublime from a context-bound idea to an essentializing conception in understanding the nature of aesthetics, cultural and political spheres of human existence.

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