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Preface to Longinus

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Peri; u{youV = *On the Sublime by* Longinus is the treatise whose authorship and date have not been identified, while it was favorably received in 18th century, playing a distinctive part in the beginnings of the Romantic movement and even now it has enthusiastic supports. The purpose of this paper is to confirm that *On the Sublime* was written under the influence of ancient rhetoric and with a view to responding Plato's attack on poets.

u{yoV and its cognates were employed as literary terms in 1st century, although they had been used by Homer. In 1st century B.C., Cicero referred the height in his rhetorical treatises and other rhetoricians talked of the sublime as one of the three styles. Longinus' sublime is not confined to the style, but has many elements in common with rhetorical treatises. *On the Sublime* is a guidebook of rhetoric.

On the other hand, Longinus' sublime-theory is peculiar in that he treated the sublime, not on the part of orators, but on the part of audience or readers. To Longinus, the experience of the sublime raises the spirits of audience or readers. Therefore he required the rigid distinction between the true sublime and the false one. Technique alone is not capable of

creating the true sublime. It is the great genius (fuvsiV) of writers that can produce the true sublime.

Longinus put emphasis on the great genius, because Nature (fuvsiV) endows humans with the language and the intention to bring the spirit from the earth up to the heaven. This idea is based on several Greek philosophies, including the Stoicism, whereas the Eros-theory by Plato has the important affect on Longinus, who did not accept the Idea-theory. Longinus thinks that spirit and language are inherently connected and that the relation between the expression and the meaning is not arbitrary. This is the reason why writers should not have a mean thought. Furthermore, writers are unable to produce the true sublime by means of musical effects which are meaningless. It is appropriate for humans to produce the sublime in terms of the meaningful language.

Plato influenced Longinus indeed, but Longinus does not seem to have been a Platonist. He is sympathetic to pathos, and probably did not agree to Plato's attack on poets. Nevertheless Longinus approves Platonic ethic, as is evident from the dialogue on the literature decline, the final chapter of *On the Sublime*. The sublime-theory is a Platonic literary criticism, for Longinus as well as Plato esteems the great genius and the honorable thought. Longinus' intention is to mediate between Plato and poets, responding to Plato's attack with the help of Platonic philosophy. For that purpose, Longinus says that Plato emulated Homer, which fact (Longinus thought) proves that Plato was not absolutely hostile to poets.

It is true that the criticism of Longinus is platonic, but it is inconceivable to regard the sublime-theory as the criticism of Plato. Longinus' theory is established on the Eros-theory without Idea and the inspiration-theory without Musa, both of which is, strictly speaking, never consistent with Plato's philosophy. What is more, *On the Sublime* lacks the idea of a literary work, which is a defect prevalent among rhetorical treatises. These points necessarily results from the fact that *On the Sublime* is a guidebook of rhetoric.

Despite these points, it is impossible to deny that *On the Sublime*

still now compels many people to experience the sublime and testifies the eternity of the sublime. Whether his treatise is a literary criticism or a guidebook of rhetoric, Longinus achieved his goal.