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*Pseudo-Longinus, On the Sublime*

Stephen Halliwell, *Pseudo-Longinus, On the Sublime*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2022. Pp. 592. ISBN 9780192894205

Review by

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*On the Sublime* is one of the most influential texts in the history of literary theory and aesthetics. The modern fascination with the sublime, from the early modern period via the Romantic Age to the twenty-first century, is mainly inspired by (readings of) Pseudo-Longinus' *On the Sublime*, although James Porter (2016) has demonstrated that the sublime existed before and apart from this ancient Greek treatise. Stephen Halliwell has now provided a masterly critical edition of *On the Sublime* with facing English translation, an extensive introduction, and a learned, comprehensive commentary. Halliwell's text edition and commentary surpass and replace Russell (1964), which has been the standard in the Anglophone world for almost 60 years. This review will successively discuss the introduction, the text edition, the translation, and the commentary.

Halliwell offers a clear, detailed, and well-documented introduction to *On the Sublime*, which considers the date and authorship of the treatise, its structure and design, the profession of Pseudo-Longinus (criticism rather than philosophy or rhetoric, as Halliwell explains), his rivalry with Caecilius of Caleacte, the concept of the sublime, the notion of creative inspiration, the modern reception, and the transmission of the text. Particularly groundbreaking is the excellent discussion of the date and authorship of the treatise, which contains a systematic argument against the authorship of Cassius Longinus. I will briefly summarize the vexed problem and Halliwell's approach.

The manuscript Parisinus graecus 2036 attributes the text to 'Dionysius Longinus' (heading) and to 'Dionysius or Longinus' (table of contents). While some scholars (including Mazzucchi 2010) believe that the author was indeed called Dionysius Longinus, it is more plausible that the names Dionysius and Longinus are the conjectures of a medieval scribe, who attributed the work to either Dionysius of Halicarnassus (Augustan period) or Cassius Longinus (third century AD). Most scholars reject both options, but Malcolm Heath (1999) has presented an eloquent argument for the authorship of Cassius Longinus, which has remained unanswered for more than two decades. Halliwell now presents the response that scholarship has eagerly waited for, adducing nine arguments against the authorship of Cassius Longinus. Among other things, he reminds us that the author of *On the Sublime* refers to his treatises on Xenophon, on composition, and on emotions. None of these works is ever mentioned among the titles of Cassius Longinus' works. From chapter 44 (a dialogue with 'one of the philosophers'), Halliwell concludes that the author of *On the Sublime* does not consider himself a philosopher. It is unlikely that Cassius Longinus would have denied being a philosopher. Most importantly, Halliwell points to several discrepancies between the doctrine of *On the Sublime* and the views that Cassius Longinus presents in his *Ars Rhetorica*. Case closed (?).

Concerning the date of the treatise, Halliwell is admirably nuanced; he chastises other scholars for being overconfident and presenting arguments that are 'flimsy to an

embarrassing degree' (p. xi). After a careful reconsideration of the evidence, Halliwell concludes that any date between the Augustan period and the early second century AD remains possible. At the same time, Halliwell very cautiously, and without committing himself, suggests that some indications might point to an early date (early first century AD). Most importantly, *On the Sublime* presents itself as a polemical response to the critic Caecilius of Caleacte, a contemporary friend of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who was active in the Augustan period. Heath (1999) has pointed out that someone could well respond to Caecilius after three centuries, but Halliwell rightly observes that Pseudo-Longinus responds to not one, but three different works of Caecilius (*On the Sublime*, *On Lysias*, *On Figures*). Pseudo-Longinus' polemical tone throughout the treatise might indeed suggest chronological proximity between him and Caecilius, although there is no proof, as Halliwell acknowledges.

The text of *On the Sublime* depends almost entirely on Parisinus graecus 2036 (tenth century). Halliwell provides an excellent text edition, which is a model of reliability and reasonableness, with a limited apparatus criticus, indicating the emendations adopted and plausible conjectures. The edition by Mazzucchi (2010), which has a fuller apparatus, remains indispensable for textual matters (see also Jahn and Vahlen 1910). Halliwell's edition is certainly superior to that of Russell (1964, reprinted in 1968); a list of differences between these editions would have been welcome. Halliwell makes sensible choices, corrects the manuscript where necessary, and rejects wild conjectures. I will discuss some examples.

In the first sentence of the treatise (*Subl.* 1.1), Longinus addresses his 'dearest' friend Terentianus. But what is his name? The manuscript has Ποστούμει Φλωρεντιανέ. Russell (1964) adopts Manutius' emendation Ποστούμει Τερεντιανέ (Terentianus is the name that appears elsewhere in the treatise). Halliwell, like Mazzucchi (2010), adopts a more plausible emendation that is reported by Tollius (possibly proposed by Isaac Vossius): Ποστούμει Φλώρε Τερεντιανέ. This means that Pseudo-Longinus addresses his friend in the first sentence with a gentilicium (Postumius) and two cognomina (Florus Terentianus). Russell (1964, 59) calls it 'very unlikely' that a third name was given (without argument), but Halliwell rightly observes that P's corrupt Φλωρεντιανέ is much easier explained as a case of haplography (Φλώρε <Τερε>ντιανέ) than as a misreading of Τερεντιανέ.

In *On the Sublime* 2.1, there is the famous problem of 'bathos'. According to the manuscript, Pseudo-Longinus asks 'whether there is an art of sublimity or bathos' (εἰ ἔστιν ὕψους τις ἢ βάθος τέχνη). Russell (1964) prints the manuscript reading (defended by Porter 2016, 207), which is however problematic. After this sentence Pseudo-Longinus is silent about βάθος ('depth', 'profundity': the term certainly did not have the meaning that it acquired in Pope's *Peri Bathous, On the Art of Sinking in Poetry*, 1728). Like Mazzucchi (2010), Halliwell adopts the easy conjecture πάθους (already considered by Russell). The relationship between emotion and the sublime is indeed close (cf. De Jonge 2022), although there is also sublimity without emotion (*Subl.* 8.2).

*On the Sublime* 15.7 praises Achilles' appearance above his tomb in Sophocles' *Polyxena*. Pseudo-Longinus comments: 'I do not know whether anyone pictured this more vividly than Simonides' (ἦν οὐκ οἶδ' εἴ τις ὄψιν ἐναργέστερον εἰδωλοποίησε Σιμωνίδου). Halliwell prints Sommerstein's <πλήν> ('except') before Simonides, arguing that this emendation 'eases the sense of the passage'. The abrupt transition from Sophocles to Simonides is indeed strange.

The context is all about tragedy. Sophocles is praised for his visualizations, but then suddenly Simonides is said to have surpassed him (an allusion to fr. 277 Poltera). With Sommerstein's conjecture, the meaning would be (my translation): 'No one has pictured this more vividly <than Sophocles>, except for Simonides.' The manuscript reading seems not impossible, but I agree with Halliwell that Sommerstein's emendation is attractive.

In On the Sublime 22.1, Pseudo-Longinus states that hyperbaton is 'so to speak the authentic stamp of energized emotion' (οἶονεὶ χαρακτήρ ἐναγωνίου πάθους ἀληθέστατος, translation Halliwell). Russell (1964), following Wilamowitz, indicates a lacuna after οἶονεὶ, reasoning that 'χαρακτήρ hardly needs an apology'. Halliwell, like Mazzuchi (2010) rejects the lacuna, without comment. I would agree and suggest that it is the strong, superlative expression χαρακτήρ ἀληθέστατος ('truest mark') that needs the softener οἶονεὶ ('as it were'), a 'remedy for daring expressions' (Subl. 32.3).

In On the Sublime 40.2, Russell (1964) places the corrupt words δ' ὅμως between cruces. Several good emendations (adverbs on -ως) have been proposed; Halliwell prints Wilamowitz's δεινῶς; this is certainly a more elegant solution than assuming a lacuna (Mazzucchi 2010), although this reviewer would adopt a different conjecture (cf. De Jonge 2012).

Halliwell's new translation is superior to the translations that are most cited in the Anglophone world: the one by Russell for the volume Ancient Literary Criticism (Russell 1972) and the one by W. Hamilton Fyfe, which was revised by Russell for the Loeb series (Fyfe / Russell 1995). Halliwell's translation, which is conveniently printed next to the Greek text, stands out for three reasons. First, unlike earlier translators, Halliwell does not introduce Romantic or Christian vocabulary (like 'genius' or 'God' with capital). Second, the quotations of Homer, Sappho, Plato, and other authors are all in clear, contemporary English, avoiding the archaisms of earlier translations. Third, Halliwell consistently remains close to the Greek text, and astonishingly succeeds in mimetically representing Longinus' sublime style in accessible English sentences. The longest sentence of On the Sublime compares the impact of word arrangement (synthesis) to the effects of instrumental music (Subl. 39.2-3): Pseudo-Longinus illustrates his own point by composing a long and impressive sentence of 180 words. Russell (1972) breaks this one Greek sentence up into nine, Fyfe / Russell (1995) into seven English sentences: both lose the effect of the original. Halliwell, by contrast, manages to imitate the Greek period in one English sentence of 228 words, which is surprisingly easy to follow.

Take On the Sublime 36.1: καὶ τὰ μὲν ἄλλα τοὺς χρωμένους ἀνθρώπους ἐλέγχει, τὸ δ' ὕψος ἐγγὺς αἴρει μεγαλοφροσύνης θεοῦ. Russell (1972): 'Other literary qualities prove their users to be human; sublimity raises us towards the spiritual greatness of god.' Fyfe / Russell (1995): 'Other qualities prove their possessors men, sublimity lifts them near the mighty mind of God.' Halliwell (2022): 'While other things show their practitioners to be human, sublimity raises a writer close to the greatness of mind of a god.' Halliwell's translation wins the first prize (as Pseudo-Longinus would say) for several reasons. He avoids labeling the sublime as a 'quality'; 'human' is more inclusive than 'men' (think of Sappho); the indefinite 'a god' corrects the tendency to read a kind of Christian theology into Pseudo-Longinus; finally,

Halliwell's relatively sober translation of μεγαλοφροσύνη is consistent (cf. Subl. 9.2: 'sublimity is an echo of greatness of mind').

Donald Russell's commentary on *On the Sublime* (1964) was a landmark in classical scholarship. Almost sixty years have passed since its publication, and countless new interpretations of many aspects of the treatise have been advanced. Having diligently considered those publications (the bibliography covers 79 pages), Halliwell presents a balanced, accurate and nuanced interpretation of *On the Sublime*. His commentary is more focused and user-friendly than Mazzucchi (2010), which has extensive lemmas dealing with very long portions of the Greek text.

Halliwell's commentary (378 pp.) is more profound and detailed than Russell's (137 pp.). Whereas Russell modestly intended to 'make it easier for students to read a book which is certainly difficult' (Russell 1964, preface), Halliwell covers all aspects and all levels of interpretation, including textual criticism, vocabulary, syntax, Pseudo-Longinus' self-exemplifying style, his views on the sublime, his metaphors, his imitations and quotations of classical literature, the structure of the treatise, and its intriguing connections with Greek and Latin literature. This rich commentary serves all the needs of scholars who are interested in specific passages; students who hope to read through the text quickly might find the amount of information somewhat overwhelming.

Halliwell's commentary is impressively wide-ranging, and it contributes countless new insights to our understanding of the text. One of the very few points with which I would disagree is the statement that Pseudo-Longinus 'shows no real interest (...) in the large-scale unity of rhetorical and literary works' (p. 186 on Subl. 10.1). Pseudo-Longinus (Subl. 8.1) points out that 'composition' (synthesis) connects all the other sources of sublimity. This formulation and the recurring emphasis on synthesis (Subl. 10; 39-43) suggest that composition might be more than just word arrangement: Pseudo-Longinus regards Sappho fr. 31 as a model of 'selecting and integration' into 'one unified body'; the treatise *On the Sublime* is likewise a unified body, which demonstrates how examples from the literary tradition are selected and integrated at the highest level.

This wonderful commentary is essential reading for anyone working on the history of rhetoric, literary criticism, aesthetics, and the history of the sublime. Three years ago, Donald Russell (1920-2020) passed away after a scholarly life that was dedicated to ancient literary criticism. His deep impact on the field is visible on every page of Halliwell's book; but it is entirely in the spirit of Pseudo-Longinus' views on imitation and emulation that Halliwell, 'like a young competitor facing an acknowledged master' (Subl. 13.4), has now surpassed his great predecessor.

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