

Frye and Longinus

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There he stood on the renewing crags of
time, stood on the ringed summit
of the sublime universe.

Ferenc Juhász

THE EARLIEST REFERENCE TO LONGINUS in Frye's work is in a 1953 review of books by Allen Tate, Herbert Read, and Francis Fergusson, where he says that the theme of Read's *The True Voice of Feeling* "is essentially the same as the problem of ecstasis or 'transport' in Longinus," adding that this "problem" had been "ably handled" by Tate. He is referring to Tate's "Longinus and the 'New Criticism'" from a collection of Tate's essays, *The Forlorn Demon* (1953). About the same time, Frye writes this somewhat riddling entry in Notebook 37: "Re the first lecture: sublime process as beautiful product (Longinus on sublime). Sublime includes *self*-identification (process). Interest in a *convention* ... more congenial to the aesthetic, especially in paradoxical forms of it like T. E. Hulme's. The *rhetorical* relation expects to instruct & delight" (CW 23:126).¹ The "first lecture" is most

¹ Internal evidence suggests that Frye began writing in this notebook in 1949, put it aside, and then picked it up again in the mid-1950s.

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likely a reference to the first address Frye gave at Princeton in 1954. Invited by E. D. H. Johnson of the Special Programs in Humanities at Princeton to institute a new series, known as the Class of 1932 Lectures, Frye gave four talks at Princeton in 1954: "The Critic and His Public," "Symbols of Fact and Fiction," "The Language of Poetry," and "Myth and Society" (Ayre 244). In his preface to *Anatomy of Criticism*, he notes that much of the substance of the book came from his Princeton lectures. In any event, Frye seems intent on exploring the connection between Longinus' emphasis on the sublime process and the Aristotelian "aesthetic" approach. The opposition between "convention" and "rhetorical relation" is apparently an opposition between final and instrumental value: the aesthetic needs no justification beyond itself, whereas rhetoric is concerned with the ways and means of instruction and delight. The reference to Hulme seems to be that his call for formal restraint and concrete imagery ("dry hardness"), along with his attacks on Romanticism, means he is a "classicist" and does not belong to the Longinian camp.

The notebook entry on "the first lecture" suggests that in his thinking about the beginning of the *Anatomy* Frye has in mind two approaches the critic might take to literature, one emphasizing process and the other product. And in fact this opposition turns up at the end of the *Anatomy's* first essay where Frye expands on the meaning of the terms "fictional" and "thematic" in his theory of modes. A "fictional" work for Frye is one that has internal characters, as in novels, epics, and plays. A "thematic" work is one in which there are no characters involved except the author and the reader, as in lyrics and essays, or in which the internal characters are subordinated to the writer's argument, as in allegories and parables. The foundational category in the first essay is Aristotle's *ethos*, or, rather, Frye's expansion of this term: even though the meaning of "character" in "fictional" works differs from its meaning in "thematic" works, *ethos* is the constant term in both. Here is the passage at the end of the first essay:

The difference in emphasis that we have described as fictional and thematic corresponds to a distinction between two views of literature that has run all through the history of criticism. These two views are the aesthetic and the creative, the Aristotelian and the Longinian, the view of literature as product and the view of literature as process. For Aristotle, the poem is a *techne* or aesthetic artefact: he is, as a critic, mainly interested in the more objective fictional forms, and his central conception is catharsis. Catharsis implies the detachment of the spectator, both from the work of art itself and from the author. The

phrase “aesthetic distance” is generally accepted now in criticism, but it is almost a tautology: wherever there is aesthetic apprehension there is emotional and intellectual detachment. The principles of catharsis in other fictional forms than tragedy, such as comedy or satire, were not worked out by Aristotle, and have therefore never been worked out since.... Just as catharsis is the central conception of the Aristotelian approach to literature, so ecstasis or absorption is the central conception of the Longinian approach. This is a state of identification in which the reader, the poem, and sometimes, at least ideally, the poet also, are involved. We say reader, because the Longinian conception is primarily that of a thematic or individualized response: it is more useful for lyrics, just as the Aristotelian one is more useful for plays. (CW 22:62–3)

Thirty-three years later Frye is still appealing to the Aristotelian–Longinian dialectic. In *Words with Power* (1990) he writes: “Traditional critical theories, from Plato and Aristotle on, look at literature within a mimetic context. We are told in both the *Republic* and in the *Poetics* that the poet’s work is imitative, though very different inferences are drawn from the principle in the two contexts. What the poet imitates is usually assumed to fall within either the phenomena of human society or the order of nature. But the Longinian conception of ecstatic response suggests another dimension of imitation” (CW 26:108–09).

John Stuart Mill reports that “Coleridge used to say that everyone is born either a Platonist or an Aristotelian.”² For Coleridge, there was no complementarity in this dialectic: if you are a Platonist, you cannot be an Aristotelian, and vice versa. “Dialectic” signals the presence of oppositions, and Frye is a dialectical thinker. He is forever moving back and forth between opposing poles of reference: knowledge and experience, space and time, stasis and movement, the individual and society, tradition and innovation, synthesis and analysis, engagement and detachment, freedom and concern, *mythos* and *dianoia*, the world and the grain of sand, immanence and transcendence, and scores, nay, hundreds of other oppositions. But in Frye there are few occasions that present us with an *either/or* choice, and the Aristotle–Longinus dialectic is no exception. Frye’s world is a *both/and* world. The two perspectives complement each other.

2 *Autobiography* 262. Coleridge had written, “Schools of real philosophy there are but two,—best named by the arch-philosopher of each, namely, Plato and Aristotle. Every man capable of philosophy at all (and there are not many such) is a born Platonist or a born Aristotelian” (*Literary Remains* 33).

The imprint of Aristotle is everywhere in Frye's work. He sets out in the *Anatomy* to develop a twentieth-century *Poetics*, and a number of Aristotelian topoi appear with regularity: *mythos*, *ethos*, and *dianoia* are the material cause for much of Frye's analysis in the first three essays of the *Anatomy*, and *melos*, *lexis*, and *opsis* serve the same function in the fourth essay. Frye frequently relies on the four-cause method of definition. Aristotelian terms—*mimesis*, *spoudaios* and *phaulos*, *catharsis*, *hamartia*, and *anagnorisis*—are scattered liberally throughout his writing. More often than not Frye greatly expands the meanings that these terms have in Aristotle, as already suggested, but the *Anatomy* nevertheless would have been a very different book had there been no *Poetics*.

The occasions Frye has to write about Longinus are far fewer than the Aristotelian ones, but they are frequent enough to deserve our attention. I propose to examine the influence of Longinus on Frye and to speculate on whether or not in his *both/and* world, where Aristotle complements Longinus and vice versa, he finally privileges one over the other. In studying the influence of Longinus on Frye we have the class notes for his 1954 course in Literary Criticism, recorded by his student Margaret (née Kell) Virany,³ a course in which he taught the major Classical critics: Plato, Aristotle, Horace, Longinus, and Quintilian.

Some uncertainty surrounds the translation of *Peri hypsous* as "On the Sublime." Most agree that it conveys the sense of height or elevation. The first English translation by John Hall in the seventeenth century was entitled *Of the Height of Eloquence*. Even the etymology of "sublime," which comes from the Latin *sublimis*, is uncertain. The *OED* speculates that *sublimis* probably derives from SUB- "up to" plus *limen* "lintel." G. M. A. Grube says that the "English translators and editors seem to be agreed that sublime is an unsatisfactory translation ... but they continue to use it; few of them given any clear idea of what Longinus is writing about" (355). One of the implicit meanings of *hypsous* is that of movement or process. Emma Gilby maintains that "Longinus gives us to understand that 'hypsos' is best defined as a movement, and not just a movement upward (as one might expect from a term often translated as 'height') but also horizontally toward others" (23).

3 In 1994 Virany sent me her class notes for this and six other courses she had with Frye. She was assisted in her note-taking, written neatly and thoroughly, by her training in Pitman shorthand, the keys to which she generously provided. From studying these class notes, I feel confident that she gives a more or less complete account of what Frye said in class.

Longinus is a qualitative critic.

Etymology and the uncertainties of translation aside, Longinus is relatively clear about what he means by *hypsous*. In his opening paragraph he says to his correspondent Terentianus that the first requirement of a systematic treatise is “a statement of the subject,” and he proceeds to provide just that in his opening chapter. Elder Olson is clearly correct in calling our attention to two contexts for the definition. One is that the ends and means of the sublime are contrasted with those of rhetoric; the other is that the definition is presented within the framework of the familiar triad of audience, author, and work.

From the perspective of the *author*, sublimity is that which has constituted the greatest poets; it is what has given them their high place, their fame: “Sublimity is a certain distinction and excellence in expression, and that it is from no other source than this that the greatest poets and writers have derived their eminence and gained an immortality of renown” (1.3).⁴

From the perspective of the *audience*, the “effect of elevated language upon an audience sublimity is not persuasion but transport [*ekstasis*]” (1.4). Ecstasy is stronger than persuasion because the audience can resist persuasion, but it can’t resist transport. The Greek stem for *ekstasis* means a being put out of its place, and in late Greek it acquired the additional meaning, according to the *OED*, of “withdrawal of the soul from the body, mystic or prophetic trance.”

From the perspective of the *work*, the excellencies of rhetoric are contextual: they emerge from the whole and are temporal. The excellencies of *ekstasis* emerge from the part and are instantaneous: “Sublimity flashing forth at the right moment scatters everything before it like a thunderbolt” (1.4).⁵

Thus, to summarize in a chart:

	Author	Work	Audience
Art of rhetoric	rhetorician	whole	persuasion
Art of the sublime	greatest poets and writers	part	transport

Longinus is a qualitative critic. Whereas Aristotle is interested in artistic wholes and the way the parts go to make up those wholes, Longinus is interested only in a particular literary quality, sublimity, which can be

4 References to *On the Sublime* are to chapter and paragraph number.

5 Longinus uses the lightning and thunder metaphor on two other occasions: 12.4 and 34.4.

found in any number of genres, including nonliterary ones. There are parallels in contemporary criticism: Cleanth Brooks's concern, for example, with the qualities of irony and paradox or Mikhail Bakhtin's with the dialogical and carnivalesque—qualities they discover in a variety of literary forms.

Margaret Virany's class notes for Frye's lecture on Longinus, which are reproduced in the appendix, are mostly a rather matter-of-fact summary of the topics Longinus addresses. Frye does remark that Longinus "gets to the heart of great writing," says (in regard to chapter 2) that Longinus is noncommittal about whether or not the sublime can be taught, notes that Molière satirized circumlocution, comments regarding diction that "beautiful words are the light of thought (not realized in England until Coleridge) / —cf. stained-glass window and light / —words and thought must be correlated." He also says that Longinus was the first to point out that judicial literary criticism is difficult and can come only after long experience, and he points out that the passages Longinus cites are similar to Matthew Arnold's "touchstones." Finally, he notes that Longinus' requisites for sublimity—"words, thought, conception, imagination, feeling"—make for a "rare combination." Otherwise, Frye seems content simply to list the topics Longinus treats. These are marked with an asterisk on the following outline of *On the Sublime*:

Chapter
Number

- *1–2 Introduction
[missing text]
- *3–5 Instances of False Sublimity: Tumidity, Puerility, "Parenthysus"
- 6–7 Definition of Sublimity
- 8 Sources of True Sublimity
 - A. Sources that are innate: common to all art; independent of words
 - * 1. Great Thoughts, Conceptions
 - * 2. Strong Passion, Feeling
 - B. Sources that are acquired
 - 3. Proper Handling of Figures
(words in connection with thought)
 - 4. Noble Diction
(words in connection with one another)

5. Elevated Composition
(words by themselves)

First Source: Thoughts (9–15)

- *9 First mode for achieving sublimity: nurturing the soul to great conceptions requires the contemplation of great objects: gods, heroes, majesty of nature, etc. [missing text between 9.4 and 9.5]
10 Second mode: selection and integration of characteristics upon which a great subject's sublimity depends
*11 Third mode: Amplification or Magnification
12 (Third mode, continued)
[missing text between 12.2 and 12.3]
*13–14 Fourth mode: Imitation of Great Writers
15 Fifth Mode: Invention or Imagination
[Second source: Strong Passion, Feeling. Missing section]

****Third source: Proper handling of figures (16–29)***

- 16–17 Figures of thought: Adjuration (*apostrophe, oath, etc.)
18 Figures of thought: Questions
[missing section after 18.2]
19–29 Figures of Feeling
19 Asyndeton (omission of conjunction)
20–21 Anaphora (repetitions) and diatyposis (vivid descriptions)
22 Hyperbaton (inversions)
23 Polypota (accumulations, variations, climaxes)
24 Plural to Singular
25 Past to Present
26 Transposition of Persons
27 Change in Narrative Point of View
*28–29 Periphrasis (circumlocution)

****Fourth Source: Choice of Words (30–38)***

- 30 Introduction to Diction
[missing text after 30.2 and before 31]
*31 Use of Common Language
*32 Metaphors
33–36 Digression on Genius (though not without fault) vs. the Commonplace
37 Similes
[missing text in 37 and beginning of 38]

Fifth Source: Elevated Composition (39–43)

- *39 Rhythm
- *40 Shape of Sentence
- *41–43 Features Antithetical to Sublimity: rhythmic affectation, “cut up” style, excessive concision, trivial expression

*Reasons for the decay of great literature (44)

If we assume that Margaret Virany gives a fairly complete account of Frye’s lecture on Longinus, there is little evidence to suggest from his rather unexceptional summary of topics that Longinus would come to represent for him one of the two central approaches to literary criticism, first articulated in “Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility,” a paper he presented in 1955, only a year after he gave his literary criticism lectures. Frye’s thesis is that Aristotle and Longinus represent complementary approaches to literature. He returns to this proposition at the end of his theory of modes in the passage quoted above from *Anatomy of Criticism* (CW 22: 62–3), written about the same time, and then again in *The Well-Tempered Critic*, lectures delivered in 1961. From these three sources we can abstract the key elements in the opposition Frye sets up between Aristotle and Longinus. These are summarized in figure 1. Except for what Frye says in his lecture about true sublimity involving a meeting between or a union of the poet and the reader, there is nothing in the class lecture that anticipates this broad critical dialectic.

Figure 1. Complementary Approaches to Literature

	ARISTOTELIAN (POEMA)	LONGINIAN (POIESIS)
VIEW OF LITERATURE	Aesthetic: literature as product (“hieratic”)	Creative, psychological: literature as process (“demotic”)
NATURE OF POEM	Techne or artistic artifact; poem as product; imitation	Poem as process; expression; creation; locus of sublime passages
CENTRAL CONCEPTION	Catharsis	Ecstasis
SPECTATOR	Detached from work of art and from author	Identification of reader, poem, and poet; individualized response, based on participation

CHIEF INTEREST	Fictional forms (more useful for plays)	Thematic forms (more useful for lyrics)
TYPICAL METAPHORS	Of objective order; <i>natura naturata</i>	Of organism, genesis, and elevation <i>natura naturans</i>
FOCUS	Human society and order of nature; metaphors of imitation	Prophetic; metaliterary; metaphors of divine creation or inspiration; oracular “touchstones”
NATURE OF TEXT	Text as single form; unified story	Text as sequence of epiphanies; series of ecstatic moments or points of expanding comprehension
EMPHASIS	Classical	Romantic
POETIC IMAGERY	Images of order and purpose	Images of mystery and vagueness

We should note that the Longinian context for the sublime is different from the eighteenth-century one in which the sublime, distinguished from the beautiful, is identified by Shaftesbury, Dennis, Burke, Kant, and others with the picturesque in nature. This is the context in which Frye discusses Blake’s view of the sublime, especially in reference to Burke, in *Fearful Symmetry*. The rhetorical context for the Longinian sublime emphasizes the effect of the qualities found not in nature but in thought and language.⁶

As already said, Frye is a dialectical thinker, frequently seeking to unify the many oppositions contained in his criticism as a matter of course. In his late work this is often achieved through the method of the great synthesizer, Hegel, who takes the contraries to another level through a process he calls *Aufhebung*. Frye almost always resists the Kierkegaardian *either/or* solution. But unity is not achieved at the expense of variety, and in his notebooks he never tires of insisting that opposites are never resolved by reconciliation, harmony, or agreement. Such terms relate to propositional language and are forms of what he calls “imperialistic compulsion” (*cw* 6:653). In one of his notebooks from the mid-1960s Frye writes: “I have always distrusted what I call Reuben the Reconciler in thought: the syncretism that ‘reconciles’ Plato & Aristotle or St. Thomas & Marx. I think every great structure of thought or imagination is a universe in itself, identical

⁶ On this distinction, see *cw* 17:110–11.

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with and interpenetrating every other, but not similar or harmonizable with any other” (CW 9:39). At about the same time Frye wrote in his “Letter to the English Institute, “I wish we could throw away the notion of ‘reconciling,’ and use instead some such conception as ‘interpenetration.’ Literature itself is not a field of conflicting arguments but of interpenetrating visions” (CW 27:216). Earlier—in the *Anatomy*—Frye had taken a different position regarding reconciliation. The Bible, he writes, may “be examined from an aesthetic or Aristotelian point of view as a single form, as a story in which pity and terror, which in this context are the knowledge of good and evil, are raised and cast out. Or it may be examined from a Longinian point of view as a series of ecstatic moments or points of expanding apprehension—this approach is in fact the assumption on which every selection of a text for a sermon is based. Here we have a critical principle which we can take back to literature and apply to anything we like, a principle in which the ‘holism,’ as it has been called, of Coleridge and the discontinuous theories of Poe, Hulme, and Pound are reconciled” (CW 22:305).

To reconcile means to restore to a unity or to make things compatible or agreeable with each other. After the *Anatomy* did Frye change his mind about the possibility of reconciling the holistic approach of Aristotle with the discontinuous one of Longinus? It is difficult to see how the two ways of seeing a text—as an organic whole or as a series of ecstatic moments—can be brought together as a single “critical principle.” Frye does say in an endnote in the *Anatomy* that the “conception of Aristotelian aesthetic catharsis and Longinian psychological ecstasis ... [are] complementary to one another” (CW 22:411), complementarity suggesting that what is missing in one approach is supplied by the other. Whatever the reason for Frye’s both affirming and denying the principle of reconciliation, it is clear that as he moved beyond the *Anatomy*, interpenetration did become an increasingly important principle for him. He uses interpenetration to define a kind of experience, a way of understanding, a process of enlightenment, a religious final cause, and a visionary perception. Around the word “interpenetration” cluster a host of additional verbal formulas that help to define it, and interpenetration is a function of the Hegelian *Aufhebung*.

“Complement” comes from the Latin meaning to fill up or complete. Two years after the *Anatomy* was published, Frye defined a “complete” theory of criticism in these terms:

There are traditionally two main centres of emphasis in the theory of criticism, sometimes described by the words *poesis* and *poema*. The former, or Longinian, centre is primarily an

interest in the psychological process of poetry, and in the rhetorical relation (often arrived at by indirection) set up between poet and reader. The latter, or Aristotelian, centre is primarily an interest in the aesthetic product, and is based on a specific aesthetic judgment, detached by catharsis from moral anxieties and emotional perturbations. Any complete theory of criticism needs both, but in a complete theory the aesthetic judgment takes precedence, for the Longinian interest is in enthusiasm, or what “carries us away,” in other words in what uncritical feelings we may trust to afterwards. (*CW* 21:277).

We encounter here Frye’s privileging, in the 1950s, the Aristotelian over the Longinian approach: the aesthetic view takes precedence over the enthusiasm of *ecstasis*, as the feelings generated when we are transported are not subject to critical scrutiny. But as Frye continued to reflect on the complementary critical approaches, he leaned more and more in the Longinian direction. In one of his late notebooks, he has this reprimand to himself for not including Longinus in his account of the oracular, kerygmatic mode of language: “Longinus, you idiot. Why did you leave him out of chapter four? Most of him is the fragmentary, oracular, individualized, that’s-for-me kerygma” (*CW* 5:343). Frye is referring to chapter 4 of *Words with Power*. In chapters 2 and 3 he has been exploring the relation between the rhetorical and the poetic. He turns now to the relation between the poetic and kerygmatic, mending his omission by saying this about Longinus:

We need the guidance of a critic who understands what we have called the ecstatic state of response, and the difference, or contrast, between the ideological rhetoric that persuades and the proclamation that takes one out of oneself. The best of such critics is the first- or second-century writer whom we know only as Longinus. The title of Longinus’ treatise, *Peri Hypsous*, is usually translated *On the Sublime*, which refers to an eighteenth-century adaptation of his ideas. The most effective part of *On the Sublime* deals with brief passages—“touchstones,” as Matthew Arnold would call them—which stand out from their context. This we may call the oracular or discontinuous prophetic, the passage in the text where we suddenly break through into a different dimension of response. Longinus’ examples come from Greek literature, but one—he was probably a Jew or a Christian—is the “Let there be light” verse from Genesis. (*CW* 26:106)⁷

⁷ The passage from Genesis is quoted by Longinus in 9.9.

The “proclamation that takes one out of oneself” is what Frye calls *kerygma*, a term he introduced in *The Great Code*, meaning the rhetoric of proclamation. But in *Words with Power* he expands the meaning of *kerygma* far beyond what it had meant in *The Great Code*. It now becomes synonymous with the prophetic utterance, the metaliterary perception that extends one’s vision, and the Longinian ecstatic response to any text, sacred or secular, that “revolutionizes our consciousness.”⁸ *Kerygma* takes metaphorical identification “a step further and says: ‘you are what you identify with’” (CW 26:110). We enter the kerygmatic realm when the separation of “active speech and reception of speech” merges into unity (CW 26:111).

Frye’s late work often focuses on ecstatic states and the revolutionizing and expanding of consciousness that results from the experience of ecstasis. *Kerygma* moves beyond the poetic, embracing the reader’s existential experience. The highest states of this experience are a function of what Frye calls existential or, following Heidegger, ecstatic metaphor. In one of his *Words with Power* notebooks Frye writes:

Metaphor is the attempt to open up a channel or current of energy between subject and object. It begins in ecstatic metaphor (Stone Age painting and “primitive” music), and literature develops in proportion as the sense of a split between subject and object becomes habitual. The link with religion is there because metaphor creates a “Thou” world between the “I” and the “it,” and the god is the stabilized metaphor. (CW 6:537)

In *Words with Power* Frye proposes three levels of metaphorical experience: the imaginative, the erotic, and the existential or ecstatic. As we move up the ladder of metaphorical experience, the difference between identity and difference continues to lessen until we arrive at the highest level, an ecstatic state in which, Frye says, “there is a sense of presence, a sense of uniting ourselves with something else.” Such a state is Longinian *ekstasis* or transport—a being put out of its place. “In the ecstatic state,” Frye writes, “there is a sense of presence, a sense uniting ourselves with something else” (CW 26:85).

Moments of intense consciousness for Frye move us beyond time and space into a world of pure identity that is an altogether different order of experience:

⁸ For these expansions of *kerygma*, see CW 26: 105–08. For a more detailed discussion of Frye’s use of *kerygma*, see Denham 65–09.

Continued study of literature and the arts brings us into an entirely new world, where creation and revelation have different meanings, where the experience of time and space is different. As its outlines take shape, our standards of reality and illusion get reversed. It is the illusions of literature that begin to seem real, and ordinary life, pervaded as it is with all the phony and lying myths that surround us, begins to look like the real hallucination, a parody of the genuine imaginative world. The glimpses that I have had of the imaginative world have kept me fascinated for nearly half a century. (CW 7:567)

If we step back from the total body of Frye's work, we can see how the Aristotelian and Longinian complementary approaches play out in his own career. The first phase, in which the *Anatomy* looms large, is schematic, analytical, systematic, and, like the first chapters of the *Poetics*, given to taxonomy. The *Anatomy* appropriates and redefines, as indicated above, a host of Aristotle's central terms. Its focus is on the conventions of the aesthetic product as an object. But once Frye turned his attention to the Bible, Longinian *ekstasis* became the focus of his attention. Frye himself notes the change in emphasis:

Many of the most intense forms of human experience take some form of ecstatic metaphor. The hypothetical nature of literature, its ironic separation from all statements of assertion, was as far as I got in my *Anatomy of Criticism*, published nearly thirty years ago. The literary imagination seemed to me then, as in large part it does now, to be primarily a kind of model-thinking, an infinite set of possibilities of experience to expand and intensify our actual experience. But the *Anatomy* had led me to the scripture or sacred book as the furthest boundary to be explored in the imaginative direction, and I then became increasingly fascinated with the Bible, as a book dominated by metaphor throughout, and yet quite obviously not content with an ironic removal from experience or assertion. Clearly one had to look at other aspects of the question, and reconsider the cultural context of metaphor, as something that not only once had but may still have its roots in ecstatic experience. (CW 18:348–9)

In his late work Frye repeatedly explores those moments of intense consciousness that move us beyond time and space into the mythical world of pure identity. The key issue here is the experience of myth and metaphor. It is possible, Frye feels, to recapture the intensity of perception

that was available to people in Vico's age of the gods. These are what he calls "moments of ecstatic union," or what we refer to as peak experiences—epiphanic moments that take us away from ordinary waking consciousness. Here are two typical accounts of such experience:

The poem or painting is in some respects a "hallucination": it is summoned up out of the artist's mind and imposed on us, and is allied to delirium tremens or pretending that one is Napoleon. Blake would say that such creative hallucinations are spiritual visions, and that what they present is more detailed, more vivid, and more accurate than anything that normal eyesight affords. In other respects a work of art is like a dream, but it does not introduce us to the ordinary dream world, where we retreat from reality into our withdrawn selves. It takes us into the world of social vision that informs our waking life, where we see that most of what we call "reality" is the rubbish of leftover human constructs. It speaks with authority, but not the familiar authority of parental or social conditioning: there will always be, I expect, some mystery about the real source of its authority. (CW 7:566–67)

Moments of ecstatic union ... may come and go, like flashes of lightning, but some moments are ... the frozen or simultaneously grasped aspects of a *mythos* or continuous narrative. Within the limitations of human life, the most highly developed human types are those whose lives have become, as we say, a legend, that is lives no longer contemplating a vision of objective revelation or imprisoned within a subjective dream. The New Testament presents the ultimate human life as a divine and human Logos, but the Logos has transcended its relation to logic and has expanded into mythos, a life which is, so to speak, a kind of self-narration, where action and awareness of action are no longer clashing with each other. (CW 18:325)

Such ecstatic moments transport one into a purely symbolic world that is given to recording "portents or auguries of what life could be." "It is worth any amount of commonplace life," Frye says, "to purchase one of them" (CW 18:336). He remarks that we try to capture the intensity of experience involved in the identification of metaphor with such words as "magical" and "religious" (CW 18:294). These moments of intense perception are what Blake calls seeing with a twofold vision. When such perception takes place, Frye says, "the whole world is humanized" (CW 4:183). Or again,

Metaphor, as a bridge between consciousness and nature, is in fact a microcosm of language itself. It is precisely the function of language to overcome what Blake calls the “cloven fiction” of a subject contemplating an object.... Language from this point of view becomes a single gigantic metaphor, the uniting of consciousness with what it is conscious of. This union is Ovid’s metamorphosis in reverse, the transfiguring of consciousness as it merges with articulated meaning. In a more specifically religious area this third order would become Martin Buber’s world of “Thou,” which comes between the consciousness that is merely an “I” and a nature that is merely an “it.” (CW 18:345)

Longinian *ekstasis* has a central role to play in what Frye refers to variously as the transfiguring, the intensifying, the revolutionizing, or the expanding of consciousness. Beginning in the late 1950s Frye devoted a great deal of energy to designing a framework for the development of the stages of religious consciousness. He referred to these stages as the three awarenesses. He even contemplated writing a book about the topic, and he speculates about a somewhat mysterious fourth awareness.⁹ Awareness as a category, however, tends to disappear from Frye’s vocabulary in the 1980s. The fourth *awareness* of the notebooks is transformed into speculations about higher levels of *consciousness*. For Frye one of the central archetypal scenes of the intensity of consciousness that arises from the desire to identify is found in the Paleolithic cave drawings, references to which appear on more than thirty occasions in his work. The cave drawings represent “the titanic will to identify” (CW 18:346).

When one considers the skill and precision of these works, and the almost impossible difficulties of positioning and lighting surrounding their creation, we begin to grasp something of the intensity behind them to unite human consciousness with its own perceptions, an intensity we can hardly imagine now. Magical motives, such as maintaining a supply of game animals by picturing them on the cave walls, seem utterly inadequate: for one thing, many of the figures are evidently human beings in animal skins. In any case such caves are the wombs of creation, where conscious distinctions have no relevance and only pure identity is left. (CW 26:215–16)

The cave drawings at Lascaux, Altamira, and elsewhere are an example of what Lévy-Bruhl called *participation mystique*, the imaginative identifica-

⁹ On the three awarenesses, see Denham 76–9, 276–81.

tion with things, including other people, outside the self, or an absorption of one's consciousness with the natural world into an undifferentiated state of archaic identity.¹⁰ In such a process of metaphorical identification the subject and object merge into one, but the sense of identity is existential rather than verbal (CW 6:503).

But what does the intensity or expansion of consciousness entail for Frye? Answering this is something of a challenge, for Frye reflects on the implications of the phrase only obliquely. But let us take the clues Frye does provide and see how they align with the Longinian perspective.

1. Expanded consciousness is a function of *kerygma*. Ordinary rhetoric

seldom comes near the primary concern of "How do I live a more abundant life?" This latter on the other hand is the central theme of all genuine kerygmatic, whether we find it in the Sermon on the Mount, the Deer Park Sermon of Buddha, the Koran, or in a secular book that revolutionizes our consciousness. In poetry anything can be juxtaposed, or implicitly identified with, anything else. Kerygma takes this a step further and says: "you are what you identify with." We are close to the kerygmatic whenever we meet the statement, as we do surprisingly often in contemporary writing, that it seems to be language that uses man rather than man that uses language. (CW 26:110)

This is a principle that Longinus affirms in his account of the excellencies of Demosthenese, "allied to the highest sublimity and perfected to the utmost." His "mighty gifts," which were "absorbed bodily within himself, ... we may deem heaven sent (for it would not be right to term them *human*)" (CW 34.4).

2. Expanded consciousness does not necessarily signify religion or a religious experience, but it can be "the precondition for any ecumenical or everlasting-gospel religion" (CW 5:17). Moreover, the raising of consciousness is revelation (CW 5:61). Longinus does not speak directly about religion, although he does say that the true sublime uplifts the soul (CW 7.2) and elevates the spirit (CW 33.4) and that sublimity raises human beings "near the majesty of God" and so "transcends the human" (CW 36.1, 3).

3. Whatever the techniques used to expand consciousness (for example, yoga, Zen, psychosynthesis, meditation, drugs), or whatever forms

¹⁰ On *participation mystique* see CW 22:276, CW 5:16, CW 6:503, and CW 18:347. There is no evidence that Frye had read Lévy-Bruhl. His source for *participation mystique* was doubtless Jung, a considerable portion of whose work Frye knew well.

it takes (or example, dreams, fantasies, the “peak experiences” described by Abraham Maslow, ecstatic music), the language of such consciousness always turns out to be metaphorical. Thus literature is the guide to higher consciousness, just as Virgil was Dante’s guide to the expanded vision represented by Beatrice (*CW* 6:717; *CW* 26:40–1). Still, Frye believes that language is the primary means of “intensifying consciousness, lifting us into a new dimension of being altogether” (*CW* 6:717). For Longinus, language is also one of the keys to the sublime—the third source for the poet who wants his work to transport the reader—and he devotes chapter 32 to metaphor. After an extensive catalogue of metaphors in Plato, he concludes that “figurative language contains great natural power, and that metaphors contribute to the sublime” (*CW* 32.6).

4. *Vision* is the word that best fits the heightened awareness that comes with the imagination’s opening of the doors of perception. What the subject sees may be “only an elusive and vanishing glimpse. Glimpse of what? To try to answer this question is to remove it to a different category of experience. If we knew what it was, it would be an object perceived in time and space. And it is not an object, but something uniting the objective with ourselves” (*CW* 26:83). The “kerygmatic breakthrough,” Frye writes, “always contains some sense of ‘time has stopped.’ The sequential movement has become a focus, or fireplace. In intensified consciousness the minute particular shines by its own light (or burns in its own life-fire)” (*CW* 5:290).

Again, *ekstasis* means a being put out of its place, which Longinus eloquently captures in this passage:

Nature has appointed us men to be no base nor ignoble animals; but when she ushers us into life and into the vast universe as into some great assembly, to be as it were spectators of the mighty whole and the keenest aspirants for honour, forthwith she implants in our souls the unconquerable love of whatever is elevated and more divine than we. Wherefore not even the entire universe suffices for the thought and contemplation within the reach of the human mind, but our imaginations often pass beyond the bounds of space, and if we survey our life on every side and see how much more it everywhere abounds in what is striking, and great, and beautiful, we shall soon discern the purpose of our birth. (*CW* 35.2–3)

5. The principle behind the epiphanic experience that permits things to be seen with a special luminousness is that “things are not fully seen until they become hallucinatory. Not actual hallucinations, because those would merely substitute subjective for objective visions, but objective things

The “kerygmatic
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Frye writes,
“always
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sense of ‘time
has stopped.’”

transfigured by identification with the perceiver. An object impregnated, so to speak, by a perceiver is transformed into a presence” (CW 26:87). This is analogous to Longinus’ view that the sublime casts a spell over us (CW 1.4).

6. Intense consciousness does not sever one from the body or the physical roots of experience. “The word spiritual in English,” Frye writes

may have a rather hollow and booming sound to some: it is often detached from the spiritual body and made to mean an empty shadow of the material, as with churches who offer us spiritual food that we cannot eat and spiritual riches that we cannot spend. Here spirit is being confused with soul, which traditionally fights with and contradicts the body, instead of extending bodily experience into another dimension. The Song of Songs . . . is a spiritual song of love: it expresses erotic feeling on all levels of consciousness, but does not run away from its physical basis or cut off its physical roots. We have to think of such phrases as “a spirited performance” to realize that spirit can refer to ordinary consciousness at its most intense: the *gaya scienza*, or mental life as play... Similar overtones are in the words *esprit* and *Geist*. (CW 26:119)

Or again, St John of the Cross makes “a modulation from existential sex metaphor (M₂) to existential expanding of consciousness metaphor (M₁)” (CW 5:120). As in *Aufhebung*, things lifted to another level do not cancel their connection to the previous level: “M₂” is still present at the higher level. Chapter 6 (“The Garden”) of *Words with Power* “is concerned partly, if not mainly, with getting over the either-or antithesis between the spiritual and the physical, Agape love and Eros love” (CW 6:451). Again, “spiritual love expands from the erotic and does not run away from it” (CW 26:195).

The best account in Longinus of the uniting of soul and body is his analysis of Sappho’s “Peer of Gods” lyric: “Are you not amazed how at one instant she summons, as though they were all alien from herself and dispersed, soul, body, ears, tongue, eyes, colour? Uniting contradictions, she is, at one and the same time, hot and cold, in her senses and out of her mind, for she is either terrified or at the point of death. The effect desired is that not one passion only should be seen in her, but a concourse of the passions” (10.3).

7. Intensified consciousness is represented by images of both ascent and descent: “Images of ascent are connected with the intensifying of consciousness, and images of descent with the reinforcing of it by other forms of awareness, such as fantasy or dream. The most common images of

ascent are ladders, mountains, towers, and trees; of descent, caves or dives into water” (CW 26:138). These images, which arrange themselves along the *axis mundi*, are revealed with exceptional insight in some of Frye’s most powerfully perceptive writing—the last four chapters of *Words with Power*. In these concentrated chapters Frye illustrates how four central archetypes connect the ordinary world to the world of higher consciousness: the mountain and the cave emphasizing wisdom and the word, and the garden and the furnace emphasizing love and the spirit.

Longinus focuses on elevation, although he does remark on the sublimity of Ajax’s silence in the underworld (CW 9.2), and he notes that we admire the imagery of both the “celestial fires” and the “subterranean fire” of the craters of Etna (CW 35.4).

The notion of expanded consciousness, which appears everywhere in Frye’s late work, is related to many things other than Longinian *ekstasis*. It is linked to the thesis of his final book, *The Double Vision*, to Patanjali’s yoga, to the German mystics (especially Eckhart and Boehme), and to other forms of the visionary and kerygmatic breakthrough that was the goal of Frye’s quest. But of the two approaches to criticism—the Aristotelian and the Longinian—Frye ends up decidedly in the Longinian camp. This does not gainsay the insights of the *Anatomy*, which continue to have widespread interest and application. But the Longinian thrust of *The Great Code*, *Words with Power*, *The Double Vision*, *Myth and Metaphor*, and the three volumes of his notebooks on the Bible suggest that Frye did not try to resolve the Aristotle–Longinus antithesis with still another of his many applications of the Hegelian *Aufhebung*. The two approaches remain complementary, but the final accent of Frye’s own allegiance is to Longinus.

Appendix

Margaret (née Kell) Virany’s Class Notes on Longinus from Frye’s 1954 Course in Literary Criticism

Dec. 10.

Longinus

—minister of Zenobia, Queen of Palmyra in Africa—213–292 A.D.

—fragments only

—“Sublime”—this really means anything that can raise anything up

—written to Terentianus—to correct a lost work of Sicilius

—1–6 and 41–43—false sublimity

- 7—grandeur of conception
 - vehement, deep feeling
- 17–29—careful manipulation of figures
- 30–38—nobility of phrase
- 39–40—word order
- 42–43 (with 1–6)
- 44—decay of eloquence
- he gets at the heart of great writing

Purpose of sublimity

- Not persuasion but transport. Appeal of writing is immediate, not reasoned out
- can it be used for teaching ?
 - non-committal
 - need for some teaching
- missing section

Defects of Style

- puerility—learned trifling, insipid
- parenthysus—uncalled for display of emotion
 - more in speaking than writing
- comes from a craze for novelty

Needed for the Sublime

- lofty thought and lofty words
- submission to great predecessors

Figures of Speech

- amplification
- rhetorical treatment of the commonplace
- images—writer has clear picture and gives it to readers
- no arbitrary devices
- artificial ring in figures—harmful
 - e.g., from Demosthenes and others
- apostrophe—emotional appeal

Periphrasis

- round about way of saying things
 - e.g., death = destined path
 - warned that it could fall flat

—Molière satirized this. Popular in the eighteenth century

Diction

—lost section

*beautiful words are the light of thought (not realized in England until Coleridge)

—cf. stained-glass window and light

—words and thought must be correlated

—twenty metaphors could be good in a passage. One could spoil it; i.e., the number doesn't matter

Rhythm

—can be too pronounced

Literary Criticism

—difficult. First to point this out

“crowning fruit of long experience”—Can person get it by study? Thinking of criticism as judicial rather than historical. Fewer critics than creative artists.

False sublimity

—the true lifts up

—two minds meet—creator and reader

—immediate response of the reader

—what appeals to all men at all places and times. Universal appeal

“Men” = men of literary taste

—test—wanted to read it again

—suggestive powers

—test—lasting comparison with the recognized great

—e.g., Matthew Arnold's “touchstones”

Sublimity—words, thought, conception, imagination, feeling

—a rare combination

—prefers Iliad to Odyssey

—typical Greek fear of so much fantasy in the Odyssey

Faultlessness

—greatness not to be confused with accuracy. The former appeals while the latter never can. A touch of genius can overcome defects. “Faultless mediocrity” versus “genuine greatness.” Perfection annoys us in life or

literature. Great poet (1) ability—feel and experience (2) ability to communicate feeling (3) great soul—imagination. Faults come from within

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