

# Symptoms of the Sublime: Longinus and the Hippocratic Method of Criticism

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HOW IS A LITERARY CRITIC like a doctor? Writers have often characterized their reviewers as surgeons, connoting the very best and the worst of the profession. The good critic is a healer who cuts away malignant tissue; the bad critic is a butcher. James Ralph, a contemporary of Alexander Pope, believed that literary criticism most approximated the science of medicine in classical antiquity, when criticism “was an agreeable Dose of Physick, given by a skilful regular Physician, which carry’d off insensibly all noxious Humors, without any Injury to the Constitution.”<sup>1</sup> The critics of the eighteenth century, in contrast, were “illiterate quack[s]” who poisoned texts and left their corpses on the operating table. These critics responded in turn by pointing to classical antiquity as the source, not the remedy, for literary contagion in British literature. Scottish satirist Archibald Campbell, for instance, mocked Samuel Johnson’s penchant for classical vocabulary with the diagnosis, “He is very ill indeed, he is terribly afflicted with the disease of hard long-tailed words drawn from the Greek and Latin languages.”<sup>2</sup> Asserting the critic’s right to cure stylistic maladies, Campbell maintained

<sup>1</sup> J. Ralph, *The Touch-Stone: or, Historical, Critical, Political, Moral, Philosophical, and Theological Essays upon the Reigning Diversions of the Town* (London 1728) 164.

<sup>2</sup> A. Campbell, *Lexiphanes: A Dialogue Imitated from Lucian, and Suited to the Present Times* (London 1767) 87. For context and other examples of medicalizing literary criticism in Britain see S. Domsch, *The Emergence of Literary Criticism in 18th-Century Britain: Discourse between Attacks and Authority* (Berlin 2014) 45–46.

that the “doctor of letters” played a crucial role in protecting readers from the contagions that careless writers could inflict upon them.

This nosological attitude towards literature and literary criticism was not restricted to the writers of early modern Europe. In the first century of the Roman Empire as well, authors argued that the art of eloquence had taken a turn for the worse and debated the critic’s role in its recovery. “Recently that immense, blustery loquacity from Asia has entered Athens and, like some sickly star (*veluti pestilenti quodam sidere*), has inflated the minds of young men ascending to greatness,” bemoans Encolpius, the protagonist of Petronius’ *Satyricon*.<sup>3</sup> Echoing Thucydides’ description of the plague in Athens, Encolpius imagines bad literary style as an infectious disease descending from the East into Greece. That the sickness had spread even into Italy is clear from similar remarks by contemporary poets, philosophers, and historians about the dearth of eloquence among the Romans.

Over the past half-century classicists have become increasingly skeptical of such claims about the literary health crisis in the Roman Empire. Already in 1972, George Kennedy cautioned that critiques like Encolpius’ might reflect “a literary commonplace about decline” and not the true artistic vitality of the principate.<sup>4</sup> More recently, Laurent Pernot and Jeffrey Walker have challenged the decline thesis and evaluated the new aesthetics of Imperial epideictic rhetoric.<sup>5</sup> One outcome of these studies, however, which have otherwise prompted a resurgence of interest in literature of the principate, is that classicists often dismiss ancient discussions of literary degenera-

<sup>3</sup> Petron. *Sat.* 2. Translations throughout are my own. Cf. Thuc. 2.48.1–2: ἤρξατο δὲ τὸ μὲν πρῶτον, ὡς λέγεται, ἐξ Αἰθιοπίας τῆς ὑπὲρ Αἰγύπτου, ἔπειτα δὲ καὶ ἐς Αἴγυπτον καὶ Λιβύην κατέβη καὶ ἐς τὴν βασιλέως γῆν τὴν πολλήν. ἐς δὲ τὴν Ἀθηναίων πόλιν ἐξᾶπιναιῶς ἐνέπεσε.

<sup>4</sup> G. Kennedy, *The Art of Rhetoric in the Roman World* (Princeton 1972) 448.

<sup>5</sup> L. Pernot, *Rhetoric in Antiquity* (Washington 2005) 132; J. Walker, *Rhetoric and Poetics in Antiquity* (Oxford 2000) 94–108.

tion as “hackneyed complaint[s]”<sup>6</sup> rather than examples of a fascinating medicalizing rhetoric. If indeed there was agreement among first-century authors about the atrophy of eloquence in speech and writing, we might also ask whether they concurred about its causes and symptoms. Was the condition of literature terminal or remediable? Did conceptualizing literature as a body elevate the critic to the rank of doctor?<sup>7</sup> The embodied descriptions of eloquence from Philo to Tacitus are rich sources of evidence on what it meant to read and to evaluate in the principate. Furthermore, their complaints reveal an ongoing effort to promote literary criticism as a therapeutic science on a par with medicine itself.<sup>8</sup>

This paper analyzes the intersection of medicine and literary criticism in the Greek treatise *On the Sublime*, attributed to Longinus. In the first part of the paper, I situate Longinus’ somatic rhetoric of decline in the broader landscape of first-century (and primarily Roman) perspectives on literary decay.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> E. Fantham, *Roman Readings: Roman Response to Greek Literature from Plautus to Statius and Quintilian* (Berlin 2011) 277–284, at 278. See also J. Connolly, *The State of Speech: Rhetoric and Political Thought in Ancient Rome* (Princeton 2009) 260–261, and K. Lamp, *A City of Marble: The Rhetoric of Augustan Rome* (Columbia 2013) 3–4.

<sup>7</sup> Critics and grammarians were regular targets of mockery in the principate for their perceived pedantry, as in Sen. *Dial.* 10.13.2, Petron. *Sat.* 2, and Lucian *Ver.hist.* 2.20. The most extensive critique appears in the second-century polemic of Sextus Empiricus *Math.* 41, which appropriates the Homeric *exemplum* of the Sirens as a warning against the attractions of such study.

<sup>8</sup> For the remainder of this paper, I use the word ‘science’ in order to express what some Greek authors mean by τέχνη. It is often translated as ‘craft’ or ‘art’, but I believe that ‘science’ better captures the technical principles that Plato, the Hippocratic writers, and Longinus aspire to in their respective fields of study. ‘Art’, in its modern usage, often connoting the idea of an ineffable talent or empirical understanding, diverges from the ancient conception of τέχνη in these contexts.

<sup>9</sup> Current scholarly consensus locates this treatise in the first century CE. D. Marin, “L’opposizione sotto Augusto e la datazione del ‘Saggio sul sublime,’” in *Studi in onore di A. Calderini e R. Paribeni* I (Milan 1956) 157–185,

Beginning from Plato's presentation of embodied speech in the *Phaedrus*, I demonstrate the variety of medical metaphors that Imperial critics used to diagnose the ailments of contemporary literature. The latter half of this study, however, focuses on the specifically Hippocratic method of medicine that Socrates recommends in the *Phaedrus* and Longinus' interpretation of this method in the *On the Sublime*. While many critics of the principate adopt medical terminology to describe authorial genius and literary decline, I argue that Longinus takes up the Platonic mandate to apply a Hippocratic method to diseased texts. Penetrating beneath the outer symptoms of the sublime to its internal sources, Longinus constructs critical reading as an act of literary dissection and establishes the expertise of the critic as a technical and teachable discipline.

1. *The somatic rhetoric of literary decline*

"Every speech must be organized like a living creature, having a body of its own, so as not to be headless or footless, but to have a middle and extremities that are composed to fit one another and the whole."<sup>10</sup> Socrates' well-known compari-

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favors an earlier Augustan dating and a possible attribution to Dionysius of Halicarnassus. E. Norden, "Das Genesiszitat in der Schrift vom Erhabenen," *Kleine Schriften zum klassischen Altertum* (Berlin 1966 [1954]) 290, leans towards the mid-first century with a possible attribution to Philo. K. Heldmann, *Antike Theorien über Entwicklung und Verfall der Redekunst* (Munich 1982) 286–293, and M. Heath, "Longinus *On Sublimity*," *PCPhS* 45 (1999) 53, defend later dates, in the second and third centuries respectively. Whether Longinus wrote at the beginning of the first century or the end of the third, his interest in the sublime and scarcity of literary genius places him in direct dialogue with critics and stylists of the early Empire, as argued in C. de Jonge, "The Attic Muse and the Asian Harlot: Classicizing Allegories in Dionysius and Longinus," in J. Ker and C. Pieper (eds.), *Valuing the Past in the Greco-Roman World* (Leiden 2014) 391. In the following section I argue that the deployment of medical language and bodily metaphors in *On the Sublime* roots this treatise more firmly in the first-century preoccupation with sickly speech.

<sup>10</sup> Pl. *Phdr.* 264C: δεῖν πάντα λόγον ὡς περ ζῶον συνεστάναι σῶμά τι ἔχοντα αὐτὸν αὐτοῦ, ὥστε μήτε ἀκέφαλον εἶναι μήτε ἄπουν, ἀλλὰ μέσα τε ἔχειν καὶ ἄκρα, πρέποντ' ἀλλήλοις καὶ τῷ ὅλῳ γεγραμμένα.

son of *logos* and the body in the *Phaedrus* initiated a long tradition of medical metaphors and somatic analogies in ancient discussions of eloquence. Although descriptions of “bloodless” speeches and “swollen” styles would eventually become commonplace by the principate, it was the Platonic corpus that first envisioned speech itself as a living, breathing entity whose survival depended on the harmonious coordination of limbs. Archaic poets and fifth-century sophists had long recognized the ability of *logos* to affect human bodies with delight, distress, and healing.<sup>11</sup> In Plato’s Athens at last, speech received a body of her own, one that required nourishment and exercise, and continued to “speak” long after an orator had passed away.

By the first century of the Roman Empire, however, ancient sources report that the corpus of classical literature had become diseased. Musings on the decay of eloquence appear in a range of genres, from the prose fiction of Petronius to the satires of Persius.<sup>12</sup> One of the earliest descriptions of this process appears in a treatise by the Jewish philosopher Philo. Writing in Alexandria before 50 C.E., he observed that the rhetoricians of his generation had spoiled the once fit physique of speech (*De plantatione* 157–158):

τοὺς μὲν γὰρ λόγους ὑγιαίνοντας καὶ ἐρρωμένους εἰς πάθος ἀνήκεστον καὶ φθορὰν περιήγαγον ἀντὶ σφριγώσης καὶ ἀθλητικῆς ὄντως εὐεξίας οὐδὲν ὅτι μὴ νοσοῦν κατασκευάσαντες καὶ τὸν πλήρη καὶ ναστόν, ὡς ἔφη τις, ὑπ’ εὐτονίας ὄγκον εἰς παρὰ φύσιν οἰδοῦσης καχεξίας ἀγαγόντες καὶ κενῶ φύσῃματι μόνον ἐπαίροντες, ὃ δι’ ἔνδειαν τῆς συνεχούσης δυνάμεως, ὅταν μάλιστα περιταθῆ, ῥήγνυται.

<sup>11</sup> For the therapeutic applications of speech before Plato see A. Roth, *Reciprocal Influences between Rhetoric and Medicine in Ancient Greece* (diss. Univ. of Iowa 2008) 19–41.

<sup>12</sup> Heldmann, *Antike Theorien* ch. 3, provides the most thorough survey of biological models of oratorical decline in Roman literature; he also explores earlier possible sources of these models in Attic and Roman historiography. See also Kennedy, *The Art of Rhetoric* 446–486.

For they have led healthy and vigorous speech round to incurable sickness and death. Instead of a strong and truly athletic condition, there is nothing they do not make diseased. They take a speech that is, so to speak, a full and firm mass due to its vigorous style. Then they turn it into a swollen tumor and elevate it by empty puffing alone, which bursts open when it is most distended because it lacks the strength to hold itself together.

Within a discussion on sobriety and intoxication, Philo enhances the details of Plato's fallen body of speech. The rhetoricians of fifth- and fourth-century Greece trained their *logos* up to fighting form. The athletic condition of Classical rhetoric (ἀθλητικῆς εὐεξίας) bespoke its active role in settling serious matters of state, and the "fullness" of speech matched the intellectual heft of its speakers. In his own day, however, Philo detects an imbalance between form and content. Empty bloating replaces vigor and strength, for speech lacks any real power to anchor its mass.

The *Dialogus* of Tacitus, a key text in discussions on the decline of Imperial rhetoric, connects the body of the speaker still more intimately to his speech. Tacitus repeats familiar sentiments that the style of the man matches the style of his words:<sup>13</sup> Asinius Pollio, in both his tragedies and his orations, remained "stiff and dry" (*durus et siccus*, 21.8). Messalla Corvinus' own faculties of mind and intellect (*vis aut animi aut ingenii*, 21.9) did not afford him the brilliance demanded by the literature of his time. Playing the part of the physician, Tacitus takes these equivalencies a step further by envisioning eloquence as a healthful body (21.8–9):

*oratio autem, sicut corpus hominis, ea demum pulchra est in qua non eminent venae nec ossa numerantur, sed temperatus ac bonus sanguis implet membra et exurgit toris ipsosque nervos rubor tegit et decor commendat.*

But speech is just like the human body: when the veins do not stick out and the bones cannot be counted, it is especially beauti-

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Sen. *Ep.* 114.2: *quemadmodum autem uniuscuiusque actio dicendi similis est, sic genus dicendi aliquando imitatur publicos mores, si disciplina civitatis laboravit et se in delicias dedit.*

ful. Good, steady blood fills the veins and swells the muscles, and a red flush covers the sinews themselves, and external beauty confirms this.

Tacitus too imagines good speech as a robust body with meaty muscles and a ruddy complexion, which confirms the steady flow of blood. Like Philo, he conceives of external features (*rubor, decor*) as signs of internal wellness. But Tacitus departs from Philo in that he envisions bad speech as an emaciated figure rather than a swollen protuberance. Speech reduced to skin-and-bones will not function to its full capacity. In this way, the *Dialogus* suggests that the Roman Empire has been starving (rather than inflating) the body of rhetoric.

Philo's *On the Planting* and Tacitus' *Dialogus* bookend a dialogue that stretches from Augustus through the Flavians about eloquence and its corporeal decay, a conversation in which the critic Longinus certainly participated.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, some of his most memorable sentiments in *On the Sublime* are those that express literary merits and vices in somatic terms. "Tumors are bad both in bodies and in speeches, being hollow and false," he quips in an effort to disambiguate sublimity and swelling.<sup>15</sup> The untrained eye might not be able to distinguish the truly robust mass of the sublime from the sickly distension of the pseudo-tragic (*παραπράγφδα*, 3.1). But Longinus leads us to believe that he, the expert, possesses a method for providing a differential diagnosis. More famous still is Longinus' biological ex-

<sup>14</sup> This is not to say that no critics prior to Philo or subsequent to Tacitus adopt bodily metaphors. Cicero regularly uses the language of health and sanity in relation to eloquence (see *Brut.* 80–82 and 278–284; *De Opt. Gen. Or.* 8 and 11–12). Demetrius and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and then later Hermogenes, employ somatic language of meagerness (*ισχνός*) and stoutness (*ἀδρός*), of bodily strength (*ῥωμή*) and lifelessness (*ἄψυχος*). See L. Van Hook, *The Metaphorical Terminology of Greek Rhetoric and Literary Criticism* (diss. Univ. of Chicago 1905) 18–21, for a catalogue of terms and passages. But the deployment of such terms in relation to a broader discourse of literary decline is concentrated in the first century CE.

<sup>15</sup> *Subl.* 3.4: *κακοὶ δὲ ὄγκοι καὶ ἐπὶ σωμάτων καὶ λόγων οἱ χαῦνοι καὶ ἀναλήθεις*, ed. D. A. Russell (Cambridge [Mass.] 1995).

planation for the sentimentality of the *Odyssey* in contrast to the manly vigor of the *Iliad*: “Homer nevertheless displays throughout the *Odyssey* ... that as great *physis* declines, the love of storytelling becomes characteristic of old age.”<sup>16</sup> In this chapter, Longinus attributes the inferiority of the *Odyssey* to Homer’s aging mind. In doing so, he provides a more subtle account of the relationship between a man’s nature and his speech than the static equivalencies we find in Tacitus. Longinus describes *physis* in more fluid terms and argues that an author’s faculties of speech may fluctuate in tandem with the deterioration of his body.

Longinus’ most sustained engagement with the corporeal qualities of speech appears in the final and fragmentary chapter of *On the Sublime*, which attempts to explain the “universal dearth of literature that pervades our lifetime” (44.2). Acknowledging a certain barrenness (ἀφορία) that has of late beset the literary world, Longinus recalls a dialogue between himself and an unnamed philosopher about its causes. The philosopher, on the one hand, contemplates the familiar explanation that sublime speech cannot thrive in an imperial habitat. If democracy and political antagonism foster literary genius, then repressed speech encloses the statesman in a mental prison. To this philosopher Longinus attributes the vivid simile of a confined pygmy: “The boxes (τὰ γλωττόκομα) in which pygmies are raised (or dwarves, as they are called) not only stunt their growth, but weaken them by applying chains to their bodies. Thus one could reason that all slavery, even the most lawful kind, is a box for the soul (ψυχῆς γλωττόκομον), a common prison” (44.5–6). In this simile, the philosopher describes a process that stunts the body and the soul through constriction. The *glōssokomon*, literally “tongue-box,” limits the growth and movement of its captive. A similar method for producing miniature pets is described in the Aristotelian *Problemata* (10.12 [892a]), which reasons that dwarf creatures result either from a lack of nourishment or a lack of space. Longinus’ philosopher

<sup>16</sup> *Subl.* 9.11; see also 9.13–15.

subscribes to the latter theory as an explanation for the microcephalic minds of his generation. All men remain slaves under the confines of imperial rule and their souls never fully mature.

Longinus, on the other hand, favors a different explanation for the shortage of literary geniuses in his epoch. Rejecting the consensus that contemporary political systems are to blame, he argues, “It is our love of money, by which we are all now insatiably sickened, and our love of pleasure, that enslave us ... For avarice is a shrinking disease (νόσημα μικροποιόν) and self-indulgence a most sordid one.”<sup>17</sup> Repeating the popular refrain of avarice as ailment,<sup>18</sup> Longinus depicts greed as a sweeping sickness that gradually incapacitates the infected population. Men of the modern day are wholly overtaken by their love of material wealth, which diminishes the healthy soul. Longinus goes on to describe this gradual decay and death of the soul (φθίνειν δὲ καὶ καταμαραίνεσθαι, 44.8), as mankind privileges ephemeral pleasures over immortal greatness. In this way, he revises his interlocutor’s political explanation for the decline of rhetoric by reimagining modern men as slaves to their own passions, the willing victims of a pandemic. Although Longinus adopts a more cynical view of mankind than the philosopher, his counterargument also creates the possibility of a solution: if speakers can once more turn their attention to the lasting greatness of literature and philosophy, sublime speech will thrive again.<sup>19</sup>

This debate between external and internal causes is emblematic of a widespread etiology of literary decline in the

<sup>17</sup> *Subl.* 44.6–7: ἡ γὰρ φιλοχρηματία, πρὸς ἣν ἅπαντες ἀπλήστως ἤδη νοσοῦμεν, καὶ ἡ φιληδονία δουλαγωγούσι ... φιλαργυρία μὲν <γὰρ> νόσημα μικροποιόν, φιληδονία δ’ ἀγεννέστατον.

<sup>18</sup> On discussions of luxury and moral decline predating Longinus see C. Mazzucchi, *Dionisio Longino Del Sublime* (Milan 2010) 304–305.

<sup>19</sup> On the contrast between the philosopher’s determinist view of political decline and Longinus’ developmental view of human nature see D. A. Russell, “Longinus Revisited,” *Mnemosyne* 34 (1981) 83–84, and Heath, “Longinus and the Ancient Sublime,” in T. Costelloe (ed.), *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge 2012) 21–22.

principate. At the end of the first book of his *History*, Velleius Paterculus considers the reasons why literary genius blossoms in certain generations and withers in others. Noting that great authors of each genre tend to emerge in rapid succession, he hypothesizes that rivalry fosters talent (*alio aemulatio ingenia*, 1.17.6). But as each genre climbs to the point of perfection, newcomers despair of their chances of improving upon predecessors and seek new avenues for their talents (*materiam quaerit novam*). Quintilian too, before completing his landmark *Orator's Education*, composed an entire treatise entitled *On the Causes of Eloquence's Corruption*. This book is now lost, but we get a sense of its arguments in the later books of the *Orator's Education*, which denounce the “decadent style of speaking” so popular among Roman youth. Quintilian identifies as telltale characteristics of this style “swelling with excessive distension (*inmodico tumore turgescit*), frenzy for useless subjects, or shiny ornamentation that collapses if shaken even lightly.”<sup>20</sup> In this definition, Quintilian acknowledges the debauched literary styles of his time and borrows from familiar nosographic terminology to do so. But it is not the case that Quintilian accepted the degenerative theories of eloquence espoused by Philo and Velleius Paterculus. Rather, the purpose of the *Orator's Education* is to show how, with the proper course of training, modern speakers can rival the orators of Classical Athens and Republican Rome.<sup>21</sup>

Because it is primarily Latin authors, such as Velleius and Quintilian, who conduct the most extensive investigations into the causes of literary decline in the early Empire, one might reasonably conclude that this diagnostic activity was a particularly Roman preoccupation.<sup>22</sup> Longinus represents something of

<sup>20</sup> *Inst.* 12.10.73: *aut inmodico tumore turgescit aut inanibus locis bacchatur aut casuris si leviter excutiantur flosculis nitet.*

<sup>21</sup> *Inst.* 10.1.122. Kennedy, *The Art of Rhetoric* 495: “References to the *De causis* do not seem to justify regarding it as a general assessment of the state of oratory like that in Tacitus’ *Dialogus*. Though Quintilian saw corrupted literary style around him, his whole point of view is strongly against admitting any general decline in eloquence or literature.”

<sup>22</sup> On the role of medicine and medical discourse in the transition from

an anomaly as a Greek critic who not only anthropomorphizes eloquence, but also searches for the sources of its undoing.<sup>23</sup> One possible explanation for this is that Longinus wanted to engage readers of the Roman West, rather than fellow Greek-speakers in the Eastern Empire. *On the Sublime* is dedicated to a Roman recipient, the otherwise unknown Postumius Terentianus. In addition, scholars have postulated that the debate on literary decline described in chapter 44 of *On the Sublime* actually took place in the city of Rome, between Longinus and the philosopher Philo himself. This meeting would have occurred when Philo visited Rome as part of an embassy to Caligula,<sup>24</sup> and would certainly have been of interest to Roman intellectuals.

In this section, I have tried to flesh out the broader literary-historical context in which Longinus writes: a century of self-conscious inquiry into the symptoms and sources of literary decline in the Roman Empire. It is clear from his deployment of somatic analogies and the diagnostic debate in *On the Sublime* that Longinus was both aware of and invested in the same questions of causation and cure as his Roman contemporaries. What distinguishes him from fellow critics in this period, however, is his interest in the methods, and not merely the language, of the physician. In the following section, we return to the *Phaedrus* to see how Plato first conceptualized the relationship between medicine and rhetoric. For Longinus' conception of the critic *qua*

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late Republican to Augustan Rome see J. Hawkins, *The Poetics of Medicine in Augustan Epic: Therapoetics after Actium* (diss. Stanford 2006) 15–49, and the introductory chapter to her *Therapoetics after Actium: Narrative, Medicine, and Authority in Augustan Epic* (forthcoming, Johns Hopkins Press).

<sup>23</sup> Apart from Philo and Longinus, there is little discussion of literary decline among Imperial Greek authors. Plut. *Prae.ger.reip.* 10 (805A–B) claims that there are fewer opportunities for the rhetorician to employ speech in democratic political action, but this does not necessitate a decline in oratory. Furthermore Pernot, *Rhetoric in Antiquity* 130, notes the optimistic attitudes of the Greek rhetorician Dionysius of Halicarnassus and his successors in the Second Sophistic.

<sup>24</sup> See G. Goold, “A Greek Professorial Circle at Rome,” *TAPA* 92 (1961) 174, and Mazzucchi, *Dionisio Longino Del Sublime* 313–320.

physician is rooted in the Platonic understanding of the Hippocratic method.

## 2. *Plato and the Hippocratic method*

Plato's picture of embodied speech with all its fingers and toes may have been the *Phaedrus*' most memorable contribution to the rhetoric of literary decline in first-century Rome. But in the latter half of the *Phaedrus*, Plato conducts a more theoretical inquiry into whether medical methods for studying the body can provide a model for rhetoric. This line of questioning begins when Socrates and Phaedrus contemplate a flaw in previous treatises on rhetoric: while authors like Theodorus, Prodicus, and Polus have identified techniques for delivering powerful speeches, they do not explain how to deploy them to the desired effect (268A–B). By way of analogy, Socrates asks Phaedrus to imagine a person who claims to be a physician because he knows which drugs cause heating and cooling in the body, and which induce vomiting and defecation. But if the same person is ignorant about which patients should receive such drugs, and when and in what quantity to apply them, then he should not be called a physician but a madman. “Because he read from some book or stumbled across some medicine, he thinks he is a physician,” Phaedrus agrees, “when in fact he has no understanding of the science.”<sup>25</sup> In response, Socrates proposes one criterion that distinguishes the physician from the pseudo-physician: the depth of his knowledge. While the physician understands the science of medicine (τὰ ἰατρικά, 269A), his imitator understands only the “necessary preliminaries” (τὰ πρὸ ἰατρικῆς ἀναγκαῖα).

The degree of difference in learning between physician and the pseudo-physician is only part of the picture, however. As a second criterion, Socrates proposes that the true physician must undertake a systematic study of nature, the precondition for all sciences. “The manner of the science of medicine is like that of the science of rhetoric,” Socrates famously insists.<sup>26</sup> Both fields

<sup>25</sup> *Phdr.* 268C: ἐκ βιβλίου ποθὲν ἀκούσας ἢ περιτυχὼν φαρμακίους ἰατρὸς οἶται γεγονέναι, οὐδὲν ἐπαίῳ τῆς τέχνης.

<sup>26</sup> *Phdr.* 270B: ὁ αὐτός που τρόπος τέχνης ἰατρικῆς, ὅσπερ καὶ ῥητορικῆς.

demand a definition of *physis*—the natures of the body and the soul respectively—and should proceed by technical expertise and not empirical evidence alone (τριβῆ μόνον καὶ ἐμπειρία, 270B). Socrates likens the empirical method to the progress of blind and deaf men, who grope for the truth by trial and error. Into this group he lumps pseudo-physicians. The true physician and true rhetorician, in contrast, must define the various natures of the soul and the body. They divide natures into different categories and analyze what different types of men result from these natures. They observe that the same practices produce different results in different people. Speech that persuades one type of man will not necessarily win over another, just as the same drug creates different outcomes in different bodies.

As a paradigm for his ideal rhetorician in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates adopts Hippocrates, the founding father of medical science. Socrates' descriptions of the famous doctor resonate with parts of the Hippocratic corpus. Socrates' analogy of the pseudo-physician who dispenses drugs irresponsibly, for example, echoes arguments in chapter five of the *Science of Medicine* about the correct and incorrect applications of remedies. And his insistence on the classification of souls and speeches, as Mark Schiefsky has noted, resembles chapters in the Hippocratic treatise *On Ancient Medicine*: chapters 3 and 20 emphasize that the doctor must define categories of human constitutions and their reactions to various foods, drinks, and medications.<sup>27</sup> Finally, Stephen Pender has linked Socrates' emphasis on the knowledge "of the whole" to the Hippocratic conception of mental sight, by which "raw (subjective) symptoms are translated into meaningful (objective) signs [and] probable sign inference becomes the main constituent of diagnosis, prognosis, and retrospection."<sup>28</sup> There is no need here to determine how accurately Plato understood Greek medical practice, or even

<sup>27</sup> M. Schiefsky, *Hippocrates On Ancient Medicine* (Leiden 2005) 67–68.

<sup>28</sup> S. Pender, "Between Medicine and Rhetoric," *Early Science and Medicine* 10 (2005) 47.

which Hippocratic treatises (if any) he had read.<sup>29</sup> What is important is that Plato does not simply use medicine as a metaphor, but engages the field as a serious model for literary criticism. Furthermore, he identifies the best medical practices with the Hippocratic school of thought.

One aspect of the Hippocratic method that must have appealed to Plato was its preference for natural etiologies of disease instead of magico-religious approaches to the body. Socrates and Phaedrus are trying to dispel supernatural ontologies of speech and to demystify the persuasive power that the sophist wields over the human soul. Speech should no longer function like Gorgias' "divine spells" with the twin techniques of "witchcraft and magic" at their disposal (γοητείας δὲ καὶ μαγείας δισσαι τέχναι).<sup>30</sup> Instead, Socrates seeks to turn speech into a science in which practitioners understand its invisible workings and true causes. If previous rhetoricians like Theodorus and Prodicus were mere spell-casters, then Socrates' 'Hippocratic' rhetorician is meant to be a genuine healer of the soul.

As a point of comparison, we might juxtapose Plato's discussion of pseudo-rhetoricians with the description of pseudo-physicians in the Hippocratic *On the Sacred Disease*.<sup>31</sup> In the

<sup>29</sup> Plato's acquaintance with the Hippocratic corpus, and particularly Socrates' suggestion that the Hippocratic physician has an understanding of "the whole" (τῆς τοῦ ὅλου φύσεως, 270c) has been a source of debate since Galen. J. Mansfeld, "Plato and the Method of Hippocrates," *GRBS* 21 (1980) 341–362, analyzes the Platonic understanding of Hippocrates and links this to *Airs, Waters, Places*. See G. Lloyd, *Methods and Problems in Greek Science* (Cambridge 1991) 196–203, for a summary of scholarship on the issue and his own skepticism concerning Plato's knowledge of Hippocratic medicine. More recently, S. Levin, *Plato's Rivalry with Medicine: A Struggle and its Dissolution* (Oxford 2014) 41–51, addresses Plato's engagement with the Hippocratic corpus in the *Gorgias*, although not in the *Phaedrus*.

<sup>30</sup> *Gorg.* *Hel.* 10. On the triangulation of speech, drugs, and magic in Gorgias see J. de Romilly, *Magic and Rhetoric in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1975) 11–22, and D. Roochnik, *Of Art and Wisdom: Plato's Understanding of Techne* (University Park 1996) 71–74.

<sup>31</sup> I emphasize here that I do not argue that Plato read or was influenced

prologue, the Hippocratic author investigates how epilepsy received its reputation as a divinely inflicted ailment (2.1–5): “The first people to consecrate this disease, it seems to me, are the sorts of men like our current magicians, purifiers, charlatans, and quacks, men who indeed pretend to be very religious and to know something more.” The Hippocratic author first attacks these false physicians with charges of impiety: if a disease is truly caused by the gods, it cannot be healed by human arts. Any suggestion otherwise implies superiority over the gods and thus impiety (4.11–16). He also argues that if certain diseases were truly divine, then traditional religion would be their only cure: “They ought to treat these people ... by sacrificing and praying and bringing them to the shrines to supplicate the gods” (4.40–42). Ultimately, the author rejects divine causation and demonstrates his superior piety in the process: scientific medicine proceeds on the understanding that diseases do not result from the will of a god, but from natural causes.

The second and more damning charge that the author levels against such pseudo-physicians is their pretense to know “something more” (πλέον τι). According to the Hippocratic author, this knowledge consists of little more than empirical guesses: “If [patients] imitate a goat, and if they bellow or spasm on the right side, they say that the Mother of the Gods is to blame. If [a patient] cries out sharply and loudly, they compare him to a horse, and they say that Poseidon is to blame” (4.21–25). This diagnostic method is a simple matching game that pairs symptoms with the attributes of the gods. To treat individual symptoms, false healers prescribe a dizzying array of purifications, incantations, the consumption of rare fish and birds, superstitions, and baths (or the avoidance thereof). The

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specifically by *On the Sacred Disease*. J. Laskaris, *The Art is Long: On the Sacred Disease and the Scientific Tradition* (Leiden 2002) 60, in fact demonstrates that Plato’s conception of epilepsy was at odds with the explanation of the Hippocratic author. Rather, I am interested in the parallels of sophistic styling of experts and their imitators, and the definition of *technē* in both treatises.

Hippocratic author's aversion to such treatments is not necessarily that they are ineffective, but that they are random. Much like Socrates' groping blind men, the pseudo-physician may occasionally stumble upon a true cure. Empirical medicine, as Plato understands it, strives only to treat the external symptoms; Hippocratic medicine understands symptoms as manifestations of deeper natural causes.

The search for *physis* draws the Hippocratic author deep into the inner workings of the body. In the case of epilepsy, the brain specifically is at fault: "the brain is responsible (αἴτιος) for this condition, as well as for other more serious diseases" (6.1–3). Thus for the Hippocratic author, *aitia* becomes the internal location of the body where the disease first appears. In chapters 8–9 he claims that a fetus' head must be purged of impurities before birth; otherwise, the brain suffers melting in the womb and phlegm manifests itself in the child's head. On the other hand, he concedes that epilepsy impacts different people in different ways, and with different chances of fatality depending on their natures. Children, we learn, usually die from epilepsy; the small size of their veins cannot endure the flood of phlegm that congeals the blood (11). The elderly can also die from epilepsy because the watery quality of their blood makes it difficult to combat phlegm (12).

If the Hippocratic author quickly pinpoints the abnormal brain as the internal locus of epilepsy, he nevertheless devotes a great deal of time to describing its external symptoms. Chapter 10 catalogues the most common symptoms of the epileptic: the patient becomes speechless and senseless, the hands are paralyzed, the eyes roll, the mouth foams, and the legs kick. For each symptom listed, the author describes the internal mechanisms (liver, diaphragm, lungs, etc.) that incite them. As human dissection was not practiced until the Hellenistic period, the Hippocratic doctors of Plato's generation relied almost solely on observable symptoms to identify internal causes. Looking past the external signs of epilepsy through to the internal impulses, the doctor understands the whole of the body to account for its various workings.

As a single constituent of the substantial and occasionally contradictory Hippocratic tradition, *On the Sacred Disease* cannot be taken as representative of the attitudes or practices of all Hippocratic physicians in Classical Greece. This is especially true in light of research on the sophistic context of the treatise's production and reception.<sup>32</sup> But the text does distill a new technical orientation in the practice of medicine that casts aside the magic and mystery of the divine healing in favor of a systematic study of causes, cures, and their effects on the human body. It is precisely this turn towards the technical that Plato seizes upon in the *Phaedrus*. In Socrates' interpretation, the Hippocratic rhetorician sees beyond the superficial powers of his speech and peers into the souls of the men he addresses. By turning to a Hippocratic method, the ability to "lead souls" (ψυχαγωγία) serves no longer to beguile listeners, but to lead them towards a deeper understanding of the self, from the inside out.<sup>33</sup>

### 3. *The quack and the critic*

Returning from the intersection of medicine and rhetoric in Classical Athens to first-century Rome, we observe how the Platonic ideal of the rhetorician-physician culminates in Imperial descriptions of literary decline. Philo, Quintilian, Tacitus—all these authors, in different ways, play the doctor and diagnose deeper political-cultural causes of corrupted eloquence. Among this multitude, I argue, Longinus stands out for his engagement with the specific model of the Hippocratic rhetorician he inherited from Plato. To begin, there is good reason to believe that Longinus was a close reader of the *Phaedrus* in particular, and not simply the generalities of Platonic literary

<sup>32</sup> Laskaris, *The Art is Long* 83–93.

<sup>33</sup> See E. Asmis, "Psychagogia in Plato's *Phaedrus*," *ICS* 11 (1986) 156–157, on the definition of *psychagogia* in the *Phaedrus*: "Socrates gradually develops the view that genuine rhetoric is an art by which a speaker guides another to the truth by adjusting his words to the other's soul. Rhetoric no longer appears as a pseudo-art of deception, but is shown to be an art of teaching individuals to discover the truth about themselves."

criticism.<sup>34</sup> In chapter 40, for example, Longinus reiterates the structural metaphor from *Phaedrus* 264C, that the parts of a well-composed speech operate like coordinated limbs of the body.<sup>35</sup> Scholarship on Longinus has uncovered other passages that evoke images and arguments from the *Phaedrus*. Robert Doran notes the influence of *Phaedrus* 269D in Longinus' warnings about the dangers of untrained genius.<sup>36</sup> James Porter has argued that Longinus' analysis of the Homeric horses of heaven (9) playfully alludes to the *Phaedrus*' allegory of the chariot.<sup>37</sup> These Platonic echoes highlight the *Phaedrus* as a key point of departure for Longinus and indicate that he read this dialogue carefully (among others in the Platonic corpus) in his attempt to render scientific criticism.

Our first clue that Longinus is responding to the *Phaedrus*' comparison of Hippocratic physicians and rhetoricians is in the prologue to *On the Sublime*. Here Longinus, like Socrates and the Hippocratic author before him, articulates the gap between experts and their imitators. The first sentence of his treatise targets Caecilius, whose study of sublimity failed on two accounts.<sup>38</sup> First, Caecilius failed to define sublimity (τοῦ δεῖξαι τί τὸ ὑποκείμενον, 1.1). Second, and more egregiously, he did not

<sup>34</sup> For Longinus' philosophical influences see C. Segal, "'ΥΨΟΣ and the Problem of Cultural Decline in the *De Sublimitate*," *HSCP* 64 (1959) 137–139.

<sup>35</sup> *Subl.* 40.1: ἐν δὲ τοῖς μάλιστα μεγεθοποιεῖ τὰ λεγόμενα, καθάπερ τὰ σώματα ἢ τῶν μελῶν ἐπισύνθεσις, ὧν ἓν μὲν οὐδὲν τμηθὲν ἀφ' ἑτέρου καθ' ἑαυτὸ ἀξιόλογον ἔχει, πάντα δὲ μετ' ἀλλήλων ἐκπληροῖ τέλειον σύστημα— a Platonic echo also noted by Y. Too, *The Idea of Ancient Literary Criticism* (Oxford 1999) 196.

<sup>36</sup> R. Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime from Longinus to Kant* (Cambridge 2015) 52, on *Subl.* 2.2–3.

<sup>37</sup> J. Porter, *The Sublime in Antiquity* (Cambridge 2016) 579. C. de Jonge, "Dionysius and Longinus on the Sublime: Rhetoric and Religious Language," *Trends in Classics* 5 (2013) 318–340, detects another reference to the *Phaedrus* in *Subl.* 36.3, in which Longinus responds to an unnamed writer on the "faulty colossus."

<sup>38</sup> Caecilius of Caleacte, rhetorician at the end of the first century BCE, whose own treatise *On the Sublime* is known to us only through Longinus.

demonstrate how his readers could reproduce the effects of sublimity in their own writing. The treatise by Caecilius does not survive, but it is likely that it resembled a collection of sublime instances with little discussion of their poetic qualities.<sup>39</sup> In this sense, Longinus characterizes his rival as being like the pseudo-physician in Plato's *Phaedrus*: Caecilius the pseudo-critic knows which techniques produce which effects. But he neither inquires into the true nature of the sublime nor does he understand the sublime as a whole; he cannot therefore apply these effects in a systematic way or teach others to do so.<sup>40</sup>

Even Caecilius' flawed attempts to teach the sublime, however, are preferable to a second class of readers described by Longinus. In a passage often regarded as the theoretical crux of *On the Sublime*, Longinus defends the science of criticism to those who think literary genius cannot be systematized: "We must first raise the question whether the sublime is a certain science (*technē*) ... For some people say that lofty genius comes into being untaught and that there is only one technique for producing it. Works of nature, they are convinced, are made worse and utterly demeaned when they are wasted away by systematic treatments" (ταῖς τεχνολογίαις κατασκελετευόμενα).<sup>41</sup> Here Longinus identifies a group of anti-critics who, in contrast to the pseudo-critics, regard literary sublimity as a naturally-occurring quality beyond the grasp of scientific study. Genius is born, not made. What is more, genius is ruined when

<sup>39</sup> E. Olson, "The Argument of Longinus' *On the Sublime*," *Modern Philology* 39 (1942) 231, summarizes: "Caecilius has utterly failed ... he has sought to define the sublime by the mere collection of instances of sublimity; this is useless, either for a theoretical or for a practical inquiry."

<sup>40</sup> The ability to reproduce positive and negative effects with treatment is an important qualification of rational medicine, as the Hippocratic author insists in *Morb.sacr.* 3.9–12, ed. W. H. S. Jones (Cambridge [Mass.] 1923).

<sup>41</sup> *Subl.* 2.1: ἡμῖν δ' ἐκεῖνο διαπορητέον ἐν ἀρχῇ, εἰ ἔστιν ὕψους τις ἢ βάρους τέχνη ... γεννᾶται γάρ, φησί, τὰ μεγαλοφυῆ καὶ οὐ διδακτὰ παραγίνεται, καὶ μία τέχνη πρὸς αὐτὰ τὸ πεφυκέναι· χεῖρω τε τὰ φυσικὰ ἔργα, ὡς οἴονται, καὶ τῷ παντὶ δειλότερα καθίσταται ταῖς τεχνολογίαις κατασκελετευόμενα.

subjected to technical study. It is striking how very counter to the principles of the *Phaedrus* this line of thinking runs. Socrates establishes the study of nature as a prerequisite for all great sciences. Indeed, the scientific fields of medicine and rhetoric could not fulfill their stated purposes of improving the body and the soul without first defining the various natures of these entities. But Longinus' anti-critics segregate the natural and the scientific, two fields that the *Phaedrus* had bound closely together.

There are no exact parallels for the anti-critic in the matrix of practitioners in the *Phaedrus* and *On the Sacred Disease*, and this is not altogether surprising. We can easily imagine literary connoisseurs who do not want to spoil their sublime experience with theory or analysis. Longinus' use of the word *kataskelēteuomena*, literally "reduced to a skeleton,"<sup>42</sup> implies the worst sort of medical intervention, leaving nothing but the bare bones of a lifeless body. We are unlikely, however, to find equivalent 'connoisseurs' of disease, spectators who prefer to watch an infection without trying to understand its progress. But do Longinus' anti-critics have grounds for opposing a science of sublimity? After all, the Hippocratic physician uses medical theory to remove disease; in correctly diagnosing the sources and symptoms of the sublime, does Longinus too run the risk of eliminating it? The parallel here between doctor and critic raises a quiet but long-acknowledged insecurity about the power of literary theory, that in the process of identifying the internal causes of the sublime, the critic actually destroys it.

In response to these concerns, Longinus asserts a constructive relationship between nature and science, in which systematic study nurtures and steadies natural genius. Not only does nature operate in accord its own sort of method, he argues, but is even improved with technical intervention (2.2):

<sup>42</sup> D. A. Russell, *Longinus' On the Sublime* (Oxford 1964) 64. Compare Isoc. *Antid.* 15.268: μή μέντοι περιδεῖν τήν αὐτῶν κατασκελετευθεῖσαν ἐπὶ τούτοις. Here Isocrates uses the uncommon word to express concerns about the desiccation of young men's minds by the study of philosophy.

εἰ ἐπισκέψαιτό τις ὅτι ἡ φύσις, ὡσπερ τὰ πολλὰ ἐν τοῖς παθητικοῖς καὶ διηρμένοις αὐτόνομον, οὕτως οὐκ εἰκαλίον τι κάκ παντὸς ἀμέθοδον εἶναι φιλεῖ· καὶ ὅτι αὕτη μὲν πρῶτόν τι καὶ ἀρχέτυπον γενέσεως στοιχεῖον ἐπὶ πάντων ὑφέστηκεν, τὰς δὲ ποσότητος καὶ τὸν ἐφ' ἐκάστου καιρὸν ἔτι δὲ τὴν ἀπλανεστάτην ἄσκησίν τε καὶ χρῆσιν ἱκανῆ πορίσαι καὶ συνενεγκεῖν ἢ μέθοδος· καὶ ὡς ἐπικινδυνότερα αὐτὰ ἐφ' αὐτῶν δίχα ἐπιστήμης ἀστήρικτα καὶ ἀνερμάτιστα ἐαθέντα τὰ μεγάλα, ἐπὶ μόνῃ τῇ φορᾷ καὶ ἀμαθεῖ τόλμῃ λειπόμενα·

One should consider that even as nature is inclined to govern itself in matters of emotion and elevation, neither does it usually work at random or entirely devoid of method. Nature, on the one hand, exists as the first and archetypal element of production in all things, but method is capable of providing and contributing in matters of quantity, of appropriate timing, and the most accurate rules of practice and use. Greatness runs a greater risk when left to its own devices, unsupported by the ballast of scientific knowledge, left only to impulse and foolish daring.

In this passage, Longinus envisions nature and science working together towards the perfection of sublime speech. So vigorously does he defend the value of science for the study of literature that he characterizes nature as operating according to some method of its own (αὐτόνομον, οὐκ ... ἀμέθοδον). Scholars have traditionally looked to this passage, along with the description of sublime sources in chapter 8, in order to determine whether Longinus gives the ultimate place of priority to science or nature. But the more significant question at stake, as James Porter has argued, is “why art is necessary at all, and whether nature could ever produce sublimity on its own.”<sup>43</sup> The answer Longinus offers here is that while nature produces all the necessary components of sublime speech, it nevertheless requires science to make them effective—and safe. Without the steadying force of science, genius runs the risk of becoming bombast: Philo’s swollen tumor with no substance to support its

<sup>43</sup> Porter, *The Sublime in Antiquity* 66.

weight. Here the descriptions of dangerous healers in both the *Phaedrus* and *On the Sacred Disease* loom large. Any fool can lay his hands on drugs or a diseased body, both products of nature. But without training in the science of medicine, he runs the risk of doing greater harm than good.

#### 4. *The ins and outs of sublime speech*

In countering the anti-critics and differentiating himself from pseudo-critics like Caecilius, Longinus reinforces the *Phaedrus*' message that sublime speech needs technical expertise—even more so in the state of literary decay thought to characterize the Roman Empire. A long tradition of hypnotic sophistry induced Plato's call for rhetoricians to embrace a Hippocratic method, but Longinus believed himself to be facing a full-blown epidemic of grandiloquence. For this reason, one fruitful way to revisit *On the Sublime* is as a medical treatise: it sets out to define the “symptoms” and “sources” of good and bad speech, and explains how to treat these naturally occurring phenomena with technical precision.

In exploring a medical reading of *On the Sublime*, *On the Sacred Disease* can once more provide a helpful model. This is not because Longinus had necessarily read *On the Sacred Disease*, which was not especially well-known to Imperial readers, despite its modern renown.<sup>44</sup> But the experience of an epileptic seizure and a sublime moment might not have been so disparate from the perspective of the ‘patient’. In the midst of an epileptic episode, the Hippocratic author tells us, the patient appears to vacate his own body: he loses control of his mouth and his speech, his eyesight and limbs, and even conscious thought (*On the Sacred Disease* 10). In a similar sense, Longinus describes an encounter with the sublime in terms of *ekplēxis* and *ekstasis*: hearing sublime speech initiates an out-of-body experience. “The conditions of sublime ecstasy,” as Stephen Halliwell notes, “are so overwhelming as to leave the mind no control

<sup>44</sup> Laskaris, *The Art is Long* 60–62.

over its own response.”<sup>45</sup> Although the sublime experience is not equivalent to a seizure, it is illuminating to juxtapose shared lines of inquiry and methodologies between *On the Sacred Disease* and *On the Sublime*. Both treatises are trying to explain invisible phenomena that displace the ‘patient’ from rational consciousness. Both treatises try to articulate the expertise of the physician/critic that makes these phenomena intelligible. And they do so in opposition to a purported consensus that such phenomena are beyond the scope of science.

The second section of this paper called attention to the spatial terms in which the *Phaedrus* and *On the Sacred Disease* distinguished scientific models of medicine and rhetoric from their predecessors. Central to this distinction was the juxtaposition of external, conspicuous symptoms and internal, invisible causes. While any spectator could observe overt signs of sickness and even recommend a course of treatment, the science of the expert lay in his ability to “see within” to the true nature of the patient. In this section, I argue that Longinus adopts this diagnostic distinction of internal and external in his search for the sublime. Not only does his treatise constitute a pioneering technical treatment of literary elevation, but it also defends the critic as a scientific practitioner on an equal footing with the physician.

Immediately following his defense of literary criticism as a science in chapter 2, Longinus addresses literary styles that are occasionally mistaken for the sublime. Among these flawed styles are the pseudo-tragic, the puerile, the pseudo-sentimental, and the frigid (3–4). It is striking how many of these literary terms have an embodied dimension: bad style can balloon like

<sup>45</sup> S. Halliwell, *Between Ecstasy and Truth: Interpretations of Greek Poetics from Homer to Longinus* (Oxford 2011) 333, who qualifies this irrationality as “a powerful intersubjectivity,” a collective experience of the psychological compulsion of the great literature. Or does Longinus understand sublime ecstasy as a religious experience, in the same way as novice physicians regard epilepsy as a divine disease? On the religious terms of sublime ecstasy see C. de Jonge, “Dionysius and Longinus on the Sublime: Rhetoric and Religious Language,” *AJP* (2012) 277–281.

a tumor (τὸ οἰδοῦν), remain stunted in a childlike state (τὸ μαιρακιῶδες), or chill the listener (τοῦ ψυχροῦ).<sup>46</sup> Longinus also highlights examples of these flaws in earlier Greek authors, and emphasizes the ease with which novices can misinterpret them as signs of the sublime. Hellenistic authors like Hegesias and Matris, for example, believed they were inspired, but were really just “playing at it” (παίζουσιν, 3.2). Other imitators of the sublime mistake it for sentimentality, likening the sublime experience to inebriation.

Part of the challenge such authors face is that flawed styles originate from failed attempts at the sublime—styles that either overshoot or fall short of the mark. Longinus sets forth this thesis more explicitly in chapter 5, when he argues that our good and bad qualities spring from the same place.<sup>47</sup> The pseudo-tragic style, for example, results from excessive or misplaced grandiloquence: as the writer piles on lofty phrases, his speech inflates with empty air. The paradoxical nature of this—that excessive eloquence simply sinks into the banal—prompts Longinus to introduce the adage that “nothing is dryer than the man with dropsy.”<sup>48</sup> He qualifies the phrase as a popular saying with the verb *phasi*, and indeed a number of ancient sources confirm this medical contradiction: the tissue of the patient swells with interstitial fluid, and yet he suffers from insatiable thirst.<sup>49</sup> Thus Longinus envisions the pseudo-tragic

<sup>46</sup> C. Segal, “Writer as Hero: The Heroic Ethos in Longinus, *On the Sublime*,” in J. Servais et al. (eds.), *Stemmata: mélanges de philologie, d’histoire et d’archéologie grecques offerts à Jules Labarbe* (Liège 1987) 214–215, observes that Longinus penalizes texts that explicitly mention bodily processes or entrails. But authors like Plato and Demosthenes who allegorize the organs and other body parts to communicate philosophical and moral messages are praised. Perhaps the association of low literary styles and somatic attributes is meant to reinforce Longinus’ link between tastelessness and bodily functions in literary contexts.

<sup>47</sup> *Subl.* 5.1: ἀφ’ ὧν γὰρ ἡμῖν τὰ γαθὰ, σχεδὸν ἀπ’ αὐτῶν τούτων καὶ τὰ κακὰ γεννᾶσθαι φιλεῖ.

<sup>48</sup> *Subl.* 3.4: οὐδὲν γάρ, φασί, ξηρότερον ὑδρωπικοῦ.

<sup>49</sup> For example Hippoc. *Int.* 26 and Hor. *Carm.* 2.2.13–16.

writer as a dropsy victim, drowning himself in bombast without recognizing that every swallow makes his limbs swell.

*On the Sublime* is the only ancient source to use dropsy as a metaphor for bad literary style. Dropsy was, however, analogous in the ancient imagination with avarice. In Polybius, for example, Scopas of Aetolia cannot satisfy his greed with new wealth any more than the dropsy patient can quench his thirst by ingesting more liquid (13.2.2). Ovid repeats a similar warning: “Riches have grown and with them the rabid desire for riches ... Just so are those whose bellies swell from dropsy: the more they drink, the more they thirst.”<sup>50</sup> By co-opting the dropsy-avarice metaphor to describe the pseudo-tragic style, Longinus lays the groundwork for his argument in the final chapter of *On the Sublime*: greed, not empire, is to blame for the decline of eloquence.<sup>51</sup> Men’s bad stylistic habits match their bad behavior, as a sickness of the soul overtakes speakers of the principate.

If the craft of the sublime speaker lies in his ability to apply the right techniques at the right times in the right amounts, then the science of the critic rests on the ability to tell truly sublime speech from its imposters. But as Longinus himself concedes, “A clear knowledge and determination of what is truly sublime ... is a difficult thing to grasp” (6.1). Although he claims that literary judgment can come from long experience (πολλῆς πείρας), he also strives to provide a technical definition of the sublime: “Perhaps it is not impossible to provide a *diagnōsis* of these things” (6.1). At the core of its definition, *diagnōsis* is differentiation, and thus *On the Sublime* devotes as much attention to showing readers what the sublime is not as

<sup>50</sup> *Fast.* 1.211–216: *creverunt et opes et opum furiosa cupido ... sic quibus intumuit suffusa venter ab unda, quo plus sunt potae, plus sitiuntur aquae.*

<sup>51</sup> D. Innes, “Longinus: Structure and Unity,” in A. Laird (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Ancient Literary Criticism* (Oxford 2006 [1995]) 308–310, analyzes the structure of *On the Sublime* and shows that many themes in the final chapter of the treatise, especially freedom and enslavement, are also planted in the early chapters.

what the sublime is.

The most important precept in this diagnosis of the sublime is the need to penetrate beneath the surface of speech to its essence. In chapter 7, Longinus cautions that “certain works have the appearance of grandeur (μεγέθους φαντασίαν), plastered on without purpose (προσαναπλαττόμενον); but once these works are laid open (ἀναπτυττόμενα), they are found otherwise spongy (εὐρίσκοιτο χαῶνα).”<sup>52</sup> On the one hand, “plastering” prompts the image of flawed speech as a badly built wall with a thin coating applied. But the latter half of the sentence, which tells us to open up texts and expose their innards, evokes a sort of literary autopsy. The critic cuts into the cavities of a speech and exposes the rotten matter within. The adjective *chaunos* makes a frequent appearance in the Hippocratic corpus to describe edematous tissues. Women’s chests are “spongy” from inactivity, by comparison to muscular male chests (*Glands* 16); certain bones in the human body, like the collarbone, are edematous and therefore break more easily (*Joints* 14). Sponginess is also a characteristic of tumors, which the Hippocratic corpus regards as more benign than dense, knotty tumors (*Aphorisms* 67, *Epid.* 1.1). In this way, Longinus recalls the image of tumorous rhetoric that Philo introduced in *De Plantatione*, but leads the reader beyond the surface of speech’s body into the tumor itself. *On the Sublime* urges its readers to develop a critical sight that penetrates to the tissues and cavities within.

In Classical Greek medical writing, Brooke Holmes has argued, the symptom and its accompanying verbs of signification mediate a threshold of the body that cannot be crossed: “Because the body cannot be opened and because cause cannot be seen, we access the unseen only indirectly, through a conceptual leap from signs to hidden truths.”<sup>53</sup> Occasionally, however,

<sup>52</sup> *Subl.* 7.1: ἐπισκεπτέον, μή τινα μεγέθους φαντασίαν ἔχοι τοιαύτην, ἧ πολὺ πρόσκειται τὸ εἰκῆ ἑπὶ προσαναπλαττόμενον, ἀναπτυττόμενα δὲ ἄλλως εὐρίσκοιτο χαῶνα, ὧν τοῦ θαυμάζειν τὸ περιφρονεῖν εὐγενέστερον.

<sup>53</sup> B. Holmes, *The Symptom and the Subject: The Emergence of the Physical Body in*

medical writers do conduct virtual dissections of the body, narrating what the observer would see, should the infected cavities be opened.<sup>54</sup> In *On the Sacred Disease*, the Hippocratic author encourages his readers to imagine cutting into epileptic livestock. “If you cut through the head, you will find that the brain is wet and very full of dropsy and smells bad, and in this clearly you will know that it is not the god afflicting the body, but the disease” (14.14–18). Here the author narrates a simulated cranial incision from the embodied perspective of the observer. Peering into the exposed head, the reader “sees” the phlegmatic brain, “feels” its wet texture, and “smells” its bad odor. In a similar way, Longinus’ insistence that we can open seemingly sublime speech functions as a sort of literary dissection. If speech has a body, as the *Phaedrus* argued, then the literary critic must be prepared to get his hands dirty.

Even the language Longinus uses to express the “opening” of speech like a body signifies exposure and exploration. The verb *anaptussō*, “to unfold/lay open,” is used in a wide variety of contexts in Greek, from the unfolding of an army phalanx to the opening of an oyster shell. The two definitions that Longinus employs, however, are as a verb of reading and as a verb of dissection. The first, “reading,” appears early and often in Greek literature, alluding to the unrolling of papyrus scrolls. In Herodotus, the unfolding of the written word carries a revelatory connotation, as when Croesus “unfolds” the written responses of the oracles (ἕκαστα ἀναπτύσσων, 1.48.1) or when Cyrus reveals his intentions to the Persian assembly (ἀναπτύξας τὸ βιβλίον, 1.125.2). Reading in this way becomes an

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*Ancient Greece* (Princeton 2010) 128.

<sup>54</sup> J. Annoni and V. Barras, “La découpe du corps humain et ses justifications dans l’antiquité,” *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 10 (1993) 194–195, observe the practice of imaginary dissections of the human body in the Hippocratic *Joints*: “Le patient au muscle deltoïde atrophié est démembré par le scalpel imaginaire du médecin de la même manière que la carcasse de l’animal par le couteau du mageiros.” See also H. King, *Hippocrates’ Women: Reading the Female Body in Ancient Greece* (London 2014) 37–38.

act of illumination, bringing to light truths concealed or obscured by their exterior wrappings.

By the principate, however, the verb *anaptussō* (primarily in the passive voice) could also be used to express the opening of bodies in scientific and medical contexts.<sup>55</sup> Athenaeus, citing Aristotle, gives us two examples of virtual animal dissections by describing the contents of an octopus' head and the intestines of a giant squid.<sup>56</sup> These descriptions are neither as vivid nor as sensory as the Hippocratic discussion of phlegm-filled goat heads in *On the Sacred Disease*, but they do experiment in a similar way with an imagined dissection of the animal body. In Galen's *Method of Medicine*, on the other hand, *anaptussō* describes the opening of the human epidermis. In his recommendation on how to heal a wounded nerve, Galen asks readers to "imagine that the skin has been opened wide (ἀνεπτύχθαι πολύ), so that the nerve appears exposed."<sup>57</sup> Here Galen is not discussing a dissection, but rather a wound that has pierced the flesh and made visible the concealed fibers of the body. The precariousness of such exposure becomes clear as Galen warns physicians not to apply the same topical medications to the bare nerve as they would to a closed wound.

When Longinus maintains that a speech must be "laid open" in order to diagnose the sublime from the pseudo-sublime, he constructs the practice of critical reading as a medical dissection. To analyze the language of an epic poem or a rhetorical speech is to cut, to unfold the layers of skin, and to scrutinize its viscera.<sup>58</sup> The initial chapters of *On the Sublime* prepare us to

<sup>55</sup> It must be acknowledged that the verb is used in the Hippocratic corpus, but does not become associated with dissection until the principate. This suggests to me once more that Longinus is not actually reading Hippocratic texts as the basis for his curative criticism, but borrowing vocabulary from contemporary medical discourse in the belief that they are one and the same.

<sup>56</sup> Ath. 316D and 326D (Arist. fr.334, 340 Rose).

<sup>57</sup> Gal. *De methodo medendi* 6.3 (VI 401 K.).

<sup>58</sup> By using dissection as a metaphor for criticism, Longinus inverts an older metaphor in scientific literature that likens the study of anatomy to the

dislike what we see: tumors and dropsy, on the one hand, and underdeveloped or stiff muscles on the other. But on occasion, Longinus suggests, his readers may peer into something truly exalted and find the workings of a healthy body beneath its layers. In this instance, when a magnificent interior matches external loftiness, the sublime emerges. For the sublime, he reminds us, is nothing more and nothing less than the echo of a noble mind within.

### *Conclusion*

As a Greek-speaking intellectual in the Roman Empire, Longinus' world must have been filled with doctors. Hippocratic physicians spread throughout Classical Greece, Asclepiades of Prusa made his way to late Republican Rome, and Greek medicine became the gold standard in urban centers of the Mediterranean. For wealthy and well-educated Romans, "it had become almost *de rigueur* to employ Greek physician[s]," who flocked to Imperial cities in growing numbers and benefited from Augustan tax immunity.<sup>59</sup> Skilled practitioners of Greek medicine were not restricted to the bedside, but invited even into the social and intellectual circles of their patients. The symposia in Plutarch's *Moralia* frequently feature doctors as guests, both the congenial Moschion and the cantankerous Glaucus.<sup>60</sup> So regularly were physicians frequenting the lecture halls, complains the elder Pliny, that their understanding of practical medicine and pharmacology had suffered (*HN* 26.5). By the second century C.E., a visitor to Rome could expect to find crowds forming around the anatomical exhibitions of Galen, who rivaled the sophists with his stagecraft.<sup>61</sup> Cutting

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act of reading. M. Vegetti, *Il coltello e lo stilo: le origini della scienza occidentale* (Milan 1996) 76–77, highlights how Aristotle's anatomical treatises frame animal dissection as a cognitive process of synthesis and interpretation.

<sup>59</sup> V. Nutton, *Ancient Medicine* (London 2013) 167.

<sup>60</sup> For a fuller account of the physicians and medical debates in Plutarch see R. Durling, "Medicine in Plutarch's *Moralia*," *Traditio* (1995) 311–314.

<sup>61</sup> See M. Gleason, "Shock and Awe: The Performance Dimension of Galen's Anatomy Demonstrations," in C. Gill et al. (eds.), *Galen and the*

into the cavities of pigs, apes, and even elephants in order to test their theories of the body, Greek physicians set a high bar for *technē*.

Given the prevalence of Greek physicians in elite settings of the early Roman Empire, it is not surprising that critics absorbed the discourse of medical diagnosis in their competing theories of decline. Elaborating on Plato's longstanding image of embodied speech, these authors conjured visions of swollen tumors and starving stomachs, of deformed dwarves and emaciated old men—sights that would have been commonplace in any Mediterranean hub. In *On the Sublime*, Longinus partakes in this somatic rhetoric of literary decline, but stands out from his Roman peers for his attention to the Hippocratic method of medicine celebrated in the *Phaedrus*. Like the pharmacologist who grasps “the whole” of the human condition, Longinus claims to know all of nature's untaught stimulants of the sublime *and* how to apply them with technical precision. Furthermore, he insists that the craft of the critic centers on a penetrating diagnostic gaze: the ability to peer beneath the surface symptoms to the viscera of eloquence. Peeling back the skin of Homeric epic at one moment and the rhetoric of Hegesias at another, Longinus dissects literary texts like a surgeon. In this way, *On the Sublime* surpasses a mere appropriation of medical discourse. It propels literary criticism into a competitive arena with medicine, defending the doctor of letters as an essential healer of the human condition on a par with the physician.

Longinus' interest in developing a Hippocratic method of criticism, however, signals a loftier enterprise still. Throughout the long tradition of Greek authors cited in *On the Sublime* persists the belief that speech—whether poetic, rhetorical, or philosophical—is the most powerful drug to heal the ailments of the soul. “There is no other *pharmakon* for love, no ointment or powder, than the Muses,” writes Theocritus to the Milesian

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*World of Knowledge* (Cambridge 2009) 86–88, on Galen's anatomy demonstrations, as well as his more intimate showings before private audiences.

physician Nicias at the beginning of his eleventh *Idyll*. Lucretius too concedes that even the most caustic cures of philosophical speech could be sweetened with a smear of poetic honey (1.936). But what happens when speech itself becomes sick? Presenting himself as the healer to a generation of stunted speakers, Longinus exalts the literary critic as a doctor to the doctor of the soul. The science of criticism serves the sublime, not as a handmaid, but as a physician of superior expertise.<sup>62</sup> As the Empire looks to its speakers to restore the Roman world to its former health, so too must speakers look to the healing hands of their critics.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Too, *The Idea of Ancient Literary Criticism* 204–207, argues that Longinus conceives of the sublime as the product, and not merely the object, of criticism: “The sublime, according to [Longinus’] account, is a quality of discourse that itself discriminates ... Judgment and discrimination are in turn also required in the production of the sublime.”

<sup>63</sup> A version of this paper was presented at the 2015 conference “Medicine and Poetry: From the Greeks to the Enlightenment” at the University of Miami, whose organizers and participants I thank for their criticism. The anonymous reviewer made excellent suggestions for streamlining its arguments. I am very grateful to Natasha Peponi and Maud Gleason for their early encouragement of the project and willingness to read multiple drafts. I am also equally appreciative of Susan Stephens and Clarissa Daniel, who offered critical feedback on the final versions.