

Sublimity in Paradise Lost

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Abstract

Sublimity is a concept that is defined differently in different ages. It is one of the aesthetic canons in art that is evaluated differently throughout the literary history. It is associated with what is high and lofty in art and nature. For different scholars there are different sources for sublimity. It is first introduced by Longinus who associated it with the author and the literary work and gave it five sources. Later scholars associated it with the audience. This concept is investigated in John Milton's Paradise Lost (book III) to find out the sources of sublimity, Longinus set, in such a masterpiece.

1. Sublimity

It is a Latin –derived word meaning “on high, lofty and elevated”. It is first introduced by Longinus in his treatise “On the Sublime” in the first century. The treatise remained unknown until published in 1554 and then translated into Latin in 1572. After that an English translation had been produced in 1652 by John Hall. It started having influence in the late 17th century, but, the greatest influence it made on English literature and art in general was in the 18th century (Preminger, 1965 :819).

This concept became fashionable in the 18th century but it was partly influenced by Longinus treatise. It became distinguished from the beautiful and ranked above it. It played a considerable role in the drift toward subjectivism and psychologizing literature

and literary experience and the rise of romanticism and establishment of aesthetics as a new, separate branch of philosophy (ibid).

In that century interest in the term went with interest in the effect of objects on the mind and consequently it got different definitions. Addison, Burke, Kant and Schopenhauer defined it differently, yet, they all shared the interest in the audience while Longinus associated it with the author and the literary work with his consideration of the tropes. However, Longinus admitted that sublime works transport the soul of the reader.

Longinus gives five sources for sublimity. The first element for the elevation of language is *elevation of mind*. We must "nurture our souls [as far as that is possible] to thoughts

sublime, and make them always pregnant, so to say, with noble inspiration" (Longinus in Adams, 1971:81). Thus, "sublimity is the echo of a great soul... Great accents we expect to fall from the lips of those whose thoughts are deep and grave" (ibid).

Supreme excellence can be found also in *vehement and inspired passions* and this represents the second source of sublimity, which can be a characteristic of the author and the work. The final three elements represent features of the work: the due formation of *figures of speech, noble diction, and dignified and elevated composition*.

In other words, these sources can be cast in two parts: part of them is related to the author's elevated or grand thoughts and emotions (first and second sources) that he pours into the content of the literary works; this is to be reflected on the other part. Noble and lofty thoughts and vehement emotions find their expression in lofty language. Thus, the other part is associated with the form in the use of figures (the third source) that impart excellence and elevation to the style.

Longinus does not deal with all figures but only with those that give distinction to style like images, amplification, rhetorical question, asyndeton, hyperbaton and periphrasis (ibid:77-102). He states (ibid:88) that if such devices (or figures) are handled in the proper manner they will contribute to sublimity of literary works.

He gives the importance of each figure saying that images contribute greatly to dignity and power in their mental representations (ibid:86). Amplification (a device in which language is used to extend, magnify and emphasize to attain a particular effect (Cuddon, 1982:35)) also gives strength, magnitude and grandeur (Longinus in

Adams, 1971:84). As for the rhetorical question (expecting no answer or to which the answer is self-evident), it makes language "not only more elevated but also more convincing" (ibid:89). Moreover, questions asked and answered by oneself stimulate a natural outburst of passion. Periphrasis (a roundabout way of writing (Cuddon, 1982:500) also contributes to the sublime because it "harmonizes with the normal expression and adds greatly to its beauty" (Longinus in Adams, 1971:93). Hyperbaton (or inversion in which words are transposed from their usual order (Cuddon, 1982:315)) bear the impress of vehement emotions; and asyndeton (omitting conjunctions, articles, and pronouns for the sake of speed and economy (ibid:60-61) heightens the expression.

Such figures give an emotional quality to style and enrich it because they are connected with thoughts and emotions and not merely mechanical. Diction (the fourth source) refers to "the choice of proper and striking words [that] wonderfully attracts and enthralls the hearer... Beautiful words are in very truth the peculiar light of thought" (Longinus in Adams, 1971:93-94). It is also associated with form. It includes the choice and arrangement of words as in metaphor and simile and hyperbole that arise from emotion. Form is reflected also through dignified composition and arrangement (the fifth source) which comprises the verbal order called rhythm. It is the harmonious combination of words that appeals to the soul and enables the reader to share emotions of the writer.

2. Sources of Sublimity in Paradise Lost

"Paradise Lost" is a masterpiece epic poem written by the 17th century English poet John Milton (1608-1674) and published in

1667 in ten books. This great poem implies greatness of Milton's soul .Milton's poetic ambition was to write a poetry animated by moral ,religious and patriotic motives .The sublimity of Milton's thought lies in his intention to serve his country by putting before it noble and religious ideals in the highest poetic form.

2.1 The First and Second Sources

The sublimity of Milton's thoughts and emotions are reflected in a sublime form(the epic).He accomplished his epic on Virgil's model. Just as Virgil had glorified Rome, Milton had considered the possibilities of an Arthuriad .In Muir's (1955:131) words:

He decided instead to write what may be regarded as an International epic, though he wrote it in English, and not in the Latin which he might have chosen. He rejected the loose episodic structure of Aristotle and Spenser , and accepted instead the Virgilian form.
(*ibid:131-2*)

2.2. Other Sources in Book III

In addition to vehement thoughts and passions with which Milton wrote his masterpiece there are other sources that can be detected in the poem .The analysis is confined to Book III due to the extended length of the poem.

2.2.1 A Summary of Book III

This Book produces heaven in which God sees Satan traveling on earth .The Son sits on His right .They discuss how fallen

angles lead rebellion against God through their own free will. They discuss also Man's future. God prophesizes that man also will disobey him and must die unless a suitable sacrifice is offered .The Son offers to die for Man and God praises the Son ,and the angles rejoice. Satan, at the edge of the universe disguised, inquire about where Man is to be found to tempt him(McGoodwin,2006:3).

2.2.1.The Third ,Fourth and Fifth Sources

One of the images that contribute to the dignity and power of the poem is the following one which draws the happy Garden in Heaven in which Adam and Eve are enjoying the bless of God in the image of reaping joy and love:

*Our two first Parents, yet the only two 65
Of mankind, in the happie Garden plac't,
Reaping immortal fruits of joy and love,
Uninterrupted joy, unrivald love
In blissful solitude;...*

Another image can be found in the Son's speech to God to die for the Man because God may not leave the Son dead but he will rise again. The image presents the Son as a victorious warrior who defeats death:

*But I shall rise Victorious, and subdue 250
My Vanquisher, spoiled of his vanted spoile;
Death his deaths wound shall then receive ,&
stoop
Inglorious, of his mortall sting disarm'd.*
* * *

Another figure of speech used by Milton is amplification which invests the discourse with grandeur as is presented in the scene that describes God in a supreme way .Sublimity

comes from the Majesty of God, a grandeur that excites admiration:

*Now had the Almighty Father from above,
From the pure Empyrean where he sits
High Thron'd above all highth ,bent down his
eye,
His own works and their works at once to to
view:
About him all the Sanctities of Heaven 60
Stood thick as Starrs,and from his sight
reciev'd
Beatitude past utterance ;on his right
The radiant image of his Glory sat ,
His onely Son;...*

Another example of amplification could be detected in the scene of the Angles' hails and praise to God that follows the Almighty's speech :

*No sooner had th' Almighty ceas't ,but all
The multitude of Angles with ashout
Loud as from numbers without numbers
,sweet
As from blest voices ,uttering joy ,Heav'n
rung
With Jubilee ,and loud Hosanna's fill'd
Th' eternal Regions:lowly reverent
Towards either Throne they bow,& to the
ground 350
With solemn adoration down they cast
Thir Crowns invove with Amarant and Gold,
Immortal Amarant,...*

Rhetorical question is another figure used to make the language of the poem more elevated and convincing .This is shown by the following extract of God's speech that shows ingratitude of man towards God that Man chose to be disobedient by his own free will:

*.....so will fall 95
Hee and his faithless Progenie:whose fault?
Whose but his own ?ingrate ,he had of mee
All he could have ;I made him just and right,*

Other examples on rhetorical question could be found in the speech directed to God praising His grace :

*For should Man finally be lost ,should
Man 150
Thy creature late so lov'd,thy youngest Son
Fall circumvented thus by fraud,though
joynd
With his own folly?that be from thee farr,
That farr be from thee,Father ,who art Judge
Of all things made ,and judgest onely right.
Or shall the Adversarie thus obtain
His end,and frustrate thine ,shall he fulfill
His malice ,and thy goodness bring to naught,
Or proud return though to his heavier doom,
Yet with revenge accomplish't and to
Hell 160
Draw after him the whole Race of mankind,
By him corrupted ? or wilt thou thy self
Abolish thy Creation,and unmake,
For him ,what for thy glorie thou hast made?
So should thy goodness and thy greatness
both
Be questioned and blaspheam'd without
defence.*

* * *

Milton uses Asyndeton to endow his work with sublimity. In the scene that shows Satan's attempt to get the way to Paradise there is an example of asyndeton in which the pronoun is omitted :

*... As when a Scout
Through dark and desart wayes with peril
gone*

*All night ;at last by break of cheerful
dawne 545
Obtains the brow of some high-climbing Hill,
Which to his eye discovers unaware
The goodly*

The pronoun "he" is omitted from the beginning of line 546 which should come before "obtains" to refer to Satan. Another example of asyndeton comes from the omission of the conjunction as in the following example:

*Thir S[t]arry dance in numbers that
compute 580
Day's, months, and years ,towards his all-
chearing Lamp
Turn swift their various motions ,or are
turned
By his Magnetic beam ,that gently warms
The Universs,...*

The conjunction "and" is omitted from the beginning of line 582 .This line describes the constellations in the sky. The constellations dance in numbers that compute days, months and years and turn their various motions(or are turned) by the Magnetic beam that warms the universe. Originally the line might have been:

(And) turn swift their various

* * *

Many examples of inversion (hyperbaton) could be detected in book III as well. This departure in the order of expressions or ideas from the natural sequence serves to intensify emotions as in the following extract from a scene in which a multitude of Angles are praising God:

Thee next they sang of all Creation first ,

*Begotten Son, Divine Similitude,
In whose conspicuous count'nance, without
cloud 385
Made visible, th' Almighty Father shines,
Whom else no Creature can behold;on thee
Impresst the effulgence of his Glorie abides,
Transfus'd on thee his ample Spirit rests.*

Lines 385-6 without inversion might have been:

*In whose conspicuous count'nance th'
Almighty Father
Shines without cloud made visible
and line 388 might have been :*

The effulgence of his Glorie abides impresst, while line 389 might have been :

*His ample Spirit rests transfus'd on thee
or:
On thee his ample Spirit rests transfus'd .*

Another example of inversion lies in the following extract from the scene in which Angles are praising God for His mercy and grace towards Man, and envious Satan from Globe (God made out of chaos) tries to approach paradise to deceive Man:

*Thus they in Heav'n, above the starry Sphear,
Thir happie hours in joy and hymning spent.
Mean while upon the firm opacous Globe
Of this round World, whose first convex
divides
The luminous inferior Orbs , 420
enclos'd
From Chaos and th' inroad of Darkness old,
Satan alighted walks: a Globe farr off
It seem'd ,now seems a boundless Continent
Dark,waste*

Without inversion line 417 might have been:

Spent their happie hours in joy and hymning

And lines 422-23 might have been:

.....*a Globe which seem'd farr off*
Now seems a boundless Continent

Milton tries to postpone the words and inverts the order of ideas to impress and arouse vehement emotions.

* * *

Moreover, he uses periphrasis to add to the sublimity of his work .The following extracts show a roundabout way of expressing things:

To whom the great Creator thus reply'd.
O Son ,in whom my Soul hath chief delight,
Son of my bosom ,Son who art alone
My word ,my wisdom ,and effectual
might, 170

The Son is referred to as "Son of my bosom", "my word", "my wisdom" and "effectual might". And "Son both of God and Man" ,"anointed universal King" and "Head Supream" represent other periphrases to the Son given in the following lines:

Here shalt thou sit incarnate, here shalt
Reigne 315
Both God and Man ,Son both of God and
Man,
Anointed universal King ;all Power
I give thee ,reign for ever ,and assume
Thy Merits; under thee as Head Supream
* * *

Metaphor is presented with idea of the fall of man .God says that "man shall not quite be lost, but sav'd " and this is not for

will in him but from grace in God. God gives chance for "stonie hearts" to repent and this metaphor enthralls the reader with its rhetorical, vivid description and shows disobedience of hard hearted man:

...for I will cleer thir senses dark,
What may suffice ,and soft'n stonie hearts
To pray, repent, and bring obedience
due. 190
To prayer ,repentance,and obedience due,
Though but endevord with sincere intent,
Mine eare shall not be slow,mine eye not
shut.
And I will place within them as a guide
My Umpire Conscience, whom if they will
hear,
Light after light well us'd they shall attain,
And to the end persisting ,safe arrive.

"Paying debts" is a metaphor that refers to the termination of life of the Son who redeems his life for the sake of Man as in the following extract:

Though now to Death I yield ,and am his
due 245
All that of me can die ,yet that debt paid,
Thou wilt not leave me in the loathsome grave
* * *

Simile is another device used by Milton to elevate his diction in the following extract that describes the new Globe God created and into which Satan makes a journey:

That stone ,or like to that which here below
600
Philosophers in vain so long have sought,
* * *

As for hyperbole, Milton uses many examples of it to enrich his diction as in the following line about disobedient human

beings that may not repent and insist on disobedience:

*But hard be hard'nd, blind be blinded
more 200*

Another example of hyperbole is clear in the following extract that presents the Son's offer to redeem Man as an unexampled love:

*....offered himself to die
For mans offence unexempl'd love, 410
Love no where to be found less than Divine!*

The reference also to stars in heaven as being innumerable and numberless is an example of hyperbole in the following lines:

*Amongst innumerable Starrs, that
shon 565*
and
*Numberless, as thou seest, and how they
move; 719*
* * *

Milton uses the fifth source of sublimity also in this poem to make his style elevated through dignified composition and arrangement that comprises the verbal order called rhythm.

The poem is written in iambic pentameter and called blank verse because it does not rhyme. The rhythm of blank verse is more formal, more intensely regular than looser rhythmic patterns of normal speech. Its regular formality creates an incantatory effect and the strong rhythm tends to capture and modify the listener's heartbeat and induce a slightly altered state of consciousness. The regularity of blank verse prepares the listener for a heightened response to the effect of language and image in the poem.

Yet, this regularity is not monotonous. Each line consists of 5 heavy stresses and 5 minor stresses. The rhythm of lines read as:

da-dum ,da-dum , da-dum , da-dum , da-dum

But many lines reverse the stress where da-dum is replaced by dum-da and dum-dum. Milton varies his rhythm and musical quality of words to fit what he wants to say. This is shown in this extract that gives God's speech about Man's disobedience and how he would be saved (rhythm of this extract varies from the one that follows):

*That they may stumble on, and deeper fall ;
And none but such from mercy I exclude .
But yet all is not don; Man disobeying,
Disloyal breaks his fealtie, and sins
Against the high Supremacies of Heav'n,
Affecting God-head ,and so losing all,
To expiate his Treason thath naught left,
But to destruction sacred and devote,
He with his whole posteritie must die,
Die hee or Justice must; unless for him 210
Some other able ,and as willing ,pay
The rigid satisfaction ,death for death.*

Milton makes sonorous rhythms pulsate through and beyond one verse into the next without using punctuation at the end of many verses to create voluble units of rhythm and sense that go well beyond the limitations might be found in rhymed verse (Labriola, 2007:14). This can be felt in the following extract which depicts the surprise of Angels for the Son's sacrifice:

*His words here ended, but his meek aspect
Silent yet spake, and breath'd immortal love
To mortal men, above which only shon
Filial obedience: as a sacrifice
Glad to be offer'd ,he attends the
will 270
Of his great Father .Admiration seis'd
All Heav'n, what this might mean, &
whither tend
Wondering;but soon th' Almighty thus
reply'd:
O thou in Heav'n and Earth the only peace*

*Found out for mankind under wrauth, O
thou
My sole complacence!well thou know'st
how dear,
To me are all my works, nor man the least
Though last created, that for him I spare
Thee from my bosom and right hand, to
save,
By loosing thee a while, the whole Race lost.*

The difference of rhythm in the last two extracts is clear that each one creates a different emotion in the audience.

3. Conclusion

The epic poem "Paradise Lost" is known for its sublime style .Milton draws sublimity from different sources .Investigating the five sources Longinus set for sublimity in the third book of this poem shows that all these sources are used by Milton to endow his style with grandeur .This grandeur is detected on the levels of form and content in this masterpiece.

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المخلص:

التسامي في الفردوس المفقود

أن لمفهوم التسامي تعريفات مختلفة على اختلاف العصور وهو أحد القوانين الجمالية في الفنون الذي كان له تقييمات مختلفة في التاريخ الأدبي. يرتبط التسامي بما هو مرتفع الشأن وذو قيمة عالية في الفن و الطبيعة، ويرى الأدباء أن هناك مصادر مختلفة للتسامي، فقد قدمه (لونجينس) Longinus أولاً وقرنه بالمؤلف والعمل الأدبي ووجد له خمسة مصادر، بينما قرنه آخرون بالمتلقي. يتقصى هذا البحث مصادر التسامي في قصيدة "الفردوس المفقود" Paradise Lost (جون ملتن) John Milton (بجزئها الثالث) للوقوف على مصادر التسامي (التي وضعها (لونجينس)) في هذه الرائعة من روائع الأدب الإنجليزي.