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Echoes of Longinus in Gregory of Nyssa

Malcolm Heath
University of Leeds

ABSTRACT: Gregory's stylistic criticisms of his opponent in *Against Eunomius* show the terminological influence of the *Art of Rhetoric* and *Philological Discourses* of the third-century critic Cassius Longinus. There is no conclusive evidence of his familiarity with *On Sublimity*.

1. Gregory and Cassius Longinus

In *Against Eunomius* Gregory of Nyssa repeatedly satirises his opponent's style.¹ The vocabulary used in the following passage is striking, and on closer investigation reveals something of Gregory's intellectual background (1.480):

ταῦτα διὰ τῆς ἑμαντοῦ λέξεως γράφω, οὐ παρερμηνεύων αὐτοῦ τὴν διάνοιαν ἀλλὰ τὸ στομφώδες καὶ κατεστοιβασμένον τῆς ἔρμηνείας ἐπανορθούμενος, ὡς ἂν εὐσύνοπτον αὐτοῦ πᾶσι τὸ βούλημα γένοιτο, διὰ τῆς κατὰ τὴν λέξιν σαφηνείας ἐκκαλυπτόμενον.

I put these things in my own words, not to distort his meaning, but to correct the bombastic and impacted quality of his diction, so that what he intends can be easily grasped by everyone, unveiled through the clarity of the language.

Two words here are worthy of note. κατεστοιβασμένον ('impacted') has only a single earlier attestation: the third-century literary scholar, rhetorician and philosopher Cassius Longinus used it in his *Art of Rhetoric* to describe a stylistic shortcoming of Thucydides.² Familiarity with Longinus' critical writings on Gregory's part is intrinsically plausible; Eunapius, a younger contemporary, testifies to Longinus' high reputation as a critic, and to the fact that a large number of his works were still in circulation and were held in great esteem (4.1.1-6 = 6.9-7.7 Giangrande).

στομφώδης ('bombastic'), a word which (with the cognate στόμφος) Gregory uses several times in *Against Eunomius*,³ is also associated with Longinus. Jaeger (*ad* 1.480) comments that it is a technical term in rhetoric; but that is misleading.

¹ On Gregory's critique of Eunomius' style in general see E. Norden *Die Antike Kunstprosa* (Stuttgart 1915) 558-62; C. Klock, *Untersuchungen zu Stil und Rhythmus bei Gregor von Nyssa* (Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie 173, Frankfurt 1987), 145-58. So far as I am aware, the connection with Longinus has not been noticed previously.

² On Longinus see L. Brisson and M. Patillon, 'Longinus Platonius Philosophus et Philologus, I. Longinus Philosophus', *ANRW* 2.36.7 (1994), 5214-99; 'Longinus Platonius Philosophus et Philologus, II. Longinus Philologus', *ANRW* II 34.4 (1998), 3023-3108; M. Heath, 'Longinus *On Sublimity*', *PCPS* 45 (1999), 43-74. The *Art of Rhetoric* is known from an extensive fragment (179-97 Spengel-Hammer) and an epitome by Michael Psellus (208-12 Spengel-Hammer, re-edited in P. Gautier, 'Michel Psellos et la rhétorique de Longin', *Prometheus* 3 (1977), 193-9). The comment on Thucydides is preserved only in the epitome (212.3 Spengel-Hammer = 88 Gautier). Since Psellus was the epitomator, the occurrence of κατεστοιβασμένον in his *Chronographia* (6.33) is presumably also dependent on Longinus.

³ στόμφος: 2.360; στομφώδης: 1.480; 2.360, 413, 480, 607.

In Aristophanes *Clouds* 1367, στόμφαξ was applied to the style of Aeschylus; we learn from an anonymous commentator on Hermogenes (*RG* 7.963.17-964.9 Walz) that Longinus interpreted this passage in the context of a discussion of the word στομφώδης in book 21 of his *Philological Discourses*.⁴ With the possible exception of the treatise *On Sublimity*, the date and authorship of which are disputed (see §2 below), there is only one occurrence of a cognate word in extant literary criticism and rhetorical theory before Longinus: Hermogenes uses the verb στομφάζειν (*Id.* 247.13 Rabe), but does not apply it directly to a style (he is describing the shape of the mouth associated with sounds appropriate to a certain style). The fact that Syrianus, in his commentary on this passage of Hermogenes (1.39.11-15 Rabe), felt the need to explain στομφάζειν and στομφώδης suggests that they were not standard technical terms. Two pupils of Syrianus also use the word: Proclus (*In Tim.* 1.64.22) and Hermias (*In Phaedr.* 9.17-19 Couvreur). This distribution of evidence suggests that στόμφος and its cognates were introduced into critical currency in late antiquity under Longinus' direct and indirect influence.

Elsewhere, Gregory makes ironical use of the language of sublimity (ὑψος) in his satire on Eunomius' style (1.29):⁵

δηλοῦται γὰρ ἐκεῖ δῆθεν τὰ πεπραγμένα καὶ τὰ πάθη διὰ τοῦ λόγου εἰς ὑψος αἴρεται καὶ εἰς τραγωδίας ὄγκον ἢ ἱστορία μετασκευάζεται

For there his exploits are made known, his sufferings raised to sublimity through his discourse, and the story transformed into the magnificence of tragedy.

Here, too, we can infer a connection with Longinus. Proclus reports Longinus' analysis of the opening sentence of Plato's *Timaeus*, in which he shows how its structure achieves sublimity (*In Tim.* 1.17.4-20). The concept of sublimity appears elsewhere in Proclus.⁶ In Syrianus' commentary on Hermogenes it is striking that sublimity is paired with grandeur (ὑψους καὶ μεγέθους μετέχειν 1.30.5), since Hermogenes himself never uses the word ὑψος,⁷ although he speaks frequently of grandeur (μέγεθος) and magnificence (ὄγκος). Syrianus' introduction of sublimity into a context where it did not originally occur suggests that the neoplatonic interest in the concept is distinctive; these writers are not simply reproducing a critical commonplace. The implication is that some predecessor's treatment of the topic has exercised an influence on the tradition in which they were working, and the obvious candidate for the source of this influence is again Longinus.

ὄγκος, paired with sublimity in *Against Eunomius* 1.29, is also recurrent in Gregory and Longinus.⁸ The word means 'bulk', and can be used in a positive

⁴ Longinus' discussion was apparently drawn on by a later commentator on Aristophanes: cf. ΣV *Clouds* 1367. John of Sicily (*RG* 6.225.9-29) seems to have contaminated his source's note on στομφώδης in the *Philological Discourses* with his own recollection of *On Sublimity* 3.1.

⁵ Cf. ὑψηλός 1.551, 3.6.35, 3.7.1.

⁶ *In Tim.* 1.64.7-11 (citing Longinus' pupil Porphyry), 1.64.11-23; *In Parm.* 646.28 Cousin.

⁷ The adjective ὑψηλός occurs three times.

⁸ Gregory: ὀγκώδης 2.339; ὄγκος 1.81, 3.3.27, 3.5.26; ὀγκώσας 3.7.1. For Longinus see 214.13, 28 Spengel-Hammer, and the fragment of the *Philological Discourses* quoted by Lachares 294.14-35, in H. Graeven, 'Ein Fragment des Lachares', *Hermes* 30 (1895), 289-313.

sense ('magnificence') or in a negative one ('tumidity'). It is very widely distributed in ancient criticism (we have already noted its occurrence in Hermogenes), and is thus less distinctive. But there is one possible, if subtle, symptom of Longinian influence in Gregory's use of it. Longinus interpreted the Aristophanic *στόμφοξ* as meaning that Aeschylus' diction has *φαντασία* but not *σύστασις* (ὡς τῶν ῥημάτων τοῦ Αἰσχύλου φαντασίαν μὲν ἔχόντων, μηδεμίαν δὲ σύστασιν μηδὲ κρότησιν *RG* 7.964.6f.). Compare Gregory's remark (2.340) that Eunomius' over-inflated (*ὀγκώδης*) style, like mist seen from a distance, seems to have *σύστασιν ... τινα καὶ φαντασίαν*, although on closer inspection the sense disappears. Has the phrasing been suggested by a passage in Longinus that Gregory's use of *στομφοῦδης* had already recalled to mind?

2. Gregory and *On Sublimity*

The constellation of terms *στόμφοξ*, *ῥψος* and *ὄγκος* which we have traced in Gregory and Longinus also occurs in the treatise *On Sublimity*.⁹ This work was universally attributed to Longinus until the beginning of the nineteenth century; since then the attribution has been widely questioned, and most scholars now reject it. I believe, however, that the objections to Longinus' authorship are ill-founded, and that there are positive connections between the treatise and the fragments of Longinus which make the traditional attribution the most credible and economical hypothesis.¹⁰ If that is so, then it is worth considering whether there is any evidence that Gregory's familiarity with Longinus' critical writings extended to *On Sublimity* (or, if the traditional attribution is not accepted, that he was familiar with *On Sublimity* in addition to works by Longinus). I note the following parallels:

(i) *Subl.* 3.1 ἐν τραγωδίᾳ, πράγματι ὀγκηρῶ φύσει καὶ ἐπιδεχομένῳ στόμφον ('in tragedy, a thing that is by nature magnificent and tolerant of bombast'): cf. *Against Eunomius* 1.29 (quoted above) εἰς ῥψος ... καὶ εἰς τραγωδίας ὄγκον ('to sublimity ... and ... into the magnificence of tragedy'). Tragic *ὄγκος* is too common a notion for this parallel to be used as evidence in itself, but it may have some weight when taken with other possible echoes of the same chapter of *On Sublimity*.

(ii) *Subl.* 3.2 καὶ τινα τῶν Καλλισθένους ὄντα οὐχ ὑψηλά, ἀλλὰ μετέωρα, καὶ ἔτι μᾶλλον τὰ Κλειτάρχου· φλοιώδης γὰρ ἀνὴρ καὶ φουσῶν ... ('certain passages in Callisthenes that are not sublime so much as elevated in mid-air, and even more those in Clitarchus; for he is a pompous fellow, blowing ...'): cf. the parallel progression in *Against Eunomius* 3.7.1 ἐπὶ τοὺς ὑψηλοτέρους μετέρχεται λόγους καὶ μετεωρίσας ἑαυτὸν καὶ ὀγκώσας ἐν διακένῳ φουσήματι λέγειν ἐπιχειρεῖ τι τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ μεγαλοπρεπείας ἐπάξιον ('he proceeds to more sublime discourses, and elevating himself in mid-air and swelling himself up in empty blowing he tries to say something worthy of the

⁹ *στόμφοξ* 3.1, 32.7; *ῥψος* *passim*; *ὄγκος* 3.1 (*ὀγκηρός*), 3.4, 8.3, 12.3, 15.1, 28.2 (*ὀγκώω*), 30.2, 39.3, 40.2, 43.5.

¹⁰ See Heath (n.2).

grandeur of God'). But the evidential value of this parallel is weakened by Philo *De Ebrietate* 128: Ἄαρὼν δὲ ἐστὶν ὁ ἱερεὺς, καὶ τοῦνομα ὀρεινὸς ἐρμηνεύεται, μετέωρα καὶ ὑψηλὰ φρονῶν λογισμὸς, οὐ διὰ μεγαλαυχίας κενοῦ φυσήματος ὑπόπλεων ὄγκον, ἀλλὰ διὰ μέγεθος ἀρετῆς ('Aaron is the priest, and his name means "mountainous"—i.e. reason that is elevated and sublime, not because of the swollen tumidity of boastfulness's empty blowing, but because of the greatness of his virtue').¹¹

(iii) *Subl.* 3.3-4 expounds the paradox that ill-judged attempts to avoid aridity (ξηρότης) lead to tumidity (ὄγκος), and hence to the very aridity that was being shunned: cf. *Against Eunomius* 2.607, on Eunomius' 'bombastic aridities' (τὰς στομφώδεις ... τὰτάς ξηροστομίας; the last word is a *hapax*).

(iv) *Subl.* 3.4 links περιεργασία ('over-elaboration') and τὸ μειρακιῶδές ('puerility'): cf. *Against Eunomius* 2.128-9, where κομμωτικὴ περιεργία ('over-elaborate embellishment') is linked to τὸ γλίσχρον καὶ μειρακιῶδες ('pettiness and puerility'). See also *Against Eunomius* 1.19, on the κομμωτικὴ περιεργία needed in the absence of truth.¹²

(v) *Subl.* 12.3 ἐν ὄγκῳ καὶ μεγαλοπρεπεῖ σεμνότητι ('in magnificence and solemn grandeur'): cf. the pairing ὀγκώσας ... μεγαλοπρεπείας in *Against Eunomius* 3.7.1, quoted in (ii) above. Again, the parallel cannot be pressed, since this juxtaposition is not unique (cf. Aristotle *Poet.* 1459b28; Plut. *Comp. Dem. et Cic.* 1.3); but the next example involves a possible further echo of the same passage.

(vi) In *Against Eunomius* 1.19 Gregory refers to the inherent beauty which illuminates the text like lightning (οἴκοθεν ἐπαστράπτει τοῖς λεγομένοις τὸ κάλλος) when the truth is expounded pure, unadulterated and without artifice. Lightning imagery is also applied ironically to Eunomius' style at 1.482: ὡς ἐπαστράπτει τῇ συντάξει τοῦ λόγου τὸ λεῖον καὶ κατεστιλβωμένον τῆς λέξεως ('how the polished brilliance of the diction illuminates the composition of his discourse like lightning'). Imagery of light, fire and thunderbolt is found frequently in *On Sublimity* (1.4, 12.3-4, 15.11, 17.2, 30.1,¹³ 33.5, 34.4). Particularly interesting is *Subl.* 12.3, already mentioned under (v) above, where Plato's 'magnificence and solemn grandeur' is described as having less intensity (οὐχ οὕτως ἐπέστραπται) than Demosthenes. Since ἐπιστρέφειν has a recognised use in stylistic criticism to denote vehemence or intensity, it is methodologically correct for modern editors to retain the transmitted ἐπέστραπται. But Bentley's conjecture ἀπαστράπτει (justly described by Russell *ad loc.* as 'brilliant'), introducing a reference to lightning that fits well with the

¹¹ A number of other parallels between Philo and *On Sublimity* have been noted in the past: see D.A. Russell (ed.), *'Longinus' On the Sublime* (Oxford 1964), xxix-xxx. There is no consensus as to whether these parallels prove that the author of *On Sublimity* had read Philo.

¹² Cf. ἀναλήθεις in *Subl.* 3.4? A purely verbal echo, at most: the context and sense are different.

¹³ The parallel with Longinus *Art of Rhetoric* 186.19-20 Spengel-Hammer has long been recognised.

surrounding images of flame (ἐκφλεγόμενον) and thunderbolt (σκηπτῶ ... κεραυνῶ), would give a striking parallel to Gregory's use of ἐπαστρέπτει.

(vii) *Subl.* 34.2 σκώματα οὐκ ἄμουσα ('jests not lacking in taste'): cf. *Against Eunomius* 2.561 ἄμουσα σκώματα, the only exact parallel I have traced,¹⁴ although there are looser parallels in Plutarch (*Alexander* 39 τινι τῶν περὶ πότον καὶ σκώματα οὐκ ἀμούσων) and Lucian (*Merc. Cond.* 34 οὐκ ἀμούσως ... ἀποσκώπτων); cf. also Libanius *Prog.* 12.6.

These parallels are not by any standard of reckoning conclusive. But we could scarcely have hoped for conclusive evidence that Gregory had read *On Sublimity*: he is not a mechanical imitator, and has no reason to make a specific allusion to that text, the concerns of which are only incidentally relevant to his project. Given the probability that Gregory was familiar with the critical writings of Longinus (see (§1) above), the parallels might be thought suggestive if it is accepted that Longinus was the author of *On Sublimity*; but no stronger claim is warranted.

¹⁴ I report here the findings of a search of the TLG D CD-ROM.