Persuasion, Power, Possession

Thomas Rosenmeyer

This paper comes out of a project of trying to discover whether ancient Greek criticism has a concept of "literature", or whether it is bedevilled with some of the same difficulties that have prompted many current critics to question the privileged standing of that notion.[1] As always in these matters, we have to begin with Aristotle, since Plato's various scrutinies of spoken and written discourse are usually conducted with a view to determining where discourse fits into a world dictated by philosophical accountability. The *Phaedrus* contains passages that bear investigating (esp. 276D1ff.); but Aristotle is the more rewarding resource. "Aristotle" is, in most of our inquiries, tantamount to the *Poetics*. But in that work Aristotle is concerned almost exclusively with two specific literary genres, drama and epic. In his introductory chapters he has some important things to say about the performing arts in general, and documents his more comprehensive interest by lamenting the absence of a general name for the verbal arts (1.1447a8-b13). Thereafter, however, the two major genres monopolize his attention. For a more catholic appreciation we have to go to the *Rhetoric*.[2] Now it is true, of course, that the *Rhetoric*, with its focus upon the three oratorical genres — forensic, deliberative, and performative (I hope this translation of ἐπιδεικτικὸς λόγος will not be found confusing) — is in the first instance a compendium outlining, both descriptively and prescriptively, what a good public speaker ought to know. But only in the first instance. The work is shot through with wise and cunning remarks on how recipients, both listeners

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1 This paper, delivered at the 1992 meeting of the American Comparative Literature Association in New York City, is dedicated to Ra'anana Meridor with some diffidence. She delights and excels in details, in meticulously plotted argument, in precision. I hope my free-ranging essay will be acceptable as what U.S. soldiers call a "liberty". — My thanks to Mark Griffith for comments on an earlier version.

2 Among recent publications on the *Rhetoric*, the following may be noted: W.M.A. Grimaldi, comm., *Aristotle: Rhetoric* I-II (1980, 1988); E. Eggs, *Die Rhetorik des Aristoteles* (1984); E.E. Ryan, *Aristotle's Theory of Rhetorical Argumentation* (1984); S. Schweinfurth-Walla, *Studien zu den rhetorischen Überzeugungsmitteln bei Cicero und Aristoteles* (1986); K. Eden, *Poetic and Legal Fiction in the Aristotelian Tradition* (1986).

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and readers, can best be reached. Chapter 12 of book 3, with its remarkable contrastive analysis of one style for listening and one style for reading, comes through as a broadly authoritative survey of what discourse is capable of, and of how many kinds of recipients there are.[3] Let me say that like most ancient critics, Aristotle talks about listeners rather than readers; but his own experience is that of a reader, and even when he talks of listeners we have to assume that the model is that of a *viva voce* reader who listens to himself and responds to his own vocalization. But in order not to weight the balance in favor of either listener or reader, I shall often in this paper use the convenient if ugly neutral "recipient".

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle is rarely concerned with the effect a play has upon the audience. I myself belong to the school of Kitto and Else and others who believe that when Aristotle cites pity and fear and their cleansing, he has in mind above all the feelings experienced by the characters within the drama, and the constitution of the plot such that everyday passions and experiences are made serviceable to an artistic construct.[4] In the *Rhetoric*, on the other hand, the chief emphasis is on persuasion, on how the speaker or writer, that is, the author, can best reach the recipient, and what stratagems are encouraged or permitted under this aegis. When we get to Longinus and Proclus, we will find that this emphasis on persuasion falls by the wayside; they revert to the concern of the *Poetics* with the intrinsic nature of good discourse. In addition they return to Plato's preoccupation with the nature of the artistic personality. What they have learned from the *Rhetoric*, however, is to pose their questions so as to achieve a general understanding of what discourse, rather than specific varieties of discourse, is about. That this is so can be shown only by a detailed examination of how the authors fail, or rather manage not, to keep the various kinds of discourse, and especially poetry and prose, distinct from each other. Here I will offer only a brief summation of what is involved.

That the *Rhetoric* has something to tell us about more than oratory should not be surprising to a generation raised on Kenneth Burke, Chaim Perelman and

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3 For Aristotle's comparative-contrastive analysis of γραφική and ἀγωνιστικὴ λέξεις, see A. Hellwig, *Untersuchungen zur Theorie der Rhetorik bei Platon und Aristoteles. Hypomnemata* 38 (1973), 142ff., and G.A. Kennedy, tr. comm., *Aristotle on Rhetoric* (1991), 253-57. Aristotle's chapter contains a number of puzzles that still await thorough analysis.

4 G.F. Else, *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument* (1957), 224-32, 423-47; H.D.F. Kitto, "Catharsis", *Studies Caplan* (1966), 133-47. See also D. Keesey, "On Some Recent Interpretations of Katharsis", *Classical World* 72 (1978/9), 193-207. My position is a minority view. For a recent version of the majority opinion, see S. Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics* (1986), 184-201, 350-56.

Paul de Man.[5] The meaning of persuasion, Aristotle's term for the effect the author means to have on the recipient, has been exposed to some strains. De Man, in a comment on Nietzsche's early teaching, says: "Considered as persuasion, rhetoric is performative, but when considered as a system of tropes, it deconstructs its own performance".[6] To be sure, de Man locates the tension *between* persuasion and trope, and *within* rhetoric. But persuasion itself is necessarily burdened in the process. It is my suspicion that in Aristotle, also, persuasion is a heavily strained concept. Of what is it that a persuader persuades: the truth of a fact? the likelihood of an event? the plausibility of a presumption or an argument?[7] All three of them are involved, as Aristotle careens back and forth between forensic and performative and deliberative discourse. For our purposes, of course, performative, the kind of discourse created for show, the nonpolitical and nonjudicial art of a Gorgias or an Isocrates, is of special relevance. But Aristotle's common assumption that the kinds make a comprehensive whole guarantees an enduring complexity or opacity of the sense of persuasion.[8]

The appeal of persuasion is to the intellect.[9] With his advocacy of the dominance of reason, Aristotle never in the *Rhetoric* abandons his belief that critical judgment is involved in all responses to persuasion. Never once in the *Rhetoric* does he anticipate Longinus' call for imaginative or emotional overpowerment. Persuasion in its optimal sense is neither indoctrination nor enforcement; it is carried forward by arguments, by quasi-syllogisms and evocations of precedent. The response to the arguments may be one of pleasure or displeasure, that is, it may be aesthetic. But such a response, and the aim of the discourse working toward it, still come under the governance of the intellect; they involve a learning process. The recipient, especially a group of listeners, may be incapable of the sophisticated judgment the author hopes for, but this does not alter the fact that persuasion attempts to rely, to the greatest degree possible, on argumentative instruction.

The discourse relies upon two other factors, character and experience, that is, the response of the recipient to the implied character of the author, and further, to the experience, emotional or otherwise, invested in the discourse. In Aristotle's words: "As judges of discourse, people are persuaded either because they

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5 K. Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1950); C. Perelman and L. Olbrects-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* (1969); P. De Man, *Allegories of Reading* (1979).

6 De Man (previous note), 13.

7 For modes of persuasion in fifth-century texts, see R.G.A. Buxton, *Persuasion in Greek Tragedy* (1982), 48-57.

8 A close study of how the three major kinds, forensic, deliberative, and performative, shade off into each other in the course of Aristotle's discussion is a *desideratum*.

9 This is the principal point of Grimaldi and S. Schweinfurth-Walla (above, n. 2).

have themselves had certain experiences *or* because they conceive the speakers to have certain qualities *or* because an argument has been made" (*Rhet.* 3.1.10-13). The ranking of the three factors in this statement may be misunderstood, for in the balance of the treatise argumentation gets the lion's share of the discussion. Perhaps Aristotle finds character and experience or feeling less rewarding or less promising as topics of analysis, at least in the present context. As the treatise develops, these two factors have little independent force. The discourse, the *logos*, is primarily conceived as a network of cleverly combined rational procedures, modally intensified by the admixture of character and feeling.

As a tool of reason, persuasion has its roots in the practice of *sapheneia*, of clarity and current or ordinary speech.[10] Here Aristotle makes a distinction between poetry and prose; in poetry *sapheneia*, the use of ordinary language, is of course not sufficient (3.2.1404b1-5). But in prose, also, the ideal of clarity, stressed early in book 3, is soon abandoned or rather undergoes a strange metamorphosis. By the time we have reached the end of chapter 12 and the discussion of style, clarity has been, overtly and covertly, qualified in important ways, though it continues to be virtually synonymous with *to pithanon*, the factor of persuasion. The conversion of persuasive clarity into something new goes hand in hand with other deflections Aristotle introduces as the original concept of simplicity is found to be inadequate. In part, Aristotle's bending of the axiom of clarity is once again due to his elitist sense that recipients may not be susceptible to lucid arguments and need to be persuaded by an overlay of show. The more crucial cause of Aristotle's abandonment of basic language is his finding that tropes, and especially metaphors, are built into language in such a way that they both endorse and negate *sapheneia*. Metaphor and other tropes and figures help to persuade by a sort of mental click; at first the recipient is puzzled and lost by the strangeness of the trope, but almost immediately, upon unfiguring the figure, he is delighted by the consonance (3.11.1412a19-22).[11] Still, the author must not foreground his use of metaphor; the later *ars est celare artem* is amply anticipated in Aristotle's text.[12] The recipient, Aristotle says, especially one in authority, may resent the manifest exploitation of tropes and figures, and may think

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10 *Rhet.* 3.2.1404b2-3: Aristotle associates σαφῆ εἶναι and δηλοῦν, clarity and signification.

11 For this topic, see S. Consigny, "Transparency and Displacement: Aristotle's Concept of Rhetorical Clarity", *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 17 (1987), 413-19. For Aristotle on metaphor, see S.R. Levin, "Aristotle's Theory of Metaphor", *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 15 (1982), 24-46; also Eggs (above, n. 2) 316-39; and G.W. Most, "Seming and Being: Sign and Metaphor in Aristotle", in M. Amsler, ed., *Creativity and the Imagination* (1987), 11-33.

12 For the precariousness of this stratagem, see the contrast between *Rhet.* 3.2.1405a30, where Euripides is criticized for choosing a word too grand for its context, hence not concealing the art, and *Poet.* 22.1458b19ff., where Euripides is praised for a similar venture, and Aeschylus is criticized for picking a κύριον.

he is being had (3.2.1404b20-21).[13] (It is always good to be reminded that Aristotle thinks of the audience as both intellectually limited and politically on top. Longinus follows him in this.) So Aristotle develops a whole set of terms to designate the art of concealment: terms of deception, ἐξαπατᾶν,[14] of hiding, λανθάνειν, of stealing, κλέπτειν. From the original position that persuasion requires clarity and common speech, and that prose requires this more than poetry, he arrives at the position that just as people are more intrigued by strangers than by fellow-citizens, so language should be unfamiliar, but in such a way that the unfamiliarity remains unnoticed (3.2.1404b8-19; 35-36).

Thus, ultimately, persuasion is contingent upon concealment. In Kenneth Burke's understanding, followed by De Man, deflection is acknowledged as the rhetorical basis of speech, as a "dialectical subversion of the consistent link between sign and meaning".[15] In Aristotle's scheme, deflection, though cited within the parameters of a *Rhetoric*, is not merely a rhetorical necessity but a property of all persuasive speech. Deception in the end covers more than the use of tropes and figures. At one point Aristotle recommends that, in competitive discourses, the speaker should slip in his own personality and that of his opponent from the start without the listeners becoming aware of it (3.16.1417b7-8). The best persuasion, in defiance of its own prelapsarian call for clarity and directness, operates with instruments of evasiveness and defamiliarization. (It should be understood, of course, that in Aristotle, deflection is a willed procedure, a stratagem forced upon the author by programmatic difficulties intuited by him, and not a deception or deformation which, as in Gorgias and in some modern theorists, is an indigenous mark of all language in its relation to the referent).

Much more could be said about deflection in Aristotle's talk about what happens to ordinary language and natural speech under the impact of what I think may be called literary discourse.[16] But now let us look at Longinus.[17] Where

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13 Kennedy (above, n. 3), 222 suggests that Aristotle's μὴ δοκεῖν λέγειν πεπλασμένως ἀλλὰ πεφυκότως refers to the act of speaking (natural delivery) rather than to diction, and it is true that the example of Theodorus points in that direction. But this is a daring illustration, its oddity mediated by the comparison with wine; the chapter as a whole is about speech *qua* diction, and reverts to this immediately after the comparison.

14 At *Rhet.* 3.11.1412a20 the reading προεξαπατᾶν seems to me preferable to προσεξαπατᾶν: the recipient is first, briefly, deceived before intelligence clicks in.

15 De Man (above, n. 5), 8.

16 Cf. P. Valesio, *Novantiqua* (1980), 24f.: Rhetoric III "is a reticent masterpiece, one whose brilliant insights are hidden in a maze of oscillations and ambiguities, ... because ... the whole treatise is born out of a laborious and delicate compromise". See also P. Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor* (1977), 7-43, esp. 20. Aristotle may be said to bob and weave among various positions, such as: 1. λόγος calls for clarity; 2. λόγος calls for τὸ πρέπον; 3. poetry and prose have different πρέποντα; 4. prose should use deviations from ordinary speech economically; 5. metaphor is part of

Aristotle measures the substance of the discourse by what it aims to do and by how that aim can be attained, and hence arrives at a diversified landscape of discourses, Longinus levels his sights upon the unitary concept of discourse at its best. Once again, poetry and prose are initially distinguished but then, via diffraction and the nonrestrictive use of quotes, made to join forces under the banner of *hypsos*, "height". "Height" is a quantitative term, and if Kant's "sublime" has any relevance to Longinus' "height" — not likely, since Kant's sublime is not the property of an object but a property of our apprehension of the object — it would be the mathematical sublime. With his array of signals of magnitude, and of the surpassing of magnitude, of excess and surplus and hypertrophy, Longinus goes to bat for a sort of gigantism, documented in the famous chapter (36) on the *kolossos*, whose details I will come to in a minute. Aristotle, too, now and then, but quite unprogrammatically, espouses *megethos*, magnitude, which in fact happens to be closely associated with the old Greek idea of beauty.[18] Aristotle's *megethos* is the rightful magnitude, the size that defines an organism as a surveyable entity. In Longinus the quantitative dimension, veiled by the translation of *hypsos* as "the sublime", is fundamental, though complicated by an unsettling tension between mass and height and extension, on the one hand, and the crashing through barriers, on the other. And, to quote Longinus (1.4), "The immeasurable transports the listeners into ecstasy rather than persuasion".[19] Where the effect of the best discourse is visualized as the impact of irresistible quanta upon recipients whose needs or expectations are passed over in silence, persuasion is moot, beside the point.

In addition to magnitude, or rather as an epiphenomenon of magnitude, there is power, the power of rapid movement and abruptness, of dizziness and ravishment, terror and fulmination (chs. 8.2; 19; 20.2). Kant's dynamic sublime bears only a remote relationship with Longinus' glorification of a power that reveals itself both in the discourse and in its effect upon the recipient.[20] This power is twofold, owing to the twofold aspect of the quantitative dimension. It is the power of the impact of the mass, and it is the power released as the mass is tran-

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ordinary speech; 6. where prose uses deviations, that use must be concealed, to create a semblance of clarity; 7. persuasion is contingent on concealment.

17 The standard work in English is D.A. Russell, ed. comm., *'Longinus' on the Sublime* (1964). Cf. also the same author's "Longinus Reconsidered", *Mnemosyne* 34 (1981), 72-86. Further, N. Hertz, *The End of the Line* (1985), ch. 1, and G.B. Walsh, "Sublime Method: Longinus on Language and Imitation", *Classical Antiquity* 7 (1988), 252-69.

18 *Poet.* 7.1450b34-9; *Rhet.* 1.9.1367b28-68a29.

19 οὐ γὰρ εἰς πειθὼ τοὺς ἀκροωμένους ἀλλ' εἰς ἔκστασιν ἄγει τὰ ὑπερφυᾶ.

20 To speak of "power" in Longinus would seem to run afoul of the quantitative rather than qualitative cast of his vision, unless we are willing to recognize the quantitative aspects of his talk of power, the emphasis on augmentation, on expansion, on excess and diminishing.

scended and made cosmic (chs. 15, 32, 35-36). The energy is, in some contexts, viewed as a horizontal force, carrying the speaker-writer along with it or even outrunning him; in other contexts it is, in its pressure upon the recipient, conceived of as vertical, a thunderbolt reaching down from the sky. We may compare Homer, where the force of battle on a level plane is often highlighted by similes from vertical meteorology, that is, images of snow or hail or rain.[21] The power of the discourse coincides with, conforms to, an element of passion, *pathos*, in the speaker as well as in the recipient. If there was a sustained discussion of *pathos* in the treatise it is now lost;[22] but Longinus' incidental remarks in various places show its close kinship with power, suffering and agitation. We remember that in the *Rhetoric*, *pathos* can usually be rendered by "experience", the mental event which defines a momentary affect, and this could be modesty, or coldness, as well as anger or jealousy. In Longinus *pathos* is predominantly passion, the strong and vital emotion that is linked to unsettling and amazement. Aristotle's pity and fear are quasi-intellectual, judgmental responses, feelings prompted by a judicious act of comparison: here but for the grace of God go I.[23] Longinus' fear, or rather terror, stands by itself, as an exemplary adjunct to the power of the discourse (chs. 22.4, 34.4). Pity gets short shrift, because that civilized feeling has no share in the impetus of magnitude.

Critics have not been slow to identify in Longinus' own writing the stirrings of magnitude and power, and the tensions and excesses to which this emphasis must fall victim.[24] It is difficult to speak of deflections in an essay that appears, at times, overawed or jolted by its own claims. But one by-product of Longinus' exaltation of movement and of power bordering on violence is that it is difficult to locate the fixed outlines one associates with a systematic criticism. Unlike Aristotle's rhetoric, whose contours can be roughly delineated and summarized, Longinus offers, not a system or a doctrine but a *Nacherleben*, a rousing acclamation of the literary experience. Like Aristotle, however, and perhaps *because* his procedure works against systematicity, he succeeds in covering a wide range of forms of discourse, and sees equal opportunities for excellence, for height, in all of them.

The chapter on the imagination (15) is symptomatic of this inclusiveness. To begin with, as I have indicated, Longinus distinguishes between poetry and oratory. On the face of it, the distinction is asymmetrical; not all prose is covered by the rubric of oratory. Further, Longinus ascribes to the two kinds two different types of imagination, on the grounds that the end of poetry is stagger and shock,

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21 Cf. my "On Snow and Stones", *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* 11 (1978, publ. 1979), 209-225.

22 See Russell (above, n. 17), xii-xiv.

23 Cf. Else (above, n. 4), 370-75, 433-6.

24 See Hertz (above, n. 17).

while the end of prose is clarity, a clarity of exposition rather than of speech.[25] (Note the transformation of the referent, from *rhetorike* to *logoi*.) But, he adds ingenuously, poetry and prose really share in both aims, clarity and agitation.[26] Right from the start of this crucial discussion, then, Longinus engages in several varieties of deflection, or rather slippage, as I would like to call the phenomenon in his case. From his asymmetrical dichotomy he proceeds to a more symmetrical one; this he ties in with asymmetrical ends — agitation and shock define the response of the recipient; clarity defines the quality of the message — whose disparity and asymmetry are, in turn, resolved by means of a reckless reconciliation. But is "reckless" the proper term, and is the compromise resolution totally unjustified? In the course of a further discussion of the imagination, as examples from the authors are brought in, it emerges that some of the prose writers, especially orators, fall back on the poetic imagination. Elsewhere the poets themselves are divided into those of power and those who favor a lucid meticulousness.

These are instances of slippage; but unlike Aristotle's deflections which remain evasive maneuvers even while they fortify the solidity of his system, Longinus' slippages come along because his vision does not accommodate itself to an orderly scheme. Whenever, true to his training in the rhetorical schools, he ventures upon a trace of systematizing, of plotting a provisional chart of distinctions, he is bound quickly to get away from it in order to do justice to his totalizing vision of what all discourse, at its most impressive height and power, is and can do. The distinction between poetry and prose also has to be given up because the great excellences, height and power and surplus and passion, subsist equally in both of them. Slippages can be found in the most minor paragraphs of Longinus' essay. For instance, as he enumerates the several contraries of *hypsos*, the negative simulacra of height, he singles out frostiness (*to psuchron*, ch. 4). But once he has registered his disapproval he proceeds to argue that this supposedly unpropitious quality also may be the result of a worthwhile instinct: it may be prompted by a spirit of innovation, and may in fact be a companion effect of the realization of *hypsos* (ch. 5). This backpedalling, to allow for a writer like Timaeus but also for passages in Plato and Herodotus, is necessary, from Longinus' point of view, because a strict dichotomy into the good and the bad, not to mention the effective and the ineffective, would be unrealistic. It would run against the grain of his awareness that the literary experience is too nuanced and too amorphous to be caught in a clash of contrarieties.

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25 Ch. 15.1: τῆς μὲν ἐν ποιήσει [sc. φαντασίας] τέλος ἐστὶν ἔκπληξις, τῆς δ' ἐν λόγοις ἐνάργεια.

26 There is a lacuna in the text at this point (ch. 15.2); my supplement (ἐπίδηλον) differs from others that have been proposed. Ch. 15.2: ἀμφότεραι δ' ὅμως τό τε ⟨ἐπίδηλον⟩ ἐπιζητοῦσι καὶ συγκεκινημένον. Cf. my "*Phantasia* und Einbildungskraft", *Poetica* 18 (1986, publ. 1987), 205 n. 25.

In spite of the great gulf that separates Longinus' criticism from Aristotle's rhetoric, Longinus, too, especially in his discussion of figures, tends to praise authors for their skill in concealment and sleight-of-hand. Demosthenes, he says (c. 16), in a famous speech after the disaster at Chaeronea, managed to boost the morale of the audience by reminding them of ancient glories without actually using the term "victory". The suppression of the key term was a trick, an act of stealth and a "heading off of the listeners", who might have resented victory talk in the hour of defeat. This recourse to the device of *elleipsis* is almost forced upon Longinus because of the difficulty he has with the relation between nature and natural talent, on the one hand, and technique, *techne*, on the other. A great writer, the creator of a discourse of height and power, is expected to be answerable only to his innate talent. But training, technique, rhetorical craftsmanship are inveterate parts of Longinus' culture, and he holds no brief for the untutored genius. The passage on the *kolossos* (c. 36) is the most tangled testimony to the difficulty Longinus has on this score. An opponent had claimed that the *kolossos*, a gigantic and roughly finished and thus flawed sculpture, was not on account of its size superior to Polyclitus' elegant spear-carrier. Longinus replies that the analogy is false; in the visual arts minute workmanship is the objective, while in natural products size is what is admired. Now it is by nature, he continues, that man is a user of speech.[27] In statues we look for verisimilitude; in artful speech we require a surpassing of human dimensions. And then Longinus, in his usual devil-may-care way, has a closing paragraph about the mutual implication and reciprocal helpfulness of nature and technique (c. 36.4).

There are a number of bold steps in this argument. The introduction of the *kolossos* is risky in as much as Longinus, to deflate the critic's condemnation of gigantism, has to go out of his way to deny the parallel between the two sister arts, sculpture and literature. Further, the appeal to nature as favoring magnitude (shades of Aristotle's endorsement of magnitude in an organism) goes awkwardly with the accreditation of extraordinary magnitude, in fact, a magnitude that resists measurement, in discourse. Once again, the unabashed angling of the argument, the slippage between nature and technique and magnitude, derives from Longinus' habit of focusing on the power of the discourse, to the exclusion or at least downgrading of the linguistic and compositional moves needed for the proper persuasion of the recipient.

Longinus' critical model — and he is a very good critic of individual texts, much more so than Aristotle — is one of the appreciation of excess. Verbal compounds formed with the prefix *hyper*, "over and beyond", and literal allusions to a motion that ruptures the frontiers of our terrestrial haven, are found again and again as Longinus assesses the remarkable power of superior discourse. This gets us to the third figure to be discussed, Proclus, the fifth-century

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27 Ch. 36.3: ἐπὶ μὲν τέχνης θαυμάζεται τὸ ἀκριβέστατον, ἐπὶ δὲ τῶν φυσικῶν ἔργων τὸ μέγεθος. φύσει δὲ λογικὸν ὁ ἄνθρωπος.

head of the Platonic school in Athens, and a major source for Renaissance neo-Platonism. Among Proclus' many extant writings there is a long commentary on Plato's *Republic*, which *inter alia* contains a fully developed theory of discourse, though it pretends to be nothing more than a clarification of what Plato himself says on this head. Proclus' theory has been the subject of a series of excellent recent books.[28] Briefly stated, Proclus' approach is defensive; he devises allegorical and symbolic mechanisms to demonstrate that, given a proper understanding of Plato's views of poetry, Homer, the poet *par excéllence*, can be rescued from Platonic strictures. The word "allegory" does not appear in Proclus' writings; but the method of unearthing a meaning from underneath the surface text is unmistakable, and in fact he offers a fifteen-page theoretical justification of the allegorical method.

This defensive procedure is tied to a complex assessment of the production of literary discourse. Accepting Plato's tripartition of the soul and describing the lives associated with each of them — the irrational, the intermediate, and the purely rational — Proclus establishes a parallel series of three kinds of poetry and the receptions appropriate to them:[29] a poetry of *doxa* and imitation and passion; a poetry of understanding that distinguishes between the good and the bad; and finally the highest poetry, the superior rapture of the tempered soul that allies itself with the gods. Throughout this elaborate scheme, the word "poetry" ought to be understood in its widest sense; no distinction is made between poetry and prose. What is peculiar and significant about Proclus' critical edifice is the claim that in the best literature all three levels of poetry, and that means, all three levels of the soul-life, are comprehensively involved. The ultimate aim, however, is the reaching out for *eros*, beauty, and the divine; and his language suggests something like a mystic union. This is where Proclus connects with Longinus; the latter's tendency toward cosmic enlargement finds its systematic endorsement in this theory of a literary production and the response to it that get their credentials from a transfer, literally a *metaphora*, into the divine realm.

Proclus cites the magnet sequence from Plato's *Ion*: the chain reaction stretching from the Muse through the poets to the rhapsodes and their listeners is reversed to designate the celestial One as the objective the finest poetry aspires to reach.[30] But the original orientation of the chain remains in place; the highest poetry, in spite of its layered components, is a poetry of possession. In creating his best work the writer submits to the hierarchic linkage which stamps him a beneficiary of the charges that stretch between the One and him, and render him

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28 A.J. Festugière, tr. comm., *Proclus: Commentaire sur la République* (1970); J. Coulter, *The Literary Microcosm* (1976); A.D.R. Sheppard, *Studies on the 5th and 6th Essays of Proclus' Commentary on the Republic. Hypomnemata* 61 (1980); R. Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian* (1986).

29 Proclus *in rempubl.* pp. 177.14 - 179.32 Kroll.

30 *Ibid.* p.183 Kroll.

possessed. Here, too, there are deflections; both the simultaneity of the two orientations I have mentioned, and a further splitting of the lowest level of poetry and of life-soul, makes for slippages in terminology (an important issue, given the ambitions of the scheme) and in the development of tactical details. But the vitality of the system, the secret of its efficiency, is due neither to the act of persuasion nor to the power of human greatness but to the state of being possessed by the god, or, more philosophically speaking, by the One, which in its alternating rhythm of procession and retrocession guarantees the authority of the poet. In the course of setting out his program Proclus employs a variety of vivid images that herald a close affinity between literary theory and the language of religious experience. I can think of modern parallels. Geoffrey Hartman, in *The Unmediated Vision* (1954), purports to disdain the symbols and other mediating mechanisms of the critical tradition he opposes. But as an interpreter of Wordsworth he uses terms like "dilation" and "luminosity" which often seem to me to point in the direction of Gnosticism or neo-Platonism.

This is a very foreshortened glimpse at Proclus. Let me say by way of summary that in Aristotle, Longinus, and Proclus we have three theorists and critics who develop programs that permit them to catch various branches of discourse under one denominator. We may rightly say they are concerned with what we understand by literature. At the same time, because of the specific vantage points from which they address their topics, and because of the various deflections and slippages their choices carry in their wake, they continue to wrestle with the problem of coverage, and with the issue of the relation of discourse to language, an issue which it would be folly in this context to take up.

University of California, Berkeley