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Desiring the Transcendent – Plato's Eros and Eighteenth-Century Notions Concerning the Affections of the Sublime

Most scholars agree that eighteenth-century notions of the sublime stem from antiquity, seeking its origins in Pseudo-Longinus' famous tractate On the Sublime. *The objective of the present study is to highlight a less discussed viewpoint as described more recently by James I. Porter, which argues that the aforementioned theories have more to do with ancient Platonic conceptions regarding intelligible beauty than Longinus' rhetorical analysis of* ὕψος. *Plato's* Phaedrus *and the* Symposium *are the most frequently mentioned dialogues to support this theory, focusing mainly on divine beauty and its parallels with eighteenth-century descriptions of the sublime. In this article I would like to approach the question from a somewhat different perspective: eros. Is it possible to find parallels between early modern accounts of emotions accompanying the sublime experience and Plato's notions on erotic* mania*?*

Keywords: sublime, Eros, Longinus, Plato, Kant, Burke

'[…] this wondering:
this is where philosophy begins and nowhere else […]'
(Plato, *Theaetetus* 155D)[1]

1. Introduction

Why do people experience a sense of awe while observing depictions of natural disasters such as volcanic eruptions or tornadoes? What is the psychological mechanism which makes us appreciate bloody tragedies, or more recently, watching horror movies? What exactly fascinates us in the fateful fall following the romance of Romeo and Juliet? This human ten-

[1] COOPER (1997: 173).

dency, a sense of fearful awe when we face some uncontrollable power, has perplexed philosophers, aesthetes and psychologists for centuries.

Since the 18th century, especially with the publication of two key studies, namely Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) and Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (1790), it has been fashionable to answer the above query by differentiating between two fundamentally separate aesthetic categories: the beautiful, inducing peaceful relaxation of the senses, and the sublime, which in turn generates a paradoxical emotion, that of a fearful joy and desire or awe in the observer. The latter, famously, went on to become a hallmark feature of high romanticism. But from where does this observation, this differentiation really originate?

Current scholarship generally agrees that the genesis of the notion of the sublime can be traced back to the obscure, fragmentary tractate entitled *On the Sublime* (Περὶ Ὕψους) written most probably in the 1st century by an anonymous author referred to as Longinus or Pseudo-Longinus, noting that this is the first known study utilizing the term *ὕψος* (height, sublimity) similarly to early modern theories. In addition, scholars almost universally concur that although Pseudo-Longinus took an important first step, his analysis remained mostly literary, and therefore Burke and Kant made a revolutionary leap forward by treating the sublime as a more universal phenomenon, which constitutes an entirely separate and mostly antithetical category from the beautiful.

But is this approach valid? There have always been voices which problematized this traditionally accepted reception history, to a lesser or greater degree, which more recently culminated in James I. Porter's monumental study entitled *The Sublime in Antiquity* published in 2016.

Although his theory remains somewhat controversial and has been criticized by some for its rather simplistic deconstruction and dichotomy of the sublime and the way he attributes its roots to almost any philosophical school in antiquity, in this study I would like to argue that part of Porter's argument – the reason why he downplays Pseudo-Longinus' significance in favor of Plato – remains valid; and I would go still further by suggesting that even if we reject Porter's somewhat obscure categories of *material sublime* and *immaterial sublime*, and with them many

other presumed ancient sources of the concept, some of Plato's views will still represent the best ancient precursor of eighteenth-century notions of the sublime, centuries earlier than Pseudo-Longinus' tractate.

It is important to highlight one essential difference between Porter's theory and my argument: although I am going to build on his views concerning Plato in this study, I am not following his dichotomy of *material sublime* and *immaterial sublime*. In my view, all sublime experience is paradoxical *par excellence*: material and immaterial at the same time; whatever object it is induced by, it ultimately arises from a feeling of fearful awe at the transcendent and a desire to experience its power based on some form of physical experience.

In addition to the above departure, in this study I would like to argue that the many parallels between the Platonic notion of eros and the sublime experience have been somewhat overlooked in previous investigations in favor of those parallels with experiencing *Beauty Itself*. I will attempt to show this through the analysis of the concept of Plato's *eros* and *erotic mania* (or *enthusiasm*) in this context, mostly building on passages from the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*, respectively.

2. Definitions and Reception History

Somewhat ironically, even though he himself emphasized the argument that the cornerstone of every theoretical investigation should be the clear definition of its objective, the author of *On the Sublime* falls short in that respect.[2] This is a disconcerting reminder of the difficulties every scholar needs to face in such an investigation, and should not be entirely surprising since the notion of sublimity, as we will see below, is inextricably linked to the qualities of inconceivability and ineffability.

As a solid starting point, in *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy* we find the following entry:

> **Sublime**: n., adj. Awesome grandeur (of a personal character, of a work of art, of nature), contrasted in eighteenth-century aesthetics (Burke, Kant) with the beautiful. The classical treatment is *On the Sub-*

[2] Longinus 1.

> *lime*, a work from the first century. Longinus is commonly given as the name of the author.[3]

Dictionary entries often add that the Greek noun ὕψος used by Pseudo-Longinus, depending on the context, can be translated in various ways, from 'height' to even 'loftiness' or, of course, 'sublimity'. The Latin counterpart '*sublimis*', a compound adjective made up of 'sub' (under) and 'limes' (boundary or border), can be translated as 'heightened' or 'grand', and went on to become the ancestor of the modern terminology *sublime* and *sublimity*.

At the beginning of his book, James I. Porter gives an account of the traditional reception history referred to in the above entry, also referenced by most scholars whenever any investigation concerning the sublime takes place.

Umberto Eco is no exception when, in his *On Beauty*, he considers Pseudo-Longinus' tractate as the root of all other theories. In his interpretation, the term discussed in the original study refers to

> […] an expression of grand and noble passions (like those expressed in Homeric poetry or in the great Classical tragedies) that bring into play the emotional involvement of both the creator and the perceiver of the work of art. With regard to the process of artistic creation, Longinus accords the maximum importance to the moment of enthusiasm […].[4]

In the beginning of his work, the ancient author himself provides the following introduction to the concept:

> [...] the Sublime consists in a consummate excellence and distinction of language, and [...] this alone gave the greatest poets and prose writers their preeminence and clothed them with immortal fame. For the effect of the genius is not to persuade the audience but rather to transport them out of themselves. Invariably what inspires wonder, with its power to amaze us, always prevails over what is merely convincing and pleasing. (Longinus 1, 3)

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[3] MAUTNER (2005).

[4] ECO (2004: 278).

Based on the above, it can be observed that Pseudo-Longinus' analysis is mostly literary, and in later passages he considers five major sources of sublimity: great thoughts, strong emotion, certain figures of thought and speech, noble diction, and dignified word arrangement.

Eco also echoes most scholars in recounting that this tractate was almost completely forgotten during the Middle Ages, rediscovered sometime in the 16th century and eventually brought back to the focus of intellectual discourse by Nicolas Boileau in the 17th century, gradually becoming a more general aesthetic concept as opposed to the more rhetorical one represented by Pseudo-Longinus.

In 1757, Edmund Burke wrote the first essential study on this subject, which was published under the title *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful.* Eco points out that although most scholars agree that this was the revolutionary moment when sublimity became an entity completely separated from the notion of beauty, we should not forget the fact that by this time the definition of this term, just like the Greek word itself, had been somewhat modified: while for Pseudo-Longinus it is artistic creativity that induces the experience of the sublime, Burke goes on to merge these approaches and analyzes the concept in both contexts, natural as well as artistic objects and their attributes alike:

> Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime.[5]

In a later passage he goes on to define the sublime as follows:

> The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully is astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror.[11] In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it. Hence arises the great power

[5] BURKE (1990: 36).

> of the sublime, that far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings and hurries us on by an irresistible force. Astonishment, as I have said, is the effect of the sublime in its highest degree; the inferior effects are admiration, reverence, and respect.[6]

One of the many undeniable merits of Burke's study lies in its objective of creating a standard dichotomy of the beautiful and the sublime, which can be summarized in the following table:

Table 1:

Beautiful	**Sublime**
diminutiveness	grandiosity
smoothness	roughness
graduality	suddenness
sophistication	enthusiasm, astonishment, overwhelming power
regular light	darkness, or translucent light
finiteness	infinity

This analysis served as the basis of the philosophical discourse of which Immanuel Kant also partook, and whose most significant testament is the chapter devoted to the mentioned dichotomy scrutinized in the *Critique of Judgement*.

As Eco concludes, the German philosopher defined the experience of the beautiful as 'disinterested pleasure, universality without concept, regularity without law', whereas the sublime is 'absolutely great' generating negative pleasure and awe.[7] The experience can also be induced by a formless object, 'insofar as we present unboundedness, either [as] in the object or because the object prompts us to present it, while yet we add to this unboundedness the thought of its totality.'[8]

As is well-known, beyond a new dichotomy of the beautiful and the sublime, Kant also created further distinctions by differentiating between mathematical and dynamic sublimities. The former is the 'nega-

[6] BURKE (1990: 53).
[7] ECO (2004: 294).
[8] KANT (1987: 98).

tive pleasure' that we feel, for example, when staring at the nighttime sky with its innumerable stars, while the latter is an emotion incited by the sheer forces of nature, such as thunderstorms.[9]

It is worth noting at this point that Kant, although emphasizing the importance of applying the term only to objects of nature, he himself uses works of art as examples of mathematical sublimity, namely the pyramids of Giza as well as Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome.[10]

In addition, he also argued that the sight of the beautiful kindles an emotion of peaceful contemplation, as opposed to sublimity which instigates a dynamic locomotion in the mind. The latter point is in interesting opposition to Burke's views, which placed more emphasis on the concept of astonishment in connection with the sublime, an almost frozen state of mind, whereas for Kant the hallmark feature of sublimity is dynamism of the mind.[11]

Kant's complex dichotomy concerning the beautiful and the sublime might be summarized in the following table:

Table 2:

Beautiful	**Sublime**
finality, symmetry, disinterestedness, minuteness	grandiose, colossal, infinite with a sense of totality
static	dynamic
tranquility and positive pleasure	enthusiasm: anxiety, negative pleasure
independence	moral freedom
acquired virtue	actual virtue
x	mathematical, dynamic (and moral) aspects

Interestingly, this is the point at which Umberto Eco ends his history of sublimity in his study *On Beauty*, although as Porter and Shaw also point out, its story is far from over after Kant. The two early modern studies had a huge influence on German idealism, romanticism, modernism, and

[9] ECO (2004: 294).
[10] KANT (1987: 108).
[11] KANT (1987: 108).

postmodernism alike, and the discourse regarding the nature of the sublime, sometimes referring to the same or a very similar basic concept under a different term such as *the uncanny* or *awe*, and its role in our aesthetic experiences continues still today. To a name just a few: Freud, Auerbach, Lacan, and more recently, the philosopher Slavoj Žižek or the neuroscientist Beau Lotto, have all contributed to the ongoing dialogue.

3. An Alternative Approach to the History of the Sublime

As already mentioned above, some scholars do not entirely agree with this standard reception history. A slight departure especially can be observed in the twentieth century and is shared by many scholars today; the focus has shifted more towards the experience and the emotions of the sublime as opposed to the quality of the objects that can induce them.

Philip Shaw is a good example of this, with his definition in his famous *The Sublime – The New Critical Idiom*, in which instead of enumerating the many observable qualities of physical objects generating the sublime (stepping beyond traditional categorizations such as *rhetorical sublime* and *aesthetic sublime* or *natural sublime*), he focuses rather on the emotional experience shared by all descriptions:

> In broad terms, whenever experience slips out of conventional understanding, whenever the power of an object or event is such that words fail and points of comparison disappear, then we resort to the feeling of the sublime. As such, the sublime marks the limits of reason and expression together with a sense of what might lie beyond these limits; this may well explain its association with the transcendent [...] To adapt Robert Doran's analysis, this encounter with the limit reveals the paradoxical nature of the sublime: on the one hand, being overwhelmed/dominated by an encounter with the transcendent in art or nature induces a feeling of inferiority or submission ; on the other, it is precisely by being overpowered that a high-minded feeling of superiority or nobility of soul (mental expansiveness, heroic sensibility) is attained.[12]

[12] SHAW (2017: 2).

James I. Porter expresses a similar view, rejecting the traditional reception history and the categories of *rhetorical sublime* or *aesthetic sublime.* I elaborate the reasons for this departure.

Firstly, he does not believe Pseudo-Longinus should be considered as the primary source of later notions of the sublime, underlining the fact that even *On the Sublime* references to earlier theories and the word ὕψος is not treated as a strict philosophical/literary term by the ancient author himself. Sometimes it is used in the singular, at other times in the plural (τὰ ὕψη), and in other passages it is replaced with other words with a similar meaning, such as (τὰ ὑπερφυᾶ*).* His definition of the notion remains similarly obscure.[13]

Based on this argument, he explains that the best way to grasp at what counts as sublime for the ancient author, is to not look merely at the literary quotes provided by him, but also the emotions and passions rendered in connection with it. In other words, just as Shaw did in his later study, Porter also investigated examples or 'thematic markers' denoting *emotions* in the text which frequently describe a paradoxical set of passions, fearful joy or enthusiastic awe.[14]

Table 3:

Ecstasy (ἔκστασις, 1, 4)
Wonderful (θαυμάσιον, 1)
Ravery (βάκχευσις, 3, 2)
Enthusiasm (ἐνθουσιασμός, 3, 2)
Authentic passion (γενναῖον πάθος, 8, 3)
Grandeur (μεγαλοφροσύνη, 8, 3)
Ambivalent emotions (ὑπεναντιώσεις, 10, 3)
Erotic mania (ἐρωτικαῖς μανίαις, 10, 2)
Fear (φοβερός, 10, 6)
Greatness (μέγεθος, 8, 3)
Frenzy (μανία, 8, 3)
Harmony (ἁρμονία, 39, 3)
Loftiness (ὑπεραῖρον ἀνθρώπινα, 36, 3)

[13] PORTER (2016: 5).

[14] PORTER (2016: 51).

Looking at these phrases and passages describing awe, ecstasy, astonishment, enthusiasm or frenzy when referring to the sublime, there appears to be an obvious connection with Plato and his notions concerning *enthusiasmos* or divine frenzy, which possesses these hallmark emotions of awe combining fear and joy as described in the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*.

In conclusion, Porter references the scholarship according to which the above concept of sublimity lends itself well to the idea of the transcendent,[15] which in Plato's terminology would be called *Beauty Itself*; therefore Plato contrasting earthly beauty with *Beauty Itself* can be viewed as the actual precursor to the modern categories of the beautiful and the sublime.[16]

Based on the above reasoning, Porter constructed a different reception history not solely based upon the term of ὕψος. As he himself put it:

> On this alternative history of the sublime's entry into early modernity, Boileau appears as a mere latecomer, Longinus is a dispensable accessory, rhetoric can serve as a principal agent of aesthetics (including Christian aesthetics), and sublimity need not be limited to literature. […] The Platonizing tradition that swept across Europe in the wake of Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, touching everything from theology to theories of art and aesthetics, has to be reckoned as one of the main contributing factors in the spread of the sublime independently of Longinus.[17]

He also goes on to construct his own dichotomy of *material sublime* and *immaterial sublime*:

> [Material] Sublimity originates in an encounter with matter. It bears, so to speak, memory of this encounter even when it strains to pull

[15] Encountering the divine is often described as a terrifying experience in many Biblical passages as well as in Greco-Roman myths. The following lines from *The Second Book of Enoch* reflect this exceptionally well: 'And those two men lifted me up thence on to the seventh Heaven, and I saw there a very great light [...] and I became afraid, and began to tremble with great terror [...]' (5, 20).

[16] PORTER (2016: 51).

[17] PORTER (2016: 38).

> away from the physical realm into some higher, often more spiritual realm [...]
> Whereas the immaterial sublime represents an escape from matter into the immaterial, the material sublime is an experience of the radical otherness of matter and a reveling in this quality.[18]

Later, similarly to the argument to our study, Porter claims that many elements in Plato's aesthetics show a strong parallel with what he calls immaterial sublime:

> Plato's sublime is an *immaterial* sublime. It is posited on the disgrace of matter and a repudiation of the senses, and it seeks to transcend the phenomena of this world in order to achieve contact with another, higher world.[19]

Following this argument, he goes on to examine the relationship between the experience of *Beauty Itself* and that of the sublime, and gives a more detailed analysis of this based on passages from the *Phaedrus*, the *Symposium* and the *Io*.

As has been mentioned, Porter's book has received some criticism,[20] and even Porter may agree that Plato's ethereal Good or *Beauty Itself* implying symmetry and harmony in the *Timaeus,* does not immediately remind us of the sublime: the latter usually associated with an immense and more disorderly or even shapeless powerful force.

One might also argue that the dichotomy of *material* versus *immaterial sublime* seems rather arbitrary, which is a point Porter also seems to imply in his study.

However, one important fact often overlooked by his critics is that it was not he who associated Plato with the sublime in the first place, as the connection, directly or indirectly, had been made by many scholars even before Porter. Even without resorting to a postmodern deconstruction of the sublime and going through a complicated line of argumenta-

[18] PORTER (2016: 391).
[19] PORTER (2016: 562).
[20] See HALLIWELL (2016).

tion including religious experience, looking at the key texts themselves more carefully, Plato's name will ultimately appear.

Upon closer inspection, it seems that Pseudo-Longinus himself was a great admirer, and most probably a follower of Plato, treating him as an author of sublime texts and mentioning and quoting him in his short tractate as many as twenty times.

'The followers of Plato' are mentioned by Edmund Burke himself in his famous study, saying that when it comes to treating power as a source of the sublime and the notion's parallels to religious experience, they already knew something of this relationship.[21]

In some passages, Kant also seems to draw more direct parallels between intelligible or intellectual beauty and the sublime.[22]

Beside those already mentioned above writing on the sublime, we should not forget about other contemporary scholars who make similar connections. Robert Clewis, for example, in his 2009 study *The Kantian Sublime and the Revelation of Freedom* writes the following concerning enthusiasm which, as we have seen, is considered to be the passion of the sublime: 'Indeed, there are very intriguing connections to be made between inspiration, genius, and enthusiasm which can be traced back to enthusiasm's Platonic origin.'[23]

Robert Doran, in his famous *The Theory of the Sublime from Longinus to Kant* (published one year before *The Sublime in Antiquity*) also addresses the relationship, not accepting the traditional rhetorical-aesthetic categorization of the sublime, pointing out that all theories, rhetorical or aesthetic, describe essentially the same experience, which is overpowering astonishment and awe representing fear and joy. He adds: 'The fact that this feeling of ecstasy is produced more pragmatically, but not exclusively, by nature in Burke's and Kant's theories does not thereby negate the real continuity between Longinus and modern aesthetics.'[24]

As we have seen above, Philip Shaw also emphasized that sublimity is essentially a form of altered state of consciousness of an ambivalent

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[21] BURKE (1990: 64).
[22] KANT (1987: 131).
[23] CLEWIS (2009: 11).
[24] DORAN (2015: 272).

nature inducing awe (being a combination of fear and joy), seeing further parallels between Pseudo-Longinus's notions concerning sublimity and ecstasy and Plato's eros.[25]

Moving on to another common counter-argument referenced above, we should address the notion of harmony, which is famously associated with heavenly beauty in many Platonic passages. This fact in itself, however, does not render our investigations impossible if we take into consideration the ancient views on the paradoxical nature of *harmonia*, in which it is often defined as the ultimate form of beauty, being a union of contrary forces.[26]

The key argument is, therefore, that a form of enthusiasm and ecstasy accompanied by ambivalent or paradoxical emotions of awe (fear and joy), even without mentioning the term ὕψος, is exactly what Plato describes concerning enthusiasm in some of his dialogues, most famously in the *Phaedrus* and in the *Symposium*; and this serves as the basis for our research in considering Platonic dualism as the actual precursor of eighteenth-century dichotomies of the beautiful and the sublime.

4. Erotic *Mania* and the Affections of the Sublime in the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*

Now that Plato's role in the genesis of the notion of the sublime is established, I consider a less studied element: the question of how his description of a specific form of enthusiasm, *erotic mania,* relates to 18th century notions of the sublime experience.

For this, it is important to highlight a fact only briefly alluded to above, namely that in the feeling of enthusiasm shared by basically all theories of sublimity, there is an element of longing. The sublime, the power of which as fearful or incomprehensible as it may be, triggers an interest and a desire to comprehend or participate in that power, very much reminiscent of the notion of the drive toward the Good symbolized by Plato's Heavenly Eros.

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[25] SHAW (2017: 31).

[26] See Iamblichus *Vita Pythagorae*, DK 58 C4 and Philolaus VS 44 B 6.

If we can believe the description of Pausanias, there used to stand a statue of Eros at the entrance of Plato's Academy,[27] and his frenzy or *mania* is in the very center of two of Plato's most famous dialogues, the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*; therefore one might rightfully assume that this deity bore a special significance for Plato and his followers.

The Platonic term μανία essentially covers a form of ἐνθουσιασμός, which is derived from the adjective ἔνθεος, a compound translating roughly as 'possessed by god'. Its erotic form is connected, of course, to Eros himself, the Greek deity of love and sexual desire whose cult gradually gained prominence and evolved in many ways over the centuries.

The erotic *mania* is famously referenced in the *Symposium*: 'A lover is more godlike […], since he is inspired by a god.'[28] Of course, the notion of possession can already remind the reader of the longing, the astonishment and the enthusiasm described by the early modern theories previously alluded to.

What is known of the ancient views on this god, and his cult in general? As for religious ceremonies, physical evidence is scarce, but fortunately we still have much in the way of literary and mythological references to get a more detailed picture.

Surprisingly, Homer never mentions Eros as a divinity *per se*, although love and desire, in its many forms, famously plays an essential role in his epics. In Hesiod's *Theogony* however, he is named as one of the primordial gods (as it is also related in the *Symposium*), and Parmenides, one of Plato's heroes, also considered him to be among the first deities (fragment 13).[29]

In the 5th century, Prodicus defined him as 'desire doubled', and *mania* as 'eros doubled'.[30]

In the earliest depictions, he is a pubescent boy, often associated with any deity who was involved in some form of love affair. In later centuries, he famously accompanied Aphrodite, often directly referred to as her son, and especially by Hellenic times was frequently depicted

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[27] See Pausanias 1, 30.

[28] COOPER (1997: 465), *Symposium* 180b.

[29] HORNBLOWER–SPAWFORTH (2012).

[30] Fr. B7 *DK* as referenced by USTINOVA (2018: 294).

as an inseparable companion to her as one of several prepubescent boy figures, the *erotes*, symbolizing different forms of love. However, we should remember that like all ancient deities, his figure was very intricate, and also had appeared in the company of Dionysus for instance, whose role in divine frenzy or *mania* is well-known.[31]

The complexity of ancient beliefs is well reflected by the fact that the Amor of Apuleius' *Metamorphosis,* apparently, is not a prepubescent boy, whereas in Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe*, he is described as one. In some archaic legends referenced in the *Symposium*, Eros is one of the youngest of the gods and indeed he is depicted as such, whereas in others he is considered as most ancient. In one of the many origin myths he is named as the son of Aphrodite and Ares who obviously represent two opposing forces, and Harmonia, Deimos (terror) and Phobos (fear) are his siblings,[32] which facts already lend themselves to notions of sublimity exceptionally well.

There is one element however, which all myths share; even centuries before Plato's analyses, he had already been considered an ambivalent figure, implying the paradoxical emotions of longing, not unlike the sublime – joy as well as pain, yearning as well as fear.

As we have seen above, a form of erotic passion is also an important element of Pseudo-Longinus' notions on ὕψος; he even cites Sappho's famous love poem, finding sublimity in her description of bitter-sweet love inducing paradoxical feelings. His activity of inducing love is both joyful and terrible, so much so that in a way, his name was synonymous with madness.[33]

Plato's famous passages on Eros depict an equally complex picture. As one can see in the *Phaedrus*, erotic *mania* is one of the four divine frenzies, all of which are related to different higher powers: prophetic *mania* associated with Apollon, telestic *mania* attributed to Dionysus and poetic *mania* connected to the Muses.

This categorization is further complicated by the *Symposium,* in which Plato seems to imply that the root cause of all four frenzies is also

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[31] CYRINO (2010: 44).

[32] HARRINGTON–TOLMAN (1897).

[33] USTINOVA (2018: 298).

a kind of desire, that is, a form of Eros himself: from Diotima's argumentation we can conclude that ultimately all people are driven by a form of desire for *Beauty Itself*, and which is basically identical to the divine Good,[34] and moreover, they desire the everlasting possession of the Good. Everlasting is the same as eternal, a well-known quality of deities, therefore Plato seems to imply that yearning for an immortal existence, in other words, desiring the transcendent is a basic human tendency.

This very longing in ephemeral human beings manifests itself in the desire or the drive to produce something permanent: the creation of works of art (this includes poetic mania stemming from eros) and the production of offspring are the most physical manifestations of this aspiration. Thus, all the above-mentioned frenzies can be traced back to the same drive, a kind of desire or eros. As Diotima says: '[…] love, Socrates, is not, as you imagine, the love of the beautiful only. [It is…] the love of generation and of birth in beauty.'[35]

The most noble form of this erotic mania is of course spiritual; and its elevating aspect – which, in Platonic terms, is pushing us towards *Beauty Itself* or the Good, the immaterial, supersensible form of divinity – very much resembles the experience of the sublime, especially Kant's notion of the mathematically sublime: one cannot quite comprehend the immensity of space by looking at the stars, but still feels a kind of elevated desire to look at the starry sky and try and make sense of the meaning of the divine qualities of endlessness and eternity. There is an element of privation and an element of desire to this notion.

Now that we have investigated how eros as a divine form of enthusiasm is related to all other forms of enthusiasm, and ultimately to the sublime, let us now examine another interesting parallel, the duality of eros. As mentioned earlier, it is common to think that Burke and Kant were revolutionary in creating the dichotomy of the beautiful and the sublime. Although it is truly difficult to find any specific examples of this in Pseudo-Longinus's work, a very similar dichotomy is obviously present in Plato's philosophy.

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[34] 206a3.

[35] 206e.

As we see in the *Phaedrus*, there are two forms of beauty, earthly beauty and *Beauty Itself*, the divine source or form of beauty and goodness, which is obviously superior to the former aspect. *Beauty Itself*, as Porter also pointed out, has much to do with the notion of the sublime. When people first get an idea of it, they go through astonishment and desire accompanied by the paradoxical set of emotions of fearful joy so well-known from descriptions of eighteenth-century analyses of the sublime. This is beautifully described in the somewhat agonizing process of growing wings in the *Phaedrus*, an image that clearly shows that the ascension of the soul is not something that one could call a traditionally pleasant experience.[36]

In the *Symposium*, it is further emphasized however that not only beauty, but Eros – similarly to his companion Aphrodite – has two different aspects: *pandemos* (common love as the physical representation) and *ouranios* (heavenly). The object of the former is something physical; thus it represents a certain desire that can be physically fulfilled, whereas the latter represents a drive towards spiritual fulfillment that is beyond, and in some ways in opposition to, the human form. This interesting duality permeates the entire dialogue right from the beginning, with the different encomia attributing opposing qualities to Eros.

Another intriguing question is whether the Eros in the speech of Diotima – who articulates that Eros is not really a god, but a *daimon* – constitutes a third kind, or not. Both Plutarch and Alcinous say that Plato proposed the existence of three different kinds of Eros, the noble, the base, and the median position, whereas Plotinus seems to have accepted only the first two.[37]

A metaphysical explanation might resolve this issue, namely the notion that humans in their earthly bodies are only capable of thinking in opposites, whereas in the realm of forms, true existence defeats human understanding and can only be described in terms of paradoxical nature. This is also supported by the many Platonic passages preferring *noesis* to *dianoia*.

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[36] See also the famous 'Allegory of the Cave', where walking up into the light is initially a rather unpleasant experience.

[37] See Alc. 187; Plot. 3, 5.

Diotima's suggestion in considering Eros to be an essentially paradoxical concept representing ambivalent emotions may imply this notion as well: by mediating between the physical and the heavenly spheres, he is essentially a unity of opposing forces, which is beautifully symbolized by not only the legend of him being the son of Ares and Aphrodite, but also by Diotima's myth attributing Eros' birth to contrary powers of Poros and Penia.

In addition, Diotima's comment that Eros is 'not just love in the beautiful', but 'love in the generation and birth in beauty', also suggests that the experience of *Beauty Itself* (in our interpretation: the sublime), is more akin to birth and as such, not something we would traditionally describe as pleasant; it is painful and joyful at the same time. This also, in a way, can be interpreted as a metaphor of the paradoxical nature of the sublime.

5. Eros and Psyche

Diotima emphasizes that Eros dwells in the soul, and indeed there are many literary, mythological, and philosophical references in which this deity is inextricably linked to the psyche. But how can such passions belong to the ethereal soul if at other times they are strongly associated with the body?

Such contradictory views on the soul and the passions famously permeate the Platonic corpus, and some scholars might even argue that any comparison between 18th century notions on the sublime in this context can be considered nearly impossible, because of the many passages in which Plato seems to imply that emotions or passions are from the mortal coil, being in direct opposition with the pure soul belonging in the realm of forms. And truly, if the *Definitions* is of any authority on these matters, it is rather odd to find no entry for eros, and the following one for *mania*: 'Madness: the state which is destructive of true conception.'[38]

As always, one should remember the Socratic problem and the fact that – as it was also outlined by T. M. Robinson in his summary of Plato's soul theory – the philosopher seems to have changed positions

[38] COOPER (1997: 1686).

about this point over his lifetime, his views ranging from the arithmetical dualism of the *Gorgias* to the mitigated dualism of *Alcibiades I* (if we can accept the latter's authenticity), or even a form of monism reflected in the *Charmides* and the panpsychism implied by the *Timaeus*.[39]

Some of these views, nonetheless, can justify the affections of the sublime to be present in the soul: the first – and most obvious one – is the famous soul chariot metaphor of the *Phaedrus*, where, beside the rational part of the soul, there are two other faculties: the spirited and the appetitive, representing emotional drives.

Although these are generally considered to be inferior to the rational capacity, there are passages that imply a more balanced relationship, such as the entry on the notion of ῥαθυμία in the *Definitions* meaning '"laziness", an inertia of the soul, having no passion'.[40]

Furthermore, just as Eros can be earthly and heavenly, emotions are of two kinds, and those propelling the soul towards the transcendent are not to be restrained. Even traditionally there is an element of Eros which seems to be connected to self-sacrifice which can be interpreted as a form of rejection of the body in favor of our true, spiritual self, [41] not to mention the many literary and artistic references to the close relationship of the figures of Eros and the Psyche, and Diotima also placing Eros in the soul in her speech.

Based on the above we can conclude that Plato – or at least the Plato of the middle-period – seems to be more accepting of passions, arguing that the key to a happy life cannot mean a mere rejection of all affections, but rather finding the right balance between emotions and rationality. This is reflected by the afore-mentioned differentiation between earthly and heavenly eros in the *Symposium*. A form of enthusiasm therefore, where noble passions are combined with *noesis*, is encouraged, and this is what the heavenly form eros in the *Phaedrus* and *The Symposium* seems to symbolize. The passage mentioned of Alcinous' study also seems to support this interpretation.

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[39] WRIGHT (2000: 38).

[40] COOPER (1997: 1681).

[41] Sappho names Eros to be her 'therapon', which can also refer to a substitute in ritualistic sacrifice. See NAGY (2009: 32).

This tendency itself is also reminiscent of the Kantian concept of the sublime. In his *Critique of Judgement*, we can read the following: 'If the idea of the good is accompanied by affect, this is called enthusiasm (…)', and a few lines below the passage he goes on by also stating: 'enthusiasm is sublime'.[42]

5. Conclusion

In light of the above argument, eighteenth-century notions of the dichotomy between the beautiful and the sublime seem to be inextricably linked to the Platonic dualism of earthly beauty and intelligible beauty; therefore instead of Pseudo-Longinus' tractate, Plato should be considered as their ancient precursor.

Furthermore, a similarly close relationship with the duality of earthly eros and heavenly eros, the paradoxical emotions of eros or erotic enthusiasm and the affections of the sublime can be observed in the spiritual longing and the conjoined presence of ambivalent passions *and* simultaneous cognitive processes induced by sublimity and the same experienced through eros, as is described in the *Phaedrus* and in the *Symposium*.

The above connections justify further research for more parallels in later Platonic texts, some already referred to, but not thoroughly elaborated upon by Porter himself, such as Plotinus' *Enneads*, Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis*, Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* or Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite's *Mystical Theology*.

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