ALEXANDER POPE AND THE LONGINIAN TRADITION OF THE SUBLIME

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Respicit Aeneas subito et sub rupe sinistra
moenia lata videt triplici circumdata muro,
quae rapidus flammis ambit torrentibus amnis,
Tartareus Phlegethon, torquetque sonantia saxa.
Porta adversa ingens solidoque adamante columnae,
vis ut nulla virum, non ipsi exscindere bello
caelicolae valeant; stat ferrea turris ad auras […]
(Vergilius: *Aeneis*, VI, 548–555.)

In the context of early 18th-century British literary aesthetics, rhetoric and psychological interpretations of sublimity appear parallel, increasingly focusing on the affective potentials within the psychological mechanism of the sublime. On the one hand, this changing approach towards the sublime developed according to early 18th-century British authors' growing interest in sensibility and imagination. The original rhetoric category was widened towards a more empirical and psychological one. The reinterpretation of Longinus' *Peri hypsous* reinvigorated French and British classicist literary debates. At the same time, however, the new trend of reinterpreting the sublime was also a result of a selective rediscovery of the Longinian sublime and the reception of Lockean empiricism simultaneously. This paper offers insights into how the literary aesthetic discourse on the sublime became genuinely heterogeneous by the 1740s, and how it was 'prepared' to be reassessed and recapitulated by Edmund Burke, presenting a scheme which served as the representation of the unity of terror, astonishment and joy on a deeper, half-subconscious level (*sub-limen*).

Moreover, the aim of this study is to also explore and examine some aspects of how Alexander Pope interpreted sublimity within the context of early 18th-century British literary aesthetics. It is worth discussing var-

ious interpretations of the sublime in this period, because the first half of the 18th century witnessed the gradual transformation of the concept from its original, stricter, rhetoric interpretation towards a more imaginative and empiricist psychological aesthetic category. Within the realm of early 18th-century British literary aesthetics, I investigated in an earlier paper how the early 18th-century concept of the sublime developed towards the aesthetic concept with the major source of terror in the theories of Burke and Kant with John Dennis as the hallmark of this change (Cora 2014). Dennis was one of the first among the British literary critics of this period, who reinterpreted the rhetoric tradition of the Longinian sublime, and reconceptualised it by using the physico-theological theory of Thomas Burnet (*Sacred Theory of Earth* (1681)) (Cora 2014).

Although this process of transformation began with John Dennis in the early 18th century, this period still displays ambiguity in the interpretation of sublimity, namely, the above mentioned rhetoric and the empiricist-psychological trends. Because Alexander Pope had a direct debate with Dennis on the merits of literary criticism, including the nature of sublimity, it is worth investigating Pope's ideas on the sublime. Thus, one can also see the different facets of contemporary interpretations of sublimity.

My hypothesis is that Pope belongs to that group of critics who interpret the sublime as a rhetoric category which needs erudition and refined taste (the peripathetic tradition of the sublime), following the classical model of the urban sublime by Horace and Cicero (*sublimitas urbana*). The latter concept is based on the classicist notion of *urbanitas* (Ramage 1964: 390–414).[1] Most of Pope's contemporaries tended to shift the interpretation of the sublime towards a more empiricist and psychological basis. Yet, Pope belongs to that stream of literary aesthetics of neoclassicism, which springs from a wide spectrum of sensibility. This stream brings about heterogeneous interpretations of sublimity from finer ones derived from a crisp and grand style to those that spring from wild nature's affective force of awe and terror. However, prior to discussing Pope's critical theory, it is worth investigating the tradition of the sublime in neoclassicist literary aesthetics.

The paper also hypothesises that while the enthusiastic and passionate aspects of the sublime originate not only from 18th-century philosophy,

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1   For further examples of the parallels between the satirisation of Pope and Horace, see Sanders (1996), 280–285.

but rather from Greek peripatetic rhetorical theory and Platonic philosophy, yet the ontological and psychological significance of *terror* in the sublime becomes elaborated only in the 18th century. As for the structure of the paper, a short philosophical investigation on how various postmodern thinkers, first of all, Jean-François Lyotard, Hans Bertens and Guy Sircello, rephrased the problem of the sublime is followed by a longer section, in which I elaborate on how the Burkean and the Kantian sublime can be reinterpreted from the perspective of the Longinian tradition. Finally, the question is investigated of how the sublime can be hypothesised as an affective source for human insights, both rhetorically and empirically in the early 18th century.

Some poststructuralist aesthetic theories about the sublime appear as fashionable concepts with three well-identifiable critical points. First, according to Guy Sircello, the *epistemological transcendence* means that imagination overpowers cognition in sensing the sublime. Thus, thinking is disabled, therefore, creating a theory of the sublime is impossible, because theoretical working-out necessarily relies on cognition, which is in this case overwritten by excess imagination (Sircello 1993). Secondly, the notion of *ontological transcendence* refers to the fact that the sublime has its effects on human beings, thus, it exists, if only in an unreachable way, as a consequence of the former transcendence (Sircello 1993: 542–550). Whereas, finally, according to the poststructuralist critic, Jean-François Lyotard, the concept of *radical openness* in general implies that the sublime presents the unpresentable: the lack of the *validity* of reality yields an invention of other realities (Lyotard 1993: 109–133), as also pointed out by Hans Bertens:

> an art of negation, a perpetual negation […] based on a neverending critique of representation that should contribute to the preservation of heterogeneity, of optimal dissensus […] [it] does not lead towards a resolution; the confrontation with the unpresentable leads to radical openness (Bertens 2005: 128).

Although postmodernism revisits this basic ontological question with a critical theoretical refinement and builds it into its terminology (Bertens 2005: 126–128), I do not think it produces any fundamentally new perspectives or interpretations of the sublime. Because the very tradition — in the form postmodern critical thinkers refer to them — that began with

Longinus and continued much later with Kant, in itself carries this contradiction between the *eidetic* and *ontic* aspects of the sublime. In addition, if this aesthetic and philosophic tradition is reconsidered, Hans Bertens' conclusion of an emerging "radical openness" acquires a more complex meaning.

Authors of classical antiquity interpreted the sublime in a rhetorical-formal way with its final intention of exciting delight and affection in the audience of the orator. The *genus sublime*, also known as the *genus grande*, was the strongest among the three basic rhetorical modes (*genus tenue, mediocre et grande*), and it united a large variety of rhetorical elements. Though many authors can be pinpointed as significant within this rhetorical tradition, for our discussion, it is Longinus, or occasionally called Pseudo-Longinus, who in his work, entitled *Peri hypsous* (*On the Sublime*), united these rhetoric features and inevitably stands as the very source of the modern tradition of the sublime (for the questions of authorship and dating, see Adamik 1998: 169–172; Nagy 1935: 363–378; "Pseudo-Longinus" 2001: 513–514; Kennedy 1997: 306; Russell 1965: x–xi; Russell 1981: 72–73; Longinus 1991: xvii–xxi). Albeit his person is much debated, yet he most probably lived in Rome in 1ˢᵗ century A.D. In that period the capital city of the Roman Empire was the centre of elitist classicism and 'Greek renaissance' within Latin culture that implied emulation and confrontation with the Greek tradition (Kennedy 1997: 307–308). It is this vivid and exuberant context that inspired Longinus, the Greek philologist, to write his treatise on a topic which had been taken up by numerous authors in the previous centuries, including Theophrastos, Cornificius, Cicero, or Horace.

Longinus conceived the sublime by using original compositions of the peripathetic rhetorical practice and Platonic ideas on intuition and beauty to bring about a new reception theory with a unique literary technique (Malm 2000: 1–10; Usher 2007: 2892–303). The sublime appeared as the manifestation and result of the interplay of congenial and great thoughts, strong emotions, rhetorical modes, artistic performance, and an elevated style. The way Longinus unites the Platonic interpretation and the rhetorical technique of the *genus sublime*, thus constructing a new meaning for the sublime, is indispensable to understand the transformation of the concept from a purely rhetorical to a more imaginative and affective notion

(for examples of the literary compilation technique in order to achieve the sublime aesthetic effect, see Longinus, *On the Sublime*, 11–16).

In a similar fashion to his Greek contemporaries, Longinus relied on peripathetic and Platonic thoughts on artistic creation (Innes 2002: 259–284). With respect to the ideas of greatness, beauty, affection and partly perfection, Longinus dwelt on the idea of harmony with respect to sublimity (Longinus 1991: cap. I–II.). It is also one of the primary propositions of Kant as well concerning the interplay of imagination and cognition. Plato, when discussing poetic and rhetorical truth, rejects mimesis on ethical and ontological grounds. However, not entirely: those artistic forms which are nearest to the abstract ideas they represent and are thereby based on the invention (*heuresis*) of eternal and universal principles, are ethically acceptable. As for art, music and poetry, and subsequently, beauty and harmony (sublimity is not distinguished from beauty in early Greek thought) had to have a constant or fixed point of reference. If they are capable of representing the *eidos*, the universal concept in each and every phenomenon, then they are nearer to the idea (Plato, *Republic* 475d–476b, *Symposium* 210e²).

In addition, Plato revered Homer, recognised the power in his poetry, which he attributed to the fact that the master managed to attain Beauty, which is a constant principle only accessible to philosophers, and to one who can imperviously lead the souls wherever he wants (*psychagogy*). This most affective ability is not residing in the *eidos*, it is not eidetic beauty, though it has to meet certain prescribed measures not to appear mean or fustian. The affective force is subsequently not resulting from them. In the Platonic dialogue, *Ion*, Socrates derives this ability of Ion from divine origins (Plato, *Ion* 536a). It is not *techné* that makes Ion a magnetic musician and actor (*rhapsodos*), but his enthusiasm (*enthusiasmos*). Therefore, the enthusiastic *rhapsodos* unites the eidetic and non-eidetic elements of sublime art by intuitive identification, by his moving emotions and the terrible manifestations of his imagination in a harmonious way that makes him attractive to the audience (Plato, *Ion* 534c-d). In turn, if an artistic creation or phenomenon meets this principle, which nevertheless retains an aspect

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2   For Platonic works I only indicated the section markers without the page numbers because in many cases certain themes recur at different parts of the section. For the references of the dialogues see Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, *Plato: the Collected Dialogues* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961); Allan Bloom, ed. and trans., *The Republic of Plato* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

that cannot be fully comprehended, then that artwork or object attains a perfect affective power to the human mind. It is also a source and explanation residing within the affective power of the Kantian sublime which has its origins in classical conceptions of the sublime, reinterpreted and transmitted by Longinus.

Notwithstanding this theoretical refinement, Kant also had a direct source and fore-runner in the mid-18th-century treatise of the Irish philosopher, historian, and politician, Edmund Burke. Burke also distinguished the sublime from beauty, since he thought that sublime is an external objective quality which is reflected in its effects, and can be recognised through these effects. In his essay, Burke provides an "objective" natural spectroscopy among which one can distinguish categories and aesthetic judgments directed by our Taste. The most common causes of the sublime according to his wide view are: obscurity, the idea of power, vacuity, darkness, solitude, silence, infinity, nature, large objects, and uniformity (Burke, *Enquiry*, Part I, 2, 3–23).[3] In addition, sublime comes with the feeling of terror, astonishment and reverence: "Indeed, terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently, the ruling principle of the sublime" (Burke, *Enquiry*, 2, 2.). He also states that "astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, not by consequence reason on that object which employs it" (Burke, *Enquiry*, 2, 1.) For Burke sublime can also be an imitation of a great talent in literary works of art that have effects, such as astonishment, admiration, and grandeur, similar to natural phenomena (Burke, *Enquiry*, Part V, 1–6.). Therefore to copy and compete with a genius appears as an ambition in order to create something *original*: imitation is thus anti-mimetic, or, more precisely, mimetic and non-mimetic at the same time, which results in a creative (re)thinking of artistic expression. As it has been pointed out, this idea was basically entertained by Plato and subsequently Longinus when discussing the artistry of the *enthusiastic rhapsodos*.

In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Immanuel Kant discussed the sublime as being different from beauty, since sublimity incites strong emotions, respect and fear from the spectator, but at the same time, it gives de-

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3   In the case of Burke's work, the Arabic numbers refer to chapters and subchapters.

light and joy. It points beyond the sensuous world, reaching out to infinity. Human beings are capable of perceiving either sublime objects, such as the ocean, or a huge mountain, (*mathematical sublime*), or sublime forces, such as a storm, or a volcano (*dynamical sublime*). During the latter process, our imagination arrives at a disharmony with cognition (judgment), since the cognitive part tries to reach totality, attempts to grasp reality in its entirety, but is in-capable of receiving the sublime as a whole (as the sublime is infinite and affective). In the former case, the "collapse" of cognition enables us only to conceptualise the object as a mathematical progression without being able to imagine it, and it leads to the certainty of ideas. That is precisely the reason why Kant contrasted sublimity with beauty: beauty is always framed and finite and it can be grasped with our understanding. As for the sublime, it is unintelligible, since it cannot be conceptualised, yet one elevates the idea of the totality of one's own mind over the sensation of the sublime (and the source of one's joy). Thus, human beings transcend themselves over nature, being aware that they are superior to it and its phenomena, as they are free to elevate themselves beyond sublimity (Kant 2000: §23–28, *passim*.) The aesthetics of the sublime can have subsequently no conceptual framework. Language can never make it wholly intelligible and communicable, according to Kant, since only conceptual thoughts can be explicated and communicated. Consequently, one needs intuition and imagination to decipher sublime aesthetics through poetry or art. Kant adds that sublime aesthetics:

> is very powerful in creating, as it were, another nature out of the material which the real one gives it [...] it is really the art of poetry in which the faculty of aesthetic ideas can reveal itself in its full measure [...] give imagination an impetus to think more, although in an undeveloped way, than can be comprehended in a concept, and hence in a determinate linguistic expression. (Kant 2000: 192–93 [§49])

Though Burke's ideas on the sources of the sublime are the primary sources for Kant as well, Burke's empirical interpretation strongly differs from Kant's ideas on reflective aesthetic judgments, which are metaphysical in their nature. In the Kantian sublime there is a conflict between judgment and imagination within the sublime, wherein imagination cannot articu-

late the desire of the totality of the judgment. The imbalance, the lack of harmony in the mind between imagination and judgment is solved so that judgment raises the mind to a level of abstract freedom where it can face with nature as a totality and finally overcome it, thus creating a balance between imagination and cognition. Consequently, a considerable difference lies in the fact that for Kant the sublime is only present in the mind, and it is far from being an objective empirical quality as it is for Burke.

However, at the same time, it is quite obvious that poetic or artistic acts imply constructedness, that is, *techné*. As it has been explained so far, the role of techné in sublimity is as old as the tradition of the sublime itself. Plato's *Ion* points towards non-rhetoric, non-eidetic origins of the sublime along with the already existing rhetorical tradition. Socrates was explaining to Ion that divine poetic powers are gifted to the poet, channelled through his art while the poet is inspired and filled with holy awe (*enthusiasmos*). On the contrary, the rhetorical interpretation of the sublime style (*genus grande*) views the sublime as an effect raised by the orator through the refined and systematic application of figures and tropes (*schemata dianoeias et lexeos*).

In order to endeavour to explicate this duality of the nature of the sublime, and to argue for the hypothesis put forward in the introduction, namely, that the affective scope of the sublime began to expand in 18th-century British aesthetics, it is worth looking at a different interpretation of the epistemological and ontological problem posed by the sublime. In order to provide further reinforcement to my argument, it is now worth revisiting the treatise of Longinus.

Longinus originates the sublime from five sources that arise from *physis* (tendency toward elevated thought or *enthusiastic pathos* — the latter is also a Platonic idea), or from *techné* (*schemata dianoeias and lexeos*, that is, tropes and figures; *phrasis*, and *synthesis*) (Longinus 1991: Section 7). The hypothesis for the latter group of sources is that words are harmoniously allocated like musical notes in a congenial composition. And since harmony is innate to human beings, if it meets the former preconditions of *physis*, it has the effect of touching the soul (Longinus 1991: Section 39). *Physis* and *techné* are subsequently necessarily supplementary. Besides Plato, Longinus dwells on the peripathetic rhetorical tradition that had gradually developed in Greek rhetoric since Gorgias and Aristotle, which assumes

that *techné*, literally conceived, also arises from nature (*phainen*). This idea repeats the original theory of mimesis by Aristotle (Aristotle, *Physics*, Book B: 194a).[4] Therefore, Longinus thinks that only art can reveal nature, but at the same time art conceals itself through *techné*: *physis* disappears. Nature loves to conceal itself (*physis kruptesthai philei*) is a thought attributed to Heraclitus in the classical tradition. In addition, every art is limited in the sense that it transforms *physis* into a 'static form'. Presentation appears as knowledge (*mathésis*) but a knowledge that is inherently limited, while great art requires great talent (*genius*). However, according to Longinus, even a genius must rely on art:

> Nature supplies the first main underlying elements in all cases, but study enables one to define the right moment and appropriate measure on each occasion, and also provides steady training and practice. […] Great qualities are too precarious when left to themselves, unsteadied and unballasted by knowledge, abandoned to mere impulse and untutored daring; they need the bridle as well as the spur. Demosthenes shows that this is true in everyday life when he says that while the greatest blessing is good fortune, the second, no less important, is good counsel, and that the absence of the second utterly destroys the first. We might apply it to literature, with talent in the place of fortune and art in that of counsel. The clinching proof is that only by means of art can we perceive the fact that certain literary effects are due to sheer inborn talent. If, as I said, those who object to literary criticism would ponder these things, they would, I think, no longer consider the investigation of our subject extravagant or useless (Longinus 1991: Section 2, 5.)

If sublime art is the achievement of the genius whose art is based on *techné* as a development out of nature, then the question arises how it is actually achieved. The Longinian idea implies that the genius elevates his art by

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4   For the works of Aristotle I only indicated the section and caput markers without the page numbers because in many cases certain themes recur at different parts of the section. For the references see *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941).

imitation (*mimesis*) and emulation (*zélotis*). But even this mimesis is not a technical one. It is rather something "mysterious" like a contagion. This idea is taken up by Kant when he discusses that the essence with which the genius vests art cannot be transmitted, it is unique because it does not rest on any concept (and only conceptual phenomena are communicable). The genius is not acting on rational grounds when creating art (Kant 2000: 186–97). Mimesis of the congenial art is subsequently non-mimetic, it is not imitation (*Nachahmung*), but creative rethinking of the heritage with the elements of inheritance (*Nachfolge*) (Kant 2000: 162–164). Kant also adds that the disciple needs to meet the original sources again that the genius originally used, and at the same time it has to learn the mode of availing himself of these sources (Kant 2000: 186–191). It is rather agonic competition, the engine of which, according to Longinus, is impression by ethos (*apotypòsis*), for instance, a beautiful plastic artwork, or a good performance. Though in great art *techné* is an ally to nature, it is different in the case of the beautiful, where it is perfection and harmonious resemblance to humans (*eidetic beauty*), and in the case of the sublime, where it rather rests on *logos*, on non-eidetic origins. In this latter instance, *techné* works best if it is concealed from view, wherein *physis* is allowed to be presented as natural pathos (Longinus 1991: Section 35). The *logos* of the sublime is thus a true logos, since it unveils. But it also needs delicacy, disguise which is the very essence of veiling the unveiled (*dialanthané*). And the tool for disguise is the shining or light of the figure (*dèlon oti tô phôti autô*). As Longinus points out:

> We should not here omit, dear friend, though we shall deal with it very briefly, a subject we have studied, namely, that figures naturally reinforce greatness and are wonderfully supported by it in turn. I shall explain why and how this happens. The cunning use of figures arouses a peculiar suspicion in the hearer's mind, a feeling of being deliberately trapped and misled. This occurs when we are addressing a single judge with power of decision, and especially a dictator, a king, or an eminent leader. He is easily angered by the thought that he is being outwitted like a silly child by the expert speaker's pretty figures; he sees in the fallacious reasoning a personal insult; some-

> times he may altogether give way to savage exasperation, but even if he controls his anger he remains impervious to persuasion.
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> That is why the best use of a figure is when the very fact that it is a figure goes unnoticed. Now greatness and passion are a wonderful help and protection against the suspicions aroused by the use of figures; cunning techniques, when overlaid with beauty and passion, disappear from view and escape all further suspicion. [...] How has an orator there concealed the figure? Clearly, by its very brilliance. Just as dimmer lights are lost in the surrounding sunshine, so pervading grandeur all around obscures the presence of rhetorical devices. Something not very different happens in painting: light and shade are represented by colors on the same plane, yet the light is seen first, it not only stands out but seems much nearer. In the same way, great and passionate expressions affect our minds more closely; by a kind of natural kinship and brilliance they are seen before the figures, whose artistry they overshadow and keep hidden (Longinus 1991: Section 17, 29).

Therefore, on the basis of what has been said so far, the sublime can be interpreted as shining — the "truth" of great art, the appearance of its radiance (*phainesthai dia laprotèta*). But the real essence of art remains cryptical, since light casts it into the shadow (*ekphanestaton*). In addition, the "Longinian shining" or light metaphors are supplemented by heliotropes in the sense Jacques Derrida refers to them (Derrida 1982: 207–271). It is pointed out in one of the studies of Jacques Derrida that *heliotropism* is one of those deep undercurrents in Western philosophy that constantly return in diverse forms. One might also add that in cultural representations as well. Sun and sunlight metaphors, such as tropes of light, brilliance, and resplendence, all imply a metaphysical assumption of vision as well. Thus, I think, the sublime can also be seen as a transmitter, a channel, or, at the very least, an intermittent dimension, but at the same time a gateway as well, through which a nonrepresentational quality and a prohibition, crystallised in the inscription, could be played out. Therefore, the sublime not

only unites tropes of light and shadow, but also poses a possibility of prob-lematising ontological and epistemological limits and non-limits (Nancy 1984: 76–103). Longinus sees Homer writing the Odyssey as a setting sun (Longinus 1991: Section 9). He also refers to the Book of Genesis ('Fiat lux!'), as an instance of pure epiphany (Longinus 1991: Section 9).

However, this shining has to be sought for, needs to be cleared. The mo-tive power hereby is human yearning: nature implanted in us the ability of contemplations and the urge to rival our predecessors, the yearning that cannot be overcome (*érôs*) for great things, for the divine beyond the earth-ly realm (*daimoniôteron*) (Longinus 1991: Section 35). Thus humans are, as Lacoue-Labarthe argues, "metaontic", "metacosmic beings" (Lacoue-La-barthe – Kuchta 1991: 225). The source of astonishment or terror when sublime emerges is this very clarification, the unveiling of our transcend-ence beyond finite and rational limitations. The essence of the sublime is subsequently "beyond the light", and is in turn in contrast to beauty as appearance.[5]

Consequently, in a philosophical sense it is plausible to argue for this aspect of terror in the sublime as a valid source of insight into truth or in the case of art, into its essence. And even if the sublime does not lead to "truth" in any conceptually conceived way, still it conveys a presentation of the unpresentable, thus validating and consolidating non-rational ways of attaining knowledge of human existence. In my opinion, this is what Guy Sircello summarized in the relation under the terms of *epistemological* and *ontological transcendence*. Nevertheless, as it has been shown, the Longinian basis holds a very similar proposition as partly repeated and reinterpreted in Burke's and Kant's theories: a larger scheme which serves as a representa-tion of the unity of terror, fear, pity and joy on a deeper, half-subconscious level (*sub-limen* — i.e. below the threshold). Thus, this seems to answer the problem of *epistemological transcendence*: the reality of the *sub-limen* cannot be perceived directly (non-real), hence an invention of the reality of the sublime becomes possible in the human mind. Consequently, using Sircel-

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5   For a further elucidation of how veiling and unveiling functions concerning the presentation of the unpresentable, and the non-rational ways of attaining knowledge of human existence see Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Colophon, 1971), 17-87; Martin Heidegger, *The Will to Power as Art*, trans. David Farrell Krell, vol. 1. *Nietzsche* (New York: Harper, 1979), 80, 109-10.

lo's concept again, the *ontological transcendence* opens up a vista for gaining an aesthetic though valid knowledge of the world.

Nonetheless, the result poststructuralist aesthetics arrives at — radical openness — is in my view insufficient as a critical concept, or at the very least, lacks refinement because it does not say anything about the sublime itself, it only reflects on a potential repercussion of its epistemology. As has been pointed out earlier, the critical notion of Bertens is neither novel, nor is it a meticulously elaborated concept. Perhaps this is not even simply semantics or the question of a more elaborate philological and philosophical analysis: the existence of sublimity and our perception of it reflect something of the transcendental realities in great art that eventually and perhaps for our sake remain unveiled in our human life.

However, these considerations had their origins in early 18th-century British aesthetics. The sublime of Longinus inspired many generations of philosophers, orators, and writers from the late Roman to modern times. The work of Longinus had been known in England since the mid-17th century, as it was translated into Latin by two English authors (Langbaine 1636, Hall 1652).[6] In the preface to his translation, John Hall emphasized the psychological, elevated, divine, and inspirational qualities of the sublime.

Nevertheless, more frequent allusions to the sublime appeared only after 1674 when Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux's work on Longinus (*Traité du sublime ou du merveilleux dans le discours traduit du grec de Longin*) was translated into English. French literary debates on the notion of sublimity also influenced early 18th-century British literary critics, who elaborated on the conceptualisation of the sublime so as to gradually transform it from its original, narrower and stricter rhetorical interpretation towards a more imaginative and empiricist psychological aesthetic category. Thus, the early 18th-century concept of the sublime developed towards that aesthetic concept which finally became the major source of terror in the aesthetic theory of Burke and later authors. It is therefore essential to note that the Kantian and Burkean ideas of greatness and astonishment in the aesthetics of the sublime had a very firm source in the 18th-century classicist literary and rhetorical tradition.

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6   Editio princeps in England: Gerard Langbaine (Oxford, 1636); first English translation by John Hall: *Peri Hypsous, or Dionysius Longinus of the Height of Eloquence rendered out of the originall by J. Hall Esq.* (1652). Republications: 1698, 1730, 1732, 1733, 1733, 1743, 1752.

Although the late 17th-century French literary debate and its English reception signalled a reinvigoration of the theory of the sublime, it did not lose its deeply rooted classical origins. In my view, this is also shown by the tendency that, on the one hand, changes in 18th-century English interpretations of the sublime ran parallel to the altering interpretations of the work of Longinus. On the other hand, this process of aesthetic interpretation was neatly connected to the main tenets of British empiricism as well. With respect to periodisation, it can be plausibly argued that from Boileau's reception to the mid-18th century the sublime was gradually transformed from a more formal, structural and rhetorical mode towards a psychological and empiricist, imaginative, less literary and more sensational one (Monk 1960: 1–62). Within this process passion, enthusiasm and astonishment obtained higher values. As B. H. Bronson pointed out, "[s]ublimity is constantly in the thought of Dennis and his contemporaries, made vividly aware of Longinus by Boileau" (Bronson 1967: 18.). The sublime is a most prevalent concept used in defense of the irregular and the unbounded as well.

Alexander Pope, the 'national critic' and the author of *An Essay on Criticism* (1711) gained huge popularity and plaudits in a relatively short period. The Catholic and Tory leader of the *Martinus Scriblerus Club* (John Gay, Dr. John Arbuthnot, Thomas Parnell, and Jonathan Swift among the members) became an *arbiter elegantiae* besides Addison and Shaftesbury in the early 18th century. It is not by chance that Samuel Johnson praises Pope's style which "exhibits every mode of excellence that can embellish or dignify composition – selection of matter, novelty of arrangement, justness of precept, splendour of illustration, and propriety of digression" (Johnson quoted by Fairer, 1989: 25). I argue that Pope's views on the sublime can be understood only by interpreting his thoughts on literary taste simultaneously. It is John Dennis, whom Pope saw as a bad critic, who 'provoked' the writing of a theory of art and literary criticism in a poetic form (Rogers 1975: 29). The *Essay* imitated Horace's *Ars poetica*.

Pope formed his judgements of taste according to two key concepts (for the forerunners of Pope with regard to this, see Fairer 1989: 34–36). *Manners* is the skill of distinguishing between good and bad, which ideally aims to create a humorous, tolerant and perceptive rapport, the 'great manner'. He discusses it in the *Essay* as follows:

> Be niggards of advice on no pretence;
> For the worst avarice is that of sense.
> With mean complaisance ne'ev betray your trust,
> Nor be so civil as to prove unjust.
> Fear not the anger of the wise to raise;
> Those best can bear reproof who merit praise. (lines 578–583)[7]

In this respect, Pope adhered to the intentions of the Club, since all of its members took pains to establish an educated public discourse, in which artistic performances could be judged and assessed according to exact aspects governed by a refined taste. The other source of judgements of taste is the ability to distinguish between the beautiful and the ugly. This ability also helps the critic to compare works of art on the basis of understanding the cultural context and the artistic intention. Consequently, Pope thinks that one has to strive for universality when forming judgements of taste so that Truth (in the sense of natural law) could be revealed. The uncovering of truth, however, is a personal, human and at the same time moral obligation as well, and not an abstraction or metaphysical finiteness:

> Learn then what Morals Criticks ought to show,
> For 'tis but half a Judge's Task, to Know.
> 'tis not enough, Taste, Judgement, Learning, join;
> In all you speak, let Truth and Candor shine:
> That not alone what to your Sense is due,
> All may allow; but seek your Friendship too. (560–565)

In addition, because of their universality, these judgements have to be based upon sense and naturalness. According to Pope, sense is a moderate form of understanding, which also has decorum:

> 'Tis hard to say, if greater Want of Skill
> Appear in Writing or in Judging ill;
> But, of the two, less dang'rous is th' Offence,
> To tire our Patience, than mis-lead our Sense:
> Some few in that, but Numbers err in this,

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7   The paper's quotations, referring to lines, are derived from the following edition: Pope, Alexander: *An Essay on Criticism*, in Butt, John (ed.): *Alexander Pope's Collected Poems*, London, J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1965, 180-215.

> Ten Censure wrong for one who Writes amiss;
> A Fool might once himself alone expose,
> Now One in Verse makes many more in Prose. (1–7)

Ratio as opposed to the vacuity of mind and the lack of erudition, which has to harmonise with artistic expression and is part of critical intelligence, but at the same time it is poignant and sensible:

> Pride, where Wit fails, steps in to our Defence,
> And fills up all the mighty Void of Sense!
> […]
> Some dryly plain, without Invention's Aid,
> Write dull Receits, how Poems may be made:
> These leave the Sense, their Learning to display,
> And those explain the Meaning quite away. (209–210;
> 114–117)

If taste is refined in due accordance with the principles of the art of poetics, precision and decorum with the help of Sense, then, as Andrew Sanders also argues, style impresses with the sensation of naturalness (Sanders 1996: 287–289).

The essence of nature is invisible, can only be witnessed in its manifestations, and it sets limitations to talent within which one's lore can be perfected by art. Pope interprets Nature as divine force (l. 68–73), and as the cosmos itself, the order, symmetry and harmony of which the work of art must imitate and reflect (l. 74–87) (for further details of the complexity of the concept of nature in the 18th century, see Lovejoy 1960). By its internal, lively essence, Nature is the opposite of "artificiality" and at the same time, the source of inspiration, while art provides those forms into which this inspiration could diffuse and create beauty:

> In Wit, as Nature, what affects our Hearts
> Is not th' Exactness of peculiar Parts;
> 'Tis not a Lip, or Eye, we Beauty call,
> But the joint Force and full Result of all. (243–246)

Even if the *Essay* is the "handbook of Augustan orthodoxy" (Bronson, 1967: 18), Pope, in a timely manner, corrects the seemingly rigid notions attributed to nature by moving between great wits and less gentler forms

of Nature. It can be noted that Pope's "pathetic tenderness" (Bronson 1967: 20) provides for full-fledged extravagancies and lovely descriptions of a gentler Nature in "Windsor Forest" (1704) (Bronson, 1967: 18–21). Therefore, it can also be argued that Pope also swings in a stream of early 18th-century heterogeneous interpretations of sublimity from finer ones derived from a crisp and grand style to those that spring from wild nature's affective force of awe and terror, even if he mostly represents the peripathetic tradition within. Artistic intention, naturalness and creative force are therefore *sine qua non*s; however, similarly to Horace, Pope allows for minor mistakes in case of the genius, thus enabling licence (*licentia*):

> If, where the Rules not far enough extend,
> (Since Rules where made but to promote their End)
> Some Lucky Licence answers to the full
> Th' Intent propos'd that Licence is a Rule.
> Thus Pegasus, a nearer way to take,
> May boldly deviate from the common Track.
> Great Wits sometimes may gloriously offend,
> And rise to Faults true Criticks dare not mend;
> From vulgar Bounds with brave Disorder part,
> And snatch a Grace beyond the Reach of Art,
> Which, without passing thro' the Judgment, gains
> The Heart, and all its End at once attains. (146–155)

The great thought of Longinos, which inspires sublime, is coupled with Wit on the wings of Pegasus. Yet, it can rarely soar:

> True Ease in Writing comes from Art, not Chance,
> As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance,
> 'Tis not enough no harshness gives Offence,
> The Sound must seem an Eccho to the Sense.
> Soft is the Strain when Zephyr gently blows,
> And the smooth Stream in smoother Numbers flows;
> But when loud urges lash the sounding Shore,
> The hoarse, rough Verse shou'd like the Torrent roar.
> (362–369)

This swiftly and elegantly moving sublimity is joined with Sweetness and Light (11–16), Candor and Truth (562–563), as well as Ease. Pope also

lists the opposites of these qualities: meanness and witlessness 36–41); lack of independence, avarice, the platitudinous and the untrue (566–583). What is more, he often plays with light, if he discusses the clear, grand and sublime style or criticism, and thus represents the requisites of clarity metaphorically as well:

> But true Expression, like the', unchanging Sun,
> Clears and improves whate'ev it shines upon,
> It gilds all Objects, but it alters none. (315–317)

The poet transforms the negative 'downward pressure' of rules into positive 'compression'. His concentrated energy moves between the poles of contraction and release. Hence, sublimity is manifested in the grand style, and only poetic Wit is able to reach true Sublime, the par excellence examples of which the author finds in the works of masters of classical antiquity with their perceived universal validity. Moreover, Pope elaborates on the idea of universal values in his later work of moral philosophy, *An Essay on Man* (1733–1734). In this work, Man is represented as a part of the all-pervasive harmony of the order of nature, which binds every creature according to the principle of the "great chain of Being" with God at its end. It is also characteristic of Pope and his age's poetry that Man is at the centre of urban satirisation, too:

> Know then thyself, presume not God to scan,
> The proper study of mankind is man.
> Placed on this isthmus of a middle state,
> A being darkly wise, and rudely great:
> With too much knowledge for the sceptic side,
> With too much weakness for the stoic's pride,
> He hangs between; in doubt to act, or rest;
> In doubt to deem himself a god, or beast;
> In doubt his mind or body to prefer;
> Born but to die, and reasoning but to err;
> Alike in ignorance, his reason such,
> Whether he thinks too little, or too much:
> Chaos of Thought and Passion, all confused;
> Still by himself abused or disabused;
> Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;

> Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurl'd:
> The glory, jest, and riddle of the world! (*Epistle II, Argument*, 1–15 quoted in Hollander 1973)

Furthermore, in almost all cases, these interpretations originate from the Longinian philological tradition with their wide-ranging allusions, from which the limits of this paper enabled only a few to be examined. Moreover, Pope explicitly praises Longinos:

> Thee, bold Longinus! all the Nine inspire,
> And bless, their Critick with a Poet's Fire
> An ardent Judge, who Zealous in his Trust,
> With Warmth gives Sentence, yet is always Just;
> Whose own Example strengthens all his Laws,
> And Is himself that great Sublime he draws. (675–680)

What is more, this line ends a beautiful series of *enkomion*s, praising Horace (653–664), Dionysius Halicarnasseus (665–666), Petronius (667–680), and Quintilianus (669–674). Finally, the poet crowns this with his own critical standpoint (719–746). In sum, Pope belongs to that group of critics who interpret the sublime as a rhetoric category which needs erudition and refined taste (the peripathetic tradition of the sublime), following the classical model of the urban sublime by Horace and Cicero, thus constituting the category of the urban sublime (*sublimitas urbana*). Most of Pope's contemporaries tended to shift the interpretation of the sublime towards a more empiricist and psychological basis. Yet, Pope belongs to that stream of literary aesthetics of neoclassicism, which springs from a wide spectrum of sensibility. This stream brings about heterogeneous interpretations of sublimity, including finer ones derived from a crisp and grand style. Pope provides a *par excellence* example of what he meant by the *genus sublime*, positioning himself as the spearhead of this tradition, inspiring others in his wake.

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