

Modern studies have described the nature of aesthetic emotion in contrast with sentiments experienced ordinarily (Matravers 1998, Robinson 2005), a topic that has not been considered in the field of classical literary theory and philosophy. This paper discusses ancient views about correspondences as well as differences between emotions felt in real life and emotions produced by art, in particular by literature. While both Plato and Aristotle distinguish between “aesthetic” and “real” emotion, neither elaborates the subject. In his famous condemnation of poetry (*R.* 10. 604), Plato warns the audience of tragedy and epic against responding with pity to the suffering of fictional characters. Though conducive to aesthetic pleasure, he argues, such an emotional response to fiction can trigger “real” feelings (i.e. desire to mourn for personal loss). Aristotle briefly notes the existence of two types of fear (*De An.* 3. 427): one type is experienced when somebody faces real dangers, the other when looking at terrifying paintings. The former emotion relies on conviction (*doxa*, the belief that a threat has become imminent), whereas the latter is based only on imagination (*phantasia*, imagining the threat). These examples already emphasize different degrees of intensity that separate aesthetic and real emotion.

Later on, ancient critics seem to be less interested in observing emotional reactions to art (i.e. audience’s) and more concerned with expressions of emotion in art (i.e. artist’s ability to convey *pathos*). Several descriptions of fourth-century and Hellenistic art testify about artists who have tried to capture the essence of “real” feelings. For instance, Pliny (*NH* 34.81) talks about Silanion’s portrait of Apollodorus, a modeler himself, who would often become so furious that he would smash his own sculptures, whenever dissatisfied with the execution. Silanion captured the emotion that best defined Apollodorus’ personality to such an extent that the bronze created was not simply the likeness of this man, but of “anger itself.” In this case, human features serve as mere pretext to convey the impression of emotion.

Longinus’ *On the Sublime* offers fascinating insights into the correlation between real and literary *pathos*. An unwanted phenomenon consists of the so-called “pseudo-bacchanalian” (*Subl.* 3). This occurs when artists fail to communicate feelings (which are either too private or overstated) and, therefore, they appear as if drunk and in a state of enthusiasm when the audience is sober. To avoid such a plight, writers should acquire deep knowledge of the universal features of real emotions to give them expression in their art. Sappho transposes the complex emotions of love taken from life (*ek tes alethes*) most successfully, because she concentrates what lovers feel universally in her poetry (*Subl.* 10). According to these and other passages in the treatise, aesthetic emotion needs to encapsulate the quintessence of real feelings, which should be recognized by both writer and reader. Longinus often appraises the emotional power of various figures of style. Perhaps the most striking observation pertains to hyperbaton (*Subl.* 22), which is defined as the mark of the truest emotion (*pathous alethestatous*). Strangely enough, this characterization does not mean that hyperbaton best conveys a particular *pathos*. Instead, it refers to the fact that hyperbaton reminds one of (literally “imitates”) people who are in the grip of emotions (such as anger, fear, jealousy, etc) and thus lose their coherence in speech, under stress or excitement. Far from Plato’s concerns about how aesthetic emotion can turn into outbursts of feelings in real life, Longinus becomes preoccupied with using and transforming emotions of real life in writing, in order to obtain stylistic effects.