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Shakespeare, Burton and the Intellectual's Acedia*

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The article aims to put the interpretation of Shakespeare's melancholics into the context of the rising debates on melancholy as a 'social emotion' or a disease with a 'social aetiology' and a 'social course' (Wolf Lepenies, Jennifer Radden, Michal Altbauer). In such a discussion, a conscious effort is needed to avoid constructing a model which reduces this state to an individual condition, and assigns to literary texts a function of illustrating the abnormal and providing a cautionary moral discourse. The discourse of medicalization of the melancholic state so obvious in Elizabethan texts like Timothy Bright's A treatise of melancholie works well in line with neo-Platonic explorations of the melancholy of the learned — both views essentialize melancholy and refuse to focus on the underlying emotion.

I propose to use the texts by both Shakespeare and Robert Burton to show that the emotional state of the melancholic intellectual can be followed by a combination of methods. Burton's professed theatricality and conscious assumption of the role of actor/playwright sets him up in a position of self-surveillance. At the same time, seclusion of the melancholic allows him to perform a divestment of the social 'clothes' and reveal the elusive 'body without organs' to the eye of reason. Shakespeare's melancholics, just like Democritus Jr, can be analyzed as describing their own state of acedia, taken out of the original theological context and understood as an inability to fully grasp the discrepancy between the expected and the actually experienced. The answer to this crux is bridging the chasm between contemplating and acting by 'anatomizing' emotion, on and off-stage.

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The study of ‘emotional communities’, although a quite recent vein in scholarship, has already brought up a number of important issues. As Barbara Rosenwein has convincingly put it (Rosenwein, 2010), the earlier trends in emotion studies (such as the works of Paul Ekman) (Ekman, 1992; Ekman, Davidson, 1994) have been seeking the biological firm ground in ‘unchangeable’ emotions and as such were ‘universalist’ or ‘presentist’, rather than historical.

There is so far no middle ground between the physical anthropology of emotion and its historical reconstruction, which leaves no final proof of the authenticity of our reconstruction. What we discuss, as clearly seen from Rosenwein’s sample analysis of ‘happiness’ (Rosenwein, 2010: 5–7), or Erin Sullivan’s treatment of sorrow (Sullivan, 2013), is the cultural history of words denoting emotions. All emotions in historical communities are thus basically textual and discursive.

A constructivist-minded social scientist would come to the rescue here, telling us that many communities, not least the current ones, are ‘imagined’ in the Andersonian sense. The studies of how they have been imagined over time are no less discursive (albeit with a slightly different methodology) than trying to understand why we, as part of a social entity, feel this or that way now. In Rosenwein’s definition, communities of emotions are “groups in which people adhere to the same norms of emotional expression and value — or devalue — the same or related emotions” (Rosenwein, 2006: 2). This is a definition which works well with well-formed socio-intellectual groups — monks, humanist intellectuals, Stoic philosophers, to name but a few - because they, firstly, have left behind a solid body of texts and secondly, have provided a verbal description of what they understand as, say, anger, sorrow or grief. This is a fine start for a new subfield, which allows scholars to concentrate on the strongest points (although Rosenwein does note that the title of her book should be glossed as “*some* emotional communities”).

In this sense, the purest emotional communities are also ‘textual communities’ as understood by Brian Stock. Here also an individual (or a group) may be needed who, “having mastered it, then utilized it for reforming a group’s thought and action” (Stock, 1983: 90), i.e. provided a philosophy of emotions which would be held true for a period of time. However, emotions are never as normative as religious texts (which Stock mainly analyses as the basis for a textual community). If a community of emotions is a textual community, they both should not be reduced to an individual climbing to perfection, to full dissolution in text or control over emotions.

Since emotion is an important focus where individual response, the social mind and the human physiology come together, this unique field can thrive when taking the middle way between a number of extremes: presentist construction of history (What contemporary diagnosis does melancholy translate into?); overreliance on community-shaping texts and clear-cut groups (Why does a certain prince behave not as a certain *speculum* tells them to? What would have Galen or Paracelsus said?); and the desire to dig out of history a complete set of emotional standards (nothing serves better here than Lucien’s Febvre concern for establishing “a detailed inventory of the mental equipment of the time” (Febvre, 1973: 9).

Communities of emotion as I imagine them in this essay are not just groups with common understanding of emotion. As Peter and Carol Stearns have shown, we should keep in mind the distance between “emotionology and emotional experience” (Stearns P., Stearns C.,

1985: 825). At the same time, emotion studies should cover both. A way out of all this limitations is to find certain foci which would allow us to embrace difference and see how various communities and individuals take on the same word, attaching a number of conflicting meanings to it. This generally follows the three-stage Stearns' "program" (study emotional behavior — fathom it over time — examine how people mediate between "emotional standards" and their own behavior) (*ibid*), but with a special emphasis on text creation and public opportunities as spaces where emotions are recognized and discussed — in sermons, theatre, reading and reciting poetry, etc.

In the remaining part of my essay I would suggest that melancholy is a very good case to see how external conditions (such as social) help generate emotional response which contributes to the author's or character's self-fashioning, which is then communicated to an audience. Emotional communities of various sorts here, in the public sphere, clash and interact, exposing particular responses and making them accessible to wider public. The biggest contribution emotion studies can make to literary studies (which I, unfortunately, would not be able to follow here) is thus how emotions can empower an intellectual — whom I treat inclusively as anyone producing texts — to motivate their writing¹.

There is already a tradition of treating melancholy not only as an 'intellectual condition' but as a 'social emotion' or a disease with a 'social aetiology' (Altbauer-Rudnik, 2006: 33) and a 'social course'. Wolf Lepenies in his seminal *Melancholy and Society* derived the genealogy of melancholy "from the enforced hypertrophy of the realm of reflection, from imposed loss of an ability to exercise real power, and from the consequent pressure to justify one's situation" (Lepenies, 1992: 61). This strand in discussing melancholy is a welcome addition to the debate. The seminal "Saturn and melancholy" some decades earlier traced every intellectual intricacy of how the melancholic intellectual typically explained the condition, prioritizing the Ficinian explanation via the influence of planets and elements.

The key point here is that it would be wrong to debate which explanation is more 'true'. Lepenies was right in a sense when he describes Burton (shortly after Mark Curtis published his article on 'alienated intellectuals' (Curtis, 1962)) as a dissatisfied philosopher of life who "as a poor intellectual... could never hope to put his ideas into practice" (Lepenies, 1992: 146), but the librarian of Christ Church and the holder of two sinecures could never have been as poor as the German scholar imagines him, and we can never know what, in fact, Burton had been trying to achieve. Another issue is a well-known reluctance of most authors to openly discuss their own condition. Donne's poetic melancholy finds illuminating parallels in his letters, but what can be known of the author of *Il Penseroso*, or Shakespeare, in that matter?

It would be wrong to dismiss the 'arcane' explanations via elements and planets, as well as the medicalization of melancholy that happens in texts like Timothy Bright's *A Treatise of Melancholie*. It is true that both the astrological and the medicalized views essentialize melancholy and cannot focus on the underlying emotion. From the standpoint of modern-era specialization of knowledge we tend to reduce the state of melancholy to an individual condition, thus viewing literary texts as illustrating a sad condition and providing a cautionary discourse. Indeed, Bright's work was very deeply rooted in European medical writing of his times and did produce a coherent medical discourse, but the thing often overlooked is how Bright balances between "simple" and "derivative" perturbations, creating almost a list of emotions that may lead to the melancholic condition: "joy, sadness, delight, displeasure, hope, fear" (Bright, 1586: 97). They allow a large number of combinations, but more importantly, they provide room for various aetiologies, where individual responses to the same

line as sins and humoral disbalances. Does it then make its readers belong to the same emotional (or textual) community? Rather, it provides a space where various explanations compromise and interconnect². This short example is enough to reveal the fundamental mistake old-school history of ideas made when referring to treatises as stable bodies of knowledge which could help, say, Shakespeare fit “a ready-made destiny with a convincing character” (O’Sullivan, 1926: 678–679).

Given that even Bright’s text could allow for an interpretation when “perturbations” can be caused by life events, including social grievances, I would like to note that this social background needs a special term to refer to and it might be found in the word ‘acedia’. Growing out of the monastic theology which explained it as an inability to act or think the appropriate way, later expanded into the generic sin of sloth (Jackson, 1985; Wenzel, 1967), acedia was fundamentally rethought by Petrarch in *Secretum* (see, e.g.: Wenzel, 1961; Wilkins, 1962), said to be compounded of experience of misfortune, memories of the past and fear for the future. From its origin in the monastic community, when a *frater acediosus* found it impossible to explain their condition (stemming basically from the gap between the provision in the sacred text and the imperfections of the community), acedia had a dramatic element, a need to be spoken out in a dialogue or acted as self-drama. It is acedia that put Petrarch the character in the dialogue with Augustin. Manifesting itself as it does in the figure of a solitary man, acedia is communal in its birth and by the virtue of its existence has the power of shaping a community. It is acedia which most suits Lepenius’ description of melancholy cited above, but revealing itself more generically, in a theatre-like self-exposure of the melancholic, complemented with a stance of an onlooker anatomizing the world.

“Democritus Junior to the Reader”, Burton’s preface to the *Anatomy*, famously begins with a theatrical metaphor: “Gentle Reader, I presume thou wilt be very inquisitive to know what Anticke or Personate Actor this is, that so insolently intrudes upon this common Theater, to the worlds view, arrogating another mans name...” (Burton, 1989: 1). The mask of Democritus is what prompts this metaphor, making Burton an “actor” who “arrogates” the name of the ancient philosopher and performs a role on the “common stage”. Indeed, this very metaphor is followed by the quotation from Seneca’s *Apocolocyntosis* claiming the right for authorial freedom: “I am a free man borne, and may chuse whether I will tell, who can compell me?” (ibid).

The famous “Digression on the Misery of Schollers” provides a good case of how social aetiology of melancholy and personal emotional experience can be linked with the theatrical self-presentation. Lamenting that “only Schollers, me thinks are most uncertaine, unrespected, subject to all casualties, and hazards” (ibid: 307), Burton combines it with such arguments as impossibility to find employment and dependence on patron’s whims. Demanding that “scholars be highly rewarded”, he intersperses the barrage of arguments from classical texts with practical experience of poor scholars (not necessarily himself!). This creates an almost dramatic effect, different from other parts of the *Anatomy*, except the Prologue and Epilogue.

It is important that the scholar’s acedic condition which Burton sums up as “discontent and idleness”, inability to speak what should be spoken combined with the deep dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs, is combined with the assumed position on the “stage”, as a “meere spectator of other mens fortunes and adventures, and how they act their parts... as from a common Theater or Sceane” (ibid: 4). Both actor and spectator, he asserts himself primarily as a free author wrapping both conflicting desires together as a manifestation of his freedom: “in an unknowne habite, to assume a little more liberty and freedom

of speech” (ibid: 5) This is also the freedom to measure his own exits and entrances, such as the one in the *Digression on the Misery of Scholars*. The authorities quoted and examples cited in the *Anatomy* in this logic act as characters in dialogue with the protagonist, who even considered distancing himself from Democritus Junior: “The last Section shall be mine, to cut the strings of Democritus visor, to unmaske and shew him as he is” (Burton, 1994: 469).

Angus Gowland correctly described Burton’s “physical withdrawal” and his “critical-philosophical ‘view from above’” as connected with his personal self-fashioning (Gowland, 2006: 284–285). By a prolonged act of creating his, Democritus Jr. emphasizes the emotions — sorrow, anxiety, “discontent and idleness” which propel his writing. The anatomical gaze notes the smallest distinction and causes of these, but the same gaze throws them together as dramatized ‘melancholy’, creating the supra-community of readers who possibly look for cure against melancholy, for a way to express a similar acedic condition or is driven by any other emotion. The eye of reason provides little solace, what really exists is the community of those who attach some importance to melancholy as a compound condition. All of these have their Deleuzian “body without organs”, i.e. divestment states when desires (and thus emotions) have been temporarily suspended, but from these they return to the everyday state where the desire forms the response and the response called for a need to present it to the world.

Shakespeare’s melancholics, just like Democritus Jr, can be analyzed as describing their own state of acedia, taken out of the original context and understood as an inability to fully express the discrepancy between the expected and the actually experienced. Jennifer Rust recalls Walter Benjamin’s diagnosis of “the philosophy of Wittenberg and the protest against it” in Hamlet (Rust, 2003: 266). Historicizing Freud’s view of melancholy in its struggle with memories, we should add that the acedic state of the prince is driven by both personal memory of the family loss, the intellectual memory of the religious strife (i. e. the issue of purgatory) and the historical memory of royal power (as late Tudor audience would have understood it). Acedia, following Petrarch, proceeds as if from remembering too much, and remembering it emotionally (not as in “the art of memory” that Burton recommends as a cure against melancholy). Explaining the cause of Hamlet’s melancholy that other characters undertake does bring us back to treatises on this condition, but obviously lacks the whole acedic dichotomy of the individual self-fashioning and collective experience.

Another perfect example of how this procession works can be found in Jaques (Kronenfeld, 1976; Marshall, 1998) with his “a melancholy of mine own, compounded of many simples, extracted from many objects, and, indeed, the sundry contemplation of my travels; in which my often rumination wraps me in a most humorous sadness” (Shakespeare, 2006: 286–287). Being compounded from many simples links it to Bright and other medico-moral treatises, while the contemplation of personal experience — the core act of melancholy — is boosted with a power to “suck melancholy” from whatever the character sees.

The conspicuousness of Shakespeare’s melancholics (disarray in their attire, conventional poses and hectic speeches) makes them easily recognizable as members of an emotional community in the strictest sense Rosenwein’s definition can suggest. They are perceived as different from other characters, but never really secluded, even because of the conventionalities of drama — not because they do not appear alone on the stage, but because Shakespeare’s dramatic art binds them with other characters through advice, mockery, exhortation and other speech acts, which infuse others with their emotion. A notable exception is Richard II, whose melancholic rebirth and the acceptance of the new, frail body of an intellectual happens not just in seclusion, but at the point when he has no power to influence anyone except the spectators. In the identification of the melancholic, as Drew Daniel

states, “visual recognition, clinical observation, medical diagnosis, scholarly interpretation, and playgoing spectatorship all dovetail” (Daniel, 2013: 35). The latter is especially important, since unlike most his contemporaries, Shakespeare’s outward melancholics like comedic lovers differ greatly from ‘true melancholics’ as Hamlet, Jaques or Richard II. The latter are driven by acedia, which is founded partly on individual experience, and makes their melancholy ‘their own’, unexplainable fully by sad events at court, travels, or loss of crown. Even in non-dramatic sonnets Michael Bristol finds the same combination: “nothing is more idiosyncratic than melancholia, and yet nothing is more public and histrionic in its expression” (Bristol, 2011: 193).

The performance of melancholy, both purely textual, as in Burton and dramatic, as in Shakespeare, can thus draw the audience into the melancholic community, and the dramatic logic can make them question the real motives behind the conventional acts of a melancholic. This is a transformed cathartic action, since the viewer does not simply identify with the character, but thinks about their acedic background which avoids a simple moral explanation. Melancholy thus becomes a more multi-faceted part of the large emotional community theatergoers belonged to as part of the London society.

ПРИМЕЧАНИЯ

¹ A good recent case is the debate around Stephen Greenblatt’s account of his journey to Iran that appeared in *The New York Review of Books* (Greenblatt, 2015). His opponents critique his text from the standpoint of ‘grand narratives’ such as Orientalism, while it would be very interesting not to contemptuously ignore the emotions which drive the contributions of every participant in the ensuing discussion — the original author’s nostalgia and desire to reconnect with the Persia of his dream, as well as his critics’ pride and other expectations.

² They could be arranged in a pattern: “Saturn provided the influence; the dark humor supplied the suitable internal conditions; and idleness took care of the rest — for writing was the prerogative of the melancholy man” (Engel, 1995: 116), but could easily be positioned otherwise.

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ШЕКСПИР, БЕРТОН И АЦЕДИЯ ИНТЕЛЛЕКТУАЛА
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Изучение меланхолии и шекспировских персонажей-меланхоликов в данной статье помещается в контекст дискуссий о меланхолии как «социальной эмоции» или болезни с «социальной этиологией» и «социальным протеканием» (В. Лепенис, Дж. Радден, М. Альтбауэр). Необ-

ходимо избегать модели, которая сводит меланхолию исключительно к индивидуальному состоянию, а литературный текст — до иллюстрации ненормальности и морального предостережения. Дискурс медиализации меланхолического состояния, разумеется, присутствовал и в Елизаветинской Англии, например, в «Трактате о меланхолии» Тимоти Брайта, и в целом соответствовал неоплатоническим рассуждениям о меланхолии ученого. Оба взгляда эссенциализировали меланхолию, не сосредоточиваясь на ее эмоциональной стороне.

В статье на примере текстов Уильяма Шекспира и Роберта Бертона показано, что эмоциональное состояние интеллектуала-меланхолика можно описать с помощью сочетания методов. Театральность положения Демокрита Младшего, о которой говорит Бертон, и принятая им роль актера/драматурга обеспечивают автору положение наблюдателя за самим собой. В то же время меланхолическое уединение позволяет ему снять социальные «одежды» и открыть взгляду разума ускользавшее от него «тело без органов». Шекспировские меланхолики, как и Демокрит Младший, находятся в состоянии ацедии, изъятой из богословского контекста и понятой как неспособность полностью охватить различие между ожидаемым и реальным опытом. Снять эту проблему можно, если преодолеть дихотомию созерцания и действия и «анатомировать» эмоцию на сцене и в тексте.

Ключевые слова: У. Шекспир, Р. Бертон, ацеция, меланхолия, история эмоций, социальный аспект эмоции.

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