ANCIENT DEPRESSION

P. TOOHEY: *Melancholy, Love, and Time. Boundaries of the Self in Ancient Literature*. Pp. x + 386, ills. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2004. Cased, US$70, £44. ISBN: 0-472-11302-X.

Peter Toohey's study of the language of melancholia, boredom, and lovesickness in antiquity sets a large goal for itself: no less than to demonstrate the development of a changing register of thought about the self from classical Greece to early imperial Rome (and beyond). Melancholy and its related disorders, T. argues, 'became a locus through which the self and self-consciousness gain vivid representation'; this new representation was 'constituted by inwardness' and 'built upon an opposition of "inside–outside" ' (p. 1). In substantiating this claim, T.'s volume ranges through Greek vase painting, tragedy, Greco-Roman medical texts, Hellenistic epic, modern anthropology, behavioral psychology, the ancient novel, ascetic texts, Roman satire, Seneca's essays, and still further sources. Despite the value and interest inherent in such a project, however, T.'s approach will cause many to question not only his results but also the viability of his methodology.

T. begins his study by the bold claim that the seated figure of Orestes on a red-figure vase attributed to the Eumenides painter is 'depressed' and also shows signs of 'an inner turmoil'. He surmises that this pigmented character is suffering, not from bipolar depression, in which agitation and stillness alternate rather than occur simultaneously, but from a condition parallel to that of a nineteenth-century woman (also pictured) diagnosed with 'stuporous mania'. In this woman's corporeal rigidity and hostility of expression, we are told, 'the parallels to the combination of oppression and tension in the Eumenides Painter's Orestes is [*sic*] striking' (p. 18). With Orestes safely diagnosed, T. devotes the rest chapter to what he calls the long course it took for literary tradition to 'catch up' with the insight of the Eumenides painter (p. 20): namely, that melancholy can be depressive/interior as well as manic/exterior. For example, while Apollonius Rhodius has no words yet to describe what is wrong with his protagonist (T. knows, though: 'Jason is clearly of a melancholic disposition, and he is evidently depressed', p. 45), by Persius' time we can see that the narrator's mention (*inter alia*) of the stickiness of his black ink in *Satire* 3 (a term 'which hints at constipation', p. 51, which, like flatulence, is associated with melancholy by physicians such as Aretaeus, p. 209) points to an awareness of depressive melancholia and reveals the poet's (gastro)psychological insight.

Throughout this chapter, T. can be praised for offering careful readings of ancient medical texts (the Hippocratic text *On the Nature of Man, Problema* 30.1, works by Celsus, Soranus, Aretaeus, and Galen) and a clear analysis of the way in which they differ from literary texts of the same era in their presentation of melancholy and the humors. But here and throughout, the volume's strings of speculation, which cannot be dispelled by T.'s apotropaic admissions of speculation, range from untenable to simply bizarre. In his introduction, T. complains of an anonymous colleague who called his prior scholarship 'safe'. This work should put that predicate eternally to rest. Literary texts are approached as if they were themselves medical patient files, with no regard for the mediating effect of myth or medium; diagnostic parallels are drawn between real and fictitious characters, and between different centuries, circumstances, and even species; throughout, psychological insights offered by T. himself are presented as supports to his argument. Indeed, T. suggests that the love-struck Sappho of fr. 31 must have looked like an Australian aborigine after the

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latter is cursed by a ritual 'boning' —the blanching, the glassy eyes, the twitching muscles, the choked voice. This is an image made all the more vivid by the photo of one terrified, naked aborigine, standing upright with both hands in the air, on p. 167; my view of Sappho will never be the same.

In subsequent chapters T. goes on to link depressive melancholy to: lovesickness (cf. Sappho 31: but 'was this experience depressive or was it manic? I wish we could say, but Sappho does not tell us', p. 75), boredom ('I am quite sure that the unmarried Greeks [waiting for the winds to change at Aulis] were bored', p. 110), seasickness, the effects of the Australian aboriginal 'boning' mentioned above, monkish *acedia*, the frustration of hungry chickens caged with food in sight, calenture (a condition in which sailors feel compelled to jump overboard), and Ajax's mental illness (which T. suggests Sophocles misrepresents, just as Lucan 'did not understand the motives of his own subjects', p. 185). In a book on the boundaries of the self, one wonders if chickens are a worthy comparandum.

The volume proceeds to a discussion the representation of time and leisure in the first century C.E. (for example, T. argues that the sense of linear time expressed by Petronius' Trimalchio and evident in Seneca and Lucan displaces a former cyclical sense of time and is itself linked to passivity, melancholy, and digestion). A final chapter on the increasingly popular Hostius Quadra of Seneca's *Natural Questions* discusses the link between watching oneself and a sense of alienation from the self, which sense in turn is said to shore up said boundaries: Hostius shows us how an individual can survive the melancholic affliction of his peers: in eliciting a strong (negative) reaction from his audience, he is able to redefine himself in opposition. For the most part, however, the boundaries of the self are rarely in evidence in this book, despite their evocation in the introduction and in the appendix on the painter Giorgio de Chirico. T. comes closest when he suggests in Chapter 5 that the attention paid to suicide in several early imperial texts attests to a shared sense of frustration, and that as a display of strength, suicide managed to put on display volitional control and the integrity of an individual's selfhood, p. 189), but the development he goes to such pains to illustrate via medical vocabulary earlier generally remains loosely described as 'a thickening or deepening' in the representation of the self (*passim*). At the same time, the Stoic element in the thinking of Seneca and others on this topic is largely disregarded, and there are no signs of T.'s acquaintance with important current scholarship on the nature of self in antiquity, such as Christopher Gill's volume on Greek personality, or Brad Inwood's or Catharine Edwards's (very different) articles on Senecan selfhood. It is a real misfortune that while T.'s claim about the development of a language of interiority by the early Roman empire may well be correct, his approach to the sources may lead to skepticism rather than persuasion. The bones of this study deserve a better and more sober fleshing out, which perhaps Toohey's 'safe' *Doppelgänger* will yet write for us one day.

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