

CATHARSIS THERAPY IN THE 17th CENTURY ENGLISH DRAMA: A CASE STUDY OF R. BROME'S COMEDY "THE ANTIPODES"

The paper regards catharsis therapeutic application as a theme of the 17th century English drama: a case study of Brome's play "The Antipodes" (1637–1638), never being in focus of Russian literary criticism. Catharsis is a central concept of drama especially in its scenic presentation. The resemblance of personal experiences to those in a play can provoke strong cathartic emotions, causing spectator's purification and mental balance. The 20th century psychology used this effect as a "psychodrama" method for treating patients with mental disorders. Its essence is in transforming patients into actors of a dramatic piece reminding them their traumas, the emotions resulted proceed with cathartic cleansing of the painful symptoms. The paper discusses in detail the first use of the "psychodrama" method in the 17th-century English comedy "The Antipodes". The play's theme is the characters' mental disorder featured with despondency and insanity healed by doctor Huball's method of making the unsuspecting patients act in a performance ("inner play") of an artificially created "antipodean" world of disorder similar to their overturned consciousness. The patients' rejection of the "antipodean" world brings in strong cathartic emotions causing the characters' mental health. The play's analysis shows that the author exceeds the limits of the avant-garde catharsis therapy theme. The play passes his concern about the disease of the English society facing serious upheavals. It aims at bringing all his spectators in catharsis in order to heal the English world's disease and let common sense triumph over the existing disorder and madness.

Keywords: catharsis, *psychodrama*, 17th century English drama, comedy, antipodes, Richard Brome, inner play.

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КАТАРСИЧЕСКАЯ ТЕРАПИЯ В АНГЛИЙСКОЙ ДРАМЕ: КОМЕДИЯ Р. БРУМА «АНТИПОДЫ»

Статья посвящена теме целебного воздействия катарсиса в английской драме XVII в. Материалом служит комедия Р. Брума «Антиподы» (1637–1638). Тема, как и творчество драматурга, практически не затронута в отечественном литературоведении. Катарсис — значимый элемент драмы, особенно в ее сценическом исполнении. Сходство личных переживаний зрителя с треволнениями, представленными в драме, способно вызвать у зрителя сильные эмоции, оказывающие катарсическое

действие и восстановление душевного покоя. Это свойство катарсиса в начале XX в. психологи стали использовать при лечении психических расстройств. Данный метод получил название «психодрама». Суть его состоит в вовлечении несведущего пациента актером в драматическое действо, изображающее события, близкие к тем, что нанесли ему душевные травмы. Воспоминание о них порождает эмоциональный взрыв, вызывающий катарсис, способствующий исцелению пациента. В статье рассматривается метод «психодрамы», впервые использованный английским драматургом Р. Брумом в качестве темы комедии «Антиподы». Все ее персонажи страдают душевным расстройством, симптомы которого — «уныние и безумие», вызванные их перевернутым мироощущением. Приглашенный врач применяет необычный метод лечения. Он погружает «больных» в искусственно созданную обстановку перевернутого «антиподного» мира, сценически представленного во «внутренней пьесе» «Антиподы». Пациенты принимают пьесу за реальную действительность, и через осознание и отрицание пороков и абсурда антиподного общества — катарсиса, все персонажи излечиваются от своих недугов. Детальный анализ комедии показывает, что драматург переходит границы авангардной темы катарсической терапии. Пьеса являет собой послание автора зрителю, выражающее глубокую озабоченность душевной болезнью всего английского общества, требовавшего срочного лечения, которое он предлагает своей пьесой — «психодрамой». Комедия завершается «маской», в которой звучит надежда на катарсис всего общества и его исцеление от безумия и хаоса.

Ключевые слова: катарсис, психодрама, английская драма XVII века, комедия, антиподы, Ричард Брум, внутренняя пьеса.

Introduction

Translated from Greek, «catharsis» (katharsis) means purification, cleansing, clarification in various fields of human nature. The concept of «catharsis» plays an important role in the sphere of art, especially in the theater. It was from the theater of ancient Greece that the concept of catharsis came to dramatic art meaning the moral, spiritual and mental purification of a hero, his positive rebirth due to suffering and misfortune he experienced. Moreover, largely not only the main character of the drama gets through catharsis, but also the theatrical spectators, who together with the main character feel his dramatic misfortunes. Aristotle [Aristotle, 1983, p. 651] saw the purpose of tragedy in the process of catharsis and its influence on the viewers sincerely and deeply feeling fear for the tragic hero, sympathize with him, thereby, ultimately, experience catharsis themselves — moral purification and cleansing of their souls from past sin or moral injury. The similarity of personal experience with the experience presented in a dramatic work can lead the viewers into a strong emotional

state, causing a cathartic effect: spiritual renewal of his soul, restoration of internal balance and mental state. However, Aristotle mentions that catharsis is peculiar not only to tragedy: in the 8th book of “Politics”, devoted to the education of youth, discussing music and chanting, draws attention to the impact of the spectacle on the human soul, bringing the effect “like healing (iaterria) and purification (catharsis). [Aristotle, 1983, p. 642]. This principle applies to all types of dramatic art including comedy, which in the 17th century had a pronounced moralistic meaning, the purpose of which was to cleanse and purify a person from dirt and vices. The leading playwright of English comedy at that period was Ben Jonson. Like all Elizabethans, he following the principle of imitating nature used to hold a mirror in front of her, though in his mirror he concentrated on reflecting the “ugliness of the century”: the negatives and vices of the real world [Jonson, 2013, p. 4]. The aim of comedy was at exposing them to ridicule and debunk so that the contemporaries would be horrified and turn away from them, that is, to get through catharsis purifying and renewing themselves, awakening their best personal qualities thus helping free the world from evils standing in the way of harmony.

The scope of catharsis is extensive. Despite its different forms and fields of application, the essentials of catharsis remain the same: purification, liberation and healing from a certain burden and trauma, tragic self-perception, feelings of sin and guilt, contributing to healing those symptoms through emotional experience. In the 19th century, this nature of catharsis attracted attention of psychologists. Catharsis found wide therapeutic application in psychotherapy for treating patients with mental disorders. The founders of the cathartic treatment method in psychotherapy were Austrian psychologists Joseph Breuer and Sigmund Freud. The core of their method was in making the patient remember and talk about the events after which the symptoms of the disease appeared. Catharsis as psychotherapy started with hypnosis and psychoanalysis becoming a breakthrough in the field, though not so effective as they expected. Jacob Levi Moreno, psychiatrist, psychologist and sociologist at the beginning of the 20th century considered hypnosis and psychoanalysis to have two serious weak points: full passivity of the patients and their isolation from the reality, which caused poor results. Doctor Moreno saw his task in creating “antitheses to psychoanalysis” and developing a more vital and more realistic therapeutic theory and practice [Leutz, 2007, p. 12].

On April 1, 1921 J. Moreno presented an experimental production “on the topic of the day” to the public in Vienna theatre. While performing the actors improvised and involved the audience in the action — it is considered a birth of the “psychodrama” method, the world’s first method of group psy-

chotherapy [Leutz, 2007, p. 4]. Psychologists accepted it as a very productive method of cathartic treatment. The essence of the method is in its form of a small theatrical performance or a scene in which the actors are the patients themselves. Being under the emotional influence of the events taking place in a scene related to their mental problems and the reaction of their performance partners, the patients involuntarily recall their forgotten traumatic experience thus allowing them to get rid of the painful symptoms: “Repetition in the illusion makes patient free from his disease” [Leutz, 2007, p. 204]. This method revolutionized the world of psychotherapy.

The paper touches on a unique example of treating the cathartic method of “psychodrama” in the 17th century English drama, in particular, comedy.

Methods & Material

The impact of catharsis played an important role in the 17th century comedy, which had a pronounced moralistic meaning, the purpose of which was to cleanse and purify humans from dirt and vices and to restore mental and soul harmony. The material used for the analysis is a comedy “The Antipodes” (1637–1638) by Richard Brome, a devoted Ben Jonson’s disciple and successor becoming one of the most popular playwright in the reign of Charles I. Brome followed the basic principle of Ben Jonson’s comedy presenting severe moral contrasts in “The Antipodes”, pitting vice against virtue, making the evil life parody and reverse the good life. The play was written and staged in the extremely difficult and disturbing period for England — the late 30s of the 17th century when the country was on the verge of revolution and civil war having one part of the society “live like Antipodes to others in the same city” [Jonson, 2014, l.42]. The whole nation was critically ill and needed proper cure, which Brome offered through his comedy. In “The Antipodes” Brome exposes, the folly and wickedness of the world his characters dream to live in. They are all ill suffering mental problems and need serious medical help that the playwright together with the play’s doctor offers them through a catharsis therapeutic method of “psychodrama“.

The basic research method applied is a descriptive one including component and contextual analyses of the comedy text.

Discussion

The situation in England at that time was aggravated by the fact that the country had experienced one of the most terrible plague epidemics in 1636–1637, which took away the lives of 10,000 people. The English were

slowly recovering after the plague. The epidemic prompted Brome the main theme of the play — some serious disease to be successfully healed. The playwright had no doubt about the positive effect of his comedy on the public: “as for your sorrows, you came to lose ‘em” [Brome, 1966, p. 9] and the disease will recede after the plague. The course of the comedian’s treatment is based on the healing property of laughter — “comic catharsis” [Chernyavsky, 1956, p. 81–107]. Laughter, showing the meaninglessness and absurdity of existing conventions and relations in modern society, ridiculing them, creates a “world of anti-society with anti-culture”, contrary to the established traditional world order and destroying it [Likhachev D. S., Panchenko A. M., Ponyrko N. V., 1984, p. 3].

The theme of the play is mental disorder that all its characters suffer from with the main symptoms of: “despondency and madness” caused by inverted consciousness, morality and attitude, which generated chaos, disharmony in all spheres of their lives. The comedy action takes place in London of the late 30s of the 17th century, just freed from one ailment, but suffering from another, no less dangerous disease: as the contemporaries mention: “Now the world has turned upside down and everyone behaves like antipodes” [Backervill., 2012, c. 24]. p. 78]. The main character of the play is Peregrine (“the wanderer”). He is 25 years old and his life looks quite good and successful: he grew up in a prosperous family, received a decent education, but his inner condition causes great concern to his dear ones. He suffers from a mental disorder. According to his relatives, this is the result of his passion for travel books: “In tender years he always lov’d to read / Reports of travels and of voyages; / When young boys like him would tire themselves / With sports and pastimes, restore their spirits / Again by meat and sleep, he would whole days / And nights (sometimes by stealth) be on such books/ As might convey his fancy round the world” [Brome, 1966, p. 14].

His childhood passed away, but adult Peregrine unsatisfied with dull reality keeps on dreaming about traveling and distant countries. Together with his beloved author of travel books, Mandeville, he mentally wanders through unknown countries: “this wilderness, / and seen the trees of the sun and moon, that speak / And told King Alexander of his death... / That now is kept and guarded by wild beasts ... / And monsters more, as numberless as nameless” [Brome, 1966, p. 27]. Even marriage could not bring him back from the world of fantasy and fiction to real life. Peregrine’s family members, concerned about his mental health, decide to invite a doctor to him — the last hope to return Peregrine to the real world. Thus, the doctor Huball appears in the play. After getting to know the whole family and their immediate environment, he concludes that all of them

suffer from mental disorder to one degree or another. It turns out that Peregrine's wife Martha also has a serious mental problem: their marriage not only did not heal the young man, but also led to a violation of his young wife's psyche: for three years of marriage, she did not get to know the happiness of love, marriage, or motherhood. She suffers from loneliness, unspent feelings and a passionate desire to have children — the theme of "children" becomes obsessive for her and leads to insane tantrums: "Sometimes in extreme weeping, and anon / In vehement laughter; now in sullen silence, / And presently in loudest exclamations" [Brome, 1966, p. 15]. Peregrine's father, Joyless, is also mentally ill: he suspects his young wife Diana of infidelity and jealousy drives him crazy. As for Diana, she is not healthy as well: her unrestrained speech and wandering gaze [Brome, 1966, p. 18.] testify to her overwhelmed passions. A friend of the Peregrine family, the artist Blaze, suffers from the same disease, tormenting his wife Barbara with jealousy. Blaze's friend, Lord Letoy looks rather healthy being not consumed by either jealousy or longing for unknown countries. However, he is also not very normal as well: he is a noble aristocrat, whose French ancestors came to England together with Wilhelm the Conqueror [Brome, 1966, p. 21], despises the life of nobility, whose interests are limited by "their horse tricks, and their jockies that / Can outtalk them [Brome, 1966, p. 24]. The Lord with his unusual behavior, preferences, contrary to the norms accepted in secular society, gained a reputation as "a strange lord, more like a petty merchant with the manners of an emperor" [Brome, 1966, p. 22]. Thus, all the comedy characters become patients of doctor Huball.

From the replicas of the characters, we learn that the doctor has an extensive practice in London: his numerous patients from various circles of society suffer from varying degrees of mental or mental disorders, among them: "a country gentleman that fell mad / For spending of his land before he sold it: / ...a lady mad... with Tedious and painful study... / Officers and men of place/ Whose senses were so numb'd they understood not/ Bribes from due fees and fell on praemunires / ... T'other day /He set the brains of an attorney right, /That were quite topsy-turvy overturn'd/" [Brome, 1966, p. 10–11]. Thus, the author significantly increases the number of those in need of treatment: these are not only comedy characters, but also residents of London, and indeed of all of England. In addition, the spectators who came to the performance are the patients of "doctor Brome" as the characters of the comedy are the patients of doctor Huball. Therefore, the diagnosis of the main patient Peregrine and his entourage was made — "madness", the symptoms of which are an inverted "upside down" consciousness and worldview. Doctor Huball's method

of treatment, at the prompt of the playwright, is «the wedge is driven by the wedge»: the doctor decides to immerse “the sick” in the upside-down world in which they mentally existed. Doctor’s method determined the main dramatic technique of the comedy — inner play, that is “a play within a play” [Zonina, 2022, p. 32–33]. The playwright creates an inner play in his play, the action of which takes place in an inverted world, in a world of anti-laws and anti-culture, of antipodes.

Despite the indisputable originality of the plot, the very idea of antipodes excited the minds and caused heated discussions in English society, and not only in English. The existence of continents, such as Australia and America, located in the other hemisphere of the Earth and inhabited by people, was accepted by the 17th century as an indisputable fact. However, their geographic polarity contributed to the spread of ideas about the complete opposite, physical and moral-spiritual, of their inhabitants to the inhabitants of the Old World that received the name of antipodes”. Their “turnaround” existence doomed them to life “upside down”: “they have the opposite, because when the Sun gives us Summer, they have Winter there in the midst; and when we have day, a long night descends on them ... ” [Eden, 1885, p. 10]. Everything that is white in the northern hemisphere is black in the southern hemisphere, and vice versa: “And their swans are black, and the crows are white” [Brome, 1966, p. 25].

The idea of the “antipodes” gave rich material to the author for a comic and satirical interpretation of reality, in order to show the world his true face as in a distorting mirror. Broom places his characters in an antipodal “world upside down”, the absurdity and chaos of which should lead them to deny such a world, to reject it, thereby contributing to their healing.

So, for the treatment of Peregrine and the other patients doctor Huball proposes to create for the young man the world of his dreams the world of a distant and outlandish country — the country of “antipodes”. To do this, he needs a stage, a play and actors. Lord Letoy is ready to help with the stage and the play as he loves the theater, patronizes a famous company of comedians and even tries to write plays himself: “anyone can sing a song, or play a passage on the viol, And also play a role in a comedy” [Brome, 1966, p. 15]. As for the actors, the doctor’s patients were supposed to play roles.

Therefore, Lord Letoy builds up a huge stage on his estate, on which the action of the “inner” play “The Antipodes”, written by him especially for this occasion, takes place. The doctor, promising Peregrine a fascinating journey to an amazing country, puts him to sleep. Waking up an hour later, he learns from the doctor that he has slept for six months and within that time all their company managed to arrive at the country on the other side of the Earth, located exactly under England, i. e. at Anti-England —

moreover, they stopped in its capital Anti-London. The doctor takes them round the city. They are curious about the life of the antipodes. They find that the people there in appearance, language, religion, resemble those whom they oppose, that is — the English. However, this similarity proved to be true only to external features, while their customs, manners, and style of life are absolutely the opposite — antipodean. Even “the geographical image — “live like Antipodes ...precisely suggests the strong moral polarity of Jonson’s thought” [Donaldson, 1970, p. 78] — this is what they eventually discovered in the antipodean country.

In Anti-England, common people govern the magistrate, wives command husbands, parents and masters obey children and servants. As for men, they are only busy with gossiping and chattering, while women are fond of hunting at this time and indulge in pleasures. Cats are kept in a cage there in order to save them from mice and merchants’ wives trade overseas while the husbands cuckold them at home, old men marry maidens while old women chose boys as their husbands. Their lawyers are the most dishonest people and all their poets and actors were Puritans [Brome, 1966, p. 76–77]. Brome focuses on the aspect of moral contrariness referring to the absolute evil of witchcraft activities as only dark forces could only create such chaos, lawlessness and the life upside down in violation of all traditional ties and relationships [Brome, 1979, p. 138–217].

The playwright vividly depicts that country, touching upon all aspects of its life: socio-economic, spiritual and moral ones that undoubtedly evoked vivid associations with English reality among his contemporaries. In the country of antipodes, everything is turned upside down: lawyers, called upon to guard the law and protect the interests of citizens, rob them taking the last pennies from the poor [Brome, 1966, p. 73]; the church ministers do not disdain usury; courtiers, rude in manners and language, did not differ from London carters and were engaged in projecting [Brome, 1966, p. 95]; the monopolists that led the country’s economy to collapse are under the reliable protection of the king, and the king, neglecting his duties to the country and the people, dissolves the parliament and establishes despotism in the country [Brome, 1966, p. 98]. Thus, the author’s satire in the play is aimed not only at the individual vices of the antipodes’ society, but also at country’s entire structure: from the legislative system to the supreme power.

Peregrine takes the theatrical performance for reality, which caused his active protest. Observing the anomalies, depravity and absurdity of the relations existing in that country, he wills to change this “reality”. Mistaking the theatrical dressing room for an “enchanted castle”, he rushes into battle with theatrical props, crushing the monsters inhabiting it in

the tradition of Don Quixote. After defeating imaginary enemies, he discovers royal robes and a crown among the costumes. Without doubting the authenticity of the royal power's regalia, Peregrine proclaims himself the king of the "antipodes". He is determined to transform this imperfect country. Thus, the "psychodrama" method succeeded in returning him from the world of illusions and fantasy to reality, even if the reality is artificially created, which he does not suspect. The positive result of the cathartic therapy through "psychodrama" was obvious: for the first time he looked up at the world around him and got interested in it feeling eager to be its active participant. His awakened concern about real life, the correct assessment of the relations developed in the world in which he found himself, the rejection of absurdity and chaos testify to the process of his healing. Doctor Huball's method of "psychodrama" has also a healing psychotherapeutic effect on the other characters of the comedy imperceptibly involved in the play. Peregrine's return to real life contributes to the establishment of harmony in his family and Martha finds peace and mental balance. Joyless and Diana get rid of their ailments: jealousy and excessive amorousness as well. The method proved to be very efficient.

The course of "psychodrama" treatment in the play was carried out so professionally and effectively that American literary critic R. Kaufman called doctor Huball "the first practicing psychiatrist on the English stage" [Kaufmann, 1961, p. 65].

Conclusion

The analysis of "The Antipodes" shows the playwright's mastery in the comedy genre with its elaborate plot and complicated play's design directed into the most significant psychic aspect of the play. His belief in healing ability of the drama catharsis is strong and indisputable which is proved by his unique cathartic therapy method of "psychodrama" presented by "the play within the play". Moreover, the author exceeds the limits of the avant-garde "psychodrama" method of the catharsis therapy theme. With his play, Brome appeals to all his spectators expressing his serious worry about a crucial disease effecting all the English society with almost the same symptoms the comedy's characters suffered from — the ones of despondency and mental disorder. The playwright hopes that watching and rejecting the madly inverted reality the people are surrounded with they having got through catharsis will be able to restore fair reality in the country. Thus "The Antipodes" becomes "a title which describes both inner and outer plays" [Cope J. I., 1973, p. 147] and "The Antipodes" comedy on the whole appears to serve as a catharsis therapeutic "psychodrama"

aiming through his theatre spectators at all the nation which needs to be purified, cleansed and healed in order to save their country from crucial disaster . Thus, Brome in his comedy to a certain extent took over the function of a healer — “the doctor of the age” [Brome A., 1968, p. 135]. The playwright does believe that the nation’s disease like the one of the comedy’s characters is curable and common sense will overcome discord, chaos and madness — this is what the final scene proclaims: “But soon they vanish and the mansion quit

Unto the gods of Health, Love, Wine and Wit...” [Brome, 1966, p. 126]

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