

Romanian Journal of Artistic Creativity

Clamours of death



The storm [Against all odds]

Dumitru Bostan Sr.



New York • Summer 2015 • Volume III • Number 2(10)



Mania, depression, and culture

Mircea Lăzărescu

Victor Băbaș University of Medicine

What occurs in psychopathology is the disturbance of psycho-anthropological modules, or rather the demise of institutions like the king's fool, and the detour of cultural phenomena like the carnival. They become undifferentiated, rigid, relatively autonomous, tending to react to minor and nonspecific stimuli, and finally taking over the psyche and de-situationalizing it.

Keywords: mania; depression; culture; anthropology

Depressive pathology, as well as the manic type, which often evolve together, refers to psychological disorders that were first identified in Western culture, by Hippocratic medicine. Acknowledged, described, and commented upon ever since. Of course, by medicine. Also by European culture, until the emergence of the psychiatric clinic in the 19th century.

The medical model

Lately, more precisely since the American diagnostic system DSM-3 through 5 dominated official psychiatry, there was a shift of focus towards depression. Even the classical manic-depressive disease, which for Kraepelin was the second endogenous psychosis along with schizophrenia, is mentioned as "bipolar depression." But until neuropsychiatric asylums were formed, tradition commented expansively on melancholia rather than mania. But this is due to the fact that, in Galen's times, the melancholic was inscribed among the four official temperaments, in the absence of a temperamental variant to have been obviously derived from mania (Tellembach 1983). And during the Renaissance this melancholic temperament gained a remarkable prestige, especially through its associations with wisdom, made by Marsilio Ficino, the leader of the Platonic Academy of Florence (Culianu 1994). Even Dürer made three engravings on the topic of this

Carpe nocem

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to mlazarescu39@yahoo.com.

melancholy, coming from his broad knowledge of the futilities of the world. At first sight, at the level of the marginal culture of traditional medicine, the renown of melancholia was, therefore, remarkable. But starting with the 19th century, when melancholia turned into depression (Berrios 1996), nonpsychotic forms were no longer prominent, as people preferred neurasthenia, anxiety or obsessive psychasthenia.

And then, why is it that depression began drawing a particular attention in the period after DSM-3? Not only did the unipolar depressive disorder appear, but depression became apparent in countless clinical variants, in practically all of psychiatry. By 2020 depression is expected to be one of the main causes of invalidity. We believe that the answer can come only from the kind of society in which we live, which brings into fore the assertiveness of success by all costs, being afraid of the melancholic withdrawal into deep meditation and wisdom. Therefore, any depression, no matter how weak, is dangerous and must be treated.

While not becoming entirely absorbed into this world in which we spend our life, we will try to focus on mania, from a cultural perspective. (Marneros&Goodwin 2005)

2000 years ago, in the first century after Christ, Aretæus of Cappadocia, commented on mania as follows:

Some manic patients are cheerful—they laugh and dance day and night and they walk...in the square with wreaths on their heads, as if they had won a competition; these patients do not disturb the others. But others become furious, their manifestations are intemperate. Some manic individuals who are intelligent and well educated start talking about astronomy, although they never studied philosophy or they consider themselves poets served by the muses.

Aretæus notices thus, in the delirious manics, cultural grandiosity and connections with games. Those wearing wreaths on their heads considered themselves winners in competitions, and let us not forget that the Olympic games also implied courses of poetry and

shows. And those speaking about astronomy considered themselves creators in philosophy. Finally, Aretæus intuited the connection between manic states and creativity, a topic of interest for many twentieth century researches, the best

known being those of Andreasen and Jamison (Goodwin&Jamison 2007). Creative inspiration highlights many psychological aspects in the manic sphere: heightened alertness, absence of fatigue, rapid and various associations of ideas, exalted mood, increased (ideative and cultural) productivity. But, as opposed to the manic, the creator is not in a state of dispersion; but of concentration and synthetic selection. Therefore, during the periods of artistic creation, the subject becomes detached from the environment and focuses on the fictitious world, on his creative universe – whereas the manic keeps looking up and sharing with everyone his grand plans.

The connection between the manic state and cultural creation, so rigorously documented at present, requires more than some marginal consideration. Finally, despite not being an original creator, the hypomanic can be positively productive, in regular work and activities. The increase of energy, the absence of fatigue despite little sleep and increased effort, hypervigilance and hypermnesia, good sociability and reduced reticence, fast decisions by intuiting the whole, these are all psychological aspects that render the hypomanic state, of course up to a certain intensity, desirable and cultivated in every domain of activity, inclusively in exams. It is thus revealed that the pathological manic experience is derived from a psychological functional and adaptive state, which probably explains why this casuistry is genetically selected and transmitted. Evolutionist doctrine might also be involved in the psychopathology of mania (Lăzărescu 2011). Actually, in DSM-5 the characterization of the manic episode emphasizes this aspect of the increase of energy, of initiative and behaviour; of course, above an adaptive level, given the tachypsychic disinhibition. Along with the expansive mood and the increase of energy and purpose-oriented activity, of the other seven items of the diagnosis, only the increase of self-esteem is not correlated with behavioural activities.

What is amazing is the fact that the DSM system completely disregards the gregarious hypersociability and the ludic, festive behaviour. Although any clinician psychiatrist or, for what is worth, anyone with common sense, cannot ignore these aspects of mania.

We can thus begin completing the semiology in the DSM-5 criteria with the fact that the manic

has a high responsiveness towards contact with the others. He easily and spontaneously approaches whoever he meets. And, what is essential, he transmits well-being to the others, who become more cheerful, and seldom laugh wholeheartedly. The manic often makes surprising jokes or observations, given his mobile attention and pithy perception, while the collocutors become contaminated by the atmosphere. On a clinical level, there is a frequent comparison between the jokes told by the manic and those of patients with frontal syndrome – or by a schizophrenic – at whose jokes no one laughs but the person telling them. The contaminating aspect of the manic mood is observable in hospitals as well, where not only do they get involved in all sorts of activities – cleaning up, helping with food distribution –, but they also engage in these actions and motion the depressives around them. Moreover, the manic's sociability lacks reticence. He does not hesitate to share to the consulting doctor observations that concern him; but which are normally not made public. And the latter is not mad, but rather engaged in the manic's good mood, laughing with him.

It is possible that DSM-5 should not have introduced any item concerning the manic's sociability, euphoria, and contaminating gregariousness, for methodological reasons. However, these aspects are consistent with a series of other manic manifestations, suggesting a festive atmosphere.

Not rarely does the manic spontaneously sing, dance, and recites poetry; or does this things in response to the slightest request. He sometimes composes poetry on the spot. Along with the contaminating and unreluctant hypersociability, such manifestations indicate a festive atmosphere of the carnivalesque kind. Or remind of the buffoon. These hints are hardly insignificant, were we to seriously consider a possible origination from normality of mania.

The cultural model

During the carnivalesque celebration – and in fact during any celebration in the stage of unleashed partying – people are in a good mood, in a state of gregarious sociability disregarding of social hierarchies, engaging in

games and shows, with music and dance. Celebrating parties are accompanied by plenty of food; and frequently by alcohol, which potentiates this generalized psychomotor and social disinhibition. In a way, alcohol can induce in many people a state of a manic euphoric type (and in others a depressive state), being a substance consumed by people precisely for the support provided to the community during celebrations. A particular aspect of carnivalesque celebrations is mask-wearing and the collapse of social hierarchies, which is consistent with the unreluctant approach of the other. In this sense, it is worth retaining such observations and comments (Eliade 1979) that correlate this type of celebration with the temporal cyclicity of the mythical-sacral Universe, claiming a periodical renewal of profane time. Every year, at a certain time, “the order” of the previous year gets old and dies. With this death of time, the world enters, for a moment, the primordial chaos, so that afterwards “the new year” is born and the human world is reordered. The carnivalesque celebration – like the Roman Saturnalia, but replicated in all structured cultures – takes place during this intermediate period. Now, in the “interregnum,” no order is valid anymore, no restriction or social hierarchy. The rule is general disinhibition, gregariousness, the presence of ancestors among people, social undifferentiation, when the slave temporarily becomes Emperor and vice versa. This gregarious sociability, which is shameless and cultivates instinctive disinhibitions that might turn into orgies, would be, according to Mircea Eliade, the prototype of any celebration, either religious or secular, during which it manifests – of course only with some of the afore-mentioned behaviours – after the culminating moment of “theophany,” the revelation of the god, long-evoked through prayers. An appearance that confirms the god's continuing support offered to the community. This fact explains the unleashing of the celebrating party.

This scenario of the annual carnivalesque celebration, of time's regeneration, lasted a while in Christianity as well. In its performance – as well as in other celebrations – an important role was played by the fool...the buffoon, the jester, embodying hypomanic behaviour.

The model of the Saturnalia was expressed during the Renaissance within the Church itself, under the express denomination of "feast of fools" or of "the Holy Innocents" (Lever 1983). The event was probably continuing the Roman tradition, still vivid for the people. Ever since the 15th century, details about this type of celebration have been made known from a circular letter of the University of Paris, from 1444, written with the purpose to appease or eradicate.

The feast of fools took place on Christmas when in the Church, with the regular service, a paraphrasing ritual was officiated, usually by deacons with the help of choir children; this was followed by a carnivalesque procession. Masks were worn, the protagonists disguised themselves, sometimes dressed as women or with clothes from the theatre's props. Not missing from the event were those disguised as "fools," with hoods and baubles. Then, a "boy bishop" was chosen from the commoners; he wore the miter and received the people's blessing. He performed a pseudo-service, with jokes and curses. Then the cortege left for the town, in pomp and circumstance, with joy, songs and often indecent behaviour, dances, licentious jokes, wine, all under the patronage of the boy bishop. The joyful people accompanied the cortege. Characteristic of the performance were buffooneries, pantomimes, and the burlesque behaviour.

Important official people of the Church sometimes attended as spectators. For instance, in Lille, in 1372, the duke of Bourgogne participated, initiating the performance in his chapel. The feast of fools also took place in some monasteries. It stopped taking place after an ecclesiastic decision on 19 January 1552.

"The feast of fools" is indicative of the similitude between madness and chaos. But it is a necessary, periodical and controlled chaos. The interesting aspect of the Renaissance consists in the institutionalization of madness, by attesting the profession of fool, similar up to a point to what is called a buffoon. This fool had a precise social status, which was partially correlated with the celebrating performance.

For many centuries, especially in France, there was a custom that the towns should establish a "fool of the town." He had a specific outfit and his main function was to animate feasts.

Especially in the local celebrations, he had an important role. For example in Lille, on the occasion of Fete-Dieu, the fool led the cortege of the procession, doing somersaults, grimaces, spreading jests, and not far away, there came the bishop with suites of priests and prayers. There is an account of an incident in 1480 when an impostor wanted to compete with the official fool. This wage-earner was often a rich bourgeois of the town. Or the trade was transmitted from father to son. Sometimes, the town did a selection through competition. If the rich towns like Dieppe hired a fool for the whole year, the poorer villages only hired him for a celebration. The German towns also hired professionals for feasts, even specialized ones: some were "farceurs," others were "jesters," and so on. They played a special role, for instance, in the carnival of Nürnberg.

The folk feasts, through the atmosphere here induced, favour shows, games, dance, food and drinking, jugglery and pantomime, circus, jokes, jests, collective laughing. But the character specialized in feasts remains, as mentioned above, the fool. What kind of folly could be behind this "fool"?

We know more on the matter, especially from Shakespeare's plays, invoking particularly the king's fool, but also that of people of high rank.

The king's fool, according to his job description, had to induce good mood around him. For this, he had to be truly cheerful, of a contaminating euphoria. As far as it is known about him, he merrily moved, did somersaults, practised pantomime, his mind functioned alertly, he easily associated ideas, noticed details, had humour, and was very skillful at language games, by telling jests. He relaxed the atmosphere and made everyone laugh. He also entertained the king, who needed this, given the gloomy atmosphere of plots at the Court and the atmosphere of general dissimulation of the daily intrigues.

The fool was the only one who could confront the king with the truth without risking disgrace. The fool was unreluctant, rapidly covering the psychological distances between intimacy and official appearances, similar to the way things occurred during carnivals.

In 1616, at the Louvre in Paris, Philip V, also known as the Tall, established a function retributed at his Court for his fool, Geoffrey, who

entertained and made him laugh. From then on, at the French Court this function was to be occupied by a titular for life. So did the Courts of Anjou and Bourgogne.

As expected, the occupation of this function, at different courts, but especially around kings, attracted a lot of candidates, due to incumbent advantages, inclusively financial. For example in 1629, Henry IV's fool, Guillaun, received 1200 pounds, as compared to 2000 for the captain of guards or 300 for the writing teacher of Louis XIV. Among those placed in such positions, there were former chemists, doctors and genuine gentlemen.

The function implied multiple talents and tasks. The fool was a comedian, a clown, a mime, an acrobat, a dancer, a singer, a musician. He had to be good at telling jokes, funny stories, fables and anecdotes. He had to collect and invent them, so as to always have at hand the right word, capable to make word games, puns, crosswords, to tell rhymes. And his availability had to be permanent, every time the sovereign was in the mood. And everything occurred with the most intimate familiarity, as the fool had immunity. He represented for the king a special sort of mirror.

This "official fool" was actually a wise person. The whole speech of Erasmus (1959) from *The Praise of Folly* – Encomion Moria – a self-praise of folly is also one of openness to a serene and humorous wisdom. So, different from that of the sad melancholy promoted by Ficino and engraved by Grova Durer. This manic folly, functioning adaptively in the middle of a cultural mankind was thus personified in those times through the social profession of buffoon. This opinion was shared by Shakespeare who, in the *Twelfth Night* (Act 3, Scene 1) commented on this character:

This fellow is wise enough to play the fool;
And to do that well craves a kind of wit:
He must observe their mood on whom he jests,
The quality of persons, and the time,
And, like the haggard, cheque at every feather
That comes before his eye. This is a practise
As full of labour as a wise man's art
For folly that he wisely shows is fit;
But wise men, folly-fall'n, quite taint their wit.

Therefore, not only melancholy was officially acknowledged as a prestigious actor in high Renaissance culture. Its opposite, hypomania, had in that period, the same status – or even a

promising one – through these special variants cultivated by the people of those times; pointed out by Erasmus and Shakespeare.

The meaning for mankind of the disappearance of the status and social role of the fool, of the hypomanic from the Emperor's courts, was revealed in the twentieth century, when no one around Hitler or Stalin dared to tell them the truth to their faces and when no one was open to jokes, when the games practised by the buffoon (from crosswords to role plays) stopped cheering people up.

In our days, we preserve the memory of the hypomanic buffoon, through his persistence in games. For example, in chess and in card games. It is said that chess came to Europe from the Orient, from Iran. In this game, the bishop is situated in the immediate proximity of the king and queen, closer than the knights and the rooks, behind the pawns. It occupies a high rank in this society, moving along the squares of a chess board, directly participating at the level of supreme decisions. In card games, the indispensable joker plays the fool. The entire strategy, based on a rational calculation of probabilities, can be upturned by the "fool's folly," who can replace anyone, transgressing all the rigid rules. This joker of the card games reminds us of the necessary folly within each of us, when we riskily engage in any game.

The anthropological model

We can now return to the psychiatric clinic of bipolar disorder, with manic episodes of clinical aspects and different intensities. The hypomanic episode is also attested, as well as cyclothymia and mixed states. But what about the "pre-hypomanic" states potentiating productivity and creativity? What shall we do about them? Shall we moderate them with tymic stabilizers? What about people's availability for feasts and participating in parties with songs, shows, and games? What about the cheerfulness of people who know how to play for pleasure – not only for money – who know and like to joke and talk carelessly, wasting their time?

The moral of the speech above has got many faces:

We think that the first and the most important is that the pattern of the medical model of

bipolarity should not conceal its anthropological perspective, which shows how mania and clinical depression derive from normal experiences and manifestations, adaptive and creative on a cultural level. The human being is capable of “falling” in the minus psychopathological condition of mania, because he is able to stand out energetically and expansively in the investigation of novelty, in accomplishing work and performance, because he can experience three moments of creative inspiration, and especially because he participates for all of his life in various celebrations, with joy, songs, games, and jokes. Celebrations in which he manifests a gregarious sociability, an instinctive disinhibition opened to humour and laughter, to shows and dance. For thousands and thousands of years worldwide, people work, pray to gods and celebrate. The psychobehavioral model of the celebration must be inscribed, like a distinct functional structure, like a pattern in every man’s brain. If evolutionist psychology demonstrates that those animal behaviours that are adaptive are selected as genetically transmitted models, so as to be exerted by the brain of the descendants, why would not the same thing happen with the human brain’s responsiveness to the celebrating condition? If the brain of various animals is genetically programmed in an adaptive sense – probably as a consequence of natural and sexual selection – to trigger behaviours such as hibernation, why not accept that the human brain is programmed, maybe as a consequence of a kind of evolutionary selection, to be able to perform behaviour of the kind of bereaving or unleashed celebrating euphoria.

These capabilities, these socio-cultural adaptive affective moods are to be found probably as some “functional mechanisms” or as some “psycho-anthropological modules” in the psycho-cerebral functional structure of each person, remaining at his disposal, as tools that can be activated whenever required by circumstances; i.e. to enter a celebrating state whenever there are celebrations.

What occurs in psychopathology is of course a disturbance in the organization and functioning of these “psycho-anthropological modules,” in the sense that they become undifferentiated, rigid, relatively autonomous, tending to manifest with minor and unspecific stimuli. And once in the foreground, such a rigid manifestation takes over the psyche, disturbing its normal functioning, de-situationalizing it - so that, instead of a natural presence in the situation, the subject feels projected in a fictive future.

The psychological behaviour of the manic episode, of the bipolar disorder in general, should be searched for in the disruption that transforms and shifts natural, adaptive and creative, human experiences and manifestations into other types that are abnormal, formally rigid and decontextualizing. The fact that the disruption in the bipolar disorder is founded on modifications in the neurotransmission of the brain is certain. But equally certain is that what the medical model calls manic episode, is decanted from natural experiences of the cultural man, who cannot live without work, celebrations, and the invocation of transcendence.

References

- Berrios GA (1996) *The History of Mental Symptoms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Culianu IP (1994) *Eros și magie în Renaștere*. București: Nemira.
- Eliade M (1979) *Aspecte ale mitului*. București: Univers.
- Erasmus (1959) *Elogiul nebuniei*. București: Editura Științifică.
- Goodwin FK, Jamison KR (2007) *Manic-depressive Illness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lăzărescu M (2011) Tulburarea bipolară în perspectiva psihopatologiei. Doctrina evoluționistă și fenomenologia existențialistă. *Revista Română de Psihiatrie* 1-2.
- Lever M (1983) *Le sceptre et la marotte. Histoire des fous de cour*. Paris: Fayard.
- Marneros A, Goodwin F (2005) *Bipolar Disorder. Mixed states, rapid cycles and atypical forms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tellembach H (1983) *Melancholie*. Berlin: Springer.