



The Melancholic Persona in Susan Evance's Sonnet *To Melancholy*

Susan Evance'in *Melankoliye* Sonesinde Melankolik Karakter

Öznur YEMEZ¹ 



ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the sonnet *To Melancholy* by the English Romantic writer Susan Evance in terms of the representation of the melancholic mind of the authorial persona. The study suggests that the implied author experiences melancholy as a form of mood state rather than a type of disorder or disease peculiar to the melancholic writers of the present and the past. Therefore, the author applies melancholy as a creative instrument and poetic inspiration in the narrative of the poem and a principal way to self-actualize as a Romantic writer. The literary representation of a melancholic mood thus causes the authorial persona to melancholize deliberately not only for her own sake, but also for the sake of both implied and historical readerships. With the aim of realizing her artistic potential, the poetic persona withdraws from the other and rejects society, experiencing a deliberate melancholy detachment for aesthetic reasons and a literary concern. This causes the subjective experience of melancholic suffering to turn out to be a social problem rather than simply a personal issue. Using the terminology of Julia Kristeva and Karen Horney, the paper analyses melancholy as a textual mode and a transient mood that removes self-estrangement but brings about social alienation.

Keywords: Susan Evance, Julia Kristeva, Karen Horney, Melancholy, sonnet

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, İngiliz Romantik yazarı Susan Evance'in *Melankoliye* sonesini, melankolik yazıya hâkim olan yazar kişiliği ve bu kişiliğin melankolik zihninin temsili açısından analiz eder. Çalışma, örtük yazarın melankoliyi, günümüzün ve geçmiş dönemlerin melankolik yazarlarına özgü bir tür bozukluk ya da hastalıktan ziyade bir ruh hali olarak deneyimlediğini öne sürer. Bu nedenle, yazar melankoliyi şiirin anlatısında yaratıcı bir araç ve şiirsel bir ilham kaynağı ile Romantik bir yazar olarak kendini gerçekleştirmenin temel bir yolu olarak uygular. Bu melankolik ruh halinin edebi temsili böylelikle yazar kişiliğin kasıtlı olarak sadece kendi adına değil, aynı zamanda hem örtük hem de tarihsel okurlar adına da bilinçli bir biçimde melankoliye bürünmesine neden olur. Şiirsel kişilik, sanatsal potansiyelini ortaya çıkarabilmek ve kendini gerçekleştirebilmek amacıyla ötekenden kaçır ve toplumu reddeder; estetik sebepler ve edebi kaygılarla bilinçli melankolik bir kopusu yaşar. Bu durum melankolik ısrabın bütüncül bir özne deneyim olarak yalnızca kişisel bir sorun olmaktan ziyade daha çok toplumsal bir sorun haline gelmesine neden olur. Julia Kristeva ve Karen Horney'in terminolojisini baz alan bu çalışma melankoliyi metinsel bir mod ve öz-yabancılaşmayı ortadan kaldıran ancak bunun yanında toplumsal bir yabancılaşmayı beraberinde getiren geçici bir ruh hali olarak analiz eder.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Susan Evance, Julia Kristeva, Karen Horney, Melankoli, sone

¹Ress. Assist. PhD., Selçuk University, Faculty of Letters, Department of English Language and Literature, Konya, Türkiye

ORCID: Ö.Y. 0000-0002-1102-7407

Corresponding author:

Öznur YEMEZ,
Selçuk Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi,
İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı, Konya, Türkiye
E-mail: oznuryemez@gmail.com

Submitted: 30.01.2021

Revision Requested: 02.09.2021

Last Revision Received: 22.11.2021

Accepted: 06.01.2022

Citation: Yemez, O. (2022). The melancholic persona in Susan Evance's sonnet *To Melancholy*. *Litera*, 32(1), 105-120. <https://doi.org/10.26650/LITERA2021-871225>



Introduction

The distinction between the clinical terms and critical concepts related to the historical backdrop for melancholy should be drawn in order to cast light on the categorical transformation of melancholy as a phenomenon over the course of time. Apropos of disease, the label refers to a pathological and medical condition that displays a cluster of observable symptoms and signs and mostly covers the physiological states besides the psychological ones. The term accordingly signifies the presence of an abnormal biological state and explores "the will speaking through the body, a language for dramatizing the mental: a form of self-expression" (Sontag, 1978, p. 44) that represents a kind of anomaly which requires a medical diagnostic label, necessary treatment and "impairs the normal function" (Galen, 1916, p. 199). Throughout the ages, disease has always been associated with a certain imbalance, while treatment appertains to the act of restoring the balance so as to regain health. Within this framework, what classifies melancholy as a disease, besides the traditional notion of the excessive bodily black bile, turns out to be "the absence of the cause, or the unpredictable link between cause and effect, that makes for the abnormality" (Terry, 2011, p. 58) and "mental responses that are out of proportion to what triggers them" (Terry, 2011, p. 67). In terms of classical understanding, "among the several diseases of the black bile was identified the eponymous disorder of melancholy itself, a condition whose symptoms included unwarrantedly dispirited and apprehensive affective states" (Radden, 2009, p. 5). Hence, melancholy might be defined as a bodily and spiritual kind of disease that exhibits a wide variety of signs, symptoms as well as causes, and needs extensive treatment and cures in accordance with each individual patient. As for the explanation of disorder, it should be highlighted that the label involves the condition of dysfunction, impairment and disruption "affecting cognition and affection, respectively" (Radden, 2009, p. 15). Disorder comes to denote a medical condition with symptoms and signs, yet unlike disease, it does not lead to a structural change within the subject. Therefore, melancholy was correspondingly subcategorized as a disorder caused by the excessive black bile that turns out to be in itself a disease. Melancholy was thus regarded simultaneously as a kind of disorder and a subtype of disease. In terms of mood states, it might be specified that moods are simply states of mind and transient emotions or feelings that circumvolve the subject in certain circumstances. Moods are in essence nonintentional and causeless or, in other words, "objectless," (Radden, 2009, p. 15) as "because they color and frame all experience, moods are a particular way of experiencing, rather than a particular experience, it might be said" (Radden, 2009, p. 14). Henceforth, disease and

disorders might be basically evaluated as subjective experiences whereas moods are solely viewed as the instrument or by-product of this experience itself and an aspect of melancholic subjectivity. In regard to temperament, the term signifies the nature or personality of the subject, particularly attributed to that of the learned or scholarly subject that in fact promotes him as the man of genius. In light of all these dissimilarities, it is possible to suggest that “melancholy is in one sense a treatable illness,” so that “diseases can be remedied, griefs can be consoled and moods can be lifted” (Lund, 2010, p. 195). Against this background, the present study particularly distinguishes authorial melancholy as a mood for interpreting the narrative of the poem, contrary to what has been believed and suggested. Previously, poets have used literature in their search for an effective cure for their melancholy experienced as disease, disorder and temperament, unlike Susan Evance, who deliberately uses melancholy to compose a sonnet form. The study thus suggests that Evance instrumentalizes her melancholic mood as a poetic subject for the construction of a poetic self and reveals the function of melancholic tendency in the process of self-actualization as a Romantic author. As a result, what the persona represents through the signs and the narrative is simply a melancholic experience instead of an essentially melancholic self, while the melancholic experience provides a therapeutic effect for a non-writing writer who at times becomes afflicted with neurotic inhibitions about her poetic abilities.

The Melancholic Writer and Melancholic Writing

Melancholic writing is significant in terms of revealing the melancholic mind of the writer and verbalizing the unutterable sorrow via signs so that the melancholic can comprehend and picture the quintessence of her melancholy. Julia Kristeva (1989) establishes a direct correlation between the melancholic writer and melancholic writing and mostly replaces the term with melancholia, providing the exact definition of the state as “the institutional symptomatology of inhibition and asymbolia that becomes established now and then or chronically in a person, alternating more often than not with the so-called manic phase of exaltation” (p. 9). Signifying melancholy as a whole with the phrase melancholy/depressive composite, she associates the state with object loss and a modification of signifying bonds. The melancholic loss causes in the subject a denial of speech so that language starts to function as an anxiety-punishment mechanism, forcing the melancholic into a kind of asymbolia. Therefore, the loss becomes transformed into a loss of speech in addition to a loss of the ego, rendering the loss to be entirely narcissistic. As for the nature of the loss, Kristeva lays special

stress on the fact that the melancholic experiences not the conscious loss of an object but an unconscious loss and the lack of a thing which itself turns out to be unsignifiable and noncommunicable. Solely through literature, the subject becomes able to represent, comprehend and "secure an uncertain but adequate hold over the Thing" (Kristeva, 1989, p. 14). In this respect, literary creation turns into a verbal evidence of the affect that encompasses the subject through the very act of creating, which "transposes affect into rhythms, signs, forms" (Kristeva, 1989, p. 22).

Kristeva associates melancholy with the failing matricide of the subject which in fact prevents individual autonomy. The loss of the mother as an object is, if eroticized, recovered and replaced by another substitute, as in the case of male heterosexual or female homosexual subjects. This loss might be transposed in the symbolic realm and lead to the eroticization of the other, as in the case of a heterosexual female subject or transfigured into a sublime form as an artistic creation in the semiotic realm. Hence, overidentification with or the introjection of the maternal object ends up with the loss of the self as the image that belongs to the undead mother who cannot be transformed into the other remains embedded within the subject, who gradually devours her psyche through melancholy. The melancholic woman turns out to be the one that only destroys herself and eternally mourns for the loss of the maternal object that can never be wholly lost in the final analysis. This unmetabolized loss manifests itself best in the discourse of the subject, which proves to be repetitive, depressive, tedious, broken, obsessive and chaotic. At times, it leads to the emergence of denial of the signifier that coerces the melancholic subject into recurring asymbolia and silence. This silence in fact provides a grand reunion with the indispensable Thing and functions as the evidence for the loss of meaning induced by melancholy. Literature in this regard provides a maternal space for the melancholic authorial persona to soothe her pervasive loss.

The relationship of the melancholic subject with language reveals itself in two basic ways: negation and denial. Denial denotes the loss of speech or "the rejection of the signifier as well as semiotic representatives of drives and affects," while negation refers to "the intellectual process that leads the repressed to representation on the condition of denying it, and on that account, shares in the signifier's advent" (Kristeva, 1989, p. 44). The discourse of the melancholic always signifies the ever-present obsession with the object that can never be given up. That is the essential reason why the subject feels unable to speak or write about anything except what is implicitly or explicitly related with the object and is forced into muteness in the meantime. Negation in this respect

enables the subject to accept and confront what has been repressed through denial whereas “at the same time what is essential to the repression persists” (Kristeva, 1989, p. 45). If the melancholic subject rejects negation and insists on denial, then repudiation brings about psychosis, destroying the reality itself and, with it, a coherent sense of self. Through negation, the depressed subject thus achieves in verbalizing the affect, the only sign of object constancy, in works of art in a way that it protects the subject against suicide and sudden attacks of psychosis. This type of work of art enables the melancholic author or melancholic reader to give birth to a new self, functioning as “if it isn’t an antidepressant, is at least a survival, a resurrection” (Kristeva, 1989, p. 51). Yet, if the melancholic subject becomes resolute in denial of negation, then language itself turns out to be devoid of meaning and sense for herself and the maternal tongue is entirely foreign, becoming eventually the harbinger of suicide.

The significance of melancholic writing lies in the fact that it ameliorates the relationship of the subject with her melancholy states. It first and foremost helps the subject perceive and conceive the meaning of the unnameable Thing eternally mourned for and, secondly, to identify with an ideal and more sublime poetic form than the mere nothingness the state itself generates. Through mastering the signs, the subject experiences a form of forgiveness and renews the consciousness and the relationship with her own self in addition to that between the lost Thing and herself. This aesthetic sublimation and artistic style accordingly enable the subject to manage and overcome the melancholy moment which mostly reveals itself with the state of withdrawal and the presence of “an actual or imaginary loss of meaning, an actual or imaginary despair, an actual or imaginary razing of symbolic values, including the value of life” (Kristeva, 1989, p. 128). The writing persona reconstructs a subjectivity within narrative and in the semiotic “to overcome such wretchedness by setting up an “I” that controls both aspects of deprivation” (Kristeva, 1989, p. 145), a privilege she lacks in the symbolic realm. Therefore, it is possible to suggest that “the act of writing alone is implicitly master and avenger” (Kristeva, 1989, p. 158). In this regard, melancholic writing allows the melancholic writer to transpose, translate and transform the uncommunicable loss and the Thing/object in the form of “signs without signifieds, as *infra* or *suprasigns*, which beyond communication, attempt to reach the dead or untouchable object, to take over the unnameable being” (Kristeva, 1989, p. 165).

The melancholy/depressive composite accordingly lies as a whole within the neurotic realm. Hence, the uncompromising attitude of the melancholic writer might be evaluated

within the framework of neurosis, experienced within as either in the form of character or tendency. Horney (2007) elucidates the concept of neurosis as "deviations from the normal pattern of behaviour" (p. 19) and suggests that it stems from not only cultural factors but physiological as well as biological conditions. The two essential characteristics of all forms of neurosis are specified as "a certain rigidity in reaction and a discrepancy between potentialities and accomplishments" (Horney, 2007, p. 22). Besides, "anxieties and defenses built up against them" (p. 23) are defined as another common factor of all neuroses. Taking all these significant points into consideration, Horney (2007), in a brief statement, offers a concise definition of the state: "a neurosis is a psychic disturbance brought about by fears and defenses against these fears, and by attempts to find compromise solutions for conflicting tendencies" (pp. 28-29).

Neurosis manifests itself in the melancholic subject in two basic forms as character neurosis and situation neurosis. The former type is considered as the direct outcome of a chronic process that goes back to the childhood of the subject whereas the latter is brought about by the presence of an external conflict or a simple situation. A situation neurosis does not indicate the presence of a character deformation but rather "a momentary lack of adaptation to a given difficult situation" (Horney, 2007, p. 30), unlike character neurosis which exists much earlier than that particular situation or crisis. The very essence of all neuroses is anxiety, whether simple or basic, while the former refers to situation neurosis and the latter to character neurosis. The four principal ways to deal with simple anxiety are in this regard identified as "rationalize it, deny it, avoid it, narcotize it" (Horney, 2007, p. 48). The third mechanism is mostly associated with the presence of inhibitions in the subject who unconsciously adopts the attitude to avoid doing, feeling or thinking of certain things to escape the anxiety called forth by the very idea of those things. This anxiety generates a hostility for the subject which, if it remains repressed, prevents that person from changing the state and fighting against the other, ultimately resulting in a form of defenselessness. The last method is particularly connected with being released from the anxiety through numbing the consciousness whether directly or indirectly. Drowning the self in overactivity or passiveness might be accordingly accepted as methods of narcotizing the neurosis. Contrary to situation neurosis, character neurosis is related with pre-existing anxieties and hostilities, and prevails in interpersonal relations. The neurotic subject internalizes and introjects object relations in the form of acquired attitudes wholly based on childhood experiences concerning the Oedipus complex and sibling rivalry. Horney (2007) explicates four main ways to manage this basic anxiety as "affection, submissiveness, power, withdrawal"

(p. 96). As melancholy has an impact upon the relations of the subject with the other/ the symbolic, the subject might be said to apply particularly the last two techniques to manage the relationship with the state and the other along with her own self. In terms of power, the subject desires to be intellectually superior to the other, gaining power, possession or knowledge and satisfying the urge to self-actualize as an individual. Regarding the act of withdrawal, the subject might achieve a kind of independence from the other and remain not only emotionally detached but also physically isolated and socially disconnected. Hence, the melancholic subject very often displays the characteristics of character and situation neuroses which are determined as an inherent aspect of the melancholy-depressive composite.

Poetry enables the writer to contend with the neurotic tendency/character and the melancholy state experienced within as a temperament, mood, disorder or disease through holding onto a literary form and textual realm instead of developing masochism and attacking the self. The constant conflict with the self or the other that at times ends up with the loss of speech and attacks of asymbolia might be transformed, transfigured and transposed in the textual realm, which provides a new bond with the signifying system and allows the writer to negate through the semiotic. Literary production in this respect functions as the textual evidence of melancholy and neurosis and serves as a therapeutic device for the historical and implied writers and for the historical and implied readers. Through the act of writing, the writer narcotizes the pathos she is afflicted with and avoids the conflict with the self or the other while putting an end to the masochistic tendency and managing the present anxiety. The hostility caused by the conflict with the other is correspondingly transposed into a poetic form through sublimation and negation. The melancholic writer might make use of poetic form to manage object relations and redefine her own position in society by satisfying the desire to reach a form of intellectual superiority over the other so that she might overcome the label of outcast and reinvent a new self for herself as a bohemian and refined person. The repeated patterns of withdrawal might thus be tolerated by the other and provide a realm of creativity for the writing subject to self-actualize as an individual being.

Evanca and Sonnet *To Melancholy* (1808)

Susan Evanca is regarded as one of the lesser-known female poets of nineteenth-century English literature, having published only two volumes of poetry in 1808 and

1818, after which “she had dropped out of sight by the 1820s” (Feldman & Robinson, 1999, p. 134). In an era during which “a number of female poets experienced a similar degree of celebrity” (Knowles, 2007, p. 1100) and “in large and small ways, the women’s influence on one another is apparent” (Backscheider, 2005, p. 341), Evance achieved a relatively unenduring poetic fame at the margins of a mostly male Romantic literary culture and was said to have been inspired by Charlotte Smith as her “poetry of female suffering welded the poetics of sensibility she learned from Smith’s sonnets with religious piety” (Pinch, 2011, p. 165). As an influential figure of the feminine poetics of sensibility and sentimentality, Evance might be referred to as one of those writers that was involved in “the literary landscape [that] was dominated by female poets who led retired lives beyond public reproach” (Knowles, 2007, p. 1100) due to the pressure of cultural gender assumptions. The notion that there was a close relationship between the actual suffering of the literary figures and their poetry was thus supported in the early 19th century, particularly for those “aspiring female writers [who] were, therefore, in a bind, and their creative output reflected their predicament” (Incorvati, 2012, p. 159). Addressing an increasingly female audience, the works of these poets included “prefaces that encourage readers to link the suffering on the page with suffering in the poet’s life” and to peruse the “poems that refuse to offer remedies for the habitual melancholy that plagues the speaker” (Incorvati, 2012, p. 160). At such a period, “in 1808, the little-known (but perhaps Welsh-sounding?) poet Susan Evance published some of the period’s most recognizably Smith-inspired verses— among them, *To Melancholy*, “Written on an Eminence Over-hanging the Sea” and “Written Near the Sea” (Edwards, 2017, p. 7). Of this collection of melancholy seaside poetry, predominantly the sonnet *to Melancholy* rivets the attention of the readers with its vivid depiction of a deeply intense emotional experience in the form of feminized distress and pensive mood that turns out to be a path towards a spiritual transcendence and creative awakening as well as a way to overcome the artistic inhibition and the anxiety of authorship.

When wintry tempests agitate the deep,
 On some lone rock I love to sit reclined;
 And view the sea-birds on wild pinions sweep,
 And hear the roaring of the stormy wind,
 That, rushing through the caves with hollow sound,
 Seems like the voices of those viewless forms
 Which hover wrapped in gloomy mist around,

Directing in their course the rolling storms.
 Then, Melancholy! thy sweet power I feel,
 For there thine influence reigns o'er all the scene;
 Then o'er my heart thy "mystic transports" steal,
 And from each trifling thought my bosom wean.
 My raptured spirit soars on wing sublime
 Beyond the narrow bounds of space or time! (Feldman & Robinson, 1999,
 p. 134)

Included in the volume *Poems* (1808), *to Melancholy* might be presented as one of the finest sonnets that reflects the female poetic tradition of sensibility prevailing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries of English literature. It might accordingly be classified as a type of melancholy seaside poetry particularly associated with the pioneering female poet of the late 18th century literature, Charlotte Smith. The focal point for the sonnet is to highlight the explicit connection between melancholy mood and melancholy nature and to reveal the significance of intense emotional experience in the emergence of spiritual transcendence and poetic production. In the narrative of the poem, nature functions as the replica of melancholy, and the intrinsic nature of melancholy is displayed through exterior nature itself. The octave section (lines 1-8) provides a striking portrayal of melancholy with vivid visual and auditory imagery. The authorial persona begins the description with an indirect reference to the season, autumn, which is unequivocally related with the melancholy states since "autumn is the season most often associated with melancholy, invoking the sense of things passing, of imminent decline" (Bowring, 2009, p. 117) and referring to the inevitability of decay and death. In this respect, the persona turns out to be in the habit of experiencing and re-experiencing, constructing and reconstructing the melancholy mood and space with the coming of autumn as the word "when" (line 1) implies. On these occasions, the persona reveals a deep desire to seek solitude and experiences a kind of melancholic withdrawal and resignation. This is significant in that it reveals the essential connection between melancholy and solitude, which in itself proves to be self-imposed, self-controlled and self-sufficient as a form of aesthetic contemplation, as the signifier "love" (line 2) indicates. The persona deliberately melancholizes for both herself and for the implied and historical readers, willingly undergoing a complete melancholic detachment from everything and everyone at once to avoid particularly "the corrupting influence of society" (Knowles, 2010, p. 180), an inclination attributed to Romantic writers. This intense melancholic experience awakens within the authorial

subject a kind of defamiliarization in a way that she becomes attentive to the outside world and earthly things, observing nature more closely. In her reticence, the persona remains mindful of the fluttering of the sea-birds which "on wild-pinions sweep" (line 3), the loud sound of the storms that "agitate the deep" (line 1), the echoes within the caves which are sent out by "the roaring of the stormy wind" (line 4) and the dense mist around that turns out to be extremely gloomy while she listens with assiduous attention to "the voices of those viewless forms" (line 6). Amidst this bleak scenery, the persona identifies with the sea-birds that move swiftly across the celestial sky and gradually overcomes the emotional isolation as well as inhibition through forming a union with Melancholy, since her inner world and ideal/artistic self are reflected through the outside world and exterior nature by means of externalization. In this regard, the persona makes an obvious analogy between her artistic self/divinely inspired version and the sea-birds with outstretched wings, between the viewless forms and melancholy, and between the course and the transcendence. She accordingly draws an analogy between melancholy and the landscape, which as a matter of fact provides her with creative inspiration for the melancholy and the textual representation of the state. This might be interpreted as that the poetic persona experiences melancholy not as a disease, disorder or temperament but as a passing mood and rather as a way of experiencing and comprehending the outside world and the self, since if she is to move away from the shoreline, the feelings of despondency and the distress are to be immediately relieved, removing the melancholic state of mind. The present state might therefore be analysed as a form of melancholic experience rather than a real melancholic self, while the feelings are explained as transient emotions invoked by the melancholy landscape itself since, prevailing the narrative, "the transcendent voice is always wise, resigned, above the scene surveyed, supremely self-controlled, and timeless" (Backscheider, 2005, p. 333).

The authorial persona invokes Melancholy as the literary muse, which reveals that she, as the creative subject, deploys her melancholy as a kind of creativity object for the poetic output and a way of achieving a spiritual transcendence. In the sestet (lines 9-14) section, the poetic persona addresses the source of inspiration of the literary device as "thy sweet power" (line 9), which accordingly indicates another aspect of deliberate melancholizing within the narrative as the signifier "sweet" (line 9) reveals. Addressing the personified Melancholy directly as "then, Melancholy!" (line 9), she relates the basic cause for the enforced retirement from society and the melancholic withdrawal through the explicit link and the transparent analogy between the state

and the landscape: the union with melancholic nature makes it possible to reunite with the melancholy mood, which means, in the final analysis, a reunion with the literary creation and poetic production as well as a reunion with the ideal and artistic self. Hence, the persona makes a retreat into melancholy nature that evokes the melancholy mood in the writing subject for the mode of feminine self-representation. Through this melancholic experience, the authorial persona achieves transcendence by way of “mystic transports” (line 11), which releases her from the burden of earthly worries and “from each trifling thought my bosom wear” (line 12). Everything turns out to be trivial in the presence of melancholy, except for the melancholy itself and literature. Through this spiritual transcendence, the poetic persona “soars on wing sublime” (line 13) going beyond the borders of “space and time” (line 14) and feels exalted, as “my raptured spirits” (line 13) reveals. It might then be suggested that “melancholy is here explicitly a transporting force” (Knowles, 2006, p. 207) that provides a source of artistic inspiration for the writing persona to have a pair of sublime wings, as “in the western tradition, the inspired poets usually have their own wings” (Ferber, 2006, p. 848). Therefore, the melancholy mood plays an instrumental role in the conscious construction of a poetic self and a poetic display of female sensibility and self-representation, thus becoming necessary for Evance’s self-construction and self-actualization as a female Romantic poet. It is purely through this meditative, gentle and self-controlled melancholy mood that the implied author becomes able to realize her unfulfilled artistic potential and self-actualize as a poet.

A metatextual perusal of the narrative suggests that the text functions as the literary representation of a personal suffering of melancholy the implied author experiences in the form of groundless and objectless mood rather than disorder, disease or temperament. In fact, the text in itself does not signify the presence of the verbal indicators for the characteristics of an inherently melancholic temperament, any physical or psychological symptoms or signs the persona might be afflicted with, and that constitutes the essential reason for the implied author to keep her subjectivity both from within (the semiotic) and outside the narrative (the symbolic). What she sustains is not the subjective experience of melancholy but rather an aspect or an instrument of the melancholic subjectivity peculiar to the mood states and an intense emotional experience. She deliberately melancholizes to textualize a self-representation and is portrayed not in search of a cure for her melancholy but rather a poetic display of the female sensibility of a Romantic writer and a careful construction of a melancholic poetic self, since she never refers to any curative methods or hopes of being released from the mood within the text and

there are no verbal indicators which reveal that she has a complaint about the melancholy state. She goes through the melancholy mood as a social problem that brings about a kind of self-estrangement, inhibition and alienation in the presence of the other in the symbolic, while the process of writing and solitude provide a curative effect for the act of overcoming the emotional isolation and anxiety within. The narrative as a whole, for itself and in itself, might be accepted as the textual and linguistic evidence of the melancholy mood, and reveals the explicit link between melancholic writing and the melancholic writer. Through the act of writing, the implied author transposes the melancholic affect into a sublime form and communicates via the signs the nonsignifiable, noncommunicable and nonrepresentable Thing inherent in melancholy states. Therefore, the text enables the melancholic writer to make the melancholic affect perceptible to both herself and the implied and historical readers with the use of nature analogy, figures of speech (imagery, metaphor and personification) and signifiers. The text thus turns out to be the replica of the melancholy mood that is to be remedied and lifted, as nature itself serves as the visual replica of the nature of melancholy and the inner world of the writing persona during the process of creating.

The undefinable and nonsignifiable loss or lack the female subject experiences in the symbolic due to the sudden and repeated attacks of depression and melancholy is transposed and transformed into a sublime and ideal form of artistic creation as poetry, which ultimately protects the subject from attacking her own self and developing masochistic attitudes at times of inhibitions and during severe attacks of anxiety. The narrative, therefore, provides a maternal realm for the melancholic implied author in the way nature offers a maternal realm to the female melancholic subject. Via the act of writing, the implied author becomes able to comprehend the quintessence of her melancholy and finds a curative effect for the artistic inhibition that afflicts her now and then. Therefore, she does not eternally mourn for the unnameable affect but rather transforms this destructive affect into creative energy, reinventing a new self and identity for herself as a poetess.

The melancholy mood, despite being represented as a deliberate and conscious act within the textual realm as the signifiers "love" (line 1) and "sweet" (line 9) indicate, ruins the ongoing relationship of the subject with language in the symbolic at times of melancholic fits but provides a new sphere in the semiotic, securing a firm bond with language through poetic production and textual representation. In this regard, the mood and affect might end up with the denial of the signifier in the symbolic on the

part of the female subject but, through the act of negation, the writing subject becomes able to overcome this denial and negate. Hence, the denial does not bring about a repudiation in the female subject who becomes able to protect her mental health and prevents the recurring rejection of the signifier from gradually growing into a pattern of psychosis. She accordingly prefers to transpose the symbolic asymbolia into a poetic form and verbalizes the mood that circumvolves her, partly releasing what still remains repressed in the symbolic and the subconscious, and finally having a confrontation against that thing within the semiotic or textual realm. In a very real sense, she builds and maintains a steady relationship with the melancholy mood, the signifying system and her own self through negation and textual production. Hence, in the symbolic, she becomes able to achieve in keeping control of these attacks and preventing the melancholy moods from being a repeated and unconscious pattern in her life.

The melancholic writing is significant in that it ameliorates and alleviates the relationship of the subject with her own self. The suffering subject turns her melancholy mood into an aesthetic and artistic form, which ultimately transforms the mourning subject into the writing and creative subject, transposing the passive sadness and masochistic tendency into an ideal form and active sadness. Thus, the implied author overcomes the feelings of nothingness the state itself generates and renews the consciousness of her own and the readers, experiencing a form of forgiveness. She creates a new self and persona for herself through the act of writing, redefining her own identity and position within society and for her own part with the role of author and the creator rather than a simply melancholic individual. The melancholy moment, which might be about imaginary or real suffering and a temporary or permanent loss of symbolic values becomes the focal point for creativity and literary aspiration for this creative and prolific subject. The act of writing prevents the loss of speech and destroys the mute feminine depression both from within (the semiotic) and outside the narrative (the symbolic). So, the writing exerts a curative effect for the implied author even though she does not seek a cure for the melancholy within the text, but a more sublime and idealized form of poetry and an ideal artistic self. This becomes the chief reason for the melancholy mood to remain as an object and a literary tool in the life and art of the melancholic subject.

Poetry permits the implied author to cope with the neurotic aspect of the melancholy state. She deals with the situation neurosis and the related simple anxiety through writing and negating. She avoids the outer conflict and external dilemma with the

other and the inner conflict with herself with the help of the state of withdrawal and related melancholy moments. Through poetic production, she narcotizes her consciousness, which is afflicted with not only the gloomy mood but also the anxiety of authorship, with the act of writing, which in itself provides a therapeutic effect. She avoids social anxiety and the ensuing inhibitions by preserving a complete privacy for her own self. In terms of object relations, it might be stated that the authorial persona manages her basic anxiety through withdrawal and power. She reaches a form of intellectual superiority over the other and her contemporaries in the symbolic through producing poetry, and satisfies the urge to self-actualize as a Romantic writer. She correspondingly gains knowledge, prestige and power as an author, replacing the label of outcast with the creative individual or a female artist, which Kristeva attributes to the melancholic writer. Thus, the repeated pattern of withdrawal opens up a new realm for creativity for the author, transforming the hostility into sublimation through ensuring independence from the other and destroying the symbolic asymbolia.

Conclusion

In the sonnet *To Melancholy* (1808), the English writer Susan Evance deploys melancholy as a literary subject, a mode of feminine self-representation and an artistic device to display a poetic sensibility peculiar to the Romantic authors of the period and to write a work of poetry, although the traditional melancholic authors deploy literature as a way of escaping and managing their melancholy states. In a different manner from these literati who have aestheticized their melancholy, which mostly manifests itself as temperament, disease and disorder in works of art in order that they might eventually achieve therapy and recuperate from the state, Evance makes use of the melancholy mood as a poetic inspiration and a form of therapy for her artistic inhibition, since without this she might not be able to create anything as a writer. She instrumentalizes this mood to self-actualize and compose sonnet so that she not only transposes and translates the affect and the asymbolia in the symbolic into the effect and infra/suprasigns in the semiotic, but also transforms her own self and identity in society. Poetry thus enables her to identify with a third form, the literary form and the act of writing, other than the loss, the lack, the unnameable Thing or the pensive mood the melancholy state often invokes so that she becomes able to convert and sublimate the destructive affect into an artistic form and eventually into the creative effect itself. The narrative and the semiotic in this respect provide a maternal realm for the persona, who succeeds in securing a firm bond with language and existing in the symbolic,

preserving her own subjectivity as an individual. As for the neurotic aspect of the melancholy-depressive composite, it might be said that she manages her basic and simple anxiety as well as the anxiety of authorship through narcotizing and achieving power/prestige. She simply submits to melancholy within the text and within a specific melancholy time and space, managing and controlling the state from both within (the semiotic) and outside the narrative (the symbolic). The text as a whole thus turns out to be the verbal evidence of this gentle and meditative melancholy mood that remains transient and functions as a romantic convention. To conclude, melancholic writers conventionally instrumentalize literature to seek a cure for their melancholy states, while Evance instrumentalizes her melancholy mood to produce a poetic discourse. She accomplishes this through limiting the melancholy mood to a specific time and space and reducing it to a conscious and deliberate act, so that the immature and neurotic defense mechanism of repression is ultimately transformed into a mature form of suppression and sublimation while, via writing, she “help[s] return the form to its status as a self-reflexive form and the poet’s ultimate claim to being a Poet” (Backscheider, 2005, p. 324).

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.

Conflict of Interest: The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

Grant Support: The author declared that this study has received no financial support.

References

- Backscheider, P. R. (2005). *Eighteenth-century women poets and their poetry: inventing agency, inventing genre*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.
- Bowring, J. (2008). *A field guide to melancholy*. Harpenden: Old Castle Books.
- Edwards, E. (2017). “Local and contemporary”: reception, community and the poetry of Ann Julia Hatton (“Ann of Swansea”). *Women’s Writing*, 24(4), 436–450. DOI: 10.1080/09699082.2016.1268339.
- Evance, S. (1808). To melancholy. In Feldman, P. R. & Robinson, D. (Eds.). (1999). *A century of the sonnets: the romantic-era revival 1750-1850* (p. 134). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Feldman, P. R. & Robinson, D. (Eds.). (1999). *A century of the sonnets: the romantic-era revival 1750-1850*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ferber, M. (2006). The eagles of romanticism. *Literature Compass*, 3(4), 846–866. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-4113.2006.00358.
- Galen (1916). *On the natural faculties*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Horney, K. (2007). *The neurotic personality of our time*. Milton Park: Routledge.

- Incorvati, R. (2012). Sensibility and female poetic tradition, 1780–1860: the legacy of Charlotte Smith by Claire Knowles. *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 61, 159–16.
- Knowles, C. (2006). Female poetic tradition in the regency period: Susan Evance and the evolution of sentimentality. *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 55, 199–225.
- Knowles, C. (2007). Poetry, fame and scandal: the cases of Byron and Landon. *Literature Compass*, 4(4), 1109–1121. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-4113.2007.00481.x.
- Knowles, C. (2010). Ann Yearsley, biography and the "Pow'rs of Sensibility Untaught!". *Women's Writing*, 17(1), 166–184. DOI: 10.1080/09699080903533346.
- Kristeva, J. (1989). *Black sun*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lund, M. A. (2010). *Melancholy, medicine and religion in early modern England*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Pinch, A. (2011). Sensibility and female poetic tradition, 1780–1860: the legacy of Charlotte Smith, by Claire Knowles. *Victorian Studies*, 54(1), 165–166.
- Radden, J. (2009). *Moody minds distempered: essays on melancholy and depression*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sontag, S. (1978). *Illness as metaphor*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Terry, R. (2011). Philosophical melancholy. In *Melancholy experience in literature of the long eighteenth century: before depression, 1660-1800*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.