THE TEMPEST TOSS’D SHIP: TWELFTH NIGHT AND EMOTIONAL COMMUNITIES IN EARLY MODERN LONDON

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A deep analysis of William Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night, this essay provides a framework for understanding the emotional expectations of the early modern audiences at the public playhouses. These emotional values subverted a growing emotional stoicism underpinning government actions and the rhetoric of anti-theatricalists of the time. Furthermore, this essay borrows from Barbara Rosenwein’s concept of “emotional communities” in order to illuminate the way that this play functioned both as a site where two groups with incongruent emotional norms and values come into fictional conflict (in the world of the play), while, in the act of performing itself, simultaneously establishing a microcosm of a parallel conflict of emotional values unfolding in early modern London.

In his 1612 emblem book Minerva Britanna, a volume filled with allegorical images coupled with explanatory poems, Henry Peacham illustrates the stark contrast of emotionalism and emotional governance under the title “Nec igne, nec unda” (“Neither fiery, nor billowing”).1 His allegory is fairly simple, offering icons of explicitly masculine emotional governance and an implicitly feminine emotional chaos. Central to the image stands a pillar of stone jutting out from a churning and turbulent sea. Peacham’s poem explains that this stone, tall amongst the crashing waves and beneath a stormy sky “is Manlie Constancie of mind”. As the poem explains, this stone endures without alteration despite the world’s changeability and the forces (wind, lightning, sea) that would alter it. The stone is entirely barren, further suggesting that no change, even internal to itself, will reshape this pillar. Sailing through the storm, oriented as if it were suspended

1 Henry Peacham, Minerva Britanna, The English Experience, its Record in Early Printed Books Published in Facsimile, no. 407, Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1971, 158.
in the moments before smashing itself against the great stone, Peacham has placed a “goodly ship to drowne”. This ship, ablaze with flames (intended to represent passions) and piloted by pride and desire, is Opinion. Held in opposition to the stern stone body, the ship offers the alternative which Peacham cautions against: a body in emotionally charged transformation. For him, such a body cannot help but come to wreckage, a victim as much of the world’s influences as its own passion.

In her essay exploring emotional governance in the seventeenth century Katherine Rowe explains that the trope was fairly common at and around the time that Minerva Britanna was published, with notable instances occurring in Thomas Wright’s The Passions of the Minde in Generall, as well as in Macbeth.² In Shakespeare’s play Ross urges a frightened Lady MacDuff to “school yourself”, lamenting that they live in such a fearful state that:

... we hold rumor

From what we fear, yet know not what we fear,
But float upon a wild and violent sea
Each way and move –³

Peacham’s stone offers an icon of emotional regulation capable of resisting all emotional input and remaining constantly its severe self in direct contrast to the emotionally volatile self which presented a danger to itself beyond help of any but God. Elsewhere, I have tried to demonstrate that this emblematic contrast is something of an artefact in which we can see competing valuations of emotion with direct implications for the early modern public theatre and those who participate (on stage or in the auditorium) in the performance.⁴ Here, I