

Fernando Pessoa

SHAKESPEARE — The basis of lyrical genius is hysteria.

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The basis of lyrical genius is hysteria. The more pure and narrow the lyrical genius, the clearer the hysteria is, as in the case of Byron and Shelley. But in this case the hysteria is, so to speak, physical; that is why it is clear.

In the lyrical genius of the grade above this — that which ranges over several types of emotion — the hysteria becomes, so to speak, mental; either because, as in Victor Hugo, a violent physical health drives it inwards from physical manifestation or (...)

In the lyrical genius of the highest grade — that which ranges over all types of emotion, incarnating them in persons and so perpetually depersonalising itself — the hysteria becomes, so to speak, purely intellectual; either because physical health is good but vitality deficient (...)

Hysteria takes on different mental forms according to the general temperament with which it happens to coincide (meet). If health be frail in any way, the form of hysteria will be almost physical; and, if the hysteric be a lyric poet, he will sing out of his own emotions, and, the greater number of times, out of a small number of emotions. If health be good or very good, the constitution strong and, except for the hysteria, the nerves fairly sane, the operation of hysteria will be purely mental; and the lyric poet produced will be one who will sing of a variety of emotions without going out of himself — either because, like Goethe, who was of this type, he had a variety of emotions, all, however, personal, or because, like Victor Hugo, he was constantly, though uniformly and monotonously, impersonal and fictitious. If, finally, the constitution be neutral, that is to say, neither strong nor weak, as in the case of a frail but not unhealthy man, the operation of hysteria will become vaguely physical and vaguely mental, neither wholly one thing nor the other, the result will be, in the case of the lyric poet, a mixture of the two others — the capacity to live in imagination the mental states of hysteria, the power therefore to project them outwards into separate persons, in other and more precise words, the

psychological ability which goes to make, but does not essentially make, the dramatist.

(Shakespeare was then 1) by nature, and in youth and early manhood, a hysteric; 2) later and in full manhood a hystero-neurasthenic; 3) at the end of his life a hystero neurasthenic in a lesser degree; he was also of a frail constitution and of deficient vitality, but not unhealthy. Thus much we have determined already.)

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