

# Shakespeare's Melancholics

*Richard Malim considers the neglected work of a professional psychiatrist.*

A book by Dr. W.I.D. Scott<sup>1</sup> with this title was published in 1962. While making no claim to literary scholarship, with undue modesty, Dr. Scott was able to ally his professional expertise as a psychiatrist to his amateur interest as a producer of Shakespeare. He found much of the unconscious Shakespeare in some of his melancholic characters, listing: -

Antonio : the endogenous depressive  
 Orsino : the immature lover  
 Jaques : the involuntional thinker  
 Hamlet : the intuitive manic-depressive  
 Pericles : the schizophrenic

He has also interesting things to say on Don John (All's Well), Timon and Leontes, but to him Prospero is the embodiment of the fully mature and integrated Shakespeare. Dr. Scott sums him up:-

'Accepting that there was some faculty in Shakespeare's mind denied to other authors, I have considered whether his own psychological type might be a unique balance of all the possible characteristics, whereby he could view the world both as an introvert and extravert, with no bias to any one of the four main functions (i.e. feeling, thinking, sensation and intuition). But I am satisfied that this is not so. The intuitive faculty is so strongly developed that I cannot deny it pre-eminence; I am also certain that most of his own self has gone into his introverted characters, of which a majority of my melancholics are examples.'

His final judgment :-

'What is most astonishing about Shakespeare is the genius of his characterisations, with the excursions into psychological depths unplumbed by any dramatist before or since, anticipating the more scientific understanding of our own time. Francis Bacon, in his Essays, shows a similar fund of innate wisdom from which he drew rules for the guidance of human conduct - but no such understanding of morbid psychology.'

'This remarkable faculty of Shakespeare's has induced people to believe that his plays could only have been written by a man of high rank and exceptional education. But the kind of genius he exhibits is intuitive and no more likely to be in the possession of a courtier than of an intelligent artisan.'

Oxfordians are unlikely to quarrel with any of his methods or conclusions, but we must take issue with the penultimate sentence. I know of no Oxfordian who would agree with the non-sequitur that 'This remarkable faculty of Shakespeare's has induced people to believe his plays could only have been written by a man of high rank'; everyone agrees that the 'remarkable faculty' could be innate in anyone, but might be totally undeveloped, as Gray's Elegy famously points out.

The faculty must be there, but so must be the 'exceptional education', to include in its widest sense the fullest and widest experiences. The good doctor omits consideration of the requirement for this element: such an education was not in Tudor times open to an intelligent artisan or even to a university graduate as such, but only to one having the time, the desire and the access to it, i.e. Oxford.

(1) Mills and Boon 1962 : the quotations are from pp. 165 and 164.