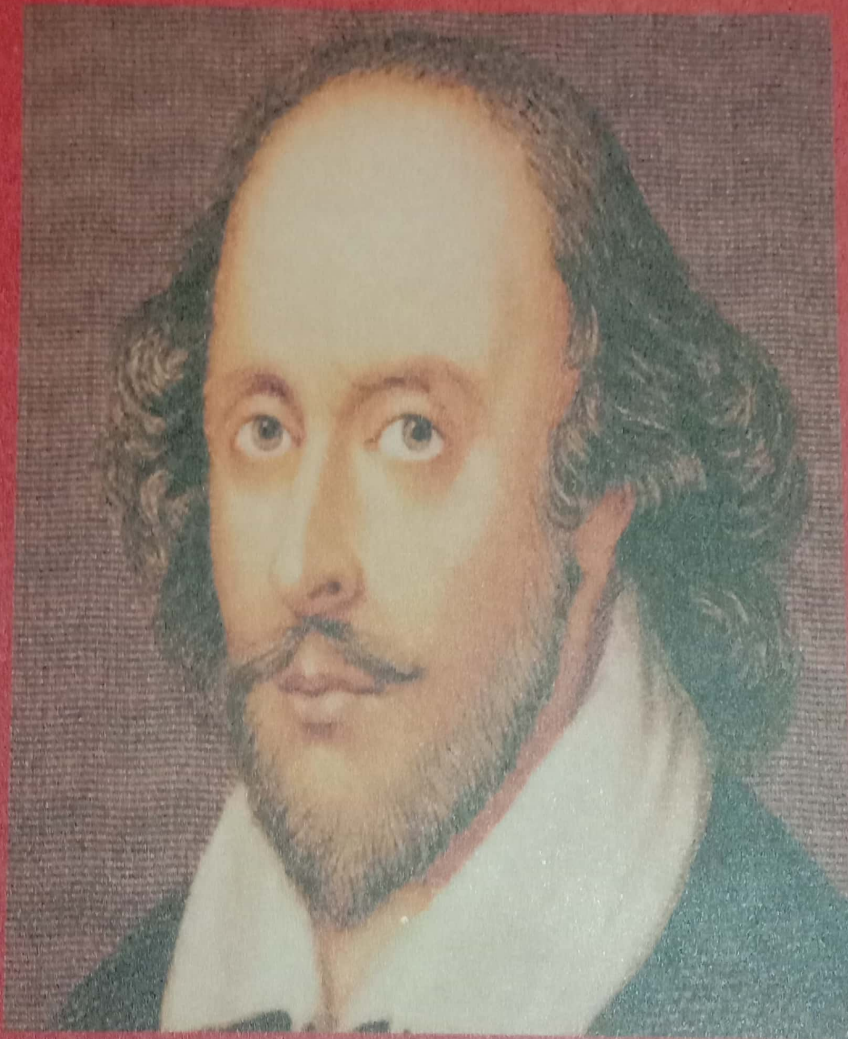


SHAKESPEARE FOREVER

T.M. UMA RANI
GOMEZ SOPHIA
U. ANAMICA



DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
Jayaraj Annapackiam College for Women
(Autonomous)
Periyakulam, Tamilnadu, India

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 Web:jaceng@annejac.com
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EXPLORING THE TIES BETWEEN HUMAN MIND AND BODY IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

J. SHARMILA

**"The body is a temporary structure made of earth, a
burden to active mind".**

-Wisdom 17:15

The Bible points out that the earthly body can dominate mind to a great extent. This we can observe in ourselves when we get sick. Mind then becomes weak, unenergetic and, may be, sick. Therefore, when mind suffers, body cannot remain unaffected and vice versa. Regarding physique and emotion, I. A. Ratcliffe wrote:

"It is not a question of debating whether the physical or the emotional factor is the more important in any given situation or reaction. What is much more important is to appreciate that these two factors can never be entirely separated. Each must interact with the other in every situation of life".

Shakespeare, the greatest writer in the English Language and the world's pre-eminent dramatist portrays the same in some of his famous works. The "Bard of Avon" has the knowledge of the mind-body relation. In *King Henry V*, Henry says that if the mind is activated, the body becomes activated too. He has a design to win the French crown and so marches towards Calais.

But he is intercepted at Agincourt by the French. The old King is infuriated and says:

And when the mind is quick'ned, out of doubt
The organs, though defunct and dead before,
Break up their drowsy grave and newly move
With casted slough and fresh legerity. (4. 1. 20-23)

King Henry means to say that mind can sometimes energise the body. The strength and facility of the mind depends upon a certain condition of the body.

In *Hamlet*, the ghost says, when the body is weakest, the mind can contrive conceits the most. When Hamlet's mother, the Queen, is mentally overworked, the ghost has some favour for her and asks Hamlet:

O, step between her and her fighting soul!
Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works.

(3.4.113-114)

And this is confirmed when the Queen says in her aside:

To my sick soul, as sin's true nature is,
Each toy seems prologue to some great
amiss. (4.5.17-18)

The mind-body interactionism is again spoken of by Lear in *King Lear*. Lear is misbehaved by Regan and arrives at a house near Gloucester's castle. The King cannot understand why Regan departed from the house and why his messenger has not returned. He is enraged and seeks a meeting with Cornwall, husband of Regan. Lear is about to reprove Gloucester for his not turning up but stops short:

No, but not yet. May be he is not well.
Infirmity doth still neglect all office
Whereto our health is bound, we are not ourselves
To suffer with the body. (2.4.103-107)

In *Othello*, Iago beautifully compares the relation between mind and body. He compares body to a garden and mind to the gardener. What the gardener sows, he reaps afterwards. He means to say that body is governed and guided by the will than mind. In the same breath, moreover, he says that our rationality and sensuality are normally balanced. Iago says that virtue is but a fig; it is mind which does everything:

Our bodies are our gardens to the which our wills
are gardeners; ..., the blood and baseness of our
nature would conduct us to most preposterous
conclusions. (1.3.323-330)

And, yet, mind and body may not always go hand in hand. This happens when one is very much shocked mentally. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Antony is away for the battle of Actium and Cleopatra cannot bear with this separation:

The soul and body rive not more in parting
Than greatness going off. (4.8.5-6)

In a mental shock, Cleopatra means to say, mind and body work not in unison. Not only this, when mind is disturbed, body cannot function perfectly.

Sometimes eye perceives not well. In *Venus and Adonis*, Venus is mourning the death of Adonis. She is so much disturbed that she perceives the dead Adonis wrongly:

His face seems twine, each several limb is doubled;
For oft the eye mistakes, the brain being troubled.
(167-168)

Shakespeare again takes up the theme of the relation between mind and body in *The Rape of Lucrece*. Brutus consoles Collatine on the wrong done to his wife, Lucrece, saying that in such circumstances, self-torture is childish that the weak mind proceeds:

Such childish humour from weak minds proceeds. (*The Rape of Lucrece*, 1825)

The power of mind over body is once again revealed in *King John*. King Philip of France and the Duke of Austria plan to invade England, but, however, a treaty is made between France and England, and King John of England gives his niece Blanch in marriage to the Dauphin. War again breaks out between England and France on the instigation of Pandulph, the Cardinal. The Cardinal manages to convince the Dauphin – “For England go; I will whet on the King”. And Lewis, the Dauphin convincingly and candidly responds:

Strong reasons make strong actions.

Let us go; (3.4.182-183)

Lastly in *Troilus and Cressida*, Ulysses has a wonderful explanation for the way the mind works.. He says that things in motion are more easily perceived than those which are not. Paris' son Priam has carried off Helen, wife of the Greek Menelaus, and this is the cause of the Greek siege of Troy. Priam's eldest son, Hector, offers single combat but the Greek hero Achilles is non-chalant. To move him, Ulysses tells him that even the

ponderous Ajax is ready to fight – Ajax is on the movement in contrast to Achilles' immobility. Ajax, for his agility is perceived by all the Greek and why should Achilles not move? Ulysses' instigating argument runs thus:

That all the Greeks begin to worship Ajax,
Since things in motion sooner catch the eye
That what stirs not. The cry went once on thee,

(3.3.182-184)

From all what we know is, Shakespeare the "Soul of the age, the applause, delight the wonder of our stage" clearly enlisted his peculiar and spectacular scenes related with human body and mind by his noblest, gentlest and strongest conversing style. Therefore, we can be certain about the interaction between mind and body, albeit

"no one knows such about the laws governing the supposed workings of the mind, while the postulated interactions between the workings of the mind and the movements of the hand are acknowledged to be completely mysterious".

(Sarkar,45)

Shakespeare still remains an uncharted territory waiting to be explored and articulated. He is hailed, presciently, as "not of an age, but for all time". His plays remain highly popular and are constantly studied, performed, and reinterpreted in diverse cultural and political contexts throughout the world. But the object of all this earnest endeavour, the experience in some degree of Shakespeare's greater view of human mind and body, cannot be reached without the taste to chew his works.

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