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SHAKESPEARE'S CONCEPT OF HEAVEN

BY

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INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare had his favorite words. One of them was "heaven." This is evidenced in Bartlett's *Concordance to Shakespeare*, which lists three hundred nine quotations containing "heaven."\(^1\) It is enlightening to read these numerous quotations, for we find that Shakespeare's ideas of heaven are of many sorts. If we ask ourselves how he could have used this word in such a variety of ways, we shall find part of our answer in the *Shakespeare-Lexicon* which gives us four meanings of "heaven."\(^2\) It may refer to the habitation of God and the blessed spirits; it is used metonymously as referring to God; it is looked upon as the sky or firmament; and it may also be considered as a place of supreme felicity.

However, when we attempt to classify the "heaven" quotations under these four heads, we find the word given great consideration under still another idea, and that is the Elizabethan concept of heaven. The Elizabethan's picture of heaven was much more complicated than ours. His concepts of heaven were a continuity of medieval ideas on astronomy, which gave him a set of complex ideas of the cosmos. He had a fantastic concept of the material and spiritual heaven;

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he considered himself to have a close relationship to the order that existed in heaven; he believed, also, that the stars exercised an influence on him. These many phases of the Elizabethan concept of heaven gave Shakespeare inspirations for numerous quotations on heaven.

There is still another reason to account for the prodigious usage of "heaven." It was employed as a substitute for "God." In 1605 an Act was passed forbidding on the stage the use of the name of God, of Jesus Christ, of the Holy Ghost, or the Blessed Trinity in jesting or in a profane manner. It is quite clear in many of the plays that the word "heaven" takes the place of "God." If we study the plays that have quartos as well as folios, such Parts One and Two of Henry IV, we have direct evidence that "God" in the quartos is changed to "heaven" in the folios.

In order to systematically classify Shakespeare's concepts of heaven, I originally planned to divide this thesis into four chapters according to the four definitions of heaven. However, I discovered that if I wished to adequately treat every idea of Shakespeare on heaven, I would have to include a chapter dealing with the Elizabethan concept of heaven. I also found that a chapter on heaven as a state of supreme felicity would be concerned with only one of

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the many figures of speech Shakespeare used regarding heaven, so I decided to include this phase in a chapter entitled, "Heaven As a Figure of Speech."

Besides making a careful examination of the various concepts Shakespeare has of heaven, we shall also make it our aim to investigate what dramatic effects he obtains by the dexterous handling of this word in its various meanings. Because heaven is a useful word to poets, since it exalts the emotions, we shall observe in this thesis what use the greatest poet made of it to create striking images and obtain dramatic effects.
CHAPTER I

THE ELIZABETHAN CONCEPT OF HEAVEN

When the modern man hears the word "heaven," he has no more than a very cloudy vision of where he hopes to go after death. But this very same word flashed many colorful pictures on Shakespeare's imagination. Fanciful, and even ridiculous as these concepts appear to us, they were the spurs that incited his genius to develop the themes of a number of his plays. If heavenly orbs had not ruled the fate of Romeo and Juliet, we would not possess the tale of the "star-cross'd lovers." Had the heavens not become alive and miraculously saved Prospero and Miranda, the Tempest never would have taken form. Omit the awful climax of King Lear striving "in his little world of man to out-scorn the to-and-fro conflicting wind and rain" of heaven, and the dreadful fury of that tragedy is gone. The pictures of havoc and disorder that run through the series of the History Plays would be meaningless if Shakespeare had not aimed to show "that behind disorder is some sort of order or 'degree' on

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1Romeo and Juliet, Prologue, 6.
2King Lear, III, 1, 10.
earth, and that order has its counterpart in heaven.\textsuperscript{1}

The above mentioned themes are only a few of the Medieval ideas of heaven that are continued in Elizabethan thought. In order to understand why the concepts of heaven were so varied and so many, it is necessary to know what heaven meant to the Elizabethan, what man's relations to heaven were considered to be, and what influences heaven was thought to have on man.

The misleading theories concerning astronomy were largely responsible for man's fantastic ideas of the meaning of heaven. Although Copernicus had recently explained the solar system, the people of Shakespeare's day were loathe to give up the idea of a geocentric earth. This fanciful thought was especially dear to the poets. Caroline Spurgeon thinks

\begin{quote}
 it possible that the myth of Phaeton driving his horses across the sky, so dear to the Elizabethan poetic mind was largely responsible for the unwillingness of the poets to give up the conception of the sun revolving round a fixed earth.\textsuperscript{2}
\end{quote}

If Shakespeare had too readily accepted the hypothesis of a prosaic solar system, he could not have painted for us "the worshipp'd sun" peering "forth the golden window


of the east,"¹ nor would it have been possible that a static sun

Should in the furthest east begin to draw
The shady curtains from Aurora's bed.²

According to the Ptolemaic system this "center," the earth, was surrounded by a series of nine concentric spheres, each one of the first seven containing a planet. The moon, therefore, moved in the sphere nearest the earth. The fixed stars made their circuit in the eighth sphere, while the primum mobile, or ninth sphere, controlled the motions of all the rest. The friction of one sphere revolving upon another caused a heavenly music, which idea "lent itself peculiarly to poetic imagination, and is reflected in many expressions current in literature even down to the present day."³ Each one of the spheres, according to its closeness to the earth, was ruled by a choir of angels according to its rank. This arrangement gave the Cherubim charge of the primum mobile, and the Angels custody of the moon. Shakespeare uses the concept of the spheres to draw the most striking pictures of the heavens. He bids us note

¹Romeo and Juliet, I, i, 125.
²Ibid., I, i, 141.
that the mermaid in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* warbled so beautifully

That the rude sea grew civil at her song
And certain stars shot madly from their spheres
To hear the sea-maid's music.\(^1\)

What a clear-cut picture of rapidity is that of the little fairy darting "everywhere swifter than the moon's sphere."\(^2\) Even the lovers express their union by the picture of a star within a sphere.

She's so conducive to my life and soul
That, as the star moves not but in his sphere
I could not but by her.\(^3\)

In order adequately to describe the beauty of Juliet's eyes, Shakespeare allows it to happen that

Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,
Having some business, do entreat her eyes
To twinkle in their spheres till they return.\(^4\)

Mindful of the heavenly music that the spheres create, he tells us

There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to young-eyed cherubims.\(^5\)

Cleopatra has no better way of conveying to us the perfect qualities of Antony's voice than by sighing that

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\(^1\) *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, II, i, 152.


\(^3\) *Hamlet*, IV, 7, 14.

\(^4\) *Romeo and Juliet*, II, ii, 15.

\(^5\) *The Merchant of Venice*, V, i, 58.
His voice was propertied
As all the tuned spheres.¹

Calling earthly states before him, our poet
points to the harmony of the heavens as an example of
the order that should reign on earth. If men could only
realize in their relations, the warning that keeps the
stars in such accord: "untune that string, and hark
what discord follows."²

Had it been possible for the Elizabethan to
pierce the clouds and extend his vision past the outer
sphere, or the primum mobile, he would have been rewarded
with the sight of the habitation of God and the
blessed spirits, which he called the coelum empyraeum.
Perhaps it was this conception of heaven that caused
Juliet to cry,

Is there no pity sitting in the clouds
That sees into the bottom of my grief?³

From this belief of a heaven beyond the clouds, a poet
would immediately grasp the idea of transforming the
firmament into the ceiling of the material heavens,
which would make it also the floor of the celestial
abode. Shakespeare, with this thought in mind, shows us,

¹Antony and Cleopatra, V, ii, 83.
²Troilus and Cressida, I, iii, 109.
³Romeo and Juliet, III, v, 198.
the lightning in the collied night,  
That, in a spleen, unfolds both heav'n and earth.¹

But we miss the Beatific Vision that might have been ours because

er a man hath power to say 'Behold!'  
The jaws of darkness do devour it up.²

Though lightning's flash gives mortals too small a chance to pierce the heavens, yet Lady Macbeth fears that heaven will have little difficulty to "peep through the blanket of the dark, to cry, 'Hold, hold!'"³ before her crime is committed.

Hamlet compares the firmament to a roof as he thus marvels at its beauty: "this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire."⁴ Lorenzo considers it as the floor of God's heavenly home.

Look how the floor of heaven,  
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold.⁵

The Elizabethan was not content to contemplate the wonders of the material heavens as explained by the Ptolemaic system, but he very seriously studied the

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¹_A Midsummer Night's Dream_, I, i, 144.  
²_Ibid.,_ I, i, 147.  
³_Macbeth_, I, v, 54.  
⁴_Hamlet_, II, ii, 311.  
⁵_The Merchant of Venice_, V, i, 58.
close relationship he bore them. This matter for reflection was derived from the Medieval concept of order. All created beings were linked in a great chain of being, from the lowest class of inanimate matter to the topmost link, which was the Creator of the universe. The ascent was perfectly gradual and regular, as each link was necessary for the existence of the one next higher. Tillyard, in calling our attention to the dependence of the higher link on the lower explains that

The chain is also a ladder. The elements are alimental. There is a progression in the way the elements nourish plants, the fruits of plants beasts, and the flesh of beasts men. And this is all one with the tendency of man upwards towards God.¹

Not only was the created universe considered as links of a chain closely connected and dependent upon each other for existence, but all beings were grouped into planes according to their dignity. The point of reflecting on them in their various planes was to show the close relationship that existed between them. Thus the macrocosm, or universe, was reflected in the microcosm, which was the little world contained in each man. Since all living beings were composed of the four elements: earth, water, air, and fire, their relationships were more closely bound. Professor Allen says that ac-

according to this way of thinking

It is assumed that all things are composed of various and determining proportions of the four elements; hence there is a sympathetic or antipathetic relationship between all things and a hierarchy of created matter.¹

If a man were unfortunate enough to contain more of earth than of the other elements, he would be unintelligent and resemble the animals. But if fire was the most predominant element in his make-up, he would be like to the celestial beings who dwell in the Empyraeum, which word signifies "fire." Since reason was compared to air and fire, a man was "at one with the stars."² Because his head contained his reasoning power, it was likened to the sky. So Cleopatra had good reason to describe her lover thus:

His face was as the heavens; and therein stuck
A sun and moon, which kept their course, and lighted
The little 0, the earth.³

That "little 0" in Antony, as well as Hamlet's "distracted globe,"⁴ referred to the microcosm, or little universe, that existed in every man. This idea, which was stressed by Paracelsus, took a prominent

²Ibid., p. 183.
³Antony and Cleopatra, V, ii, 79.
⁴Hamlet, I, v, 97.
place in Medieval and Renaissance literature.

All the objects in the macrocosm are to be found in the microcosm. Man, says Paracelsus, contains a thousand trees, plants, animals, metals, and minerals. To the amusement of Bruno, he divided man into a map of the world, and may have begot Shakespeare's "map of my microcosm" (Coriolanus, II, 1, 61) and the geographical description of Dromio of Syracuse's sweetheart.1

It should have been the aim of man in his little world, as well as the state at large, to duplicate the order of heaven in his being. But why pierce the clouds to discover an ideal, when the music of the spheres reminded him of that perfect order that reigned in the heaven of the stars. Shakespeare points to the harmony of the planets as an example of the lasting peace that would exist in earthly kingdoms if each man would be content to remain in his sphere and respect authority.

The heavens themselves, the planets, and this center
Observe degree, priority, and place,
Insisture, course, proportion, season, form,
Office and custom, in all line of order;
And therefore is the glorious planet Sol
In noble eminence enthron'd and spher'd
Amidst the other, whose medicinal eye
Corrects the ill aspects of planets evil
And posts like the commandment of a king,
Sans check to good and bad.2

This illustration of perfect order,
... ... derives its intensity from this underlying

1Allen, op. cit., p. 185.
2Troilus and Cressida, I, iii, 85.
idea of the mutual influence of microcosm and macrocosm: the idea that the entire universe responds to and is unified by a single law or set of laws.¹

Tillyard clearly states why man's attitude toward heaven was so idealistic:

Though the four elements were the material for the whole universe, they were differently mixed in these two regions: below the moon ill, above it perfectly. Hence the heavens were eternal, the sublunary regions subject to decay: on the medieval principle that, in Donne's words, whatever dies was not mixed equally.²

No wonder man looked for perfection in the spaces beyond the moon.

For the center of the world was not a position of honor; it was rather the place farthest removed from the Empyrean, the bottom of the creation, to which its dregs and baser elements sank. . . . And the whole sublunary region was, of course, incomparably inferior to the resplendent and incorruptible heavens above the moon.³

It was man's task then, to copy the eternal order of the planets, for "as the earth approached the heavens in perfection, it grew in beauty."⁴

Besides keeping in mind the relationship of the


²Tillyard, op. cit., p. 35.


microcosm to the heavens, the Elizabethan seriously considered the influence of the stars on his life and conduct. Truly, God's Providence was recognized as man's preeminent guide on his earthly sojourn, but God carried out his plans for humanity through the mediation of the changeless stars. To show how reverently the Elizabethan linked the signs in the heavens with belief in God, Hardin Craig declares that

"man was given eyes to view the heavens, so that he should not be so vain as not to realize the unimportance of earthly life. Man should study to understand the signs spread out in the heavens, since God wills that nothing should happen suddenly and without warning."¹

God, in His infinite mercy, intended the stars to benefit man; but Adam, through the Fall, set the celestial bodies against each other in their evil influence on mankind in general. Romeo and Juliet are the best examples of characters haunted by astral domination until death shakes "the yoke of inauspicious stars from this world-wearied flesh."² Juliet's "star-cross'd" life began on the day of her birth.

Juliet was born on 'Lammas-eve at night,' that was when the sun was in the house of the constellation, Leo. Those born under Leo were supposed to be choleric and passionate if not incontinent, inclined to be stout, and the type was associated with youth and summer. If,

¹Craig, op. cit., p. 36.
²Romeo and Juliet, V, iii, 111.
then, Juliet is of this hot complexion, her planet should be Mars or the sun; and with the latter the text constantly associates her.\(^1\)

Since a person's unruly actions were often thought to be the result of the influence of the stars, Hermione gives this kind interpretation to her husband's harsh conduct:

> There's some ill planet reigns:
> I must be patient till the heavens look
> With an aspect more favorable.\(^2\)

Of all the planets the moon took first place as ruler of men's lives.

The prime importance of the moon in relation to earthly events was recognized by the Middle Ages in countless treatises upon astrology and in a constant practical application of astrological doctrine to daily life. Not only for professional astrologers was the moon the ruling queen of variability in man's destiny; for the unlearned and practical man of affairs she was the very center and head of all astral influence, the one body in the night sky whose changes he could observe easily without professional help and by which he could guide the critical actions of his life.\(^3\)

Closely connected with the domination of the moon was the superstition regarding Fortune. Since she was "the personification of earthly instability,"\(^4\)

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\(^2\)The *Winter's Tale*, II, i, 105.


\(^4\)Ibid., p. 107.
her power could be exercised only in sublunary regions.

In the Middle Ages, association between Fortune and the moon was of such ready occurrence to men's minds that Fortune was continuously compared with the moon in attempts to elucidate her changeableness. Like the moon she waxed and waned, like the moon she raised the tide of our happiness and lowered it. Like the moon, indeed, was her famous wheel, upon which men who attached themselves to worldly ambition never ceased from rising and falling.¹

The fatalistic attitude toward Fortune and the stars that had always been proper to pagan civilization could tend only to discourage men. But the more moderate view of the Middle Ages showed him that all was not lost, however crossed his stars might be. No matter how evilly a planet might frown upon man's designs, there was always a greater Power to Whom he could appeal. Even Romeo takes solace in this thought when he foresees that the stars are planning ruin. He admits that his mind misgives

Some consequence yet hanging in the stars
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date.

But He, that hath the steerage of my course,
Direct my sail.²

If God, at Christmas time, could so control the heavens, that "then no planets strike, so hallow'd and so gracious is the time,"³ He surely would protect man at all

¹Farnham, op. cit., p. 107.
²Romeo and Juliet, I, iv, 106.
³Hamlet, I, i, 162.
times from their vagaries.

Besides the helping hand of God, there was always man's free will to ward off the power of Fortune and the stars. Tillyard remarks that many are inclined to forget that the Renaissance man considered his will a more powerful force than that of the stars. "The prevalence of the doctrine that our wills are our own and that the stars' influence can be resisted may not be sufficiently recognized." 1 Craig shows that this belief was by no means underestimated in the days of Elizabeth: "The freedom of the soul, and hence of the will, was doctrinally so important, that even astrology had to admit that the stars incline but not compel."

Rather than picture man's whole being crushed in the grind of Fate, the optimist thought thus:

Though Fortune's malice overthrow my state,
My mind exceeds the compass of her wheel. 2

It would not be contrary to Renaissance thought for Shakespeare to agree with Kent that "It is the stars, the stars above us, govern our conditions," 3 and at the same time to admit with Edmund that man cannot lay the whole blame of "his goatish disposition on the charge of

1 Tillyard, op. cit., p. 53.
2 Craig, op. cit., p. 52.
3 The Third Part of King Henry VI, IV, iii, 46.
4 King Lear, IV, iii, 34.
a star."¹ He gives despairing man the remedy for pulling himself out of life's debris by considering Cassius' words:

The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.²

Linked with the belief that the stars influenced the lives of men, was the superstition that a disturbance in the microcosm would violently upset the macrocosm. The startling images that this thought created were used with great dramatic effect by Shakespeare. Gloucester, feeling that treachery is brewing close by, remarks, "These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us."³ His premonitions come true. For as poor Lear's microcosm is shattered by blasts of grief, "the all-shaking thunder smites flat the thick rotundity o' the world."⁴

No great crime, especially that inflicted on a king, could escape the "strange impatience of the heavens."⁵ Macbeth dwells awhile on this thought when he says, "But let the frame of things disjoint, both the

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¹King Lear, I, ii, 138.
²Julius Caesar, I, ii, 140.
³King Lear, I, ii, 112.
⁴Ibid., III, ii, 6.
⁵Julius Caesar, I, iii, 61.
worlds suffer."

"Stars with trains of fire and dews of blood" foretell the death of Caesar, and Richard's destruction is linked with the descent of a meteor:

Ah, Richard, with the eyes of heavy mind
I see thy glory like a shooting star
Fall to the base earth from the firmament.

Shakespeare used this idea not only for dramatic effect. He wanted to call to man's attention, that as a member of the human race, his actions were vastly influential for good or evil on the entire world.

Shakespeare added a new twist when he decided that a disturbance in the microcosm could produce a catastrophe in the macrocosm. In this way he makes man morally responsible for the harmony of the universe.

After studying what the concept of heaven was to the Elizabethan mind, the various uses Shakespeare makes of this word become more meaningful to us. When we understand the importance the Elizabethan placed upon astral influence, as well as the relation of the microcosm to the macrocosm, we realize why Shakespeare used the word "heaven" so frequently.

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1Macbeth, III, ii, 16.
2Hamlet, I, i, 117.
3King Richard II, II, iv, 18.
4Allen, op. cit., p. 186.
CHAPTER II

THE HABITATION OF GOD AND THE BLESSED SPIRITS

Shakespeare's great interest was in man. His chief purpose in his plays was to entertain man with the emotions and desires of intensely human characters. His concern for humanity therefore has drawn the deduction from many a critic that his "thought rarely went beyond earthly life." But since he was working in a movement "freighted with the deliberate and conscious purpose of attuning the human mind to greater possibilities," it would be impossible for him to accomplish this task without raising the noble reason of man to heavenly things. We shall consider here his reasons for not treating directly of religious topics, although he always had in mind the spiritual betterment of man.

First, he wrote his plays chiefly for entertainment, and not for the purpose of preaching a sermon.

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3Hamlet, II, ii, 316.
Besides, he would not have been allowed to dwell on a spiritual theme, since the Reformation had swept away much religion from the drama, and this distaste was "stimulated and kept alive by the wishes of the government." Then if he had brought in hopes of heavenly reward for his tragic heroes, the effect of tragedy would have been spoiled. In that case his characters would have been transformed into martyrs, and there is nothing tragic about the birthday of a martyr in heaven. Lastly he withheld a religious atmosphere from his plays for the very purpose of making man think more seriously on the eternal values or losses incurred by the moral acts of his characters. Commenting on this point, Peter Alexander explains that

the ironic reserve he maintains to what are described as religious convictions is itself an artistic device that gives an added force to the evidence his work affords us about the ultimate nature of things and the grounds of religion itself.  

Shakespeare was writing during a revolutionary

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3 Farnham, op. cit., p. 176.

period when insecurity was the dominant feature of life,\(^1\) and the great paradox of death and immortality was its most living truth.\(^2\) Although his themes were decidedly worldly, he let them proclaim, true to their Elizabethan background, "the briefness of life and the vicissitudes that come with time."\(^3\) In order to do this without spreading an array of religious beliefs, he impressed his audience with the all-important thought of the world to come chiefly by implication.

The supernatural world, which the playwright does not bring before the footlights, may exist nevertheless in the minds of his characters and his audience. He may refer to it, appeal to it, and imply it, in the actions and in the sentiments he attributes to his heroes.\(^4\)

If our minds go beyond what is actually spoken to the true import of the dramas, especially the tragedies, we see the hellish effect of vice on one hand, and the heavenly reward awaiting the practice of virtue on the other. For instance, it has been noted that the entire tragedy of Macbeth is a conflict between sin leading to

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hell and grace opening heaven. We are asked to consider as an example "the Castle of Inverness with the charming description of 'heaven's breath' and 'the temple-haunting martlet,' before the crime, and its porter of hell-gate, after."  

While witnessing a Shakespearean tragedy we experience an uplifting sensation, because the playwright has made us feel that the virtues of his heroes are above earthly reward.

The sorrows of heroes and heroines in the catastrophes of his plays are not the cold, stony griefs of men and women who look forward to a vacuity after death; and the emotions aroused in reader or spectator, though painful, do not degenerate into pessimism. . . . Were death the "be all and end all" in their view of life they could not die as they do and we could not feel about them as we do.  

While studying the picture of life in the tragedies of Hamlet, Othello, and King Lear, we are deeply impressed by the religious values that are there present. "Shakespeare's audience found these values. . . . conveyed to them, not in formal exposition, but in the poetic suggestion of intense art."  

If we but follow the recur-

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rence of the word "heaven" in the plays, we find that it is used most often in Othello and Hamlet with the purpose of showing us "that success means not any practical achievement in the world but the perfected life of the soul\(^1\) in heaven. All the nobility of Hamlet's nature comes to light so clearly in his final moments that we see the heavens open to receive him as Horatio reverently remarks:

Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince, And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.\(^2\)

We are sure that heaven welcomes the soul of Desdemona, purer than her skin of "monumental alabaster."\(^3\) With Othello we feel too sinful to be in "possession of this heavenly sight."\(^4\) Heaven is not outwardly stated as the reward of Cordelia's filial love. But here we find one of those cases where "Shakespeare eschews the conventional forms of piety, and even makes use of certain non-Christian ideas. But by rich poetic suggestion he stirs a mood essentially religious and Christian."\(^5\) The following comment on Cordelia's generous love:


\(^2\)Hamlet, V, ii, 369.

\(^3\)Othello, V, ii, 134.

\(^4\)Ibid., V, ii, 278.

\(^5\)Myrick, op. cit., p. 228.
Thou hast one daughter
Who redeems nature from the general curse
Which twain have brought her to. 1

has made her appear as a likeness to Christ Who redeemed
the world from the reproach that the first two human be­
ings had brought upon it. 2

This solemn utterance,

Upon such sacrifices
The gods themselves throw incense. 3

suggests that a beautiful reception in heaven is in
store for one whose immolation was not rewarded on
earth.

In spite of the horrors that accompany the
death of Shakespeare's tragic heroes, it is quite plain
that the tragic world is not the final reality for them. 4
Death is only a means of setting them free for their
"virtues plead like angels." 5
It is Shakespeare's ar­
tistic ability to show real spiritual greatness in terms
of this world that enriches his plays with a much great­
er dramatic appeal than that of the medieval tragedies.

An eloquent sermon urging man to forsake the

1King Lear, IV, vi, 209.
2Edgar I. Fripp, Shakespeare, Man and Artist
(London: Oxford University Press), II, 666.
3King Lear, V, ii, 20.
4Bradley, op. cit., p. 324.
5Macbeth, I, vii, 19.
world and sigh for the joys of heaven would not be more effective than the medieval de contemptu mundi theme uttered by Shakespeare's characters. If we seriously consider Hamlet's comments as he handles Yorick's skull, we are convinced of the emptiness of worldly honors. Macbeth's picture of life as a "walking shadow"\(^1\) instinctively turns us to the picture of reality in heaven, while his remorseful remark that it is better to be with the dead, Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace, Than on the torture of the mind to lie In restless ecstasy.\(^2\)

shows us that true joy is in our eternal home. Hasting's most meaningful reflection,  

O momentary grace of mortal men,  
Which we more hunt for than the grace of God?\(^3\)

reminds us of the quotation St. Ignatius used to draw Francis Xavier from the world. The dying words of Wolsey which Shakespeare wove into his last play,

Had I but served my God with half the zeal I served my king, he would not in mine age Have left me naked to mine enemies.\(^4\)

gives us the impression that the playwright wants to

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\(^1\)Macbeth, V, v, 24.  
\(^2\)Ibid., III, ii, 18.  
\(^3\)King Richard III, III, v, 98.  
\(^4\)King Henry VIII, III, ii, 459.
remind us most forcefully for the last time to turn our hearts to heavenly things.

Shakespeare echoes again and again the salutary advice of St. Thomas More for "every man... to ryse in the love of our Lord, with an hope of heaven, contempt of the world, and longing to be with God."¹ That a noble life should be crowned with a happy death is for him man's greatest achievement. Old Adam says that "fortune cannot recompense me better than to die well."² Shakespeare's joyful view of death is expressed most beautifully by the great-hearted father who refuses to shed a tear for the death of his son, because it is sufficient to know that "he parted well, and paid his score."³

In those plays where life and death are the issues, we are made to reflect on the immortality of the soul. Macbeth's keenest regret is that his "eternal jewel"⁴ which was meant to grace the courts of heaven is "given to the common enemy of men."⁵ Hamlet is not


²As You Like It, II, iii, 76.

³Macbeth, V, vii, 50.

⁴Ibid., III, 1, 68.

⁵Ibid., III, 1, 69.
afraid of the harm the ghost might do his body, and he knows it cannot touch his soul, "being a thing immortal."¹ What does it matter that Juliet's "body sleeps in Capel's monument" since "her immortal part with angels lives."²

Shakespeare is very solicitous that this immortal soul be prepared for its entrance into heaven. Before Othello slays his wife he reminds her to be sorry for her sins, sincerely declaring,

I would not kill thy unprepared spirit;  
No; heaven forfend! I would not kill thy soul.³

To send even a hardened criminal to the next world in an unrepentant spirit is so abhorrent to the Duke in Measure for Measure that he exclaims that to "transport him in the mind he is were damnable."⁴ Hamlet's father informs him that the blackest part of his murder was that his brother gave him a sudden and unprovided death.

Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,  
Unhousel'd, disappointed, unanl'd,  
No reckoning made, but sent to my account  
With all my imperfections on my head.⁵

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¹Hamlet, I, iv, 66.  
²Romeo and Juliet, V, i, 18.  
³Othello, V, ii, 31.  
⁴Measure for Measure, IV, iii, 72.  
⁵Hamlet, I, v, 76.
Just what type of saint does Shakespeare wish
to crown in "the treasury of everlasting joy"\textsuperscript{1} where
"we shall see and know our friends?"\textsuperscript{2} Certainly not the
feeble virtue of a Henry VI who folds up on a molehill
in the thick of battle, and groans about this world of
grief and woe without doing his part to relieve it of
its misery, nor the self pity of a Richard II who wants
to "sit upon the ground and tell sad stories of the death
of Kings."\textsuperscript{3} Even though he talks about his soul mount­
ing to heaven, we are not so sure that it soars upward.
But we are quite certain that the man he sent into exile
has merited the reward of those who toil for God's glory
rather than their own, for

\begin{verbatim}
Many a time hath banish'd Norfolk fought
For Jesu Christ in glorious Christian field.
And toil'd with works of war, retired himself
To Italy; and there at Venice gave
His body to that pleasant country's earth
And his pure soul unto his captain Christ,
Under whose colours he had fought so long.
\end{verbatim}

Shakespeare makes worthy of eternal glory not only men
of vigorous virtue, but women also—a Portia for in­
stance, who, like another Theresa, gives herself so
generously to straighten the tangles of mankind that

\textsuperscript{1} The Second Part of King Henry VI, II, i, 18.
\textsuperscript{2} King John, III, ii, 75.
\textsuperscript{3} King Richard II, III, ii, 155.
\textsuperscript{4} Ibid., IV, i, 92.
"the poor rude world hath not her fellow."¹

But the playwright's perfect man and woman must possess other virtues than untiring Renaissance zeal. He learned much about the creation of ideal characters from the Sermon on the Mount, for if we acquaint ourselves with his most gracious characters, we notice that they are working their way to heaven through the practice of the virtues of the Beatitudes. The first step toward perfection is to become poor in spirit.

Fling away ambition;
By that sin fell the angels; how can man, then,
The image of his Maker, hope to win by it?²

The Capulets are chided thus for seeking an earthly heaven through worldly honors,
The most you sought was her promotion,
For 'twas your heaven she should be advanced;³

while, on the other hand, it is Isabella's renouncement of the world that causes Angelo to hold her "as a thing ensky'd and sainted."⁴

Because of this self-forgetfulness she can lost herself in concern for others' miseries, and in this light Shakespeare portrays her as his finest example of "Blessed are the merciful." "From his earliest plays to

¹The Merchant of Venice, III, v, 87.
²King Henry VIII, III, II, 441.
³Romeo and Juliet, IV, v, 71.
⁴Measure for Measure, I, iv, 34.
his latest he shows a belief in forgiveness as the virtue by which human goodness draws nearest to the divine.¹ And Isabella, with the crucified Christ as her model, illustrates the beauty of this virtue from a real supernatural viewpoint.

Why, all the souls that were, were forfeit once, And He that might the vantage best have took Found out the remedy.²

The Christlikeness of this virtue is radiant in Portia as she earnestly pleads that "earthly power doth then show likest God's when mercy seasons justice,"³ and speaks eloquently of the blessings in store for those who forgive.

But forgiveness emanates only from the meek and the pure of heart, the virtues which Shakespeare proved most worthy of heaven. These two beauties of soul are resplendent in his noblest characters. Because Duncan "was 'meek' and 'clear' (I, vii, 17), and his mind incapable of suspicion,"⁴ everything seemed full of heavenly sweetness to him:

²Measure for Measure, II, ii, 73.
³The Merchant of Venice, IV, i, 196.
This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
Unto our gentle senses, ¹
and he even failed to notice the guile in a traitor's heart:
He was a gentleman on whom I built
An absolute trust. ²
It was his meekness and purity that made him look so beautiful in death to Macbeth.

Here lay Duncan. ³
His silver skin lac'd with his golden blood. ³
The silver and the gold are symbolical of his gentle senses
that could smell no treachery though a whole house reaked with it. And Duncan of course could sleep. After life's fitful fever he had been laid where nothing could touch him further. ⁴

We are touched by Isabella's meekness acquired by self-control which she wishes those in authority to possess:

₀, it is excellent
To have a giant's strength, but it is tyrannous
To use it like a giant, ⁵
while we are struck with her admirable purity which

¹Macbeth, I, vi, 1.
²Ibid., I, iv, 13.
³Ibid., II, iii, 117.
⁴Van Doren, op. cit., p. 265.
⁵Measure for Measure, II, ii, 107.
draws this resolve from her lips:

The impression of keen whips I'd wear as rubies,
And strip myself to death as to a bed
That longing have been sick for ere I'd
My body up to shame.¹

Desdemona was "a maiden never bold"² and so
innocent that she never dreamed that she was suspected
of evil. It is the beauty of these virtues which
Othello sees gleaming in heaven ready to hurl his soul
from its portals.

Cordelia, whose simplicity of heart is expressed
in her unalterable love for her father, gives us a
heavenly picture of true meekness which is really ob­
tained through combat:

And now and then an ample tear trill'd down
Her delicate cheek: it seem'd she was a queen
Over her passion, who, most rebel-like,
Sought to be king o'er her.³

To the gentleman who witnessed this beautiful self-
control she is a saint already, for her tears to him
are "holy water" dropping "from her heavenly eyes."⁴

As Shakespeare lets heaven open easily to the
meek, he makes it just as inaccessible to the unfeeling.
Men like Shylock have little chance of breaking through

¹Measure for Measure, II, iv, 101.
²Othello, I, iii, 94.
³King Lear, IV, iii, 13.
⁴Ibid., IV, iii, 32.
the golden gates, but if perchance "the Jew her father
come to heaven, it will be for his gentle daughter's
sake."¹ The man of "churlish disposition" "little recks
to find the way to heaven,"² and if he does manage to
slip in, it is because of the winning way some gentle
intercessor has with God. It is the enduring gentle­
ness of a tender-hearted Kent, a comforting Edgar, and
a faithful Adam that to Shakespeare is most Christlike
and most worthy of heaven.

The uplifting quality of Shakespeare's plays may
be accounted for in the priceless value he places upon
true goodness. His chief interest is in man, but not
in man whose life ends with the grave. It is the immortal
soul of man that makes him truly noble. If we ask our­
selves why a lovable character is particularly appealing,
we discover that he is practicing the virtues of the
Beatitudes, thus making himself worthy of the habitation
of God and the blessed spirits.

¹The Merchant of Venice, II, iv, 34.
²As You Like It, II, iv, 80.
CHAPTER III

GOD

The observation that, in the three great tragedies: Othello, Macbeth, and King Lear, the theme concerns the relations of man and his Creator, leads one to observe how closely Shakespeare has linked God and His attributes with man's thoughts and actions, especially in the tragedies and problem comedies, where we cannot fail to see that man is performing his acts in the presence of God. The word, "heaven," therefore, used metonymously as referring to God, is found most often in plays of a tragic or serious theme, its occurrence in Othello being noted sixty-three times. Its repetition in these plays where a solemn issue is at stake makes it clear that God, with His Heavenly court, is present with a purpose. The radiant introduction we receive to Desdemona, with the grace of heaven before, behind her, and on every side, keeps us in touch with heaven's constant delight in her purity. She herself reminds us more than once of this "heavenly light" that surrounds her. It is our knowl-

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2Othello, III, i, 84.
3Ibid., IV, iii, 66.
edge of heaven's smile upon Desdemona that turns our sympathy from her to Othello standing forsaken in dark silhouette against a "marble heaven." In order to make his dereliction the blacker, God withholds His smile. The poor man even feels the clang of heaven's gates, as he urges the devils to whip him "from the possession of this heavenly sight."

King Lear seems to have a sense of heaven's being close at hand as he prays:

0 heavens,
If you do love old men, if your sweet sway
Allow obedience, if yourselves are old,
Make it your course, send down and take my part!

Heaven comes down and identifies itself with Lear; it convulses with his sobs.

It is impossible to lose sight of the presence of God in contrast to the spirit of evil that pervades Macbeth. Banquo solemnly declares, "In the great hand of God I stand;" but so stands every character in the play. Lady Macbeth is conscious of God's presence when

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1Othello, III, iv, 46.
3Othello, V, ii, 278.
4King Lear, II, iv, 192.
5Macbeth, II, iv, 36.
she is afraid lest "heaven peep through the blanket of the dark to cry, "Hold, hold!"\(^1\) No sooner has Duncan been murdered, than "heaven's cherubim blow the horrid deed in every eye."\(^2\) Everywhere we are reminded that it is useless to "equivocate to heaven."\(^3\) God certainly is not far distant when the sorrows resulting from Macbeth's wickedness "strike heaven on the face."\(^4\)

It is this consciousness of God's ever watchful eye that gives us the satisfaction of knowing that, although innocence feels the sting of injustice on earth, 'tis not so above;

There is no shuffling, there the action lies In his true nature; and we ourselves compell'd Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults, To give in evidence.\(^5\)

Grieved as we are with the cruelty that strikes even the good in the tragedies, we come away contented that a just God is waiting to reward those who have suffered from human injustice, for

Heaven is above all yet; there sits a judge That no king can corrupt.\(^6\)

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\(^1\) *Macbeth*, I, vi, 22.
\(^5\) *Hamlet*, III, iii, 57.
\(^6\) *King Henry VIII*, III, i, 100.
Terrifying are Shakespeare's pictures of God's justice; touching and attractive are his portrayals of Divine mercy. With Scripture's reference to God's gentle handling of the bruised reed in mind, the poet shows us the difference in God's treatment of the humble penitent from that of the hardened sinner:

Merciful heaven, Thou rather with
Thy sharp and sulphurous bolt
Split'st the unwedgeable and gnarled
Oak than the soft myrtle. ¹

In order to picture how lavish God is with His mercy, he lets us see it falling as a "gentle rain from heaven."² No sin is too great for a merciful God to pardon, for, asks Hamlet of his mother, "Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens to wash it white as snow?"³ He explains that she need only

Confess yourself to heaven,
Repent what's past, avoid what is to come.⁴

God's loving care of man requires a trustful heart in return. Conformity to God's will in heavy trials is man's best proof of confidence.

¹Measure for Measure, II, ii, 114.
²The Merchant of Venice, IV, i, 184.
³Hamlet, III, iii, 15.
⁴Ibid., III, iv, 149.
If heaven be pleased that you should use me ill, 
Why then you must.¹

Despondency has no place in sorrow that is buoyed up by hopeful words like these:

But heaven hath a hand in these events, 
To whose high will we bound our calm contents.²

Childlike confidence in God brings God Himself to dwell in the souls of His creatures. It is the possession of heavenly grace that explains the charm of Shakespeare's most lovely characters. Prospero is kept from despair by the smile of his little child "infused with a fortitude from heaven."³ "The heaven such grace did lend."⁴ Sylvia, that she wins the hearts of all. The "grace of heaven"⁵ is so active in the soul of Desdemona that, through it, she always finds the good that may be drawn from evil. "Heaven me such uses send, not to pick bad from bad, but by bad mend."⁶

Not only is human beauty nothing unless lighted with the grace of God, but man's actions also are fruit-

¹King John, IV, i, 55.  
²King Richard II, V, ii, 37.  
³The Tempest, I, ii, 154.  
⁴Two Gentlemen of Verona, IV, ii, 42.  
⁵Othello, II, i, 85.  
⁶Ibid., IV, iii, 105.
less without God's help, for as Helena says, "Most it is presumption in us when the help of heaven we count the act of men."\(^1\) She proves her belief in her doctrine when, after successfully curing the king, she humbly states, "Heaven hath through me restored the king to health."\(^2\) Man's dependence on Heaven for help demands that he make use of every grace that God offers him.

The means that heaven yields must be embraced
And not neglected; else, if heaven would,
And we will not, heaven's offer we refuse.\(^3\)

Shakespeare reminds us that if we keep in mind our true relationship to God, He will bless us more richly than if we "serve heaven with less respect than we do minister to our gross selves."\(^4\)

It is man's union with God through prayer that keeps him in heavenly favor. The poet gives us his estimate of the value of prayer by showing that man can best pay his fellow

Not with fond shekels of the tested gold,
Or stones whose rates are either rich or poor
As fancy values them; but with true prayers
That shall be up at heaven and enter there 'Ere sunrise.\(^5\)

\(^1\) *All's Well That Ends Well*, II, i, 155.
\(^3\) *King Richard II*, III, ii, 29.
\(^4\) *Measure for Measure*, II, ii, 85.
\(^5\) *Ibid.*, II, ii, 149.
He indicates the ideal spot for undisturbed converse with God as far removed from the turmoil of the world:

This rock and these demesnes have been my world; Where I have lived at honest freedom, paid More pious debts to heaven than in all The fore-end of my time.¹

In impressive language he shows us the necessity for recollection and sincerity in our prayer, else like Angelo we lament about

Heaven in my mouth As if I did but only chew his name,² or like Claudius whose conscience says, "Words without thoughts never to heaven go."³

In his ever recurring praise of prayer, Shakespeare recognizes it in each of its forms. Helena, kneeling in prayerful attitude, exemplifies our chief reason for prayer as the glory of God, as she confesses "before high heaven"⁴ that the human being she loves most ranks in her affections only "next unto high heaven."⁵ We should not confine our gratitude to miraculous and outstanding favors, but be simple enough to get "down on your knees, and thank heaven fasting for a good man's

¹*Cymbeline*, III, iii, 69.
²*Measure for Measure*, II, iii, 43.
³*Hamlet*, III, iii, 98.
⁴*All's Well That Ends Well*, I, iii, 198.
⁵*Ibid.*, I, iii, 199.
love."¹ Prayer of expiation is graphically depicted by King Henry's paupers "Who twice a-day their wither'd hands hold up toward heaven, to pardon blood."² The power of prayer of petition is felt by the man who entreats his countrymen to

Make of your prayers one sweet sacrifice
And lift my soul to heaven.³

Man's union with God becomes more secure if his respect for the king satisfies the Renaissance ideal, which considered the king as "a mortal God on earth, unto whom the living God hath lent his own name as a great honor."⁴ Since the king is a superman as well as God's deputy,⁵

Not all the water in the rough rude sea
Can wash the balm off from an anointed king.⁶

A loyal subject should so reverence the king that he would rather "stoop to the block than these knees bow to any save to the God of heaven and to my king."⁷ Whatever the

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¹As You Like It, III, v, 57.
²King Henry V, IV, i, 317.
³King Henry VIII, II, i, 79.
⁶King Richard II, III, ii, 54.
⁷The Second Part of King Henry VI, IV, i, 126.
king ordains is expressly the will of God. "The will of heaven be done, and the king's pleasure by me obeyed." It is hard for the Renaissance man to picture anything as sacrilegious as God's vice-gerent an object of insult:

The king of heaven forbid our lord the king Should so with civil and uncivil arms be rushed upon. If man were to go so far as to take part in the deposition of a king, he would find, upon examining the Eternal Records, his crime, "Mark'd with a blot, damn'd in the book of heaven." On the other hand, if man is submissive to authority ordained by God, there is peace and order on earth, and "there is mirth in heav'n."

To notice the closeness of Heaven, meaning God and His Heavenly Court, throughout Shakespeare's plays is to discover that, although the playwright was deeply concerned with man, he seldom took his thought from the Great Power that was above all earthly show. Shakespeare's marked regard for the presence of God, for His attributes, and for the respect that is His due from man, gives his plays that exalted moral tone which appeals to the high ideals of man. His ability to show the soul of man in its true light is one of the secrets of his genius.

1King Henry VIII, I, 1, 215.
2King Richard II, IV, 1, 236.
3Ibid., IV, 1, 236.
4As You Like It, II, iv, 81.
CHAPTER IV

THE SKY

Shakespeare poetically refers to the sky as the "heavens" most frequently in three plays: Romeo and Juliet, A Midsummer Night's Dream, and The Merchant of Venice. A beautiful starlit sky forms the setting for all three dramas, but it assumes a different aspect in each play, according to the way it is looked upon by the characters. We may go so far as to say that the firmament actually plays a role in Romeo and Juliet, at least the all-important two have given it more than one duty to accomplish. Juliet reminds this midnight sky that it has a "love-performing" function. It must spread its "close curtain" round her and her beloved. Although it is evident that "the awful gloom of Lear and Macbeth nowhere overcasts the bright Italian sky," the young lovers have vested it in somber shades because they want to use it as "night's cloak" to shield them from intruders. The resplendent beauty that each sees in the

1Romeo and Juliet, III, ii, 5.


3Romeo and Juliet, II, ii, 75.
other extinguishes every bit of brightness in the glorious sky. To them it is a "somber-suited matron, all in black," whose eyes are dark and black-brow'd.

The radiant sunrise, which brings such bright hopes to normal people, has no attraction for Romeo. His father is puzzled that he should look for solace in the gloom of a sycamore grove.

Many a morning hath he there been seen,
With tears augmenting the fresh morning's dew,
Adding to clouds more clouds with his deep sighs;
But all so soon as the all-cheering sun
Should in the farthest East begin to draw
The shady curtains from Aurora's bed,
Away from light steals home my heavy son
And private in his chamber pens himself,
Shuts up his windows, locks fair daylight out,
And makes himself an artificial night.²

While he broods in his darkness, the rest of the world rejoices to see the dawn of another bright day, which the good friar thus admires:

The grey-ey'd morn smiles on the frowning night,
Check'ring the Eastern clouds with streaks of light.
And flecked darkness like a drunkard reels
From forth day's path and Titan's fiery wheels.³

Van Doren explains why Romeo has an aversion for these beautiful dawns.

If day is life, as Friar Lawrence says it is, then life is for Romeo the enemy of love, which can exist in its purity only by itself, in the little death of a private darkness. Hidden in

¹Romeo and Juliet, III, ii, 11.
²Ibid., I, i, 138.
³Ibid., II, iii, 1.
that darkness it can shine for the knowing lover
with a brightness unknown to comets, stars, and
suns.\footnote{Mark Van Doren, op. cit., p. 68.}

Juliet is as wildly impatient as her lover for day to be
gone, so that she may be covered securely with night's
dark sky.

\begin{lstlisting}[language=Shakespeare]
Gallop apace, you fiery footed steeds,
Towards Phoebus' lodging! Such a waggoner
As Phaeton would whip you to the West
And bring in cloudy night immediately.\footnote{Romeo and Juliet, III, ii, 1.}
\end{lstlisting}

Our attention is first called to the dark mid­
night setting for the lovers' romance by Juliet's
father:

\begin{lstlisting}[language=Shakespeare]
At my poor house look to behold this night
Earth-treading stars that make dark heaven light.\footnote{Ibid., I, ii, 2.}
\end{lstlisting}

This little remark begins a series of comparisons that
will culminate in a picture of Juliet more glorious and
dazzling than any conceivable creature. The beauties
of Verona are so charming that they eclipse heavens' stars. But the grace of these dainty dancers is ex­
tinguished by the resplendent loveliness of Capulet's daughter, the sight of whom causes Romeo to sigh, "I ne'er saw true beauty till this night."\footnote{Ibid., I, v, 55.} His first glimpse of her lifts his thoughts to the skies, and calls

\begin{lstlisting}[language=Shakespeare]

\end{lstlisting}
forth these admiring words:

So shows a snow dove trooping with crows
As yonder lady o'er her fellows shows.¹

He must enshrine her in the heavens. He must enjoy her
loveliness in its completeness against the background of
a midnight sky. Looking at her thus enshrined, he ex-
claims,

It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
Like a rich jewel in an Ethiope's ear.²

From that moment of happy meeting night does her
work of lifting these two lovers above the earth, and
wafting them to a heaven of delights. Romeo and Juliet
are everything now, and the rest of the world counts for
nothing. But all that does remain in their ecstatic
world must rise to the heavens with them. In order to
hold our imagination above the earth, the poet paints
for us word pictures of only such things as exist in the
sky, such as birds and fairies, moon and stars, wind and
air. Even the messengers of their love should fly quick-
ly through the sky.

Love's heralds should be thoughts,
Which ten times faster glide than the sun's beams
Driving back shadows over low'ring hills.
Therefore do nimble-pinion'd doves draw Love,
And therefore hath the wind-swift Cupid wings.³

¹Romeo and Juliet, I, v, 50.
²Ibid., I, v, 47.
³Ibid., I, v, 4.
How well Queen Mab fits into this ethereal atmosphere, for her team of little atomies whizz lightly through the sky, coming just low enough to skim "athwart men's noses as they lie asleep."¹ Not once does this fairy touch the earth as she directs the construction of her wagon. Here we see her reaching for "the moonshine's wat'ry beams"² to create a tiny collar. Now she is stealing some gossamer from the dewy air to fashion her filmy lash. Then how quickly she must speed through the heavens in order to parcel out dreams to palaces, parsonages, and barracks. As Queen Mab is making her rounds through the sky, Romeo lightly swings over Juliet's garden wall. Earlier in the drama, Mercutio, for the sake of drawing him out of the depression his first love has caused him, says,

You are a lover; borrow Cupid's wings
And soar with them above a common bound,³
to which Romeo replies he is

too sore enpierced with his shaft
To soar with his lightfeathers.⁴

¹Romeo and Juliet, I, iv, 58.
²Ibid., I, iv, 62.
³Ibid., I, iv, 17.
⁴Ibid., I, iv, 19.
"But," notes Spurgeon, "when he has met Juliet, far from being weighted, he finds that it is 'love's' light wings which enable him to climb the orchard wall,"¹ "for stony limits cannot hold love out."²

He searches the heavens, which are unusually beautiful this evening, for a light to which he might compare Juliet. After weighing the merits of the "blessed moon" "that tips with silver all these fruit-tree tops,"³ he calls on Juliet to slay the pale disk with her charm.

Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon, Who is already sick and pale with grief, That thou her maid art far more fair than she.⁴

Then with lyric imagery he explains why her eyes are beyond comparison with heaven's brightest stars.

Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven, Having some business, do entreat her eyes To twinkle in their spheres till they return. What if her eyes were there, they in her head? The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars As daylight doth a lamp; her eyes in heaven Would through the airy region stream so bright That birds would sing and think it were not night.⁵

Needless to say, Romeo must go beyond the earth to find

¹Spurgeon, op. cit., p. 140.
²Romeo and Juliet, II, ii, 67.
³Ibid., II, ii, 107.
⁴Ibid., II, ii, 4.
⁵Ibid., II, ii, 15.
a fitting comparison for this heavenly maid. She is no less than his

bright angel! for thou art
As glorious to this night, being o'er my head,
As is a winged messenger of heaven
Unto the white-upturned wond'ring eyes
Of mortals that fall back to gaze on him
When he bestrides the lazy-pacing clouds
And sails upon the bosom of the air.¹

Romeo, too, is past earthly comparison. Juliet, picturing in her mind how his splendor would transform the heavens, calls on night to take him after death

and cut him out in little stars,
And he will make the face of heaven so fine
That all the world will be in love with night
And pay no worship to the garish sun.²  

Romeo and Juliet are the king and the queen of the heavens in the ecstatic world they have fashioned for themselves. Since they surpass the firmament in resplendence, they will use heaven's lights to do their biddings. As they say good-bye in the first light of morning, Juliet calls the dawn

some meteor that the sun exhales
To be to thee this night a torchbearer
And light thee on thy way to Mantua.³

The coming of dawn so welcome to us and so repelling to the lovers, calls forth this farewell from Romeo:

¹Romeo and Juliet, II, ii, 26.
²Ibid., III, ii, 22.
³Ibid., III, v, 13.
Look, love, what envious streaks
Do lace the severing clouds in yonder East.
Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops.
I must be gone and live, or stay and die.

The love-performing "curtain of Romeo and Juliet's
sky rises higher to the level of A Midsummer Night's
Dream so that the long, playful beams of its moon may
shine on a happy playground as spacious as the universe.
This is a friendly, wide-awake sky that welcomes the
high and the low.

Four classes of persons forgather in this
story. Of these, the fairies are creatures
neither of daylight nor of darkness. When dark­
ness is mentioned, they say: 'But we are spirits
of another sort.' They like the twilight: they
'follow darkness like a dream.' They love the
woods. When, therefore, they hold nightly rev­
els in those woods, it must be by moonlight.
Everybody who knows a forest glade feels that it
is moonlight that creates the fairy atmosphere.
As for Theseus and Hippolyta, they are on the
eve of their honeymoon. As for the other two
couples, what are they but moon-struck lovers?
And the horny-handed men of Athens, at work all
day, can have their secret rehearsals only by
moonlight, and choose a play in which Moonlight
is itself one of the dramatis personae.

The following lines from the drama show how in­
dispensable heaven's moonlight is to each of these four
classes. The duke and his betrothed are waiting es­
pecially for the new moon's arrival before they cele­
brate their wedding.

1Romeo and Juliet, III, v, 7.
2F. C. Kolbe, op. cit., p. 78.
Four days will quickly steep themselves in night;  
Four nights will quickly dream away the time;  
And then the moon, like to a silver bow  
New-bent in heaven, shall behold the night  
Of our solemnities.

The thought that the moon will light the way to future happiness Lysander unfolds to his love:

Tomorrow night, when Phoebe doth behold  
Her silver visage in the wat'ry glass,  
Decking with liquid pearl the bladed grass  
(A time that lovers' flights doth still conceal),  
Through Athen's gates have we have devised to steal.

It is moonlight that beckons the tired laborers to practise their play in its beams. And so the carpenter reminds his friends to meet him

... in the palace wood, a mile without the town,  
by moonlight. There will we rehearse; for  
if we meet in the city, we shall be dogg'd  
with company, and our devices known.

The moon is, of course, the special friend of the fairies, who meet "by fountain clear, or spangled starlight sheen."

All through the play we notice the hospitable sky injecting the brightness of its moonbeams into every living being that frolics in its light. With Philostrate it hears the orders of Theseus to

2. Ibid., I, i, 209.  
3. Ibid., I, ii, 102.  
4. Ibid., II, i, 29.
Stir up the Athenian youth to merriment;
Awake the pert and nimble spirit of mirth.\textsuperscript{1}
and it straightway welcomes the young lovers to that
fairyland of

midnight revels on hill or in dale, forest or
mead, by paved fountain or by rushy brook, or
in the beached margent of the sea where ringlets are danced in quaint mazes to the whistling
of the wind.\textsuperscript{2}
And the heavens have a reason for leading them there.
For the very arrow which Cupid aimed at the "imperial vot'ress," the "wat'ry moon" quenched in her "chaste beams,"\textsuperscript{3} and let it fall upon a little Western flower.
It is the juice of this pansy that will bring Demetrius
and Helena together, and make them as happy as their friends. In fact, the presence of this magic nectar in
Demetrius' eyes will render Helena so bewitching that she
will "shine as gloriously as the Venus of the sky.\textsuperscript{4}

The sky in \textit{Romeo and Juliet} is close and en-
veloping; in \textit{A Midsummer Night's Dream} it is distant and exhilarating. Referring to the moon of this refreshing heaven, Van Doren says,

\textsuperscript{1}A \textit{Midsummer Night's Dream}, I, i, 12.
\textsuperscript{3}A \textit{Midsummer Night's Dream}, II, i, 163.
\textsuperscript{4}Ibid., III, ii, 107.
This is not the sensuous, softer orb of Antony and Cleopatra, nor is it the sweet sleeping friend of Lorenzo and Jessica. It is brilliant and brisk, silver—distant.1

It is a playful moon, begetting activity. Everything darts by in a flash in its enlivening atmosphere. Puck can "put a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes,"2 and his fairy friend laughingly boasts that she wanders "everywhere, swifter than the moon's sphere."3 Oberon, thinking of the night that heaven was shot with dashing lights, tells Puck how he

sat upon a promontory
And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back,
Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath
That the rude sea grew civil at her song,
And certain stars shot madly from their spheres
To hear the sea-maid's music.4

Even the mortals, stirred by the vigor of this playful moon, are kept in a constant swirl. Helena, in her futile attempt to catch up with Demetrius, pants out this complaint,

Apollo flies, and Daphne holds the chase;
The dove pursues the griffin; the mild hind
Makes speed to catch the tiger—bootless speed,
When cowardice pursues and valor flies.5

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1Van Doren, op. cit., p. 79.
2A Midsummer Night's Dream, II, i, 175.
3Ibid., II, i, 6.
4Ibid., II, i, 149.
5Ibid., II, i, 231.
laughing heartily at the ridiculous tangles that unravel into a triple solemnity of joy as

the eastern gate, all fiery-red, 
Opening on Neptune with fair blessed beams, 
Turns into yellow gold his salt green streams.¹

After scurrying here and flying there in the light of Athens' spirited moon, how peaceful it is to rest beneath the moon that shines so calmly over Portia's country home. We are content to recall quietly with Lorenzo and Jessica, all the lovely things that happened

In such a night as this, 
When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees 
And they did make no noise.²

Their first glance at this radiant moon awakens in this young couple's minds a series of romantic events that took place in the light of just such a beautiful moon as this. In the course of their conversation, as the romantic brilliance of the moon gradually changes to a soft lucidity, Lorenzo interrupts to call Jessica's attention to "how sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank."³ This peaceful beauty of the heavens raises his thoughts to the most exalted contemplation of the firmament that any Shakespearean character has expressed.

¹A Midsummer Night's Dream, III, ii, 391.  
²The Merchant of Venice, V, i, 1.  
³Ibid., V, i, 54.
Others have called the sky the "vaulty top of heaven," an "excellent canopy," or a "majestic roof." But to Lorenzo it is the very border of the celestial abode.

Look how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patens of pure gold.¹

Then he points out to Jessica the heavenly order that exists below that floor in the music of the spheres:

There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-ey'd cherubins.²

The concord in God's Heaven, and the musical movement of the spheres are reminders to them that "such harmony exists in immortal souls."³ Truly it is that harmony in Lorenzo's soul that makes it possible for him to appreciate God's creation to such a high degree. It is this fine understanding of beauty that causes a critic to remark that Lorenzo "has an artistic soul, and to the depth of his passion for music and for the beauty of nature we are indebted for some of the noblest passages in Shakespeare."⁴

A classic image is next awakened in his poetic mind as he calls the musicians to "wake Diana with a

¹The Merchant of Venice, V, i, 58.
²Ibid., V, i, 60.
³Ibid., V, i, 63.
hymn."¹ This same picture flashes before Portia's imagination, but touched with a coloring of romance. "Peace, ho!" she whispers to Nerissa, as they happily walk up the moonlit lawn, "The moon sleeps with Endymion, and would not be awak'd."² Portia, like Lorenzo, while contemplating the beauty of the night, experiences an untold joy, which emotion awakens in her mind a practical lesson, as this thoughtful remark so well proves:

> The light we see is burning in my hall.  
> How far that little candle throws its beams!  
> So shines a good deed in a naughty world.³

A clear evening sky awakens no more than a feeling of peace and contentment in most of our prosaic souls. But with Shakespeare as our guide, we begin to appreciate and to find a meaning in every aspect of the sky. The moon is not simply a yellow disk, but Diana sleeping with Endymion. The sky is so exquisitely lovely because it is the floor of heaven. The harmony of heaven should exist in our immortal souls. The influence of each of our good deeds will be as far reaching in a sin-darkened world as the beams of a candle in a midnight sky.

¹The Merchant of Venice, V, i, 66.  
²Ibid., V, ii, 109.  
³Ibid., V, ii, 89.
CHAPTER V

"HEAVEN" AS A FIGURE OF SPEECH

To trace Shakespeare's use of "heaven" as a figure of speech is to follow his development from a phrase decorator to a poetic genius. "His early plays abound . . . . in elaborate embroidery of language done for its own sake . . . . To many young poets of the time their language was a new-found wonder; its very handling gave them pleasure."¹ What a delight a word as workable as "heaven" for poetic use would be to the adept Shakespeare! As a result of his joy in experimenting with "heaven" and its various synonyms, such heavily wrought fanciwork as this comes from the workshop of his youth: "a jewel in the ear of caelo, the sky, the welkin, the heaven."²

It is not long, however, until as an accomplished lyricist, he puts "heaven" to the effective use of delighting the imagination, as he turns our gaze to "the moon like to


²Love's Labour's Lost, IV, ii, 6.
a silver bow new-bent in heaven,"\textsuperscript{1} or to a galaxy of lovely ladies that like "earth-treading stars make dark heaven light."\textsuperscript{2}

Then, having reached the pinnacle of perfection, the finished artist so wields this magic word as to penetrate the very heart of his audience. We feel all the bitter anguish of Othello when the sight of his murdered wife's pure face wrings this broken-hearted cry from his lips, "This look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven."\textsuperscript{3} We sense the ardor of a father's love as he desperately tells his daughter that, "He that parts us shall bring a fire brand from heaven, and fire us hence like foxes."\textsuperscript{3}

We appreciate Shakespeare's dexterity in handling words when we notice the variety of effects he can produce, as need requires, by his masterful use of "heaven." A Renaissance man was wont to give vent to his amorous feelings in the most rapturous language possible, so what was more becoming than to express a state of supreme felicity as a "heaven"? It was the style for a lover of those days to pour forth his feelings in this wise:

\footnotesize
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{A Midsummer-Night's Dream}, I, i, 9.
\item \textit{Romeo and Juliet}, I, ii, 25.
\item \textit{Othello}, V, ii, 274.
\item \textit{King Lear}, V, iii, 22.
\end{enumerate}
I, for mine own part, am brought into a Paradise by the only imagination of woman's virtues; and were I persuaded that all the devils in hell were women, I would never live devoutly to inherit heaven, or that they were all saints in heaven, I would live more strictly for fear of hell.  

In keeping with the vogue, Shakespeare's lover sighs to his lady that, "heaven on earth I have won by wooing thee." To her admirer Lucrece is the "heaven of his thoughts;" and of course, for Romeo, "heaven is here where Juliet lives." Then, when love has been spurned, the forgotten one poignantly expresses her feelings by wailing, "He hath turned a heaven into hell."  

Medieval love-imagery pictured one's lover as a saint. This was carried into Renaissance literature, Spenser being especially fond of painting lovely women as celestial. Shakespeare is also medieval in this respect. Rosalind is devised by a "heavenly synod." The Duke, raised to ecstasy

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2*All's Well That Ends Well*, IV, ii, 66.
3*The Rape of Lucrece*, l. 338.
4*Romeo and Juliet*, III, iii, 29.
5*A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, I, i, 207.
6Charles G. Smith, "The Ethical Allegory of the Two Florimels," *Studies in Philology*, XXXI (1934), 140.
7*As You Like It*, III, ii, 157.
by the appearance of Ophelia, sighs that "heaven walks on
earth;"¹ and two young gentlemen debate whether Sylvia is
a "heavenly saint" or an "earthly paragon."²

If one's beloved was looked upon as coming from heaven,
it followed that everything about that person would inspire
thoughts of heaven. Hence numerous conceits were fashioned
to express the exalted opinion the lover had of his ideal.
Taken in themselves, these conceits seem to be exaggerated in
their imagery, but Shakespeare's characters need these over­
powering expressions to unburden the intensity of their
feeling.³ We understand the transport of a man who looks
upon the eyelids of an unconscious beauty as "cases to those
heavenly jewels,"⁴ or the ecstasy of another, who sees the
eyelids of his sleeping lady "laced with the blue of heaven's
or the ecstasy of another, who sees the eyelids of his sleep­
ing lady "laced with the blue of heaven's own tint."⁵ Cleo­
patra's rapture is certainly intense enough for her to sigh

¹Twelfth Night, V, i, 100.
²Two Gentlemen of Verona, II, iv, 145.
³John Middleton Murry, Shakespeare (New York: Harcourt,
⁴Pericles, III, ii, 97.
⁵Cymbeline, II, iii, 22.
that Antony's "face was as the heavens,"¹ or that "his faults in him seem as the spots of heaven."²

Though the heaven Shakespeare creates for lovers is delightful, the heaven to which he gives the attributes of a person is awe-inspiring. It was very natural to a medieval man to convert intellectual concepts into live beings.³ The Renaissance man also thought in pictures; his imagination would welcome a heaven pulsating with life. What might better portray the anger of God than a "strange impatience in the heavens."⁴ When "cross blue lightning" opens the "breast of heaven,"⁵ we sense the fury of a living God. "As we often see against some storm a silence in the heavens,"⁶ it is time for us to cower in fear in the presence of an overpowering Personality. And yet the prayer, "Let the heavens give him defense against the elements,"⁷ gives us a gentler view of

¹Antony and Cleopatra, V, ii, 79.
²Ibid., III, xiii, 159.
⁴Julius Caesar, I, iii, 61.
⁵Ibid., I, iii, 50.
⁶Hamlet, II, ii, 506.
⁷Othello, II, i, 44.
the Eternal Majesty, for we see a Mighty Hand push back the fury of the waves to guide man's frail and timid bark safely into port.

True poet of the Renaissance, Shakespeare cannot resist the impulse to give this living heaven a pagan coloring. We see heaven under a new aspect, when the tender music of the gods "makes heaven drowsy with the harmony."¹ For another Renaissance variation, Fortune must be linked with heaven and reward a "most unholy match with plagues."²

With just the proper touch a skilful artist creates an enduring masterpiece. With the deft placing of such a word as "heaven" in a phrase, Shakespeare makes his imagery immortal. Having little scenery to produce a distinctive atmosphere, the Renaissance audience relied on pictures, made with words. Their imaginations depended on these mental pictures, and waited eagerly for the most realistic paintings.³ Shakespeare's awareness of that need resulted in striking word pictures that furnished a splendid background of unlimited height as "rough quarries, rocks, and hills whose heads touch

¹Love's Labour's Lost, IV, iii, 345.
²Two Gentlemen of Verona, IV, iii, 31.
heaven."¹ Then to place his audience in a lighter air, almost removed from this world, he wafts them skyward to "mountain pines fretted with the gusts of heaven."² Instead of wasting words to describe a high hill silhouetted against a morning sunrise, he darts our imaginations to a "heaven-kissing hill."³ To allure us to stay forever in the fresh summer air of a castle garden, he murmurs that, "Heaven's breath smells wooingly here."⁴ Where we would be at a loss to describe the winsomeness of a baby's smile, Shakespeare says it is "infused with a fortitude from heaven."⁵ He fills our hearts with the deepest pity for the outrages heaped on a tender little prince by bidding us look upon his tears as "heaven-moving pearls."⁶

By means of contrasting heaven with hell, Shakespeare produces striking and well defined pictures. The madness of a sea storm is made horribly vivid as we watch "the laboring bark climb hills of seas Olympus-high and duck again as low

¹Othello, I, iii, 141.
²Troilus and Cressida, IV, i, 78.
³Hamlet, III, iv, 59.
⁴Macbeth, I, vi, 5.
⁵The Tempest, I, ii, 154.
⁶King John, VI, i, 170.
as hell from heaven."¹ Contrast is used very effectively
where Shakespeare shows the foolishness of men who clearly
realize where indulgence in illicit delights will drag them,
and yet do not have the will power to resist:

All this the world well knows; yet none knows well
To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.²

To make a splendid impression, "heaven" is sometimes
the best word to produce the desired effect. When Claudius
wishes to impose his grandeur and kingly importance upon his
court, he vociferates about the violent reaction there will
be in the heavens to his regal celebrations:

No jocund health that Denmark drinks today,
But the great cannon to the clouds shall tell
And the king's rouse the heavens shall bruit again,
Re-speaking earthly thunder.³

The treachery concealed in his final toast to Hamlet must be
covered with magnificent orchestral effects that are climaxed
with violent outbursts in the heavens:

Give me the cups;
And let the kettle to the trumpet speak,
The trumpet to the cannoneer without,
The cannons to the heavens, the heavens to earth,
'Now the king drinks to Hamlet.'⁴

¹Othello, II, 1, 191.
²Sonnet XXIX.
³Hamlet, I, ii, 123.
⁴Ibid., V, ii, 282.
That the thought of heaven was kept closely in mind by the Elizabethans is evidenced by the place the "heavens" occupied on their stages.

There are several references to the "heavens" which identify that region with the hut or garret on top of the tiring house. It housed the machinery for hoisting and lowering the mythological divinities whose aerial exits and entrances delighted the crowd.

Several quotations in Shakespeare make us aware that the characters, when referring to the "heavens," had an eye on the "heavens" of the stage. When Lady Macbeth feared that, in the midst of her evil deed, heaven would "peep through the blanket of the dark," the audience instinctively looked for action from the "heavens" of the stage. Coriolanus climaxed his mother's dramatic pleadings by calling attention to something that was happening above, not only in imagination, but probably in reality: "Behold! the heavens do ope, the gods look down, and this unnatural scene they laugh at." We have clear evidence in Cymbeline that the "heavens" of the theater are in action. We read the invitation of Sicilius to Jupiter to "peep through thy marble mansion," and we find in the stage directions that Jupiter accepts by descending in thunder and lightning, sitting upon an eagle.

1Spencer, op. cit., p. 92.
2Macbeth, I, v, 54.
3Coriolanus, V, iii, 183.
4Cymbeline, V, iv, 87.
From our study of Shakespeare's use of "heaven" as a figure of speech, we notice how workable a poetic word is in a creative mind. If we follow his experiments with his word, we watch his development from a phrase decorator to a poetic genius. His dexterity in producing a variety of emotions by the proper handling of this word, his ability to charm his audience with unforgettable pictures by using "heaven" as his chief descriptive device, and his utilizing the "heavens" of the theater to add effectiveness to dramatic situations show us the vast possibilities of an expressive word in the workshop of a genius.
CONCLUSION

A passing glance at the three hundred ninety-nine quotations containing "heaven" in the Shakespeare Concordance would reveal little except that the bard relied very often on that word to enrich his poetry. But a careful study of "heaven" in these quotations and a systematic classification of their meanings under five different heads has brought to light the vast possibilities of an expressive word in the hands of a genius; it has also given us a correct idea of the value Shakespeare set on the things of Eternity.

We have found that some of the most interesting "heaven" quotations are those which reveal the Elizabethan concept of heaven. Under this aspect we gained the information that the Renaissance man had strange ideas about the cosmos, that the stars influenced his fortunes, and the material and spiritual heavens were merged together.

After studying the quotations on heaven which refer to the habitation of God and the blessed spirits, our veneration for Shakespeare has grown. We have discovered that he sets the right values on spiritual things and solid virtue, because they are the only enduring things and lead to everlasting happiness with God. We are glad we can refute with evidence those critics who say that his thought rarely went past this world, by showing that God and Eternity are the dominating forces in plays where great issues are at stake.
When our attention was called to God, of Whom Shakespeare metonymously speaks as "Heaven," we felt His power and the grandeur of His attributes. Shakespeare has given us a loving God, One to Whom we should give glory through prayer and obedience to lawful authority.

In our fourth consideration of heaven as the sky we realize the power of this master lyricist to lift us from the earth and enchant us with the beauties of the firmament.

Our final chapter took us into the workshop of a poetic genius where the artistic use of "heaven" brought a vast variety of striking pictures to our view. As Shakespeare compared some earthly beauty with heaven, or contrasted heaven with hell, or darted our fancy from the dingiest spot on earth to the rhapsodies of heaven, we could not help but think of his own description of poetic imagination:

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven.1

As we once more scan in retrospect the five concepts of heaven, we marvel at the numerous effects Shakespeare has produced with this poetic word, we revere the glory of God and the virtue of the saints that his treatment of heaven has revealed, we see new beauties in the starry vault of heaven, and we go back to our workaday world with unforgettable images in our minds that have been made so impressive with just the right touch of "heaven" from a master's pen.

1A Midsummer-Night's Dream, V, 1, 12.
Books


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