STRAY APPROACHES TO SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare is like the Himalayan range, not merely in heights and depths but also in grandeur, sublimity, and mystery. As you scale one peak, the other peaks emerge confronting you. Similarly every reading of Shakespeare tends to be an arch wherethrough gleams the untravelled world. In a sense, Shakespeare has so penetratingly represented life in all its diversity and depths that one must throw up his arms in despair while presuming to make an attempt at defining an approach to him. No less a man than T. S. Eliot in his essay on "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca" (Selected Essays) admits:

About anyone so great as Shakespeare, it is probable that we can never be right; and if we can never be right, it is better that we should from time to time change our way of being wrong. Whether Truth ultimately prevails is doubtful, and has never been proved; but it is certain that nothing is more effective in driving out error than a new error.

Not only a new error but several errors are apt to crop up in an attempt like this at approaching Shakespeare. John Keats might 'humbly assay / The bitter-sweet of Shakespearian fruit' while "sitting down to read our King Lear once again", and awed with 'our deep eternal theme' might pray

Let me not wander in a barren dream,
But when I am consumed in the fire
Give me new Phoenix wings to fly at my desire.

And a modern poet like Delmore Schwartz might find 'the sad and passionate gay player of Avon avowed with vivid exactness, eloquent variety... as immense as the sea is. The sea which neither the humble nor the proud can damn, control, or master'. In the face of these approaches, all one can presume to do is to veer round that immortal bard of Avon, and fumble in quest of a few elusive glimpses.

Like every artist Shakespeare is also the child of his age. It would certainly be no exaggeration to say that had there
been no Renaissance in England, there should have been no Shakespeare. He was born at the full tide of England's history, and his genius was in tune with the age. It was an age of change and challenge and also an hour when England emerged as a power conscious of her own destiny. The frontiers of the mind were fast expanding. The printing press, endless voyages of the navigators, establishment of colonies and expansion of the empire—all filled England with a desire to spread her wings and take off on destinations far beyond the horizon. Now, an artist who must belong not to an age but to all time—an artist who must be a contemporary to the posterity—must be contemporaneous with the age in which he lives also. Shakespeare was both of his age and yet of all time. And to understand Shakespeare, our contemporary, we must try to be Shakespeare's contemporaries—approach him as the Elizabethans approached him also. This is fundamental.

Among Shakespeare's predecessors—the University Wits—there was Greene whose posthumous publication entitled Greene's Groatsworth of Wit has this disparaging remark about Shakespeare:

"You trust them not... for there is an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his Tiger's heart wrapped in a Player's hide, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse, as the best of you... and in his own conceit the only Shakescene in a country".

But then his young friends John Heminge and Henry Condell, the editors of the First Folio in 1623, in their preface pay a great tribute:

"Who as he was a happie imitator of Nature, was a most gentle expresser of it. His mind and hand went together: and what he thought, he uttered with that easiness, that we have scarce received from him a blot in his papers".
That is how he appears to his contemporaries. But then what do we know of Shakespeare? Was he born in 1564 at Stratford-upon-Avon? Was his schooling a casualty because of his father's fluctuating fortunes? Was he persecuted for poaching in Sir Thomas Lucy's park? Did he in 1582 marry Anne Hathaway, a woman some eight years his senior? Did he go to London as a beggar to return to Stratford almost as a king? And how about his emotional crisis? Who was that Dark Lady? How about W. H.? But Shakespeare himself forbids us all these obstinate questionings. On His grave-stone at Stratford is inscribed his last wish:

Good friend for Jesus sake forbear
To dig the dust enclosed here.
Blest be the man who spares these stones,
And cursed be he that moves my bones.

Who can have an audacity to rattle with his bones? In other words here is a red light against any biographical criticism which is a modern fashion of approach. Drama is a most objective art-form, which involves what T. S. Eliot describes as a complete 'extinction of the personality of the artist.' Then alone, can the playwright create a mimic world, an illusion so real that we would fain prefer it to our everyday reality which is so dull and mundane.

We must, therefore, turn to Shakespeare's works. And when we turn the pages of his complete works which Carlyle likens to The Bible, we see his creation over a brief span of about 15 years from 1592-1607 from which, as Logan Smith puts it, "Shakespeare rises like a Jinn from a bottle till he seems to fill the sky".

Now the basic fact about Shakespeare is this: He was an Elizabethan poet, who was also an actor and a playwright. He did not write drama in the form of poetry, but expressed poetic ideas dramatically conceived. His early verse is full of Elizabethan conceits, Venus and Adonais and The Rape of Lucrece were his early poetic exercises: Venus and Adonais
unfolds the romantic story of a goddess fallen in love with a mortal Shepherd. Venus identified herself with a fascinating landscape:

“I’ll be a park, and thou shalt be my deer,
Feed where thou wilt, on mountain, or in dale;
Graze on my lips, and if these hills be dry,
Stray lower, where the pleasant mountains lie.

Within this limit is relief enough,
Sweet bottom-grass, and high delightful plain,
Round rising hillocks, brakes obscure and rough,
To shelter thee from tempest, and from rain:
Then be my deer, since I am such a park;
No dog shall rouse thee, though a thousand bark.

Here is a cluster of Elizabethan conceits growing into a crude sex imagery: Venus the Park for Adonais, the deer. It is astonishing the way Shakespeare outgrows all this and becomes the master of metaphor, which Aristotle describes as a mark of genius. But *Venus and Adonais* is interesting for another reason also—the boy theme in Shakespeare. There are boys and boys in his dramatic world. Romeo and Orlando and Florizel and Ferdinand and a host of them. Some boys like Fool in *King Lear* or Lucius in *Julius Caesar* steal our hearts away in a way that we miss them all along once they get lost. Both Fool and Lucius follow their masters like their shadows through the fiery ordeals of life. And abruptly they fade out. Fool, who follows the mad king through the most violent moral and physical storms, breaks down and with his last utterance “I shall go to bed at noon” vanishes, hinting, perhaps, that he is dying in the prime of youth. And we miss him thereafter. But look at Lucius, Brutus’s page. During the stormy night preceding the assassination of Caesar, he is busy letting in and letting out the conspirators who haunt Brutus’s Orchard with muffled faces and hidden daggers. And then the next day he is simply to keep company to Portia, mentally deranged under the heavy burden of unbearable secret and suspense. When Portia wants him to run to the senate house he is simply dazed;
Madam, what should I do?
Run to the Capitol, and nothing else?
And to return to you and nothing else?

And like Fool following King Lear, he follows Brutus in his tragic wanderings after Antony turns the tables on the murderers of Caesar. Portia is dead. Brutus's quarrel with Cassius has just ended. And he is haunted by the spirit of Caesar. Here is that tender scene:

Brutus: Look Lucius, here's the book I sought for so;
I put it in the pocket of my gown.

Lucius: I was sure your lordship did not give it me.

Brutus: Bear with me, good boy, I am much forgetful.
Canst thou hold up thy heavy eyes awhile,
And touch thy instrument a strain or two?
It will not hold thee long. If I do live,
I will be good to thee.
(Music and song. Lucius falls asleep)
This is sleepv tune, O murd'rous slumber
Layest thou thy leaden mace upon my boy
That plays thee music? Gentle knave
Good night. I'll take it from thee and good boy, good night.

Meanwhile the Ghost of Caesar enters. Brutus is upset:

Brutus: How ill this taper burns! Ha, who comes here?

And finally he cries:
Boy, Lucius! Varro! Claudius! Son awake.

And soon Lucius wakes up:
Lucius: The strings, my lord, are false.

Brutus: He thinks he is still at his instrument!

But then Lucius disappears. And we miss him so much that we feel like going out in search of him. Thus going out in search of the vanishing characters in Shakespeare could be quite an absorbing approach. One could explain the vanishing of Fool who might have been played by the actor playing Cordelia. But Lucius? Is vanishing a mode of dying?
But to return to the boy theme, which might smack of even Shakespeare’s homosexuality, particularly with reference to the male lover of the Sonnets, is quite intriguing. Many a Shakespearean protagonist is boyish. King Lear is boyish in his fondness for the display of affection, in his plan to divide the kingdom as a reward for it, in his pugnacity and obstinacy, in his clinging to the straws of waning power. Shylock, asking his daughter to shut the ears of his house—the windows—against music, or sharpening his knife on the shoe-soles to cut off a pound of flesh from near Antonio’s heart and weigh it in the scales dangling in his hand is naive and peevish. So is Coriolanus who succumbs to his mother’s entreaty and loses a game. And so is also Hamlet who makes a mess of things partly because of his immaturity and lack of adult wisdom. Beneath all their magnificence, splendour or prowess a large number of Shakespearean heroes are either boys or have an extended, almost endless adolescence. Exploration of the boy theme from *Venus and Adonis* down to *The Tempest* and *The Winter’s Tale* is quite a rewarding experience, particularly when we see that “the old fools are babes again”.

Let us turn to the plays, for the play is the thing. It is said, Shakespeare’s plays were not meant for reading, they were meant for acting. But surely we do not commit any heresy by reading Shakespeare by the fireside instead of watching it on the stage as helplessly as the Greek chorus. The play on the stage does spring to life, and ignorance of the theatrical context must prove quite a handicap. But then the book of plays is also an excellent mechanism. We are there the masters. We control that world of the pocket theatre from where the play is projected on the stage of imagination in the theatre of our mind. Here we control the show. We can push it forward or backward, we can play it over and over again, we can bring it to a stand-still and make the pageant static for our scrutiny. We can let a phrase or a word echo and re-echo as long as we want. And how can we ignore the patent fact that even the players in Shakespeare’s Globe first read the play and
then acted. Hence we can as well approach Shakespeare in our study, though we would fain go to the theatre.

In our approach to Shakespeare, beginning with those early plays when Shakespeare started his career by revising the scripts of other playwrights to the astonishing flowering of his dramatic genius, we are simply struck with the range and variety of Shakespeare's characters large enough in number to populate a big municipal town: a breathtaking pageant of humanity. As Walter Raleigh puts it:

To judge Shakespeare, it is necessary to include his thought in ours, and the mind instinctively recoils from the audacity of the attempt. On his characters we pass judgement freely; as we grow familiar with them, we seem to belong to their world and to be ourselves the pawns, if not the creatures of Shakespeare's genius. We are well content to share in this dream-life, which is so marvellously vital, so like the real world as we know it, and we are unwilling to be awakened. How should the dream judge the dreamer? By what insolent device can we raise ourselves to a point outside the orbed continent of Shakespeare's life-giving imagination? How shall we speak of his character, when the very trails of that character are themselves men and women? (Shakespeare Macmillan E. M. L. Series).

Shakespeare breathed life in his characters with a conviction that "there is something good even at the heart of things evil". He created an artistic microcosm of the vast macrocosm and peopled it with men and women, old and young, rich and poor, happy and unhappy, brilliant and dull, superstitious and cynical, good and wicked. He created all of them with love. Like God, Shakespeare does not hate. His boundless sympathy like the universal sunshine wraps all of them. With an x-ray eye as it were, he explores the hidden labyrinth of human head and heart and goes to the very root of human behaviour. The result is, even the murderers like Richard III or Macbeth, the villains like Iago or Iachimo and the libertines like Falstaff, too, do not stray
away from the pale of our understanding and sympathy. The classic example is Shylock of *The Merchant of Venice*. True, the play was written during an unsettled hour in the history of England when there broke up Jew-baiting because one Jew, Dr. Lopez was involved in a conspiracy against the life of Queen Elizabeth. Now Shakespeare, the Elizabethan, set out to write a play where the Jew had to be darker than deep hell could contain. And you have the harrowing story of a heartless Jew, hungry for a pound of flesh from near a young Christian’s heart. Shakespeare tried to have his digs at Shylock—a queer, comic, abominable character; one who identified life with money bags—a callous rascal. It was the artist who had to write the play, not the Elizabethan Christian, Shylock was also a dream-child of Shakspeare’s. Shylock had started walking under the rainbow colours of his master’s imagination. And lo: Shylock grew—grew into a tragic hero who for a while stifled all your laughter. The trial is over. The Christian ideal of the quality of mercy has proved hollow. If Shylock attempted—unavailingy—a physical murder of an antagonist in a starkly hostile world, the Christians robbed him and finally by stripping him off his religious faith committed his moral and spiritual murder. We are confronted with a strange hierarchy of values: and the words of Shylock re-echo in our ears:

I am a jew, Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die?

( *The Merchant of Venice* )

And here is the rub. Shylock almost turned the tables. Shylock’s humanity burst forth from beneath his heartless savagery. And we find Shakespeare spinning the coin—showing both the sides. Shakespeare never lets us forget that all these characters are...
flesh out of our flesh; they are human beings. Now we often talk of Shakespeare's wonderful blending of humour and pathos but cannot fully grasp it on the printed page. You must go to the theatre for which Shakespeare wrote. When I saw The Merchant of Venice at Manchester, I for the first time experienced what it meant. In the theatre tensions mount up steadily and intensely leading to the crisis of the trial scene. It is only when the clouds roll away, and Antonio's life is saved that we heave a sigh of relief. As the play moves on to Belmont after Portia's frivolous pleasantry, we say, thank God, it is all over. It is at Belmont where moonlight sleeps on the shore when Portia reflects on how a little candle throws its beam like a good deed in this dark world that we experience relief too deep for tears. One really feels choked in transit from Venice to Belmont. The fullest response to Shakespeare is not possible on the printed page, it is always in the theatre. Alternatively, the reader must enact the play on the mental stage and watch it perform through his mind's eye.

This sympathy is Shakespeare's touch-stone. In Shakespeare's earlier plays, in which the protagonists tend to be conventional stage-types, the minor characters are more real for they are Shakespeare's invention e. g. Bottom in A Midsummer Night's Dream or Nurse in Romeo and Juliet. But as Shakespeare progresses, these characters become more and more real. The increase of his creative power is visible not only in the larger number of living characters but also in their greater depth and complexity and we have characters like Iago and Hamlet. All these characters come to be known to us as people in real life; mirrored in the eyes of other characters as well as through their deeds and words. If you have on one hand Prince Hamlet who believes "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hewn them how we will" and sees "a special providence in the fall of a sparrow" or Julius Caesar "who has, of late, grown superstitious" you have on the other hand, Cassius trying to hoodwink Brutus:

The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves that we are underlings
or Edmund, who can so confidently mock at human superstitions. While Gloucester laments: “These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us” Edmund at once laughs at him the moment he turns his back:

This is the excellent foppery of the world, that when we are sick in fortune—often the surfeit of our own behaviour—we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon and the stars: as if we were villains by necessity; fools by heavenly compulsion, knaves, thieves and treachers by spherical predominance...to lay his goatish disposition to the charge of a star:

(King Lear)

Against a pair of virtuous man and woman—Othello and Desdemona—Iago can stand up with a cynical belief that “Virtue is a fig!” If Hamlet wavers and vacillates, Fortinbras and Laertes can act without delay or hesitation. The study of Shakespeare’s characters gives us not merely the cross-section of humanity, but a vast and varied pageant of humanity brimming with amazing incompatibility and ambivalence, strength and tenderness, success and failure, gaiety and grief. It would surely be an error to isolate any phrase or statement and attribute it to Shakespeare. There can be no greater futility than to endeavour to build up Shakespeare’s philosophy of life based on his plays. When he took the whole life without frontiers for his province, how can there be a Shakespearean philosophy? Here is no book: who touches the book, touches man.

Equally marvellous is Shakespeare’s symbolical economy. Hamlet of all plays traces quite effectively moral decay that ultimately leaves the state of Denmark quite rotten. Faith is betrayed, friendship fails, love cools down. Hamlet abuses Polonius as a fishmonger and goes off at a tangent:

Hamlet: For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a good kissing carrion—Have you a daughter?

Hamlet suggests that the corruption of this world is so great as to pervert even divine influences. The sun that is the source...
of light and life, of food and flowers breeds maggots when it kisses a carcass! What a profound moral vision!

Equally interesting is the imagery in Shakespeare: e.g. take Romeo and Juliet. It is not entirely a true story. It is largely a fiction invented by some Italian writers with a strong didactic purpose of cautioning the reckless youth against the perils of midsummer madness. But in the green world of Shakespeare's imagination the fiction got a gloss of reality and the illusion appeared to be real. The imaginary characters, the artist's dream-children, at once sprang to life and became the nurslings of immortality. And we have a lyric tragedy of youth echoing the still, sad music of humanity. With immense concern, we follow the tragic destiny of the pair of star-crossed lovers who vanish untimely beyond the horizon of life, craving for love and beauty and joy. Now Romeo and Juliet is replete with images of light, the flash of brilliant light revealed in darkness, the candle light, torches, of bright or evil stars.

To Juliet, the sudden awakening of the fountain of love is rather baffling:

It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden,
Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be
Ere one can say, it lightens.

Friar Lawrence pulls up Romeo for staying with Juliet at night.

These violent delights have violent ends,
And in the triumph die, like fire and powder,
Which, as they kiss consume...

Romeo, who is a fortune's fool, does revolt against the stars as he gazes at the vast canopy of the sky: He is by the side of his Juliet, lying dead:

O! here
Will I set up my everlasting rest,
And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars

But Juliet's Romeo is brighter than the stars

Juliet: Give me my Romeo: and, when he shall die,
Take him 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.

Thus *Romeo and Juliet* has abounding star-imagery that brightens the tragic significance of the play.

*Macbeth* is eminetly a play of crime and punishment involving a series of murders. A. C. Bradley has done a brilliant analysis of the images of night and darkness in the play, focussing the effects of the colours particularly black and red. Here we have the darkness and night, black night broken by flashes of light and colour, the red colour of blood. 'You see blood splashed all through the play. Macbeth finds clots of blood sticking to the dagger which he sees hanging in the air before Duncan's murder : blood on his own hands'.

What hands are here? Ha! they pluck out mine eyes,
Will all great Neptune's Ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnandine,
Making the green one red.

Here is a terrific image of the green ocean turning red with blood. To Lady Macbeth blood is a means of making others scapegoats of her crime:

If he do bleed
I'll gild the faces of the groom withal
For it must seem their guilt:

To her the blood upon her husband's hands is a matter of taunt:

My hands are of your colour, but I shame
To wear a heart so white.

Turning to Macbeth, the murderer, who is redeemed by his imagination and the poetry that sits on his lips, we find in his utterances innumerable images conveying profound vision and meaning. When he is told that the Queen is dead, his spontaneous reaction is: "She should have died hereafter". But with a spurt he is lost in a complex, universal speculation
of Time and Life and Death embodied in a cosmic vision under the stress of love and death. If we have in front of us an endless line of tomorrows—Tomorrow, and tomorrow—growing dimmer and dimmer in the far off distance, all our yesterdays push us on to dusty death. A candle that burns briefly, a walking shadow, a poor actor who struts and frets for an hour upon the stage and above all a meaningless tale told by an idiot are the images of life. Talking of Shakespeare's use of light and darkness, we think of Bradley's brilliant examination of the setting of *Macbeth*, assuming sustained symbolical significance. In *Othello* light and darkness are exploited for symbolical as well as dramatic purposes. Right in the Opening Scene when Roderigo and Iago awaken Brabantio from sleep to inform him of Desdemona's missing, and thus raise the problem of Othello-Desdemona affair, the question of colour-bar is at once symbolised:

Strike on the finder, ho!
Give me a taper! call up all my people!

... ... ... ... ... ...
Light I say! light!

Light here is Desdemona and darkness Othello. This symbolical strain runs all through: Let us turn to Act V, Sc. ii, the bedchamber scene opening with Othello's troubled soliloquy.

It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul—
Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars—
It is the cause.

The stars are bright and chaste not so Desdemona with her 'dark deed'! But he cannot bear light:

Put out the light, and then put out the light...
... ... ... but once put out thy light,
Thou cunning'st pattern of excelling nature,
I know not where is that Promethean heat
That can thy light relume.

... ... ...
[kissing her.

Now beneath the surface symbolism of light and darkness don't we have here the recurrence of the colour-bar symbolism?
Othello, who probably sniffs off the candle flame with his palms does unconsciously rehearse snifing off the life-flame of the white Desdemona, to lapse into the dark world, in darkness finding compatibility of not merely his deed but his complexion also. Light stands for the fair European girl, darkness for the black moor which has lost all its meaning. Thus a short soliloquy reveals Othello's sense of utter frustration and futility: Images in Shakespeare are not embellishments superadded. They grow like leaves on a tree and thus are an integral part of the plays. Shakespearean imagery has always a profound poetic meaning and it serves as an excellent clue to the understanding of themes and characters besides heightening dramatic significance. Let us juxtapose two moments, one from *Hamlet* and another from *Antony and Cleopatra*:

The Prince of Denmark is certainly not naive. He can easily read through the deeds of man although would fain put a mask of madness. He disdains Polonius and ridicules his gentle art of flattery:

*Hamlet*: Do you see yonder cloud that's almost in shape of a camel?

*Polonius*: By the mass, and 'tis like a camel indeed.

*Hamlet*: Methinks it is like a weasel.

*Pol*: It is back'd like a weasel.

*Ham*: Or like a whale.

*Pol*: Very like a whale.

*Ham*: (Aside) They fool me to the top of my bent ...

(Act III, Sc. iii)

And here is Antony, who does not care even if Rome in the Tiber melts and the arch of the empire falls, for compared to his love for Cleopatra, kingdoms are clay. After his disgraceful retreat from the Battle of Actium he is down with terrible depression and in that mood, like Hamlet, gazes at the sky.

*Antony*: Sometime we see a cloud that's dragonish,
A Vapour sometime like a bear or lion,
A tower'd citadel, a pendent rock,
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A forked mountain, or blue promontory
With trees upon't that nod unto the world
And mock our eyes with air. Thou hast seen
these signs,
They are black vesper's pageants.

Eros: Ay, my lord.

Antony: That which is now a horse, even with a thought
The rack dislimns and makes it indistinct
As water is in water.

Eros: It does my Lord.

Antony: My good knave Eros, now thy captain is
Even such a body.

(Act IV, Sc. xiv)

Now both Hamlet and Antony are passing through the most
critical moments of their life; and in that mood they turn their
eyes skyward only to let their fancy run riot at the sight of
the ephemeral welkin pageant. And yet how both of them react
differently, though profoundly? Thus the study of Shakespearian
imagery is a very rewarding experience.

So is the thematic study that takes us to the very heart of
the plays. If in the History plays we watch almost an endless
scramble for power, in the Comedies love conquers all. His
Tragedies lay bare the most unfathomable depths of human
suffering whereas the Last Plays explore the different planes of
reality. Thematically Shakespearian drama covers the vast
terrains of human life and the whole gamut of human emo-
tions. Take, for instance, the crisis in parent-child relationship
which is so predominant in Shakespeare. In The Merchant of
Venice, Hamlet, King Lear and Cymbeline, to take only a few
illustrative plays, we have this theme handled with a remarkable
diversity.

In The Merchant of Venice, Jessica revolts against her father
Shylock and elopes with a Christian. But this crisis is not at
all highlighted in the play. On the contrary this pair of lovers
accentuates the harmony and order that pervade Belmont. After the stress and strain of the Trial are over, Shakespeare takes us to the lovers who are enjoying their well-earned honey-moon.

Lorenzo: How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank! Here we sit and let the sounds of music creep in our ears.

Sit, Jessica...
There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st But in his motion Like an angel sings...
Such harmony is in immortal souls, But whilst this muddy vesture of decay Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.

Jessica: I am never merry when I hear sweet music.

(Act V Sc. i)

She is moved to sadness by music which has perhaps stirred her filial feeling! If in Hamlet the crisis between the Prince and his mother results in some of the most tormenting scenes, we are not for a moment allowed to forget Gertrude the mother at whose sinful heart there rolls the boundless sea of filial love that redeems all her sins. Hardly has ever a mother been more abused by her child than Gertrude by Hamlet. But she still loves him. When Ophelia drowns herself, she laments at her grave. Here is a very tender and moving moment:

Queen: Sweets to the sweet; farewell!
(scattering flowers)
I hop'd thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife;
I thought thy bride-bed to have deck'd, sweet maid,
And not have strew'd thy grave

(Act V Sc. i)

Ophelia is dearest to her, for she is her son's sweet-heart, no matter how much he might torture her. Nor can we forget the final scene, when through the thick of a duel, with profound concern and love, she prays for Hamlet's safety, and tenderly wipes sweat from over Hamlet's face.
King Lear is a great spiritual tragedy with the theme of crisis in parent-child relationship at the centre. The old King, who banishes the grateful daughter and loves to be hoodwinked by his ungrateful daughters, is at last driven out in a stormy night to wander as a beggar. The commotion in nature signifies the upheaval in the moral world, and Lear invokes the elements of nature to do their worst. But wandering on the heath, the mad king collapses and falls on the ground. His grateful daughter Cordelia returns and finds her father, whom she left on the throne, here with a crown of thorns on his head and unconsciously bleeding. With gentle music Lear is brought back to consciousness.

Cordelia: How does my royal lord? How fares your majesty?

Lear had forgotten that he was king of England. He had now become a tragic representative of suffering humanity. The play, which has in a remote way and to an extent a bit of the pattern of Divine Comedy, has already put the old King through inferno, which is life to which he is reluctant to return.

Lear: You do me wrong to take me out o’ the grave,
Thou art a soul in bliss, but I am bound
Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
Do scald like molten lead.

Cordelia: Sir, do you know me?

Lear’s eyes are full of tears, his heart loaded with anguish. He knows, he is not in perfect mind. Here is a sight too good to be true, a child too grateful to be alive.

Lear: Your are a spirit, I know.......
Do not laugh at me
For, as I am a man, I think this lady
To be my child Cordelia.

Cordelia: And so I am, so I am.

(Act IV Sc. vii)

We have a sight so very touching. Now the father and the daughter are reconciled, and even when captured, the king
looks forward to singing like two birds in a cage. Alas, this moment is only short-lived and we have a heart-rending tragedy ending in the hanging of Cordelia and the death of her father whose heart is broken to pieces!

It might seem rather preposterous, if anyone attempted to examine moral fervour in the plays of Shakespeare who could not be in the least didactic. But the moral pattern is remarkably embodied in almost every play of his. If it becomes conspicuous in his rejection of Falstaff, the Tragedies have an unmistakable moral significance when the playwright sets out to examine the problem of the universal conflict between the forces of good and evil. Shakespeare’s tragic vision is essentially moral, so is his comic view.

Tragic vision is at bottom moral vision. Beneath apparent destruction and even death there always emerges a pattern of moral and spiritual victory of good over evil. Never once is evil allowed to have an upperhand no matter how very devastating it is. Shakespeare often embodies this moral view in densely packed metaphors with utmost economy. In *Hamlet* the state of Denmark has become rotten and things are thrown out of joint. Hamlet is bewildered to see how under the influence of evil good decays, and we have a telling metaphor as Hamlet confronts Polonius. As noted earlier the sun that is the source of light and life, and gives us food and flowers breeds maggots in a rotten carcass! How dangerous could be bad company!

*Measure for Measure* unfolds the moral wasteland of Verona where power degenerates into tyranny under a mask of hypocrisy. Isabella pulls up Angelo for this abuse of power in a most telling imagery:

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... but man, proud man,
Drest in a little brief authority,
Most ignorant of what he is most assured—
His glassy essence — like an angry ape,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
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As make the angels weep . . . who with our spleens
Would all themselves laugh mortal.

Shakespeare's vision of life is cosmic. It is tragic as well as comic and more often than not, the playwright laments to see what man has made of man.

Shakespeare's plays, like life, constitute a dome of many coloured glass through which we see the radiance of eternity. How many masks, how many faces does life present? Shakespeare also presents so many.