

English Language Notes

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On the meaning of "enciel'd"
in **Measure for Measure**.

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ON THE MEANING OF "ENCIEL'D" IN
MEASURE FOR MEASURE



Isab. That I do beg his life, if it be sinne
Heauen let me beare it: you granting of my suit,
If that be sin, Ile make it my Morne-praier,
To haue it added to the faults of mine,
And nothing of your answere.

Ang. Nay, but heare me,
Your sense pursues not mine: either you are ignorant,
Or seeme so crafty; and that's not good.

Isab. Let be ignorant, and in nothing good,
But graciously to know I am no better.

Ang. Thus wisdome wishes to appeare most bright,
When it doth taxe itselfe: As these blacke Masques
Proclaime an en-shield beauty ten times louder
Then beauty could displaid: But marke me.
To be receiued plaine, Ile speake more grosse:
Your Brother is to dye.

Verse 80, in Act II, Scene iv of *Measure for Measure*, as reproduced in the First Folio edition, runs: "Proclaime an en-shield beauty ten times louder."¹ A good number of editions of *Measure for Measure* accept the original transcript *en-shield* with a slight emendation: the removal of the hyphen. Thus *enshield* becomes one of the numerous examples of Shakespearian formations with prefix *en-*²

While some outdated editions, e.g. the 1863 Macmillan edition of Shakespeare's complete works³ or the Everyman's Library 1906 edition of the comedies,⁴ refrain from glossing the word, most modern editions give it the meaning of "protected, covered, shielded":⁵ the Signet Classic Shakespeare and the Oxford edition of *The Complete Works* classify it as a past participle, with the meaning of "concealed," "emblazoned";⁶ the New Penguin Shakespeare gives it the meaning of "shielded, defended";⁷ the *Riverside Shakespeare* glosses it as "enshielded, shielded from view."⁸ It is therefore quite obvious that in these cases *enshield* is treated as one of those past participles where *-ed* is omitted after *d* or *t*, mainly for euphonic reasons.⁹

However, the First Folio transcript is not universally accepted as the definite one. Quiller-Couch and Dover Wilson maintain that II.iv.80 is actually a corrupt or emended verse and therefore suggest that the word should read *enshelled*, thus becoming a clear reference to Ben Jonson's *Masque of*

Blackness, which was given at Court on January 5th, 1605.¹⁰ The regular form of the past participle, *enshielded*, is another variant, suggested by Kittredge.¹¹ To my knowledge, however, the most audacious emendment to date is the one suggested by J. W. Lever, i.e. *enciel'd* for *en-shield*.¹² This emendment only alters the transcript of the word since Lever does not in any way depart from the acknowledged meaning, which he gives as "[shaded] as with a canopy or screen."¹³

Phonological evidence justifies Lever's choice. The transition from Middle English to Modern English gave rise to a certain instability in the pronunciation of the sound [s], which was even more frequent in words adopted from the French or Latin languages. A French loan word *ciel* < Lat. *caelum* could well have been pronounced [si:1] or [zi:1]. The general instability of the sound could have induced Shakespeare to write *shield*, with [ʃ] for [s] or [z]. In such a case, he would just be following the widespread dialectal tendency to pronounce [ʃ] for [s].¹⁴

The verb *enciel/enceil* is not recorded in dictionaries. This is quite understandable since the verb is of Shakespearian coinage and obsolete in current English. One must therefore refer to the verb *ciel* or *ceil*. *Ciel* was already recorded as a noun in the early 15th century, with the meaning of "canopy."¹⁵ In his *Etymological Dictionary*, Ernest Klein records *ceil* as a verb and refers the reader to the French *ciel* and Latin *caelum*.¹⁶ *The New English Dictionary* (later to become the OED) records various uses of the verb *ceil/ciel*, all connected, however, with the meaning "covered": (a) "to furnish with a canopy, hangings, or a screen"; (b) "to cover with a lining of woodwork, [. . .]; to wainscot. [. . .] To overlay"; (c) "to line the roof of, provide or construct an inner roof for [. . .]; usually, to plaster the roof"; (d) "to line (a ship, or a compartment in a ship)." The derivation of the verb is considered to be doubtful, but the NED suggests three sources: (a) Latin *celare*, French *celer*: to hide; (b) Latin *caelare*: to carve, engrave in relief; (c) Latin *caelum*: sky, vault of heaven.¹⁷ Finally, in the *Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, s.v. CEIL, CIEL, "[t]he verb to *ciel*, *seile*, or *syle* is closely connected with the sbs. *celure* or *selure*, and *syle* or *cyll*, a canopy [. . .]. The verb to *syle* meant to canopy, to hang with canopies, [. . .]." However, while *caelum* and *caelare* are considered to have influenced the English word, "the other words are not at all to be considered."¹⁸ The common feature in all dictionaries consulted is the association of *ciel/ceil* with *caelum*. It is here my intention to suggest a dif-

ferent meaning for *enciel'd*, based on *caelum* and its Italian derivative *incielare*, which should further justify Lever's choice of transcript.

The transitive verb *incielare*, which derives from the substantive *cielo*, is recorded in Italian literary language with the meaning of "to place in heaven."¹⁹ The *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, in the note written by V. Valente on the verb *incielare*, points out that the verb does not only denote location, but also expresses the idea of heavenly beatitude: "Neologismo dantesco usato solo in *Pd* III 97 *Perfetta vita e altro merito inciela/donna più sù*. Appartiene alla serie dei verbi parasintetici con prefisso *in-*. Simile anche per il senso a '(i)mparadisare' (v.), è spiegato dall'Ottimo 'levò in cielo.' Non c'è solo l'idea di luogo, ma pur quella connessa di più alta beatitudine [. . .]."²⁰ This definition is confirmed in S. Battaglia's *Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana*: "INCIELARE (*incelare*), tr. (*incièlo*). Letter. Collocare, porre in cielo; innalzare alla beatitudine celeste.—Anche assol."²¹

Battaglia also lists various instances where *incielare* appears in Italian literature. Taking for granted that most of the literary works listed prior to the date of composition of *Measure for Measure* were completely unknown to Shakespeare,²² and that probably even Dante was not well known to him,²³ it is quite possible that the Bard of Stratford did read these lines in Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme Conquistata*, XX, 97 ("Matilde ancor si vela / di casta luce, e fra gli eroi s'inciela [. . .]"). Consequently, *enciel'd* could be an offshoot of Tasso's use of the verb *s'inciela*.²⁴

In this case, then, Shakespeare's *enciel'd* would be modelled on *incielato*, *-a*, and would have the dual meaning of "placed in heaven" and "heavenly," thus echoing Lucio's definition of Isabella in Liv.34 "as a thing enskied and sainted." From a semantic point of view, Shakespeare would be economizing by expressing two *signifiés* through the use of one *signifiant*; from a morphological point of view, the coinage of *enciel'd* would be an exact reproduction of *enskied* (prefix *en-* + *signifiant* for *caelum* + past participle ending); from a stylistic point of view, the Anglo-Saxon form *enskied*, being more typical of everyday language, is said by the *Fantastic*, Lucio, while the Latinate form *enciel'd*, more suited to high sounding and formal registers, is uttered by the Duke's deputy, Angelo.

Moreover, the "heavenly" meaning attributed to *enciel'd* is further highlighted by the immediate dramatic context of Angelo's speech, which reproduces the transcendental aura

that invests Isabella in the three lines of Lucio's speech immediately following his definition of the heroine "as a thing enskied and sainted." In fact, while Lucio's insistence on Isabella's "heavenly" attribute is conveyed through the image of "immortality" ("immortal spirit," I.iv.35) and "holiness" ("saint," I.iv.37), Angelo's definition of Isabella as an *enciel'd beauty* is preceded by an impressive crescendo of "heavenly" imagery: the 80 lines in Act II, Scene iv that precede the Duke's definition contain no less than seven references to the word "heaven" or its derivatives!²⁵ The stylistic parallelism between the two scenes is further strengthened by a structural parallelism: in both cases it is two non-virtuous men—the self-proclaimed "play[er] with [. . .] virgins" Lucio and the seemingly dignified, but equally wretched, Angelo—who proclaim Isabella an "enskiel'd/enciel'd" being, and keep on harping on her "heavenly" qualities!

The meaning "heavenly" for *enciel'd*, rather than "protected, covered, shielded," would not only fit in well with the "chaste virgin" theme of *Measure for Measure*, but would further enhance Isabella's image as a "thing enskied and sainted," thus placing her on the same level as Shakespeare's other heavenly beauties, who closely resemble the "donna-angelo" of the Italian *stilnovismo*.²⁶

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NOTES

¹ Cf. Charlton Hinman, ed. *The First Folio of Shakespeare: The Norton Facsimile* (New York, 1968) 87.

² On the use of *en-* as prefix, cf. E. A. Abbott, *A Shakespearian Grammar* (New York, 1966) 323.

³ William George Clark and John Glover, eds. *The Works of William Shakespeare*, v. I (Cambridge, 1863).

⁴ W. Shakespeare, *Comedies*, ed. by Ernest Rhys (London, 1906).

⁵ Cf. J. Foster, *A Shakespeare Word-Book* (London, 1908), s.v. ENSHIELD.

⁶ Cf., respectively, W. Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, ed. S. Nagarajan (New York, 1964) 73 and W. Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, general ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor; *Measure for Measure*, J. Jowett, ed. (Oxford, 1986) 1418.

⁷ W. Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, ed. J. M. Nosworthy (Hammondsworth, 1969) 164.

⁸ G. Blakemore Evans, ed. *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston, 1974) 563.

⁹ On this omission cf. Abbott 242-244 and C. T. Onions, *A Shakespeare Glossary* (Oxford, 1953) 70.

¹⁰ W. Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, Arthur Quiller-Couch and John Dover Wilson, eds. (Cambridge, 1922) 101-102; 133.

¹¹ On this, and other variants, cf. W. Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, J. W. Lever, ed. (London, 1965) 58n and *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare, Measure for Measure*, Mark Eccles, ed. (New York, 1980) 284.

¹² Lever 58.

¹³ Lever 59.

¹⁴ On the pronunciation [z]/[s] and on the dialectal change [s] to [ʃ], cf. E. J. Dobson, *English Pronunciation 1500-1700*, v. II (Oxford, 1957) 927-931; 947.

¹⁵ Cf. H. Kurath, S. M. Kuhn, *Middle English Dictionary* (Ann Arbor, 1959), s.v. *ciel*.

¹⁶ E. Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, v. I (Amsterdam, 1966) 255: "CIEL, tr. v., to overlay, cover. —F. *ciel*, "sky, canopy," fr. L. *caelum*, "sky." See CELESTIAL."

¹⁷ Cf. James A. H. Murray, ed. *A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, v. III (Oxford, 1893), s.v. CEIL, CIEL. s.v. CIEL (415), the NED also records a 1627 variant: "CIEL, var. of SEEL, v. to sew up, blind. 1627 FELTHAM *Resolves* I. XXVI. Wks. (1677) 46. Their souls have ceiled eyes, than can see nothing but perfection in their own labors."

¹⁸ Cf. W. W. Skeat, *An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (1879-1882; rpt. Oxford, 1958), s.v. CEIL, CIEL.

¹⁹ Cf., s.v. INCIELARE, C. Battisti, G. Alessio, *Dizionario Etimologico Italiano*, v. III (Firenze, 1952) and G. Devoto, *Avviamento alla Etimologia Italiana. Dizionario Etimologico* (Firenze, 1968).

²⁰ Umberto Bosco, gen. ed. *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, v. III (Roma, 1971), s.v. *incielare*. The corresponding English translation goes: "A neologism coined by Dante and used only in *Paradiso* III 97 *Perfetta vita e altro merito incielà / donna più sù*. Belongs to the series of parasynthetic verbs with prefix *in-*. Similar, also in meaning, to '(i)mparadisare' (verb), it is explained by l'Ottimo, who specifies: 'levò in cielo' ['raised to the sky']. It does not only convey the idea of location, but also that of a higher degree of beatitude [...]."

²¹ S. Battaglia, *Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana*, v. VII (Torino, 1972), s.v. INCIELARE. In English, the explanation would read: "INCIELARE (*incelare*), transitive (*incielo*)—Literary term. Place, put in the sky; raise to celestial beatitude.—can even be of absolute use."

²² E.g. the *Laude Cortonesi*, which were written around 1260; the *Commento sopra la Divina Commedia*, written by Francesco di Bartolo da Buti (c. 1324-1406); and *Le relazioni universali*, part V, written by Giovanni Botero (1544-1617).

²³ Cf. J. E. Ruoff, *Handbook of Elizabethan and Stuart Literature* (London, 1975), s.v. TRANSLATIONS: "[...] Dante was not translated from Italian and thus remained unknown except to scholars [...]."

²⁴ On Tasso's popularity in England, cf. C. P. Brand, *Torquato Tasso*, Part II (Cambridge, 1965).

²⁵ Cf. Act II, Scene iv, vv. 2, 4, 19, 34, 45, 50, 70. In the 105 lines that follow, "heaven" only appears once more.

²⁶ On this theme, cf. J. Vyvyan, *Shakespeare and Platonic Beauty* (London, 1961), esp. the chapter entitled "The Heavenly Beauty."