Introduction: Definition of Benevolence
Benevolence is an expression of kindness and altruism. It means generosity towards others. It is a form of love. But some theologians like Thomas Jay Oord\(^1\), have argued that love is reciprocal. A loving person must, therefore be both benevolent and receive gifts from others. Also, Rob Harle in his article entitled "Was Shakespeare An Existential Wimp?" writes that Benevolent means, "to do good without thought of profit"\(^2\). This implies selflessness in the person concerned. However, he thinks that there is no such thing as pure benevolence. There is always a self-interest involved, though unconscious, behind all human actions. This idea or theory was expounded by Hobbes\(^3\) in *The Leviathan*, and as the discipline of Evolutionary Psychology matures, the idea becomes more compelling. The ideology of Christianity, underpinned by Platonism would argue strongly against it. How would people perform benevolent Christian acts of goodness if they believed there was no reward? The concept of reward goads one now and later as well.

There are questions like, how benevolence operates in the last plays of

\(^3\) [http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl302/texts/hobbes."leviathan-contents.html](http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl302/texts/hobbes."leviathan-contents.html)
Shakespeare, or how benevolent are the parts of body like tongue, mind and hands. Or, how benevolent is human nature? Or, how benevolent are the supernatural powers? And what is the benevolent design? These will be focused upon in the present study. But Shakespeare's best plays have been interpreted by critics in a variety of ways. Interestingly, E. M. W. Tillyard's classic study *Shakespeare's Last Plays* (1938) includes only *Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, and The Tempest*. Tillyard excludes *Pericles* on debatable grounds of authorship and quality saying 'although it is likely that the last three acts are mainly Shakespeare, there is no proof that he handled them seriously enough to justify our basing any elaborate theorizing upon them.\(^4\) Derek Traversi includes *Pericles* but is no less *Tempest*-oriented as he considers the climax of that play important, 'For it at this point, if anywhere, that the pattern of the *Tempest*, and with it the whole design initiated in the history plays and carried through the tragedies to the last symbolic comedies here under consideration, is substantially complete.'\(^5\) He feels that Traversi's book tries to rescue the late romances from an obscurity they no longer suffer. For Traversi, the group of four plays represents a consummation of Shakespeare's interests and a move towards completeness in drama.

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Raphael Lyne\(^6\) goes on to say about the last plays that they cohere because they share generic characteristics. He feels that to some extent one could say that they share a genre or a mode called romance. It was not associated with Shakespeare's plays at that time. In the well known generic division of the first folio edition of Shakespeare (1623), *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale* are comedies, while *Cymbeline* is a tragedy. *Pericles* is not included. Whether *Pericles* is Shakespeare's own work or shared by someone is still not proved. Therefore, keeping aside this controversy one may accept that *Pericles* too is a Shakespearean play.

Moreover, the late plays are not an independent entity in Shakespeare's canon. They, 'are a natural outgrowth of Shakespeare's experience in writing comedy and tragedy'.\(^7\) Northrop Frye in *A Natural Perspective* expresses a similar opinion except that he confines himself to comedy. Also, Allardyce Nicoll wrote in 1960, 'it may be suggested that much of the current interpretation of the romances either imposes on these plays a purpose not in Shakespeare's mind when he wrote them or else, if the interpretation be regarded as valid, indicates a failure on his part to achieve that purpose'.\(^8\) David N. Beauregard in an article entitled *Human

\(^8\) "What do we do with Shakespeare?" *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, 96 (1960): 45
Malevolence and Providence in King Lear\textsuperscript{9} gives an optimistic Christian interpretation, approved by critics like G. Wilson Knight and Roy Battenhouse, who emphasize the concept of redemption that suffering leads to growth, self-knowledge, patience, humility and love. Ivor Morris, like Granville-Barker and Bradley, believes that Lear achieved renunciation when he recognized the bond of love:

Should we not be at least near the truth if we called this poem The Redemption of King Lear, and declared that the business of 'the gods' with him was neither to torment him, nor to teach him a 'noble anger', but to lead him to attain through apparently hopeless failure the very end and aim of life?\textsuperscript{10}

The article raises the issue of Cordelia and Lear's death. What it says is that at the end of the play Cordelia is hanged and Lear dies in a state of delusion and hence deserves some sort of redemption. Nahum Tate and Samuel Johnson also find the play's ending a violation of poetic justice and a lapse of rationality that seemingly justified rewriting the final scene. What one concludes from the article is that the foundation of faith seems shattered in the tragedies. King Lear is just one example. Lear calls the gods again and again but they do not respond. He dies. His daughter Cordelia also dies. There is sin and suffering but no redemption, no reconciliation and resurrection, though critics like G. Wilson Knight and Roy

\textsuperscript{10}Ibid
Battenhouse believe that the play moves towards redemption at the end. All in all, in the last plays the foundation of faith appears protected. Almost all the benevolent characters are redeemed, resurrected and reconciled to their families. Hence in accordance with the article, 'If we turn to various well-known Christian theological sources, it is apparent that divine beings are spiritual and invisible, that providence operates through the mediation of virtuous human beings, and, most importantly, that suffering can have value—it can be punishment for sin, it can be perfective, it can be expiatory, it can be redemptive, and it can lead to illumination.'

The article also refers to Thomas Aquinas, saying that God's justice is proportioned, and therefore, Mercy and truth are necessarily found in all God's works, if mercy be taken to mean the removal of all kinds of defects. Further that Justice and mercy appear in the punishment of the just in this world, since by afflictions lesser faults are cleansed, and the just are elevated by closeness to God. Also that God mediates His providence and has intermediaries do it, for He governs things inferior by superior, not on account of any defect in His power, but by reason of His goodness. Thus, the dignity of causality is imparted even to creatures.

*Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*, the last plays of Shakespeare, have certain common distinctive features. There is affinity with the earlier comedies and this helps us see the romances as a natural progression in the

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playwright's development. The last plays mark a change in Shakespeare writing. E.M.W Tillyard sees these plays work out full tragic patterns with the regeneration of a new order as well as the destruction of an old one. According to Tillyard, the romances of Shakespeare, which close the dramatist's career, and which follow the long series of tragedies, complete the pattern of a tragic view of life which the playwright wanted to present. Tragedy depicts, in general, the destruction of an established order, either through the collision of a human beings' will with the forces of destiny or through transgression of laws of nature, which the person either fails to perceive or having perceived fails to observe. But in any case the result is suffering and loss. This, however, is a limited view of the tragic pattern of life because the complete pattern includes some kind of reconciliation, some probability of reconstruction after deconstruction, or at least some recognition of tragic error, whereby a way to renewal of life is promised.

These romances do have serious themes which definitely cast a deep shadow over the lighter, comic aspects of Shakespeare's plays. And despite all darkness and despair, the culmination of each Shakespearean romance is unequivocally happy. Quiller-Couch considers this 'by far the most important point of likeness' between the earlier and later plays. 'They' he says, 'all deal with human reconcilement'.

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13 Shakespeare's First Plays, p.20
14 Quiller-Couch, Workmanship, p.239
Before Quiller-Couch, Dowden also expressed similar views that ‘dissonance must be resolved into a harmony, clear and rapturous, or solemn and profound’\(^\text{15}\). In fact, the earlier critic had seen it as just ‘not a mere stage necessity, or a necessity of composition’, but ‘a moral necessity’\(^\text{16}\). He thus attributed to Shakespeare some higher purpose in writing the romances. It was to show the ordering of a moral world. The heroes and heroines, earlier, controlled their destinies by their actions. The characters in the romances, however, are often at the mercy of gods. It is only divine or other supernatural aid that enables a character to attain harmony at the end.

The other mundane aspects of the romances to which Hoeniger refers to are that not only the younger generation falls and are united but also the older generation actively involve and participate in the process of regeneration, whereas earlier the elders figured only forces of opposition. Hoeniger considers this a ‘peculiar kind of double plot not to be found elsewhere in Shakespeare, and hardly anywhere in Elizabethan drama.’\(^\text{17}\) Here, parents and children are closely interwoven in the structural strand. Thus, the ultimate end of the last plays is benevolence, though, each play, begins with human malevolence, conflict, chaos and disorder. Antioch in *Pericles* is incestuous. Tharsus suffers due to natural calamities. And, in

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\(^{15}\) Dowden, p.403  
\(^{16}\) *Loc. cit.*  
\(^{17}\) Hoeniger p.lxxii
Pentapolis the big fish devours the little ones. Also, one suffers, if he or she cannot beg. Mytilene is reputed for flesh trade, and the governor as well as ordinary citizens attend customer betrothals. And, it is Mytilene who treats Marina as a commodity. Families also share the affliction with which each last play begins. Dear ones are separated though they are finally reunited. Reunion, divine benevolence is not visualized, even as a distinct possibility. Pericles loses his wife to the sea. His daughter too is lost and survives without his knowledge under the care of Cleon and Dionyza. Even the possibility of a meeting is barred by the intrusion of jealousy. Events just spin out of Pericles’ control. Some supernatural power holds sway. Agony heightens when he discovers an epitaph bearing Marina’s name. Pericles’ suffering is memorable. Repentance is the only way out of this predicament. He is firm in his expiation. Thaisa too decides to confine herself to a temple at Ephesus. And even Marina seeks divine help. Then, miracles occur, because due to repentance, expiation and prayer there is divine intervention. The family of Pericles’ is reunited. Cermion plays the role of a divine agent. People responsible for disorder are punished and Order is restored. Harmony and peace prevail over the universe. What is thus dramaturgically transacted is ultimately a perfect benevolent design.

*Cymbeline* re-enacts almost a similar dramaturgic pattern. As it begins, it exhibits malevolent intentions, chaos and conflict. Two sons of the king are kidnapped by a courtier. Imogen, the king’s only daughter rebels and marries Posthumous, a commoner. There is a possibility of war because the king has refused
to pay tribute to the Romans. Cymbeline's queen is a wicked step-mother. Cloten is the evil step-son of the queen by an earlier husband. The queen wants Cloten to become king. Besides these events likely to cause disorder, there is Posthumus' suspicion of his wife Imogen regarding adultery and almost deputing Iachimo, a cynical villain to spy on Imogen to disprove the virgin which she professed to be. Posthumous suffers because of the sin of suspicion, and Imogen due to her dedication. Thereafter, follows repentance and after that divine intervention. The war leads to reunion for Imogen meets her lost prince brothers and so does Cymbeline, the king, his separated daughter and sons. Cloten is killed. Even Iachimo, the cynical Italian regrets and repents. Finally, a benevolent order sets in and peace and harmony are re-established, dramaturgically re-affirming the final design of an ultimately great and grand benevolence.

In *The Winter's Tale* the main emphasis is on the sin of jealousy. Leontes, the jealous king suspects his wife of adultery. Polixenes, a childhood friend is the culprit. The sin of jealousy strikes at the sacred and long cherished friendship. Leontes believes that his wife Herimone and friend Polixenes are lovers. Polixenes escapes being poisoned. In retaliation Hermione is imprisoned. In jail a daughter is born to her. That adds to the complication. Leontes is furious and orders the child, Perdita to be left out in a desert, totally oblivious to a Delphos Oracle forbidding him to do so. Conflict and chaos, malevolent intentions are now at their pinnacle. All the universe gets involved. Leontes' suffering starts. He loses wife, son and
daughter. Mamilus, his son was very dear to him. The sinful and misguided king repents. Hence it seems order will be restored. There is once again divine intervention. Perdita left in the desert was adopted by a shepherd. She was innocent and divinely inspired. At sixteen she meets Florizel, a prince. Leontes' repentance is followed by miracles. The dead Hermione is resurrected. Perdita, Leontes' real daughter is restored to him and he is overjoyed. He is also reconciled with his friend Polixenes. A perfect benevolent design is once more dramaturgically worked out and ends all conflict, chaos and evil.

*The Tempest* also begins with the malevolent acts of two brothers. Prospero commits the sin of negligence. As a result his dukedom is usurped. He is exiled along with his daughter, Miranda. However, he controls the sea with magical power. He gets two helping hands in the guise of Ariel and Caliban, though Caliban tries to kill him and rape his daughter. He suffers for sixteen years by being confined to the island away from his native land in complete isolation from the rest of the world. His suffering and guilt consciousness ultimately open the doors of benevolence. He also indulges in repentance. Finally, he is able to control his enemies with the help of magical and supernatural power and gets back his dukedom. He also gets a son-in-law as reward for his suffering. The sea that was rough earlier is now quiet. It pleases and soothes everybody. Once more order is restored and peace and harmony reflect a perfect benevolent design.
Thus, there is a tug of war between benevolence and malevolence throughout the last plays of Shakespeare. Every character, episode, and dialogue illustrates the idea of benevolence or vice-versa. Supernatural power is both benevolent and malevolent. If Pericles is a malevolent character Antiochus is his opposite. And opposed to benevolent Marina is Antiochus' incestuous daughter. If there is true love of a father in Simonides for his daughter and son-in-law, there is Antiochus who murders his would be son-in-law to continue an incestuous relationship with his daughter. If there is the generosity of Pericles in Tyre there is also the treachery of Cleon and Dionyza. If a tempest kills Thaisa, another one brings Pericles to Myteline to be reunited with his daughter. If the superstitious people float Thaisa's coffin in the sea, an intellectual Cerimon opens the coffin and restores her life. If divinity destroys Antiochus and his daughter, it also reunites two lost souls. If a daughter becomes the cause of the destruction of her father and herself, Marina also is responsible for the revival of herself and her father. There is suffering and also redemption, death is followed by resurrection. Brothel business flourishes like singing, dancing, sewing and cooking. A treacherous servant like Leonine has a counterpart like the truthful Helicanus. There are souls like Antiochus and his daughter, and Marina and her father. However, in this tussle between benevolence and malevolence in the last plays benevolence prevails.

Similarly, there is a tug of war between benevolence and malevolence in *Cymbeline*. If the queen plots against Posthumus, then there is divinity too plotting
against her wicked design. A spoilt son Cloten has a rival in a noble man like Poshtumus Leonatus. If Iachimo exhibits Michaivaillian treachery Imogen is perfectly honest. If Posthumous has callous friends Cymbeline’s Guiderius and Arviragus are sober. Britain and Rome, once at war are now peaceful. Two lovers Posthumus Leonatus and Imogen, are re-united.

The design of benevolence and its opposite are also found in *The Winter’s Tale*. Leontes rages against Hermione in the beginning, but expresses his true love for her at the end. The news of Hermione’s supposed death is followed ultimately by her resurrection. Perdita thrown out into the forest in the beginning is restored to her father at the end. Leonates rages and roars against Paulina and ends up begging, forgiveness and seeking her help. The two friends Polixenes and Leontes turn rivals because of Perdita, are also re-united through her at the end.

The same tussle between benevolence and malevolence is present in *The Tempest*. Antonio plays the role of a malevolent character whereas Prospero is benevolent. Antonio’s wicked design to dethrone his own brother is defeated by Prospero’s magical powers and patient forbearing that assist him to get back the dukedom from his treacherous brother. The savage and uncivilized Caliban, is curbed by a civilized spirit like Ariel. If the lovers are tried and tested they are also formally rewarded.
At the end of each play benevolence prevails over malevolence. Benevolent actions crush evil designs. And, therefore benevolence finally triumphs. In *Pericles*, the malevolent Antiochus and his daughter are destroyed by divinity. Cleon and Dionyza, too meet a similar end. Pericles, Marina and Thaisa, despite heavy suffering are rewarded for their benevolent acts. They seem to suffer for a short while but soon enter into a peaceful abode.

In *Cymbeline* peace to Britain returns with the death of the malevolent queen and her son Cloten. Posthumous Leonatus gets back Imogen after realizing his mistakes. The two fighting armies of Britain and Rome also reconcile on even terms. The king repents and gets back his two sons Guiderius and Arviragus. Another malevolent character Iachimo is forgiven after he realizes his faults which further proves that benevolence has an upper hand.

In *The Winter’s Tale* Leontes realizes his sin in suspecting his innocent wife after the loss of his son Mamillius and supposed death of his wife Hermione. And he turns to gods to seek forgiveness. Hence, he is not only redeemed but the gods are benevolent enough to restore his daughter Perdita. Hermione is resurrected. Leontes and Polixenes become friends and their friendship is further strengthened by the marriage of Florizel and Perdita. The young generation plays a key role in forming the play’s benevolent design.
In *The Tempest* Antonio, a malevolent brother is dethroned and the real duke of Milan, Prospero gets back his dukedom. Prospero uses magic and intellect to obtain his rights. The benign influence of the young generation has a therapeutic effect on everything. For instance Antonio is forgiven. Hence, Hans Urs von Balthasar a Catholic theologian quoted by Edward T. Oakes in his article makes a tall claim: "the real dramatist of forgiveness is and remains Shakespeare." Though there are some ups and downs, like Caliban tries to rape Miranda, and Sebastian and Caliban plot to kill Prospero yet after all the kind dictum of the play supervenes. Music also affects the benevolent design of the play. When Thaisa is resurrected, Cerimon asks for music to be played before *Pericles*. Also, Paulina in *The Winter's Tale* asks for music before the resurrection of Hermione takes place.

Shakespeare was more influenced by the plays written in the Middle Ages at the end of his career and the design of benevolence appears to be the central concern in the religious drama of the Middle ages. In the three medieval dramatic genre — mystery, morality and miracle – the dominant theme is God's benevolence towards the sinful humanity. God's mercy is freely extended to all mankind without exception. To partake of this mercy, sinful man must first accept it as His supreme Benevolence. He must also accept the fact that Christ's suffering shall be the means

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of man's salvation. Faith itself is the decisive factor in man's salvation. In the mystery plays God's justice and His reward and punishment is enacted. The purpose was to persuade men to act virtuously and the method adopted was the dramatization of the hell-fire sermon. However, the moralities had a quite different way of putting things. Sin, as it manifested itself in the human behavior had its impact on his relationship with God. In the mysteries and the moralities man's relationship with God was emphasized. Thus, through the mystery plays the history of creation leading on to the last judgment was shown. On the contrary, the morality plays presented single characters whose relationship to God served to define everyman's relationship to God. The process by which this representative soul attains salvation reflects the salvation of mankind. Man attains salvation because God will forgive him for the offence he is guilty of. The morality play ends necessarily with the forgiveness of an erring hero. Thus, the pattern of sin-repentance-forgiveness constitutes the basic pattern of a medieval morality play. In Shakespeare, the ingredients of these medieval plays were used frequently.

The fundamental concern of medieval drama in England was to dramaturgically portray man's relationship to God. In Elizabethan romance comedy the primary motive was to show man's relationship to man and also man's relationship to woman. In this comedy the sinner was forgiven when he repented. The end, therefore, was peaceful because forgiveness is a fundamental Christian doctrine. Both Luther and Acquinas emphasized it in their own style. Forgiveness
and mercy were considered cardinal virtues. Aggression needed charity to control it. The Elizabethans believed that God created a perfect universe in which absolute harmony prevailed. Satan goaded by pride rebelled against God. Man created in God's image succumbed to temptation, tasting the fruit that was forbidden. This disturbed the universal harmony, and man's disobedience led to his fall and brought about corruption in the divine order of the universe. Christ, through Incarnation and Atonement for man's sins will bring him salvation. God's grace can also save man if he leads a good life and indulge in contemplation and prayers.

E. M. W. Tillyard\(^{19}\) and Robert Grams Hunter\(^{20}\) were of the opinion that the created universe is divided into two parts. The smaller part is the sublunary sphere, the world of time and change, birth, reproduction and decay, life and death or the world of mutability. This earth is at once the centre of the universe and also its lowest and crudest part. It is surrounded by water, and above it, are air and fire. The earth is a form of sphere around which revolve a number of concentric spheres, which form the second and the larger part of the universe. The moon is the dividing line between the world of time and change and the timeless eternal world of the planets and stars. For example, Shakespeare's phrase 'beneath the visiting moon', would lose much of its effect if divorced from this cosmic setting. Above the moon, are Mercury, Venus and the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, and the fixed stars. Next, is


the sphere of Premium Mobile, which is regulated by the highest order of angels, called Seraphs, and which set all the spheres in motion, thereby producing a heavenly music. Each of the spheres is directed by an order of angels or ‘Intelligences’. God himself was believed to reside, attended by hosts of angels, in the ‘empyrean’ which was beyond ‘the fixed stars’.

Furthermore, Elizabethans considered all created things linked together and arranged in a fixed hierarchy, which was often thought of in terms of a ladder or chain called the Great Chain of Being. The metaphor, says Tillyard, served to express the unimaginable plenitude of God’s creation, its unaltering order, and its ultimate unity. The chain stretched from the foot of God’s throne to the meanest of inanimate objects. Every speck of creation was a link in the chain, and every link, except the two extremities, was simultaneously bigger and smaller than another: there could be no gap. Between God and man were the angels, who therefore held an intermediate position. Their nature was purely intellectual and their function was to act as God’s messengers, and to protect man. But there were those amongst the angels who had fallen from grace, and who were out to do mankind much harm.

Like the angels man, too possessed the faculty of reason but man also partook of the nature of what was immediately below him, that is the beast. Hence, he was a link between matter and spirit for he was below the angels and above the

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31 Tillyard, op. cit., p. 23
beasts. Along with reason man had existence, life, feeling and understanding. The animals had all these features except the faculty of understanding. Then came the plants, which possessed existence as well as life but lacked sensitivity. At the bottom of the scale was mere existence, for example, metals, stones and rocks. Now because man had within himself all the qualities of earthly existence, he was often called ‘the little world’, or microcosm.

Within each class, there appeared hierarchy, often defined as ‘degree’. Among the metals for example, gold was higher in the scale of being than brass, and the dolphin’s place was above all fishes, as was the eagle above all birds. Similarly, in the world of vegetation the oak was considered nobler than all other trees, and the rose best among flowers. So was the king or ruler supreme over his subjects, as also was father the head of the family, and man himself superior to woman. Even the human body itself was thought to be constituted of a hierarchy. Thus, the head ruled the liver and the heart. Hierarchy existed among the planets also. Thus, the sun was most important among heavenly bodies. Even among the angels a rigid hierarchy prevailed, although, there was no common agreement regarding the names of the superior or inferior ranks. Furthermore, the Elizabethan conception of the universe was very integrated and unified so that within it there was subtle correspondence. For example, the king among men, the sun among planets, the lion among beasts, the eagle among birds, and, the rose among flowers had correspondence. There was
also the obvious correspondence between universe as macrocosm and man as microcosm.

This was the picture of a cosmic order which the Elizabethan consciously accepted as perfect. Through it he viewed the entire universe as an integrated pattern, which, to him was indeed majestic and awe-inspiring. The feeling of being an outsider in an indifferent universe was not there because man had a well-defined place in a totally ordered universe. However, the pattern could sometimes be precarious because harmony could prevail only as long as assigned places in the scheme of things were quite strictly adhered to. In the absence of correspondence, disorder was bound to affect the entire system, or the universe itself. The Elizabethan, therefore, was sometimes haunted by insecurity and even a vague metaphysical fear lest chaos should oust order in this well-ordered creation and, therefore, sensitive beings in particular were alarmed whenever they saw any of the links, forming the chain of being overstepping their assigned limits. Committed to a well-ordered cosmos, the Elizabethan considered all that happened on earth as part of a divine plan that made his life meaningful. Extreme pessimism was, indeed quite out of question. Though the earth was the basest of the elements, and contained the dregs of the universe, yet man was superior to all earthly creatures, and after all, was he not created in God’s image!
Focusing on man in particular, the Elizabethans propounded a theory which made them believe that what decided the quality of a man, a beast or an inanimate thing was the proportion in which each had within itself the four elements, earth, water, air and fire. If the proportion was right the product was perfect and not easily subject to decay and corruption. For instance, in diamond, the elements would be better mixed than in any other stone. And, in *Julius Caesar*, when Antony says that Brutus had excellence and nobility of character, a proper mixture of elements is referred to as:

*The elements*

*So mix'd in him that nature might stand up*

*And say to the entire world, 'This was a man!'*

(V.v.73-5)

The four elements earth, water, air and fire were essential constituents that made up human body and also the food it ate. The Elizabethan concept of freedom of will, and, along with it, the prevailing thought and also the influence of stars on human destiny was quite known. Astronomical influence could have had a rationale, given the belief in the chain of being, yet it was never the determining factor in the Elizabethan thought not at least as influential as was the concept of freedom of will, which had reason as its determining factor. However, the entire universe being inter-related, stars were thought by many to influence man's disposition also. However, in the final analysis, man was partly, if not wholly his own master, and, therefore, master too of his fate. The weaker the will, reason being
weak, the stronger would be the influence of stars. Thus, weak men succumbed for, they did not exert enough reason, and their will over which they had power, their wills being free. But then astronomical influence too was not a matter of superstition only, for the agreement was that planets were created only to do well, and it was only man's fall that disturbed the harmony of the universe. Planetary influence was part of an overall divine plan. Being endowed with the faculty of reason man could mitigate astronomical influence itself. Beasts had no reason, and therefore, the factor of stars was supreme.

According to the Elizabethans, reason in man's nature was divine. It was the elements in man that distinguished him from the beast and made him more akin to God and the angels. It had two constituents: the understanding or wit, and, the will. But then man's intelligence and wit were of necessity imperfect for whereas the angels knew all that they were capable of knowing, their knowledge was intuitive, man begins from a state of ignorance. He had to learn, and this learning was a slow and painful method being discursive. He had to learn about God, and about the world of created things, and also about himself. His fall had impaired the power of understanding. As a consequence he was now allured by the illusion of his senses. This made thinking and learning rather painful processes. The fall had similarly corrupted man's will also, for, whereas the angels only will that which accorded with the will of God, man often acted against his better judgment and followed the call of his instinct and passion against dictates of his reason, thereby ' abandoning
the dignity of his proper nature' and behaving like a beast. Not that Elizabethans preached complete absence or denial of passion. They did accord it but its appropriate significance recommended that it be kept under strict control. What was invoked was the rule of the golden mean and of moderation. Thus, what Hamlet admired in Horatio's character was that his 'blood and judgment' were 'so well com mingled'.

The next important issue is what the Elizabethans thought about forgiveness and salvation. St. Thomas Aquinas believed that the forgiveness of sin depended upon the atonement, habitual care and charity. Atonement was a supremely important act, and therefore, care and charity had to be constant factors. Penance had to have three essential constituents. There had to be contrition, confession and satisfaction. Of these the first had to be contrition. The 'voluntary sorrow for sin whereby man punishes in him that which he grieves to have done' was said to be contrition. It could be a formal sacrament of penance, but could be non-sacramental also. In either situation it was thought, "the cause of the forgiveness of sin". However, its nature as an occasion for forgiveness had to be carefully defined. This was because "God alone" was "the principal efficient cause of the forgiveness of sin". Contrition as the 'positive' and the material cause of forgiveness was understood in the sense of its having "disposed matter to receive something''. But then salvation was dependent entirely on God's grace and benevolence for mankind, as was manifested in Christ's sacrifice for humanity. Therefore, without grace, forgiveness
of sin was impossible. Furthermore, forgiveness was also dependent upon the will of
the sinner, for contrition had to have the sinners’ will as an essential constituent.
The participation of the sinner’s will, would ensure that contrition was indeed
experienced. The ‘will to atone’ was, therefore, mandatory. Contrition makes God’s
mercy available. In fact, contrition was medieval Christianity. It had themes central
to medieval religious drama also. Contrition was the answer to the persistent
question, “What shall man do to be saved?” Of course Luther did not agree, and
challenged the answer, insisting that “the forgiveness of the guilt does not rest on
the contrition of the sinner nor on the office or power of the priest. Rather it rests
on faith which clings to the world of Christ.” This insistence is at the heart of
Luther’s break with Catholicism. Though the English reformation drew its first
intellectual and spiritual reformation from Luther’s revolt, it did not finally accept
sola fides as its basic doctrine regarding the forgiveness of sins. In fact it appears
that the orthodoxy in which Shakespeare and his contemporaries were expected to
believe was very close to Summa Theologica when it came to the forgiveness of sins.

This then was the perspective in which the plays of Shakespeare would have
to be set. The detailed pattern supplied Elizabethan poets and Shakespeare pre-
eminently, with an endless source of metaphor and imagery. It was charged with a
great collective emotional energy. Shakespeare often describes his king in terms of
the sun, or the eagle or dolphin and uses fire as an indication of nobility and music
as an expression of order and harmony both within and without. The best example
of Shakespeare's use of these details of a world order is to be found in Macbeth, when Macbeth murders his king, the whole order, we feel is upset. All nature suffers from an upheaval as a result. Macbeth's act has cosmic reverberations. Similarly, in Pricles the harmony of the universe is disturbed by the incestuous relationship of Antioch and his daughter. Other examples include Posthumous Leonatus suspecting his faithful wife Imogen for adultery and executing an order to murder her. Imogen's wooing of Posthumous a commoner in Cymbeline and Leontes' suspicion of his innocent wife for adultery in The Winter's Tale as also Antonio's usurpation of Prospero's dukedom in The Tempest, and each becomes a sufficient cause of the universal turmoil that ensues. Malevolence, Disorder, conflict, and chaos are the consequence. Only contrition and remorse then restore harmony. And, when repentance is genuine, Divine Benevolence gets initiated, and the benevolent design in the old order is restored. What becomes manifest ultimately is the universe of Divine Benevolence.