Conclusion
The last plays of Shakespeare follow a systematic benevolent pattern. Almost all the major characters commit sin consciously or unconsciously, suffer and repent. Their repentance leads them to redemption, resurrection or reconciliation. This redemption, resurrection or reconciliation is in fact the design of benevolence in the last plays of Shakespeare. Young generations also suffer due to the sin committed by their parents. They are separated from their dear ones and when their parents' repentance is accepted, they are reunited. The role of supernatural power is direct and emphatic. The nature whether it is forest or mountain, sea coast or the border, water or fire becomes the agent of divine gods. Music plays an important role in resurrection of the characters. The central characters in the last plays are constantly protected by supernatural powers. They do not meet death. Unlike tragedies, the characters in the last plays turn to gods for their help. They are almost dependent on divine powers.
The supernatural powers play important role in accomplishing the benevolent design of the play. They take different shapes on different occasions. Sometimes, they interfere directly. Antiochus and his incestuous daughter are burnt to death in *Pericles*. Thaisa’s body floats and reaches Cerimon at Ephesus, who resurreets her. Pericles’s ship harbours at the city where his daughter Marina works. Sudden appearance of pirate, which saves Marina’s life, is yet another method of divine power to help his loving creature. Pericles’ vision in dream asking him to go to Ephesus and narrate his pathetic story there is yet another powerful mode of benevolent design. Surprisingly, the divine power descends by himself in *Cymbeline* assuring Posthumous Leonatus in his dream that his wife Imogen will be restored to him. Death of the queen and her son Cloten open the avenue for a benevolent world. Iachimo repents at the end and is forgiven. Cymbeline is reunited with his sons and daughter. At the end, there is peace between Rome and Britain. Similarly, Paulina playing the role of a benevolent agent resurreets Hermione in *The Winter’s Tale*. The shepherd’s arrival on the spot to take Perdita in his possession is seen as miraculous. Those involved in throwing the infant Perdita on the sea-coast of Bohemia are destroyed. Antigonus is eaten by the bear. Even the crew members are drowned into the sea. Prospero acts as the agent of God. He heals through his magical art those who are not unjust and unfair. With the help of his magical art, he raises a tempest and controls it in the sea. All his enemies were made to understand that there is a God above them who does not allow a benevolent
character and an innocent infant to perish. Gonzalo and Ariel play an important role in the benevolent design of the play.

The pattern of the late plays of Shakespeare is different from the pattern of tragedies. The basic pattern of Shakespearean tragedy is sin, suffering and death. The pattern of the last plays is generally sin, suffering, repentance and redemption or resurrection. The redemption or resurrection or reconciliation is the benevolent design of the last plays. Towards the end of Shakespeare’s career when the last plays were staged depict a world where the life of characters starts with a sinful act, the sin leads on to suffering and the suffering in turn leads on repentance. Repentance is accepted in general and suffering comes to an end. However, if the sinner is adamant to repent after committing sin and the sin is serious in nature he is destroyed. The most important message that one gets from the last plays is that one should have faith in divinity.

Some of the characters are not only benevolent; they are like saints and therefore, the last plays can also be termed as “Saint’s Play”. In Pericles, Cerimon disapproves worldly pleasures and takes delight in helping others. Thaisa prefers to live in a temple at Ephesus and indulge in charitable acts. Marina too wants to help others in making them learn singing, dancing, and sewing. In The Winter’s Tale Paulina plays the role of a saint. She resurrects Hermione. She continuously cleans the mind of Leontes loathed with suspicion and ultimately succeeds in purifying it. In Cymbeline, Cymbeline acts as a saint at the end, who pardons everyone in his
court as well as members of the Roman army who fought against him. Prospero acts as a saint by raising a tempest in the sea, having full control on his enemies and yet forgiving them at the end of the play.

The central characters in the last plays ‘smile out of extremity’. They never give up hope even in the worst situation. Marina’s virginity remains intact in the brothel because of her sincerity and determination. Imogen sets out all alone to find out the cause of her husband’s suspicion. To achieve her objective she even participates in a battle against the Romans. Hermione when imprisoned does not surrender to the vicious ideas of her husband and maintains her innocence till the end. Prospero, too, does not lose courage when his brother usurps his dukedom and leaves him and his daughter at the mercy of the sea.

The last plays mark a change of mood on the part of Shakespeare. According to Tillyard the three romances of Shakespeare, with which he closes his career, and which come immediately after 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 man’s will with the forces of destiny or through man’s transgression of laws of nature which he either fails to perceive or having perceived fails to observe. But in any case the result is suffering and loss. This however, is the limited view of the tragic pattern of life; because the complete pattern includes some kind of reconciliation; some probability of regeneration after destruction; or at least some recognition of the tragic
error, whereby a way renewal of life is promised. Dover Wilson quoted by Tillyard, rightly indicates this fact in his comment on the catastrophe in Lear. He observes, "The Lear that dies is not a Lear defiant, but a Lear redeemed. His education is complete, his regeneration accomplished". The same may be said of Othello. The end of these tragedies promises a new order of life, but it is cut short as the dramatic technique demanded it. But the creation of new order is an essential part of the tragic pattern. "Of the conception of tragedy as destruction followed by regeneration there have been many elaborations...Indeed, it fits one of the most elementary life processes, one so simple and obvious as to be almost embarrassing to mention." It is, therefore, natural to conclude that the complete tragic pattern is that in which recreation after destruction is depicted. It seems that this exactly was the aim of Shakespeare in his last plays. The tragedies only depict one aspect of the pattern, indicating at times the second, but these last romances present the complete pattern.

The last plays aim at "complete regeneration; at melting down of the old vessel and recasting of it into something new." Cymbeline who, at the end says, "Pardon's the word to all", and acts accordingly, indicates regeneration, through suffering and humiliation that comes out of his tragic error of head strong

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2 Ibid
willfulness. The whole process by which the complete tragic pattern is revealed in the last three plays can be described in Tillyard’s own words as follows: “In the last three plays the old order is destroyed as thoroughly as in the main group of tragedies, and it is this destruction that altogether separates them from the realm of comedy in general and from Shakespeare’s own comedies in particular.”

Shakespeare presents his thought by making the characters go through a process of resurrection in the last plays. The characters are given opportunities to repent and after repentance they are restored, what they lose as a result of their sin, whereas the characters’ flaw leads to their tragic end in the tragedies. The pattern of the last plays of Shakespeare leads many critics to believe that Shakespeare was influenced by Christianity and the Christian thought dominates the last plays. However, there are also many critics who do not link Shakespeare with any religion as there is no proof that Shakespeare ever practiced Christianity. There is also a debate among the critics, who find Christian element in Shakespeare, and they question if Shakespeare was a Catholic or a Protestant. There are also critics who believe that Shakespeare was just paganising the Christian theme to heighten the mystery of his drama.

Unlike the tragedies, women are raised from the level of prostitution to the height of virginity in the last plays. They are symbols of infidelity, betrayal and unfaithfulness in the tragedies. They are whores, opportunists, and murderers too.
But they are also symbols of virginity, benevolence, sacrifice, commitment, dedication and devotion in the last plays. Thaisa in *Pericles*, Imogen in *Cymbeline*, Perdita in *The Winter's Tale*, and Miranda in *The Tempest* are characters as pure as morning dew, as innocent as a newly born babe, and as beautiful as rose. Shakespeare has taken almost a U-turn in the last plays about the women as if he wants to change our perception about them as he painted in the tragedies. However, a similar character like Lady Macbeth also appears in the form of the queen in *Cymbeline*, and Dionyzia in *Pericles*, but they are not allowed to dominate. Their wicked designs are destroyed by the benevolent powers. An illicit relationship like that of Hamlet's mother and his uncle is also described in *Pericles* with reference to Antioch and his daughter but they are not allowed to survive, and are set on fire. We also find a character like Iago called Iachimo in *Cymbeline* but again, he is not able to harm Imogen as Iago harmed Desdemona and Othello. Unlike Iago Iachimo repents at the end. Thaisa and her daughter Marina in *Pericles*, Imogen in *Cymbeline*, Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*, and Miranda in the *Tempest*, turn out to be the most benevolent characters.

The heroines of the last plays are almost perfect. Gervinus declares that "Imogen is, next to Hamlet, the most fully drawn character in Shakespeare's plays"."\(^3\)

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The characters are generally very simple, and “They are characterized by three virtues: the naïve girl, the queenly woman, and the tragic victim.”

The new generation in the Last plays is responsible for the reconciliation of their parents. For example, Marina breaks the prolonged silence of Pericles. The latter returns to a world where there is joy, love and peace. Guiderius and Arviragus, Imogen and Posthumus fight for the British army, defeat the Romans and become the main source of reconciliation of their families in *Cymbeline*. Perdita and Florizel reunite Leontes and Polixenes in *The Winter’s Tale*. The king of Bohemia and the king of Sicilia become good friends. Miranda and Ferdinand unite all the rivals in the *Tempest*. At the end, it is the benevolent design that pervades the last plays.

In the last plays, the hero acquires self-knowledge after going through suffering. In all the four last plays someone is lost and ultimately found. The major characters are responsible for the loss, and the reconciliation is the result of repentance. Nature is also shown as essentially benevolent, though capable of raging storms. Nature has a healing power that teaches virtuosity which ultimately leads on to happiness and joy.

Another characteristic feature of the last plays is the motif of journey. In each of the late plays the character goes on a journey, and this journey essentially leads...
on to the final reconciliation. In *The Winter's Tale* the journey motif is less clear than in *The Tempest,* but nevertheless it exists. Perdita makes a journey to the land of the shepherds, to the world of natural virtue, as opposed to the dreary world of Sicilia. Similarly, Hermione performs a symbolic journey to the underworld because she remains “underground” for a period of sixteen years waiting for the recovery of her lost child. Leontes is left alone in the court grown indifferent to him. Paulina constantly probes his conscience. Imogen too makes a journey from the court to the forest for exploring the truth. Pericles travels and reaches Antioch for marrying Antiochus’ daughter. His mission fails at Antioch but succeeds in Pentapolis.

Cynthia Marshall finds “An inherent motif in each of Shakespeare’s last plays is afterlife—or the return of the dead.” Characters that have been lost for years suddenly reappear and thus seem to have come back, tantalizingly, from the grave. The sense of a resurrection or quasi-resurrection having taken place is a recurrent motif in Shakespeare’s comedies as well, while the countervailing frustration of a failed resurrection figures prominently in a number of the tragedies. Shakespeare’s quasi-resurrections have their ultimate roots in the world of classical comedy and romance, one of whose conventions is the recognition scene in which characters separated by various means—shipwreck, abduction, wandering, a sleeping potion, even disguise—rediscover one another in a joyous reunion.

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When the characters reunite, one of the initial reactions--so strong is the belief that the lost person died--is that he or she has been miraculously resurrected from the dead. What happened instead was merely a separation and subsequent but false presumption of death.

Time, growth, decay and regeneration are yet another feature of the last plays. The theme of time, however, pervades *The Winter's Tale*, because it is Time who manages to restore peace to the scarred spirit of Leontes. But the cycle of Time covers the cycle of growth, decay, and regeneration in humankind as well as in Nature and the emphasis in *The Winter's Tale* is continually on regeneration and fertility. In fact in some ways the whole play can be read as a fertility myth or allegory. Perdita and Hermione disappear: Hermione in effect goes to the underworld, so also does Perdita as in the Proserpine (Persephone) myth, while the pregnancy of Hermione is discussed by her ladies in terms of a frank joy in fertility and the renewal of human life. Similarly, in the long fourth act of *The Winter's Tale* Perdita in her own speech expresses the same joy in the fertility and creative power of nature, which also has educative and regenerative powers. Perdita herself is a product of the educative power of nature, uncorrupted by civilisation and the court. Finally, the marriage of Perdita and Florizel in itself stands for procreation, for regeneration and for fertility, while the recovery of Hermione for Leontes makes the winter of their age a new spring. At the same time they can see themselves when
young in the persons of the children and in that respect they achieve immortality, a
tHEME also common in Shakespeare's sonnets. Leontes, Polixenes, and Hermione
pay their debt to Time. But in the marriage of Perdita and Florizel they are in effect
born again, and thus they also have defeated Time.

The characters apparently dead are found to be alive in the last plays. Cleon
and Dionyzia think Marina is dead in Pericles. Pericles thinks that Thaisa is dead
and throws Thaisa's supposed dead body from his own hand into the sea. He
completely alienates himself from the worldly life after seeing the fake monument of
his daughter Marina. Cymbeline's long-lost sons, Guiderius and Arviragus, remind
us of the lost children of Pericles and Leontes. Guiderius and Arviragus think that
Imogen is dead, and even prepare to bury her. Solemn music sounds at her
supposed death. Posthumus, too, is led to think that Imogen is dead. Alonso in The
Tempest believes that his son is no more alive. Ultimately, what is discovered at the
end of the play is that Imogen, Thaisa, and Ferdian, Perdita all are alive.

The forgiveness of enemies is yet another concept to which Shakespeare often
returns to in the Late Plays. For example in The Tempest, Prospero spares his
brother, Antonio, forgives the king of Naples Alonso, and lets off Caliban. In
Cymbeline, Imogen forgives Posthumus. Cymbeline offers a general pardon.
Belarius, prisoners of the Roman army and Iachimo are all forgiven. After all
suffering and punishment endured by Leontes, Hermione forgives him too, in the

*The Winter’s Tale*. Thus, forgiveness is a dominant motif in the last plays of

Shakespeare.

The culture of Elizabethan age is deeply imprinted in the last plays of

Shakespeare. It is true that all art bears the imprint of its historical epoch, but great

art is that in which this imprint is most deeply marked. E. M. W. Tillyard in

*Elizabethan World Picture* exemplifies this approach to Shakespearean criticism, and
despite the disfavor into which Tillyard’s theory has fallen, all cultural studies in

some way share its most basic assumption, that literature is embedded in a particular
culture. The last plays portray benevolence as a dominant theme, which is also a
dominant feature of the Elizabethan culture.

The role of Divinity is portrayed in a very emphatic manner in the last plays

of Shakespeare. Good characters are rescued from tyrants in *Pericles*, *Cymbeline* and

*The Winter’s Tale*. Innocents are resurrected from death by intervening deities such

as Diana, Jupiter and Apollo. The characters also receive counseling and medical aid

from Helicanus and Cerimon in *Pericles*, Belarius, Pisanio, and

Cornelius in *Cymbeline*, Camillo and the talismanic power of a chaste maid

Paulina in *The Winter’s Tale*. Prospero is a central character who uses supernatural

power to redeem an entire ship of state. He also receives aid from a wise counselor,
and is inspired by an angelic daughter. He controls the "spirits" who helps in working out a benevolent pattern in the play.

The last plays of Shakespeare are termed as “romances”⁶ by Edward Dowden. Dowden finds similarities between the last plays and medieval romance literature. However, we find that romantic notions culminate to divine act of marriage in the last plays. For example, in Pericles Pericles-Thaisa come closer to each other before marriage, in Cymbeline Posthumus-Imogen meet secretly in the court, in The Winter's Tale Flrizel-Perdita too, meet each other, and in The Tempest Ferdinand-Miranda discover a new world. The romance culminates into the divine act of marriage in the late plays of Shakespeare.

The sea plays variant roles in the last plays. Sometime it is a sea of birth, and at another time it is a sea of death. The same sea is also a sea of re-birth on some other occasion. Interestingly, it is furious at one time and benevolent at another. Marina is born in the sea. But Thaisa’s supposed death takes place in the sea on the same ship where Marina is born. Marina is reborn to her father Pericles on the seashore of Mytilene. Thaisa’s supposed dead body floats in the sea and reaches Cerimon, a physician who resurrects her with the help of fire and music. Prospero and Miranda are left to die in the sea in The Tempest by Antonio. The same sea brings them to an island where he was able to raise a tempest in the sea to punish his enemies. The same sea is calm and quiet when Alonso and Prospero sail to

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⁶ Edward Dowden. Shakespeare: A Critical Study of His Mind and Art (1875)
Milan to start a new life. The sea is sometimes so outraged that it drowns the entire crew members who bring infant Perdita to leave her at the mercy of nature at the sea shore of Bohemia in *The Winter’s Tale*.

Thus, the last plays of Shakespeare follow a systematic benevolent pattern. The supernatural powers play important role in accomplishing the benevolent design of the play. Some of the characters are not only benevolent, they are like saints. The central characters in the last plays ‘smile out of extremity’. Women are raised from the level of prostitution to the height of virginity. They are symbols of benevolence and sacrifice. They are almost perfect. The hero acquires self-knowledge after suffering. The characters apparently dead are found to be alive. Enemies are forgiven. The romantic notions culminate into the divine act of marriage. The sea plays variant roles in the last plays. The new generation is responsible for the reconciliation of their parents. The characters are redeemed, reconciled, and resurrected after repentance.