Chapter III

Theme of Benevolence in *Cymbeline*
Shakespeare’s primary sources for the central plot, the wager over Imogen, are supposed to be the Decameron and an anonymous English translation of the Dutch play Frederike of Jennen. Shakespeare seems to have read both works, since Cymbeline has details peculiar to both. Different versions of the wager story were available in Shakespeare’s day as it was a very popular story since thirteenth century. Also, Boccaccio’s ninth story of the second day and Frederike of Jennen are the two sources that are known to have been used by Shakespeare for the wager. And, the anonymous play, The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune, printed in 1589 but written some eight or ten years earlier, seems to have provided Shakespeare with many of the other ideas and episodes in Cymbeline. However, the sources are ‘open to certain serious objections’.

In Love and Fortune the princess also falls in love with a foundling who had been brought up at the court. Her rude brother challenges him. Her lover is banished. He meets a hermit in a cave who proves to be his father. They live together in the cave. The princess wanders in the wilderness searching for her love.

---


66
She also comes across the hermit in the cave. Many of these episodes are common romance and folk-tale devices, but many of the parallel events in the two plays seem to have been borrowed by Shakespeare from *Love and Fortune*. The name of the princess in *Love and Fortune* is Fidelia and that seems to be the origin of Shakespeare’s Fidele. Other episodes in *Love and Fortune*, however, differ greatly from *Cymbeline*. Nosworthy refers to R.W. Boodle in his introduction to the play. Boodle says, ‘Shakespeare was indebted to *The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune*\(^\text{2}\)

The historical setting of the play, the war between England and Rome over paying tribute, comes primarily from Holinshed, with the additional ideas borrowed from *The Mirror for Magistrates*. Although this historical material in the play is not prominent, it is important, since it gives the play a frame of reference. Nosworthy writes to the following effect:

> Various dates for the composition of *Cymbeline* have been put forward. Malone who first attempted to place the plays in chronological order, successively favoured 1604, 1605 and 1609 and this last date which has been generally accepted, is probably not far wrong.

Most critics place it after *Pericles* and just before or about the same time as *The Winter’s Tale*. The theaters were closed on account of the plague from August of 1608 until December 1609 and possibly a month or two later, and *Cymbeline* may have been written during that time.

\(^2\)Ibid.p.xxv
A theater review of Cymbeline published in the New York Times reports that the play is about 'a father who favors a second wife over his child, a husband rocked by the suspicion of a mate's infidelity, a foster parent confronting the torment of relinquishing his boys, a mistreated woman going into hiding to recuperate'. However, a web magazine writes:

The play deals with elements of the divine, of divine ratification, of yielding to the gods and the power of the gods. Jupiter intervenes and Posthumus is given a book and a prophesy that everything will come out right. At this point the play deals with faith and redemption, a kind of yielding to destiny.

The dates are not certain. The play has been staged by adding variety of sources, yet Cymbeline is a wonderful play. It has received both applaud and criticism in recent years. There are critics who do not see any worth in the play whereas there are many who find it one of the most moving plays of Shakespeare. The most familiar critical comment on Cymbeline is one of Dr Johnson's:

This play has many just sentiments, some natural dialogues, and some pleasing scenes, but they are obtained at the expense of much incongruity. To remark the folly of the fiction, the absurdity of the conduct, the confusion of the names and manners of different times, and the impossibility of the events in any system of life, were to waste criticism upon unresisting imbecility, upon faults too evident for detection, and too gross for aggravation.

4.http://www.rsc.org.uk/cymbeline/current/actors.html#cloten
5.Johnson, VIII, 403.
Even Granville-Barker referred to by Kenneth Muir in his book speaks of Shakespeare in this play as a "wearied artist." However, Wilson Knight thinks, ‘Cymbeline is an extremely complex work: in mastery of plot weaving it certainly has no rival’ Also, the twentieth century critic F R Leavis is gentler and is far from total contradiction of the strictures of Dr Johnson. Leavis writes thus:

The play contains a great variety of life and interest, and if we talk of “inequalities” and “incongruities” it should not be to suggest inanity or nullity: out of the interplay of contrasting themes and modes we have an effect as (to fall back on the usefully corrective analogy) of an odd and distinctive music. But the organization is not a matter of a strict and delicate subservience to a commanding significance, which penetrates the whole, informing and ordering everything—imagery, rhythm, symbolism, character, episode, plot—from a deep centre: Cymbeline is not a great work of art of the order of The Winter’s Tale.

According to Leavis, Cymbeline though it contains some good things, is ultimately not a great work of art. Quiller-Couch, however, counterattacks Dr Johnson: “I turn on Dr Johnson,” he says, “and demand ‘...why do you not include mention of the marvelous portrayal of Imogen?’...For Imogen is the bee-all and the and-all of the play.” It is one of the most admired plays of Tennyson who always kept a copy of Cymbeline on his bed. He kept on turning the play even at the last moment of his life till he gets the line Hang there like fruit, my soul, /Till the tree die! He was so fond of the play that a copy of Cymbeline was kept in

---


7 The Crown of Life: Essays in Interpretation of Shakespeare’s Final Plays p.129

8 F.R.Leavis, *The Criticism of Shakespeare’s Late Plays: A Caveat*, Scrutiny, X (April 1942),340

9 *Shakespeare’s Workmanship*, p.217
his grave. Naseeb Shaheen, too, referring to Tennyson writes, 'Cymbeline', however, was Tennyson's favorite Shakespeare play, and Hazlitt thought act 5 scene 5 was one of the greatest revelation scenes in drama.\textsuperscript{10} She also mentions Swineburne in her book who 'considered Imogen the “Crown and flower” of all the Shakespeare's women.'\textsuperscript{11}

Kenneth Muir defends Shakespeare's 'experimental'\textsuperscript{12} style and rejects the criticism of Dr Johnson and Granville-Barker. He gives examples of one of the performances where both actors and producers had believed the play as Dr Johnson had thought it. They, therefore, made several cuts but to their astonishment they were moved by the impact of the play in the theater, and 'by the time they all awoke to the fact that it was a good play, it was too late to restore the cuts.'\textsuperscript{13} Similarly, 'The last scene of the play, which this producer thought boring because the audience was aware all the time of the secrets hidden from the characters, is in fact one of the most moving scenes in all Shakespeare's works. The gradual revelation of facts which are known, or partly known, to the audience can achieve an effect which is not directly proportional to the amount of surprise involved.'\textsuperscript{14} He goes on saying 'When we reach the end of the play we realise that everything has been arranged, and arranged with superb artistry.'\textsuperscript{15}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{10} Naseeb Shaheen. \textit{Biblical References in Shakespeare's Plays}. University of Delaware Press. 1999. P.698
\textsuperscript{11} Loc.cit
\textsuperscript{12} Nosworthy,op.cit., p.xlviii
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid,41
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid,44
\end{flushright}
From the beginning till the end of *Cymbeline* the idea of benevolence which is found in *Pericles* gets emphatic treatment in *Cymbeline*. Whether it is Posthumous banishment from court, or it is Imogen's leaving the court for search of truth or her temporary stay in a welsh mountain or her coming into contact with her lost brothers lead to the Christian mode of benevolence. Posthumous forgives Iachimo, Imogen forgives Posthumous and Cymbeline's 'pardon is the word to all' lead to the perfect benevolent design of the play. Good characters are also assured to be rewarded on the Day of Judgment. Destruction of evil characters and domination of benevolent characters complete the purpose of the play. Benevolence in the play is achieved through forgiveness and reconciliation. Hence, Joel G. Fink writes 'Cymbeline is a play in which redemption is achieved through forgiveness and reconciliation.'\(^{16}\) The play starts with the domination of malevolent designs of queen and Cloten but ends with the domination of benevolent thoughts.

Benevolent design of the play stems from the biblical idea of life and death. As soul separates from body, reaches hell or heaven, after purgation, similarly characters separate from their dear ones, live in a state of purgation during their trial and unite at the end. The union of characters at the end of the play seems to be a replica of doomsday. Their enjoyment, their happiness, and their merriment all lead to the benevolent design of the play.

The benevolent design of the play has religious overtones. In Shakespeare’s day, death was thought of as “the separation of the Soul from the body”. The Church taught that on the Day of Judgment body and soul would come together again. This idea has been taken up effectively by Cynthia Marshall. She says, “Each eschatological motif in Cymbeline - death, judgment, and apocalypse -- is comprehended in both individual and communal senses.”

Marshall, further elaborates, “The play illustrates the individual understanding of eschatology by presenting concrete images of death, which remind the audience of their personal mortality. It illustrates communal eschatology by suggesting a last day on which the private should be judged”.

There are three plots of the play: Cymbeline’s broken relationship with Rome, Posthumus’ ill-treatment of Imogen, and Belarius’ abduction of Cymbeline’s sons. These three issues of the plots are resolved at the end of the play. The relationship which was broken under the influence of the queen is restored. There is peace between Rome and Britain. Posthumus realizes his mistakes and seeks Imogen’s forgiveness. Cymbeline’s sons are restored to him at the end. Whether it is an issue of clearing Posthumus’ doubts, or restoration of Cymbeline’s sons or relationship between Britain and Rome, a perfect benevolent design operates which

---

17 Mornay p.240
19 Ibid. p. 14
has its origin in Christian faith. David Scott Kastan finds: the "pattern of innocence/fall/redemption" in each of the three plots (147).

The play begins with a rift between father and daughter. The father under the influence of his second wife wants his daughter Imogen to marry his second wife's son Cloten, which she refuses. Her refusal sets the stage for conflict. Gradually the queen's malevolent design appears on the surface. Her motif is the main source of evil in the play as she wants to see her son a future king. Apparently, she plays the role of a mediator between Posthumus and the king. Secretly, she is preparing a ground for her son's marriage with Imogen. She advises Posthumus to avoid the king but declares her real intention in an aside, showing how secretly she influences Cymbeline:

... yet I'll move him
To walk this way: I never do him wrong,
But he does buy my injuries, to be friends:
Pays dear for my offences.  

(I.ii.34-37)

Her love for Imogen and the king is a sham. She had poison ready for both. She wants just the absolute power. She knows that Cymbeline will be angry with her allowing Posthumus access to Imogen but she will use the resulting conflict with her husband to promote her objective: the advancement of Cloten under pretence of

---

All quotations from Cymbeline are taken from the New Arden Shakespeare edition of the play, ed. J.M. Nosworthy. London: Methuen & Co Ltd. 1976
protecting Posthumous. These early scenes reveal her as an agent of evil. Wilson Knight writes:

His Queen is more firmly realized as a 'crafty devil' (II. i. 51) and 'A mother hourly coining plots' (II. i. 58). Her considered villainy is amazing and her only unselfishness her instinctive support of her fool son, Cloten. She is a composite of Lady Macbeth and Goneril, though without the tragic dignity of the one and the cold rationality of the other. She is cruelty incarnate.\(^{21}\)

When Cymbeline comes to know the fact that Imogen has married Posthumus, he is outraged and banishes Posthumus from the court. Imogen gives a diamond ring to her husband and Posthumus, a bracelet to his wife as token of love. They promise never to part it as long as they are alive. His banishment, however, is an opportunity for him to be away from a place which has been corrupted because of the evil queen.

Her son, Cloten is first mentioned in the play as 'a thing | Too bad, for bad report' (I.i.16-17), but Cymbeline sees him quite differently, and so the differences between father and daughter aggravate:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{Cym.} & \quad \text{That mightst have had the sole son of my queen!} \\
\text{Imo.} & \quad \text{O blessed, that I might not! I chose an eagle,} \\
& \quad \text{And did avoid a puttock.} \\
& \quad (I.ii.69-71)
\end{align*}\]

There is an extensive use of imagery to elaborate Cloten. Carr sees him as 'a type of brute appetite and violence'. Wiles finds, the Folio spelling, 'Clotten', indicates that he is a fool, or clot, and suggests that he should be presented as a parody of Posthumus. Granville-Barker is closer to the truth when he finds him 'an uncommon if not unique item in the Shakespearean catalogue, a comic character drawn with a savagely serious pen'.

Cloten's wooing of Imogen explains his nature. He executes it not with sensitivity and refinement, but in a crude manner, as seen in his indulgence in sexual punning on the music he orders for her:

\[
\text{Clo. \ldots Come on, tune: If you can penetrate her with your fingering, so: we'll try with tongue too: if none will do, let her remain: but I'll will never give o'er.}
\]

\text{(II.iii.13-15)}

When she rejects his advances, he becomes increasingly impatient, and ironically accuses her, breaking benevolent order by adhering to banished Posthumus:

\[
\text{You sin against}
\]

\[
\text{Obedience, which you owe your father; for}
\]

\[
\text{The contract you pretend with that base wretch,}
\]

---

24 Granville-Barker, p.304.
One, bred of alms, and foster'd with cold dishes,  
With scraps o’ th’ court, it is no contract, none.  

(II.iii.110-114)

These lines have Biblical connotations, too. Naseeb Shaheen writes:

‘You sine against/Obedience, which you owe your father’ seems to have been derived from the biblical command to obey one’s parents. Eph. 6.1-2:

“Children obey your parents in the lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother.”25

Posthumous after banishment from the court reaches Rome where he indulges in a wager with cunning Iachimo. He engages in the wager because he loves Imogen deeply and has complete trust in her. Had he not the deepest love for, and implicit trust in Imogen, he would never have made the wager with Iachimo. Challenging Posthumous’ love for Imogen, Iachimo provokes Posthumus love for Imogen and says that Imogen too can be easily enticed. Under the impulse of his male pride he accepts the challenge and gives a letter asking Imogen to take care of his friend Iachimo. Imogen welcomes her husband’s friend but rejects his advancement outrightly. He, then, pretends that he was just testing her love for Posthumous. Poor Imogen believes it. Iachimo plays another trick on her saying that he wants to keep a trunk of valuable gifts in her bed chamber which she accepts. Iachimo hides in the trunk and comes out during midnight. He observes Imogen closely and discovers a mole on her breast. He also looks at the room minutely,

takes off her bracelet, and goes to Posthumus with all these details claiming that his wife is not loyal to him. Posthumous is outraged. Without confirming it he orders Pisanio, a servant to murder Imogen. This is Posthumous’ sin, for which he has to suffer and receive punishment on the Day of Judgment. Both Cloten and Posthumus plan to kill Imogen, and Parker observes that 'similar violence lurks inside both characters'. 26 However, for Siemon the comparison is more general, in that 'as Posthumus yields gradually to fear and anger, his behaviour becomes increasingly like Cloten's. 27 Hunter, like Parker, stresses their violence: 'Posthumus, then, has adopted the mindless savagery of Cloten" 28 . However, Posthumous deserves our sympathy for we know the fact that he has been deceived whereas Cloten’s sole purpose to marry Imogen is to quench his lust for sex and power.

Pisanio after receiving the order from Posthumus asks Imogen to leave the court and come along him in order to meet Posthumus. When Pisanio reveals his real intention and shows her Posthumus’ order, she is stunned. He, however, does not execute his master’s command and asks Imogen, like Helicanus in Pericles to travel and find out the basis of Posthumus’ order. Her leaving the court where the wicked queen and her son dominate is in fact a benevolent design which helps her explore the complex world, meet Posthumus, and clear his misunderstanding.

28 Hunter, Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness, p.158
The British Posthumus loves Imogen and Italian Posthumus suspects her, abuses her and orders to kill her. It reminds one of the nunnery scene in *Hamlet*. Posthumus, like Othello, is torn from his wife after Iachimo able to persuade him by giving the details of her bedchamber, mole on her breast and bracelet. Posthumus fails whereas Iachimo succeeds. In other words malevolence dominates and benevolence is defeated. Imogen now feels that her relationship with Posthumus was breach of order and hence it has proved sterile. She comes to realize that a fruitful and harmonious marriage cannot be based on a relationship itself founded on disorder, a flouting of parental authority:

And thou, Posthumus, thou that didst set up  
My disobedience 'gainst the king my father,  
And make me put into contempt the suits  
Of princely fellowes, shalt hereafter find  
It is no act of common passage, but  
A strain of rareness ....  

(III.iv.89-94)

Imogen now starts her journey for search of truth. Hunter describes Imogen’s ordeal thus:

Imogen is moved from the evils of the court into a heightened and transforming nature. Much more than Arden or Bohemia, however, The Welsh mountains are shown to be tormenting as well as salutary. They are rough desert wasteland—the background for Imogen’s ordeal. She finds love as well as suffering in them. Guiderius and Arviragus provide her with comfort and
love when she is sick, with weariness and despair, and they save her by killing
the monster, Cloten who pursues her. They are pre-eminently creatures of
nature. Their nurture has been natural.\(^\text{29}\)

Hunter, however, is very categorical about Imogen’s journey which takes place
under the supervision of gods:

Imogen’s journey is undertaken under the observation of the gods and with
the fulfillment of heaven’s will as her final destination, and her movement from
the court is a movement into the power of the ruler of the heavens—the sun
itself.\(^\text{30}\)

On the way to this difficult journey she is tested and tried, but she never
gives up. She is quite hopeful that truth will prevail and falsehood will be defeated.

Cloten in order to woo Imogen puts on Posthumus’ garments. It does not
impress Imogen at all. In fact, Cloten’s love for Imogen is lust as he thinks of raping
and killing her. The idea is astonishingly bizarre. Imogen loves Posthumus’
garments even if it is inferior in quality. She says:

\begin{quote}
His mean’st Garment
That ever hath but clipp’d his body, is dearer
In my respect, then all the Hairs above thee,
Were they all made such men.
\end{quote}

\(\text{II.iii.132-135}\)

\(^{29}\) Hunter, R. G. \textit{Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness}. New York: Columbia UP, 1965p.155

\(^{30}\) Ibid.p.154
There is sexual association between Posthumus' clothes and Imogen. Bergeron, too, sees 'sexual association' on Imogen's part between Posthumus and his clothes,\(^{31}\) Bergeron continues to write, 'the clothes seem to offer him a strength he otherwise does not have'.\(^{32}\) Cloten's wearing of Posthumus' clothes expresses his inner desire to become like Posthumus, and he dwells on the similarity of his appearance to that of Posthumus, not only in respect of the well-fitting garments, but also, 'the Lines of my body are as well drawn as his; no less young, more strong' (IV.i.9-10). Cloten's plan to take Posthumus' place can never succeed because he lacks the inner qualities of Posthumus. His feelings towards Imogen are ambivalent, as he admits to himself, 'I love, and hate her' (III.v.71). His love is based on her beauty and rank. Love to him means sex and power - 'for she's fair and royal' (III.v.71) - rather than on her inner virtues. He hates her because of her devotion to Posthumus.

The war between Britain and Rome erupts. Britain wins. The war proves to be blessing in disguise as it leads to reconciliation and resurrection. Wilson Knight, who finds it natural that Posthumus, whose role in the play is 'to typify Britain's best manhood',\(^{33}\) should expect Cymbeline to resist the Roman demand for tribute, 'but what we might not expect is to find precisely the same thoughts expressed even

\(^{31}\) Bergeron, p.162  
\(^{32}\) Ibid., p.163  
\(^{33}\) Wilson Knight, op.cit, p.140
Cloten is witty and the queen's arguments sound high patriotism at least on the surface level. The very names, Posthumus Leonatus, and that of his father, Sicilius, owe something to Roman influence, and it is significant that Posthumus changes sides several times in the course of the battle, showing that his allegiance is not clearly defined. The decisive battle fought at the play's end carries overtones of Armageddon. After the battle, those who have been presumed dead — Cymbeline's three children — are effectively resurrected and restored to life.

A series of individual conflicts come to light. Characters make their confessions. Judgment is threatened but then overturned by pardon. The stunning pronouncement of peace at the very conclusion has apparently obscured the extent to which judgment fuels this final scene. In fact, the play's action reaches resolution in act V, scene V as if before a high court of justice: judgment is declared on the queen, Iachimo, Posthumus, Guiderius, Cloten, Pisanio, Belarius. In some cases judgment is self-inflicted, and in some it is overturned, but the process of hearing, evidence and passing sentence proceeds the turn to peace and absolution at the very end. The dream offers a balm that partially heals Posthumus' guilty death wish, but he still requires a public experience of rebirth. Putting it another way, one could say that Posthumus has been reconciled with one family, who exist only inside his memory, and now must seek reconciliation with his second family, who exist in the

---

34 Ibid., p.134
public arena. His words upon embracing Imogen — "hang there like fruit, my soul, /Till the tree die!" (V.v.263-264) — with their combined resonances of fertility, crucifixions, and marital imagery, constitute one of the most profound reunions in the last plays.

Hence the perfunctory quality of many of the judgments pronounced in the final scene of *Cymbeline* accords with contemporary understanding of the Last Judgment: everyone must be judged, but the judgments are in most cases predetermined. So, for instance, the recitation of the queen’s confessed crimes suggests a life being summarized rather than weighed in the balance. The distinctly Christian terms in which her death is recounted are surprising, given her overwhelming resemblance to the witch of a fairy tale.

*Cymbeline* dismisses the queen’s account by pronouncing her the recipient of divine justice:

*Our wicked queen,*  
*Whom heavens, in justice both on her and hers,*  
*Have laid most heavy hand.*

*(V.v.463-465)*

Cloten, somewhat similarly, is recalled in the final scene so that his account can be set in order. Pisanio tells the sordid tale of Cloten’s violent pursuit of Imogen. Cymbeline’s defense of title — "he was a prince" (V.v.291)— is challenged by Guiderius’ defiant response — "a most incivil one, "nothing prince-like" (V.v.292,
The clashing of value systems is part of the larger action of the scene (and the play), whereby inner virtues like charity displace outer ones like rank and authority. Guiderius, eventually forgiven by Cymbeline precisely because of his own princely rank, is correct in his assessment of Cloten, as well as generally triumphant in his ability to combine virtue with title.

After receiving the play's hardest lesson in forgiveness, however, Posthumus overturns his anger and everyone's expectations:

Kneel not to me.
The pow'r that I have on you is to spare you;
The malice towards you, to forgive you. Live,
And deal with others better.

(V.v.417-420)

Posthumus finally frees himself from vengeance when he releases Iachimo from his guilty debt. It is the culmination of Posthumus' education in forgiveness, the sequence that illustrates the Advent theme of the arrival of a new dispensation of mercy.

The relationship between mercy and the law is an issue in the other two judgments at the close of the play, those of Guiderius and Belarius. Both have broken the law of the kingdom: Guiderius in beheading Cloten, Belarius in kidnapping Cymbeline's sons. Both believe their actions served justifiable purposes. In both cases, the law's significance crumbles when the happy results of Belarius' crime come to light. Intentions, inner laws, are shown to matter.
The law of Cymbeline's kingdom is overturned by generosity of spirit. The king's own vindictive impulse -- he says "the whole world shall not save" Belarius (V.v.323) -- disappears with the sudden access of joy at discovering his sons; he then accepts Belarius as "brother" (V.v.399) Cymbeline applauds Posthumus' decision to forgive Jachimo with a significant phrase -- "nobly doom'd!" (V.v.422) -- and himself completes the chain of forgiveness by announcing that "pardon is the word to all" (V.v.424). Cymbeline's personal decision to embrace forgiveness constitutes the scene's largest act of judgment, since it determines the course of his kingdom. When the regent "dooms" in favor of peace, he, in effect, transforms his realm from one of malice to one given over to celebration of good will. Yet the peaceful chord that closes the scene does not invalidate the dominant motif of judgment; instead, peace is the happy result of a "noble doom." The monarch resolves the conflict between judgment and forgiveness by uniting the two forces in one action.

Cymbeline's generosity is unmatched. It is the peak of benevolence. After he wins the battle with the help of Posthumus, he is not only ready to pay the tribute demanded by Rome but also forgives all the imprisoned soldiers. He agrees to give freely what he had refused to give under compulsion of the queen. Lucius' speech of defeat shows how they had lost all hope when they are about to lose their lives.

... had it gone with us,
We should not when the blood was cool, have threatened
Our prisoners with the sword. But since the Gods
Will have it thus, that nothing but our lives
May be call’d ransom, let it come: Sufficeth,
A Roman, with a Romans heart can suffer.

(V.v.76-81)

Instead of ordering for 'slaughter' (V.v.72) the Roman captives in revenge for the loss of British life, Cymbeline declares “pardon is the word to all”. This is the climax of benevolent design in Cymbeline.

Posthumous’ first soliloquy in act V is an expression both of sorrow for his own trespasses and of forgiveness for the woman, who, he thinks, has trespassed against him:

You married ones,
If each of you should take this course, how many
Must murder wives much better than themselves
For wryng but a little?

(V.i.2-5)

Here, Posthumous by forgiving his wife demonstrates that he deserves forgiveness. Aquinas believes, ‘Repentance is never too late.’ The acknowledgement of sin is also the source of another basic Christian virtue—charity. It is the knowledge of our own sinfulness that inspires us to forgive the sins of others and the forgiveness of our fellow human is the sign of true contrition and the sine qua non of divine forgiveness.

35 Griffith, p.561-62
Luther is forceful on the subject: ‘When [the Christian] sees the mote in his brother’s eye, he should look at himself in the mirror before passing judgment. He will then find beams in his eyes big enough to make hog troughs’. Though Luther insists that God’s forgiveness does not depend upon our forgiveness of others, he makes it clear that such forgiveness is, nonetheless, a necessity: ‘It is also necessary for us to provide proof by which we testify that we have received the forgiveness of sin. Such proof is to consist in everyone’s forgiving his brother his trespasses.’

According to the Arden editor:

The hero’s remorse of conscience is unconvincing. Since he still believes in Imogen’s guilt, his attitude towards her should remain unchanged, however much he may repent of the supposed murder. To term her alleged offence “wrying but a little” seems contrary to the moral code of the play, though as Professor Ellis Fermor points out, it is not necessarily inconsistent with the feelings of a human being illuminated by grief and seeing with new eyes.

In spite of Imogen’s supposed adultery, in which Posthumus still believes, he admits that she is better than him. He wishes that the gods had taken vengeance for his own sins, and saved the ”noble” Imogen to repent. He speaks of her as the mistress of Britain and determines to die in battle for her sake. He enters, overwhelmed with guilt and remorse, planning to fight in Britain’s defense by way of atonement.

---

36 What Luther Says: An Anthology, ed. Plass, I,524.
37 Luther, I,527.
38 Nosworthy, p.145
For thee, O Imogen, even for whom my life
Is every breath a death; and thus, unknown,
Pitied nor hated, to the face of peril
Myself I'll dedicate.

(V.i.26-29)

When Posthumus turns up outside the Roman camp, he is unaware that Pisanio has disobeyed the order to kill Imogen and has sent a false token. He addresses the token and then the audience:

Yea, bloody cloth, I'll keep thee, for I wish'd
Thou should'st be colour'd thus. You married ones,
If each of you should take this course, how many
Must murder wives much better than themselves
For wrying but a little! O Pisanio,
Every good servant does not all commands;
No bond, but to do just ones. Gods, if you
Should have ta'en vengeance on my faults, I never
Had liv'd to put on this; so had you saved
The noble Imogen to repent, and struck
Me, wretch, more worth your vengeance.

(V.i.1-11)

Judged on intentions, he is guilty of his wife's murder, and critical reaction to Posthumus at this point generally endorses his scathing self-indictment. The situation is complicated by Posthumus' still believing that Imogen has cuckolded him. Nevertheless, he now dismisses her supposed
infidelity as "wrying but a little." Even the fifteen-year penitent Leontes does not suggest that he would forgive Hermione had she actually been unfaithful. He realizes instead that his own perceptions were mistaken. Posthumus' forgiveness therefore violates the norms for Renaissance drama, where honor is typically the code which regulates sexual behavior. His attitude here, as Joan Carr writes, "parallels the Christian doctrine of forgiveness: 'Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you'".

Robert Hunter, who sees Posthumus as "the central, humanum genus figure of the play", describes the character's crucial inner turn toward self-knowledge: "Self-knowledge must necessarily be a knowledge of sinfulness, and it will lead to remorse and the forgiveness of a wife who, he thinks, has wronged him". Posthumus achieves a perception from which recognition of common sinfulness allows for mutual forgiveness.

Posthumus' soliloquy gives extreme, even exaggerated, expression to such ideas. Addressing the theater audience, he insists that sinfulness is inherent in the human condition:

\[\text{You married ones,}
\]
\[\text{If each of you should take this course, how many}\]
Must murder wives much better than themselves
For wrying but a little?

(V.i.2-5)

Posthumus is searching, reaching for an understanding of divine judgments.

He addresses the gods:

But alack,
You snatch some hence for little faults; that's love,
To have them fall no more: you some permit
To second ills with ills, each elder worse,
And make them dread it, to the doers' thrift.

(V.i.11-15)

Although he then prays to be made an instrument of the gods ("do your best
wills, / And make me blest to obey" (V.i.16-17) , his presumption of the ability to
measure faults and to discern divine purposes reveals Posthumus to be still obsessed
with judgment. He has achieved forgiveness toward Imogen by turning the
judgmental impulse upon himself - "Me, wretch, more worth your
vengeance"(V.i.11). His life to him is "every breath a death" (V.i.27). He flings
himself into battle, but soon complains he "could not find death where I did hear
him groan" (V.iii.69). He leaves off fighting to seek death unequivocally:

For me, my ransom's death:
On either side I come to spend my breath,
Which neither here I'll keep nor bear again,
But end it by some means for Imogen.

(V.iii.80-83)
Although he adopts a sacrificial tone, Posthumus' dedication to death evinces profound soul-sickness. The burden of Posthumus' experiences in act V is to carry him from a legalistic view of sin, whereby death can be the only adequate payment for his crime, to an acceptance of grace, which demands an act of self-forgiveness. Posthumus' accusations against himself illustrate that an obsession with judgment is dangerous in private as well as in public contexts. Having lost his wife, his allegiance to the British throne, and his fighting spirit, Posthumus drops to the nadir of his fortunes.

Posthumus is almost in a state of Hamlet where he doesn't know what to do, end his life or to keep it. Posthumus apparently means he will "keep" not only the tablet but his life, which only a few moments before he was eager to doff. There is a submerged echo of Hamlet's If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come -- the readiness is all. (Ham. V.ii.220-222). In contrast to the funeral in act IV, which proclaimed repeatedly that "all must...come to dust," Posthumus' dream counts, for him at least, as an indication of life after death. During his sleep, "solemn music" plays, after which certain musicians precede the stately entrance of two ghosts -- his father, dressed as a warrior, and his mother. After more music his dead brothers appear with the wounds they received in battle. The first stage direction concludes: "They circle Posthumus round as he lies sleeping" (V, iv, 29 SD). Next the Posthumus family appeals to Jupiter to intervene on behalf of the unfortunate Posthumus. Another
stage direction brings the scene to its climax: "Jupiter descends in thunder and lightning, sitting upon an eagle: he throws a thunderbolt. The Ghosts fall on their knees" (l. 92 SD) After hurling his thunderbolt Jupiter rebukes the Leonati for their complaints, assures them that Posthumus will be reconciled to Imogen, and gives them a tablet to lay on Posthumus' breast. He then ascends and the ghosts vanish. Benevolence is at the level of spectacular. Posthumus awakes, reads the oracular tablet, and is appropriately puzzled. There is a direct intervention by the god. The play gains immeasurably from Jupiter's presence, since, in giving his approval to the establishment of peace and harmony at the end, the presence of Jupiter is all-pervading, infinitely durable to make the world benevolent:

\[
\begin{align*}
    \text{The fingers of the Powers above, do tune} \\
    \text{The harmony of this Peace.}
\end{align*}
\]

\((V.v.467-468)\)

Even Iachimo repents at the end:

\[
\begin{align*}
    \text{The heaviness and guilt within my bosom,} \\
    \text{Takes off my manhood: I have belied a lady,} \\
    \text{The Princess of this Country; and the air on't} \\
    \text{Revengingly enfeebles me ....}
\end{align*}
\]

\((V.ii.1-4)\)

Cymbeline, too, is near despair, with Cloten and Imogen missing, and the Queen mortally ill:

\[
\begin{align*}
    \ldots\text{my queen}
\end{align*}
\]
upon a desperate bed, and in a time
When fearful Wars point at me: Her son gone,
So needful for this present. It strikes me, past
The hope of comfort.

(IV.iii.5-9)

Belarius blesses Cymbeline's sons before handing them over to him, and the images of heavenly water and inlaying of stars express the fertility anticipated once order is restored:

*The benediction of these covering Heavens*

*Fall on their heads like dew, for they are worthy*

*To in-lay Heaven with Stars.*

(V.v.351-353)

For Cymbeline, the restoration of his sons and daughter explains the benevolent design of the play:

*Oh, what am I?*

*A Mother to the birth of three? Ne'er mother*

*Rejoic'd deliverance more.*

(V.v.369-371)

The final scene of *Cymbeline* where the reunion is in action is almost similar to *Pericles*, where Pericles asks Marina to confirm her identity:

*Bel. Be pleased a while;*

*This gentleman, whom I call Polydore,*

*Most worthy prince, as yours, is true Guiderius:*

*This gentleman, my Cadwal, Arviragus,*
Your younger princely son, he, sir, was lapp'd
In a most curious mantle, wrought by th' hand
Of his queen mother, which for more probation
I can with ease produce.

Cym. Guiderius had

Upon his neck a mole, a sanguine star.

It was a mark of wonder.

Bel. This is he,

Who hath upon him still that natural stamp.

It was wise Nature's end in the donation

To be his evidence now.

Cym. O, what am I?

A mother to the birth of three? Ne'er mother

Rejoic'd deliverance more. Blest pray you be,

That, after this strange starting from your orbs,

You may reign in them now!

( V.v.357-373)

Belarius offers one, the 'curious mantle', and Cymbeline asks for another, Guiderius's mole. When Belarius says that 'it was wise nature's end in donation' everything has followed a providential plan—this could just be bit of conventional piety, but in this plays which actually has a staged divine intervention, and in Shakespearean romance generally the presence of supernatural is tangible and pressing.
The last scene explodes the dramatic dynamite. Posthumus, Imogen and Iachimo are brought together on the stage for the first time. Posthumus, believing that Imogen has been murdered by his orders, and not recognizing her in the boy Fidele, wishes to die. As soon as Imogen sees the ring on Iachimo’s finger, she begins the questioning which causes him to confess his villainy, and so informs Posthumus that he has been duped. But he still does not know that Imogen is alive. There is a poignant passage in which Imogen reluctantly refuses to beg for the life of her Roman master, who had just begged successfully for hers, because she must first establish the truth of Iachimo’s villainy. But Shakespeare wrings the last ounce of sensation out of the situation by making Posthumus strike Fidele, whom the audience know to be Imogen, and thereby provoke Pisanio to reveal her identity. Posthumus blames not Iachimo but himself and forgives the slanderer as Imogen had forgiven him.

Iachimo knows he is worthy of death, but even his confession is associated with the fertility of the wedding ring, now restored, and Imogen’s bracelet, both emblems of faith in marriage: And with this she makes her request to the king. The choice is explained for among the Roman prisoners she has spotted Iachimo, wearing her diamond ring:
Imo: My boon is, that this gentleman may render
Of whom ye had this ring.

(V.v.135-36)

She wants Iachimo to tell truth before everyone. Iachimo confesses his crime and proclaims that Imogen is faithful to Posthumus. He had in fact deceived him. Posthumus realises the worth of Imogen after knowing the truth from Iachimo, and he repents from the depth of his heart. The vigorous expression of distress and remorse, hurting the one for whom he cares the most is an affirmation of Posthumus' fitness for redemption. He terms Imogen 'The temple Of Virtue' (V.v.220-221). Iachimo returns the ring and bracelet:

Take that life, beseech you,
Which I so often owe: but your ring first,
And here the bracelet of the truest Princess
That ever swore her faith.

(V.v.415-418)

Also vital to peace and prosperity is the re-establishing of the royal line through Guiderius:

The lofty cedar, royal Cymbeline
Personates thee: And thy lopp'd branches point
Thy two sons forth: who, by Belarius stol'n
For many years thought dead, are now reviv'd
To the majestic cedar join'd; whose issue
Promises Britain peace and plenty.

(V.v.454-459)

Shakespeare writes about the end of the queen in a very mild manner which is indicative of the fact the sense of order, harmony and peace are at the close of the play, in which 'Pardon's the word to all' (V.v.423). However, Tinkler writes, 'A large number of the images involve ideas of muscular tension and strain .... There is an insistent feeling of brutal strain', contributing to the violent atmosphere of the play. Though the queen meets a violent death, Shakespeare writes about her end:

Cor. With horror, madly dying, like her life,
Which (being cruel to the world) concluded
Most cruel to herself.

(V.v.31-33)

One important piece of stage violence is not strongly expressed, however. This is the striking of the disguised Imogen by Posthumus in the final scene:

Imo. Peace my Lord, hear, hear—
Post. Shall's have a play of this? Thou scornful Page,
There lie thy part. [striking her: she falls]
Pis. O, Gentlemen, help!
Mine and your Mistress: Oh my Lord Posthumus!
You ne’re kill’d Imogen till now: help, help,
Mine honour’d Lady!

Taylor has observed, the 'blow brings to a climax and to an end the thwarted relationship between the lovers', and it also creates mystery and suspense when Imogen is about to reveal her identity.

In contrast to the other last plays, in which the lost are restored singly, Cymbeline features a vast reunion, in which almost everyone experiences the return of a loved one believed to be dead. The gathering of the last union is also compared to the doomsday. Belarius, Arviragus, and Guiderius are baffled by the presence of "Fidele," the boy they have buried. Belarius' stunned question, "Is not this boy reviv'd from death?" (V.v.119) implies the possibility of resurrection, although he hesitates to assume this has happened. Guiderius, insisting "we saw him dead"(V.v.126) , apparently thinks he sees "Fidele's" ghost before him. Pisanio, who has feared for Imogen's life, recognizes her in disguise. Posthumus discovers the wife he thinks he has killed. And Cymbeline’s three children -- the two sons missing some twenty years, the daughter presumed dead after her flight from court -are restored to him.

---

The final scene of *Cymbeline* also features a stunning number of reversals. Imogen forgives Posthumus for doubting her, testing her, and plotting to kill her. Posthumus forgives Iachimo for deceiving him. Cymbeline forgives Belarius for kidnapping his two sons, and then decrees that "pardon's the word to all" (V.v.422). The sheer magnitude of forgiveness -- Cymbeline even offers tribute to his defeated foe -- violates expectations created by the rest of the play.

David Daiches narrates Imogen's adventures praising her heroic qualities. The way she controls the situation stemming out of her husband's suspicion from beginning of the play till the end is marvellous. Daiches writes:

She takes her destiny into her own hands and having survived the shock of hearing that her husband has ordered her to be murdered and the counter shock of seeing what she thinks is the dead body of her husband, survives to win her husband back in the final scene of explanation and reconciliation.\(^{44}\)

At the end, *Cymbeline* shows similarity to a miracle play. The miracle plays primarily celebrate God's love for man and the mercy which God is constantly willing to extend to his repentant creatures. In *Cymbeline* too repentant characters are granted mercy. The human virtue which the medieval plays exalt is man's love for God. These verities of love remain important in *Cymbeline*, but the primary emphasis is shifted to two kinds of human love: the romantic love of man and

woman, and charity. The most powerful emotional moment of the last scene of
*Cymbeline* comes in the lines that dramatize the reunion of Posthumous and
Imogen:

*Imo.*  *Why did you throw your wedded lady for you?*

*Think that you are upon a rock, and now*

*Throw me again.*

*Post.*  *Hang there like fruit, my soul,*

*Till the tree die.*

*(V.v.261-265)*

Prof. A.A.Ansari,⁴⁵ compares Posthumus to an eagle and Imogen to phoenix
and gives valuable inputs to the conclusion of this discussion:

In spite of the mirage of death life continues to flourish at the subterranean
level, and contribution to the idea of unification is made unwittingly by the
newly recognized two brothers of Imogen: Guiderius and Arviragus. Although
*Cymbeline*, unlike Imogen, has had no experience of even feigned death, yet
in being reunited with his supposedly lost ‘sons’ and daughters, and reconciled
to Posthumus after following the lone meandering path of mistrust and moral
confusion and eventually accepting the burden of his own sin, he, too becomes
partaker of the thrill of new life being ushered in and goes the experiences of a
sort of baptism. Posthumus has been referred to as eagle(I chose an eagle/And
did avoid a puttock’) with an unflinching gaze—something which connotes

---

both radiance and strength—and Imogen as phoenix (‘She is alone the Arabian
bird’) which is reborn out of its own ashes. Both these basic symbols, with all
the richness of concretion that gathers around them, link up with the other
elements of structure in helping to build up the ultimate design of harmony (or
‘harmonized experience’) in the play.

Hence, what we find at the end, disorder is a thing of the past, separation is
no more, wicked characters are buried with their wickedness, and characters chose
to be good flourish with their benevolent design. The war which is usually loathed
in blood, horror and death turns out to be an event of reconciliation, clearing doubts
and peace. Love prevails all around and there is a general pardon to all from the
king and his followers. The life in spite of its pain and its suffering, and its
inevitable end in death, is beautiful after all as the characters educate each other for
benevolence and which is the central concern of the play. So, Posthumus spares
Iachimo’s life and instructs him to deal with others in a benevolent manner:

*The power I have on you is to spare you:*
*The malice towards you, to forgive you. Live*
*And deal with others better.*

*(V.v.419-421)*

Cymbeline ushers in a new era where only peace reigns He embraces the
defeated army, forgives deposed soldiers and accepts his daughter and banished son-
in-law. The Roman eagle of Imperialism vanishes, pardon and harmony steps in.
The fountain of love floats all around and engulfs the entire kingdom. Cymbeline cries out of joy:

_Cym. Never was a war did cease,
(Ere bloody hands were wash'd,) with such a peace._

_(V.v. 485-486)_