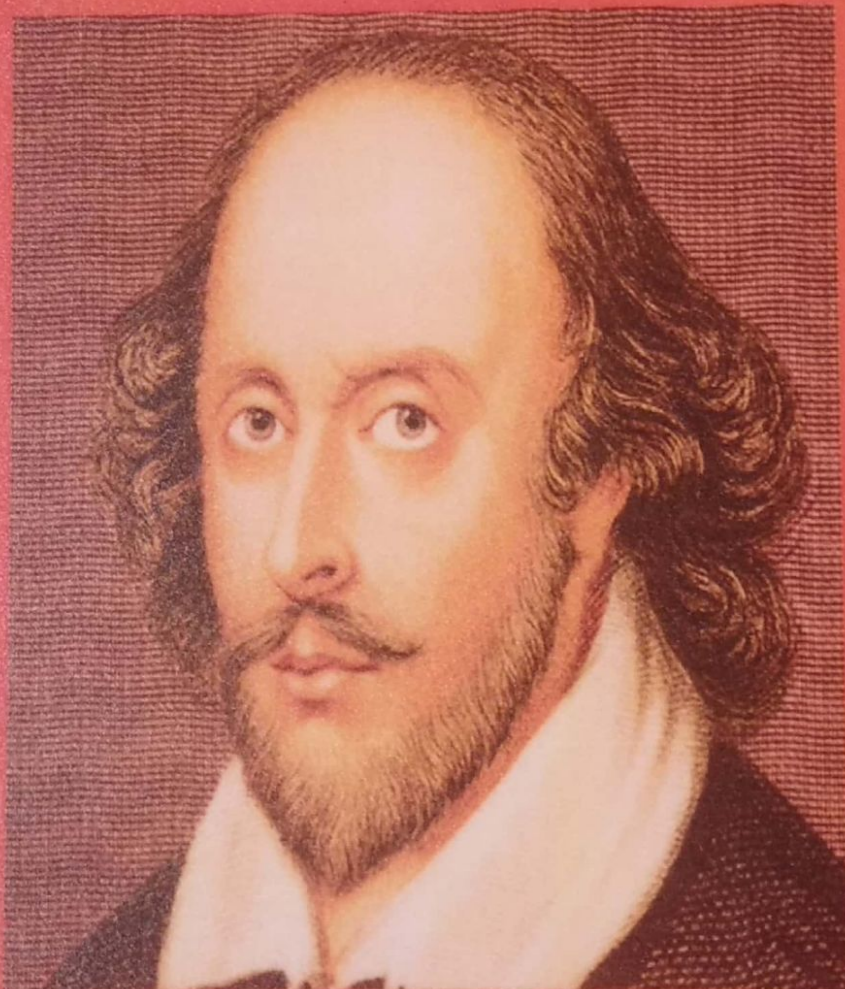


SHAKESPEARE FOREVER

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THE ELIZABETHAN THEOLOGY OF ORDER AS GLEANED FROM SHAKESPEARE PLAYS

M. KARTHIGA

Theology means the science of God. The Elizabethan theology of order implies the belief of Elizabethans that God created all things in a hierarchy. William Shakespeare besides arousing in the audience the feelings of aesthetic pleasure, disseminates the theology of order.

Shakespeare characters act out the Elizabethan theology of order and strengthen our moral sense. The belief of Elizabethans is that, God is the absolute reality and He is both transcendent and immanent in the Universe. According to this idea, everything in the world has its position fixed by God. The earth is the centre of the universe and the stars moved around in fixed routes. In heaven God ruled over the archangels and angels. On earth this order with its fixed classes from the highest to the lowest – kings, nobles, merchants, and peasants. The animals have their own rules too, the lion being the 'king'. Among the trees, the most superior is the oak; among flowers, it is rose; among the minerals, gold is the most superior. The Elizabethans called this hierarchical structure 'The great chain of being'.

Any attempt to break the chain of being would upset the established order and bring about Universal disorder. Thus When Julius Caesar is assassinated, there is chaos in the heaven as well as the earth. In Macbeth after Duncan is murdered we are told by the Old Man and Ross (2.4.) that the day became as dark

as night, a falcon was killed by an owl and that Duncan's horses turned wild and ate each other. Only when the rightful king (Malcolm) gains his throne at the culmination of the play is order and harmony to the world restored.

Shakespeare's firm faith in God and his adherence to the theology of order as Crystal-clear in Macbeth (5.1.68-73) In this scene the character of Doctor of physic is a mouthpiece of Shakespeare himself. The Doctor speaks to the waiting gentleman:

*"A great perturbation in nature.....
Foul whisperings are abroad, unnatural deeds
Do breed unnatural troubles; infected minds
To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets
More needs she the divine than the physician,
God, God forgive us all....." (5.1.68-73)*

An abundance of theological ideologies can be found in Macbeth that helps with the development of the theme-illusion versus reality : "*fair is foul and foul is fair*". Just as William Shakespeare believed in heaven, which is eternal house (kingdom of God) so too he believed in hell, an occult state of suffering forever. The porter scene in Macbeth gives a glimpse of it.

*Here is a knock indeed! If a man
Were porter of hell-gate, he should
Have old turning the key..... (2.3.1-20)*

Heaven and hell are two symbolical names of the spiritual realm of reality. The former one is the name of the house of God and the angels, and the latter indicates the adobe

of fallen angels with Lucifer. The fallen angels signify the violation of order. They wanted to dethrone the Creator. Pride brought about disorder in the spiritual realm. We may discover in Macbeth a symbol of Lucifer.

*" I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent, but only
Vaulting ambition, which over leaps itself
And falls on the other." (1.7.25-28).*

That all things in this world have been hierarchically set in is a tenet of the Elizabethan philosophy. According to this philosophy, we have men, animals, and minerals in descending sequence on earth. Men are superior to animals, animals superior to plants and plants superior to minerals. The superiority consists in the nature of the vital principle which we call the soul but except human beings other creatures are not considered to possess souls. Human beings not only undergo physical changes but they are capable of intellectual development which is a glorious expression of the rational soul. Man is the paragon of animals because his rational soul is created in the image of God. The Elizabethan humanism is a pealing anthem in Shakespeare.

"What a piece of work is a man, how-noble in reason, How infinite in faculties, in form and moving How express and admirable, In action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a God; The beauty of the world, the paragon of animals." (2.2.200-204)

However, we are inclined to think that the Elizabethans entertained an anthropomorphic

portrait of God. Shakespeare delineates the Creator as an artist who accomplished his work of creating man with proper observation and deliberation. Such a portraiture has not only an aesthetic value. It teaches the salvific message that we live in Him, through Him and for Him.

All Shakespeare scholars agree on the point of Shakespeare's cosmology. His order- Picture of the cosmos is pre-Copernican. "The Elizabethans visualized the cosmos as planetary system in which the earth stood static at the centre, surrounded by concentric spheres which revolved carrying round with them the various heavenly bodies. This is the Universe as Shakespeare pictured it." To illustrate Ross tells the old man, '*By the clock, it is day; And yet dark night strangles the travelling lamp.*' (2.1. 6-7)

Man is the crown of creation. Shakespeare exclaims the mystery of the universe and the excellence of man in it. Miranda in *The Tempest* voices forth Shakespeare's admiration for man who is the means between the creator and creatures.

"O Wonder!

How many goodly creatures are there

How beauteous mankind is ! here ! O brave new world..... (5.1.182-186)

An echo of this amazement can be found in the lines of revelation in Isaiah 43:4-5.

*"Because you are precious in my eyes
and honoured, and I love you,
I give men in return for you*

.....

.....
Everyone who is called by name
Whom I created for my glory
When I formed and made”

With his ‘little Latin and less Greek’ and no formal university education, Shakespeare surpasses even theologian in his idea of God, religion and philosophy. This proves Shakespeare to be the master craftsman who see the world, not through spectacles of books but as one who fathomed even the unfathomable mysteries of life with sheer insight, world view and wisdom.

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